



# ROYAL STUDIES JOURNAL

2021

VIII

*Angel and Sovereign:  
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Legitimation, and Relics of Power*

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WINCHESTER  
UNIVERSITY PRESS



## Angel and Sovereign: Henry VII's Royal Coins, Legitimation, and Relics of Power

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**Abstract:** The introduction of the *angel* and later the Tudor *sovereign* gold coins in the late 1400s became part of a political rhetoric aimed at mediating the king's image, power, and wealth. However, it also played a part in the legitimation of the Tudor dynasty during the later stages of the Wars of the Roses, a time of Yorkist pretenders and foreign opposition to Henry VII's reign. As only the rightful king was believed to have the gift of healing, Henry VII appropriated both coins and ritual from the Plantagenet dynasty associated with the sanctity of kingship. Ordinary objects bearing the King's image were imbued by the people with supernatural and political powers. How could the religious function of contact relics also facilitate the use of the non-religious Tudor gold *sovereign* and other denominations by mimicking the iconography and ritual use of the *angel*? And how were these coins used as part of political rhetoric to legitimate the claim for the throne to support a myth of royal succession and prove Tudor right by appealing to the public? This article argues that the coins created and empowered the King with saintly abilities, granting the object carrying the King's image a relic-like power, further fusing the image with people's belief in the legitimate King's God-given power of healing. The visual migration or transfer of an image's symbolic properties, in this case the transference of its sacred properties to secular objects, mediated both the literal and conceptual image of the King as part of political legitimation against the Yorkist pretenders and foreign powers.

**Keywords:** The Wars of the Roses; numismatics; visual rhetoric; Tudor; relics; legitimation; healing

**A**lthough the Battle of Bosworth (1485) had resulted in Henry VII's (1457-1509) ascension to the English throne, it did not mark the end of civil unrest and further battles.<sup>1</sup> Michael Hicks has termed the period spanning from 1485-1525 "The Third War," pointing out that Bosworth did not terminate the conflict as Tudor propagandists claimed.<sup>2</sup> A number of pretenders challenged the Tudor dynasty throughout Henry's reign challenged the Tudor dynasty, most notably Lambert Simnel, Perkin Warbeck,

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<sup>1</sup> I thank the two peer reviewers for their thorough, engaging and beneficial comments and suggestions. I would also like to thank Profs. Henning Laugerud, Stuart Sillars, and Sverre Arve Myklebust for several readings and comments along the way.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Hicks, *The Wars of the Roses* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 5–6, 233.

and the de la Poles. This continuous opposition made clear the need for a powerful rhetoric aimed at proving the legitimacy, both divine and battle won, of the Tudor claim. One such device was the divine gift of healing the king's illness, known contemporarily as scrofula, modern-day tuberculosis.<sup>3</sup> In an effort to legitimise his dubious claim to the throne in a time of pretenders and foreign opposition, Henry demonstrated the healing power of the rightful king through the ceremony of touching, in which the monarch touches his subjects in a formal ritual, thus healing them of the royal disease. A vital part of this ceremony was the gifting of an *angel*, a gold coin believed to be imbued with the monarch's healing properties. The image of the king and healing powers were transposed onto other objects, such as silver pennies and pewter copies. These were believed to carry the same abilities of healing, underlining a popular belief in a divinely legitimate king among all the pretenders.



Figure 1: Pierced angel of Henry VII (1505-1509). Oxford, Ashmolean Museum

From his questionable claim of Plantagenet royal lineage, Henry appropriated the medieval idea of royal thaumaturgy, the regal version of saintly miracle work, by being able to heal, something only the rightful king could do.<sup>4</sup> By proving to his subjects that he held this divine power of healing, he added a layer of sacred legitimacy to his royal claim, and embedded a physical element of visual rhetoric in the object known as the *angel* coin (Figure 1), as well as introducing the gold sovereign that showed the power, wealth and majesty of the Tudor dynasty (Figure 2).

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<sup>3</sup> *Britannica Academic*, s.v. "Tuberculosis (TB)," <https://academic.oup.com/britannica/article/tuberculosis/73667#253298.toc>.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Brogan, *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England: Politics, Medicine and Sin* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2015), 45.



Figure 2: Second issue sovereign of Henry VII (c.1493-1495). Royal Mint Museum

There has been little discussion in recent research and discussions on the topic of the visual and rhetorical use and function of these coins in relation to the early Tudor political context, especially their connection to the numerous pretenders and foreign opposition to Henry's rule.<sup>5</sup> In this article, I focus mainly on the two coins, the *angel* and *sovereign*, and their involvement in the making of the Tudor myth of power and legitimacy in the third phase of the War of the Roses. In their relationship with legitimating the royal claim against the pretenders during Henry VII's reign, I interrogate how the religious function of contact relics could facilitate the use of the non-religious Tudor gold *sovereign* and other lesser denominations by mimicking and associating the iconography and ritual use of the *angel* coin. How were these coins used as part of political rhetoric to legitimate the Henrician claim for the throne and support a myth of royal succession and Tudor dynasty?

### Angels and Sovereigns

Coinage connected to a specific ruler are known as far back as the Lydian king Croesus (sixth century BC),<sup>6</sup> and Alexander the Great,<sup>7</sup> and have been an integrated part of a rhetorical symbol from the reign of the roman emperor Augustus.<sup>8</sup> The history of the *angel* and Tudor gold *sovereign* goes back partly to Edward III, c. 1344-1346, and the introduction of the gold *noble*. Edward's introduction of the English *noble* was an attempt to reintroduce the gold

<sup>5</sup> Ian Arthurson, *The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy* (Stroud: The History Press, 2009); S.B. Chrimes, *Henry VII* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Sean Cunningham, *Henry VII* (London: Routledge, 2007); Ralph Alan Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998); Hicks, *The Wars of the Roses*.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher Howgego, *Ancient History from Coins* (London: Routledge, 1995), 2-4.

<sup>7</sup> Karsten Dahmen, *The Legend of Alexander the Great on Greek and Roman Coins* (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "Image and Authority in the Coinage of Augustus," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 76 (1986): 72.

currency, imitating the Florentine *florin*, the Venetian and Habsburg *ducats* and French *noble* gold coins.<sup>9</sup>

Introduced in Paris by Henry VI in 1427,<sup>10</sup> the angelot (Figure 3), featured the angel Gabriel aloft the royal shields of England and France, and on the reverse, a Latin cross with the French lys to the left and the English lion to the right. The legends read, on the obverse: “Henry, by the grace of God, King of France and England” and the reverse: “Christ conquers, Christ reigns, Christ commands.” The angelot was given to the recipient of the royal touching as a contact relic imbued with the healing power of the king, to be worn as a medallion. The symbol of St Michael, together with St George, was often depicted as a healer of the sick.<sup>11</sup> The *angel* was originally introduced as the *nobel-angel* by Edward IV during his first reign in 1464, measuring 28 mm in diameter, weighing 80 grains (*c.* 5 grams) and valued at 6*s.*8*d.*,<sup>12</sup> the same value as Edward III's noble. On the obverse it was stamped with the Archangel Michael trampling down the dragon, and on the reverse a ship bearing the royal arms and a mast flanked by a sun and rose, replacing the king as captain seen on the gold *noble* since Edward III's in 1344 (Figure 4).<sup>13</sup> The iconography of the *angel* has remained almost unchanged since, with only minor alterations on the royal arms, including the **H** for Henry and the Tudor rose and dragon mint mark.<sup>14</sup> On the gold *sovereign*, Henry minted his ancestral Welsh dragon alongside the Lancastrian greyhound to showcase his double line.

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Oman, *The Coinage of England* (London: Pordes, 1967), 169; Geoffrey Callender, “The Gold Noble of Edward III,” *The Mariner's Mirror* 2, no. 3 (1912): 79–81.

<sup>10</sup> 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): 148.

<sup>11</sup> An analogical representation has also been drawn to Apollo and St Michael as slayers of serpents/dragons, and healers of plague. “St Michael,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume 9* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 595; G. F. Hill, “Apollo and St. Michael: Some Analogies,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 36 (1916): 134–162.

<sup>12</sup> Pre-decimal currency abbreviations shillings: *s.*, and pennies: *d.*

<sup>13</sup> Oman, *The Coinage of England*, 173–175, 219–220.

<sup>14</sup> A fine introduction to the political imagery of the Tudor dynasty is still Sydney Anglo, *Images of Tudor Kingship* (London: Seaby, 1992). As has been pointed out by more recent scholars, Anglo focuses more on a modern and simplistic approach to a post-Reformation society, not taking properly into account the long religious traditions and rituals fully integrated into people's beliefs and everyday lives, such as the belief in the healing power of saints and relics. Sarah K. Gaunt, “English Political Propaganda, 1377-1485” (PhD thesis, University of Huddersfield, 2018) 59.



Figure 3: Angelot, Henry VI, Rouen Mint (1427). F.R. Kunker, Auction 201, February 2012, lot 20

The *angel* had symbolic and religious value because of the ritual of royal touch, and became part of royal ceremonies and processions, given to the people by the king, who in turn had touched and imbued them with his grace. The coin was often pierced so that people could hang it round their necks as tokens with healing power akin to religious relics, a ritual instituted by Henry VII, as is seen on a coin from Henry VII's time (Figure 1).<sup>15</sup> It was important that the coin continued to be worn by the sufferer, establishing a function as an amulet rather than a talisman, and a physical reminder of the true king's right to rule and heal his subjects with divine powers granted only to the true king.<sup>16</sup> Within a short time, the *sovereign* along with other lesser denominations might have taken on some of the sacred properties of the *angel* coin. These coins were not connected to religious ritual, but the combination of the king's image minted on the coin and the function of public memory gave them added powers; even the silver penny became a symbol of Tudor myth and divine sanctity. The *angel* coins were supposedly able—being imbued with the king's touch—to ward off scrofula, in the same way as the king's touch could cure it.<sup>17</sup> Although the *angel* became ceremonial after 1590, it was the most commonly used gold coin of its day, which, as Brogan suggests, might be why not all Tudor *angels* were pierced, as opposed to later ones.<sup>18</sup>

Previous Plantagenet kings had issued large gold coins, such as Edward III's *noble*, and Edward IV's *ryal*. Edward's *noble* portrayed a ship with a crowned king in armour carrying a sword and the shield of France and England quarterly, the ship is a reference to Edward's

<sup>15</sup> Helen Farquhar, "Royal Charities, Part I – Angels as Healing-Pieces for the King's Evil," *British Numismatic Journal* 12, no. 2 (1916): 71.

<sup>16</sup> Brian Robinson, *Silver Pennies and Linen Towels: The Story of the Royal Maundy* (London: Spink, 1992), 7.

<sup>17</sup> Fleta N. Bray, Mohammed Alsaïdan, Brian J. Simmons, Leyre Ainara Falto-Aizpurua, and Keyvan Nouri, "Scrofula and the Divine Right of Royalty: The King's Touch," *JAMA Dermatology* 151, no. 7 (2015): 702.

<sup>18</sup> Brogan, *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England*, 49.

victory in the Battle of Sluys in 1340 (Figure 4).<sup>19</sup> A second reference was to the Ship of State from Plato's *Republic*, B.VI, with an image of the state as a ship in need of a commander, the figure of the monarch on one side and the cross on the other. The image of the ship is reused on Edward IV's introduction of the *angel* in 1464 as a memory of the old *noble*.<sup>20</sup> The armed and crowned monarch is replaced with a cross in splendour superimposed with the royal arms flanked by a rose and sun. The legend on the reverse reads "PER CRUCEM TVAM SALVA NOS REDEMPTOR" (By your Cross save us, Redeemer Christ) from the Sarum Breviary, but it was also a symbol of English might at sea.<sup>21</sup>



Figure 4: Gold noble of Edward III, © The Trustees of the British Museum, London, British Museum, E.4361

To surpass all previous gold coinage, in 1489, Henry VII introduced a new currency: a *double ryal* or the *sovereign*, a massive gold coin of 38.5mm in diameter and weighing 240 grains (about 15.35 grams).<sup>22</sup> The *sovereign* was made as the first re-creation of the standard pound sterling in solid gold since the thirteenth century and became a symbol of the new dynasty and its power.<sup>23</sup> The *sovereign* was the most valuable coin in English history; at 240 grains it was double the weight of the *ryal* valued at 20s. The first issue depicted the Tudor double rose on the reverse with the royal escutcheon superimposed; on the obverse, the robed king in splendour sitting on a gothic throne. It is the first coin to feature the arched crown, a symbol

<sup>19</sup> Oman, *The Coinage of England*, 171–174.

<sup>20</sup> Oman, *The Coinage of England*, 219–220.

<sup>21</sup> Anglo, *Images of Tudor Kingship*, 19; Oman, *The Coinage of England*, 174–175.

<sup>22</sup> Even a double sovereign exists weighing 480 grains, probably only intended for royal gifts or religious offerings. Oman, *The Coinage of England*, 236.

<sup>23</sup> André Cœtel and Svein H. Gullbekk, *The Sovereign and Its Golden Antecedents*, 2nd ed. (Oslo: Monetarius, 2006).

of imperial power.<sup>24</sup> Throughout his reign Henry's *sovereign* underwent a few stylistic changes, but the main features remained the same. The most elaborate second issue bears resemblance to Edward III's *double leopard* and later gold *noble*.<sup>25</sup> On the obverse the king sits enthroned crowned with the closed imperial crown holding the royal orb and sceptre with small fleur-de-lis "powdered" around. On either side we see the Beaufort greyhound and the Welsh dragon. The Plantagenet and Arthurian image of royalty seen on the second issue (1493-1503) of Henry's *sovereign* (Figure 2) featured a dragon mint mark, the Arthurian symbol widely used by British monarchs as part of their descent from Brutus and Arthur, fulfilling the return of the king prophecy.<sup>26</sup> The inscription is the same as Edward's *double leopard* and *noble*, written out in full with the added space of the enormous coin: "HENRICUS . DEI . GRATIA . REX . ANGLIE . ET . FRANCIE . DNS . IBAR."<sup>27</sup> On the reverse the Tudor rose was embossed with the royal arms. Again the inscription is the same as on the *double leopard* and *noble* written out in full, from the Vulgate, Luke IV.30. "IESUS . AUTEM . TRANSIENS . PER . MEDIUM . ILLORUM . IBAT."<sup>28</sup>

The second version of the *sovereign* featuring the Tudor rose, the arms of France, and the imperial crown, minted in 1492, coincided with the diplomatic conflicts over Brittany and the Siege of Boulogne via Calais, which resulted in peace with France in the Treaty of Étaples, ending all French aid to the Perkin Warbeck opposition.<sup>29</sup> Cunningham refers to the rhetoric of a propaganda war played out in Parliament the year before and an extraordinary gold coin (Figure 5). Oman defines it as a *ryal*, while the British Museum classifies it as a *sovereign*, but this coin combines the old Edward III *noble* featuring the king standing in a boat, with the imperial crown and the dragon and *h* on each side above.<sup>30</sup> On the obverse, it has the Tudor rose with the arms of France superimposed. As the *noble* was meant to commemorate the successful Battle of Sluys (1340), minting a coin so similar in the year of a Tudor invasion of France would also be a forceful reminder to Perkin Warbeck's foreign supporters amidst the turbulent diplomatic skirmishes.

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<sup>24</sup> Philip Grierson, "The Origins of the English Sovereign and the Symbolism of the Closed Crown," *British Numismatic Journal* 33 (1964): 119.

<sup>25</sup> Oman, *The Coinage of England*, 171.

<sup>26</sup> Oman, *The Coinage of England*, 242–243, 385; Karen R Moranski, "The 'Prophetic Merlin', Animal Symbolism, and the Development of Political Prophecy in Late Medieval England and Scotland," *Arthuriana* (1998): 59.

<sup>27</sup> *Henry by the grace of God King of England and France Lord of Ireland*.

<sup>28</sup> Retelling the story of when Jesus passed through an angry Jewish crowd at Nazareth: "But Jesus passed through the crowd and went on His way."

<sup>29</sup> Arthurson, *The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy*, 70; Cunningham, *Henry VII*, 69–73; Hicks, *The Wars of the Roses*, 243.

<sup>30</sup> Oman, *The Coinage of England*, 237.





Figure 5: Ryal, Henry VII (1492). © The Trustees of the British Museum, London British Museum, GHB.373

The Tudor *angel* and *sovereign* both incorporated images of kingship and power, and their conflation in ritual use as symbols of healing and power contributed to the creation of a saintly and heroic image of Henry VII. The coin became a symbol of royal power, wealth, and national unity. These rituals and cultural objects became means of professing the king's legitimacy, power, and the divine presence in Tudor mythmaking, especially with Henry VII's revival of the ritual of the King's touch.<sup>31</sup>

### A King's Touch

The historical tradition of monarchs having healing powers is seen throughout history. Pliny tells the story of Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, and how he healed a man by the touch of his toe, while Tacitus gives an account of Emperor Vespasian restoring the sight of a blind man by touching his eyes.<sup>32</sup> The ritual of touching relates to the specific ceremony and practice of the laying of hands by the monarch on those sick with the disease known as the king's evil: scrofula, or tuberculosis. The idea of healing by mere touch came along with the expansion of Christianity.<sup>33</sup> Following the spread of Christianity, the gift of healing by touch imitated Christ's healing in Luke 5:12–14. Royal touch in the medieval way was first practised by King Robert II the Pious, in eleventh-century France, though it was not yet associated with the office of the king, but rather individual kings.<sup>34</sup> In England, the first sovereign who supposedly had the gift of healing scrofula was the saint-king Edward the Confessor (1003–1066). William

<sup>31</sup> Brogan, *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England*, 45, 49–51.

<sup>32</sup> Raymond Henry Payne Crawford, *The King's Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), 10.

<sup>33</sup> Pieter J Lalleman, "Healing by a Mere Touch as a Christian Concept," *Tyndale Bulletin* 48 (1997): 356.

<sup>34</sup> Crawford, *The King's Evil*, 12.

of Malmesbury comments on the hereditary royal line as the origin of the healing power of kings, in his description of “The origin of the Royal touch” from the *Gesta Regnum Anglorum*. Malmesbury gives a description of a miracle of healing performed by Edward the Confessor in 1065 on a woman who had contracted a sickness. On the sanctity of the king, Malmesbury confirms that “the cure of this disease does not proceed from personal sanctity, but from hereditary virtue in the royal line.”<sup>35</sup> As a political work of history writing, the rhetoric elevates King Edward in order to give prominence to his successor, William the Conqueror. With Christianity the ritual added the act of gift giving, often of an object related to the ceremony, to ward off future illness or as part of offerings and almsgiving.<sup>36</sup> The royal power of healing in Norman Britain was retraced to the prophecy of Edward the Confessor and his legitimation as the true king of Britain. This prophecy was revealed to Brithwold, Bishop of Wilshire, in a dream sequence in the *Vita Ædwardi Regis* (1067).<sup>37</sup> Here, St Peter appears and gives Edward supernatural powers of healing and the divine right to the throne of Britain. Edward was then instructed by the saint to build St Peter’s Abbey, later Westminster Abbey.<sup>38</sup> Ailred of Rievaulx’s *Life of Saint Edward* (1161-1163) strengthened the ties between Edward and the Plantagenet dynasty, justifying the rule of William the Conqueror and ultimately Ailred’s patron Henry II.<sup>39</sup> The Tudor line had been traced back to the divine power and true royal blood ascribed to Edward the Confessor.

Divine endorsement of the king meant the king had authority to rule by God, and the ability to perform the healing royal touch proved the king’s legitimacy and right to rule, as had been an integrated part of French royal praxis since Charlemagne. The sacred monarchy, and the anointed kings of France and England ruled “by the grace of God.”<sup>40</sup> The king’s healing power builds on the image of Christ as both healer and King of Kings. Kings were set apart from nobility. The sacrament of unction gave the monarch his sacral character and raised him closer to the divine. As Stephen Brogan outlines, the sacral monarchy, the sanctity of the king through unction, and the significance of king’s two bodies, the mortal man and the immortal office of the king, were the “preconditions for the ultimate expression of sacral monarchy,

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<sup>35</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, trans. R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 1:407–409.

<sup>36</sup> Blake Leyerle, “John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Use of Money,” *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 1 (1994), 40-42; Sally Dixon-Smith, “The Image and Reality of Alms-Giving in the Great Halls of Henry III The Reginald Taylor and Lord Fletcher Prize Essay, 1998,” *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 152, no. 1 (1999), 82; Lucia Travaini, “Saints, Sinners and ... a Cow: Offerings, Alms and Tokens of Memory,” *Chronicle* 164 (2004): 209–210.

<sup>37</sup> British Library, Harley MS 526, fols. 38r–57v.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Mortimer, *Edward the Confessor: The Man and the Legend* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009), 176.

<sup>39</sup> Ailred had dedicated his work to the first Plantagenet king, Henry II, as part of the rhetoric to legitimate the Plantagenet dynasty. John E. Lawler, “Aelred of Rievaulx’s Life of St. Edward the Confessor: A Medieval Ideal of Kingship,” *Fides et Historia* 31, no. 1 (1999): 45; Mortimer, *Edward the Confessor*, 179.

<sup>40</sup> The words *Dei Gratia* were also inscribed on the Great Seal since William the Conqueror, and several coins since the Norman period had had “DG” inscribed. Jack Autrey Dabbs, *Dei Gratia in Royal Titles, Volume 22* (The Hague: Mouton, 1971), 103.

touching the sick in imitation of Christ,” and the most prolific example of royal thaumaturgy.<sup>41</sup> Coins had long been used in religious ceremonies such as Holy Communion, and offerings during Good Friday rituals connected to the Adoration of the Cross. The coins could be retrieved, and either be made into rings or pierced with a hole and worn as a medallion to warn off sovereign illnesses like epilepsy, cramp, and gout.<sup>42</sup> Parallel to the ritual of royal touching was the gifting of cramp rings during the Adoration of the Cross on Good Friday, and silver coins, known as Maundy money, at Easter during the ceremony of Royal Maundy, both of which symbolised the healing power of the king granted by God.<sup>43</sup> Henry introduced the ritual of giving a specific religious gold piece as a gift to the receiver of the king’s touch, a ritual adapted from almsgiving practices familiar throughout medieval Europe.<sup>44</sup>

### **Legitimacy of Kings**

Henry Tudor’s claim to a Lancastrian genealogy, albeit contested, was his only royal claim. Although descended from Catherine of Valois (1401-1437), he had no legitimate royal blood. Henry claimed to be descended from the Lancastrian royal line through his grandmother Catherine of Valois’ first marriage to Henry V (1386-1422), who then later married Owain Tudor (c. 1400-1461). He also claimed John of Gaunt (1340-1399) to be his ancestor via the Beaufort line. This royal claim had to be proven in more than combat and marriage. His wife, Elizabeth of York (1466-1503), was of royal blood, being the daughter of Edward IV (1442-1483), and while this provided some support from the Yorkist families in the north, it was only with the birth of Prince Arthur and later the accession of Henry VIII that the unity of York and Lancaster was generally accepted. Proving Henry VII’s right to the throne was paramount in the early years of his reign, as there were still a large number of Yorkist supporters and several Yorkist pretenders with powerful backers with a stronger claim. As both houses, York and Lancaster, were heirs to Edward III (1312-1377), the justification and legitimation of royal right depended on persuasive rhetoric as the “preferred truth.” For Henry Tudor, these rhetorical strategies added both verbal and visual richness to his campaign.

The means Henry used to prove and secure his genealogical royal rights often took the shape of visual rhetoric and adaptations of popular rituals based on both established and institutionalised religious structures and popular belief.<sup>45</sup> The Tudor claim through persuasion

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<sup>41</sup> Brogan, *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England*, 24.

<sup>42</sup> Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France*, trans. J.E. Anderson (1927; Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 95–99.

<sup>43</sup> Robinson, *Silver Pennies and Linen Towels*, 13, 95.

<sup>44</sup> Farquhar, “Royal Charities, Part I,” 46.

<sup>45</sup> Popular belief, or vernacular religion, is the popular experience of religious belief, shaping everyday culture and understanding. In this article I approach the term as defining the non-institutionalised religious beliefs and practices. Marion Bowman and Ulo Valk, *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief* (London: Routledge, 2014), 5; Carl Watkins, “‘Folklore’ and ‘Popular Religion’ in Britain During the Middle Ages,” *Folklore* 115, no. 2 (2004); *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 141.

and visual rhetoric to legitimacy became almost as important as the truth behind the claims, especially against the claims put forth by the Yorkist pretenders and their foreign backers. Both Simnel and Warbeck were backed by Irish, Scottish, and Burgundian forces, most significantly Margaret of York, Duchess of Burgundy (1446-1503), and later under the protection of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519). The method of claiming the right to the throne came both from the power of winning in battle, and the mythmaking rhetoric of legitimate Lancastrian or Yorkist heritage. We see the rightful claim for power through war as legitimation in Max Weber's famous definition of the state and use of force as "the human community which (successfully) claims the monopoly of legitimate use of physical force."<sup>46</sup> The modified version by Rodney Barker supports the significance of claiming legitimacy: "what characterises government, in other words, is not the possession of a quality defined as legitimacy, but the claiming, the activity of legitimation."<sup>47</sup> As king, Henry VII joined the line of royal healers that proved their divine and God-given right to rule by performing the ritual of touching. The religious ceremony of touching was adapted from the French as divine proof of the rightful king, that he could heal scrofula—the King's Evil.<sup>48</sup>

Henry VII's continuous attempt to legitimise his right to the throne took him down several roads. With his marriage to Elizabeth of York he was the unifying king of the two houses after the long and bloody civil war, symbolised in the heraldic unity of the white rose of York and the red rose of Lancaster, the Tudor rose. He appropriated the image of a warrior-hero, vanquisher of the monstrous usurper-king and established himself as the rightful heir to the throne by way of combat, having successfully dethroned Richard III (1452-1485) in the Battle of Bosworth in 1485. Within the historiographical imagination Henry made himself kin to the legendary kings of old, proving his royal bloodline back through the ages by his Lancastrian ancestry. This was manifested in his heraldic symbols of John of Gaunt's greyhound, Beaufort's portcullis, and the proliferation of chronicles and chronicle rolls. These last two symbols were key to his bloodline and the visual rhetoric needed to secure not only his right by battle and marriage, but by divine right through royal blood. It is this claim of divine gift of kingship that is vital to understanding how the collective image of the Saint-King Henry VI was utilised by Henry VII to secure his own right. This alignment was a strong force in the early formation of the Tudor iconography, and part of creating the cult of Henry VI.<sup>49</sup>

A question arises when a secular coin, the gold *sovereign* and lesser denominations, are shown to be appropriated in a similar fashion as the *angel*, suggesting they were given healing properties and worn as a protective amulet. The pierced *sovereign* in the Ashmolean collection

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<sup>46</sup> Max Weber, "Politics as Vision," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. Hans Heinrich Gerth, C. Wright Mills, and Bryan S. Turner (1921; New York: Routledge, 2009), 78.

<sup>47</sup> Rodney Barker, *Legitimizing Identities: The Self-Presentations of Rulers and Subject* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>48</sup> Bloch, *The Royal Touch*; Crawford, *The King's Evil*.

<sup>49</sup> Leigh Ann Craig, "Royalty, Virtue, and Adversity: The Cult of King Henry VI," *Albion* 35, no. 2 (2003): 188–190; McKenna, "Henry VI of England and the Dual Monarchy," 152–154.

(Figure 6) and the *sovereign penny* (Figure 9) suggests it was either worn around the neck or sewn into a manuscript. Although this was not an object connected in any way to religious or healing ceremonies, the coin bears the royal image of the king in splendour, and thus by association and social memory, might be thought of as carrying the gift of healing.<sup>50</sup> There is of course an issue of generalisation with so few remaining gold *sovereigns* from Henry VII's reign, and pierced coins even more scarce, which opens the discussion to how these coins were perceived by the general public, if such a term is at all useful here. There is of course a possibility that the *sovereign* here was kept as a personal memento and sewn into a manuscript, suggesting ownership by a wealthier part of society, as manuscripts were expensive commodities. Relics and contact relics were often sewn into Books of Hours, which could imply a devotional function. Even if this was the case with the *sovereign* from the Ashmolean, it still might suggest the coin was kept for symbolic rather than monetary reasons. I would argue that by looking at the iconographic likeness and associations with contemporary and familiar devotional beliefs, social memory and visual migration could establish a commonality between possible political projection and social reception. The ritualistic images and references inherent in the iconic use of a religious touch piece are continued and mediated by the obvious similarities between the *angel* and the Tudor *sovereign*. But, while the former draws its symbolic power from religious contact relics, the latter is a palimpsest, a composite image of sacred and secular power, drawing the attention and actualisation towards Tudor imagery and royal mythmaking. The political rhetoric of the Tudor power image is emphasised and made possible by its physical relations to an integrated social function of relics and rites, creating a visual migration of symbolic myth between the divine and the secular.



Figure 6: Henry VII, pierced gold sovereign (1493–1495). Ashmolean Museum

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<sup>50</sup> I am very grateful to Brad Sheperd, librarian to the Royal Numismatic Society, for tracking down this coin, and for all the help and suggestions concerning this topic.

### Saints and Monarchs

There is an emphasis here on the close relationship between the divine and secular image of power; the close association between royal power and religious power through familiar rituals and symbols; and how an alignment between saint-kings and saintly heroes dynamically contributed to the image of Henry VII's political campaign. We must look at the mutual exchange between the symbols of state, church, and the king as being part of the body politic.<sup>51</sup> Significant here is the visual and rhetorical aspect of contact relics and political rhetoric associated with saints and saintly figures, or as Eamon Duffy calls them: "Christian heroes and heroines."<sup>52</sup> Aligned with Duffy's description, Sarah Salih expands on the societal perception of the saints as Christian heroes and celebrities: "they were both in heaven and ever-present; utterly and concretely present in their relics, but also present in their images and embodied in dramatic representation."<sup>53</sup> Kings were supposed to have the same kind of supernatural and heroic presence. One of the signs of true royalty lay in the divinity of his person. The king was God's representative on earth and occupied the highest office of justice and power. The power of God flowed through the veins of the king, made visible to the people in his ability to heal the sick. In medieval theological and royal theory, the holy personae of the King was transferred at the moment of death to the new and rightful king—the legitimation was thus dynastic—royal power was granted by God and passed on by primogeniture.<sup>54</sup> English kingship was protected by divine authority and God's law; by the fourteenth century it had become purely hereditary, and thus also subject to disputes regarding the true line of kings.<sup>55</sup> Proving the legitimate line became a major part of Tudor and Yorkist historiographers, not only to establish the immediate line of contemporary kings, but also to prove the line stretched back to the old saintly kings.

The sanctity of the old kings gave an added dimension of divine right and a sacred dynastic lineage. Being able to trace the line back to the legendary and divine kings, Saint Edward the Confessor, Saint Edmund, King Arthur, the French king Louis IX, and Henry VI, gave the kings a sacred right by bloodlines and royal sanctity secured in the sacrament of unction. As Duffy observes, the king "was doubly blessed, a personal as well as political icon of Christ himself," and this holy relationship "harnessed the reputation of saint-ancestors to validate monarchy in general and their own dynasties in particular."<sup>56</sup> Established with the faith in King Edward the Confessor's healing powers, there was a belief in the divinity of the king both before and during Tudor times: "to his subjects, whether Christian or Pagan, the English

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<sup>51</sup> Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, ed. Conrad Leyser and William Chester Jordan (1957; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 193.

<sup>52</sup> Eamon Duffy, *Royal Books and Holy Bones: Essays in Medieval Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018), 150.

<sup>53</sup> Sarah Salih, ed., *A Companion to Middle English Hagiography* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 1.

<sup>54</sup> Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 330.

<sup>55</sup> John Neville Figgis, *The Divine Right of Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 36–37.

<sup>56</sup> Duffy, *Royal Books and Holy Bones*, 151.

king was God Incarnate.”<sup>57</sup> Anglo points to Henry VII's political motives for appropriating and exploiting “every possible sanction to power,” such as the firmly established belief in the healing power of kings.<sup>58</sup> Henry appropriated the ritual of touching to show true kingship by utilising a belief in the king's sanctity. Connecting himself with Henry VI as saint-king strengthened his alignment with the supernatural powers of the kings Saint Edmund and Saint Edward.

The Lancastrian jurist, and Henry VI's prominent propagandist, Sir John Fortescue (1394–1479), added to the power of Henry VI as opposed to Yorkist rule, by describing ways in which only the true king would reveal himself. In Fortescue's words the miracle of touching was proof of an “indubitable title,” and “a king who could heal was a king indeed.”<sup>59</sup> According to Fortescue, “only the true king can heal.”<sup>60</sup> He also comments on the royal touch, writing in the age of Henry VI against the House of York's claim to the royal throne:

At the touch of his most pure hands ... you can see even today sufferers from the King's Evil, including those despaired of by physicians [sic], recovering their longed-for health by divine intervention; and this redounds to the praise of the Almighty, for it is from divine grace that the grace of health proceeds. Those who witness these deeds are strengthened in their loyalty to the king, and this monarch's undoubted title to the throne is thus confirmed by divine approval.<sup>61</sup>

Like the discord prompted by Fortescue against Yorkist claims, Henry VII was not unchallenged on the grounds of being the only sanctified and coronated king. Lambert Simnel, the proclaimed last Plantagenet heir, Edward, 17th Earl of Warwick, son of the previous king's older brother, George, Duke of Clarence (1449–1478), was crowned king of England in Dublin in 1487. During his coronation a small circlet was used, taken from a statute of Virgin Mary from the nearby parish of St Mary de la Dam, proclaiming the young Edward VI to be sanctified by the Virgin.<sup>62</sup> The declared reign of Simnel was short-lived, and no records of claims to healing powers have been found. Even though some coins by Warbeck were minted, no effort seems to have been made by any of the pretenders to claim the same healing powers as the Tudor king. But there might have been some movement towards the sanctification of Warbeck since the earliest record of Henry VII touching coincides with Warbeck's first landing

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<sup>57</sup> Margaret Alice Murray, *The Divine King in England: A Study in Anthropology* (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), 16.

<sup>58</sup> Anglo, *Images of Tudor Kingship*, 20.

<sup>59</sup> Anglo, *Images of Tudor Kingship*, 20.

<sup>60</sup> *Defensio juris domus Lancastriae*. Danna Pirovansky, *Martyrs in the Making: Political Martyrdom in Late Medieval England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 83.

<sup>61</sup> “De titulo Edwardi comitis Marchies,” in Thomas Lord Clermont, *The Works of Sir John Fortescue* (1869), quoted in Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, 65.

<sup>62</sup> Jeroen Deploige and Gita Deneckere, *Mystifying the Monarch: Studies on Discourse, Power, and History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 65.

in Ireland in 1489.<sup>63</sup>

### **Relics and Rituals**

The creation of added value to objects and rites connected to royal power is inconceivable without religious belief in the divinity of the ruler. The integrated and socially accepted rituals connected to saints and relics were juxtaposed with royal divinity and the sacred monarchy to confirm the kings' right to rule by divine unction. Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (1122-1190), who had succeeded in having Charlemagne canonised by Antipope Pascal III in 1165, ordered coins minted with the saint-emperor on one side and the living emperor on the other, to have "power transferred from Heaven to the physical throne," associating the canonised legendary emperor with the living.<sup>64</sup> The belief in royal sanctity made it possible for the ritual function of one image, the *angel*, to be transferred to others, the *sovereign* and the *penny*. In the case of the *angel* and *sovereign*, the latter was a symbol of royal wealth and power, but, because of its likeness to the *angel*, social memory and familiarity with the ritual of touching associated the one with the other, giving sacred power to both objects. Conflation of the visual likeness of the *angel* and the *sovereign* coins is comparable to the conflation of religious rituals and folk belief in the sacred power of the king and his image on objects with lesser material value. As the popular rites and practices of contact rituals conflated with the royal ceremonies of touching, a composite image consisting of a cultural object of both healing and political rhetoric was created. The established *angel*—it too an object devised as a combination of the *penny* given as alms to the poor by the king and saintly contact relics—carried both material and symbolic value. Social memory that emphasises a shared belief in a common history and its hierarchical power roles is strengthened by cultural objects and added rites.<sup>65</sup> It is possible to suggest a similar function between the established pierced *angel*, of which there are several examples, and the pierced *sovereign*, even though an absolute certainty of such a popular reception is difficult to determine. There is evidence of similar features of pierced *sovereigns* in the reign of subsequent monarchs, and even after the Reformation there is an example of a pierced golden *sovereign* from Elizabeth I's reign (Figure 7).

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<sup>63</sup> Brogan, *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England*, 47.

<sup>64</sup> Travaini, "Coins and Identity," 323.

<sup>65</sup> Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 129.





Figure 7: Gold sovereign, pierced, Elizabeth I (1590-1592). British Museum, 1909, 0707.64.

Several of the *angels* from the Tudor dynasty all the way up to the end of the ritual of touching by Queen Anne in 1714 have been found pierced, indicating they might have been worn as a protective amulet or kept like a pilgrim's memento or souvenir.<sup>66</sup> The *angel* has been firmly established as a touch piece directly connected to the ritual of royal touching. However, I would argue that the frequency of other coins being pierced suggests that a possible belief in the sanctity of the sovereign was transmitted to other objects, which had only a symbolic and iconographic connection to the king through his image. The retention of associative images in public memory is what empowers the king's image. Associating the image of the king with healing powers not merely restricted to contact relics makes possible the association of royal healing with political power. As in the case of Frederick I Barbarossa and Charlemagne, medieval politics and religious belief were one and the same, and for a ruler to prove his royal descent from a saintly forbear strengthened the claim and position of the living. Although the act of royal healing may be visual and verbal rhetoric, it draws on collective memory and association to the king's office and function.

Because of the supernatural or holy character of kings throughout the Middle Ages, even in Stuart England "the almost daily spectacle of the touch for scrofula, which was born of this belief, had become its firmest and richest support; and it had penetrated to the very depths of the collective consciousness."<sup>67</sup> Henry VII was the first king to introduce a liturgy for the ritual of royal touch, having grand displays to show the divine healing powers of the true king.<sup>68</sup> In the description of the rites performed during the ritual of touching, the king presents

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<sup>66</sup> The ceremony of royal touch was practised well into the Age of Enlightenment, but the ritual was at its most popular under the Stuarts in the seventeenth century. Duffy, *Royal Books and Holy Bones*, 151.

<sup>67</sup> Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, 102.

<sup>68</sup> James F. Turrell, "The Ritual of Royal Healing in Early Modern England: Scrofula, Liturgy, and Politics," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 68, no. 1 (1999): 24; Crawford, *The King's Evil*, 52.

the *angel* to the receiver as a token and memento for the sick to carry as a medallion to ward off future ailments.<sup>69</sup> Earlier iterations of the ceremony have the sick presented with different valued alms ranging from a *penny* to six *shillings* and eight *pence*, the value of the *noble*, and later the *angel*.<sup>70</sup> These rituals' importance and endurance bear witness to what Marc Bloch observes with reference to the Adoration of the Cross ceremony, that "no sovereign seems to have failed to lay the florins, nobles, or sterlings at the foot of the cross on the prescribed days."<sup>71</sup>

The widespread tradition of pilgrimage and the faith in the healing powers of both saint's relics and contact relics—such as pilgrim badges and ampullas—formed the way in which these tokens of healing and protective power contributed to the legitimation of both saints and saint-kings. The *angel* acted like the pilgrim badges, which "were deemed to have absorbed elements of the grace of the holy site itself if they had been in physical contact with the relics and they could act as agents of apotropaic transfer."<sup>72</sup> Contact with the physical remains of a saint made the object take on a part of holiness inherent in the saint, as Duffy describes: "the saint was believed to be present in his or her relics, as Christ was present in the Eucharist."<sup>73</sup> By tracing the function of relics further to the *angel*, in effect a royal relic because of the ritual of touching, the king's power was transferred to the coin, making it a protective touch piece. This transformation might have been the case with the golden *sovereign* with two holes (Figure 6).<sup>74</sup> As the coins were distributed among the people, these coins became associated with the healing power of the true king, using visual rhetoric in the form of the king's image to promote the divine right of the new Tudor dynasty. We do not know for certain how these specific coins were perceived other than their monetary function. The *sovereign* was not intended as part of any religious ritual connected to royal relics, so is it likely to suggest a possibility that some imbued the coin with sacred properties by way of association to the monarch and his image based on a contemporary belief in contact relics and their iconographic features.

### Power of the Royal Image

There are examples of other coins from the early Tudor period being used as medallions.<sup>75</sup> If

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<sup>69</sup> Bray, Alsaidan, Simmons, Falto-Aizpurua, and Nouri, "Scrofula and the Divine Right of Royalty."

<sup>70</sup> The *penny* was, in the early days of the ritual of healing during the reign of Edward I, given to the patient at the royal ritual of healing, as noted by Crawford, *The King's Evil*, 34. 6 *shillings* and 8 *pence* were the typical alms given by Henry VII at his Sunday oblation, and on St George's Day by Henry VIII and Edward VI, Farquhar, "Royal Charities, Part I," 18–19, 34. The *angel-noble* struck by Edward IV, featuring St Michael trampling down the dragon, was valued to the same amount, 6s. 8d., Oman, *The Coinage of England*, 220. This was also a doctor's usual pay. Farquhar, "Royal Charities, Part I," 35.

<sup>71</sup> Bloch, *The Royal Touch*, 100.

<sup>72</sup> Farquhar, "Royal Charities, Part I," 33; Richard Marks, "Images of Henry VI," in *The Lancastrian Court: Proceedings of the 2001 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Jenny Stratford (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2003), 121.

<sup>73</sup> Duffy, *Royal Books and Holy Bones*, 156.

<sup>74</sup> This differs from the usual markings found on coins used as protective amulets, where a single hole can often be found either in the middle or the outer rim of the coin.

<sup>75</sup> An example is the pierced silver halfpenny from Edward I's reign (1272-1307) from the Ashmolean collection,

this is the case, the image of the king's healing and protective powers was not confined only to the ritual of touching but was more like the saintly properties connected to contact relics and pilgrim badges. The secular coins take on a new set of symbolic meanings in an effort to reach out to a wider public, with strong connections to social memory of saintly relics. In a similar manner, when Henry VII started his campaign to have his uncle Henry VI declared a saint, the visual rhetoric used to legitimise the Tudor dynasty saw the production of contact relics connected to the Lancastrian saint-king. Shrines were built in several churches and cathedrals, like Ripon and Durham, and even in the fiercely anti-Lancastrian York Minster.<sup>76</sup> In an effort to associate himself and the Tudor dynasty with the popular Lancastrian saint-king, Henry VII spent considerable time and effort on building the grand shrine dedicated to his uncle in Westminster Abbey, in which he himself in the end was buried.<sup>77</sup> Several accounts of the late King Henry VI's saintly miracles were reported, as early as in the reign of Edward IV and throughout the reign of Richard III, and the cult of Henry VI grew into both a saintly cult and into a political phenomenon to advance the legitimation of the Tudor dynasty.<sup>78</sup> This focus on the sanctity of his uncle created new objects of veneration, emphasising the Tudor claim by visual and ritual similarity.



Figure 8: Pilgrim badge of Henry VI (fifteenth or sixteenth century), pewter. British Museum 1856, 0701.3011.

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dated 1280: <http://hcr.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/coin/hcr36803>.

<sup>76</sup> John W. McKenna, "Piety and Propaganda: The Cult of King Henry VI," in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies: In Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins*, ed. Beryl Rowland (London: George Allan & Unwin Ltd, 1974), 74.

<sup>77</sup> Paul Binski, *Westminster Abbey and the Plantagenets: Kingship and the Representation of Power, 1200-1400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 206.

<sup>78</sup> Ronald Knox and Shane Leslie, *The Miracles of Henry VI* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923); Craig, "Royalty, Virtue, and Adversity," 187.

An example of the king's likeness as part of the pilgrim badge is the badge of Henry VI (Figure 8). The badge is based on a gold *noble* from Henry's time, which used a cast made from the obverse of the coin, depicting the king in a ship. The making of these badges flourished during the early reign of Henry VII.<sup>79</sup> A similar example of copies of gold coins being made into badges is found on a brass bracteates badge based on Henry VI's *angel*.<sup>80</sup> In both these cases, not only the golden coin itself carried the sacred powers of the king, but also the copy made of pewter or brass that formed the object of devotion. This conflation of rituals and adaptations of healing objects corresponds to the phenomenon of mirror-badges. With the growth of mass pilgrimage came new measures of security, limiting the physical contact that pilgrims had with shrines and relics. Some pilgrims thus employed the old pagan rituals of mirror-magic, believing that if they held a mirror towards the relic it would catch the divine grace radiated from it and encapsulate its powers for future use.<sup>81</sup> The divine presence is thus not necessarily connected to the object itself, but can take on the properties of a contact relic by invoking the image of the sacred. Copying the image of the rightful king could create and retain a relic like the mirror-badge. This visual and functional migration mimicked the creation of these mirror-badges, where the mould is made from the original, thus capturing the royal touch and transferring it to the cast. A perhaps more common association to the transformation of religious power and properties would be the moulded communion wafers and the Christian theory of transubstantiation of the Eucharist, since 1215 when Pope Innocent III declared it to be the literal body of Christ.<sup>82</sup> It can also be linked to the ritual of creating the Agnus Dei wax discs, wherein the remnants of last year's paschal candles were melted down and cast as discs to be blessed and handed out to pilgrims in Rome.

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<sup>79</sup> Brian Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges* (London: Museum of London, 1998), 276.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Mitchiner, *Medieval Pilgrim and Secular Badges* (London: Hawkins, 1986), 233.

<sup>81</sup> Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges*, 17–18.

<sup>82</sup> The widespread use of wafers included both religious ceremonies and feasts, such as weddings, with wafer irons found with Christological imagery on one side and a heraldic badge on the other. A contemporary example is a wafer iron from Bruges, dated 1430-1470, with an Agnus Dei on one side and the heraldic badge of Charles the Bold, married to Margaret of York, on the other, <http://balat.kikirpa.be/object/105086>. The dating of this wafer iron fits with the celebration of their marriage in 1468, which could suggest the wafer was made for this occasion. Communion wafers and lead-tin replicas were kept as pilgrim souvenirs, often sewn in Books of Hours, a possible associative source to the pierced Ashmolean *sovereign*. Kathryn Margaret Rudy, "Sewing the Body of Christ: Eucharist Wafer Souvenirs Stitched into Fifteenth-Century Manuscripts, Primarily in the Netherlands," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2016), doi:10.5092/jhna.2016.8.1.1.



Figure 9: Obverse of sovereign penny of Henry VII (1485-1495), minted in Rotherham.



Figure 10: Sovereign Penny reverse, Henry VII (1485-1495), minted in Rotherham.

Other, much lesser valued coins have also been found pierced, such as the *sovereign silver penny* (Figures 9 and 10), suggesting even such a small denomination was used as a protective medallion in similar fashion as the *angel*, as in the gifting of pennies as Maundy money. Henry VII's *silver penny* had the king enthroned for the first time since Edward the Confessor, as opposed to only the head of the king on the obverse, which gave it the name of *sovereign penny*.

The aforementioned silver penny had been part of the Royal Maundy, also practised by Henry VII.<sup>83</sup> One can assume that touching the king's image had significance from the worn-down adverse side as opposed to an equal wear on both sides if the coin had been in normal circulation. This iconographic change accentuated Henry's ancient lineage, and the arched imperial crown first seen on Henry's *sovereign* became a feature on the *silver penny* from 1489, adding yet another iconographic, ritualistic, and symbolic similarity between the two coins.<sup>84</sup>

Ancient rituals of royal healing merged with folk belief in contact relics and became juxtaposed with similar objects connected to collecting, imbued with certain powers of healing, political, and social power, and of group identity and dynastic loyalty. The pilgrim and livery badges functioned as a visual means of displaying social status and political connections. Image creation and popular engagement by means of rituals present royal power by relating it to a long line of shared memory and contemporary power, and the state is given its social power by reaffirming rituals that connect to a social collectiveness. It becomes a shared understanding of the ritual as enforcing and imbued by true power, the image functioning *pars pro toto* for the totality of monarchic or state power. The association between the ritual of the angel coin and divine legitimacy of the monarch carries with it all the connotations of a saintly and iconic presence. The religious motif and intended power are mediated through the layers of intertextual references creating a composite image, or myth of power. The image of divine power was transferred by means of popular associations and visual likeness. Secular and everyday objects like the brass and silver *penny* could be made into sacred objects directly connected to the king's power of healing, in turn emphasising the legitimation process, as only the true king had the divine gift of healing.

### **Popularising the Sacred**

Several of the coins from antiquity have obvious religious iconography, and have been found pierced, suggesting an added sacred dimension connected to healing and protection related to the emperor's divine powers. The political side of this transferral is similar to the effect hoped for by Frederick I Barbarossa: an associative line drawn from the ruling monarch to the image of a previous and sanctified monarch that grants legitimacy and divine justification. The use and distribution of coins bearing the king's likeness support what Diarmaid McCulloch and Evan David Jones call "the popular element" during the Wars of the Roses.<sup>85</sup> The distribution of the king's image formed part of the successful political campaign led by Richard, Duke of York after his two protectorates (1454 and 1455), leading to what Hicks terms "The First War" (1459-1461) to take over the Lancastrian government.<sup>86</sup> Even during the short reigns of

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<sup>83</sup> Robinson, *Silver Pennies and Linen Towels*, 27

<sup>84</sup> Oman, *The Coinage of England*, 237.

<sup>85</sup> Diarmaid McCulloch and Evan David Jones, "Lancastrian Politics, the French War, and the Rise of the Popular Element," *Speculum* 58, no. 1 (1983): 95–135.

<sup>86</sup> Hicks, *The Wars of the Roses*, 139–163.

Edward V and Richard III, coins with their name and heraldic symbols were minted.<sup>87</sup> Examples of coins used as symbols of power are seen throughout most of history, as an image of familiarity, proof of conquest and as a significant part of dynastic visual rhetoric. Although highly contested, a couple of silver *groats* have been suggested were minted in Ireland for Simnel, and Warbeck in 1487 and 1494.<sup>88</sup> Since the minting of coins rested on the king's control, a regulation Henry VII established and was particularly invested in, in 1489, the same year as the introduction of the *sovereign*, he made the forging of foreign coins treasonable, making the Simnel and Warbeck coins powerful acts of rebellion.<sup>89</sup> There is a markedly different projection of power suggested in the minting of coins by Simnel and Warbeck, and the coins minted by Henry VII, in that while Simnel's silver *groat* might have functioned as a monetary statement of power, Warbeck's coin, which it has been suggested is a medallion rather than a coin, has an added political layer with its legend on the reverse, taken from the denunciation against Belshazzar directed against a monarch in possession of the throne. Although this does not indicate any religious ceremony, it might suggest an attempt at challenging the healing power of the king, and could also be commemorative or statement of loyalty.

The *angel* conveyed specific sacred value because of its use in the royal ritual of touching and was directly connected to proving royal legitimacy by showing the sovereign's divine gift of healing. But, as has been pointed out, several other objects seem to have taken on a similar sacred possession without having anything to do with the ritual making them into a contact relic. In Russell Belk's study on modern day sacredness in consumer culture, he describes the sacralisation process in much the same way as saintly rituals found in late medieval culture pertaining to the creation of contact relics. Belk argues that in regards to the sacredness of everyday objects such as money, "an ordinary commodity may become sacred by rituals designed to transform the object symbolically."<sup>90</sup> As a shrine and relic of a saint can transform an image or representation of the saint, for instance pilgrim badges, into contact relics, so could copies bearing the image of the rightful ruler, as seen on Henry VI's pilgrim badge *noble* (Figure 8), or Henry VII's brass copy of the *sovereign*. In the making of the *sovereign*, symbolic value became layered with different social images of the royal presence, God's anointed servant, and political image of the victorious king, making a composite image comprising of the relic, the collectable pilgrim badge, and the loyalty and identity marker of the

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<sup>87</sup> Richard III had his angel coins engraved with his heraldic boar. See: E.J. Winstanley, "The Angels and Groats of Richard III," *British Numismatic Journal* 24 (1941): 180.

<sup>88</sup> John Ashdown-Hill, "Coins Attributed to the Yorkist Pretenders, 1487–1498," *The Ricardian* 19 (2009): 72, 75. A 1487 *groat* with three crowns supposedly minted for Simnel by the Earl of Kildare, <https://oldcurrencyexchange.com/2016/05/11/irish-rare-coin-review-silver-groat-of-lambert-simnal-king-of-ireland-c-1487/>. The 1494 silver medallion suggested to have been minted for Warbeck, [https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C\\_M-6778](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_M-6778).

<sup>89</sup> Cunningham, *Henry VII*, 249–250.

<sup>90</sup> Russell W. Belk, Melanie Wallendorf, and John F. Sherry Jr., "The Sacred and the Profane in Consumer Behavior: Theodicy on the Odyssey," *Journal of Consumer Research* 16, no. 1 (1989): 14.

livery badge. Connecting the ceremony of royal touching and almsgiving of the *angel* coin to the mass communication of power and dominance of Tudor rhetoric serves the purpose of demonstrating how social memory was formed in the distribution of images of power. The belief in the creation of sacred objects from tangible low-value objects, such as the mass-produced pewter pilgrim badges, *farthings*, or *pennies*, meant that they carried the image of the sanctified king, either in his likeness or allegorically in form of his heraldic emblem.

As Henry VII adopted the popular belief in the sanctity of Henry VI, he likewise utilised his Welsh heritage and the dragon emblem to doubly promote his legitimacy as the rightful king. In a similar manner to how Edward IV had appropriated Arthurian myth to support the effort of creating a national myth, Henry VII emphasised his descent, not only from the Lancastrian, but from Arthurian lineage.<sup>91</sup> Several of Warbeck's backers utilised the same symbolism, by claiming that Warbeck was the prophesised royal hero returned, naming him the Son of Man, returned from the dead.<sup>92</sup> The test of legitimacy lay in the moment King Arthur pulls the sword from the stone, when the king is revealed, causing a sudden manifestation of royal sacred power—a kind of hierophany.<sup>93</sup> In the same way as Arthur proved his divine and prophesised right to the throne by pulling the sword from the stone, so did Henry Tudor by revealing his God-given healing powers, showcased by way of the ceremony of royal touching and the distribution of his divine image.

When contact relics blend with pilgrim badges, military and heraldic badges, and everyday monetary objects to form a palimpsest of visual and cultural artefacts, the coins join together the belief in the king's power to heal with political belief in the king's dual body and hereditary right to rule. It is the proposed idea that the true king is the culmination of all previous legitimate kings, sharing their royal and divine blood, sharing in their God-given power as legendary rulers, heroes, and saints.

### Memory and Images of Power

The coins stand in for the image of the rightful king's sacred and worldly powers, recognised and worshipped by the masses, as argument for his legitimate rule. Belting argues that the symbolic role and performance of images are “surrogates for what they represent,” and that their power in a religious and political context comes from how “images function specifically to elicit public displays of loyalty and disloyalty.”<sup>94</sup> The wearing of the king's image is as much

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<sup>91</sup> Jonathan Hughes, *Arthurian Myths and Alchemy: The Kingship of Edward IV* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2002), chapter 5. An example of Henry's interest in Arthurian prophecies is his commission of a genealogy roll, BL Royal MS 18 A LXXV, tracing Tudor lineage through his grandfather Owain Tudor back to Cadwalladr and Brutus. Sydney Anglo, “The British History in Early Tudor Propaganda,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 44, no. 1 (1961): 24.

<sup>92</sup> Arthurson, *The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy*, 76–77.

<sup>93</sup> Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry Jr., “The Sacred and the Profane in Consumer Behavior,” 6.

<sup>94</sup> Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 1.



an image of a belief in the king's abilities to heal as a belief in the king's right to rule, the two being mutually dependable. Distributing the *angel* and aligning its healing powers associated with the divine rights of the king to other objects made it possible for the *sovereign* and other coins bearing the image of the king to become symbols of sacred and secular power. This association became a means to show Tudor right to the English throne, both as descendants from the ancient saint kings and as divinely sanctified sovereigns with the power to heal, opposing the Yorkist pretenders.

The combined rite of healing and distributing coins as royal contact relics became a political statement of justification, as Henry VII promoted his argument as rightful king, not only by defeating Richard III in combat, but also by proving his divine right as superior to that of the successive pretenders. The king's supernatural power was used to legitimise the right to the throne as the image of a saintly king lingered on in people's memory, in the form of social and religious rituals. Henry VI's shrine at Windsor functioned as a memorial image, signalling the presence and the memory of the late king, and as social mnemonic mediation of the king's grace "promoting pilgrimage" to the shrine. This act of pilgrimage created new objects of veneration bearing the image of the proposedly saintly king.<sup>95</sup> This popularised the sacred function of the rightful king for all to see, in close association with the living sovereign.

The *angel* as religious relic was rooted in the tradition of contact relics and pilgrim badges and functioned as a visual rhetorical structure lending itself to be mimicked and copied. Its sacred powers were transferred to coins and objects in the same way that contact relics gained their own powers. The *angel* and *sovereign* mediated sacred and secular power through a mythopoetic actualisation of the royal image. They created and empowered the king with saintly abilities, granting the object carrying his image a relic-like power, further fusing his likeness with the legitimate king's God-given power of healing. The visual migration, or transfer, of an image's symbolic properties, in this case the transference of an image's sacred properties to secular objects, mediate both the literal and conceptual image of the king as part of political legitimation. The social memory of accepted rituals connects divine powers to the king and transfers them from a familiar religious image to a secular object by means of visual re-collection and ceremonial association. The two objects incorporate both religious and secular values and create a new type of transferrable symbol. The distribution of money and the association of it with the king's power made it possible to reach all levels of society. The *angel* and *sovereign's* enormous material value limited their distribution while their silver, brass, and pewter copies suggest a belief that the king's power could be transferred in a similar fashion to pilgrim badges and contact relics.

The coins functioned as mediums for power and conflated the images of religious and political rhetoric. Henry's creation of the *sovereign* and the appropriation of the *angel*—with its connection to the royal abilities to heal—helped secure and claim royal rights. When people

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<sup>95</sup> Marks, "Images of Henry VI," 121.

gave added value to an object, its cultural and social image produced a palimpsest of images and rites that are put in play to create new images. In the case of the *angel* and *sovereign* there is a flow of sacred and political significance between the two in the form of visual and ritual similarity. The *angel* has its symbolic power connected to contact relics and the ancient belief in the royal political theological concept of the king's two bodies, granting its wearer the same protection as if touched by the saint. The *sovereign* and lower denomination coins might have taken on these properties by way of association and have a layer of political visual rhetoric added to them. This visual rhetoric becomes incorporated into the political rhetoric for legitimating Tudor rule. People's belief in the sacredness of the object means that it operates both as a royal relic and a political statement of power. It mimics the appearance of the grand gold coins of antiquity and Byzantium and its value in weight of gold. At the same time as the pierced coins are no longer monetary objects, simple coins or pewter copies of coins are transformed into allegories of sacred kingship. The golden *angel* can easily be replaced with a *penny* (Figure 10) or pewter pilgrim badge (Figure 8).

Henry utilised the socially established and accepted Lancastrian sanctity of his predecessors, Henry VI, and the Lancastrian Saint-Kings Edmund the Martyr and Edward the Confessor, to convince his citizens of his rightful claim to the English throne. Henry VII's political rhetoric of legitimation lay in the importance of justifying and claiming the throne. It was not enough to win the battle and defeat the previous king or show his royal bloodline in ancestral lines on parchment and symbols drawn on banners; the persuasive argument additionally came in the form of convincing people of his divine power integrating the reign with long dynastic lines. The acts of royal healing and distribution of coins served as visual and political arguments in the Tudor claim to legitimate the Tudor dynasty, as only the true king could heal. Since stories of earlier kings' ability to heal had been both documented in the beatification of kings and saints, and orally transmitted for generations, the rituals associated with royal healing were integrated in people's daily lives and rituals. The *sovereign* serves multiple purposes in this context, as it also comprises several social rites all with their own cultural memory. For Henry VII, the distribution of *angels* and *sovereigns* bearing his image became political rhetoric, associated with a medieval belief in the sacred monarchy and God-given right to rule, legitimating his victorious usurpation and ensuing pretenders. But where the two coins had clear associations either with established religious ceremonies or relics, I would argue that the rhetoric of Tudor mythmaking came when objects that were not part of any obvious sacred rite became imbued with contact relic features by bearing the king's image. The pierced *silver sovereign penny* and the pewter casting of Henry VI's *noble* relied on visual likenesses to their more exclusive counterparts, but more important was the presence of the king's image. I propose that the pierced coins discussed here were granted some added value other than mere monetary to the wearer, be it on the merits of personal affection or a social belief, potentially implying a perception and conflation of socially accepted rites and beliefs rather than a definite intended political rhetoric or projection of the king as sanctified. The

visual migration of the royal image is thus not restricted to either a specific religious medium or rituals, suggesting a further iconographic movement of mythopoesis and political rhetoric with images of power.