Ceremony and Conflict in Fifteenth-Century France: 
Lancastrian Ceremonial Entries into French Towns, 
1415–1431 

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The renewal of the Hundred Years’ War by Henry V led to the rapid expansion of Lancastrian power in northern France. Although England’s military campaigns have been studied in great detail, historians have paid little attention to the Lancastrian monarchy’s use of ceremony to establish its rule in France.¹ This article will principally focus on the ceremonial entry, which was a dynamic and versatile rite that could be adapted to suit the rapidly changing conditions engendered by Lancastrian successes in France. The ceremonial entry underwent a period of intense development in England and France during the later Middle Ages. Following the inclusion of multifaceted dramatic performances in England from 1377 and in France from 1380, entries became increasing complex (Kipling 6).

A ceremonial entry was the moment at which a ruler took formal possession of a town, and these entries were used frequently in zones of persistent conflict, such as northern France, where towns regularly passed from one lord to another. Indeed, the Lancastrian rulers of France made at least twenty-three ceremonial entries in the sixteen years running from 1415 to 1431. This article will look at Lancastrian ceremonial entries during the period running from Henry V’s invasion of France in August 1415 to his son’s coronation at Paris in December 1431. It will provide a wider contextualisation of the Lancastrian monarchy’s use of ceremony and relate the developments made to the form and function of the entry to the wider political and economic conditions created by war in northern France. It will show how French ceremonial practices crossed political and cultural borders in the early fifteenth century, when the establishment of Lancastrian rule in northern France led to a range of cultural exchanges among England, France and Burgundy. While the Dual Monarchy was short-lived, several of the ceremonial innovations produced in the early fifteenth century had a lasting impact on French political culture.

This article utilizes a wide range of contemporary evidence to investigate the evolution of Lancastrian ceremony in France. Visual material depicting Lancastrian entries in France is scarce; indeed, with a few notable exceptions, much of the visual material relating to French entries of the early fifteenth century comes from illuminated manuscripts created in the later fifteenth century, such as the illustration of Charles VII’s entry into Paris in 1436 made by Jean Fouquet in 1484 (BnF, f. fr. 5054: 93v). In addition to the lack of visual material, there are also difficulties with the municipal sources, which are much less complete for the 1420s and the 1430s than they are for the mid-fifteenth century.

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The lack of good municipal documentation is compensated for by the large number of English, French and Burgundian chronicles (including those written by Monstrelet, Jehan de Wavrin, Pierre Cauchon and Thomas Basin), which give detailed accounts of the entries made by the Lancastrian rulers of France. The most important of these is the chronicle of the so-called bourgeois de Paris, most likely a doctor of theology and a canon of Notre-Dame, even possibly Jean Chuffart, who was also chancellor of the University of Paris (Beaune, Bourgeois 12-13; Bjork 1:282). His place amongst the Parisian social elite put him in a good position to provide detailed accounts of Lancastrian ceremonial entries into the capital of the kingdom; indeed, much of our knowledge about the civic organisation of the entries comes from his journal. Unlike many of the contemporary chroniclers who provided second-hand accounts of the ceremonies, the bourgeois de Paris actually witnessed the entries taking place; moreover, it is probable that he also participated in some of the ceremonies, including those surrounding Henry VI’s coronation in 1431. This makes his work an invaluable source for the study of Lancastrian entries during this period. In addition to these narrative accounts of the ceremonies, we also possess the abundant administrative sources of the Lancastrian monarchy, most notably the Norman rolls (TNA C64).

Using the full range of the surviving records, this article will demonstrate that there was an evolution in form of Lancastrian ceremonial entries in France between 1415 and 1431, which reflected the growth in power and scope of English rule in northern France. The article begins with an analysis of the entries made by Henry V during his conquest of Normandy, when he posed first as a conqueror and then as duke of Normandy. It will then examine the ceremonial developments which came in the wake of the sealing of the treaty of Troyes in May 1420, which made Henry regent and heir to the throne of France. The final section of the article considers the resurgence of Valois power in 1429 and the Lancastrian monarchy utilised ceremony to respond to this threat, most notably with the entry of Henry VI into Paris as king of France.

Henry V and the Conquest of Normandy, 1415–19

Town were administrative, economic and military centres, and their possession was fundamental to Henry V’s strategy in France. As such, ceremonial entries formed a crucial tool for the promotion of the Lancastrian cause in France from the outset of Henry V’s invasion of Normandy in August 1415, when they were used in conjunction with the ceremonial surrenders of urban communities. Following a siege lasting almost six weeks, Harfleur capitulated on 22 September 1415, when it became apparent to the townspeople that no French relief force was coming to their aid. Henry had a magnificent tent of gold cloth erected on a hill outside Harfleur in which to receive the formal surrender of the townspeople. The ceremonial surrender formed a tableau of the Day of Judgement, with Henry placed in a Christ-like role and possessing the power to either condemn or pardon the population. The members of