

# Royalty, Virtue, and Adversity: The Cult of King Henry VI

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In 1471, King Henry VI of England died in the Tower of London amid disputed circumstances. Between his death and Henry VIII's break with Rome in the 1530s, he was venerated as a saint and martyr. Modern historians have generally dismissed this cult as a political phenomenon, created and used by the Tudors as they sought legitimacy. While there is some truth in that assessment, political allegiance was only a part of the impetus for the participation of Henry's devotees in the cult. Alongside carefully crafted (and perhaps, artificial) portrayals of Henry's virtues lay something else his former subjects found compelling: his very real political failures, and more importantly the adversity that they engendered. Henry's devotees used these royal adversities as the basis from which to imagine a sympathetic relationship between themselves and "good King Herre" in which he had great concern for their fatal and near-fatal emergencies. These neglected devotional aspects of Henry VI's cult are the subject of this article.

Biography

King Henry VI of England was born in 1421, the only child of Henry V and Catherine of Valois.<sup>1</sup> His father, lauded for his success in the Hundred Years' War, died in 1422, leaving his nine-month-old son to inherit the crowns of both England and France. While his uncle, Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, and great-uncle, Cardinal Henry Beaufort, the Bishop of Winchester, wrestled for control over his minority government, Henry grew into a shy and pious young man interested in charity and education (later founding both Eton and King's College, Cambridge). He also had a genuine distaste for deceit, avarice, and bloodshed; as such, he made a poor leader. He was indecisive, lenient to dangerous foes, unable to intercede effectively in noble feuds, and generous with money he did not have. His wife, Margaret of Anjou, was an equally problematic leader, considered abrasive because of her French background and commanding personal-

<sup>1</sup>For Henry's biography and the political history of his reign, see Bertram Wolffe, *Henry VI* (London, 1981); John Lovett Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge, 1996); Ralph A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI: The Exercise of Royal Authority, 1422-1461* (London, 1981); Anthony Gross, *The Dissolution of the Lancastrian Kingship: Sir John Fortescue and the Crisis of Monarchy in Fifteenth-Century England* (Stamford, 1996); Jack Robert Lander, *Henry VI and the Duke of York's Second Protectorate, 1455 to 1456* (Manchester, 1960); John W. McKenna, "Henry VI of England and the Dual Monarchy: Aspects of Royal Political Propaganda, 1422-1432," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965): 145-62.

ity.<sup>2</sup> Between his marriage in 1445 and his deposition in 1461, Henry's reign was a string of disasters. His generals steadily lost his French territories to Joan of Arc and Charles VII. He failed to cope with constant tension between noble factions led by Richard, Duke of York and his own allies. He twice suffered from long spells of mental illness during which he was unable to rule at all. England endured a state of intermittent military tumult, including Jack Cade's rebellion of 1450, Richard, Duke of York's military actions against "traitors" (generally Henry's closest advisors and allies), and finally, open war between Lancaster and York, beginning in 1459.

In 1461 Henry's weak leadership and desperate financial situation led to his deposition at the hands of Edward, Duke of York, who became Edward IV. For four years Henry was hidden by Lancastrian allies in Scotland, Northumberland, and Yorkshire. He was captured by Edward IV in 1465, and imprisoned in the Tower of London. Meanwhile, Margaret of Anjou raised troops abroad and led forays into England in the attempt to regain the Crown for her husband and son. Not until the Earl of Warwick (later called the "Kingmaker") fell out with Edward IV and decided to ally with Margaret was she successful. Together, the two reinstated Henry as king in late 1470. Edward rallied quickly, and by May of 1471 he had recaptured both Henry and London and re-assumed the throne. Henry died in the Tower during the night of May 22, 1471; Edward was recrowned the following morning, and this convenient timing left lingering suspicions as to the cause of Henry's death. Many contemporaries believed that he had died by the dagger of Edward's brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester (later Richard III), who was in charge of the Tower at the time,<sup>3</sup> but there is no definitive proof of this.<sup>4</sup> His jailers claimed that Henry had died of melancholy.<sup>5</sup>

Although Henry's body was hurried along the Thames to be buried at the out-of-the-way abbey of Chertsey, he could not be disposed of so easily as Edward might have hoped. After his death, rumors began to circulate: the king had been murdered by Gloucester, rather than having died of melancholy; his corpse, like those of all murder victims, had bled during his funeral; and he was now performing posthumous miracles, in thanksgiving for which pilgrims had begun to appear at Chertsey.<sup>6</sup> Edward IV tried to suppress the growing cult,

<sup>2</sup>See Phillippe Erlanger, *Margaret of Anjou, Queen of England* (Coral Gables, FL, 1970); and Diana Dunn, "Margaret of Anjou: Queen Consort of Henry VI: A Reassessment of Her Role," in *Crown, Government, and People in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Rowena E. Archer (New York, 1995), pp. 107-44.

<sup>3</sup>John W. McKenna, "Piety and Propaganda: The Cult of Henry VI," in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins*, ed. Beryl Rowland (London, 1974), p. 73.

<sup>4</sup>Wolffe, *Henry VI*, p. 347.

<sup>5</sup>McKenna, "Piety and Propaganda," p. 73.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

with little success.<sup>7</sup> In 1484 Richard III, having seen the failure of suppression, chose the role of patron instead. He moved the king's body to St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle, and the dean of St. George's began to record the stories of pilgrims who arrived claiming that Henry had performed a miracle for them. One hundred and seventy-four such stories were edited and compiled into a single volume by 1500. John Blacman, a Carthusian monk and one of Henry VI's former spiritual advisors, also wrote a *vita* of Henry some time before 1510.<sup>8</sup> Royal patronage of the cult peaked under the Tudors, when Henry VII appealed to Rome sometime before 1492 to begin canonization proceedings.<sup>9</sup> By the mid-1520s, during the reign of Henry VIII, these proceedings had progressed to the point where papal representatives sought to verify the miracles by gathering testimony from those who claimed to have benefitted from them or witnessed them.<sup>10</sup> But the canonization proceedings stalled after 1528 because of the problems between Henry VIII and Rome. By 1538 pilgrimage, votive offerings at shrines, and the veneration of relics had been banned by royal injunction.<sup>11</sup> With little further need to legitimize Tudor rule and such veneration considered heretical, the cult of Henry VI faded.

Given his political failures and the partisan nature of the times, there is an understandable skepticism among modern scholars who have dealt with Henry's cult. When one compares Henry's earthly achievements with, for example, those of the brilliantly successful French royal saint, Louis IX, Henry's cult seems incongruous at best and laughable at worst. Ralph A. Griffiths began his political biography of Henry by tracing the growth of the cult, explaining that in posthumous propaganda Henry had been changed "from an incompetent innocent into a guileless saint."<sup>12</sup> Bertram Wolffe's biography sought to debunk the hagiographic view of his personality, which insisted he was meek, gentle, and pious, and hence innocent of blame for the difficulties that beset England during and after his reign, by showing how the mismanagement of government was the

<sup>7</sup>Wolffe, *Henry VI*, p. 354.

<sup>8</sup>An excellent commentary on Blacman and his relationship with and portrayal of Henry VI is provided by Roger Lovatt, "A Collector of Apocryphal Anecdotes: John Blacman Revisited," in *Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History*, ed. Anthony Pollard (New York, 1984), pp. 172–97.

<sup>9</sup>Wolffe, *Henry VI*, p. 355; for further information and descriptions of primary source material pertaining to Henry's canonization process, see Paul Grosjean, *Henrici VI Regis Miracula Postuma* (Brussels, 1935), ch. 7: 152\*–233\*.

<sup>10</sup>Ronald Knox and Shane Leslie, eds. and trans., *The Miracles of King Henry VI* (Cambridge, 1923), pp. 26–28.

<sup>11</sup>Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400–1580* (New Haven, 1992), p. 407.

<sup>12</sup>Griffiths, *The Reign of Henry VI*, p. 6.

direct result of his capricious decision-making.<sup>13</sup> In his investigation of the cult itself, John W. McKenna insisted that “Henry VI...was as poor a saint by modern standards as he was unkingly in the eyes of his contemporaries,” concluding that the growth of the cult rested on the efforts of “shrewd royal publicists” who manipulated the “flourishing lay piety of the age.”<sup>14</sup>

While it is possible to assume that propagandists intended Henry’s cult strictly to underscore the royal blood of the reigning or aspiring scions of Lancaster, Simon Walker has proposed a somewhat more balanced explanation. He has investigated Henry’s cult together with those of Thomas of Lancaster, Simon de Montfort, Richard Scrope, and Edward II, calling them “political saints,” because all of them had died for their opposition to a ruling regime. But he argued that these cults, instead of becoming a locus for continued discontent, “help[ed] to restore a measure of harmony after the strife was over in making reconciliation...easier for the losers by offering a higher, and more objective, constraint to which all could submit without dishonor.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, he observed that Henry’s cult, like those of other political saints, encompassed themes of re-established social harmony.

But even if we accept the argument that contemporary partisan politics provided the impetus for such cults, Henry VI’s case still requires further explanation. This is because it was a larger presence in late-medieval devotion than the rest by several orders of magnitude. Walker himself points out that Edward II’s cult was localized and left little documentary evidence, Simon de Montfort’s seems to have faded on its own as rapidly as it was established, and Scrope’s cult may have been following the same pattern.<sup>16</sup> Even where other political cults had a certain staying power, none of them can claim the widespread activity that Henry’s could. For example, Henry’s pilgrim badges have been studied by Brian Spencer, who called them “an impressive testimony to Windsor’s enormous...appeal to pilgrims. Canterbury is the only English shrine to have left behind significantly more souvenirs, but these were deposited over a period of three and a half centuries, whereas Windsor’s accumulated during three or four decades.”<sup>17</sup> Based on this evidence, Spencer argued that in the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Henry VI edged out Thomas of Canterbury as the favored saint of the inhabitants of London.<sup>18</sup> The pilgrims to Henry’s shrine

<sup>13</sup>Wolffe, *Henry VI*, p. 21.

<sup>14</sup>McKenna, “Piety and Propaganda,” pp. 72–73.

<sup>15</sup>Simon Walker, “Political Saints in Later Medieval England,” in *The MacFarlane Legacy: Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society*, ed. Richard H. Britnell and Anthony J. Pollard (New York, 1995), p. 91.

<sup>16</sup>Walker, “Political Saints,” pp. 83–86.

<sup>17</sup>Brian Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges* (London, 1998), p. 189.

<sup>18</sup>Spencer, “King Henry of Windsor,” p. 238.

were also numerous enough to generate significant income for St. George's Chapel. The pilgrim offering-box there, which has not been moved or modified since its installation,<sup>19</sup> was designed and placed with great concern for the large sums of money it once held. It had four locks, each of which required a different key held by a different official of the Chapel, so that four pairs of eyes were present when the box was opened. Further, it was (and still is) placed under a small quatrefoil peephole in the ceiling. From a room above, the peephole allowed chapel officials to keep continuous watch over the coffer as pilgrims moved past the shrine and deposited their offerings.<sup>20</sup>

Other evidence suggests that the popularity of Henry's cult was not confined to the area adjacent to Windsor. Devotional images of Henry appear in parish churches in villages and towns as far-flung as Whimble, Devon (Figure 1), Ashton-under Lyne, outside Manchester (Figure 2), Alnwick, Northumberland (Figure 3), and several East Anglian churches. And Henry's miracle collection shows an equally broad distribution of activity. While fifty of the 135 miracles



Fig. 1. Henry VI, from the fifteenth-century rood screen in St. Mary's Church, Wimble, Devon. The face has been damaged and was further obscured by the camera flash.

<sup>19</sup>Shelagh M. Bond, ed., *The Monuments of St. George's Chapel, Windsor Castle* (Windsor, 1958), p. 98, offers a summary of changes to the monument over time.

<sup>20</sup>For this information on the offering-box I am indebted to a kind gentleman who was working as a tour guide at St. George's Chapel in the spring of 2000. Upon finding that I was visiting for purposes of this research, he led me around the rope barriers so that I could look at the offering-box, and pointed out the location of the quatrefoil, explaining that he himself had been in the room that afforded the view of the box. I am grateful for his generosity, but he slipped away before I could get his name.



Fig. 2. Henry VI, from the "King's Window of the Church of St. Michael and All Angels. Ashton-Under-Lyne, outside Manchester.



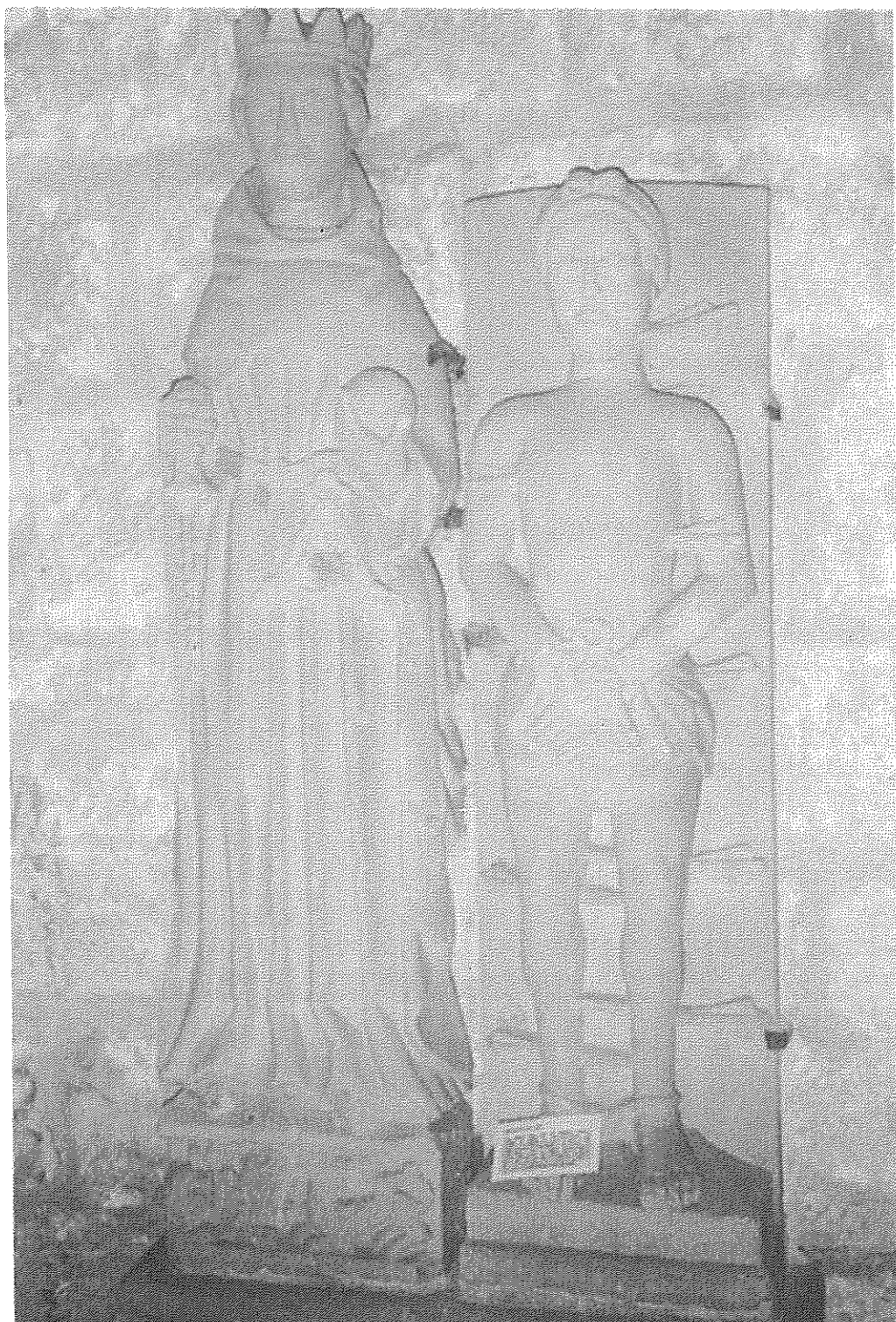


Fig. 3. Henry VI (left) and St. Sebastian (right). Late fifteenth-century sculpture from St. Michael's Church, Alnwick, Northumberland.

that were later investigated were reported by devotees from London, Kent, Sussex, and Essex, the remaining eighty-five told of pilgrims who traveled from as far as Durham, Wales, Cornwall, and Calais.<sup>21</sup> The evidence also suggests that his devotees represented a broad cross section of the social spectrum. The miracles tell of London serving-girls and noblemen alike. And, while the elite left evidence of their devotion to the cult in their prayer-books,<sup>22</sup> the ordinary laity offered devotional images in churches that provide evidence of interest among “a more popular culture.”<sup>23</sup> On rood-screens, for example, Henry most often rubs shoulders with such popular figures as the virgin martyrs Barbara, Agnes, Appollonia, and Katherine of Alexandria. In Eye and Ludham he shares the screen with the other English royal saints, Edmund and Edward the Confessor, as well as well-known English saints such as William of Norwich and Thomas Becket (Eye). Finally, he appears alongside early Christian figures: Mary Magdalen, Lawrence, and Stephen (Ludham), Clement and Sebastian (Whimple), and St. John the Evangelist (Eye). Given that his image occupied a space controlled by the laity and given over to such popular saints, we can safely presume that Henry’s cult had also achieved a certain stature in rural parishes.

The patronage of the Tudors has been the fallback explanation for this popularity, but more compelling possibilities are suggested by evidence that describes the qualities Henry’s devotees admired, and the kinds of situations that caused them to seek him out. Taken together, this evidence suggests a genuine devotional impulse at work amongst Henry’s devotees. Such information is available in artistic evidence, liturgy, Henry’s *vita*, and his miracle collection. A thorough investigation of this evidence suggests that admiration for Henry was only partially based in the “propagandized” understanding of him as a martyr and virtuous man. Nevertheless, at the outset it cannot be denied that Henry’s saintly and political roles were intertwined in the popular imagination, as his iconography is unmistakably regal. He always appears robed in ermine and crowned;

<sup>21</sup>Grosjean, ed., *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, pp. 103\*–04\*.

<sup>22</sup>Several of the manuscripts clearly belonged to the nobility, and some to the highest ranks thereof. Notations in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Gough Liturg. 19 (fol. 32<sup>v</sup>) show that it once belonged to the family of Sir John Iwardby of Hampshire; London, British Library, Harley 2887 (fol. 11<sup>v</sup>) is a manuscript so decorated as to require special supervision of readers; and Henry even appears in the Bohun Psalter (Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS Addit. 38–1950 fol. iv<sup>v</sup>) which was commissioned by the Bohun family, later belonged to Henry VI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, and is a major monument of fourteenth-century manuscript illumination.

<sup>23</sup>On the location, function, and donation of rood-screens, Aymer Vallance, *English Church Screens: Being Great Roods, Screenwork & Rood-Lofts of Parish Churches in England and Wales* (London, 1936), esp. pp. 34–36 and 63–65. On their reflection of popular religious sentiment, see Colin Richmond, “The Visual Culture of Fifteenth-Century England,” in *The Wars of the Roses*, ed. Anthony J. Pollard (New York, 1995), p. 192.



he bears a scepter and orb; his coat of arms and heraldic device buttress him. Henry's iconography is much the same in other surviving devotional images, rendered in fresco, panel painting, stained glass, and sculpture. He always holds a scepter and in most cases an orb, although in the stained glass of King's College Chapel, Cambridge (Figure 4) and the fresco at St. Lawrence, Alton



Fig. 4. Henry VI. Stained glass panel c. 1500 from King's College Chapel, Cambridge.

<sup>24</sup>This may have been an early or a competing version of his iconography. The screen at York Minster, which was not originally intended for devotional purposes, shows him holding a book as well. It is probably a reference to his educational foundations at Cambridge and Eton.



Fig. 5. Henry VI. Late fifteenth-century fresco from St. Lawrence Church, Alton, Hampshire.

(Figure 5), he holds a scepter and a book.<sup>24</sup> According to Brian Spencer, Henry's pilgrim badges followed the same pattern in regal dress and accessories.<sup>25</sup> While his coat of arms does not appear in other images, his antelope recurs on a statue at St. Michael's, Alnwick, and on rood-screen panels in Foulden and Binham Priory, Norfolk.

Literary sources, too, use royal status as their most basic descriptor of Henry. I have located twelve liturgies and hymns that routinely addressed him as the "blessed King Henry,"<sup>26</sup> or some variant of that title. These references to his political role became lengthy in a few cases, asserting his claim to the crown of France, as well.<sup>27</sup> Even where his kingship was not asserted, his noble status was; he was often hailed as a knight,<sup>28</sup> and once as the "flower of nobility."<sup>29</sup> Henry's *vita* also began by offering Henry's political position for the reader's consideration. Blacman started off by explaining why he was not discussing Henry's noble status, but he did so at such great length that it served the purpose of actually discussing the matter: "Now of his most noble descent, how he was begotten according to the flesh of the highest blood and ancient royal stock of England, and how in the two lands of England and France he was crowned as the rightful heir of each realm, I have purposefully said nothing...."<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Brian Spencer, "King Henry of Windsor and the London Pilgrim," in *Collectanea Londiniensia: Studies in London archaeology and history presented to Ralph Merrifield*, ed. Joanna Bird, Hugh Chapman, and John Clark (London, 1978) p. 245.

<sup>26</sup>Bodleian Library, MS Univ. 8, fol. 88v: "beatum Henricum regem." MS Univ. 8 is a fifteenth-century book of hours originally belonging to the Percy family. BL, MS Harley 5793, fol. 1<sup>v</sup> and MS Stowe 16, fol. 151<sup>f</sup>, and Bodleian Library, MS Gough Liturg. 19, fol. 32<sup>v</sup>: "beatus rex Henricus." Harley 5793 is a breviary with prayers to Henry written on the flyleaf in a fifteenth-century hand. MS Gough Liturg. 19 is a late fifteenth-century prayer book containing a calendar, prayers, and psalms, which originally belonged to the Iwardby family.

<sup>27</sup>Walter C. Trevelyan, "Extracts from an ancient Bede-Roll. Communicated by W. C. Trevelyan, Esq., in a Letter to John Adamson, Esq., F A S etc., Secretary," *Archaeologia Aeliana* 4 (1855): 2: "Gaude princeps populorum / Dux et decus Britanorum / Rex Henrice nomine...." and 3: "O rex Anglicorum / Gubernatorque Francorum...." See also Durham, University of Durham, Palace Green Library, MS V. III. 7, fol. 97<sup>v</sup>: "...Atque coronatus in Westmynster veneratus / et post ffrancorum rex es de iure creatus...."

<sup>28</sup>BL, MS Harley 5793, fol. 1<sup>v</sup> and MS Stowe 16, fol. 151<sup>f</sup>, and Bodleian Library, MS Gough Liturg. 19, fol. 32<sup>v</sup> call him "Tuum sanctum militem." MS Stowe 16 is a fine illuminated book of hours originally belonging to George Rotherham. BL., MS Harley 423, fol. 72<sup>f</sup> and MS Royal 13.c.viii, fol. 1<sup>v</sup> each contain a hymn that begins "Salve, miles preciose." The hymn in Trevelyan, "Extracts," 3, addresses him as a "miles Dei virtuosus." Harley 423 is a sixteenth-century miscellany that included a hymn to Henry VI and a portion of his miracles. Royal 13.c.viii is the complete manuscript of the miracles of Henry VI, later annotated by papal investigators as they sought to verify his miracles.

<sup>29</sup>BL, MS Harley 423, fol. 72<sup>f</sup> and MS Royal 13.c.viii, fol. 1<sup>v</sup>: "Salve flos nobilitatis...."

<sup>30</sup>John Blacman, *Henry the Sixth. A Reprint of John Blacman's Memoir with Translation and Notes*, ed. and trans. Montague R. James (Cambridge, 1919), p. 25; 3: "De praenobili ejus prosapia, quomodo scilicet ex nobilissimo sanguine & stripe regia antiqua Angliae secundum carnem progenitus

But this iconographic and literary emphasis on Henry's regal status did not necessarily originate with a desire to underscore the royal claims of the later scions of Lancaster (although it was doubtless used this way). Kingship, and nobility more generally, had long been understood to have a sacral component,<sup>31</sup> and thus for Henry's devotees kingship may have evoked sanctity as much as sanctity underscored Tudor kingship. Marc Bloch has noted that one outcome of sacral kingship "was to transform the enemies of royalty into apparently sacrilegious persons."<sup>32</sup> The obverse of this logic led Henry's devotees to consider his death, which was presumed to be the result of political violence, to be a martyrdom. He is not portrayed with the instruments of his martyrdom, as is the other English royal martyr, St. Edmund,<sup>33</sup> perhaps because in his case the instrument was not known. But liturgies composed in his honor commonly addressed him with some variation on the title "Blessed Martyr Henry."<sup>34</sup>

Further, there was significantly more to Henry's saintly persona than the surface aspects of sacral kingship and martyrdom that have fueled arguments such as McKenna's and Walker's. Written sources also describe in some detail the personal qualities that impressed them: both his piety before God and his kindness in dealing with his fellow-man. After his death, it was Henry's piety that was first and most often mentioned among his good qualities.<sup>35</sup> Although he may not have been the quasi-monastic ascetic that liturgy and his *vita* imagined, his modern biographers confirm that he was "a pious, if orthodox, Englishman,"<sup>36</sup> whose "love of the ceremony of public worship is firmly attested" in several sources.<sup>37</sup> Blacman noted his regular attendance and devout behavior at Mass: "kneeling almost continuously before his book, with eyes and hands up-erat, et qualiter in duabus regionibus Angliae s. & Franciae, ut verus utriusque regni heres fuerat, tacere curavi...."

<sup>31</sup>On sacral kingship, see Jaques Le Goff, "Le Roi dans l'Occident médiéval: Caractères originaux," in *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Exeter, 1993), pp. 1–40; Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, trans. J. E. Anderson (New York, 1989); and also Walker, "Political Saints," p. 87. On the relationship between nobility and sanctity, see André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge, 1997), p. 173.

<sup>32</sup>Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, p. 38.

<sup>33</sup>Maria Chiara Celletti, "Edmondo, re dell'Anglia Orientale, santo, martire. Iconografia." *Biblioteca Sanctorum* 13 vols. (Rome, 1964), 4: col. 918.

<sup>34</sup>See, for example, Bodleian Library, MS Univ. 8, fol. 89r: "beati Henrici Regis et martyris..." and fol. 88v: "...Henrici martyris almi...", and "alme Dei martir Henrice..." Or Trevelyan, "Extracts," 2: "...beatum Henricum regem et martyrem..."

<sup>35</sup>Walker, "Political Saints," p. 95, also briefly noted this facet of the cult.

<sup>36</sup>Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI*, p. 249.

<sup>37</sup>Wolffe, *Henry VI*, p. 9.

turned, he was at pains to utter with the celebrant (but with the inward voice) the mass-prayers, epistles, and gospels.<sup>38</sup> These public displays of devotion led his devotees to suggest later that he also engaged in private ascetic practices such as fasting, and that he denied the worldly in favor of devotion to God.<sup>39</sup> As such, prayers and liturgy also praised his chastity;<sup>40</sup> Blacman insisted that he was not only faithful to Margaret when she was away, but also never “used her unseemly” when they were together, “but with all conjugal honesty and gravity.”<sup>41</sup> He also capitalized on the king’s distress upon witnessing any nudity whatsoever, using it to show that his subject was indeed deeply pious.<sup>42</sup>

In his dealings with other people, Henry’s devotees claimed that he exhibited generosity, charity, and mercy. In the provision of royal patronage, Henry had indeed been generous to a fault, a trait that made him a good saint, but weakened him as a king, leaving his finances and his government in shambles.<sup>43</sup> But Blacman nevertheless cited this generosity in patronage as a great virtue, and conflated it with his generosity to the poor and reluctance (or perhaps, inability) to tax his subjects, describing him as

Most liberal to the poor in lightening their wants; and [he] enriched very many others with great gifts and offices, or at least put all neediness from them. Never did he oppress his subjects with unreasonable exactions as do other rulers or princes, but behaving himself among them like a kind father, relieved them from his own resources in a most comely sort, and contenting himself with what he had, preferred to live uprightly among them, rather than that they should pine in poverty, trodden down by his harshness.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Blacman, *Henry the Sixth*, p. 28; 6: “...quasi continue coram libro genua flectans, oculis et manibus erectis, missalia, oracula, epistolas, euangelia internis visibus promere gestibat cum celebrante.”

<sup>39</sup>Trevelyan, “Extracts,” 2: “...frequentasti ieiunare...” Bodleian Library, MS Bodl. Don. e. 120, fol. 1<sup>r</sup> and MS Bodl. 939, fol. 45<sup>v</sup>, as well as Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS Addit. 38–1950, fol. iv<sup>v</sup>: “Hic vir mundum despiciens et terrena triumphans divitias celo condidit ore manu.” See also Bodleian Library, MS Bodl. Don. e. 120, fol. 3<sup>v</sup>: “Ave tutor ecclesiasticorum / Utens norma religiosiorum / Respuens vana mundanorum.” Don.e.120 is a mid-fifteenth century Flemish book of Hours originally owned by the Pudsay family, with prayers to Henry written in a front flyleaf. Bodl. 939 is a late fifteenth-century prayer-book. It was originally compiled for a woman named “Aleanora,” who may have been Eleanor, the Baroness Poynings, a granddaughter of John of Gaunt. MS Addit. 38–1950 is the Bohun Psalter, a famous specimen of fourteenth-century illumination created for Humphrey de Bohun and later owned by John Stafford, the archbishop of Canterbury, as well as Henry VI and Margaret of Anjou.

<sup>40</sup>See, for example, Trevelyan, “Extracts,” 2: “Artem lenae repuisti / fructum carnis amisisti....”

<sup>41</sup>Blacman, *Henry the Sixth*, p. 29; 7: “Non etiam ad praefatam suam conjugem effrenate, vel more impudicorum, haere solebat accessum dum insimul commanserunt: sed tantummodo ut ratio et rei necessitas, servata semper inter eos honeste conjugali et cum magna gravitate.”

<sup>42</sup>Blacman, *Henry the Sixth*, pp. 30–31; 7–8.

<sup>43</sup>Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI*, p. 251.

<sup>44</sup>Blacman, *Henry the Sixth*, p. 31, 9: “Sed ad pauperas omnino liberalis erat, eorum inopiam sublevando. Alios etiam quamplures largitate ditabat donorum, aut officiorum, vel saltem omnem ab eis

Hymns, too, attribute this openhandedness to Henry, although they focus exclusively on his generosity to the poor.<sup>45</sup> Henry was overgenerous with more than money; he was also liberal in his forgiveness of wrongs against him, and thus mercy is one of the virtues that appears often in prayers and liturgies, which pictured him “dismissing offenders.”<sup>46</sup> Blacman emphasized his mercy by referring to his pardons of rebellious nobles, his disinclination to punish, and even his dislike of the hunt, which required that he kill an “innocent” animal.<sup>47</sup>

McKenna and Wolffe have dismissed these assertions of Henry’s virtue as nothing but a kindly reframing of his incompetence. Their argument seems plausible enough. Although public piety or generosity could bolster a king’s reputation, in Henry’s case the piety that led him to spend more than he had, pardon obviously dangerous foes, and become visibly distressed in the presence of scantily-clad women did not serve to bolster his leadership. But amidst the praise heaped on Henry for potentially fictitious virtue, there is also praise for an aspect of his real experiences. Henry’s devotees honored not only his piety and generosity, but also the positive example he set for those experiencing adversity. According to liturgy, Henry had been “in every adversity adorned by a love of perfect charity,”<sup>48</sup> and hence after his death he functioned as a “school of patience / to those oppressed by force / to the sad and desolate.”<sup>49</sup> Walker, too, noted this respect for Henry’s patience.<sup>50</sup> But in Henry’s case the virtue of patience provided not only a positive example, but also a means of imagining

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egestatem amovebat. Nequaquam suos opprimebat subditos immoderatis exactionibus, ut ceteri agunt principes et magnates: sed tamquam pius pater inter filios conversatus, eos decentissime ex suis relevans, propriis contentus maluit sic juste inter eos vivere quam ipsi deficerent egestate, sua suppressi crudelitate.”

<sup>45</sup>BL, MS Harley 5793, fol. 1<sup>r</sup>, MS Stowe 16, fol. 151<sup>r</sup>, and MS Harley 2887, fol. 11<sup>v</sup>: “Beatus Rex Henricus pauperum et ecclesiae defensor ad misericordiam pronus, in caritate fervidus...;” “Deus, qui beatum regem Henricum Tuum sanctum militem ecclesiae defensorem et pauperum amicum....” Harkey 2887 is a highly-illuminated book of hours of the late fifteenth century.

<sup>46</sup>See Trevelyan, “Extracts,” 2: “Offendentes remisisti...” and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Don.e.120, fol. 4<sup>r</sup>: “Was never man cam beforne thy face / Rebellion or oder yn adversite / Off they compassion commanded them go free....”

<sup>47</sup>Blacman, *Henry the Sixth*, p. 40; 18–19.

<sup>48</sup>BL, MS Harley 5793, fol. 1<sup>r</sup> and MS Stowe 16, fol. 151<sup>r</sup>, and Oxford, Bodleian, MS Gough Liturg. 19, fol. 32v: “...in omnibus adversis perfectae caritatis amore decorasti....”

<sup>49</sup>BL, MS Harley 423, fol. 72<sup>r</sup> and MS Royal 13.c.viii, fol. 1<sup>v</sup>: “Vi oppressis vel turbatis / mestis atque desolatis / Scola paciencie.” For a similar sentiment, see BL, MS Harley 5793, fol. 1<sup>r</sup> and MS Stowe 16, fol. 151<sup>r</sup>, and Bodleian Library, MS Gough Liturg. 19, fol. 32<sup>v</sup>: “praesta quaesimus ut eius exempla sequentes tam in mundi prosperis quam in eius adversis perfecto corde tibi serviamus....”

<sup>50</sup>Walker, “Political Saints,” pp. 95–96.



him as having particular sympathy for others suffering from troubled circumstances. Virginia Reinburg has commented on a similar connection between Mary Magdalen and her devotees, who found her particularly sympathetic to penitential petitions because she herself was a repentant sinner.<sup>51</sup> Thus, an English prayer that seems to have been specifically intended for use by pilgrims at Henry's shrine emphasized his concern for those in trouble: "Was never man cam before thy face / Rebellion or oder yn adversite / Off thyn compassion commanded them goo free."<sup>52</sup> In fact, Henry's suffering during his own life was so entwined with his concern for his devotees and his ability to help them that it was interpreted as divine will. One prayer explained that Jesus had:



Fig. 6. Henry VI. Woodcut, c. 1496, from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 277, fol. 367<sup>r</sup>.  
Reprinted by permission of the Bodleian Library.

<sup>51</sup>Virginia Reinburg, "Praying to Saints in the Late Middle Ages," in *Saints: Studies in Hagiography*, ed. Sandro Sticca (Binghamton, N.Y., 1996): pp. 278–81.

<sup>52</sup>Bodleian Library, MS Don.e.120, fol. 4<sup>r</sup>.

willed that [His] beloved servant King Henry should be afflicted by the weight of many tribulations, in order that by the merits of his patience and most innocent life...the copious sweetness of [His] grace may be displayed to the people by the glory of miracles....<sup>53</sup>

Thus, Henry's devotees not only appreciated his dubious virtues, but also deeply sympathized with his genuine experiences of failure and adversity, and assumed that he would have sympathy for their own.

It was this patronage of adversity that made Henry the object of a heartfelt and widespread veneration; as such the theme of adversity, and of Henry as its cure, appears in both visual and written sources. A woodcut pasted into the rear flyleaf of an English bible, now MS Bodley 277 (Figure 6) provides an excellent illustration of this trend.<sup>54</sup> Henry VI stands at the center, depicted with all his royal iconography (robes, orb, scepter, the arms of the English king, and his device, the antelope.) Eight figures kneel around him: three men, four women, and one too badly damaged to determine its gender. Four of these figures have been harmed by arrow, knife, or noose. Behind the figures are displays of votive figurines, crutches, chains, and other tokens commonly left at the shrines of the saints by grateful pilgrims. While Henry's royal status, portrayed at the center of the woodcut, may have had political meanings, his injured devotees deserve our attention.

Fortunately, the motivations and attitudes of the devotees in the Bodley 277 woodcut can be evaluated rather specifically, because they seem to correspond to people who appear in Henry's miracles. The volume of Henry's miracle tales, now British Library MS Royal 13.v.iii, is an unusually rich and reliable source upon which to base an investigation. Papal investigators used the volume as they located and interviewed those who originally reported them. Their marginal notations, including their judgement as to the veracity of the stories, survive. These notations show the stories to have been accurate enough that two decades after they were originally recorded, the investigators could analyze the testimony of living witnesses according to rigorous standards and pronounce, in twenty-two of thirty cases where witnesses could still be found, that the miracle was "pro-

<sup>53</sup>BL, MS Harley 423, fol. 72<sup>r</sup> and MS Royal 13.c.viii, fol. 1<sup>v</sup>: "Salvus et salvator omnium in te credencium, piissime Domine Jesu Christe, qui dilectum famulum tuum regem Henricum variis tribulacionum pressuris opprimi voluisti, ut ex eius paciencie innocentissime vite meritis quasi quibusdam botris uberrimus copiosa tue gracie dulcedo per miraculorum gloriam distillaret in plebem...." For a similar sentiment, see the last two verses of the English hymn appended by the editor to Blacman, *Henry VI*, pp. 50–51.

<sup>54</sup>Falconer Madan, in the *Summary Catalog of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford vol. II* (Oxford, 1922), calls it "the Bible, in Wycliffe's later version," and cites a date for the woodcut of 1496. In the sixteenth century, someone wrote in the rear of the bible that "Hic liber erat quondam Henrici Sexti, qui postea donabatur domui Cartusiensium quae Londinum contigua est." It was donated to the Bodleian collection in 1604 by Sir George More.

batum,” or proved.<sup>55</sup> As such, the basic elements of the narratives, including the names of suppliants and the situations that bound them to Henry’s pilgrimage, can be regarded as reliable. Most of the injured pilgrims in the woodcut can be identified with pilgrims whose stories appear in the miracle collection. For example, the woman with the knife in her throat could be a picture of either nine-year-old Joan Barton or (less likely, given the age difference) two-year-old Benedicta Barrow, both of whom fell and lodged knives in their throats.<sup>56</sup> The man whose chest is pierced by an arrow evokes the tale of Reginald Scarborough, who sustained just such an injury during archery practice in the village of South Luffenham in Rutland.<sup>57</sup> The man wearing the noose could be either Thomas Fuller or Richard Beys, both of whom were condemned to hang and were saved from their fate through Henry’s intervention.<sup>58</sup>

Some of the votive offerings that decorate the shrine in the background of the woodcut can also be connected with particular miracle stories. While the collection does not mention that any of them left their chains at the shrine, it relates four different occasions when Henry freed prisoners.<sup>59</sup> At least three

<sup>55</sup>On the rigorous examination of this testimony, see Aviad M. Klienbergh, “Proving Sanctity: Selection and Authentication of Saints in the Later Middle Ages,” *Viator* 20(1989): 201–03. For further information on the marginalia, see Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, pp. 74\*–104\*.

<sup>56</sup>Knox and Leslie, ed. and trans., *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, p. 62; Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, pp. 61–64. Spencer, in “King Henry and the London Pilgrim,” p. 243, has identified this figure with Helen Barker, who slit her own throat, but Helen’s story does not include a knife actually stuck in her neck; she was found with her throat slit from ear to ear (Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, p. 163; Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, pp. 203–05). Joan, who fell on the knife and lodged it in her body, is a better candidate.

<sup>57</sup>Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, pp. 181–82; Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, pp. 237–39. Spencer, “King Henry and the London Pilgrim,” p. 243, has identified the two figures of men with arrows through their chest and throat respectively, without distinguishing between them, as Scarborough and Richard ap Merideth. Merideth was pierced through the stomach with a sword or spear (Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, pp. 56–57 and Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, pp. 38–40). The second figure, however, clearly sports an arrow in the throat, and seems to represent neither Merideth’s story nor any others in the extant collection. However, Knox and Leslie point out that at least 271 miracles were eliminated from the original collection by the compiler of the final volume, so it is possible that such a story may have circulated, but was not preserved (*The Miracles of King Henry VI*, p. 19).

<sup>58</sup>Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, pp. 89–98, 149–56; Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, pp. 106–12, 185–90. Spencer, “King Henry and the London Pilgrim,” p. 243, assigns him the identity of Thomas Fuller.

<sup>59</sup>Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, pp. 57, 121, 127, 128; Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, pp. 41–44, 72, 74, 75.

paralyzed suppliants, Harvey Acke, John Trussel, and John Gery, left their crutches at the shrine.<sup>60</sup> William Anderson presented a wax effigy of a ship, similar to that in the upper right of the woodcut, when his ship was saved from destruction through Henry's intercession.<sup>61</sup> The votive horse in the upper left of the image might have been brought by a grateful Thomas Simon, who vowed to bring "a little offering" to the shrine when he requested that Henry intercede on behalf of his two ailing horses.<sup>62</sup> And perhaps most remarkable is the story behind the wax effigy of a man with a hole through its torso, in the upper left of the woodcut. This figurine seems very strange by itself, but corresponds directly to the agonizing story of Henry Walter de Guildford. While fighting the king's enemies at sea, he was struck by a cannonball such that "his body was shot through, and it was thought that he was even then face to face with death."<sup>63</sup> The wound festered, and Henry was put out to sea in a small boat by his crewmates, who could no longer tolerate his presence. He attributed his survival, rescue, and healing to King Henry, who appeared to him in visions during his ordeal, and later had his sister send an effigy of his body to Windsor in thanksgiving.

The pilgrims illustrated in the woodcut, then, are based on real pilgrims who appeared at Windsor and had their stories recorded in the miracle collection. Their stories, and the choice of their particular stories to appear in the woodcut, illustrate Henry's status as a patron of adversity, a status that is confirmed by an examination of the entire miracle collection. The common thread in his miracles, unlike most such collections, is not the healing of some particular type of injury or illness. Indeed, the miracle collection described remarkably diverse situations, ranging from the traditional *imitatio Christi* healing of the blind, lame, and mute to the removal of a foreign object from an ear canal. Henry healed traumatic injury, freed prisoners, protected people from fire, shipwreck,

<sup>60</sup>Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, pp. 76, 122, 135; Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, pp. 72, 95–96, 172. Spencer, "King Henry of Windsor and the London Pilgrim," p. 243, attributes them to Acke.

<sup>61</sup>Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, p. 177; Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, p. 223. Spencer, "King Henry and the London Pilgrim," p. 243, concurs.

<sup>62</sup>Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, p. 41; Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, p. 25: "...ei scilicet apud Wynsore oblaciunculam suam iterum devovendo."

<sup>63</sup>Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, p. 78; Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, p. 99: "...unus inter ceteros electior ictu patrarie percussus obruitur, immo verius perforato corpore iam tunc putabatur oppoetere." Spencer, "King Henry and the London Pilgrim," p. 243, calls this votive a "boy-figure" and relates it to the tale of John Lincoln (Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, pp. 62–63; Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, pp. 60–61), whose parents left a wax effigy of their son in thanks for the cure of his unspecified illness; but the effigy, when examined closely, does actually appear to have a large hole through the torso.

and drowning, repaired inanimate objects, healed animals, and even helped to find lost property. But the common thread in all his miracles is the same circumstance that may, in their minds, have linked his devotees to Henry: like him, they were all in trouble, oppressed and harassed, suffering from great adversity in their lives.

Although "adversity" is a broad term, and in fact describes the situations of all persons who sought miraculous aid (after all, they would not have sought miracles if they had no problems), in this case the word was applied in the sense of distress or calamity. The circumstances surrounding Henry's miracles display a unique urgency that suggests he was a figure his subjects called upon to alleviate emergencies and tragedies. As such, he was most often called upon in situations that arose suddenly. In exactly half (eighty-seven of 174, or fifty percent) of the miracles, Henry intervened immediately in situations that were both sudden and fatal: he revived people who had just died of illnesses or accidents, cured those who were in mortal danger from injuries, protected suppliants from mortal dangers such as house fires, shipwrecks, death sentences, or choking. In twenty-four cases (fourteen percent), he intervened in situations that evolved over a longer time, but were nonetheless fatal. In these Henry cured those who had been ill for anywhere from four days to several years, and whose illnesses had now brought them to death's door. All told, only sixty-one (thirty-five percent) of Henry's miracles rectified chronic conditions that were not immediately fatal, such as blindness, paralysis, or scrofula. Because of the emergency nature of the problems brought to his attention, in 105 of 174 miracles (60.3 percent) Henry aids his suppliant "immediately," "very quickly," "at once," or in some period of time under an hour. In fifty-eight more cases (33.3 percent), the suppliant received help at some time before he or she undertook the pilgrimage; in only ten cases (9.5 percent), the cure happened at the shrine itself, after a pilgrimage had already been both vowed and performed.<sup>64</sup> This immediate reversal of crisis differs significantly from the pattern presented by other medieval saints' cults, wherein the majority of devotees brought some chronic complaint with them to the shrine in the hopes of leaving it there.<sup>65</sup> Vauchez argued that by the later Middle Ages, miracle stories began to display a shift away from healing at shrines in favor of healing at the moment of the vow (i.e., on the spot, and hence away from the shrine).<sup>66</sup> Nevertheless, Finucane's work on nine high-medieval miracle collections found that roughly half

<sup>64</sup>The remaining case, which exists in epitome only, does not provide enough information for the reader to determine when the miracle occurred.

<sup>65</sup>Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Medieval Religion* (Totowa, N.J., 1975), pp. 81–84.

<sup>66</sup>Vauchez, *Sainthood*, p. 447.

of the cures still took place at the shrine, and even cures granted before a pilgrimage was completed were gradual, such that “the instantaneous faith-healing miracle was rare.”<sup>67</sup>

Even among later medieval collections, the emergency nature of Henry’s intercessions is unusual. Rates of illness and accident among children best demonstrate his deviation from the usual pattern of saintly intercession. Vauchez found in late medieval collections that the number of children who were healed rose significantly. He reasoned that children, since they were more fragile than adults, were less likely to survive a pilgrimage *before* they were healed, and thus their increased presence in later medieval collections is a result of the increasing incidence of miracles being granted on-the-spot.<sup>68</sup> Certainly this assertion is supported by Henry’s miracles, wherein fifty-six of fifty-seven children (98.2 percent) were healed in their moment of immediate need, rather than after they had already been brought to Henry’s shrine. But these immediate miracles healed more violent and sudden harms than those brought to Henry’s late-medieval counterparts. In Finucane’s study of children in eight late-medieval collections (including Henry’s), roughly two-thirds of children cured by the saints were ill, and the other third were accident victims.<sup>69</sup> But in Henry’s miracles alone, this statistic is very nearly reversed: twenty-two of fifty-seven children (38.6 percent) were dying or dead of an illness, while thirty-six of fifty-seven (63.2 percent) were injured or killed in an accident, or prevented from having a potentially fatal accident altogether through Henry’s intercession. Hence, Henry’s devotees most often sought his aid for their children in life-threatening situations—sudden, unexpected, shocking, and infrequent events that, when fatal, were regarded by medieval people as an “unnatural” cause of death, as opposed to deaths caused by “natural” illnesses. The reactions of parents to such accidents, even in other collections, “were nearly always immediate and explosive in their intensity,” and lent a note of urgency and frenetic distress to Henry’s collection, as well.<sup>70</sup>

Further investigation of the healing of children makes Henry’s status as a patron of adversity even clearer. One of the most striking aspects of the stories of children who received miracles from Henry is that twenty-five of them (forty-four percent of miracles involving children) describe the restoration of a child who had not only been injured, but actually killed in an accident. In another

<sup>67</sup>Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London, 1977), pp. 69–70.

<sup>68</sup>Vauchez, *Sainthood*, p. 470.

<sup>69</sup>Ronald C. Finucane, *The Rescue of the Innocents: Endangered Children in Medieval Miracles* (New York, 1997), pp. 158–63.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 98.



nine cases (sixteen percent of miracles involving children) Henry was asked to heal a child whose traumatic injuries had brought him or her to death's door. In these thirty-four cases, which represent 59.6 percent of the children Henry healed, the perception of Henry as having particular understanding of the needs of those in distress is central. The accident is explained in heartrending detail, as are the frantic responses of the people at the scene. Take, for example, the story of little Beatrice Shirley of Wiston, Sussex, recorded at Windsor on June 9, 1489, and later declared proven by papal investigators:

A girl of three years old was sitting under a large stack of firewood in the company of other children of that age who were playing by themselves, when by a sudden and calamitous accident a huge trunk fell from the stack and threw her on her back in the mud, pinning her down so heavily as to instantly deprive her of the breath of life. It was not possible that the breath should remain in her when her whole frame was so shattered; for the trunk was of such a size that it could scarcely be moved by two grown men. You may be assured that the horror of the sight soon scattered the company of the child's friends, who forthwith ran to and fro in all directions, showing that something untoward had happened by their screams or their flight, not by words. Perhaps it was this warning which made the child's father come up to see what had happened; and he, looking from some distance off, could see that it was his little Beatrice who lay stretched out there. Not a little alarmed, he hastened forward, and, on drawing near and finding her already carried off by so cruel a death, found his face grow pale, and his heart wrung with an agony of grief.<sup>71</sup>

Luckily, Henry's intercession brought the girl back to life.

Henry's healings of children, of course, are only one concrete example of the relationship between Henry's sanctity and his devotee's adversities. Far more mundane situations appear, but in most cases the author attempted to highlight the gravity of the circumstances, and the personal distress they caused for suppliants. Take, for example, the story of Henry's intercession on behalf of Steven Payne and Henry Lugey, two simple carters from Caversham. The author begins by emphasizing the poverty of his protagonists: "both were simple folk and of good reputation, but they were poor, as are those who live in extremely rural areas and procure the necessities of life for themselves and their families by the sweat of their brow."<sup>72</sup> This specific description of their insolvency justified

<sup>71</sup>Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, pp. 51–52; Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, pp. 35–36: "Siquidem puella quedam triennis dum coetaneis comitata suaptim lusitantibus sub stasse non modica focalium resideret, casu precipiti et infausto truncus ingens ex stasse prouens, tactam in pectore vel stomacho eam obruit, stratamque resupinam in lutum tanto pondere compressit, ut vitalem ex ea spiritum protinus effugaret. Neque enim possibile erat toto corpore conquassato, in ea remanere vite spiraculum. Extitit quippe tantillus truncus ille, ut vix a duobus adultis potuisset amoveri. Facti igitur horrore turbata, socialis illa turba infancium continuo dispergitur, segregatique extemplo atque hinc inde cursitantes, vel ululatu fortasse vel fuga ipsa, non verbis, rem aliquam inopinatum contigisse significant. Quo fortassis ammonitus pater occurrit, cupiens quid actum sit agnoscere, prospiciensque eminus prostratam suam sobolem agnovit Beatricem. Attonitus igitur non modicum acceleravit gressum. Porro cum appropriasset, cernens infantulam tam immani mortis genere iam defunctam, palluit vultu, cordeque concussus doloris spiculo...."

<sup>72</sup>Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, pp. 100–02; Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, p. 118: "...simplices utique ambo ac bone opinionis viri, opibus licet

the extremity of their desperation when their cart overturned and the tun of wine they were transporting split, sending the actively-fermenting contents shooting as much as twenty feet into the air. They could not have afforded to replace the wine, or to lose business in the future, and so they were forced to “cast up to heaven the *anxiety of this terrible alarm*”<sup>73</sup> (emphasis mine) and seek Henry’s aid, which he graciously provided.

The emergencies that brought Henry to mind were often so serious and so public that they seem performative in nature. Henry was routinely invoked in situations of such severity that the person in need no longer had the physical capacity to personally ask for his intercession. Instead, in seventy-six of 151 cases (50.3 percent) where the identity of the suppliant could be determined, the person or persons who made the appeal to Henry were bystanders, companions, and family members of the victim. Succinctly put, these were situations in which a modern person would immediately call 911. These stories often included a public element, wherein those who discovered or witnessed the misfortune would raise the hue and cry and call in the community. Then, someone would decide to pray to Henry, and the entire crowd would join in the appeal. Such was the case for little Joan Walran of Lambourne, Berkshire, whose mother discovered her after she had accidentally hanged herself to death. She “called her fellow townspeople and neighbors from their houses, and, to be brief, in a short time a large crowd of both sexes had hurried into the house, and were all bewailing the mother’s lot.” In this public setting, someone in the crowd thought of Henry, and when the whole community joined in praying to him, Joan began to revive.<sup>74</sup>

The nature of the evidence suggests that this portrayal of Henry as a patron of adversity would have been as broadly disseminated as any politically-oriented interpretations. Miracle stories, reported by pilgrims and then chosen and phrased by educated churchmen, incorporated the views of both. Not only were the majority of Henry’s miracles able to stand up to investigation later on, but they also would, as the Bodley 277 woodcut illustrates, have spread significantly beyond this one telling, becoming common fame through re-tellings in public liturgy, processions, sermons, and exhibitions of relics.<sup>75</sup> This broad publicity satis tennes, utputa qui extrema rura colentes vix multo sudore sibi suisque vite necessaria procurabant....

<sup>73</sup>Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, pp. 100–02; Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, p. 119: “...et ad nubes usque tam ingentis timoris excucientes horrorem...”

<sup>74</sup>Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, pp. 116–17; Grosjean, *Henrici VI Angliae Regis Miracula Postuma*, p. 142: “Siquidem, et plus fletibus vel horrore incompositi clamoris quam verbis sensum facientibus, convicaneos e suis evocat sedibus et vicinos. Ut quid igitur plura referam? Irruit extemplo in domum utriusque sexus haud modica multitudo. Plangunt universi mestissime matris miseriam...”

<sup>75</sup>See Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, pp. 156–59; also Pierre-André Sigal, *L’homme et le miracle dans la France médiéval (xie-xiie siècle)* (Paris, 1985), pp. 182–88.

would have shaped the attitudes of Henry's devotees just as much as liturgy, demonstrating to them that Henry could be useful in times of distress. Demonstrations of Henry's utility in the form of newly-reported miracles sustained themselves for at least sixteen years, between 1484 and 1500. Henry's devotees, then, may have been aware of the current political climate when they venerated their former king. They may even have taken quite seriously the claims to his virtuous life that modern scholars insist were a skewed perception of his problematic and unkingly personality. But even if his devotees believed that Henry had exhibited them during his life, it was not Henry's virtues that called him to mind. Instead, it was his experience of adversity, a demonstrably real aspect of his life, which created bonds of sympathy between Henry and his devotees, and thus brought him to mind in moments of genuine distress. At such moments Henry, who in life had failed to provide safety and stability for his subjects, could immediately intervene to provide those very things. Small wonder, then, that early printed prayer-books classified Henry as a plague-saint;<sup>76</sup> plague, too, was a sudden and fatal interloper, requiring an immediate cure. But manuscript materials previous to 1510 interpret his efficacy in adversity more broadly, leaving one with the impression that before the Henrician reforms ended public participation in his cult, Henry VI was fast on his way to becoming a patron saint of emergencies.

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<sup>76</sup>Walker, "Political Saints," p. 86, mentions this later direction of the cult; see an example in the compilation *Horae Beatae Mariae* of c. 1527, Columbus, Ohio State University Library BX 2080. A3 S3 RARE fol. 82<sup>f</sup>, wherein Henry appears alongside St. Roche as a plague-saint.