

ARTICLES

THE ACCESSION OF RICHARD III: two sources supporting the *Titulus Regius* and pre-contract crisis of June 1483.

Part Two: the French source

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In Part One we looked at the Recognition, part of King Richard's coronation ceremony of 6 July 1483. We revealed how it supported the *Titulus Regius* and pre-contract crisis of June 1483, as well as the transparency of Richard's accession. We also proposed its significance as a contemporary source, pre-dating the ratification of Richard's title, the *Titulus Regius*, at the Parliament of 23 January 1484. This further supports the legitimacy and transparency of Richard's accession. In Part Two we will consider the French source. It is important to bring these sources to light in order to reveal the events of 1483 as they occurred, and provide a clearer picture about what people knew about Richard's accession, both at home and abroad.

The French source that supports the accession by election of Richard III and its transparency comes from a surprising source, Guillaume de Rochefort's speech to the Estates-General of France in Tours on 15 January 1484.¹ The Estates-General was a legislative and consultative assembly that acted as an advisory body to the French king, where petitions from the various separate estates, which included the nobles, clergy and commons, could be presented. In its composition it was not dissimilar to our parliament but unlike the English assembly the French Estates-General had no power in its own right, being an advisory body only.

From 1483 to 1492 Guillaume de Rochefort was the Lord Chancellor of France, the officer of state responsible for the judiciary, and a leading member of the French government. His speech on 15 January 1484 opened the Estates-General at a time of national crisis. Louis XI, the Spider king, had died on 30 August, leaving his 13-year-old son and heir, Charles VIII, as the country's new monarch. As the king was a child, a regency government was established under the guidance of Charles' older sister, Anne of Beaujeu. However, Louis XI's second cousin, Louis of Orleans, and a number of feudal lords had attempted to seize the regency in open revolt against the royal authority. This grab for power was 'rejected by the Estates-General of Tours.'²

The parallels with the political situation in England at this time are quite remarkable. As the Valois monarchy came under increasing pressure from their Orleanist cousins, the political future of a child king, as

two of its leading families vied for position and power, must have been a cause for concern.³

As a result, de Rochefort's opening address is a significant source. His speech, understandably, is a long-winded justification of France as a great nation, loyal to its kings, and the young (Valois) king as its undisputed leader. It is also, understandably, deeply hostile to the English propensity to overthrow their kings and equally hostile to England's new (warrior) king, Richard III. Both countries had recently experienced failed rebellion attempts and many English rebels had since fled to the Continent. This is what de Rochefort says about events in England:

French:⁴

'... qu'il me suffise de citer en témoignage nos voisins les Anglais. Regardez, je vous prie, les événements qui, après la mort du roi Édouard, sont arrivés dans ce pays. Contemplez ses en-fants, déjà grands et braves, massacrés impunément et la couronne transportée à l'assassin par la faveur des peuples!'

English translation:⁵

'... that it suffice to quote the testimony (evidence) from our neighbours the English. Look, I beg you, at the events which, after the death of King Edward, happened to that country. Behold his children, already great and brave, murdered unpunished and the crown transferred to the murderer by the favour (approval)⁶ of the people.'⁷

It is what de Rochefort says about the accession of Richard III that is most revealing. He confirms that the

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crown was 'transferred' to Richard by the favour (approval) of the people. Note the word *transportée*, meaning the throne was transferred or transported to Richard. No negative (constitutional) connotation is given for Richard's accession. Moreover, de Rochefort confirms that Richard was not only given the crown by the favour (approval) of the people – a direct reference to the Three Estates of the Realm and lawful accession – but also that it was sufficient to quote the *témoignage* (testimony or evidence) of the English as confirmation. Testimony is defined by the *OED* as 'a formal written or spoken statement, especially one given in a court of law' and 'evidence or proof of something'. Did this evidence come from Richard's early communication with Louis or from his herald, Blanc Sanglier, and was this supported and given further credence by the presence of Buckingham Herald? In whatever manner this information was received, the French government and its Chancellor were clear on two things: Richard's lawful accession, and its transparency.

The account of Domenico Mancini was explored in Part One and is consistent with this view. It is also important to note that Mancini's account was written for a leading member of the French court, Angelo Cato, the archbishop of Vienne, formerly counsellor and physician to King Louis. Cato's impatience for Mancini's account is also suggestive. Following Louis's death and the October rebellion in England, the French government were eager for any new intelligence to use against the English king.⁸ Cato and de Rochefort, leading figures at the French court, were well acquainted. Mancini completed his account on 1 December 1483, only a few weeks before de Rochefort's speech to the Estates-General.⁹ It is therefore not too great a step to suggest that de Rochefort had access to Mancini's text while he was preparing his speech. Indeed, French failure to exploit this precious intelligence would have been remarkably amiss.

However, what is most significant is not only the official line de Rochefort took about Richard's accession (as above), but how the 'murder' of the sons of Edward IV was the only accusation used against the new English king. Mancini's account is clear: 'Whether, however, he [Edward V] has been done away with, and by what manner of death, so far I have not at all discovered'.¹⁰ But now in de Rochefort's speech 'murder' has become certain fact and truth (and for both boys) – with the deed committed before Richard was crowned and thereby presented as the means by which the new English king obtained his throne.

'What is most important is how de Rochefort failed to impugn Richard's accession, legally or constitutionally. If the French government had no compunction in calling to account the English king for the murder of children, then surely they would have had little hesitation in calling him to account for an illegal and/or fraudulent accession.'

The French were well versed in anti-English propaganda, powerfully highlighted most recently by the discovery and research, concerning the Black Prince, by Guilhem Pepin and Michael Jones.¹¹ He was believed for centuries to have carried out the brutal massacre of 3,000 men, women and children at Limoges in 1370; we

now know that it was in fact the French forces who undertook this massacre of their own people. What is most important is how de Rochefort failed to impugn Richard's accession, legally or constitutionally. If the French government had no compunction in calling to account the English king for the murder of children, then surely they would have had little hesitation in calling him to account for an illegal and/or fraudulent accession. This they failed to do. It is therefore the present writer's contention that the French government did not censure the English king in this way because they were aware of events that led to a legal and transparent accession. As a result, the French government dared not risk

their own international reputation by formulating propaganda that would leave them exposed and open to ridicule.

In summation, it is therefore this writer's conclusion that King Richard's Recognition was of great importance to him and the realm. In it the process that led to his acceptance of the throne is clearly expressed. This is further supported by de Rochefort's speech to the Estates-General. He too is clear – in his haste to denigrate Richard as a murderer he fails to dissemble so well and we glean the truth. The French government were well aware of the manner of Richard's accession, by election and approval of the people (the Three Estates). How the French government received this information, I suggest, was through the usual diplomatic channels; whether by the presence of heralds, emissaries and ambassadors, spies (sometimes the same thing), or by letters and communications now no longer extant or destroyed by the new Tudor regime.¹²

Notes

1. Masselin, J. (ed) *Journal des États-généraux de France tenus a Tours en 1484*, (Paris, 1835). See also: Harding, Alan, *Medieval Law and the Foundations of the State* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 284: Rochefort's speech was 'reported in great detail by Jean Masselin, a deputy from the bailliage of Rouen, who played a leading part in the proceedings.'
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mad_War. Accessed 2 January 2019.
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mad_War. Accessed 2



The Estates-General meeting in Tours January 1484. Musée Dobrée, Conseil général de Loire-Atlantique, Nantes, Inv. Ms. XVIII, f° 66 v. Image in public domain

January 2019. The revolt or 'Mad War' or 'Silly War' was also known as the 'War of the Public Weal' and extended in one form or another from the beginning of the reign of Charles VIII in August 1483, when Louis of Orléans (Louis XII) tried to seize the regency, to 1488.

4. Masselin, *États-généraux*, pp 37 and 39.
5. de Rooij, Albert Jan, English translation on behalf of The Missing Princes Project, December 2017. With thanks also to Clive and Fraser Atkinson, 3 January 2019.
6. Harding, *Medieval Law*, p. 284. Harding translates this as 'approval'.
7. The exclamation mark has been removed, as it is not present in Masselin's original Latin account. See: Masselin, *États-généraux*, p. 38.
8. Armstrong, C. A. J. (ed.) Mancini, Domenico, *De Occupatione Regni Anglie per Riccardum Tercium* (1969). Mancini's account of his visit to London in the spring and early summer of 1483 was written in France on 1 December following the rebellion in England against Richard III. It is important to note that Mancini's account does not include any physical description of Richard III,

nor any eyewitness account of the coronation ceremony and/or banquet.

9. Mancini's account was completed at Beaugency, where the French king and his court were staying, Armstrong, *De Occupatione*, p. 23. For Mancini's connection with Guillaume de Rochefort in 1484, and his brother, Gui de Rochefort, pp 23–4.
10. Armstrong, *De Occupatione*, p. 93.
11. Jones, Michael, *The Black Prince* (2017), pp 367, 371–3. Also see Appendix: 'Black Propaganda and the Sack of Limoges', pp 405–8. For Pepin's discovery (2014), see p. 408.
12. Henry VII's destruction of records pertaining to King Richard's reign is well attested and includes the copies of *Titulus Regius* itself. It also stretched as far as Ireland and its parliament of 1487 when King Edward was crowned in Dublin. For a discussion on this historical figure, see Matthew Lewis's article, 'Lambert Simnel and Edward V' (July 2018) at: <https://mattlewisauthor.wordpress.com/2018/07/24/lambert-simnel-and-edward-v>.