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in the Late Middle Ages

by Matthias Kuhn

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CONTINUITY, AGE, AND RELATIONSHIP TO THE CROWN: CENTRAL ARGUMENTS IN GERMAN AND ENGLISH NOBLE GENEALOGIES IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

MATTHIAS KUHN

In the late Middle Ages, numerous genealogical manuscripts were produced that depicted the origins not just of royal families, but also of noble ones.¹ These took various forms, such as codices or rolls, and used a variety of communicative techniques – charts, portraits, texts, and coats of arms.² As noble courts became centres of historiography, genealogies of the nobility were produced in growing numbers because there was a need to turn vague ancestries and kinship relationships

Translated by Marielle Sutherland and Jozef van der Voort (GHIL).

¹ On royal genealogies, see Michael Thomas Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307* (Chichester, 2013), 144.

² Most of the genealogies analysed in this article are rolls. This is because the archival research for it was carried out as part of the ‘Rolls for the King’ project led by Prof. Jörg Peltzer – a sub-project of the Material Text Cultures collaborative research centre, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). Without this project, neither the research findings presented here nor my doctoral thesis, on which this article is partly based, would have been possible. I am therefore very grateful to the centre for its support. I would also like to thank Her Majesty the late Queen Elizabeth II and her son, His Majesty King Charles III, as well as the Duke of Northumberland and His Royal Highness the Duke of Bavaria, for granting access to their archives. Finally, my thanks also go to Prof. Michael Hicks, who gave me an insight into the world of the Wars of the Roses through both his work and in personal conversations, and to Maria Hauber for reviewing this article and making suggestions to improve it.

into concrete lines of descent.³ These works were created for a range of purposes: for weddings, during dynastic crises, or as an instrument of *memoria*.

Noble genealogies have not yet been analysed systematically and comparatively, although there are numerous studies that deal with individual manuscripts or families.⁴ There are various reasons why it is interesting to compare English and German genealogies:⁵ not only

³ Birgit Studt, 'Historiographie am Heidelberger Hof', in Jörg Peltzer et al. (eds.), *Die Wittelsbacher und die Kurpfalz im Mittelalter: Eine Erfolgsgeschichte?* (Regensburg, 2013), 311–28, at 311; Birgit Studt, 'Hofgeschichtsschreibung', in Werner Paravicini, Jan Hirschbiegel, and Jörg Wettlaufer (eds.), *Höfe und Residenzen im spätmittelalterlichen Reich*, vol. iii: *Hof und Schrift* (Ostfildern, 2007), 373–90, at 373–4; Karl-Heinz Spieß, *Familie und Verwandtschaft im deutschen Hochadel des Spätmittelalters: 13. bis Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 2015), 490; Karl Schmid, 'Zur Problematik von Familie, Sippe und Geschlecht, Haus und Dynastie beim mittelalterlichen Adel: Vorfragen zum Thema "Adel und Herrschaft im Mittelalter"', in *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins*, 105 (1957), 1–62, at 2; Karl-Heinz Spieß, 'Dynastische Identitäten durch Genealogie', in Udo Friedrich, Ludger Grenzmann, and Frank Rexroth (ed.), *Geschichtsentwürfe und Identitätsbildung am Übergang zur Neuzeit*, vol. ii: *Soziale Gruppen und Identitätspraktiken* (Berlin, 2018), 3–26, at 14.

⁴ To name but a few examples: on the Wittelsbachs, see Jean-Marie Moeglin, *Les ancêtres du prince: Propagande politique et naissance d'une histoire nationale en Bavière au Moyen Âge (1180–1500)* (Geneva, 1985); on the rolls of the Margraves of Baden, see Stefan G. Holz and Konrad Krimm, 'Die badischen Genealogien Georg Ruxners: Ein Herold als politischer Waffenträger zu Beginn des 16. Jahrhunderts', *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins*, 168 (2020), 65–114; on the founders of Tewkesbury Abbey, see Julian Luxford (ed.), *The Founders' Book: A Medieval History of Tewkesbury Abbey. A Facsimile of Oxford, Bodleian Library Ms Top. Glouc. d. 2* (Donington, 2021); on the Earls of March, Northumberland, and Warwick, see Gudrun Tscherpel, *The Importance of Being Noble: Genealogie im Alltag des englischen Hochadels in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Husum, 2004); and for an important discussion of the Earls of Warwick and their rolls, see Charles Ross, 'The Rous Roll: An Historical Introduction', in William Courthope (ed.), *The Rous Roll: With an Historical Introduction on John Rous and the Warwick Roll* (Gloucester, 1980), pp. v–xviii.

⁵ On historical comparison as a research method, see Jörg Peltzer, *Fürst werden: Rangerhöhungen im 14. Jahrhundert – Das römisch-deutsche Reich und England im Vergleich* (Berlin, 2019), 15–17; Benjamin Müsegades, *Heilige in der mittelalterlichen Bischofsstadt: Speyer und Lincoln im Vergleich (11. bis frühes 16. Jahrhundert)* (Vienna, 2021), 26–30.

have numerous fifteenth-century manuscripts survived from both kingdoms, but the comparison is also worthwhile in terms of content. For one thing, there are many structural similarities between the German and English nobility. Both shared a common courtly culture, developed a stratified hierarchy of rank, and used similar conventions and modes of expression.⁶ But there are also differences: the German nobility was headed by an elected king or emperor during the late Middle Ages, while England was a hereditary kingdom.⁷

In fact, the relationship to the king is of central importance in both German and English genealogies. It is therefore worth comparing the arguments used by families in their genealogical accounts, as this provides new insights into the self-understanding of the nobility. One would expect to find that the differences between hereditary and elective kingship also influenced that self-understanding, as the nobility derived its authority from the monarch. When the Crown was kept in the hands of a single family through inheritance, it can be assumed that this made the nobility more dependent on the king. By analysing genealogies, therefore, we can work out to what extent they reflect the greater influence of the English king on the nobility. This can only be done through comparison, as the structure of genealogical arguments emerges all the more sharply in their similarities and differences.

This article asks what differences and similarities can be identified between England and the Holy Roman Empire in the genealogical

⁶ Werner Paravicini, 'Gab es eine einheitliche Adelskultur Europas im späten Mittelalter?', in Rainer Christoph Schwinges, Christian Hesse, and Peter Moraw (eds.), *Europa im späten Mittelalter: Politik – Gesellschaft – Kultur* (Munich, 2006), 401–34, esp. 433. See also Chris Given-Wilson, 'Rank and Status Among the English Nobility, c.1300–1500', in Thorsten Huthwelker, Jörg Peltzer, and Maximilian Wemhöner (eds.), *Princely Rank in Late Medieval Europe: Trodden Paths and Promising Avenues* (Ostfildern, 2011), 97–117, at 97–9; Nicholas Vincent, 'Sources and Methods: Some Anglo-German Comparisons', *ibid.* 119–38, at 130; Jörg Peltzer, *Der Rang der Pfalzgrafen bei Rhein: Die Gestaltung der politisch-sozialen Ordnung des Reichs im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert* (Ostfildern, 2013), 24.

⁷ Bernd Kannowski, 'The Impact of Lineage and Family Connections on Succession in Medieval Germany's Elective Kingdom', in Frédérique Lachaud and Michael Penman (eds.), *Making and Breaking the Rules: Succession in Medieval Europe c.1000–c.1600 / Établir et abolir les normes: La succession dans l'Europe médiévale, vers 1000–vers 1600* (Turnhout, 2008), 13–22, at 13–15.

representation of the nobility. On the German side, my analysis focuses on the many surviving genealogies of the Margraves of Baden and the Wittelsbachs. Both were princely families, although the margraves were among the lowest-ranked members of this group.⁸ On the English side, the genealogies of the Botelers of Sudeley, the Berkeleys, the Mortimers, the Percys, the Beauchamps, and the Earls of Gloucester and of Salisbury survive in numerous manuscripts.⁹ The families all belonged to the English peerage, but span almost the entire hierarchy of this group, from the Botelers of Sudeley as barons at the bottom to the Beauchamps as the Earls of Warwick at the top. By analysing these numerous surviving manuscripts, it is therefore possible to answer the question of whether aristocratic genealogies in the kingdoms under study used the same structures, arguments, and

⁸ Heinz Krieg, 'Strategien der Herrschaftslegitimation am unteren Rand des Fürstenstandes: Das Beispiel der Markgrafen von Baden', in Grischa Vercaemer and Ewa Wólkiewicz (eds.), *Legitimation von Fürstendynastien in Polen und dem Reich: Identitätsbildung im Spiegel schriftlicher Quellen (12.–15. Jahrhundert)* (Wiesbaden, 2016), 225–45, at 225–31.

⁹ For the Baden rolls, see Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe (hereafter GLA), 47/516 1 (1503); GLA, 47/516 2 (1508); GLA, 47/516 3 (1508). For the Wittelsbach rolls, see Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Geheimes Hausarchiv (hereafter HSTA GH), HS 65 (1479/84); Stiftsbibliothek Michaelbeuern (hereafter Stiftsbib.), MS Chart. 106 (1479/84); Wittelsbacher Ausgleichs Fond (hereafter WAF), HS 326/18 (1480–1505). A roll produced by the Botelers of Sudeley is held in the New York Public Library (hereafter NYPL), Spencer Collection MS 193 (1447/8). The genealogies of the Berkeleys can be found in Berkeley Castle (hereafter BC), SR 97 (1490/2) and SR 98 (after 1515); and Gloucester Archives (hereafter GA), D471 (after 1492). The Mortimer genealogies are found in the Wigmore Abbey and Brut chronicles: University Library of Chicago (hereafter ULC), Codex MS 224 (1414/60). For the Percys, see Alnwick Castle, DNP 80 (c.1461) and Bodleian Library, Oxford (hereafter Bodl.), MS. Bodl. Rolls 5 (c.1485). For the rolls of the Earls of Warwick, see British Library (hereafter BL) Add MS 48976m (1483/5) and College of Arms (hereafter CoA), ID 105646 (1477–85). By 'Earls of Gloucester', I refer to the individuals described in multiple genealogies as the founders of Tewkesbury Abbey. This group appears in multiple manuscripts, but not all of them bear the title of Earl of Gloucester. See CoA, ID 9782 (after 1431); Bodl. MS lat misc b 2 (r) (1434/74); Bodl. Ms Top. Glouc. D. 2 (1490). For both versions of the genealogy of the Earls of Salisbury, see BL Loan MS 90, pp. 176–225 (1460) and British Museum (hereafter BM) MS Add. 45133 (1483–5).

communicative techniques and, above all, whether they were produced with the same objectives in mind.

Gert Melville has identified three features that appear so often in genealogies as to be tropes: the age of one's line (which could be extended by claiming descent from earlier dynasties), the highlighting of kinship relationships that establish one's rank, and the showcasing of exceptional ancestors.¹⁰ The genealogical rolls I am examining here had two primary goals in terms of their design, construction, and narrative: they were intended to prove both the age and the continuity of the family's lineage. Rolls were particularly effective in conveying these messages due to their form. They were regarded as an old and venerable style of manuscript, and their writing surface, which could be continuously and flexibly extended by unrolling, also emphasized the impression of continuity, as the manuscript imposed no boundaries, unlike the margins of a book.¹¹

Age, continuity, and proximity to the Crown are not only the central themes of the genealogies under examination, but also serve as categories of analysis in order to compare the self-conception of the aristocratic cultures in each kingdom. First, I will present the arguments and techniques used by the families to prove their age and continuity. I will then compare the nobility in the two kingdoms, which will make it possible to analyse the relationships with the king presented in their genealogies.

¹⁰ Gert Melville, 'Zur Technik genealogischer Konstruktionen', in Cristina Andenna and Gert Melville (eds.), *Idoneität – Genealogie – Legitimation: Begründung und Akzeptanz von dynastischer Herrschaft im Mittelalter* (Cologne, 2015), 293–304, at 298–301. On key figures in late medieval origin narratives, see František Graus, *Lebendige Vergangenheit: Überlieferung im Mittelalter und in den Vorstellungen vom Mittelalter* (Cologne, 1975), 379; Beate Kellner, 'Kontinuität der Herrschaft: Zum mittelalterlichen Diskurs der Genealogie am Beispiel des "Buches von Bern"', in Jan-Dirk Müller and Horst Wenzel (eds.), *Mittelalter: Neue Wege durch einen alten Kontinent* (Stuttgart, 1999), 43–62, at 45.

¹¹ Norbert Kössinger, 'Gerollte Schrift: Mittelalterliche Texte auf Rotuli', in Annette Kehnel and Diamantis Panagiotopoulos (eds.), *Schriftträger – Textträger: Zur materialen Präsenz des Geschriebenen in frühen Gesellschaften* (Berlin, 2015), 151–68, at 159, 165.

I. *Continuity and Age*

In order to prove their age and continuity,¹² English families typically traced their origins back to the Norman Conquest of 1066—their forebears being either Norman associates or Anglo-Saxon opponents of William the Conqueror¹³—whereas Continental noble families preferred to claim descent from Trojan legend.¹⁴ In any case, the repertoire of ancient ancestors was larger on the Continent than in England. Uninterrupted lines of descent were then constructed between these progenitors and the youngest generation of a ruling family.

Due to frequent interruptions to agnatic lines of succession, discontinuities in ancestry were the rule rather than the exception for noble families in England and on the Continent alike. Partly for this reason, continuity represented the greatest possible genealogical success.¹⁵ By

¹² Maurice Keen, 'Heraldry and Hierarchy: Esquires and Gentlemen', in Jeffrey Denton (ed.), *Orders and Hierarchies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Basingstoke, 1999), 94–108, at 107.

¹³ Gudrun Tscherpel, 'The Political Function of History: The Past and Future of Noble Families', in Richard Eales and Shaun Tyas (eds.), *Family and Dynasty in Late Medieval England: Proceedings of the 1997 Harlaxton Symposium* (Donington, 2003), 87–104, at 90.

¹⁴ Beate Kellner, *Ursprung und Kontinuität: Studien zum genealogischen Wissen im Mittelalter* (Munich, 2004), 131–4, 294; Tobias Tannenberger, *Vom Paradies über Troja nach Brabant: Die "Genealogia principum Tungro-Brabantinorum" zwischen Fiktion und Akzeptanz* (Berlin, 2012), 91–3; Tscherpel, 'The Political Function of History', 91; Joachim Ehlers, 'Kontinuität und Tradition als Grundlage mittelalterlicher Nationsbildung in Frankreich', in Joachim Ehlers, *Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, ed. Martin Kintzinger and Bernd Schneidmüller (Berlin, 1996), 288–324, at 315; Wolfgang Brückle, 'Noblesse oblige: Trojasage und legitime Herrschaft in der französischen Staatstheorie des späten Mittelalters', in Kilian Heck and Bernhard Jahn (eds.), *Genealogie als Denkform in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Tübingen, 2000), 39–40.

¹⁵ Birgit Studt, 'Symbole fürstlicher Politik: Stammtafeln, Wappenreihen und Ahnengalerien in Text und Bild', in Rudolf Suntrup, Jan Veenstra, and Anne Bollmann (eds.), *The Mediation of Symbol in Late Medieval and Early Modern Times / Medien der Symbolik in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Frankfurt am Main, 2005), 221–56, at 226; Gert Melville, 'Vorfahren und Vorgänger: Spätmittelalterliche Genealogien als dynastische Legitimation zur Herrschaft', in Peter-Johannes Schuler (ed.), *Die Familie als sozialer und historischer Verband: Untersuchungen zum Spätmittelalter und zur frühen Neuzeit* (Sigmaringen, 1987),

contrast, for a family line to die out and lose its title and name was a catastrophe, genealogically speaking.¹⁶ In principle, genealogical charts could trace either generations of a family or sequences of rulers. Ideally, these would exactly coincide, but although genealogies were often constructed to show this, they seldom reflected reality.

Despite these efforts to present perfect continuity as far as possible, not all genealogies feature unbroken lines. On closer inspection, the family trees of the Earls of Gloucester and the Wittelsbachs show more of an approximate succession of genealogical networks.¹⁷ The Wittelsbach rolls aim to present a perfect congruence between the line of succession and family descent, as the title of two of the rolls makes clear: *Das ist der Pawm des geschlachts der Herrn von dem Haws zu Bayern*.¹⁸ However, because the Duchy of Bavaria had also been held by the House of Welf and the Ottonian dynasty, the Wittelsbachs could not claim uninterrupted possession of the title. As such, the rolls show only an indeterminate line of descent from the oldest, legendary rulers of Bavaria. Nevertheless, once the family acquired the titles of Count Palatine of the Rhine and Duke of Bavaria, all members of the dynasty subsequently bear them in the genealogy unless they happen to also hold higher-ranking ones. The family's coat of arms is also repeated throughout the rolls, with many variations. Despite discontinuities in both rulership and genealogy, the charts suggest the greatest possible order and a harmonious line of succession through the generations.

Most of the genealogies studied for this article present unbroken lines of descent in the form of charts, thereby concealing interruptions to both the family line and the maintenance of power. The rolls of the

203–309, at 215; Gert Melville, 'Geschichte in graphischer Gestalt: Beobachtungen zu einer spätmittelalterlichen Darstellungsweise', in Hans Patze (ed.), *Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsbewußtsein im späten Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen, 1987), 57–154, at 58; Tobias Tannenberger, 'Land und Genealogie: Das Identifikations- und Legitimationspotential des Raumes in der *Genealogia principum Tungro-Brabantinorum*', in Andenna and Melville (eds.), *Idoneität – Genealogie – Legitimation*, 423–39, at 432–3.

¹⁶ Tscherpel, 'The Political Function of History', 89.

¹⁷ CoA, ID 9782 (after 1431); Bodl. MS lat misc b 2 (r) (1434/74); HSTA GH, 65 (1479/84); Stiftsbib., MS Chart. 106 (1479/84); WAF, HS 326/18 (1480–1505).

¹⁸ 'This is the family tree of the Lords of the House of Bavaria.' HSTA GH, HS 65 (1479/84); Stiftsbib., MS Chart. 106 (1479/84).

Earls of Gloucester and the Dukes of Bavaria differ in that they show these breaks, but smooth them over through the overall arrangement of the charts, coats of arms, and drawings, so that the discontinuities only become apparent on closer inspection.¹⁹ By presenting successive generations in vertical columns along the page, the rolls give an impression of unbroken continuity at first glance.

Discontinuities in descent and succession were further concealed on horizontal rolls by arranging portraits in rows, removing the need for connecting lines; the relationships between the figures is thus not explicitly spelled out. This strategy was used by the Earls of Warwick and the Earls of Salisbury, whose lines were in fact interrupted multiple times.²⁰ Like the genealogies of the Earls of Gloucester, their rolls primarily depict a line of rulers.²¹ Admittedly, none of the three families were able to present an unbroken succession of rulers, but it would have been even less plausible to claim genealogical continuity due to the extinction of various families who inherited these titles.

In contrast, the genealogies of the Botelers of Sudeley and the Mortimers are designed to show an unbroken line of descent.²² Both families trace their ancestry back to the Norman Conquest. It is striking that the genealogies of the Earls of Warwick, the Mortimer family, and (in one case) the Percy family not only construct continuity, but also focus on the exceptional age of their ancestral lines.²³ Aeneas is depicted as the earliest ancestor of the Earls of Warwick—a rare example demonstrating that those stories of Trojan ancestors that were so common on the Continent were also known in England, and were

¹⁹ CoA, ID 9782 (after 1431); Bodl. MS lat misc b 2 (r) (1434/74); HSTA GH, 65 (1479/84); Stiftsbib., MS Chart. 106 (1479/84); WAF, HS 326/18 (1480–1505).

²⁰ BL Add MS 48976 (1483/5); CoA, ID 105646 (1477–85); BL Loan MS 90, pp. 176–225 (1460); BM MS Add. 45133 (1483–5).

²¹ BL Loan MS 90, pp. 176–225 (1460); BM MS Add. 45133 (1483–5). For the Earls of Warwick, see Matthias Kuhn, 'Die genealogischen Rollen der Markgrafen von Baden und der Earls von Warwick: Ein materialbasierter Vergleich', in Giuseppe Cusa and Thomas Dorfner (eds.), *Genealogisches Wissen in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit: Konstruktion – Darstellung – Rezeption* (Berlin, 2023), 185–211, at 196–9.

²² NYPL, Spencer Collection MS 193 (1447/8); ULC, Codex MS 224 (1414/60).

²³ BL Add MS 48976 (1483/5); CoA, ID 105646 (1477–85); ULC, Codex MS 224 (1414/60); MS. Bodl. Rolls 5 (c.1485).

sometimes even used by the English nobility. The Mortimers and the Percys, by contrast, are descended from Adam and Eve – but in both cases the narrative is presented in the context of royal lineages. The nobility were unable to prove that they were directly descended from biblical figures, independently of the Crown.

Most rolls use continuous charts arranged in columns to show an unbroken line of descent. The rolls of the Margraves of Baden, the Percys, and the Berkeleys present uninterrupted lineages from the oldest ancestors down to the youngest members of the dynasty.²⁴ However, they can only do so by obscuring the difference between genealogical descent and the line of succession, as well as by reshaping the narrative.²⁵ One ruler appears to be succeeded by his son, even though the accompanying text makes it clear that his title was inherited by a nephew or another relative. There is also no mention of the extinction of titles. What the genealogies of these three families have in common is that they cover comparatively short periods: three centuries for the Margraves of Baden, and around 400 years for the two English families. In these examples, it was thus more important to demonstrate continuity than exceptional age.

Because they consist of one long reading and writing surface, manuscript rolls are ideally suited to show continuity through their format alone, as the genealogy unfurls before the reader's eyes without being interrupted by having to turn the pages of a book. Charts and sequences of figures could thus be designed in such a way as to establish unbroken lines, be they of succession, descent, or a mixture of both categories.²⁶ The genealogies show the significance of

²⁴ GLA, 47/516 1 (1503); GLA, 47/516 2 (1508); GLA, 47/516 3 (1508); Alnwick Castle, DNP 80 (c.1461); MS. Bodl. Rolls 5 (c.1485); BC, SR 97 (1490/2); BC, SR 98 (after 1515); GA, D471 (after 1492).

²⁵ On the blurring of these categories, see Birgit Studt, 'Formen der Dokumentation und Repräsentation von Macht: Historiographie und Geschichtskultur im Umkreis des Fürstenhofes', in Reinhardt Butz and Jan Hirshbiegel (eds.), *Hof und Macht: Dresdener Gespräche zur Theorie des Hofes. Ergebnisse des gleichnamigen Kolloquiums auf Schloss Scharfenstein bei Dresden, 19. bis 21. November 2004* (Berlin, 2007), 29–54, at 33. For the Margraves of Baden, see e.g. Holz and Krimm, 'Die badischen Genealogien Georg Ruxners', 107, 109.

²⁶ František Graus, 'Epochenbewußtsein im Spätmittelalter und Probleme der Periodisierung', in Reinhart Herzog and Reinhart Koselleck (eds.),

unbroken lines for the self-understanding of the German and English nobility.²⁷ How exactly that continuity was established was ultimately of secondary importance, however.²⁸

II. A Comparison of the German and English Nobility

In order to analyse the differences between German and English aristocratic families in terms of their relationship to the Crown, it is first necessary to provide an overview of the workings of nobility and kingship in both polities.²⁹ The most important difference between the two aristocratic cultures was that the King of the Romans was elected, whereas the English Crown was passed on by inheritance.³⁰ This had

Epochschwelle und Epochenbewußtsein (Munich, 1987), 153–66, at 158; Matthew Fisher, 'Genealogy Rewritten: Inheriting the Legendary in Insular Historiography', in Raluca L. Radulescu and Edward Donald Kennedy (eds.), *Broken Lines: Genealogical Literature in Medieval Britain and France* (Turnhout, 2008), 123–41, at 140.

²⁷ The same is true of genealogies of English kings. See Olivier de Laborderie, 'A New Pattern for English History: The First Genealogical Rolls of the Kings of England', in Radulescu and Kennedy (eds.), *Broken Lines*, 45–62, at 58; Jon Denton, 'Genealogy and Gentility: Social Status in Provincial England', *ibid.* 143–58, at 143. For a discursive example of how genealogical ruptures could also be used in invective, see Gert Melville, 'Geschichte im Diskurs: Zur Auseinandersetzung zwischen Herolden über die Frage: "Qui est le royaume chrestien qui plus est digne d'estre approuché d'Onneur?"', in Chantal Grell, Werner Paravicini, and Jürgen Voss (eds.), *Les princes et l'histoire du XIV^e au XVIII^e siècle: Actes du colloque organisé par l'Université de Versailles-Saint-Quentin et l'Institut Historique Allemand. Paris/Versailles, 13–16 mars 1996* (Bonn, 1998), 243–62, at 250.

²⁸ Beate Kellner, 'Genealogien', in Paravicini, Hirschbiegel, und Wettlaufer (eds.), *Höfe und Residenzen im spätmittelalterlichen Reich*, vol. iii: *Hof und Schrift*, 347–60, at 350.

²⁹ Spieß, *Familie und Verwandtschaft*, 541–2; Kenneth B. McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England: The Ford Lectures for 1953 and Related Studies* (Oxford, 1973), 268.

³⁰ Peltzer, *Der Rang der Pfalzgrafen bei Rhein*, 107. On elective monarchy in the Holy Roman Empire, see Andreas Büttner, 'Dynastische Kontinuität im Wahlreich der Kurfürsten? Kandidatur und Thronfolge im Spätmittelalter', in Matthias Becher (ed.), *Die mittelalterliche Thronfolge im europäischen Vergleich*

a major impact on the structure of the nobility and, above all, on the relationship between the Crown and the aristocracy in the two kingdoms.³¹ Thanks to their voting rights, the German electors had much greater autonomy, both politically and as rulers, than did the English nobility, whose fiefs were granted directly by the monarch.³² Although feudal oaths continued to be sworn to the German king, he retained little control over fiefs once they had been issued, and princely fiefs in particular were inherited independently. While the granting of offices and fiefs gradually dwindled in importance in the Holy Roman Empire and increasingly took on a merely ritual character, it remained standard English practice even in the late Middle Ages.³³ German princes who did not hold the dignity of elector nonetheless remained a distinguished group within the nobility and enjoyed a high degree of independence from their overlord.³⁴

(Ostfildern, 2017), 289–340, at 292–4; Andreas Büttner, *Der Weg zur Krone: Rituale der Herrschererhebung im spätmittelalterlichen Reich* (Ostfildern, 2012), 652–5. The English royal elections of the fifteenth century did not decide who would become king, but rather confirmed the existing king's status. See Michael Hicks, *English Political Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (London, 2002), 40.

³¹ Jörg Peltzer, 'Introduction', in Thorsten Huthwelker, Jörg Peltzer, and Maximilian Wemhöner (eds.), *Princely Rank in Medieval Europe: Trodden Paths and Promising Avenues* (Ostfildern, 2011), 11–26, at 16.

³² Peltzer, *Der Rang der Pfalzgrafen bei Rhein*, 161; Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L. A. Manyon, 2 vols. (London, 1965), ii. 370–1.

³³ Karl-Heinz Spieß, 'Erteilung, dynastische Rason und transpersonale Herrschaftsvorstellung: Die Pfalzgrafen bei Rhein und die Pfalz im späten Mittelalter', in Franz Staab (ed.), *Die Pfalz: Probleme einer Begriffsgeschichte vom Kaiserpalast auf dem Palatin bis zum heutigen Regierungsbezirk. Referate und Aussprachen der Arbeitstagung vom 4.–6. Oktober 1988 in St. Martin/Pfalz* (Speyer, 1990), 159–81, at 159; Karl-Heinz Spieß, *Fürsten und Höfe im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 2009), 33. In this sense, the ritualized enfeoffments of the late medieval empire are indicative not of the king's strength, but his weakness. See Peltzer, *Fürst werden*, 28.

³⁴ Peter Moraw, *Von offener Verfassung zu gestalteter Verdichtung: Das Reich im späten Mittelalter 1250 bis 1490* (Berlin, 1985), 177; Werner Hechberger, *Adel im fränkisch-deutschen Mittelalter: Zur Anatomie eines Forschungsproblems* (Ostfildern, 2005), 460, 469; Ernst Schubert, 'Probleme der Königsherrschaft im spätmittelalterlichen Reich: Das Beispiel Ruprechts von der Pfalz (1400–1410)', in Reinhard Schneider (ed.), *Das spätmittelalterliche Königtum im europäischen Vergleich* (Sigmariningen, 1987), 135–84, at 183. For a discussion of the title of

The granting of noble titles and the exercise of power also had immediate consequences for the dynamics of inheritance. In the German nobility, princely titles were inherited, but the king was elected.³⁵ England, by contrast, was a hereditary monarchy, and aristocratic titles were conferred by the Crown. Admittedly, it was customary for English titles to be passed down through the generations of the same noble family: on the death of an earl, the king would grant the title to one of his sons, where possible. However, the king could still assert his power against the nobility through the prerogative to create new titles and to revoke them.³⁶

The German nobility saw their offices, titles, and lands as family property. As a result, families strongly identified with their lordly and territorial titles, and this was reflected in how they named themselves.³⁷ All children of German noble families were permitted to use their father's titles, and any property was usually divided between them on his death, whereas English titles could only be passed on to one son.³⁸ As a result, the English aristocracy based its nomencla-

Fürst ('prince'), see Hans-Werner Goetz, 'Fürst, Fürstentum', in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (Turnhout, 2023), vol. iv, 1029–4, at 1029.

³⁵ Jörg Peltzer, 'Idoneität: Eine Ordnungskategorie oder eine Frage des Rangs?', in Andenna and Melville (eds.), *Idoneität – Genealogie – Legitimation*, 23–38, at 33; Moraw, *Von offener Verfassung zu gestalteter Verdichtung*, 186.

³⁶ On investiture and revocation, see Jörg Peltzer, *Fürst werden*, 26–30; Stephen Henry Rigby, *English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Class, Status and Gender* (London, 1995), 197; Given-Wilson, 'Rank and Status', 99.

³⁷ Ernst Schubert, *Fürstliche Herrschaft und Territorium im späten Mittelalter* (Munich, 2006), 24; Spieß, *Familie und Verwandtschaft*, 501; Walter Ziegler, 'Witelsbach', in Jan Hirschbiegel, Werner Paravicini, and Jörg Wettlaufer (eds.), *Höfe und Residenzen im spätmittelalterlichen Reich: Ein dynastisch-topographisches Handbuch*, vol. i, pt. i: *Dynastien und Höfe* (Ostfildern, 2003), 218–25, at 219; Karl-Heinz Spieß, 'Zwischen König und Fürsten: Das politische Beziehungssystem südwestdeutscher Grafen und Herren im späten Mittelalter', in Kurt Andermann and Clemens Joos (eds.), *Grafen und Herren in Südwestdeutschland vom 12. bis ins 17. Jahrhundert* (Epfendorf, 2006), 13–34, at 14–15.

³⁸ Although property continued to be divided in the late Middle Ages, the German nobility also increasingly sought strategies to prevent excessive fragmentation of family estates. See Jörg Rogge, *Herrschaftsweitergabe, Konfliktregelung und Familienorganisation im fürstlichen Hochadel: Das Beispiel der Wettiner von der Mitte des 13. bis zum Beginn des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 2002), 9, 318–33. On English practices, see Hicks, *English Political Culture*, 52;

ture more on surnames than on noble titles, as the latter were less closely associated with a single family. The German nobility therefore developed stronger group identities by passing on paternal titles to all children. This is reflected in their genealogies, which frequently include secondary branches of the family—a feature rarely found in English manuscripts.³⁹

In both kingdoms, agnatic succession prevailed,⁴⁰ but England was also subject to the law of primogeniture.⁴¹ This principle of having a sole male heir, which was intended to secure property and titles in one hand, meant that hardly any family lines survived under agnatic succession for more than 100 years.⁴² English genealogical rolls, which trace lines of descent over several centuries, are impressive testimony to families' efforts to establish a continuity that hardly existed under an agnatic system.

The English nobility oriented itself much more strongly towards the person of the king than their German counterparts did. This was not only due to the English monarchy's greater control over and independence from the aristocracy,⁴³ but also because the king was less reliant on the nobility to maintain his power in a hereditary system. The nobility's rank and political influence were also established through kinship with and descent from the king. The number of English noble families related to the royal family had grown

Jörg Peltzer, 'The Marriages of the English Earls in the Thirteenth Century: A Social Perspective', in Janet Burton, Phillip Schofield, and Björn Weiler (eds.), *Thirteenth Century England XIV: Proceedings of the Aberystwyth and Lampeter Conference, 2011* (Woodbridge, 2013), 61–85, at 62.

³⁹ On family consciousness in England, see Hicks, *English Political Culture*, 65–70; on nomenclature and family consciousness in the German nobility, see Spieß, *Familie und Verwandtschaft*, 2, 501.

⁴⁰ David Crouch, 'The Historian, Lineage and Heraldry 1050–1250', in Peter Coss and Maurice Keen (eds.), *Heraldry, Pageantry and Social Display in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2002), 17–37, at 36.

⁴¹ McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England*, 270. 'With minor exceptions the law governing the inheritance of a fief was simple and unambiguous: primogeniture among males, equal shares between females, a son always preferred to a daughter, a daughter to a brother or other collateral.'; Hicks, *English Political Culture*, 65.

⁴² McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England*, 143.

⁴³ Peltzer, *Fürst werden*, 97.

considerably by the fifteenth century, as Edward III (1312–77) had married most of his thirteen children to the nobility.⁴⁴ This resulted in extensive royal kinship networks.⁴⁵ The situation was very different in Germany, where the (princely) nobility were more independent than their English counterparts—not only in the exercise of power, but also in their kinship relations with the king; indeed, the electors even regarded themselves as equals of the monarch.⁴⁶

III. Kingship and Nobility

Noble genealogies in both kingdoms centred on the family's relationship with the Crown.⁴⁷ In England, this relationship is reflected not least in the fact that many of the genealogical rolls of English kings also contain branch lines listing noble families.⁴⁸ Nobility and royalty were depicted on these rolls as members of a wider genealogical network that was characterized by a clear hierarchy: the king

⁴⁴ McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England*, 151; Vincent, 'Sources and Methods', 130. On Edward III's dynastic strategies, see Chris Given-Wilson, *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages: The Fourteenth-Century Political Community* (London, 1987), 43–4; Robert Bartlett, *Blood Royal: Dynastic Politics in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 2020), 283–5.

⁴⁵ Ralph Alan Griffiths, 'The Crown and the Royal Family in Later Medieval England', in Ralph Alan Griffiths and James W. Sherborne (eds.), *Kings and Nobles in the Later Middle Ages: A Tribute to Charles Derek Ross* (Gloucester, 1986), 15–26, at 16.

⁴⁶ Karl-Heinz Spieß, 'Kommunikationsformen im Hochadel und am Königshof im Spätmittelalter', in Gerd Althoff (ed.), *Formen und Funktionen öffentlicher Kommunikation im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 2001), 261–90, at 278–9; Karl-Heinz Spieß, 'Rangdenken und Rangstreit im Mittelalter', in Werner Paravicini (ed.), *Zeremoniell und Raum: 4. Symposium der Residenzen-Kommission der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen veranstaltet gemeinsam mit dem Deutschen Historischen Institut Paris und dem Historischen Institut der Universität Potsdam, 25. bis 27. September 1994* (Sigmaringen, 1997), 39–61, at 47.

⁴⁷ Schmid, 'Zur Problematik von Familie, Sippe und Geschlecht', 48; Tscherpel, 'The Political Function of History', 89.

⁴⁸ e.g. Free Library of Philadelphia, Lewis Roll E 201 (1475); see also the genealogy on the front of Bodl. MS lat misc b 2 (r) (1434/74). Many Considerans rolls also show the lines of succession of noble families with royal kinship; e.g. BL Royal MS 14 B VIII (before 1461).

and his line stood at the centre, with the nobility positioned to the side. Kinship ties with the royal family are also highlighted on many of the genealogical rolls produced by the English nobility. On the rolls of the Botelers of Sudeley, a roll belonging to the Percy family, and one depicting the line of the Earls of Gloucester, the king's family tree is placed at the centre of the page, parallel to those of the noble families—just like on royal rolls.⁴⁹ On another roll by the Earls of Gloucester and on the genealogy of the Mortimers, the noble genealogies even come after the royal genealogy.⁵⁰ The rolls of the Earls of Warwick include portraits of kings among the series of figures, with royal arms either interlinked with those of the nobility or placed alongside them.⁵¹ Other noble genealogical rolls also include royal coats of arms in order to establish a close link between royalty and nobility.⁵²

This close visual connection between kingship and nobility is not found on German rolls. Royal insignia, such as crowns, sceptres, and the heraldic eagles of the kings and emperors, appear on the rolls of the House of Bavaria primarily at times when members of the family held the Crown. Other dynasties, such as the Ottonians, the Habsburgs, and especially the Salians and the kings of the Interregnum, are made less prominent by positioning their portraits at the edge of the roll, without even coats of arms or insignia, and in some cases without royal titles.

Similarly, kings are mentioned only obliquely on the rolls of the Margraves of Baden. Connections with the Habsburgs are described and depicted, with the Habsburg arms establishing a link between the

⁴⁹ NYPL, Spencer Collection MS 193; MS. Bodl. Rolls 5 (c.1485); CoA, ID 9782 (after 1431).

⁵⁰ Bodl. MS Lat misc b 2(r). The Tewkesbury roll features a royal genealogy on the front and a noble one on the reverse. In the Wigmore chronicle, the Mortimer genealogy comes after a genealogy of the English kings: ULC, Codex MS 224 (1414/60).

⁵¹ BL Add MS 48976 (1483/5); CoA, ID 105646 (1477–85).

⁵² Royal coats of arms can be found on NYPL, Spencer Collection MS 193 (1447/8); BL Add. MS 48976 (1484/5); CoA, ID 105646 (1477–85); Bodl. MS Lat misc b 2(r) (1434/74); MS Bodl. Rolls 5 (1485); and ULC, Codex MS 224 (1414/60). See Kathleen L. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts 1390–1490*, 2 vols. (London, 1996), i. 61.

two houses.⁵³ In this respect, the Habsburgs are presented as a royal family through the reigns of Frederick III and Maximilian. Nonetheless, such links assume only a subordinate position in the genealogy; other Kings of the Romans are barely mentioned, for example. In short, royal connections are very prominent on the English rolls I examined, but are treated with comparative restraint on the German rolls.

The King as an Ancestor

Many noble families presented themselves as being descended from a king. These narratives sometimes also served to highlight the family's distinctive longevity by naming kings from long ago as ancestors. The Wittelsbach rolls thus all claim that the family is descended from the Carolingians, through Charlemagne and his own forebear Arnulf of Metz.⁵⁴ Still more important than these ancestors, however, is the Wittelsbach Emperor Louis IV, who is depicted particularly prominently on the rolls with a central position and heraldic decoration.⁵⁵ This is a deliberate choice, as it was thanks to Louis IV that the Wittelsbachs became eligible for election as kings.⁵⁶ The other monarchs of

⁵³ On the considerable importance of the Habsburgs for the Margraves of Baden in the fifteenth century, see Heinz Krieg, 'Die Markgrafen von Baden und ihr Hof zwischen fürstlicher und niederadeliger Außenwelt im 15. Jahrhundert', in Thomas Zotz (ed.), *Fürstenhöfe und ihre Außenwelt: Aspekte gesellschaftlicher und kultureller Identität im deutschen Spätmittelalter* (Würzburg, 2004), 51–84, at 54–9.

⁵⁴ While earlier legendary Bavarian kings and dukes appear only as indeterminate ancestors, Arnulf of Metz (b. 582, d. after 640) is named as the progenitor of the family's verifiable lineage.

⁵⁵ Jean-Marie Moeglin, 'Das Erbe Ludwigs des Bayern', in Ulrike Hohensee et al. (eds.), *Die Goldene Bulle: Politik – Wahrnehmung – Rezeption* (Berlin, 2009), 17–38, at 27, 37; Jean-Marie Moeglin, 'Das Bild Ludwigs des Bayern in der deutschen Geschichtsschreibung des Spätmittelalters (ca. 1370–ca. 1500)', in Hermann Nehlsen and Hans-Georg Hermann (eds.), *Kaiser Ludwig der Bayer: Konflikte, Weichenstellungen und Wahrnehmung seiner Herrschaft* (Paderborn, 2002), 199–260, at 240.

⁵⁶ Wilhelm Störmer, 'Die innere Konsolidierung der wittelsbachischen Territorialstaaten in Bayern im 15. Jahrhundert', in Ferdinand Seibt and Winfried Eberhard (eds.), *Europa 1500: Integrationsprozesse im Widerstreit. Staaten, Regionen, Personenverbände, Christenheit* (Stuttgart, 1987), 175–94, at 176; Moeglin, 'Das Erbe Ludwigs des Bayern', 17–19.

the House of Bavaria also enjoy pre-eminent positions in the genealogies, highlighted through heraldry and insignia.⁵⁷ By contrast, the Margraves of Baden could not boast any royal forebears. In order to compensate for this to a degree, the oldest ancestor named on their rolls is Irmengard (1200–60), daughter of the Count Palatine, who was a Welf and therefore had royal blood.⁵⁸

Royal descent was also extremely important for the English nobility,⁵⁹ who sought to prove it in both genealogical charts and their accompanying texts. However, contemporaries apparently did not distinguish between legendary kings and historically verifiable ones. Some genealogies thus trace the lines of noble families back to mythical kings. Two families, the Mortimers and the Percys, are portrayed as descendants of the legendary British King Brutus, each creating their own complex narrative constructions.⁶⁰ Similarly, in an introductory text, the Berkeleys claim descent from the equally legendary King Harding of Denmark.⁶¹ They are also linked cognatically to Edward the Confessor (1004–66) and even (fictionally) to a king of Jerusalem.⁶² On the roll of the Earls of Salisbury, a son of Henry II is portrayed in the series of figures as the first earl,⁶³ while the Botelers of Sudeley

⁵⁷ HSTA GH, HS 65 (1479/84); Stiftsbib., MS Chart. 106 (1479/84); WAF, HS 326/18 (1480–1505).

⁵⁸ On Irmengard's ancestry and the increase in rank conferred by her marriage to the Margrave of Baden, see Maria Pia Schindele, 'Die Abtei Lichtenthal', *Freiburger Diözesanarchiv*, 104 (1984), 19–166, at 26.

⁵⁹ Only one roll does not trace the family's descent back to royal ancestors: Alnwick Castle, DNP MS 80 (c.1461).

⁶⁰ ULC, Codex MS 224 (1414/60); MS. Bodl. Rolls 5 (c.1485). Brutus was also an important ancestor of the Kings of England. However, not all genealogies of the Percy family claim this royal descent, which is always presented in an extremely complicated and not very intelligible way. See Matthias Kuhn, 'Enrolling Lines of Power: Yorkist Pedigree Rolls as Material Evidence of Kingship', in Abigail S. Armstrong et al. (eds.), *Keeping Record: The Materiality of Rulership and Administration in Early China and Medieval Europe* (Berlin, 2024), 211–38, at 231–2.

⁶¹ BC, SR 97 (1490/2); BC, SR 98 (after 1515); GA, D471 (after 1492).

⁶² BC, SR 97 (1490/2).

⁶³ The series of figures begins with William Longespée (1167–1226), an illegitimate son of Henry II. BL Loan MS 90, pp. 176–225 (1460); BM MS Add. 45133 (1483–5).

claim descent from Harald Godwinson (1022–66).⁶⁴ The Earls of Warwick produced a much more complicated chart with many branches tracing their line, along with those of the French and English kings, back to Charlemagne—although the main design element of their rolls is a series of figures.⁶⁵ Another chart on the same rolls goes a step further and portrays an ancestor of the Earls of Warwick as the forefather of the Plantagenets; however, this chart is tucked away between the figures, making its spectacular claim easy to overlook. Both lines of descent on the rolls of the Earls of Warwick are genealogically verifiable and not fictitious—an astonishing achievement by their author, John Rous, albeit one belied by the poor execution of the charts.⁶⁶ Compared to the colourful coats of arms and detailed portraits, the complex, carelessly drawn charts on the Warwick rolls fade into the background. The figures and coats of arms themselves communicate meaning; here, too, we find kings and royal arms.

Aside from the genealogies of the Berkeleys and the Botelers of Sudeley, it is striking that direct lines of descent from royal ancestors are presented rather casually in the English genealogies and by no means assume centre stage. Other family connections to the contemporary royal family take up far more space, however.

Proximity and Distance to the King

Kinship relationships with and marriages into the royal family are presented even more prominently than royal ancestry on the rolls. As well as claiming descent from the Carolingians, the Wittelsbach rolls also present a fictional link with the Ottonians via various lines.⁶⁷ This was not done solely to extol the family's illustrious kin; rather, through

⁶⁴ NYPL, Spencer Collection MS 193.

⁶⁵ BL Add. MS 48976 (1483/5). The Beauchamps, as Earls of Warwick, were not the only ones to claim descent from Charlemagne; the de Veres, who were Earls of Oxford, did so too. Tscherpel, 'The Political Function of History', 103; Lucy Toulmin Smith (ed.), *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535–1543*, 5 vols. (London 1906–10), vol. iv, appendix I(a), 145.

⁶⁶ There are further charts on the rolls that, unlike the previous ones, show fictional relationships between the Plantagenets and the Earls of Warwick.

⁶⁷ HSTA GH, 65 (1479/84); Stiftsbib., MS Chart. 106 (1479/84); WAF, HS 326/18 (1480–1505).

direct comparison with the Ottonians, the genealogies demonstrate the Wittelsbachs' success, both as rulers and as a lineage. Although the Ottonians had been kings, emperors, and Dukes of Bavaria, they had died out, whereas the Wittelsbachs had not only prospered across numerous family branches and been Dukes of Bavaria for centuries, but had also become eligible candidates for the Crown thanks to Louis IV and Rupert I.⁶⁸ Being descended from the Carolingians and related to the Ottonians, the Wittelsbach family was furthermore a pillar of the empire and its electoral system. They also presented themselves as a royal family: Wittelsbach women who married foreign kings and men who themselves became Kings of Hungary, Bohemia, and Denmark are also mentioned, in order to demonstrate that the Wittelsbachs were eligible to become monarchs.⁶⁹

The Baden rolls also attest to kinship with monarchs across Europe, with four of the margraves' wives displayed alongside the royal arms of their ancestors in order to prove that they had royal blood. These include the coats of arms of the Kings of England, Seville, and Poland.⁷⁰ As I have already mentioned, great importance was also attached to emphasizing the family's ties to the Habsburg emperors and kings, and this was likewise done using coats of arms. Thus we see that Charles of Baden (1427–75) married the sister of Emperor Frederick III (1415–93).⁷¹ This provided a pretext to include excerpts of the lineage of Catherine of Austria (1420–93), which allowed numerous other striped shields—symbols of the Habsburgs—to be added to the genealogy. The royal status of the Habsburgs is thus presented on the Baden rolls as dynastic in

⁶⁸ Bavarian historiography aimed to show that other families ruled over the Duchy of Bavaria only temporarily. See Joachim Schneider, 'Dynastisch-territoriale Geschichtsschreibung in Bayern und Österreich: Texte und Entstehungsbedingungen—Herkunftsgeschichten und Mythen', in Gerhard Wolf and Norbert H. Ott (eds.), *Handbuch Chroniken des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 2016), 225–65, at 244.

⁶⁹ Ziegler, 'Wittelsbach', 224.

⁷⁰ The purported link to the English Crown is fictitious, however. See Holz and Krimm, 'Die badischen Genealogien Georg Rixners', 100.

⁷¹ GLA, 47, no. 516,1 (1503), 'Carolus marggrave zu Baden und Grave zu Sponheim: Sin gemahel was frow katherina von österreich, keisser fridrichs swöster'.

nature, unlike in the Wittelsbach genealogies, which feature royal and imperial eagles and thus emphasize the elective character of German kingship—the eagle being a symbol of the empire rather than a particular family.

While the Wittelsbachs primarily depicted themselves as eligible to rule both the Holy Roman Empire and other European kingdoms, the Margraves of Baden were anxious to demonstrate not only that they were descended from kings across Europe, but also that they had kinship ties to the German royal family in power at the time. Overall, however, both princely families adopted a pan-European perspective on kingship.

This is in striking contrast to the English aristocratic families, who focused on the English Crown in their attempts to prove their proximity to royalty. It should be noted that not every family proclaimed their kinship with the royal dynasty; such relationships are absent from the genealogies of the Berkeleys and the Botelers of Sudeley, even though, as I have mentioned, they claim royal ancestors. In cases where no kinship ties to the current ruling dynasty could be shown, it was all the more important to demonstrate royal ancestry. In any case, however, relationships with the king were of fundamental importance for the English nobility.

All the other English noble houses examined in this study were able to show direct kinship with the royal family. In the Mortimer genealogy, the accompanying text explicitly points out that Edmund Mortimer's wife Philippa of Clarence (1355–82) had royal blood as the granddaughter of Edward III. The coats of arms feature the differentiated Plantagenet colours, marking the Mortimers as a cadet branch of the royal family, and are ostentatiously displayed in the manuscript.⁷² On the rolls of the Earls of Gloucester, the royal line is always shown alongside the family's genealogical networks; marriage and kinship connections between the two lines are thus established repeatedly over the generations. The complex layout of the charts suggests that the Earls of Gloucester were close to the Crown for centuries, although their connections with the royal family are presented in an unsystematic and disorganized way.

⁷² ULC, Codex MS 224 (1414/60), 59r.

A similar approach was taken in at least one of the Percy rolls, with the family line placed alongside that of the king, and shared connections repeatedly emphasized through complex networks.⁷³ Marriage and kinship relationships are primarily depicted textually,⁷⁴ which makes the construction chosen on MS Bodl. Rolls 5 all the more exceptional. Elizabeth Mortimer (1371–1417), daughter of Lionel of Antwerp, married Henry Hotspur, and so her descendants were related to the Plantagenets – but more than that, they were also able to draw upon the Plantagenets’ mythic origins. These were particularly fraught with meaning at the time the roll was created, during the reign of the House of York, as the Yorkist kings also claimed descent, via Lionel of Antwerp’s wife, from the legendary British monarchs Arthur and Brutus.⁷⁵ By linking themselves to the royal line here in particular, the Percys established a special relationship with the Crown. This was particularly opportune because, after initially opposing Henry IV (1366/7–1413), the Percys had long sided with the House of Lancaster; now, however, they could point to their kinship ties with the Yorkist kings, which were based on mythic roots.⁷⁶

Yet the Percys also neglected to use one other possible means of establishing proximity to the House of York. They had initially rebelled against the first Lancastrian king, Henry IV, in support of the claim of Edmund Mortimer, an ancestor of the House of York, and several members of the Percy family had died in battle against the House of Lancaster.⁷⁷ Indeed, Henry IV is even depicted as a usurper on MS Bodl. Rolls 5. With that in mind, it would have made sense for the Percys to highlight not only the legendary forebears they shared with the House of York, but also the fact that they had fought against the Yorkists’ enemies. Yet there are no such narratives on

⁷³ MS Bodl. Rolls 5 (1485).

⁷⁴ Alnwick Castle, DNP MS 80 (c.1461).

⁷⁵ Kuhn, ‘Lines of Power’, 231.

⁷⁶ Tscherpel, ‘The Political Function of History’, 95; Anne F. Sutton and Livia Visser-Fuchs, ‘Richard III’s Books: Ancestry and “True Nobility”’, *The Ricardian*, 9/119 (1992), 343–58, at 345.

⁷⁷ John Malcolm William Bean, ‘Henry IV and the Percies’, *History*, 44/152 (1959), 212–27, at 221–2.

the roll. Henry Hotspur is presented as the primary agitator against the king and loses his life fighting him at the Battle of Shrewsbury, but this episode is told in the margins of the roll and commands no particular attention.⁷⁸ The Percys thus did not capitalize on the fact that they had rebelled against the enemies of the ruling dynasty; instead, they suppressed it as much as they could. It was only under the Tudors that the family's struggle against Henry IV was used by the Percys to position themselves as loyal supporters of the Crown, when they asserted that they had upheld the Yorkist claim to the throne out of loyalty to Richard II. In this sense, their rebellion had been legitimate.⁷⁹

Deprecating the king seems to have been completely unthinkable for English noble families, even during the Wars of the Roses, when many of these genealogical rolls were created. The Crown was too sacrosanct for that. This finding is surprising, given that royal genealogies actively tried to delegitimize competing dynasties, as we see in France.⁸⁰ During the reigns of both Lancastrian and Yorkist kings, the royal genealogies produced by each house valorized their own line while downplaying those of their rivals.⁸¹ Despite the fact that the Wars of the Roses pitted two branches of the Plantagenets against each other—two royal dynasties descended from the same stock—the nobility was unable to minimize the importance of the monarch, as the German nobility did. Such narratives were not available to the English nobility; the Crown was too central, even when it was disputed. This point is underscored by the dynastic politics of Edward III, who married the majority of his children into the English nobility, with the result that by the time of the Wars of the Roses, many families could claim

⁷⁸ Tscherpel, 'The Political Function of History', 95.

⁷⁹ Matthew Holford, 'Family, Lineage and Society: Medieval Pedigrees of the Percy Family', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 52 (2008), 165–90, at 184; Bean, 'Henry IV and the Percies', 216.

⁸⁰ Marigold Anne Norbye, 'Genealogies in Medieval France', in Radulescu and Kennedy (eds.), *Broken Lines*, 70–101, at 97.

⁸¹ Alison Allan, 'Yorkist Propaganda: Pedigree, Prophecy and the "British History" in the Reign of Edward IV', in Charles Ross (ed.), *Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England* (Gloucester, 1979), 171–92, at 172–3; Kuhn, 'Lines of Power', 214–16.

royal descent, as the genealogies also show.⁸² Noble families did not generally use this as a basis on which to claim the throne, however.⁸³

While a single connection to the royal family was of particular importance on one of the Percys' rolls, the Earls of Warwick could claim numerous connections to the royal line.⁸⁴ Isabel (1451–76) and Anne Neville (1456–85) had married brothers of King Edward IV (1442–83), with Anne's husband later becoming king himself as Richard III (1452–85).⁸⁵ Richard and Anne's son, Edward of Middleham (1473–84), thus united in his person the lineages of the Earls of Warwick and of the English royal family. This genealogy is set out using heraldry and charts, as I have already described above.⁸⁶ Only the rolls of the Earls of Warwick feature Spanish and Bohemian kings alongside English ones in their charts.

Richard III appears in a strikingly large number of English noble genealogies. He is named as the reigning king on one of the Percy rolls, and he also features in the genealogies of the Earls of Salisbury.⁸⁷ As the Duke of Gloucester, he also plays a special role in one of the genealogies of the Earls of Tewkesbury and in a later continuation of *The Founders' Book of Tewkesbury Abbey*, alongside his brother George, Duke of Clarence.⁸⁸ The differenced Plantagenet arms are

⁸² McFarlane, *The Nobility of Later Medieval England*, 151.

⁸³ A rare counter-example can be found on a roll from the Tudor period which indicates that the Yorkist claim has passed on to the de la Pole family. This is an absolute exception, however. Kuhn, 'Lines of Power', 233–4; John Rylands Library, Latin MS 113.

⁸⁴ Michael Hicks, 'Heirs and Non-Heirs: Perceptions and Realities amongst the English Nobility, c.1300–1500', in Lachaud and Penman (eds.), *Making and Breaking the Rules*, 191–200, at 195.

⁸⁵ Michael Hicks, *Anne Neville: Queen to Richard III* (Stroud, 2007), 175.

⁸⁶ BL Add MS 48976 (1483/5); CoA, ID 105646 (1477–85).

⁸⁷ MS. Bodl. Rolls 5 (c.1485); BM MS Add. 45133 (1483–5). Anthony Wagner, Nicolas Barker, and Ann Payne, *Medieval Pageant: Writhe's Garter Book. The Ceremony of the Bath and the Earldom of Salisbury Roll* (London, 1993), 75.

⁸⁸ Bodl. MS lat misc b 2 (r) (1434/74); Bodl. MS Top, Glouc. D.2 (1490), fol. 39r. The genealogical line then ends with Edward, son of George, Duke of Clarence, accompanied by a splendid heraldic display. Julian Luxford, 'The Founders' Book', in Richard Morris and Ron Shoesmith (eds.), *Tewkesbury Abbey: History, Art & Architecture* (Almeley, 2003), 53–64, at 61; Julian Luxford, 'The Founders' Book: Object, Images and Purpose', in Luxford (ed.), *The Founders' Book*, 1–19.

ostentatiously displayed next to those of their wives, Anne and Isabelle Neville. In this way, the descendants of the Earls of Warwick, the Earls of Tewkesbury, and the Earls of Salisbury – all of whom were related – could boast direct kinship with the royal family.⁸⁹

Proving kinship with the royal family was therefore important for both the German and English aristocracy. However, some important differences can be identified. Comparing the families of the Margraves of Baden and the Wittelsbachs, it is noticeable that the former claimed close dynastic links with the ruling royal family dynasty, while the Wittelsbachs maintained the greatest possible distance from the Habsburgs and Luxembourgs, the only two other families capable of producing kings in the fifteenth century. Although the Wittelsbachs could have easily demonstrated their connections with both dynasties, they mention them only peripherally. In particular, the Habsburg King Rudolf I and the Salians are virtually ignored, their royal titles going unmentioned on two of the Wittelsbach rolls, and Charles IV of Luxembourg is named only in passing in the margin.⁹⁰ Any connections to the royal dynasties of the empire are thus avoided, as the Wittelsbachs considered themselves superior. Such disregard for royalty is surprising even in an elective kingdom, but it reflects the fact that the Wittelsbachs preferred to mention the Crown only when it was in their possession; other, competing royal dynasties were played down as far as possible.⁹¹ The Wittelsbachs presented themselves as equal to the ruling dynasty and capable of rule themselves, and they clearly distinguished themselves from other German royal families while at the same time emphasizing their connections with kings elsewhere in Europe. By contrast, the Margraves of Baden, being lower in rank than the Wittelsbachs, sought proximity to and kinship with the Crown.

When comparing noble kinship relationships with royal families in Germany and England, we see that the German nobility focused not only on the German Crown, but also more broadly on other

⁸⁹ It should also be noted that the number of surviving noble genealogies from the reign of Richard III is exceptionally high.

⁹⁰ The third roll omits them altogether. HSTA GH, 65 (1479/84); Stiftsbib., MS Chart. 106 (1479/84); WAF, HS 326/18 (1480–1505).

⁹¹ Ernst Schubert, *König und Reich: Studien zur spätmittelalterlichen deutschen Verfassungsgeschichte* (Göttingen, 1979), 100–1.

European kings, such as the rulers of Sicily, Poland, Hungary, and France, whereas the English nobility concentrated almost exclusively on the English king. Here, too, a difference between elective kingship on the Continent and the English hereditary system comes into view. In England, kinship with the royal dynasty played a much more important role in establishing a family's rank than in Germany.⁹² If an English noble house could demonstrate that they were related to the royal family, that would remain the case for all subsequent generations, as English kings all shared the same line of descent. This was not the case in the Holy Roman Empire. Unlike the Wittelsbachs, who presented themselves on their rolls as equals of the monarch and eligible to become kings in their own right, English noble houses always acknowledged the pre-eminence of the royal family in their genealogies by placing the royal lineage at the centre of the roll, and often by enlarging it too.

IV. Summary: Representing Rank on Genealogical Rolls

Despite the contrasts between the elective and hereditary systems, German and English noble families essentially used the same kinds of arguments in their genealogies to establish their rank. References to the age and continuity of the family line were a central feature, especially on manuscript rolls. Age and continuity could apply either to lines of succession or to lines of genealogical descent. These categories were often deliberately mixed, or not clearly differentiated, in order to produce the longest possible unbroken lines. Despite the fundamental pattern of agnatic succession in both kingdoms, the compilers of genealogies also had to resort to cognatic constructions in order to establish continuity across the centuries. Separate agnatic lines were thus linked through wives and daughters.

⁹² In this context, the claims made by the Wittelsbachs and the Margraves of Baden that they were related to the English and French kings respectively – i.e. to hereditary monarchies – are particularly revealing, as they confirm that dynastic ways of thinking about royalty were present even in the German electoral system. Büttner, 'Dynastische Kontinuität im Wahlreich der Kurfürsten?', 301, 307.

Royalty also played an important role in both England and Germany. Direct descent from or kinship with the royal family was emphasized in many noble genealogies, especially in England, where proximity could be established simply by presenting one's own family line alongside that of the king. Furthermore, the clearest differences between German and English noble genealogies can also be seen in their treatment of royalty. Not only are claims to royal descent more common and varied in English genealogies, they also take up a much more central role. This finding is particularly striking in relation to the Wars of the Roses, when the Houses of York and Lancaster – both descendants of the Plantagenets – fought for the English Crown. Noble families had to choose a side, and indeed often changed sides; yet this dynastic conflict is hardly mentioned in the genealogies and plays only a minor part in their narratives. Establishing royal descent seems to have been more important than the question of which side the family had taken during the war.

In German noble genealogies, surprisingly, we also find a dynastic approach to royalty, despite the rolls being produced in an elective monarchy. One example of this is the relationship with the Habsburgs claimed by the Margraves of Baden. Another is provided by the Wittelsbachs, who presented themselves as a royal dynasty and glossed over their relations with the Luxembourgs and the Habsburgs. In fact, they went a step further and demonstrated the strength of their family line by contrasting it with the extinction of the Ottonian and Salian dynasties. The message was clear: the Ottonians, Salians, and Hohenstaufens had died out and other kings were merely an interlude, whereas the Wittelsbachs, with their numerous branches and titles, were thriving. Although the Habsburgs were the unchallenged occupants of the throne at the time the rolls were created, their compilers, by framing the elective monarchy in dynastic terms, suggested that rivals to the Crown could always be supplanted. Such assertiveness towards the king, derived in this case from the Wittelsbachs' rank, is scarcely conceivable for the English nobility, even though the Percy family would have been in a position to deprecate the House of Lancaster more strongly.

Another important difference between the Continental and English nobility is that the former also tried to establish close genealogical

relationships with non-German kings, whereas the English nobility focused almost exclusively on the English king. This close connection between the aristocracy and the Crown reflects the greater control that the English king was able to exercise over his nobles.⁹³

All in all, the German and English nobility sought to justify their rank genealogically through the same arguments, communicative strategies, and techniques. The roll format made it possible to present seemingly endless and unbroken lineages, which were generally portrayed using colourful, ostentatious coats of arms and portraits rather than lengthy texts. Charts and figures were also used on the rolls, and codex manuscripts were sometimes employed too. What all these manuscripts have in common is that they always show the age, continuity, and noble origins of the lineages they describe.

⁹³ Given-Wilson, 'Rank and Status', 98.

MATTHIAS KUHN studied history, politics, and society, as well as art and church history, in Bonn, Perugia, Heidelberg, and Amherst, Massachusetts. He completed his PhD on the genealogical rolls of the German and English aristocracy as part of the Heidelberg Collaborative Research Centre 'Material Text Cultures', drawing on archive material from Germany, Austria, the USA, and the UK.