Occasional Liturgy in the Henrician Reformation

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OCCASIONAL LITURGY IN THE HENRICIAN REFORMATION

by

Joshua Wiggins

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

HISTORY

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

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ABSTRACT

Occasional Liturgy in the Henrician Reformation

by

Joshua Wiggins, Master of Arts
Utah State University, 2018

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King Henry VIII (1487–1547) famously severed ties with Roman Catholicism and nationalized the church in England in order to secure an annulment from his wife. His decision instigated the Henrician Reformation (1527–1547), a subset of the English Reformation. The king assumed the title ‘Supreme Head of the English Church’ and vested himself with the power to reform his country’s church. Occasional liturgies—the formal religious ceremonies surrounding birth, marriage, and death—were prime opportunities to publicly display new doctrines and procedures. Instead, these rituals changed surprisingly little and largely mirrored the pageantry performed by his parents.

Two conclusions are drawn from the results. First, the modern perception of Henry VIII as an all-powerful rebel is challenged due to his careful observance of the liturgy in order to achieve a desired outcome, whether it be a proper christening, wedding, or state funeral. Second, these royal rituals are shown to not only demonstrate religious beliefs, but also social and political realities as well. These two principles add complexity to understanding the course of the Henrician Reformation.

(91 pages)
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Joshua Wiggins
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The story of the English Reformation is a story of politics and religion.\(^1\) England's schism from Roman Catholicism hinges upon moments within one monarch’s reign: King Henry VIII (1487–1547).\(^2\) The Henrician Reformation (1527–1547), a subset of the English Reformation, began the progression of religious changes imposed from the top upon the English population.\(^3\) Understanding how the country came, in general, to adapt to these changes requires studying the royal family as those in power and control of the religious trajectory. Henry VIII accorded himself the title of Supreme Head of the English Church, and important, highly visible ceremonies—especially christenings, marriages, and funerals—provided an avenue to incorporate new orthodoxy. Here were natural opportunities to demonstrate what a good English subject should practice and believe. However, in spite of all the religious and political adjustments of the English Reformation, surprisingly little actually changed in these ceremonies, which challenges the one-dimensional characterization of Henry VIII as a rule-breaker.

This thesis seeks to grasp the nature of how the royalty negotiated with the new orthodoxy at each event, and the internal and external pressures which influenced the outcomes. In order to explore the evolution of liturgy, a longitudinal study is employed

\(^1\) The years given for the English Reformation vary widely by historian; each uses different criteria for determining cutoff dates. Most begin at 1517 but establishing an end date is particularly difficult: some use 1547, the date of Henry VIII’s death, while others identify the Reformation as extending well into the seventeenth century.


\(^3\) This date range is based on the beginning of Henry’s attempts to secure an annulment from Catherine of Aragon and ends with his death.
across the Henrician Reformation to assess royal ceremonies concerning birth, marriage, and death—what can be termed ‘occasional liturgies’—which in theory would happen only once in an individual’s life. While not a comprehensive dissection of every detail of each ceremony, this compilation of events typically considered separately reveals just how minor the changes to sacred rites actually were. The result requires one to rethink commons assumptions surrounding the English Reformation, which remains fertile ground for historians of religion.

The centuries-long, all-out theological war between Catholics and Protestants over the narrative of the English Reformation has shifted to the purview of the academic. Historians with keen insight have combed through archives, examined the evidence, published their interpretations, and debated with colleagues about the Reformation for decades. England’s modern religious landscape traces its origins to the country’s break from Roman Catholicism in the sixteenth century. Indeed, historians categorize this period as ‘early modern,’ a designation intended to point to this era as an intellectual, religious, and social predecessor to our own. Historians universally agree that the English Reformation brought about change. It is in wrestling with the how and why that produces the debate.

Scholarship on the English Reformation is usually divided between “bottom-up” and “top-down” interpretations. Those of the former camp argue that English medieval Catholicism had decayed and that the people demanded the reform of a corrupted church; A. G. Dickens’ *The English Reformation*, printed in 1964, is the crown jewel of this
For decades, his interpretation was the accepted paradigm; for example, college texts such as M. D. Palmer’s seminar book on Henry VIII (published first in 1971) subscribed to this view.

More recently, the pendulum of scholarship has shifted to the “top-down” model. In the early 1990s, historians such as Eamon Duffy diverged from Dickens’ assessment, insisting that religious shifts occurred primarily as the result of Henry VIII’s break from Rome. Change, Duffy argues, was imposed on the masses from their political leadership. He demonstrates that the church was alive and well before the schism.

Duffy’s scholarship is part of a larger trend. G. W. Bernard casts Henry not as a hapless witness of this Reformation, but as its principal author. G. R. Elton asks the important question of how the Reformation was enforced by the government, because he identifies significant popular resistance. Ethan H. Shagan takes a similar view, noting examples of compliance in addition to opposition. The recent trend of scholarship has so convincingly cast the English Reformation as having been imposed from the top-down

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5 M. D. Palmer, Henry VIII, 2nd ed., Seminar Studies in History (London: Longman, 1983). See, for example, Palmer’s discussion on the Reformation on p. 51, in which he asserts “These changes were met with very little opposition” and that “loyalty to the Pope mainly involved the clergy, and the ease with which the change was carried through is explained by their attitude.”


that Alec Ryrie has humorously reflected, “It is a little disconcerting to realise that peace has broken out. We are becoming used to a new historical landscape, in which (whisper it) we pretty much agree on the broad outline of events.”

As important and useful as it is to produce a general paradigm with which to study the English Reformation, some historians have altered their focus away from attempting to categorize its nature to understanding how changes impacted people. For example, Diana O’Hara mines ecclesiastical records for how courtship practices changed throughout the Reformation to gain insight on how the abstract adjustments in theology translated to altered social customs. Norman Jones argues that worshippers and church leaders adapted individually and generationally to Henry’s changes until it was too late to return to pre-Reformation England, as Mary Tudor attempted under her rule.

Interestingly, scholars have mostly focused on religious and social change after Henry VIII. In a state-of-the-field article penned in 2013, Alec Ryrie touched on this curious omission. Though the body of “wonderfully interdisciplinary” works recently published on the Reformation ought to be praised, “[it] has left some holes, though. The most glaring is Henry VIII’s reign. It is a vital part of the story and little work is being done on it now.” The reason for this is not immediately clear, since Henry VIII is easily one of England’s most memorable rulers. Perhaps historians are collectively allergic to

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13 Ryrie, “The English Reformation.”
such well-trodden ground, preferring to focus their talents on understanding the shadows of history. Or maybe the monumental tomes of such works as J. J. Scarisbrick’s *Henry VIII* or G. W. Bernard’s *King’s Reformation* feel so comprehensive that few historians feel they can add to the narrative.\(^{14}\) Regardless, this history must still be explored.

**Why Liturgy?**

G. J. Meyers, the author of the popular history *The Tudors: The Complete Story of England’s Most Notorious Dynasty*, suggests that “a writer should have an excuse for adding to the endless stream of Tudor literature[.]”\(^ {15}\) My justification focuses on liturgy, which is best described in the words of Prosper of Aquitaine, “Lex orandi, lex credendi” (The manner of praying [reveals] the manner of believing).\(^ {16}\) It is the outer forms of worship—the rituals, the prayers, and the observances—which reveal the beliefs of the worshipper.

It can be difficult to grasp what liturgy is; it is, simply put, a formal procedure to properly worship. To clarify with an example, consider the rite of baptism. What is the purpose of baptism? Who can perform a baptism within a particular faith? When can it be performed? Are there specific locations limiting the performance of the rite? Has its implementation changed over time? Asking these sorts of questions reveals that liturgy


does not just ‘happen.’ Some religious authority must outline the rite and declare the proper method for its completion.

Prior to the Reformation, Roman Catholic churches throughout Europe followed different rubrics to standardize worship services. E. C. Whitaker indicates that the so-called Sarum Rite proved to be the most popular “in many parts of England on the eve of the Reformation.” It is therefore most likely that the accounts of the royals used in this thesis followed the Sarum Rite, which are employed to contextualize the historical records.

King Henry VIII’s religious reforms set England on a course away from many medieval Catholic doctrines; the rift between belief and liturgy grew increasingly more acute as time passed, necessitating a new standardized liturgy. Henry recognized this exigency and commissioned Archbishop Thomas Cranmer and others to, in Cranmer’s words, “devise a uniform order … for a better expedition of divine service to be set forth accordingly.” Yet the path to the completed Book of Common Prayer of 1549 was anything but straightforward. Under the strict eye of the king, Cranmer and the bishops reworked the Sarum Rite material, eliminating offending references to discouraged practices. Henry’s influence can be detected in surviving draft manuscripts (British Library Royal MS 7 B. IV), which manifest significant editing notations, as Cranmer and

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his team worked and reworked the liturgy to meet their king’s approval. The work was only completed after Henry’s death, and even then it underwent multiple revisions in the following years. In this way, the power of the crown indirectly dictated the nature of ceremony to the church, who ultimately controlled the liturgy.

This thesis examines the rites performed by members of Henry VIII’s royal family because he had the most opportunity to alter the rites. Though it may seem elitist to focus so extensively on the crown, a brief analogy may be helpful to dispel this sentiment. If the course of England’s religion is compared to the path of a cannonball, historians can clearly tell that the position of the cannonball altered between two points of time (the beginning and end of the sixteenth century). It is by studying the positioning of the cannon, from which the changes launched, that the resulting projectile’s course can be determined. The emphasis on the top is not coincidental; it is imperative to understanding the nature of the Henrician Reformation.

The implementation of liturgy as a source of evidence has only recently entered the field. Helen Gittos provides the methodology with which this study makes sense of the liturgical events. She emphasizes the value in studying medieval liturgical texts as historical sources. Gittos argues that while liturgy was once viewed as too conservative (that is, non-representative of the religion due to how slowly it changed) or too difficult

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21 The essay compilation *Understanding Medieval Liturgy*, including a monograph advising how to use rites as historical sources, was just published in 2016. See Helen Gittos and Sarah Hamilton, eds., *Understanding Medieval Liturgy: Essays in Interpretation* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2016).
to use, liturgy actually represents “evidence for current ideas and concerns” because “medieval rites were ‘living texts’ that were regularly tinkered with.” The variations of even a single religious rite may seem surprising to some modern worshippers, yet in medieval times they were not. For instance, Walahfried Strabo in about 840 CE states that “new compositions … are not to be rejected” though Gittos admonishes only “so long as they were doctrinally orthodox.” These variations provide evidence for “changes in political, theological or social ideas”; that is, the differences in recorded rites enables historians to discern broader differences in time or place. Gittos cautions, again, that liturgies must be considered in their proper context as inspirational and procedural—the texts prescribe correct practice for worship—rather than normative, in other words, describing what congregations actually practiced.22

This research probes the historical records to understand the royal ceremonies, not to demonstrate a prescription for proper worship, but to analyze what actually happened; therefore, the liturgy will certainly have been “performed.” This is the method utilized in this study of ceremonies surrounding birth, marriage, and death. Each historical occurrence is like an insect trapped in amber: each represents a moment in time that, taken collectively, are used to examine the evolution of the English Reformation.

To frame these liturgical moments, David Cressy’s argumentative paradigm is applied in which he outlines the changes surrounding birth, marriage, and death in early modern England.23 Chapter 1 focuses on the christening ceremonies of Prince Arthur,

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Princess Mary, Princess Elizabeth, and Prince Edward to demonstrate how liturgy manifested little change. The next chapter considers three of the six marriages of Henry VIII to illustrate how the demands of proper performance reigned in the king’s behavior. The third chapter juxtaposes the royal funerals of Henry’s parents (Henry VII and Elizabeth of York) against the later funerals of Henry VIII and Jane Seymour. It demonstrates that Henry’s break from Rome initially made little impact on how the country liturgically commemorated the passing of its rulers. An analysis of the social, religious, and political pressures simultaneously at work explains the conservative nature of the changes observed. Taken together, the three categories of liturgy reveal a more complex narrative of the Henrician Reformation.
CHAPTER II
BIRTH

On October 14, 1537, the Marchioness of Dorset sent Henry VIII a letter congratulating him on the birth of his son Edward (1537–1553).¹ “I have receyved the Quenes Graces lettres, of the most joyfull newes, and gladde tydynges, that cam to Englond thies many yeres; … hit hath pleased Hym [God], of His greate mercy, so to remembre Youre Grace wyth a Prynce, and us all, youre poore subjectes, to the grete comfort, universall weale, and quyetness of this your hoole Realme.”² The marchioness highlights the significance of a royal birth: it would hopefully produce stability for the realm (“weale” and “quyetness”). Her choice of words pinpoints the country’s need for security and peace.

This letter accentuates an interesting interplay between royal births and conflict in the Henrician Reformation. This chapter examines this intersection through the significant moment of royal baptism, which initiated a newborn prince or princess into the church. It argues that the baptisms expose manifestations of conflict between traditional Catholicism and Henry’s reforms. More intriguing, however, is the absence of any real resolution of these conflicts.

This slice of history has proven interesting to a wide range of historians. Gender historians have taken a great interest in the practices surrounding early modern English


² In this quote, and throughout all quotations in this thesis, I have retained the author’s original spelling, grammar, and punctuation. State Papers Published under the Authority of His Majesty’s Commission. King Henry the Eighth, Parts I and II., vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1831), 570.
births, particularly because they represent one of the few realms in which women exercised significantly more control than men, at least in the early years of the Reformation. For example, Jacques Gélis surveys early modern Europe’s birth practices, mainly concentrating on the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries. This chapter supplements Gélis’ research to include sixteenth-century England.

Social historian David Cressy has published an extensive study of the early modern English rituals regarding birth and child-bearing in his landmark study Birth, Marriage, and Death. As a general study of the life-cycle throughout the English Reformation, his work explores what the majority of people experienced. Baptism was a social event, as Will Coster’s research on godparents in early modern England demonstrates. This chapter builds upon these general observations by narrowly focusing on the monarchical family to determine whether those in power followed the same general patterns, or if they behaved differently due to their status.

To expand this body of scholarship, this chapter compares and contrasts the christening accounts of four royal infants: Prince Arthur Tudor (1486), Princess Mary I (1516), Princess Elizabeth I (1533), and Prince Edward VI (1537). The initial goal of

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3 Cressy, Birth, Marriage, and Death, 15–16.


5 Cressy, Birth, Marriage, and Death.


this study to focus entirely on the liturgical life-cycle of King Henry Tudor VIII himself has proven untenable and warrants the inclusion of his older brother. Unlike in the following chapters examining his marriages and funeral, little information survives about Henry VIII’s birth, other than the fact that it happened. The kingdom fully expected Prince Arthur, Henry’s older brother, to fulfill his destiny as England’s next king. The ceremonies marking Henry’s birth were not considered to be as historically significant to the realm, which meant that contemporary chronicles recorded very few details. J. J. Scarisbrick mourns this dearth of historical information: “Not least because he was the second son of his father and inevitably overshadowed by his elder brother Arthur, we know very little about his early life.”

Naturally, this results in the secondary sources being sparse on details of the christening ceremony. Lucy Wooding identifies Bishop Richard Fox as the officiator, but beyond this, all that can ever be recorded is that the royal child was christened and baptized. Because both primary and secondary sources provide few details of the liturgy employed at Henry VIII’s baptism and christening, little analysis of that particular event can be performed. Therefore, this chapter considers the christening ceremony of Prince Arthur, which transpired early enough to establish what constituted royal English birth liturgy before the Henrician Reformation. It will serve as a point of reference for the

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10 See, for example, Wooding, *Henry VIII*, 12.
accounts of Henry VIII’s children. Any liturgical details omitted from the records will be supplied from the text of the Sarum Rite.

To best understand the underlying liturgical tensions in a royal christening, we first explore the procedure for a proper baptism. Next, the individual elements of royal baptisms are compared with the general rubric, revealing the monarchy’s grasp of theatrical displays of power and importance. Finally, the conflicts between the traditional doctrines and Henry’s reforms are revealed.

A Standard Baptism

Though colloquially one may interchange the two, baptism and christening are distinct but closely related liturgical events.\(^{11}\) This was true in both early modern Roman Catholicism and the early Church of England. Confusion about the two stems from the fact that for newborns, priests would perform both during one proceeding. For those who convert and are baptized into the confession, the christening portion would obviously not be performed.

The christening ceremony formally bestows a name upon the infant. Baptism, on the other hand, ritually introduces the individual into the faith. Kathryn R. Vulic and David J. Kennedy define baptism as “[the] first of the [Roman Catholic] church’s seven sacraments,” which “remits the initiate’s sins to that point (including original sin), joins the initiate with the church, and identifies the initiate as Christian.”\(^{12}\) Not even kings or

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\(^{11}\) For this chapter, the two will be used interchangeably, especially since the primary source material makes no distinction between them.

queens, though rulers by divine right, could claim to have been born free of the taint of ‘original sin,’ nor could their posterity. The doctrine of original sin dictates that Adam and Eve’s transgression of God’s command in the Garden of Eden taints all mankind, resulting in a morally corrupt condition passed through sex and conception, and remains present at the moment of birth, which necessitated heavenly cleansing. Baptism was essential for everyone—royalty included—in order to wash away the stain of original sin.\textsuperscript{13}

The liturgy of baptism, as outlined by the Sarum Rite, can be unpacked into five parts. First, the infant was brought to the doors of the church, where the priest blessed and exorcised him or her. Second, the priest brought the infant and observers into the church and prepared the font for the baptism. Third, the godparents on the child’s behalf formally renounced the devil “and all his works.”\textsuperscript{14} Then, the infant was baptized in the font. Finally, the child was anointed and blessed. Seen in this manner, baptism was a quinquepartite sacrament moving the infant from an initial state of degeneracy to a cleansed, sin-free condition, then setting the baby on a path to eternal life. Each of these states built upon the previous steps.

First, the baptismal party arrived at the outer doors of the church. The priest blessed the child by making the sign of the cross, and prayed over the infant, asking God

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to “drive from him (or her) … all blindness of heart,” and to “break all the bonds of Satan with which he (or she) was bound.” God was also petitioned to “[o]pen to [the infant] … the door of thy goodness,” a particularly appropriate request, given the location of the ceremony outside the church’s doors.\textsuperscript{15} This moment began the candidate’s navigation into the sacred geometry of the church, moving from west to east and from outside to inside. The child was further exorcised with holy salt as a definitive banishment of the devil inside, and blessed to have orifices open to God’s “sweetness.” The priest also supplicated with the \textit{Pater Noster}, the \textit{Ave Maria}, and the \textit{Credo}.\textsuperscript{16}

Thus prepared, the group could move inside the church and the baptismal font could be prepared if the water had gone stale. In the case of the royal family, the water would most probably have been changed. If so, the priest blessed the water with prayers and multiple crossings, and he additionally anointed the water with oil and chrism.\textsuperscript{17} No one was to touch the water once it was blessed. Duffy emphasizes this point: “This was not a simple matter of preventing superstition: the water itself was clearly considered to be both powerful and holy, and the priest was strictly charged to prevent anyone except the child from even touching the baptismal water.”\textsuperscript{18}

The next step required that the individual about to be baptized exercise their free will in turning away from sin. Because newborns obviously have no power to vocalize such sentiments, adults spoke on his or her behalf, anticipating the child’s wish to be free

\textsuperscript{15} Italics in the original. Ibid., 232.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 233, 237–238.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 238–245.

\textsuperscript{18} Duffy, \textit{Stripping of the Altars}, 280.
of sin. These adults were never the birth parents, who played almost no role here. Instead, the godparents were the dominant participants. Being godparents was no small honor—or responsibility. Their role, male or female, was to bestow a name on the child, to act as protectors, and to “teach the infant” prayers such as the *Pater Noster* and the *Ave Maria.*\(^{19}\) The priest asked the godparents the name of the child, and then, addressing it, asked it to “renounce Satan … and all his works … and all his pomps.”\(^{20}\) Once the godparents had affirmed this, the priest anointed the child with oil again. Then through questions he ensured faith in God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The godparents finally expressed that the child had a desire to be baptized, which allowed to the priest to perform the actual ritual.\(^{21}\)

The formula for infant baptism was as follows:

*Then let the priest receive the infant sideways in his hands: and having asked his name let him baptize him with a threefold dipping invoking the Holy Trinity once saying thus: … I also baptize thee in the name of the father (and let him dip him once with his face turned toward the north and his head towards the east) and of the Son (and again let him dip him once with his face turned towards the south) and of the Holy Ghost. Amen (and let him dip him the third time with his face towards the water).*\(^{22}\)

Here again is manifest the symbolism of the cross, invoked in tandem with the names of each member of the Godhead. Dipping the child in the water was understood to wash away sin in a literal fashion.

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\(^{19}\) Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 248.

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 245.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 246.

\(^{22}\) Italics in the original. Ibid., 247.
The baby was blessed and anointed a final time. Once completed, the priest robed the child in a chrisom, a white garment symbolically representing its new state of purity. Here the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* diverges with the Sarum Rite: where the older rubric dictated that the child be anointed before being robed, the new formula switched the two. The priest then placed a lit candle in the infant’s hand (presumably supported by the priest) and gave a final prayer and admonition to “guard [his or her] baptism … [and] keep the commandments” in order to be prepared for “eternal life.”

Baptism cleansed the initiate; the process moved the child from his or her native sinful condition into a state prepared for eternal life in heaven. With this technical explanation of the general outline of baptism, the royal accounts can be examined for a comparison to the customary formula.

**The Accounts of the Baptisms**

Theoretically and theologically, baptism is an egalitarian process. Jesus of Nazareth taught that baptism is an essential part of salvation for every human being: “Verely verely I saye vnto the: except that a man be boren of water and of ye sprete he cannot enter into the kyngdome of god.” As long as the sacrament is properly performed, the effect is the same for the recipient; there are no varying degrees of

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25 Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 247. In modern practice, the candle is now given to the father of the child.

26 John 3:5 (Tyndale).
baptism. Nevertheless, the monarchical family amplified each aspect of the ceremony in a display of importance and power.

It evidently would not be a royal event without a rich assortment of decorations designed to assert the authority and wealth of the ruling family. Even in Prince Arthur’s time, a sense of the dramatic pervades the records. Lady Margaret Beaufort, Henry VII’s formidable mother and the grandmother of the prince, authorized the production of a silver baptismal font especially for the occasion if the one at Canterbury could not be procured.27 She also directed the font be decorated with a “Clothe of Golde” and prescribed a multiplicity of colorful fabrics for the occasion.28 Mary’s christening (1516) featured the church “hung with cloth of needlework garnished with precious stones and pearls.”29 The decorations for Elizabeth’s (1533) were similarly ostentatious: the baptismal font—also fashioned from silver, no less—sat under a canopy of “crimson satin … fringed with gold,” and the halls were ornamented with arras.30 Prince Edward’s account (1537) bears the same types of instructions.31 Clearly, the royals intended to visually mark the family’s exalted status.


28 Ibid., 4:181.


This is a particularly fascinating intention because the royal parents were not major players in a baptism. For example, in Prince Edward’s christening, King Henry VIII only appears by title in relation to his two daughters, Princess Mary and Princess Elizabeth (for example, the text states “the ladye elizabethe the Kinges doughter”), and Queen Jane Seymour is entirely absent in the plans for the prince’s christening. The break from Rome did not change the role godparents performed in the ceremony. David Cressy’s observation that “mothers had no part to play in the baptism of their children, and fathers were permitted no more than a shadowy role” is as true during the Henrician Reformation as it would be a hundred years later.

The godparents in each event were selected from the nobility, befitting the status of the infant. They did not need to be related to each other, nor was there a requirement to have one male and one female. For example, Elizabeth’s godfather was the archbishop of Canterbury, and she had two godmothers from the nobility. In Edward’s case, the Duke of Norfolk was appointed to be godfather, and his half-sister Mary godmother.

This process of aggrandizement even elevated the officiator. Lady Margaret Beaufort dictated that “the Baptizor” at her first grandchild’s christening “must be an Archbishoppe or Bishoppe.” This is significant because a priest was perfectly capable

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32 Ibid., 128.
33 Cressy, Birth, Marriage, and Death, 149.
35 HM41955 fol. 128v. This may explain the conflicted relationship the two shared: Mary, as a devout Catholic, was supposed to be the spiritual guardian of Edward, who was reform-minded.
36 Leland, Antiquarii, 4:182.
of completing the ceremony. It appears that every actor had to be more exalted than the standard requirement to emphasize the position of the monarchy.

The theatrical aspect of these occasions cannot be overstated. A reading of each account shows the careful choreographing of everyone’s parts. For example, the organizers of Prince Edward’s christening were thorough, and they planned every detail, including who would provide and remove the salt for the ceremony: “It[e]m the s[e]rieant of the pantrye to be Redie at the saide chambr[e] to deliver the salte and the towell[e] and to be Reddy at the chappell[e] to receive the same after the cristoning be don[.]”

Similar exactness appears in the records of Prince Arthur:

Then shall the Sergeante of the Kings or Queenes Pantry be readye at the Churche with a faire Towell of Reynes about his Necke, and a Salte Seller in his Hande, with Salte therein, and that he be ready to take the Assaye of the Salte before it be hallowed, and the Treasurer of Howsholde to goe before him and present the Assaye. Also the Sergeant of the Ewery shal be ready in the Churche, with Basonnes covered and uncovered, suche as the Case shall require, for the Byshoppes to washe in.

Such a meticulous plan suggests a planner conscious of the power of drama. Every move was coordinated and every position accounted for; nothing was left to chance. It was not just the people and the decorations that received an upgrade. The royal accounts also magnify the various liturgical objects. For example, the water, the fundamental element of the rite, had to be absolutely pristine. Most tellingly, the Sarum Rite specifically directs the priest not to treat those of “distinction” with a higher degree of “deference” in changing out the water, unless it was necessary because the water had

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37 HM41955 fol. 127v.

indeed become stagnant.\footnote{Whitaker, \textit{Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy}, 239.} The fact that the instructions include this stipulation suggests that nobles and royalty expected such deference. With the opulent details included in each of the four accounts, one suspects that the powerful would accept nothing less. However, the silver basins mentioned in Arthur’s and Elizabeth’s christenings are not the standard equipment.\footnote{Leland, \textit{Antiquarii}, 4:180; Gairdner, \textit{Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 6}, 1533, 464.} These would not have been used prior to the royal ceremony, which means that the officiator would not have needed to replace the water but to simply fill the basins. The point remains, however, that a high degree of respect had to be afforded to the royal family due to their status.

Even the candle, borne by the infant, received the royal treatment. The records list hundreds of torches lit at the climax of the ritual. Prince Arthur’s baptism required 200, all lit “as soone as the Christeninge is done, and the Childes Taper abovesaide, which the saide Childe shall beare up to the highe Auter in his Hande.”\footnote{Leland, \textit{Antiquarii}, 4:181–182.} The plans for Edward’s christening copy this procedure, with the addition of a forceful declaration of the heir to the throne: “And when the prince shalbe cristoned then all[e] torches to be leighted and garter principall[e] King at arm[ ] to proclaime his name in fourme Folloinge/ God of his infynyte grace and goodnes gyve and send good lyffe and long to the Reight heigh and excellent prince and lorde.”\footnote{HM41955 fol. 128.} These torches, simultaneously ignited, symbolized the
psalmic exhortation to let the word of God act as a burning lamp to elucidate the pathway back to heaven, and also spectacularly highlighted the power of the monarchy.\textsuperscript{43}

Through all the royal embellishments, the four baptisms expose the reinforcement of royal power through imagery, people, and processes. What appears to be a simple initiation ritual also performed a secondary role as a celebration of the continuing dynasty. Henry VII and Henry VIII each had to assert power \textit{vis-à-vis} the nobility during their respective reigns. S. J. Gunn points out that Henry VII acted to curtail their authority: “In national as in local politics, when confronted with the king's intrusive councillors and courtiers, many noblemen felt their rightful power constrained by Henry's rule, above all in his latter years.”\textsuperscript{44} E. W. Ives argues that “Henry VIII's enduring achievement was to uncover the power of the English crown.”\textsuperscript{45} For these two monarchs, raising the crown’s importance meant reducing the rival influence of the nobility. Catherine Bell observes that the struggle for power can be realized in ritual:

“Ritualization always aligns one within a series of relationships linked to the ultimate sources of power. Whether ritual empowers or disempowers one in some practical sense, it always suggests the ultimate coherence of a cosmos in which one takes a particular place.”\textsuperscript{46} The baptisms of the two princes and two princesses, in addition to demonstrating respect demanded by the crown, asserted the preeminence of the monarchy over the entire realm.


\textsuperscript{45} Ives, “Henry VIII (1491-1547),”

\textsuperscript{46} Catherine Bell, \textit{Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 141.
Clashes with New Doctrine

The rubrics outlined above bore some doctrinal issues for Henry’s church. The struggle over which confession was the ‘true faith,’ the making of the sign of the cross, and the blessing of objects for use in the liturgy were each sites of friction for the baptismal ceremony. None were completely solved in the Henrician Reformation.

One of the questions the priest asked the godparents prior to the baptism in both the Sarum Rite and the Book of Common Prayer invoked the nature of the church: “Doest thou beleve in the holy gost, the holy Catholike Churche, the communion of Saintes, remission of Sinnes, resurrection of the fleshe, and everlasting lyfe after death?”47 This question is nearly identical in both the Sarum Rite, used prior to Henry’s break from Rome, and in the Book of Common Prayer, published shortly after his death. The appropriation of this phrase coincides with Henry VIII retaining the papally granted title of ‘Defender of the Faith’ whilst adopting the designation ‘Supreme Head of the English Church.’ These words manifest an underlying consistency in what appears to be a haphazard era. Though definitively excommunicated from Roman Catholicism by Pope Paul III in 1538,48 this phrase, retained in the 1549 liturgy, reveals that in Henry’s view, he had not created a new confession for his own whims, but had rather set a course for reforming the true, universal Christian faith (hence the term “catholic,” meaning


“universal”) within his own domain. Of course, not everyone agreed with Henry’s vision for a reformed church, and this schism irreparably sundered early modern England.

A second point of conflict arose with the sign of the cross. The Sarum Rite requires the frequent making of the sign of the cross. The 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* retains the direction for the priest to use this gesture, but as Cressy points out, “Some of the more radical Tudor churchmen would gladly have abandoned the residual gesture of the cross in baptism, but [the Church of England] maintained it in the interest of conformity and discipline.”

The matter of crossing would, a generation later, become a massive point of contention. Duffy pointed out the medieval “insistence on the objective power of sacred things and formulae, and especially of the sign of the cross, to banish the Devil.” The disappearance of crossing in the 1552 printing, just three years after the first edition, demonstrates that reformers viewed crossing as part of “Catholic England,” along with blessing the water of the font, “[bowing] to the host at Communion, or [praying] for the dead in any circumstances.”

The ceremonies of Arthur, Mary, Elizabeth, and Edward each followed the Sarum Rite, and there is no indication that Henry VIII felt any unease at the sign of the cross, though it did stir up contention for his descendants.

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51 Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 124.


The ceremony’s usage of sacred items, such as the salt, the oil, and the water, creates an interesting conundrum for historians attempting to understand Henry’s reforms. Clearly, he felt the need to utilize the sacred emblems as essential instruments necessary for the proper baptism of his children. However, in the same year as Prince Edward was christened, his agents were implementing his orders to dismantle the monasteries throughout England.  

A central feature of this campaign targeted the sacred power of physical objects. Previous historians argued that the underlying justification for the dissolution of the monasteries was to amass money for the crown, particularly since the venture was so lucrative. However, the latest scholarship concludes that the reasons were far more steeped in religion. G. W. Bernard sees a triad of reasons: monasteries were seen as “lax, wasteful of scarce resources, [and] steeped in superstition.” In the minds of the reformers, the adoration of relics lay at the heart of this superstition. Bernard’s survey of the records the government agents who investigated the monasteries reveals “the assumption that the veneration of relics—often described as worship—was intrinsically superstitious and fit only for ridicule. Such relics were of questionable authenticity and doubtful efficacy.” This type of skepticism bore fruit time and again throughout the English Reformation, provoking Protestant protestations whenever objects and places were deemed holier than others.

54 Bernard, *King’s Reformation*, 433.

55 See, for example, Palmer, *Henry VIII*, 53.

56 Bernard, *King’s Reformation*, 255.

57 Ibid.
It is difficult to reconcile the contradiction in seeing holy, efficacious power in something like blessed salt, but not in something like a reliquary containing the bones of a deceased saint. How did Henry overcome this dissonance between the justification for the dispersal of an entire ecclesiastical subpopulation and the requisite ingredients for a correctly performed ritual?

This problem was most certainly understood during Henry’s time, because contemporary reformers railed against the sacralizing of objects. In 1528 William Tyndale disparaged what he saw as a fastidious reverence of the holy, liturgical ingredients:

What reverence give we unto holy water, holy fire, holy bread, holy salt, hallowed bells, holy wax, holy boughs, holy candles, and holy ashes! … When we cast holy water at the devil, or ring the bells, he fleeth as men do from young children, and mocketh with us, to bring us from the true faith, that is in God’s word, unto a superstitious and a false belief of our own imagination.58

According to Tyndale, when one ignorantly put their faith in an object, the devil got the last laugh. This sentiment traces back to Erasmus’ criticism of the superstitious uses of objects. Erasmus felt not that the “sacramental materials” were inherently defective, but that devotion of such objects completely missed the point; the real purpose of the performance of liturgy was the “cultivation of virtues.”59

First, the Supreme Head of the English Church did not simply deny that the ingredients contained holy power. Taking as an example the holy salt, the latest of the

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four accounts, Prince Edward’s, reveals that it was still being used by 1537. Likewise, the anointing oil appears in the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*, suggesting its efficacy.

Additionally, these holy ingredients were the most visible and tangible features of the ceremony. Baptism clearly relied on these emblems, yet if they were only present by tradition, rather than necessity, then surely they were also superstitious objects, as Henry deemed relics to be. Brian Cummings neatly summarizes this problem: “Baptism presented a dilemma for the Reformed liturgy, as it was clearly scriptural but the plethora of bodily performances in Sarum were anathema. The English service [later] swept away almost all the physical actions, yet for the laity these were often the most functional parts of the ritual.”

To complicate matters further, some of the components like salt and oil judged obligatory in the sixteenth century may not have been of the same elements deemed sacred in early Christianity. James Calfhill, an Elizabethan reformer, drew attention to practices in the early Church:

> Now, come ye down to Tertullian’s time; and ye shall find many strange inventions. Three dippings in the water: tasting of milk and honey; abstaining from all other washing for a seven-night after. In Hierom’s time, there was no honey used; but, in lieu thereof, wine and milk were given. … Notwithstanding, the latter age … hath taken most of all these away.

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60 HM41955 fol. 127v.


62 Ibid., 707.

What was sacred then was obviously not in Henry’s time. How was he to decide what was holy and what was not? Even a thousand years of Christianity had not been able to settle that question.

The answer to this deeply complex problem may actually lie within the evidence already presented. The key may be Henry’s distrust of the cult of the saints. Cynthia Hahn has noted that the nature of relics can prove detrimental to their existence: “The charges of being products of ‘superstition’ and ‘pious ignorance’ cling to them like a sticky ooze. To the modern mind, they are at best uncanny, at worst only the utilitarian instruments of misdirected piety.”64 Their exquisite containers and shaky provenances work, in the reformer’s mind, to undermine their validity. Henry must have seen relics as idols drawing attention away from the veneration of Christ. Their shrines, the destinations of pilgrimages, represented hotspots of superstition.65 The ingredients of baptism, on the other hand, were tools to be used in performing the rite and nothing more. They were consumable and could be created at will by a blessing, and they did not stay around long enough to be venerated on their own. Of course, many others disagreed with this perspective, since salt and oil disappeared from later liturgy.66

Each of these problems brooded over the baptismal ceremony past Henry VIII’s death, and the royal ceremonies kept to a fairly conservative formula. Reformers and conservatives alike contested over the details because salvation hung in the balance. The

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65 Bernard, *King’s Reformation*, 453.

66 See, for example, the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, found in Cummings, *Book of Common Prayer*, 408–419.
existence of the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* directly attests to such controversies, as the Cranmer designed it to, as MacCulloch asserts, “produce uniformity in the worship of the English Church.”67 The reformers argued that trivial or excessive details should be pruned. But on the other hand, it was critical that they did not eject important procedures necessary for the proper execution of a rite. These were questions that would never be satisfactorily answered for everyone.

**Conclusion**

This first chapter has argued that the royal christening ceremonies manifest two types of ongoing conflict: tension between the monarchy and the nobility, and between traditional and reforming practices. These pressures continued to increase beyond Henry’s reign. What is seen here are opportunities to adapt the liturgy, yet church and crown significantly did not do so.

Further studies on royal baptisms would have to creatively increase the data by incorporating the accounts of nobles. Henry’s three children, though rulers, never bore any children themselves, which makes extending the timeline through the rest of the Tudor dynasty impossible without expanding to include the greater nobility, whose baptisms and christening events were public spectacles. In gathering this additional information, the trajectories of the unanswered questions might be resolved.

The next chapter changes the focus from the family of the king and turns instead to Henry VIII himself. Each of his weddings illuminate how the liturgy circumscribed the actions of the monarch in the events of one of history’s greatest turning points.

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CHAPTER III
MARRIAGE

Bringing up the name of Henry VIII at a social function usually elicits a response like this one: “Was he the one with a lot of wives?” Popular conception of this king appears to focus on the six times this ruler married.¹ A study of the English Reformation invariably must address Henry’s matrimonial history, since the schism from Rome stemmed from Henry’s desire to secure an annulment from his first marriage to Catherine of Aragon. There is no denying the powerful link between Henry’s marriages and the world-altering events of the English Reformation.

Henry’s marriages provide insight into the religious realities of early modern England. Henry’s first marriage to Catherine of Aragon in 1509 occurred while England was still a vibrantly Catholic nation. When she failed to produce for him a male heir, his eyes wandered to Anne Boleyn, an attractive and ambitious woman who refused to submit to his sexual advances unless she first be made his legal wife and queen. Her calculated demand, formulated from watching her sister Mary be used as Henry’s mistress and then be discarded, created what came to be called the ‘King’s Great Matter’: he sought to find a way to annul his unsatisfying marriage with his queen, Catherine, to secure the desirable Anne.²

¹ To illustrate how embedded this is in our collective imagination, a sketch-comedy production made for kids, Horrible Histories, includes an episode with a particularly catchy song about Henry’s wives. It includes the rhyme “divorced, beheaded, died; divorced, beheaded, survived” as a mnemonic to remember the order of his many wives and their respective fates. For an online version of the recording, see Ben Willbond, Terrible Tudors: The Wives of Henry VIII, Horrible Histories, 2009, accessed December 1, 2016, https://vimeo.com/90738933.

² Lucy Wooding disagrees with this characterization: she believes that Henry and Anne mutually decided to remain chaste until they could be married. This seems dubious to me, as Henry had no qualms about obtaining mistresses such as Mary Boleyn. See Wooding, Henry VIII, 124, 127.
When the pope delayed and then refused Henry’s request, the argument shifted to assert the royal supremacy over matters spiritual and temporal in the realm over which the king presided. Once Henry had gathered historical evidence and justification through the *Collectanea satis copiosa*, Henry’s claim of spiritual authority was formally declared in the Act of Supremacy (1534) and buttressed by a series of parliamentary acts designed to protect the king and his family, including the Treasons Act. This was a dramatic event that created a national Church of England, distinct from Roman Catholicism, with Henry himself declared as the Supreme Head.\(^3\) The existence of a nationalized English church points directly to King Henry VIII’s quest to sire a legitimate male heir through his multiple marital attempts.

This chapter argues that Henry VIII’s wedding ceremonies demonstrate how liturgy constrained his actions throughout the Henrician Reformation. The same king who appeared to break all the religious rules to obtain what he wanted nevertheless had to follow the proper rules to marry. Though seemingly paradoxical, understanding this principle is imperative to understand the perplexing ruler.

Other historians have demonstrated interest in marriages in Tudor history. Lawrence Stone, for example, focuses specifically on family structures and relationships, marriage, and sexual behaviors in early modern England. He traces “massive shifts in world views and value systems in England” to this time period.\(^4\) Cressy’s work, used in

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\(^3\) Palmer, *Henry VIII*, 50–51.

the previous chapter, must again be mentioned here.\textsuperscript{5} Antonia Fraser’s \textit{The Wives of Henry VIII} and Alison Weir’s \textit{The Six Wives of Henry VIII} each focus on narrating the differences between each of the six women.\textsuperscript{6}

Very little contemporary material survives that catalogues the actual ceremonies. Lucy Wooding indicates that “all of Henry’s marriages … took place quietly and privately.”\textsuperscript{7} That privacy has yielded, in most cases, facts about the dates and places of the weddings, but liturgical details are scarce and difficult to find. For this reason, only three of the weddings are examined. This chapter assembles what is known about the marriages of Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, and Catherine Parr to trace the events across time. While a point-for-point direct comparison of the marriages is impossible, the liturgy of the Sarum Rite can fill the ‘holes’ of the written record. In cases where even this is not feasible, the silences actually reveal insights.

The first part of this chapter reviews the marriage between Henry and his first bride, Catherine of Aragon, in order to contextualize what Roman Catholicism, and English tradition, deemed a proper ceremony. The marriage of Anne Boleyn is considered next to show how the couple was bounded by the requirements of liturgy. The final section concerns Catherine Parr’s wedding as Henry again used the accepted liturgy.

\textsuperscript{5} Cressy, \textit{Birth, Marriage, and Death}.


\textsuperscript{7} Wooding, \textit{Henry VIII}, 49.
Figure 1: Henry VIII’s Marriage and Annulment Timeline. Source: Produced by the author.
The First Wedding: Catherine of Aragon

Catherine of Aragon was an unusual choice for Henry in two important respects. First, she had briefly been espoused to his brother, Prince Arthur, who died unexpectedly in 1502. The young, accomplished woman was suddenly left a widow. Second, Henry’s father, Henry VII, briefly considered marrying her after his wife died. Against these impediments, Henry VIII pursued a marriage to Catherine.

A special papal dispensation had to be granted to allow Henry and Catherine to wed because of their close affinity. Reportedly, Arthur and Catherine had never consummated the relationship, and this was most critical. This one point, exclusively known between the couple, would prove an important weapon of the Crown in the later matrimonial war between Catherine and Henry. Only once this approval had been given could Henry wed the exotic Spanish princess in 1509.

Why Catherine?

Henry’s motivations appear as simple as young love. Wooding describes his infatuation in simple terms: “It seems that he was attracted to [Catherine], and that, initially at least, he loved her.” She speculates that his role at the impressionable age of 10 of escorting her to her wedding with his older brother may have caused him to “[envy] the lot of his elder brother as future king as well as new-wedded husband.” If so, his childhood crush had blossomed into a triumphant fulfillment of his boyhood fantasies.

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9 Ibid., 59–60.
This was a particularly unusual occurrence, since Scarisbrick asserts that the old order dictated that romantic love rarely played any part in royal weddings: “Royal marriage-treaties were the very stuff of diplomacy—long had been, and long would remain so—and the parties concerned were neither expected nor allowed to have any say in the bartering. Marriage, it was contended, came first, love afterwards.”

This is not to say that geopolitical factors and familial expectations played no role in these circumstances. On the contrary, this marriage favorably positioned England and Spain against France. The “wealth and glory” of Spain significantly outstripped England’s. Additionally, Henry purportedly acted “in obedience to his father’s dying wish.” The fact nevertheless remains that he definitely wanted to marry Catherine: “If I were still free,” he wrote to his father-in-law after the ceremony, “I would choose her for wife before all others.” The feeling seems to have been mutual: for her part, Catherine would no longer be a young widow, and a letter to her father implies a genuine affection for her new husband. Marriage allowed him to be with the woman he loved and acted as a kind of “sexual safety valve” for his desires.

15 Quoted in Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 126.
17 Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 297.
The Ceremony

To be properly wedded in the eyes of God and the law, the couple needed to satisfy three elements: first, both individuals had to give consent; second, the two exchanged gifts; and finally, the couple was required to consummate the marriage. These stipulations held true across the social spectrum, and the royal couple was not exempt.

Chroniclers reported remarkably little about the ceremony. The little we do know, catalogued in secondary sources, is mixed with misinterpretations. For example, what Antonia Fraser attributes to details about Catherine’s wedding appearance (“Catherine wore white, with her hair long and loose as befitted a virgin bride”) actually describes her procession to her coronation: “The Queen sat in a litter[.] … Her person was appareled in white satin embroidered, her hair hanging down her back to a very great length, beautiful and goodly to behold.”19 All that can be said for certain is that they were married at Greenwich “at the oratory of the Franciscan Observants just outside the palace wall.”20

Like Retha Warnicke’s study on Anne of Cleves, we can hazard some educated guesses about the ceremony by using the accepted rubric to fill the gaps.21 As was the

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19 Fraser, The Wives of Henry VIII, 49; Walter George Bell, Fleet Street in Seven Centuries: Being a History of the Growth of London beyond the Walls into the Western Liberty, and of Fleet Street to Our Time (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1912), 166–167.

20 Mattingly, Catherine of Aragon, 125.

case of the baptisms of the previous chapter, Henry would have adhered to the liturgy of the Sarum.\textsuperscript{22} The standard procedure dictated that the couple meet at the church doors (or “in the face of the Church”) with the man on the right of the woman. The priest asked the banns, which meant asking the crowd if there was any reason why the two should not marry. The couple then exchanged wedding vows.\textsuperscript{23}

In this respect, however, the officiant altered the standard rubric, because one of the few details we do know are the words spoken to solemnize the marriage. They are, as translated from Latin:

\begin{quote}
The formal words pronounced at their wedding. Most illustrious Prince, is it your will to fulfil the treaty of marriage concluded by your father, the late King of England, and the parents of the Princess of Wales, the King and Queen of Spain; and, as the Pope has dispensed with this marriage, to take the Princess who is here present for your lawful wife? The King answered: I will. Most illustrious Princess, &c. (mutatis mutandis). The Princess answered: I will.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

The vows reference the diplomatic context for this religious ceremony, providing a discourse between politics and religion. The two blend together here, because the wedding was of international importance: it marked a union not only between two people, but also the kingdoms of England and Spain.

The two then clasped hands, promising each other “to have and to holde fro this day forarde, for better for wors, for richere for poorer, in sykenesse and in hele, tyl

\textsuperscript{22} For this chapter, I use \textit{The Sarum Missal, in English} (London: Church Press, 1868), accessed March 3, 2018, https://archive.org/details/sarumn00cath. It is a translation of the original Latin text “for a more perfect description of the Ceremonial which prevailed in England, at the epoch of the Reformation, than has hitherto been accessible in the vulgar tongue.” See ibid., vi.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{The Sarum Missal}, 551–552.

deth the us departe, if holy chyrche it woll ordeyne.” Cummings indicates that this was the climax of the ceremony: “In medieval marriages it was the clasping of hands and not the exchange of rings that was seen as the sacramental moment.” Next, the ceremony dictated that Henry give Catherine a wedding ring; surviving records do not mention this detail, but the need to exchange gifts bespeaks its presence. This ring, blessed by holy water, would become the focus of the liturgy for the Book of Common Prayer, but here it was to provide “strength of heavenly defence … profitable unto [the bride’s] eternal salvation.” Further, the ring served to remind the bride to “be stedfast in [God’s] peace and abide in [His] will;” interestingly, the priest enunciated no such blessings for the groom, which implies that, in the view of the church, the man did not need such prompting. This absence supplies a fascinating window into the early modern English perspective of gender and virtue, which linked women with “innate inferiority.”

Prayers followed, and the couple was led to the altar, where they were further blessed to resist temptation, grow old in the love of God, have “the length of their days … multiplied,” and be protected through their third and fourth generations of

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25 The Sarum Missal, 552.

26 Cummings, Book of Common Prayer, 713.

27 The Sarum Missal, 552.

28 Ibid.

descendants. The officiator made the sign of the cross six times throughout this process. Immediately afterwards, the couple moved to the presbytery and mass began.30

Of interest here is one modification of the mass relevant to the completed wedding. In a segment devoted to the bride (the groom has no equivalent blessing), the priest prayed for her “protection,” for “the yoke of love and peace [to] be upon her,” and he commanded her to “be faithful and chaste.”31 He exhorted her to be like the biblical women Rachael, Rebecca, and Sara; he prayed that God would “fortify her weakness,” which was entirely consistent with contemporary attitudes about women, even royal women.32 Finally, he prayed for her ability to bear children, a most critical charge for a queen.33 Unfortunately no record has survived of a ceremonial bedding, the final element to legally bind the marriage.34 However, the later birth of Mary, not to mention the many stillbirths and miscarriages, removes any doubt that the couple did at some point consummate the marriage and continued to have an active sex life for at least a decade.

Henry and Catherine, wedded after this pattern, followed the liturgy expected of late medieval monarchs, but dark days lay ahead. The upcoming storms emanated from a multiplicity of causes. One problem was the king’s philandering within five years of his wedding (as early as 1510 with “the sister of Edward Stafford,” and definitely by 1514

30 Ibid., 554–556.
31 Ibid., 557–558.
32 Ibid., 558. For an example of the gendered hierarchical view prevalent during this time, one can consult Henry VIII’s justification in A Glasse of the Truthe (1532) for needing the annulment from Catherine, quoted in Wooding: “If the female heir, shall chance to rule, she cannot continue long without a husband, which by god’s law, must then be her governor and head.” See Wooding, Henry VIII, 129.
33 The Sarum Missal, 558.
with Elizabeth Blount). Another was the lack of a legitimate male heir.\textsuperscript{35} One more stemmed from Catherine’s body manifesting the stress of seven pregnancies, rendering her less attractive to the king; Wooding estimates that Henry stopped having sexual relations with Catherine “from about 1525 onwards.”\textsuperscript{36} With these excuses Henry allowed his wandering eye to turn to Anne Boleyn at some point between 1526 and 1527.\textsuperscript{37}

The Clandestine Weddings: Anne Boleyn

Historians have already performed considerable evaluation on Henry’s tenacity in pursuing an annulment from Catherine, known contemporaneously as ‘the king’s great matter.’\textsuperscript{38} The salient evidence here are details surrounding the ceremonies performed to wed Henry and Anne.

The very nature of the act has left little evidence. Because the annulment had not yet been approved by the pope, Henry’s marriage with Anne had to be clandestine, especially since he was technically committing bigamy. Two secondhand accounts offer conflicting dates of November 14, 1532 and January 25, 1533. Diarmaid MacCulloch posits that both may be correct: one “may have been the couple’s impulsive reaction” and the other “the first occasion on which a priest was present.”\textsuperscript{39} Whichever way or ways

\textsuperscript{35} Scarisbrick, \textit{Henry VIII}, 147; Bernard, \textit{King’s Reformation}, 3–4.

\textsuperscript{36} Wooding, \textit{Henry VIII}, 128.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 117.

\textsuperscript{38} See, for example, Scarisbrick, \textit{Henry VIII}, 163–240; see also Bernard, \textit{King’s Reformation}, 1–72.

\textsuperscript{39} MacCulloch, \textit{Thomas Cranmer: A Life}, 637–638.
they were married, it came as a surprise to Henry’s court; Cranmer mentioned in a letter to Archdeacon Hawkyns, “Notwithstanding it hath been reported throughout a great part of the realm that I married her; which was plainly false, for I myself knew not thereof a fortnight after it was done.”

Though frustrating, this uncertainty is a clue in the attempt to reconstruct the proceedings. Henry VIII has been described as “a king cloaked in as many contradictions and contrasts as he had wives.” Though he pursued his annulment with ferocious tenacity, he was also circumscribed by the theological and liturgical constraints of marriage. He himself acknowledged these boundaries; in a letter to Anne, he writes,

I desire also, if at any time I have offended you, that you will give me the same absolution that you ask, assuring you that henceforth my heart shall be devoted to you only. I wish my body could also be. God can do it if he pleases, to whom I pray once a day that it may be, and hope at length to be heard.

This corroborates what Bernard claims: “It is God, not Anne, that Henry sees as the arbiter of his desires.” Additionally, Wooding asserts that “it was firmly established in contemporary thought … that sexual sins committed in private would have public and catastrophic implications.” A wedding not performed correctly was not binding and


42 Quoted from Bernard, King’s Reformation, 6. Emphasis Bernard’s.

43 Ibid.

44 Wooding, Henry VIII, 27.
would lead to sexual sin. Henry was obligated to perform the ceremony ‘correctly’ liturgically, not in just a legal and political sense.

These details give some insight into their secret marriage. Fraser argues, “Since royal marriages at this time were small private affairs—like Henry’s marriage to Catherine in 1509—there was nothing unconventional about a quick secret ceremony taking place.” Cressy does acknowledge a “considerable degree of flexibility” for marriage liturgy. If MacCulloch is correct, the first instance in November 1532 would have involved the simple exchange of words between the king and Anne. Cressy’s explanation of the process elucidates the technical requirements:

A marriage was technically made valid in law by this contract or spousals per verba de presenti, providing there were no overriding impediments. A contract de futuro, made in the future tense (such as, 'I will marry you'), became immediately binding if followed by sexual intercourse. Such was the core of medieval law, that was not changed in England until Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753.

Because we know that Anne Boleyn became pregnant “some time in the middle of December 1532,” we can surmise that the two had established a contract de futuro. Cressy cautions, however, that such a simple ceremony did not usually meet society’s expectations: “In practice, however, such simple, private, secular commitments were treated as seriously deficient.” This explains the necessity of a second wedding with a priest present in January. “A wedding in a church,” Norman Jones observes, “was public

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46 Emphasis mine. Cressy, Birth, Marriage, and Death, 317.
47 Ibid.
48 Scarisbrick, Henry VIII, 309.
49 Cressy, Birth, Marriage, and Death, 317.
confirmation of something that may have long since been agreed upon and acted upon by the couple."\textsuperscript{50} This public confirmation was crucial to legitimize the child born from Anne’s pregnancy. Because no alternative liturgy existed yet such as the \textit{Book of Common Prayer}, they doubtless again used the Sarum liturgy to complete the wedding.

The conditions of Anne Boleyn’s wedding ceremonies mirror the confused religious landscape of the country. By obliquely listing what is known and what was rumored, a picture of the liturgical events can be reconstructed. The two most likely performed the minimally required liturgy to accomplish the task, first in November of 1532, and then in January 1533. Clearly, what was important to Henry (and, in his mind, to the kingdom) was that they were legally wedded in the sight of God, even if very few knew about it, ensuring the right of his heir to inherit the kingdom. Here, Henry and Anne were bounded by church law, and they were required to follow the proper liturgy to ensure the legitimacy of their unborn child.

\textbf{The Final Wedding: Catherine Parr}

Those attempting to develop a better picture of Henry’s wedding liturgy in including the ceremonies of Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, and Katherine Howard will unfortunately be stymied by the lack of primary source material.\textsuperscript{51} Fortunately, the

\textsuperscript{50} Jones, \textit{The Birth of the Elizabethan Age}, 107.

\textsuperscript{51} I have been unable to find much useful data from the National Archives (including the calendars of the Letters and Papers of Henry VIII) about these three marriages, other than citations in letters that they occurred. \textit{Hall’s Chronicle} has one brief line about Queen Jane’s marriage: “The weke before Whitsontyde the kyng maryed lady lane doughter to the right worshipfull sir Ihon Seymour knight, which at Whitsontyde was openlye shewed as Quene.” For Anne of Cleves’ marriage, Hall describes the circumstances vividly, but the marriage itself is simply recorded as: “Then the Archebysshop of Caunterbury receyued them & maried them together.” See Edward Hall, \textit{Hall’s Chronicle: Containing the History of England, during the Reign of Henry the Fourth, and the Succeeding Monarchs, to the End of the Reign of Henry the Eighth, in Which Are Particularly Described the Manners and Customs of Those}
wedding to Catherine Parr was well documented, which provides the final clues in how liturgy influenced the king’s actions.

Catherine’s Appeal

By 1543 Henry was 52, and his health was showing signs of deterioration. After the last disastrous two marriages, first to Anne of Cleves (which Henry annulled because her appearance repulsed him), and then to Katherine Howard (executed in 1542), he was looking for stability. Catherine Parr (1512–1548), Henry’s final bride, “an impressive and agreeable woman” who became “an elevated, purposeful queen,” more than fit the bill.

Her legacy reveals the extent to which her influence stabilized Henry and his family. As queen, she managed to reconcile Henry’s three living children with their father and to act as their loving mother. This was no small feat, especially since he had at one time declared both his daughters illegitimate and had briefly contemplated executing Mary for stubbornly refusing to bend to his wishes.


52 Wooding, Henry VIII, 262.

53 Ibid., 248; Fraser, The Wives of Henry VIII, 309.


The Ceremony

Unlike any of the other wedding ceremonies, Catherine Parr’s was fully recorded. At Hampton Court, in the “Quynes Pryevey closet,” the two were wedded by the Bishop of Winchester Stephen Gardiner. Their liturgy closely matched the Sarum rubric. First, the officiant asked if any impediments existed preventing marriage, but with “none opposing but all applauding the marriage,” he questioned the couple if they wished to proceed.56

Next, they grasped right hands and spoke their vows. Their words correspond with the required liturgy: “I, Henry, take thee, Katharine, to my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death us depart, and thereto I plight thee my troth.”57 The Sarum text includes the provision “if holy chyrche it woll ordeyne, and therto I plight the my trouthe,” which has been dispensed with here. Henry VIII was the Supreme Head of the English Church, and he evidently had no need to invoke the blessing of his “holy chyrche.”58 They unclasped hands, and then gripped hands again, as required by the liturgy. Catherine spoke her vows, adding that she promised “to be bonayr and buxome in bed and at board, till death us depart, and thereto I plight unto thee my troth.”59 The king


57 Ibid.

58 The Sarum Missal, 552.

then gave her a ring and “proffer of gold and silver,” and the bishop gave a benediction, which concluded their wedding.60

The record of their ceremony is an attested instrument, which is significant for two reasons. First, as a legal, notarized document, it is intended to remove any doubt that the bishop performed the wedding correctly. Second, the phrasing of the narrative is curiously, almost suspiciously, close to the Sarum Rite. It raises the question of whether Henry’s prothonotary, Richard Watkins, wrote the ceremony’s details from what he witnessed or from what he expected. In other words, was the marriage really so close to the prescribed liturgy, or did Watkins observe the event and later fill in particulars from what the rubric dictated? It may be a case of a distinction without a real difference, as both alternatives demonstrate a normal state wedding. If the first scenario is true, and the account is accurate, then the king obviously needed to follow the prescribed Sarum rite, with some minor modifications pertinent to the new religious reality. If the second option is correct, it still manifests normality, since the occasion was ‘close enough’ for Watkins to extrapolate the specifics, including the words spoken, from the matrimonial rubric.

Henry’s wedding with Catherine Parr mirrors his effort to stabilize his waning years. The ceremony adhered strictly to most of the Sarum Rite, excepting the mention of the church. This latter omission is consistent with his reforms, which placed himself at the head of religious life in England. It is striking how ‘normal’ his final wedding ceremony appears, given the opportunity he had to aggrandize himself through an altered liturgy.

60 Ibid.
Conclusion

This chapter has explored the liturgy surrounding Henry VIII’s marriages with Catherine of Aragon in 1509, Anne Boleyn in 1532/1533, and Catherine Parr in 1543. What has emerged is a glimpse of a ruler conscious of the need to follow religious protocol to obtain his desires. Simple but inaccurate depictions of Henry as the proverbial bull in the china shop fail to capture the nuances of his personality. Neither he nor the church instigated dramatic reforms for marrying royal couples, but instead largely retained the old liturgy. This speaks to its power in circumscribing and validating the king’s actions in selecting the nation’s queen consort.

What do other marriages before and after reveal? The marriages of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, Prince Arthur and Catherine of Aragon, and Mary I and Philip II of Spain could each yield additional data to understand how the wedding liturgy mirrored the circumstances of the participants. For example, in the case of Mary and Philip, the usual placement of the female on the left and the male on the right was reversed; this was to signify the power of the queen as the source of royal power, rather than her husband.61 An analysis of noble marriages may also prove insightful in reconstructing the shift in liturgy from the Sarum Rite to the *Book of Common Prayer*.

The next chapter focuses on the final aspect of the liturgical life-cycle: the commemoration of death. Like marriages and baptisms, the expected alterations do not appear. The question to answer, then, is why.

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CHAPTER IV

DEATH

1547 began cold and wintry. King Henry VIII, the terrifying monarch and Supreme Head of the English Church, had finally succumbed to his body’s slow decay. His subjects lined the streets and somberly gazed at the lengthy, stately procession bearing the king’s body to his final resting place in Windsor. This single powerful ruler “lastingly and divisively” shifted the country’s religious trajectory. And yet, the older members of the crowd could not help but notice that “his commemoration and burial followed time-honoured tradition.” The people were undoubtedly confused, and modern historians share this emotion. One might expect the king who had transformed English religion to also have refashioned the rites marking his own departure from mortality, if only to reflect the new orthodoxy.

Strangely, and just as in the case of royal christenings and weddings, he didn’t leave instructions redefining what it meant to commemorate a deceased king. And yet, there are subtle differences when comparing previous funerals with Henry VIII’s. Focusing on what changed—as well as what did not—in royal funeral liturgy reveals important insights into the nature of the Henrician Reformation. As is true of many historical phenomena, complex factors ranging from politics to religion dictated the nature of alterations to the death liturgy. This chapter argues that liturgy used at royal

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2 Wooding, Henry VIII, 286.

3 Ibid., 276.
funerals during the Henrician Reformation mostly remained the same, mainly due to ‘murky’ doctrines, the sheer social force of tradition, and political factors relating to state legitimacy.

The existing historiographical debate on the English Reformation includes many elements of this study, but no one yet has combined them in this fashion. Following the rise of social history and the corresponding thirst to discover more about the lives of ordinary people, historians such as David Cressy and Peter Marshall have examined the liturgy of death for the majority of worshippers. Sam Wood recently extended this type of analysis to Henry VII’s funeral, but Jennifer Loach expressed bemusement as to why the funeral of Henry VIII is not more widely studied. In fact, the scholarly community lacks a general comparison of funeral liturgy as it applied to the country’s ruling family during this era.

In order to explore this gap in the literature, this chapter considers four significant funerals of English royalty which happened before, during, and at the end of the Henrician Reformation. To establish a baseline of the characteristics of royal funerals prior to this period, we shall study the deaths of Henry’s parents, Elizabeth of York (1466–1503) and Henry VII (1457–1509). The ceremonies of Jane Seymour (1508/9–

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4 Cressy, Birth, Marriage, and Death; Peter Marshall, Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).


1537) and Henry VIII illustrate how royal funeral liturgy did and did not change over this time period. Of Henry’s six wives, only Jane Seymour bore the distinction of being buried as a queen. Henry VIII’s funeral in 1547 operates as the critical element in this analysis of the ways death liturgy evolved during the Henrician Reformation.

Unlike weddings, which are largely forward-looking events, funerals are mostly retrospective in nature. The previous chapter considered Henry’s marriages sequentially because their effects extended into the future, affecting, at least potentially, future weddings. In this chapter, the four ceremonies are juxtaposed without regard to chronology, since their prospective aspect was limited to reinforcing the power of the heir.

This analysis first identifies the basic structure for royal funerals. Next, the static and dynamic elements of these ceremonies, together with their significance, are explored. Finally, this chapter suggests a set of religious, social, and political factors to explain why the liturgy did not radically depart from pre-Reformation standards, despite significant and widespread religious upheaval.

**The Structure of a Funeral**

Complex and lengthy, the early modern European sequence of rituals memorializing a deceased member of the royal family may seem excessive to the modern

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8 Beer asserts that “Queen Jane was the first English queen to die in ‘good estate’ since the death of Henry VII’s consort Elizabeth of York in 1503.” Ibid.

9 The relevant original primary source materials survive to this day. This chapter utilizes printed transcriptions of these sources, used by other historians in their studies, due to their convenience.
reader. The obsequies spanned many days and multiple locations. However, the chronology can be summarized into four general sections: the preparation of the body, supplications on behalf of the deceased, processions moving the body, and the final interment.

First, the corpse needed to be sufficiently prepared to slow its decomposition and prevent the spread of disease. Henry VIII’s account inventories the personnel and tasks involved:

After the corps was cold, and seen by the lords of the privy council, and others the nobility of the realm, as appertained, commandment was given to the apothecaries, chirurgeons, wax-chandlers, and others, to do their duties in spurging, cleansing, bowelling, cering, embalming, furnishing, and dressing with spices the said corps.¹⁰

The body was then sealed in lead. This process was especially important, particularly as it preserved the body long enough to allow the subsequent proceedings to occur.¹¹ In fact, this technology was so effective that when Catherine Parr’s tomb was discovered in May 1782, Susan E. James indicates that upon opening the lead casing, “they found the body in perfect condition but it rapidly disintegrated with rough handling and exposure.”¹²

Next, mourners uttered prayers and the clergy performed masses to help speed the deceased through purgatory. In Roman Catholic theology, purgatory acts as an intermediary space between heaven and hell which purges sins prior to the occupant’s

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¹⁰ John Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials; Relating Chiefly to Religion, and Its Reformation, under the Reigns of King Henry VIII. King Edward VI. and Queen Mary the First: With the Appendixes Containing the Original Papers, Records, &c., vol. 6 (London: Samuel Bagster, 1816), 267.

¹¹ Cressy, Birth, Marriage, and Death, 427.

¹² James, “Katherine [Katherine Parr] (1512–1548).”
entrance to heaven.\textsuperscript{13} Prayers by those living were thought to shorten the time the
deceased spent in this state.\textsuperscript{14} Though conceptions of both purgatory’s location and the
activities of its occupants varied before and during the Reformation, there was
nevertheless a definite sense of benefit derived from these oblations.\textsuperscript{15} “[T]he plethora of
masses and services,” Wood agrees, “provides works to affectively include mourners in a
conception of the church which includes both the living and the dead.”\textsuperscript{16} This idea of a
community of saints working together permeates the funeral liturgy, as shall be discussed
later. These prayers and ceremonies would last many days; Jane Seymour, for example,
died on October 24, and masses and prayers extended from October 26 to her burial on
November 12 (a total of 19 days).\textsuperscript{17}

Then, the body could be moved to the burial site through an elaborate procession.
Often this procession could transport the body to several different chapels and cathedrals
before its journey to its interment, apparently to include as many parts of the nation in the
mourning activities as possible. The ostentatious nature of the pageantry highlighted the
status of the deceased and provided public closure. Figure 2 depicts Elizabeth I’s
procession in 1603; the records of these four funerals very closely match this illustration,

\textsuperscript{13} David Leeming, “Purgatory,” \textit{The Oxford Companion to World Mythology} (Oxford: Oxford University

\textsuperscript{14} Marshall, \textit{Beliefs and the Dead}, 7.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 11.


\textsuperscript{17} James Gairdner, ed., \textit{Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 12, Part II: 1537}
(London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1891), 372–373, accessed November 9, 2017,
http://www.british-history.ac.uk/letters-papers-hen8/vol12/no2/pp370-386.
which exposes the stark contrast between the black of the costumes and the colors of the heraldry. Though the procession purposefully incorporated mourners ranking from the highest nobility to the city’s very poor, precious few of the lower class—and only a small number of the upper class—would actually have been able to correctly interpret the meaning of the heraldry’s intricacies. The procession thus paradoxically both included and excluded the vast majority of English subjects.

Figure 2: The funeral procession of Queen Elizabeth I to Westminster Abbey, 28th April 1603. Little changed in one hundred years of funeral liturgy, and this image could just as easily represent any of the funerals examined in this chapter. Note the lifelike effigy of Elizabeth. Source: Funeral Procession of Queen Elizabeth, 1603, Additional MS. 35342, f.37v, accessed November 30, 2017, https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/drawings-of-the-funeral-procession-of-elizabeth-i. © British Library Board, Additional MS. 35342, f.37v. Reprinted with permission.

Finally, the body was laid to its eternal rest. This is the part likely most familiar to a Western audience. Sermons, prayers, and many masses were spoken and performed, including the dirige and placebo. The climax occurred when the officiators placed the corpse in the vault. The records indicate great emotion at this stage for both king’s and queen’s funerals as attendees paid their last respects. This marked the end of the authority of the deceased’s administration (regardless of gender), who had served at the pleasure of
their king or queen. After the officers had broken their staves to symbolically demonstrate the termination of their duties, if the deceased were male, the representative from the College of Arms (the Garter King of Arms), would announce the next in line to the throne. By this signal, the mourners knew to depart for the feasts prepared at nearby palaces, which concluded the obsequies.

The Static and Dynamic Elements of the Funerals

Having explored this background, the constant and variable aspects of the funerals of Elizabeth of York, Henry VII, Jane Seymour, and Henry VIII can now be compared and contrasted. Even from a cursory reading of each of the four funerals, one cannot miss the telling similarities. The static parts far outweigh the dynamic components of the funerals. This is surprising when one considers the magnitude of the religious upheaval during the Henrician Reformation, such as the dismantling of the monastic institutions of England. In turn, we shall consider the symbols used to convey meaning, who participated, and the words spoken to gather a complete picture of funeral liturgy, few of which differ over time.

The Symbols

Later Protestants targeted many of the symbols utilized for ceremonies during the Henrician Reformation as superstitious customs contaminating the true faith. The practice

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18 For a female example for both the emotion and the breaking of the staves, see Francis Grose and Thomas Astle, eds., *The Antiquarian Repertory: A Miscellaneous Assemblage of Topography, History, Biography, Customs, and Manners*, vol. 4 (London: Edward Jeffery, 1809), 663. For a male example of both, see Strype, *Ecclesiastical Memorials*, 6:290.

19 See, for example, Wood, “The Funeral of Henry VII,” 376.
of ringing of bells to announce someone’s death—Elizabeth of York’s, for example, in 1503—would be sneered at in 1561 because they “bringe the peopell unto supersticion, and […] confirme them in the opinion of Purgatory.”

Contemporaries of Elizabeth of York justified bell-ringing not only as an instrument to alert the community of the passing of a fellow Christian, but also as an act to comfort the mourners and to pray for the dead. Their descendants, however, scoffed at this connection between physical objects and spiritual effects. Even after Henry VIII’s reformation campaign against superstition, holy relics, and faith in material things, royal funerals retained these symbols which would later prove a sore point for future generations.

Torches and candles, as another example, were not merely practical tools to provide light, but performed an important religious function. Eamon Duffy reveals their powerful role in bringing the mourners into contact with the divine:

The burning of candles round a corpse was an act with profound resonances. Blessed candles had apotropaic power to banish demons. They were also understood as particularly eloquent examples of a whole vocabulary of light and darkness, symbolizing the desire that Christ “that is the lughte of the worlde wyll gyve clere lyght unto the soule by the derke way and unknownen by the whyche he shall walke”. Held in the hands of the poor, candles were both a prayer in themselves and a means of ensuring the powerful intercession for their bearers.

This explains why royal funerals employed such a vast quantity of candles and torches for the participants and for the hearse—Henry VIII’s funeral reportedly utilized 4,000


21 Marshall, Beliefs and the Dead, 128, 161.

pounds of wax for the candles and hearse. Duffy admits that the practice “undoubtedly lent itself to the vanity of ostentatious display,” which is one reason why reformers would later take such issue with them. The other reason, of course, was their rejection of purgatory and the related exigency of intercessory acts on behalf of the deceased.

Beyond the physical objects of bells and candles, the careful restriction of colors to a narrow palette of black, white, and gold separated this type of event from other important ceremonies. The financial records establish that organizers purchased bolts of scarlets, blues, and greens, but these probably made up the clothes given to the poor mourners for alms and for the construction of the heraldic decorations, rather than as ostentatious décor. The fact that the eyewitness accounts focus on black, white, and gold emphasizes their ritualistic significance.

Black featured prominently as a traditional western emblem of mourning. Cressy’s observation about seventeenth-century English practices holds true to these earlier times: “Mourning gear helped to distinguish funeral participants from mere onlookers, and the quality and amount of black cloth served further to identify those most intimately associated with the deceased. Aristocratic funerals featured blackness in

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24 Duffy, Stripping of the Altars, 361.
abundance.”

The sheer amount of black cloth listed for Henry VIII’s funeral (nearly 33,000 yards!) confirms Cressy’s assertion.\textsuperscript{28}

The white and gold decorations appear to act as supplementary liturgical colors. Elizabeth of York’s ceremonies liberally incorporated white in addition to the black. The account of her funeral specifically identifies that she had died in childbirth as the liturgical reason for this fabric color.\textsuperscript{29} Though Jane Seymour’s death could be attributed to the same cause, the only mention of white in her funeral records reflects its standard use as part of the mourner outfit (white ‘kerchers’ [kerchiefs] on black robes).\textsuperscript{30} Gold, on the other hand, appears in most funerals (except, curiously, Jane Seymour’s, which seems most likely an omission in the record, given Henry’s affection for her), possibly highlighting the royal status of the deceased.\textsuperscript{31}

These outward manifestations visually communicated to a mostly illiterate population the important tenets of the faith: the nature of death, the afterlife, and the proper rites a Catholic should perform to help speed the deceased through purgatory.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{27} Cressy, Birth, Marriage, and Death, 440.
\textsuperscript{29} Grose and Astle, The Antiquarian Repertory, 4:657.
\textsuperscript{32} Literacy rates are notoriously difficult to measure for early modern England, especially as the old rule of thumb equating signatures with literacy has been disproven. We can, however, be reasonably sure that pre-Protestant England held relatively few literate people, as historians and contemporary Englishmen alike noted that the advent of printing and the rise of Protestantism resulted in a dramatic increase in literacy rates. See Christopher Haigh, English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 194–195. See also David Cressy, Literacy and the Social Order: Reading
The symbols proved vital in unifying the nation to mourn for the passing of royal family members. Next, we shall turn our attention to how the participants affected—and were affected by—the liturgy.

**The Participants**

In reading the sources, the practical effects of Henry VIII’s campaign to dissolve the monasteries in England become clear. The abbot, whose name derives from *abba* (meaning ‘father’), served as the father or superior figure of the abbey. In Elizabeth of York’s funeral, abbots were prominent officiators of the proceedings: “So this order as before was dayly kept as long as she was in the Tower every day *in pontificalibus* by a Bishop or an Abbott at the least as the next day by the Abbott of Barmsey the iijd [3rd] by the Abbott Albones The iijth [4th] by the Abbott of Winchcomb.” Jane Seymour’s funeral in 1537, at the beginning of the suppression of the smaller monastic houses, still featured these spiritual leaders. But ten years later the abbot’s position had vanished, replaced by the bishop, as demonstrated in this account of Henry VIII’s funeral:

The names of the bishops and prelates appointed as well for the executing and ministering divine service in the chappel, as also to attend upon the conduct of the said corps, when it shall be removed: Steven Gardiner, Bp. of Winchester, chief prelate. Cuthbert Tunstal, Bp. of Durham. …

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*and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 42–61 in which he discusses the difficulty in measuring literacy rates.


35 The account of Queen Jane’s funeral mentions seven abbots participating at various points. See Gairdner, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 12, Part II: 1537*, 373.
Whereof the Bishop of Winchester was appointed to make the sermon; and being the chief prelate of the order, to execute.  

This is important because the selection of bishops often served as the king’s political tool to reward allies, as episcopates proved to be lucrative positions. Felicity Heal indicates that “the English bishop already had two roles before the Reformation. He was a leader and pastor to his flock, with an especial obligation to supervise the lesser clergy. He was also a servant of the crown: usually a nominee of the king and often engaged in secular administration.” The dissolution of the monasteries, with the accompanying loss of monastic leaders, pruned the religious hierarchy of England so that the monarchy had greater direct control over the religious officials—and the religion—of his realm.

Consequently, Henry VIII’s funeral liturgy adapted to this shift in religious leadership dynamics.

The abbots and bishops constituted the officiators, and the mourners formed the bulk of the participants; the organizers fashioned the black outfits for them. For the wealthy, the death of a sovereign marked a transition to a period of humility and grieving: they “‘put off their rich apparel, doing on their mourning habit and white kerchers hanging over their heads and shoulders.’” For the poor, the gift of clothing represented an act of charity and mercy; as well as “a clear *quid pro quo* … in return for the gift the

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38 Ibid., 2.

39 Gairdner, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII, Volume 12, Part II: 1537*, 372. “Rich,” of course, is a relative term due to the expense of the black cloth; this probably refers to the richness of the wealthy’s typical attire.
recipient was to pray for the giver."\(^{40}\) This charitable gesture incorporated the impoverished, who were “in a special sense the images of Christ; [therefore] gifts to them could be made into a deliberate act of homage to the Crucified [Jesus Christ]."\(^{41}\) It also acted as a work of penance, which was considered one of “four keys … to open purgatory,” meaning to shorten time spent in purgatory.\(^{42}\)

The chief mourner acted as the most visible of the assembly of poor and noble spectators. Interestingly, the records evince a minor gender divide in this role. The chief mourner always matched the gender of the deceased. For example, Henry VII was not the chief mourner for his late wife, as a modern reader might expect, but instead her sister assumed that role.\(^{43}\) The accounts provide no explicit elucidation of this rule, but the document describing Henry VIII’s funeral provides one tantalizing clue: “the chief mourner [Henry Gray, Lord Marquis of Dorset] served … as if it had been the kings majesty personally present.”\(^{44}\) The chief mourner apparently served as a surrogate for the deceased, necessitating that their genders matched. His or her role extended the physical presence of the recently departed monarch. This is similar to the purpose of the lifelike effigy of the deceased, which Chris Given-Wilson postulates functioned as a focal point.

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\(^{40}\) Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 360.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 362.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 354.

\(^{43}\) Grose and Astle, *The Antiquarian Repertory*, 4:656.

for the mourners’ “prayers and emotions.” The chief mourner served as a similar focal point, representing paradoxically the mourners and the mourned.

**The Words**

The text spoken at these state funerals across the almost fifty-year time span remained remarkably consistent. Prayers and masses formed the foundation for this rite. It was through these that the living extended aid to their departed loved ones.

A particularly tender phase of the mourning process occurred shortly after the body had been prepared, when mourners engaged in night watches over the corpse. Participants would remain awake throughout the night, watching over the body and praying on behalf of the deceased, which provided intimate, sacred moments of quiet reflection. For example, Elizabeth of York’s funeral account reveals, “That night and every Night following was ordyned a goodly watch both of men and Gentlewomen[.] … The gentlewomen were relieved with vj [6] ladies which continually did knele about the Corps.” Cressy’s analysis of this practice reveals two purposes: it was a time of paying respects, and it “provided a final period of intimate attendance before the body was publicly laid to rest.” It connected living and dead on a private, personal level.

The official ceremonies of mass, publicly performed by abbots and bishops, included the *dirige* and *placebo*. The *dirige* and *placebo* took their names from the first Latin word in each respective mass: “*Dirige* Domine Deus meus in conspectu tuo viam

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47 Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, 427.
meam” (Direct, my Lord God, my way in your sight) and “placebo domino in regione vivorum” (I will please the Lord in the province of the living). These two phrases are the first antiphons for the Matins and the Vespers respectively and are taken from the Vulgate Bible. These petitions served a dual purpose, for they are intercessory prayers for the deceased and strengthen the mourners. Duffy asserts that these masses were “recited at every funeral” due to the “centrality of intercession for the dead in the piety of late medieval men and women.” His assertion holds true for this study: the dirige and/or the placebo masses show up by name in each of the four royal funerals, making them indispensable aspects of the liturgy.

These actions, on a private and public level, and by both the mourners and the officiators, formed a community in which the living extended time and resources to help the dead. The collective expectation dictated that as the living faithful would pray for the dead, the next generation would pray for them once they had passed on. Cressy asserts, “One of the most profound effects of the protestant elimination of purgatory was to

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50 Duffy, Stripping of the Altars, 369.

51 Ibid., 220.

shrink the community of souls and to sever the relationship between the dead and the living.” The dead were thought to be beyond the aid of the living. However, this fracture of community was just beginning to take place by the end of Henry VIII’s reign and would only fully transpire in his children’s reigns.

Factors Influencing the Stability of the Liturgy

One of the first principles a budding historian learns is that historical events very rarely stem from a single cause; multiple factors almost always feed into the phenomenon. The ceremonies outlined above follow this precept. Religious, social, and political circumstances influenced the relative stability of royal funerals over the course of Henry VIII’s lifetime.

In relation to death liturgy, the most significant religious change of the Henrician Reformation was the suppression of the monasteries in England. This policy represented the king’s religious beliefs, heavily influenced by his friendship with theologian Desiderius Erasmus, that the institutions harbored loyalties to the pope, and worse, exhibited inefficient, corrupt, and superstitious behavior. His evolving policy against the monasteries simultaneously challenged the doctrine of purgatory, which medieval Christianity postulated was a significant realm of the afterlife. R. W. Hoyle asserts that monasteries, with their focus on performed works for the dead, were “purgatorial

53 Cressy, Birth, Marriage, and Death, 396.

institutions”; therefore a threat to the one was a threat to the other.\textsuperscript{55} It initialized an erosion of the belief in purgatory’s existence, confusing the English faithful for years.\textsuperscript{56}

The king’s position on purgatory is similarly muddled. Where the Ten Articles (1536) qualified the efficacy of prayers and masses for the dead and the Six Articles (1539) had to reassert the validity of private masses, the \textit{King’s Book} in 1543 tellingly left out the word ‘purgatory’ and called into question the entire system.\textsuperscript{57} On the other hand, the Chantries Act of 1545 granted the king the power to seize chantries and similar institutions allegedly to prevent their economic abuse; Alan Kreider argues the purpose to have been economic rather than religious.\textsuperscript{58} Kreider proposes that Henry never stopped believing “in the efficacy of prayers and masses for the souls of the departed.” From the “ambivalent” position of his government, however, it is easy to see why this could be termed a “most confusing of periods.”\textsuperscript{59}

It would take into the reign of Henry’s daughter, Elizabeth I, for reformers to fully purge purgatory and intercessions from English religion. The four funerals spanning from 1503 to 1547 mention prayers and supplications many times. Each also records explicit

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{56} Marshall, \textit{Beliefs and the Dead}, 124.
\item \textsuperscript{59} Kreider, \textit{English Chantries}, 175.
\end{itemize}
requests that the people “pray for the soul [of the deceased].” This injunction is consistent with Henry VIII’s will, which requested prayers and an altar “furnished for the saying of daily masses while the world shall endure.”

Three possibilities offer themselves here in understanding Henry’s religious beliefs about death. First, it could be that Henry VIII backtracked on his reforms at the last minute. Second, the organizers of his funeral might have felt obliged to maintain the religious traditions of previous state funerals. Third, what transpired may have reflected Henry’s beliefs in purgatory. The truth could even be a combination of any of these. It is a question that has frustrated historians for centuries.

In considering the first scenario, the approach of old age tends to crystalize beliefs about death and dying. Henry was keenly aware of his slowly decaying body and his impending demise. He occupied his final days arranging his son’s regency and finalizing his will. It could be that Henry’s final breaths were spent regretting what had transpired during his reign, but there is little evidence either way. “It is characteristic of the man,” Wooding muses, “that his final act should be one so full of ambiguity.” This confusion could have resulted in the second possibility mentioned above, namely that the

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62 Wooding, Henry VIII, 271.

63 Ibid., 273–277.

64 Ibid., 276.
organizers returned to previously established traditions in order to resolve their own confusion.

The third alternative is the most compelling. In contrast to earlier historians, G. W. Bernard casts Henry as the principal and informed instigator of the English Reformation, rather than as a hapless experimenter stumbling blindly through the consequences of his own capriciousness. After an examination of the apparent contradictions between what Henry preached and what the clergy practiced in his funeral, Bernard argues, “Yet Henry’s provisions were in keeping with his reforming middle way, rather than evidence of traditional conservatism. In no sense did they contradict the cautiously sceptical treatment of purgatory in his religious formulations from the Ten Articles onwards.” Bernard crafts subtle distinctions between Henry’s distrust of the existing intercessory system (including the invocation of saints and its sense of mechanical precision) and prayers for the dead in general. If Bernard is correct, Henry never stopped thinking of himself as a true, faithful Catholic, even after clashing so spectacularly with the Roman Catholic authorities on the continent. The standard liturgy then makes sense, since it would agree with Henry’s beliefs.

Religious factors, powerful though they were, did not solely stabilize the liturgy; the social force of tradition also manifested an appreciable effect. The careful noting of the attending nobles by name and heraldry is an intriguing window into how funerals reinforced the social and political order. For example, Henry VII’s funeral lists name

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65 Bernard, King’s Reformation, 593.
66 Ibid., 593–594.
upon name of lords, knights, and various gentry in an attempt to catalogue the important attendees.  

These inventories of nobles accompany each funeral account and are precise in their detail and ordering; the College of Arms constructed them to adhere to the correct social order. The percentage of the chronicles devoted to this purpose reveals how critical noble contemporaries viewed their participation.

The presence of the powerful permeates the records. For example, Thomas Wriothesley’s sketch of Henry VII on his deathbed features hand-drawn miniatures of the heraldic symbols of important witnesses (see Figure 3). As mentioned previously, Henry VIII’s body had to be “seen by the lords of the privy council, and others the nobility of the realm, as appertained,” prior to beginning any preparation of the body. The number of individuals attending to the dying king in the drawing suggests that the presence of the nobility was required to sanction the proper burial of their monarch. This company of witnesses could then attest that the king had in fact expired and that the designated heir should be crowned; this prevented rebellions from those claiming to be royalty, which is exactly what happened in 1487 when Lambert Simnel led a rebellion, claiming to be one of the so-called ‘princes in the tower’ because no one knew what had happened to them.


The nobles were not the only powerful influencers of ceremony; the officers of the court also operated as a check against radical liturgical change. As Given-Wilson states in his study of Edward III’s burial, the royal household bore the responsibility for properly administrating the event. Each funeral required extensive planning, and this magnitude, including the procurement of candles and fabrics discussed previously,

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furnished a significant impediment to any rapid change. Because the standard liturgy was adequate, no one directed the officers of the household to vary their preparations.

The ceremonies acted as a vehicle to promote the legitimacy of the state. Demonstrating an unbroken chain linking to previous rulers, especially in the minds of those ruled, was critical to maintaining the social hierarchy. Norman Jones points out, “Henry VIII was hardly a Protestant in his heart, but he nationalized the church in order to get what he wanted. In the process, he encouraged people to question religious authority—even, unwittingly, his.”71 Yet it was not just religious jurisdiction that seemed precarious, because his funeral acted as a corrective to reinforce his authority and that of his descendants over the state posthumously.

The dynasty’s claim as the rightful rulers of England had always proved a tricky point. In the Battle of Bosworth in 1485, Henry Tudor’s army proved victorious, King Richard III perished, and the upstart Henry declared himself king. There was even a sort of unofficial viewing of the body to prove to the country that Richard was dead: a 1559 chronicle notes, “Then was the corps of Richard late king spoiled, & naked as he was borne, … caried unreuere[n]tly … unto [the] friers at Leiceter. Where after a season that he had lien, that al men might behold hym, he was there with little reuere[n]ce buried.”72 After the battle, Henry married into the York line to secure the cooperation of his former

71 Jones, English Reformation, 9.

enemies and became Henry VII. The Tudor line thus at that moment rested upon a very tenuous connection to the royal bloodline, a fact which caused constant and enormous anxiety for the newly minted ruler and his family.73

The four burial ceremonies of Elizabeth of York, Henry VII, Jane Seymour, and Henry VIII adhere to the standard pattern for state funerals. They conform because the Tudor dynasty required the legitimacy endowed by the apparatus of ceremony and liturgy. A real, divinely approved monarch would necessarily need to be buried in the time-honored fashion: Henry VIII’s account indicates the proceedings were “done and executed accordingly, as to the dignity of such a mighty prince it appertaineth.”74 The funerals, with all their ceremony, implicitly marked the validity of the dynasty.

The consistent opulence of these occasions also highlights what Wood surmised about Henry VII’s obsequies: they were less about honoring the person and more about the political station he or she had held and was passing on.75 For example, Henry VII’s and Henry VIII’s funerals each designate the transferal of power to their respective heirs. The moment the staves were broken and thrown into the grave, the Garter King of Arms cried out “Vive le Roy Henry le huitiesme” (Long live King Henry the Eighth) and “Vive le noble roy Edward” (Long live the noble King Edward) in each particular ceremony, indicating a seamless transition of authority from father to son, even prior to the official coronations.76

73 Wooding, Henry VIII, 13.
74 Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, 6:267.
76 Ibid., 376; Strype, Ecclesiastical Memorials, 6:290.
Henry VIII’s religious changes affected only in a minor way the burial of his wife, Jane Seymour, and his own funeral. The largest change emanated from restructuring who acted as officiators because abbots and monasteries no longer existed in England. However, other factors proved more influential in how the liturgy memorialized deceased royalty. Religious components, social traditions, and the issues surrounding the legitimacy of the state slowed and tempered change, resulting in a more conservative evolution of the liturgy.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined how royal funerals before and during the Henrician Reformation transpired. Though a reading of Henry VIII’s break from Rome would suggest a dramatic change in how the country eulogized the deceased, such shifts were relatively minor. A series of religious, social, and political factors have been explored to explain why the liturgy remained so stable.

Further studies on this subject should expand to include the higher nobility. This would provide a larger sample of state funerals from which correspondingly clearer trends could be discerned.\(^7\) The funerals of the following generations, extending into Elizabeth’s reign, may illustrate more dramatic change and a more diverse interpretation of proper funeral liturgy, mirroring the development of the English Reformation.

Up to this point in this study, the rites surrounding birth, marriage, and death have each been considered separately. The following, concluding chapter of this thesis reflects

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\(^7\) Lucy Wooding kindly suggested this approach in an e-mail to the author: “I think the idea of looking at liturgical changes in this way is interesting, but you would need to range over quite a broad time span, I suspect to make it viable.” Lucy Wooding, e-mail to author, November 22, 2017.
upon the analysis from this and the previous chapters to assemble the progression of liturgy for all three types of life events. This will allow a synthesis of the royal life-cycle during the Henrician Reformation.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

From the perspective of the scholar, attempting to chronicle and understand Henry VIII’s break from Rome proves difficult and confusing on account of his “see-sawing doctrinal policies.”\textsuperscript{1} Paradoxically, the king maintained a moderate approach between traditional Catholic ideas and reforming influences. Overzealous reformers found to their peril that Henry was unwilling to allow drastic changes, yet those who held too strictly to the most conservative tenets of Roman Catholicism faced dire consequences. Determining the nature of Henry’s faith was a matter of life and death for his contemporaries, and historians since have struggled with this central question. Despite common misconceptions about this period, what M. D. Palmer states is helpful to bear in mind: “On doctrine there was very little deviation from Catholic orthodoxy during the reign.”\textsuperscript{2} Henry’s national church was simply not as Protestant as it would later become under his son Edward or his daughter Elizabeth.

This thesis has approached this broad issue through three types of early modern English rituals from the perspective of the country's most powerful individual. Like most late medieval and early modern English families, the Tudor monarchy performed the standard rites marking birth, marriage, and death. Their elevated social standing meant that their christenings and funerals were highly visible, public events. In the case of weddings, Henry’s preference of private ceremonies did not lessen their significance or

\textsuperscript{1} Aude De Mézerac-Zanetti, “Reforming the Liturgy under Henry VIII: The Instructions of John Clerk, Bishop of Bath and Wells (PRO, SP6/3, Fos 42r–44v),” \textit{The Journal of Ecclesiastical History} 64, no. 1 (January 2013): 96.

\textsuperscript{2} Palmer, \textit{Henry VIII}, 59–60.
consequences. The kingdom watched them all as part of their efforts to gauge the religious temperament of the king.

Though exclusively a survey of the royalty, this thesis can act as a starting point for further investigations. Others could extend the analysis by broadening the base of actors to the noble class. How did nobles perform christenings in 1509? How did it differ from those of, say, 1550 or later? At what point did the changes occur? What about marriages? How did those with power negotiate with new doctrines and religious realities in their funerals? The resulting increase in data would aid in plotting out the Henrician Reformation.

From the specific instances of occasional liturgy we have examined, two general precepts can be distilled. First, liturgy has been shown to be valuable in expanding historical understanding of early modern England. It existed in a liminal period, and now manifests to us the tension between late medieval and reforming religious principles. The Church and government altered liturgy slowly in the Henrician Reformation; the evolution of liturgy was bounded by external pressures. To rephrase Helen Gittos’ assertion, these rituals were living and dynamic.3

Second, unlike his subjects, Henry VIII had the unique authority to authorize new rites to suit his purposes or to agree with new doctrine, but relatively little changed. His actions defy the caricature of a reckless, bumbling king willing to break any rule to achieve his purposes. Instead, a more complex picture emerges in which the procedures dictated the monarch’s performance of ritual, even though he deemed himself Supreme Head over the church in England.

3 See the Introduction to this thesis.
These two principles allow further understanding of the adaptive, individualized nature of religious change as first proposed by Norman Jones. Understanding evolution over time is critical in understanding the history of any period, in particular the English Reformation. This investigation of liturgy reveals its adaptation—or stability—at various critical junctures, which further unveils the progress of the Reformation.

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4 Jones, *English Reformation*. 
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