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Displays of Power in English Tudor Painting

(1485-1558)

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History passes down the visages of Tudor monarchs and their contemporaries through paintings that attempt to show us more than their mere likenesses. The faces of these monarchs reveal not only individual physiognomies of appearance, but also characteristics of the times. Painting in Tudor England, up to the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1485-1558) reflected, and at times contributed, to shifting political and social structures in England. Patrons exercised great influence on the kind of art created and brought into England, and a study of this and how patrons utilized art as a means of propaganda reveals the way that given situations shaped art. An analysis of specific works leads to a better understanding of this period in English History and its social and political influences.

Two terms essential to this research are iconography and patronage. Iconography literally means the “writing of images,” and involves the study of the symbolic meaning of objects, persons, or events depicted in works of art. These symbolic meanings are often religious, evident through many of the Tudor paintings discussed in this research. Patronage, as it pertains to art involves the support, usually monetary, given to an individual or group by someone else in a position of power or wealth, such as a king or pope. The monetary support generally takes the form of a commission, such as that for a painting, sculpture, musical piece, or play. Not only kings and popes, but also other individuals of wealth offered their patronage to artists, including the nobility, wealthy merchants, and higher-up members of the clergy such as bishops or cardinals. Recognition of the patronage of art during the time of the Tudors allows one to see more clearly the broader function of art as a political tool and a part of the historical record.

Art historians generally agree that England failed to contribute much to the development of Western art. While it is true that England did not produce many notable artists of its own, a
study of its patronage of the arts reveals the significance of art in England at this time and how English patronage brought in many foreign artists and artistic styles. Scholarship exists regarding patronage of the arts in other countries and regions that produced more of their own artists and regarding analyses of the art itself, but little research exists concerning English patronage of the arts on a grander scale and its important role in English history.

The historiography of English painting under the Tudors is limited. The small amount that does specifically concern this portends mostly to the reigns of Henry VIII (1509-1547) and Elizabeth I (1558-1603), simply because of the length of their reigns and sheer artistic output in comparison to the other Tudor monarchs. While many scholars recognize the use of art as a political tool in the Tudor period, little research exists addressing in depth specific works and the individuals responsible for their creation. Part of this is simply because few records survive to provide scholars with the provenance, or origin, of a painting. Oftentimes, the provenance of Tudor artwork only goes as far back as a century or two, because a lack of records prevents one from knowing how it came into the hands of the most recent owners. Other scholarship explores Tudor art outside of painting, including architecture and sculpture, tapestries, literature, theater, and music. Within the period that this research explores, the historiographies of various fields, including art history, religious and political history, and social and cultural history, combine to lend a greater understanding of the paintings and their times.

Little controversy exists regarding the paintings of the Tudor century, although there is debate regarding the identity of the subjects in particular works. These works are not included in this research, as any analyses of them could only be speculation. Controversy seems too strong of a term to describe the differences in interpretations of many Tudor paintings. While the symbolism of certain things in paintings lie undisputed, the meaning of other objects or
characteristics remains more ambiguous. In my analyses of these paintings, I recognize the various possible interpretations of certain objects, allowing that multiple explanations create more ways for the power in the paintings to manifest itself. Some historians may argue for or against the necessity of examining art not only as a historical document or work of art, but also as both at the same time. I believe both are essential sides to a work of art and that separation of one of these aspects from the other creates confusion and misrepresentation about the work and the history surrounding it. This research argues for the importance of art and its broader role in history.

Some of the leading scholars of art at this time include historians and art historians such as Tarnya Cooper, Charlotte Bolland, Kevin Sharpe, and Roy Strong. Other scholars, such as Sarah Stanbury, Eamon Duffy, and Alec Ryrie offer important historical context as well. Tarnya Cooper, Curatorial Director at the National Portrait Gallery in London is one of the leading scholars on sixteenth century art, specifically British portraiture. Cooper and other scholars, including Bolland, through in depth analyses of English paintings, make an argument for the importance of paintings, especially portraiture, as historical documents. John N. King argues that a classical rather than religious lens hinders the study of English royal portraiture, particularly that of Elizabeth I, but the importance of the study remains an emphasis. Cooper and King both offer studies of art under all of the Tudor monarchs, rather than focusing solely on Henry VIII and Elizabeth, but inevitably each have more to say on the two than on the other monarchs. In his book, *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis*, King specifically concentrates on the iconography in Henrician and Elizabethan art, while studying it through a comparison of each of the other Tudor monarchs. He also evaluates the transformations of style not only through a religious lens, but also with an emphasis on the
impact of the Reformation. Kevin Sharpe's *Selling the Tudor Monarchy: Authority and Image in Sixteenth-Century England* focuses more on the historical than the art historical side of Tudor England, but utilizes the art as a way to emphasize how the different monarchs created their image.


Scholars agree that powerful men in history used myriad forms of art as a means of propaganda and a display of power, maintaining that art held a broader political function, but without directly discussing the individual works themselves. Specifically under Henry VIII, Maria Hayward discusses his use of confiscation to increase his resources and deal with political opposition. Clark Hulse and David Evett connect literature and the visual arts, and in *Literature and the Visual Arts in Tudor England*, Evett determines how they changed along with the economic and social environments in which they existed. He argues for an artistic culture in England that is relatively sheltered from the rest of Europe. Thomas Campbell’s *Henry VIII and the Art of Majesty* gives an account of the creation of Henry VIII’s extensive tapestry collection,
what it consisted of and its function. Campbell argues that the collection exposes how Henry
VIII identified with the rest of Europe, particularly in the context of his religious Reformation,
and how he used these tapestries as displays of power.5 Other scholars discuss an early Tudor
England hyper-connected through trade to the artistic movements of Europe and the East.6
Susan Foister’s article “Holbein, Antonio Toto, and the Market for Italian Painting in Early
Tudor England “concludes that England entertained a remarkable market for Italian artists,
though the phenomenon lasted only about 50 years.7 Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton challenge
the idea of western Renaissance culture defined as a contrast to the East, claiming instead that
the East and West existed as linked cultural identities with shared factors, rather than others.8

The bulk of this research’s primary sources consists of paintings of the first four Tudor
monarchs, as well as a few other notable individuals outside of the Tudor bloodline. An
examination of the portraits of the Tudor kings and queens offers insight into the displays of
power in art in England at this time. Not only did portraits offer a physical likeness, but they
also played roles in marriage negotiations and functioned as a form of early public relations,
distributing a carefully constructed image of the monarch to its public. The reappearance of
particular objects or positions and characteristics of the subject in more than one painting suggest
common themes in how viewers perceived the subject or how the subject desired others to
perceive them. These paintings lend themselves to a greater and more visual understanding of
the Tudor century.

The first group of paintings in this research concern the reign of Henry VII. Henry
Tudor, 2nd Earl of Richmond, defeated Richard III on Bosworth Field in 1485. This put an end
to the civil wars in England known as the Wars of the Roses (1455-1485), fought between the
House of York and the House of Lancaster.9 Founding a new dynasty, Henry VII needed to
legitimize Tudor rule, and this need characterized much of his reign. Two ways in which he worked to do this included uniting the houses of York and Lancaster and assuming the role of a pious king, devoted to the papacy. In order to unite the two houses, the Lancastrian Henry VII married Elizabeth of York, and combined the house symbols as well. The white rose of York and the red rose of Lancaster merged to become the red and white Tudor rose, an image that appears in numerous portraits of Tudor monarchs through the century.

The second part of legitimizing his power came as he assumed the role of a very orthodox Christian king. Throughout the middle ages, the papacy developed a reputation and garnered recognition as the highest spiritual authority in Europe. It also attempted throughout its history to set the precedent of having authority to appoint, or at the very least recognize or renounce the authority of monarchs. Although this did not usually sit well with secular rulers, Henry VII recognized it as a means in which to legitimize his own power. As long as he played the part of the Orthodox Christian king, devoted to the authority of the papacy, the pope saw fit to support his rule in return. This orthodox piety manifested itself in multiple ways, some of which make appearances in the paintings of Henry VII and his family during his rule. For instance, the cult of the saints existed as a means of popular piety, devotion to any number of saints who, through their close proximity to God in Heaven, interceded on behalf of those who prayed to them. Saint George, often depicted slaying a dragon, was the patron saint of England and therefore protector of the royal family. Henry VII took advantage of this association, utilizing the saint’s image to promote his own legitimacy and power. Through George, England, and therefore its sovereign, identified in the public mind with the “conquest of evil by true faith.”

An unknown Flemish artist painted *The Family of Henry VII with St. George and the Dragon* sometime between 1503 and 1509 (Fig. 1). The oil on panel painting depicts two tents
with the flaps open to reveal Henry VII and Elizabeth of York kneeling in prayer with devotional books, their children surrounding them on either side. An angel unites them in the center. In the middle ground, Saint George slays the dragon above a rolling landscape with fantastic architectural buildings in the background. Intended as an altarpiece, possibly for Henry’s chapel at Richmond Palace, this painting functions as a display of power for Henry VII in multiple ways.16

The extravagant buildings in the background subtly suggest the wealth and power of Henry VII, along with the rich gowns of the family members and the red and white tents behind them. The likely setting of the painting along with the depiction of religious devotion by the royal family suggests to the viewer great piety, and the presence of Saint George specifically reminds one of the devotion to the Catholic Church. The angel uniting Henry and Elizabeth, as well as their children’s presence symbolizes the unity of the two houses and the new Tudor dynasty, particularly poignant because neither Elizabeth nor all but three of the children survived by the time of this painting. Saint George, besides providing a sense of piety and legitimacy, also represents the chivalrous nature of the
king; the Order of the Garter, an order of chivalry and the highest achievable honor in England at this time, claimed Saint George as its patron.\textsuperscript{17}

Another image of Henry VII, painted by an unknown English artist with oil on panel in the early sixteenth century, portrays him at a forty-five degree angle towards the viewer’s right (Fig. 2). Set in space before a solid dark green background, a delicate gold arch frames the top third of the panel. The original frame remains, decorated with the green and white of the Tudor house. Only Henry VII’s torso and up are visible, but his hands, with a ring on each, seem to rest on the painting’s frame in front of him, delicately holding a Lancastrian red rose. Dressed in lavish clothes, in gold and crimson velvet, the King wears a black hat, bare but for one jeweled pin. The royal visage is calm, his gaze directed to the side and beyond the viewer.

The pose and composition of this portrait are similar in style to the portrait of Elizabeth of York, also by an unknown English artist in the early sixteenth century (Fig. 3). The oil on panel painting shows Elizabeth in the same forty-five-degree angle, only facing the left rather
than the right. Her hands appear at the bottom of the portrait, holding a white York rose. Dressed richly in a gold-bordered red gown and black and gold headpiece, her expression mirrors that of her husband, and if the two paintings appeared side by side, they would almost appear to be looking at each other. Having these two portraits of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York together sent a very clear and understood message for the time, solidifying and reaffirming the unity of the York and Lancaster houses in the Tudor line.

Fig. 4 *Henry VII*, unknown artist, 1505

A portrait of Henry VII, painted in 1505 by an unknown Dutch artist with oil on panel, further reflects this union and the legitimacy of the Tudor dynasty (Fig. 4). In this portrait, Henry VII sits again at a forty-five degree angle, against a solid blue background. However, this time he faces the viewer’s left and most importantly, his deep-set eyes look to the viewer, rather than beyond. This direct gaze lends a greater sense of power and authority to the image. The rose Henry holds here is no longer the red rose of Lancaster, nor is it the white rose of York. Instead, it is the red and white, distinctly Tudor rose. Completed two years after the death of Elizabeth of York, this painting suggests to the viewer that the union is still valid and the Tudor reign still legitimate. Dressed in black cap and doublet, his cloak is a stately crimson cloth-of-gold trimmed with ermine, and around his neck hangs the chain of the Order of
the Golden Fleece, a Roman Catholic chivalric order, rather than the chain of the older English
Order of the Garter.\textsuperscript{19}

This chain reflects the Hapsburg audience it served, because although this image depicts
an English king, the inscription beneath Henry's hands reveals that Hermann Rinck, envoy of the
King of Romans, Maximilian I, commissioned the painting.\textsuperscript{20} Despite the foreign contracting of
the work, there is no doubt it also served the interests of Henry VII as he considered a second
marriage after Elizabeth's death, particularly to Maximilian's widowed daughter, Margaret of
Austria.\textsuperscript{21} Despite the failed negotiations, the image of Henry VII would tell foreigners that the
crown's power and authority in England, as well as the rest of country itself, enjoyed stability
through him, symbolized by his chivalry, powerful gaze, rich garb, and the telling Tudor rose.

Images of Henry VII after his death in 1509 reflect England's historical memory of the
first Tudor king in the following century, particularly during the reign of his son, Henry VIII. In
1537, Hans Holbein the Younger completed a mural at Whitehall Palace for Henry VIII,
depicting the two Henry's, Elizabeth York, and Jane Seymour, Henry VIII's third wife.
Although the mural no longer survives today, Holbein's preparatory cartoon remains along with
a copy of the mural painted at the behest of King Charles II in 1667 by Remigius van Leemput.
Henry VII and Elizabeth York's images, from the torso up at least, share great likenesses with
their earlier portraits. These, or others like them, likely served as guides, or types for other
paintings, since most artists could not paint the portraits from life. Either commissioned by other
nobles or created post-mortem, artists used these types to make copies of a painting, or create
new ones, changing only details of background and clothes, but keeping the image of the subject
nearly identical. Artists often utilized types to create other depictions of the monarchs, such as

10
engravings used for pamphlets that circulated throughout the realm, leading to greater distribution of the monarch’s carefully constructed image.22

This second group of portraits that my research examines consists of paintings of Henry VIII as well as the Whitehall Mural cartoon and copy. The earliest of these is a portrait by an unknown Anglo-Dutch artist around 1520 with oil on panel (Fig. 5). In an almost identical position as his father’s portrait holding the red rose, a bearded Henry VIII gazes beyond the reader as he sits in front of the same green color as his father did, only this time, it is damask rather than solid, and his clothes are more regal and more lavish. The top corners, bordered with gold spandrels, show the ever-present Tudor rose. The expensive materials such as the gilding used in the clothing and jewelry suggest that a wealthy patron commissioned the painting, perhaps a high-ranking courtier.23

Fig. 5 Henry VIII, unknown artist, 1520
Fig. 6 Henry VIII, Hans Holbein the Younger, c. 1536-37

Holbein’s portrait of a regally dressed Henry VIII from 1536-1537 displays the power of both the patron and the subject as well (Fig. 6). Most likely commissioned as a diplomatic gift,
the blue background consists of “the expensive pigment ultramarine…rather than [less expensive] azurite or smalt.” To commission and then give away a painting like this one is a testament to the wealth of the patron, but to be regarded as a worthy enough recipient of such an expensive gift only serves to exemplify the power and prestige of Henry VIII already apparent in this painting though his regal clothing and visage. Another early portrait of the king, a miniature watercolor on vellum, painted by court artist Lucas Horenbout in 1526-1527, shows his body facing forward, but his head and gaze in the same forty-five degree angle (Fig. 7). A royal blue background provides a stark contrast to the pale visage of the king, and expensive gold lettering names him and gives his age. Although these images continued the physical style and look of his father’s portraits and the idea of the legitimate Tudor line, Henry VIII also continued to portray the image of pious king, though a bit more lavishly than his father did, representative of the difference in the way the two kings handled their finances.

Fig. 7 Henry VIII, Lucas Horenbout, c. 1527-27

In the 1521 painting, Henry VIII Disputing with Charles V before Pope Leo X, the artist makes the viewer hyper aware of this religiosity (Fig. 8). That year, Henry VIII published a
Defense of the Seven Sacraments, also known as the Assertio, partly in response to Martin Luther's complaints against the papacy. For his efforts, Pope Leo X granted Henry the title of Defender of the Faith. The painting commemorates this honor by depicting Henry VIII, on the left, holding his Assertio before the Pope. To his right in red stands Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, the architect behind the documents publication. The dragon at the bottom, speared through the neck, represents the evil of Luther and other Protestants vanquished by the true faith of Henry's Defense. Seated in the center, Pope Leo X accompanies the allusion to Saint George as a symbol of the loyalty England still held for the papacy. However, with the split from the Catholic Church in 1534, one sees a distinct shift in how artists depict Henry VIII and later Tudor monarchs.

Fig. 9 Henry VIII, Joos van Cleve, c. 1530-35

A portrait of Henry VIII by Joos van Cleve painted while the break from Rome was underway perfectly exemplifies this shift (Fig. 9). Against a plain green background, the artist depicts the king facing forward, his head still at the forty-five-degree angle toward the viewer’s right, but his eyes look to the left. In his hands, he holds a small scroll with a Latin inscription of the biblical verse Mark 15:16, which reads, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” Not only do the rich fabrics he wears and his body positioning convey a sense of power, but also the presence of the bible verse projects an image of Henry VIII as head of the English church, pious and faithful to God. Even more importantly, the use of this verse in a
portrait of the English king established a direct line from Christ’s delegation of his apostles to Henry VIII without any intervention from the papacy. This is particularly poignant, because throughout history the papacy commonly used this verse as a precedent for papal claim to apostolic succession, the idea that the Bishop of Rome was the successor to the Apostle Peter, but now Henry VIII claimed this for himself.27 This painting also shows a move closer to the directness and power seen in many of his later portraits. His head tilts one way but his eyes look the other way, and the counterbalancing angles give the allusion that he looks straight ahead, bringing a sense of power into the portrait.

Fig. 10 Cartoon for the Whitehall Mural, showing Henry VIII and Henry VII, Hans Holbein the Younger, 1536-37
Henry VIII’s famous power-stance originates in Hans Holbein’s dynastic mural cartoon that shows the king in full (Fig. 10). His stance is powerful and dominating, especially in comparison with his father, standing behind him and to the right. Though Henry VIII’s gaze cuts forward to the viewer directly, his head still angles away. The head is on a separate sheet of paper than the rest of the cartoon, attached at the neck, suggesting that Holbein experimented with different angles. We can surmise which angle made the final cut, not only from Remigius van Leemput’s copy (Fig. 11), but also from other portraits of Henry VIII made after this time that mimic the same power-stance as this template. The angle of the head adds exponentially to the conveyed force of Henry VIII’s power. Not only does his body, the slightest bit angled, face the viewer, but also his head is straightforward, and his piercing gaze is direct as well.

Fig. 11 Copy of the Whitehall Mural, Henry VII, Elizabeth of York, Henry VIII and Jane Seymour, by Remigius van Leemput, 1667
As a dynastic mural, Holbein’s work represented the enduring need to legitimize the Tudor line. In the 17th century copy, Henry VIII’s mother and Jane Seymour, his third wife and mother of his only son, look into the distance, their hands clasped together in front of them. Henry VII’s arm rests on the central stone altar, and both he and Henry VIII look directly at the viewer, showing their power and authority relative to the women. However, Henry VIII alone stands with feet spread, fists on hips, and a dagger hanging at his side, a portrayal that “radiated majesty and personal authority but one that inspired awe, even fear, in those who viewed it.”

Henry VIII “stands at the right hand of God, as represented by the altar,” and his dress and dagger symbolize “the military and refined virtues of this truly Renaissance prince.” The dagger also points to the altar, connecting the king to the words inscribed on it. The Latin text on the altar translates as:

If you find pleasure in seeing fair pictures of heroes Look then at these! None greater was ever portrayed. Fierce is the struggle and hot the disputing: the question Does father, does son—or do both—the pre-eminence win? One ever withstood his foes and his country’s destruction, Finally giving his people the blessing of peace; But born to things greater, the
son drove out his councils His ministers worthless, and ever supported the just. And in truth, to this steadfastness Papal arrogance yielded When the scepter of power was wielded by Henry the Eighth, Under whose reign the true faith was restored to the nation And the doctrines of God began to be reverenced with awe.  

Possibly located in the privy chamber of Whitehall Palace, the mural’s text served to reassure its audience at a time of religious change and the resulting political turmoil, that Henry VIII was right to break from the Catholic Church and that the magnificent Tudor dynasty proved again to be the true line. Holbein’s image of Henry VIII developed into “the prototype for a new kind of royal portrait which became ‘highly successful in establishing the monarch in a consistently recognized way.’” Later portraits of Henry VIII reflect this same powerful and direct position, including one after the style of Hans Holbein in 1537 (Fig. 12) and another by an unknown artist in the 1540s (Fig. 13). The two images are nearly identical in composition to the mural cartoon and copy, varying only in background details and coloring, revealing that the artists likely used the mural portrait or copies of it as a type. Lesser nobles often commissioned paintings such as these to have as a tribute to the king and to show their loyalty.
Henry VIII’s powerful image appeared in more than single portraits. Commissioned to commemorate the union of the Company of Barbers and the Fellowship of Surgeons, Holbein painted *Henry VIII and the Barber Surgeons* (Fig. 14) sometime around 1542. The two guilds struggled for years to define and regulate their respective duties, but the parliamentary Act of Union in 1540 defined their rights and duties and combined the guilds. The painting depicts Henry VIII seated on a throne, dressed in State robes and wearing the Order of the Garter. In his right hand, he holds the Sword of State. His stoic visage looks directly at the viewer, and on his left, he hands a Charter with the Great Seal to Thomas Vicary, sergeant-surgeon to the Royal Household. At the king’s feet, lies a rich Turkish carpet on rush matting, and a magnificently detailed floral tapestry hang on the back wall. As if a part of this tapestry, the artist here inserted a Latin inscription that translates as follows:
To Henry VIII, best and greatest King of England, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith and Supreme Head of the English and Irish Church, the Company of Surgeons with vows in common consecrate these lines: Sadder than ever had the plague profaned the land of the English, harassing men’s minds and besetting their bodies; God, from on high pitifully regarding so notable a mortality, bade thee undertake the office of a good Physician.

The light of the Gospel flies round about thee on glowing wings; that will be a remedy for a mind diseased, and by thy counsel men study the monuments of Galen; and every disease is expelled by speedy aid. We therefore, a suppliant band of thy Physicians, dedicate to thee with reverence this house; and mindful of the gift with which thou, O Henry, hast blest us, we wish the greatest blessings on thy rule also.36

Henry VIII never actually handed over the Charter and Seal, but Holbein’s inclusion of this image symbolizes the power of the King, despite the Union being an Act of Parliament. The
inscription’s dedication to their monarch and recognition of “the gift” that he bestowed upon them join with the lavish decorations of the king to reveal a powerful image of the King that superseded the actuality of his power.37

Portraits of the wives and members of court also offer a great amount of insight into the monarchy, and portraits of Henry VIII’s first three wives are particularly telling regarding the changes in court that accompanied his changes in wives. Henry VIII married Katherine of Aragon, his brother’s widow and daughter of Isabella and Ferdinand of Spain in 1509 and they were “jointly crowned on 24 June,”38 allowed to wed only because of a special papal dispensation.39 However, Katherine failed to produce any male heirs; she had multiple miscarriages, but one child, a daughter Mary, survived.

Fig. 15 Katherine of Aragon, unknown artist, 1520

A portrait of Katherine of Aragon, painted by an unknown artist around 1520, depicts her against a dark green damask background (Fig. 15). Though her torso faces the viewer, the artist portrays her head angled at forty-five degrees, looking to the left of the viewer. She wears an ornate headpiece, almost completely concealing her hair. Her facial expression, coupled with a rich red gown trimmed with gold, convey the weight that her position held. Strings of large pearls with a medallion hang from her neck; her hands, adorned with one red jewel set in a gold ring, come together at the bottom of the painting. Though not originally part of the same pair, the composition and green damask background of this image of Katherine recalls an earlier painting of Henry VIII (Fig. 5) of
comparable date and scale. The two images likely existed as portrait types, copied in various versions and sometimes paired together. This resulted in wider distribution of the king’s image, and any connotations the image and its symbolism brought with it.

The practice of pairing portraits commissioned together or not, occurred beyond the larger productions. Lucas Horenbout, the court miniaturist, produced a number of miniature paintings of the royal women. His miniature portrait of Katherine of Aragon in 1525 bears in gold the inscription “Queen Katherine, his wife,” suggesting that it belonged to a pair (Fig. 17). In this miniature, Katherine appears in a similar position as her aforementioned portrait against a rich blue background that reminds one of Horenbout’s 1526 miniature of Henry VIII. Her headpiece, smaller than the previous portrait, fits the fashions of the day. Her gown, of a rich red fabric and bejeweled, contrasts with her fashionable pale skin. From her neck hangs a jeweled cross and brooch, presenting the first three letters in Greek of Jesus’ name, IHS. Another miniature of the queen by Horenbout exists from about the same time (Fig. 18). Against the same blue background, she sits at the same angle. Her headdress, more similar to the larger
portrait of her, and her gown are dark in color, standing out less against the background than the previous miniature. A string of jewels and pearls hang from her neck.

Fig. 19 The Vienna Portrait, Michael Sittow, c. 1500-05

Though these paintings of the queen all differ, they also all present a similar image. Adorned with rich fabrics and jewels, she appears as a stately queen and monarch. However, the artists also portray her as a demure and pious woman. In the first and third, this is accomplished by her conservative headdress, soon to be out of fashion, and in the second, the cross hanging from her neck sends the message even more clearly. An earlier painting of Katherine, painted by Michael Sittow, reflects this image as well. Known as the Vienna Portrait (Fig. 19) painted sometime between 1500 and 1505, it shows a young Katherine probably already widowed by Prince Arthur and awaiting her marriage to Henry. Here, the downward gaze reflects the modesty befitting a good Catholic woman.

After nearly twenty-five years of marriage, Henry VIII wanted the union annulled, in part because of Katherine’s failure to produce a male heir, and partly due to his passionate attraction to Anne Boleyn, one of the Queen’s ladies in waiting. The papacy refused to grant the annulment, in part because it would contradict their own authority after the dispensation for them to marry in the first place. This directly led to Henry’s break with Rome, and he declared himself Head of the Church in England and married Anne.\textsuperscript{43} Unfortunately, she also only produced a daughter, Elizabeth I, before her enemies at court turned the king against her, finding her guilty of treason sentenced to death by beheading.\textsuperscript{44}
The contrast between portraits of Henry VIII’s first wife and the few existing ones of Anne Boleyn is remarkable. The difference is most notable in the eyes, particularly in a painting of the second queen by an unknown artist sometime around 1533-1536 (Fig. 20). Against a solid green background, the artist angles Anne in the same slightly forward, but slightly to the left position as Katherine in the 1520 portrait. However, rather than looking to the side, even downward as in Sittow’s portrait of Katherine, Anne gazes directly at the viewer. Her richly decorated dark clothes offer a striking contrast against her pale skin; the string of pearls around her neck could almost be lost against it if not for the golden “B” hanging from them. The artist also emphasizes her elongated neck and large, dark eyes, recorded as her most notable physical features.45

Henry VIII’s third wife, Jane Seymour, delivered the long sought after male heir, Edward VI, although she died shortly after giving birth in 1537. Her conservative character contrasted sharply with that of her bold and radically Protestant predecessor.46 Jane’s brief reign as queen saw a rejection in court on both her part and Henry’s of anything reminiscent Anne’s rule as queen. For instance, having spent much of her youth at the French court before arriving in England, Anne introduced and made many French fashions quite popular. This included the French hood, a type of headdress seen in the earlier painting of Anne Boleyn. A rounder headdress, it sat farther back on the head than the hoods worn by Katherine in her 1520 portrait.
and by Jane in a portrait painted around 1536 by Holbein. (Fig. 21) Jane banned the French head, along with other immodest French fashions, from court during her time as queen.47 The only of Henry’s consorts to bear him a son, Jane also enjoyed the distinction of being the only consort that Holbein received a commission to paint as queen.48

In 1527, Holbein depicted Sir Thomas More (Fig. 22), an important humanist scholar, author, statesman, and devout Catholic, during Henry VIII’s reign. Thomas More served as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster where he presided over many of the executive and judicial responsibilities in northern England during the time of this painting.49 Introduced to More by way of a letter from the great humanist philosopher Erasmus of Rotterdam, Holbein arrived in England in 1526.50 Seated and facing almost all the way to the viewer’s right, More stares into the distance with a grave look. Behind him, the artist draped a rich green, fringed fabric, its cord visible stretching across it. Despite the rich fabrics and brilliant red sleeves, More appears sober

![Fig. 21 Jane Seymour, Hans Holbein the Younger, 1536](image1)

![Fig. 22 Sir Thomas More, Hans Holbein the Younger, 1527](image2)
and unassuming. A single ring adorns his left hand, and he clasps a small folded piece of paper in front of him. Around his neck, More wears a chain as an emblem of service to his King, but it does not specify any particular office. More’s powerful status, clearly understood through this painting, also conveys other qualities, such as loyalty to the king evident through his gold chain, and a discerning nature carefully created in the expression painted by the artist. A devout Catholic and possibly one of the co-authors of Henry’s Assertio, More’s loyalty to his faith overpowered his loyalty to his king when he refused to take the Oath of Succession of 1534 that declared the marriage to Katherine of Aragon null and any children by Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn to be the heirs. More’s execution for his beliefs against his king created a martyr, characterized by an ironic sense of loyalty.

In 1532, Holbein painted Thomas Cromwell, 1st Earl of Essex, one of Henry VIII’s chief ministers between the years 1532-1540 (Fig. 23), and one of the main architects behind Thomas More’s downfall and execution. The artist portrays Cromwell seated behind a table covered in a green cloth. Almost but not entirely facing the viewer’s left side, he looks into the distance with a stern expression. Wearing simple but high quality robes, one jeweled ring adorns his hand. In the same, he clutches a folded piece of paper, and other papers lay scattered on the table. The writing on one indicates his position as Master of the King’s Jewel House. Cool blue brocade
wall coverings abut with wooden paneling behind him. The simplicity of the image recalls his humble beginnings, but the richness of the details and the fact that Holbein painted it reference Cromwell’s growing power. By 1540, he became Lord Chamberlain, although he did not survive the year in that position.54

Another important work, the German artist Gerlach Flicke’s 1545/1546 portrait of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, is highly detailed (Fig. 24). Seated on a beautifully decorated chair with a red cushion, Cranmer almost faces the viewer, angled only slightly to the left. His gaze looks out just to the left, seemingly lost in thought. Cranmer’s clothes, a black hat and a white billowing shirt trimmed in black and under a black vest, appear simple but of rich quality; the artist draped a long dark fur around his neck. On his right pointer finger, the viewer sees a ring bearing an unidentified coat of arms. In both hands, he holds the Epistles of St Paul, recognized by the artist’s inscription on the pages of the book. On the table appear two more volumes, one identified as St Augustine's *Of Faith and Works*, and a letter, addressed “‘Too the most Reverend fathere in gode and my singulare goode Lorde my Lorde tharchbusshope off Canturbury huys grace be thes [sic].”55

Behind the Archbishop, a red curtain partially covers a window with three broken panes, perhaps symbolic of Henry VIII’s break with the Catholic Church that Cranmer helped to facilitate;
Cranmer “gave formal sentence of the invalidity” of the marriage to Katherine of Aragon, and declared the marriage to Anne Boleyn as lawful. To the left of the window, the painter depicts ornate carvings of fantastic beasts, more symbolism of the wealth and status of the individual as well as a testament to the artist’s skill. In the top left, an inscription identifies the artist, and a small paper attached below it dates the painting.

After Henry VIII’s death in 1547, Edward VI came to the throne at only nine years old. Much of the image that Edward VI created for himself drew from the image that his father created before him. Despite a lessened need to legitimize the Tudor dynasty, Edward still needed to legitimize his individual power and to be seen as a leader every bit as imposing as his father, despite his youth. The effects of Holbein’s image of Henry VIII are visible in depictions of the boy king. Many portraits reflect Holbein’s predilection for a direct forward position and gaze, even before Edward became king. An oil on panel portrait of the young prince at about one year of age, painted by Holbein in 1538 shows Edward’s small body slightly angled to the left, his head facing forward and his eyes looking at the viewer with more seriousness than is usually found in the gaze of a baby (Fig. 25). His right open hand hovers in the air while his left holds a golden rattle. Clothed in gold and red, the young prince already carries the same regal presence as his father. Being the long awaited male heir to the Tudor line, this representation of the future is king is not surprising. The Latin text at the bottom of the painting calls him to take up his future responsibility:

Little one, emulate thy father and be the heir of his virtue; the world contains nothing greater.

Heaven and earth could scarcely produce a son whose glory would surpass that of such a father.

Do thou but equal the deeds of thy parent and men can ask no more. Shouldst thou surpass him, thou hast outstript all kings the world has revered in ages past.
A later portrait of the young prince, painted after Hans Holbein around 1542 on oil and panel shows him from the waist up, facing entirely forward (Fig. 26). Dressed in rich fabrics, his hands rest on a green cushion while in his right he holds a red rose. Although only a few years stand between them, portraits of Edward VI after he becomes king contrast greatly with the calm, seated images of him as a prince. However, their roots in the powerful images of Henry VIII are clearly recognizable. One image, associated with the workshop of ‘Master John,’ painted with oil on panel around 1547 shows the young king in an almost identical position as his father’s power stance, only now it is reversed, with Edward’s body slightly turned to the left rather than the right (Fig. 27). Another similar oil on panel portrait appears in an inventory of Whitehall Palace after Henry VIII’s death, although the artist painted it around 1646, just before he died (Fig. 28). Listed as a “table with the picture of the whole stature of the kings Majestie in a
gowne like crymsen satten furred with lusernes [lynx fur]." The portrait shows him in the same position as the 1547 painting, though the background and details of his regal dress differ slightly. Interestingly, this painting done before Edward became king both acknowledges him as the Prince of Wales through the jewel at his neck, and recognizes him as the soon to be king, through his representative stance.

The first Tudor monarch raised as a Protestant, a certain religious zeal marked Edward VI’s reign. In a painting *Edward VI and the Pope*, completed around 1548-1549 (Fig. 29), an unknown artist shows the young king in a seated position that his father commonly appeared in engravings and drawings. These mediums often portrayed Henry VIII in the guise of David or Solomon from the Old Testament, and Edward continued this, specifically with the role of Solomon, wise in his youth, and the successor of a flawed father. From Edward’s perspective,
Henry VIII’s flaws manifested themselves in the fact that he did not enact the more radical Protestant policies that parliament passed under Edward VI.60

On the left, Henry VIII reclines, near death, and reaches of to his son, signifying the “transfer of power.”61 Edward VI holds a sword, and the bible lay open in front of him, emblematic of his role as a champion of Christ. The Pope appears undignified, slouching and defeated at the bottom of the painting, while two friars seem to hurry away in fear. In the top right corner, an image of iconoclasm characteristic of Edward’s reign depicts a statue of the Madonna and Child toppling down. Edward’s Privy Council sits around a table on the right, creating an idealized image of Edward as a boy king who governs by their guidance. In reality, Edward was a minor for entire reign, so a regency council ruled and Edward wielded very little actual political power.62

Fig. 29, Edward VI and the Pope, unknown artist, c. 1548-49
After Edward VI died at only fifteen years old, his half-sister Mary assumed the throne. A devoted Catholic like her mother, a commitment to the Counter Reformation characterized much of Mary I's reign. As a part of this, she encouraged forms of popular devotion that had been discarded under her father and brother's reigns, such as the use of crucifixes and images of the Madonna and Child, both of which are seen in a painted miniature of her where she kneels in prayer at the altar (Fig. 30). The crucifix rests above the altar on the left, and a sculpture of the Madonna and Child appears in the background on the chapel’s wall. The border of this image contained a depiction of Saint George slaying the dragon, which functioned in two ways. First, it symbolized the return to the orthodox Christian image of England, in this case specifically claiming the heretical Protestantism of Henry VIII and Edward VI as the evil conquered. Secondly, Saint George operated as a means to legitimate power, much as Henry VII and her father had used the image before the break from the Catholic Church. However, Mary’s need for legitimacy differed from her predecessors. While the Tudor dynasty was at this point firmly established, her reign still faced threats. Not long before his death, Edward VI named his cousin, Lady Jane Grey as his successor, bypassing the Act of Succession left by his father that placed Mary and then Elizabeth next in line if Edward did not have children. Despite the tremendous support from her subjects that allowed her to take her
rightful place from Lady Jane Grey, the Catholic queen met with growing Protestant opposition, amplified after her bloody persecution of the non-
Catholics began.64

Fig. 31 Mary I, Anthonis Mor, 1554

One portrait of Mary, though commissioned for the Spanish king and painted by the Spanish court painter Anthonis Mor in 1554, served England’s, or at least Mary’s, interests (Fig. 31). Much like the portrait of her grandfather done for Maximilian I, this painting puts English power on display for other great European powers. Commissioned as a part of celebration of marriage negotiations with Prince Philip of Spain,65 the artist portrayed Mary as a pious queen. A reliquary hangs from the chain at her waist, reminding the Catholic Spain of their shared faith with England’s queen, and like her predecessors, she holds the Tudor rose, signifying her legitimacy as a Tudor ruler. Although she sits in a demure position, suitable for a woman and a future wife, the direct eye contact and sure expression remind her foreign audience of her powerful status as queen, certainly the most appealing consideration for the future King of Spain. The expression captured here illustrates a description of Mary by a Venetian ambassador in 1557 who remarked that “her aspect...is very grave...[and] her eyes are so piercing that they inspire, not only respect, but fear.”66 Part of the power wielded by Mary in her reign is apparent simply by this painting’s existence. Despite a great portion of England hating both the Spanish and Catholicism at this time, she remained determined to have her way. Mary I did marry Philip
of Spain, but upon their meeting after negotiations, he reportedly cursed the artists for the
liberties taken in their paintings of her.67

Another portrait of Mary I, painted in 1554 by Hans Eworth, depicts the queen in nearly
identical dress, although the undersleeves, necklace, and the jewels of her headdress differ (Fig.
32). This portrait clearly derives from the same sitting a three-quarter length painting of Mary
that Eworth painted in the same year (Fig. 33), in which the headdress and necklace are identical.
The first portrays the queen from the waist up, and Mary stands behind a ledge draped in green
velvet, the same material as the background. Her hands rest on the edge; in one she holds the
Tudor rose, and in the other, a pair of gloves. In the second Eworth portrait, the queen stands
before a “red-velvet cloth of honour,” and her hands clasp together at her waist where a reliquary
with the Four Evangelists hangs, similar to the one in Mor’s portrait.68 Characteristics found in
both Eworth’s and Mor’s pictures of the queen combine to form an idealized image. The
reliquaries, jeweled cross necklaces and the cloth of honour all represent a pious and honorable nature, while the lavish clothes and jeweled fingers display her wealth. The Tudor rose exists as an emblem of her legitimacy, and the gloves she holds in two of the paintings may appear not only as a symbol of wealth, but also as a token of friendliness and peace, particularly in the portrait commissioned for Spain.

The paintings of the Tudor dynasty reveal an "idealization of Tudor monarchs as exemplary religious figures" that began when Henry VII "fashioned a new dynasty." Historians often overlook the importance of art, especially portrait paintings, as descriptive of more than just the physical characteristics of a person or event. Any attention given to art of the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries focuses mainly on the Italian Renaissance, but passes over England simply because the technical skill involved, aside from artists like Holbein, just cannot rival the technical skill of artists like Raphael or Michelangelo. I believe that art embraces a broader function in history than many historians give it credit for, particularly in Tudor history, as a means of displaying power and recording more than how things looked, but how political and social environments felt.
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