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## La Normandie et l'Angleterre au Moyen Âge

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Marjorie Chibnall

In 1992 a conference was held at Reading to study the changing relations between England and Normandy that resulted from the conquest of 1066.<sup>(1)</sup> Some ten years later, after a period of intense historical investigation, a colloque at Cerisy-la-Salle re-examined the questions raised at Reading and assessed the ways in which historical understanding of the subject had been widened and deepened, and where further study was most likely to be fruitful. The proceedings of the colloque have been published in the volume reviewed here.

The meeting was carefully organised by Bouet and Gazeau, and the papers contributed have been roughly arranged in three sections, placing the changing relations between England and Normandy within the broad developments of European history over five centuries. In an introductory chapter David Bates reviews the place of the subject in general historical studies from the nineteenth century onwards, not forgetting the pioneering work of C. H. Haskins and emphasising the fundamental importance of John Le Patourel's book, *England and Normandy in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). These works made plain that the history of Normandy and England could never be separated. Bates himself sees the Conquest as a consequence of Norman expansion within the framework of state formation. For the period from 911 to 1204 seven papers reflect three stages of development. During the first, up to about 1090, Normandy became

more hieratically organised and its influence in England after the Conquest was powerful. Bates argues that, from 1090-1125 approximately, there was a weakening of Anglo-Norman dynamism, while indigenous influences and contacts with other regions slowly became more important. In a period that has attracted intense historical research historians have varied in their interpretations; some have suggested that the reign of Stephen was a breaking point in the history of the Anglo-Norman realm, and 1144 might well be taken as a significant date. Bates points to economic history as a topic insufficiently explored, noting that there had never been a strong economic union between England and Normandy, and that more work is needed on the growing power and wealth of the Capetian monarchy. The reigns of Henry II and his sons have been insufficiently explored.

These general trends are further studied in individual chapters. Pierre Baudouin's analysis of the diplomatic of William the Conqueror's charters concentrates on the reference to kinship and finds that in most the exact degree of kinship is left vague. General terms are frequently used; otherwise *dominus* is preferred, even for the relationship of a wife to her husband. This suggests the emergence of a hierarchy. Kathleen Keats-Rohan, now engaged in a prosopographical study of the leading Anglo-Norman vassals, notes that in spite of the apparent discontinuity of the great honours of William I's time there were restorations and re-groupings, sometimes in smaller units, to provide an underlying stability. She cites a large number of cases of intermarriage between aristocratic Norman women and English men, such as sheriffs or holders of royal castles; these anchored the elite of the invaders in the local administrative system.

Richard Gameson's chapter on manuscripts concentrates on the earlier period of intense exchanges, both before and just after 1066. Based on his unrivalled knowledge of the manuscripts of the period and illustrated by fourteen fine reproductions in colour, it includes a detailed list of English manuscripts of the tenth and eleventh centuries that reached Normandy before 1066. Later there was some movement of manuscripts back and forth across the Channel through plunder or purchase. Some were written by Norman monks working in English monasteries; others, notably the works of the Church fathers, were brought from Normandy or Flanders to England. In general Gameson finds that the bibliographical resources of Normandy and England were complementary and that both were enriched, though England was the greater gainer.

Judith Green, now engaged on the formidable task of writing a life of Henry I, concentrates here on Henry's government in Normandy. This is essential for a balanced account of the reign, often neglected by earlier biographers. She gives a perceptive account of the way in which Henry regarded his authority in Normandy as revealed in his charters. Hesitating to call himself 'duke of Normandy' while his brother Robert was alive, he preferred to rely on his royal status in Normandy as in his other dominions. She examines various aspects of the royal court including its exercise of justice, and revises her earlier views on the Norman exchequer. The most questionable statement is that in 1125, when Henry wished to nominate a successor in case he should never have a legitimate son, he named his daughter Matilda in preference to Theobald or Stephen of Blois and so 'malgré tout, il livra la Normandie aux Angevins?'. Apart from the question of how far he had the power, at that date, to name a successor, his choice was far more difficult. He needed an Angevin alliance to protect his southern frontier; he also needed Theobald of Blois to continue as the loyal ally he had shown himself to be during earlier periods of crisis. If 1125 became a significant dividing line (which is doubtful), this was because of later developments he could not have foreseen.

The chapter by Nicholas Vincent on Normans in the entourage of Henry II is one of the most important in the book. It is based on the charters of this period, which he is in the process of editing. The charter witnesses clearly do not include all those who are known from the accounts of chroniclers to have been present in Henry's court. Place dates show him to have been more active in certain administrative centres, especially Rouen, Argentan and Caen in Normandy; most charters were issued when the king and chancery were in the same place and the seal and chancery were less mobile than the king. Poitou and Aquitaine, acquired through his marriage, were more peripheral in his administration. As regards cross-channel families, only a few of the greatest had substantial lands in England and Normandy and some of those divided their properties between two branches of the family. Many of those who still kept their cross-channel interests chose to be buried in Normandy. Henry II, like his father, gave very few estates to reward loyalty and preferred cash or privileges. Vincent shows the consequences of the slow development of more stable

administrative centres, as indicated by Green, and the resulting changes in the functions of the court.

The remaining three papers in this section are narrower in scope, but pinpoint some topics of general importance. Churches, no less than secular lords, experienced difficulties in holding cross-channel estates. Dominique Rouet uses two unpublished cartularies of Saint-Pierre de Préaux to show the difficulties of one Norman abbey in administering its English lands. Its dependencies in England experienced all the normal difficulties of alien priories and by the mid-fifteenth century the abbots had accepted the loss of these properties.

Vincent Moss's study of the Norman and English financial rolls of 1194-1195 attempts to assess the comparative wealth of the two regions just before Normandy was lost. Calculations are difficult because of the patchiness of the series of Norman rolls and the uncertainties about which items are entered in a particular year; this has led to different estimates by earlier historians, all of which Moss believes to be wrong. In comparing the Norman resources with those of both England and Capetian France, he reaches conclusions that are interesting, challenging and controversial. He stresses the importance of revenues from towns, mentioning the importance of Paris in France, but ignoring Rouen in Normandy. One general conclusion is that the resources of Philip Augustus were actually (and not merely potentially) greater than those of King Richard. Whether or not these arguments from limited evidence are acceptable, Moss certainly adds weight to the hypothesis that in many practical ways Normandy was slipping away from its connections with England by the end of the twelfth century.

Elisabeth van Houts has chosen to explore a development as wide as that of Moss is narrow. Her chapter on exile in *l'espace Anglo-Normand* looks at the subject of exile in the whole of the territory where Anglo-Norman rule prevailed. Beginning with a brief and clear summary of publications on the subject, she analyses particular cases of the use of exile as a punishment, the possibilities of reconciliation within a certain number of years, and the retention of hereditary right to property by minors who remained in guardianship or wives who had not supported their husbands. She also insists on the value of literary sources such as the *Gesta Herewardi*, which reveal the mentality of exiles.

The three papers in the section on the thirteenth century are all important. The year 1204, generally accepted as the date of the loss of Normandy, has invited a very necessary reassessment of its significance at the approach of the year 2004. Kathleen Thompson investigates the attempts of some of the greater magnates with properties on both sides of the Channel to retain their lands. A very few were successful for a time; William the Marshall, who had risen to wealth and fame and married a great heiress, succeeded in retaining all the family lands until 1219, and his son held them until 1224. This was exceptional; in 1226 Henry III confiscated the English lands of seven barons, possibly because Louis VIII's recent expedition in the Midi meant that these barons had had to follow him for the lands they held in France. Difficulties included the need to seek royal permission to cross the Channel; attempts to secure settlements to preserve all property in the family by purchase or diplomacy, always rare, petered out. But it took time for traditional aristocrats to accept the new political dynamic of nationality. Daniel Power examines the same problems during the period 1224-44, when hostilities between France and England were mostly suspended but always threatening. Relations were affected by the hope of re-union, or at least of making a corridor through the dioceses of Avranches and Coutances to the southern Plantagenet properties. (Power is one of the very few contributors to take note of these.) After 1224, when Poitou was lost, tension increased, though the accession of the peace-loving Louis IX in 1226 revived hopes of a final reconciliation. In three case studies Power finds that, though royal contacts through marriage might help one or two of the greatest families such as the Tosny, particularly in a Franco-English rather than in an Anglo-Norman context, for most lords ties grew progressively weaker. Some of the knightly families, such as the Valliquerville, might choose to sacrifice land for spiritual benefits, and sell English properties to Cistercian or other houses with the king's permission. A useful bibliography to encourage further research is provided.

Olivier de Laborderie turns to historiography to show the changing attitude of English lords, particularly those of the knightly class, to both the original Norman conquest and the loss of Normandy. The particular records used by him are rolls illustrating the genealogies of the kings of England, which multiplied between

about 1272 and 1327. These rolls, containing short notes on each monarch, were written in the vernacular and were the earliest prose histories in English since the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. They illustrate the noble and seignorial historical culture and the tensions between the royal and the baronial ideologies in these years. They also give a new interpretation of the Conquest, apparently ignoring the (rather weak) hereditary claim of William I and the marriage of Henry I to a wife of the line of Cerdic; La Borderie suggests that after Normandy passed out of the control of the Plantagenet kings, Henry II and his successors venerated their ancestors buried at Fontevraud and tended to ignore the earlier dukes of Normandy. Two late English genealogies, however, began to add one or two dukes of Normandy, and rolls written in Anglo-Norman almost invariably included William's distinguished Norman ancestors. In spite of some strange errors, they insisted that William was no parvenu, but came of a line of noble and pious dukes. The change accompanied the renewed claim of Edward III and his successors to their 'continental patrimony'. Further consequences of the change are the subject of Part III.

Only one of the five papers in the third section deals with the fourteenth century. A study by Emilie Lebailly discusses the career of Raoul d'Eu, both constable of France and an English and Irish landholder. He belonged to the great family of Brienne and had rich possessions in Normandy, Poitou, Saintogne and Burgundy, England and Ireland, some of which came to him from his wife. He served as a French ambassador on several occasions, though without showing much talent. His career shows that a nobleman with lands on both sides of the Channel and the right connections could be given high office in the early years of young Edward III, and could even maintain his awkward position until the outbreak of war in 1337, when his English and Irish lands were confiscated.

Other papers are concerned with the period after Henry V launched his campaigns in Normandy. Anne Curry deals with the rapid capture of the port of Harfleur and the organisation of supplies and settlement in the first stages of the invasion from 1415 to 1422. It is a businesslike interim study of the beginning of the English reconquest, on which Curry is now writing at length. Phillippe Cailleux's chapter on the relations between the English and the citizens of Rouen uses the registers of scribes to assess the business carried on by the English either among themselves or with the Rouennais; his general impression is that, although a few houses were acquired for new officials and a number of mixed marriages took place, the attitude of the citizens of Rouen to the occupying English was lukewarm. Jean-Philippe Genet, writing on Normandy as seen by English historians and politicians in the fifteenth century, provides a very useful study in two parts. He agrees with Laborde that at the beginning of the fifteenth century the memory of Normandy was virtually non-existent in England; and analyses the historical writings of the period to try to find out whether a 'lobby' developed in England to provide support for the occupation of Normandy. His second section examines the records of Parliament, and the participation of the members of the Commons in the campaigns and government of the conquered lands. It is a wide-ranging and important chapter, noting how the Lancastrian usurpation of the English throne by Henry IV forced his son to justify his position by success in war, which he attributed to the will of God and his own piety and just government. Philippe Contamine, eminent historian of war, deals with an episode in the unofficial naval warfare that was becoming increasingly common and prints a hitherto unknown account of the expenses of Pierre de Brézé, grand seneschal of Normandy, for his ships during a period from 1452 to 1458. Contamine shows in vivid detail how, at a time when hostilities had ended but no official conclusion of the war had been reached, peace was continually threatened by a series of raids and semi-piratical attacks on shipping from the North Sea to the Bay of Biscay. These privateering skirmishes were loosely governed by rules that embodied a degree of humanity towards prisoners. They made clear that Normandy was no longer an easy prey, ripe for conquest.

The volume concludes with a brief summing up by Matthieu Arnoux, who picks up some of the questions raised by David Bates. He points to some subjects needing further investigation, notably the importance of towns and their wealth, and the need to place the whole study in a wider European context. Relations with Flanders, the opening of the Atlantic and the widening of trading interests are important, and ecclesiastical and sociological questions need further study. To this I would add that, at some date Gascony needs to be brought more firmly into the picture, particularly in connection with mercantile history; it is now attracting the attention of a number of scholars. Naturally perhaps in a conference specifically on England and

Normandy, Gascony may seem peripheral; it is barely mentioned by one or two contributors (Power and Contamine for instance), but is relevant to many of the general questions considered. History has at times in the past been written from a slightly teleological angle by historians, who have seen it too simply as a development towards the condition of the world in which they live. One recent trend has been to look beyond the development of nation states, which influenced much nineteenth- and twentieth-century historical work and teaching; there is sometimes an inclination towards speculations on globalisation. One trend is to talk in terms of 'space' (for example *l'espace plantagenêt*), so avoiding reference to any specific political organisation, but leaving many questions unanswered. All this shows how the volume here reviewed is a challenging and valuable contribution to an ongoing debate of fundamental importance.

## Notes

1. Proceedings published as David Bates and Anne Curry, eds, *England and Normandy in the Middle Ages* (London and Rio Grande: Hambledon, 1994). [Back to \(1\)](#)

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