King Edward VI and the Pope and Elizabeth I: Drawing Parallels in Tudor Group Portraits and Texts

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For over fifty years, ‘King Edward VI and the Pope or An Allegory of the Reformation under Edward VI’ has posed a mystery. The anonymous painting was originally thought to have been created during the reign of Edward VI—a time in which parallels were being drawn between the young king and Josiah, the boy king of Judah found in Old Testament scriptures. Recent studies, however, have concluded that the image was produced during the reign of his sister, Queen Elizabeth I. During this time, William Leigh was preaching about the parallels between Elizabeth and other Old Testament patriarchs. Leigh would later publish these sermons under the title ‘Queene Elizabeth, paraleled in her princely vertues, with Dauid, Iosua, and Hezekia’ in 1612. In light of the recent dating of this painting and the dedicatory epistle of Leigh’s published sermons, this article will seek to investigate the relevance of this image and the Tudor tradition of parallelism to Elizabeth’s reign.

In 1993, Margaret Aston published an in-depth study on the anonymous King Edward VI and the Pope or An Allegory of the Reformation under Edward VI.1 In The King’s Bedpost: Reformation and Iconography in a Tudor Group Portrait, Aston contests Sir Roy Strong’s previously accepted dating which suggested that the portrait was created during the reign of Edward VI—between the years 1548-9.2 This estimation would have correlated with the royal visitation that required removal of all images which were the focus of pilgrimages and the removal of all monuments and idols from churches.3 However, Aston’s work provides evidence that suggests this estimation is about twenty years too early. She estimates that the production date of the painting falls during the reign of Elizabeth I in the 1570s. Twenty years later, in 2013 (and possibly as a result of Aston’s work), King Edward VI and the Pope was chosen as one of three portraits to be renovated by the National Portrait Gallery through support of an art conservation project.4 This project confirmed the theory of a later production date. Dendrochronological analysis helped researchers conclude that the panel was made from a tree that was felled between 1574 and 1590.5

1 Figure 1. Anonymous, King Edward VI and the Pope or An Allegory of the Reformation under Edward VI, c. 1574-90, oil on panel, 62.2x90.8 cm © National Portrait Gallery, London.
Figure 1. Anonymous, King Edward VI and the Pope or An Allegory of the Reformation under Edward VI, c. 1574-90, oil on panel, 62.2 x 90.8 cm, National Portrait Gallery, London. © National Portrait Gallery, London

Figure 2. Lucas de Heere, The Allegory of the Tudor Succession, c. 1572, oil on panel, 131.2 x 184.0 cm. © National Museum of Wales
The dating of this piece is of particular interest due to its content. The Tudor group portrait appears to capture a moment of succession, anti-papal sentiment, and iconoclasm. The inset at the top-right corner of the image refers to image-breaking—a result of the injunctions of the 1540s and serves as a reminder of Edward’s reputation as a ‘second Josiah’ as propagated by Archbishop Cranmer. A parallel was drawn between Edward VI and the boy king of Judah who inherited the throne at eight years old—the king known to have ‘put downe’ the idols in his kingdom in obedience to God.⁶ According to Cranmer, Edward VI would continue Henry VIII’s work in England’s break from Catholicism and see, with his ‘predecessor Josiah, God truly worshipped, and idolatry destroyed, the tyranny of the bishops of Rome banished from [his] subjects, and images removed.’ Cranmer interpreted Edward’s work for the kingdom: ‘these acts be signs of a second Josiah who reformed the church of God in his days.’⁷ Despite this understanding, the date of production, the absence of the reigning monarch, and the anonymity of the artist ensures that the exact purpose of this piece remains a mystery. Given the recent developments regarding dating, the modern viewer is likely to wonder how an image of the dying King Henry VIII, Edward VI, and a fallen pope are relevant to the reign of the king’s surviving daughter, Elizabeth I.

In the decades that followed Archbishop Cranmer’s parallels drawn between Edward VI and Josiah, William Leigh’s sermons in *Queene Elizabeth, paraleld in her princely vertues, with David, Issua, and Hezekia* drew comparisons between Elizabeth’s rule and other biblical stories of the Old Testament patriarchs.⁸ This work, compiled of three sermons preached during Elizabeth’s reign, is prefaced by a dedicatory epistle to Princess Elizabeth (James I’s daughter) which offers a few clues about how this image may relate to the reign of Elizabeth I. With *King Edward VI and the Pope* and Leigh’s dedicatory epistle as a focal point, this article will observe Elizabeth I’s place in the relationship of the Protestant Tudor dynasty to their royal Judaic predecessors. Through studying this anonymous Tudor group portrait with reference to its context and Leigh’s dedicatory epistle to his sermons, we can observe this depiction of Edward VI as it may have been intended—as a monarchical proxy. He is an icon for and a representation of the Protestant ruler of England.

In order to understand the relevance of *King Edward VI and the Pope* to Elizabeth’s reign, we must first look at other Tudor group portraits. Two of the more pertinent examples are *The Allegory of the Tudor Succession* (c. 1572) by Protestant Flemish artist Lucas de Heere and the updated engraving based on the same scene by William Rogers (c. 1595-1600).⁹ In these Tudor succession images, King Henry is surrounded by his heirs. In both images, Mary enters from the left with her husband, Philip, and Mars, the god of war. ‘Prudent’ Edward

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⁶ *The Bible and Holy Scriptures conteynd in the Olde and Neue Testament* (Geneva, 1560), 2 Kings 23:4. All subsequent references will be cited by book, chapter and verse.


⁹ Figure 2. Lucas de Heere, *The Allegory of the Tudor Succession*, c. 1572, oil on panel, 131.2 x 184.0 cm, National Museum Wales © National Museum of Wales.; Figure 3. William Rogers, *The Family of Henry VIII*, engraving after *The Allegory of the Tudor Succession*, c. 1590-95, 35.56 x 48.9 cm, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, London ©Trustees of the British Museum.
kneels at Henry’s feet, receiving the sword of justice and Elizabeth enters the scene holding hands with Peace; they are followed closely by Plenty.\footnote{Figure 2 and Figure 3.}

\begin{figure}
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{William Rogers, \textit{The Family of Henry VIII}, c. 1590-95, engraving after \textit{The Allegory of the Tudor Succession}. 35.56 x 48.9 cm, British Museum, Department of Prints and Drawings, London. ©Trustees of the British Museum}
\end{figure}

Both de Heere and Rogers guide the viewer in their interpretation of the scene through Henry’s body language. His torso and head are turned to the right—towards his Protestant heirs—and demonstrate a clear favouritism of the Protestant regime. The image is also balanced in favour of a Protestant future by the depiction of Elizabeth (and her substantial gown) dominating the foreground on the right of the image. Catholic Mary is depicted in the background and she is dwarfed by the opulence of Elizabeth’s sleeves and wide skirt. However, Mary is not simply depicted in order to represent a contrast with a peaceful Elizabeth. Explanatory verse on the frame of the earlier de Heere painting offers an interpretation of the image of succession as a single image of a corporate entity. The verse tells its viewer that, the ‘fowr stotes’ in the ‘little roome’ are represented by a ‘valyant’ Henry, a ‘rare and vertvovs soon’ Edward, a ‘zealvs daughter’ Mary and, in Elizabeth, the ‘last of all a virgin queen to Englands Ioy we see/ Svccessyvley to hold the right, and vertves of the
three’. Mary is generously identified as ‘zealous’ in an attempt by the Protestant artist to enhance the qualities of Elizabeth. This inscription suggests that an interpretation of Elizabeth’s presence should not be an independent one; she should be interpreted as the receptacle of inherited virtues. Through the depiction of others, her image as a monarch is strengthened; her predecessors’ virtues have been explicitly identified as parts of a perfected queen. In a similar fashion, the text of the Rogers engraving identifies all of the monarchs as vehicles through which the history of Elizabeth I and her current Protestant kingdom of plenty and peace is told. In these images, Elizabeth I is an amalgamation—a symbol of hope for a Protestant future. This reading is supported by William Leigh’s example of the Tudor propensity to draw parallels of monarchs with past figures.

William Leigh, a popular preacher who was later appointed as tutor to Prince Henry under James I, makes a similar reference to corporate and inherited identity in the ‘Epistle Dedicatorie’ to his three sermons preached during Elizabeth’s reign. In this letter, written after Elizabeth’s death, he draws parallels between Elizabeth I and the ‘Kings of Israels Iudah’:

My purpose is not to stirre Elizabeths sacred hearse, whose graue is full of Princely earth, and her obsequies are ended, my thoughts are higher euē to match her Manes in blisse, with greatest of Soueraignes there (Soueraignty it selfe onely excepted) I meane with Dauid, Iosua, and Ezekia, guides, and Kings of Israels Iudah.

After having established Elizabeth I’s desirable status as one of the ‘greatest Soueraignes’ in the history of Christendom (including King David whose name is frequently referred to in support of the messianic claims in the genealogies of Christ), he explores the parallels between the Queen and princess Elizabeth:

Pard [...n me (gracious Lady) if I put this vn-d [...]r the shelt [...]r of your highnesse protection, Sem-blance of sexe, name and blood, together with your high place, person, and pietie, craueth no lesse at your Princely hands, then protection of her shrine, and Ghost. Shee a Kings daughter, so are you: shee a maiden Queene, you a Virgin Prince: her name is yours, her blood is yours, her carriage is yours, her countenance yours, like pietie towards God, like pittie towards men: one-ly the difference stands in this; that the faire flower of her youth is fallen; yours flourisheth like a Rose of Saram, and a Lilly of the Valley. [...] euer may your happinesse growe together, and make you blessed with that immortall crowne, that withe-reth not. 12

Special attention should be paid to the repeated references to the similarities between the two Elizabeths and the reminder of the ‘immortall crowne, that with-reth not’. The grouping of Princess Elizabeth as one of James I’s ‘three children’, and references to the princess as one of the ‘threefold gable’ reinforces the image of corporate identity. There is also an ambiguity

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11 Aston, Bedpost, p. 129.
13 Leigh, ‘Epistle Dedicatorie’ in Queene Elizabeth, paraleld.
in the semantic conflation of the ‘immortall crowne’. It appears as though this is the crown of Christ’s followers and the crown of the body politic.


An example of how these concepts are merged in the narrative of the Protestant cause is demonstrated by the close proximity of Leigh’s reference to how ‘superstition withereth’ in the ‘thrice happie government of our Liege Lord, and King’—superstition being closely associated with Catholic practices at the time. The Protestant cause of a return to “true worship” is inseparable from the English monarchy’s break from Rome. Leigh appeals to Princess Elizabeth’s similarities to Elizabeth I and (given the content of the sermons) consequently appeals to Princess Elizabeth’s shared Protestant identification with the spirit of the Old Testament patriarchs. As was the case in the de Heere portrait, we can see here that Elizabeth I’s image (or memory) is appropriated in this epistle in order to strengthen the rhetoric of the Protestant cause.

14 1 Corinthians 9:25.
15 Leigh, ‘Epistle Dedicatorie’ in Queene Elizabeth, paraleld.
Leigh’s epistle offers two main reflections which shed light on the relevance of King Edward and the Pope to the reign of Elizabeth. Firstly, the epistle draws attention to the reign of Elizabeth I as instrumental in the Tudor and Stuart Protestant narrative. Secondly, he highlights how common the practice of drawing parallels between Protestant monarchs and the irrefutable authority of the Old Testament patriarchs was. Perhaps most significantly, Leigh’s work reinforces an implied relevance of the anonymous painting of Edward VI to Elizabeth’s rule by concluding his letter with a reminder of the divine appointment of all rulers. ‘The Lord God of heauen’ is the ‘maker of Kings and director of Crownes’.

Elizabeth demonstrated her (arguably self-preserving) reverence for the divine appointment of kings in several ways—most famously in her reluctance to execute Mary Queen of Scots in 1587. Despite his attempts to disinherit her in favour of the Duke of Suffolk’s daughter Jane, she also allowed images of Edward VI to act as a Protestant icon in the publications of the New Testament under Christopher Baker, which still held the young prince’s image on the title page as late as 1595. In 1568, Elizabeth’s image was found on the title page of the Bishop’s Bible. However, her appearance was not long lived. As Aston argues, there were purists ‘who deemed it inappropriate for any living mortal—even the Supreme Governor of the Church – to be represented in the book of God’s word’. Aston’s conjecture is that, perhaps, the role of Edward VI in the English Reformation helped to sanction the privilege of his image remaining. It is more likely that the conflation of Edward VI and Josiah in the English consciousness (as supported by Cranmer) played a part. This conflation of divine appointment and the need to justify “true worship” with reference to Old Testament narratives was widespread.

In the Elizabethan world order, this understanding of corporate identity, the body politic, and the body natural was typical. Though her natural body would age and eventually die, as a queen, Elizabeth inherited the corporate body politic. The Henrician practice of extending the scope from the English throne and identifying with the Old Testament patriarchs was carried on from the reign of Edward VI to Elizabeth I. One example of this parallelism that precedes Leigh’s sermons is found in court favourite, Hans Holbein the Younger’s Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (1534-5).

In this engraving, King Solomon is clearly modelled on the image of King Henry—suggesting the holiness, wisdom and plenitude of his reign. By the time King Edward VI was

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16 Leigh, ‘Epistle Dedicatorie’ in Quene Elizabeth, paraleled.
19 Aston, Bedpost, p. 133.
20 Aston, Bedpost, p. 133.
21 Edmund Plowden, Les comentaries, ou les reportes de Edmunde Plowden vnapprentice de le comen ley, de dyuers cases estoantes matters en ley, & de les argumentes sur yceux, en les temps des raygnes le roye Edwardele sige, le roigne Mary, le ray & roigne Phillipp & Mary, & le roigne Elizabeth (London: In aedibus Richardi Tottelli, 1571); Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz, The King’s Two Bodies (Princeton, 1957).
22 Hans Holbein the Younger, Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, c. 1534, Brown and grey wash, blue, red and green bodycolour, white heightening, gold, and pen and black ink over metalpoint on vellum, 22.9 x 18.3 cm, Royal Collection Trust, London.
painted, and by the time Leigh preached his sermons, there was a well-trodden path of parallelism. For example, in John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* (1570) (which includes Henry VIII and Edward VI), Queen Elizabeth is referred to as ‘our peaceable Salome’. Here, ‘Salome’ is variant spelling of Solomon and a history of King Solomon is the story with which the book opens.24 Foxe begins: ‘Salomon the peaceable Prince of Israell’.25 He writes about the building of the temple (representing a return to a correct form of worship) and examples of correct ‘fayth, and doctrine’. By referring to Elizabeth as ‘our peaceable Solome’, Foxe is accomplishing two things. First, he is elevating Elizabeth’s rule to the glory of her father’s reign in the Protestant history of England. He links Elizabeth to Henry’s legacy of freeing the English from the power of Rome whose ‘ambition destroyed Religion’, drowning it in ‘superstition and ceremonies’.26 He is also drawing support for Elizabeth’s policies by aligning her cause with a patriarch abundantly blessed by God.27 Likewise, Leigh’s sermons explicitly link Elizabeth to other Judaic leaders: David, Joshua, and Hezekiah—all of whom led God’s people during uncertain times. Hezekiah (also in the Davidic line) was about the same age as Elizabeth was at her coronation when his reign in Jerusalem began.28 Like Josiah, he is known for the destruction of idols and is traditionally remembered for recording Solomon’s proverbs.29 Leigh’s sermons are conscious of this necessity of biblical precedent as he assures his listeners and readers in this uncertain time that ‘…we haue as stable and certaine promises to assure vs, as euer Iosua had’.30 With this reference, he likens Elizabeth to Joshua, who (chosen by God) helped lead the Israelites through the desert after the death of Moses who had led their escape from slavery in Egypt. Leigh reminds his readers that, like her brother and father before her, in this new Protestant kingdom, she would help to lead her people away from spiritual slavery to the Catholic church; she is ‘Queen Elizabeth who ruleth for God…’31

*King Edward and the Pope* is a ‘text-picture’. Following the tradition of *ut pictura scriptura*, the story it tells provides insight into the relationship between the Protestant church, Judaic kingly prototypes and the Tudor corporate monarchy.32 It appears to serve the same purpose of Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* which appeals to ‘all true disposed mindes which shall resort to the readdyng of this present history contaynyng the Actes of Gods holy Martyrs [...] receiue some such spirituall fruit to their soules’.33

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25 Foxe, ‘A Protestantation to the whole Church of England’.
26 Foxe, ‘A Protestantation to the whole Church of England’.
28 2 Kings 18:2.
29 2 Kings 18:4.
30 Leigh, *Queene Elizabeth, paraleld*, p. 100.
31 Leigh, *Queene Elizabeth, paraleld*, p. 18.
33 Foxe, ‘A Protestantation to the whole Church of England’.
Figure 5. Hans Holbein the Younger, *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, c. 1534, Brown and grey wash, blue, red and green bodycolour, white heightening, gold, and pen and black ink over metalpoint on vellum, 22.9 x 18.3 cm, The Queen’s Gallery, Palace of Holyroodhouse, Edinburgh. Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2016
The image itself is oil on panel and is measured at approximately sixty-two by ninety centimeters. At the centre of the image sits Edward VI on his throne. He is in a relaxed pose above a fallen pope and he is surrounded by some familiar court figures such as Protector Somerset, Thomas Cranmer and Garter knights.\textsuperscript{34} A bible in the vernacular, or, ‘THE WORDE OF THE LORDE’ has apparently crushed the Pope. Surrounding this figure are banners that read ‘IDOLATRY’ and ‘SVPERSTICIOU[N]’ – clearly referring to the ‘FEYNED HOLINES’ of the Catholic figures. If the viewer is left in any doubt about what these figures represent, the precariously-balanced papal tiara is pointed towards the word ‘POPS’ (‘popes’). This is Protestant England rejecting Rome and recovering “true worship”, free of superstition and idolatry.

The righteousness of the Protestant cause is indicated by several features. One example is found in the juxtapositioning of the falling ornate triple-tiara and the writing across the papal figure’s chest; the phrase ‘ALL FLESHE IS GRASSE’ is a pointed reminder of the Protestant challenge to papal infallibility and hypocrisy.\textsuperscript{35} By painting ‘all fleshe is grasse’ (a phrase taken from Isaiah 40.6 and 1 Peter 1.24) across the Pope’s rich garments, the artist has indicated that the Pope’s glory will fade and that his person holds no special authority in England. Henry, however, points to his son who sits above the vernacular Bible; this symbolizes an image of his enduring significance in a new Protestant kingdom.

Leigh notes that following her father’s first daughter, Queen Elizabeth began her reign ‘in desperate times’; ‘her sister had shaken the State, with no lesse fearefull then fiery designes, fetched Altars from Rome, and sacrificed her chiefest subiects to the fire, exiled the godlie of the land…’.\textsuperscript{36} The difficulties of Josiah were also hers. Elizabeth’s desire to see God being ‘truly worshipped’, ‘idolatry destroyed’, ‘the tyranny of the bishops of Rome banished’, and ‘images removed’\textsuperscript{37} is reflected here. Though her desires for the end of idolatry were tempered by comparison, The Injunctions of 1559 were based on her brother’s earlier work.\textsuperscript{38} The inset of image-breaking also reflects interpretations of her injunction: ‘…they shall not set forth or extol the dignity of any images, relics, or miracles; but declaring the abuse of the same …’.\textsuperscript{39} Elizabeth’s ‘advancement of the true honour of Almighty God’ and the ‘suppression of superstition’ is imagined here. Though it could be argued that the violence of the image-breaking in the inset more closely resembles accounts of iconoclasm sanctioned in Edward’s reign, the goals of cleansing the church of idolatry in the spirit of the Old Testament Patriarchs were the same:

\textsuperscript{34} For information about identification of the figures, see Aston, \textit{Bedpost}, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{35} See Isaiah 40:6; 1 Peter 1:24.

\textsuperscript{36} Leigh, \textit{Queene Elizabeth, paraleld}, p. 136.


\textsuperscript{38} Aston, \textit{Iconoclasts}, pp. 299-301.

\textsuperscript{39} Aston, \textit{Iconoclasts}, p. 299; for information on non-state ordained or wilfully misinterpreted forms of iconoclasm, see Aston, \textit{Iconoclasts}, pp. 298-317.
Queen Elizabeth purged the Sacraments of her Christ, and reduced them to their right forme, left off, if not weleware lost in the vaste wildernesse of popish impietie, for more then fortie yeares ten times told.\(^\text{10}\)

The inset is a primary focus due to its alignment with the steady gazes of Henry and Edward. Despite its relative size, the inset scene of image-breaking in the painting demands the attention of the viewer. The drama of the chamber appears still and peaceful when compared to the flames and movement depicted in the inset. Though this portion of the portrait is nearly monochrome, it is perhaps one of the most persuasive details of this text-picture. The inset offers an odd conflation of the classical and Catholic in its iconoclasm. The classical plinth with a Marian figure balancing dubiously on a column serves as a reminder to the viewer that Catholic idol worship is akin to pagan idol worship and that the work of Josiah, is the work of the Protestant church. The figure, like the papal tiara, is about to fall and join the broken idolatrous relics behind her.

In addition to the general Protestant practices of printing vernacular holy texts and participating in iconoclasm, the Pope in the image highlights current events of Elizabeth’s reign. At the time of production, Pius V’s 1570 papal bull *Regnans in Excelsis* would have been fresh in the minds of any viewer. The papal bull damned Elizabeth and threatened excommunication for anyone who made any oath of allegiance to her.\(^\text{41}\) The Pope at the feet of Edward is easily paralleled with Elizabeth’s excommunication. It is a pose commonly found in Tudor art depicting a literal interpretation of Psalm 110:1 which reads ‘Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool’.\(^\text{42}\) It is reminiscent, for example, of the woodcut of Henry VIII in the 1570 *Actes and Monuments* where ‘The Pope [is] suppressed by K. Henry the eight.’\(^\text{43}\) In both images, the Pope is the enemy of the monarch and he is made the literal ‘footstool’ for their feet. There is no doubt that the Pope was considered the enemy of Elizabeth. She shared a common burden with her brother which was represented by a small girdle-book she wore. It contained a manuscript of her brother’s final prayer: ‘O my Lord God defend this realm from papisterie and mainteine thy true religion, that I and my people mai praise thy holic name’.\(^\text{44}\)

Elizabeth I inherited the throne in a time of political and religious turmoil. As was the case in the reigns of her father and brother, the Protestant cause required an irrefutable authority to reference in their break from Rome. They found this support through a combination of divine right and allusions to exemplars from the Old Testament such as Solomon, David, Josiah, and Hezekiah. In the 1570s, Elizabeth I was considered a part of a corporate Protestant vision—a vision that was already conflated with these exemplars. Due to this,

\(^{10}\) Leigh, *Queene Elizabeth, paraleld*, p. 87.

\(^{41}\) Thomas Barlowe, *Bratum fulmen: or The bull of Pope Pius V. concerning the damnation, excommunication, and deposition of Q. Elizabeth, : as also the absolution of her subjects from their oath of allegiance, with a peremptory injunction, upon pain of an anathema, never to obey any of her laws or commands. With some observations and animadversions upon it* (London, 1581).

\(^{42}\) See also Matthew 22:44.


depictions of her role in the Tudor succession were complex. We can witness this complexity with the holistic view provided by the ‘Epistle Dedicatory’, Leigh’s sermons, contemporaneous paintings and engravings of the Tudors. Edward VI and the Pope, though devoid of explicit images of the female successors, is not lacking in relevance to the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. In the minds of the Elizabethans, she was not only continuing the work that her father and brother had started, but she was a part of a much older narrative of restoring “true worship” to God’s people. When we look at Edward VI and the Pope, we should recall that we are looking at a Tudor group portrait—not only with all the complexities of corporate identity that are seen in de Heere and Rogers but also with the complexities of subtext and flexible parallelism as seen in the works of Leigh and Foxe. With this considered, we must acknowledge that this Tudor group portrait not only tells the story of Edward and Josiah, but also the stories of Elizabeth and Hezekiah. Edward VI and the Pope tells the story the Protestant ruler of England.

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SECONDARY SOURCES


**LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS**

Figure 1. Anonymous, *King Edward VI and the Pope or An Allegory of the Reformation under Edward VI*, c. 1574-90, oil on panel, 62.2x90.8 cm, National Portrait Gallery, London. © National Portrait Gallery, London

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