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From Sacred Goddess to Divine King: Continuity in the Rhetoric of Power

Cultural history often emphasizes contrasts and discontinuities between certain epochs. When it comes to Elizabeth I and James I, and the change not just of dynasties, but also of the nationality of the monarch, the juxtaposition of their reigns is justifiably prominent. However, discontinuities are never perfect: there are several continuities that enable and enforce the smooth and successful adoption of a discontinuity. As recent historical research suggests, James I seems to have adopted several aspects of Elizabeth I's policies, which indicates that the aspiration of contemporaries to treat the "succession ... as though there had bin noe change" was successful.¹ This paper will analyse such a perceptible link between late Elizabethan royal representation and early Jacobean rhetoric on monarchical power. It will contend that the strategy of heaping excessive praise upon Queen Elizabeth in the post-Armada years found a direct continuation in the early popular reception of James I as a divinely ordained monarch with exceptional powers.

Two texts – eight years apart – were chosen to illustrate the significance of the close connection of the ideas belonging to the years of transition between the two reigns. Both make the suggestive statement that princes are Gods on Earth and that kings are the lieutenants of God. These sections of the speeches show close resemblance both in their vocabulary and phrasing underpinning the argument of continuity. However, the context of the two passages is vastly different. The first was included in a sermon delivered on the last Accession Day of Queen Elizabeth on 17 November 1602 by John Howson, the second was delivered by James I to his Parliament on 21 March 1610. Under closer scrutiny, the two passages suggest substantial variance between the two epoch's understanding of royal power. The first was part of the eulogy of the elderly Queen and rested upon a long tradition of accommodating phrases as "sacred" and "goddess" from classical mythology. However, when after the death of Elizabeth I on 24 March 1603 this eulogy was adjusted to honour the new King, the ceremonial gesture of James's English subjects became conflated in his oration by his own political views that vindicated divine and absolute power for kings and aimed to justify the King's intention to curtail Parliament's privileges. Thus, – as the paper will point out – close semblance

¹ John Watkins, *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England: Literature, History, Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 6; the entry for 24 March 1602 [Old Style] in John Manningham, *The Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple, 1602–1603*, ed. John Bruce (Westminster: Nichols and Sons, 1868), 147.

may disguise difference, yet it also may help in making new understandings and interpretations accessible and acceptable precisely because they smoothly follow the patterns familiar from earlier times.

Through the close readings of Howson's sermon and the King's oration, the paper will argue that there are several thematic continuities in James I's early speeches that enforce and revitalize elements of late Elizabethan propaganda. Furthermore, the cult language of the Queen already contained aspects of her successor's theory about the absolute rule of monarchs, thus, the Queen's excessive celebration at the end of her reign prepared the way for James's rhetoric about his divinely sanctioned rule on the throne of England.

The Two Texts

On 17 November 1602, John Howson, vice-chancellor of the University of Oxford, addressed his audience at Oxford to defend the custom of celebrating Queen Elizabeth's Accession Day in church. Quoting various biblical precedents of thanksgiving for a worldly ruler, he finally elaborated on the nature of kingship:

Princes are the Gods of the earth, Gods immediate lieutenants ... God honoreth Princes with his owne name, so that they are called *Gods*, and *Gods anointed*, and the *sonnes of the most high*: he calleth them by his owne name, and furnisheth them with divine and supernatural qualities. ... For there is ... *divination in the lips of the king*, *Prov. 16*; so that they do often foresee, forespeake, and foretell things to come ... they haue gifts of healing incureable diseases, which are miraculous and aboue nature ... they haue power absolute without limitation accountable only to God for their actions. ... they haue authoritie to blesse their dutifull and loyall subiects, and they are blessed: & authoritie to curse their subiects disobedient; & they are cursed with temporal curse.²

Eight years later, King James repeated the ideas nearly verbatim in his speech to the assembled Lords and Commons at Whitehall:

Kings are not onely GODS Lieutenants vpon earth, and sit vpon GODS throne, but euen by GOD himselfe they are called Gods. ... Kings are iustly called Gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of Diuine power vpon earth: For if you wil consider the Attributes to God, you shall see how they agree in the person of a King. God hath power to create, or destroy, make, or vnmake at his pleasure, to giue life, or send death, to iudge all, and to bee iudged nor

² John Howson, *A Sermon Preached at S. Maries in Oxford, the 17. Day of November, 1602. in defence of the Festiuities of the Church of England, and namely that of her Maiesties Coronation* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1602), C4^v, D1^v-D2^r.

acomptable to none ... And the like power haue Kings: they make and vnmake their subiects: they haue power of raising, and casting downe: of life, and of death: Iudges ouer all their subiects, and in all causes, and yet accomptable to none but God onely.³

Both texts underline the exceptional nature of monarchical authority, both quote the same passage of the Bible, and both claim that monarchs possess – by the grace of God – absolute power, and both were influenced by the early seventeenth century rhetoric about the nature of government, especially by French political thought on sacred monarchy stemming from Jean Bodin, who saw the state as a “sovereign majesty absolute.”⁴

However, in spite of all outward similarities, there is a big difference between the sermon of Howson and the oration of James I: their contexts in which they were applied. The laudation at Elizabeth’s feast day stemmed from a long process of cult formation where the persona of the Queen stood also for the identity of a nation forged by the continuous threat of a strong and mighty enemy from the 1570s onwards. As opposed to this, the speech of James derived from his own political convictions rooted in his thorough learning and long experience as a king of Scotland, and repeated ideas published in his two treatises about monarchy both written before succeeding to the English throne.⁵

Howson’s and James’s words theoretically defy the English parliamentary traditions, yet while the sermon on Elizabeth posed no challenge to it, James’s speech was met with resentment and resistance as he tried to enforce his ideas in practice. The failure of James to understand the context of Queen Elizabeth’s late cult ultimately led to the breakdown of his relationship with his subjects in spite of the many thematic similarities and direct borrowings from the late Queen’s representational strategies which were much more successful.

The Late Cult of Queen Elizabeth and the Sermon by John Howson

John Howson’s Accession Day sermon stands at the end of a long and unprecedented tradition of celebrating a monarch’s accession.⁶ Starting with localized bell-ring-

³ James I, *The Workes of the Most High and Mightie Prince, Iames*, ed. James, Bishop of Winton (London: Robert Barker, 1616), 529.

⁴ John Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 155–159.

⁵ *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* – addressed to his people – was published anonymously in 1597 and reprinted in London at James’s accession to the English throne in 1603. *Balislikon Doron* (1599) – written for his son, Prince Henry on the issues of governing – had originally only seven printed copies to cater for the innermost court circle of James. In 1603 it was republished in London, where it was highly popular selling 13–16,000 copies. Pauline Croft, *King James* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 135.

⁶ David Cressy, “The Protestant Calendar and the Vocabulary of Celebration in Early Modern England,” *Journal of British Studies* 29.1 (1990): 31–52, 35.

ing and bonfires in the 1560s, the day of 17 November became widely commemorated by both church and civic bodies by the mid-1570s, and the anniversary gained in popularity during the growing Catholic military threat of the 1580s only to bring forth works of excessive – very often repetitive and formulaic – praise in the last decade of the Queen’s reign.⁷

While in Christian churches giving thanks for worldly leaders was customary being based on – among others – 1 Timothy 2: 1–2, the celebration of Queen Elizabeth in the Church of England started cautiously after her accession to the throne to satisfy the need for reduced liturgy and visual pomp.⁸ However, the Elizabethan revised *Book of Common Prayer* of 1559 lifted over supplications for monarchs from its 1549 original compiled by Thomas Cranmer, and added further passages of the most general nature highlighting the Queen’s role in caring for God’s “people committed to her charge, in welth, peace, and godlynes,” and her subjects’ duty to “faithfully serue, honour, and humblye obey her.”⁹ The new edition of the *Book of Homilies* (1559), and its second volume of 1563 both proclaimed the importance of thanksgiving for rulers, and, in the aftermath of the 1569 Northern Rebellion, a new sermon was printed with a prayer for the Queen to be repeated after each of its sections.¹⁰ Yet this development was restrained and mindful about not hurting Puritan sentiments. In 1567, the Accession Day sermon preached by John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury set out to refute such a Protestant anxiety about committing idolatry in celebrating a monarch in church, and positioned the anniversary not as remembering Elizabeth’s personal achievements but as rejoicing over the success of God’s grace:

God sent his handemaide, and deliuered vs. Let vs be kinde and thankfull vnto God for so great blessing. I say not, let vs make it the first day of the yeere. Yet this I say, let vs haue it in remembrance ... Let no man be offended herewith, it

⁷ About the development of the Queen’s Accession Day feast see Roy Strong, *The Tudor and Stuart Monarchy: Pageantry, Painting Iconography II: Elizabethan* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), 125–128; David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), 50–57; Natalie Mears, Philip Williamson, “The ‘Holy Days’ of Elizabeth I,” *History* 105 (2020): 201–228.

⁸ “I Exhorte therefore, that aboute all thynges, prayers, supplicacyons, intercessions, and geuyng of thanks be had for all men: for kynges, and for all that are in auctorite, that we maye lyue a quyete and a peaceable lyfe, wyth all Godlynes and honesty.” 1 Timothy 2: 1–2, *The Great Bible 1539*, in *Textus Receptus Bibles*, accessed February 10, 2025, <https://textusreceptusbibles.com/Great/54/2>.

⁹ Brian Cummings, *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559 and 1662* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), xxiii.

¹⁰ *Certyayne Sermons Appoynted by the Quenes Maiestie* (London: Richard Iugge and John Cawood, 1559), T3^v; *The Seconde Tome of Homilies of such matters as were promysed, and intituled in the former part of homilies, set out by the auctoritie of the Queenes Maiestie. And to be read in euery paryshe churche agreablye* (London: Richarde Iugge, and Iohn Cawood, 1563), 127^v; *An Homilie against disobedience and wyllfull rebellion* (Richarde Iugge, and John Cawood, 1570), C1^v–C2^r.

is onely a remembrance of the mercy of God, it behoveth vs to remember it, it is good to speake of it.¹¹

The first special service book for 17 November was published in 1576, and two years later, for the twentieth anniversary of the Queen's accession, a new, enlarged version came out with additional psalms and anthems.¹² The anniversary occasions triggered public rejoicing with songs composed to well-known psalm tunes and published as cheap prints.¹³ In 1582 Thomas Bentley devised a special set of prayers for the day in his deluxe collection of devotions *The Monvment of Matrones, conteining seuen seuerall Lamps of Virginitie*, and in 1585 Edmund Bunny printed a sermon manual for the Queen's day with forty-three different aspects to give thanks to God for placing Elizabeth on the throne of England.¹⁴

However, from the 1580s onwards, with the growing number of plots against the life of the Queen, the church issued an increasing number of special services that incorporated supplications for the preservation of Queen Elizabeth. The language of the services contained expressions illustrating the apocalyptic struggle of the English – manifested in the person of the Queen – against evil. Amid such dramatic rhetoric, the tone of the services was also heightened, and within the texts of the special prayers ordered in 1594, 1598, 1602 the adjective “sacred” was applied to Elizabeth.¹⁵ This exaggerated oratory was strongly criticized by the Catholics of the Continent and Puritans in England, who both regarded the feast day as idolatrous.

Howson's sermon sets out to refute such claims by highlighting the importance of festivities as occasions of magnifying God for his conferred blessings. To counter Puritans' disparagement of the feast, Howson attacked the significance they attached to preaching, a controversy within the Church of England since 1583 when Archbishop of Canterbury Edmund Grindal was replaced by John Whitgift for the former's support of “prophesyings,” a practice of free preaching.¹⁶ Instead, Howson cited biblical precedents and emphasized the importance of solemnizing a feast,

¹¹ John Jewel, *Certaine Sermons preached before the Queenes Maiestie, and at Paules crosse* (London: Christopher Barker, 1583), C6^r, D5^v.

¹² *A fourme of Prayer, with thankes geuyng, to be used euery yeere, the 17. of Nouember, beyng the day of the Queenes Maiesties entrie to her raigne* (London: Richard Iugge, 1576). About the introduction of the day as a feast day of the Protestant calendars see Natalie Mears and Philip Williamson, “The ‘Holy Days’ of Elizabeth I,” *History* 105.365 (2020): 201–228.

¹³ Katherine Butler, “Creating Harmonious Subjects? Ballads, Psalms and Godly Songs for Queen Elizabeth I's Accession Day,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 140.2 (2015): 273–312.

¹⁴ Thomas Bentley, *The Monvment of Matrones: conteining seuen seuerall Lamps of Virginitie* (London: H. Denham, 1582), 673–687; Edmund Bunny, *Certaine Prayers and other godly exercises, for the seenteenth of Nouember* (London: Christopher Barker, 1585).

¹⁵ *National Prayers: Special Worship Since the Reformation, Volume I: Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings in the British Isles, 1533–1688*, ed. Natalie Mears, Alasdair Raffe, Stephen Taylor, Philip Williamson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013), 207, 228–231, 239.

¹⁶ Peter E. McCullough, *Sermons at Court: Politics and Religion in Elizabethan and Jacobean Preaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 164.

which should be “hot and zealous, crying with the Angels *holy, holy holy*, Lord God of hosts” rather than turning “churches into schools” and “hearing an exercise” for edification.¹⁷ Answering the criticism of Catholics, Howson referenced precedents of thanksgiving for Princes in Europe, and reminded his audience of the injunctions during Mary I’s reign which ordered the celebration of her nativity and coronation with annual mass and processions.¹⁸ Then he addressed those who attacked the “*manner of solemnizing* it, with ringing, and bonfires, and anthems, and sermons, and feasting ... as though it were preferred before Easter and Christmas, the blessed memorials of our Saviour Christ.”¹⁹ Underlining the distinction between ordinary and voluntary holy days within the church calendar – the first designated to God where “*men abstaine more from worke,*” while the second not prescribing the cessation of labour – he defined the latter as a lesser feast not vying with the sanctity of the former.²⁰ Placing Elizabeth’s Accession Day among the lesser feasts, Howson gives an intriguing image about the custom of churchgoing on 17 November as an exclusive event, “as no man is forced by law to this solemnity, and fewe solemnize it but the better sorte of the people, & masters of families.”²¹ Finally, Psalm 73 (74) is adapted “*quiescere faciamus festivitates eorum a terra*” (“let us abolish all their festival days from the land”) as a strategy of the “wicked man in the Psalme” and is paralleled with the attacks of Queen Elizabeth’s authority referring to the assassination attempts against her life, the plans to invade the country, and the many libels about her.²²

After such a lengthy defence of the feast of celebrating a monarch, the sermon comes to its most notable part – the one forming the subject matter of this paper – in which princes are called “the Gods of the earth, Gods immediate lieutenants.”²³ The context of the statement implies that Howson is refuting any idea of resistance against a lawful prince. He raises his voice against the Puritan idea of justified resistance rooted in Calvin’s teaching and advocated in Christopher Goodman’s *How Superior Powers ought to Be Obeyd of their Subiects* (1558).²⁴ Yet even more directly, he attacks the authority of Pope Pius V’s bull *Regnans in Excelsis* (1570) to dispense Catholics subjects from their allegiance to their sovereigns. In defending the honour of Princes, Howson finds evidence in the “divine and supernatural qualities” monarchs display and enumerates features which he deems to be fully manifest in Queen Elizabeth.²⁵ These exceptional traits of a sovereign contain aspects which had

¹⁷ Howson, *A Sermon*, A3^v.

¹⁸ Howson, *A Sermon*, C3^r.

¹⁹ Howson, *A Sermon*, C3^v.

²⁰ Howson, *A Sermon*, C3^v, B1^v.

²¹ Howson, *A Sermon*, C4^r.

²² Howson, *A Sermon*, C4^v.

²³ Howson, *A Sermon*, C4^v.

²⁴ Christopher Goodman, *How Superior Powers ought to Be Obeyd of their Subiects* (Geneva: John Crispin, 1558).

²⁵ Howson, *A Sermon*, D1^v.

become stock elements of the Queen's eulogy by this time: her excellent learning, prudence, and oratorical skills, her standing as God's elected as witnessed through the many unsuccessful conspiracies against her life, and her "gifts of healing incurable diseases," the custom of the touching for the "King's Evil."²⁶ This last item on the list of royal traits is especially used to underscore a supernatural quality in the Queen. While the frequency and scope of Elizabeth's performance of the Royal Touch is not well documented,²⁷ in her entertainments her supernatural influence was often utilized as a poetical device. From 1575 onwards, a recurring trope to eulogize her was to attribute a miraculous radiance to her presence which exerted a power to free and heal characters, as for instance at Kenilworth and Woodstock in 1575, at Elvetham in 1591, and at Ditchley in 1592.²⁸ However, Howson avoids overemphasizing the excellence of the Queen and paying merely lip service to her. Instead, the enumerated features serve as examples to illustrate a general concept rather than to praise one individual monarch. Furthermore, this section – being the only part of the sermon that describes Elizabeth and even there referring to her as "Her Majesty" without mentioning her name – takes up one single paragraph in the twenty-eight page long printed version of the sermon. It serves as an argument for the rightful celebration of a monarch and not for demanding extensive authority above them.

Within this context – and as the last and least emphatic aspect – is a monarch's power claimed to be absolute and accountable to nobody but God. Instead of dwelling on the details of what a monarch is justified to do to her subjects, it focuses on what Elizabeth does for her subjects through her foresight, wisdom, love and healing via the Royal Touch.

James I's Speech to Parliament in 1610

In James I's address to the assembled members of the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament on 21 March 1610, the same passage about the power of monarchs became the principal tenet upon which all other deliberations and requests of the King rested. While enlisting the issue of the power of kings as the third topic to be mentioned in his speech, with a masterstroke James started with the discus-

²⁶ Howson, *A Sermon*, D2^{r-v}. The touching for the "King's Evil" practiced by French and English monarchs entailed the laying of the monarch's hands on patients suffering from scrofula, a disease that usually healed by itself with the passing of time. About the tradition see Marc Bloch, *Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France*, transl. J.E. Anderson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973).

²⁷ Stephen Brogan, *The Royal Touch in Early Modern England: Politics, Medicine and Sin* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2015), 45–46, 65.

²⁸ Erzsébet Stróbl, "The Figure of the Wild Man in the Entertainments of Elizabeth," in *Writing the Other: Tudor Humanism Versus Barbarism*, eds. Michael Pincombe and Zsolt Almási (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 59–78.

sion of this last point making it the first and most significant part of his more than two-hour long oration. All other issues discussed by him – the laws of England, the Common Law, grievances, and his request to Parliament for a financial grant – were based upon the theoretical principle that kings “exercise a manner or resemblance of Diuine power vpon earth ... they make and vnmake their subiects: they haue power of ... life, and of death: Iudges ouer all their subiects, and in all causes, and yet accomptable to none but God onely.”²⁹ As opposed to the sermon which cited Elizabeth’s “supernatural” traits in connection with these ideas, James mentioned no special royal attributes to buttress his claims for the special status of monarchs. In contrast with the rhetoric about Queen Elizabeth, it was not prudence, magnanimity, or charity that marked out a prince, but simply his position as the head of the natural body of a commonwealth, where laws were “properly made by the king onely.”³⁰ Although the phrases of James’s oration closely resemble those of John Howson’s sermon, both the passage’s relative importance within the text and its wider political context render its intentions and implications strikingly different from Howson’s defence of celebrating Queen Elizabeth’s Accession Day. To understand James’s views, one needs to look at his earlier writings and royal representation.

Ascending the throne at the age of thirteen months and brought up from the age of four under the strict principles of the Puritan scholar George Buchanan, James acquired an exceptional knowledge of theology, literature, and languages. Yet after assuming control of the government in Scotland, he turned against his tutor’s political ideas and rejected Buchanan’s main principle about the limitation of royal power advocated in his *De Juri Regni apud Scotos* (1579).³¹ In opposition to his teacher, his first theoretical treatise on government, *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies* (1598), argued for an absolutist theory of monarchical authority. The text stands as a precursor to his 1610 speech to the Parliament in London, as it describes kings as the lieutenants of God sitting upon God’s throne on Earth, as being above the law and accountable to none but God, and as true fathers to their people who have power over their subjects’ bodies.³² The treatise explicitly refutes the contemporary notions of government by consent and the theory of a coronation contract between the king and his subjects which claimed to give people the right to hold their monarchs accountable for their deeds.³³ While James acknowledges that a king at his coronation “willinglie promiseth to his people, to discharge honourably and truely the office giuen him by God ouer them” and that those that break this oath are

²⁹ James I, *Workes*, 529.

³⁰ James I, *Workes*, 530.

³¹ Croft, *James I*, 13–18.

³² James I, *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies: Or, the Reciproock and Mutvall Dutie Betwixt a free King, and his naturall Subiectes* (Edinburgh: Robert Waldegaue, 1598), B3^r–B4^v, D1^r–D3^v. The treatise was printed in London in 1603.

³³ About the contemporary theories on government by consent see Johann P. Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots: Politics and Ideology in England 1603–1640* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 55–80.

deemed tyrants, yet he asserts that “the Kinge must make count of his administration” only to God.³⁴

James’s ideas about the absolute power of monarchs were also strengthened by the nature of Scottish government. While John Aylmer, the apologist of Queen Elizabeth’s female authority, regarded the Queen’s government as a mixed polity embodied in Parliament “wherin you shal find these. 3. estats. ... if the parliament vse their priuileges: the King can ordein nothing without them,”³⁵ in Scotland Parliaments were short and members were expected only to discuss issues approved by the king.³⁶ Upon finding himself facing a Parliament in London which refused to act according to his wishes, James lectured his Lords and Commons several times about their duties to speedily proceed during sessions. Referencing the Scottish customs, he admonished his MPs on 7 July 1604 about their lengthy discussions of matters:

In my government bypast of Scotland ... I was heard not only as a king, but, suppose I say it, as a counsellor. Contrary, here nothing but curiosity from morning to evening to find faults with my propositions. There, all things warranted that come from me; here all things suspected...³⁷

While Parliament had the liberty to advise monarchs, James spoke against further topics being introduced, telling them on 9 November 1605: “you are heere assembled by your lawfull King to giue him your best aduises, in the matters proposed by him vnto you.”³⁸ The reluctance of James to acknowledge the English parliamentary traditions was one crucial factor that led to the bitter note upon which his Parliaments of 1604–1610, 1614, and 1621 ended. Thus, in spite of the similarity of the passages from the 1602 sermon and the 1610 royal address, there was a major difference in the understanding of the nature of royal power. However, the common language employed by both is not a coincidence, as there were several aspects of continuity between the two reigns applied: on the one hand, by the English in the King’s public reception to ensure a smooth transition of dynasties, and on the other, by James I in his public speeches to utilize strategies of Elizabeth which she used successfully to bargain with her Parliaments.

When Queen Elizabeth died on 24 March 1603, James’s accession to the throne was already secretly prepared by her chief minister, Robert Cecil, who by that time sent a copy of the proclamation about the succession to the Scottish court for approval. While Elizabeth never publicly acknowledged a successor, the scheme of

³⁴ James I, *True Lawe*, E1^r.

³⁵ John Aylmer, *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subiectes, agaynst the late blowne Blaste, concerninge the Government of Wemen* (London: John Day, 1559), H3^r.

³⁶ Croft, *James I*, 36–38, 42.

³⁷ James I, “Speech at the Prorogation of Parliament, 7 July 1604”, in *The Stuart Constitution, 1603–1688*, ed. J. P. Kenyon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 41.

³⁸ “A Speech in the Parliament Hovse,” 1605, Nov 9. in James I, *Workes*, 507.

Cecil and James worked well, and the transfer of power caused no civil unrest.³⁹ The poems issuing from London's presses mourned the Queen and welcomed the new King within the same works, and the reception of James was rooted in the panoply of symbolic language of the late Queen to display his just and undisputed claim to the English throne.⁴⁰ Capitalizing on one of the devices of Elizabeth, broadsides and pamphlets greeted the new King as a new phoenix: "*Luna's* extinct, and now beholde a Sunne / Whose beames soake vp the moysture of all teares. / A *Phoenix* from her ashes doth arise, / A King at whose faire Crowne all glory aymes."⁴¹ As James progressed through the country from the Scottish border towards London, more and more people flocked to see him and to bask in the favours heaped unrestrained upon them.⁴² The joyous reception of James during his slow advance towards London reflected the relief of the people about the peaceable succession to the English throne, a reassurance that the death of Elizabeth did not tear apart the country and plunge it into Civil War, nor did the enemy invade instantly.⁴³

On 15 March 1604, James I's royal entry into London – postponed because of the plague for eight months – referenced the late Queen's memory in several shows. At the third pageant the Dutch community – who during the reign of Elizabeth enjoyed protection – asked for a similar favour from James: "brought vp in the tender bosome of a Princely mother, *Eliza*. The loue which we once dedicated to her (as a Mother) doubly do We vowe it to thee, our *Soueraigne*, and *Father*."⁴⁴ The fourth pageant welcomed James as "that sacred *Phoenix*, that doth rise, / From th' ashes of the first,"⁴⁵ and in the sixth his praise referenced *Astraea*, the Goddess of Justice, one of the best known figures associated with the late Queen: "From whence *Astraea* is descended ... / Who with our last *Queenes* Spirit fled vp thither, / Fore-knowing on the earth she could not rest, / Till you had lockt her in your rightfull brest."⁴⁶ The constant references to the late Queen and the echoes of her representational strategies reflected the common wish of the English for a seamless transition between the two reigns.

³⁹ Alexandra Courtney, "The Scottish King and the English Court: The Secret Correspondence of James IV, 1601–3," in *Doubtful and Dangerous: The Question of Succession in Late Elizabethan England*, ed. Susan Doran and Paulina Kewes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 134–151.

⁴⁰ Catherine Loomis, *The Death of Elizabeth I: Remembering and Deconstructing the Virgin Queen* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 47–82.

⁴¹ Henry Petowe, *Elizabetha quasi viuens Eliza's funerall. A fevve Aprill drops, showed on the bearse of dead Eliza. Or The funerall teares of a true hearted subject* (London: E. Allde, 1603), B3^r.

⁴² See the growing number of people and the lengthening lists of the names knighted in *The True Narration of the Entertainment of His Royall Maiestie, from the time of his departure from Edenbrough; till his receiuing at London: with all or the most special Occurrences* (London: Thomas Creede, 1603).

⁴³ Croft, *James I*, 50–53.

⁴⁴ Stephen Harrison, *The Arch's of Triumphe Erected in honor of the High and mighty prince. Iames. the first of that name. King, of England and the sixt of Scotland at his Maiesties Entrance and passage through his Honorable City & chamber of London. vpon the 15.th day of march 1603* (London: John Windet, 1604), E1^r.

⁴⁵ Harrison, *The Arch's of Triumphe*, F1^r.

⁴⁶ Harrison, *The Arch's of Triumphe*, H1^r.

James himself imitated several aspects of Elizabeth's rhetoric although he refrained from acknowledging his debt to her. In his first speech to the English Parliament on 19 March 1604, he sidestepped the praise and mention of his predecessor and fashioned himself rather as a new Henry VII uniting not two royal dynasties, but two kingdoms.⁴⁷ Two years later, he had the late Queen's body exhumed from the tomb of her grandfather, Henry VII, in Westminster Abbey's Henry VII's chapel, and prepared his own resting place there to signal the continuity of the royal line through the Stuart dynasty and mark out the Tudors as a dead end.⁴⁸ Yet his political writings reflected Elizabeth's political thoughts and he was influenced by the power of the Queen's rhetoric. Even before he assumed power in England, in the foreword of his *Basilikon Doron* (1599), James borrows the image used by Queen Elizabeth in her famous 1586 speech about his mother, Mary, Queen of Scots – published in 1586 in English and the following year in French –, in in which kings are “set ... vpon a publique stage, in the sight of all people; where all the beholders eyes are attentiuely bent, to looke and pry in the least circumstance of their secretest driftes,” thereby underlining the significance of royal representation.⁴⁹ In his thirty-six speeches delivered to his Parliaments, James regularly had recourse to the tactics of showing himself a loving monarch, one of the chief strategies of Elizabeth's public representation.⁵⁰

James's 21 March 1610 speech contained many of these elements. He claimed not just that he was a loving father of his people, but that “the hearts and riches of the people, are the Kings greatest treasure,” echoing Elizabeth's famous words at the Tilbury camp, “I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and goodwill of my subjects.”⁵¹ Resounding the Queen's words about the exposedness of a monarch to public opinion, James asserts “Kings Actions (euen in the secretest places) are as the actions of those that are set vpon the Stages, or on the tops of houses: I hope neuer to speake that in priuate, which I shall not auow in publique.”⁵² James based his speech on the imagery of being visible and transparent and offered his audience the present of a “Christall Mirror ... through the transparentnesse thereof, you may see the heart of your King,” and – as the Queen often boasted of her education – he added “as it is a trew Axiome in Diuinitie, That *Cor*

⁴⁷ Speech of James on 19 March 1604. James I, *Workes*, 487.

⁴⁸ Julia M. Walker, “Reading the Tombs of Elizabeth I,” *English Literary Renaissance* 26.3 (1996): 519–524.

⁴⁹ James I, *Basilikon Doron* (London: Richard Field, 1603), A1v. See Queen Elizabeth's words uttered on 12 November 1586: “princes, I tell you, are set on stages in the sight and view of all the world duly observed. The eyes of many behold our actions; a spot is soon spied in our garments; a blemish quickly noted in our doings.” Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 194.

⁵⁰ Megan Mondt, “The Speeches and Self-Fashioning of King James VI and I to the English Parliament, 1604–1624,” *Constructing the Past* 8.1 (2007): 169–171. Accessed October 20, 2024, digitalcommons.iwu.edu/constructing/vol8/iss1/11.

⁵¹ James I, *Workes*, 540; Elizabeth I, *Collected Works*, 326.

⁵² James I, *Workes*, 532.

Regis is in manu Domini, So wil I now set *Cor Regis in oculis populi*.⁵³ In this speech, James's eloquence rarely slipped into expressing his resentment, and even then it sounded reasonable: "you doe not meddle with the maine points of Gouvernment; that is my craft ... to meddle with that, were to lesson me: I am now an old King; for sixe and thirtie yeeres haue I gouerned in *Scotland* personally, and now haue I accomplished my apprenticeship of seuen yeeres heere."⁵⁴ He also acted out the role of being magnanimous by acknowledging that "the King with his Parliament here are absolute, (as I vnderstand) in making or forming of any sorts of Lawes," and conceding with making the promise that the "vastnesse of my expence is past ... Christmas and open tide [the time of year when no fast is observed] is ended."⁵⁵ Thus, the speech of James ultimately secured the trust of his subjects in spite of its strong absolutist tone.

The oration had a favourable reception, contemporaries noted proudly its persuasiveness and learning.⁵⁶ Although it highlighted the concept of the absolute power of monarchs unprecedented yet in England, it balanced it with an emphasis on the duties of kings, and a promise about abiding by the laws of England and always acting in the interests of the public good.⁵⁷ As James was asking their agreement to a financial settlement – the Great Contract – which would have secured his finances in the long run, he was eager to earn the goodwill of his parliament and went out of his way to assure his audience about his respect for the common law and his fatherly love of the people. Both James and contemporaries regarded the King's address to his Parliament so significant that it was published three times that year and was selected into the volume comprising the writings of James in 1616.⁵⁸

Conclusion

The paper set out to investigate potential connections between two passages about royal power: one from the 1602 sermon by John Howson in defence of Elizabeth I's Accession Day and the other from the 1610 speech by James I to his Parliament. While the words, phrases and images employed in both to describe the power of monarchs show considerable resemblance, examining the textual and political contexts reveals that there is a substantial difference between the understanding of late Elizabethan and early Jacobean royal authority. Yet the paper argued that thematic

⁵³ "The king's heart [is] in the hand of the Lord" and "the king's heart [is] in the eyes of his people." James I, *Workes*, 527–528.

⁵⁴ James I, *Workes*, 537.

⁵⁵ James I, *Workes*, 532, 542.

⁵⁶ Mondì, "The Speeches and Self-Fashioning of King James VI and I," 151.

⁵⁷ Johann P. Sommerville, *King James VI and I: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), xxv–xxvi.

⁵⁸ Sommerville, *King James VI and I*, 295 fn. 851.

similarities between the late Queen's and the new King's public representation was intentional and contributed to the smooth transfer of power between the two dynasties. The impact of applying similar verbal constructions – although with different contexts – secured a continuity that contributed to the trouble-free accession of James I to the throne of England.

However, in spite of the subjects' wish to see James as a monarch peacefully taking over their late Queen's realm, and in spite of James's adoption of Elizabeth's rhetorical strategies, James did not succeed in maintaining a good relationship with his English Parliament in the long run. In 1607, Nicolo Molin, the Venetian Ambassador to England sent home a description about England in which he renders a compelling image about the public reception of James in his new kingdom:

He does not caress the people nor make them that good cheer the late Queen did, whereby she won their loves: for the English adore their Sovereigns, and if the King passed through the same street a hundred times a day the people would still run to see him; they like their King to show pleasure at their devotion, as the late Queen knew well how to do; but this King manifests no taste for them but rather contempt and dislike. The result is he is despised and almost hated. In fact his Majesty is more inclined to live retired with eight or ten of his favourites than openly as is the custom of the country and the desire of the people.⁵⁹

While the images of the *Sacred Goddess* and the *Divine King* were expressed by the very similar words in the two passages under examination, the first endured and strengthened with the passing of time, and the second failed to capture the imagination and trust of the people.

Abstract

The paper will analyse possible links between elements of late Elizabethan royal representation and early Jacobean rhetoric on monarchical power. Through the close reading of a sermon by John Howson on 17 November 1602 and a speech to his Parliament by King James I on 21 March 1610, it will draw attention to the similarities and thematic continuities of the texts to highlight how James I's early speeches revitalized elements of Queen Elizabeth's late propaganda. The paper will argue that the strategy of heaping excessive praise upon Queen Elizabeth in the post-Armada years found a direct continuation in the early popular reception of James I as a divinely ordained monarch with exceptional powers. However, it will also contend that

⁵⁹ *Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, Volume 10, 1603–1607*, ed. Horatio F Brown (London, 1900), *British History Online*, accessed January 20, 2025, british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol10.

the close semblance of the phrasing of the orations disguised fundamental differences in the two epoch's understandings of royal authority.

Keywords: Queen Elizabeth, Accession Day sermons, James I, divine rights of kings, Jacobean parliaments

Rezümé

Az áldott istennőtől az isteni királyig: A hatalmi retorika folytonosságai

A tanulmány a késő Erzsébet-kori királynői reprezentáció és a korai Jakab-kori hatalomról szóló retorika lehetséges kapcsolatait elemzi két szöveg alapján. John Howson 1602. november 17-i prédikációjának és I. Jakab 1610. március 21-i beszédének egyes szakaszai megdöbbentő hasonlóságot mutatnak, ami arra utal, hogy Jakab beszédeiben felhasználta Erzsébet királynő kései propagandájának elemeit. I. Jakab önreprezentációja, amelyben hatalmát közvetlenül Istentől eredeztette, nagyban tekinthető a spanyol armada feletti angol győzelem éveiből származó retorika közvetlen folytatásának, amikor Erzsébet királynőt túlzott dicsőítés vette körül. Ugyanakkor a dolgozat arra is rá kívánja irányítani a figyelmet, hogy a közeli hasonlóságok alapvető különbségeket lepleznek, tükrözve a két korszak királyi hatalomról alkotott merőben eltérő felfogását.

Kulcsszavak: I. Erzsébet, trónra lépés napi prédikációk, I. Jakab, kormányzás isteni jogon, Jakab-kori parlamentek

Jelen tanulmány egyéni kutatás keretében készült el, az „I. Erzsébet Jakab-kori kultuszának kutatása” című, 20800B800 témaszámon támogatott belső projekt vállalásaként, melyet a Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem tudományos projektek támogatására kiírt pályázati konstrukció keretében finanszírozott.