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The Wars of the Roses –

The eclipse of medieval monarchy in England?

A case study of the Wars of the Roses as a cause for political change in England.

Bachelor's thesis

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Introduction

"War is the father of all things"- Heraclitus [1]

The Wars of the Roses has become known as one of the main driving forces behind England's shift from a fragmented, late medieval monarchy to an early modern consolidated one. It has been argued that the strong aristocracy and bastard feudalism that marked the medieval political organisation in the 15th century was replaced by a strong and consolidated monarchical power as the conflict eventually ended with Henry Tudors ascend to the throne in the end of the century. This thesis will study this alleged shift and its political repercussions through a case study of the conflict itself.

In the years between 1455 and 1487, England was plagued by political turmoil and at times violent clashes between the houses of York and Lancaster, cadet branches of the royal house of Plantagenet, and their respective supporters.[2] The Lancastrian King Henry VI's increasing inability to rule made room for the power magnates of the English aristocracy to fight for the power to rule England, leading to a conflict that would last for most of the later part of the 15th century.

Later in history the conflict was to be known under the name of the Wars of the Roses, a name inspired by the rose sigils of the two main antagonists' houses: Lancaster's red rose, and the white rose of York. The campaigns that took place during the conflict had important international socioeconomic, military, and political involvement and repercussions in many years to come.[3] The period become known as a watershed in England between the late Middle Ages and the transition to early modern times. Ending with the eventual strong centralized monarchical rule under Henry Tudor (VII), and the subsequent long and stable rule of his son and granddaughter, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, the conflict left lasting marks on the state organization of England and weakened unchecked aristocratic power. Going from a mismanaged and at times almost lawless and fragmented rule under Henry VI, England

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[1] Kirk, G. S. (2010). *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. 245
[2] Gillingham, J. (1981). *The Wars of the Roses: Peace and Conflict in Fifteenth-Century England.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson. p. 254-55
[3] Goodman, A.,1981., p. 1 Goodman, A. (1981). *The Wars of the Roses : military activity and English society, 1452-97.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. p. 1

became one of Europe's greatest powers under Tudor rule and stood at the forefront of many important societal changes in the continent at the time [4]

However, the image of the Wars of the Roses as a driving force for comprehensive change, and even as a brutal and important conflict, has been largely disputed by varying historians in later years.[5] The image of a destroyed aristocracy, bloody battles, long-lasting rivalries, and political drama that swept through England for more than 30 years has been a central image in many retellings from both Tudor loyalists and important literary figures like Shakespeare. There is little real historical evidence to back this image, in fact there are many parts of the conflict we know little about.[6] Of the sources available to us, many implies that even though there is no doubt there was a complex dynastic conflict at the time, it was also marked by long periods of peace, reconciliation, and a functional political organisation. The actual battles were fewer and longer between than one would imagine, and on a much smaller scale than what is implied in many dramatic retellings. In many ways, it was not one "war" at all, but many different conflicts caused by a different set of problems.[7] How is it then that the Wars of the Roses are said to have caused a watershed in English history, leading to the transition from one form of political society and state to another?

In this thesis, will use the backdrop of the civil war to analyse if and how it was influential to England's transition from a society marked by weak royal power in the late Middle Ages, to a strong consolidated monarchy, marking England's transition to early modern times. Further, I will analyse how much of this alleged change can be attributed to the conflict, and if or how it shaped the evolution of England's political structure. Whether it was the weakening of the aristocracy, the consolidation of power during the Tudor dynasty or a complex combination of events that caused it, there is no doubt that England saw an extensive change by the ending of and immediately after the Wars of the Roses. This leads to my central research question for this thesis:

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[4] Loades, D. M. (1999). *Politics and Nation: England 1450-1660.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers. p. 11-12
[5] Grummitt, D. (2013). *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses.* London: I.B. Tauris. p. 133
[6] Gillingham, 1981, p. 242
[7] Gillingham, 1981, p. 254-55

Can the War of the Roses be claimed to have caused extensive political change in the end of the 15th century, leading to England's transition from a fragmented and weak late medieval Kingdom to a strong, consolidated early modern one?

Method

This thesis will provide a case analysis of the Wars of the Roses to see whether it can be claimed that it was one of the main reasons for the shift from a late medieval monarchy to an early modern one, and the turn from a weak and fragmented to a strong centralized monarchy in England. To do this, the most central parts of the conflict will be accounted for, from its immediate prelude and beginning around 1450 and onwards, to its conclusion when Henry Tudor (Henry VII) came to power in 1485 and defeated the last prominent resistance in 1487, as well as some of the early aspects of Tudor rule.

To analyse this conflict and its role in the transition between medieval times and early modern times, it will be necessary to define central terms and aspects such as war and civil war in the Middle Ages, bastard feudalism and military organisation, and the concept of the state in a medieval perspective. I will also briefly explain the governmental structure of England at the time, before analysing the conflict itself.

Limitations

The Wars of the Roses is a complex, long lasting conflict, and it would be difficult to include all aspects both political, economic, and societal in this thesis. It has been argued that the war was not a civil war at all, but rather a period of unrest, turmoil and sometimes violent clashes and military campaigns that took place in the latter part of the 15th century. Some would even claim that the civilians at the time would hardly notice the conflict at all.[8]

However, this thesis will assume the cohesive and general term of the Wars of the Roses used to describe the period and conflict and will analyse it as more or less a civil war. It will be centred around the central political aspects of the conflict and its most prominent actors The thesis will mainly focus on the aristocracy's role in the events, and the political aspects surrounding the war. Clearly, such a superficial analysis of a period complex both in

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[8] Grummitt, D., 2013 p. 12

magnitude and in the fact that it is a conflict that took place more than 500 years ago, will not claim to make any revolutionary new discoveries of any kind. This thesis, however, does not strive to do so, and will merely focus on the case analysis needed to discuss the general transition from one political period to another, and how this affected the political organization of one of Europe's most powerful and central monarchies at the time.

Being a case study of a conflict that took place in a time that is so different from our own modern day, it will be important to not analyse the Wars of the Roses through the lens of the 21st century, but rather try to understand it as it was perceived in the 15th century. This will be especially important when it comes to modern day concepts regarding the state and civil war. In the following section these concepts, as well as bastard feudalism, will be explained, laying the groundwork for the analysis later in the thesis. The general political organization of the state of England in the 15th century will also be presented briefly in this section.

Histography

This thesis uses historical research literature and commentary as its backdrop. The research on the conflict provides different approaches and understanding of the Wars of the Roses and the view on the impact of the conflict appears to have undergone changes from the oldest research literature and up until the most recent literature, resulting in three different main understandings of the impact of the conflict.

The first and oldest literature seem to focus much on bastard feudalism as one of the main causes for the conflict. The older literature also portrays the conflict in the light of earlier understandings of it as a significant and bloody war, important to England's transition from the Middle Ages.[9] The second approach focuses on discrediting this dramatic retelling and deescalating the image of the war as incredibly brutal and significant. Much of this literature also discredit bastard feudalism as the main cause of the conflict. [10] Further it claims that the conflict was of lesser importance than originally imagined and had little effect on day-to-day life in English society- rather, it suggested that it was hardly noticed by the people in general at the time.[11]

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[9] Gillingham, 1981, p. 254-55
[10] Gillingham, 1981, p. 254-55
[11] Grummitt, D., 2013 p. 133

The last approach offers something in between, seeing the Wars of the Roses as an important time in English history that had varying consequences for the political organisation in the country, but at the same time being a less substantial conflict than the earliest literature claims. Arguing that many modern historians underestimate the importance of the conflict, this approach paints an image of a significant change in both society and political attitudes in England after the war.[12]

The background for my theoretical approach in this thesis is mainly based on Hans Jacob Orning and Øyvind Østeruds' research literature in "Krig uten stat – Hva har de nye krigene og middelalderkrigene til felles?", where they use much of Hobbes 16th century philosophy regarding war, state creation and consolidation in a medieval perspective.[13] Their approach discuss civil war in the Middle Ages as something that created states. They also approach war as something that is not a definite state, but something that shifts between violent and peaceful times, often being in a place between the two states.[14]

Definitions and Theory

War and civil war in the Middle Ages

War is a broad phenomenon and has many aspects and variations throughout history. How we define war today differs significantly from what was understood as war in the Middle Ages. The political landscape more than 500 years ago, as well as general day to day life for most, was in many ways completely different from our lives today. However, periods of war in medieval times can be defined and understood by comparing it to what can be considered as "Peace". Being a period of "un-peace", war is something that occurred all over Europe during the end of the Middle Ages. The Hundred Years War, the Italian Wars and the French Wars of Religion are all examples of this.[15] In the Middle Ages warfare was mostly about land, and to control the humans who cultivated it.[16] This in turn defined the Kings role in politics, as he was also a landowner, and in that regard not very different from the other landowners he ruled.[17]

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[12] Grummitt, D., 2013 p.
[13] Orning, H. J., & Østerud, Ø. (2020). *Krig uten stat: Hva har de nye krigene of middelalderkrigene felles?* Oslo : Dreyers Forlag. p. 22
[14] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 24
[15] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 40
[16] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 19
[17] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 68

Civil war, which differs from the general state versus state concept of war, is often characterized by two fighting entities, one governmental representing the "state" and one rebellion fighting for various reasons, be it a wish for independence or to overthrow the ruling "power" in the state. [18] However, both concepts of the state, governmental representatives and "rebels" are blurred in medieval times, as many consider the early modern concept of states only to develop in the end of the Middle Ages.[19]

Civil war as characterized by a collapse of the existing state organisation, and the replacement of this existing organisation with something new [20], is exemplified in the case of the Wars of the Roses by the rather frequent deposing and replacement of the head of state, the King, and the political repercussions generated by this. One important aspect to note on the difference between civil war as we see it in a modern context, and how it was perceived in the Middle Ages, is how it relates to construction and destruction of the state. In modern society civil war is considered to tear down the state, but in the Middle Ages it was generally understood as something that built states.[21]

Hobbes, the medieval state, and war

War and state are closely interwoven, and therefore it is essential for the analysis to understand how both concepts were understood and organised in the Middle Ages. The state in the 15th century and Middle Ages in general is quite different from what we consider to be modern states today.[22] Some argue that states as we know them and their role as active actors in war did not develop before the end of the Middle Ages, around the Hundred Years War (1337-1453).[23]

In Medieval Europe war was one of the defining aspects of the establishment of the modern concept of the state. The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes was a central figure behind this concept of war as a motivation for "state-creation".[24] Hobbes wrote his famous work on the structure of the state, Leviathan, in 1651, 164 years after the end of the Wars of the Roses.

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[18] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 20
[19] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 46-47
[20] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 20
[21] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 22
[22] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 15
[23] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 16
[24] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 22

Hobbes describes the period before the surrender of power from the subjects to the "ruler" as the state of nature, marked by war, violence, anarchy, and brutality.[25] This is a state known to describe society in England during the height of conflict in the Wars of the Roses.

Hobbes theory on the state provides clear spheres for responsibility and the division of power in the state. Inside the state it is the government led by the head of state who maintains order and security for its citizens with a firm hand. Outside state borders, it is the military that protects the nation and its sovereignty. If the King cannot ensure this security for his citizens, he is no longer legitimized to hold power.[26] Long before Hobbes, it was common to associate warfare with the King or ruler, and in turn the protection of borders and territory as something that was the Kings responsibility.[27] However, Hobbes theory further underlines the understanding of the importance of Kingly power, and how the lack of this power will lead to chaos within the state.

War and civil war, as well as internal turmoil and violent clashes, plays a reoccurring part in the construction and consolidation of power in early modern states in Europe, including England. War became seen as a motivation for political and societal change, and civil war provided the political and structural change needed for strong state organisation. [28]

Hobbes developed his understanding of the state from his experience with an England that had been through a devastating Civil War from 1642 to 1651. Taking place more than 150 years after the Wars of the Roses, Hobbes understanding of the consolidation of the state and his view on the importance of a strong head of state is still highly relevant for the understanding of the Wars of the Roses. It is also likely that his political understanding of the state played a big part in the histography surrounding the conflict, especially on the matter of strong royal power and the state of nature that precedes the strong and consolidated state.

Bastard feudalism

Land was the dominant form of wealth and liquidity in the Middle Ages. As land was a very limited resource, even the King could often not afford large standing armies.[29] This made the

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[25] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 48-49
[26] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 49
[27] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 51
[28] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 60-62
[29] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 63

King as a political figure easier to challenge. Before and during the Wars of the Roses, armies were expensive, and only held together if necessary for the Kings cause or some lesser lords. During the Hundred Years War, the English King Edward III, lacking money, allowed his nobility to raise armies by contract, sacrificing the power and influence of the crown in his need for soldiers.[30] This exemplifies the phenomenon that marked the political and military organisation of medieval England, often referred to as bastard feudalism.

With the military organisation of bastard feudalism, the relationship between common man and his lord was both financial and personal. The common man was indentured to attend and ride with his lord whenever required due to a military campaign or war, suitably armed, and equipped. A lord's responsibility to his King or superior was to provide a certain number of mounted men and acres when needed for campaigns domestically and abroad. In return for the indenture, often a written contract between a lord and his men, the lord was to provide his men with a pension and protection.[31]

This arrangement had many political problems, especially for the King. Motivating loyalty and indenture to one's lord instead of one's King could greatly weaken the Kings power over his subjects if he did not prove a good enough ruler. It also put great power and responsibility in the hands of individual lords. Often having many retainers, it was the lord's responsibility to oversee that they respected the law. The King had little control over Aristocratic disputes and conflicts, as the soldiers that often partook in these disputes were not under his authority.[32] In periods of weaker monarchy, as under Henry VI, the problems with bastard feudalism became more and more evident. Indentured men could commit many crimes and be spared any legal consequences due to the protection from their lord, leading to periods of lawlessness in England and dissatisfaction with the Kings leadership.[33]

The outcome of the Wars of the Roses was decided by actual battles. The forces for these battles were mostly raised ad hoc when needed.[34] Bastard feudalism exemplifies the importance of popularity, support, and allies in the political elite, as this was the main way of raising an army to one's cause. The contesting houses had to rely on gaining support by the

[30] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 17
[31] Storey, R. L. (2015). Bastard feudalism. in J. Cannon, & R. Crowcroft, *The Oxford Companion to British History (2. ed)*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.
[32] Storey, R. L., 2015.
[33] Loades, 1999. p. 113
[34] Gillingham, 1981, p. 32

big and low lords and vassals who had contracts to bring men to their campaign.[35] This made it easier to openly oppose the King as the opposition had their own armies who were not affiliated with any governmental military, and therefore had no substantial allegiance to the King.

British government in the 15th century

Medieval English government was mainly dominated by the King, his council, the nobility, and Parliament. In 1215, English barons made King John of England sign the Magna Carta, a royal charter of rights that would ensure a limitation on the Kings power over his subjects. Initially intended for the barons and aristocracy, it would prevail in various forms for centuries. It was around the same time that Parliament was created.[36] Parliament in a medieval English context refers to the central and national assembly of magnates, churchmen, royal ministers, and representatives of lesser status, such as officials from shires and boroughs. After the 1320s, representation from the non-aristocratic representatives was regular in Parliament. Whether this representation indicated any lasting influence on Parliament from the commons in general is unsure at best. Most likely the economic and political elites in the smaller communities dominated the elections for Parliament, and rarely represented the interest of those with lesser status. The Parliament was regularly summoned by the King and discussed and processed various cases regarding economic, political, and societal aspects of English society.[37]

Though somewhat dependant on the popular support of the people, the general population had very little say in the political organisation of England.[38] By the beginning of the 15th century, however, the participation of some of the upper peasantry was ensured in the election of Parliament members from their communities.[39] The structure of English government in the late Middle Ages gave the aristocracy significant influence, making the King dependant on their support in his rule.

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[35] Gillingham, 1981, p. 33
[36] Reynolds, S. (2016, December). Magna Carta in its European Context . *History (London)*, pp. 659-670 . p. 663
[37] Maddicott, J. R. 2016, October 1. Parliament and the People in Medieval England . *Parliamentary History*, pp. 336-351., p 338-339
[38] Reynolds, 2016. p. 663
[39] Maddicott, J. R. 2016. p. 348

The Wars of the Roses

In posterity, the general impression of the Wars of the Roses has been shaped by the dramatic retellings of Shakespeare and Tudor loyalists.[40] It portrays a civil war that was ruinous and brutal, with scheming and dramatic antagonists. The real conflict was far different in its scale of death and destruction, especially compared to more recent wars in the 20th and 21st century. However, it is beyond any doubt that the Wars of the Roses was at many times violent, brutal, and intense.[41]

The Wars of the Roses is what some would call a "colligatory term". This is to say that it is a term invented by historians to try and make chaotic and confusing series of events more understandable and easier to analyse.[42] The period between 1455 and 1487 remembered as the Wars of the Roses is by no means a single cohesive period of civil war and conflict. It was also marked by long periods of relative peace and stability.[43] In recent times, there has been more evidence towards a less dramatic, but all the same important, conflict and period in English history.

Prelude

Some contemporaries trace the beginnings of the Wars of The Roses back to 1399. Though this is somewhat disputed, many claim that the conflict has its roots in the deposition and likely murder of Richard II by Henry Bolingbroke. More recent studies claim that the main reasons for the war took place close to its outbreak in the mid-15th century.[44] However, 1399's events had some important implications for the Wars of the Roses, the most important being the deposition of the King in 1399 leading to a change in the attitude of what was possible for a King, and what the limitations of the position would be. The King was, as the event showed, not above the law. The new, Lancastrian reign began under Henry IV, and surviving the crisis of legitimacy after he died, the throne was passed on to his son Henry V.[45] His seemingly successful rule was to be a stark contrast to his son and successor, Henry VI.

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[40] Gillingham, J., 1981, p. 2
[41] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 40
[42] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 12
[43] Gillingham, 1981, p. 254-55
[44] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 3
[45] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 9

Henry VI's rule

"In Henry VI England was afflicted with the worst possible kind of medieval monarch." [46]

In June 1450, the men of Kent protested that the law had no purpose any more than to do wrong to the ones it was meant to protect. This reflects the general attitude in England at the time that the English Government and the King did not fulfil the role of maintaining law and order.[47] Succeeding the throne at nine months old, the Lancastrian King Henry VI was reliant on the help of advisors and protectors from an early age. Soon proving to be an example of what many consider to be a fundamental problem with medieval state organisation in England; The quality of a royal government was dependant on the abilities and ambitions of the monarch. [48]

Henry VI was dealing out advantages, pardons, titles and land without any seemingly critical thought or consideration.[49] Local conflicts and private disputes in the aristocracy became more frequent, and the King proved unable to stop them.[50] Foreign policy and finances were troubled as well, and England was in deep debt by 1433.[51] The constant demand for soldiers, supplies and money due to military expeditions between 1415 and 1450 brought a substantial militarization of English society.[52] As the Crown did not have the means to create their own army, the indenture of soldiers to higher lords created a military organization that provided a private army for many in the aristocracy. This became a persistent problem both for Henry VI, as well as the maintenance of law, order, and justice in England in general. The Kings lack of authority and worsening mental health all made him an easier target for the increasingly powerful aristocracy, with many of its most prominent members having direct claims to the throne. Creation of full-time armies who rather would support their lord than their King made it easier to challenge monarchical power as the King's grip became weaker and weaker.[53] By 1449 and the summons of a new Parliament, the Lancastrian regime was facing both political and economic ruin.[54]

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[46] Loades, 1999. p. 18
[47] Loades, 1999. p. 13
[48] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 13
[49] Loades, 1999. p. 18
[50] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 14
[51] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 14
[52] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 35
[53] Storey, R. L., 2015.
[54] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 21

The Duke of York 1449-1455

Richard, Duke of York was a prominent figure in the English court at the time, and a direct descendant of Edward III on both his father's and mother's side. Sometimes referred to as the greatest magnate of his age, he was initially a great supporter of the Lancaster regime and Henry VI.[55] Seen as a resourceful lord,[56] he soon he became a public spokesperson in the name of reform in the Kingdom. [57] This, as well as his lasting and very public dispute with Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset, led to Henry VI openly fearing Richards ambitions by 1452.[58]

In 1453, after hearing of the English military defeat against the French and the subsequent loss of close to all English possessions in France, Henry's mental health immediately declined, leaving him in a stupor that would last for a year. The Kings Great Council was forced to rule in his stead. Wishing to avoid Queen Margaret ruling as regent the role was given to Richard of York instead.[59] At this time many disputes between different lords, dukes and men of power took place in England, and the lack of any stable authority during the Kings madness led to an increasingly unstable political situation.[60] The King recovered from his mental illness during Christmas 1454, and soon summoned the Great Council to meet in the beginning of 1455. York did not attend in fear of being accused and arrested on charges of treason after ruling in the Kings stead during his illness.

Outbreak 1455-59

The Battle of St Albans on 22 May 1455 is commonly known to mark the beginning of the civil war. It began as Richard, Duke of York, and his allies, most prominently the Earl of Warwick, Richard Neville, attacked the King's party in St Albans. The attack resulted in the killing of York's long-standing enemy, the Duke of Somerset, and changing the political notion that one could not use violence against a monarch. This was, however, not to mark the beginning of constant and bloody direct warfare. The years between the first clash of 1455 and the next case of open conflict in September of 1459 was marked by continual effort by

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[55] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 28
[56] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 29
[57] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 31
[58] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 33-34
[59] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 33
[60] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 37

most parties to reconcile, find compromise and maintain the stability through consensus.[61] After the clash at St Albans, York was soon made protector again, but failed to maintain power, as he was dismissed by what seems to be the King himself on advice from his other lord and aides.[62] In the following years, the political role of Queen Margaret of Anjou increased.[63]

The scene in the Temple Garden from Shakespeare's play Henry VI, part one, depicts how the different lords of England were to pick either red roses for Lancaster or white roses for York to show which side they supported.[64] In reality, most of the nobility did not commit to either York or Lancaster at the time. Many lords, leading churchmen and members of the council also seemed to try their best to reconcile York and Lancaster fractions. [65] Eventually peaceful negotiations broke down when the King proceeded to accuse York and his allies of treason in 1459. Facing certain defeat in a potential battle between the Yorkist host and the Lancastrian, York and his allies fled England.[66]

York's way to the throne 1459-64

The period after York's defeat in 1459 was fast moving and complicated. With the help of the cunning mind of Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, the military position of York was strengthened even in exile.[67] The Lancastrians was facing the same economic and political issues as before. By the end of July, Richard of York was again in control of Henry VI, killing many Lancaster lords with the help of his army. Queen Margaret fled England with her son.[68]

York made his claim to the crown to Parliament in October 1460 but was not met by initial support from his peers. Eventually they reached a compromise, with an accord that declared Henry VI was to remain King, but upon his death the throne was to pass to York and his heirs.[69] Queen Margaret soon amassed an army that threatened York and his supporters. In the following battle York's army was crushed by the Lancastrian army, and along with his son

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[61] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 43
[62] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 48
[63] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 49-50
[64] Gillingham, J., 1981, p. 112
[65] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 51-52
[66] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 59
[67] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 60
[68] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 64
[69] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 64

and other allied lords, Richard Duke of York was killed in the Battle of Wakefield in December of 1460.[70]

The deceased Duke of York's oldest son, Edward, soon retaliated and defeated part of the Lancastrian army in the beginning of February of 1461. Edward and Warwick with the York army was granted entry in London 27 of February. Consequently, they claimed that the Lancastrians had broken the accord from last October by killing Richard, the Duke of York. Edward laid claim to the crown but met much resistance.[71] He had to defeat the Lancastrian army that was still at large.

York together with Warwick led their host against the Lancastrians in the battle of Towton in the end of March 1961. While many descriptions of the Wars of the Roses as incredibly bloody and violent seems to be mostly exaggerated, the battle of Towton was truly a devastating battle, and the biggest and bloodiest fought in the civil wars by large.[72] Though the numbers are uncertain, it probably consisted of tens of thousands of soldiers with the combined armies and was distinguished by the active participation of the nobility, with around three-quarters of the entire aristocracy present on the field.[73] The battle proved devastating for the Lancastrian side, killing many of its allied lords and their retainers.[74] The royal family, however, managed to escape to Scotland after the defeat. Subsequently in June, Edward was officially crowned King in Westminster.[75]

England was still divided in loyalties, and a great number still favoured the Lancastrian regime. In the following years Edward IV had to face many opposing lords and commons, and after a period of civil war and weak government, he had much difficulty in achieving royal obedience in the populace in general.[76] Edward faced substantial Lancastrian resistance until mid 1464, when the opposition was crushed in the Battle of Hexham.[77] After this, Edward IV ruled in relative peace, until the fallout with his closest ally and advisor, Warwick, in 1469.

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[70] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 66-67
[71] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 70
[72] Gillingham, J., 1981, p. 133-35
[73] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 72
[74] Gillingham, J., 1981, p. 134-35
[75] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 73-74
[76] Gillingham, J., 1981, p. 138-39
[77] Gillingham, J., 1981, p. 152-54

Warwick's rebellions 1465-70

Edward IV seemed to have been mostly popular among his peers as well as being rather popular with the people.[78] He was, however, losing his grip over his closest ally and cousin, Lord Warwick. The main cause for the fallout between Edward and Warwick is often attributed to Edwards un-tactical marriage to the English widow of a Lancastrian knight, Elizabeth Woodville, in 1464.[79] Marriage between nobles was largely a political and financial matter in the Middle Ages, the marriage of a King was especially so. Warwick, who for long had negotiated for an advantageous marriage that would secure foreign political interests in France, was clearly side-tracked infuriated by Edwards actions.[80] Yet, the marriage between Woodville and Edward was probably not the sole, if even major, reason for Warwick's growing discontent and eventual open hostility towards the King. Edwards style of ruling, and open wish to choose his own approach in both domestic and foreign policy clashed with Warwick's wish for influence due to his attributions in making Edward King.[81]

Two times Warwick rebelled against Edward, ultimately leading to his death at the Battle of Barnet in 1471. Warwick's motives are somewhat obscure, the motives of Edwards younger brother, George Duke of Clarence even more so. It is clear, however, that by 1467 the two had agreed to some extent that they were to take power from Edward. By July 1469, they made public their plan to depose the King as his rule was causing the "nation's ills".[82] Summoning their supporters and their retainers, they marched on London in July. In the violent clashes that followed several nobles were executed at the hands of Warwick and Georges armies. The King seemed deserted and was captured by his brother and cousin.[83] Soon enough, Warwick's inability to rule soon led to his eventual admitted defeat in in October. Edward was released and returned as King, surprisingly choosing to forgive and forget the wrongdoings of the Duke of Clarence and Warwick.[84]

The picture of reconciliation and forgiveness soon shattered. Warwick and the Duke of Clarence once again conspired to overthrow Edward in 1470. The King soon found evidence of this new treachery, declaring George and Warwick rebels and traitors, forcing them to flee

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[78] Gillingham, J., 1981, p. 156-57
[79] Gillingham, J., 1981, p. 157
[80] Gillingham, J., 1981, p. 157-58
[81] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 83
[82] Gillingham, J., 1981, p. 161-62
[83] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 91
[84] Gillingham, J., 1981, p. 164-65

the country.[85] They fled to Normandy, where they reconciled and struck up an alliance with the exiled Queen, Margaret of Anjou, agreeing to reinstate Henry VI. This combined with the backing of Lancastrian supporters, forced Edward IV to flee to Burgundy in September 1470.[86] Warwick reinstated Henry VI as King without bloodshed, but once again his rule soon collapsed, and Edward was able to reclaim the throne by April 1471. Almost all Lancastrian resistance was removed with the death of Warwick in the following battle of Barnet, Margaret of Anjou's subsequent defeat and imprisonment, the execution of her son and heir and many remaining Lancastrian lords, and the eventual death or murder of Henry VI in the Tower some weeks later.[87] At last, from 1471, after 16 years of turmoil, unrest and at times substantial bloodshed, Edward IV of York ruled England in relative peace until his death in 1483.

Richard III and Henry Tudor 1483-85

Edward IV's reign was largely peaceful domestically, and he was secured by two heirs in his sons by Elizabeth Woodville.[88] In the beginning of 1483 Edward fell ill, and shortly after, on April 9, he died.[89] The late King left his minor son and Heir, Edward V, in the care of the two hostile camps of his Queen and his brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, as both sought to be protector of Edward V.[90]

Richard III is an ambiguous figure, his image for posterity greatly marked by Shakespeare's portrayal of him as an utterly evil and morally corrupt monarch.[91] Despite this depiction, there is no reason to believe Richard wanted the crown for himself after Edward IV's death. He had been loyal to his brother and served him well throughout his reign.[92] It seems that it was the conviction pushed by both himself and peers that the Woodville's intended to usurp him from his role as protector for the minor King that made him pursue the cause of action that eventually led to his coup in July 1483.[93]

Richard acted quickly on the perceived Woodville threat, calling on arms to aid him against the Queen and her allies, and executing many leading members of the Yorkist supporters.

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[85] Loades, 1999. p. 55
[86] Loades, 1999. p. 56
[87] Loades, 1999. p. 56-57
[88] Loades, 1999. p. 67-68
[89] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 112
[90] Loades, 1999. p. 68
[91] Gillingham, J., 1981, p. 2
[92] Loades, 1999. p. 69
[93] Loades, 1999. p. 69

Soon, he outlined his own claim to the throne, which it seems he based on the statement that Edward IV's sons and heirs were illegitimate. Accepted by an assorted group of lords, knights, and esquires, he was crowned King Richard III in front of a small crowd on 6 July 1483. Richard had in the scope of a few months after his brother's death put all his children and heirs aside and assumed power as the rightful King.[94] The fate of his two nephews, Edward, and Richard, as well as Richards motives and reasons behind his actions in 1483, remain unclear. It seems, however, that the general conviction at the time was that Richard had had his nephews murdered. This conviction greatly affected his reputation at the time as well as in posterity.[95]

Richard's usurpation was seen as a huge misuse of power by contemporaries and undermined further the already weak authority of royal government.[96] Richard III was soon faced with the conspiracy of Elizabeth Woodville and Margaret Beaufort to put Margaret's son, Henry Tudor on the throne.[97] A distant descendant of Edward III,[98] Tudor's royal lineage was more obscure than that of Richard III. The fact that Henry Tudor was considered of little to no importance in the political game of England up until 1483, and still managed to invade and claim the crown by 1485, is clear evidence of Richard III's lack of authority and support in the aristocracy during his reign.[99] This played a big part in his eventual demise.[100]

Henry Tudor eventually got aid from the French King, who gave him both men and equipment. Painfully aware that Henry Tudor would leave his current location in France and invade England,[101] but failing at any political attempt to stop him,[102] Richard III met Tudor's invading army at Bosworth 22 August. Richard's host lost the battle and he died in the field, leaving Henry Tudor free to claim the crown of England as Henry VII. [103]

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[94] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 113-14
[95] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 115-16
[96] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 130
[97] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 117
[98] Flattun, J.-W. (2021, July 19). The Kings' Lines and Lies: Genealogical Rolls in Mythmaking and Political Rhetoric in the Reign of Henry VII. *Journal of Art History*, pp. 139-158.
[99] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 124
[100] Loades, 1999. p. 73
[101] E. F., J. (1961). *The Oxford History of England: The Fifteenth Century, 1399-1485*. Oxford: Oxford Univeristy Press. p. 639
[102] Gillingham, J., 1981, p. 243
[103] Loades, 1999. p. 74

Tudor rule and consolidation of power

Bosworth is commonly understood to mark the beginning of the end of the Wars of the Roses. Henry symbolically crowned himself as King by right of conquest, not waiting to go through Parliament. This was to be a foreshadowing of Henry's style of ruling in the years to come. As Henry VII began his rule, he consolidated his power quickly by marrying Elizabeth of York, Edward IV's oldest child and heir, uniting the houses of Tudor and York, and working to reconcile the royal houses of Plantagenet and York.[104]

Henry had Richard III denounced as a usurper, but acknowledged both Edward IV and V's legitimacy, further strengthening his relationship with the York's. He also avoided any substantial retaliation against those who had supported Richard, working to improve his support and popularity with the aristocracy.[105] The military organization of bastard feudalism that had plagued his predecessors was put under control when Henry imposed a new law in 1504 prohibiting indenture without a royal license. This gave him the power to refuse his peers large personal armies if he deemed them a threat to him and the crown.[106]

Henry faced no easy task in restoring authority in the monarchy. In the last thirty years, the crown had changed hands five times, creating an unstable and unpredictable political reality. Even though he eventually succeeded in this regard, he faced many obstacles both by opponents in the aristocracy as well as popular uprisings and rebellions in the first years of his reign.[107] In 1487 a Yorkist rebellion was quenched at the Battle of Stoke Field and became the last battle with armies in the field during the Wars of the Roses. This is generally considered to be the definite end to the dynastic conflict that had lasted for over 30 years.[108]

Henry VII had in his peers no other nobles who could threaten his rule like his predecessors had in the Earl of Warwick and the Duke of York. As opposed to the popular retelling, the aristocracy was not necessarily crushed by the Wars of the Roses,[109] but many of the old alliances had broken down in the last decades, both due to political changes and natural ones,

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[104] Loades, 1999. p. 75
[105] Loades, 1999. p. 75
[106] Storey, R. L., 2015
[107] Loades, 1999. p. 76
[108] Loades, 1999. p. 78
[109] Oliphant, T. L., 1872. Was the Old English Aristocracy Destroyed by the Wars of the Roses? *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, pp. 351-356. P. 355

such as death and marriage. Therefore, there was no alliances strong enough to challenge the new Tudor King.[110] Henry VII also focused on distributing his trust evenly among the nobility. This made the threats of jealousy and rivalry among the political elite less prominent and counteracted any of the leading men in the nobility growing too powerful.[111]

Other than the clearest changes that followed Henry's ascend to power and move towards a more stable authority, there was no dramatic changes in the political situation and structure of England. The King was still dependent on the support from his lords and their retainers in the face of rebellion and foreign invasion and conflicts. After all, he had not extinguished bastard feudalism, only put it under a clearer royal control.[112] However, his need for support in the aristocracy was far less dominant than it had been for his predecessors. Before Henrys ascend to power, the political elite had been largely occupied by managing their own estates and ensuring their own interests. Under Henry VII, however, to be included in the political life of the state and to protect one's interests, the aristocracy had to be in the King's presence at court.[113]

There also seemed to be a shift in the attitude towards the Kings' responsibilities during Henry VII's reign. When before the King's accountability to both his peers in the nobility as well as the commons had been emphasized, it was now put more stress on the nobility and commons responsibilities to their King.[114] This rising culture of obedience affected both the aristocracy's power, and Parliaments room of action in state affairs. This change was a result on active policy by Henry during the 1480's, making way for the policy that almost all kind of disobedience to the King was treason, and as such punishable by death. A fate befalling many powerful and resourceful lords, as well as ladies, during the Tudor dynasty.[115]

Henry VII managed to free himself from much of the constraints former Kings had been under from Parliament. Regarding fiscal policies, he managed to ensure a private royal economy that he managed himself through the treasurer of the Kings chamber. This made him able to pursue a freer foreign policy amongst other liberties.[116] Henry also succeeded in

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[110] Loades, 1999. p. 82-83
[111] Loades, 1999. p. 12
[112] Loades, 1999. p. 82
[113] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 182-83
[114] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 183
[115] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 184
[116] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 171

making Parliament raise taxation of the commons to reflect the real income of the people. This changed almost two hundred years of Parliament resisting the crowns attempts at raising taxes.[117] Further he ensured support from the Pope, having him declare Henry as rightful King of England in 1486, which he skilfully spread word about through the Kingdom with the use of the newly developed use of print.[118]

During Henry VII's rule, the Tudor dynasty was in no way secure, and he had to spend the remainder of his life working to secure the peaceful passing of the crown to his son, Henry VIII. Rebellions, wars, financial difficulties, shifting loyalties, and the premature death of his oldest son, Arthur, were all prevailing threats to the dynasty. The lack of any realistic threat in the political elite during the later parts of his reign helped Henry restore authority, with the help of what appears to be a prevailing and competent council.[119] There is, however, no doubt that the personal political qualities to Henry Tudor also played a big part in laying the groundwork for the dynasty that would last until 1603.[120]

Henry VII's son, Henry VIII, would enjoy a freedom of action that none of his predecessors had seen.[121] Upon his ascension to the throne, he had a functional council and administration that was able to govern in his name. With the help of able councillors and the groundwork and stability created by his father, Henry's rule was by most means successful and stable.[122] Though the succession of his three children, Edward, Mary and Elizabeth was tumultuous and marked by both difficult and dangerous religious divisions and tensions, Elizabeth I's eventual rule was to go down in history as a golden age in England, making it one of the most dominant powers in Europe at the time.[123]

Analysis

This section seeks to analyse weather the Wars of the Roses can be said to have brought on the political changes seen in the shift from 15th century, and whether these changes can be explained through the theoretical aspects of medieval civil war as a motivator for state

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[117] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 183
[118] Loades, 1999. p. 83
[119] Loades, 1999. p. 93-94
[120] Loades, 1999. p. 92
[121] Loades, 1999. p. 12
[122] Loades, 1999. p. 100-101
[123] Loades, 1999. 107-08

creation and consolidation. It will also investigate how problems with the military and governmental organization in 15th century England created the conflict that eventually led to its decline and reform.

More recent research literature on the Wars of the Roses seem to show a consensus that the conflict had little immediate or long-lasting consequences for English society.[124] It seems the conflict was far less brutal and important than portrayed by various earlier accounts. The battles that took place were few and long between, and the political impact of the conflict was less than substantial. Some even argue that fifteenth century England was the most peaceful country in Europe at the time.[125]

I argue that this approach to the Wars of the Roses downplays its importance and role in political change in England at the time. The fact that the actual brutality of the war has been exaggerated does not necessary imply that little political change happened because of the conflict. In line with Hobbes theory of civil war as a cause of or the creation and strengthening of states, England did indeed undergo many of the political and governmental changes associated with medieval civil war during and after the Wars of the Roses.

Further, I will argue that the Wars of the Roses can be categorized as a civil war in a medieval framework. Being an internal conflict between the different power magnates of England that eventually led to the replacement of the existing weak political order with something stronger and more stable. In line with Orning and Østeruds approach to civil war in the Middle Ages,[126] the Wars of the Roses can consequently be said to have contributed to or provided by itself the shift to a stronger and more centralized state. This matches the general conception of civil war in the Middle Ages as something that created states rather than tore them down.[127] The Wars of the Roses can be understood as a period of "un-peace", with some longer periods of peace, like during the latter part of Edward IVs Regin. As with other medieval civil wars, the lines between the governmental fraction and the rebellion are unclear and complicated with the Wars of the Roses as well. As the Kings was deposed and replaced frequently during the conflict, the opposing sides often shifted roles from rebellious to governmental, along with the loyalties of the political elite.

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[124] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 133
[125] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 133
[126] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 22-23
[127] Orning & Østerud, 2020. p. 22

Either way, the approach to civil war as something that is state consolidating can be argued to ring true for the Wars of the Roses. Hobbes approach to the state of nature that precedes states can also be applied to the years that the conflict played out. With no seemingly lasting and stable rule or authority in any of the kings, all the monarchs before Henry Tudor experienced deposition at least once. This state of chaotic political reality was ended with the Tudor dynasty, further amplifying the image of the Wars of the Roses as a civil war that contributed to the creation and consolidation of the early modern English state. The political transformation that followed stabilized and consolidated England as a state, weakened the aristocracy and Parliaments influence and power and changed the attitudes towards royal power, leading to a strengthening of the Kings role and power.[128]

The lack of authority

As a general trait of civil wars, the breakdown of the existing systems partly manifested itself in the deposition or replacement of the King five times in the span of just 30 years during the conflict.[129] The fact that it was possible to depose the King in such a frequent manner was a result of many aspects of English society in the 15th century, such as military and governmental organisation and the aristocracy's power and central role in state affairs at the time. Tracing the deposition of Kings back to the Lancaster rise to power in 1399, it can be argued that the impression of a King as someone that could very well be deposed if he failed to fulfil his duties, left a lasting perception in the memory of the English aristocracy. This could have made way for the understanding that a monarch could be deposed and replaced by another heir in line to the throne should it be necessary.

What made the deposition of a King "necessary" seemed to vary from monarch to monarch during the war. With Henry VI it was generally stated that his personal qualities, or lack thereof, made him unable to perform his Kingly duties. With Warwick's attempt at deposing Edward IV, he stated that the King was causing the "nation's ills" through reckless use of tax-money. Richard III simply stated that Edward IVs heirs were illegitimate. All these cases exemplify how the Kings security in his position was greatly affected by the general opinion of him in the nobility, as the Kings in power during the conflict were often claimed to be unfit

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[128] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 184
[129] Loades, 1999. p. 76

to rule by his peers. Criticism of the King did not in most cases result in serious consequences for the ones delivering it.

Parliament

The Kings power before 1487 was also limited by Parliament and the need for the aristocracy's support both in political matters such as military campaigns. This created a fragile political situation when Henry VI proved more and more to be a weak and incompetent King, with strong, resourceful, and popular opponents in his peers, like the Duke of York. The Parliament limited power and proved an obstacle for almost all the major actors during the conflict. Richard of York was stopped from being made King during his first rebellion by Parliament, Edward had to earn Parliaments support for his Kingship for years, and Warwick twice lost his fleeting grip on power when Parliament opposed his ambitious plans. Parliament also posed a limitation on the Royal financial power, stopping much of the attempts on raising taxes on the commons, and even controlling the economy of the crown itself.[130] This further reduced the Kings power both in domestic matters and foreign policy.

Bastard feudalism

Parliament was not the only obstacle for royal power during the Wars of the Roses. A strong militarized aristocracy with large private armies meant that the political stability often was threatened by the unstable relations between its members, as well as making the King dependant on military backing from his lords in campaigns both in England and abroad. As exemplified with Richard Duke of York's personal conflict and enmity with the Duke of Somerset, personal conflicts in the English aristocracy could take on a highly militarized character due to the large standing armies at the lord's commands. The battle of St. Albans is one example of this and shows how the King was unable to curb these disputes between his subjects. With bastard feudalism these smaller conflicts could always have the potential to become actual battles and bloody confrontations, all depending on the personal qualities and ambitions of the lords in question. I will argue that almost all the battles during the Wars of the Roses were marked by bastard feudalism, making alliances and allegiances within the aristocracy essential to maintain power for the King as well as his opponents.

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[130] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 171

The Duke of York's attack on the King's party at St. Albans in 1455 and following military success was only possible due to his support by large parts of the aristocracy both military and politically, further exemplifying the nobility's role in the power shifts at the time. Henry VI had proved lacking in gaining the support of his peers, which left him exposed to the ambitious York. Opposition towards Richard from both Parliament, Lancaster loyalists, and other members of the nobility made him in turn reliant on support in the aristocracy to maintain a military power strong enough to remain in control. Queen Margaret of Anjou proved able to gain enough sympathy and alliances in the nobility to muster armies that posed genuine threats to York rule several times, eventually leading to the death of the Duke of York.

Both Richard of York as well as his son, Edward IV also fell victim to the shifting loyalties of the aristocracy and the constant need to ensure their support to be able to maintain power. Twice during Edward IV's reign, he was pushed from power, albeit briefly, by his cousin Warwick. Warwick himself was also pushed from power twice over, due to a lack of support from his peers and Parliament eventually leading to his demise. With Richard III, the consequences of lacking military support in the nobility became apparent when Henry Tudor, an obscure claimant to the throne with no substantial army or lineage, was able to defeat Richard and claim the crown in 1485.

These are all examples of how the nobility played an essential part militarily and politically during the Wars of the Roses, leading to a frequent shift in who held power and a generally unstable and fragmented political reality. The already weakened trust in royal authority reached a height with Richard III's unpopular coup and short reign. By then it was clear that the authority and power of the King in England was weak, corrupted, and unstable. This changed with the ascend of Henry Tudor.

Henry Tudor and political change – How did the Wars of the Roses cause consolidation of power?

The civil war that had lasted the last 30 years had left a political elite tired of the constant breakdown of authority. Rebuilding this authority demanded substantial changes in policy from Henry Tudor, which he promptly delivered. I argue that England witnessed a breakdown of the old system during the Wars of the Roses, up to the point where royal authority was practically non-existent. As political and governmental structures at the time suffered from the

turmoil, they were more prone to substantial change when Henry VII ascended the throne. Political cunning, limitations in Parliaments influence, advantages regarding no serious power threats in the aristocracy, and stable and sound advice and council from his allied peers helped Henry VII rebuild the authority that was lost, and further strengthening it as well. Perhaps most importantly of all, Henry VII and his successor and son, Henry VIII, created a new culture of obedience to the King that had not been existent before the Wars of the Roses.[131] Although it was not a radical political change, and many of the systems that existed before 1487 remained in function, there was a notable change in the power structure of England, that would lay the groundwork for even more substantial political change in the future.

One of the main changes the Wars of the Roses brought was not a completely incapacitated aristocracy, but the lack in the nobility of any "great man" that could pose a threat to the King. There were no magnates left with the same resource's, power, or influence as Richard of York, Edward IV, Warwick, and Richard III had in their time. Many of the old alliances of the aristocracy had also disappeared with Richard III's reign, mostly because of natural reasons like death, illness, marriages etc., and some due to the political turmoil surrounding Richard III's regime and Henrys ascend to power.[132]

With no direct and substantial threats to the Crown, Henry was already much more secure than his predecessors had been. Without the need to focus on the curbing of large invasions and rebellions after 1487, Henry VII had the opportunity to focus more on policy and establishing his dynasty. Tudor rule represented a shift of power were before the King had been dependant on the support of the aristocracy to achieve any real policy or development, the aristocracy was now more and more dependent on the favour of the King.[133] This does not imply that it was an easy task for Henry to re-establish authority. Despite the political power vacuum created in the turmoil of the wars, Henry needed to show a firm royal policy to regain the authority and influence of the King that had been severely damaged during the many years of conflict.

The aristocracy was deeply involved in the Wars of the Roses, both with armies and support of the varying claimants, but also in the ever-changing political plotting, scheming and insecurity that followed the unstable political situation. With most families having lost some

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[131] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 183-94
[132] Loades, 1999. p. 94-95
[133] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 133

relatives to the conflict, the memory of it would most likely be fresh in the mind of the nobility. As a result, the aristocracy remembered what the consequences could be if the Royal authority failed or was challenged by to strong magnates.[134] Even though the contemporary retelling of the Wars of the Roses during the Tudor dynasty undoubtedly exaggerated the devastating consequences of civil war and disobedience to the King, the aristocracy probably agreed to some extent that it was best for all parties to avoid a similar series of events.

This probably led to a less hostile political climate surrounding the King than before. Henry seized this momentum and worked to secure power and loyalty to him as a person, as well as the image of the King and royal authority. Political change caused by the Wars of the Roses is then apparent in the creation of a stable government surrounding the King, loyalty in his peers, and more personal power for the King as a person of the state. Both Henry VII and VIII, to further secure their position as absolute monarchs, demanded obedience and would punish treason harshly.[135]

Great men, Parliament, and the attitudes towards royal power

To claim that the War of the Roses led to the shift from Middle Ages to early modern times would be a stretch. It is, however, quite possible to see a link between the years of political turmoil and unrest as the main driving force for change in the political organisation of England. I will argue that there were three main changes caused by the Wars of the Roses that led to the transition from a medieval and weak monarchy to a strong, consolidated early modern monarchy and the creation of a clearly defined English state.

Firstly, the weakening of the aristocracy's great men and their armies. As mentioned earlier, the aristocracy was far from ruined by the civil war. It was, however, changed substantially during the conflict. Before and during the Wars of the Roses, the aristocracy possessed power over the King in both military capacity and political influence. The King was dependant on the aristocracy when it came to military campaigns, domestic policy, and foreign policy. Aware of this fact, the King could risk much by displeasing his peers.

The period before and during the civil war was also influenced by extremely powerful magnates with direct claims to the throne. However, by the time Henry VII assumed power,

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[134] Loades, 1999. p. 81-82
[135] Loades, 1999. p. 102-3

many of the most powerful lords of the Kingdom were dead, either because of the conflict itself, or natural causes like age and disease. Henry effectively removed all remaining threats to his authority and consolidated both economic and political power making him hard to challenge. When the most ambitious and resourceful magnates of the aristocracy was gone, it seemed that there was more room for political growth as the King did not need to spend as much of his resources on keeping the nobility in line as his predecessors had done. By distributing his favours evenly among the nobility, and keeping many different advisors as opposed to a few overly powerful ones, he also curbed the evolution of too powerful lords in his peers. Even further, Henry secured greater control of the challenges associated with bastard feudalism after he imposed a law that prohibited indenture without an explicit royal license.[136] This further diminished the aristocracy's military power, securing the King more control over his peers as well.

Secondly, Henry marked the shift in the power balance between himself and Parliament almost immediately, when he crowned himself King before going through Parliament when he invaded England and defeated Richard III. His reforms around fiscal policies both regarding the crowns personal economy, as well as an adjustment in taxes laid on the commons, showed a substantial shift away from the policies and structures of Parliament that had marked the last century. As the aristocracy was less inclined to oppose the King after the end of the Wars of the Roses due to the change in attitudes to royal power, the commons represented in Parliament had a harder time opposing the royal authority. This in turn strengthened the Kings power over Parliament compared to earlier rulers, who was more reliant on Parliament in both domestic, foreign, and fiscal policy.

Thirdly, attitudes towards the Kings relationship and responsibilities towards his peers and commons changed significantly during Henry VII's reign, as well as during his sons. When before royal authority and the Kings person had been openly questioned, deposed, and opposed, it was now a much more dangerous thing to criticize the King. Not to say that it had no consequences before or during the Wars of the Roses, but the shift in the perception of the aristocracy and commons responsibilities to their King is evident.[137] Now the aristocracy had to be much more present at court and in the King's inner circle to be a part of political life and favour. Obedience and loyalty to the King was emphasized, showing signs of discontent or a

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[136] Storey, R. L., 2015
[137] Grummitt, D., 2013, p. 183-84

lack of loyalty and obedience was regarded as treason. This in turn created a culture where it was much harder to criticise the King, and any potential dismay was directed towards his advisors and peers instead. When before the King had been held responsible by Parliament, the nobility, the commons and even of Magna Carta in Richard II's case, it now seemed that the King again was above the law, some would even say he was now only responsible to God.

The breakdown of old structures during the Wars of the Roses paved way for the Tudors to create an England that was different from what it had been before. The King was now at the absolute centre of government, and Parliament and other members of the nobility did not have the same influence and power as they had had before. As Hobbes claims, the breakdown of order in war and civil war paves way for the creation of strong and centralised states. The England that grew forth after the Wars of the Roses was a stronger, more stable, and central state in Europe than the fragmented, weak, and chaotic England that existed immediately before and during the conflict. I argue that the Wars of the Roses may still be claimed to be one of the decisive factors of England's political change and turn to an early modern monarchy and state in the 16th century and onwards.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have analysed the Wars of the Roses as one of the main causes for political change in England during the latter part of the 15th century. The thesis has the theoretical backdrop of Hans Jacob Orning and Øyvind Østeruds approach to medieval civil war, and Hobbes theory on the war's role in the creation of state together with the implications of bastard feudalism and governmental organisation in England in the 15th century. With these approaches I have analysed the conflict and its political consequences, briefly accounted for the essential parts of the Wars of the Roses itself, as well as its main political actors. I have analysed the major political implications of the conflict by looking at the consequences in the governmental structure of England and the structure and organisation of the upper class.

I conclude my findings with the following: Even though the short term and long-lasting effects of the wars itself are disputed in much research literature, the dynastic and political power struggle of the Wars of the Roses affected England as a state, and the organisation of the monarchy as a political institution. The political structures of the country saw extensive change in the transition between the 15th and 16th century, leading to a transition from a

fragmented late medieval monarchy to the strong and consolidated Tudor rule that would last until 1603.

Early accounts of the War of the Roses portray it as a much more bloody and substantial war than what we have evidence to claim. Our understanding of the scale of the conflict is undoubtedly, as with much of history, influenced by the overdramatized and inaccurate accounts from historical figures that lived years after the events took place. Still, I argue that more recent research literature undermines the effect the conflict had on the consolidation of royal power under the Tudor dynasty by trying to counteract the earlier overdramatized accounts of the conflicts.

The tumultuous political climate surrounding the civil war in England during the Wars of the Roses made it possible for Henry Tudor to invade England and crown himself king. It also created the possibility for him to achieve the political changes needed to create a strong centralized royal authority. I argue that the lasting political problems that marked England before and during the Wars of the Roses was broken down by the civil war. Bastard feudalism, a strong nobility with many powerful magnates in position to challenge the King, weak rule from the King himself as well as his limited reach in political matters all contributed to the unstable government and lack of royal authority witnessed during the Wars of the Roses.

I argue that up to a point the results of the conflict removed much of the weaknesses in English late medieval government, creating a break with the old England when Henry Tudor assumed power, entering the stages of an early modern monarchy and state. The authority of Royal Government which had almost been destroyed by the political turmoil of the latter part of the 15th century, was restored during the Tudor dynasty. Any substantial opposition to the King was controlled, and Henry VII was by 1487 not in any considerable danger of open rebellion from his peers, as all his predecessors had been. By distributing his favours evenly among his peers, he curbed the creation of any too powerful figures in the nobility. With a change in attitudes towards royal power and authority, Tudor rule secured the King as a powerful political figure with much more power than the rulers of the 15th century had seen.

While some of the immediate changes during Henry VIIs reign may seem small, most of them created lasting consequences for England and contributed to creating a strong and

consolidated monarchy and state, that would become one of the leading powers in Europe at the time. Henry VIII enjoyed an unprecedented royal power and freedom compared to his predecessors in the 15th century. The policies and ruling style of Henry VII's son and granddaughter would not have been possible in the political climate that existed in the latter part of the 15th century, and as such witness to the changes resulting from the conflict. Despite the earliest exaggerated historical accounts and the subsequent reductionist approaches in historical research literature, I conclude that the Wars of the Roses contributed to the transition from a late medieval political organisation to an early modern one. Consequently, more than 500 years after its end, the conflict still plays an important part in England's political history.

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