

Some Evidence for the Early Career and Practice of Dominic de Serego, Physician to Edward IV and Queen Elizabeth Woodville

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The royal physicians who served King Edward IV are, by and large, well-studied figures. Roger Marshall¹ and John Argentine (physician to Edward, prince of Wales, the later Edward V)² have been noted for their learning, and Edmund Albon has been associated with certain medical recipes of the period;³ William Hattecliffe is known for his place in Yorkist government and diplomacy as the King's secretary, as well as his physician;⁴ Dominic de Serego provides a textbook example of the difficulties experienced even by the King's own physicians to secure payment for their services;⁵ while James Friis rather more successfully acquired property and corrodies;⁶ Lewis Caerleon acted as

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¹ C.H. Talbot and E.A. Hammond, *The Medical Practitioners in Medieval England: A Biographical Register*, London 1965, pp. 314-15; L.E. Voigts, 'A doctor and his books: the manuscripts of Roger Marchall, d. 1477', in R. Beadle and A.J. Piper, eds, *New Science out of Old Books: Studies in Manuscripts and Early Printed Books in Honour of A.I. Doyle*, Aldershot 1995, pp. 249-314; *eadem*, 'Marchall, Roger', in *Oxford DNB*, *sub nomine*.

² Talbot and Hammond, *Medical Practitioners*, pp. 112-15; P.M. Jones, 'Argentine, John', in *Oxford DNB*, *sub nomine*; D.E. Rhodes, *John Argentine, Provost of King's: His Life and His Library*, Amsterdam 1967; *idem*, 'The princes in the Tower and their doctor', *English Historical Review*, vol. 77 (1962), pp. 304-6; *idem*, 'Provost Argentine of King's and his books', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, vol. 2 (1954-8), pp. 205-12; D.R. Leader, 'John Argentine and learning in medieval Cambridge', *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, vol. 33 (1984), pp. 71-85; C. Rawcliffe, 'Careerists, consultants and conspirators: royal doctors in the time of Richard III', *The Ricardian*, vol. 8 (1988-90), pp. 250-58, at pp. 253-4, 256, 258.

³ Talbot and Hammond, *Medical Practitioners*, pp. 38-39; M.C. Jones, 'Vernacular Literacy in late-medieval England: the Example of East Anglian Medical manuscripts', Glasgow University PhD thesis, 2000, pp. 364-65.

⁴ Talbot and Hammond, *Medical Practitioners*, pp. 398-99; R. Horrox, 'Hatteclyffe, William', in *Oxford DNB*, *sub nomine*; J. Otway-Ruthven, *The King's Secretary and the Signet Office in the Fifteenth Century*, Cambridge 1939, pp. 64-68, 73, 77-80, 85, 103-04, 124, 135, 155; F. Getz, 'Medical practitioners in medieval England', *Social History of Medicine*, vol. 3 (1990), pp. 245-83, at p. 281; C. Rawcliffe, *Medicine and Society in Later Medieval England*, Stroud 1995, pp. 94, 112, 118; *eadem*, 'Careerists, consultants and conspirators', pp. 250, 252.

⁵ Talbot and Hammond, *Medical Practitioners*, p. 36; C. Rawcliffe, 'The profits of practice: the wealth and status of medical men in later medieval England', *Social History of Medicine*, vol. 1 (1988), pp. 61-78, at p. 74; *eadem*, *Medicine and Society*, p. 111.

⁶ Talbot and Hammond, *Medical Practitioners*, pp. 96-98; A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to A.D. 1500*, Cambridge 1963, p. 243; Getz, 'Medical practitioners', p. 262; Rawcliffe, *Medicine and Society*, pp. 109-11; *eadem*, 'Careerists, consultants and conspirators', pp. 252-3; E.C. Roger, 'St George's College, Windsor Castle, in the Late-Fifteenth and Early-Sixteenth Centuries', Univ. of London PhD thesis, 2016, pp. 196-9, 288.

go-between for Lady Margaret Beaufort and the dowager queen during Richard III's reign;⁷ and William Hobbes unusually combined the practices of the physician and surgeon, and in these capacities successively served Richard, Duke of York, Edward IV and Richard III.⁸

Yet, particularly in the case of those who had not studied at English universities, little is known of their careers before they entered royal service. One of these was Dominic de Serego, who was in Edward IV's employ by the end of 1466.⁹ He originated from Venice,¹⁰ and in the absence of a reference to him at an English seat of learning presumably studied at an Italian university, thus qualifying for the style of 'Magister' accorded to him. He was evidently among Elizabeth Woodville's early medical attendants, and certainly attached to the royal household by the time of her first pregnancy after her marriage to the king. At the time, so Robert Fabyan later recorded,

y^e kynge was assuryd of his phisycions that the quene was conceued w^t a prynce; & specially of one named maister Domynyk, by whose counsayll great proucyon was ordeyned for cristenynge of the sayde prynce. Wherefore it was after tolde, that this maister Domynyk, to y^e entent to haue great thanke & rewarde of y^e Kynge, he stode in the seconde chamber where y^e quene trauayled, that he myght be the firste that shulde brynge tydynges to the kynge of the byrth of the prynce: and lastly when he harde y^e childe crye, he knockyd or called secretly at y^e chamber dore, and frayed what the quene had. To whom it was answeryd by one of the ladyes, what so euer the quenes grace hath here wythin, suer it is that a fole standithe there withoute. And so confused with thys answer, he departed wythoute seyng of the kynge for that tyme.¹¹

Even then, he was, nevertheless, in receipt of an annuity of £40 from the queen for his 'good, laudable and acceptable service', both before that time and in future, and he may indeed have been Elizabeth Woodville's principal

⁷ Talbot and Hammond, *Medical Practitioners*, pp. 203-04; P. Kibre, 'Lewis of Caerleon, doctor of medicine, astronomer and mathematician (1494?)', *Isis*, vol. 43 (1952), pp. 100-08; Emden, *Cambridge*, p. 116; K. Snedgar, 'Caerleon, Lewis', in *Oxford DNB*, *sub nomine*, Roger, 'St George's College', pp. 213-15, 295-96; Rawcliffe, *Medicine and Society*, pp. 92, 118-20; *eadem*, 'Careerists, consultants and conspirators', pp. 254-56.

⁸ Talbot and Hammond, *Medical Practitioners*, pp. 401-02; C. Rawcliffe, 'Hobbes, William', *Oxford DNB*, *sub nomine*; *eadem*, 'Careerists, consultants and conspirators', pp. 252-53; Getz, 'Medical practitioners', p. 282.

⁹ Foreign names have baffled the English through the centuries. Variants of Serego's name found in 15th-century English records include Desereius, Deserus, Sercgo, Sereyo, Sergeo, Sereyo, Sirego, and Zereio.

¹⁰ CPR 1461-7, p. 11; C1/29/507.

¹¹ Robert Fabyan, *New Chronicles of England and France* ed. H. Ellis, London 1811, p. 655.

physician.¹² He continued in royal service into the 1470s, and by 1475 was explicitly styled physician to the king's daughters, as well as to the royal couple.¹³

In contrast to this relative wealth of detail, rather less is known to date of de Serego's activities and connexions prior to his entry into the royal household. For these, the *corpus cum causa* files of the royal Chancery, a source that Stuart Jenks commended to the attention of medical historians some years ago, provides interesting new evidence.¹⁴ On 30 May 1461 a writ of *corpus cum causa* was sent to the sheriffs of London, ordering them to produce de Serego, then in their custody, into Chancery, along with a statement of the offences for which he had been imprisoned. In reality, this meant that de Serego was to be released on finding sufficient sureties for his court appearance. In their return, the sheriffs went on to rehearse an entire litany of charges on which the physician had been arrested, mostly brought by individuals of little substance. Pleas of trespass had been entered by the porter Richard Wellys and his wife Alice, one Peter Godard, apparently the only gentleman among the physician's opponents,¹⁵ and a 'singlewoman', Elizabeth Sylet, who in addition had brought charges of threatening behaviour. De Serego's principal adversary was the carpenter William Waryn, who charged him not only with trespass, debt and threatening behaviour, but had also made allegations of treason against the new king, affray and breach of the peace.¹⁶

Rather more interesting is the single man who appeared to stand surety for de Serego's court appearance, where a panel of three or four sureties would have been more usual. This mainpernor was John Dynham, the Devon esquire who had been instrumental in Edward of March's escape to Calais after the disaster at Ludford Bridge in 1459, and whose exploits as commander of a flotilla of the earl of Warwick's ships had done much to bring about the successful Yorkist invasion in 1460.¹⁷ By the summer of 1461, Dynham was a member of Edward IV's council, as well as a trusted associate periodically relied upon to provide advances of ready cash from his own pocket to the young monarch. Beyond question, he was an exceptionally influential supporter for de Serego. It is not clear how long the physician had languished in prison, but his

¹² A.R. Myers, 'The household of Queen Elizabeth Woodville, 1466-7', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, vol. 50 (1967-68), pp. 207-35, 443-81, repr. in *idem*, *Crown, Household and Parliament in Fifteenth Century England*, ed. C.H. Clough, London and Ronceverte 1985, pp. 251-318, at p. 302.

¹³ CPR 1467-77, p. 555.

¹⁴ S. Jenks, 'Medizinische Fachkräfte in England zur Zeit Heinrichs VI. (1428/29-1460/61)', *Sudhoffs Archiv*, vol. 69 (1985), pp. 214-27.

¹⁵ CP 40/814, rot. 346d.

¹⁶ C244/91/51.

¹⁷ For Dynham, see R.P. Chope, 'The last of the Dynhams', *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, vol. 50 (1918), pp. 431-92; H. Kleineke, 'Lady Joan Dinham – a fifteenth-century west-country matriarch', in T. Thornton, ed., *Social Attitudes and Political Structures in the Fifteenth Century*, Stroud 2000, pp. 69-87, at pp. 75-77; *idem*, 'The Dinham Family in the Middle Ages', University of London PhD thesis, (1998), pp. 242-47.

release was brought about with considerable speed: the sheriffs made their return and the Chancery recorded Dynham's mainprise on the same day on which the writ had been issued. Moreover, on 14 June, just a fortnight after his release from the custody of the London sheriffs, the Italian was granted a general pardon.¹⁸

This was not, it seems, the end of de Serego's troubles. Two years later, in the summer of 1462, he was in dispute with a London 'singlewoman', Margery Drewe *alias* Grene, whom he sued for debt and sureties of the peace.¹⁹ At another, uncertain, point between 1460 and 1465 he quarrelled with the Northampton apothecary and mercer Henry Baldeswell. He claimed that on a visit to Northampton he had stayed in Baldeswell's house, and had entrusted him with various jewels and other goods for safe keeping, which the apothecary had subsequently failed to return.²⁰ Finally, and even after de Serego was already in royal service, he sought release from a London prison for a further time.²¹

The details of the earlier career of Dominic de Serego that have come to light are too fragmentary and disconnected to allow for certain conclusions. As much as they offer, it is a little food for two separate hypotheses. The first of these concerns the Venetian's practice. Master Dominic's particular responsibility within the royal household for the persons of the queen and her daughters have long been known to scholars. Equally familiar is his membership in 1468 of a panel of royal physicians instructed to examine a woman from Brentwood suspected of suffering from leprosy.²² If the 'single women' among his erstwhile opponents had also come into contact with him in a professional capacity (and the records provide no certain evidence whether they did or did not), it may be that de Serego specialised in the treatment of women from an early point in his career.²³

¹⁸ CPR 1461-67, p. 11.

¹⁹ C244/96/5; S. Jenks, 'Picking up the pieces: cases presented to the London sheriffs' courts between Michaelmas 1461 and Michaelmas 1462', *Journal of Legal History*, vol. 29 (2008), pp. 99-145, at p. 130.

²⁰ C1/29/507; CP40/796, rot. 241; C.A. Markham and J.C. Cox, eds, *Records of the Borough of Northampton*, 2 vols., Northampton 1898, vol. 2, p. 558. Baldeswell was a man of some consequence in his town, who served as bailiff in 1440 and coroner by 1451: C131/230/27; CPR 1446-52, p. 465.

²¹ C1/11/391. This final incident cannot be accurately dated, but the petition for a writ of *corpus cum causa* is addressed to the bishop of Bath and Wells as chancellor. On the basis of the hand, the document would seem to belong to the chancellorship of Robert Stillington (1467-70, 1471-3), rather than that of John Stafford (1432-43).

²² M.T. Walton and P.J. Walton, *Medical Practitioners and Law in Fifteenth Century London*, 2007, pp. 111-12.

²³ There is an extensive literature on the theories about the female body prevalent in the later middle ages, and the treatment of women. A starting point is Rawcliffe, *Medicine and Society*, esp. chs. 8 and 9, and the work of Monica Green, whose annotated bibliography of published writings on women and medicine provides a useful gateway: M.H. Green, 'Bibliography: women and medicine', *Medieval Feminist Forum*, vol. 30 (2000), pp. 44-49, now available in updated form (to

Perhaps even more tentative is the second hypothesis which concerns the route by which Dominic de Serego entered royal service. As the Italian's dispute with Henry Baldeswell demonstrates, he possessed connexions in Northamptonshire, and Baldeswell's trade as an apothecary suggests that they were of a professional nature. And it was of course in Northamptonshire, at Grafton Regis on the direct route from London to Northampton, that the later Queen Elizabeth's family, the Woodvilles, had their home. Her father, Richard Woodville, Lord Rivers, and her brother Anthony Woodville, Lord Scales, were taken prisoner by the exiled Yorkist lords in a surprise raid on Sandwich in January 1460. The leader of this raid was none other than John Dynham. Both Rivers and his son were at liberty once more in the summer of 1460 and that autumn attended the Parliament summoned in the aftermath of the battle of Northampton: it is just possible that Dynham had first encountered de Serego in the Woodvilles' entourage either then or a year later. In the early weeks of 1461, the later queen's relatives renewed their Lancastrian allegiance, and fought against Edward IV at Towton. Perhaps the Venetian physician openly maintained similar loyalties, and thus became guilty of the treasonable behaviour of which he was accused by William Waryn.

Dynham himself may have had need of a physician as well as a surgeon in mid 1460, for in the course of a second raid on Sandwich in June he had been wounded in the leg. By the following spring he had recovered sufficiently to take his place among the Yorkist leaders at Towton. By the end of May, when the king was still progressing slowly through the Midlands, he had returned to London, and was on hand to extract de Serego from his predicament, in the first instance by securing his release from prison. Just as soon as the king also returned to his capital, he was persuaded – presumably also by Dynham – to grant the physician a pardon.²⁴

Until further details of de Serego's early practice and connexions come to light, it is impossible to draw more than tentative inferences as to his early practice and his possible connexions with the family of the later queen. What is, on the other hand, certain, is that even by the late spring of 1461 he had established contacts at the heart of Edward IV's fledgling court which placed him well for his subsequent career as a court physician in the service of the young monarch and his family.

early 2010) on-line as M.H. Green, 'Bibliography on medieval women, gender, and medicine (1985-2009)', *Digital Library of Sciència.cat*, February 2010, Universitat de Barcelona (see online). I am grateful to Miss Zosia Edwards for drawing this bibliography to my attention.

²⁴ For the king's movements from mid May to mid June, see C81/782-783, *passim*.

Appendix

In the following, common abbreviations have been expanded silently, capitalization standardized, and a degree of punctuation introduced. Editorial interventions are indicated by square brackets [].

TNA, Early Chancery Proceedings C1/29/507

To the right worchep[*f*]ull and reuerent ffader in God
My lorde busshop of Excetre, chaunceller of England²⁵

Besecheth right humbely your pouere servaunt Domynyco de Sercgo of þe parties of Venyce born, that wher he duellyng and abydyng in þis reaume of England vnder þe Kynges proteccion and saufconduyt boþe of body and goodes late rood to the tovn of Northampton, havng w^t hym certeyn jowelx and oþer his propre goodes to þe value of cc marcs and more and toke his loggyng þere \in/ the hows of Herry Baldeswelle, mercer of þe same toun, by agryment of þe same Herry; the which Herry receyved all þe forseied jowelx and goodes, tristyng to your seid suppliant þat þe same Herry wold make delyueraunce to hym þerof what tyme he wher desired or required. And whow be it your seid suppliant hath ofte required þe seid Herry for to make delyueraunce of þe seid jowelx and goodes, as right wol, yet þe same Herry in no wyse wol delyuere þem, but kepeth þem from your seid suppliant, stille ageyns al trouth and conscience and contrary to þe Kynges seid saufconduyt to his importable hurt w^toute your gracious remedye in þis behalve. It may þerfor please your noble lordeship to graunte to your seid suppliant a writ sub pena of cc li. vnder þe Kynges grete seale directyd to þe seid Herry commaundyng hym to appere afore your good lordeship in þe Kynges court of chancerye to þentent to make delyueraunce of þe seid jowelx and goodes, or elles shewe þe cause why as lawe and good conscience requireth and he shal pray euer for þe conseru[a]sion of your good lordeship.

Plegij: Hugo Fenne de London, Gentilman,²⁶ and
Thomas Snell de London, Gentilman.²⁷

²⁵ George Neville, bishop of Exeter 1456-65, chancellor of England 1460-67.

²⁶ Hugh atte Fenne, auditor of the Exchequer and later under treasurer of England to Edmund, Lord Grey of Ruthyn and Sir Walter Blount: C.E. Moreton, 'Hugh atte Fenne', in L.S. Clark (ed.), *The History of Parliament: The Commons 1422-61*, forthcoming; J.H. Baker, *The Men of Court*, 2 vols., London 2012, vol. 1, pp. 662-63. I am grateful to the Trustees of the History of Parliament Trust for permission to draw upon Dr. Moreton's unpublished work.

²⁷ Presumably Thomas Snell, servant of Richard Bedford, one of the auditors of the Exchequer; probably a Lincoln's Inn-trained lawyer: Baker, *Men of Court*, vol. 2, p. 1424.