

# New Europe College Yearbook 2000-2001



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Editor: Irina Vainovski-Mihai

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ISBN 973 –85697 – 8 – 8

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# THE POLITICAL MENTALITY OF THE ENGLISH GENTRY AT THE END OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

## **Introduction**

At the beginning of the fifteenth century and at the end of the reign of the celebrated King Henry V, England witnessed a period of political instability that had serious implications at all levels of society. This climate of anxiety can also be seen in documents, chronicles, letters, and literary and political tracts of the time. While England had lost its Continental possessions at the end of a long and troubled century of war with France, inside factions destabilized English kingship and the governance of the state underwent significant changes. The political ideas of kingship, good governance of the state and royal counselors became topics of discussion among a larger audience than ever before, including not only the nobility (traditionally involved in politics), but also the gentry, who were increasingly involved in central politics. The purpose of this study is to investigate the reading habits of the late fifteenth-century English gentry as their preferences would help to envisage the process of shaping political mentality and ultimately the identity of the future Tudor gentleman. There are miscellaneous manuscripts that were read, owned, bought or commissioned by members of the English gentry; their existence points to the necessity of examining the political concepts contained in the texts included, with a view to revealing the mentality of the gentry in the period.

## **Historical background**

In England, the process of transition from a feudal society to the early modern state and its institutions coincided with the factional strife between

the royal houses of Lancaster and York. The extraordinary monarchical crisis of the fifteenth century had its roots in the unstable situation England was left in following the death of the Lancastrian Henry V in 1422. His son Henry, later Henry VI, became the youngest monarch in English history since the Conquest, inheriting the throne when he was less than nine months old. Henry VI's reign was also longer than any previous English monarch's reign at the time.<sup>1</sup> He became one of the most successful kings in English history owing to his victories against the French and his efficient governance of the realm. At his death, Henry V's legacy to his infant son and heir was the double crown of England and France. In December 1431 Henry VI became the first English king to be crowned as king of France. Despite this remarkable legacy, Henry VI was not a successful monarch. Unlike his predecessors (Henry IV, Henry V) and successors (Edward IV, Richard III, Henry VII), he had not benefited from growing up during his father's reign and witnessing the practice of successful kingship 'at work' through his father (and predecessor);<sup>2</sup> he matured under the tutelage of his uncles and protectors of the realm, Humphrey Duke of Gloucester and John Duke of Bedford. In 1437 he was once again showed himself to be unique in English history by becoming the first king in medieval England to assume the full royal prerogatives at the age of sixteen, earlier than any of his predecessors since the Conquest. At first sight Henry VI, it seems that he began reign under favorable auspices. However, he did not have the powerful personality of his father: unlike the warrior king Henry V, Henry VI was a pious man, not inclined to military action. Moreover, he suffered from a mental condition that rendered him incapable of ruling the country for periods of time. In these circumstances his father's victorious legacy could not be carried on – a situation that created anxiety and discontent with the king and his counselors at all levels of society, though mainly among the nobility and gentry who were involved in central and local government.

The instability of the English monarchy during the 1440s, when the last territories in France were lost, was heightened by Richard Duke of York's claim to the royal crown in 1450. York claimed his right to the throne through his descent from Lionel, the second son of Edward III, claiming that Lancaster was the usurping dynasty. The first Lancastrian king, Henry IV, had deposed Richard II, who was heir to the first son of Edward III, Edward Prince of Wales.<sup>3</sup> It was this controversy concerning the Yorkist claim to the throne that led to the civil wars, known as the Wars of the Roses. The Yorkist victor who emerged from the political

struggle was the Duke of York's son, Edward Earl of March, from 1461 Edward IV. Edward IV inherited a divided country of split loyalties to the opposing royal houses. His first task was to stabilize the domestic political situation, and then to establish England's image abroad. Edward gradually changed his approach to political governance during his first reign (1461-1469) and second reign (1470-1483). Traditional medieval kingship ensured the king's cooperation with the most powerful barons and peers of the realm.<sup>4</sup> However, there was a 'seismic' shift in the concept of governance during Edward's two reigns; in Colin Richmond's words, the change was "not in the way England was governed, but in the way England's governors related to the governed".<sup>5</sup> Two main areas of this change in Yorkist kingship and governance are particularly relevant to this essay, namely: Edward's attitude towards the gentry, whom he advanced socially, together with his renewed use of political propaganda, intended to consolidate his claim to the throne and his image abroad, and the gentry's own sense of involvement in politics and the shaping of their mentalities through the texts they commissioned and read.

Edward also chose a number of his royal counsellors from among the knightly class and the gentry, some of whom he raised to peerage. This political choice was part of Edward's change of policy during his two reigns. Throughout the Middle Ages, king's counsellors had mainly been of the king's kin (his 'natural advisers') and the most powerful peers of the realm. Charles Ross comments:

Many of those most prominent in the council between 1461 and 1470 had been newly promoted from the ranks of the gentry. *A more significant change in the composition of the council is the increase in the numbers of men of gentry origin, many of them connected with the royal household, amongst them some of the king's most reliable servants.* (my italics)<sup>6</sup>

The squires of Edward IV's household, mainly chosen from among the gentry, also acquired the function of (unofficial) counsellors, as Edward would consult them regarding the political affairs of the locality:

...by the auyse of his counsaill to be chosen men of theyre possession, worship and wisdom; *also to be of sondry sheres, by whome hit may be knowe the disposicion of the cuntries.* And of thees to be continually in this court xx squiers attendaunt vppon the kinges person... (my italics)<sup>7</sup>

Myers notes that the king's squires usually included sheriffs, justices of the peace, and commissioners in shires "where their influence [was] greatest", which implies that these squires were "recruited" from among the knights of gentry background involved in local government.<sup>8</sup> Thus Edward would have been provided with first hand information about the political situation in the shires. In these circumstances, it is easy to understand the increased importance of the gentry in late fifteenth-century English society.

In recent years Christine Carpenter and John Watts have shed new light on the political concepts that applied to central and local government in the fifteenth century.<sup>9</sup> Watts in particular analyses the ideas that underlay fifteenth-century governance and its manifestation at all levels of society starting with Henry VI's reign; he considers that "each political society is governed by a matrix of ideas to which all its politicians must make reference".<sup>10</sup> It is by looking at the complex contemporary evidence that one can assess the way this "matrix of ideas", according to Watts, influences politics

because in order to promote and defend their activities in a particular public environment, politicians are forced to explain themselves with reference to its 'accepted principles', and this consideration, in turn, shapes their behavior.<sup>11</sup>

In the fifteenth century this set of "accepted principles" shaped both the political conduct and the assumption about efficient kingship and governance of the realm at all levels of society, including the gentry. In the fifteenth-century, kings, magnates, gentry, and commoners alike felt the need to "draw attention to the ideas and principles which underpinned their actions", at a time when "the disorderly political events [...] were accompanied by a rich debate over the rights and duties of rulers and subjects".<sup>12</sup> It is this premise that the present study of the fifteenth-century gentry context takes as a starting point. In late fifteenth-century England the political debate over the duties of kings and subjects took stock of the already existing principles governing the locality, the "horizontal" links between members of the same social class, the gentry, and between the gentry and the nobility. An understanding of fifteenth-century gentry mentality can therefore be achieved by first examining the concepts underlying social "exchange" and interaction among the gentry and between the gentry and magnates (which also involved political action),

and then the political attitudes developed by the gentry as influenced by the texts they read.

### **The English Gentry**

In discussing fifteenth-century gentry mentality, and especially gentry political mentalities, a definition of the term gentry is required. In the *Middle English Dictionary* the noun “gentil”, later “gentleman”, initially denoted “a member of the nobility or the gentry” (*MED* 1.a). The notion of “gentil”, used as a qualitative denominator (adj.) also incorporated the character and manners “befitting one of gentle birth” and, as such, the word was used to describe the behavior found in both noblemen and later in members of the gentry. The terms “gentil” and “gentleman” were used widely across the nobility and the gentry classes throughout the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. Fifteenth-century historians, however, note that starting in 1400 the term acquired a more precise definition denoting the social status of the class immediately below the nobility. As T.B. Pugh points out:

Before the emergence of a parliamentary peerage the social distinction between the English nobility and the gentry did not exist. It was in the early fifteenth century that persons of some social standing began to describe themselves simply as ‘gentlemen’; at first, no doubt this meant nobleman (as it had done in the past), but this new usage soon spread and the meaning of the term changed. In an age of social mobility the status of men who had advanced their fortunes might well defy precise classification. [...] Hitherto, gentle (*gentil*) had meant noble, and before 1400 gentlemen were noblemen, born and not made.<sup>13</sup>

The term gentleman appears for the first time as a sign of social status in 1413 when the Statute of Additions required that in all official documents concerning criminal actions the “estate, degree or mystery” of the offender be specified.<sup>14</sup> The concept of “gentleman’s manners” and behavior did not cease to be associated with the nobility, although the connotation did not refer to the social status of the person if he was a nobleman. While literary contexts are not always clear about the social class to which the term “gentil”/“gentleman” is applied, in fifteenth-century English society a clearer distinction was increasingly made between

noblemen and gentlemen (in other words, between the nobility and the gentry). Within the hierarchical structure of fifteenth-century England a nobleman would not have accepted the description of gentleman unless the word denoted only refined manners and behavior. The tensions inherent in the new classification of the gentry and the nobility resulted from the “fluidity” with which the term was used, and particular care is needed in analyzing contexts in which the connotation of the term is not precise. Furthermore, fifteenth-century gentry commissioned and used “courtesy books”, through which “gentleman’s manners” were taught. According to Felicity Riddy, the popularity of the books of courtesy among the fifteenth-century gentry was justified by the fact that “at a time of social fluidity, many parents were not quite sure of what to teach”; the gentry needed the manners, the “social skills of the class to which they *aspired for themselves or for their children*” (my italics).<sup>15</sup> Indeed, as Christine Carpenter notes,

Once the lesser landowners had ceased to think of themselves collectively as ‘knights’, probably in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, there had been no obvious title for those who chose not to be knighted. The appearance of titles to dignify the gentry who were not knights reflects to some extent the gentry’s growing sense of their own importance. These titles were ‘esquire’ by the late fourteenth century, followed by ‘gentleman’ in the first decades of the fifteenth, for those below the esquires. By 1436, [...] the terms ‘esquire’ and ‘gentleman’ were still used [...]; there were perhaps some 7,000 men who could be called gentry.<sup>16</sup>

Edward IV developed a policy of advancing some members of the gentry into the nobility, which brought tensions within the ‘old nobility’. Pugh notes that the fifteenth-century English nobility initially accepted into their ranks the additions of the families of the de la Poles, the Hollands, the Beauforts and the Bourchiers (all “of mixed social origins”), and later of Edward IV’s new relatives, the Woodvilles, the family of his queen.<sup>17</sup> These changes in the structure of fifteenth-century nobility were not without consequences in the long run, and resentment was felt by the established nobility towards newcomers during the late 1460s, especially when Richard Neville, Duke of Warwick rebelled against King Edward. According to Pugh, during Warwick’s rebellion of 1469 the “newly created magnates” could not raise support for the king because “they could attract no binding loyalties on the part of the gentry, the class from which they

themselves had so recently sprung".<sup>18</sup> The participation of the gentry in both local and central politics, as well as their social rising through knighting was a phenomenon that took place gradually, throughout the fifteenth century:

...Richard II, Henry IV and Edward IV in particular relied heavily on gentlemen as councilors and for all manner of administrative and other services; the records are full of references to these trusted servants. For centuries gentlemen had served the king personally, in war or in the localities, and prospered; the novelty in the later Middle Ages is that the service was becoming more and more governmental; this is the so-called Tudor 'new' man in the making.<sup>19</sup>

This process requires discussion in order to understand the shaping of fifteenth-century gentry mentality, especially with regard to their social and political concerns. Indeed, the change was mainly related to the involvement of the gentry in local and central politics, as Colin Richmond notes:

At the centre of this political process or social intercourse – they were one and the same [...]. *Such men were the councillors of many masters, kings not excluded.* It is these men who managed things, who were at the heart of political life, whether of town, shire, or kingdom. Their loyalties were never predetermined because they owed them everywhere; they were their own men because they were everyone else's. *If power has to be located in one place then it should be here with these gentlemen.* It is at this level of society that we should be looking: in town and country where the active gentry were most active.<sup>20</sup>

The political mentality of the gentry was informed by the texts they read and which will be discussed in the following pages.

### **Miscellaneous manuscripts and their importance for the study of gentry mentality**

The imitation of the models of the nobility was not a new trend in the fifteenth century. Since the early Middle Ages, the cultural patterns of the aristocracy gradually permeated to the lower classes in various forms; Georges Duby notes that the popularization of cultural models is an

“essential, determining force in cultural history.”<sup>21</sup> The process of borrowing cultural patterns in fifteenth-century England could be seen in the choice of the gentry to commission specific texts for their miscellanies, a choice that shows a new development in their interests. The fifteenth-century gentry increasingly shared the interests of the nobility in matters such as political governance and kingship. While the texts owned and read by the fifteenth-century gentry were not their exclusive “intellectual property”, an “opening” process of the reading public can be witnessed which took place in the late Middle Ages, with particularly high growth in numbers in the mid to late fifteenth century. Reading, previously regarded as the privilege of the nobility, or as part of the job of a clerk or a cleric, became both a “pastime” and a way of learning for the gentry. The economic conditions in the late fifteenth century created a more stable financial situation for larger sections of the gentry, who had more spare time and disposable money for books. This led to the spread of what Malcolm Parkes calls the “non-pragmatic” literacy among the middle classes.<sup>22</sup>

In the fifteenth century many more gentry inherited, bought or commissioned books than in previous centuries. The book trade developed to an unprecedented extent.<sup>23</sup> The development of the “gentry mentality” is intimately connected with their reading preoccupations. Information about the books the gentry owned and commissioned can mainly be drawn from gentry wills.<sup>24</sup> A survey of the books that occur as bequests in gentry wills points to a larger corpus of books than those produced and used in the fifteenth century, as many of the mentioned books were passed down through generations. The documents that attest to the existence of books in possession of various members of the gentry give limited information on the real number of books in circulation.<sup>25</sup> It has been suggested that many popular manuscripts have not survived from the fourteenth and the fifteenth century due to “heavy use and cheap production”, and to the relatively low status of the English language (by comparison with the French, which was still the fashionable language of the nobility).<sup>26</sup>

In the fifteenth century buyers, and owners of books ceased to be exclusively associated with the court, and the royal house and the nobility had less influence on the production and dissemination of books among the gentry.<sup>27</sup> Arthurian romances, chronicles, and political tracts, attracted an ever-growing audience. Meale’s analysis of fifteenth-century possessors of romances reveals that various reading material could be afforded not

only by the nobility, but by the gentry as well.<sup>28</sup> In her discussion of the social milieu in which Sir Thomas Malory wrote his *Morte D'arthur*, Felicity Riddy suggests that the readership of romances in the late Middle Ages seems "not to have been among members of the nobility but, rather, among educated townspeople or members of the gentry".<sup>29</sup> Thus Riddy supports the idea that the development of the romances in the vernacular was encouraged by demand from the reading public, including the landowning gentry.

However, the fact that the gentry started buying and commissioning books similar in content to those of the nobility is an indication of their aspiration to shape their tastes according to those of the higher circles around the court.<sup>30</sup> The organization of court circles in the late fifteenth century suggests that there was a constant interchange of ideas (and books) among those associated with the court.

Some fifteenth-century members of the gentry, such as Sir John Paston, had the privilege of mixing socially in the circles of the court where they acquired new friends in high positions and new tastes. Other members of the gentry, not as fortunate as Paston, may also have tried to emulate the fashions of the court, possibly their literary tastes. Sir John Paston commissioned a "grete boke"<sup>31</sup> after the model book of Sir John Astley.<sup>32</sup> Sir John Astley was a knight of high repute who had proved himself on several occasions in tournaments organised at the royal court. Curt Bühler has suggested that Paston's "grete boke" was a type of miscellany that may have become, by the middle of the fifteenth century, the equivalent of a medieval "best seller".<sup>33</sup> Bühler believes that such anthologies contained a core of texts, among which were Vegetius's *De Re Militari*, Christine de Pizan's *Epistle of Othea*, and the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secreta Secretorum*; In Bühler's opinion, these miscellanies were "obviously written for the landed gentry".<sup>34</sup> However, G.A. Lester argued against this theory, using as evidence the few extant manuscripts containing the structure suggested by Bühler.<sup>35</sup> Cherewatuk has also analysed the relevance of the content of Paston's and Astley's chivalric miscellanies, arguing for a new understanding of Malory's *Morte D'arthur* as a "grete boke".<sup>36</sup>

There is evidence that the gentry owned a large number of miscellanies; however chivalric tracts and Arthurian romances were not always included among the gentry's composite manuscripts (which may be called "grete bokes"), or, if they were, they did not form their core material. This analysis will argue that the tracts copied into what could

be described as the “grete bokes” commissioned by the gentry were more varied than Bühler, Lester, and Cherewatuk have suggested, and that the most common works included were political tracts, the *Brut* chronicle, works by Hoccleve and Lydgate, and genealogical material. Such texts would have shaped the response of gentry readers to the political reality they experienced, and indeed their political mentality.

The great increase in the production of miscellanies, or “commonplace” books, was motivated by popular demand (mainly from the gentry and merchants), which may be taken as “a sign of the aspirations of ordinary people to own books”.<sup>37</sup> As a result such manuscripts became more affordable for larger sections of the reading public. Fifteenth-century gentry owned miscellanies of variable sizes and content: Paston’s “grete boke” that he instructed his scribe William Ebesham to write for him (now BL MS Lansdowne 285),<sup>38</sup> is closely related to Astley’s book, (now Pierpont Morgan MS 775).<sup>39</sup> Comparison of the two “grete bokes” by Paston and Astley makes clear the similarity of the two, suggesting that Astley’s manuscript is the original for Paston’s “boke”.<sup>40</sup> A similar book was written by Sir Gilbert of the Haye, who, in the 1450s or 1460s, at around the same time that Astley’s book was produced, translated French and copied several chivalric tracts for the Earl of Orkney and Chancellor of Scotland, William Sinclair.<sup>41</sup> Haye’s book contained similar tracts to those in Astley’s and Paston’s “grete bokes”; Cherewatuk considers that such volumes addressed “a knightly audience, for the specific purpose of instruction or edification”.<sup>42</sup> The similarity may indeed be interpreted as a sign of a “social practice”, as a gentleman was likely to seek to “[improve] himself by imitating a knight of the highest renown – not only mimicking him in chivalric conduct but also in reading material”.<sup>43</sup>

The gentry’s “grete bokes” contain military subjects, chronicles, genealogies, as well as literary and political tracts on kingship and the governance of the realm, like Hoccleve’s *Regiment of Princes* and John Lydgate’s translation of the *Secrets of the Philosophers*.<sup>44</sup> One very popular tract in the fifteenth century, both in the aristocratic circles of the court and in the gentry household, and particularly among those who emulated nobility in their tastes, was Vegetius’s *De Re Militari*, or *Epitoma Rei Militari*.<sup>45</sup> Books that were indebted or related to *De Re Militari*, William Worcester’s *Boke of Noblesse* and Caxton’s edition of the *Book of Fayttes of Armes and Chyualrye* acquired great importance.<sup>46</sup> The popularity of these works and their rapid dissemination, as well as their chivalric content, may be a reflection of the revival of chivalry at the English

court in the second part of the fifteenth century and the gentry's interest in it, particularly during Edward IV's reign.

### **Political dialogue in chronicles and genealogies owned by the gentry**

Fifteenth-century genealogical chronicles are yet another type of material that was consumed by gentry readers, following the example of both the nobility and royalty. The genealogical material, copied into the gentry's miscellanies, or produced separately in individual rolls, also shaped the response of the English gentry to national history and the political issues of kingship and the governance of the realm.

The genre of genealogy first developed in Europe in the early Middle Ages. By the twelfth century it had become a popular aid to the teaching of history. Peter of Poitiers' *Compendium Historiae in Genealogia Christi* was one of the main sources for the development of the genealogies produced in subsequent centuries in Europe, and later in England.<sup>47</sup> His work was an abbreviated biblical history accompanied by a chart that illustrated the descent of all the prophets from Adam and Eve by means of roundels linked by lines of descent. Such a chart had a teaching purpose and required a roll format, so that it could be read from top to bottom. Genealogical rolls usually contained little explanatory text, but focused on the visual impact of the line of descent. The model became so popular across Europe that in the next few centuries pedigrees and chronicle rolls were produced in great numbers. Apart from being an aid for the teaching of biblical history, the rolls became a way of recording the genealogy of kings, and in that sense a way of recording the history of a country.

In England genealogical chronicles developed first as a means of recording the royal descent of the kings of England, claiming ancestry from Brutus, the great-grandson of Eneas. In the fifteenth century the new production of royal genealogies provided a means to justify the English kings' claim to the crowns of France and Spain. Genealogical rolls and narratives functioned primarily as propaganda material but had a didactic use as well, becoming, in Livia Visser-Fuchs's words, "a diagrammatic backbone to the history of a country".<sup>48</sup> In the fifteenth century genealogies were extensively used by the royal houses at a time of political instability in support of their claim to the throne. When the house of Lancaster was replaced by the house of York in 1461, a new production of genealogical

chronicles ensued, which presented King Edward IV as a rightful king, although the opposing royal house argued that he gained his throne by usurping the “rightful” dynasty of Lancaster. The period of time after Edward IV’s ascent to the throne was characterized by a particular increase in the number of royal pedigrees and chronicles, due both to Edward’s need to justify his claim to the throne, and to his attempt to gather popular support for his plans for future military campaigns – in order to recover the English possessions (territories) in Scotland and France. Yorkist genealogical chronicles and pedigrees, like the Lancastrian ones before them, show a concern with inheritance among the members of the royal house and were aimed, as Alison Allan points out, at “the nobility *and the gentry*, and the increasingly educated commercial classes”, whose support was “of the greatest practical importance” to Edward IV.<sup>49</sup> However, few of these rolls have been edited; in the opinion of the nineteenth-century editor Thomas Wright, these genealogies contain useless material, because they combine history and myth, and this opinion is common even today.<sup>50</sup> The production and dissemination of genealogical material in the fifteenth century, whether in roll or codex format, in verse or in prose, is, however, essential to the present study of a shared view of history (through kingly descent), and the re-assessment of the history it implied (in terms of good or bad governance) among the English nobility and gentry. Malory’s own view of kingship may well have been influenced by contemporary genealogical material.<sup>51</sup>

King Edward IV claimed his ancestry from the early British king Cadwalader and portrayed his accession to the throne as the fulfillment of the prophecy of the return of the British race, using Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*, which included the royal descent of all the English kings from Arthur, the celebrated British king.<sup>52</sup> His use of historical propaganda was not the first time that Arthur was used in a claim to the crown of England. The Mortimers, in the previous century, also attempted to justify their own claim to the English crown through their links with the Welsh, an attempt that was foiled by Richard II’s ascent to the throne.<sup>53</sup> However, Edward IV knew that in order to get the support of large sections of the (divided) nobility and gentry, he needed to appeal to the broader view of history they entertained and cultivated through the *Brut* chronicle tradition. Sidney Anglo notes the impressive number of royal genealogies in circulation during Edward IV’s reign: out of the twenty-two pedigrees produced for Edward after 1461, fifteen included his British descent.<sup>54</sup> E.D. Kennedy adds another nine manuscripts

to Anglo's list and suggests that many more may have been in circulation at the time.<sup>55</sup> In their discussion of King Richard III's interest in genealogical material which he inherited from his brother, Edward IV, Visser-Fuchs and Sutton describe several manuscripts containing royal genealogies, among which the most interesting are Oxford Bodley MS Lyell 33, Philadelphia Free Library MS Lewis E 201 and BL MS Harley 7353.<sup>56</sup> These manuscripts contain royal propaganda, and were displays of the Yorkist claim to the English crown intended for foreign powers.<sup>57</sup> Such propaganda was put forth in the pictorial images contained in BL Harley 7353 and Philadelphia Free Library MS E 201, where Edward is shown as a king chosen through God's will. In the Harley roll, Edward sits enthroned on top of the Wheel of Fortune, whose move is permanently stopped by Reason, who puts a spoke in the Wheel. Another interesting example of royal propaganda is The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek MS 78 B24, which was originally a "Lancastrian" roll, ending with Henry VI and the birth of his son, but which was added to, in Latin and French, while it traveled to France between 1452 and 1460, and was finally updated to include Henry VIII.<sup>58</sup> In Oxford Jesus College MS 114, Edward IV and Queen Elizabeth are portrayed in a pious posture, praying before God's throne, which suggests the author's interest in conveying God's approval of Edward's right to the throne.<sup>59</sup>

The imagery in such rolls was not solely intended to impress foreign ambassadors. Indeed, some of the rolls were owned by the gentry, as is the case with BL MS Harley 7333 (described below). As Richmond suggests, fifteenth-century royal propaganda reflected the current political changes in central government – not in the way people were governed, but in the way the central government addressed the governed.<sup>60</sup> Richmond's re-assessment of fifteenth-century royal propaganda suggests that there was a constant exchange of political ideas among the "governors" and "the governed" – and among those who increasingly manifested an interest in political matters, the gentry were very conspicuous.

Many of the fifteenth-century gentry miscellanies contain king-lists and entries from genealogical chronicles, even if in abbreviated form. A case in point is given by the commonplace book owned by Humphrey Newton, a fifteenth-century gentleman from Newton and Pownall, Cheshire, now Bodleian Library MS Latin Miscellaneous c. 66.<sup>61</sup> Another fifteenth-century miscellaneous manuscript, BL MS Cotton Vespasian E vii, contains calendars, zodiac tables, and a brief historical tract on the

kings of Britain, from Brutus to Edward IV, with half-page coats of arms, including Cadwallader's, and also Edward's claim to the English crown through the Mortimers.<sup>62</sup> The tract covers the whole of British history in only three folios (ff. 69<sup>v</sup>-72<sup>r</sup>) and ends abruptly on fol. 72 with a picture of the enthroned Edward IV, wearing the triple crown of England, France, and Spain, while the coats of arms planned to fill the next two pages are left unfinished (ff. 72<sup>v</sup>-73<sup>r</sup>). The manuscript also contains a brief anti-Lancastrian tract in Latin (in which King Henry IV is described as "henricus maledictus" on fol. 73<sup>r</sup>), Merlin's prophecies, and a list of the Kings of Britain and the length of their reigns up to Edward IV (fol. 138<sup>r</sup>).

Among other historical and propagandistic material, BL MS Stowe 73 also contains a short genealogical chronicle on folios 2-48, which finishes abruptly on folio 48, with the coronation dates and the length of the royal reigns from Henry IV to Henry VI fitting on one page. Edward IV is mentioned as the son of Richard Duke of York, and the Yorkist genealogy and claim to the crown are placed on the right side of the kings' line of descent.<sup>63</sup> Similar manuscripts may have circulated in rural and urban gentry circles, and although there is no clear physical evidence in BL MS Stowe 73 of its circulation, it could be assumed that the same interest in historical and propaganda material that prompted the copying of chronicles was also behind the copying of this genealogical chronicle.

The presence of these genealogical tracts in miscellaneous manuscripts has not been addressed as yet by either historians or literary critics. Insofar as they have been looked at, they have been considered only from the point of view of royal propaganda. The use of material for propaganda was not a new feature during Edward IV's reign. King Henry VI's right to the crowns of England and France had also been given propaganda value, for example through John Lydgate's poem on his "Title" to the two crowns, a poem commissioned by John Duke of Bedford which survives in over thirty-six surviving manuscripts, proving the "enormous popularity" of this poem.<sup>64</sup> Apart from the lavishly illustrated first display of the poem that was said to have been posted in Notre Dame in Paris in 1423<sup>65</sup> it was also copied into numerous miscellanies, often owned by the gentry. One such manuscript is BL MS Harley 7333, where Lydgate's poem was copied on folios 24<sup>r</sup>-30<sup>v</sup>; the manuscript also contains a chronicle in English to Richard II (mentioned above), verses from Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*, and other poems by Lydgate.<sup>66</sup>

Lydgate's poem contains an obvious sense of celebration, and was written for the propagandistic purpose of supporting the young King Henry

VI and his claim to the crowns of England and France. Despite its “occasional” function, the poem enjoyed continuous popularity throughout the fifteenth century. Mooney suggests that both the ceremonial aspect, and the propaganda contained in the poem were later altered in order to “suit the political biases of scribes and patrons” both in Henry’s reign and “[...] in the reigns of his successors”. Mooney stresses the importance of the continued use of the poem:

...the use of brief versified chronicles of the kings as political propaganda [was established in order to] establish a monarch on the throne, to glorify his accession, or to bolster aristocratic or popular support for him during his reign – for all of which purposes we see them [the poem and its other variants] and their imitations being employed in England for almost a century after their original composition.<sup>67</sup>

The continuous presence (and use) of Lydgate’s poem and its altered versions as genealogical material supports the idea of a demand from large sections of the reading public for texts dealing with national history. This is also proof that genealogical material was in popular demand in the fifteenth century, whether as verse or prose, in codex or in roll format.<sup>68</sup>

The nobility and later the gentry also used pedigrees as a means of showing their connection to royal blood; in this sense the rolls and genealogical chronicles were produced not only as royal propaganda, as Allan has argued,<sup>69</sup> but as objects of pride for their owners. As Philip Morgan suggests, these genealogies acquired a “voracious readership” in their time.<sup>70</sup> The nobility pictured their family descent alongside the genealogy of the kings of England which may point to their sense of participation to history: the nobility wanted records of its involvement in history and especially wished to display their long experience in state affairs. Several members of the nobility commissioned pedigrees which had both the royal descent and their own family line presented side by side: the Percies and the Talbots thought they had as much claim to a genealogy going as far back as Adam as their kings had.<sup>71</sup> Meale points out that the genealogical rolls made for those with less financial means equally display their sense of pride. New York Public Library MS Spencer 193 is such an example; the roll focuses on the history of the Boteler/Sudeley house of Gloucestershire from the reign of Edward the Confessor down to the time of Henry VI. Meale considers that this roll is of inferior quality, suggesting cheap production; however, with closer analysis, its

visual impact comes across strongly.<sup>72</sup> NYPL MS Spencer 193 clearly functioned as “a manual of instruction” in the Boteler/Sudeley families, and served its purpose “by appealing to the eye, the ear and the memory.”<sup>73</sup> Meale concludes that:

While families and other well-defined social groups were striving to establish pedigree and reputation through the commissioning of commemorative records it could be argued that *there was a broader movement within England to consolidate a sense of national identity through historical writing.*<sup>74</sup> (my italics)

The gentry were similarly interested in genealogy and used their descent, real or “fabricated”, for very practical purposes. This is proved, for example, by the Paston family, who claimed land properties and backed up their claim in a letter to the king by an appeal to the immemorial nobility of their line.

Also they shewed a great multitude of old deeds, without date and with date, wherein their ancetors were alwaies sett first in witnes and before all other gentlemen. Also they shewed how that their ancetors *had in old time and of late time married with worshipfull gentlemen, ...and made open by evident prooffe how they and their ancetors came lineally descended of right noble and worshipful blood and of great lords sometime living in this oure realme of England.* And also they made open prooffe how they were nere of kin and blood to many of the worshipfullest of the country [...] They shewed a lineall discent how their first ancetor Wulstan came out of France, [...] and how Wulstan had issue Wulstan, which bare armes gould flowret azure, and how he had issue Raffe and Robert, which Raffe senior bare armes as his father and Robert the younger bare silver flowret azure. And Robert had issue Edmund and Walter, which Edmund the elder bare as his father, and his brother, because he married Glanviles daughter, a cheife indented golde, the field silver flowret azure; ...and how Sir John Paston was heire to all those, for they dyed sans issue. And this was shewed by writing of olde hand and by olde testaments and evidences. (*Paston Letters* II, pp. 551-2; my italics)

Although there is no evidence of the Pastons’ descent to the ancestors they mention in their claim for property rights to the king, their letter stands as proof of the desire of many of the gentry to trace their genealogy back even to the time of Brutus. An example of such an attempt is Rylands manuscript roll Bromley-Davenport 1, a fifteenth-century pedigree roll

that contains biblical and royal genealogies, the succession of the archbishops of Canterbury and a chronicle.<sup>75</sup> This roll has recently been dated to 1443-52, and its purpose seems to have been that of supporting the Lancastrian King Henry VI at a time when his claim to the English crown was challenged by Richard Duke of York. In the roll, the entire descent of Lionel, Edward III's second son, is absent, including the Mortimer line, beginning with Philippa, Clarence's daughter. The structure of the roll relates it to the tradition of Peter of Poitiers' biblical history in roll format (see discussion above). The ownership of this roll, according to Jeremy Parrett, seems to have been from among those families "shown [in the roll] clustering, supportively, around the royal line".<sup>76</sup> The audience and owners of the roll may have come from among the gentry who supported the Lancastrian cause. A comparison of Bromley Davenport roll 1 with another similar (though of inferior quality) roll in the same collection, Bromley Davenport roll 2, shows that variants of the same royal descent, accompanied by a short chronicle, were produced for a market. A more elaborate roll that may have been produced for a gentry audience is Rylands MS French 54, which, though it is written in French, presents evidence of scribal annotations by an English hand that continued the English royal descent up to Henry VI (initially the roll was designed to finish with Richard II).<sup>77</sup> The English bias of the additions is also present in the short Latin chronicle in the form of annals on the back of the roll, from William the Conqueror to Henry VI. There are many illustrations of abbeys in this roll, but only four kings are included: Vortimer, William the Conqueror, King Arthur (on the English side) and Charlemagne (on the French side). The roll contains the four columns format, with the Emperors of Rome, the Popes, the French kings, and the English kings. The current appearance of the roll suggests heavy usage over the centuries and, although there is no evidence of its commissioner or early owners, it is likely that it was used in a gentry family who supported the Lancastrian cause.<sup>78</sup>

The evidence confirms that genealogical rolls did not only have propagandistic use in the fifteenth century, but a family value as well, reflecting "territorial pride and acquisition", "fostering inheritance and judicious, profitable marriage and procreation", justified by the necessity to ensure (or manipulate) family inheritance:

Each new heir required a new line for himself and his heir on the family pedigree and he might choose to edit out 'superfluous' uncles, brothers

and sisters, change a few rich widows into heiresses, demote a childless elder son to the place of deceased young son all in the cause of tidying up and flattering the picture.<sup>79</sup>

The function of this type of material shows the interest manifested by both English nobility and gentry in national history that would influence their political choices, their own sense of family history, and participation in local and national politics.<sup>80</sup>

### **Advice literature**

As shown above, chronicles, and especially genealogical material, formed a large proportion of the texts commissioned, owned and read by the English gentry at the end of the fifteenth century. This audience also consumed other texts containing political ideas that would have shaped their political mentality. Such texts were not always of a political nature in themselves, nor their appeal limited exclusively to a courtly audience. Jean-Philippe Génét notes:

Since the dialogue was public, and political society embraced groups whose level of culture was not high, any review of the history of political ideas and attitudes must avoid focusing too much on the 'great works' written for a circumscribed elite; as important is the study of their circulation and the intellectual milieu from which they derived.<sup>81</sup>

The largest corpus of manuscripts containing tracts with a political appeal is formed by either miscellaneous or single text manuscripts of the "mirrors for princes" written by John Lydgate and Thomas Hoccleve at the beginning of the fifteenth century, but which continued to circulate throughout the century. While such long treatises in verses were initially designed to please the king, and were dedicated to him, the vocabulary used by their authors became part of the public domain, and a vehicle for the transmission of political ideas at all levels of society. In her in-depth study of the political concepts contained in the fifteenth-century English mirrors for princes, Judith Ferster points out the process of appropriation of the political concepts used by authors of advice literature into the public sphere:

...historical actors [...] borrow their vocabulary from the mirror for princes tradition. The authors of the mirrors for princes provided nuanced models of relationships between rulers and subjects that were dances of deference and delicate challenge. Magnates and kings, accepting some of the literary terms and rejecting others, performed these dances on a grander scale involving life and death and the faith of the nation.<sup>82</sup>

The audience for these texts was diverse and encompassed “the newly empowered strata of the ruling class, the gentry and the richest of the urban gentry”; such people saw the court as “the source of culture as well as political authority”, and for them “the growing consumption of vernacular literature was no less an exercise in cultural entitlement than the growing participation in political discourse”.<sup>83</sup>

Indeed the kind of political ideas put forth by mirrors for princes appealed to a large audience and conditioned even the designed recipient, the prince, as such literature created the context for representations of kingship:

Princes welcomed [mirrors] and on occasion commissioned them, not because they specially desired to have instruction in the business of government from clerks, not because they would much appreciate being told things they did wish to hear, but because it was important that they should represent themselves as receptive to sage counsel. They are not simply political public relations exercises but, equally, they are not [only] “books of instruction”.<sup>84</sup>

There are more than forty surviving manuscripts of each of Hoccleve’s and Lydgate’s mirrors for princes, and sometimes miscellaneous manuscripts, possibly owned by members of the gentry, contained versions of both. Such an example is Cambridge Fitzwilliam Museum MS McClean 182, dated approx. 1450, which contains Lydgate’s translation of the popular medieval treatise known as *The Secrets of the Philosophers*, Hoccleve’s *Regiment for Princes*, as well as Lydgate’s unique prose work *The Serpent of Division* (which takes the form of a political commentary on the dangers of political instability and internal strife in the kingdom) and prophetic verses from his *Fall of Princes*.<sup>85</sup> Similar fifteenth-century miscellaneous manuscripts possibly read by a gentry audience are BL MS Arundel 59 (containing Hoccleve’s *Regiment* and Lydgate’s translation of the *Secrets*), BL MS Harley 2251 (containing part of Lydgate’s verses advice from the book of manners known as *Babees Book*), BL MS Sloane

2027 (containing Lydgate's translation of the *Secrets*, a version of the Middle English *Brut* chronicle, as well as John Russell's *Book of Nurture* and Vegetius's *De Re Militari*)<sup>86</sup> and BL MS Harley 4826 (containing, part of Lydgate's *Lives of St. Edmund and Fremund*, his translation of the *Secrets* and Hoccleve's *Regiment*).

Such miscellanies were vehicles for the transmission and dissemination of political concepts such as good governance, wise kingship and prudent choice of royal counselors, which were discussed not only at the royal court, or among the nobility, but among the gentry as well. Authors like Hoccleve and Lydgate appealed to the concepts of stability in the realm through wise kingship and thus gained popularity in an age dominated by internal strife, anxiety over the future of the possessions in France and also a period of personal concern with advancement in society. The advice of these texts may appear as a commonplace for the entire medieval period; nevertheless the specific targets of Lydgate's and Hoccleve's verses were real kings in a period of political crisis in England, and the political mentality of their gentry readers was shaped by the concepts put forward, for the first time, in the vernacular. In addressing the king, Hoccleve, for example, appeals to the notion of law, and deplores the instability in the country, reminding the king that he is expected to rule with a firm hand:

Prince excellent, haue your lawes chere;  
 Obserue hem, and offende hem by no wey!  
 Bi oth to kepe it, bounde is the powere  
 Of kyng; ab by it is kynges noble  
 Sustened; lawe is bothe lokke and key  
 Of suerte; whil law is kept in londe,  
 A prince in his estate may sikir stonde.  
 [...]  
 Now in gode feith, I pray god it amende,  
 Law is nye flemed out of this cuntre,  
 For fewe be that dreden it offende.  
 Correccioun and al is long in the.[...]<sup>87</sup>

Indeed the law was a fascinating topic for fifteenth-century readers, as it connected issues of political governance and kingship. As David Lawton notes in his survey of the impact of fifteenth-century writing in verse:

The more they [the audience] could find out about those laws, the better; hence the demand for encyclopedias of mutability and tips on other's mistakes, compilations of what are commonplaces to us but may have appeared to them as political philosophy. Boethian wisdom was political survival. Witness, for example, Edward IV's consuming interest in alchemy and astrology, in which we see a typical action of a fifteenth-century king, the construction of his own subjectivity, just as in the public writing of the period we see, if I may pun on the "subject", the construction of the king as a subject.<sup>88</sup>

Indeed the process of re-fashioning the identity of the king was prompted, among other things, by the necessity of justifying the claim to the English crown by both the royal houses of Lancaster and York. This process had implications at many levels of society, and not least for the gentry who witnessed changes in royal governance and the king's approach to the gentry – especially towards the second half of the fifteenth century, when Edward IV was looking for support, less from the divided nobility and more from among the newly empowered members of the gentry.<sup>89</sup> In this respect Lawton's assertion is correct: the writings of Hoccleve and Lydgate were intended for the public sphere, and their impact was as great as that of political writings by "professionals" like Sir John Fortescue.<sup>90</sup> Indeed these were "open texts", and their readers participated in "the construction of their meaning".<sup>91</sup> As such these literary and political texts were both shaped by the classical culture of their authors and by the political thinking of the day. The political culture of late fifteenth-century England was thus fashioned out of exempla provided by Latin authors with relevance to the contemporary political situation.

In this context, it is easy to understand the impact in England of the political works of Christine de Pizan, a Franco-Italian poet of fame at the French court in the fifteenth century. Her political works were translated into English and some of her ideas were even appropriated in works written in England. Christine de Pizan's works spoke of a more traditional order of things, of a tripartite structure of society, whereas England had developed a diversification of this social hierarchy. Nevertheless her work contained the wisdom of a kind greatly enjoyed by a fifteenth-century English audience – that of the ancient world – and her writing appealed to, and blended in with, the public debate sparked off and developed by the writings of Hoccleve and Lydgate. Thus the gentry audience for such works, and implicitly the future Tudor gentleman, were the consumers of this literature and their political mentality was shaped through this "new

learning" – "medieval humanism" preceded and anticipated what we now know as the humanism of the Renaissance:

...it is important to remember that the "new learning", although of obvious significance, was not the only intellectual strand in late medieval culture, nor did it flourish in isolation. The older patterns of "medieval humanism" lived on, sometimes ignoring it, sometimes domesticating it or cautiously accepting it. The older patterns were very long-lived. Christine, who is a good example of the older "humanism", can still speak – like Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate – to writers and readers in mid-fifteenth-century England. They were mostly not interested in writing a purer Latin but in learning from the ancient world.<sup>92</sup>

Indeed, if Christine were to be cited, a gentry reader would have been pleased to find her advice, not be "ashamed to here trouthe & good teching of whom that euer seith it, for trouthe noblith him that pronounceth it".<sup>93</sup>

## Conclusion

This study has attempted to show a context for the shaping of late fifteenth-century gentry political mentality in England with a view to the complexity of the public debate over political duties, good governance and kingship, and the relevance of such issues for the gentry. Some of the members of the gentry became the "civil servants" of the Tudor age; their political outlook was fashioned both through their experience of political changes and through their reading. Political chronicles, genealogies, incipient political propaganda, as well as advice literature must be considered when one envisages the study of mentalities, particularly in the case of the gentry who were important instruments of the change in English government. The development of the early modern state, its institutions and a new political outlook, is closely linked to the emergence of the English gentleman at the end of the fifteenth century, and an assessment of the cultural and political context preceding the Renaissance is indispensable for both literary critics and historians of the period.

### List of Abbreviations

- BL British Library  
MS manuscript  
MED Middle English Dictionary, ed. H. Kurath (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959-...)  
*Manual* *A Manual of Writings in Middle English 1050-1500*, vol. 8, general ed. A. E. Hartung

NOTES

- 1 See R. A. Griffiths, entry on King Henry VI, in *Medieval England: An Encyclopedia*, eds. Paul E. Szarmach, M. Teresa Tavormina, Joel T. Rosenthal (New York and London: Garland, 1998), pp. 348-9.
- 2 For the details of King Henry VI's and Edward IV's kingship and the politics of the period, I am indebted to the magisterial studies of R. A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1998), and Charles Ross, *Edward IV* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1974).
- 3 See, also, R. A. Griffiths, "The Sense of Dynasty in the Reign of Henry VI", in *Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England*, ed. Charles Ross (Gloucester: Allan Sutton, 1979), pp. 13-36.
- 4 For a discussion of fifteenth-century royal counselors see G. L. Harriss, "The Dimension of Politics", in *The McFarlane Legacy: Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society*, eds. R. H. Britnell and A. J. Pollard, *The Fifteenth-Century Studies 1* (Stroud: Allan Sutton, 1995), pp. 1-20, esp. p. 15.
- 5 Colin Richmond, "Propaganda in the Wars of the Roses", *History Today*, 42 (1992), 12-18.
- 6 Ross, *Edward IV*, pp. 308-10. See also J. R. Lander, 'The Yorkist Council and Administration', *English Historical Review*, 83 (1958), 27-46 and Lander, "Council, Administration and Councillors, 1461-85", *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 32 (1959), 137-78. See also Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory*, p. 73 ff.
- 7 *The Household of Edward IV: The Black Book and the Ordinance of 1478*, ed. A. R. Myers (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), p. 127.
- 8 Myers, *The Household of Edward IV*, p. 246, n. 202.
- 9 Christine Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses: Politics and the Constitution in England, c. 1437-1509* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and John Watts, *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- 10 Watts, *Henry VI*, Intro., p. 7.
- 11 John Watts, 'Polemic and Politics in the 1450s', in *The Politics of Fifteenth-Century England: John Vale's Book*, eds. M. L. Kekewich, J. L. Watts, Anne Sutton, Livia Visser-Fuchs, and Colin Richmond (Gloucester: Allan Sutton, 1995), pp. 3-42, at p. 5.
- 12 Watts, "Ideas, Principles, and Politics", in *The Wars of the Roses*, ed. A. J. Pollard (London: Macmillan, 1995), pp. 110-33, at p. 111. See also in the same collection, Rosemary Horrox, 'Personalities and Politics', pp. 89-109.
- 13 T. B. Pugh, "The Magnates, Knights and Gentry", in *Fifteenth-Century England: 1399-1509*, eds. S. B. Chrimes, C. D. Ross, and R. A. Griffiths (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), pp. 86-128, at pp. 96-7.
- 14 See *Statutes of the Realm* (11 vols, 1810-28), II, p. 171 (1 Henry V, cap. V), cited in D. A. L. Morgan, "The Individual Style of the English Gentleman", in

- Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe*, ed. Michael Jones (Gloucester: Allan Sutton, 1986), pp. 15-35, at pp. 16 and 29, n. 2. A large part of the present discussion of the notion of fifteenth-century “gentleman” and “gentry” is based on this study. See, also, R. L. Storey, “Gentleman-bureaucrats”, in *Profession, Vocation, and Culture in Later Medieval England: Essays Dedicated to the Memory of A. R. Myers*, ed. Cecil H. Clough (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982), pp. 90-129, especially pp. 90-7. A very important study that considers the differences between the concept (and reality) of the French gentleman and the English gentleman, explaining the greater complexity and advancement of the English gentry culture, is Philippe Contamine’s “France at the End of the Middle Ages: Who was then the Gentleman?”, in Michael Jones (ed.), *The Gentry and the Lesser Nobility in Late Medieval Europe* (Gloucester: Allan Sutton, 1986), pp. 201-16. Since my study is designed to explore the mentality of the English gentry in depth, and its unique character has been remarked on by most historians, my initial comparative approach with the French has proved unfruitful.
- 15 Felicity Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), p. 71 (my italics).
- 16 Christine Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses: Politics and the Constitution in England c. 1437-1509* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 45.
- 17 Pugh, “The Magnates, Knights and Gentry”, p. 87. On the question of the nobility objecting to new members, and especially to Edward’s alliance to the Woodvilles, Pugh comments that the aristocracy “had no reason to reject the Wydevills once Lord Rivers’s daughter, Elizabeth, had become queen of England. Between October 1464 and February 1466 the earls of Arundel and Essex, and Edmund Grey, the newly created earl of Kent, married their heirs to Wydevill wives. Their readiness to contract such marriage alliances with the Wydevills hardly suggests that they viewed the rapid advancement of the queen’s family with resentment. Even the greatest of aristocratic houses in late medieval England did not allow social snobbery to impede their chances of material gain.” For a discussion of the Woodvilles’ advancement at the court, see also Michael Hicks, ‘The Changing Role of the Wydevilles in Yorkist Politics to 1483’, in *Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England*, ed. Charles Ross (Gloucester: Allan Sutton, 1979), pp. 60-86.
- 18 Pugh, ‘The Magnates, Knights and Gentry’, p. 93.
- 19 A. L. Brown, ‘The King’s Councillors in Fifteenth-century England’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> series, 19 (1969), 95-118.
- 20 Colin Richmond, ‘After McFarlane’, *History*, 68 (1983), 46-60, p. 59.
- 21 George Duby, ‘The Diffusion of Cultural Patterns in Feudal Society’, *Past & Present*, 39 (1968), 3-10.

- 22 M. B. Parkes, 'Literacy of the Laity', in *Literature and Western Civilization: The Medieval World*, eds. D. Daiches and A. K. Thorlby (London: Aldus, 1973), pp. 555-77.
- 23 Carol Meale, "Patrons, Buyers, and Owners: Book Production and Social Status", in Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (eds), *Book Production and Publishing in Britain 1375-1475* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 201-38, at p. 201.
- 24 See Meale, "Book Production", pp. 201-38, and Susan H. Cavanaugh, "A Study of Books Privately Owned in England: 1300-1450", unpublished PhD thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1980.
- 25 Kate Harris, "Patrons, Buyers and Owners: The Evidence for Ownership and the Role of Book Owners in Book Production and the Book Trade", in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain*, pp. 163-199, at p. 167. See also Carol Meale, "Manuscripts, Readers and Patrons in Fifteenth-Century England: Sir Thomas Malory and Arthurian Romance", *Arthurian Literature*, 4 (1985), 93-126. Meale notes that wills are "notoriously unreliable as guides either to general interest in literature or to the actual subject of the books people actually possessed" because book-owners very often "either [do] not list a single MS in their bequests, or [...] omit mention of volumes which, because they are still extant, and bear contemporary *ex libris* inscriptions or other identifying marks, can be confidently assigned to them" (pp. 101-2).
- 26 See Harris, "The Evidence for Ownership", pp. 163-99, and Meale, "Book Production", pp. 201-38.
- 27 This marks a difference from the situation on the Continent, and especially in France. See Meale, "Book Production", p. 202.
- 28 See Meale, "Manuscripts, Readers and Patrons", pp. 102 and 105-8. For an analysis of the ownership of Middle English romances, see John J. Thompson, "Collecting Middle English Romances and Some Related Book-Production Activities in the Later Middle Ages", in *Romance in Medieval England*, eds. Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows, and Carol Meale (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1991), pp. 17-38. For a discussion of book patronage and its political importance at the English court in the late Middle Ages, see A. I. Doyle, "English Books In and Out of Court from Edward III to Henry VII", in V. J. Scattergood and J. W. Sherborne (eds.), *English Court Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Duckworth, 1983), pp. 163-81, and, in the same collection, J. J. Alexander, 'Painting and Manuscript Illumination for Royal Patrons in the Later Middle Ages', pp. 141-62.
- 29 Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory*, p. 13.
- 30 The gentry was attempting to fashion their own social identity under the influence of the nobility and this new trend was also present in their increased demand for chronicles, like the *Brut* and its continuations, and in the production of family pedigrees and genealogies (under the influence of royal propaganda).

- 31 *Sir John Paston's "Grete Boke": A Descriptive Catalogue, With An Introduction, of British Library MS Lansdowne 285*, ed. G. A. Lester (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1984).
- 32 See Barber, 'Malory's *Le Morte D'arthur* and Court Culture', at p. 147: "Astley's book is a collection of chivalric and heraldic treatises, and was almost certainly completed in the early 1460s, probably by 1461. Its core is a professional copy of a group of texts concerning knighthood, military affairs and ceremonial." Chivalric books had also been commissioned by kings: Henry IV took an interest in Christine de Pizan's *Epistle of Othea* (See Meale, 'Book Production', p. 208), and his heir Henry V manifested the same interest, as well as Henry VII (these works were mainly in French, and the *Epistle of Othea* was a commonly-read and translated tract in the fifteenth century).
- 33 Curt F. Bühler, 'Sir John Paston's Grete Boke, a Fifteenth-Century "Best Seller"', *Modern Language Notes*, 56 (1941), 345-51.
- 34 Bühler, 'Sir John Paston's Grete Boke', p. 351.
- 35 Lester, *Grete Boke*, pp. 47-8.
- 36 See Karen Cherewatuk, "Malory's Book of Chivalry: the *Morte D'arthur* and Manuals of Chivalry", unpublished PhD thesis, Cornell University, 1986.
- 37 Lester, *Grete Boke*, p. 54.
- 38 *Paston Letters and Papers*, ed. Norman Davis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), vol. II, pp. 386-7 and 391-2.
- 39 Pierpont Morgan MS 775 is a unique miscellany assembled for Sir John Astley, which contains several chivalric tracts, among which works by Vegetius and Christine de Pizan. It also contains the Poem at King Henry VI's coronation (ff. 14-15), Aristotle's *Secreta Secretorum*, in its translation by Lydgate and Burgh (ff. 130-195<sup>v</sup>), and verses from Lydgate.
- 40 Lester, *Grete Boke*, pp. 31-4.
- 41 Karen Cherewatuk, ' "Gentyl" Audiences and "Grete Bokes": Chivalric Manuals and the *Morte D'arthur*', *Arthurian Literature* 15 (1998), 205-16. At p. 212 Cherewatuk comments: "Haye's great book is the first extended volume in Scots prose". See *The Prose Works of Sir Gilbert Hay*, ed. J. A. Glen, 3 vols., Scottish Text Society, 4th series, 21 (Edinburgh, 1993). Felicity Riddy suggests that Haye, in composing the 'Buik of Alexander', had a similar task with Malory's, that of refashioning a coherent story drawn out of various sources. (Riddy, *Sir Thomas Malory*, p. 29)
- 42 Cherewatuk, " "Gentyl Audiences" and "Grete Bokes"', p. 213.
- 43 Cherewatuk, " "Gentyl Audiences" and "Grete Bokes"', p. 211.
- 44 An example of a typical miscellaneous manuscript owned by a member of the gentry is BL MS Sloane 2027, described in Meale, "Book Production" (p. 215), as "a large paper miscellany written by one scribe probably during the 1460s or 70s", which contains, "in a neat hand of the second half of the fifteenth century, the inscription "Wylliam Braundon of knolle in the Counte of waryke" (fol. 96<sup>v</sup>), which is repeated with variations on several blank

pages." The other items in the book are Vegetius' *De Re Militari*, John Russell's *Boke of Kerving and Nurtur* and Lydgate and Burgh's 'booke Off the gouemaunce off kyngis and pryncis' (otherwise known as "Secrees of Old Philosoffres"). Meale considers that "the thematic consistency of this material gives a comparatively rare insight into the tastes of minor provincial landowners of the time." (pp. 216 and 233, n. 88). Similar manuscripts are MS Lambeth 491, MS Huntington 114 and BL MS Harley 3943, discussed elsewhere (see my article "Talkyng of cronycles of kynges and of other polycyzez": Fifteenth-century Miscellanies, the *Brut* and the English Gentry', *Arthurian Literature* (2001), 125-41. An interesting example of a fifteenth-century gentleman's commonplace book is Humphrey Newton's "book", now MS Latin Miscellaneous c. 66, which, despite its misleading cataloguing title (the book also includes tracts in languages other than Latin), contains, among other items, excerpts from the Middle English *Brut* (ff. 6<sup>v</sup>-7<sup>r</sup>), a king-list (f.2), short genealogies on local Cheshire families (ff. 14-15), a pedigree of the earls of Chester (f.63), and two English courtesy tracts (ff. 66-8). (The contents of this manuscript are taken from the handout provided by Dr. Deborah Youngs for her talk at the Gentry Colloquium on the theme of Gentry Identities, held at Keele, in November 1998. I am grateful to Dr. Philip Morgan for letting me have a copy of Dr. Youngs's handout)

45 Versions of the *De Re Militari* were produced later in the fifteenth century, such as the verse *Knyghthode and Bataile* (c. 1457-60) and a partial English translation was carried out by a Scottish herald around 1500. See Lester, "Grete Boke", p. 50.

46 Christine de Pizan, *Book of Fayttes of Armes and Chyualrye*, ed. A. T. P. Byles, Early English Text Society, old series, no. 189 (London, 1932).

47 See the new edition of Poitiers's work by Dan Embree, (ed.) *Peter of Poitiers's Chronicle of the Popes and Emperors* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999). For a discussion of the development and function of genealogical chronicles in England, see W. H. Monroe, 'Thirteenth and Fourteenth-century Illuminated Genealogical Manuscripts in Roll and Codex', unpublished PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute, London, 1989. For a discussion of genealogical chronicles in roll format, see, also, Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, "Richard III's Books: Ancestry and 'True Nobility'", *Ricardian*, 9 (1992), 343-58. The discussion of most of these genealogical chronicles is based on my own examination of the chronicle manuscripts.

48 Livia Visser-Fuchs and Anne Sutton, *Richard III's Books: Ideals and Reality in the Life and Library of a Medieval Prince* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997), p. 135.

49 Alison Allan, "Yorkist Propaganda: Pedigree, Prophecy and the British History", in *Patronage, Pedigree and Power*, ed. Charles Ross (Gloucester: Stroud, 1979), pp. 171-92, at p. 189 (my italics). See, also, Allan's analysis of fifteenth-century chronicles and political propaganda, in her unpublished

- PhD thesis, "Political Propaganda employed by the house of York in England in the mid-fifteenth century", University of Wales, Swansea, 1981. See, also, Colin Richmond, 'Propaganda in the Wars of the Roses', 12-18.
- 50 Thomas Wright, *Feudal Manuals of English History Compiled at Different Periods from the Thirteenth Century to the Fifteenth Century for the Use of the Feudal Gentry and Nobility* (London, 1872).
- 51 Professor E. D. Kennedy has suggested the possibility that Malory himself was aware of genealogical material in his unpublished conference paper "Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte D'arthur*: a Fifteenth-century English Adaptation of a Thirteenth-century French Romance", given at the 19<sup>th</sup> International Arthurian Congress, University of Toulouse le Mirail (July 1999). I am grateful to Professor Kennedy for allowing me to use his unpublished paper.
- 52 See Allan, "Yorkist Propaganda", pp. 171-92.
- 53 See M. E. Giffin, "Cadwallader, Arthur and Brutus in the Wigmore Manuscript", *Speculum*, 16 (1941), 109-20.
- 54 See Sidney Anglo, "The British History in Early Tudor Propaganda", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 44 (1961-2), 17-48.
- 55 See Kennedy, *Manual*, pp. 2676-7 and 2889-90. Kennedy catalogues them as two versions, the Longer and the Shorter English Genealogical Chronicle of the Kings of England. The manuscripts of the Long Version are Bodleian 3646 (e Museo 42), in which the chronicle is copied on ff. 1<sup>r</sup>-35<sup>r</sup> (dated by Kennedy to 1467-69), Bodleian Lyell 33 (ff 1<sup>v</sup>-63<sup>v</sup>, dated 1469-70), Corpus Christi Oxford 207 (ff. 1<sup>v</sup> -28<sup>v</sup>, dated 1467-9), BL MS King's 395 (ff. 1<sup>r</sup> -34<sup>r</sup>, dated early 16<sup>th</sup> c), and Yale University Beinecke Library MS Marston 242, which is a roll dated to c. 1467 (Kennedy, *Manual*, p. 2889). The Shorter Version manuscripts are Cambridge Univ MS Addit. 3170 (ff. 1<sup>v</sup>-27<sup>v</sup>, dated 1470), Magdalene Cambridge Pepys 2244 roll (c. 1473), BL MS Stowe 73 (ff. 2<sup>v</sup> -48<sup>r</sup>, c. 15<sup>th</sup> c), BL MS Addit. 31950 roll (15<sup>th</sup> c, originally intended to finish with Edward IV, but ends abruptly with Henry VI), College of Arms Arundel 23, pp. 2-54 (15<sup>th</sup> c, up to Edward IV), and College of Arms Schedule 20/20, which is a pedigree from Adam to Edward IV.
- 56 See *Richard III's Books*, pp. 137-41, especially pp. 138-9. A related genealogical roll is Pierpont Morgan MS B 30, a fifteenth-century roll which contains the royal descent of the English kings to Edward IV, and includes an addition, in a later hand, of a poem dedicated to Henry VIII (the manuscript is now bound as a book).
- 57 See, for example, the letter from the Pope in which he refers to such a genealogy. The example is taken from T. Rymer, *Foedera, Conventiones, Literae, Et Cujuscunqve Generis Acta Publica*, 20 vols, XI, vol. 5, part 2, p. 110 (22 March 1462) (cited in *Richard III's Books*, pp. 138-9).
- 58 See *Richard III's Books*, p. 140.
- 59 The manuscript is described in Allan, "Political Propaganda employed by the house of York", pp. 285-87.

- 60 See Richmond, "Propaganda in the Wars of the Roses", 12-18 (the imagery of the roll is reproduced and discussed there). For further information of the political use of genealogies and prophecies in the fifteenth century, see Leslie Coote, 'Political Prophecy in Fifteenth-century England', unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 1987.
- 61 See the discussion of the contents of this manuscript above.
- 62 The tract is only briefly mentioned in Kennedy, *Manual*, pages 2677 and 2890, Allan, "Yorkist Propaganda", p. 179, and Anglo, "The British History", p. 43.
- 63 Kennedy lists the manuscript in *Manual*, p. 2890. This is one of five manuscripts of the Shorter English Genealogical Chronicle listed by Kennedy. See, also, Kennedy, *Manual*, pp. 2677-8, item 49.
- 64 See Lynne Mooney, "Lydgate's 'Kings of England' and Another Verse Chronicle of the Kings", *Viator*, 20 (1989), 255-89, at p. 256.
- 65 B. J. H. Rowe "King Henry VI's Claim to France in Picture and Poem", *The Library* 4<sup>th</sup> series, 13 (1933), 77-88. Rowe also suggests that the image that accompanied Lydgate's poem was the one reproduced in BL MS Royal 15 E vi, which is a miscellaneous manuscript, containing several chivalric tracts, presented by John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, to Margaret of Anjou on her marriage to Henry VI.
- 66 The chronicle is briefly mentioned in Kennedy, *Manual*, p. 2819, and dated 15<sup>th</sup> c. See discussion in Mooney of this MS ("Lydgate's 'Kings of England'", 255-89).
- 67 Mooney, 'Lydgate's "Kings of England"', p. 276.
- 68 Another example is Pierpont Morgan MS B 5, which contains, apart from a version of Hardyng's *Chronicle*, the "Title of Fraunce" (that is, the English kings' claim to the French crown) on fol. 98<sup>v</sup> (see Harker, p. 37). I am grateful to the Librarian to the Special Collections in the Pierpont Morgan Library, Ms Sylvie Merian, for her guidance in genealogical material in the Pierpont Morgan collections.
- 69 Allan, "Yorkist Propaganda: Pedigree, Prophecy and the British History", pp. 171-92. See, also, Allan, "Political Propaganda employed by the house of York".
- 70 Philip Morgan, "'Those Were the Days': A Yorkist Pedigree Roll", in *Estrangement, Enterprise, and Education in Fifteenth-Century England*, eds. Sharon Michalove and A. Compton Reeves (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), pp. 107-16.
- 71 The roll containing the parallel history of the Kings of England and the Percies' descent is Oxford, Bodleian Library Bodley Roll 5, briefly described in Anne Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, *Richard III's Books*, p. 142. Other pedigrees and rolls of the main influential noble families at the English court in the fifteenth century are the Beauchamp Pageant, detailing the line of the Beauchamps to which the Neville connection is added (now BL MS Cotton

- Julius B iv), the Salisbury Roll, a history of the Neville family, now BL Loan MS 90, and the Rous Roll, describing the Warwick family history (now extant in two versions, Latin and English, which are London, College of Arms, MS Warwick Roll, and BL MS Add. 48976 respectively). Another roll is the Clare Roll, now College of Arms, 3/16, a pedigree of the lords of Clare, showing the coats of arms of the Mortimers, and Richard Duke of York's claim to the English throne; the last coat of arms is Edward IV's. These rolls are only briefly discussed in *Richard III's Books*, pp. 144-50.
- 72 I am grateful to the Custodian of Rare Manuscripts in the New York Public Library, Ms. Margaret Glover, for her help and assistance in my study of this unique manuscript.
- 73 *Family History (Journal of the Institute of Heraldic and Genealogical Studies)*, 10 (1977), 33.
- 74 Meale, "Book Production", p. 215. See, also, Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, p. 253. The same is the case of Douce MS 291, which contains, apart from Vegetius' tract on *De Re Militari*, a pedigree of the family of Chalons of Devonshire. (Meale, "Book Production", p. 232, n. 79).
- 75 This is a unique manuscript which has received no attention until recently. Thomas Wright, the nineteenth-century antiquarian, refers to this roll, or perhaps to one related to it, claiming that the interest shown in the Welsh connection of the English royal family seems to indicate that the roll was produced for a Welsh baron (see Wright, *Feudal Manuals*, p. xvii). The most recent work on this roll has been done by Jeremy Parrett, Librarian at the John Rylands University Library of Manchester. I am grateful to Mr. Parrett for discussing the roll with me, and for allowing me to use his unpublished work. (The roll is mainly in Latin and English)
- 76 Parrett, study of Bromley-Davenport 1. See reference above.
- 77 This roll has not been studied so far. My work on this roll and the related roll Rylands French 99 has taken the form of a conference paper, "Rylands French MSS 54 and 99: French and English Views of History", presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Medieval Chronicle Conference, The Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Utrecht (July 1999). A related roll that I am going to discuss in the published version of this paper is BL Cotton Roll xiii. 33, dating from the fifteenth century, and containing the same format as French MS 54.
- 78 A similar case is Rylands Latin MS 114, discussed by Morgan in his article "Those Were the Days". Although Latin MS 114 is a much more elaborate and lavishly illuminated roll containing medallions of all the kings of England to Richard III (with additions to Henry VII), it was initially produced and "consumed" by a fifteenth-century gentry audience (see reference above). Another roll, known as the "Maude roll", was commissioned for a fifteenth-century noble family from West Riding, Wakefield; their name was derived from "Monhault", and their family line goes back to the Conquest.

The manuscript contains a genealogy of the kings of Britain, and the Maudes' descent is placed along the central royal line. In this roll the Lancastrian kings are described as usurpers; yet internal evidence (the presence of a red rose on Noah's ark) suggests that the roll may have been produced in a Lancastrian household before 1460, and after Edward's victory in 1461, it was added to in a Yorkist vein (See *Handbook to the Maude Roll, Being a XVth Century Manuscript Genealogy of the British and English Kings from Noah to Edward IV, With a Marginal History*, ed. A. Wall [Auckland and London: Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd., 1919]).

<sup>79</sup> *Richard III's Books*, p. 140.

<sup>80</sup> See the example of Thomas Dervent, who was arrested in the early years of Edward IV's reign, for his possession of a 'pedegre of the true and verrey lynyall descent from noble progeniteurs to your highnesse as rightfull and verrey enheritour to the crownes of Englund and Fraunce', which was a Lancastrian pedigree roll. The supporting document is P. R. O, Special Collections, Ancient Petitions, SC8/107/5322 (example taken from *Richard III's Books*, p. 140).

<sup>81</sup> Jean-Philippe Génét, "Politics: Theory and Practice", *Cambridge Medieval History: c.1415-c.1500*, vol. VII, ed. Christopher Allmand (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 8.

<sup>82</sup> Judith Ferster, *Fictions of Advice: The Literature and Politics and Counsel in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 88.

<sup>83</sup> Larry Scanlon, "The King's Two Voices: Narrative and Power in Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes*", in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530*, ed. Lee Patterson (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 216-47, at pp. 227-8.

<sup>84</sup> Derek Pearsall, "Hoccleve's *Regement of Princes*: The Poetics of Royal Self-Representation", *Speculum*, 69 (1994), 386-411, at p. 386.

<sup>85</sup> For a complete description of the manuscript, see M. R. James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the McClean Collection of Manuscripts in the Fitzwilliam Museum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), pp. 369-52.

<sup>86</sup> See the discussion of this manuscript, and especially of the *Brut* chronicle contained in it, in my PhD thesis, forthcoming as a book, *The Gentry Context for Sir Thomas Malory's Morte D'arthur*.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Hoccleve, *The Regiment of Princes*, in *Hoccleve's Works*, ed. F. J. Furnivall (London: Early English Text Society, nos. 71, 72, 1897), pp. 100-1, lines 2773-9 and 2787-90.

<sup>88</sup> David Lawton, "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century", *English Literary History* 54 (1987), 761-99, at p. 789.

<sup>89</sup> See the discussion of Edward's policies of advancing the gentry in the brief section on historical background to the period.

- <sup>90</sup> See my discussion of Sir John Fortescue and his political tracts in my article "Sir John Fortescue's *Governance of England*", in *Studia* (2001), special issue on medieval philosophy and political philosophy, ed. A. Baumgarten, forthcoming.
- <sup>91</sup> Lawton, "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century", p. 790.
- <sup>92</sup> Douglas Gray, "A Fulle Wyse Gentyll-Woman of Fraunce": *The Epistle of Othea* and Later Medieval English Literary Culture", in *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain, Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. J. Wogan-Browne et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), pp. 235-49, at pp. 247-8.
- <sup>93</sup> Christine de Pizan, *Epistre d'Othea*, cited in Laurie Finke, "Christine de Pizan in England", in Finke, *Women's Writing in English: Medieval England* (London, New York: Longman, 1999), pp. 197-217.