

The Loveliest Music and the Turkish Frontier Itself: von Popplau's day with King Richard

Marie Barnfield

Not only is Edward of Middleham's date of death unrecorded, but so also are the date and place of his burial. The child's memorial tomb in the parish church of Sheriff Hutton was widely assumed to be his until 2009, when Jane Crease convincingly showed it to belong to the early fifteenth century¹. Since then Richard's itinerary has become the main focus of the search for his son's burial. In particular, many Ricardians have begun to wonder whether the sung Mass, and the feast that followed, which the Silesian knight Nicolas von Popplau attended with King Richard on Monday 3 May, may have been connected with the prince's funeral or week's mind.

Von Popplau's description

The next day the king sent a nobleman to me, that I would go to his church. There I heard the loveliest music I have ever heard in my life; in the purity of the voices it was to be compared to the blessed angels. After mass the king sent to me John, Lord of Bergen op Zoom He led me by the right hand into the church when the king was about to leave the church after mass, and led me before the king into the building or tent which had been erected near the church. Here I saw the king's bed decorated from top to bottom with red samite... In the king's tent there was also a table set up next to the bed, covered all around with silk cloths of gold embroidered with gold. The king set himself at the table and he wore a collar of an order set with many large pearls, almost like strawberries, and diamonds. The collar was quite as wide as a man's hand, went over his shoulders [sic] on the left side to his back and to the front under his right arm. His princes and lords went with him to the table. The King was sitting alone, his three table companions having been placed almost at the ends of the board in order to show him off to greater effect: 'the royal magnificence was so well displayed... that I could see him at the table as a king in his royal splendour...'²

Richard's isolation at high table would not seem to have been normal daily practice. In applying to the pope for a dispensation to eat meat on fast days, Edward IV had requested the waiver to apply to himself and eight table companions because,

on account of the manner and custom of the realm of England at the time being, and also on account of his royal dignity, he is not accustomed to take his place at the dining table without great company of his nobles and retinue³.

King Louis XI also liked to have 'at least seven or eight people to eat at his table, and sometimes many more.'⁴ Nor was the present unsociable seating plan simply Richard's personal preference, because when he saw von Popplau standing in the hall watching him he quickly invited him to join him. It is, however, an arrangement echoed in the description of Henry VII's first Garter feast, held in York two years later, viz:

¹ J. Crease, 'The Sheriff Hutton Monument,' *Ricardian Bulletin*, September 2009, pp 37–9 and December 2009, pp 39–41.

² L. Visser-Fuchs, 'Review Article: "He hardly touched his food, but talked with me all the time": What Niclas von Popplau really wrote about Richard III,' *The Ricardian*, vol. 11, no. 145, June 1999, pp 526–7.

³ '... propter morem et consuetudinem Regum Anglie pro tempore existentem tunc etiam propter eius regiam dignitatem sine magna suorum nobilium et procerum comitiva in mensa cibaria sumere non consuevit . . .' (C. Scofield, *The Life and Reign of Edward IV*, vol. 2, London and New York, 1923, p. 482).

⁴ 'car son Plaisir estoit que tousjours mangeoient sept ou huyt personnes à sa table pour le moins, et aulcunes foiz beaucoup plus' (B. E. de Mandrot (ed.), *Mémoires de Philippe de Comynes*, Paris, 1901, p. 403).

th archebisshop, whiche ministrede the dyvyne service, sat on the kinges right hande in non other array but as he dayly gooth in. And at that other ende of the kinges borde that day satt noman⁵.

This was the dinner at which Richard, upon hearing from von Popplau of how the king of Hungary had, with the aid of imperial forces, won a victory over the invading Turks, expressed his now-famous dream of chivalry:

I would like my kingdom and land to lie where the kingdom and land of Hungary lies, on the Turkish frontier itself. Then I would certainly, with my own people alone, without the help of other kings, princes or lords, properly drive away not only the Turks, but all my enemies and opponents⁶.

The sumptuous ‘collar of an order’ worn by Richard over his left shoulder at this feast may also indicate that this was a special occasion. The notes to Livia Visser-Fuchs’ translation of this passage explain that the word she has rendered as order is in the original German ‘*Gesellschaft*, “company”, “society”, which may mean “order” (of chivalry) and therefore also the insignia of an order, i.e. a collar. Von Popplau’s description appears to refer to a baldric, however, and it is not clear what Richard was really wearing⁷. Collars, as Livia Visser-Fuchs suggests, were normally worn over both shoulders; baldrics were belts, generally sword belts, worn over one shoulder and reaching to the hip on the opposite side. As for the order or society to which this collar might have belonged, fifteenth-century England had only one order of chivalry, and that was the Order of the Garter. The early Garter statutes tell us only a limited amount about the regalia in use at this period, but a Latin text on the supposed reasons for the institution of the Order claims that Edward III had provided for ‘a French-language motto to be inscribed in letters of gold or in some other costly manner, and to be worn *on one shoulder*, or on the leg, or sometimes on the thumb.’ This somewhat vague statement is clarified a little further on by the writer’s observation that ‘by that honourable and circular garter *round one shoulder* or leg, the knights are reminded to complete all that they undertake with piety, sincerity, friendship, loyalty, and skill.’⁸ Evidently the knights were offered a choice between wearing an actual garter or a notional one in the form of a baldric or a thumb-ring. There would seem to be little doubt, therefore, that the collar Richard was wearing on this occasion was that of the Order of the Garter⁹.

Prince Edward’s funeral?

So on Monday 3 May the court was clearly observing some special occasion which involved attendance at High Mass. Unfortunately, it was almost certainly not Prince Edward’s funeral. Von Popplau’s account does not even mention the prince’s death, and, according to established protocol, kings and queens did not openly attend funerals, even those of their own close family. Edward IV

⁵ E. Cavell (ed.), *The Herald’s Memoir 1486–1490*, Richard III and Yorkist History Trust in assoc. with Shaun Tyas, Donington, 2009, p. 81.

⁶ Visser-Fuchs, ‘What Niclas von Popplau Really Wrote’, p. 528.

⁷ Visser-Fuchs, ‘What Niclas von Popplau Really Wrote’, p. 530, n. 4.

⁸ This document appears, from internal evidence, to have been written shortly after the death of Henry VII. The first passage reads: ‘*Huic etiam . . . apothegma gallice constituit inscribi, scilicet aureis vel preciosis alioqui literis; et in altero humero, crure quoque, inter dum police gestari*’. The second reads: ‘*Insigni nanque et orbiculari sub fibulo alterius humeris eu cruris, admonentur equites, ut pie, sinceriter, amice, fideliter, et dexteriter, omnia quae aggrediuntur itaque perficiant*’ (J. Anstis, *The Register of the Most Noble Order of the Garter*, vol. 1, 1724, pp 24, 26). The italics in the translations have been added by the present author for emphasis.

⁹ This baldric-style Garter collar, with its motto and precious stones, should not be confused with the riband or sash of the modern Garter regalia, which was introduced by King Charles I.

and Queen Elizabeth, for instance, are not mentioned amongst the mourners at the funerals of either Prince George or Princess Mary; Henry VII and Elizabeth of York did not travel to Worcester for the funeral of Prince Arthur; and Henry VIII and Queen Katherine were absent from the funeral of their son Prince Henry, duke of Cornwall¹⁰. It is theoretically possible that Richard and Anne could have attended the funeral incognito, hidden behind a screen, but von Popplau's description indicates that Richard attended this service quite openly. In addition, neither the décor in the tent nor Richard's animation at dinner would seem to have been in keeping with either a funeral or a memorial service.

The Garter requiem?

Had it not been for the prohibition regarding double saints' days, the annual Garter Feast would have been held, either at Windsor or at the King's current residence, on Sunday 2 May (see previous article on Edward of Middleham's death), and Monday 3 May – the date under scrutiny here – would have seen the sung requiem for deceased companions that concluded the annual ceremonies. Von Popplau's account does show that Richard was wearing the Garter in the form of a 'collar', yet the Mass he attended was followed by a feast, and the royal bed set up in the pavilion was decorated with red samite, whereas the bed-of-estate at the Garter Feast was by tradition draped with blue taffeta¹¹. Most problematically, it would have been extremely difficult for Richard to have ignored the rules and held the Garter Feast over the first three days of May, since the occasion's many church services would have clashed with the religious observances of two separate double feasts: Sts Philip and James on 1 May, and the Invention of the Holy Cross on 3 May, the day that von Popplau was describing.

Crouchmas

The feast of the Invention of the Holy Cross, often referred to in England as Crouchmas or Roodmas, celebrated the finding of the True Cross by St Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine. Owing to the belief that Helena had been a British princess¹², this festival was keenly observed in England, and it may well have had a particular importance for the house of York, since, if the annals attributed to William Worcester are to be believed, it was the birthday of both Richard's mother and his youngest sister Margaret. Margaret, according to one version of the annals, was also born at Holy Cross Abbey in Waltham¹³. The religious observances of Crouchmas included a sung Mass, which followed terce (the 9 a.m. service) and so would have finished at a convenient time for dinner, and the liturgical colour ascribed to the day was red, like the drapes on the bed set up in Richard's pavilion¹⁴. This would also have been a very fitting occasion for Richard to have worn the Garter and expressed bold dreams of a crusade.

So, having examined all the obvious options – Prince Edward's funeral, his week's mind, the Garter requiem and the religious feast appropriate to the date, the last of these has proven to be the only

¹⁰ A. F. Sutton and L. Visser-Fuchs with R. A. Griffiths, *The Royal Funerals of the House of York at Windsor*, Richard III Society, 2005, pp 49–50, 60–61; T. Penn, *Winter King: the dawn of Tudor England*, Penguin, London, 2012, p. 85; J. Guy, *The Children of Henry VIII*, OUP, 2013, p. 15.

¹¹ E.. Ashmole, *History of the Order of the Garter*, p. 128.

¹² L. Thorpe (trans.), *Geoffrey of Monmouth, The History of the Kings of Britain*, Penguin, 1996, p. 132.

¹³ T. Hearne, *Liber Niger Scaccarii nec non Wilhelmi Worcestrii Annales Rerum Anglicarum*, vol. 2, London, 1774, p. 525; J. Stevenson (ed.), *Letters and Papers Illustrative of the Wars of the English in France*, vol. 2, part 2, 1864, pp 759, 764.

¹⁴ 'The Invention of the Holy Cross', website of The St Lawrence Press Ltd.

solution that fits all the known facts. As so often, it is the simplest explanation that turns out to be the best. Wherever and whenever Edward of Middleham was buried, therefore, it was almost certainly not in York on 3 May. Indeed, since von Popplau's account of Richard's northern progress makes no mention of the funeral, it is likely that this had occurred, in accordance with strict protocol, before his parents' arrival.

The author wishes to extend their warm appreciation to Peter Hammond for his patient support and unfailingly helpful suggestions.