

Richard, son of Richard: some further evidence

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This short paper produces further evidence for the reception and circulation of a prophecy about Richard III, one of several known or believed to have been composed in the 1480s.¹ The prophecy, which it is convenient to call 'Richard, son of Richard', was discussed twenty years ago in an article by Lesley Coote and Tim Thornton, but nothing else about it seems to have come to light since.² It should be said straight away that the 'new' evidence does not revolutionise what is already known of this short text. Its main value lies in the tentative support it gives to the arguments of Coote and Thornton about dating and provenance. Most interesting, perhaps, is the fact that it is the earliest direct evidence for the prophecy. I do not intend to rehearse the arguments for associating the text with Richard III, although it may just be said that these include a lack of other royal candidates for a father-son

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¹ For others, see articles by Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs in *The Ricardian*, vol. 8 (1988-90), pp. 136-48 (at p. 144); pp. 217-24 (for context); pp. 290-304; pp. 351-62; pp. 403-13 (for context); pp. 449-50; and Bernard Witlieb, *The Ricardian*, vol. 4 (1977), pp. 15-19.

² L. Coote and T. Thornton, 'Richard, son of Richard: Richard III and political prophecy', *Historical Research*, vol. 73 (2000), pp. 321-30.

combination of the name.³ I will, however, discuss the manuscript context of the new evidence, mainly because it is relevant to the question of the purpose of this evidence. Indeed, it seems best to come to the evidence through a brief examination of context, beginning with the established view of the prophecy.

The prophecy as we have it is short and always reproduced in modern English. It seems unlikely to be a translation of a Latin original, although that is a possibility. It reads as follows:

Then rise up Richard, son of Richard,

And bless the happy reign.

Thrice happy he who sees this time to come

When England shall know rest and peace again.⁴

If the case made by Coote and Thornton for associating this with Richard III is accepted, then the text can be read as a prediction of peace and prosperity under his reign. As they note, it is thus evidence for a positive assessment of Richard and his machinations in the years 1483-5. It seems particularly to emphasise the relationship of Richard to his father, Richard, 3rd duke of York (d. 1460). The reason for this given by these authors is grounded in the duke's positive public image and a claim to the throne arguably superior to the Lancastrian one. Such things may have persuaded Richard III that his own claim to the throne, and what

³ See *ibid.*, p. 326, for these arguments. At the time of writing (December 2020), the Coote-Thornton article could be accessed gratis through Academia.edu.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

he did about realising it, was justified as a matter of duty and hence necessity: thus the reference to lineage.⁵ This assumes that the prophecy reflects propaganda generated by Richard, or someone close to him, which seems reasonable enough but is amenable to no more than a circular argument.

Coote and Thornton state that the prophecy is known from 'Tudor' sources, by which a manuscript datable to c. 1600 appears to be meant.⁶ The text of this manuscript, which is from Cheshire, deals (among other things) with the transfer of Vale Royal abbey to its post-dissolution owners and the aftermath of the Battle of Bosworth. This material, which would presumably have been of limited interest at the turn of the seventeenth century, suggests that the text was written at an earlier date. 'Richard, son of Richard', which is only the final stanza of a much longer prophecy, was often printed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with an attribution to the supposed Cheshire prophet Robert Nixon.⁷ While this

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 327-9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 325-6. Their argument for 'Tudor sources' I find difficult to follow but have no reason to doubt its conclusion. Compare T. Thornton, 'Reshaping the local future: the development and uses of provincial political prophecies, 1300-1900', in *Prophecy: The Power of Inspired Language in History 1300-1900*, ed. B. Taithe and T. Thornton (Stroud, 1997), pp. 51-67 (at pp. 58-9). I have not seen the c. 1600 manuscript, which is now Chester, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, DDX123. The Discovery catalogue of The National Archives assigns it the date 'late 16c.-early 17c'.

⁷ In addition to the Coote and Thornton article see (*inter alia*) J. Simpson, 'Nixon's prophecies and their historical setting', *Folklore*, vol. 86 (1975), pp. 201-7 (at 207 n. 11);

attribution is not important for present purposes, the association of the prophecy with the north-west of England may be relevant to the interpretation of the new evidence, because this evidence is found in a manuscript that was in that region in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and may have got there earlier.

The manuscript containing the new evidence is now British Library, Add. MS 11305. It is remarkable for the quantity of its early modern marginalia, the bulk of which associates it with members of the Hesketh family of Rufford, a village lying about thirteen miles south-west of Preston.⁸ It was originally made to contain a text of the southern recension of *The Prick of Conscience*, a long Middle English religious poem that has been called ‘a storehouse of information [on] various kinds of religious lore’, and survives in at least 118 copies plus various extracts and copies in Latin translation.⁹ Ian Doyle attributed the writing of Add. MS 11305 to Stephen Dodesham (d. 1481 or 1482), a professional scribe who became a

Thornton, ‘Reshaping the local future’, pp. 58-9; S. Wright, ‘Nixon, Robert [called the Cheshire Prophet]’, in *ODNB*.

⁸ In terms of manuscripts, this family is better known for the illuminated genealogy which gives its descent from the thirteenth century to the reign of James I (with later additions), now BL, Add. MS 44026.

⁹ For a recent conspectus of copies, including nineteen containing the southern recension and ninety-nine the ‘main version’, see R. Hanna and S. Wood, *Richard Morris’s Prick of Conscience: A Corrected and Amplified Reading Text* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 378-83. For the quotation see R. E. Lewis and A. McIntosh, *A Descriptive Guide to Manuscripts of the Prick of Conscience* (Oxford 1982), p. 14.

Carthusian monk, first at Witham in Somerset and then at Sheen in Surrey.¹⁰ It is very unlikely to have been made in Somerset, and the most recent account of the manuscript, which is a searching one, suggests that it was made in or around London in the period before Dodesham became a monk.¹¹ It is not known when or how the manuscript went to the north-west of England, although there are possible clues in a verse inscription, now much faded, at the back (f. 127^r: there are 128 leaves altogether). This ascribes ownership to one Catharine Radcliffe (née Mallory), identified by Doyle as the wife of Sir George Radcliffe of Derwentwater (Cumberland) and Dilston (Northumberland). She is recorded in documents of the 1560s and 1570s, and the style of the hand in which the inscription is written agrees with this.¹² The inscription says she obtained the manuscript from a heretic, implying that she shared the Catholic sympathies widely attested in Elizabethan Lancashire.¹³ It also says 'she brought the book to this land' (i.e. 's[h]e brought me tyll this

¹⁰ A. I. Doyle, 'Stephen Dodesham of Witham and Sheen', in *On the Making of Books: Medieval Manuscripts, their Scribes and Readers. Essays presented to M. B. Parkes*, ed. P. R. Robinson and R. Zim (London, 1997), pp. 94-115 (at pp. 104-6, 115).

¹¹ M. Johnston, 'Copying and reading *The Prick of Conscience* in late medieval England', *Speculum*, vol. 95 (2020), pp. 742-801 (at pp. 799-800).

¹² Doyle, 'Stephen Dodesham', p. 106 n. 44; W. N. Thompson, 'The Derwentwaters and the Radcliffes', *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, n.s., vol. 4 (1904), pp. 288-322 (at p. 313). Johnston, 'Copying and reading', p. 799, prefers to read the name as 'coleyne' (Colleen) rather than 'catryn', but unlike Doyle cannot identify a candidate.

¹³ C. Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975).

land'), which may mean that she carried it to the north-east from elsewhere, although that conclusion would assume she was living in the region when the inscription was written.¹⁴

Including this verse inscription, the manuscript contains written marginalia with at least sixteen names in them. Most of these additions seem to date from the seventeenth century and indicate that the book was put to a variety of uses, of which devotional reading seems to have been less important than a desire to express possession, either for its symbolic value or as a record of financial transaction.¹⁵ For example, on f. 108^r, one finds 'John Sharrock is as yet the true oner of this book 1651'.¹⁶ The Sharrocks, otherwise Sherrocks, were a north-western family with whom the Radcliffes were associated.¹⁷ Why Sharrock had the book appears on f. 16^r: 'I the said John Sharrock lend unto Mr Robert Hesketh 2s. upon this book and I pray you whosoever hase this book when I am att London if Mr Robert

¹⁴ It seems worth giving the text of the verse inscription: 'Who so ever dothe one me lowke/
I ame dame catryn Radecliffs boke/
Yf I be lost & you me fynde/
I pray you hartle be so kynde/
As to take so myche payne/
To brynge me to my mystris agayne/
For yf youd lyst to know the trothe/
She bought me of ane herytike forsothe/
For I was longe under his hand/
Till that s[h]e brought me tyll this land.'
(A Catholic book was thus 'liberated' from Protestant thraldom.)

¹⁵ Useful ways of thinking about the marginalia of Add. MS 11305 are suggested in A. Bale, 'Belligerent literacy, bookplates and graffiti: Dorothy Helbarton's book', in *Book Destruction from the Medieval to the Contemporary*, ed. G. Partington and A. Smyth (Basingstoke, 2014), pp. 89-111.

¹⁶ Sharrock is also mentioned on f. 86^v (dated 1654) and f. 122^v (as possessor).

¹⁷ Johnston, 'Copying and reading', p. 799.

Hesketh would have it agane u [*sic.*] give itt him if he giue you two Shillings if not keep it til I send for it. So saist your loueing frend John Sharrock.’ The Heskeths were part of the same economic and religiously conservative orbit as the Radcliffes and Sharrocks. This Robert Hesketh is probably the individual of that name who died in 1658. John, one of his brothers, also appears, first as a creditor of John Semmerton of Rufford (f. 12^r), and later, on f. 19^v, as a caustic and self-deprecating versifier: ‘Mr John Hesketh this is my hand this my deed and hee is a knaue that doth it reed/ and when I am dead and layd in graue there lies foure quarters of a knaue pore John Hesketh.’¹⁸ Other verses, and proverbial sayings, were written elsewhere in other seventeenth-century hands: ‘well well grate words butters [*sic.*] noe pa[r]snispes’ (f. 1^r); ‘Say well & doe well and [...] a letter/ To saye well is good but to doe well is better’; ‘The ring is round and hath noe end/ soe is my love unto my friend [:] R H’ (both f. 96^v; the latter perhaps from a poesy ring); ‘The man is blest/ That liues att rest/ So co[n]t[inu]ing still/ but hee but hee/ was Curst that/ was the feirst/ and gaue [h]is wife/ her will’ (f. 126^v).¹⁹

The inscription relating to the prophecy is earlier than any of this (**figs 1, 2**). Going by the style of the hand, it dates from the 1500s, and, if the spelling is contemporary with it

¹⁸ It is possible that this John was the father of the Robert named on f. 16^r, in which case the book would seem to have passed from father to son. ‘Four quarters of a knave’ puts one in mind of John Skelton’s play *Magnificence* (c. 1530-33), in which the expression is given to the character of Folly.

¹⁹ The faulty metre is that of the manuscript. A version of the same on f. 127^r reads: ‘The man is blest that hath a chest and gold to putt [t]herein/ But he is [...] that trothis his arte and [...]. (The inscription is damaged.)

(specifically, 'be mi sothe' on f. 31^r), to the earlier half of that century. It is, admittedly, hard to be confident about this, and the photographs and transcriptions given here will hopefully allow readers to judge for themselves. Even though it is earlier, the individual who wrote it, along with some other inscriptions, was evidently motivated by similar impulses, and it is thus possible to think that his work incited and set the tone for the seventeenth-century additions. He wrote on six pages of the manuscript, as follows:

On f. 21^r, upside down in the tail margin: 'Robart reforth owys thys boke at thys tymye'; 'I wyll'; 'James'.

On f. 26^v, in the side margin, at right angles to the text: 'Ryse vp Rychard sone of Rychard [or possibly 'Rychore']/ and crowne George of Edward/ thy true heyre';²⁰ in the tail margin: 'h'; 'l'; 'nn ote well'; 'h'.

²⁰ A later hand has added 'Ryse up' near this, indicating that it was read rather than ignored as a pen trial.

On f. 31^r, in the same manner: ‘da michi da’; ‘ego sum ille qui non vult fugere’;²¹ ‘ego su m’; ‘frm’; ‘be mi sothe’.²²

On f. 33^r, in the same manner: ‘The man of gode’; ‘homo’; ‘ego sum’.

On f. 41^r, in the same manner: ‘tha’; ‘tha’; ‘bono a lex ammu’; im’; ‘bono’.

On f. 59^r, in the same manner: ‘The man qui vos’.

None of these inscriptions has any obvious relation to the text of the *Prick of Conscience*, and nothing would be served by considering them too curiously in that regard. As specimens of marginal writing they have the hallmarks of what are often called ‘pen trials’, including textual incompleteness, disjunction, incoherence vis-à-vis primary content, and inversion relative to the *mise-en-page*. While such marginalia may be too readily dismissed as meaningless, it is clear enough that the scribe did not consider his additions particularly important. Whether he was called Robert Reforth, or someone of that name really did own the manuscript, is merely possible: ‘at this time’ appears pointless without the addition of

²¹ I.e. ‘I am he who does not wish to flee’. This phrase is spoken by Narcissus in Act III, scene 6 of *Victoria*, a play written c. 1583 by Abraham Fraunce (c. 1559-1592/3), a poet and lawyer from Shropshire who studied at Cambridge. See *Victoria, a Latin Comedy by Abraham Fraunce*, ed. G. C. Moore Smith (Louvain, 1906), p. 52, line 1446. I owe this reference to a referee of this article. But it was evidently a stock phrase long before this; see e.g. its use as an *exemplum* in a Middle English grammatical text of the fifteenth century: see *An Edition of the Middle English Grammatical Texts*, ed. D. Thomson (New York, 1984), p. 198.

²² For the avoidance of doubt, ‘be mi sothe’ is not a borrowing from the adjacent text of the *Prick of Conscience*.

anything more specific. In any case, the scribe's informal approach is beneficial in relation to the scrap of prophecy on f. 26^v, because it encourages one to think of 'Richard, son of Richard' as an article of common currency, like the later proverbs in the manuscript, rather than anything solemn or politically sensitive.

Of course, the wording of the prophecy here is different from that associated with Robert Nixon. It may be a farrago. In any case, I cannot make any historical sense out of 'Crown George [son] of Edward thy true heir'. George calls to mind Richard III's brother, the duke of Clarence, but he, needless to say, was also son of Richard, duke of York. Clarence had a son named Edward, but this is obviously the wrong way around. Possibly, the close association of the names George and Edward in relation to the life and career of Richard III, together, perhaps, with the common use of the name Edward in earlier political prophecy, caused the names to be combined in an incongruous but pleasingly resonant way. Alternatively, there may be some elusive meaning. If this text were historically coherent then one would have to ask whether it represented an earlier version of the prophecy than that discussed by Coote and Thornton, but the apparent nonsense of it makes this unnecessary.

With the possible exceptions of the names 'Henry Stanlye' and 'John Harlaw' written on f. 41^v, these are the earliest added inscriptions in the manuscript. They were in the book when Catharine Radcliffe brought it from wherever the 'heretic' sold it to her. This transaction may have occurred in the north-west of England, so that she did not carry the manuscript very far. If this is correct, then the fragment of prophecy on f. 26^v of Add. MS 11305 was perhaps written in the same region: possibly, 'Reforth' on f. 21^r is even a corruption of 'Rufford'. That would support the case made by Coote and Thornton for the preservation of 'Richard, son of Richard' in northern oral tradition, to which written tradition could be

added. The matter is conjectural and will probably remain that way. The question of provenance does not, anyway, influence whatever basic value of the discovery of an earlier witness to this uncommon prophecy may be thought to have.