

FELLOWSHIP FINAL REPORT

Royal journeys, palaces and pageantry in England and France 1460-1589: establishing a comparative and multidisciplinary methodology

John Cooper¹, Phillipe Vendrix²

¹Department of History University of York (UK),

²CESR, Université de Tours, France

REPORT INFO

Fellow: **Prof John Cooper**

Department of History

University of York UK

Host laboratory in region Centre-Val de Loire: RicercarLab / CESR

Host scientist: **Prof Philippe Vendrix**

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ABSTRACT

Why did the rulers of sixteenth-century England and France spend so much time on the road? Building on the ‘Henry VIII on Tour’ UK AHRC-funded research project (Historic Royal Palaces, University of York, Newcastle University) and interdisciplinary research at RicercarLab / Centre d’Études Supérieures de la Renaissance, this project compares the mobility of Renaissance monarchy in terms of purpose, extent, impact and meaning. Henry VIII of England (r. 1509-47) and François Ier of France (r. 1515-47) were intensely aware of one another as rulers, competing for dominance and prestige in Europe. Their extensive journeys and progresses have been described in similar terms, but what were the factors specific to England and France? This project draws out the contrasts between monarchy, government and display in two Renaissance kingdoms engaged in a complex mutual relationship.

1- Introduction

This project establishes a dialogue between English and French Renaissance history in terms of the royal journeys and tours (often called ‘progresses’ in English; this doesn’t directly translate into French) undertaken by Henry VIII of England and François Ier of France. Two hypotheses were explored and tested: that sixteenth-century monarchy was fundamentally mobile, defined by its movement between palaces, monasteries, hunting lodges and courtiers’ houses (including those of the Loire region); and that England and France exerted a profound influence on each other during this defining period in European history, not just on the battlefield but in terms of courtly ritual, art and architecture, royal music and other forms of ‘soft power’. The similarities and distinctions between the two regimes, which are

often compared anecdotally but more rarely subjected to systematic analysis, are a particular focus of the research. Bridging historiographies written in both English and French, the project is deliberately interdisciplinary in approach, collating insights from musicology, art history and architecture as well as historical studies in order to take advantage of the scholarly range represented at the host laboratory and amongst the wider Le Studium fellowship. Connecting a major current UK research project to equivalent work in France, this initiative also worked to construct a stable network of scholars who can sustain the collaboration beyond the four-month residency as a visiting researcher and inform potential future funding bids.

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2- Experimental details

As set out in the scientific proposal submitted to Le Studium, the research was organized into three overlapping phases:

- i. assembling an interdisciplinary network of interested scholars at RicercarLab / CESR, the Loire region, and elsewhere in France to interact with the 'Henry VIII on Tour' UK research team;
- ii. accessing the rich French-language historiography of royal tours, festivals and performances in the CESR library and elsewhere, and gathering and analysing comparative data on sixteenth-century royal journeys in France;
- iii. carrying out site visits to a sample of royal houses and chateaux in the Val de Loire, to explore the politics of space in surviving Renaissance-era buildings (by comparison with their English equivalents), and to inform understanding of the relationship between the centre and the regions of France.

Following discussion with my host Prof Vendrix, a fourth objective was identified as a priority:

- iv. to share knowledge of the broader societal impact of academic research conducted by RicercarLab and the University of York over the past dozen years as a means of informing future funding bids.

Results of i-iv presented at a Le Studium Thursday seminar and a conference, see below.

3- Results and discussion

RicercarLab and CESR proved to be an excellent research base, exceeding my hopes and expectations for academic network-

building. For this reason, I decided to prioritise objectives i and iii above, with the addition of the unforeseen objective iv. Given the reduced duration of my visiting researcher residency (four months rather than the five awarded, owing to visa application delays), re objective ii I chose to focus on gathering data (spreadsheet, journal articles, books) for fuller analysis when I returned to the UK, to maximize the utility of the time physically in France – the key benefit of this Le Studium scheme for me.

Addressing the objectives in turn:

- i. With the kind assistance of my host scientist and additionally Prof Philippe Canguilhem, I had face-to-face meetings with senior scholars including Prof David Fiala, Dr Vasco Zara, Prof Florence Alazard, Prof Pascal Briost, Prof Elena Pierazzo and Dr Jean Senié, to discuss my research and scope future collaborations. Through Le Studium I discussed my work with Prof Richard Freedman, Dr Carlo Bossi and Dr Sara Tagliatella, and presented a paper 'Monarchy on the Move' at the Thursday seminar 9 Jan 2025. A successful Le Studium conference grant award enabled a 2-day international conference 'Performing Royal Power in Renaissance England and France' 15-16 Jan 2025, including two former and three current Le Studium researchers as well as senior staff, post-doctoral researchers and schoolteachers from the Loire region and elsewhere in France. A co-authored article resulted from the conference, see 6 below. The PI of the 'Henry VIII on Tour' UK project has now applied for a Le Studium fellowship to take forward this new collaboration.
- ii. Assisted by twice-weekly French tuition arranged by Le Studium, I used the CESR library and followed up recommendations from French colleagues to assemble a specialist

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secondary bibliography of books and articles relating to royal mobility, pageants and civic entries in late medieval and Renaissance France, as the basis of a comparative article to be submitted to *Royal Studies Journal* summer 2025. Courtesy of Dr Caroline zum Kolk and the Cour de France project, I was granted a copy of their database of French royal journeys to compare with the equivalent database for Henry VIII currently being finalized by the UK 'Henry VIII On Tour' team.

- iii. I undertook site visits to surviving examples of late medieval and Renaissance-era royal houses and chateaux including Amboise, Chinon, Langeais and Villandry, changing my understanding of the comparative layout of French and English royal apartments and the politics of access during the sixteenth century (a theme also discussed at the Le Studium conference).
- iv. Day 2 of the Le Studium 'Performing Royal Power' conference focused on non-academic impact, featuring the University of York impact case studies 'St Stephen's Chapel Westminster' (completed) and 'Henry VIII on Tour' (current) as well as recent work conducted by RicercarLab, to inform a joint statement on best practice in impact.

Ongoing University of York commitments during this period of research leave included PhD supervision and teaching preparation for semester 2. My honorary role as Director of the Society of Antiquaries of London and committee chair also carried on during my Le Studium residency.

4- Conclusion

My research will be written up in a *Royal Studies Journal* article to be published in 2026. Pending full analysis of the data gathered and

knowledge shared during my Le Studium residency, my provisional conclusion is that the apparent similarity between the practice of kingship in Renaissance France and England (my starting hypothesis) actually conceals fundamental differences between the two regimes in terms of the scale and function of royal journeys (far more extensive in France than England; also for different purposes, including military operations and the raising of taxation), with significant consequences for the comparative histories of the French and English states. The resemblance of English and French palatial layouts, to the extent that Henry VIII directly copied French royal protocol, also needs to be questioned; French scholarship reveals key differences in the layout of royal buildings (for instance in terms of privacy and access), again suggesting that what might seem to be similar is actually more distinct. My initial understanding of the subject has thus been changed (in some respects, upended) by contact with new data, scholarship in French that I can now read for myself, and the opportunity for face-to-face conversations with the scholars able to explain both the evidence and its interpretation. In addition, our joint conversations around impact have revealed an opportunity to exchange knowledge derived from a UK academic environment with the distinctly different French and European research ecosystems, yielding benefits on both sides.

5- Perspectives of future collaborations with the host laboratory

I first visited CESR for a Le Studium workshop in 2014, led by Prof Magnus Williamson (now Co-I with me on the 'Henry VIII on Tour' project). My own residency has helped to turn this into a long-term relationship between an international network of historians and musicologists, drawing in recent and current Le Studium researchers (Dr Alex Robinson, Prof Richard Freedman), and capable of being sustained in the future (current application of Prof Anthony Musson for a Le Studium

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fellowship 2025-26). My work focusing on impact with Prof Vendrix has the potential to inform future RicercarLab funding bids, opening up the possibility of a deeper collaboration with University of York staff. For instance, there are synergies between the CESR and York's Centre for Renaissance and Early Modern Studies which could be developed.

6- Articles published in the framework of the fellowship

Augustin Braud (editor), Philippe Vendrix and John Cooper (project leaders),

'Considering impact strategies in historical and musicological research projects':

[10.5281/zenodo.15118210](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15118210)

An article comparing English and French royal mobility through the case studies of Henry VIII and François 1er is also in preparation.

7- Acknowledgements

At RicercarLab I would like to acknowledge the academic leadership and impeccable hospitality of host scientist Prof Philippe Vendrix, and the guidance and encouragement offered by Prof Philippe Canguilhem. Dr Augustin Braud contributed his own astute thinking to the impact document, in addition to capturing the ideas of others.

At Le Studium I would like to thank Dr Aurélien Montagu and Dr Sophie Gabillet both for their consistent academic support, and their warm personal welcome to the region. Maurine Villiers acted quickly to turn a conference proposal into a successful reality. The whole team at Le Studium worked to make the Thursday seminars a vehicle of academic friendship as well as intellectual exchange. To the international committee who recommended funding my residency and conference at Le Studium, thank you for your faith in an interdisciplinary arts and humanities project.