

Oii8 Why was the varlett sent into the meane

Notes. The 17 August 1627 issue of the official newsbook on the Ré expedition featured a report of an assassination attempt on Buckingham by a so-called “Disciple of the Jesuites” acting on the orders of the commander of the citadel of St. Martin (A Continued Journall, 17 August 1627, 14). The 30 August issue included a foldout picture of the assassin’s weapon—“a strange and dangerous Poynado”—which had been brought over to England and “delivered unto the Dutches of Buckinghame”. Buckingham, in the act of what the newsbook termed “a noble and mercifull Generall”, pardoned his attempted assassin (A Continued Journall, 30 August 1627, tp, 1-2). This libel casts a rather more sceptical eye on the whole affair, undercutting the considerable boost the Catholic assassination plot might have given to Buckingham’s much cherished and always tenuous reputation as a Protestant hero.

“the duke at the Isle of Ree sent a knife into England wherewith a varlet should have stab’d him. ut dicitur.”

Why was the varlett sent into the meane¹
and the knife heere that should thy grace have slaine
Great Duke we thinke thy polecie discreete
to take such care those two should never meete

Yet since we cannot vindicate thy foe
unles we might his name or beinge know
o send him hither, whilst him we pursue
we doe mistake him for the wanderinge Jewe.²

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Source. Bodleian MS Eng. Poet c.50, fol. 27r

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¹ *the meane*: the main; the mainland of France. *A Continued Journall* reported that after questioning the assassin, Buckingham “sent him back to the prison, and after three dayes pardoned him, and sent him over into the mayne” (17 August 1627, 14).

² *the wanderinge Jewe*: medieval anti-semitic legend told of the Jew who, after insulting Christ, was sentenced to wander the earth until Christ's return on Judgement Day.
