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The royal entries of Henry VI in a London civic manuscript

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Abstract

London Metropolitan Archives, MS Letter Book K, contains descriptions of Henry VI’s royal entries into both Paris (1431) and London (1432). Their placement one after the other in a London Letter Book was likely the work of the city’s common clerk, John Carpenter, who was the author of the description of the London entry. The royal entry descriptions’ textual contents and manuscript context demonstrate a conscious effort to compare the two events and the king’s two capitals, and to promote the city of London over Paris.

Keywords: royal entries; John Carpenter; Henry VI; London Letter Books; John Lydgate; John Wells; London; Paris

Henry VI was crowned king of England in November 1429, a month before his eighth birthday. Just over two years later, in December 1431, he made a royal entry into Paris for a coronation ceremony at Notre Dame cathedral. Having been crowned king
of France – an achievement unprecedented and never repeated for an English ruler –
he promptly returned to London, where in February 1432 he made a royal entry into
his English capital. Part procession, part spectacle, these civic-organised entries began
with the greeting of the king by the city’s officials outside the gates. He was then led
through the city, stopping to view pageants along the procession route. Henry VI’s
English and French coronations, and the royal entries accompanying them, were part
of the same public relations exercise: the promotion of his claim to the dual monarchy
of England and France. Although Henry had theoretically inherited both realms in
1422, when he was still an infant, his claim to France was rivalled by that of his
uncle, Charles VII. Charles’ recapture of Reims, the traditional site of French
coronations, and his coronation there in July 1429, threatened English claims to the
dual monarchy. The decision to crown Henry VI while he was still a child, rather than
waiting until he was older to hold the ceremonies, was intended to help counter the
increased legitimacy conferred on Charles VII by virtue of his coronation.¹

¹ On Henry VI’s coronations, see Anne Curry, ‘The “Coronation Expedition” and Henry VI’s
Court in France, 1430 to 1432’, in The Lancastrian Court: Proceedings of the 2001
Harlaxton Symposium, ed. Jenny Stratford (Donington,: Shaun Tyas, 2003), 29–52; Bertram
Wolffe, Henry VI (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), 48–64 (‘Coronations’); Lawrence M.
Bryant, ‘Configurations of the Community in Late Medieval Spectacles: Paris and London
during the Dual Monarchy’, in City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe, eds. Barbara
Hanawalt and Kathryn Reyerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 3–33;
on the royal entries of Henry VI, see Lawrence M. Bryant, The King and the City in the
Parisian Royal Entry Ceremony: Politics, Ritual, and Art in the Renaissance (Geneva: Droz,
1986), 27, 32, 84–8, 105, 126, 158–9, 178–80; Gordon Kipling, Enter the King: Theatre,
143–56; Guy Llewelyn Thompson, Paris and Its People under English Rule: the Anglo-
monarchy and Henry VI’s minority, see J.W. McKenna, ‘Henry VI of England and the Dual
Monarchy: Aspects of Royal Political Propaganda, 1422–1432’, Journal of the Warburg and
of England and of France’, in The Royal Minorities of Medieval and Early Modern England,
The surviving descriptions of these two royal entries include accounts of both the Paris and London events preserved in the same London civic manuscript, London Metropolitan Archives, Archives of the Corporation of London, MS Letter Book K (Letter Book K). The Letter Book’s anonymous Middle French account of the 1431 Paris entry (ff. 101v–103r) is the most detailed surviving account of the Paris event, which is also described in chronicles and administrative records. A Latin description of the 1432 London entry appears on the following folios of the manuscript (ff. 103v–104v). The author of this description was John Carpenter, common clerk of London from 1417 to 1438. The Letter Book K unit of royal entry descriptions demonstrates the extent to which contemporaries saw Henry VI’s two royal entries as linked events. Other descriptions of the London entry include John Lydgate’s Middle English poem, based on Carpenter’s description and surviving in seven manuscripts, as well as 12 prose chronicle descriptions that, in turn, may or may not be based on Lydgate’s version. Yet another description of the London entry survives in Lambeth Palace

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Library, MS 12 (ff. 255r–v), an account whose wording is almost identical to that of Carpenter’s version where their content overlaps.

A number of recent studies have explored the relationship between John Lydgate’s poetic description of the London event, the way it was used in the London chronicles, and its evidence for the poet’s involvement in civic-sponsored projects, while the Lambeth description has been studied for its emphasis on a messianic view of kingship. But while the Letter Book K descriptions have been used separately as sources for the events they describe, their appearance in the same manuscript has largely been ignored. This is in part due to the tendency of royal entry scholars to study English and French events separately from each other, despite the connections between Henry VI’s London and Paris entries and despite the fact that the Letter Book K descriptions were edited in the same volume as early as 1847. Scholars of the London event have also tended to focus their analysis on Lydgate’s poem, rather than the Letter Book K account.

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7 Jules Delpit printed both Letter Book K descriptions in 1847: ‘Relation de l’entrée solennelle de Henri VI à Paris’, in Collection générale des documents français qui se trouvent en Angleterre, 239–44; ‘Relation de l’entrée de Henri VI à Londres’, in Collection générale des documents français qui se trouvent en Angleterre, 244–8; in their collection of material on French royal entries, Guenée and Lehoux include the Paris Letter Book K description without mentioning the appearance of a London royal entry description in the same
The preservation of descriptions of London and Paris royal entries back-to-back in Letter Book K is important for our understanding of the contemporary function of these events and of their textual descriptions. For the royal council, Henry VI’s coronations and royal entries were an opportunity to promote the king’s claim to the throne of France in both of his kingdoms. To the organisers of the civic ceremonies the royal entries were an opportunity for dialogue with the king and his counsellors. The cities could use the occasion to communicate their expectations for French or English kingship and for the relationships between king and capital. In London, citizens were concerned that the large-scale, coronation expedition to France signalled a renewal of expensive and increasingly unpopular war efforts there. In the French capital, Parisians were aware of the city’s crucial position in Lancastrian claims to the French throne. At the same time, the presence of English administration in Normandy and Charles VII’s rival institutions such as the Parlement of Poitiers threatened the city’s status. The uncertainty of the entire situation must have been highlighted by the unprecedented circumstances of Henry VI’s Paris entry: not only was he an English king, but French monarchs usually made a royal entry into Paris

manuscript: ‘Première entrée du roi Henri VI à Paris, Récit anonyme’; Gordon Kipling uses both Letter Book K descriptions as sources for Henry VI’s royal entries, but treats the events in separate chapters and does not explore the manuscript context of their descriptions. While he argues that the Letter Book K description is more authoritative than Lydgate’s, Kipling nonetheless analyses some elements of the entry described by Lydgate but not Carpenter: Enter the King, 86; 142–3, n. 59; Nolan, John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture, 184, n. 2; Lawrence M. Bryant also uses the Letter Book K descriptions without mentioning their appearance in a common manuscript. His discussion of the London entry is largely based on Lydgate’s poem: ‘Configurations of the Community’.

8 Bryant, ‘Configurations of the Community’, 25.


after being crowned at Reims, not before a coronation ceremony in the capital.11

Designing the royal entry pageants gave the civic authorities of Paris and London the opportunity to express their anxieties, expectations and concerns publicly to the king, to the members of his entourage and to the inhabitants of the city who lined the streets to watch the procession go by.12

Like the entry pageants themselves, the textual descriptions of these events were also an important element in the process of communication.13 This is especially the case given John Carpenter’s previous involvement in textual and visual attempts to promote the city of London, his authorship of the London entry description and his control over the London letter books as common clerk.14 Carpenter was likely behind

11 See for example the chronicle accounts of the Parisian entries of Philippe VI (1328), Jean II (1350), Charles V (1364), and Charles VI (1380) in Guenée and Lehoux, eds., Les entrées royales françaises de 1328 à 1515, 47–58.
12 Bryant, ‘Configurations of the Community’, 3.
the inclusion of the description of the royal entry into Paris in the manuscript, in addition to being the author of the London description. A closer look at the textual contents of the Letter Book K descriptions, at their placement within the manuscript, and at the role of the Letter Book as a book of civic record demonstrates the ability of London civic officials like Carpenter to use events such as these to promote their city. The Letter Book K descriptions privilege the urban contexts of the events, emphasising London’s claim to being the royal chamber and portraying Paris as having a much less secure relationship with the king. At the same time, these descriptions – especially when considered in context with other material in the Letter Book – also invite the reader to compare Henry VI’s English and French capitals, with London emerging as the superior city. Like John Lydgate’s poetic description of the London entry, the Letter Book K royal entry descriptions were pro-London accounts preserved in a London-centric manuscript. The work of these men reminded their readers that, while Henry VI may have been crowned in his ‘Reeme of France,’ it was to his ‘blessed Reeme of Englond’ and his ‘notable Citee off London’ that he returned.\(^{15}\)

The royal entries and their manuscript context

The placing of these two royal entry descriptions in Letter Book K encourages the reader to view them as a unit and to read them together. Written in the same hand, they appear on folios 101v–104v and are part of the original gathering (ff. 98–105),

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\(^{15}\) Lydgate, ‘King Henry VI’s Triumphant Entry into London, 21 Feb., 1432’, 632.
rather than having been inserted at a later date. The mostly chronological order of the Letter Book has been compromised to allow for the positioning of these two descriptions one after the other, despite the fact that the events in question took place months apart.

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The description of the entry into Paris, in Middle French, appears first, beginning on f. 101v and ending about halfway down f. 103r. The description is mostly in a single column, with two columns used for the list of the Worthies who appeared in one of the pageants and for setting the pageant verses apart from the rest.
of the text. A Middle French poem, the *Complainte de Paris* [*Complaint of Paris*], appears on the second half of folio 103r, in two columns. The poem is in a different hand from that of the royal entry descriptions, and may have been added to fill the second half of f. 103v at a later date. Any readers looking at this section of the manuscript after the poem’s addition would likely have considered it in context with the royal entry descriptions. John Carpenter’s description of the London entry, written in the form of a letter, begins at the top of folio 103v and continues to the bottom of folio 104v. Most of the letter is in Latin, but where Carpenter quotes speeches and songs he uses Middle English. As with the description of the entry into Paris, the text is primarily in one column except for the Londoners’ welcome song to the king (f. 104r; Figure 1), which groups four verses in the left-hand column and one line per verse in the right-hand column.

The positioning of these descriptions of the two royal entries one after the other, and in a book of civic records, must have been deliberate. These are the only royal entries described in a Letter Book of this period, despite the survival elsewhere of descriptions, for example, of the London royal entries of Richard II (1377 and 1392); Henry V (1415); and Margaret of Anjou (1445). The Letter Book is also

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17 The poem is printed in Delpit, ed. *Collection générale des documents français qui se trouvent en Angleterre*, 238–9.
unique for its inclusion of the description of the entry into Paris in a London civic manuscript. This version is the most complete account of Henry VI’s Paris royal entry – the only one that includes the speeches and detailed descriptions of the pageants – and is the earliest detailed description of any Paris royal entry. The textual contents of the two royal entry descriptions stress the importance of civic concerns, of the two cities’ relationships with the king, and of London’s pre-eminence in particular.

Carpenter’s description of the London entry focuses more on the city of London than does the other Latin description, in Lambeth Palace Library, MS 12, folios 255r–v (referred to hereafter as ‘Lambeth’). The Letter Book K description of the Paris entry, meanwhile, presents the French capital as in a much weaker position than the English one. Positioning these two entry descriptions in the same manuscript, with the *Complainte de Paris* between them, encourages the reader to compare the two events and the two cities.

The London royal entry began with the mayor and civic representatives greeting the king outside the city at Blackheath. At the Southwark end of London Bridge, there was a pageant featuring a protective giant, who promised to clothe the king’s enemies in confusion. The giant was accompanied by two antelopes – the animal featured on Henry VI’s personal device – which supported the arms of


20 Descriptions of the Paris entries of Philippe VI, Jean II, Charles V, and Charles VI do not include the content of any speeches or signs displayed during the pageants: Guenée and Lehoux, eds., *Les entrées royales françaises de 1328 à 1515*, 47–59.
England and France. The second pageant took place on London Bridge, and featured the empresses Nature, Grace and Fortune. They endowed the king with strength, knowledge and prosperity, while the maidens accompanying them bestowed upon Henry the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. A further seven maidens gave him seven more gifts, representing virtues such as mercy and justice. In the third pageant, at Cornhill, Lady Wisdom and representatives of the seven liberal arts reminded Henry that good kings must rule with wisdom. The following pageant featured a child dressed as the king, enthroned and surrounded by the virtues necessary for a just rule. At Cheapside, there was a fountain of wine as well as two figures representing Enoch and Eli, who expressed hope that God would protect the king. The next pageant, at St Paul’s, displayed both a Jesse Tree and a genealogical tree charting Henry’s claims to the dual monarchy. The final pageant, representing the Trinity, took place at the Conduit in St Paul’s.

The differences between John Carpenter’s version of this event and the Lambeth description highlight Carpenter’s efforts to promote London’s claims to a special relationship with the king. While Lambeth begins with the giant’s pageant on London Bridge, Carpenter’s version describes first the procession of the mayor, aldermen and sheriffs of London, along with 12,000 citizens and foreigners, to Blackheath to greet the king. Individuals were identifiable by the mark of their trade. When the king arrived, he was greeted with a speech welcoming him ‘to [his] noble roialme of Englond and in especial unto [his] notable cite London ober wise called

22 Letter Book K, ff. 103v–104v. See also Lydgate, ‘King Henry VI’s Triumphant Entry into London, 21 Feb., 1432’.
[his] chambre’ and praising God for Henry’s ‘good and gracioux achevyng of [his] coronne of Fraunce.’ Carpenter’s inclusion of the Londoners’ greeting draws the reader’s attention to the royal entry as a civic welcome: it begins outside the capital, and showcases the strength of London’s government and trades. The inclusion of the speech reminds the reader that the royal entry was, in effect, the city’s show, while its contents stress London’s privileged position as the king’s chamber – an important recurring metaphor in Carpenter’s description. The concept of London as the royal chamber had developed out of the relationship between the king’s bedchamber and the privy purse, and Londoners had previously used the metaphor in a royal entry for Richard II. Other cities recognized the value of this relationship: York and Coventry both made similar claims to being the royal chamber. Carpenter’s reference to London as the king’s chamber reminds the reader of the importance of this relationship and of London’s privileged position in a way that the Lambeth description, which omits this part of the entry, cannot.

A similar emphasis on London’s role as the king’s chamber occurs in Carpenter’s description of the welcome song during the London Bridge pageant. He includes the lyrics, grouped into verses and visually separated from the rest of the text on the folio (Figure 1):

23 Letter Book K, f. 103v.
25 Liddy, ‘Rhetoric of the Royal Chamber’, 335–44.
Soveraign lord, to your cite

With alle reverence welcome ye be

Thanked be god of his goodnesse

That you hath kept from hevynesse London your chambre for to see

And brought you ayen with gladnesse

Thanked be ye with alle lowenes

That nought wolde spare youre tendrenes To worship your lond in eche degre

But put you to travaile and besynes

Wherfor god that ys full of myght

Haþ holpe you atteyne your right The piler of worship that ye be

And crownd twyes with gemes bright.

London be glad with alle þi myght

For god haþ sent unto þi sight Wherfor nowe syng and say with me

Thi lord þi prince þi kyng by right

Soveraign lord to your cite

With alle reverence welcome ye be.26

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26 Letter Book K, f. 104r. For the layout, see Figure 1. In this transcription, all abbreviated forms have been extended in italics; capitalisation has been normalised.
Carpenter’s inclusion of the song’s lyrics draws the reader’s attention away from the allegorical pageant figures and from the king. Instead, we are reminded of the importance of Londoners in the entry itself – and, of course, of the city’s crucial position as the king’s ‘chambre.’ The visual layout of the text, which sets the song apart from the rest of the description, focuses the viewer’s attention on it. For any readers consulting the description as a precedent for what Londoners might be expected to provide in a royal entry, this assertion of the city’s status relative to that of the king would have been clear.27 By contrast, in Lambeth the song’s lyrics are reduced to two lines at the end of a paragraph, grouped together by a parenthesis in the right margin and omitting the reference to the royal chamber: ‘Souereyne lord to your cytee/Welcom welcom welcom yee bee.’28

Carpenter’s entry description contains a third reference to London as the royal chamber, also absent in Lambeth: he includes the speech given by the civic authorities as they presented the king with a gift of £1000. This speech again reminded Henry that London was ‘otherwise cleped [his] chambre’.29 It is important to note that all three of Carpenter’s references to London as the king’s chamber are found in the dialogue – or, perhaps more accurately, monologue – of his description, informing the reader that Londoners reminded the king himself of the English capital’s special status.

27 For the royal entry description as a precedent, see Lindenbaum, ‘Drama as Textual Practice’, 388–90.
28 London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS 12, f. 255r, col. b. For Lydgate’s version of the song, which refers to the king’s ‘home komyng’ from France but not to London as royal chamber, see Lydgate, ‘King Henry VI’s Triumphal Entry into London, 21 Feb., 1432’, ll. 204–22.
29 Letter Book K, f. 104v.
This emphasis on the special relationship between the king and London is even more striking when considered in the context of the Letter Book K unit of royal entry descriptions, in which the London description is preceded by both the description of the Paris event and the *Complainte de Paris*. The Parisian royal entry pageants as described in Letter Book K express some of the city’s anxieties about the young king’s abilities to better the Parisians’ situation, while simultaneously promoting the city’s own status to their royal visitor. The king was greeted outside the city by its civic and royal administrators: the *prévôt des marchands*, the *échevins*, and the bourgeois citizens; and the royally-appointed *prévôt de Paris* and the king’s representatives in the court of the Châtelet. On his approach to Paris, Henry was welcomed into his French capital by the goddess Fama, mounted on a horse draped with the city’s arms and accompanied by the Nine Worthies and their female counterparts. On his way between this pageant and the next, the king encountered further members of his French government: treasurers, notaries and secretaries as well as the members of the judicial Parlement, including its first president. The pageant at the St-Denis gate featured the ship of Paris, whose passengers held out three hearts to the king, asking him to receive them with good grace. At the St-Denis bridge, the king was greeted by a group of ‘*hommes et femmes sauvages*’ (wild men and women), as well as a group of mermaids in a fountain, while the pageant at the Hospital of the Trinity featured a Nativity scene. At the Painters’ Gate (the former St-Denis gate), the pageant and accompanying sign depicted the three stories of St Denis. The following pageant, at the fountain of the Holy Innocents, depicted the hunt of a

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The final pageant, at the Châtelet, showed an enthroned Henry VI, accompanied by both French and English nobles. While the London entry focused on the king’s presence in his royal chamber, the Paris event emphasised royal institutions that functioned even in the king’s absence.

The Letter Book K description of the Paris entry depicts a different relationship between king and city than that described in the London entry. In the pageant of the Nine Worthies, for example, a herald proclaimed that:

The renowned worthies of ancient times
Are figured here
With this lady, and represent to you
Paris, which of all its will, lord
Receives you humbly
Keep it lovingly
Because this celebrated city
Is worthy of being well-governed.

By associating the city, and not the king, with the Worthies tradition, this pageant presents a vision of Parisian prestige that is not dependent on its relationship with, or

31 The role of the stag is explored in a recent article by William Blanc. I would like to thank Colette Van Coolput-Storms for bringing this article to my attention. William Blanc, “‘Alors sailly un cerf’: une chasse royale en plein Paris, le 1 décembre 1431’, in L’homme et l’animal dans la France médiévale (XIe–XVe s.) Human and Animal in Medieval France (12th–15th c.), eds. Irène Fabry-Tehranchi and Anna Russakoff (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), 179–92.
33 Bryant, ‘Configurations of the Community’, 18.
the presence of, the king.\textsuperscript{35} Furthermore, while the speech professes to receive the king ‘humbly’ to the city, it also expresses dissatisfaction with the king’s lack of regard for Paris in its reminder that the city deserves better governance.

Later pageants also implied a lack of confidence in the king, using the entry to instruct Henry on aspects of his French heritage and expectations for French kingship. The pageant at the former St-Denis gate, for example, featured a platform, decorated with tapestries, on which several actors depicted the three stories of St Denis. The accompanying sign proclaimed that:

To increase our faith
St Denis came from Greece to France,
In preaching, he wished to proclaim it.
This is how: here is the demonstration.\textsuperscript{36}

The concluding line – ‘Comment: vecy la demonstrance’ – reminded the king that he was dependent on Parisians in order to learn this story, while the conclusion of the pageant highlighted the king’s youth:

If the kings of France are called
Most Christian, because they keep the faith
Defend it, young king
As did the ancient kings.\textsuperscript{37}


\textsuperscript{36} Letter Book K, f. 102v: ‘Pour notre foy multiplier / Vint saint Denis de Grece en France, / En preschant, la voult publier. / Comment: vecy la demonstrance.’

\textsuperscript{37} Letter Book K, f. 102v: ‘Se les rois françois sont appellez / Pour le foy garder, tres cristiens / Defendez-la vous je me [jeune] roy / Comme ont fait les roy anciennes [anciens].’
Here, the reminder of the claim of French kings to being exemplary Christian rulers was used in much the same way that earlier writers had used it for Henry’s grandfather, Charles VI of France: to highlight the king’s inadequacies, to encourage him to remedy his rule, and to urge his relatives to support him rather than furthering the civil war between them.\textsuperscript{38}

Even the final pageant of the Paris entry, the only one likely organised by the royally-appointed \textit{prévôt} rather than the civic authorities, stressed not a partnership between the king and the city but rather Parisians’ independent efforts on behalf of the kingdom. At the Châtelet pageant, the sign informed the king that:

\begin{quote}
Your true French subjects

Have safeguarded the crown for you

And if it pleases the King of Kings
\end{quote}

You yourself will be safeguarded by them.\(^{39}\)

Rather than focusing on a special relationship between Paris and the king, this description of the royal entry stresses Henry’s youth, his need to follow through on key aspects of French kingship and his uneasy relationship with his French capital.

The positioning of the description of the royal entry into Paris in the Letter Book – with the *Complainte de Paris* appearing on the same folio as the final pageant – highlights the precarious position of the city. In the poem, a personified Paris begs the reader to intercede with the English king so that he might send them much-needed help. The poem warns that if the king fails to protect Paris, he will lose Paris and all of France.\(^{40}\) Probably written in 1433 during the absence of Henry’s regent, the duke of Bedford, in the poem notes that:

I am Paris which does nothing but languish

Much time has passed since the duke of Bedford

Went for my sake to England

To his king and mine, to ask for help

This has not arrived, and I am losing hope.\(^{41}\)

This plea over an absent regent is reminiscent of Parisian anxiety over the absence of Henry VI’s grandfather, Charles VI, from the city during the Burgundian and Orléans/Armagnac struggles to control it.\(^{42}\) In addition to its worries about Bedford’s


\(^{40}\) Letter Book K, f. 103r.

\(^{41}\) Letter Book K, f. 103r: ‘Jeo suis Parys qui ne faiz que languir / … Long temps desja que le duc de Bethfford / S’en est allé pour moy en Angleterre / Devers son roy et le mien, secours querre / Qui pas ne vient, dont je perd Esperance.’

absence, the poem suggests that Henry will be incapable of helping. The personified Paris reminds the reader that: ‘As much as I have been able, I have kept from falling’ (‘Tant que j’ay peu, j’ay gardè de faillir’), but that it is still suffering ‘Because our king, is too young and weak / Of age and of heart’ (‘Car notre roy, est trop jeune et peu fort / D’aage et de seinz’), ending with a plea for help: ‘Rescue me, and wage good war, / Or you will lose Paris and all of France’ (‘Secourrez-moy et faitez bonne guerre, / Ou vous perdrez Paris et toute France’).43

The poem’s requests for help highlight the civic authorities’ anxieties, which were also expressed in letters sent to London asking Henry’s English subjects to plead with the king on their behalf. Some of these letters were copied into Letter Book K under Carpenter’s direction. The pleading character of these communications leaves no doubt about which of the king’s two capitals was in the stronger position. Parisians addressed Londoners as ‘very dear lords, brothers and particular friends’ (‘tres chiers sires freres et especiaulx amis’), imploring them to ‘labour for the good of this city and the surrounding region’ (‘labourer pour le bien de ceste ville et du pays d’environ’), whose situation could be ameliorated ‘by means of you [your actions]’ (‘par le moyen de vous’).44 The Letter Book K description of the Paris entry should be considered in the context of these other representations of the city in the manuscript.

The Letter Book’s picture of Paris – from the letters sent by the Parisian municipality


43 Letter Book K, f. 103r.

44 Letter Book K, f. 101r. Other letters appear on ff. 2r (undated, but likely composed shortly after the death of Henry V) and 96v (March 1432). Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Letter Book K are my own.
to Londoners, the *Complainte de Paris*, and the description of the royal entry – is one of an uneasy relationship between Henry and his French capital, and of a city under constant threat.

**John Carpenter and Letter Book K**

The civic origins and purpose of Letter Book K, its portrayal of Paris, and the way Carpenter used other parts of the book to promote the city of London, are important for our understanding of these two descriptions of royal entries. In another manuscript, these accounts might reflect an effort of the royal council to promote the dual monarchy. John Lydgate was involved in some of the council’s efforts: he had, for example, written a poem about the king’s English coronation banquet, at which even the subtleties – the set-piece, display dishes served between the courses – stressed Henry’s dual claims. Among the dishes were both a custard with an English leopard upon it, and a fritter shaped like a sun with a fleur-de-lis on top.\(^45\) Lydgate also translated into English the French poem commissioned by the duke of Bedford to accompany an image of Henry VI’s genealogical tree, asserting his claim to the throne of France, in Notre Dame cathedral.\(^46\) Other similar efforts by the royal council to promote the dual monarchy included posting open letters in public places and producing coinage portraying Henry as the saviour of the French.\(^47\) Clearly, this was a


royal council accustomed to finding ways to convince the public to support the dual monarchy.

The Letter Book K unit, however, was produced by a London official and placed in a London manuscript. Like the London chronicles – albeit with a narrower circulation – the 50 London Letter Books were primarily civic manuscripts. These books of records cover the period from the reign of Edward I to that of James II, and contain items such as communications between the king and the government of London, notices of civic elections and proclamations about local trade. Civic officials consulted them when compiling customaries of London practices. Letter Book K, written in Latin, Middle English, and Middle French, covers the years 1422–61. Its contents reflect its civic origins and purpose: 786 of its items are directly related to the administration of the city (such as elections, admissions to the mysteries, and guardianship of orphaned children); 188 items concern London’s relations with the Crown (such as summonses to Parliament, royal processions and funerals, taxes, and loans to the king); and 34 items discuss London’s relations with other cities. Carpenter seems to have been particularly interested in using the book to compare the English and French capitals: all six items in Letter Book K that deal with the city of Paris date to the period in which he was common clerk.

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50 Barron, London in the Later Middle Ages, 187; Mooney and Stubbs, Scribes and the City, 8, 15–16; for a list of Letter Book K’s contents, see Sharpe, Calendar of ... Letter-Book K.
Carpenter also used the manuscript to preserve London-centric accounts of other royal events, for example by emphasising the role of the city’s mayor. Rather than recording the details of Henry VI’s English coronation, the Letter Book focuses on the mayor’s involvement in the event. The manuscript includes a copy of the proclamation asking everyone with a right to serve at the coronation to report to the duke of Gloucester. It dedicates an entire folio to the city’s reply, which notes that the mayor of London has the right to serve the king at his coronation and to receive a gold cup as his fee. A small sketch of the cup appears in the margin of the manuscript.51 This was in keeping with the city’s ongoing efforts to promote the role of its civic leader, for example by giving the mayor and his swordbearer precedence over the duke of Gloucester and his swordbearer during the duke’s visit to London in 1425.52 John Lydgate’s poetic version of the 1432 royal entry, commissioned by the mayor, John Welles, further emphasised the mayor’s role. Possibly in an attempt to recall the mayor’s involvement in the coronation banquet, the poem describes the red velvet and fur garments that Welles wore during the entry and even uses his surname as a pun when describing the entry’s fountains or ‘welles’ of wine.53 Emphasising the prestige of London’s mayor may have been a particularly valuable tactic in comparing the city with Paris, which had royal institutions such as the Parlement, but no equivalent civic figure. While the prévôt des marchands was elected, the prévôt de Paris was

51 Letter Book K, ff. 69v–70r.
appointed by the Crown.54 [I would prefer the original formulation of “royally appointed” here, as I don’t see “the Crown” being used in France in this way.] The Letter Book K version of Henry VI’s English coronation creates a memory of this event that focuses, like its royal entry descriptions, on London’s importance and prestige.

John Carpenter was one of several men who were adept at ‘manipulating various registers of [London’s] documentary culture’ in this period, and used this experience to the city’s advantage both in the Letter Book and in other arenas.55 Like many other Guildhall clerks, Carpenter had experience – before he became common clerk – of copying literary manuscripts by authors such as Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower.56 As clerk, he was a key player in important attempts to use textual means to assert London’s privileges. In one of these, Carpenter supervised the compilation of the Liber Albus, a London customary authorised by Richard Whittington as mayor and in which Carpenter likens the status of London’s mayor to that of an earl.57 This collection of London records promoted the city’s jurisdiction against the claims of Church and king, a concern also addressed by Carpenter’s involvement in a second project: the London Dance of Death.58 Carpenter commissioned this project c.1430. It consisted of a set of paintings accompanied by a poem by John Lydgate, and hung on

56 Mooney and Stubbs, Scribes and the City, 86–106.
the cloister walls of the Pardon Churchyard at St Paul’s cathedral. The location was significant: the churchyard was an important site in civic processions, especially those marking the election of a new mayor, and had recently been enclosed by the cathedral authorities. Placing the poem and paintings in the churchyard was intended to assert London’s privileges.59

Carpenter brought this experience and his desire to promote the city of London to the royal entry descriptions in Letter Book K. He placed two accounts of civic events one after the other, using the juxtaposition between Henry VI’s two capitals to draw attention to the status of both cities. Appropriately enough, Lydgate’s poem, based on Carpenter’s description of the London entry, also circulated in London manuscripts. It was copied into five manuscripts of the London chronicles, a civic tradition of historical writing organised by mayoral, rather than regnal, years.60


Like the placement of Carpenter’s description in the Letter Book, and like that description’s contents, Lydgate’s poem deliberately presents a moment of negotiation between two powers largely as a civic moment. The London chroniclers who used Lydgate’s version of Henry VI’s entry treated it in much the same way as it had been commissioned: it was used by Londoners to preserve a pro-London version of the event.

Conclusion

The textual contents and manuscript context of the Letter Book K royal entry descriptions are important for our understanding both of how contemporaries used descriptions of these events, and of the role of civic records like the London Letter Books. Carpenter’s Letter Book K unit demonstrates the use of royal entry descriptions by civic officials working in a documentary culture that strove to create a ‘corporate personality’ for the city.61 The way Carpenter contrived Letter Book K expresses a specific relationship between the king and the city, setting a precedent for the role of London in royal entries and promoting the city’s position as the royal chamber.62 These descriptions focus exclusively on the urban portions of the French coronation expedition, describing neither of the king’s coronations – only the royal entries, which were organised by civic officials. The order in which the descriptions

62 Lindenbaum, ‘Drama as Textual Practice’, 389.
appear in the manuscript, combined with the *Complainte de Paris* positioned between them, encourages the reader to make comparisons between the royal entries, between London and Paris, and between the two capitals’ relationships with the king. The focus of these entry descriptions thus becomes not the promotion of the dual monarchy of Henry VI, but rather the relationship between the king and the city, and a juxtaposition between the king’s two capitals. Carpenter used Letter Book K to create a specific urban memory of the past. He used this unit describing the royal entries to make the relationship between king and capital the only one that mattered.

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