

ROGER OF ST. ALBANS, *Progenies regum Britanniae* [*The Progeny of the Kings of Britain*]
In Latin, illuminated manuscript roll on parchment
England, possibly London or Westminster (?), c. 1505-1525

Parchment scroll composed of twelve membranes of varying dimensions, pasted together and joined end to end, lacking at least one membrane at the end, no visible ruling, written in at least two hands, one a calligraphic Gothic hybrida used to write most of the names appearing inside roundels and the other a hybrid script, primarily used to write the longer passages outside of the roundels, blending Gothic hybrida and italic characteristics that vary in dominance throughout membranes 1-9, with italic script predominating on membranes 10-12, Roman capitals used in some roundels probably by this second hand, red rubrics, one-line red initials on membranes 1-10, membranes all laid out in three columns, with two outer columns of roundels, drawn with one red ring flanked inside and outside with brown rings, running along right and left edges and comprising a total of 338 (251 on the left and 87 on the right), along with three additional roundels and one lozenge executed much more faintly in the right column in brown ink and one red roundel placed adjacent to that column, branches of green, red, or brown connect many of the roundels in the central column, of which there are 23 one-ring roundels, 325 three-ring roundels, 109 six-ring roundels (with two red rings, each flanked inside and out by brown rings), and 69 six-ring roundels surmounted by crowns, painted in red and gold, on membrane 10 a black bull's head is painted to the right of the large crowned roundel with gold painted horns and a ring in its nose and over a garland of red and gold, somewhat smudged, some small holes in the parchment with no loss of text, some soiling and rubbing, especially at the beginning and end of the roll and to a lesser extent along the bottoms of each membrane, water stains on membranes 5-10, chiefly along the right edge, with some loss of legibility, membrane 11 faded, upper edges of membrane 1 worn with some small tears, tear along the bottom of membrane 1, now patched on the back with tape, small tear at upper right corner of membrane 8, overall in good condition. Dimensions 6,938-6,940 x 294-310 mm. (length of individual membranes: 544-546, 617, 584, 575, 562, 573, 521, 603, 552, 620, 513, and 674 mm.).

Over twenty-two feet in length (exceeding the height of an average two-story house), this illuminated genealogical roll preserves a copy of an important chronicle that remains unedited, understudied, and unavailable in print or digital facsimile. History and propaganda are tightly intertwined in this text, first written in the tense years leading up to the Wars of the Roses in support of one faction over the other. Copied well after the conclusion of those wars, this roll testifies to an ongoing interest in that struggle and in the long lines of kings that preceded it.

PROVENANCE

1. Evidence of script and decoration suggest that this roll was produced in England, likely in or around London or Westminster, early in the sixteenth century, c. 1505-1525. In the second half of the fifteenth century, a single workshop, probably in London or Westminster, specialized in copying genealogical rolls (de la Mare, 1971, p. 82; Scott, 1996, no. 116, pp. 315-317). Examination of our roll alongside these fifteenth-century manuscripts should shed light on whether the present manuscript – or, perhaps, its exemplar – originated in the same milieu.

Our roll very closely resembles London, British Library, Add. MS 63009, a copy of the chronicle dated c. 1453-1461, with later additions (Rajšić, 2016, p. 116, n. 46). Their shared textual and visual characteristics could indicate that they shared a common exemplar. However, in this case, we believe, the evidence suggests that our roll was copied from the British Library manuscript, probably in or around London shortly after c. 1505.

Both rolls use branches (rather than simple straight lines) to connect family members and both place gold crowns atop the roundels in the central royal genealogy. They also now begin at the same point, with the legendary British king Hely. Physical evidence shows us that our manuscript always began at this point, but the British Library manuscript now lacks at least one membrane at the beginning. This discrepancy is easy to explain only if our roll was copied from Additional MS 63009 after it had lost its beginning membrane.

Both rolls also include the crest of Sir Thomas Wriothesley (c. 1460-1534), Garter King of Arms from 1505 until his death. This crest – a black bull’s head decorated with a gold teardrop pattern and with two gold horns, a gold crown, and two gold rings in its nose – bears no relation to the text contained within these rolls, and yet it appears in both in precisely the same place, facing the roundel of Henry III. It was almost certainly added to the British Library manuscript by Wriothesley himself, as he was one of its early owners (his arms also appear at the bottom of that manuscript). The identical placement of the crest in our roll most likely indicates that it was copied directly from the Additional roll during or after the time it belonged to Wriothesley, probably in London, where Wriothesley resided from 1505 until his death. This is supported by a comparison of the crest on our roll with one Wriothesley added to another of his manuscripts, London, British Library, Lansdowne MS 285 (see f. 2 in the digitization in Online Resources), which reveals that our crest was not added in Wriothesley’s hand.

TEXT

Text and diagrams run vertically from top to bottom:

[first text on right], incipit, “Iste Lud renouauit mures vrbis Trinouantum ...”; [genealogy of Saxon rulers], incipit, “Oppa / Caphe, ...”; [main genealogy, running down the center of the scroll, beginning with British kings], incipit, “Hely / Lud, Cassibellanus, Nennius ...”; [genealogy of Welsh rulers], incipit, “Tecuan / Choel Godbawk ...”; [first text on left], incipit, “Iste hely regnauit xl annis et postquam hinc tres filios uidelicet Lud Cassibellanus et Nennium ...”; [final genealogy of the Percy family, far left], “... RADVLPHVS PERCYE, HENRICVS PERCYE / RICARDVS PERCYE, ANNA PERCYE”; [final genealogy of the Yorkists, center left], “... DOMINVS RICARDVS [“Rex Ang.” added in later hand] / DOMINA ELIZABETIA, DOMINA ANNA VXOR HENRICI DVCIS EXCETRIE / DOMINA IULIANA, DOMINA MARGARETA”; [final genealogy of the Bowcher family, center right] “... HVMPRIDVS Bowcher, THOMAS Bowcher / Johannes Bowcher, Edwardus Bowcher”; [final text], “... Regnauit autem annis Lij. Et apud Westmonasterium sepultum est.”

A genealogical chronicle of the kings of England, sometimes titled *Progenies Regum Britanniae* [*The Progeny of the Kings of Britain*]. This pedigree is commonly attributed to Roger of St. Albans, a Carmelite friar active in London in the 1450s. Individual biographies of past kings of England accompany a massive family tree, resplendent with branches in red, green, and brown and with sixty-nine golden crowns. Extending more than twenty-two feet, this roll contains over eight hundred roundels documenting legendary and historical popes, emperors, kings, and members of the European nobility.

No modern edition exists of *The Progeny of the Kings of Britain*, although it was quite popular and influential in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England. Not only did it serve as a source for other genealogical chronicles produced around this time, but it survives in at least fifteen manuscripts, including this one (see Rajsic, 2016, p. 116, n. 46 for this most recent count, in which she includes the present manuscript; Rajsic notes that there may be a sixteenth manuscript at Lehigh University); most of these reside in English institutional collections and they are rare on the market. This manuscript offers an important opportunity to pursue a critical edition of *Progeny* at a time when it is becoming increasingly clear to scholars that rolls like these need to be studied more closely.

Genealogical rolls were a popular genre in late medieval England. Over seventy English genealogical chronicle rolls survive from the fifteenth century alone, and these bear witness to a rich tradition that drew on Latin, Anglo-Norman, and Middle English chronicles and varied considerably in scope (Rajsic, 2016, pp. 115-116; De la Mare, 1971, pp. 80-85). Like some other genealogical chronicles of the period, *Progeny* draws on earlier chronicles like Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *Historia regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*) to trace the rule of England from contemporary English kings backwards through lines of Anglo-Saxon and legendary British monarchs. Most copies of *Progeny* reach back into the pagan and biblical past, including Norse gods Frea and Woden (Odin) among the ancestors of the Saxons and extending all the way back to Noah's son Japhet and, before him, Adam. Chronological lists of popes and emperors running down the outer edges of these rolls place English monarchs within a broader European context.

Because it is presented in the format of a roll rather than a codex, this chronicle achieves a clear and intuitive presentation of its long genealogies while emphasizing a visual continuity between the reigns of legendary figures like Arthur and those of recent, embattled monarchs. Distant or even fabricated lines of ancestry often served a propagandistic purpose. For example, during the Wars of the Roses (1455-1487), a series of civil wars in which the noble houses of York and Lancaster fought for control of England's throne, genealogical rolls could be reshaped to accentuate the distinguished legendary ancestors of either the Lancastrians or the Yorkists, lending the favored line textual and visual legitimacy.

Progeny originated during a period of conflict and upheaval in England, initially concluding with the birth of Edward of Westminster, only son of Henry VI (reigned 1422-1461, 1470-1471), in 1453. Written during the reign of Henry VI, perhaps even to be presented to him (Allan, 1979, p. 173), the chronicle demonstrates a pro-Lancastrian slant. Later copies of the chronicle were nonetheless extended to accommodate Henry's Yorkist successor, Edward IV (reigned 1461-1470, 1471-1483) (De la Mare, 1971, pp. 84-85), and even to emphasize the legitimacy of Yorkist rule (Rajsic, 2016, p. 117, n. 46, London, College of Arms MS 20/6). Genealogical chronicle rolls were likely produced to sway the opinions of the nobility and gentry and increasingly educated commercial classes, on whose support the Lancastrian or Yorkist monarchs depended during the War of the Roses.

The present roll is of special interest because it exemplifies an enduring interest in genealogical chronicles well after the events they recorded and the reigns they justified. It was copied after the Wars of the Roses had concluded with the victory of Henry VII (reigned 1485-1509) over Richard III (reigned 1483-1485) and the establishment of the Tudor line. Because our roll is

now lacking at least one membrane at the end, we cannot know whether the manuscript's genealogy was extended to include Henry VII. It now concludes with Edward III (reigned 1327-1377) and with several prominent aristocratic families of the fifteenth century, including the Percy and Bowcher families (both typically prominent in *Progeny* manuscripts), as well as the House of York.

Our roll appears to preserve the Lancastrian slant evident in the earliest copies of *Progeny*, likely reflecting the support of its copyists or earliest owner – a member of the gentry or a wealthy merchant, as in the fifteenth century, perhaps, or an officer of arms, like Wriothesley (see Provenance, above) – for the Tudor monarch of the time. Though the Yorkist Edward IV was added at a later date to our roll's probable exemplar, Additional MS 63009 (see Provenance, above), our roll appears to have excluded him from its central line of kings (the copyists identify Edward IV and Richard III only as offshoots of the Yorkist line, not as kings), but to have presented England's first Lancastrian monarch, Henry IV (reigned 1399-1413), as part of a legitimate royal succession. Since the Tudors claimed the throne on the strength of their Lancastrian descent, this was probably a politic choice on the part of the copyists. Further study may shed more light on what political significance readers of the sixteenth century may have attached to this chronicle of England's royal past.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

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