



Kingless Progresses: Locating Authority in the Regencies of Katherine of Aragon and Katherine Parr

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Abstract: During Henry VIII's French campaigns in 1513 and 1544 he appointed his wife, first Katherine of Aragon and later Katherine Parr, regent in his absence. Both queens were empowered to rule in the king's stead, and both queens made use of their temporary powers. They issued orders, travelled between royal properties, and met with their councils. Yet, there has been little sustained comparison of the two regencies and where they have been compared, historians have sometimes anachronistically pitted the two queens against each other. This article uses the concept of "kingless progresses" to explore how both queens exercised monarchical authority through travel, governance, and performance in the king's absence. Drawing together letters, state papers, financial accounts, and literary material, the article situates their regencies within the broader institutional framework of Tudor government and the gendered expectations of queenship. It argues that progress remained a tool of personal monarchy even in the king's absence. By reconstructing their itineraries, the article reveals how each queen adapted the tools of queenship to distinct circumstances, and it reframes regency as an active extension of royal power.

Keywords: queenship; regency; Henry VIII; Katherine of Aragon; Katherine Parr; authority; progress.



The regencies of Katherine of Aragon and Katherine Parr are often celebrated as examples of their remarkable lives and queenship. This article builds on this work to re-examine their regencies with attention to the queens’ travel on progress, journeys beyond the monarch’s standing palaces, to argue that royal travel remained a tool of personal monarchy even in the king’s absence. Katherine of Aragon served as regent for almost four months, from 30 June to 21 October 1513, while Katherine Parr acted as regent for two and a half months, from 12 July to 30 September 1544.¹ Both queens participated in governance and faced similar challenges: they had to support the king’s campaigns in France, defend the realm against the threat of a Scottish invasion, and manage affairs at court. Despite these similarities, their regencies unfolded in very different contexts. Katherine of Aragon governed early in Henry VIII’s reign when he lacked an heir, and the realm was broadly united in religion. In contrast, Katherine Parr’s regency occurred amid a fractious political and religious climate that had divided both court and country.

There has been little sustained comparison of the two regencies. The predominantly biographical focus of scholarship on Henry VIII’s queens has focused on the regents themselves, rather than their regencies.² Consequently, the two regencies have often been treated as isolated events, either to emphasise the exceptionalism of each queen or to anachronistically pit them against each other to determine who wore the title of regent better. In her biography of Katherine Parr, Susan James briefly compared the two regents using the letters that they wrote to Henry VIII. She implied that Parr was the more serious candidate as her letters focused on money, transport, and logistics, whereas Katherine of Aragon’s letters were more concerned with whether the king had clean underwear.³ Here, James overlooks the complexity of the queen regent’s position. By reducing Katherine of Aragon’s correspondence to seemingly trivial concerns, James underestimates the duality of her role. As regent and consort, the queen had both military and domestic responsibilities. These dimensions of queenship could at times appear contradictory, yet they were also complementary, each reinforcing her partnership with

¹ LP I 2055, 2065, 2337, 2391; LP XIX/2 344; TNA, C 82/393; TNA, SP 1/189, fol. 184; BL, Cotton MS Caligula E IV.

² Earenfight, *Catherine of Aragon*, 99–104; Beer, *Queenship at the Renaissance Courts of Britain*, 149–153; Tremlett, *Catherine of Aragon*, 189–199; Garrett Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 155–162; White, “Katherine Parr,” 139–159; Porter, *Katherine the Queen*, 200–224; James, *Kateryn Parr*, 164–188.

³ James, *Kateryn Parr*, 167–168.

the king. In addition to biographical studies, the more voluminous records of Parr’s regency have also attracted interest from art and literary historians. James examined portraiture commissioned by Parr during her regency as a form of self-representation used to reinforce her agenda and celebrate her achievements, while Micheline White argued that Henry VIII’s authorisation of Parr’s *Psalms or Prayers* formed a “textual precedent for [the king’s] decision to appoint her regent in July 1544.”⁴

Comparative work on the regencies has examined how active each queen was in governance and examined the impact of regency on their queenship. Dakota Hamilton and Retha Warnicke’s studies of Katherine of Aragon and Katherine Parr’s regencies examine the powers granted to the queens and the political contexts in which they wielded them.⁵ Hamilton concluded that both regents were active participants in governance and performed the role effectively, whereas Warnicke argued that Katherine of Aragon held greater authority. However, neither study situates these powers within the broader landscape of Tudor government. Without this institutional context, it is difficult to discern the scope and limits of each queen’s authority, and there is a risk of overemphasising aspects of their power at the expense of procedural and pragmatic realities. This article builds on the work of Hamilton and Warnicke by embedding the regencies in an administrative framework, in order to examine how progress functioned as an expression of monarchy and as a practical tool of governance within a broader pattern of divided government.

The utility of the term “regent” to describe the tenure of the two queens has been debated. Elena Woodacre’s comparative analysis of their roles interrogates the concept of regency in relation to queenship by situating the Tudor regencies within broader European and medieval traditions.⁶ Her work serves as a powerful reminder of the need to understand Tudor queens within inherited frameworks of queenship. Woodacre highlights the militaristic duties undertaken by both queens and their success in supporting the king’s campaigns and defending against the Scots. On this basis, she argues that, despite contemporary usage of the term regent, their roles are better categorised as lieutenancies, to reflect their temporary and martial character, which chimes with continental precedents.⁷ This article acknowledges the utility of Woodacre’s lieutenancy model in

⁴ James, “Lady Jane Grey or Queen Kateryn Parr?” 1–19; White, “Katherine Parr,” 23–46.

⁵ Hamilton, “The Household of Queen Katherine Parr,” 216–225; Warnicke, *Elizabeth of York*, 147–152.

⁶ Woodacre, “Between Regencies and Lieutenancies,” 181–202.

⁷ Woodacre, “Between Regencies and Lieutenancies,” 181–202.

interpreting the events of 1513 and 1544, but retains the term regency in recognition of the wording of the documents that empowered the queens as regents. Katherine of Aragon was appointed “*rectrix et gubernatrix*”, regent and governor, whereas Katherine Parr was named “Regent general.”⁸ At first glance, Parr’s title may sound more authoritative, but Katherine of Aragon’s designation as “governor” reflects her greater hands-on administrative powers. Moreover, caution is warranted when interpreting Katherine Parr’s regency as a lieutenancy. Her commission also named a lieutenant, Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, who was appointed to serve alongside the queen.⁹ This underscores the importance of retaining a clear distinction between regents and lieutenants in English traditions of absent government. Continental comparisons, such as Louise de Savoie and María de Castilla, are fruitful but need to be sensitive to the particularities of English political and legal context. The nature of Seymour’s appointment is unclear as his commission of appointment does not survive. However, his role may have been similar to the Earl of Surrey’s position as Earl Marshall under Katherine of Aragon in 1513.

Queen regents were created in response to absence. Although regency has long been a subject of interest in queenship studies, scholarship has largely focused on queens acting as regents on behalf of child monarchs, which was a relatively common phenomenon in early modern Europe.¹⁰ This article shifts the focus to regency during a king’s temporary absence and argues that progress served as a key tool through which queens constructed and legitimised their authority. Building on Theresa Earenfight’s assertion that queenship was a “daily act of reconstruction and interpretation,” this article argues that regency also had to be continuously constructed and performed.¹¹ Like queenship, regency was a vessel of royal authority shaped by circumstance, but it concentrated ruling authority in the queen’s person. Within a framework of personal monarchy, where the monarch’s physical presence remained integral to government despite the delegation of duties necessitated by the increasing complexity of the state, this

⁸ TNA, C 54/381; TNA, C 82/393; TNA, SP 1/189, fol. 218.

⁹ TNA, SP 1/189, fol. 185.

¹⁰ Blakeway, *Regency in Sixteenth-Century Scotland*; Crawford, *Perilous Performances*; Earenfight, “Absent Kings,” 85–109; Ylä-Anttila, “Habsburg Female Regents,” 117–123; Poulet, “Capetian Women and the Regency,” 93–116.

¹¹ Earenfight, “Without the Persona of the Prince,” 14.

posed a challenge.¹² In the king's absence, queens regent had to adapt ideals of kingship to their position. Woodacre has characterised regency as a form of co-rulership based on the established partnership between king and consort.¹³ Regular correspondence between the royal couple which provided updates on administrative business and advice illustrates this shared rule. In this sense, regency extended the queen consort's role, allowing her to draw on the same tools used to construct her queenship. Progress was one of these tools.

This article uses the term "kingless progresses" to describe the journeys taken by the queen regents in the absence of the king. This characterisation emphasises the monarch's absence and focuses on the performance of delegated authority which provides a unique window into the queens' agency. Although these journeys were unusual, they help to illuminate the queen's role in progress. This role is not well understood as it has been eclipsed by studies that focus on the progresses of ruling monarchs.¹⁴ Both regents initially governed from London before embarking on journeys around England. Previous scholarship has treated these journeys as incidental details of their regencies, but this article argues that they were deliberate displays of royal authority. The journeys of both queens were progresses that travelled beyond the London standing palaces and followed itineraries that served defensive, recreational, and devotional purposes. This distinguishes kingless progresses from the routine movements of the itinerant court, which typically involved short moves within the Thames valley for logistical reasons such as cleaning. As Anthony Musson and John Cooper's pan-European collection of essays on royal travel persuasively argues, progresses were about the journey, not merely the destination.¹⁵ Therefore, it is vital to examine the role of travel in sustaining royal authority. Comparison of the two regencies reveals how each queen used progress to fashion their regency and adapted the tools at their disposal to distinct political circumstances, offering new insights into the multifaceted uses of royal progresses in the reign of Henry VIII.

The comparison is enabled by a substantial body of source material including warrants, financial accounts, proclamations, and letters that document the events of both

¹² Hicks, "What was Personal about Personal Monarchy in the Fifteenth Century?," 8–22.

¹³ Woodacre, *Queens and Queenship*, 73–82; Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens*, 2.

¹⁴ Including, but not limited to: Samman, "The Progresses of Henry VIII, 1509–1529," 59–74; Kisby, "Kingship and the Royal Itinerary," 29–39; Hill Cole, *The Portable Queen*; Archer, Goldring and Knight, *The Progresses, Pageants and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*; Keenan, *The Progresses, Processions, and Royal Entries of King Charles I*; Musson and Cooper, *Royal Journeys in Early Modern Europe*.

¹⁵ Musson and Cooper, *Royal Journeys in Early Modern Europe*.

regencies. However, the surviving record is uneven and there is more material for the regency of Katherine Parr. This is in part due to accidents of survival, but it is also due to administrative reforms. The formalisation of the Privy Council in 1540, culminating in the appointment of a clerk to keep a register of councillors’ attendance and proceedings, contributed to this disparity as the council was more active in 1544 and its activities were better recorded.¹⁶ To mitigate the asymmetry of the archive, this article avoids direct comparison of the queens’ activities and instead focuses on the administrative, spatial, and ceremonial dimensions of their regencies. This contextualises the comparison within a broader pool of material, including correspondence, literary material, and the itineraries of the two queens. The itineraries have been reconstructed by re-examining the records of their regencies for locational details and cross-referencing them with household accounts that record preparations for travel, such as payments for lodgings and goods. By retracing their movements, this article locates authority during the regencies in the queens’ person to reveal the significance of their role and how they adapted to the demands of governance.

Queens Regent

Henry VIII’s decision to appoint two of his queens as regent was significant. Their regencies marked a departure from English tradition during a king’s absence, as such appointments were rarely granted to queens. Katherine of Aragon was the first queen since 1253 to be named regent in England.¹⁷ While queens like Philippa of Hainault, Margaret of Anjou and Elizabeth Woodville had exercised informal influence during royal absences or incapacity, they were not granted formal authority.¹⁸ In contrast, continental monarchies, including France, Castile, and Aragon, had a stronger tradition of appointing royal women as regents and lieutenants. María de Castilla, Juana Enríquez, and Margaret of Austria all governed in the absence of their male relatives.¹⁹ In France, where Salic law barred them from inheriting the throne, queens were considered ideal regents, because they were thought to have no personal ambitions to seize power.²⁰ In this context, Henry VIII’s decision to appoint his queen as regent was not unprecedented, but it was certainly unusual. It marked

¹⁶ TNA, SP 1/162, fol. 46; Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, 95–96; Warnicke, *Elizabeth of York*, 148.

¹⁷ Wilkinson, “Eleanor of Provence,” 226–230.

¹⁸ Ormrod, “Philippa of Hainault,” 58; Laynesmith, “Elizabeth Woodville,” 231.

¹⁹ Earenfight, “Absent Kings,” 85–109; Ylä-Anttila, “Habsburg Female Regents,” 117–123; Earenfight, “Maria of Castile,” 45–61.

²⁰ Poulet, “Capetian Women and the Regency,” 93–115; Parsons, *Medieval Queenship*, 7.

a departure from English tradition that was probably influenced by political necessity and Katherine herself.

The fragility of Henry's position in the early years of his reign, without an heir, necessitated the appointment of a regent who could be trusted to safeguard his dynastic interests. In this context, his wife was the most suitable candidate. As queen consort, she embodied the legitimacy and loyalty required to act as guardian of the realm. Katherine of Aragon's upbringing granted her political experience; her mother Queen Isabella provided a model of successful female rule, and her father had employed her as his ambassador at the English court.²¹ These qualities and her position made her an apt figure to represent the king in his absence. The dynastic logic that underpinned her appointment also explains why Katherine Parr was named regent in 1544. Parr's appointment is often attributed to her predecessor's success in the role and to Parr's personal qualities. While both probably played a role, the decisive factor was again dynastic. By 1544, Henry's health was in decline, and his court was split by religious division. Rather than privileging a partisan statesman, Henry appointed his wife, an act consistent with his broader moderation in religious policy.²² This moderation is reflected in the makeup of the council he appointed to support Parr. It included reformers like Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford, conservatives such as Thomas Thirlby, Bishop of Westminster, and Sir William Petre, and the pragmatic Lord Chancellor, Sir Thomas Wriothesley.²³ Moreover, by 1544 Henry had an heir, whose protection was imperative as demonstrated by the king's orders that the prince and his household move to Hampton Court in his absence.²⁴ As stepmother, Katherine Parr was the natural choice of guardian for the prince to protect his interests and person. Thus, as on the continent, the status of queen consorts, combined with their familial roles as wives and mothers, underpinned their candidacy for regency.

Conditions for Progress

The powers granted to Katherine of Aragon and Katherine Parr as regents created the conditions for kingless progresses. Authority was located in their person which enabled them to act, but its exercise was mediated by their councils and institutional structures.

²¹ Herber, "Katherine of Aragon", 44–51.

²² Wooding, *Henry VIII*, 245–296.

²³ TNA, SP 1/189, fol. 184.

²⁴ TNA, SP 1/189 fol. 184.

Much of the historiographical debate surrounding the regencies centres on the extent to which the queens actively participated in government or served as nominal leaders. Some historians, such as Retha Warnicke, have argued that real authority rested with the councils, while the queens acted as figureheads who presided over the machinery of government.²⁵ However, this interpretation risks underestimating their role and neglects broader patterns of Tudor governance. As Jonathan McGovern has shown, by the sixteenth century, many important government activities and decisions were managed by the council without the king's direct approval.²⁶ His personal involvement in administration declined further after 1540 in response to the formalisation of the Privy Council, creating greater distance between the monarch and the council's routine work. Nevertheless, the king remained instrumental in specific government functions, including signing documents, declaring war, and appointing councillors and peers. The regencies of Katherine of Aragon and Katherine Parr must be understood in this context, where executive authority was distributed between the monarch's person and institutional structures.

The regents acted as the king's legal representative to provide administrative continuity. They were empowered to "passe and bear teste" in the king's name, which altered the declaration on letters patent, grants, and writs from *teste me ipso* (by my witness) to *teste regina* (by the queen's witness).²⁷ Both queens used this executive authority to sign grants of land, offices, and wardships, and issue proclamations and pardons.²⁸ In July 1513, Katherine of Aragon witnessed several grants concerning the distribution of land and clerical appointments. She attested to the appointment of Robert Cressy as a canon of St Stephen's College, Westminster, and approved the denization of the king's printer, Richard Pynson.²⁹ Similarly, in July 1544, shortly after the king's departure, Katherine Parr signed and issued a proclamation ordering all French nationals to become denizens or leave the realm as "his highness ... straightly chargeth and commandeth by this his present proclamation."³⁰ These actions demonstrate the power of the queen regent as a governor acting in the king's name, not merely a figurehead.

²⁵ Warnicke, "Queenship: Politics and Gender," 207–208; Ridley, *Henry VIII*, 383–384.

²⁶ McGovern, "Royal Counsel," 1462–1464.

²⁷ *LP I* 2065, 2136; TNA, SP 1/189, fol. 184.

²⁸ *LP I* 2136.

²⁹ *LP I* 2136/22, 2136/31.

³⁰ Hughes and Larking, *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, 336–337.

The significance of the queen's personal authority is further revealed when compared with occasions where no regent was appointed. In October 1532, for instance, Henry VIII sailed to Calais with Anne Boleyn to meet François I and stayed abroad for a month. A council of state was established at Westminster to manage affairs in the king's absence, but no regent was named.³¹ On this occasion, Katherine of Aragon was not invited to reprise her previous role. Her relationship with the king had broken down, and her vehement opposition to his attempts to divorce her had made Katherine a threat to his authority. The imperial ambassador, Eustace Chapuys, even reported rumours that Henry intended to send her to the Tower while he was abroad.³² Katherine's exclusion from government, despite her experience and position as queen, highlights the importance of trust in the delegation of royal authority.

When no trusted individual was named to lead in the king's absence, the consequences were immediate. Within four days of the king's departure, Chief Justice Sir John FitzJames raised concerns that the lack of a leader would impede legal proceedings as no one had been empowered to sign documents in *teste* in the king's absence. Henry had thought it unnecessary to make an appointment for so "little tyme," but this oversight risked delaying legal and administrative processes.³³ The council and the king's justices, anxious to prevent crisis, secretly searched the records at Westminster for precedents and found a similar situation in 1520, when Henry and Katherine of Aragon travelled to France for the Field of the Cloth of Gold.³⁴ Then, too, a council of lords had been left in London and no regent or head of the council was appointed. However, in that case Thomas Wolsey had possession of the seal, which allowed him to authorise documents and act with delegated royal authority. In 1532, no such provision had been made, so the judges resolved to keep the matter secret until the king returned.³⁵ Although the practical impact of these concerns is unclear, this incident illuminates the fragility of government in the king's absence when no regent was appointed. It also demonstrates the practical necessity of an individual empowered to act in the king's name.

The authority granted to the two queens was located in their person and exercised through their councils. Their councils managed much of everyday administration, but this

³¹ BL, Cotton MS Titus B I 525; BL, Cotton MS Vespasian F XIII, fol. 237.

³² LP V 1292.

³³ BL, Cotton MS Vespasian C XIV 1, fol. 166.

³⁴ TNA, E 101/419/1, fols. 20v–24.

³⁵ BL, Cotton MS Vespasian C XIV 1, fol. 166v.

did not exclude the queens, rather, it illustrates how royal authority was embodied by the queen and enacted through institutional structures. However, the extent to which each queen could independently exercise this authority varied, shaped by broader shifts in Tudor government. In 1513, Henry was a young monarch consolidating his authority. He often relied on trusted individuals like Wolsey and bypassed his council of advisers, then a loosely defined body, to achieve his aims.³⁶ Katherine of Aragon’s regency operated within this personalised framework. Most correspondence passed directly between her and Wolsey, rather than through the council.³⁷ There are few surviving records of her council’s activity, but her letters suggest a cooperative relationship. She praised her councillors as “diligent in all things concerning the expedition of the kinges service,” and worked with them to support the king’s campaign and manage domestic affairs.³⁸

No formal record of Katherine of Aragon’s council’s appointment survives, so its precise membership and powers are unclear.³⁹ The queen was granted significant independent powers, including the right to issue commissions of muster, present to vacant churches, appoint sheriffs, and, crucially, to issue warrants under her sign manual for the “payment of such sums as she may require.”⁴⁰ However, she often exercised these powers in consultation with her council as evidenced by their countersignatures on warrants and orders.⁴¹ Historians have attempted to reconstruct the council’s membership using these countersigned documents, but this has led to some confusion. Theresa Earenfight, drawing on Garrett Mattingly, suggested the council included Thomas Howard, Sir Thomas Lovell, William Warham, and John Heron. Retha Warnicke, citing a countersigned warrant dated 8 September 1513, proposed Warham, John Fisher, Sir Thomas Englefield, and Sir Robert Southwell.⁴² However, the presence of further signatories—including Sir William Blount, Dr Nicholas West, Sir Walter Hungerford, and Sir John Cutte—suggests that the queen’s council may have resembled the broader structure of the king’s council.⁴³ At its core,

³⁶ Gunn, *Early Tudor Government*, 48–58; Starkey, “Court, Council, and Nobility,” 175–203.

³⁷ BL, Cotton MS Caligula D VI, fols. 92–94.

³⁸ BL, Cotton MS Caligula D VI, fol. 92; TNA, SP 1/230, fol. 18.

³⁹ TNA, SP 1/229, fol. 211 notes that the names of her councillors, officers, and servants were annexed to the document, but this second document seems to have since been lost.

⁴⁰ LP I 2055/47.

⁴¹ TNA, SP 1/230, fol. 18; LP I 2143.

⁴² Earenfight, *Catherine of Aragon*, 100; Warnicke, *Elizabeth of York*, 148; Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon*, 155; LP I 2243.

⁴³ TNA, SP 1/5, fol. 38; TNA, SP 1/230, fol. 18; TNA, PROB 11/22/72; LP I 2055, 2121, 2330; LP II 601.

however, was probably a smaller group of “four lords”—Warham, Englefield, Lovell, and Southwell—who were in regular attendance on the queen and feature most prominently in the records.⁴⁴ Although Howard is often cited as a council member by historians, there is no direct evidence for this. His role appears to have been military, consistent with his position as Earl Marshal of England and his leadership at the battle of Flodden Field. Katherine was thus granted considerable delegated powers, but their use was mediated by a council whose role, although less formalised than in later decades, remained integral to the everyday operation of government.

In contrast, by 1544 the role of the Privy Council was more codified, and Katherine Parr’s regency was more tightly integrated into institutional structures. The events of her regency are largely documented in correspondence between the two halves of the Privy Council, that with the king in France and that which remained in England with the queen. On occasion, her council acted without her prior endorsement, such as in September 1544 when Wriothesley acted on a request from the king’s council in France to dispatch ships without first referring the request to the queen.⁴⁵ However, there is also evidence of Parr’s hand in proceedings as many of her council’s letters describe consultation with the queen and defer to her judgement.⁴⁶ Hamilton has shown how Katherine Parr worked in collaboration with her council. The council typically drafted correspondence and passed it to the queen for her to review and approve before it was dispatched.⁴⁷ This process reflects a more bureaucratic model of governance, where the council handled much of the administrative workload, including correspondence, and periodically sought the queen’s endorsement. Unlike her predecessor, Parr’s authority was explicitly limited by her council. The terms of her appointment required that at least two council members attend her at all times and financial warrants had to be co-signed by members of her council.⁴⁸ These provisos suggest a deliberate attempt to limit her independence and more firmly anchor her authority within established structures, possibly to provide greater support to a relatively inexperienced queen and to retain tighter control. Therefore, Katherine Parr’s authority was more constrained than Katherine of Aragon’s, but both queens played active roles within the evolving structures of Tudor government. Their embodied authority

⁴⁴ LP I 2055/60, 2055/104, 2067, 2163; BL, Cotton MS Caligula B VI, fol. 39; Hall, *Chronicle*, 539.

⁴⁵ LP XIX/2 292.

⁴⁶ LP XIX/2 207.

⁴⁷ Hamilton, “The Household of Queen Katherine Parr,” 206–207.

⁴⁸ TNA, SP 1/189, fol. 184, 218.

established the conditions for progress by granting them a degree of independence to govern, act, and perform royal authority in ways that shaped their regencies.

Performing Power

The two regencies demonstrate the ways in which the queens were able to perform their authority. As the embodiment of monarchy in the king’s place, the queen led the government, presided over the court, and managed the royal household. These responsibilities were significant as they upheld royal authority in the king’s absence. Initially, the practical demands of establishing their regency and coordinating logistical support caused both queens to remain in one place. During the first few weeks of July 1513, Katherine of Aragon was based at Baynard’s Castle before moving to Richmond, where she remained until late August.⁴⁹ Similarly, in 1544, Katherine Parr spent the first month of her regency at Hampton Court before moving to Woking at the end of August where she and her council remained for much of September.⁵⁰

From these central bases, the regents and their councils coordinated logistical support of the northern border to ensure that the garrisons were adequately provisioned. The threat of a Scottish invasion loomed over both regencies, but their responses reveal the contrasting severity of the threat. In 1513, Katherine of Aragon oversaw extensive preparations for war including supplying the garrisons at Berwick, making gunpowder, and issuing commissions of muster.⁵¹ The threat materialised on 22 August, when Scottish forces invaded northern England, culminating in battle at Flodden on 9 September. In contrast, Katherine Parr did not face an invasion, but her regency was marked by persistent cross-border tensions and raids. The queen and her council managed these tensions through a network of intelligence. Francis Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, provided updates from the border and relayed intelligence gathered from intercepted letters and captured prisoners to London.⁵² Parr sent select letters on to the king to evidence the “crafty dealing” of their enemies.⁵³ This information enabled the queen and her council to

⁴⁹ TNA, E 101/417/12, fol. 16; TNA, SP 1/230, fol. 18; *LP I* 2010, 2143, 2200, 2222/2; Cahill Marrón, “La Reina Catalina de Aragón,” 209.

⁵⁰ TNA, SP 1/190, fols. 155, 157–158, 212, 220; TNA, SP 1/191, fols. 165, 203, 205; BL, Add MS 27404, fols. 39v–40; TNA, SP 1/195, fol. 169; BL, Harley MS 442, fol. 162; TNA, E 101/424/1.

⁵¹ *LP I* 2121, 2143; TNA, SP 1/230, fol. 41.

⁵² *LP XIX/2* 17, 128, 173.

⁵³ TNA, SP 1/190, fol. 220.

monitor unrest from London and pre-empt potential threats, possibly spurred on by the memory of the events of 1513, when the Scots took advantage of the king’s absence.

Their responsibilities as regents overlapped with their duties as consorts. In the king’s absence the queens became the focal point of royal life. They would have sat in state in the presence chamber, presided over the court, and managed their households.⁵⁴ Two weeks after his departure in 1513, the king entrusted Katherine of Aragon with the mediation of a dispute between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Winchester.⁵⁵ In response, the queen summoned Warham before her council to answer for his actions and commanded him to obey the king’s orders.⁵⁶ This intervention on the king’s behalf reflects the queen’s role as governor and as an intercessory figure. Her correspondence with Wolsey during this period further reveals the range of her responsibilities, from papal diplomacy to managing the fallout from her disgraced former lady-in-waiting. Katherine Parr managed similar expectations. In addition to her responsibilities as regent, she oversaw management of her estates and household.⁵⁷ She issued orders to the tenants of her dower lands, signed “Kateryn the Quene Regente,” which reflects her overlapping roles and the continuous demands of queenship.⁵⁸ Remaining at court in a central location allowed both queens to establish their positions and maintain communications. However, static governance was not sufficient to meet the demands of rule.

Kingless Progresses

Kingless progresses functioned as spatial performances of delegated sovereignty. By embarking on progress, the queens projected their legitimacy through visibility, ritual, and control over their itineraries. These journeys are particularly valuable as they provide a rare window into the queen’s travel. Although queens often accompanied the king on progress, and sometimes deviated from his itinerary to travel alone, their ordinary travel is not well documented and there are no known *giests* issued in advance of the queen’s travel. The regents exercised agency by determining the terms of their travel independently of the king or their councils. This mobility was not incidental but intrinsic

⁵⁴ Starkey, *Elizabeth*, 38–39.

⁵⁵ *LP I* 2098.

⁵⁶ BL, Cotton MS Caligula B VI, fol. 39.

⁵⁷ *LP XIX/2* 324.

⁵⁸ *LP XIX/2* 165.

to their authority. It contrasts with other forms of delegated governance, such as councils of state, whose authority was often tied to fixed institutional settings. In 1532, the council remained at Westminster despite a severe outbreak of plague. While lawyers broke their term and fled to the countryside, the council continued to meet in the palace as it was deemed expedient that they remain in place in the king's absence.⁵⁹ In contrast, the queen's authority as regent was more portable as it was concentrated in her person and reinforced through her movement. She could relocate herself and her household in accordance with the customary rhythms of court life, whether to go on progress or to avoid sickness.

Both queens travelled in response to the events of their regency. In August 1513, the Scottish invasion created a domestic crisis that prompted Katherine of Aragon to travel north to bolster defences and assert her royal presence. In contrast, Katherine Parr decided to travel after the king's victory at Boulogne in September 1544. When military pressure eased, she embarked on a more leisurely journey with the royal children. Although these journeys had different objectives, both served to reinforce the queens' authority and visibility. Katherine of Aragon's travel towards danger was unconventional, as queens were typically expected to remain in the safety of London during times of crisis. Her choice to personally lead men and arms north was therefore extraordinary and appears to have been her own initiative. Katherine Parr's travel also seems to have been on her own accord. Her removings contravened the terms of her appointment as regent. The king indeed stipulated that Parr should always be attended by at least two councillors, yet she seems to have left them behind at Woking. In late August 1544, the Earl of Hertford left to join the king in France, and throughout September the council continued to receive and send correspondence at Woking while the queen moved around the county.⁶⁰ The precise terms of this arrangement are unknown, but it was probably instigated by the queen herself, with the council's assent, to allow her to travel with a reduced household and the royal children while the council managed business from Woking. Progress allowed the queens to move beyond the court and reinforced their legitimacy in ways that static governance could not. This privilege was employed by both queens to shape their regencies and assert their authority.

Progress provided visibility, but it also created significant logistical challenges that cost administrative efficiency. John Cooper and Keely Hayes-Davies have suggested that

⁵⁹ BL, Cotton MS Titus B I 525; TNA, SP 1/71, fols. 118, 132, 141, 144, 146–147; Biggs, "Halls of Power," 390–410.

⁶⁰ LP XIX/2 272, 283, 292.

the king became accessible to a wider circle of advisors while on progress.⁶¹ However, this view is qualified by Rory McEntegart’s examination of Henrician policy in the 1530s and Mary Hill Cole’s work on Elizabeth I, which consider the wider implications of progress for central government. They argued that progress was often a disruptive force that severed the court’s connections to London as communications had to be re-established at each new location. In this context, the court became more isolated and the monarch dependent on the advisors travelling with him.⁶² Disruption is evident during the queens’ regencies. In September 1513, Katherine of Aragon was forced to apologise to Wolsey for being unable to forward documents to him as they had been packed in a coffer that had already been sent ahead to her next residence.⁶³ Katherine Parr’s regency government also faced issues once she began travelling as communications between the queen and the council became more laborious and risked slowing down their responses to the king.⁶⁴ Despite the logistical challenges of progress, which forced the regents to balance the projection of authority with the practical demands of governance, its use in the king’s absence demonstrates its value.

Both queens used progress as a tool to reinforce their authority, but they did so in different ways. Katherine of Aragon used progress as a public display of martial strength to present herself as protector of the realm, whereas Katherine Parr used progress to consolidate her queenship. These journeys required extensive logistical preparations to gather provisions, secure transport, and ready their lodgings.⁶⁵ In 1513, Katherine of Aragon’s preparations began in August. On 2 September, she wrote to Wolsey that she was ready to depart, and the next day she ordered Lovell to muster an army in the Midlands.⁶⁶ However, the queen remained at Richmond until at least 8 September as she signed several warrants there.⁶⁷ These warrants reveal the scale and urgency of her preparations for progress. The king’s printer, Pynson, was paid 40s to print 100 papers concerning “the interdiction of Scotland,” and the king’s armoury was emptied of ordnance and armour ready to be transported “with the quenes grace northwards” to Warwick.⁶⁸ In contrast,

⁶¹ Musson and Cooper, *Royal Journeys*, 26.

⁶² McEntegart, *Henry VIII*, 116–117; Hill Cole, *The Portable Queen*, 36–40.

⁶³ BL, Cotton MS Caligula B VI, fol. 39.

⁶⁴ LP XIX/2 292.

⁶⁵ Edwards, “Preparing to Progress,” 53–69.

⁶⁶ TNA, SP 1/5, fol. 31; LP I 2330.

⁶⁷ LP I 2243; TNA, E 101/517/23.

⁶⁸ LP I Preface; TNA, E 101/517/23; TNA, E 36/215, fols. 264–267.

Katherine Parr’s preparations for her progress in 1544 reflect a different set of priorities. A surviving set of household accounts record payments made to gentlemen ushers sent to prepare lodgings for the queen, carts hired to transport her possessions, and servants sent out to inspect areas for signs of sickness.⁶⁹ These expenses were focused on providing for the comfort and health of the royal party to cater to a progress shaped more by leisure than military necessity.

The itineraries of the two progresses contrast in scope and purpose. Katherine of Aragon used progress to reinforce her political legitimacy and navigate the gendered expectations of queenship through ritualised expressions of piety. As regent, her journey north towards Warwick was driven by the need to deliver ordnance and assert royal authority during a time of crisis. The route that she took from London is not recorded, but she probably travelled via St Albans Abbey and Dunstable Priory, as she is recorded stopping at Buckingham and Woburn Abbey.⁷⁰ The number of religious houses on this route was no coincidence. Logistically, they were well-suited to hosting the court due to their extensive domestic infrastructure, but their spiritual significance served to legitimise the queen’s progress by cloaking her military intervention in the acceptable guise of queenly piety. By 16 September, the queen had reached Woburn at the head of a sizeable force and Lovell was stationed in Nottingham with 15,000 men.⁷¹ It was at Woburn that Katherine heard of the English victory at Flodden, which altered the course of her progress. Rather than continue north, she informed the king of her intention to give thanks at the shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham in Norfolk for the “great victorie that our lord hath sent your subjects in your absence.”⁷² Michelle Beer has queried the timing of this pilgrimage, but records signed by the queen suggest that it did occur in 1513.⁷³ Katherine travelled to Hitchin on 17 September and reached Walsingham by 23 September, where she seems to have stayed for a few days before returning south to London via Sudbury.⁷⁴ By travelling to Walsingham, the queen used pilgrimage as an act of personal devotion and an expression of providential victory. In doing so, she humbly presented the achievement not as her own, but as the product of divine favour. Her choice of a Marian shrine associated with fertility

⁶⁹ TNA, SP 1/195, fols. 167–169.

⁷⁰ BL, Cotton MS Vespasian F III, fol. 33; Hall, *Chronicle*, 564.

⁷¹ BL, Cotton MS Vespasian F III, fol. 33; BL, Cotton Caligula B VI, fol. 39; CSPV 2 316.

⁷² BL, Cotton MS Vespasian F III, fol. 33; BL, Cotton Caligula B VI, fol. 39.

⁷³ Beer, *Queenship at the Renaissance Courts of Britain*, 145.

⁷⁴ LP I 2772/64, 2287, 2422/2; TNA, E 361/8.

was also significant. Shortly before the second leg of her progress, Katherine had given birth to a stillborn son.⁷⁵ This personal loss added poignancy to her pilgrimage. Through the combined display of military might and Marian piety, Katherine used progress to legitimise the actions of her regency.

Katherine Parr's progress covered a more limited distance. Unlike Katherine of Aragon's urgent, militarised journey, Parr's movements were shaped by patronage and plague. The queen, accompanied by the three royal children, undertook a series of short journeys from Woking. Their itinerary began in early September with visits to the queen's brother at Guildford and extended to her properties at Mortlake and Hanworth.⁷⁶ These brief trips to family and other royal residences reflect a cautious route that avoided London. On 18 September, the queen issued a proclamation that prohibited anyone who had been in contact with plague from approaching the court "to avoid danger to her grace's person, the Prince's grace and other the King's majesty's children" on pain of punishment "at her highness' pleasure."⁷⁷ This proclamation was issued in her name and couched in her authority as "general regent" in response to an immediate danger. It illustrates how Parr exercised her authority to safeguard the succession and highlights her maternal and dynastic role as protector. Following word of the king's victory at Boulogne in late September, the progress took on a more celebratory and relaxed tone. Around 24 September the queen set off on a longer journey eastward, from Woking to Chobham, where she stayed overnight, and then travelled on to Beddington, with a break to dine at Nonsuch Palace.⁷⁸ She reached Eltham by 28 September and remained there until the end of the month, before parting ways with the children and travelling on alone to meet the king in Kent. This final leg of her progress stopped at Otford, Mereworth, and Allington Castle on the way to Leeds Castle.⁷⁹ The journey retained the character of a traditional leisure progress, but it was also distinctly maternal. The presence of all three royal children affirmed her role as stepmother and guardian of the royal household, entrusted with protecting the succession in the king's absence. As such, Parr's progress reframed her regency as ceremonial and maternal to uphold dynastic stability.

⁷⁵ LPI 2287.

⁷⁶ TNA, SP 1/195, fols. 169–173; TNA, E 315/340, fol. 12v; TNA, SP 1/244, fol. 261.

⁷⁷ Hughes and Larking, *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, 339.

⁷⁸ TNA, SP 1/195, fols. 167–173.

⁷⁹ TNA, SP 1/195, fols. 169–173.

Furthermore, both queens used spectacle and materiality to display their authority beyond the court. Warrants and account books reveal the items that were taken on their travels to display magnificence on the move. Katherine of Aragon’s train clinked across the countryside laden with arms and armour, including 1,500 almain rivets, which projected martial strength. The Great Wardrobe supplied hundreds of standards, banners, and pennants, adorned with the royal arms of England and Spain, and religious emblems including St George, Our Lady, and the Trinity.⁸⁰ These symbols proclaimed Katherine of Aragon’s royal lineage and piety, while the inclusion of the Spanish royal arms purposefully marked the progress as the queen’s journey. In August, she had sewn standards with her ladies; in September, she rode beneath them as a powerful image of monarchy in motion.⁸¹ Katherine Parr’s progress was less militarised, but no less performative. Her baggage train included luxurious furnishings, jewellery, and gowns. She travelled with members of her household including her ladies, Jane the Fool, and her parrot.⁸² The richness of her possessions was emblematic of her wealth and status, contributing to the striking image of the queen’s train as it moved between residences.

The social rituals of progress, particularly pilgrimage, hunting, and gift-giving, served as political performances. Parr’s household accounts include provisions for falconry and hunting equipment, such as a case and strings for the queen’s crossbow.⁸³ Glenn Richardson has argued that women’s participation in the hunt was limited to passive roles like following the king or awaiting his arrival at the hunting lodge.⁸⁴ However, Katherine Parr’s independent activities on progress suggest that women were more actively involved in the chase. As Dustin Neighbors has shown in the context of Elizabeth I, hunting enabled royal women to cultivate relationships, participate in political life, and display martial skill.⁸⁵ Hunting and the administration of parkland could also facilitate the distribution of patronage through gift-giving. During her regency, Parr distributed many gifts of game to statesmen and noblewomen, including Robert Southwell, Master of the Rolls, and Anne Stanhope, Duchess of Somerset.⁸⁶ Southwell probably received the gift in

⁸⁰ LP I 2243.

⁸¹ BL, Cotton MS Caligula D VI, fol. 93.

⁸² TNA, SP 1/195, fols. 167–173.

⁸³ TNA, SP 1/195, fol. 167.

⁸⁴ Richardson, “Hunting,” 129.

⁸⁵ Neighbors, “Elizabeth I, Huntress of England,” 49–79.

⁸⁶ TNA, SP 1/195, fols. 167–173.

exchange for his hospitality at a dinner he hosted for Parr at his home in Mereworth.⁸⁷ Together, the materiality of these kingless progresses demonstrates how their journeys used appeals to symbols, ceremony, and courtly ritual to assert their authority and broadcast their queenship to a wider audience.

Progress helped to construct the pious and maternal public image of the queens to legitimise their authority and support the objectives of their regencies. Katherine of Aragon's march north served not only as a triumph of public relations, as Sean Cunningham suggests, but also as a performative assertion of her role as protector of the realm.⁸⁸ Although she had spent months overseeing logistical support for the northern garrisons, it was her highly visible decision to travel north and lead the reserve forces that captured the imagination of both contemporaries and later historians. Italian scholar, Peter Martyr later wrote that the queen "in imitation of her mother Isabella ... made a splendid oration to the English captains."⁸⁹ The accuracy of Martyr's account of this speech can be questioned, it is unclear when or where it took place, but the comparison he draws probably extended beyond rhetoric. Katherine had observed her mother's rule and seems to have consciously modelled her queenship on her example. Her progress therefore provided an opportunity to publicly demonstrate her leadership in the image of her parents. The positive reception of her regency, among some contemporaries and in later accounts, suggests that this image was effective in reinforcing her legitimacy in the king's absence.

In contrast, Katherine Parr's regency was celebrated for her fidelity. John Parkhurst, a Latin epigrammatist who became her chaplain in 1545, composed an epigram applauding Parr as an "incomparable woman" and comparing her favourably with classical models of female constancy.

If the old Latin and Greek poets had known of you,
Would they have adorned Penelope with such praises?
Surely they would not, for in virtues you excel
Penelope, and her of Argos, by many paces.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ LP XIX/2 688.

⁸⁸ Sean Cunningham, "Katherine of Aragon and an army for the North in 1513," *The National Archives Blog*, accessed 6 January 2025, <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/katherine-of-aragon-and-an-army-for-the-north-in-1513/>.

⁸⁹ LP I 2299.

⁹⁰ Translated in Mueller, *Katherine Parr*, 74.

Although the text is undated, Janel Mueller has argued that it was written shortly after Parr's regency. This dating is consistent with the themes Parkhurst explores. By comparing Parr to Penelope, a symbol of patience and loyalty, Parkhurst celebrates her brief regency as surpassing Penelope's virtues in her twenty years of constancy in Odysseus' absence. However, the emphasis on constancy risks diminishing Parr's political role as it characterises her more as a devoted wife awaiting her husband's return than as a leader. This framing corresponds with the image Parr presented through her progress as a loyal consort caring for the royal children. Whether shaped by Parr herself or projected onto her by male-authored praise, this image framed her role in terms that fulfilled contemporary ideals of queenship. Mueller interpreted Parkhurst's reference to 'her of Argos' as Electra, but Hera, patron deity of Argos and consort of Zeus, is more plausible.⁹¹ As goddess of marriage and queen of the gods, Hera represents the ideals of loyalty and queenship that Parkhurst probably intended to evoke. Thus, his praise of Parr commended her personal virtue and legitimised her political authority by presenting her as an ideal wife and consort whose regency exemplified her virtues. In both cases, progress enabled the queens to construct public images of their regencies, martial or maternal, that reinforced their legitimacy and authority as regents.

Conclusion

The regencies of Katherine of Aragon and Katherine Parr demonstrate that progress remained an instrument of monarchical authority even in the king's absence. Both queens actively shaped their regencies through movement, ritual, and visibility. Their travels were acts of governance that allowed them to project royal authority, respond to political and military pressures, and reinforce their legitimacy at a time when female authority was viewed with suspicion. Unfortunately, their success as regents did not guarantee their success as Henry's queens, but it has been suggested that these precedents provided important models of queenship for Mary I and Elizabeth I.⁹² The effectiveness of their regencies, and the notable absence of contemporary criticism, also provided compelling evidence of women's capacity to govern. This inconvenient truth implicitly challenged the notion that female rule was unnatural and illegitimate. When conceptualised as kingless progresses, these journeys reveal how queens consort could utilise the tools of personal

⁹¹ Mueller, *Katherine Parr*, 74.

⁹² Woodacre, "Between Regencies and Lieutenancies," 201.

monarchy to govern effectively. Although these progresses occurred in extraordinary circumstances, they raise important questions about the role of consorts in more routine royal travel. Further research into the queens' participation in progresses alongside the king, where their movements are often obscured in the records, could shed light on the extent of their agency when not empowered to act as regents. The autonomy of the queens' travel during kingless progresses suggests that their roles in joint progresses may have been more significant than previously thought. They were not figureheads, but figures who could perform monarchy in motion to successfully exercise authority in the king's place.

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