

Richard III and St. Julian: a new Myth

ANNE F. SUTTON AND
LIVIA VISSER-FUCHS

RICHARD III IS SURROUNDED by myths, but most of them are centuries old. The one that connects him with St. Julian is almost brand-new and its growth can be precisely charted. The story is instructive — and somewhere there is undoubtedly a moral.

Towards the end of the Hours of Richard III (Lambeth Palace Ms. 474), the King's personal book of hours, there are several incomplete prayers. One of them is the so-called 'prayer of Richard III' — a long entreaty for help in sorrow and distress (folios 181-183b) added for his personal use during his reign. It included his name as king, enabling him to insert Ricardus Rex in the correct place whenever he said the prayer. This devotion was *not* part of the original book which was produced around 1420.

Before 'the prayer of Richard III' one folio is now missing. Because of the missing folio both his prayer and the preceding text, which *is* part of the original book, are defective. In the manuscript's present incomplete state 'Richard's prayer' lacks its beginning¹ and the text that precedes it ends abruptly (at the end of the last line of folio 180b) in the middle of the rubric² of an entirely different devotion. This devotion is the last surviving of a number of suffrages³ of the sort usually found in books of hours, each headed by a rubric in red ink containing the relevant saint's name and sometimes the purpose of the prayer. Here the rubric is incomplete and reads:

De beato Juliano. Cum volueris pere —

(Of the blessed Julian. Whenever you have decided [to] . . .)⁴

Suffrages to St. Julian are not common and both they and their saint need to be explained. There are several saints of the same name and modern scholars have not completely disentangled them or the various legends attached to each.⁵ Medieval authors were also aware of this confusion and Jacobus de Voragine in *The Golden Legend* mentions no less than four Julians.⁶ The best known and

most popular is St. Julian the Hospitaller, patron of innkeepers, ferrymen and travellers, to whom many hospitals were dedicated. His legend is as follows: when he was a young man he was warned, like a medieval Oedipus, that he would kill his father and mother. To escape this fate he went into exile, entered the service of a king in a distant country and was given a rich lady in marriage. His parents, travelling in search of him, by chance came to Julian's castle when his wife was at home alone. She made them welcome and had them sleep in her own bed. Julian, on coming home, found two people on the conjugal couch and without hesitation killed them both.⁷ When he discovered his fatal mistake, he and his wife fled into the wilds and went to live on the bank of a dangerous river. For years they did penance by giving shelter to travellers and ferrying them across the stream. One cold night they welcomed a poor wretch, disfigured by leprosy, and laid him in their own bed. Suddenly their guest changed into a shining angel, announced that their penance was complete, and disappeared. Shortly after Julian and his wife died and went to heaven.

As explained above only part of the rubric of the suffrage of St. Julian in Richard III's Hours remains, and its contents and those of the suffrage itself have to be guessed at, but enough evidence exists to make a sensible guess. Because of his career as host and ferryman Julian became the patron of travellers and pilgrims on earth, and also the guide of those who journey to eternity. Like Mercury he not only protected wayfarers and led them to a hospitable inn, he was also invoked as companion on one's final journey to the next world. The following texts will serve as examples:

Of saint Julian. Antiphon. Saint Julian, sweet delight of the poor, you are the merciful comforter of the wretched.

Versicle. Pray for us, blessed father Julian.

Response. That we may be worthy.

Let us pray. O God, who gave your people the blessed Julian as minister of eternal salvation, grant us, we pray, that he who taught (or guided) us on earth may always intercede for us in heaven. Through Jesus Christ our lord. Amen⁸

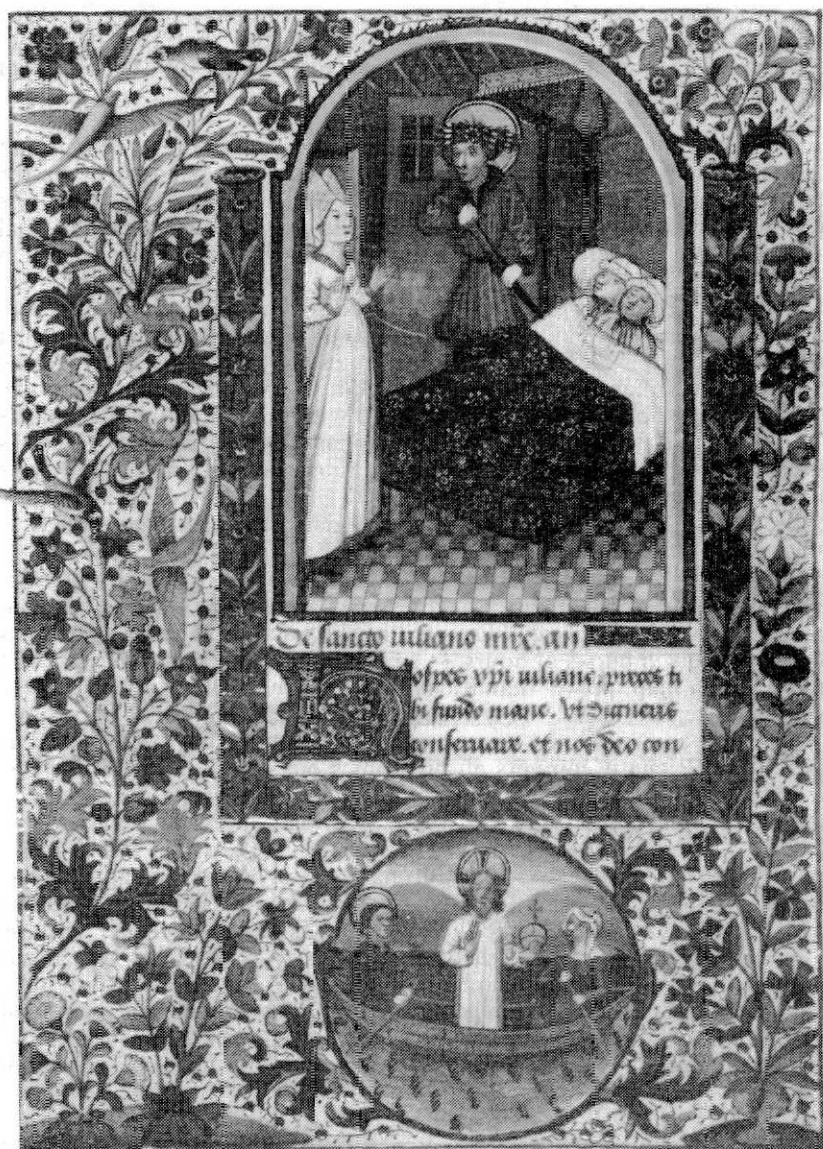
The collect of another suffrage reads:

O God, who gives food to the beasts and to all flying creatures that call on you, grant us, we pray, that through the intercession of the blessed Julian, your martyr and ferryman, we may have all we need to live and a prosperous journey and a good and cheerful host, both during the day and the night.⁹

Some prayers of this type are to be said in the morning.¹⁰ All are similar in spirit to the two quoted here and none of them mention the original deed that started Julian on his career of charity.¹¹ Miniatures accompanying these suffrages do sometimes depict the murder of his parents, but most of them show Julian and his wife ferrying a third person (often Christ) across the water.

On such evidence it may be concluded that the rubric of the suffrage in Richard III's Hours had analogous contents. In fact, the number of Latin words, especially verbs, starting with *pere-* is so limited that the choice is easy: *peregrinari* (to travel to foreign countries, to wander) is the most likely candidate and fits in with the evidence.¹² The following conjectural rubric can now be formulated:

Of the blessed Julian. Whenever you have decided to travel abroad [say the following prayer each morning and you will certainly find a good place to rest for the night, and return home safely].



A comparatively rare illustration of St. Julian's murder of his parents together with the more usual one of him and his wife ferrying the mysterious traveller across the river. From the Hours of Pierre de Bretagne (1455-7), Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale Ms. Lat. 1159, f. 155b. Photograph Bibliothèque Nationale Paris.

This was probably followed by a text similar to the complete suffrage and the other prayer quoted above. It should be remembered that this devotion, whatever its exact contents, was included at the request of the first and unknown owner of these hours.

In recent times a theory has been advanced on the prayer of St. Julian and 'Richard III's prayer', and imaginary connections have been made between the extant fragments of the two texts. The first step in the development of this theory was the joining of the few words of the rubric in the text of the original book (written circa 1420) to the long but incomplete prayer, and printing them as one text.¹³ This is not only palaeographically and chronologically impossible, but also unlikely as far as grammar and devotional contents are concerned. Secondly an ominous tenor of 'Richard III's prayer' was realised and elaborated on and seen as proof of Richard's unhealthy state of mind.¹⁴ Thirdly the implications of St. Julian's connection with the prayer were 'discovered' and this connection regarded as 'the key to the prayer'. Without explaining St. Julian's function as patron of travellers and merely emphasising that the saint killed his parents, the remaining scrap of the suffrage's rubric was linked to the King's prayer and it was concluded that:

A parricide was a fitting intercessor for an infanticide, let alone a man who had murdered another saint.¹⁵

To believe in this theory one needs to be undeterred by the gap of sixty years between the two texts and unaware of the significance of the one being in red and the other in black ink, besides disregarding the usual contents and formulas of medieval prayers in books of hours. In spite of all this the theory has already been taken up to help 'prove' that Richard did indeed commit the crimes of which he has been accused.¹⁶ This argument is an elaboration on the time-honoured one of hypocrisy and may be called the myth of the 'holy sinner'. It runs as follows: Richard commits all his crimes out of a conviction of their political necessity and then tries to expiate them, politically by his good government, spiritually by having a prayer to St. Julian 'specially composed' for him.¹⁷

This attractive *leitmotiv* is destined to have a long life, for its appeal is as obvious as that of the 'hypocrisy' explanation of Richard III's character. The hypocrisy theme has its roots in antiquity and is difficult to undermine because it appeals strongly to the emotions, but this new myth of the 'holy sinner' has nothing to recommend it: it is based on error. It pictures Richard III continually on his knees expiating crimes he must have committed — otherwise he would not be on his knees! Its attractions are illusory for this 'prayer to St. Julian' does not exist and therefore does not offer any evidence to help solve the enigma of Richard III.

Among the many saints venerated by the medieval church there was none that specialised in interceding for murderers, nor was there any prayer that led the supplicant to believe that such intercession was possible. The medieval Christian church did provide a prayer for many other occasions, however, and all students of Richard III may like to turn for encouragement and help to St. Thomas Aquinas' plea to God 'before study':

... Thow which makest eloquent the tounge of them that want utterance, instruct my tounge, and powre into my lips the grace of thy blessing. Give me quicknes of understanding, capacite of retayning, subtilty of interpreting, facility of learning, and copious grace of speaking; guyde my going in, direct my going forward, and accomplish my going foorth. Through Christe oure Lord. Amen.¹⁸

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The 'prayer of Richard III' lacks its original three or four opening lines. A sixteenth-century hand added a slightly inaccurate beginning in the top margin of folio 181. The prayer was over a hundred years old by Richard's reign.
2. A rubric is an explanatory heading to a prayer or other devotion written in red ink. Some of them are very long, running to several pages, many are short, e.g. 'A prayer', 'A devout prayer' or 'A prayer to ...'.
3. A suffrage is a devotion to a particular saint; it usually consists of antiphon, versicle, response and a short prayer for the saint's intercession. See the example quoted below.
4. It must be emphasised that these six words are all written in red and are all part of the rubric; none of them is part of the text of the actual suffrage. — Suffrages are generally given according to the hierarchy and popularity of saints. In Richard III's Hours Julian's is preceded by those to the Archangels, St. John the Evangelist, St. Anne, Sts. Anne and Joachim jointly and Joseph (the son of Jacob, not the husband of Mary), interspersed with other prayers. These reflect the preference of the original owner of the book.
5. See La Légende de St. Julien l'Hospitalier, *Analecta Bollandiana* vol. 63 (1945), pp.145-219, and references given there.
6. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, ed. G. Ryan and H. Ripperger, New York/London/Toronto 1948, pp.128-31 (Jan. 27).
7. The hastiness of the saint's action may be astonishing and seem un-Christian, but compare the simile in Stephen Langton's *Sermo de virginibus*, where Christ is the husband, the human soul the wife and sin the lover: 'The king of glory enters . . . finding the lover with his wife. What should he do? Judge . . . if some nobleman found a lover in his wife's embrace, he would probably repudiate her or punish her in some way. Not so Christ, however. Nay, he is like a jealous man who would slay the lover, sparing his wife'. Quoted in P. E. Roberts, Stephen Langton's *Sermo de Virginibus*, in *Women in the Medieval World*, ed. J. Kirshner and S. F. Wemple, Oxford 1987, pp.103-18, esp. pp.108 and 115. — Christ is obviously milder than one should expect.
8. University of London Ms.519, a French book of hours, f.172 (translated from the Latin).
9. BL.Ms.Harl.2341, a book of private devotions, f.205 (translated from the Latin).
10. Compare the twelfth-century legend of St. Julian and William Percy. The anonymous author explains how it was the custom to recommend oneself to St. Julian before setting out on a journey, Percy did so every morning when on campaign in Scotland, but on his return journey, thinking all danger was past, he omitted and even refused to do so. He only came home after a series of disasters and when he had asked St. Julian's pardon. J. P. Gilson, St. Julian the Harbinger and the First of the English Percys, *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 3rd. series, vol. 4 (1908), pp.304-12.
11. For other examples, see La Légende (see n.5), pp.174-7, 188.
12. Words beginning *peren* . . . or *perem* . . . can probably be ruled out because the scribe would have put an abbreviation sign over the second 'e'. — *Peregrinari* was M. R. James' conjecture in *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Lambeth Palace*, Cambridge 1930, p.653.
13. In P. Tudor-Craig, *Richard III*, Catalogue of the Exhibition at the NPG, 1973, pp.26-7, 96-7. The 'prayer of Richard III', its history, missing lines and probable rubric, contents and their implications will be discussed in the present authors' forthcoming publication *The Hours of Richard III*. Richard III and Yorkist History Trust.
14. J. R. Lander, *Government and Community*, London 1980, pp.329-30.

15. Desmond Seward, *Richard III. England's Black Legend*, London 1983, pp.178-9. — It is perhaps relevant to emphasise here that in other copies of this same prayer which are complete and include an explanatory rubric, this rubric specifically states that the prayer will only be effective if the supplicant has not committed a mortal sin.
16. In *The Chronicles of the Wars of the Roses*, gen. ed. E. Hallam, London 1988, p.287, in the passage on the murder of the Princes in the Tower; and in Rosemary Horrox, *Richard III. A Study of Service*, Cambridge 1989, p.331 (and note 12 on the apparent 'newness' of St. Julian among Richard III's saints after 1483 the year of the supposed murder). The first book is aimed at the general public, the second at scholars. They will undoubtedly both be copied.
17. Seward (see n.15), p.178; Hallam (see n.16), p.287; Lander (see n.14), pp.329-30.
18. Printed in *The Primer or Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary* . . . , ed. Richard Verstegen, printed by Arnold Conings, Antwerp 1599.

It may be interesting to remind readers of Flaubert's version of St. Julian's legend, *La Légende de St. Julien l'Hospitalier*, 1895; English translation in G. Flaubert, *Three Tales*, Harmondsworth 1987.

Ricardian Index 1979-1984

A comprehensive author and subject index to articles,
notes and reviews in all issues of *The Ricardian*,
Nos. 64-87.

£1 incl. postage and packing, from:

Miss A. E. Smith,
14 Lincoln Road,
Guildford, Surrey GU2 6TJ

Cheques to be payable to the Richard III Society.