

The Marian Court in Context: Mary Tudor's Court as Part of the Tudor Legacy

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I.

Fitting Mary Tudor back into the context of a Tudor ruler is a complicated matter. As the first Queen regnant of England she was required to find a balance between her role as a woman and her role as a monarch, something that no English monarch before her had needed to do. Despite the major shift in court politics and court life in general that her reign marked, she is often ignored because of her sister Elizabeth's popularity. Instead of being seen as an important part of the Tudor legacy, she has been consistently removed from her environment and looked at as an anomaly, an aberration, or a blip in the story of early modern England. Her legacy, from the time of John Foxe's 1563 *Acts and Monuments*, has been that of a cruel, foolish woman. She was written off as too easily swayed by bad men or too committed to her own plan of Catholic restoration to be able to rule properly or even attempt to do so.

The reality of Mary's reign is so often overshadowed by the myth of it that there has been considerably less research done on her relationship to her court and advisors than of other Tudor rulers and courts. Despite the lack of research, there are a significant number of sources that provide insight into Mary's relationship to her court and advisors and which make it more clear what her role in the politics of her court was. When historians look at Mary Tudor's Privy Council and advisors, they tend to focus on who was at fault for the perceived mistakes that took place during her reign. The mistakes that have shaped her

image range from her marriage to Philip II of Spain to the executions of Protestants for which she is known.

The purpose of this paper is not to place blame, nor is it to look at who had the most influence over the actions of Mary Tudor. Instead, it aims to look at how Mary related to her council and advisors and how this fits into the context of Tudor court life and court politics. It will also explore how Mary's gender changed the way she acted as a monarch in general, as well as how she participated in court politics and ran her court in particular. Her sister Elizabeth is often seen as the monarch worth studying in terms of the intersection of gender and politics in Tudor England. While this is not untrue, Mary Tudor was the first Tudor monarch to navigate the intersection of gender and court politics; her situation was very different from Elizabeth's and certainly worthy of its own research and exploration. As the first female monarch of England, Mary essentially paved the way for all female monarchs to follow, even if they did not necessarily interact with their political courts in the same way she had. Yet the importance of her relationship with her court is rarely acknowledged and the impact her gender had on this relationship even less so. Exploring how Mary's court fits into the Tudor context and how her gender influenced her relationship with her court will show that the Marian Court was neither a duplicate of other Tudor courts, nor was it totally new or unrecognizable. In order to do so it is necessary to explore the relationships between Mary and two of her most important advisors, Simon Renard and Reginald Pole.

This paper will therefore look at ideas about court life and politics, as well as primary sources directly relating to court politics and advising in order to show the ways in which Mary's interactions with her court and court politicians were both altered by her gender and religion yet still in line with other

Tudor rulers in many ways. Specifically, it will focus on the calendars of state papers of Spain and Venice to see how advisors and councilors were communicating with Mary and with their higher-ups and how she viewed her own role in terms of court politics and decision making. Before exploring primary sources it is necessary to situate this paper in a historiographical sense.

The three themes of Tudor court politics that are especially pervasive in historians' research on court studies are the Privy Chamber, factionalism, and the "strong king". In her historiographical review of Tudor politics, Natalie Mears points out that the study of the Marian court and its politics is inherently different than that of the courts that came before it. The focus in the study of the Marian Court is generally on Mary's Privy Council and the group of councilors her husband chose to try and help guide her.¹ In the past, historians of Tudor courts tended to focus on institutions such as the Privy Council or Parliament. Geoffrey Elton, the leading proponent of this idea, believed that the lack of military, legal, and financial power in the members of the Privy Chamber, the people who lived and worked with the monarch on a daily basis and helped them with regular life, placed them below members of established governmental institutions in terms of influence.² The role of members of the Privy Chamber was not as overtly political or governmental as the role of members of the Privy Council because their job was not to help run a government, but to help a monarch with the regular activities of daily life. However, many historians since Elton have asserted the importance of the Privy

¹ Natalie Mears, "Courts, Courtiers, and Culture in Tudor England," *The Historical Journal* 46, no. 3 (2003), 708.

² *Ibid*, 707.

Chamber as a center of influence and the court as a major center of political proceedings. In Tudor courts prior to Mary's accession, the Privy Chamber had been an important political sphere, with those courtiers who were able to gain positions in the Monarch's personal quarters also gaining direct access to the monarch.

Because of her gender, Mary Tudor's Privy Chamber has not been seen as particularly important to her political decision-making. Mary's Privy Chamber was almost entirely restricted to women. As David Loades points out, some of these women, such as Susan Clarencius, had "been with Mary for years and were very close to her."³ The women of the Privy Chamber were thought by those at court to use their influence to gain things for themselves, but when it came to influencing the Queen, specifically on the matter of marriage, they surprisingly went with her inclination.⁴ Their political pull was lessened by the fact that very few of the ladies of the Privy Chamber were wives of Privy Council members, the people whose job it was to influence and help the monarch make political decisions.⁵ Even with the little influence they may have had within the Privy Chamber due to their spending large amounts of time with the Queen, women other than Mary could not cross over from the private to the political sphere in the ways that men could. A man in a male monarch's Privy Chamber could have had some authority outside

³ D.M. Loades, *The Reign of Mary Tudor: Politics, Government and Religion in England 1553-58* (Routledge, 2014), 43.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ D.M. Loades, *Intrigue and Treason: The Tudor Court, 1547-1558* (Harlow, England: Longman/Pearson, 2004), 133.

of the monarch's chambers and private life because of his gender, but a woman could not.

Compared to the role of the Privy Chamber, factionalism versus the "strong king" is an issue that is more applicable to the Marian court. Because there is less historical work on the Marian court, it is important to look at the courts that came before Mary's. In his 1995 article, "The Structures of Politics in Early Tudor England", Steven Gunn explores the debate between historians over whether or not Henry VIII was a "strong king" who controlled the government and decided what to do on his own, or whether he was influenced by factions at court. He focuses on where these ideas come from, ultimately declaring that both sides have valid and convincing evidence.⁶ In another article published in 1992, Robert Shephard also emphasizes the importance of factions in the study of court politics.⁷ In 2004, David Loades, one of the preeminent historians of the Tudor period, published his book *Intrigue and Treason: The Tudor Court 1547-1558*. One of the few books that looks specifically at the Marian and Edwardian courts, it argues that the Marian court was not defined by faction in the way that other Tudor courts had been, and even goes so far as to say there was no faction in the Marian court at all.⁸

Perceptions of Mary's authority and power have been evolving for centuries. J.A. Froude, a prominent English historian writing in the mid-19th century, was biased because of

⁶ Steven Gunn, "The Structures of Politics in Early Tudor England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, 5 (1995), 59, 90.

⁷ Shephard, Robert. "Court Factions In Early Modern England." *The Journal of Modern History* 64, no. 4, 92.

⁸ Loades, *Intrigue and Treason*, 294.

his own Protestant beliefs, and continued the Protestant trend of writing Mary Tudor as less than capable, although he differed from earlier Protestant historians in that he did not write her as particularly malicious. However, his ideas took hold and remained prevalent for decades, perhaps even as long as a century. Since Froude's depiction in the 1850s, there has been a slow and steady move towards acknowledging Mary's greater control of her reign and political decisions. Historians working in the first half of the 20th century saw her as having significantly more authority than Froude did, but still felt she was manipulated by her advisors and husband.⁹ After centuries of debate, there is still no consensus over who is to blame for the persecutions of the Marian restoration, but historians have generally come to the conclusion that Mary was a stronger ruler and had more sway in her own court than previously believed. This is certainly true for historian Anna Whitelock in her biography of the Queen, which presents a ruler who was much stronger than Froude or even H.F.M Prescott, writing in the 1950's, would have considered.¹⁰

New ideas about gender have also shaped recent studies. Historians are certainly in agreement that as the first Queen Regnant of England, Mary Tudor's court and relationship to her court was very different from her predecessors'. What is less sure is how exactly her contemporaries felt about her gender and how they applied gendered ideas to her reign and power. In her article, "Mary Tudor as 'Sole Quene?': Gendering Tudor Monarchy", Judith M. Richards argues that Mary's gender was

⁹ James Anthony Froude and Eamon Duffy, *The Reign of Mary Tudor* (London: Continuum, 2009).

¹⁰ Anna Whitelock, *Mary Tudor: Princess, Bastard, Queen*, (New York: Random House, 2009).

extremely important, as signified by the creation of legislation that further solidified her position as monarch, which was created even after her coronation. Mary was coming to the throne not only as the first female ruler of England, but as a monarch who had been previously declared a bastard, making this legislation a precaution but not a necessity. Mary's gender was even more important when she became a wife. Richards sees the social and legal subservience of wives to husbands in England as greatly problematic for Mary.¹¹ Cynthia Herrup's article – published nine years after Richards' – entitled "The King's Two Genders", takes even further the idea that while Mary's gender was an issue, it was not a simple matter of people thinking a queen could not rule on her own. She argues, "That contemporaries preferred to be ruled by an adult male is incontrovertible, yet we may have painted the disabilities of female kings in darker colors than are appropriate."¹² Herrup's article focuses on the fact that a king, male or female, was expected to have both feminine and masculine qualities, so no matter the gender of the king, they would not be lacking in some areas and better in others.¹³ She does not argue that female kings were in any way more desirable than male kings but that a female

¹¹ Judith M. Richards, "Mary Tudor As 'Sole Quene?': Gendering Tudor Monarchy," *The Historical Journal* 40, no. 4 (1997): 903, 908.

¹² Cynthia Herrup, "The King's Two Genders." *Journal of British Studies* 45, no. 3 (2006).

¹³ Herrup chooses to use the title of "king" for both male and female monarchs. In this way she emphasizes the separation between the monarch as ruler and political figure from the person who fills the role of monarch.

monarch was more complicated than may have been previously imagined. While male kings could in some ways balance out their overly masculine traits with a wife, it was more difficult for a female king to do the opposite. Even so, not all feminine traits were inherently negative and not all masculine traits were inherently positive in a king.¹⁴ The general discussion on the role that Mary's gender played in her status as Queen of England has become, over the last few decades, much more complex. Being a female ruler is no longer seen as being an entirely negative situation, but the significant difficulties of being a female ruler during the Tudor period are still acknowledged.

The primary sources being used for research on Tudor courts and Mary Tudor specifically have not changed much, but the ways in which they are examined have. Traditionally, calendars of state papers from both England and other regions, especially Spain, France, and Venice, have been used as some of the biggest sources for primary information. They are so commonly used because they collect documents, otherwise known as state papers, pertaining to a specific country during a set period of time in one place and as such can provide more extensive views of overarching themes and interactions. These documents include letters between ambassadors and rulers, as well as letters to and from various advisors and the rulers for whom they worked.

State papers are incredibly useful but, as Gunn points out, there are important issues that must be kept in mind when they are being used. For example, ambassadors were sometimes "prone to sententious and ill-informed generalization" about who was in favor at court, and because of language barriers, might have had some difficulty fully understanding the dynamics

¹⁴ Herrup, "Kings Two Genders."

of court politics.¹⁵ It is also necessary to note that not all ambassadors had the same kind of access to monarchs and other important courtiers. The second issue with state papers, specifically domestic ones, is that they can portray the court as much more congenial and cohesive than it actually was. The behind-the-scenes, secretive dealings that took place might not be evident in these papers.¹⁶

The study of Tudor court politics and Mary Tudor has changed significantly over time. There is now a general understanding that Mary Tudor was not simply a puppet used by various councilors or advisors to achieve their own ends and that Tudor courts and personal relationships were far more important than previously believed. While court studies and histories of the life of Mary Tudor have necessarily intersected, there has been less focus on the interaction between Mary and court politics. By combining these two ideas and looking more directly at how Mary Tudor interacted with her court and courtiers, it will be possible to focus on the interaction between the monarch and the court, instead of one or the other. This approach is something that Mears calls for in her review.¹⁷

II.

When Mary Tudor came to power, she reclaimed the crown from Lady Jane Grey who had gained it after the death of Mary's younger brother Edward VI. Jane's extremely short reign is relatively unimportant and did not cause much change in the Tudor dynasty. She was never truly the queen and had no opportunity to rule during her few days in power. What is

¹⁵ Gunn, "Structures of Politics," 64-65.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁷ Mears, "Courts, Courtiers, and Culture," 718-719.

important to understanding Mary's position as a monarch in the Tudor legacy, though, is her half-brother Edward VI, whose reign had been controlled by two Lord Protectors that had ruled in place of the child-king. These men, Edward Seymour the Duke of Somerset and John Dudley the Earl of Warwick, made decisions regarding Edward and the realm. This resulted in the politics and relationships of this court being decidedly different from those of the first two Tudor monarchs, Henry VII and Henry VIII. Proximity to the monarch was still important and the Privy Chamber was not totally changed, as Loades points out in his book, but Edward did not rule in his own right; power was centered at court with his protectors and councilors.

When Mary gained the throne, many significant changes took place. Despite being the first female monarch, she ruled in her own right and so the institution of Lord Protector no longer played a role. While there were certainly people who felt that a woman was incapable of ruling on her own, at least among her council and court there were no attempts to take away any of her legal power. In fact, when Mary overthrew Jane Grey, members of her council wanted to have Parliament convene in order to make Mary the legitimate heir (she had been declared a bastard previously due to her father's divorce from her mother) even before her coronation.¹⁸ This desire to solidify Mary's claim to the throne speaks to a recognition by her council of her right to rule, but also an acknowledgment of the dangers of a female monarch whose claim to the throne was anything less than perfect.

Despite this support and desire to protect her claim, there was still obvious confusion over how she, as a single

¹⁸ Alice Hunt, "The Monarchical Republic Of Mary I," *The Historical Journal* 52, no. 3 (2009).

woman, was going to rule. Women had very few legal rights regarding property, money, and inheritance, and what few legal rights they did have, they lost upon marriage. A married woman might have fewer legal rights, but this was because she was expected to allow her husband to guide her. In the case of Mary Tudor, the guidance aspect of the husband/wife relationship was expected and desired, but significant work went into making sure she was not as vulnerable to the whims of a husband as a common English woman would have been. The expectation of guidance and the need of a husband to help her rule is evinced by the way the royal marriage is discussed by the Emperor Charles V.¹⁹ Charles' input on the matter is significant because it is representative of ideas about female monarchs in Europe, but also because Charles was in constant contact with his ambassadors at court who were dealing directly with the Queen. While Herrup's argument about the English valuing feminine traits in their monarchs may be true, there was still a rush to find Mary a husband in order to properly balance those feminine traits. The perceived need to quickly find Mary a husband was also due to Mary's age and the need for an heir. She was in her late 30's when she came to the throne and had never married or had children.

Understanding what power Mary had and how it was perceived helps frame the relationships Mary had with some of the men who helped her rule. It also allows for a better understanding of why these relationships were significant and how they compare to those of other Tudor monarchs. One of

¹⁹ 'Spain: August 1553, 1-5,' in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain*, Volume 11, 1553, ed. Royall Tyler (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1916), 127-150.

these men, and one of the earliest and most important advisors to the Queen, was Simon Renard. An ambassador to England from the Holy Roman Empire, Renard worked for the Emperor Charles V. He had a very close relationship with Mary, mainly at the beginning of her reign, and was instrumental in the negotiations that made her marriage to Philip II of Spain, the Emperor's son, possible. As head imperial ambassador, Renard was in constant communication with the Emperor regarding political matters in England and particularly at court. Many of these communications are compiled in the Spanish Calendar of State Papers, which combine documents regarding the Holy Roman Empire, England, and Spain.

The letters between Simon Renard and the Emperor, as well as those between Renard and the Queen, provide important insights into both how Mary Tudor's court functioned, and how she related to her Privy Council and other advisors. They also shed light on how Mary's relationship with court politics was both different from and similar to those before her. Her relationship with Renard is representative of a slightly different kind of political atmosphere, mostly at the beginning of her reign. Some of the letters from her first year as Queen speak to the closeness of their relationship, with Mary specifically asking Renard to sneak into the Tower of London to see her.²⁰ In a letter from later on that same year, Renard mentions that Mary wanted him to start "communicating openly" with her, which illustrates even further the close and private nature of their

²⁰ 'Spain: October 1553, 11-15,' in Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 11, 1553, ed. Royall Tyler (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1916), 285-302.

relationship up to that point.²¹ As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, in Tudor courts prior to Mary's accession to the throne, the Privy Chamber had been an important political sphere, with those courtiers who were able to gain positions in the Monarch's personal quarters also gaining direct access to the monarch. As a woman, Mary's Privy Chamber was restricted almost entirely to women who may have been able to sway her in some minimal ways, but it was fundamentally different in function from those that came before it because it was a far less political body than it would have been for a king. Renard's ability to be physically close to the Queen and her desire to have him close is telling. The Queen did not have the constant presence of male courtiers around her, but she did choose an advisor to be with her and helping her, and she chose one who was both not on her council and not English.

The close relationship between Mary and Renard, as well as Renard's interactions with the council, provide much information on Mary's relationship to her council. These relationships show a queen with authority but with a complicated and often strained connection to the men whose job it was to help her rule. Mary, upon coming to the throne, had retained some of the councilors who had worked with and for her brother and even her father. She made many changes to put people who shared her interests and ambitions into positions of power but was restrained by her supporters' lack of experience.²² She was, to some extent, surrounded by people who were not always in agreement with her or whom she did not know very well, and in

²¹ 'Spain: December 1553, 16-20,' in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain*, Volume 11, 1553, ed. Royall Tyler (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1916), 439-446.

²² Loades, *Intrigue and Treason*, 128.

some cases may have even been complacent in plots against her. Loades points out that Mary's council was made up of three types of men: those who had been her long-time supporters or who had joined her cause early on, those who had been members of Edward's council, and those who had been on the council of Henry VIII.²³ Some of these men stand out as being especially important. Out of the first group, Robert Rochester is notable for his long-term support of the Queen as well as for being the comptroller. William Paget, Henry FitzAlan the Earl of Arundel, and the Marquis Of Winchester were members of the second group. The third group included men such as Thomas Howard, the Duke of Norfolk and Stephen Gardiner, the Bishop of Winchester.²⁴ Gardiner was especially important because of his role as Lord Chancellor.

Due to the make-up of her council and the uneasiness this would have caused, it is reasonable that she relied considerably on the Imperial Ambassador, Renard. He was a Catholic and worked for Charles V, her cousin and former intended husband, whom she referred to as her father in her correspondence with him.²⁵ The way that Mary interacted with Renard and her council becomes especially clear shortly after her coronation, when the question of her marriage quickly became the most important topic at court. There was a split among her advisors and councilors over whether she ought to marry Edward Courtenay, an Englishman, or Prince Phillip II of Spain. This event is one of the first times we see divisions at court and how Mary dealt with them.

²³ Ibid, 128-129.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ 'Spain: August 1553, 1-5,' in Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 11.

Mary herself seems to have been leaning towards Philip from the start, and certainly this was the side of Renard and the Emperor. Most of Renard's correspondence with the Emperor, from the day he met the queen until she married Phillip, addressed the marriage at least briefly. In the first letter the ambassadors sent the Emperor after meeting with Mary for the first time, Renard mentions that he brought up the marriage.²⁶ This early discussion of marriage gives an insight into what Mary felt comfortable keeping from her council and what she was willing to do, whether or not it was something they genuinely favored. The ambassadors wrote that the queen, "had heard that we had represented to the Council that your Majesty did not approve of her marrying a foreigner, but had understood that it had been said to serve the exigencies of the moment, and did not represent your real view."²⁷ Mary was, at least according to the ambassadors, perfectly alright with lying to her council or having others lie to her council in order to do what she thought best, which was often what Charles V wanted, but not always.

In this same letter, the ambassadors also hint at how Mary viewed her own authority over and influence on her council. Mary wanted to have a Catholic funeral for her brother Edward but many around her were encouraging her not to move forward too quickly with changes regarding religion. The Queen was adamant that she had always been honest about her faith and apparently, "She was sure her Council would make no objections, for though several of them would only consent out of dissimulation and fear, she would use their dissimulation for a great end."²⁸ Ultimately, Mary was talked out of having an

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

official Catholic funeral for Edward, but her belief that she was able to control the council or at least intimidate them, and her willingness to go against even the advice of the Emperor, speaks to her assessment of her own power and shows that she was willing to use that power to do what she wished. That it took a significant effort to convince her that the funeral was a bad idea is indicative of how much of a threat her intentions were. She may have been somewhat optimistic about her ability to convince her council of her plan, but she was still in a position of authority over them. She was becoming aware of the fact that pushing too hard and forcing matters, while within her capabilities, was not always the best course of action for a monarch.

As the marriage negotiations continued behind the scenes, the changing nature of Mary's relationship with her council becomes evident. Renard continued to meet with Mary to discuss the possibility of marriage, and Mary made it obvious that she wanted to go along with what the Emperor wanted, but that she needed support in bringing it up to her council and convincing them. Once she was assured of the Emperor's desire to have her married to his son, she requested that he send her and various members of her council letters suggesting the importance of marriage, "without mentioning anyone or specifying any match," a request she made on the grounds that she had always rejected any suggestion of marriage and that it would be strange if she were to bring it up suddenly.²⁹ Renard rejected the idea that she needed backup in this, which speaks to the ways in which those who were not royals or members of the council interpreted her authority.³⁰ Ultimately, a middle-ground

²⁹ 'Spain: October 1553, 11-15,' in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 11*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

was reached wherein Renard provided a list of points that Mary could bring up to her council in order to convince them of the marriage. He included this list in a letter sent to the Emperor on October 15, 1553.³¹

This list is indicative of how Mary interacted with her council after her rise to power, but before her marriage to Philip II. Renard included a point on the list that stated,

The principal consideration is your Majesty's inclination, for once that has been made known it is to be believed that your Council and all others who desire your prosperity and repose will adopt and conform to it, whether your choice falls on a foreigner or on a native of this kingdom.³²

This is almost certainly an overstatement of the ease with which the queen would be able to convince her council of a foreign marriage, but it also acknowledges that convincing the council of the marriage was not the only way to get them to agree to it. There was a significant possibility that much of the council would be against the marriage, because to them the threat of a foreigner gaining too much control over the country outweighed any benefits a foreign marriage might have brought. The desire to convince her council of the marriage instead of forcing it – in order to stay on good terms – is not incredibly unique, but it is suggestive of a monarch whose relationship with her councilors was such that they did not function as a means to enact her will

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

in the way that many proponents of the “strong king” idea believe her father’s did.³³

Her desire to get the full advice of her council, as well as Renard, is also indicative of how she viewed her ability to make decisions as a single woman. The people around her, and those she seems to have trusted most, all believed that she needed a council of men and a husband to help her make the best choices for the country, and she agreed with them, at least in some situations. While this paper does not intend to single Mary out and view her only through the lens of “First Female Monarch”, it must be remembered that she was a woman who had already lived a large portion of her life not expecting to become queen, and for much of it not even being eligible to be queen.

Cynthia Herrup makes a convincing argument that both masculine and feminine qualities were, to the English, desirable in a ruler and that like the idea of the king’s “two bodies”, there could also be an idea of the king’s “two genders.” If Mary as a monarch was different from Mary as a woman, then her gender as monarch also played a different role than her gender as a woman.³⁴ As a woman, Mary’s gender was almost entirely negative in terms of legal and social rights and status. In the inherited position of monarch, at least some feminine traits were valued as they provided balance to a position which could easily allow a person to become tyrannical or violent.³⁵ At the same time, Herrup also recognizes that, “The gender hierarchy, it was believed, was more natural and older than the political one.”³⁶ Mary’s womanhood was not canceled out by her position, and

³³ Gunn, “Structures of Politics,” 59.

³⁴ Herrup, “King’s Two Genders.”

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

she still had to work to make sure she was appearing as balanced as possible and not coming across as being overly influenced by anyone and thus appearing weak.³⁷

With this in mind, Mary's relationship with her council and advisors is easier to understand. Mary used male advisors to provide support and balance and to back her up, but she still had to maintain authority over them. The desire for the balance provided by male advisors can be seen even more during the later parts of the marriage negotiations. By November of 1553, the negotiations had moved even further and Renard had become more of a go-between for Mary and her council. On November 4th, Renard wrote to the emperor once again regarding the marriage and stated that the Queen, "wishes me to press the Chancellor for audience until he gives a downright refusal, in which case as soon as he asks for audience of the Queen she will find out why he has refused me."³⁸ This is not the only instance in which Renard makes reference to his position as an intermediary for Mary and her council and a lobbyist on behalf of Mary's cause. In a letter written on October 31st, 1553, Renard relayed a discussion with the queen in which he told her about the council members he had spoken to about the marriage and she encouraged him to speak to the Lord Chancellor.³⁹ Again on December 8th, 1553, Renard was summoned by the council to speak about the articles of marriage so that they could get the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ 'Spain: November 1553, 1-5,' in Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 11, 1553, ed. Royall Tyler (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1916), 331-337.

³⁹ 'Spain: October 1553, 26-31,' in Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 11, 1553, ed. Royall Tyler (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1916), 316-331.

best idea of the queen's will.⁴⁰ Based on this evidence, Renard seems to have maintained this position in some form until Philip and Mary were married. This is indicative not just of Mary's use of male advisors, but also of the closeness between her and Renard, her chosen advisor, and the strain that existed between her and some members of her council.

Renard's presence was most important in the period between Mary's accession and her marriage to Philip, but as his importance began to fade, another man stepped in to become one of Mary's key advisors. Reginald Pole was a cousin of Mary's and a cardinal of the Catholic Church. He had been away from England for years, living in Rome as a result of the religious upheaval in his home country. Pole was made papal legate to England in 1553 and returned to the country to work with and advise Mary on bringing the Catholic faith back to England. His relationship with Mary was notably different from Renard's, as he was a relative of the queen and from the same country. Pole's singular devotion to restoring the Catholic Church in England and obeying the Pope often led him to be quite frank. He often wrote in ways that the people receiving his letters would have found to be out of line, and the queen and others who occupied positions of power in England were not exempt from these letters.⁴¹ In one letter to Mary, written in October 1553, prior to his return to England, Pole's brashness and priorities are particularly evident.

⁴⁰ 'Spain: December 1553, 1-10,' in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 11, 1553*, ed. Royall Tyler (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1916), 407-423.

⁴¹ Rex Pogson, "Reginald Pole and the Priorities of Government in Mary Tudor's Church," *The Historical Journal* 18, no. 1 (1975), 8.

How could it be reasonable for the Queen to dissemble this cause of the union and obedience of the Church, and to hide this light under the bushel, Christ having placed her on the throne, that she might set it on a candlestick to be seen by the whole kingdom, and to give light to everybody? and how can it become her to do this from fear of turmoil, after having been freed by Christ from such manifest perils, when she was destitute of all human aid and protection, He showing that his hand is with her, and that it has dispersed the storm which was coming against her?⁴²

Another letter written in August of that same year is also quite strong in its unsolicited appeal for Mary to be obedient to the Catholic Church and Pope.⁴³ It is unclear exactly how Mary felt about Pole's forwardness as she had a close relationship with the cardinal, but still she was monarch. Pole began attempting to advise Mary as soon as she came to the throne, but even though he and Mary had the same goals in relation to religion, the pull of Renard and the Emperor closer to home kept her from making any quick moves on the matter. Once in England Pole had significant influence, which is evident in both his own writings and those of others collected in the Venetian calendar of state papers.

⁴² 'Spain: October 1553, 1-5,' in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 11, 1553*, ed. Royall Tyler (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1916), 261-272.

⁴³ 'Spain: August 1553, 11-20,' in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 11, 1553*, ed. Royall Tyler (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1916), 162-176.

According to Rex Pogson, Reginald Pole did not care for the normal workings of court politics. He states:

Pole avoided the tedium of administrative business – he never attended Council meetings – and Philip tactfully suggested that the legate should avoid the petty details of government and concentrate on larger policies. Throughout his life Pole acknowledged this preference for contemplation over action.⁴⁴

But Pogson also points out that Pole was an important advisor to the Queen, the most important advisor according to the Venetian ambassador at court.⁴⁵ Pole may not have attended council meetings, and his brashness may have been too much even for Philip sometimes, but the king still placed him in a position of authority when he was out of the country (which was often). Lack of manners aside, Pole did have the same religious objectives as Mary and her husband, and his intentions were well known. In one letter written by the Venetian ambassador Giovanni Michiel to the Doge, Pole is described as being “utterly devoid of all ambition and desire;”⁴⁶ he was not working for his own benefit. Philip and Mary could be reasonably sure that Pole was guided only by the Pope and his own faith, so that even if his

⁴⁴ Pogson, “Priorities of Government,” 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ 'Venice: April 1555, 1-15,' in *Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, Volume 6, 1555-1558, ed. Rawdon Brown (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1877), 35-51.

advice could not always be implemented because of its brashness, it was honest.

While Mary did not heed Pole's advice at the immediate start of her reign, she wrote to him a few months later in January of 1554. In her letter she informs him of the religious situation in the country, specifically about married priests and heretics, and asks his advice, "that she may be better acquainted with his opinion; and also learn, by what way, without scruple of conscience, she could provide for the said churches until the obedience of the Catholic and Apostolic Church be again established in England".⁴⁷ This letter speaks to the fact that Mary was already seeking out help from Pole relatively early in her reign and that she saw the need to look outside of her council for advice regarding the religious situation in England. As with Renard and the Emperor, Mary was seeking the advice of people whom she felt she could trust and with whom she already had a relationship.

Pole's role was not strictly advisory, in fact part of his legatine mission was to help broker a peace between France and the Emperor Charles V.⁴⁸ On this project he worked specifically with the queen and her council. On April 20th, 1555, Pole wrote

⁴⁷ 'Venice: January 1554,' in *Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, Volume 5, 1534-1554, ed. Rawdon Brown (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1873), 451-456.

⁴⁸ 'Venice: May 1555, 1-15,' in *Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, Volume 6, 1555-1558, ed. Rawdon Brown (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1877), 59-72.

to the Bishop of Conza informing him of the status of the negotiations and explaining to him that the queen had sent him a letter that she intended to send to the King of France. In the letter he also mentions that the queen had chosen members of her council as well as himself to go to the official peace negotiations.⁴⁹ Pole may not have attended council meetings but he was certainly involved in the workings of court politics and government. Like Renard, his position within the court fell outside the lines of a normal councilor, and yet this did not stop him from being actively involved in politics and decision-making.

After Mary and Philip wed, it is clear that the atmosphere at the court was altered, and that Mary's role changed in some ways as well. During the marriage negotiations, both Mary and her council worked hard to make sure that her legal position did not change and that Philip was unable to make decisions regarding the English government without the queen's consent. Still, letters from all sides after the marriage show the rising importance and influence of Phillip at court. This ties into the idea that Judith Richards brings up in her article on gender and the Tudor monarchy that, "Despite those declarations, the contemporary understandings of husband/wife relationships were such that few believed that, once married, Mary could continue to function as fully autonomous monarch".⁵⁰ This may be true, but it does not mean that Mary was totally stripped of her power by any means; on this point Pole's letters are again

⁴⁹ 'Venice: April 1555, 16-30,' in *Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, Volume 6, 1555-1558, ed. Rawdon Brown (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1877), 51-59.

⁵⁰ Richards, "Sole Quene," 908.

important to a full understanding of Mary's relationship to politics at her court after her marriage.

In a letter from the Cardinal to King Philip, informing him of the queen's actions at court during his absence, Pole writes:

Concerning the most Serene Queen and her assiduity in the despatch of business, she is so intent on it as to require her energy in this matter to be checked rather than stimulated, for besides passing the greater part of the day in this occupation, she then, should there be anything to write to his Majesty (as is always the case), this sort of office delighting her extremely, performs it during the greater part of the night, to the injury of her health, as known to the King, who alone can apply a remedy.⁵¹

This letter suggests that despite the marriage, Mary still took her position as monarch very seriously and worked just as hard as she ever had. It also implies that this was the norm for Mary, and that the king was aware of this because of her regular letters. So, while Philip may have been taking on part of the governing of the kingdom in a way that the English had hoped he would not, he was not becoming overly powerful, and Mary wanted him involved in some way as evinced by her desire to keep him informed. Mary recognized that she was still the ultimate

⁵¹ 'Venice: October 1555, 1-15,' in *Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, Volume 6, 1555-1558, ed. Rawdon Brown (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1877), 199-214.

authority and that she had to work with her advisors and council on state business. This letter from Pole to King Philip is also representative of the sort of committee that Philip put together to watch Mary and look over her while he was gone, which is indicative of the kind of control he wanted to have.

A sense of Mary's level of influence on Philip's power at court also emerges from the writings of Reginald Pole. Work done by Judith Richards suggests that Philip's increased political and court power was not just the result of a gendered power imbalance but of an intentional situation in which Mary "insisted" that Philip be given power.⁵² The above excerpt from Pole's letter is, at the very least, evidence that Mary wished for Philip to be informed and involved in some way in the work she was doing at court. Mary seems to have wanted Philip to play a similar role to that of Renard and Pole, but due to his own ideas about how much power he should have had and his frequent absences, he was both unwilling and unable to meet her expectations. Philip may have wanted more power so that he could act as a king in a more traditional sense, but he never truly attained that kind of authority. Any power that he had was constrained by the marriage agreement and the will of Mary and her government. This understanding of the situation acknowledges that Mary was still a monarch and was legally entitled to the final say in all matters at court. As such, she could not be written off as a weak and incompetent leader and political player during this period. To assume that Mary was a puppet or a minor player in court politics even after her marriage is to discount her legal authority and agency

Mary's relationships with her advisors, Simon Renard and Reginald Pole, allow for a look into how she interacted with her

⁵² Herrup, "King's Two Genders."

court, as well as how the court and council functioned, but they also allow for a comparison with Tudor courts in a more general sense. By doing this, it is possible to place Mary Tudor and her court into the context of a Tudor monarch, instead of looking at her as something separate from the rest of her family. In order to do this it is also necessary to look at how the three major themes in court studies discussed in the historiography apply to the Marian court.

In *Intrigue and Treason*, David Loades touches on the idea of the “strong king”, one of the most important themes. He argues that, despite various attempts to sway him, Henry VIII did what he wanted. If Henry wanted something to happen, it did not matter what the people around him desired.⁵³ The situation with Edward was, of course, considerably different as he was a minor who was being guided by two different Lord Protectors. As a child, Edward was not even legally able to rule on his own so while his input may have been considered sometimes, he certainly did not have the final say on politics at court. The concept of Mary provided by the letter’s regarding her reign, is much more like Henry in this sense than Edward. In particular, prior to her marriage to Philip, Mary recognized that she was able to do what she wished despite what her council may have wanted. This is especially evident in her insistence that she would have a Catholic burial for Edward and that her council was going to have to accept it.⁵⁴ Later on in her reign, she differed from her advisors and husband more often, but as Herrup and Judith Richards both suggest, it is possible that this

⁵³ Loades, “*Intrigue and Treason*,” 9.

⁵⁴ 'Spain: August 1553, 1-5,' in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain*, Volume 11.

was actually another example of Mary's authority.⁵⁵ If Mary was actively choosing which advisors had access to her and how much control Philip was being given, then in a sense that bolsters the idea that Mary's personal rule was stronger than previously assumed and not as different from her father's as might be expected.

While it is unclear exactly how much Mary was able to override her advisors, it is clear that she was no Edward, but she was also not her sister, Elizabeth. While Mary was able to assert her power over her council and people trying to sway her, she was still influenced, and in some ways defined, by gender roles. To a certain extent, Elizabeth was able to escape the gendering of her court and in some sense the removal (or perhaps in the case of Mary, perceived removal) of her power and authority, by remaining unmarried.

In terms of the role of and importance of the Privy Chamber, Loades notes that the study of the Marian regime has not focused much on the court, "beyond noticing that the political development of the Privy Chamber, which had been going on from the 1490s, was checked and almost destroyed by its conversion into a female precinct in 1553."⁵⁶ So while it may not be possible to compare the privy chambers of other Tudor monarchs to that of Mary Tudor, it is possible to look at how the court adjusted. The importance of the Privy Chamber lay in the closeness and access to the monarch that it gave to the men who were a part of it. This was true for Henry as well as for Edward, as evinced by the attempts to get close to him that made up the boy king's relationship with Thomas Seymour. While Loades uses the relationship between Seymour and Edward as a way of

⁵⁵ Herrup, "King's Two Genders."

⁵⁶ Loades, "*Intrigue and Treason*," VII.

proving a point about intrigue at court, it also brings up just how much influence could conceivably be had by the people closest to the monarch.⁵⁷

Although the Privy Chamber had become a significantly less political sphere and an almost totally female one, closeness to the queen outside of that space was still extremely important. This can be seen very clearly in the relationship between Simon Renard and Mary, where Renard had more influence than most and certainly had a significant level of access to the queen. The intimacy of the relationship between Renard and Mary is evident in a letter that Mary sent to Renard early on in her reign.

Sir: If it were not too much trouble for you, and if you were to find it convenient to do so without the knowledge of your colleagues, I would willingly speak to you in private this evening, as you four are to come to-morrow. Nevertheless, I remit my request to your prudence and discretion. Written in haste, as it well appears, this morning, 13 October. Your good friend, Mary.⁵⁸

In another letter, Renard references being in Mary's more private rooms, which also speaks to his closeness to the queen and his access to her private spaces at court.⁵⁹ There is less evidence for Reginald Pole's physical proximity to Mary, but there is a significant amount of evidence for the closeness of their

⁵⁷ Loades, "*Intrigue and Treason*," 66-68.

⁵⁸ 'Spain: August 1553, 1-5,' in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain*, Volume 11.

⁵⁹ 'Spain: October 1553, 26-31,' in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain*, Volume 11.

relationship in terms of religion and matters of state. Two of the letters looked at earlier in this paper are relevant to this close relationship, specifically the letter in which Pole mentions that Mary had sent him a letter to look over and the letter in which Mary asks Pole for his advice on matters of religion.⁶⁰ Even though there is less evidence that Pole was physically near Mary, she actively sought out his advice and it is likely he was at least aware of what she was doing in her private space based on his letter to Philip regarding her late-night letter writing habits.

Mary had to choose whom she wanted both physically and politically close to her because in her case, there was no official system in place. In a sense, this gave her a level of power and control over who could influence her politics that even the ultimate “strong king”, Henry VIII, did not have. The strategy, and social and political niceties that might have gone into choosing the members of a male monarch’s Privy Chamber did not concern Mary. She was able to surround herself only with those people whom she believed would either agree with her or help her to achieve her goals. People could still attempt to get close to Mary, but as a woman, no man could be physically or politically close to her or be in her chambers without her specific invitation.

Finally, Simon Renard and Reginald Pole’s relationships with Mary and descriptions of the court reveal much about factionalism. Loades defines faction as “settled groupings pursuing consistent aims.”⁶¹ In this sense, there was very little factionalism at the court of Mary Tudor, especially if groups that contain the monarch herself cannot be considered true factions,

⁶⁰ 'Venice: April 1555, 16-30,' in *Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice*, Volume 6.

⁶¹ Loades, “*Intrigue and Treason*,” 294.

as they are not attempting to sway the queen, but to achieve what she has already signaled or admitted to wanting. A group trying to, for example, further the restoration of the Catholic Church, was not truly a faction because it was trying to advance the Queen's agenda, not convince her of something new.

Simon Renard believed there was factionalism at court, reporting in a letter to the Emperor sent early in December 1553 that the council was "torn by faction."⁶² Another letter from Renard to the Emperor speaks to the perceived presence of faction even more, this time with the faction being mentioned by the queen herself as she spoke to her Privy Council on the matter of the royal marriage agreement.

That very day, she said, she had sent for the Council to come to her chamber, declared all the foregoing to them, and said she trusted them to do their duty; they must not give way to faction or weaken in their devotion to her, upon which the honour and welfare of the realm depended, and she, for her part, would do her utmost to support and help them. They replied with one voice that they would do their duty and die at her feet to serve her.⁶³

Mary was clearly aware that traditional factionalism could be dangerous, and asked her councilors that they not fall prey to it. While factionalism may have been present within the council, the kind of faction that was present was not of the variety that was meant to sway the monarch either one way or the other in the

⁶² 'Spain: December 1553, 1-10,' in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 11*.

⁶³ 'Spain: December 1553, 16-20,' in *Calendar of State Papers, Spain, Volume 11*.

way that it had with other Tudor monarchs. Division is probably a better word to describe what was then considered factionalism. Pole and Renard both had specific political goals, and as such were seemingly as prone to factionalism as anyone else, but their relationship with the queen meant that their allegiances to various groups were not intended to sway Mary but to help her sway others. Renard was part of a group that wanted Philip to become Mary's husband, while Pole wanted to further the cause of Catholicism in England; however, these two men were not necessarily pushing Mary towards these goals, as she seemed to already have wanted the first, and she most certainly wanted the second.

The Marian Court differed greatly from any of the courts that came before it. This fact appears obvious, and though it could be easily written off as the result of the transition to the first female monarch, it is not as simple as that. The writings of and about the people closest to the queen bring to light just how complicated the political situation was at court. Mary Tudor had a unique relationship with her council and male courtiers that combined aspects of the courts that had come before hers, while also creating new ways of handling politics at court. She communicated with her council on her own terms and used intermediaries if she did not want to communicate directly. Instead of choosing a council to enact her will, she did her best with a council with which she did not always get along and used her authority as monarch to give precedence to those advisors and councilors with whom she did get along such as Simon Renard and Reginald Pole.

Mary Tudor had strong ideas about what she wanted on certain matters, religion being one of the most obvious, and she did what she could to get her way. She clearly recognized her own authority and her ability to override her council, but she was also

aware, or at least became aware, of the fact that forcing too much on the Privy Council was not in her best interest. Her court had a very different makeup than what she might have wanted and her relationship with them – as can be seen from the glimpses of her interaction we get from the letters of Renard and Pole – was not particularly close or comfortable. She used the people she trusted and wanted around her as intermediaries to communicate with her council and to advise her, instead of relying exclusively on her council. In a way, Reginald Pole and Simon Renard were Mary's substitutes for likeminded people on her council, as well as for a Privy Chamber. They were Catholics and had always been Catholics, and they helped her to communicate with politicians on whom she relied to help her run her country. Mary Tudor still headed up her council and made decisions with them and with their help and advice, but she also relied on her chosen advisors to make that relationship smoother and more successful.

Ultimately, Mary Tudor's court, when looked at in the context of other Tudor courts and the themes that have defined them, is less of an outlier than it is often made out to be. Many of the traditional systems that had been in place before she came to power were not so much done away with as they were significantly reworked and changed, and even those that were done away with were replaced in some respect. The court had previously been characterized by defined physical spaces, which could be political, private, or both; however, the Marian court was different. Proximity to the monarch was still important but the defined spaces of the court became significantly less so. The Marian court was a network of people for whom influence and power were not always based in the ability to be present in the queen's private spaces but in how well one could communicate with her through the channels she allowed, even if direct contact was best.

Mary Tudor was a monarch with the same legal powers as the monarchs who had come before her. What she wanted she was able to make happen, although she was sometimes convinced that it was in her best interest to slow down or not to enforce her will at all. The closer an advisor was to her, the more influential they could be, because a direct relationship with the monarch was still the quickest, albeit more difficult, means of influencing politics. Mary was not as strong as her father but she was not totally ruled by the men around her either. The English court and government did not cease to work properly when Mary Tudor was crowned. They adjusted as was necessary based on the gendered nature of the period, and continued to work towards legal and social change as they always had. Mary Tudor found a way to work within the system that allowed her some level of control and influence despite her gender and perceived weakness, even if her power was much less than that of her father and grandfather. Without reinventing court politics or the monarch-courtier relationship, Mary Tudor participated in court politics and functioned as a monarch more than has often been assumed in the past.

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