

Labels for January 30: The Trial and Execution of Charles I

Call Number: X.c.53
February 16, 1649

Letter signed from Katharine Whetstone, Ely, to Mrs. Wind, Bergen

Katharine Whetstone Jones was the sister of Oliver Cromwell, who was in 1649 a member of Parliament and one of the signatories of King Charles I's death warrant. His sister in her letter sounds less certain of the political decisions of the day, writing to her cousin Mrs. Wind, “allasse deare cousin, I am very darke & knowe not what to Judge of sutch high things they are farr above my capacitye, I confess I was verye much troubled at that strooke, which tooke the head of this poore Kingdome from us, & trulye had I bin able to have purchased his life, I am confident I cowlde with all willingness have layd downe mine...they saye I am a royallist the Lord make mee what hee will have mee to bee...”

Call Number: Wing E311
1649

Eikōn basilikē : the porvtraictvre of His sacred Maiestie in his solitudes and svfferings. Together with His Maiesties praiers delivered to Doctor Juxon immediately before his death. Also His Majesties reasons, against the pretended jurisdiction of the high court of justice, which he intended to deliver in writing on Munday January 22, 1648...

Almost instantly following his execution, Charles was made into a martyr for England by his supporters. The allegorical frontispiece depicts the king in his martyrdom, holding a crown of thorns with his eyes set on a martyr's crown. Palm leaves, traditional symbols of martyrs, appear in the background. The text is meant to take the form of Charles's diary (although it is uncertain whether it was written by him), and both justifies the king's actions during the civil war and compels his people to forgive his executioners. It is a masterful piece of royalist propaganda. The book was published ten days after his execution, and was extremely popular, despite formal disapproval from the government.

Call Number: Wing C5217
1648/49

A collection of pamphlets related to Charles’s trial and execution

This sammelband, assembled and rebound in the 19th century, contains seven texts and multiple engravings (some of later origin) of Charles I at the time of his trial and execution. This title page, which is the only portion remaining of the pamphlet, shows a rough woodcut of the moment of execution. Executioners, or “hangmen” as they were often known despite executing people in various ways, provoked a great deal of uneasiness and anxiety in the early modern period. On the one hand, the executioner was the mechanism of justice: on the other hand, he was an individual carrying out a murder, and was regarded as unclean. In the case of the execution of a royal body, the anxiety is particularly palpable. Several pamphlets from the period purport to give the executioner’s confession, and discuss his personal repentance and anxiety that his actions were wrong.

Call Number: Wing V306.2
1660

Former ages never heard of, and after ages will admire. Or, A brief review of the most materiall parliamentary transactions : beginning November 3. 1640.

Published in the year of Charles II’s ascension to the throne and the restoration of the monarchy in England, this book purports to document the years immediately leading up to the Civil Wars, followed by the Interregnum. In this opening, which shows the text of the formal charges levied against Charles I, an early modern owner has written the names of the regicides (king killers) in the margins. In the back, he notes the fates of some of the Parliamentarians in 1659, including “dyed in the Tower” and “Hangd & Quarterd.”

Call Number: 194- 473q
1649

A peculiar prognostication astrologically predicted according to art, vvwhether or no His Majestie shall suffer death this present yeere 1649 : the possibility thereof discussed and divulged / by William Lilly, student in astrologie.

William Lilly was an astrologer and producer of almanacs—to some he was an “English Merlin,” while to his enemies, he was a “juggling wizard and imposter.” Whichever you believe, it is undeniable that his “prognostications” were extremely popular, and he produced this pamphlet discussing the astrological signs as they pertained to the king’s potential execution early in 1649. Like every good conman he makes no firm predictions, but hopes that the monarchy will be regulated instead of destroyed.

Call Number: 234- 744q
1649

Racconto della decapitatione di Carlo Stuardo re d’Inghilterra

Foreign reaction to the king’s execution was widespread—this Italian pamphlet was apparently translated from a Dutch pamphlet which had been translated from an English pamphlet, but neither of these publications has been identified. The woodcut shows a more sinister, fictional version of the execution, where a sleeping Charles is stabbed in the back.

Call Number: Wing C2792
1649

King Charls his speech made upon the scaffold at Whitehall-Gate, immediately before his execution, on Tuesday the 30 of Ian. 1648

This pamphlet reproduces Charles’s final speech on the scaffold, and relates his walk from St James’s Palace to Whitehall, where he was to be executed. Ranks of soldiers stood between the king and the spectators, and so his final words went mostly unheard except by those on the platform with him. Pamphlets such as this one helped to inform citizens about what he had said, but also provided a way for both Parliamentarians and royalists to spread their own propaganda.

Call Number: Wing E2195
1649

A proclamation for tryall of the King. : Proclaimed by sound of trumpets and drums, in Westminster Hall, at the Exchange, and in Cheapside. VVith the proceedings of the High Court of Justice against him. Also an act of the house of Commons for further prosecution against the King: die Martis 9 Januar. 1648.

Call Number: Wing W9
1649

A continuation of the narrative being the last and final dayes proceedings of the High Court of Iustice sitting in Westminster Hall on Saturday, Jan. 27. : concerning the tryal of the King; with the severall speeches of the King, Lord President, & Solicitor General. Together with a copy of the sentence of death upon Charls Stuart king of England. Published by authority to prevent false and impertinent relations.

Charles was captured in the summer of 1648, but debate over how to proceed kept him under house arrest until late that same year. He attempted to negotiate, but many among his opposition were divided. The idea of trying a king was uncomfortable—he was ultimately accused of treason for pursuing his own personal interests over the good of the country, and his opponents framed kingship as an office “whose every occupant was entrusted with a limited power to govern by and according to the laws of the land and not otherwise.” Charles continued to insist on his divine right to rule as he wished, and invoked the doctrine of sovereign immunity. He was tried in January and condemned to death on January 26th.