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Philip of Spain, English King? The Iconography of an English Royal Charter

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In 1553, Mary Tudor came to the throne of England after years of personal, political and religious turmoil. Her father, King Henry VIII, had broken from the Roman Catholic Church in order to divorce her mother, the Spanish Catherine of Aragon, and marry Anne Boleyn. He had himself proclaimed the Head of the newly created Church of England. When Mary became queen, her personal mission was to restore England to the 'true faith': Catholicism. As she was England's first regnant queen, she had to contend with preconceived notions that a woman was not fit to rule. In 1554, she married Philip II of Spain, which only served to increase agitation about female authority. Philip was a member of the great Hapsburg dynasty which ruled over much of Europe. Would Mary's Hapsburg husband be willing to take on the role of king consort, or would England be absorbed into the Spanish empire? These were problematic questions that the union brought on. After the marriage, Philip's image became synonymous with Mary's throughout England. The couple was presented together on numerous documents and paintings as co-monarchs. This paper examines a Marian Royal Letters Patent and utilizes it as a case study for analyzing the larger historical issues of the reign through an examination of the iconography which decorates the charter and the attached Great Seal. The charter in question grants to William Babington lordship over the Manor of Broadway in Worcestershire (Figure 1). The charter is dated July 27, 1558, and Mary and Philip are both depicted

within the historiated initial.[1] This paper argues that Philip's prominence on a legal document helped to ignite insecurities surrounding female rule and further decreased Mary's popularity. This particular charter itself was not necessarily significant; however, the images found on it reflect the greater political picture in England and highlight the importance of royal public image.

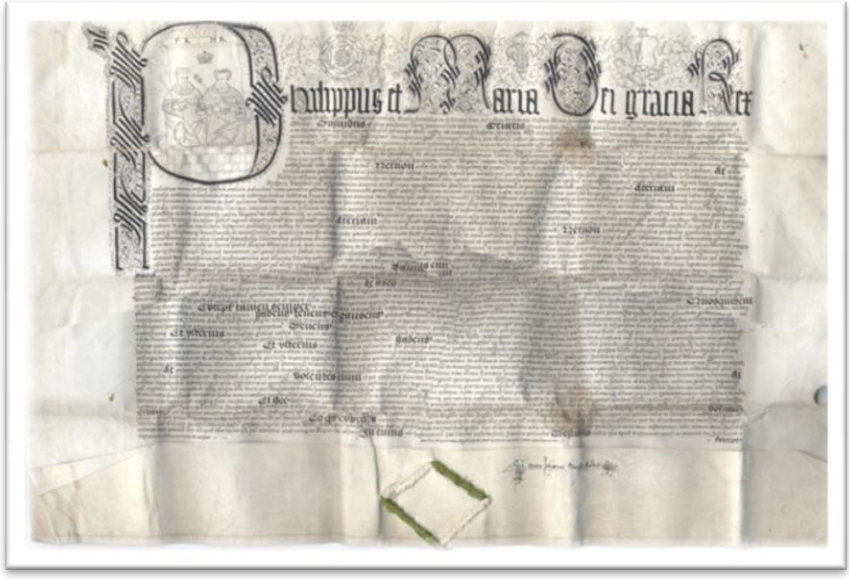

Figure 1. Royal Letters Patent: King Philip II of Spain and Mary Tudor granting lordship, 1558 (Doc.Brown.7).

Compared to earlier charters, William Babington's document can be considered quite plain. Babington was an

[1] University of Victoria Special Collections, Bruce and Dorothy Brown collection, Doc.Brown.7, Shelf 5A/11, "Royal Letters Patent: King Philip II of Spain and Mary Tudor granting lordship, 1558."

Thank you to the University of Victoria Special Collections for allowing me to examine and research the Babington Charter.

esquire of the body, which was a ranking among the lower gentry, meaning that he would have been relatively less wealthy and his charter would have been of lesser importance. Obtaining a royal grant, however, was a tiresome and expensive process so he would have held some influence in his community, no matter the quality of his document. Indeed, royal charters were "the most solemn form of Chancery instrument under the Great Seal," as they granted privileges to select individuals or boroughs directly from the monarch.[2] Charters and Letters Patent were public documents and were often put on display "as valuable evidence of royal favour and enhanced status."[3] Furthermore, they enforced land rights; thus, publicly displaying them also emphasized one's wealth and power. Because of their public usage, the images depicted on charters would have been significant, as many eyes viewed them. The practice of decorating English charters began as early as the mid-thirteenth century. They were either decorated plainly with pen and ink, like Babington's, or the more important ones were finely illuminated and coloured.[4] The most popular image that decorated a charter was that of the king seated alone in majesty, holding his sceptre and royal orb. Charters and Royal Letters Patent were seen as a "vivid link between the crown and the community."[5] These charters provided a person or a borough with a legal status, granted to them by the king himself. This

[2] Shelagh Bond and Norman Evans, "The Process of Granting Charters to English Boroughs, 1547-1649," *The English Historical Review* 91, no. 358 (Jan. 1976): 102.
[3] Elizabeth Danbury, "The Decoration and Illumination of Royal Charters in England, 1250-1509: An Introduction," *England and her Neighbours 1066-1453: Essays in Honour of Pierre Chaplais*, eds., Michael Jones and Malcolm Vale (London: The Hambleton Press, 1989), 157.
[4] Danbury, "The Decoration and Illumination of Royal Charters," 159.
[5] Danbury, "The Decoration and Illumination of Royal Charters," 179.

would perhaps be the only direct contact an individual would ever have with his monarch. By leaving them on public display, "many people who would never have had the chance to see the king in person may well have formed their idea of majesty from the only representation widely circulated; namely the great seal which authenticated royal orders and grants."[6] Babington's charter would have helped to reinforce Mary's image as a dual monarch with Philip. After 1399, most charter artists began to emphasize the king's personal connection with the grants being given, not only through the portrait initial, but also through the incorporation of royal mottoes, badges and arms.[7] Mary's badges and mottoes are included on the Babington charter, as well as Philip's titles. Philip's inclusion would have served to instil the idea that he himself had played a part in granting the privileges that came along with the charter.

As Mary I was the first regnant queen of England, there was no English precedent for her to evoke in regard to her image as ruler.[8] Because of these uncertainties, anxiety about female rule was widespread. Her marriage to the foreign Spanish prince only helped to increase agitation. When women married, in general, their wealth and property transferred to their husbands and they became their subordinates. The "separation of wifely and queenly roles was very difficult for Englishmen to comprehend."[9] There was no question that Mary should marry

[6] Danbury, "The Decoration and Illumination of Royal Charters," 169.
[7] Danbury, "The Decoration and Illumination of Royal Charters," 173.
[8] During the twelfth century, there was the brief 'reign' of Empress Matilda. However, she was not an ideal role model for female rulers to follow, as she was often ill-remembered by early modern contemporaries due to her association with civil war.
[9] Judith M. Richards, "'To Promote a Woman to Beare Rule': Talking of Queens in Mid-Tudor England," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 28, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 121.

and produce offspring, but marriage to a foreign prince was a different question. There were worries that a foreign prince would alter English administrative laws and customs, allow foreign advisors to 'intrude,' and cause the loss of royal favour to previously established court favourites.[10] Some subjects openly opposed the Spanish marriage such as Thomas Wyatt the Younger, who led a rebellion against it in 1554. In response to this rebellion, parliament created a statute which granted Mary the full regal rights held by male monarchs and, in turn, restricted Philip's authority.[11] The statute was redundant as the marriage treaty already dealt with these issues; however, it "indicated a continuing uncertainty about the powers of queens regnant."[12] After the marriage, Philip's presentation could hardly be viewed as ceremonial. The regnal year was named for the reigns of both Philip *and* Mary, and Philip appeared on coins and documents alongside his wife.[13] These images were seen odiously by Mary's enemies. One exile remarked:

> the prince of Spain hath optainid to have the name of the king of England and also is permittid in our English coins to join our English armes with the armes of Spain and his fisnamy the quenes, the crowne of England being made over both ther heds in the midest, and yet upon nether of them both.[14]

[10] Judith M. Richards, "Mary Tudor as 'Sole Quene'?: Gendering Tudor Monarchy," *The Historical Journal* 40, no. 4 (Dec. 1997): 905-906.
[11] Retha Warnicke, "Queenship: Politics and Gender in Tudor England," *History Compass* 4, no. 2 (March 2006): 215.
[12] Warnicke, "Queenship: Politics and Gender in Tudor England," 215.
[13] Richards, "Mary Tudor as 'Sole Quene'?," 915.
[14] *A supplicacyon to the quenes maiestie* quoted in Richards, "Mary Tudor as 'Sole Quene'?," 915.

Although there was a conscious effort at their wedding ceremony and entry into the city to reinforce Mary's "precedence," authoritative images of Philip gradually increased throughout the short years of her reign.[15]

The royal titles also changed after Philip and Mary's marriage. After 1555 with Philip's acquisition of some of the titles of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, royal charters, such as Babington's, proclaimed:

> *Philippus et Maria, Dei gratia Rex et Regina Angliæ, Hispaniarum, Franciæ, Utriusque Siciliæ, Jerusalem, et Hiberniæ, Fidei Defensores, ArchiducesAustriæ, Duces Burgundiæ, Mediolani, et Brabantiæ, Comites Haspurgi, Flandriæ, et Tirolis.*
>
> (Philip and Mary, by the grace of God, King and Queen of England, Spain, France, both Sicilies, Jerusalem, and Ireland, Defenders of the Faith, Archdukes of Austria, Dukes of Burgundy, Milan and Brabant, Counts of Hapsburg, Flanders and Tyrol.)[16]

The fact that Philip's name is presented before Mary's is noteworthy. Mary's councillors had resisted this placement; however, it was reported that the Spanish disagreed stating "that no law, human or divine, nor his Highness's prestige and good name, would allow him to be named second, especially as the treaties and Acts of Parliament gave him the title of King of

[15] Alexander Samson, "Changing Places: The Marriage and Royal Entry of Philip, Prince of Austria, and Mary Tudor, July-August 1554,"*The Sixteenth Century Journal* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 783.

[16] Sir Harris Nicolas, *The Chronology of history: Containing tables, calculations and statements indispensable for ascertaining the dates of historical events*, (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman, 1833): 378.

England."[17] Of particular note is the placement of the titles on William Babington's charter. The words "*Philippus et Maria, Dei gratia Rex*," are decorated profusely and act as a title to the page. The inclusion of "*et regina*" is placed on the first line of text, and not emphasized at all. A quick glance upon the page, and one would simply read "Philip and Mary, by the grace of God, *King*." The stress on Philip's title as King is hard to ignore. Furthermore, the titles reinforce Philip's status as *King* of England. Indeed, Mary is credited with titles to Philip's lands; however, Mary's role as ruler is downgraded amidst all of Philip's claims. The position and the prominence of his titles do not suggest Philip's position as king consort.

[17] Richards, "Mary Tudor as 'Sole Quene'?," 913.

Figure 2. Detail of historiated initial (Doc.Brown.7).

An examination of the historiated initial within the Babington charter further enhances Philip's position (Figure 2). Within the 'P' initial are Queen Mary *and* King Philip, rather than the popular image of the lone monarch in majesty. Instead, they are both portrayed in majesty. They are seated side by side each holding their own royal orb. Mary holds a sceptre while Philip holds a sword, signifying his own importance. A single crown rests above both of their heads serving as a symbol of their joint rule. Additionally, the royal initials *PR* and *MR* are placed above them in the frame. There appears to have been a conscious effort to represent the monarchs equally. The two monarchs are depicted rather symmetrically within the image.

Their heights are equal, and the sceptre and sword are at equal angles. Instead of sharing an orb, they each hold their own. It must be noted, however, that "whatever the unpopularity of this match," the "representation of Philip and Mary as joint custodians of the realm was effectively the only choice available to [Mary]."[18] There was no precedent to fall upon for images of a king consort, and the strong Hapsburgs would not allow Philip's role to be downgraded. Mary needed their support in order to re-establish Catholicism in her realm.

The depiction of the joint rulers was not unique to this charter. Philip and Mary were represented together on many other documents. For instance, as early as 1554, they were both portrayed within the historiated initial of an illuminated Michaelmas Plea Roll (Figure 3).[19] As in the Babington charter, they both hold their own orbs, while one holds the sceptre and the other the sword. The floating crown and royal initials, however, are absent. Mary looks straight ahead while Philip glances towards her. In an Easter Plea Roll from 1556 (Figure 4), Mary and Philip are once again enthroned wearing a mixture of English and Spanish costuming. They both look at each other, and their sceptre and sword "gesture to the crown they now share."[20] Interestingly, both of these images place Mary on the left side with Philip on the right. It has been noted that images created after 1556 began to place Mary on the right side, which is "the normal focus of the observer's view," while Philip was

[18] Kevin Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy: Authority and Image in Sixteenth-Century England*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009): 282.
[19] Roy Strong, *The Tudor and Stuart Monarchy: Pageantry, Painting, Iconography- Vol.1*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1995): figure 51.
[20] Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, 275.

placed on the left.[21] Indeed, the couple is placed this way on the Babington charter. The change in placement suggests "deliberation" perhaps intending "to highlight Mary in the face of criticism of Habsburg influence."[22] Despite this change, however, in the later images, there was a "greater attention to likeness, to representing the two rulers not just as monarchs, but as Philip and Mary regnant whose initials PR and MR adorn the canopy over their heads."[23] The Babington charter can be seen as the culmination of the couple's iconography. The joint rulers both stare ahead at a central point, with the crown and initials above them. There is no question about Philip's role. The image of the dual monarchy had been perfected.

[21] Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy* 275.
[22] Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, 276.
[23] Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, 276.

Figure 3. Plea Roll initial, Michaelmas 1554 (Strong, *The Tudor and Stuart Monarchy*).

Figure 4. Plea Roll initial, Easter 1556 (Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, 277).

Attached to the Babington Charter, the Great Seal remains perfectly intact aside from the normal scratches and dents acquired throughout the centuries on the wax (Figures 5 and 6). The Great Seal was a practical tool as well as a symbolic one, as it symbolized the monarch's personal approval of the document it was attached to. In general, monarchs would choose the design of their own seal and use the same one throughout their reign.[24] Mary's original seal depicted her enthroned with a sceptre, and on the reverse, she was on horseback. It was not

[24] Queen Elizabeth II has had two Great Seal designs due to the longevity of her reign, the second depicting her in older age.

used for very long, however. Shortly after her marriage in 1554, she commissioned a new Great Seal including Philip on it, which created a "complex re-presentation of her role."[25] On the seal, both Mary and Philip are enthroned with each placing a hand on the central orb. Mary holds a sceptre, which is "symbolic of sovereign authority," while Philip carries a sword signifying "his titular authority as king."[26] The initials P and M are intertwined on the plinth carrying the orb, and the border inscription lists the joint titles of the rulers.[27] The "possibility that England might eventually be incorporated among Hapsburg domains should the royal couple bear issue is suggested by the heraldic shield, on which the Spanish royal arms impale those of Mary."[28] On the reverse side of the seal are Philip and Mary each on horseback. Interestingly, Philip is placed in front of Mary and he dominates the image; along the borders, Philip's titles are also inscribed.[29] The emphasis is on Philip's role. This inclusion of the Spanish titles and arms on the English Great Seal created a bold statement: Mary's loyalty was with the Spanish. The artist of the Babington charter would have no doubt been influenced by the Great Seal's iconography, and the historiated initial reflects these ideas. As the Great Seal held such symbolic power, Philip's prominent placement on it showcased his joint authority over the English realm.

[25] Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, 276.
[26] John N. King, *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989): 212.
[27] Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, 276-277.
[28] King, *Tudor Royal Iconography*, 212.
[29] Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, 277.

Figure 5. Drawing of the Great Seal (Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, 279).

Figure 6. Great Seal (Doc.Brown.7).

Decorating the Babington Charter are Mary's badges and mottoes. Atop the titular proclamation are a Tudor Rose, a fleur-de-lis and a pomegranate. The Tudor Rose is not a surprising inclusion as Mary always thought of herself as a proud Tudor daughter of King Henry VIII. The other two objects, however, pose interesting questions. When Mary came to the throne, she resurrected her mother's badge, the pomegranate, as her

"personal device."[30] Although Catherine of Aragon was popular during her lifetime, Mary's use of the badge was a further reminder of her Spanish, Catholic background. People began to question Mary's loyalty to England. The Venetian ambassador remarked that Mary, "being born of a Spanish mother, was always inclined towards that nation, scorning to be English and boasting of her descent from Spain."[31] The pomegranate served to remind the English people of the Spanish influences that were prominent throughout the Marian court. The inclusion of the fleur-de-lis is not necessarily surprising as well. Ever since the Middle Ages when England owned much of France, the French symbol was common among English royal iconography. At the beginning of Mary's reign, Calais remained the only English possession in France; however, in January 1558, the French forces took Calais. This was a great ideological loss and served to diminish Mary's prestige. As early as 1557, there were rumours that Mary had urged her councillors to join the Spanish war against France "not least because of 'the obedience which she owed her husband and the power he had over her as much by divine as by human law.'"[32] An opponent of Mary, Robert Parnell, wrote in *An Admonition to the Town of Calais*, which warned the English that "the Spaniard who ruled England sought Calais to bridle France," and that "the idolatry that had overrun the English church threatened Calais too."[33] The loss of Calais propelled anti-Marian sentiments. The Babington charter was created only seven months after the loss of the French city. Perhaps the prominent position of the fleur-de-lis upon the

[30] King, *Tudor Royal Iconography*, 185.
[31] Giacomo Soranzo quoted in Samson, "Changing Places: The Marriage and Royal Entry of Philip," 781.
[32] Richards, "Mary Tudor as 'Sole Quene'?," 915.
[33] Robert Parnell, quoted in *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, 307-308.

charter served to remind those who viewed it of Mary's great loss and Philip's influence over English politics.

Mary Tudor created an image of herself as a "godly queen of a true church, who, in union with her husband and with Spain, would bring peace and harmony to her people."[34] History has pronounced that this image of herself as a joint monarch was an utter failure; however, "history has not remembered the person as she was represented," but rather as the person overshadowed by her colourful reputation.[35] Mary's intentions were not sinister. She was proud of her marital status and loved Philip greatly. For her, the Spanish relationship could only serve to re-establish the true faith in England, and Philip's image increased Catholic authority. After the marriage, Philip's image was included on numerous legal documents alongside the Queen's, including the Royal Letters Patent granting lordship to William Babington. By using this charter as a case study, one can understand the greater political picture in England. Philip's inclusion on a public and legal document reinforced anxieties about female rulership. The concept of a king consort did not work in England's highly gendered society. The emphasis on Philip within the charter created the illusion that Philip was directly involved in government and law-making, which served to undermine Mary's popularity, as people viewed her as a Spanish puppet. Mary's younger half-sister, Elizabeth, learned from Mary's foreign marriage. As Englishmen had trouble distinguishing between wifely and queenly duties, the only other alternative was that of an unmarried female monarch.[36] Elizabeth ensured that her iconography depicted her as the sole monarch in majesty. Although Babington's charter itself was not

[34] Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, 282.
[35] Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, 283.
[36] Richards, "'To Promote a Woman to Beare Rule,'" 121.

necessarily significant in the long run, the iconography portrayed within it had significant consequences for the political workings at large in England.

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