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The invisible man: body and ritual in a fifteenth-century noble household

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Abstract

Ritual and gesture were central to medieval political cultures, yet few documents survive which attest to daily comportment in non-royal elite households. This article examines the late fifteenth-century ‘Harleian Ordinances’ (from British Library Harl. MS 6815), which describe in rare detail the ceremonies and servants’ gestures used in an unnamed earl’s house. It focuses on the para-liturgical elements of the household ceremony (notably the use of ritual kisses), argues that the Burgundian court provided direct inspiration for the ordinance, and suggests a connection to Richard, earl of Warwick (‘the Kingmaker’). More broadly, it explores aspects of the relationship between lord and noble servant in the later fifteenth century and contends that nobility – an essentially invisible quality – was in part conjured up through the gestures and deportment of a nobleman’s servants. In their attempts to portray power and prestige, noblemen such as the invisible earl of this ordinance established secular household rites which required that their bodies be attended to with an almost religious reverence.

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The ‘invisible man’ of my title is an unidentified English nobleman from the second half of the fifteenth century. He was the grandee of an exceptionally splendid household in this, the true age of the ‘great household’ in English history. Although he is unnamed we can know something of him through the highly detailed set of household regulations and ordinances which survived him and were copied out in the

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sixteenth century. They are now extant in British Library Harleian Manuscript 6815: two copies in mid or late sixteenth-century hand bound together in an ‘Heraldical miscellany’ apparently compiled in the eighteenth century.¹ Internal evidence indicates a broad composition date of c.1460–c.1510, and textual parallels discussed below indicate a more specific date of the 1460s or 70s.² The regulations have attracted little attention, apart from some interest from historians of social space in medieval noble households.³ Here they take centre-stage for their revelation of ritual behaviour and its role in buttressing the prestige and eminence of men of differing social levels in a time when to be a magnate offered possibilities for the display and performance of power unprecedented in medieval England.

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries witnessed transformation in the cultures of English nobility. One element was the clarification of the gentry’s existence as a distinct group which shared elements of authority and identity with their social superiors while overall remaining the latter’s firm subordinates. Despite the swelling ranks of this middling elite, however, the upper nobility or peerage had by the end of the fifteenth century actually increased their ascendancy, with clearly defined (though not closed) membership and greater wealth than ever.⁴ This was not achieved without effort, as the peerage encountered the difficulty of having to reinforce or renew their impression of exclusivity. In any era elites need to reinvent their modes of self-presentation as parvenus threaten to usurp their status and privileges, and this was a concern in the late Middle Ages. The Harleian regulations illustrate the vital yet difficult relationship between gentry and aristocracy, expressed in this instance as that of master and servant. While the man who headed the household is in many ways invisible, the instructions regarding the rituals to be performed in his house and about his person offer an interesting perspective on such

¹ London, British Library, Harleian MS 6815 (‘Heraldical miscellany’), fols 25r–56v, 16r. The latter folio, which is the final leaf of the first copy, has become detached from the rest and misbound in the manuscript. This discussion will refer to the first copy, bound in folios 25r–41v, 16r. The second copy lacks a final leaf.

² Christopher Woolgar dates their composition to between c.1470 and c.1500, or possibly c.1460 and c.1510, on the basis of its references to Pre-Reformation liturgy and dietary calendar, types of furniture - especially trestle rather than dormant tables -, the use of spoons and knives but not forks, the large size of the household (all of which place the document more securely in the fifteenth rather than sixteenth century), and the drinking of beer rather than ale (which locates it in the later fifteenth century rather than earlier). The use of trestle tables offers an important clue, as by c.1500 it would have been quite old-fashioned not to have dormant tables in a household of this size and status. Personal Communication, 8 May 2001. The later history of the document, and its interest to sixteenth- and eighteenth-century readers, would make for interesting speculation but lie outside this paper.

³ Mark Girouard, *Life in the English country house. A social and architectural history* (New Haven, 1978), 47–50, 56, 64, 320; Jonathan Nicholls, *The matter of courtesy. Medieval courtesy books and the Gawain Poet* (Cambridge, 1985), 196; C. M. Woolgar, *The great household in late medieval England* (New Haven, 1999), 25, 161.

⁴ Christopher Dyer, *Standards of living in the later middle ages. Social change in England, c. 1200–1520* (Cambridge, 1989), 15–21, 47–8, 108. See also K.B. McFarlane, *The nobility of later medieval England. The Ford lectures for 1953 and related studies* (Oxford, 1973), 15, 122–5, 268–78; Chris Given-Wilson, *The English nobility in the late middle ages. The fourteenth-century political community* (London, 1987), 29–83; J.M.W. Bean, *From lord to patron. Lordship in late medieval England* (Manchester, 1989).

relations and reveal the extent of elite self-elevation in the late fifteenth century. It is also possible, however, that they represent the ambitions of a particular man who aimed to be more illustrious than even his king.

The document is headed ‘Statutes, Ordynances, & order of Service concernyng the state of an Earles household’. Other titles appear on the opening leaves but this is in the same hand as the body of the text and thus offers a better guide to its contents.⁵ The work bears some resemblance to contemporary courtesy books, which gave young servants resident in noble households advice on service and personal conduct, and to royal and noble household ordinances, such as the *Ryalle book*,⁶ Edward IV’s ‘Black book’, the ordinances drawn up for Henry VII, or the well-known *Northumberland household book*.⁷ As will be discussed later, however, they are closer to fifteenth-century Burgundian regulations and the unpublished ‘Second Northumberland household book’ in the level of detail with which the movements and gestures of the servants are described.⁸ What all

⁵ The heading has been crossed out at some point. The front leaf, possibly inscribed upon purchase in the eighteenth century, reads ‘An old manuscript of the state of a duke marquess and earle for their own Houses etc’, with a further note, ‘Together with the order and expence of severall Kings and princes & Households’. The latter section has been lost. Folio 25v. has a further heading, in a sixteenth-century hand: ‘Orders of service belonging to the degrees of a duke, a marques and an ~~Earle~~ Erle used in there owne howses as hereafter followeth.’

⁶ This work has traditionally been linked to Henry VII, but David Starkey has recently argued that it derives from the courts of Henry VI and Edward IV. ‘Henry VI’s old blue gown. The English court under the Lancastrians and Yorkists’, *The Court Historian*, 4 (1999), 1–28. I am indebted to Christopher Woolgar for this reference.

⁷ For editions of courtesy books see *The babees book, etc.*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS, o.s. 32 (London, 1868); *Caxton’s book of courtesy*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS, e.s. 3 (London, 1868); *A book of precedence*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall, EETS, e.s. 8 (London, 1869); *A fifteenth century courtesy book*, ed. R.W. Chambers, EETS o.s. 148 (London, 1914). For editions of fifteenth-century household regulations and ordinances see ‘Ceremonies and services at court, in the time of King Henry the Seventh’ [a.k.a. *The ryalle book*], in: *The antiquarian repertory*, ed. Francis Grose and Thomas Astle, 4 vols (London, 1807), vol. 1; ‘The black book’ in: *The household of Edward IV*, ed. A. R. Myers (Manchester, 1959); Ordinances for Henry VI, Prince Edward (son of Edward IV), Princess Cecily (mother of Edward IV), Edward IV, George, duke of Clarence, Henry VII, and Henry VIII contained in: *A collection of ordinances and regulations for the government of the royal household* (London, 1790); *The regulations and establishment of the household of Henry Algernon Percy, the fifth earl of Northumberland, at his castles of Wreshill and Likinfield in Yorkshire* (a.k.a. *Northumberland household book*), ed. Thomas Percy (London, 1827). The Harleian regulations fall better into this genre than that of the ‘courtesy book’, as they are composed as a general set of instructions for all household members rather than addressing an (imagined) individual servant as the courtesy books do. It is possible that lengthy descriptions of household protocol such as the Harleian document were meant to provide models to other households.

⁸ ‘L’Estat de la maison du Duc Charles de Bourgoingne, dit le hardi’, in: *Mémoires d’Olivier de la Marche*, ed. H. Beaune and J. d’Arbaumont, 4 vols (Paris, 1883–8), vol. 4, cxiv, 1–94. The ‘Second Northumberland household book’ (as identified by D. M. Barratt) is Bodleian Eng.hist. MS b. 208. See D. M. Barratt, ‘A second Northumberland household book’, *The Bodleian Library record*, 8, 2 (1968), 93–8; and Ian Lancashire, ‘Orders for the Twelfth Day and Night circa 1515 in the Second Northumberland household book’, *English literary renaissance*, 10 (1980), 6–45. Lancashire includes an edition of folios 34–44. The book fills the whole volume, comprising 23 ordinances dating from 1500 to 1519 (the volume was compiled c. 1519–27). It prescribes rituals for childbirth, churching, weddings, Twelfth Night and Maundy Thursday rituals, and other special occasions. Both the Harleian regulations and the ‘Second Northumberland household book’ deserve full editions.

such works have in common is an idealised notion of elite living. Also, while they say a good deal about household ceremony they leave us relatively unenlightened about more mundane matters of daily living. They may offer more fantasy and wishful thinking than social practice, but nonetheless provide an insight into noble perceptions about the kind of service they deserved. According to Catherine Belsey ‘cultural history records meanings and values, which is to say that its concern is not so much what individuals actually did, but more what people wanted to do, wished they had done, what they cared about and deplored.’⁹ While Belsey’s own concern is with Shakespearean drama, this quotation, and her view that plays do not necessarily reflect reality but ‘explore the meanings of the terms they construct and reiterate in ways that were expected to be at least partly intelligible to their original audiences’, could equally apply to all kinds of medieval works on conduct.

The invisible man’s day begins ‘At Hys Uprising’, when the groom and ushers of the bedchamber help to dress their lord, who is referred to as ‘the Estate’ throughout. They accompany him and his wife to the closet in the chapel for Matins at seven while low masses are said in the hall, and others make the lord’s bed. The service of the Estate’s breakfast follows, at a trestle table set up at the foot of the bed in the great chamber, with the lord and his wife served at that high table and any well-born guests, male and female, served at the ‘knight’s board’, or secondary table inside the chamber. The intimate servants and lady’s gentlewomen eat at a table in the ‘utter chamber’, just beyond the great bedchamber. Once this first breakfast is finished the rest of the household take their meal in the hall. High Mass follows, between ten and eleven o’clock, closely followed by the lord’s dinner (lunch) – the main meal of the day – also served in the great chamber, while the bulk of the household dine in the hall. The Estate and household attend Vespers around four in the afternoon, then are served supper at five, divided by rank as before. The final ritual of the day is the preparation of the lord’s chamber for the night: lighting the fire, bringing lights, making the bed, and setting up wine, beer and bread on the sideboard for the Estate’s late-night supper. Brief further ordinances give instruction on service at principal feasts, on greeting guests, and sundry other matters of etiquette and service.

This bare outline gives an idea of the tremendous importance of meal-times in the daily running of the household, but scarcely gives a notion of just how elaborate was the service performed at each sitting.¹⁰ This ceremonial may be illustrated by closer attention to the rituals attending the lord’s dinner. In the minutiae of the choreography one can begin to gain a sense of the meanings with which the rites were imbued, and the similarities between these rituals and liturgical rites will become quickly apparent.

⁹ Catherine Belsey, *Shakespeare and the loss of Eden. The construction of family values in early modern culture* (London, 1999), 6.

¹⁰ Only brief mention is made of the foods to be consumed, although the breakfast service lists different menus for meat and fish days, fol. 29r. Christopher Woolgar offers a fascinating study of the meals of the nobility and the vast quantities of food offered to contemporary lords in ‘Fast and feast. Conspicuous consumption and the diet of the nobility in the fifteenth century’, in *Revolution and consumption in late medieval England*, ed. Michael Hicks (Woodbridge, 2001).

The description of the lord's dinner (fols 29r-33r) offers the fullest and most solemnly executed ceremony of the day.¹¹ 'Incontynent after the levacion of the masse between x and xi of the clocke warnyng is geven to all officers to prepare for dynner'. The tables are set up in the great chamber and fires renewed. A yeoman usher enters the chamber and approaches the Estate's board with the rod of office in his hand, followed by the yeoman of the ewery bearing the tablecloth. Both curtsey to the empty table and 'so kissing their hands do unfolde the clothe'. Other servants enter, bearing vessels, wine and beer to set on the cupboard. Then the yeoman of the pantry with his towel around his neck 'tippet-wise', aided by a yeoman usher, processes, rod in hand, through the hall with salt, bread, knives and a spoon. Coming into the great chamber the yeoman of the pantry curtseys three times before the Estate's empty place and places salt, trenchers and bread to the upper end of the board - that is, at the Estate's right hand. He kisses the Estate's knife and spoon before laying them under a fold of cloth in the centre of the table.

Following tastings of the lord's food to ensure it has not been poisoned, the sewer orders the servants into their places at the entrance to the hall, while a marshall enters the hall with his rod and orders all present to stand with their heads uncovered and face the procession as it passes from the low end of the hall, bearing plates of food, towards the great chamber. The heads of the servitors are bared throughout the whole meal. The food is arrayed on the high table while servants take basins and towels to the Estate, who is perhaps waiting at the side, for the washing of his hands. He is ushered to his chair. The family members and guests designated to sit at high table follow. Once the meal commences any servant who approaches the lord curtseys as he enters or leaves his presence, and kneels to offer up food or drink or to wash and dry the lord's hands. As the meal ends the diners rise one by one, curtseying and retreating from the table in reverse order of status. The table is cleared and the board removed, leaving the lord at last to stand. Musicians enter the chamber and dancing begins.

There are numerous parallels between the Harleian dinner service and the rituals of the Mass.¹² The yeoman usher's rod recalls the verger's rod and the procession which precedes the Mass, while the careful unfolding of the tablecloth echoes the deacon's act of spreading the corporal (altar cloth) upon the altar. The 'tippet-wise' arrangement of the pantler's towel - hanging around his neck, crossed on his chest with the ends tucked into a girdle or belt, with a napkin laid over his left arm for wiping his knife - is imitative of a priest's vestments, with the stole around the neck, crossed in front and tucked into the cincture, and the maniple (a band of coloured

¹¹ Note, this was the dinner service on a flesh day. The routine for a fast day is not described.

¹² This analysis will follow the *Use of Sarum*, which was the dominant liturgical form in this era. *The use of Salisbury*, ed. Nick Sandon, 6 vols, 2nd ed. (Newton Abbot, 1990). See also Adrian Fortescue and J.B. O'Connell, *The ceremonies of the Roman rite described*, 10th edn (London, 1958). Of the growing literature on medieval gesture more broadly, particularly useful studies include Jean-Claude Schmitt, *La raison des gestes dans l'Occident médiévale* (Paris, 1990); *A cultural history of gesture. From antiquity to the present day*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Oxford, 1991); J. A. Burrow, *Gestures and looks in medieval narrative* (Cambridge, 2002).

silk) on his left arm.¹³ The bared heads have their parallels in those of the officiants at a Mass and the male members of a congregation. The kneeling and curtsies executed as the servants enter or leave the lord's real or symbolic presence echo the ecclesiastical genuflection.¹⁴ These and other parallels are striking, and too obvious to have been accidental. Moreover, each meal followed on the heels of a service in the chapel. Thus the service of the lord's daily dinner immediately followed the celebration of the Lord's last supper in the chapel.

Most intriguing, however, are the ritual kisses performed by the servitors. The ceremony accompanying the Estate's bedtime ('All Night') illustrates their uses. After supper, fires would be laid in the great chamber and lights arrayed on the cupboard. Then, 'with their curtesies, and bareheaded, kissing their hands, two of the grooms unfold the counterpoynt, making the bed playne and soft. The chamberer being a gentlewoman (if the Estate do lie with his feer [wife]) doth bring in folden a shete, the fustians, pillows, head shete and shetes, and so laie them on a stole at the bed fote, alwaies kissing her hande when she delyvereth any of these things to the gromes that make the bedd'. Bread, a great silver mug of beer and two great pots of wine were delivered to the chamber, with much kissing of napkins, the cupboard cloth, and even the loaves.

Similar kisses are prescribed for various rituals throughout the day, and are listed below:

The Estate's uprising

- In preparing the chapel for matins a gentleman usher kisses a cushion before laying it ready for the Estate to kneel on (fol. 26v.)

The Estate's breakfast

- The yeoman of the ewery kisses the Estate's napkin as it is laid on the carver's shoulder, when the latter goes to the great chamber to carve the Estate's breakfast meat (fol. 27v.)
- Once the Estate is seated the carver takes the napkin from his shoulder and, kissing it, passes it to the Estate before serving him. At the end of breakfast the carver takes the napkin from the Estate, first kissing his hand (fol. 28r.).
- The gentleman usher enters the chamber with a towel for the Estate's ablutions, kisses it, and places it on the cupbearer's shoulder. Once the Estate has washed,

¹³ Fortescue and O'Connell, *Ceremonies of the Roman rite*, 31. Girouard remarks upon this coincidence of dress, *English country house*, 47.

¹⁴ Genuflections and bows are performed frequently throughout the Mass and in ecclesiastical contexts generally, but especially when approaching a superior, facing the altar or the holy sacrament, and (in the case of bowing) when certain holy names or words are uttered. See *Use of Salisbury*, passim, and Fortescue and O'Connell, *Ceremonies of the Roman rite*, 40-1. The servants' 'curtesies' are either bows or genuflections rather than full kneeling: 'And herein is to be remembered that they that beare the dishes do not make curtesies but knele downe to discharge their dishes, and so with curtesies departe', fols 39v-40). Kneeling or genuflection while serving was important. It is ordered of the cupbearer that when he serve the Estate with his cup at breakfast he is always to be 'kneling or at the least bowing his knees', see fols 28r and 32r.

the cupbearer unfolds one end of the towel and kisses it, gives it to the Estate, and on taking it back again kisses his hand (fol. 28r.).

The Estate's dinner

- Once the Estate's board is set up in the great chamber the yeoman of the ewery, the yeoman usher with his rod, and another yeoman, kiss their own hands and unfold the cloth to cover the board (fol. 29v.)
- The yeoman of the pantry (who also has a towel 'tippet-wise' around his neck) brings the salt, bread, knife and spoon to the great chamber, makes three curtseys to the Estate's place, and kisses the knife and spoon before laying them under the 'fold of Estate' made in the tablecloth (fol. 30r.).
- The almoner and gentleman usher go to either end of the board, and kissing their hands unfold the 'Estate' (that is, the fold in the cloth) (fol. 30r.).
- At the end of dinner the yeoman of the ewery kisses a towel and lays it on the gentleman usher's left shoulder, preparatory to the Estate's ablutions (fol. 31r.).

The Estate's bedtime

- Two grooms of the bedchamber make their curtseys bareheaded, then kiss their own hands and unfold the counterpane (fol. 37v.)
- The gentlewoman chamberer brings in sheets, blankets and pillows and lays them on a stool at the foot of the bed, and always kisses her hand before she hands any item to the grooms making the bed (fol. 37v.)
- One groom goes to collect a towel from the ewery for All Night, and the yeoman of the ewery kisses it before laying it on the groom's left shoulder (fol. 38r.).
- The yeoman usher and yeomen of the chamber fetch a napkin, manchet and cheat loaf from the pantry,¹⁵ which the panter kisses before handing over to them (fol. 38r.).
- A yeoman usher fetches the cupboard cloth and covered cup of Estate from the cellar, and the yeoman of the cellar kisses the cupboard cloth before laying it on the left shoulder of a groom (fol. 38v.).
- Back in the great chamber the yeoman usher sets down the cup of Estate, and he (or a groom) kisses the cupboard cloth before spreading it across the cupboard (fol. 38v.).
- The yeoman usher takes the bread from the yeoman of the chamber, kisses it, and lays it in a napkin (fol. 39r.).
- The yeoman usher takes the towel for All Night from the groom, kisses it, casts it over his left shoulder, sets down the basin and ewer, and kisses the towel before laying it over the ewer (fol. 39r.).

The kisses are of three main types. First, servants kiss the lord's hand before they retrieve an item from him. Second (and most numerous), servants kiss items (cushion, napery, towels, cutlery, bread and the cupboard cloth) which come into intimate proximity to the lord's body through his kneeling, washing or eating. Third, servants kiss their own hands before touching the lord's tablecloth or an item of his bedding.

¹⁵ A manchet, or 'lord's bread', is a roll of the finest quality bread; a cheat loaf is bread of the second finest quality. Perhaps the former is meant for the Estate and the latter for his wife.

Kisses were also, of course, an integral gestural component of the Mass, but here similarities between the lay and ecclesiastical rites become more complex. The *Use of Sarum* describes the assistant kissing the celebrant's hand when he passes him a sacred item (censer, paten, bread and chalice).¹⁶ This resembles the Harleian ordinances' first type. The celebrant himself kisses the gospel book, paten, chalice, corporal, relics, pax and altar at moments during the service, and these resemble our second type.¹⁷ However the third type of kiss described in the Harleian regulations, where servants kiss their own hands before touching the Estate's bedclothes or table linen, is not a standard liturgical gesture. Its purpose may have been to symbolise the purification or sanctification of the servants' hands before they touched an item which would come into close contact with the body of the lord, to avoid some form of ritual pollution.

Both sacred and profane kisses had a range of meanings in late medieval culture, potentially signifying friendship, spiritual or lay fraternity, reconciliation, legal concord, familial love or sexual desire.¹⁸ Within ecclesiastical ritual, however, kisses are of two main types: the kiss of fraternal charity and peace - for example, in the Kiss of Peace of the Mass - and the kiss as sign of reverence for holy persons or things.¹⁹ The first type erases or hides hierarchical divisions, while the second type enshrines them. It is significant that in the Harleian regulations all the kisses are of the latter sort. Social, even quasi-spiritual, distinctions are not elided or softened as they would be by kisses exchanged between lord and servant; rather, those distinctions are made more visible.

It is instructive to compare the ritual kisses of the Harleian regulations with the traditional kiss exchanged between lord and vassal in the rite of homage. There, the inequality between the parties is manifest in their different postures - the lord standing, the vassal often kneeling before his lord with hands clasped and raised towards him - but softened by the kiss of legal concord, fraternity and peace which seals the contract. The kiss emphasised the feudal bond of loyalty and reciprocal obligations of the relationship.²⁰ J. Russell Major has charted the decline of the kiss in rites of homage in France and England by the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, suggesting that this may be explained by growing

¹⁶ *Use of Salisbury*, vol. 1, 12, 21, 31.

¹⁷ *Use of Salisbury*, vol. 1, 12, 16, 20, 21, 28, 30, 31, 35.

¹⁸ Nicolas James Perella, *The kiss sacred and profane. An interpretative history of kiss symbolism and related religio-erotic themes* (Berkeley, 1969); Willem Frijhoff, 'The kiss sacred and profane. Reflections on a cross-cultural confrontation', in *A cultural history of gesture*, ed. Bremmer and Roodenburg; Kim M. Phillips, 'Bodily walls, windows and doors. The politics of gesture in late fifteenth-century English books for women', in *Medieval women. Texts and contexts in late medieval Britain*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Turnhout, 2000), esp. 193-6; Burrow, *Gestures and looks*, 32-3, 50-7, 150-2; Kiril Petkov, *The kiss of peace. Ritual, self, and society in the high and late medieval west* (Leiden, 2003), esp. 11-29.

¹⁹ *New Catholic encyclopedia*, s.v. 'kiss, liturgical'.

²⁰ For a detailed, ethnographically-influenced analysis, see Jacques le Goff, 'The symbolic ritual of vassalage', in his *Time, work, and culture in the middle ages*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, 1980).

concerns about male homosexuality.²¹ Given that medieval kisses had such a range of meanings beyond the sexual, however, it is also conceivable that the changing nature of the relationship between greater and lesser nobles — moving from lords and vassals to patrons and clients — was symbolised by the decline of the kiss of homage and of a desire to heighten the symbolic display of distance between the groups.

Many historians have noted the English higher nobility's efforts through the fifteenth century to carve out a more eminent and clearly delineated niche for themselves, against a background of shifting economic structure, greater social mobility, and newer forms of social prestige. The chief tactics of withdrawal employed by the upper nobility included the tightening up of the peerage, the development of more elaborate forms of manners and household customs, and their physical withdrawal within their houses from the hall to the great chamber and other apartments.²² The latter two phenomena may be discerned in the Harleian regulations.

Other fifteenth-century households blurred the boundaries between the secular and the sacred. Cecily, duchess of York, modelled her routine as a pious widow on the monastic day, for example.²³ The Harleian rituals were somewhat different from Cecily's habits, however, as their aim was not directly spiritual. Rather, they set out to glorify the person of a secular lord. The gestures accompanying service to the Estate borrow from Church ceremonial but do not constitute exact mimicry. This is a point which will be returned to, but it is worth stepping back to gain a view of the document in a broader context, to seek its influences and the identity of the invisible man.

Aspects of the ritual described may be encountered in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century courtesy books, such as the requirement of servants to bare their heads in the presence of their social superiors and to kneel before their lords while serving them, but the close similarity to the Mass is rarely encountered in contemporary English sources. The fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century royal ordinances generally lack the Harleian level of detail in describing servants' gestures, although Henry VII's ordinances of 1493 require the chamberlain to kiss the napkin as he removes it from the king's spice plate, and servants making Henry VIII's bed made a sign of the cross and kissed it where their hands touched it.²⁴ Highly detailed documents survive from great households of the Tudor and Stewart eras, and those of the Viscount of

²¹ J. Russell Major, "'Bastard feudalism" and the kiss. Changing social mores in late medieval and early modern France', *Journal of interdisciplinary history*, 17 (1987), 509-35.

²² See footnote 4, above. On changing use of domestic space see Girouard, *English country house*, 30-47; Woolgar, *Great household*, ch. 4; Michael Thompson, *The medieval hall. The basis of secular domestic life, 600-1600 AD* (Aldershot, 1995), ch. 9.

²³ 'Ordinances and rules of the Princess Cecill', in *Collection of ordinances*.

²⁴ 'Articles ordained by King Henry VII', in *Collection of ordinances*, 110; J. C. Brooke (ed.), 'The ceremonial of making the king's bed', *Archaeologia*, 4 (1777), 311–14.

Montagu bear some resemblance to the Harleian volume.²⁵ To return to the fifteenth century there are, however, at least three contemporary works which offer clues to the Harleian regulations' inspiration.

The first comes from across the Channel. In November 1474 Olivier de la Marche, Master of the Household to Charles the Bold, duke of Burgundy, sent 'L'Estat de la maison du Duc Charles de Bourgoingne, dit le hardi', to the Lord Victualler of Calais in response to a request from William, lord Hastings, who was Lord Chamberlain to Edward IV.²⁶ The book contained lengthy descriptions of the staffing, organisation, ceremonies and duties of servants at the ducal court. His description of the service of the duke's dinner bears many similarities with the Harleian dinner, with similarly overwrought ceremony, baring of heads, kneeling and curtseying, and kissing of napkins and knife handles.²⁷ Peter Arnade in his book *Realms of ritual* on the political uses of ceremonial culture in late medieval Ghent, says of Olivier's book that it strikes 'the reader less as a compendium of manners than a liturgical handbook, replete with descriptions of genuflecting courtiers and eucharistic metaphors that vaunt the essential religious nature of serving the prince his meal', and that this sacralisation of a routine matter 'made the prince something of a priest, the table akin to an altar'.²⁸ As will be discussed below this analysis is close to my view of the Harleian regulations, with one significant point of divergence.

The courts of the Burgundian dukes in the mid- and late fifteenth century were renowned throughout Europe for their extravagance and spectacle. Visual display was a crucial ingredient in the dukes' maintenance of power. Indeed, Walter

²⁵ W. Ffarington, 'The Derby household books', ed. F. R. Raines, in *The Stanley papers*, part 2, Chetham Society, 31 (Manchester, 1853), 8-10, 20-2 (regulations for the household of earl of Derby, 1568 and 1572); G.E.P. Willoughby, *Report on the manuscripts of Lord Middleton*, Historical Manuscripts Commission 69 (London, 1911), 538-41 (regulations for the household of Sir Francis Willoughby of Wollaton, c. 1572); *Cowdray and Easebourne Priory in the County of Sussex*, ed. W.H. St John Hope (London, 1919), 119-34 (regulations for second Viscount Montagu, of Cowdray, Sussex, 1595); John Smyth, *The Berkeley manuscripts. The lives of the Berkeleys* (1618), ed. Sir J. Maclean, 3 vols (Gloucester 1883), vol. 2, 365-7, 418-20 (Regulations for household of Henry, 7th Baron Berkeley, c.1590 and 1601); 'A breviat touching the order and government of a nobleman's house' (1605), *Archaeologia* 13 (1800), 315-89; *History and antiquities of the county of Leicester. West Goscote hundred*, ed. J. Nichols (London, 1804) (Regulations for the earl of Huntingdon, at Ashby de la Zouche Castle and Donington Park, Leics, 1609); 'Copy of an original manuscript, containing orders made by Henry Prince of Wales, respecting his household, in 1610', ed. Francis Douce, *Archaeologia*, 14 (1803), 249-61. On Tudor royal courts see now Fiona Kisby, 'Religious ceremonial at the Tudor court. Extracts from royal household regulations', in I. W. Archer et al. (eds), *Religion, politics and society in sixteenth-century England*, Camden 5th series, 22 (Cambridge, 2003), 1-33. My thanks to Christopher Woolgar for this final reference.

²⁶ 'L'Estat de la maison du Duc Charles de Bourgoingne', cxiv, 1-94. See C. A. J. Armstrong, 'L'Échange culturel entre les cours d'Angleterre et de Bourgogne à l'époque de Charles le Téméraire', reprinted in *England, France and Burgundy in the fifteenth century* (London, 1983); Christine Weightman, *Margaret of York, duchess of Burgundy, 1446-1503* (Gloucester, 1989), 94; Charles Ross, *Edward IV*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, 1997), 220, 260.

²⁷ 'L'Estat de la maison du Duc Charles de Bourgoingne', 21-48.

²⁸ Peter Arnade, *Realms of ritual. Burgundian ceremony and civic life in late medieval Ghent* (Ithaca, 1996), 16-17. Otto Cartellieri made much the same point several decades earlier: *The court of Burgundy. Studies in the history of civilization*, trans. Malcolm Letts (London, 1929), 64-5.

Prevenier, Wim Blockmans and others have termed it a ‘theatre state’.²⁹ The Burgundians under Charles the Bold were at the apogee of their power in the third quarter of the fifteenth century. Although technically vassals of both the French king and German emperor, the Burgundians could vie with these monarchs in wealth and power and had monarchical aspirations. Dukes Philip the Good and Charles the Bold attempted to revive the Frankish kingdom of Lotharingia and create a true Burgundian empire.³⁰ By the 1460s the English and Burgundian courts had established close ties, and influences from the Low Countries had begun to seep into England.³¹ The 1468 marriage of Margaret of York, sister of King Edward IV, to Charles the Bold offered a window onto Burgundian court life for many English noblemen. The betrothal was celebrated in 1467 with the Smithfield Tournament, the most spectacular example of the mid- and late fifteenth-century English revival of *hastiludes*. The wedding in Bruges in the summer of 1468 included a major tournament and was attended by dignitaries from across Western Europe, each with his own large and colourful entourage. John Paston III who attended in the entourage of Lord Scales wrote to his mother about the event, famously comparing Charles the Bold’s household to the legendary court of King Arthur. His brother John II also attended in the retinue of the Duchess of Norfolk, and large numbers of other high status English nobleman and ladies were present.³² Perhaps the Harleian document was composed for one of those who had attended the event.

There were, however, plenty of other opportunities for members of the English nobility to learn of the marvels of the Burgundian court in the late 1460s and early 1470s. Olivier de la Marche visited England a number of times during the period 1468–70, and in October 1470 Edward IV fled to Bruges following the uprising led by Richard Neville, earl of Warwick, which saw the temporary reinstatement of Henry VI. Until March 1471 Edward was the guest in Bruges of Louis de Gruythyuse, a nobleman fascinated with high culture.³³ Following Edward’s return to England, the deposition of Henry VI, and the destruction of the Neville faction, Lord Gruythyuse was invited to England in 1472, and during his stay acted as something of cultural councillor to Edward IV. He was chiefly influential in architecture,

²⁹ Walter Prevenier and Wim Blockmans, *The Burgundian Netherlands*, with picture research by An Blackmans-Delva (Cambridge, 1986), 223–5; Wim Blockmans and Walter Prevenier, *The promised lands. The Low Countries under Burgundian rule, 1369–1530*, trans. Elizabeth Fackelman and Edward Peters (Philadelphia, 1999), 132–40; David Nicolas, ‘In the pit of the Burgundian theater state. Urban traditions and princely ambitions in Ghent 1360–1420’, in *City and spectacle in medieval Europe*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and Kathryn L. Reyerson (Minneapolis, 1994); Andrew Brown, ‘Bruges and the Burgundian “theatre state”. Charles the Bold and Our Lady of the Snow’, *History*, 84 (1999), 573–89. See also Cartellieri, *Court of Burgundy*, chs. 4, 7, 8; Gordon Kipling, *Enter the king. Theatre, liturgy, and ritual in the medieval civic triumph* (Oxford, 1998).

³⁰ Arnade, *Realms of ritual*, 10–11.

³¹ See Armstrong, ‘L’Échange culturel’.

³² ‘Le Recit des nopces de monseigneur de Bourgoingne et de madame Marguerite d’Yorch, seur de Roy d’Angleterre’, in *Mémoires*, ed. Beaune and d’Arbaumont, vol. 3, 101–200; Armstrong, ‘L’Échange culturel’, 406–7; Weightman, *Margaret of York*, chapter 2; *The Paston letters and papers of the fifteenth century*, ed. Norman Davis, 2 vols (Oxford, 1971–5), vol. 1, no. 330.

³³ Armstrong, ‘L’Échange culturel’, 407, 410–12; Ross, *Edward IV*, 207, 260.

notably Edward IV's rebuilding of St George's chapel at Windsor, and in encouraging the king's interest in book collection.³⁴ By the end of 1471 Edward had already commissioned the 'Black book', the lengthy guide to royal household organisation which was partly influenced by Burgundian practice.³⁵ His brother, George, duke of Clarence, had had a similar if much shorter ordinance composed for his household in 1469. In 1474 Edward had an ordinance composed for his son Edward, the Prince of Wales.³⁶ With his request to Olivier de la Marche in late 1474, Edward must have been looking for further guidance on how to make his household still more effectively run, and with something of the greater ceremony, which he had witnessed among the Burgundians. Yet none of the household documents issued within Edward's immediate circle indicate anything like the level of spectacle which was *de rigueur* in Bruges or the near-liturgical rituals of the Harleian regulations.

The 'Second Northumberland household book', from the slightly later date of c.1500–1519, is in some respects comparable to the Harleian book although it describes rituals for special occasions rather than day-to-day customs.³⁷ Ritual kisses, for example, are employed in numerous contexts. The gentleman usher is required to kiss the duchess's cushion before she kneels upon it in chapel, prefatory to her entering her chamber for confinement [fol. 8v]; gentlewomen kiss the child's mantel during the Christening of the earl's children [fols 18r, 19v]; servants kiss the bishop's towel before handing it to him to wipe his mouth in the meal served following the Christening [fol. 21r]; during the wedding of an earl's daughter a gentleman usher kisses his own hand before helping her up [fol. 25v]³⁸; on Twelfth Night a gentleman usher kisses a towel before giving it to the earl to wipe his mouth [fol. 43r]; on Maundy Thursday gentleman and yeoman ushers kiss the lord's cloth before handing it to him, officers kiss purses before handing them to poor men, the almoner kisses cloaks and aprons before giving them to the earl to hand to poor men, and so on [fols 46v–49v]. All these kisses are however performed within the context of a religious rite or on a holy day, rendering the book rather less audacious than the Harleian or Burgundian works.

The third comparable ordinance is an English document from 1465, and this may provide a clue to the identity of the invisible man. When George Neville, youngest brother of Richard, earl of Warwick, was inaugurated as Archbishop of York in

³⁴ Armstrong, 'L'Échange culturel', 410–12; Ross, *Edward IV*, 264–5. For a contemporary account of Lord Gruythuyse's reception in England see 'The record of Bluemantle Pursuivant, 1471–1472', ed. C. L. Kingsford in *English historical literature in the fifteenth century* (Oxford, 1913).

³⁵ Starkey, however, argues for native, Lancastrian influences - notably the *Ryalle book*: 'Henry VI's old blue gown', 20–24.

³⁶ These three are edited as, respectively, 'The black book', ed. Myers; 'Ordinances for the household of George, duke of Clarence, made the 9th of December, 8 Edw. IV, A.D. 1469', and 'Ordinances for the government of Prince Edward, son of King Edward IV. Made 27th Sept. 13 Edw. IV, A.D. 1474', both in *Collection of ordinances*. This collection also includes the ordinances for the household of Cecily, the king's mother.

³⁷ Bodleian MS Eng.hist. b. 208, and see footnote 7 above.

³⁸ This is the only instance of a servant kissing his own hand which I have so far encountered outside the Harleian regulations.

June 1465, his enthronement was celebrated with an exceptionally elaborate feast – no doubt designed to advertise the importance of the Neville clan – at which his brothers Richard and John (the latter then earl of Northumberland) served as steward and treasurer respectively, and Lord Hastings (who would later commission Olivier de la Marche's book for Edward IV) served as comptroller. There were many other dignitaries in chief serving positions.³⁹ Of all the late medieval English household ordinances or courtesy texts the order of service for Archbishop Neville's feast most closely resembles the Harleian ordinances for the service of dinner to the Estate. The tasks and the gestures of each servant are described in detail as in the Harleian text, and the latter's emphasis on exact sequence and timing of movements is also present. Certain passages closely echo the Harleian rituals, even in their diction: 'Then the Marshall with the Carver must go towards the hygh Table, and the Panter to folowe them, making their obeysance first in the middell of the Hall, and agayne before the hygh Dease: then the Marshall and the Panter must stande styll, and the Carver must go to the Table, and there kneele on his knee.'⁴⁰ Other gestures are less familiar; for example, the requirement to move and lift trenchers and towels with a knife or pointed rod rather than with fingers.⁴¹ The kisses, however, are striking. Servitors kiss the Archbishop's towel, napkin, and spoon before passing them to him: 'In the meane time the Yeoman of the Ewrie kysseth the Towell of estate, and layeth it on the Marshal's left shoulder... Then the Marshall kysseth the Towell for his assay, and so layeth it on the left shoulder of the Lorde of the house, or maister of the same... Then the Carver taketh the Napkyn from his shoulder, and kysseth it for his assay, and delyvereth to the Lorde. Then taketh he the Spooone, dryeth it, and kysseth it for his assay.'⁴² These passages hint that the kisses, in this instance, served a partially practical function, bringing items to the lips to 'try' them much in the way that food is tasted for poison before being served to the lord. Still, the gestures' closeness to those of the Mass is strongly evocative. Overall the level of elaboration is lower than in the Harleian regulations, and the kisses of the lord's hands and of the servants' own hands are missing, but the feast does seem designed to resemble or echo liturgical ceremony. This was perhaps seen as only fitting in a feast celebrating the inauguration of an archbishop.

As this ceremony slightly predated the main wave of Burgundian influence over the English court it raises the possibility that the chief influence on the Harleian regulations was English rather than Burgundian. On the other hand, in the years before his promotion to the Archbishopric, George Neville had served Edward IV as his Chancellor. In 1463 he had represented the King on the important diplomatic mission to St Omer in Flanders, when Neville met with the duke of Burgundy and persuaded him to transfer his allegiance to the Yorkists over the Lancastrians, and

³⁹ 'Out of an old paper roll. The great feast at the intronization of the Reverende Father in God George Nevell [...]', ed. Thomas Hearne in *Johannis Lelandi antiquarii de rebus Britannicis collectanea*, 2nd edn, 6 vols (London, 1774), vol. 6, 2–14.

⁴⁰ 'Intronization', 8. Cf. Harleian regulations, fol. 32r.

⁴¹ 'Intronization', 8, 15.

⁴² 'Intronization', 8–9, see also 15.

he would have had ample opportunity then to see how the dukes of Burgundy conducted themselves.⁴³ What all these works have in common is a fascination for liturgical gestures and their elevating effect upon the individual at whom the movements were directed. Whoever the Harleian nobleman was, he probably had dealings with the Burgundians, the Nevilles, possibly the Percies of Northumberland, or all three.

The Harleian ordinances were clearly influenced by sacred ritual, yet it is possible to take the analysis deeper. Peter Arnade's remark that the sacralisation of the Burgundian dinner service 'made the prince something of priest' is not quite correct. It is not the prince or the earl who is made a priest: rather, it is the servant. The power relationships embedded in the ritual and their implications are both more complex and more daring than Arnade implies. The servitor is elevated to a kind of priesthood, while his lord becomes akin to Christ.

It is interesting to consider the effects of the ritual on the status of those performing it as well as upon the lord who was its passive recipient. The servants in an earl's household would, obviously, have been of lesser rank than the earl but still of high enough status to reflect well on the household. Between a quarter and a third of the household would have probably been members of the gentry and many others would have been of yeoman rank, and certainly those who were granted access to the great chamber and undertook intimate service to the lord would have been of gentle status.⁴⁴ Those who were granted the perceived privilege of personal service to a nobleman were acknowledged as a cut above the other household officers; they were granted special liveries and other clothes of good quality and were often permitted to wear swords while serving. Their performance of gestures which recalled the Mass would have enhanced their duties further through adding something of the dignity of the priesthood to the position. The ceremonies announced not only the eminence of the lord but also of his followers. Perhaps this, along with the financial rewards and offices which were often granted to nobleman's most important retainers, acted as a sweetener to the servants; they delicately smoothed over the gap between the groups while at the same time advertising the depth of the division.

In the Harleian text a chief task of the gentle or yeoman servant was to conjure up the presence and bodily nobility of his lord through gestural actions. Like Christ when He is invoked by a priest's gestures, the Estate of the Harleian regulations is both the ritual's focus and its invisible man. His invisibility is of three types. First, he is virtually invisible to the reader. Throughout all the lengthy descriptions of the conduct of his household and the gestures of his servants, both in his presence and without, we barely catch a glimpse of the man who is the ultimate object of every action. His nobility is an impression evoked by his surroundings – the rooms, the furniture, the cushions and napery, the food, and the servants' gestures – rather than

⁴³ Ross, *Edward IV*, 55–6; Michael Hicks, *Warwick the Kingmaker* (Oxford, 1998), 261.

⁴⁴ Woolgar, *Great household*, 20; Kate Mertes, *The English noble household, 1250-1600. Good governance and politic rule* (Oxford, 1988), 58-74.

by his actual body. This casts the much-studied courtesy books of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in a new light. Most recent readings have argued that such manuals of conduct for young men in elite households were aimed at social aspirants rather than those who were born into positions of high status. The manuals are often read as self-help guides for those who wish to learn the manners of the elite and thus ease their climb up the social ladder.⁴⁵ The books may indeed have been aids to young men looking to make a good impression in an aristocratic household, but their newly acquired good manners also benefitted the aristocrat. A large household of well drilled and disciplined servants, along with their ecclesiastical-style gestures in his presence, and other essential props such as the furnishings, the richness of the linens, plate, and draperies, and the house itself, all constitute extensions of, or even replacements for, the body of the aristocrat. Good manners, as prescribed in the courtesy books, could have even been something the nobleman thought he was above, and the model behaviour of his servants would be even more efficacious if the latter were significant men in their own right. Where modern masculine elitism is often buttressed by trophy wives medieval noblemen were supported by trophy servants.

The Harleian aristocrat is not only virtually invisible to the reader of the regulations, but in certain respects to those present in his household also. While those serving him could naturally see the mortal man before them they could not see that their gestures conferred any supernatural nobility upon him. Catherine Bell in her study of ritual has pointed out that

ritual practices are produced with an intent to order, rectify, or transform a particular situation. Ritualised agents [i.e. those performing the ritual] would see these purposes. They would not see what they actually do in ritually ordering, rectifying, or transforming the situation.⁴⁶

In other words, as I understand her, invisibility is an essential aspect of ritual process because although the agents know what they expect or hope to produce they cannot actually see the direct process or results of their practice. ‘Ritualization sees the goal of the new person. It does not see how it produces the person.’⁴⁷ In the case of the Harleian rituals, the goal is to produce a sanctified aristocrat from a mortal man, but

⁴⁵ Norbert Elias, *The civilising process. Sociogenetic and psychogenetic investigations*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, rev. edn (Oxford, 2000), esp. 85–6; Jorge Ardití, *A genealogy of manners. Transformations of social relations in France and England from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century* (Chicago, 1998), 15; Mark Addison Amos, ‘“For manners maketh man”: Bourdieu, de Certeau, and the common appropriation of noble manners in the *Book of courtesy*’, in *Medieval conduct*, ed. Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark (Minneapolis, 2001).

⁴⁶ Catherine Bell, *Ritual theory, ritual practice* (New York, 1992), 108. My interpretation of ritual follows the arguments of some social anthropologists who contend that one must distinguish between ‘ritual’, which enables transformation and contains a magical element, and ‘ceremony’, which is conservative and celebrates an existing state of affairs. See the discussion in Karl Leyser, ‘Ritual, ceremony and gesture. Ottonian Germany’, in *Communications and power in medieval Europe. The Carolingian and Ottonian centuries*, ed. Timothy Reuter (London, 1994), esp. 190–1.

⁴⁷ Bell, *Ritual theory, ritual practice*, 110.

no amount of processing with rods, bared heads, kneeling, genuflecting, and kissing can produce any visible results. In this case as with any other ritual it is an act of faith to believe that one's gestures in any way produce a body which is any more special than usual.

This essential aspect of ritual is a key both to its power and its weakness. Because no visible change occurs, the rite's efficacy is dependent on the willingness of viewers to believe in the transformation. There is always the danger that someone will point out that the emperor is not wearing any clothes. Medieval viewers were accustomed to having such acts of faith demanded of them. The supposed transformation of the Eucharist into the body and blood of Christ at the moment of its elevation by a priest is the most obvious example. Another pertinent analogy might be with the medieval theory of the king's (or queen's) two bodies: the body natural, and the body politic. As Ernst Kantorowicz pointed out in his classic study, one feature of the body politic is that it is invisible. The Elizabethan legal scholar Edmund Plowden wrote that 'the body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled', while Edward Coke remarked that 'politic capacity is invisible and immortal'.⁴⁸ The power of the Harleian rituals certainly depends on a familiarity with a priest's gestures, but perhaps also borrows a little from political theory with the implication that this nobleman, at any rate, possessed both a visible body natural and an invisible and immortal body politic.

As already acknowledged, while the Harleian regulations borrow from the Mass they do not imitate it entirely. In alluding to ecclesiastical rites they raise awareness in viewers' minds that the Estate is somehow Christ-like, and the servants are priest-like, but avoid too crude or blunt an equation. The service of dinner to a secular lord must not strive too overtly to mimic the Mass, because that would make too naked an assertion of the Estate as Christ. To avert sacrilege, which would diminish rather than enhance the effect of the ritual, it must stop short of straightforward imitation. In many ways the ritual is dissimilar from the Mass – there is no singing, for example, and the servants do not kiss the table as a priest would an altar. Another of its methods for avoiding crude copying is to invent gestures which remind one of sacred performance but not actually found in the Mass, such as the servants kissing their own hands before touching items which will come into contact with the Estate. These deviations and innovations tend, if anything, to enhance the power of the performance, creating a new ceremonial. It is a lay liturgy to rival ecclesiastical ritual.

To return to the much more prosaic aspect of the nobleman's invisibility, we simply do not know who he was. Still, a handful of probable contenders stand out. The Percy family must be considered, especially given their 'Second' household book, but the late fifteenth century was a trying time for the Percy clan and the development of splendid households was perhaps less important than shaking off their Neville rivals and other enemies. Moreover, they do not seem to have had the

⁴⁸ Ernst Kantorowicz, *The king's two bodies. A study in medieval political theology*, 2nd edn (Princeton, 1997), 4, 7.

direct contact with the Burgundian court that the latter had.⁴⁹ If the work comes from the last decade of the fifteenth century or very beginning of the sixteenth, however, it could have been commissioned by Henry, fifth earl of Northumberland, whose tenure of the position from 1489 to 1527 saw the family regain its former strength and develop a notably magnificent household.

The Neville family also offer a strong case. The similarities between the feast mounted for George Neville and the Harleian ordinances suggest such a connection. The invisible man may have been John Neville, for a while *de facto* earl of Northumberland (1464–70) and briefly marquis of Montagu (from 1470). A more compelling contender is his elder brother Richard, earl of Warwick and Salisbury — ‘the Kingmaker’. Both Montagu and Warwick died at Barnet in 1471. The connection with the earldom of Northumberland strengthens John’s claim, indicating a line of descent from the Harleian regulations to the ‘Second’ Northumberland book, yet one cannot overlook the arrogance and vainglory of the earl of Warwick. His lust for power and influence is legendary and was fundamental in shaping fifteenth-century politics. As Michael Hicks has put it, Richard Neville was ‘the supreme example of an overmighty subject’.⁵⁰ His influence rivalled, and at some stages surpassed, that of the king himself. Moreover, Warwick had had a number of encounters with the Burgundians, notably in 1459 when a visit to Philip the Good’s court revealed to him the splendid ostentation of Burgundy. According to Kendall, Warwick was much affected by the display and sought to emulate something of its magnificence.⁵¹ More than any other figure of his day, Warwick would have been impressed by the self-elevating efforts of the still more dazzling and audacious dukes of Burgundy. The only book of Warwick’s which survives is, aptly, a lavishly-produced Burgundian copy of *L’Enseignement de la vraie noblesse* (*The teaching of true nobility*).⁵² Few of Warwick’s household accounts and no ordinances survive, to the best of our knowledge, but the *Great chronicle of London* attests to the extravagance of his hospitality and probably no Englishman could match the size of his retinue.⁵³ He orchestrated a magnificent funeral for his mother, father and brother in 1463, one which earned record by heralds as a model

⁴⁹ A recent narrative account of the Percies is Alexander Rose, *Kings in the North: The House of Percy in British History* (London, 2002).

⁵⁰ Michael A. Hicks, ‘Warwick, the Kingmaker’, in *Who’s who in late medieval England (1272–1485)* (London, 1991), 303. See also Hicks, *Warwick the Kingmaker*, esp. 1–6; Paul Murray Kendall, *Warwick the Kingmaker* (London, 1957).

⁵¹ Kendall, *Warwick the Kingmaker*, 47–8.

⁵² The book is now Geneva, Bibliothèque publique et universitaire, MS français 166. See plate 19 in Hicks, *Warwick the Kingmaker*, 206.

⁵³ *The great chronicle of London*, ed. A. H. Thomas and I. D. Thornley (London, 1938), 207: ‘The which Erle was evyr hadd In grete ffavou of the comonys of thys land, by Reson of the excedyng howsold which he dayly kepud In alle Cuntrees where evyr he sojournyd or laye, and when he cam to London he held such an howse that vj Oxyn were etyn at a Brekeffast, and every tavern was ffull of his mete, ffor whoo that had any acqweyntaunce In that hows, he shuld have hadd as/ much sodyn & Rost as he mygth cary upon a long daggar which those dayes were much usid as now they use murderers.’ The sole surviving bailiff’s account for Warwick, from 1451–2, indicates if nothing else that he kept a very large household: Hicks, *Warwick the Kingmaker*, 53, see also 227.

for the funeral of an earl. The enthronement of his brother George as Archbishop of York has already been described, and he arranged a lavish wedding for his daughter Isabel to the duke of Clarence at Calais Castle in 1469, shortly after launching his own ship, the *Trinity*, with ceremony worthy of record by John Stone in his chronicle.⁵⁴ Michael Hicks believes that Warwick longed for the title of duke.⁵⁵ Had he achieved that, he may have reached his personal zenith in becoming an English parallel to the Burgundians.

It is worth noting that the floor plan of Middleham Castle, Warwick's chief residence in the North, fits the Harleian regulations well. It is possible to match the movements of the Harleian servants from room to room against the plan of Middleham, where the central keep still contained the chief rooms in the mid and late fifteenth century. The cellars, kitchen and other services were at ground level with stairs leading to the low end of the great hall. The great chamber was located in the north-west corner of the keep, and a further chamber (designated 'inner chamber' on modern plans, this could be the 'utter' or end chamber of the Harleian manuscript) entered via the great chamber, at the south-west corner. The chapel was on the eastern side of the keep, directly across the hall from the great chamber.⁵⁶ Mention of the officers 'coming up' or 'going down' with items from the kitchen and service rooms suggests they needed to negotiate stairs, and these are mentioned specifically on folio 39v. While medieval great houses tended to share basic structural elements, it is striking that Middleham fits the Harleian description so smoothly. On the other hand Raby Castle, another of the Neville holdings, does not fit the ordinances well, with its more complex layout and two halls, lower and upper.⁵⁷ Of the chief Percy dwellings, Wressle Castle — the location of the household described in the *Northumberland household book* — does not fit either, because of its inclusion of a 'withdrawing chamber' in which the earl presumably took his meals as well as a chamber, lobby chamber and second hall among the earl's apartments. These elements are not mentioned in the Harleian ordinance, and the great hall does not immediately open onto the great chamber as indicated in our document.⁵⁸ The

⁵⁴ For the burial see 'Articles ordained by King Henry VII', 131-2; 'A book of English court ceremonies', London, British Library, Additional MS 45131, fols 21-24v; P. W. Hammond, 'The funeral of Richard Neville, earl of Salisbury', *The Ricardian*, 87 (1983), 410-16; Ann Payne, 'The Salisbury roll of arms, c. 1463', in: *England in the fifteenth century*, ed. Daniel Williams (Woodbridge, 1987). For the wedding, of which no detailed account survives, see 'Ordinances for the household of George Duke of Clarence, 1469', in *Collection of ordinances*, 98. For the launch of the *Trinity* see *The chronicle of John Stone*, ed. W. G. Searle, Cambridge Antiquarian Society, octavo series 34, (1902), 109-10. Hicks discusses all of these events in *Warwick the Kingmaker*, 228-34.

⁵⁵ Hicks, *Warwick the Kingmaker*, 234.

⁵⁶ John Weaver, *Middleham Castle* (London, 1998), 7, 32-3; Anthony Emery, *Greater medieval houses of England and Wales, 1300-1500*, vol. 1, *Northern England* (Cambridge, 1996), 368-72. At some point in the mid or later fifteenth century the keep's second-storey roof was removed and a large chamber built above. It is uncertain whether Richard Neville or his son-in-law and successor on the site, Richard, duke of Gloucester, undertook these renovations: Weaver, *Middleham Castle*, 11, 28. The renovated structure does not fit the Harleian plan so well.

⁵⁷ Emery, *Greater medieval houses* I, 123-6.

⁵⁸ Emery, *Greater medieval houses* I, 413-19.

layout of the tower-house at Warkworth Castle, another chief Percy residence suits the ordinance better, but does not offer the possibility for procession through the hall described. Rather, the great chamber there appears to have been accessed by cutting across the low end of the hall. Also, it lacks the stairs between kitchen, buttery, pantry and hall.⁵⁹ If Middleham Castle and the residence of the Harleian ordinance are indeed one and the same, then this text stands beside the two Northumberland household books in providing detailed illumination of the use of a specific late medieval building, and may fill a gap in the records of Richard, earl of Warwick.

Not all readers will be convinced that identification of the nobleman who commissioned the Harleian ordinances is possible, or indeed important. They may be more interested in the potential of the work for illustrating themes of ritual and histories of gesture and the body. In the former respect, they will be aware that Philippe Buc has chastised fellow medievalists for setting too much store by ritual and for applying modern anthropological models anachronistically to medieval texts. Of course he is right to point out that surviving textual manifestations of crafted or patterned behaviour do not necessarily correspond to practice, and that such ‘rituals’ can be overladen with implications by cultural historians. If the surviving documents offered reliable windows on to past cultures ‘we would be as blessed as stock-image Roman sacrificers, who could divine by reading a single victim’s liver the order (or disorder) of cosmos and polis.’⁶⁰ Yet it is possible to avoid the sins of anachronism and carelessness about genre and authorial intent yet still find contextual richness in documents describing ritual practices.⁶¹

While it is impossible to know whether the prescriptions of the Harleian ordinance were ever put into practice they do offer vivid insight into ideas about the ambiguous role of the body in late medieval theories of power and tell us much about elite ambitions in the late fifteenth century. The human body is not always impressive enough to bear the burden of signifying all the wealth and power which late medieval royalty and nobility hoped to display. To make their physical presence more splendid such men had themselves draped in furs and cloths of gold, seated on daises above the throng or out of view in withdrawing chambers, served abundant and extravagant foods, located in vast castles or palaces, and surrounded by massed disciplined bodies of servants and followers. Sometimes they were approached with rituals which teased the viewer with allusions to the sacred. Bodily nobility could be conjured into being through the gestures of less powerful men. Thus despite Buc’s warnings, in the ritual kisses and other gestures of the Harleian manuscript we can see encapsulated some dominant themes in the power relations of the late

⁵⁹ Emery, *Greater medieval houses* I, 144–150.

⁶⁰ Philippe Buc, *The dangers of ritual. Between early medieval texts and social scientific theory* (Princeton, 2001). Quote at 10.

⁶¹ Buc dislikes the use of the term ‘ritual’, although he retains it for convenience: ‘the word “ritual” will be a shorthand for “a practice twentieth-century historians have identified as ritual”’, *Dangers of ritual*, 2. However, given the resemblance between the Harleian actions and the rites of the Mass, ritual has been found a suitable term for the former and has been used throughout this article without Buc’s invisible quotation marks.

fifteenth-century elite. The increasing significance of the gentry, expressed through the ‘priesthood’ of their roles in service, is apparent, as is the upper nobility’s need to gain the loyalty of such men at the same time as reinforcing the impression of their own elite status. We witness also the efforts of the most ambitious men to present themselves as equal to the king himself in magnificence, and as akin to Christ in their own homes.⁶²

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⁶² Many thanks to Chris Given-Wilson, Michael Graves, and Christopher Woolgar for their invaluable assistance and the interest they have shown in this article, and to audiences in Perth, Edinburgh and York.