

Richard III's Epitaph Revisited

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There is now secure early testimony for the epitaph connected with the tomb of Richard III set up around 1495 by Henry VII,¹ and no fewer than five texts of these Latin elegiac couplets exist. These are, in chronological order:--

1. BL Additional MS 45131, folio 10v, from the collection of Thomas Wriothesley, to be called here W.
2. College of Arms MS I.3, folio 4, a later sixteenth century copy made by Thomas Hawley, to be called here H.
3. The text as given in the 1619 version of George Buck's *History of the Life and Reigne of Richard the Third*, which remained unpublished until Kincaid's edition of 1979, to be called B1 in this study.²
4. The version in the posthumous publication of Buck's work in 1647, which differs slightly from the 1619 text, to be called here B2.
5. The version given by Francis Sandford, in his *Genealogical History of the Kings of England*, 1677, which he says he took from a manuscript at the College of Arms, presumably our H. Sandford's version is here called S.

It is clear that these five texts fall into two groups, with Buck's versions, which he states that he copied from a book at the London Guildhall, standing apart in several respects from the two manuscripts and Sandford.

The two manuscript versions, W and H, appear to be closely related and contain numerous errors – readings which are nonsensical, ungrammatical or unmetrical. Such errors could have occurred at any stage in the process of transcription, especially if the text was indeed written at the tomb and had

¹ Thanks to the researches of John Ashdown-Hill, to whose generosity I also owe the suggestion to publish this note. His findings are published in 'The Epitaph of King Richard III', *The Ricardian*, 18 (2008), pp. 31-45 (hereafter 'Epitaph') and further in *The Last Days of Richard III and the Fate of his DNA*, 2nd, revised edn, Stroud 2013, pp. 98-104 (hereafter *Last Days*). I should also like to thank my esteemed colleague Professor Donald Russell, who discussed the epitaph with me and made many helpful textual suggestions. This article was completed before I was able to see the treatment of the epitaph in P. Schwyzer, *Shakespeare and the Remains of Richard III*, Oxford 2013, pp. 25-28; it will be seen that we are in partial, but only partial, agreement.

² Sir George Buck, *History of King Richard the Third (1619)*, edited with an introduction and notes by A.N. Kincaid, Gloucester 1979. In the main manuscript used by Kincaid (BL MS Tiberius F x) there are many parts of Buck's text which are deficient or illegible, including the conclusion of the work giving the epitaph. Kincaid supplied the text here from a roughly contemporary manuscript version also in the British Library (BL MS Egerton 2216).

become worn with the passage of time.³ In any case, the mistakes are unlikely to be blunders on the part of the epitaph's author, for surely only a reasonably competent Latinist would attempt such a piece, and although there may be one metrical error,⁴ there are also features of the lines which suggest a certain classicising elegance. The text as quoted in Sandford and Buck has had a lot of these anomalies removed. It does not, of course, follow that these printed texts necessarily restore the original reading. Fortunately, perhaps, in order to tease out the significance of the textual history of this little poem, it is not necessary to consider every variant in detail. This article will concentrate on the divergences between the two groups of texts: the manuscripts and Sandford on the one hand (to be called Group 1) and Buck's two texts on the other (Group 2). The verses are as follows, in the version as given by Sandford: ⁵

Hic ego, quem vario Tellus sub Marmore claudit,	
Tertius a multa voce Ricardus eram;	
Nam Patrie Tutor, Patrius pro jure Nepotis,	
Dirupta tenui Regna Britannia, fide;	
Sexaginta dies, binis duntaxat ademptis,	5
Estatesque tuli non mea Sceptra duas.	
Fortiter in Bello, merito desertus ab Anglis,	
Rex Henrice, tibi, septime, succubui:	
At sumptu, pius ipse, tuo, sic ossa decoras,	
Regem olimque facis Regis honore coli.	10
Quatuor exceptis jam tantum quinque bis annis	
Acta tricenta quidem, lustra salutis erant,	
Anteque Septembris Undena luce Kalendas,	
Reddideram Rubre dedita jura Rose.	
At mea, quisquis eris, propter commissa precare	15
Sit minor ut precibus pena fienda tuis.	

[I here, whom earth encloses beneath variegated marble, was the third Richard, in the speech of many. For as protector of my country, an uncle [reading *patrius* for *patrius*] instead of my nephews' right, I held the British realm through sundered faith. For sixty days minus two, and two summers, I bore a sceptre not my own. Bravely in war [...?], deservedly (?) deserted by the English, king

³ There seems to be no way to establish whether the text was actually placed on or close to the tomb, and Buck's testimony that the lines (or perhaps the copy he saw) were 'never fixt to his stone' is not really helpful here.

⁴ An error of quantity: at line 9, the first group have *decōras* for *decōras*. Buck 1647 (p. 149) here reads *dicaras* 'you had dedicated', which could be his own correction or what he read in his source (which as I argue below was likely to have been different from both our manuscript texts today), but is perhaps most likely to originate with his nephew, who produced the printed edition. *Dicaras* restores the metre, but is a less apt word in context.

⁵ Spelling and punctuation as given, except that abbreviations have been expanded. Elsewhere in this article I give standard modern spelling of Latin.

Henry the seventh, I fell to you. Yet you yourself, at your own expense, thus dutifully adorn my bones, and cause a former king to be revered with a king's honour. Three hundred *lustra* of salvation, take away fourteen, had passed, and on the eleventh day before the Kalends of September, I had restored to the red rose the rights it had surrendered. But whoever you are, pray on account of my delicts, so that the punishment that must happen will be less because of your prayers.]

A review of the readings of the various texts follows, with an attempt to establish the likely original form. In certain cases, it may appear that none of the readings is correct, but that some may represent a mistranscription or corruption of a lost original.

line 1, *vano* W H; *vario* S B1 B2

One reading is presumably a simple error: even in modern handwriting, it is easy to see how the two words can be confused. A careful examination of the hands in W and H, however, leaves no doubt that the reading of each is *vano*, 'pointless'. With *vario*, the marble is merely variegated, mottled – as marble often is. Buck indeed remarks that Richard had a 'fair Tomb of mingled colour'd Marble', but this may be no more than a deduction from *vario marmore* in his text. It is difficult to decide between the two readings. 'Pointless' marble chimes with what we shall see is a generally hostile text in the manuscripts, but not so well with the emphasis on Henry's generosity in lines 9-10. Given the poor quality of the transcriptions of *W* and *H*, it may be that they are mistaken, and that the true reading should be *vario*, as given in the later versions.

line 2, *multa voce* W H; *a multa voce* S; *a iusta voce* B1 B2

The reading of both manuscripts is *Tertius multa voce Ricardus eram* – 'I was Richard the third in the speech of many, the multitude', in other words 'I was commonly called Richard III'. The implication is clearly that there is some question about the rightness of the appellation, and Buck's alternative *a iusta voce* looks like an attempt to answer that point: 'I was rightly called Richard III'. However, it should be noted that the reading of W and H is unmetrical, and Sandford's *a multa voce* no doubt represents his correction of what he read in H. Though this correction restores the metre, it is scarcely possible Latin (*a* referring to an agent is odd without a passive verb or a personal noun, and *tertius a* immediately suggests 'third in line from ...'), and so it seems likely that the correct reading – what was actually written on the tomb, or what was intended to be written – was something else. Professor Donald Russell suggests that the original reading was *iniusta voce* 'by an unjust title',⁶ which restores both metre and sense and is very close palaeographically to *multa*. This has the interesting consequence that Buck or his source, in writing *a iusta voce*, reflects a genuinely different archetype from either W or H (see below p. 80).

⁶ Personal communication.

line 3, *nam patris tutor patrius pro iure nepot-* W; ... *pro iure nepoten* H; *nam patriae tutor patrius pro iure nepotis* S; *tutor eram patriae, patruus pro iure nepotis* B1 B2

Patris tutor, ‘my father’s protector’, in the manuscripts is nonsense as well as dubious metre, and *patriae tutor*, ‘my country’s protector’, must be right. *Nepotum* ‘nephews’, rather than *nepotis* ‘nephew’, may have been the original reading,⁷ although it is hard to see why the writers of the manuscripts found it so difficult. Of the printed versions, Buck’s is superior to Sandford’s: the adjective *patrius* makes little sense in context, while *patruus* ‘paternal uncle’ is exactly right, and must be what the author intended. As for the variation in the first half of the line, both versions fit the metre, but Buck’s produces a more pleasing rhythm by classical canons of taste. But there is perhaps another point: *nam* ‘for’ introduces an explanation of what has previously been said, so that this couplet gives the reason why ‘Richard III’ was an unjust title – because he broke faith and ruled where his nephews had the right. Without *nam* this connexion does not exist, although the negative implications of line 4 remain (see below p. 81).

line 6, *estatesque tuli non mea sceptras duas* W H S; *aestatesque tuli tunc mea sceptras duas* B1; *aetatesque tuli ...* B2

Leaving aside spelling variations and the clear error of *aetates* (ages) for *aestates* (summers, i.e. years), there is a major discrepancy here between the two groups. Group 1 represents Richard as holding sceptres⁸ which are not his (*non mea sceptras*), while Group 2, by replacing *non* ‘not’ with *tunc* ‘then’, converts the whole couplet into an anodyne account of the length of Richard’s reign, with no criticism of its legitimacy: ‘then I held my sceptres for two summers plus sixty days but two’. Although this version would not attract suspicion on its own, the reading of Group 1 is more pointed and epigrammatic (*tunc* is merely a space-filler), and might therefore seem more likely to be the original.

line 7, *fortiter in bello merito desertus ab Anglis* W H S; *fortiter in bello certans desertus ab Anglis* B1 B2

Both versions have Richard fighting bravely at Bosworth, just about the one virtue which the Tudor tradition concedes to him. But where the two groups differ, again Group 1 has a reading derogatory to Richard: he was ‘deservedly’ abandoned by the English (not just by – some of – his own side, the text implies, but by the whole nation). Group 2, on the other hand, has Richard ‘bravely striving in battle’ and simply ‘deserted by the English’, a reading which if anything arouses sympathy for Richard, whose courage was thus of no avail against the treachery of his allies. This second version, with *fortiter certans*, is also better Latin, for in Group 1 the adverb *fortiter* is left without any verb or adjective to qualify. If this couplet survived alone, then, one might suspect that the Group 2 version was the original, with *merito* an ill thought out alternative

⁷ Thus Ashdown-Hill, ‘Epitaph’ p. 41 n. 78.

⁸ This plural with singular significance is common in Latin poetry.

designed to discredit Richard. But it is probable, given the evidently poor quality of the transcriptions in Group 1, that the original text had a different reading. Perhaps, as Professor Russell suggests, *merito* should read *meritus*: 'having served bravely in war, deserted by the English ...', but it is difficult to be confident.

line 10, *non regem facis rege honore coli* W H; *regem olimque facis regis honore coli* S B1 B2

Rege in the manuscripts – if that is the right reading, of which I am not convinced from the photographs⁹ – makes neither metre nor sense, and the correction *regis* is an easy one and probably right. The resulting reading is pointed – 'you (Henry) cause one who was not a king to be granted the honours of a king' – but still cannot stand: not only is it unmetrical, but the necessary link between the two verbs *decoras*, in the previous line, and *facis* is missing. Sandford, no doubt observing this, probably here rejected the reading of his manuscript in favour of what he read in Buck. But was he right to do so? Could the manuscript reading conceal a correct original? After all, the divergence between the two groups of texts is in line with the situations reviewed in 1, 3 and 4 above, with one version giving an anti-Ricardian sense (and *non regem* parallels *non mea sceptrum* in line 5), while the other neatly presents a more neutral account. Various emendations might be suggested to restore the original, but perhaps the simplest is to add *–que* after *regem*: *non regemque facis regis honore coli*. The whole couplet could then be translated 'But you dutifully/piously at your own expense adorn [my] bones thus, and cause one who was not a king to be granted a king's honours'. *Decōras* (verb), required by the metre, is incidentally incorrect: the word should scan *decōras* (see n. 1 above).

line 14, *debita iura* W H; *dedita iura* S; *iura petita* B1 B2

Richard's defeat restores to the red rose of Lancaster 'the rights it was owed' according to the reading of the manuscripts; Sandford, slightly less bluntly, has 'the rights that had been surrendered', though this may be a simple error. But for Group 2, the rights are merely 'sought'. If pushed, *debita iura* is of course implicitly a criticism of Edward IV as well as of Richard.

In general, then, the Group 1 texts seem likely to be closer to the original version of the epitaph, of which my reconstruction is as follows:

Hic (*or*: ecce)¹⁰ ego, quem vario tellus sub marmore claudit,
tertius iniusta voce Ricardus eram;
Nam patriae tutor, patruus pro iure nepotum,

⁹ Ashdown-Hill, 'Epitaph', p. 42, fig. 1, p. 44, fig. 2; and his *Last Days*, pl. 26, 27.

¹⁰ The confusion in the manuscripts at this point and in l. 15 may perhaps represent alternative versions in the original, particularly if it was a literary exercise rather than an addition to the real tomb. I cannot, however, explain the *aio* (= *animo*?) of the two MS texts.

dirupta tenui regna bretanna fide;
 sexaginta dies, binis duntaxat adeptis, 5
 aestatesque tuli non mea sceptras duas.
 Fortiter in bello, merito (?) desertus ab Anglis,
 rex Henrice, tibi, septime, succubui:
 at sumptu, pius ipse, tuo, sic ossa decoras,
 non regemque facis regis honore coli. 10
 Quattuor exceptis iam tum cum ¹¹ quinque bis annis
 acta trecenta quidem lustra salutis erant,
 antequam Septembris undena luce Kalendas,
 reddideram rubrae debita iura rosae.
 At (or: sed) mea, quisquis eris, propter commissa precare 15
 sit minor ut precibus poena ferenda tuis.

Looking at the differences between this version and those of Buck, it will be apparent that five out of the seven substantial variants discussed above present a choice between a less creditable and a more creditable version of Richard's reign, and that the texts of Group 1 are almost unanimous in giving the less creditable version. It is an unflattering picture of Richard which emerges from the Group 1 variants: he was 'Richard III' through an unjust title (or, only in the speech of many), he bore a sceptre not his own, he was deservedly abandoned by the English in the field, he was not a king even though given the tomb of a king – by Henry's generosity, naturally – and his defeat restored power to its rightful place. The Group 2 readings, on the other hand, assert that Richard really was king (*a iusta voce ... tunc mea sceptras... olimque regem*), and that his power was contested by the Lancastrians (*iura petita*), not owed to them, while stating neutrally that he was abandoned by 'the English' at Bosworth. I have suggested that on balance the internal evidence of the text suggests that the Group 1 readings are likely to be the older, and this is also the probable implication of their appearance in the sixteenth century manuscripts W and H.¹² Buck's Guildhall source can no longer be found, although I have indicated above that his reading *a iusta* in line 2 is evidence of a source independent of W and H, and so may also be the heading, which he states is taken from the manuscript, and the brief prose prayer with which his version concludes.¹³ But here there must be a strong suspicion that someone – either Buck himself, or perhaps more interestingly, his source – had tampered with the text to make it

¹¹ The reading of W seems preferable here.

¹² It is of course a theoretical possibility that other early MSS might have shown Group 2 readings.

¹³ Heading: 'Epitaphium Regis Richardi tertii, sepulti ad Leicestriam, jussu, & sumptibus Sⁱ Regis Henrici Septimi.' Immediately following on the final couplet, Buck has 'Deo O[ptimo] M[aximo] Trino & Uno sit laus & gloria aeterna. AMEN.'

more favourable to Richard.¹⁴ In other words, an original hostile epitaph, whether or not actually inscribed at the tomb, has at some later point been 'cleaned up' to provide the versions of Group 2, which like most epitaphs largely avoid criticism of their subject. Yet there is one place, perhaps two places, where an unfavourable reading is retained in all our texts. The first is lines 3-4:

Nam patriae tutor (*or* tutor eram patriae), patruus pro iure nepotis (nepotum)
dirupta tenui regna britanna fide.

In the interpretation of these lines, I must register my dissent from Dr Ashdown-Hill's most recent treatment.¹⁵ *Dirupta* is shown by the metre to have a long final syllable, and thus to be ablative in case and feminine in gender. It can then only qualify *fide* ('trust having been sundered') not *regna* as translated (nor indeed *iure*).¹⁶ The commonly quoted English translation then seems rather accurate: 'By trust betray'd I to the kingdom came'.¹⁷ Even when *iniusta/multa voce, non mea sceptrā*, and *non regem* are removed from the text, Richard is still here accused of breaking faith and of usurpation. Why then did not our hypothetical Ricardian 'improver' of the epitaph alter this line as well? It would have been easy enough to substitute *dirupta* with *constanti*, *irrupta*, or some such, so that Richard could govern with constant or unbroken faith. One can only speculate on the reasons for this failure. Did the adaptor suppose that words of praise, rather than a studied neutrality, would invite suspicion of his version's authenticity?

The second place which may retain a negative implication is the final couplet. Ashdown-Hill reads this as an elaboration of the medieval convention of sepulchral inscriptions asking for the reader's prayers for the deceased.¹⁸ Of course, such prayers were necessary on the basis that the dead person, like everyone, had sinned and that the prayers of the living could lessen his or her time in purgatory. Most epitaphs, however, for understandable reasons, do not draw particular attention to the sins of the departed, whereas our text is rather insistent on this point: 'But, whoever you are, pray because of my delicts, so that the punishment I must bear may be less on account of your prayers.' The

¹⁴ It is notable that Buck's version of the *Tres sunt Ricardi* verses (see below, appendix, p. 86) is also more favourable to Richard than the other two known texts; see J.M. Luxford, 'Tres sunt Ricardi and the Crowland Chronicle', *Ricardian*, vol. 18 (2008) pp. 21-30.

¹⁵ Ashdown-Hill, *Last Days*, p. 164.

¹⁶ This is accepted by Dr Ashdown-Hill in 'Epitaph' p. 37; in his *Last Days* (p. 104) he gives a different version: 'I held the British kingdoms in trust, [although] they were disunited.' The comma after *dirupta*, reproduced here from the printed version of Buck, might also mislead the unwary reader into thinking that *dirupta* was intended to qualify *iure* in the preceding line; in fact it conforms with a seventeenth-century convention of thus signalling an adjective separated from its noun by several intervening words.

¹⁷ Apparently first in J. Hackett, *Select and Remarkable Epitaphs on Illustrious and Other Persons, in Several Parts of Europe*, London 1757, vol. 2, pp. 92-93.

¹⁸ Ashdown-Hill, 'Epitaph', p. 39, and his *Last Days*, p. 104.

word *commissa*, which I have translated ‘delicts’, may sometimes have a neutral sense, but in a context of punishment should be quite strongly negative,¹⁹ and ‘crimes’ in the English verse version may not be an over-translation. It seems to me that the original intention of these two lines was consonant with the generally hostile tone of what I take to be the epitaph’s original version: the reader is asked to pray for a lessening of punishment not just for the sins which anyone might accumulate over a lifetime, but for the specific crimes of perfidy and usurpation mentioned in the preceding lines (and optionally of course for anything else the reader might care to attribute to the dead king). But when the concluding lines are read following on Buck’s sanitised version of the poem, they might, with a bit of good will, be taken in the more charitable sense which Dr Ashdown-Hill suggests.

In fact, there is a good deal of (purposeful?) vagueness and ambiguity in the concluding couplet. Ashdown-Hill points out that the epitaph conspicuously fails to accuse Richard of murdering his nephews.²⁰ This is another argument for dating the epitaph to 1495, the date of the erection of the tomb monument, or not long after; once the view of Richard’s guilt on this score had become generally accepted, probably at some time after Tyrrell’s ‘confession’ to the murder in 1501, surely our author could not have resisted referring to this most spectacular accusation, which more than any other has blackened Richard’s name over the intervening centuries. But the *commissa* of line 19, as well as being able to be construed as no more than the average person’s sins, also admit a reading in which Richard is guilty of more than the epitaph states. Anyone reading the lines who ‘knows’ that Richard killed the princes will naturally assume that the sins here mentioned include that murder, and yet if it should be shown that such was not the case, the author is still covered, for he has not stated it as fact. We could compare the reference in Henry’s act of attainder to the ‘shedding of infants’ blood’,²¹ cleverly phrased so that it could be taken to refer to the nepoticide, but could also be no more than a generic accusation against a tyrant. It is this ambiguity no doubt, permitting a more favourable as well as a more hostile interpretation, which persuaded the ‘improver’ to leave the final couplet untouched.

To sum up, then, the original epitaph was derogatory to Richard and flattering to Henry, showing that the latter defeated an enemy whose courage in war was his sole good feature, and then had the magnanimity to set up at his own expense a regal tomb monument for a non-king. At a later date someone – perhaps Sir George Buck, perhaps an earlier reader – was sufficiently offended by the piece to introduce changes which considerably soften the picture and also convert the piece into something a little more usual. For derogatory

¹⁹ *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *commissum*.

²⁰ Ashdown-Hill ‘Epitaph’, p. 39.

²¹ *RP*, vol. 6, p. 275.

epitaphs are, for obvious reasons, not common. Those that do exist are for the most part fictitious, in the sense that they were never placed nor intended to be placed at the tomb – which could, of course, also be the case with our example – and they are generally brief and witty, amusing, or satirical – in fact a specialised sort of epigram, which the present verses clearly are not.²² Is there then any kind of literary or historical context for Richard's epitaph, any predecessors which would help to account for its form and tone?

Two earlier English kings seem also to have had less than complimentary words associated with their burial places. One is Ethelred II 'the Unready', who died in 1016 and was buried in St Paul's Cathedral. Later, his coffin was moved to the thirteenth century choir,²³ and perhaps some time after this a Latin prose inscription was added, which can be clearly seen in Hollar's seventeenth century print of old St Paul's. Translated it reads thus: 'Here lies Ethelred, king of the English, son of king Edgar, to whom on the day of his consecration, after placing the crown on his head, it is said that St Dunstan, archbishop of Canterbury, made a terrible prediction in these words: "Since you wished to attain the throne through the death of your brother, in whose blood the English conspired with your shameful mother, the sword will not leave your house, but will rage against you all the days of your life, killing those of your seed, until your kingdom is given over to a foreign kingdom, whose customs and language the race you rule over does not know, and there will be no atonement but through long vengeance for your sin, and the sin of your mother, and the sin of the men who joined in her wicked plan." And it fell out as the holy man had foretold. For Ethelred, worn down by Sweyn the Danish king and by his son Canute, forced to flee and eventually closely besieged in London, died miserably in the year of our Lord's incarnation, 1016, after reigning for thirty-six years in great tribulation.' Although this inscription must date from several centuries after the king's death, it is hard to be more precise about its date. Hollar's print shows that by this date Ethelred's tomb had been surrounded by a symmetrical double construction linking it with the tomb of Sebba or Sebbi, King of the East Saxons, whose inscription shows that he was presented as the good king to Ethelred's bad king, so that the whole would give two opposing moral examples from a history already ancient. A third inscription shows that the whole had been beautified by Isabella, Countess of Northampton; this must be Isabella Sackville, wife of the third earl of Northampton, who was married in 1647 and died in 1661. This then was not long before the final destruction of old St Paul's, but of course the original inscriptions could have been much older; the text of Dunstan's speech to Ethelred is taken verbatim from Osbern's *Life of St Dunstan*, a work written in the last quarter of the eleventh century whose popularity is suggested by the

²² On the epitaph as a type of epigram in the period, see K. Enenkel, 'Introduction: the Neo-Latin epigram: humanist self-definition in a learned and witty discourse', in S. de Beer, K.A.E. Enenkel and D. Rijser, eds, *The Neo-Latin Epigram: A Learned and Witty Genre*, Leuven 2009, p. 11.

²³ J. Schofield, *St Paul's Cathedral before Wren*, Swindon 2011, p. 44.

numerous surviving manuscripts.²⁴ It is possible that seventeenth-century antiquarianism could be responsible for the use of this text on the tomb, but it seems perhaps more likely that an epitaph of this date would have aimed for greater polish, perhaps using elegiac couplets as in the Ricardian example. The gothic arches enclosing the tombs similarly suggest a date earlier than the seventeenth century. Ethelred had few if any defenders in the period between Osbern and Isabella, his poor reputation being sealed above all by William of Malmesbury, so the inscription is in tune with the general opinion of a long period.²⁵ But it is interesting that the hostile account of Ethelred chosen for his tomb concerns not only his failure to hold his kingdom against the Danes, but also his manner of coming to the throne, which it presents as the ultimate cause of his failure. The acquisition or holding onto power through the murder of family members is of course intriguingly parallel to the accepted version of Richard's accession. But given the uncertainty surrounding the date of the Ethelred inscription, it is difficult to explore this connexion further.

The second epitaph is that of the king who along with Richard has traditionally enjoyed the worst reputation among England's medieval rulers, King John. Here we are on much firmer ground chronologically, since his tomb inscription is given by Roger of Wendover, who died in 1236, only twenty years after the monarch's own death. Roger's text reads thus:

Hoc in sarcophago sepelitur regis imago,
qui moriens multum sedavit orbe tumultum,
hunc mala post mortem timor est ne fata sequantur.
Qui legis haec, metuens dum cernis te moriturum,
discute quid rerum pariat tibi meta dierum.²⁶

[In this sarcophagus is buried the figure of a king, whose death quietened great disorder in the world. There is fear that evil fates should follow him after death. You who read this, as you realise fearfully that you will die, consider what the end of your days will bring to you.]

Here then we have a parallel for a king's tomb which not long after his death was given an uncomplimentary epitaph and thus set up as a negative example – this is how a ruler should not be. But in other respects these lines are unlike Richard's epitaph: the clomping hexameters, apart perhaps from the last two lines, are quite unlike the (mostly) refined elegance of the later piece, there is no

²⁴ W. Stubbs, *Memorials of Saint Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury*, London 1874, pp. 114–15.

²⁵ S. Keynes, 'The declining reputation of King Æthelred the Unready', *Anglo-Saxon History: Basic Readings*, ed. D.A.E. Pelteret, New York and London 2000, pp. 157–90.

²⁶ The lines are given elsewhere with slight variants, notably an additional line (metrically incorrect) following line 2: *et cui connexa dum viscit probra manebant*, and *discito* for (the post-classical sense of) *discute* in the final line. See the second edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, R. Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, London 1587, vol. 6, p. 1071.

biographical detail, no request for prayer, and most of all, no Henry Tudor figure to attract praise.

These two examples then show that the dispraising epitaph for a 'bad king', set up at his tomb some while after his death, was not a totally new idea, but they cannot explain every feature of Richard's epitaph, nor why it should have been felt appropriate to adorn his burial place at that particular moment and to produce these commemorative verses. The form and metre, showing tropes such as apostrophe (direct address to Henry) and displaying the interweaving patterns of nouns and adjectives typical of classical Latin verse, is completely different from the language of the epitaphs for Ethelred and John, and in this respect it is a typical product of its age.²⁷ Stylistically closer are fifteenth-century epitaphs in elegiacs for historical characters, such as that of Germanicus by the Greek humanist Michael Marullus, or even perhaps an anonymous addition to the Glastonbury epitaph of King Arthur.²⁸ Peculiar to our piece, however, is the prominence of Richard's enemy and 'benefactor': in a sense, there are two people in this epitaph. The role sometimes allotted in a tomb inscription to the grieving relative who has caused the monument to be erected is here massively expanded, and the lines thus contribute to Henrician propaganda. While Richard perfidiously usurped the throne, ruled illegitimately for two summers, and was defeated, Henry was victorious in battle and his sense of duty was such that he gave his defeated foe 'at his own expense' a monument greater than he deserved. This seems to me the only possible reading of the epitaph in its original form. I leave to others with more expertise in the period the question of why a tomb and an epitaph for Richard should have seemed desirable at all at that particular moment.

Appendix: The Date Given in Lines 11-14

There has been a good deal of confusion over these lines, not helped by the incorrect marginal date in Buck 1647 (giving 21 August 1484) or the notes to the English translation as given by Nichols (21 August 1384!).²⁹ To clear this up, first it must be stated that lines 11-12, giving a year date, are unlikely to refer back to the previous lines describing the erection of the tomb. It would be odd

²⁷ Another classicising feature, to which John Ashdown-Hill draws attention (*Last Days*, pp. 102, 166), comparing the epitaph for Catherine de Valois, the widow of Henry V, of similar or slightly later date, is the use of *britannus* for *anglus/anglicus*, for which we could compare the use of the name Arthur for noble or royal offspring. See also Schwyzer, *Shakespeare and the Remains*, p. 28.

²⁸ Marullus, *Epigrammata* I.13 'Epitaphium Germanici Caesaris'; M.F. Brown and J.P. Carley, 'A fifteenth-century revision of the Glastonbury epitaph to King Arthur', *Arthurian Literature*, vol. 12 (1993), pp. 179-91, reprinted in J.P. Carley, ed., *Glastonbury Abbey and the Arthurian Tradition*, Woodbridge, 2001, pp. 193-204. N. Wright however argues with some plausibility that the verses may be earlier, perhaps twelfth or thirteenth century ('A new Arthurian epitaph?', *Arth. Lit.* vol. 13 (1995), pp. 145-9, reprinted in Carley, ed., *Glastonbury Abbey*, pp. 205-9).

²⁹ W. Hutton, *The Battle of Bosworth Field*, 2nd edn with additions by J. Nichols, London 1813, pp. 221-22.

to give a year date for one event immediately followed by the day and month of another occurrence (lines 13-14), and in fact the *–que* in line 13 links the two couplets together, so that the whole of lines 11-13 forms one date (year and day) for the action in line 14, when rights were restored to the red rose of Lancaster. We should then find the date of the battle of Bosworth. There is no problem about the day and the month; eleven days before the Kalends of September (= 1 September), counting inclusively in the normal Roman style, is 22 August. The year is a little more puzzling. A *lustrum* is a period of five years, so 300 x 5 from the date of Salvation (the accepted date of the birth of Christ) appears to give 1500. Line 11 tells us to subtract from this four plus twice five years, giving us 1486, which is of course a year too late. Professor Russell ingeniously suggests that three hundred *lustra* could have been reckoned not to 1500 but to 1499, by the same calculation which in our own day led most people to celebrate the beginning of the third millennium in 2000 rather than 2001, in other words consciously or unconsciously assuming a year 0 (which of course does not exist). Presumably either this or a still more basic error of fact on the author's part is the solution to the problem.

It may be worth comparing the 'epigram on the Richards, kings of England' which immediately follows the epitaph in Buck and which he states is 'copied from an old manuscript book'; known to moderns from its first words as *Tres sunt Ricardi*, it appears also in the Croyland Chronicle, in a version a little less favourable to Richard, and in a third version in Eton MS 213, fo. 270r.³⁰ Whichever text is taken as primary, the versification is of very poor quality, but the date of Bosworth is given quite clearly. In Buck's version:

Anno milleno centum quater octuageno
adiunctis quinque, et cum lux Sextilis adest
undena duplex, dentes apri stupuerunt,
et vindex albae rosa rubra refloret in orbe.

[In the thousandth year, four hundred and eightieth, five being added, and when the twice-eleventh August day comes, the boar's tusks grew slack, and avenging itself on the white, the red rose flowers again in the world.]³¹

³⁰ See Kincaid, *Buck: Richard III*, pp. 218, 318, and J.M. Luxford, '*Tres sunt Ricardi* and the Crowland Chronicle', *Ricardian*, vol. 18 (2008) pp. 21-30.

³¹ The other two versions are even less elegant than Buck's, and give the year date unmetrically as 'anno milleno centum quater, quater atque viceno//adiuncto quinto...', but there can be no doubt that 1485 is intended (1000 + 400 + 20x4 + 5). If one *quater* were removed, the line would make a hexameter, but the date would then be either 1425 or 1185, which no one can have supposed correct.