

Normandy and its Neighbours, 900-1250: Essays for David Bates

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David Bates' career as a leading Norman and Anglo-Norman historian has bridged the channel through his extensive engagement with the scholarly community on both shores. Most recently, he has held the post of professeur invité at l'Université de Caen Basse-Normandie and is professor emeritus at the University of East Anglia. His own work has focused on the careers of individuals, notably William the Conqueror and Odo, bishop of Bayeux; the editing of complex documents, for example the *acta* of William; questions of Norman identities and the reception of the conquest of England during the Middle Ages and beyond. More recently, he has returned to the study of the Normans in relation to ideas of empire. Bates has also promoted the interests of the wider discipline of history through his work as a former director of the Institute of Historical Research and vice-president of the Royal Historical Society. The list of contributors to the volume is an impressive catalogue of leading Norman and Anglo-Norman historians, and given that the honorand of the *festschrift* has done so much to foster dialogue between historians based in Britain and those in France, three of the contributors are French. Appropriately, many of these aspects are reflected in the volume, edited by two of his former students.

The volume itself begins with an appreciation of Bates's career and a comprehensive bibliography of his published works, compiled by the two editors. The rest of the book is divided into three sections reflecting the broad areas of his research: 'Normandy and the Norman dynasty', the 'Writing of history', and finally, 'Social and legal history'. The chronological range spans the foundation of Normandy, traditionally given as 911, to the reception of ideas about the conquest of England in 1066 in the 13th century following the reintegration of the duchy into the kingdom of France. In terms of geography, many of the papers reflect, as

is noted by the title, the changing nature of the relationship between Normandy and its neighbouring powers, England in particular, through the shifting political, social and economic context of three centuries.

A real strength of the collection is the way that the contributors have not only opened up new areas of enquiry, but also responded to the challenges laid down by Bates's coherent body of scholarship and reflected on some of its themes. Janet Nelson's essay focusing on annalistic writing, which opens section one and looks back over three decades of historiography since Bates published *Normandy Before 1066* (1), exemplifies this. In many respects this piece, notably in its use of archaeological material, is reminiscent of Bates's own article in the British Archaeological Association's volume for Rouen published in 1993.(2) She situates recent work in the framework that Bates set out in 1982 and also highlights some of the points that later scholarship has developed. She picks up in particular on the use of annalistic history for studying early Normandy, stressing the need to use the near contemporary tenth-century Frankish evidence. Nelson goes on to consider the importance of marriage, analysed through a dissection of Dudo's account of the alleged marriage of Rollo and Poppa, before moving on to a consideration of the archaeological evidence for Rouen.

Several papers analyse the theme of cross-channel relationships (political, social, economic and cultural), which figure largely in Bates's work. John Gillingham considers meetings between the kings of France and England using chronicle and charter evidence to assess their frequency and importance. He analyses two types of meeting – those which occurred on borders, and those where one ruler visited the other's territories – with reference to the changing political context alongside more anthropological/sociological concepts such as gesture, marriage and sense of place. He acknowledges the importance of continuity in the political relations between the kings of England and France, from the 11th century to the reign of Philip Augustus, as seen in Bates's work. Gillingham takes a revised position, suggesting that the increase in meetings from the 1150s onwards marked a significant change in relations; however he also notes that this apparent growth might simply reflect the survival of evidence. Matthew Strickland presents an analysis of Henry I and the battle of Brémule, styled the 'battle of the two kings'. This is one of the longer essays in the volume, in which the author considers the engagement in the wider context of warfare and battle in 12th-century Normandy. As Strickland notes, the battle was one of the few occasions in the Middle Ages when two kings fought. The other remarkable feature is the small number of casualties on both sides. Strickland takes these two points and sets them into the broader framework of chivalry and kinship, notably as reflected in shared ties on either side of the channel.

Elisabeth van Houts continues the theme of cross-channel relationships in section three, by considering the role and extent of intermarriage in 11th-century England. Van Houts questions the central assumption of a great deal of historical writing on this topic, that exogamy after the conquest was common, particularly French men marrying English women. Not only does she look at marriages post-1066, but also seeks to give the phenomenon a broader context by considering intermarriage after the Danish conquest of Cnut. By trawling Domesday Book and the Durham and Winchester *libri vitae* alongside narrative sources and chronicles, she has compiled a list of cases based on onomastic evidence of intermarriage in the 11th century, handily listed in an appendix to the article. Of course, there is a long list of caveats to take into consideration (p. 241) when handling such evidence, but van Houts has opened up the debate and the potential for much wider comparative research.

Throughout his career, Bates has considered the role of the aristocracy in Norman society and ties between noble families. His first published article was an analysis of the Norman aristocracy using Bishop Hugh of Bayeux and the family of Herluin de Conteville as case studies.(3) In section three, Veronique Gazeau, with whom Bates has worked closely and co-authored a further paper on Herluin (4) uses charter evidence, particularly subscriptions, to examine the nature of the Norman aristocracy in the first half of the 11th century (her paper is in French). Her chosen example is Humphrey de Vieilles, ancestor of the Beaumont family which was the subject of David Crouch's first book. As such the article responds, not only to Bates's work, but also that of his students.

The focus on the aristocracy in this volume is primarily on the activities and lives of women. Judith Green examines four duchesses of Normandy from the tenth to the 12th centuries: Gunnor, Matilda of Flanders,

Empress Matilda and Eleanor of Aquitaine. Green explores the genealogies and personal qualities of these four women through three important and interrelated themes: gender, female agency and representation of the women by Norman historians. The significance of personality and socio-political context for how much power any one woman at any one time could exercise is emphasised, as well as women's crucial role as continuators of aristocratic lineages. The careers of the duchesses reflect difference: following the death of Duchess Matilda subsequent royal wives up to Eleanor of Aquitaine did not play a significant role in ruling Normandy, which contrasted with their position in England.

Green also considers marriage as a means of forming political alliances and this theme is continued in Kathleen Thompson's discussion of Adelaide of Aumale, sister of William the Conqueror. Thompson places Adelaide in the context of other marriages that forged political relations between England and Normandy. Through her painstaking analysis of fragmentary evidence, Thompson uses the example of Adelaide to discuss the changing attitude of the Church to problems of consanguinity. Adelaide also acted as a crucial link between William's cross-channel lands. Her role as a landholder in England was possibly much wider than historians have recognised until now. Picking up Thompson's themes, Lindy Grant discusses Blanche of Castille (niece of King Richard I) in relation to her natal and marital family, looking in detail at her role in Normandy. This paper of course takes the reader beyond 1204 and the loss of Normandy to the French crown. Though Blanche has been characterised as 'in herself the guarantee of peace' (p. 131), she seems on the face of it to have lacked the interest in Normandy of some of her illustrious predecessors with interests in the duchy. Her interests after marriage were primarily those of her husband and son, both kings of France, rather than those of her natal family as in the case of Adelaide of Aumale. Grant instead poses the suggestion that Blanche fulfilled in Normandy a similar role to that of Empress Matilda in securing peace for the rule of her son.

The writing of history in the Middle Ages is another area of Norman history of interest to Bates, as seen through his work on the earliest historians of William the Conqueror. The three articles in section two address this theme through discussions of historical writing in England, France and Normandy. The first essay by Pauline Stafford examines the 'D' chronicle and its possible links to Archbishop Ealdred of York. Through cross-comparison with other versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and historical writing, Stafford's analysis reflects the complexities of 'D'; how it developed and how it was affected by the events of 1066. As she points out, the ideological framework of the chronicle is vital for understanding its link to Ealdred. She posits the strong influence of Wulfstan II, Ealdred's predecessor at Worcester and York, on the development of the text as Ealdred would have known it. With its emphasis on an England ruled from the south and its criticism of previous archbishops' dealings with the Vikings, the content would have undoubtedly had a strong influence on Ealdred's attempts to negotiate the politics of the Norman Conquest. He was, after all, the man who consecrated William as king in 1066 and thus helped pave the way for the legitimisation of the conquest.

Pierre Bauduin's contribution (written in French) considers the work of Hugues de Fleury as a source for Norman history. Fleury had strong connections with England through various spiritual networks, but Bauduin suggests in his conclusion that this chronicle should possibly be seen as a Franco-Norman history, rather than an Anglo-Norman one. Hughes was writing from outside the duchy looking in and seeking to understand how Normandy could be integrated into the French kingdom. As such he picks up on themes identified in Stafford's paper that reflect the relationship between people, place and historical writing. David Crouch turns his attention to the *Roman de Franceis*, a vernacular poem written by Andrew de Coutances. Not only does he set his discussion within the context of Anglo-Norman history writing and the problem of Norman identity(ies), but also provides the reader with the text and a translation of the poem.

The three remaining papers focus on social and legal history. Mathieu Arnoux's contribution focuses on a group of people much neglected in Norman historiography, the peasants. This paper comprises an investigation of the *laboratores* in the context of the three orders and the related historiography. Arnoux draws on St Augustine's theory of work and the effect of Gregorian reform to analyse the fear of revolt among the peasants on the part of the knights and clerics. As he points out, our knowledge of the intellectual context of the three orders outstrips that of the economic aspects of the relationship for Normandy and

England during the central Middle Ages and it is here that there is the potential for greater scholarly enquiry. John Hudson takes the reader back across the channel in his consideration of the execution of Earl Waltheof, the last surviving English earl who was implicated in the rebellion of 1075, in relation to the ‘idea of personal law’. Hudson discusses the differences between English and Norman laws regarding treason, looking for an explanation of Waltheof’s execution as described by Orderic Vitalis. As he notes, Orderic’s account is not trustworthy in terms of the specifics, but serves to stress the exceptional nature of the case. What emerges in this article is an emphasis not on personal law in the years immediately following the conquest, but the importance of political decisions in determining the fate of rebels.

The final contribution in this collection is by Nicholas Vincent. The title of the essay ‘More tales of the Conquest’ is a deliberate echo of J. H. Round’s 1910 article ‘Tales of the Conquest’ and he uses links between the work of Round and Bates – an exploration of Normandy, an emphasis on local detail and diplomatic, and the editing of charters – to discuss attitudes towards the Norman take over in 1066. Vincent discusses a 13th-century deposition record, through which Round had tracked the descent of the Sackville family, and considers its presentation of 11th-century events. Whereas Round used it to trace genealogies, he actually missed a great deal more in terms of the uses to which charters were put and the nature of forgeries as evidence. Above all the document demonstrates the disruption caused by the Conquest in terms of landholding: ‘there could be no licence for claims that leapt backwards across the great gulf of 1066 to “English” [. . .] charters or tenures’ (p. 299). The article is also remarkable for its descriptions of Round, ‘the nastiest of polemicists, his clipped moustaches the twitching antennae of his pugnaciousness’ (p. 271), contrasted with the more irenic qualities of Bates.

This review could be twice as long and not fully examine all the themes present in this volume – for example, the nature and problems of medieval sources are points that all the contributors deal with at some level – and this perhaps demonstrates the need for a more substantial introduction. The purpose of a *festchrift* is to honour its recipient, but many of the articles here will be useful to non-Norman specialists seeking comparative material. More of a sense of context for the work contained therein would help. As with all edited collections, the contents might have been organised differently. The arrangement of the papers in each section in rough chronological order, although logical, does result in some awkward sequencing, notably the placing of Strickland’s article on warfare in amongst the contributions on the lives, roles and sources relating to aristocratic women, when it might have been better paired with Gillingham’s consideration of meetings between the kings of France and England. The more subtle links between papers in the volume and Bates’s own work are thus more implicit than they need be. These minor caveats aside, this is a fascinating collection of essays that revisits familiar assumptions, poses new challenges, particularly in the study of marriage and the peasantry, and above all, reflects the vitality and coherence of the honoree’s own research.

Notes

1. D. Bates, *Normandy Before 1066* (London, 1982). [Back to \(1\)](#)
2. D. Bates, ‘Rouen from 900–1204: from Scandinavian settlement to Angevin “Capital”’ in *Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology at Rouen*, ed. J. Stratford (London, 1993), pp. 1–11. [Back to \(12\)](#)
3. D. Bates, ‘Notes sur l’aristocratie Normande: I Hughes évêque de Bayeux (1011–env.1049); II Herluin de Conteville et sa famille’, *Annales de Normandie*, 23 (1973), 5–38. [Back to \(3\)](#)
4. D. Bates and V. Gazeau, ‘L’Abbaye de Grestain et la famille d’Herluin de Conteville’, *Annales de Normandie*, 40 (1990), 5–30. [Back to \(4\)](#)

The editors are happy to accept this review and do not wish to comment on it.

Links

[1] <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/30653>