# The Measure of a King

-

## Forging English Royal Reputations 1066-1272

Inaugural-Dissertation
zur
Erlangung des Doktorgrades
der Philosophie des Fachbereiches 04
der Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen

vorgelegt von
Dagmar Schmidt

2014

1. INTRODUCTION........ 3
1.1. ROYAL REPUTATIONS IN THE LIGHT OF CURRENT RESEARCH ........ 7
2. CHRONOLOGY........ 21
2.1 THE REIGN OF WILLIAM I........ 23
2.2. THE REIGN OF WILLIAM II........ 26
2.3 THE REIGN OF HENRY I........ 29
2.4. THE REIGN OF STEPHEN I ........ 34
2.5. THE REIGN OF HENRY II ........ 38
2.6. THE REIGN OF RICHARD I........ 42
2.7. THE REIGN OF JOHN I........ 46
2.8. THE REIGN OF HENRY III........ 49
3. CREATING REPUTATIONS: DEPICTING THE KING ........ 52
3.1. THE SOURCE MATERIAL ........ 52
3.2. ROYAL DEMEANOUR AND ITS ASSESSMENT ........ 62
3.2.1. The King's Character and Personal Sphere ........ 73
Contemporary Expectations........ 73
William I: Character and Personal Sphere........ 76
William II: Character and Personal Sphere ........ 80
Henry I: Character and Personal Sphere........ 86
Stephen I: Character and Personal Sphere........ 90
Henry II: Character and Personal Sphere ........ 96
Richard I: Character and Personal Sphere ........ 103
John: Character and Personal Sphere ........ 110
Henry III: Character and Personal Sphere........ 116
3.2.2. The King's Inner Circle ........ 125
Contemporary Expectations........ 125
The Inner Circle of William I........ 128
The Inner Circle of William II ........ 134
The Inner Circle of Henry I........ 141
The Inner Circle of Stephen........ 149
The Inner Circle of Henry II........ 156
The Inner Circle of Richard I........ 161
The Inner Circle of John ........ 168
The Inner Circle of Henry III ........ 173
3.2.3. The King's Justice........ 185
Contemporary Expectations........ 185
The Justice of William I ........ 188
The Justice of William II........ 190
The Justice of Henry I........ 195
The Justice of Stephen ........ 203
The Justice of Henry II........ 211
The Justice of Richard I ........ 220
The Justice of John........ 225
The Justice of Henry III........ 233
3.2.4. The King at War........ 242
Contemporary Expectations........ 242
William I at War ........ 245
William II at War........ 248
Henry I at War........ 252
Stephen at War........ 259
Henry II at War........ 264
Richard I at War........ 271
John at War........ 276

*Henry III at War* ........ *282*
***3.3.5. The King and the Church* ........ *287***
*Contemporary Expectations* ........ *287*
*William I and the Church* ........ *288*
*William II and the Church* ........ *289*
*Henry I and the Church* ........ *294*
*Stephen and the Church* ........ *300*
*Henry II and the Church* ........ *306*
*Richard I and the Church* ........ *319*
*John and the Church* ........ *324*
*Henry III and the Church* ........ *331*
***3.4. The King as Story: the Emerging Image* ........ 340**
***William I as Story* ........ *345***
***William II as Story* ........ *358***
***Henry I as Story* ........ *364***
***Stephen as Story* ........ *367***
***Henry II as Story* ........ *371***
***Richard I as Story* ........ *375***
***John as Story* ........ *384***
***Henry III as Story* ........ *390***
***4. FORGING KINGS* ........ 395**
**5. BIBLIOGRAPHY ........ 402**
**5.1. Primary Sources ........ 402**
**5.2. Secondary Sources ........ 406**

*1. Introduction*

What is 'kingly'? The Middle Ages are long past, and the role of kings has changed considerably since medieval rulers held sway. Yet the ideal medieval monarch still lives, still rides and fights; collective imagination has furnished him with a wealth of attributes, expectations, images and myths. It does, of course, not end there. Ideals provoke comparisons, leaving the memory and interpretation of historical kings to struggle with the standards set out for them. The perhaps most prominent testament to this struggle – once won, once lost – are the cultural depictions of the unlikely brothers that occupied the English throne in direct succession: Richard the Lionheart, in whose honour an imposing warrior statue, mounted, sword raised triumphantly, has been placed just outside the Palace of Westminster, and John Lackland, who is most commonly dubbed "Prince John", as if to belatedly deprive him of the crown he wore longer than his crusading brother. History offers heroes and villains alike – it is deciding who is what that is a matter of some controversy. The history of England between 1066 and 1272 is fertile ground for serching such heroes and villains. Beyond that most prominent pair of brothers, who can, in all probability, be considered the most popular 'good' and 'bad' kings, that period comprises eight remarkable kings and their reputations. With the Battle of Hastings in 1066 a period began that saw the English *regnum* interlocked with continental domains until the loss of the majority of these lands was at last acknowledged – temporarily – in the reign of Henry III. Apart from abandoned claims to continental possessions, Henry III's reign marked another major turning point that makes it an excellent conclusion to this analysis: already during his reign, the parliament had begun to establish itself as a factor in English politics. Kingship, simply put, was not the same anymore. In terms of captivating stories, the period in question features William the Conqueror, next to Henry VIII and Richard the Lionheart one of the most well-known royal figures of England; William II Rufus, whose reputation is still being hotly debated, and, finally, Henry III, a king that seems to have been widely ignored by historians for a long time.

Considering the great significance of kings for the political history of their times, it is hardly surprising that historians have had their part in this tug-of-war over a king's reputation. Especially in biographical works on such kings – but by no means limited to them – we find arguments continuously being produced that, as diverse as they may be, are voiced for no other purpose than to change an image that is perceived unjust. Thus, for example, when appealing for a new interpretation of William the Conqueror within the framework of ritualised politics, David Bates expressed his hope that such an approach would "banish forever the image of the ill-educated soldier"[1] that persistently clung to him; David Crouch claimed that Stephen of England had undeservedly suffered irreparable damage to his reputation "by being the first victim of modern scientific history"[2], while Wilfred Lewis Warren remarked that "Richard's reputation was glorified by an enthusiastic hero-worshipper, while John's was blighted by scurrilous gossip-mongers".[3] In these struggles over reputations, historians may strive to heighten the sense of one monarch's

[1] Bates, The Conqueror's Earliest Historians, p. 140-141.
[2] Crouch, The Reign of King Stephen, p. 342.
[3] Warren, King John, p. 4.

deeds by pointing out the shortcomings of another occupant of the throne, they may attest a problematic historiographical reception of a king, or name missing, incomplete, or biased sources as the root of all evil. Whatever their chosen approach – the attempts at changing a king's reputation seldom, if, indeed, at all, succeed in influencing a collective memory that has been producing narratives of merciful kings and despicable tyrants for centuries.

It is remarkable how long images created by such narratives can endure despite the best efforts of historians. In his 1978 monograph on Richard the Lionheart John Gillingham argued that the king had gained his thoroughly negative image as bloodthirsty, incompetent, and negligent because his approach to kingship did not satisfy the chosen analytical approach of political historians.[4] It requires only minimal knowledge of popular culture to realise that evidently, the image Gillingham characterises as prevalent is in no way consistent with how the warlike crusader-king is collectively remembered. "For nearly 800 years, [he] has been left in the hands of the myth-makers"[5], Gillingham explains – and there is little reason to believe other kings did not meet the same fate, becoming, in the hands of such "myth-makers", what they are today. In cultural memory, medieval kings are handed down with an assessment of their respective kingliness. While not all popular assessments of kings are as readily available as that of Richard the Lionheart, who haunts the vast majority of Robin Hood adaptations, a general 'reputation' is attached to every king. Often, they are not easily pinned down, and figure as vague attributions rather than concrete statements. Nebulous as they are, the images of the respective kings resting in collective memory today are diverse and all of them are judgemental.

Yet how do these assessments come into being? What is it that makes a 'good' king? And, the more intriguing question: how is he different from a 'bad' king? These are questions that we can only seek to answer in an analysis that delves deeper than the prevalent opinion and memory of these kings, be it in pop culture or in historical science. Rather than relying on the current discussion of the qualities of these kings, it needs to assess how these monarchs were perceived and portrayed by the historiographers of their own time, and how that portrayal may have shifted after their death. On the basis of such an assessment, it should be possible to elucidate which of his actions would determine the way he would be remembered, and how narrations of kings that must originally have differed merged until they became what is today perceived to be one distinct image of a monarch.

In the pursuit of these questions, three assumptions are central. The first of them is that whether kings entered history as 'good' or as 'bad' kings depended on their standing within a system of values and ideals inherent in the society of their time. It is apparent that many of the images of kings now persisting in cultural memory have been shaped by the observations of earlier historians – particularly English kings are 'branded' by a tremendous legacy of Victorian master narratives. As Vivian Hunter Galbraith observed in his essay "Good Kings and Bad Kings in English History", the "history of medieval England comes to us at least as much from the great reconstructions of Stubbs and Maitland as from the sources direct"[6]. Yet while this is the

[4] Cf. Gillingham, Richard the Lionheart, p. 5.
[5] Cf. ibid., p. 5.
[6] Cf. Galbraith, Good Kings and Bad Kings, p. 127.

case, even their verdicts had their origin somewhere; that much, at least, can be presumed, in the firm belief that the idea of historians shaping their work out of thin air can be dismissed. Thus, despite these ubiquitous narratives, any research into the images of kings must start with the very first impression they left. Everything that followed built on these impressions. They are not, however, readily available. In order to determine how they can be interpreted, it is essential to establish a viewpoint that is detached from current moral standards and to clarify what exactly constituted the values underlying contemporary judgement. Only if we have established a contemporary system of values can we hope to be able to judge a king in a manner approaching that of contemporaries. It is a complex system with many facets: while historiographers, the majority of them churchmen, would stage their assessment within the decidedly Christian framework of kingly virtues and tyrannical vices, noblemen preferably offered their service to a king who had proved his prowess in battle, displayed courtly splendour and followed a generous policy of patronage – entire dynasties were judged against their predecessors, against myths and against models. The standards these models set out for kings to follow constitute a set of criteria which makes it possible to compare the 'kingliness' of one monarch to that of another, thus allowing to trace similarities and differences both in their conduct and the verdict that was eventually to be passed on them.

The second assumption is that the actions that eventually separated 'good' and 'bad' kings were not necessarily part of everyday rule, but were communicated instead in very particular situations, in elaborate narratives in which the king could 'shine' by displaying his virtues.[7] The distinction between good and bad kingship is made in narrative code, in topoi, in the use of narrated symbols and assessments of their usage. These particular situations and their depictions are immensely powerful. Just how powerful is easily shown. Until today many positive notions reverberate in 'kingly' demeanour, but among these notions we do not find the careful balancing of give and take within at times explosive feudal relationships; neither do they include the strife for a more efficient chancery system, nor, which is perhaps most revealing, do attempts at taxation to sustain the king's policy feature greatly in them – unless, possibly, in occasional celebrated cases of their absence. It would appear that a king that is considered a stereotypical 'good' king did not earn this epithet by simply concerning himself with central political issues of his time and the mundane humdrum of everyday royal routine. Reputation was earned in another way. It travelled in narratives. Kings could work such narratives in their favour, communicating values in conscious acts of self-stylisation, but these are notoriously hard to locate in the source material. Chroniclers would, in their writing, stage such acts – in depictions that might, at times, border closely on the fictional or even cross that threshold altogether. Such noticeably fictitious accounts have often been shunned by historical research, or branded with a number of *caveats* as to their credibility. Yet they had a significant part in shaping collective perception of who can and who cannot be considered a 'good' king. Dismissing them as too openly fictional to be of value is dismissing a chance to understand kingship. For a king, both his successful kingship and his

[7] Or, rather, by his virtues being displayed, seeing that we are dealing almost exclusively with narratives about the king.

literary afterlife depended, to some extent, upon how well he could be turned into a story. This encompassed how well he fitted into the worldly and ecclesiastical ideals of his time, how he staged himself, how well he managed to clothe political decisions in the garb of the symbolically significant.

The third assumption is that the written accounts of kings, whether staged or descriptive, do, as time goes by, lose their initial dissimilarity and merge into dominant 'standards of remembering'. Like any story, the reigns of kings, recounted time and again as later chroniclers drew on earlier material to describe history until the point on which their personal recollection became sufficient, will have accumulated such details as made for the best telling, with the parts that were not well-received gradually vanishing. The different versions will draw nearer to each other, forming distinct patterns, and eventually resulting in the dominant images of kings that persist until today.

For a king, to excel on the field of governance while maintaining sufficient kingly demeanour is a difficult task at the best of times. Assuming that the urgency of securing support by means of impressive and legitimising self-display is all the more pressing when times are not at their best, it is times like these that have been chosen for this analysis. The reigns of the eight English kings between 1066 and 1272 may certainly be considered a period of serious trials for the claims and images of kings, both politically and ideologically.

Politically, the foundation of the Norman dynasty, brought about by the francophone remake of the Scandinavian dominion which the Anglo-Saxon isle had so recently cast off, rested on the shoulders of a man first commonly called 'Bastard', then 'Conqueror'. The second dynasty, that of the Angevins, arose from contested succession and civil war and was tied closely to Anjou, a region that had almost traditionally been in conflict with Normandy and England ever since the duke of Normandy had taken the English crown. Both dynasties precariously balanced their claims to legitimate rule between the feudal superiority of the king of France, the demands of the Norman elite in England and the more muted will of its 'native', subjugated people. Both lines, often against the protest of liegemen who claimed their due loyalty ended at the shores of the island, sought to maintain possessions on either side of the canal; possessions which, during the rule of the second dynasty, grew into a vast conglomeration of territories that has come to be known as the 'Angevin Empire', only to eventually collapse again.[8]

Ideologically, a similarly rough sea had to be navigated as the investiture controversy that had the penitent King Henry IV kneel before the pope at Canossa washed upon England's shores. As a more confident papacy challenged worldly power to subject its secular sword to the command of the spiritual blade of the Church, the role of the king developed towards that of *Deus in Terris,* as opposed to the incarnated, visible role of *Christus in Terris* that the pope claimed for himself.[9] This development was far less dramatic in England than it was in the Holy Roman Empire. It still saw the king as the head of a divine order and left many liturgical elements in kingship, but it

---

[8] For the disputed term "Angevin Empire", see Gillingham, The Angevin Empire, p. 2-3.

[9] Cf. Kantorowicz, Die zwei Körper, p. 111.

certainly affected the overall politics of kingship. To the shifting game of medieval politics, it added a Church that insisted to a greater extent on its independence from worldly dominance.[10]

During that time period, all of the selected kings were measured up against a multidimensional system of values and ideals. Some were famed for their splendour, prudence, prowess, others despised for their greed, foolishness, weakness. Some acquired new lands and privileges, others lost them. We are left with their stories, with momentary glimpses of their lives. It remains to be seen how, between the passionate pen strokes of idealisation, demonisation and the more pragmatic ones of administration, a king's reputation was forged.

### *1.1. Royal Reputations in the Light of Current Research*

What is research into kingship today? Studies of kings are not new. Generations of historians have researched and laboured to construct the chronological scaffolds of their reigns, writing political history and biographies. Studies of how kingship worked can be called a more recent approach in understanding medieval politics; one, at that, which is currently experiencing a revival. The 1960s' criticism of historians focussing on powerful men single-handedly shaping history had led to an approach of researching history with view to structures and institutions – an approach that did, in turn, spark another sort of criticism: history, it was said, had become devoid of people.[11] It is political communication that has moved to the centre of attention: a research strategy that discusses both the individual impact of the one in power and makes use of the beneficial work that has been done concerning structural elements. This concept regards political roles and systems not as rigid or fixed; in this more flexible approach of analysis, the centre of attention is the stylisation of roles through individuals or groups, their claims to certain rights or their declarations of norms – all of which was (and remains) in perpetual flux, constantly being discussed and negotiated.[12] The language of these negotiations is, in premodern times, often seen to have been of highly symbolic character, alive with gestures, rituals, setting.

Symbolic communication is communication the purpose of which is not fulfilled in the sole transfer of a message, but communication that carries additional meaning depending on the context within which it is placed; communication that may, especially when ritualised within a public and political framework, refer to the organisation principle of the society in which it has been uttered.[13] It is a term closely associated with sociological and ethnological studies. Pierre Bourdieu and his approach of defining symbolic capital – the acknowledgement of an individual's reputation, status, prestige – as one of the factors influencing social standing has been of exceptional influence to this field of research and, as Bourdieu's publications were read more and more often, gradually found its way into historical research. The cause of analysing symbolic capital and, with it, symbolic communication, is one that has in Germany been taken up most

[10] Cf. Oakley, Kingship, p. 122; Green, Die normannischen Könige, p. 53-56; Sarnowsky, England im Mittelalter, p. 91.

[11] Cf. Jussen, Diskutieren über Könige, p. xi-xxiv. See also Goetz, Wahrnehmungs- und Deutungsmuster, for the demand to regard individual writers not just as a source of information but as human beings with interests and opinions that merit investigation.

[12] Cf. Jussen, Diskutieren über Könige, p. xv.

[13] Cf. Stollberg-Rilinger, Symbolische Kommunikation in der Vormoderne, p. 504. See also Stollberg-Rilinger, Einleitung, p. 14-18, for the use of symbolic communication for the communication of norms.

prominently by Gerd Althoff and the research cluster of the University of Münster. Combining earlier Anglo-American approaches of analysing the use of gestures for settling conflicts with sociological and anthropological methods, his research centred, from the 1980s onwards, on the Ottonian and Salian emperors of the tenth to the twelfth century.[14] His work on symbolism and rituals – often set in the context of dealing with conflicts – is mostly based upon narrative sources. These, Althoff claims, could contribute much to research into moral concepts, motives for certain actions and patterns of behaviour, despite their commonly being eyed, due to their frequent fictional episodes, with a certain level of suspicion. He argues that the apparant need for fiction in these texts indicated the mindset of their authors and, through them, that of society.[15]

The focus of this research has long been on rituals in particular. As a repeatable string of symbolic actions that possesses an overarching meaning for its participants, they occur with relative frequency in medieval texts. It has long been central to research to assume that rituals – as one form of symbolic communication – provided, in medieval politics, a secure code of conduct especially for situations of conflict, binding agents to a given scheme, obliging them to act within the framework the ritual prescribed.[16] In this vein, a considerable number of studies discussed individual rituals, their form, function and development over time.[17] The inflationary use of the term 'ritual' and the assumption that rituals could thus dictate behaviour has been repeatedly called into question. It has been argued that especially the frequent emotional components of rituals could not have been so easily 'performed' in 'cold blood'; that the effusion of tears and self-humiliation that had, according to chronicles, accompanied supplication rituals or reconciliations could not have been as meticulously planned and performed as the Althoff

[14] Cf. Broekmann, Rigor iustitiae, p. 22-23.
[15] Cf. Garnier and Kamp, Vorwort, p. VIII. Before research began to intensively focus on ritual and ceremonial, there have been various excursions into the realm of the symbolic, analysing individual symbols and their usage especially for representational purposes. Noteworthy in this context is the work Schmitt, Logik der Gesten, which explores the conscious presentation of the body and its gestures in medieval public communication, and the various essays of Percy Ernst Schramm on regalia, blazons and thrones.
[16] Cf. Althoff, Variability of Rituals, p. 71-72. Dörrich, Poetik des Rituals, uses the approach of analysing rituals in a more literary context, regarding medieval literature rather than chronicle material. The study already incorporates the criticism voiced by Philippe Buc (see below). A similar study is Witthöft, Ritual und Text, that consciously withdraws to the realm of 'fictitious' texts to analyse the use and form of ritual acts, claiming, with view to the criticism voiced for the approach of studying ritual, that medieval writers, including chroniclers, could not be seen as directly depicting reality. However, their narratives, already being interpretations of events that were happening, could still be used as reference points that would allow historians to draw conclusions as to how these people constructed and viewed their own reality.
[17] Research into rituals of forgiveness and peace-making has proven especially fruitful. See for instance Koziol, Begging Pardon and Favor, which analyses rituals of supplication in early medieval France and can be regarded as slightly detached from the approach chosen in Münster, being less rigid in its definition of ritual, the rituals depicted consequently less easily decried as gestures that had become empty with repetition. Schreiner, "Gerechtigkeit und Frieden haben sich geküsst", explores the symbolisms of peace-making, also drawing upon English examples: see p. 84-85 for Le Mans surrendering to William I, p. 116-117 for the refused kiss between Hugh of Lincoln and Richard I and p. 120-121 for the significance of the kiss in the Becket dispute. Schreiner, Barfüßigkeit als religiöses und politisches Ritual, explores acts of monkish humiliation as political ritual that expressed regret and could absolve from guilt. Self-humiliation as legitimation of royal policy has been likewise discussed in Weinfurter, Authority and Legitmation, specifically for the case of Henry II of Germany. Also partly to be seen within the context of rituals for peacemaking is Schwendler, Herrschertreffen des Spätmittelalters, whose focus lies on analysing the symbols and rituals employed when two or more medieval rulers would meet. Such conferences could, of course, also result in peace-making (p. 278). Moving away from such conciliatory gestures and rituals, Schenk, Zeremoniell und Politik, discusses the ceremonial of *adventus* as a primarily representative tool, which needed to be viewed apart from rituals as it could not, as rituals would, be instrumentalised as a platform for change, but instead embodied continuity (see esp. p. 67-68).

school of thought seemed to suggest.[18] Philippe Buc's 2001 publication "The Dangers of Ritual", even before considering such volatile forces as emotions, called the entire approach into question, remarking in particular upon the nature of the depictions of rituals with which we are left: the vast majority of them stem from source material that can hardly be classified in any other way than 'narrative'. Buc's criticism has sparked new directions in analysing ritual. Research has begun to take into consideration the individual narrative contexts of ritual rather than focussing on rituals themselves.[19] While earlier research into rituals, focussed on the intrinsic mechanisms of such acts, had helped unearth knowledge of what could be identified as ritual behaviour in the first place, research began to turn to the question of how ritual was employed. Analysing the concrete usage of ritual in historiography opened up a perspective that might be helpful in elucidating grander schemes and motivations behind rituals.

Bearing in mind just such motivations is crucial for an understanding of rituals, since they cannot easily be regarded as the very fixed system that was assumed in the early research on rituals. This has been a point central to Buc's criticism: there was, he argued, so much evidence of failed rituals that it could by no means be assumed that rituals provided "an unambiguous system of communication"[20] and, furthermore, that "to perform rituals … must in many cases have positively been a gamble, because one's enemies might manipulate it or disrupt it"[21]. Gamble or not, and whatever the intentions of the individual participants, it stands uncontested that rituals constituted a system of expectations and values. Whether or not – or to which extent – participants were required to adhere to this system is a question that could yield further understanding of politics incorporating ritual. Since the reliability of ritual has been called into question, the current tendency is to analyse medieval politics with a view to the 'rules of the game'. The term, again coined by Bourdieu, describes rules implicit to actions within social fields; rules that can be derived by observation of behaviour in certain situations, but cannot be grasped

---

[18] See Dinzelbacher, Warum weint der König? esp. p. 24 and 36-45. Among other arguments, Dinzelbacher maintains that the extent of such profuse weeping pointed to the wish of chroniclers to have these tears seen as 'real'. While, certainly, tears might be faked, an emotional breakdown that resulted in profuse weeping could not, and was seen as divinely inspired. For this, see also Nagy, Religious Weeping as Ritual, and a short note in Krause, Konflikt und Ritual, p. 171. For the use of tears as an established means of public communication, see Becher, 'Cum lacrimis et gemitu', and of course the fundamental essay Althoff, Empörung, Tränen, Zerknirschung, that postulated the conscious 'use' of emotions in communication. Wenzel, Höfische Repräsentation, p. 142, notes more distinctly and from the perspective of literature that public communication used specific forms of emotions rather than the 'raw' basic emotions available to human beings, utilising stylised expressions of emotions that were recognised as a tool of the public symbolic communication of grief, joy, love or friendship.

[19] Cf. Schwendler, Herrschertreffen des Spätmittelalters, p. 76. See also Krause, Konflikt und Ritual, p. 43, for a similar reading of Buc's criticism that sees rituals foremost as "elements of the narrative structure of texts". At the same time, Krause, Konflikt und Ritual, offers an 'overhauled' general overview of the post-Buc views on ritual that explores many aspects of earlier research on rituals, such as the ostentation of tears, submission rituals and the conscious balancing of mercy and rigour in punishments. In many aspects, the work follows Althoff's theses, and also reaffirms that rituals could not possibly have taken place without elaborate prior discussion (p. 214-220). One step removed from this approach, again focussing on performance, symbols and gesture as a language as such, and not upon rituals in particular, is Tschacher, Königtum als lokale Praxis, which analyses representations of rulers focussed not on individual rulers, virtues or even a time, but on the place of Aachen as the locale in which such representations were staged.

[20] Philippe Buc, Dangers of Ritual, p. 8.

[21] Ibid.

in actual legislation.[22] Since the 'rules of the game' are not the product of a regulation fixed *a priori* but a fluid conception that takes shape depending on precedence, tradition, interests and the current relations of power within the social field in question,[23] the term implies, contrary to the very fixed 'ritual', that among the different players of the game, there may have been the occasional cheat[24] – or even someone who might knock the gaming table over altogether.

There is more to the game: players, cheats – and storytellers. While we may not be aware of what individual actors within the game may have thought while they played by or against the rules, we are left with the testimony of those who 'observed' their actions, and chose to commit them to writing. The vast majority of these observers were indirect witnesses at best, and the current events of the 'game' would reach them only via long and winding channels of communication. Being themselves bound by the conventions and ideas of their time, writers – who, much more often than not – considered themselves an instance of moral judgement – would record and subsequently judge events that they thus 'witnessed'. Their judgement hinged on how how these events measured up to the 'rules of the game'. Thus, the way in which a king would act with respect to these rules – whether adhering to them, bending or even breaking them – would lie at the very heart of any judgement an individual chronicler would pass on the king. If we accept the underlying rules, unwritten though they may largely be, as the framework within which contemporaries would judge actions, they are precisely the yardstick against which they would measure individuals. As chroniclers, quite apart from their often not being present at events, considered themselves to be writing for the 'Higher Truth'[25] – the way things were meant to be – it is not rare to find stories that are, if not completely fictional, then at least greatly exaggerated. Myth, fiction and stories had their fixed place in medieval historical narrative. The writers of these works had a different understanding of the purpose and nature of history, and the legitimation of power played a considerable role in this understanding.[26] A dramatic ending to

---

[22] Cf. Kamp, Die Macht der Spielregeln, p. 1-3. See also Althoff, Demonstration und Inszenierung, for an earlier use of the term "rules of the game" that analysed medieval public communication as acts of representation adhering to specific rules that should ideally not be broken so as to preserve honour; the essay, however, maintains the often-criticised notion that such acts of public communication were commonly agreed on beforehand.

[23] Cf.Kamp, Die Macht der Spielregeln, p. 5.

[24] Cf. Buc, Dangers of Ritual, p. 8.

[25] Cf. ibid., p. 249.

[26] Cf. Goetz, "Konstruktion der Vergangenheit", p. 240. Goetz argues that, on the whole, medieval writers viewed myths and miracles as natural part of their historiographic work, that they had a different understanding of time, drawing no line between what is now regarded as distinctive epochs. They would employ history, the purpose of which was often legitimation and the construction of identity, as legitimatory tool that would grow all the more powerful the longer the events upon which institutions and potentates took recourse lay in the past. See also Epp, Von Spurensuchern und Zeichendeutern, for another assessment of the purpose of medieval historiography, which comes to the conclusion that reporting the 'truth' was not the main aim of these historiographers. With their narratives that (not least) sought to establish a moral lesson for readers, they would seek to demonstrate and interpret how individual episodes, whether fact or fiction, were to be seen in the context of the overall salvation of mankind (see esp. p. 48-49). Such an understanding of history is, of course, so very different from a modern viewpoint that it must seem preposterous to use chronicle accounts as mere sources for 'facts'. For the legitimatory tendency of historiography, see also Spiegel, The Past as Text, p. 84-102, which invokes the great value set by historical precedent and the age of claims for the justifications of actions as an aspect that noticably shaped the mindset of historiographic writing. Under that influence, the past was recorded to protect the memory of great deeds and provide *exempla* to draw upon for those who lived later. Ashe, Fiction and History, explores fictional constructions of the past as building identity and myth with regard to English history. It is on p. 17 that she, too, vindicates the usage of accounts that, on the surface, seem heavily biased, as invaluable key to understanding mindsets.

a king's life, dark forebodings on the eve of battle, emulations of mythical incidents – there are many narrative elements that can be employed in the creation of 'Higher Truth'. Higher Truth cannot be equated with pure fiction, historical writing cannot be equated with literature. Historiography, unlike literature, is not content with suspending disbelief until a story is told. It lays claim to reality.[27]

It is this attribute of historiography that makes the understanding even of episodes that are deemed pure fiction so very indispensable. On the one side, these ficitious accounts allow a glimpse at what has been called a history of mentalities, allowing analyses of the way in which contemporaries viewed the world. As such, they would allow us insights into the perception of the 'rules of the game'. In seeking to understand the world view of writers, their norms and ideals, we are getting closer to why they believed they had to judge actions in a certain way[28] – why, in short, they decreed one king as bad, another as good. These depictions are of course highly stylised, but in failing to accept and analyse what is today perceived as openly fictional in the wish to plumb the depths of truth, an aspect vital to the understanding of how kingship worked would be sorely neglected. Much research has been directed in the way of 'truth'. Against the backdrop of (alleged) truth, it may be rewarding to reconstruct fiction's impact. It is an impact that has very real consequences not only in the king's afterlife, but is already of importance and in effect while the monarch still breathes: most of his subjects would see him exceedingly rarely, if, indeed, at all. It is from stories of his deeds that his subjects nurture their image of him.

'Rules of the game' are a vital starting point. Whatever behaviour displayed or claimed to have been displayed by the selected kings as they were adhering – or not adhering – to the rules would eventually enter into the judgement passed on them. Likewise, the discourse about rituals cannot be dismissed altogether, despite all the criticism it has earned. While studying rituals in order to derive 'truth' may be fraught with pitfalls of interpretation, they are far less problematic when viewed as part of a narration that aimed to stage and, ultimately, judge individual kings. Against a background such as this, rituals are but one aspect of a richly structured narration that built upon the dense system of symbols available in its corresponding society. Rituals, symbols, myths and topoi – they are all part of the very fertile narrative soil from which the depiction of kings would spring.

---

[27] A similar distinction is made by Clauss, Kriegsniederlagen, p. 95, who distinguishes historiography from literature by stating that historiography uses 'reality' as basis for their narration of a subjective 'reality' they perceived as 'real'. With the purpose in mind to educate future generations, historiography does of course have more functions than the mere construction of reality for the sake of narrative construction: in writing up a past, distinctly with the aim in mind to educate others, writers can be said to 'create' a past reality for its readers.

[28] For the research approach of a history of mentalities, see Goetz, "Vorstellungsgeschichte", as an introduction into the purpose and methods of the approach. Goetz vindicates the work of medieval authors 'as such' – not just the allegedly 'objective' information that can be deduced from it by means of long and intensive labour – as a source of interest to the historian, since, he maintains, these accounts taken for themselves would already reveal much about the time in question. It is the aim of this approach, he argues, to explore how contemporaries subjectively perceived events that took place in their world. (see especially p. 4 and 8). See also Goetz, Wahrnehmungs- und Deutungsmuster, p. 24-25, for an overview of the central arguments to his approach that, again, fiercely refutes the idea that fictious accounts would 'manipulate' historical truth and were thus not worth investigating. Goetz, "Konstruktion der Vergangenheit", deals exclusively with the value of fictionality for historical research.

Analysing symbolic communication and studying signs and symbols has rapidly become an interdisciplinary approach. Having begun in linguistics, it quickly spread to literary studies, sociology and political science. History, as a discipline, joined that discourse rather late, despite the impressive abundance of information available in the surviving material; perhaps, as Althoff has suggested, because it had long underestimated the question's relevancy.[29] While signs and symbols are the theoretical framework necessary for the analysis of the source material, the central question behind the inquiries into royal reputations is one belonging to the field of research into the nature of memory: how did a certain, collectively remembered image come into being?

To live on, in this case for almost a thousand years, memories need to be repeated, discussed, to be kept alive. Seeing that they are, very figuratively and fittingly spoken, 'recollection' – the constant re-gathering and re-organisation of fragmentary pieces of information, ever aligned anew in the light of current circumstances – every repetition is likely to have its part in a gradual change. The effect is easily traceable in everyday life: a story, if well-received by those who listen to it, will almost inadvertently accumulate details and embellishments, or even small and grand exaggerations with every new telling. The parts which evidently no one wanted to hear vanish. It is thus that Maurice Halbwachs theorised that, as memories are communicated, social responses slowly construct veritable guidelines of what and how things are being remembered.[30] Once rules of remembrance have been erected, a certain mode of recollection established, a specific interpretation of events has gathered momentum, it is hard to change. The results are powerful, 'standardised' versions of the past residing in collective memory, in their constructedness invisible until their reality is challenged by opposition or questioned by close observation.[31] Changing a given set of collectively remembered facts, images, beliefs or superstitions is no mean feat, requires considerable effort, and can often appear to resemble building castles in the sand: sooner or later, the edifice will succumb to wind, waves and weather, leaving the landscape just as it had been before.

The reason why we encounter these gradually solidifying narrations of the past lies in the nature of societal memory. Divided, following the propositions made by Jan Assmann, into communicative and cultural memory, collective memory houses two very different versions of the past, both of which are simultaneously available to a society. He defined the subcategory of cultural memory as a society's 'long-term-memory', that part of collective memory that comprises pre-biographical data and is central to a society's identity and sense of purpose. Communicative memory, on the other hand, was to be viewed as a society's 'short-term-memory', in which, unorganized, unspecialized and, due to the events still being circulated in current discourse,

---

[29] Cf. Althoff, Kultur der Zeichen und Symbole, p. 275.
[30] Cf. Hasberg, Erinnerungs- oder Geschichtskultur? p. 37-38; Pethes, Kulturwissenschaftliche Gedächtnistheorien, p. 51-58, for an overview of Maurice Halbwachs' theories. See also Assmann, Die Katastrophe des Vergessens, p. 346-347. See Zierold, Gesellschaftliche Erinnerung, p. 43-48, for a summary of memory as construction of the present and ibid., p. 59-79, for a summary of the approaches to memory as social construct.
[31] Cf. Erll, Literatur als Medium des kollektiven Gedächtnis, p. 257.

highly changeable memories rest.[32] Between these stable and shifting memories, there is, thus, a constantly moving gap. As time progresses, the precise and differentiated recollections of communicative memory are moved into cultural memory, and lose their distinctness. They do, during that journey, gain another aspect: a certain pre-conceived structure. For the Middle Ages, we can, of course, hardly assume an institutionalised, impersonal memory to the full extent in which that may be the case for modern times cultural memory; for that, our source material is too scarce and isolated. Nonetheless, the memory that we find recorded in works of historiography is always memory that does not simply store the past, but stores precisely that past which is viewed as adequate.[33] This, at least, can fearlessly be transferred to the practices of medieval chroniclers. In the examples that constitute the majority of this work, it is abundantly clear that they sorted, judged, categorised, remembered and forgot in correspondence with their own ideals, sometimes even visibly modelling individual characters on already existing stereotypes, on glorified kings and despicable tyrants. For the period in question, this may be even amplified by the use to which chroniclers were wont to put history: memory tended very much to be drawn on for legitimation and moral lessons.[34] Such a use of memory would seem to facilitate a memory that categorised stronger than modern memory might. If memory was to be used as a storehouse of legitimation strategies, as a pool of *exempla* that demonstrated the merits of adequate behaviour, it seems reasonable to assume that individual episodes, for better accessibility, would be trimmed and fitted to correspond with established narratives. If that were the case, it would go one step further towards explaining the remarkable tenacity some stories possessed in collective memory.

Realising the tenacity of well-received stories could be painful. It has long been assumde that the Angevin kings employed the legend-king Arthur for a particular identificatory purpose. He was written into history as fighting Charlemagne side by side with Aeneas' grandson Brutus before founding the kingdom of England.[35] Arthur, however, as the once and future king, had a strong tradition as symbol of Welsh resistance to Henry II's rule and hence needed to be duly

---

[32] Cf. Pethes, Kulturwissenschaftliche Gedächtnistheorien, p. 59-70, esp. p. 62-65; Hasberg, Erinnerungs- oder Geschichtskultur, p. 41; Assmann, Die Katastrophe des Vergessens, p. 342-344.

[33] Cf. Pethes, Kulturwissenschaftliche Gedächtnistheorien, p. 64-65.

[34] Burke, Geschichte als soziales Gedächtnis, p. 296, theorises, albeit reluctantly and with the very definite statement that this could not be enough of an explanation, that it is likely that a perception of similarity between historical person and an existing stereotype or story might inspire fantasy, and result in narrations beginning to circulate which, owing to the particular mode of re-telling of oral culture, gradually develop closer and closer resemblance to the original 'story' stereotype. Erll, Literatur als Medium des kollektiven Gedächtnis, p. 253, notes how the form of cultural memory depends on the respective technology of its culture. According to Elena Esposito, the media available in the Middle Ages formed a cultural memory that was used as a storehouse of *exempla*, a 'rhethorical' memory, see Esposito, Soziales Vergessen, p. 98-182, esp. 161-172, for the functioning of such a memory. For a more concrete historical perspective on this particular use of memory, see Althoff, Das argumentative Gedächtnis, p. 128.

[35] Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 271-272. Gillingham, The Cultivation of History, p. 38, argues that the lack of king-centred chronicles during Henry II's reign and the negative connotations that continued to be ascribed to Arthur during the reign of Henry II needed to be interpreted as Henry II neither actively fostering the writing of Latin history, nor using Arthur, who, he writes, would not be employed as a figure of identification until the reign of his son Richard the Lionheart. In that, Gillingham argues against an opinion that has long been maintained in research. For a similar viewpoint, see also Aurell, Henry II and Arthurian Legend. However, the story of Henry II being informed about the site of the grave and consequently ordering the search for it remains clearly connected to Henry II. Certainly, the actual 'value' of Arthur as a figure that might help legitimise and mystify Angevin kingship can be doubted, but at least the vague connection to him was establishing some sort of link to the English past that the second outsiders within 150 years might have attempted to propagate in their favour.

modified. The king, reputedly following the suggestion of a Welsh bard, ordered to search for Arthur's grave – presumably because, once his grave had been found, the mythical king would no longer live on as a king that was likely to return. In 1191, regrettably after Henry's death, the grave was discovered at Glastonbury Abbey, which had, as cynics may comment, rather conveniently burned down seven years before.[36] Within the grave, 'relics' were 'found' that revealed the Angevin kings to be descendents of Arthur himself.[37] The myth, however, whether it was meant to be consciously used or not, was never entirely under Angevin control. It backfired during the reign of King John, when numerous noblemen chose to support the claim of his nephew Arthur rather than that of the king, and his subjects in northern France rose against him. Said Arthur, born posthumously to John's elder brother Geoffrey, had, according to the contemporary chronicler William of Newburgh, raised hopes that the long-expected legend-king of prophecy had finally returned.[38]

Just as Arthur's impending return from the isle of Avalon was hard to erase from twelfth century collective memory, it may be assumed that reputations of kings, once established, developed a similar persistence. Taking up Jan Assmann's distinction between subcategories of collective memory throws an interesting light on this gradual shaping of a king's image. His argumentation opens up interesting perspectives for an analysis of medieval reputations. The genesis of a king's reputation is likely to have taken place when the differing accounts of his life – supposedly such material as was written while the king was still alive, those pieces of evidence that might be considered witnesses of a communicative memory – gradually converged into accounts that differed less, reducing the multiple facets of a king's character and conduct to a more general, standardised epithet. On this basis, it should be able to trace out when, and to what end, traditions began to crystallise from what were initially different accounts of each king's life; to trace, in other words, cultural memory in the making.

Regarding the research approaches of both symbolic communication and collective memory, English medieval history remains a territory breached by few. The focus of historical research into symbolic communication was on the empire and its emperors, although the Muenster collaborative research centre has carried its research across Europe (excepting, notably, a detailed study on the British Isles), beyond Europe[39] and well beyond the Middle Ages. For the analysis of English kings, and, indeed, for English history in general from the vantage point of symbolism, there is, as yet, no comprehensive interpretative model – perhaps owed to the wealth of administrative sources available for English history, particularly, of course, from the twelfth century onwards, when royal records began to have such depth of detail that they are still far from completely analysed.[40] Björn Weiler proposed to tackle this deficiency by investing "more work … on the very basis for any investigation into political culture, that is, the narrative

---

[36] Cf. Higham, King Arthur, p. 230.
[37] Cf. Aurell, Könige aus dem Hause Anjou, p. 97.
[38] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 3, ch. 7, p. 235.
[39] Oesterle, Kalifat und Königtum, for example, compares the representation of rulers from the Fatamid Caliphate of Egypt with that of the Ottonian and early Salian dynasty of the Holy Roman Empire, laying a special focus on ceremonial processions. Alexandru, Herrschaftliche Repräsentation also regards rulers and their representation, albeit selecting the first crusade as a point of contact between the western and Byzantine world.
[40] Cf. Weiler, Kingship, Rebellion and Political Culture, p. 35.

sources"[41]; suggesting research especially into the "intellectual framework, the cultural parameters and the genre-specific conventions of historical writing"[42]. One work that would live up to this requirement is Sigbjørn Olsen Sønnesyn's recent exploration of William of Malmesbury's ethics as evident from his writings – which also lengthily touches upon the role of kings in the historian's narrative.[43]

It is true that research concerning English history at times touches upon the symbolic value of certain gestures: in an essay as early as 1985, the English historian John Gillingham described briefly how, in policy and self-staging, Richard the Lionheart fulfilled the ideals of kingship of his time,[44] Judith Green, in her extensive 2009 biography of Henry I dedicates a chapter to the king's use of rituals and symbolic gestures,[45] while Björn Weiler, even closer to the 'classic' approach of research into symbolism, has dedicated an essay to the use of symbolism in the reign of Henry III.[46] Similarly, the ritual of coronation has received scholarly attention.[47] Beyond such works, it is usually individual episodes tinged with symbolical connotations that have merited the interest of researchers. The conquest was among it.[48] The dramatic display of repentance that Henry II performed after the murder of archbishop Thomas Becket which he had, allegedly, caused through unfortunate utterance in one of his notorious fits of temper, has stirred studies as much as the symbolism of the conflict that preceded the king's remorse[49] – just as the issue of the Angevin kings' anger and its self-stylising use in politics and finance has had great impact on, for example, the work of John E. A. Jolliffe.[50] Klaus van Eickels comparative study of the performative, symbolical and political dimensions of the Anglo-French relationship covering the time from the eleventh to the fourteenth century[51] is a rare exception. Generally speaking, comparative studies of the reigns and gestures of several kings remain as yet to be written, although it is studies such as these that may be able to make the greatest contribution to the genesis of an interpretative model applicable for English kingship and politics.

The question which the study of collective memory helps us ask goes beyond symbolism, even if the symbolism of individual gestures and depictions is a major part of the narrations concerning kings. It is the question of how reputations were formed. Whether or not a king was a

---

41 Weiler, Symbolism and Politics, p. 40.
42 ibid.
43 Sønnesyn, Sigbjørn Olsen, William of Malmesbury, esp. p. 187-258, for the role of kings in William of Malmesbury's narrative.
44 Cf. Gillingham, The Art of Kingship, p. 17-23.
45 Cf. Green, Henry I.
46 Weiler, Symbolism and Politics. Carpenter, The Burial of King Henry III, is a further worthwhile essay on symbolism in the reign of Henry III, analysing, as the title suggests, the regalia employed and ideology expressed in the burial of Henry III.
47 Schramm, Geschichte des englischen Königtums im Lichte der Krönung, analyses English history solely with view to the ritual of coronation, tracing the slow evolution of the ritual and its significance.
48 Cf. Nelson, The Rites of the Conqueror, which discusses the use of ritual in the accession of William I; see especially p. 118 for the use of the topos of a king hesitant to assume office. The topos itself is discussed in Weiler, Rex Renitens.
49 On the use of symbolism in the dispute between king and archbishop, see Reuter, 'Velle sibi fieri in forma hac'. On the significance of the kiss of peace in the Becket dispute, see Schreiner, Osculum pacis, p. 185-187 and, from the same author, "Rituale, Zeichen, Bilder", p. 117-121. Warren's very detailed biography "Henry II" also includes numerous detailed descriptions of the symbols and gestures employed, see p. 485-531.
50 Jolliffe, Angevin Kingship.
51 Van Eickels, Vom inszenierten Konsens.

'good' king has haunted historiographical writing from the very first testimonies of contemporaries – and it is a question that persists until this very day. Research on kings never truly gets old; unlike other topics that shift in and out of oblivion depending on the interests of scholars, these most prominent figures, centre of most of the kingdom's written output, are almost constantly reworked and reconsidered. Naturally, some kings find favour and interest more easily than others, but, in general, there is always some recent scholarship to be found on the individual regents. This scholarship does, as a matter of course, not always deal with their reputations, or does so only partially.

There are numerous works that consider the effectiveness of a king in different fields of governance that may touch upon the question of how competent (and, one might say, 'good') a ruler was;[52] but, apart from articles that consider a king's reputation in a certain field,[53] or assess his reputation in an individual narrative context,[54] it is the biographically-centered monographs on individual monarchs that discuss the issue most intensively. However, not all kings in question can boast a recent publication that considers their reputation in the way required by current research standard: incorporating both documentary and narrative source material, remaining critical of both, and professing the aim of a treatment that is as objective as possible. Monographs and essays alike often tackle the question of how a king's image has been

[52] For instance, Bolton, Inflation, Economics and Politics, considers the question of whether inflation could be seen as a reason for John's 'failure' as king. Summerson, Kingship, Government and Political Life, briefly assesses economic, idealistic and juridical aspects of the reigns from 1160-1280. His comments on reputations are most extensive when Henry III and John are concerned. The latter's kingship he calls a fatal combination of "political clumsiness and practical efficiency" (p. 220), the king himself as possessing "cruelty", "mean-spiritedness", but also "single-mindedness and energy" (p. 225). Henry III he considered a pious man with great ambitions, both political and as far as his office as king was concerned, who "had neither the means nor the personality to support his aspirations" (p. 225, 227). He describes Henry III's reign as a sequence of failures, culminating in the succession of his son Edward, who would bring full royal control and dominance back to the isles (p. 235). Stringer, The Reign of Stephen, assesses Stephen's reign primarily in terms of warfare and the role the king took during the reign, noting that Stephen's military failure was to be blamed on a great number of factors rather than solely on the king's inefficient leadship (e.g. p. 27). See Turner, John's military reputation reconsidered, for an overview of the reputation the king 'enjoyed'.

[53] Cooper, Timorous Historians and the Personality of Henry I, elaborately assesses the highly ambiguous reputation Henry I possessed, in terms of character, among his contemporaries, tracing the ambiguity in the depictions to some extent to Henry I's alleged dislike for ridicule (p. 65). Another perspective on another king is that of Lloyd, King Henry III, the Crusade and the Mediterranean, which analyses the personal affinity Henry III felt for the crusade, his modes of representing himself as crusader, desire to emulate his ancestors, but also the political considerations that drove him towards the crusade and the kingdom of Sicily. Weiler, Henry III and the Staufen Empire, also deals with Henry III's 'foreign' policy, and, among other remarks, draws the conclusion that the actions of Henry III would only then appear foolish if the framework of values and norms of his time was ignored, and his connection to Europe ignored in favour of an exclusive focus on England (p. 208), thus effectively appealing for a re-evaluation of the king. It is most striking, however, that the re-evaluation of Henry III in terms of virtues of kingship does not yield the result possibly hoped for, as the following will show. His negative depiction may largely be the fault of Matthew Paris' singularly adverse way of portraying him, but neither did other writers appear to be overly fond of the religious, peaceful but apparently unexciting king. Chronicle material, at least, does not seem to be able to offer the re-evaluation of Henry III Weiler has suggested in this article.

[54] Nederman, Changing Face of Tyranny, for instance, explores the reputation of Stephen as a 'bad' king, or 'tyrant', in the works of John of Salisbury. Bouet, La 'Felicitas' de Guillaume le Conquerant, analyses the Conqueror's reign, particularly, of course, the Conquest itself, with view to the legitimising concept of *felicitas*, assessing the narrative use of the Conqueror's success in military matters, which, being interpreted as divinely granted triumph, reflected very positively on his reputation. A work that is relatively close to the approach used to establish the contemporary reputation of kings in the following, is Dennis' essay Image-making for the Conquerors, which collects exclusively contemporary testimonies on the reputation of primarily William the Conqueror, and contrasts the Conqueror's reputation to that of Cnut.

historiographically treated in the course of time,[55] effectively incorporating the discourse of the respective 'goodness' of individual kings into their narrative. Quite often, particularly biographies do not only recount the gradual development of a reputation, but also regard it critically, attempting to 'right' misconceptions.[56] Such attempts may be appeals to use more varied chronicle material,[57] be more critical of the surviving chronicle material,[58] or may exhort the research community to see diverging aspects behind the unanimous verdict of contemporaries.[59]

There is widespread agreement that a king needs to be judged on the basis of the ideals of his time, not on the basis of what modern-day historians consider ideal. Common procedure, despite this declaration, has, however, not been to establish a framework of how kings were judged by contemporaries, but instead, to place individual kings next to their good (or bad) predecessor or successor and point out how one individual king did not do anything worse – or several things better than another, and his reputation should therefore be rethought, considered not justified, or

---

55 Henry II is treated, for instance, by Lyon, Henry II: A Non-Victorian Interpretation, which, as the title suggests, is mainly concerned with critically assessing the victorian interpretation of the king; Meecham-Jones, Introduction, considers Henry II's reputation as a foreword to a collective of recent essays on the king, noting his outstandingly positive depiction among historians, while Vincent, Introduction: Henry II and the Historians, offers an overview of modern opinions on Henry II as king. For Richard the Lionheart, see Gillingham, The Art of Kingship; John's standing among contemporary historiographers of France and England is analysed in Bradbury, Philip Augustus and King John.

56 Warren's 1961 publication 'King John' states the king's sinister reputation as incentive for the biographical re-evaluation of his reign. On p.10-15, he discusses the gradual development of John's reputation, from Roger of Wendover to the 19th century. Holt's concise study "King John", published only two years later, deals exclusively with the king's reputation, and attempts to re-assess it, explaining both its development and the influence of source material on John's emerging reputation. Turner's relatively recent biography "King John. England's Evil King?" has a title that already says it all, just like the smaller work of Seele, entitled "King John: An Underrated King". Similarly, Barlow, The Feudal Kingdom of England, p. 394 notes that "John's true character has been perplexingly obscured by the evil legend ... which was quickly created in order to explain his failure". The same work would also vindicate William Rufus, the second 'evil' king: on p. 147-149, Barlow remarks that "it is hard to do justice to William Rufus and his policies because all the writers of the time were bitterly prejudiced against him", and moves on to assess Rufus' reign especially with view to his (positive) secular qualities, fiercely vindicating the king, claiming that "many monsters of cruelty and faithlessness lived in the eleventh century; but William II cannot be counted among them." Barlow, William Rufus, the same writer's biography of the king is written in a very similar vein, analysing and largely refuting the faults found with the king. For another biography very much concerned with the king's reputation, see Mason, King Rufus.

57 For instance, Gillingham, Kingship, Chivalry and Love, elaborates how the positive testimony of Geoffrey Gaimar's Estoire des Engleis should not – as has often been done – be dismissed in the overall negative discourse about William Rufus. Another very beautiful example for this appeal is Thomas, Violent Disorder in King Stephen's England, which argues that modern historians have been *too* critical of contemporary source material describing the atrocities perpetrated during Stephen's reign, taking any notion of normality, and the lengthy moralising passages found in the chronicle narratives as an incentive to undermine their credibility (see p. 140-142). Thomas argues that these accounts, often dismissed, should be given some credence.

58 Berg, Regnum Norm-Anglorum, ascribes the vastly differing reputations of William I, William II, and Henry I to the interest the respective kings had shown in 'active' image-making and the writing of history. He notes that William II had earned such a dismal reputation because he showed no interest in fostering historiography, see esp. p. 173-174.

59 Markowski, Bad King, Bad Crusader? for instance, makes a point of arguing that Richard's crusade was far from a success. Harper-Bill, John and the Church of Rome, analyses John's ecclesiastical policy, in large parts mitigating the accusations raised against him. Holt, The Northerners, is not as easily fitted into this category. On p. 143-144, Holt argues how John, despite the both condemning and admiring remarks that his reign merited, must have presented a dominating, impressive figure for contemporaries; a character trait that made him an object of fascination. A more accessible, excellent example for this type of struggle is the question to what extent Stephen's reign could be seen as problematic or even failed. There has been repeated criticism of the widespread notion that the king's reign equalled turbulent anarchy, and frequent appeals to re-assess this phase of English history. One relatively recent attempt at reassessment would be Graeme, Restoration and Reform, which analyses the differences in policy between the reigns of Stephen and Henry II.

be seen in a different light. Such attempts appear to easily escalate into veritable feuds over the reputation of individual kings, inciting fierce condemnation as well as exuberant praise. These discussions are, at times, conducted with such passion that, along their lines, scholars can be distinguished into 'supporters' of one king or another; groups that then proceed to vindicate their own position and consequently attempt to undermine that of opposing groups. These individual tugs-of-war are particularly intense when a king perceived as bad was directly succeeded by a king that was perceived as good – or vice versa; in exactly those cases, to be brief, in which the differences in chronicle opinion were at their most noticeable. This is the case with William II and Henry I,[60] with Henry I and Stephen,[61] with Stephen and Henry II,[62] with Richard I and John. From among these heavily disputed reputations, the most striking is the dispute over the reputation of Richard I and John, where the struggle does indeed rage fiercely.

A case in point is Ralph V. Turner's essay "Good or Bad Kingship: The Case of Richard the Lionheart", in which he notes that interpreting Richard's reputation was made difficult because of the huge divergence between contemporary and modern values, and that "scholars today should recover a medieval measurement and judge Richard by that gauge, avoiding anachronistic twentieth-century reckonings"[63]. The general direction of the essay is a vindication of King John against the good reputation ascribed to Richard the Lionheart by John Gillingham, emphasising how it was mainly the prevalence of warlike audacity as a virtue that earned the Lionheart his good reputation.[64] Another, particularly striking example is a very dated assessment of John: the king is vindicated with the statement that Richard's "barbaric strength and ferocity", strategic knowledge, "talents of a troubadour" and "some skill in expression" was all that saved him from earning "contempt as human being, but did not entitle him to the title of king."[65]

---

[60] In his vindication of William II Rufus, Barlow, The Feudal Kingdom of England, p. 148, already mentioned above, notes that the treatment the king suffered at the hands of contemporary writers was wholly unjustified, and that his nature and secular qualities meant that "had he been less flamboyant he would have been esteemed by posterity at least as good a king as his brother Henry and probably a better man." Consequently, the judgement of Henry I is less flattering than that of other writers. Barlow notes that Henry I "seems as tyrannical as his brother, and much crueller", so that his good reputation among contemporaries could be seen as his greatest achievement (p. 171); he notes that Henry I was a harsh statesman (p. 201). Hollister, Henry I, p. 373-382, seizes upon this line of argument, lamenting that the efforts to rehabilitate William II had reinforced stereotypes of Henry I as cruel, and leveled the greater skill with which Henry I allegedly dealt with the church. Hollister's entire chapter on the king and the Church lengthily compares Henry I and William II with regard to vacancies and exploitation under their rule, an analysis interpreted greatly to the reputational disadvantage of William II and in favour of Henry I.

[61] Hollister, Henry I and the Anglo-Norman magnates, explores the relationship between king and nobility, making note of the king's widespread reputation as an oppressor of the magnates (p. 93) before moving on to explain the practices of the king's reign, and ending with the argument that Henry I's lordship was by no means too strong; rather, Stephen's had been too weak. Crouch, The Reign of King Stephen, p. 16-17, takes the opposite approach and places Stephen in a less unfavourable light, noting that despite Henry I's increasingly good reputation among historians and his undeniable political vision, "there remains something monstrous about him", while Stephen possessed "genuine humanity".

[62] With regard to Stephen's reputation when measured up against both Henry I and Henry II, Crouch, The Reign of King Stephen, p. 340, noted that "Stephen's misfortune was to be the successor of Henry I and the predecessor of Henry II, both the darlings of the school of Anglo-American constitutionalist and administrative historians who dominated the writing of history between the 1870s and the 1970s."

[63] Turner, Good or Bad Kingship, p. 63-64.

[64] Cf. ibid., especially p. 66-67, and 76-77. For Gillingham's view on Richard, see especially Gillingham, The Art of Kingship.

[65] Lehmann, Johann ohne Land, p. 130. The partially translated quote reads: "Die Kraft und Wildheit eines Barbaren, die Strategie eines Divisionsgenerals, die Talente eines Troubadours und einige Geschicklichkeit im Ausdruck bewahrten ihn vor der Verachtung als Mensch, aber berechtigten ihn nicht zu dem Titel eines Königs. Sein Übermut,

Doubtlessly such works serve their purpose. They are illuminating for the modern perception, depiction and judgement of these kings, informing historical science how to view and evaluate them from our current point of view. They do not, however, touch upon a professed aim: to discard modern standards and explore what contemporaries considered to be good kingship. An often-cited attempt to do just that has been made by Vivian H. Galbraith's essay "Good Kings and Bad Kings in English History". While much of the essay was devoted to unmasking just how Victorian interpretations of medieval kings were still prevalent in the judgements passed on them, Galbraith also noted how contemporary notions influenced the judgement of kings: "to the chroniclers therefore – and they represented fairly the more educated opinion of the time – a king was 'good' in so far as, first, he dealt rightly and even generously by the Church; and secondly, in so far as he hammered his enemies in successful war."[66] While his witty statement on chroniclers' judgement of royal activity is, entirely without doubt, beautiful to cite for both its brevity and pointedness, it does not offer more than a starting point for evaluating contemporary notions of kingship. Emma Mason's essay "William Rufus: myth and reality", employs Galbraith's threefold formula as initial basis for the king and the reputation of mythical proportion that has grown around him,[67] but, despite numerous valuable insights gained from placing the king in the context of greater developments, often relapses into a defensive stance, measuring the unfairly bad reputation of William II against the equally unfairly good reputation of his brother, Henry I. This example, apart from proving, once more, how swiftly efforts to re-evaluate kings can turn into a reputational tug-of-war, shows one thing: Galbraith's statement, only initially cited, is no sufficient basis to assess the contemporary assessment of kings. Kings were evaluated in a whole range of spheres that Galbraith's definitions do not fully cover[68] – and in a further, overarching quality as well – their qualification as 'story', or, even more intangibly, on the basis of how they were judged in the elusive category of 'charisma'. When kings passed into communicative memory, they would not usually enter it in comparison with their predecessors or successors – but as typed version of how they worked and appealed as story, as good or bad representatives of their office, with the typed anecdotes they succeeded in inspiring.[69]

In order to evaluate kings on the basis of contemporary notions, it cannot be sufficient to pit one king against another and try to determine where one fell short and the other excelled. That approach is consistent neither with the wide range of expectations that were connected with

---

anwachsend fast zur Tollheit und seine Sucht nach Geld sind ohne Beispiel...". Lehmann's appraisal of John is from 1904, more dated than most other works cited here, but noteworthy for its particularly drastic tone and vindication of the king. A more recent, but still rather polemic example is Warren, King John, p. 6-7, where the author, aiming to vindicate King John's bad reputation, discusses the reputation of Richard the Lionheart, and refers to him as "an ungracious boor who added sodomy, it was believed, to the normal carnal indulgences of a prince." As a definite asset over John, Warren claims the king's reputation, "so precarious while he lived", to have been enobled "by the starry-eyed panegyrist of The Journey of the Crusaders". Although the king had gone "to an unmourned grave, he was hardly cold in it before the gallant crusader began to displace the harsh, cold warrior as the persisting image."

[66] Galbraith, Good Kings and Bad Kings, p. 124.

[67] See Mason, William Rufus: myth and reality, p. 3.

[68] See also Görich, Die Ehre Friedrich Barbarossas, for a similar appeal to consider contemporary notions when evaluating kings. In this particular work, the writer's intent is to state the Barbarossa's reign needed to be assessed in the light of symbolic communication, see esp. p. 11-15.

[69] Cf. Althoff, Gloria et nomen perpetuum, p. 5-6 and 22.

kingship nor with the nature of the source material which, more than all other data at our disposal, judges, evaluates and considers kings: the narrative sources of each reign, foremost among them chronicles and annals. These works had their very own standards of viewing the world and those who acted within it. Exploring and analysing this world has been done periodically and with view to individual chroniclers, interspersed with occasional works that considered chronicle writing on a grander scale, exploring a wider timeframe of chronicle writing in the pursuit of overarching questions. One such attempt is Martin Clauss' work "Kriegsniederlagen im Mittelalter", which discusses the depiction of (failed) warfare, its interpretation and the significance the different modes of portrayal held for the writers and their society. The topic of war is also the focus of Matthew Strickland's work on War and Chivalry, which comprises the period from 1066 to 1217, and analyses, often in a narrative vein, the approved chivalric conduct in war. For England specifically, Chris Given-Wilson has explored common modes of narration in English medieval historical writing, covering a wide range of depictions with view to the intentions pursued by chroniclers, including warfare, foundation myths, miracles, dreams and the comparison of rulers to exemplary rulers who were chosen to represent certain virtues.[70]

Contemporary notions of kingship need to be collected and systematically grouped if they are to be of any help in determining the basis on which individual sources evaluated the actions of the kings whose reigns they chronicled. Understanding this basis is decisive for understanding whether individual depictions were meant to reflect positively on a ruler – or to condemn royal behaviour. With the system of idealistic conceptions of kingship at hand, it becomes possible to evaluate narratives of individual reigns. This system is a precondition for any evaluation of kingship that claims to recur on contemporary concepts rather than modern considerations. At the end, it should be possible to trace how individual royal reputations came into being.

Outlining the general history of the reigns between 1066 and 1272, the following chapter will provide the context for the analysis that is to follow; the framework within which individual royal gestures must be placed to be understood. The major body of the analysis uses the research paradigms of symbolic communication to assess contemporary witnesses to the kings' actions in the light of selected aspects of ideal kingship and concludes with the general image of the kings emerging during their lifetime that was to be transmitted to later chronicles. This first step exclusively uses such sources, almost exclusively of narrative nature, as can be regarded as 'contemporary'. The second step takes up these images and examines how they were moulded, changed, and established in later chronicles. The first step will review reputations in communicative memory, roughly fifty years after a king's death, while the second will revisit these images in even later chronicles, where, presumably, they will have solidified into cultural memory. With the dominant traits attributed to each king thus made visible, what remains is, on the basis of this broad overview of the different stages of a king's reputation, to attempt to answer the

[70] Given-Wilson, Chronicles; for the kings from old English history who embodied virtues of kingship – one of the most interesting parts of the work in this context – see p. 166.

question which impact staging the king as story had on his literary afterlife – how, in short, a king could be forged into a 'good' king for all posterity.

*2. Chronology*

There was little that pointed to the possibility of kingship, whether good or bad, when William the Conqueror was born. The illegitimate child of Duke Robert of Normandy and Herleva of Falaise,[1] a woman of still not entirely clarified, but certainly lowly standing,[2] was not granted much notice until in 1035, when his father decided to leave for the Holy Land and, not wanting to leave his duchy leaderless but lacking a legitimate child, presented William, his bastard son, as his heir, and had the Norman magnates swear fealty to him. Robert died on his return journey, and Normandy fell to the then seven or eight year old child.[3] In the turbulent duchy that his father had won and kept by force of arms, not only the young duke's title, but also his life was in danger, as members of the ducal dynasty fought for power and control. William's[4] supporters were few and many of his guardians had been killed by the end of 1040. The persisting turmoil turned into a coordinated assault on the duke when numerous Norman magnates, most prominent among them Guy of Burgundy, rose in open revolt. William was saved by the intervention of King Henry I of France. After the battle of Val-és-Duns, his ducal power could, for the moment, be called secure; the declaration of the truce of God (later to become known as the *pax ducis*) at Caen in 1047 underlined his triumph.[5]

Against consanguinity-founded papal disapproval, he married Matilda of Flanders – the ecclesiastical ban that lay on Normandy as a consequence was only lifted in 1059 when Matilda and William promised to each found a monastic house.[6] The duke embarked on an exemplary military career: still with Capetian approval, he campaigned at Normandy's border, where Maine was causing problems.[7]

His peace with the French king soon shattered. Possibly because of the duke's increase in power, Anjou and France attacked him on two fronts in 1054 and again in 1057. William triumphed both times.[8] He took Maine shortly after Count Herbert II of Maine had died in 1062.[9] William of Poitiers, eulogist of William the Conqueror's life, moved to legitimise this grasp for power, claiming that the duke had acted to free the people of Maine from the hated tyranny of Anjou, and even including the "extravagant assertion that the Norman dukes had once been the overlords of Maine"[10]. While William was still expanding and stabilising his position,

---

[1] Also "Arlette" in French, cf. Maurice, Guillaume le Conquérant, p. 49.

[2] Herleva is referred to alternatively as a tanner's daughter or the child of an embalmer, with the tanner apparently being the more popular fatherly profession among William's present-day biographies. Cf. ibid., Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 31; Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 61-62.

[3] Cf. Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 36-37; Maurice, Guillaume le Conquérant, p. 50-54; Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 61-63.

[4] After his succession to the duchy, William the Bastard is usually referred to as William II of Normandy. However, for the sake of simplicity and to avoid confusion he will be referred to simply as (Duke) William.

[5] Cf. Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 64-65., Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 47-51.

[6] Cf. ibid., p. 80; Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 71.

[7] Cf. ibid., p. 66.

[8] Cf. ibid., p. 67.

[9] Cf. Bates, William the Conqueror, p. 65-67.

[10] Ibid., p. 65.

especially in the Vexin and Brittany, his greatest adversaries – King Henry I of France and Geoffrey Martel of Anjou died, allowing William to look to greater prizes.

The kingdom of England was shaping up to be just such a price. Its king, Edward the Confessor, still had strong ties to Normandy, where he had been brought up and spent much of his exile while the Danish kings ruled in England. He was recalled by the ailing Harthacnut and succeeded him as king of England, but his Norman connections soon brought him into conflict with the English elite, especially with Harthacnut's most powerful earl, Godwin of Wessex. Edward banished the earl and introduced Normans to his court and the clergy.[11] It was in this time that Edward, as the Norman sources claim, promised Duke William of Normandy that were the English king to die childless, William was to inherit his kingdom. English sources mention no such promise.[12] Godwin, however, returned from banishment, and regained the favour of the English king. In the years that followed, the earl's son Harold became a familiar of the king and his potential successor.[13]

Between 1064 and 1065, Harold came to Normandy. The reasons for his journey remain as unclear as what really transpired during this visit. Harold was apparently shipwrecked in Ponthieu, taken prisoner by one of William's vassals and then delivered to the duke. Norman historiography – with the tapestry of Bayeux an impressive visual account of the Norman version of the story – claims that Harold swore an oath to William to stand by the Confessor's promise regarding the succession,[14] and subsequently styled Harold as a stereotypical bad ruler, a breaker of promises, a hasty, greedy king[15] who forfeited his claim to the throne through his *impietas* and tyrannical, vain lust for the crown.[16] Whatever the truth of their meeting (or, indeed, the whole question of succession), when Harold, with the mutual consent of the barons, acceded to the throne of England on January 6th, the day after the Confessor had died,[17] William was set on pressing his claim, gathered followers and, perhaps most impressively, assembled an elaborate legitimation for his conquest of England.

His fleet was ready to sail in August, but its departure was delayed – whether William was waiting for a tactical advantage or more favourable winds to carry him across the channel is unclear.[18] With a papal banner and relics around his neck, his reputation as a reformer of the Church, a claim to be the designated heir and the blazing accusation of Harold's infidelity and perfidy, the Conqueror embarked on what, for Western Europe, must have looked like "something in the nature of a crusade".[19]

---

[11] Cf, Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 166; Plassmann, Normannen, p. 160.
[12] Cf. Plassmann, Normannen, p. 161; Sarnowsky, England im Mittelalter, p. 56.
[13] Cf. Plassmann, Normannen, p. 162.
[14] Cf. Sarnowsky, England im Mittelalter, p. 56; Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 176-177; Bates, William the Conqueror, p. 96; see Barlow, Edward the Confessor, p. 220-229, for a detailed analysis of Harold's trip to Normandy as mirrored in the chronicle sources.
[15] Cf. Weiler, Rex renitens, p. 13-14.
[16] Cf. Bouet, 'Felicitas', p. 45.
[17] Cf. Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 451.
[18] Cf. Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 81.
[19] Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 188.

*2.1 The Reign of William I*

It would be taxing to find an event in English medieval history that has drawn as much attention as the Norman Conquest and its most decisive moment, the Battle of Hastings.[20] It is not only the battle's significance as a turning point that is of interest, but also the attempts of the new lords to justify their prize, which have embroidered the battle itself and William I's reign with a wealth of symbol-laden gestures and corresponding narratives. There can be no question as to the single most important event in the reign of William I as far as his reputation as king was concerned: the conquest of England remains without any rival in that respect. William had at last found a favourable wind that would carry him to England, and Harold, having beaten off a Norwegian invasion force in the north, hurried south to meet his second rival to the throne. He was not victorious this time: on October 14th 1066, he was killed in the Battle of Hastings, along with many of the leading men of England. The battle was the overture to a drastic change in the political landscape of England: those of the powerful elite of the old kingdom that did not find death in battle were to find it later, were stripped of their lands and power or fled into exile. The Conqueror's great survey of possessions and landholdings, Domesday Book, bears witness to the fundamental overhaul of English society: when it was completed in 1086, close to the end of the king's reign, only about eight percent of the land was still in the hands of the old elite, as Douglas surmises.[21] The remainder had been distributed among the new king's followers.[22]

After his victory at Hastings, William moved across the southern countryside slowly and, at the beginning of December, struck rapidly to encircle London, ravaging the land as he went.[23] The kingdom's chief city, surrounded by the enemy host, surrendered, and the Norman invader was met by the leading men of the city, the bishop of Worcester as well as the archbishop of York – and Edgar Aetheling, who had hastily been elected king in Harold's stead, but had been neither crowned nor anointed.[24] The crown was offered to William and the duke accepted.[25] He was crowned in Westminster December 25th in accordance with the English rite to which the French element of asking the congregation whether they were willing to accept their new lord had been added.[26] In early 1067, the Conqueror returned to Normandy in triumph,[27] as a security measure bringing with him those people in England that still held power, and around whom political resistance might have rallied: the earls Edwin and Morcar, men of the Church like

[20] See Barber, The Norman Conquest and the Media, for the different perspectives in which the Conquest was seen as time progressed, from bringing much-needed change to the barbarous lives of the Anglo-Saxon to the gradual rejection and condemnation of the conquest as an event that harmed the proud and free Anglo-Saxons. Bates, William the Conqueror, p. 207-209, analyses the legitimation of the Conquest through the Church.

[21] Cf. Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 266.

[22] Cf. ibid., p. 269: "Of all the land in England surveyed in the Domesday Book, about a fifth was held directly by the king; about a quarter by the church; and nearly half by the greater followers of the Conqueror … About half the land, held by lay tenure in England under the Conqueror, was given by him to only eleven men… . On them nearly a quarter of England was bestowed."

[23] Cf. Bates, William the Conqueror, p. 110.

[24] Cf. Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 83.

[25] Cf. Maurice, Guillaume le Conquérant, p. 149.

[26] Cf. Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 248; Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 85.

[27] Cf. Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 208.

archbishop Stigand and, of course, Edgar Aetheling. He displayed his winnings proudly, lavishly giving gifts and endowing monasteries.[28]

The return to his homeland was brief. The Conqueror had won himself a crown, but the kingdom that went with it did so rather reluctantly. The first nine months of 1068 saw William I campaigning incessantly throughout England, building castles, confronting rebellions, quelling insurgencies in Exeter, York, Warwick, Chester and large parts of eastern England. The greatest source of trouble, however, was the north. In the summer of 1069, Sweyn Estrithson, the king of Denmark, attacked England with a fleet under the command of his sons Harold and Cnut and his brother Osbern. At the same time, the Scottish king Malcolm III threatened the stability of the Conqueror's rule by marrying the Aetheling's sister Margaret, and ravaged northern England. William I's forces moved against the Danes, and the king himself followed them soon. After three expeditions to York within eighteen months had failed to keep the region at peace, he struck swiftly and with considerable force, in a campaign that is generally referred to as the "harrying of the north", the burning of York and the systematic ravaging of Mercia and Northumbria.[29] The results of the Conqueror's campaign are visible in Domesday Book, were the path of his army can be traced in the dramatic loss of value the local estates suffered.[30] The Danes were placated with money, and, after having burned down Peterborough Abbey in their second attack, left the English coast for the time being.[31]

With the Danes gone, William I still had to deal with the Scottish threat to the northern border. Directing both a land force, mostly cavalry, and a supportive sea force towards the heart of the Scottish kingdom, the Conqueror gained Malcolm's submission: in the pact of Abernethy, Malcolm III gave hostages to the English king and did homage to him – he was formally recognizing that there was a new regime in England, and, in consequence, Edgar Aetheling was expelled from the Scottish court, where he had found refuge.[32] Having settled his affairs on the island, the king turned to the continent, where matters had gotten out of hand while he had been busy pacifying his newly-won kingdom.

The Conqueror was to spend much of his remaining reign trying to secure his continental possessions, and it has been remarked that the violent pacification of his kingdom can be considered a turning point in William I's attitude to his new subjects. He had attempted to learn the language and customs of his new realm until 1070, and had issued writs in English. While he had tried to include what remained of the English nobility in his restructuring of the kingdom, the rebellions apparently changed his mind: "England would be ruled almost exclusively by his French followers"[33]. When he swept across the north, he raised fortifications and appointed local

---

[28] Cf. ibid.; See also Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 87.
[29] Cf. Bates, William the Conqueror, p. 121-123.
[30] Cf. Hollister, The Aristocracy, p. 52-53.
[31] For the rebellions and the Conqueror's measures against them, see Sarnowsky, England im Mittelalter, p. 82-83; Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 214-222 and Bates, William the Conqueror, p. 121-123.
[32] Cf. Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 226-227; Bates, William the Conqueror, p.126-127.
[33] Bates, William the Conqueror, p. 129. On the change in William I's policy, see also Plassmann, Normannen, p. 179. There is even a clear legal distinction made between Frenchmen and Englishmen, which was to gradually vanish, to become a mere relic by the time of Henry I (see Garnett, 'Franci et Angli'). See also Richter, Sprache und Gesellschaft, p. 41.

officials from the ranks of his men. As a consequence, it was not only the higher ranks of nobility that were replaced in the aftermath of the conquest: William I initiated a replacement of the elite down to the level of the *thegns*. Bretons, Flemings, Normans and Frenchmen that had accompanied him on his assault on England took up office in England. Living up to his reputation as reformer of the Church, he also set to work on the ecclesiastical ranks, deposing, among others, the vilified Stigand, Archbishop of Canterbury.[34] While many of the abbacies remained in English hands until their occupants died, all but two bishops (excepting the 'foreigners' appointed under the confessor) were replaced.[35] Until 1133, no Anglo-Saxon was appointed to a bishopric of England.[36]

On the continent, the power vacuum that had been left by the deaths of the king of France and the count of Anjou was being filled by their successors, and William I's lands were consequently in peril. He invaded and reconquered Maine in 1073.[37] Rebellion among the earls surged up again in England, but Lanfranc, the Conqueror's trusty archbishop, assured the king that the island's upheavals could be dealt with adequately by his deputies. Crushing the rebellion caused, perhaps most notably, the death of Waltheof Earl of Northumbria and last of the English earls, whose cause for involvement in the revolt remains as unclear as his exact part in it. His execution was thought by many to have been too severe a punishment, and served as a cause for criticising the king's justice.[38]

The English revolt was not to be the last William I experienced in his lifetime. Amid his struggle with Anjou and France, in which he had already suffered a defeat at Dol, his eldest son Robert Curthose rose against him. Robert had been promised Normandy even before the Conqueror set off on his conquest, and was demanding control of the duchy. The king refused to loosen his grasp on any of his possessions, and his son left in anger, trying to capture Rouen and, having failed, allied himself to the Capetian monarch of France. William, in pursuit, suffered an even more humiliating defeat than Dol had been at Gerberoi in 1079, when, after a siege of three weeks, the beleaguered garrison came out for a pitched battle, in which the king was unhorsed (possibly even by his son Robert) and wounded.[39] For a time, father and son were reconciled again, and Curthose helped make peace with Malcolm III, who was again devastating northern England.[40] However, Robert was soon in rebellion against his father once more.[41]

Despite lasting difficulties on the continent, the Conqueror remained in England to oversee the compilation of Domesday Book.[42] He returned to Normandy in late 1086 and led a counter-offensive against the French king in the Vexin, sacking Mantes.[43] The king was injured while riding through the burning streets of Mantes, and his health deteriorated rapidly. His last will

[34] Cf. Sarnowsky, England im Mittelalter, p. 83.
[35] Cf. Bates, William the Conqueror, p. 211.
[36] Cf. Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 86; Bates, William the Conqueror, p.131-132.
[37] Cf. ibid., p. 131, p. 227-228.
[38] Cf. ibid., p. 232-233.; Plassmann, Normannen, p. 185; Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 231-233.
[39] Cf. Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 102-104; Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 234-239.
[40] Cf. Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 240-241.
[41] Cf. ibid, p. 243.
[42] Cf. Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 110.
[43] Cf. Bates, William the Conqueror, p.263-264.

allegedly left Robert in possession of Normandy, while his conquest was left to God, in the hope that his second-eldest son William might succeed him. The king's hope was given a helpful hand by William being equipped with regalia and a letter of instructions to Lanfranc.[44] The king's youngest son, Henry, inherited a sum between 2,000 and 5,000 pounds, but no land to go with it.[45] He was the only one to attend the Conqueror's funeral – Robert was still rebelling against his father, and William had immediately set off to England to claim his prize.[46]

*2.2. The Reign of William II*

William II, from the early twelfth century on also called William Rufus,[47] was crowned by Lanfranc in September 1087. In his first days as king, he fulfilled the last will of his father by generously distributing alms and releasing the prisoners his father had named. Once secure in England, two of the prisoners – the Earl Morcar and Harold's son Wulfnoth – were confined yet again; too great was the danger that they might (still) serve as figureheads for an English uprising.[48] However, the division of the Anglo-Norman realm that his father's death had effected caused his reign to be turbulent from the very start. Many magnates of England held estates on both sides of the channel – which were now inconveniently subject to two different lords who were, in addition, not on entirely good terms. A coalition of nobles led by Odo of Bayeux aimed to put Robert, allegedly the more gentle and pliable of the two,[49] on the throne of England. Yet Robert failed to make an appearance in England to rally his potential followers. Rufus could win over some of the nobles, and, with promises of restoring hunting-rights, making better laws and abolishing unjust taxes, he won the hearts of the English, rallying them to his cause before he entered into the successful siege of Rochester, where Odo had sought refuge[50] – the rebellion ended before any attempt at replacing the king had been made.[51]

Rufus used the money that was at his disposal to stir up discontent among Robert's vassals, most notably resulting in the 1090 uprising of Conan son of Pilatus in Rouen. Henry, the youngest of the Conqueror's sons, played a decisive role in the crushing of this rebellion, having the rebel leader thrown out of a tower in Rouen, and his corpse dragged through the city tied to the tail of a horse. Tensions increased, but in 1091, king and duke made peace. Henry, who had been moving between the two courts, was shunned from the agreement and mistrusted by both his brothers – he only gradually recovered the power he had lost.[52]

Faced by the threat of the Scottish king ravaging the north of England, William II, for once, acted in concert with his older sibling, joining forces to reach a compromise at the northern border that acknowledged Malcolm III's (former) possessions and possibly also granted him a

[44] Cf. Mason, King Rufus, p. 45.
[45] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 24-25.
[46] Cf. ibid, p. 26.
[47] Cf. Mason, King Rufus, p. 9-10.
[48] Cf. ibid, p. 48-49.; Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 115.
[49] Cf. Morillo, Warfare under the Anglo-Norman Kings, p. 39.
[50] Cf. Mason, King Rufus, p. 56-63.
[51] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 28; Sarnowsky, England im Mittelalter, p. 88.
[52] Cf, ibid., p. 29-31.

pension in return for the Scot's recognition of the new English king,[53] with Malcolm's son becoming Rufus' hostage. When Rufus returned but a year later, erecting a fortification at Carlisle and placing English settlers there, Malcolm III accused him of breaking the treaty. The situation was resolved when the Scottish king died on his – by then fifth – assault on northern England, and, after a lengthy struggle over the throne, was succeeded by Edgar in 1097, who, having been supported by Rufus, heralded the advent of a more Anglo-Norman-friendly kingship in Scotland.[54]

Shortly after his pact with Malcolm III, the king declared that he would not be implementing the agreement he had reached with Robert. Its fulfilment had been repeatedly postponed before. Robert returned to Normandy before the king's Christmas court gathered, their momentary alliance shattered.[55] In the following spring, Rufus fell seriously ill. Fearing his sickbed to become a deathbed, he endeavoured to make as good a Christian end as he could manage. He seized upon the most often criticized feature of his reign: the prolonged vacancies in clerical offices, especially the metropolitan diocese of Canterbury, which had remained without a shepherd (thus feeding the king's coffers) since Lanfranc's death in 1089. He filled the see of Lincoln with his former chancellor, Robert Bloet. As candidate for the second vacant see, the archbishopric of Canterbury, he chose, upon recommendation, Anselm Prior of Bec.[56] Beyond filling vacancies, the king made more promises: he would cease the practice of simony, abolish unjust laws and establish good ones; he ordered the release of prisoners, the remittance of debts and the pardoning of offences, he gave land to monasteries.[57] After announcing this catalogue of good deeds, the king recovered from his illness and showed little diligence in acting upon his promises. Especially his relation to the new archbishop of Canterbury turned sour swiftly. He deprived Anselm of a large part of his see's income until such time when the archbishop would pay the annual tribute – he could, however, not get rid of Anselm himself, and, for the rest of his reign, his quarrel with the Archbishop of Canterbury would dominate his ecclesiastical policy.[58]

Anselm was a fierce advocate of Church reform and emphatically represented its ideals, while Rufus was a monarch conscious of his power and intent on keeping it. Anselm had sworn allegiance to Pope Urban II when he had still been Abbot of Bec. The king, in turn, wanted to use the political advantage of not having chosen a pope to support for as long as he might.[59] Anselm's frequent wishes to consult a pope that the king had not acknowledged and his adamant stance on ideals that encroached upon the king's power were among the reasons that caused the discord between them to flare up time and again, until, at last, when given the choice between leaving the country or refraining from further appeals to the pope, Anselm opted for the Holy

[53] Cf. Mason, King Rufus, p. 94-95.
[54] Cf. Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 123-125.
[55] Cf. Mason, King Rufus, p. 94; Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 121.
[56] Cf. Mason, King Rufus, p. 103-108; see also Barlow, William Rufus, p. 113-114, and Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 129-131.
[57] Cf. Barlow, William Rufus, p. 299-300.
[58] Cf. Mason, King Rufus, p. 109.
[59] Cf. ibid., p. 139-141; Barlow, William Rufus, p.340-343.

See, and went into exile in 1097.[60] The king was wary of the consequences: before Anselm was allowed to depart for the continent, he had all the possessions searched that the archbishop was taking along. As soon as Anselm had gone, William II had his property seized.[61]

In matters secular, the king started gathering money for an assault on his embittered brother Robert in Normandy (and, in doing so, raised another sore quarrel with Archbishop Anselm).[62] The chroniclers made note of these financial extortions, recording the rallying of foot soldiers throughout England, who, having gathered at Hastings, were deprived of their money and sent home, while the money served to pay the king's mercenaries in the continental struggle.[63] Robert could enlist the help of the French king to ward off his brother, but William II's first venture into Normandy had to be abandoned soon even without the French support: uprisings were shaking Wales.[64]

Wales was not the only region to experience upheaval. In late 1094 or early 1095, rebellion once more broke out in the north: Robert of Mowbray, Earl of Northumberland, had relieved some merchant ships coming from Norway of their cargo, and would not pay compensation even when the merchants appealed to the king. Neither did he follow the king's summons to the Easter court.[65] When Mowbray also failed to appear at the Pentecost court, William II gathered an army to bring him to heel. Upon approaching the border to the earl's land, the magnitude of the rebellion became apparent to the king when one of the conspirators submitted himself to royal pardon, and uncovered the rebels' plans.[66] Names of further conspirators were revealed to the king, who then proceeded to Mowbray's castle, where he had work start on erecting the siege castle Malveisin. The rebellious earl was eventually captured during an attempt to flee from his castle. William II had him brought before his castle, which was still being held by his wife and his kinsman Morael, and threatened punishment should they not surrender.[67] The rebels of 1088, when the king had only just obtained his kingdom, had been treated relatively gently, and many, like Gilbert of Tonbridge, who had submitted to the king, were reinstated into their property and status despite having taken part in the rebellion. Rufus was not gentle this time. One rebel was to be blinded and castrated, another hanged hanged, a third spent the last thirty years of his life in prison. Some were imprisoned, some deprived of their lands, some banished from the island, many were only readmitted into the king's favour after paying a large fine. Some were spared, the most powerful rebels having been dealt with, possibly so as not to provoke a further revolt.[68]

While William II could not gain dominion over the Welsh,[69] matters on the continent were developing more to his satisfaction: Robert had decided to join the first crusade, but had found he had no money to finance that adventure. He decided to pawn his inheritance, the duchy of

[60] Cf. Barlow, William Rufus, p. 374; Plassmann, Normannen, p. 198; Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 134; Mason, King Rufus, p. 174.
[61] Cf. Mason, King Rufus, p. 175; Green, Henry I, p. 51.
[62] Cf. ibid., p. 127; Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 121.
[63] Cf. Mason, King Rufus, p. 135; Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 124.
[64] Cf. ibid., p. 136.
[65] Cf. ibid., p. 144.
[66] Cf. ibid., p. 162.
[67] Cf. ibid., p. 162-163; Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 128-129.
[68] Cf. Mason, King Rufus, p. 164-165.
[69] Ibid., p. 163.

Normandy, to his royal brother. Many of the great men of Normandy would accompany their duke on the crusade, leaving Rufus free reign in the duchy.[70] Robert received 100,000 marks from English coffers. Much of the inevitable criticism of the king's raising of money was aimed at the man in charge of many of his fiscal dealings, Ranulf Flambard. The official was wreathed in rumours and blamed for many unwelcome decisions during Rufus' reign.[71]

William II stayed on the continent as of 1097, where he raised an army and chose Maine to be his first target. He could (temporarily) capture Le Mans, but made little progress in his attack on the Vexin, eventually agreeing on a truce with the French king and, in 1099, returned to England, where his great hall that is his most memorable monument to posterity, was nearing completion.[72] He had then re-established the extent of the Anglo-Norman realm as his father had held it by regaining the lost territories on the continent.[73] The completion of Westminster Hall, probably the biggest stone hall in northern Europe at that time,[74] was celebrated with magnificent festivities at the Pentecost court 1099.

The king had hardly settled in when news arrived from the continent that the freed Helias de la Fléche was attacking Le Mans, with the king's garrison hard pressed on the defence. The king responded swiftly and once he was on the continent, rallied an army about him. Ravaging as he went, he pursued the retreating besiegers to the castle of Mayet. Surrounded by a deep ditch that prevented any advance, it was the castle that defeated the warlike king and, breaking off the fruitless siege, he returned to England.[75]

Better tidings reached him there: the Count of Poitou was considering a move similar to that of Robert: pawning his lands to the English king in return for money to join the crusade.[76] Yet the possible bargain was never made: following a hunting accident that has never ceased to give rise to wild speculation, Rufus died of an arrow-wound in the New Forest.[77]

### *2.3 The Reign of Henry I*

Robert, the eldest son of the Conqueror, had not yet returned from the crusade when his brother died. Henry, although neither the oldest son available nor the designated successor of the late king, seized his chance as the only male surviving heir present: three days after the death of Rufus, he was crowned king of England.[78] The new king knew his position to be precarious: with his brother's impending return from the Holy Land, the time he had left to secure his claim to the English throne was short – once Robert was back, problems were bound to surge up once again. Rufus' rule had been shaken by attempts to replace him with his brother,[79] thus reuniting

---

[70] Cf. Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 122; Plassmann, Normannen, 196.
[71] Cf. Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 136. Barlow, William Rufus, 194-202, provides a detailed account of the figure of Ranulf Flambard, his career, character and the judgement passed on him by contemporaries.
[72] Cf. Mason, King Rufus, p. 199-201; Barlow, William Rufus, p. 388.
[73] Cf. Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 135; Green, Henry I, p. 36.
[74] Cf. Green, Die normannischen Könige, p. 50.
[75] Cf. Mason, King Rufus, p. 210-214.
[76] Cf. ibid., p. 215; Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 136. For some of the more exotic theories linked up with the alleged murder of William II Rufus, see Hollister, Henry I, p. 104.
[77] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 38-39; Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 138.
[78] Cf. Plassmann, Normannen, p. 201; Hollister, Henry I, p. 106-107.
[79] Cf. Morillo, Warfare under the Anglo-Norman Kings, p. 39.

Normandy and England. With Henry I on the throne and Robert returned from the crusade, the duchy and the kingdom would once again be separated, a state of affairs that many barons who owned lands on either side of the channel would rather have avoided. Henry I had to gain the favour of many. He had his coronation promises written down and distributed throughout the kingdom; a document stating the principles of his rule, his desire to return to the customs and practices of Edward the Confessor, and the issues the new king intended to address: simony, exploitation of ecclesiastical vacancies, relief payments, inheritance and the transmission of lands, the remarrying of widows and the exactions imposed by royal officials[80] – in hindsight, the king seemed intent to move against the practices that had been at the centre of the criticism of William II's reign, notably disposing and imprisoning the heavily criticised Ranulf Flambard, and recalling Anselm from exile.[81]

At long last, Henry I would manage to reach a compromise on lay investiture with the archbishop in which the pope relaxed his decrees for the English king[82] – however, king and archbishop were to come into conflict time and again before their dispute was settled at last. Even if their quarrel was of a softer tone than the one employed between Anselm and William II, the unyielding attitude of both parties would almost cause Henry I's excommunication when the king denied the exiled archbishop access to his English revenues.[83] Their eventual reconciliation, facilitated by the king's sister Adela, allowed for Anselm's return to England after the absolving letters from the Holy See had arrived.[84]

Henry I's next move would make him a figure of prophecy: he married Edith, daughter of Malcolm, King of Scots, a descendent of the pre-Conquest line of Anglo-Saxon kings. While his marriage was hailed as the fulfilment of the Confessor's prophecy, a union of past and present kingship, it was not without problems:[85] Edith was rumoured to have become a nun during her stay at Wilton Abbey. The issue of the future queen's ecclesiastical status must have caused a considerable stir. She was said to have worn the veil only as a guise that would protect her from the lust of the Norman invaders. It was claimed that Edith had done so reluctantly, forced by her aunt – and had torn it off and trampled it as soon as she was alone. Another version, more dramatically, perhaps, has her father, upon hearing that his daughter, so precious a diplomatic asset when married profitably, had taken the veil, storm the monastery and (again) trample the much-misused cloth into the dust, grab his daughter and bring her back home. Archbishop Anselm himself, the highest ecclesiastical and moral authority within the kingdom, was asked to investigate the matter – concluding, after much thought, that Edith might marry the king, if indeed she had not become a nun in earnest and willingly. Despite its symbolic significance,

[80] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 45-46.
[81] Cf. ibid., p. 47, 50-51.
[82] Cf. ibid., p. 53.
[83] Cf. Hollister, Henry I, p. 118-119, p. 170 and p. 194-198.
[84] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 85-88.
[85] Cf. ibid., p. 53-55; Clanchy, England and its Rulers, p. 55.

Henry I's marriage earned him sneers from his Norman peers for having 'gone native' in his choice of wife.[86]

Soon, the king's brother Robert returned. He had married a wealthy heiress, was ready to buy back his duchy, and on the basis of his short-lived agreement with Rufus, laid claim to the English crown. He landed at Portsmouth in 1101 with a sizeable army, and entered into negotiations with the king.[87] Far from feeling sure that all of his new subjects would loyally stand by him in this conflict, the king tried to ensure the quick departure of his rival. Anselm was coaxed into reminding the magnates of their due loyalty by promises regarding the administration of the English Church, and Henry I showed himself ready to make considerable concessions to his brother: in the end, it was agreed that all the lands the king had held in Normandy (except Domfront) would return into Robert's hands and that the duke would receive a generous pension. Robert, in turn, acknowledged Henry I as king of England, and returned to his duchy.[88] Yet this peace was not built to last. The powerful Bellême family stirred up trouble in Normandy, causing the Abbot of Sées to flee and seek shelter at the English court. With this growing instability in the duchy and the death of his leading supporter, William of Breteuil, Robert found himself in a problematic position. He decided to turn to his brother for help, but while Henry I promised his support, his words were of little consequence.[89]

When Robert Curthose allied with Robert de Bellême, the stage was set for ending the much-disliked separation of duchy and kingdom. The king raised funds for a campaign, then moved to Normandy in August 1104, accusing his brother of breaching their contract, of abandoning the duchy to thieves, of neglecting his duties as protector of the Church.[90] This was a first foray. When Robert FitzHaimon, who had been harrying the countryside with knights belonging to the royal household (presumably one of Henry I's strategies to keep his foothold in the duchy)[91], was captured, taken to Bayeux and charged for treason, the king saw fit to make his move. Bringing with him men and money, he landed at Barfleur in 1105, where he bought the support of the castellans and gathered more men about him – Robert, in turn, was desperate for money to try and pay his mercenaries. Always legitimising his attack as a protection of Normandy from the negligence of his duke, Henry I took and burned Bayeux, won Caen, and refused any of Robert's demands to return the lands he had captured or to cease his warfare.[92] The decisive battle for the continental duchy, the Battle of Tinchebray, was won after little more than an hour, when Robert de Bellême fled his overlord's ranks.[93] Robert was captured and imprisoned – and was to remain a captive for the rest of his life. The king did not at once style himself as Duke of Normandy, but

---

[86]Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 61; In her article "Henry I and the English", Ann Williams describes the relationship between the monarch and the island's native population; notably Henry I's taking of mistresses from among the native English populace.

[87] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 63-64.

[88] Cf. ibid; Sarnowsky, England im Mittelalter, p. 90.

[89] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 75-77.

[90] Cf. ibid., p. 79-80.

[91] Cf. ibid., p. 78.

[92] Cf. ibid., p. 84-89.

[93] Cf. ibid., p. 92.

as guardian of Robert's son, William Clito,[94] but set about vigorously subjecting and ordering Normandy.

The victory in Normandy had consolidated Henry I's kingship. The magnates knew what he was capable of and feared him; his loyal allies could be rewarded with the lands he had won while subjecting Normandy.[95] For a time, the king turned to the internal affairs of his kingdom, reforming court life, coinage, and finding the long-sought settlement in the investiture controversy.[96]

Many of the years that followed were dedicated to the preservation of the king's domains. Especially the newly-won Normandy proved to be a troublesome prize: in Robert's son, William Clito, opposition to Henry I's rule had a rallying-point, and the boy, evading his uncle's grasp, received the help of many powerful men on the continent.[97] Clito posed a threat – if not to the kingship of Henry I, then to his plans of succession, which were only just shaping up to the king's desire when tragedy struck him: his wife died in 1118, and his only surviving legitimate son and heir followed her but two years later, dying in the wreck of the White Ship in 1120 just after the King of France had finally been brought to accept the young prince's homage – a feat Henry I had fought long to achieve.[98] 1118 especially was a year of particularly difficulty in the rule of Normandy, with disturbances and disorder erupting throughout the duchy to such an extent that the king would not even hurry back to the isles when he heard of the death of his wife.[99] His situation had grown perilous. Not able to trust his own men to stand by him, he swiftly changed locations to avoid treasonable attacks and suffered his first defeat in a pitched battle when he found himself confronted by the joint forces of Maine.[100]

Amid the insurgencies in Normandy, Henry I collided once more with the force of papal will: the successor-elect of the late Archbishop of York, Thurstan, was refusing to acknowledge the superiority of Canterbury[101] and, consequently, the king would not have him enter the country or, indeed, receive his temporalities. By March 1120, the dissatisfied pope had granted the archbishop his full privileges, allowed him exemption from his profession to Canterbury and placed the interdict upon Canterbury and York until the archbishop was restored.[102] Henry I eventually gave way under the joint pressure of archbishop, pope and his sister, and conceded that Thurstan might enter England and receive the benefits of the York possessions. Although rebellion in Normandy subsided, Henry I had another problem to face: when his son died in the wreck of the White Ship, he was forced to make other plans for his succession.[103]

In January 1121, Henry I declared he would marry Adeliza of Louvain, in all probability hoping to produce an heir that might take the place of his deceased son. Yet although Henry I

---

[94] Cf. ibid., p. 96.
[95] Cf. ibid. p. 107.
[96] Cf. ibid., p. 109-113 for the catalogue of changes. See also Hollister, Henry I, p. 215.
[97] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 122, 132.
[98] Cf. ibid., p. 138.
[99] Cf. ibid., p. 139.
[100] Cf. ibid., p. 143-146. Hollister, Henry I, p. 41.
[101] Cf. Green, Henry I, p.155.
[102] Cf. ibid., p. 160.
[103] Cf. ibid. p.162-163.

married with utmost speed, the marriage – despite the husband having sired the greatest number of illegitimate children known for an English monarch in the Middle Ages – remained childless.[104] The supporters of William Clito in Normandy took heart at the king's evident lack of issue, which made Clito the heir presumptive, and rebellion surged up once more, incited by discontent over the king's regime and officials.[105] Henry I moved savagely and effectively against the conspirators in Normandy,[106] succeeded in having the dangerous marriage alliance between Clito and Sybil of Anjou annulled[107] and could call upon the aid of the Roman Emperor, to whom he had prestigiously married his eldest daughter, Matilda: while King Louis VI of France rushed towards Rheims to confront an enemy attack that turned out to be little more than a ruse, Henry I used his chance to try and take the Vexin.[108]

Aware now that his marriage would remain without offspring, Henry I resorted to more unusual means of securing his succession. After her imperial husband had died in 1125, Matilda returned to her father, and the king began at once to consolidate her claim to the throne. In January 1127, he had the magnates swear fealty to his daughter, and had them promise to accept her as sole and rightful queen in case he should die without a male heir.[109] Henry I pressed on. Despite the former empress' unwillingness to marry a mere count who was, at that, considerably younger than she, the king had her marry Geoffrey of Anjou[110] – thus forging the very alliance with Anjou that he had formerly denied his nephew. William Clito was to die soon after,[111] technically easing the problematic succession through his passing, had it not been for the problems of the newly-wed couple that jeopardized Henry I's plans. When the king returned to England in July 1129, he found that his daughter had been expulsed by her husband and had returned to Rouen.[112] Geoffrey did eventually take her back, and with the birth of Henry, the couple's first son, in 1133, the king's hopes seemed at long last to have been realised. Yet despite the birth of two further sons, the family grew estranged. Matilda and Geoffrey, notwithstanding their initial dislike, apparently worked together well enough to put up a fight against Henry I, who was steadfastly refusing to surrender any of the castles included in Matilda's dowry or indeed allow either of them any influence and power in his realm. Geoffrey consequently besieged castles at the Norman border, hoping to force the king into surrendering what he felt he and his wife were due.[113]

Their conflict remained unresolved. After a hunting trip in late 1135, Henry I suddenly fell seriously ill.[114] The king made arrangements for his death, confessed his sins, received the

[104] Cf. ibid., p. 168-169.
[105] Cf. ibid., p. 179; Davis, King Stephen, p. 6.
[106] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 184-187. Hollister, Henry I, p. 300-301.
[107] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 187. Hollister, Henry I, p. 306-307.
[108] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 168.
[109] Cf. ibid., p. 190-193; Davis, King Stephen, p. 6.
[110] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 198. See Gillingham, The Angevin Empire, p. 7-8, for the motives that might have led Henry I to arranging that perhaps unusual marriage that forged an alliance with a long-standing enemy of the realm.
[111] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 204. Hollister, Henry I, p. 325-326.
[112] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 206.
[113] Cf. ibid. p. 217-218.; Davis, King Stephen, p. 15.
[114] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 219.

sacrament, ordered alms to be given to the poor.[115] When he died, the future of his realm was still unclear: he had named Matilda and her descendants as his successors. Yet Matilda was fighting him at the Norman border, and she was married to a son of the House of Anjou, which had long lain in conflict with Normandy.[116] While his wavering approach to settling the succession question can be considered a cause of the turmoil that arose in England after his death, the king had been faced with a grave dilemma in the time after 1120. In his loyal bastard son Robert of Gloucester, he may have had a suitable candidate for kingship, had not illegitimacy become problematic in matters of succession. He needed to allow for the (small but existent) chance that he might yet have another son with his wife; and had he allowed for the succession of William Clito, he would have stifled the ambitions he had doubtlessly harboured concerning his own dynasty – while Geoffrey of Anjou could certainly be expected to seek control of his wife's lands, let alone to want to know which role he would take after the old king's death.[117]

### *2.4. The Reign of Stephen I*

The question of whether or not Henry I did, in the end, name his nephew Stephen of Blois, Count of Boulogne and his sister's son, his successor, has often given rise to speculation.[118] Whatever the king may have thought, hoped, or intended on his deathbed, he had certainly outfitted his nephew with a wealth of lands and power.[119] When Henry I died, the empress, who had been waging war on the border of Normandy to obtain the dowry her father had been withholding, was in no place to hasten towards the crown of the island kingdom. Stephen of Blois, however, was. He crossed swiftly to England, where he was received favourably by the citizens of London, who claimed a part in the election of a new king. With the help of his younger brother Henry, Bishop of Winchester, he gained the support of the leading figures in the late king's administration and treasury.[120] A powerful landholder of amiable, chivalric character (a opposed to an allegedly haughty woman married to a lifelong enemy), the barons approved of his accession, seeing in him, perhaps, a chance for a less severe regime than that of Henry I. Extensive promises to the Church consolidated his position.[121] When David, King of Scots, having received news of the old king's death, crossed the border once more to invade northern England, Stephen could underline his successful start by reaching a truce with the Scot – albeit a very temporary one.[122]

---

[115] Cf. ibid., p. 219-220.
[116] Cf. Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 93. Hollister, Henry I, p. 483; Gillingham, The Angevin Empire, p. 10.
[117] Cf. Green, Henry I and the Origins of the Civil War, p. 17. Hollister, Henry I, p. 310-311.
[118] Van Eickels, Gleichrangigkeit, p. 23, argues that, after the tragedy of the White Ship, Henry I had begun to establish Stephen as a possible successor, but abandoned these attempts when his daughter returned to England.See also Crouch, The Reign of King Stephen, p. 31 and 37, and Davis, King Stephen, p. 14.
[119] Davis, ibid., p. 7-8. offers an estimation of the extent of Stephen's estates on the basis of the 1130 pipe roll. See also Hollister, Henry I, p. 310-311.
[120] Cf. Davis, King Stephen, p. 16. See also Crouch, The Reign of King Stephen,
[121] Cf. Davis, King Stephen, p. 17-18; the promises involved not committing simony, acknowledging the clergy's subjection to canon law and episcopal jurisdiction, confirmation of possessions, limitations to the king's rights in vacant sees and general restrictions on (unjust) royal exactions.
[122] Cf. ibid., p. 19-20. Crouch, The Reign of King Stephen, p. 41. For the relationship between England and Scotland during Stephen's reign, see also Barrow, The Scots and the North of England.

The king returned south for a splendid Easter court, with the majority of the magnates on his side.[123] This state of quiet was not to last: the Welsh began to rise against him, and their uprisings were soon to be followed by Geoffrey of Anjou's invasion of Normandy, a series of rebellious defections among the English nobles and further Scottish border warfare. Stephen turned to Normandy, coming to terms with his older brother Theobald, whose superior claim to the throne he had bypassed when he seized kingship[124] and, as considerable dissensions within his army prevented him from fighting Geoffrey, concluded an uneasy truce with the Angevin.[125] Back in England, matters soon came to a head: the Scottish and Welsh incursions remained largely unresolved[126] while at the same time more and more English barons turned from the king, most eminent among them certainly Earl Robert of Gloucester, who renounced his allegiance to the king and declared his support for the cause of his half-sister, the empress, in 1138. Caen and Bayeux fell to Geoffrey.[127] Rumours that the empress herself was soon to arrive spread throughout England.

In a move that has often been interpreted as a dramatic turning point – if not the beginning of the end[128] – of Stephen's reign, the king, using what was "universally recognized as a contrivance"[129], had Roger bishop of Salisbury as well as his three nephews Alexander bishop of Lincoln, Roger le Poer and Nigel bishop of Ely, who between them held the entire central administration, arrested and forced to surrender their castles.[130] The arrest of the bishops is often seen as an act that destabilised the king's previously formidable relationship with the Church that had been vital in the acquisition and sustention of his rule,[131] and it was not to remain the only instance in which men who had attended the king's court were taken captive.[132] Shortly after this incident, in autumn 1139, Empress Matilda landed in England, and her coming marked the beginning of a civil war that was to last for the most of Stephen's remaining time as monarch, and has earned the period the unfavourable title of an 'anarchy', a time that contemporary

---

[123] Cf. Crouch, The Reign of King Stephen, p. 42-45; King, Introduction, p. 10.

[124] Cf. Martindale, Succession and Politics, p. 21; the author argues that the fact of Stephen being a younger son may have caused some resentment among contemporaries, pointing out that Suger takes note of the fact in his assessment of the succession. See also Crouch, The Reign of King Stephen, p. 64-65 for the gifts with which Stephen pacified Theobald.

[125] Cf. Davis, King Stephen, p. 25-26; Crouch, The Reign of King Stephen, p. 70.

[126] See Crouch, The March and the Welsh Kings, for Stephen and Wales.

[127] Cf. Warren, Henry II, p. 23. See Gillingham, The Angevin Empire, p. 13-14, for the development of the situation in Normandy.

[128] Davis, King Stephen, calls the arrest of the bishops Stephen's "most spectacular mistake" (p. 27), later a "disastrous mistake" (p. 31). For modern historiography's view on the arrest and its long-term consequences, see also Crouch, The Reign of King Stephen, p. 97-102.

[129] Davis, King Stephen, p. 31.

[130] Cf. Jäschke, Anglonormannen, p. 192; Davis, King Stephen, p. 29-30. See Stringer, The Reign of Stephen, p. 20 for the legitimation behind the king's move.

[131] Warren, Henry II, p. 22, agrees to this verdict, likewise Davis, King Stephen, p. 32-33 and King, Introduction, p. 17. White, Restoration and Reform, p. 23, points out that the view has been challenged by Kenji Yoshitake, who argued that administration and episcopal support continued despite the arrest. See also Marritt, King Stephen and the Bishops, for a more general assessment of the relationship between Stephen and the Church throughout the entirety of his reign, maintaining that the support of the bishops lasted throughout the reign, and the clergymen supported both the Roman curia and English kingship.

[132] It is thus that Dalton, Allegiance and Intelligence, p. 88, notes that, by 1140, "Stephen must have had a reputation for surprise attacks against his own men".

chroniclers connected with widespread unrest, destruction and insecurity.[133] Claiming to be her father's rightful heir and invoking the loyalty of those barons that had sworn fealty to her under Henry I, Matilda rallied support in England while her husband moved gradually (and with lasting success) through Normandy. By the end of 1144, the duchy was finally lost for the king.[134]

Stephen confronted the empress at the castle of Arundel, where she had taken refuge with the late king's widow, Adeliza of Louvain. He could have captured her there and then, but instead granted her safe-conduct to Bristol; a decision that allowed her to reunite with her half-brother Robert of Gloucester, who had left earlier to rally the barons for his sister's cause.[135] The king, his territory heavily encroached by the Angevin faction that held the west and the Scottish incursions in the north, was left to travel across England, quelling insurgencies as they arose.

Fortune seemed to favour the empress in 1141. The king was besieging Ranulf earl of Chester at the castle of Lincoln when Robert of Gloucester came to his aid and, in turn, attacked the king, supported by a number of Welsh infantry troops he had brought with him from the west.[136] After a great number of the magnates had fled the field, abandoning the king, Stephen was eventually captured and transferred into close custody.[137] With the king thus confined, the empress styled herself lady of the English and proceeded to assume her rights. Her triumph, however, was not to last long: self-confidently, she refused the proposal of the king's brother Henry of Winchester to grant to Eustace, the king's son, those lands the king had held before he took the crown – in doing so, she was refusing a tolerable compromise, and her obstinacy in this respect may well have caused unease among the magnates.[138] She tried – and failed – to win over London and Winchester, a failure often attributed to her problematic bearing. Towards the end of the year, the situation had returned to the state of affairs before the king's capture: Earl Robert of Gloucester had himself been taken prisoner in early September, and, in an elaborately contrived process, one prisoner was exchanged for the other.[139] The king's return to power was marked by his ceremonial crown-wearing at his Christmas court in 1141.

The war between the two parties continued. In 1143, Matilda narrowly avoided captivity when Stephen was besieging her in Oxford.[140] Mortality changed the struggle: Matilda's champion, Robert of Gloucester, died in late 1147, and the empress returned to her husband in Normandy.[141] The throne of England became the prize of the following generation.

While Stephen knighted his son Eustace and, following the customs of the stable Capetian dynasty, made plans to have him crowned while he was still alive, Henry FitzEmpress hazarded

---

[133] Cf. Hollister, The Aristocracy, p. 49-51.
[134] Cf. King, Introduction, p. 24; Davis, King Stephen, p. 75-76.
[135] Cf. Plassmann, Normannen, p. 218; Davis, King Stephen, p. 37-38. See Crouch, The Reign of King Stephen, p. 108-109, for a vindication of the king's decision to allow the empress to cede Arundel. He argues that besieging would not have alleviated the military threat to the king, as Robert of Gloucester was still on the loose, and would solely have succeeded in offending a powerful woman within the realm to whom Stephen had long had a good relationship.
[136] Cf. Crouch, The March and the Welsh Kings, p. 277; Davis, King Stephen, p. 49-50.
[137] Cf. ibid., p. 50; Warren, Henry II, p. 26; King, Introduction, p. 21.
[138] Cf. ibid., p. 23; Davis, King Stephen, p. 56.
[139] Cf. ibid., p. 60. Crouch, The Reign of King Stephen, p. 187.
[140] Cf. Davis, King Stephen, p. 69-70.
[141] Cf. ibid., p. 94-95.

his first cross-channel adventure in 1147. His spontaneous move proved unsuccessful and he soon ran out of funds to pay his army. Since money from Normandy was not forthcoming, he boldly asked Stephen for support – and received the necessary sum to pay his mercenaries and return to Normandy. His second venture followed in 1149, when he was knighted by King David of Scotland and then campaigned temporarily in England, chased by Eustace and avoiding numerous ambushes and search parties on his way to the safe haven of Angevin Bristol.[142]

The king did not succeed in establishing Eustace as his heir. On account of the disputed nature of Stephen's kingship, his refusal to admit the papal candidate to the see of York and his uneasy relations with the archbishop of Canterbury, the bishops of England refused to crown Eustace, despite the best threats the king could muster. Pope Celestine had forbidden the coronation, and his successor confirmed his judgement.[143] With the Church denying Stephen's wish to have his son crowned, Henry's star was rising fast. Upon his return to the continent in 1150, his father invested him with the duchy of Normandy. When Geoffrey of Anjou died in the following year, the young prince additionally acquired the Angevin dominions of Anjou, Maine and Touraine. Already rich in possessions, he married the most eligible noblewoman on the continent: the discarded wife of King Louis VII of France, Eleanor of Aquitaine, thus adding the duchess's extensive possessions in southern France to his growing dominions. His ambition to recover his mother's kingdom, within which he was increasingly accepted as the legitimate heir,[144] had to wait while he conducted this diplomatic coup and contended with a coalition of those who opposed his sudden rise to power.[145] Henry emerged victorious, and with the necessary resources to fund his campaign and the promise of reuniting England with Normandy, he crossed to England.[146]

The king gathered forces to settle the matter in a pitched battle – but was soon compelled to negotiate. The barons beseeched the king to negotiate and to accept Henry; they were weary of fighting and, presumably, so was the king. His steadfast wife Matilda had died in 1152 and Stephen's hopes of winning the throne for his own son died with Eustace, who succumbed to an illness in 1153.[147] Elaborate arrangements for peace between the two parties were made: while it was widely acknowledged that Henry was the rightful heir to the throne, Stephen was an anointed king, and could not simply be replaced. He was thus to remain king while he lived, adopting Henry as his heir and successor and Henry did homage to him. Stephen's initial landholdings, which should have gone to the deceased Eustace, were to go to his second son, William, who did

---

[142] Cf. Warren, Henry II, p. 36-37; Davis, King Stephen, p. 104-107.
[143] Cf. Crouch, The Reign of King Stephen, p. 258; Davis, King Stephen, p. 103; Warren, Henry II, p. 426. See Eales, Local Loyalties, p. 103-104, for the claim that the greatest factor in preventing the coronation of Eustace was Theobald of Canterbury, who travelled to the papal council in Rheims against Stephen's wishes and refused to crown Eustace.
[144] Cf. King, Introduction, p. 30.
[145] Among them were the king of France, Stephen's son Eustace and Henry II's brother Geoffrey, who saw himself bereft of his inheritance. Which inheritance Geoffrey of Anjou had intended to bequeath to his second eldest son remains unclear. Reports vary from a number of castles to the possession of Maine and Anjou as soon as Henry had recovered England; Geoffrey himself claimed Anjou. See Warren, Henry II, p. 45-46, and Davis, King Stephen, p. 111-113; Gillingham, The Angevin Empire, p. 16-17.
[146] Cf. Warren, Henry II, p. 48-49.
[147] Cf. ibid., p. 51; Davis, King Stephen, p. 114-121; Gillingham, The Angevin Empire, p.18.

homage to Henry. The agreement – the treaty of Westminster – also contained clauses intended to stabilise the tumultuous conditions resulting from the period of civil war. A series of agreements were made to settle questions of inheritance and land ownership among the barons. Barons who had not already done so did homage to both Henry and Stephen, thus avoiding the creation (and necessarily punishment) of a losing faction. Stephen agreed that he would act, king though he was, on advice of Duke Henry; the foreign mercenaries that had been widely used during the years of civil war were to leave England, and independently built castles to be demolished.[148]

Stephen reigned undisputed at last – but the king could not enjoy it for long. In October 1154, he suddenly fell ill and died. The throne was Henry's, and he did not have to hurry to lay claim to it.[149]

### *2.5. The Reign of Henry II*

Henry II dedicated himself to the pacification of his newly-won kingdom; an endeavour which met with little resistance and was, in its essence, completed by 1155. In his continental domains, he still had to counter the aspirations of his younger brother Geoffrey, but could soon appease him.[150] His inheritance, coupled with England and the extensive lands of his wife, made him a formidable landholder indeed, and consolidating his hold on the extensive 'empire' he had acquired remained a central of feature of his reign.[151]

In England, Henry II set to reconstructing the distribution of landed property based on the situation at the moment of Henry I's death by revoking or not acknowledging grants made by Stephen.[152] Apart from these territorial changes, he is often credited for the efforts he invested into re-ordering the financial and administrative system of England, much of which allegedly lost its efficiency during the years of civil war.[153] Besides changes in the administrative setup of the realm, Henry II also reformed and centralised the realm's coinage.[154] Justice was another target of reform (and profit-making), with sheriffs being ordered to cooperate beyond the boundaries of the individual shires in their inquiries into crimes committed since the king's accession. The newly introduced writ *novel disseisin* with its formalisation and automatisation of judicial processes promised fast judgements for those that had been (il)legitimately dispossessed.[155] The king's use

---

[148] Cf. Davis, King Stephen, p. 119-123; Holt, 1153: The Treaty of Winchester; See King, The Accession of Henry II, for a detailed analysis of the settlement, its preparations, terms and consequences.

[149] Cf. Davis, King Stephen, p. 124. This depiction of Stephen's reign has been, given the focus of this work, predominantly focussed on the king. For an overview of the time that considers "the other side" in the civil war, see the respective chapters in Chibnall, Empress Matilda.

[150] Cf. Keefe, Henry II, "Geoffrey fitz Count's revolt, 1155–1156, and Henry's ascendancy".

[151] See Gillingham, The Angevin Empire, p. 20-27, for the relationship of Henry II to the different parts of his domain, and the settlements he reached with neighbours to strengthen his borders.

[152] Cf. Warren, The Governance of Norman and Angevin Kings, p. 96.

[153] To what extent – or whether it did so at all – the well-developed English administrative system had collapsed during Stephen's reign remains an issue of frequent dispute. Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 19-20; Warren, The Governance of Norman and Angevin England, p. 100. Graeme, Restoration and Reform is concerned exclusively with these formation years of Henry II's early reign, analysing and contrasting the policies of Stephen and Henry II, exploring how 'ruling' may have functioned in the years dubbed 'anarchic'.

[154] Cf. Allen, Henry II and the English Coinage, p. 257-260; Warren, The Governance of Norman and Angevin England, p. 97; See also Eaglen, The Evolution of Coinage, and Barratt, Finance and the Economy.

[155] Cf. Poole, From Domesday Book to Magna Carta, p. 407.

of Justices in Eyre, travelling judges, aimed to ensure the continuing control and safeguarding of customary judicial legal practice, while trials by jury gradually replaced the less popular baronial justice.[156] The results these measures yielded went a long way to establish his reputation as an able administrator: twenty years later most of the jurisdiction and administration that had been exercised by local governments had fallen into the competence of the Crown.[157]

In more personal matters, Henry II could not match his success in questions of administrative policy and in dealing with external affairs. The quarrels with his family and Thomas Becket dominated his reign in the eyes of contemporaries. Several crises with substantial repercussions were to follow – the especially delicate royal discord with Thomas Becket even bestowed upon England, albeit involuntarily, a legendary martyr.

Following Henry II's insistence and support, Thomas Becket, the king's loyal chancellor and friend, had been elected to the influential archbishopric of Canterbury in 1162. Becket, reluctant to accept the high office, reacted in a way the king had apparently not anticipated. The fledgling archbishop resigned his office as royal chancellor, much against the king's wishes, and, a hitherto worldly cleric, began to fight for the rights of the Church with the same fervour with which he had formerly asserted the rights of the Crown.[158] Becket, zealous to protect the material property of his see and the freedom of the Church, came invariably into conflict with the king who aimed to re-establish the royal authority and power his grandfather had held. When the king attempted to impose the Constitutions of Clarendon, which would have severely restricted canonical jurisdiction, weakened the bond to Rome and allowed for greater royal intervention into matters of the Church, the rift between them was complete. Becket, accused of felony and embezzlement, fled to France, from where he excommunicated a number of English clerics and even threatened to ban the king himself.[159]

The exiled archbishop returned to England after negotiations for peace with Henry II, but retained the excommunications and suspensions he had proclaimed, even adding further bans in 1170, thus reprimanding those who had crowned the king's eldest son contrary to the privileges of Canterbury – which prompted the king, in a fit of anger around Christmas, to fatefully exclaim his exasperation whether there was no one to rid him of the boisterous archbishop. Four knights of his household apparently took this to be a royal order and slew the passionate defender of the Church in his cathedral.[160] Since the men belonged to the king's household, their deed fell back on him. Henry II was in Normandy when he received the news of the events. In the face of what had transpired, the king, whose European reputation – spotless before – had suffered greatly

[156] Cf. Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 31.
[157] Cf. Warren, The Governance of Norman and Angevin England, p. 101, p. 105; See also Brand, Henry II and the Creation of the English Common Law. Clanchy, England and its Rulers, p. 150-155, contrasts modern praise for the king's legal 'innovations' with the views of contemporaries, and argues that the increase in written records, rather than the genius of the king, merited the verdict of legal innovation.
[158] Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 42.
[159] Cf. ibid., p. 42-43; see also Warren, Henry II, p.97, and p. 104-105 for Becket in France and p. 482-511 for an analysis of the Becket dispute in its entirety, with especial regard to the element of Church policy in Henry II's reign. A recent analysis of Henry II's relation to the Church and the political background of the Becket dispute is provided in Duggan, Henry II, the English Church and the Papacy.
[160] Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 63, and Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 38.

from the incident, professed his humility and repentance at the site of the archbishop's grave.[161] Nonetheless, his promised submission to the verdict of the Church would have to wait. Shortly before the arrival of the papal legate in 1171, Henry II moved to Ireland, which, calling upon a papal bull of 1155, he intended to conquer and take as fief from the pope. Apart from minor financial losses, the monarch survived the Becket crisis relatively unscathed, even though he had to trade his politically valuable freedom of choice in the papal schism for the pope's goodwill.[162]

It was the discord within the king's family that caused complications on a much grander scale. The *dissensione quae fuit inter regem Henricum secundum et tres filios suos* characterised the later years of the king's reign to such an extent that Ralph of Diceto assigned them an independent symbol in the structure of his chronicle: two hands grasping at a crown.[163] The wrestle for power in the extensive Angevin dominions began to take its course in 1169, when, at Montmirail, the king attempted to settle the inheritance of his sons – in spite of his promises of ceding power and responsibility, the king maintained his exclusive grip on the entirety of his realm.[164] Allegedly following their mother Eleanor's advice, the younger sons Richard, who had become the nominal duke of Aquitaine, and Geoffrey, who had been promised Brittany by his father, resolved to aid their brother Henry the Young King in his insurrection against their father. The eldest son, despite having won great prestige through his coronation, and being strategically prepared as a successor of his father in the office of kingship, was severely hampered by the refusal of his father to concede him tangible power or lands with which he could have endowed his followers.[165] Having sent her sons to the court of their fellow conspirator (and her former husband) King Louis VII of France, the energetic queen herself called Poitou to arms against Henry II.[166] Despite the great force mustered against him Henry II triumphed over his sons.[167]

Naturally, the concessions the old king would make to his rebellious sons were a far cry from their original ambitions: Richard, for example, received merely two castles in Aquitaine – in the respective charter literally only such castles "*unde michi nocere non possit*"[168]. Henry II clearly did not trust his son with strategically more significant fortifications. In the following years, Richard, having submitted himself once more to his father's will, subdued (with some success) the rebellious barons of Aquitaine. However, after a period of peace, prosperity and remarkably good relations to France,[169] the quarrel flared up once more, amid a new exchange of hostilities with France's new king.

---

161 See Warren, Henry II, p. 135, for the interpretation that the repentance at Becket's tomb was meant to separate the cause of the rebels from the nimbus of the dead archbishop.

162 Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 66-69; Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 38-40; Warren, Henry II, p. 115, and 531-534.

163 Cf. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 1, p. 4.

164 Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 58; Warren, Henry II, p. 110-111.

165 Cf. Strickland, On the Instruction of a Prince, for the problematic situation of the young king.

166 Cf. Gillingham, Richard the Lionheart, p. 64. See Dunbabin, Henry II and Louis VII, for the role of the French king in this first great rebellion.

167 Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 74-75; Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 42; Warren, Henry II, p. 125-140

168 Cf. Diceto, Ymagines 1, p. 383.

169 Cf. Warren, Henry II, p.143-148, for the development of the relationship to France. After the mutual agreement to go on crusade, the relationship between Louis VII and Henry II took an upward turn, culminating, as far as the prestige of the English court was concerned, with Louis VII's visit to the shrine of Thomas Becket to pray for the

Aiming, possibly, at maintaining the unity of his vast possessions after his death, Henry II demanded that his sons do homage to Henry the Young King for their possessions. Geoffrey, the second-eldest, was easily convinced, yet Richard would only comply with his father's wishes if he was guaranteed that Aquitaine would remain in the possession of himself and his successors. It was a concession the young king would not make, and fighting broke out once more when Richard stormed from the assembly to fortify his castles.[170]

The tides of battle swept this way and that way. Among other confrontations, Henry II fought against Henry the Young King once more and ordered his youngest son John to join forces with his brother Geoffrey and wrest Aquitaine from Richard. Then, the young king died unexpectedly from an illness, and his brother Geoffrey died during a tournament.[171] Yet although the potential heirs for the vast Angevin dominions had thus been reduced by half of their original number, the inter-familial feuding nonetheless continued to run rampant. The French Crown, embodied since 1180 by Philip II, took part in the domestic differences of the English royal family, time and again allying with Henry II's sons against their father, most notably sharing a strong friendship with Richard.

Rumour had it that John, youngest descendant of the royal family and favourite son of his father was to marry Alice, the sister of Philip II, who had hitherto been promised to Richard, although a marriage had not yet taken place.[172] This new scheme would have made John heir to Anjou, Aquitaine and, with the exception of Normandy, the other continental French fiefs. Richard would have been left with the island kingdom and Normandy.[173] After Philip II had revealed these plans to Richard, who was very attached to Aquitaine, the southern duchy bequeathed to him by his mother, escalation was at hand once more.[174]

Negotiations for the peace between England and France soon took the shape of negotiations about Richard's Angevin inheritance. The spurned son and the French monarch demanded (apart from Philip II's continual demand that his sister Alice finally be married) not only that the magnates do homage to Richard, but also insisted that John take the cross and leave, together with Richard, for the Holy Land[175] – where, or so Richard probably believed, Henry II would hardly have been able to lavish the eldest son's rightful inheritance on him. The oath that would once and for all settle the question of inheritance, which Richard, with Philip II as his negotiating partner, would have from his father, was not forthcoming – Henry II refused to swear an oath to which he had been forced. Richard, who had witnessed his father's refusal, did, on the very spot, do homage to Philip II for the Angevin continental possessions his father held as fief from the French Crown.[176]

---

health of his son. Following the old king's death, Henry II took an active interest in the upbringing of his successor, Philip II, intervening on his behalf when he had maneuvered himself into a diplomatic impasse.

[170] Cf. Gillingham, Richard the Lionheart, p. 93.
[171] Cf. ibid., p. 95-104.
[172] Cf. Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 59.
[173] Cf. Appleby, Johann "Ohneland", p. 38-39.
[174] Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 112-113.
[175] Cf. ibid.
[176] Cf. ibid., p. 116-118.

Continued campaigning ensued. With joint forces, Richard and Philip II attacked the possessions of the English monarch, who repeatedly fled, was given chase, and finally had to surrender.[177] Henry II, greatly weakened by an illness, at long last accepted the peace terms. Besides acknowledging Richard as his sole heir, he had to accept the loss of several castles as well as reparation payments to France.[178] Henry II died but two days after he had been forced to declare Richard his successor.

### *2.6. The Reign of Richard I*

Richard, whose claim to the throne was by then unrivalled, saw to his domains on the continent before landing in Portsmouth 13 August 1189, where Eleanor, freed from the lengthy captivity imposed upon her by her husband for her involvement in the rebellion of his sons,[179] had prepared a magnificent reception for her son.[180] Richard's first weeks on the throne were full of hectic activity.

He had been the first prince to the north of the Alps to take the cross[181] and was eager to be on his way. So as to safeguard his throne, he ensured himself of the barons' loyalty, invested Geoffrey, an illegitimate son of Henry II who had displayed great loyalty to his father, with the archbishopric of York and endowed his brother lavishly with estates that, while ensuring his financial independence, did not give him a military base.[182] The king would also have Geoffrey and John swear that they would refrain from setting foot onto English soil for the next three years. He did, however, release them from this oath again, presumably because Eleanor had argued against it.[183]

Richard decided that, during his absence, his former chancellor William Longchamp was to govern his lands, aided by five counsellors that had served well under Henry II.[184] Eleanor, then over 70 years of age, would additionally provide her knowledge and advice. After her husband's death, she had, with Richard endowing her with the lands traditionally pertaining to English queens, risen to a considerable degree of power and influence.[185] The inner consolidation of the kingdom was followed by securing its outward boundaries: John travelled into the turbulent west, whence he brought the influential prince of southern Wales, Ryhs ap Gruffyds, to meet the king at Oxford. The preoccupied king, however, would not meet with the Welsh prince and Ryhs returned angrily to Wales without having talked to Richard.[186] Despite this somewhat unfortunate

---

[177] Cf. Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 60.
[178] Cf. ibid.; also Gillingham, Richard the Lionheart, p. 123.
[179] Vollrath, Kommunikation über große Entfernungen, p. 92, notes that Eleanor may have been imprisoned, but must still have enjoyed the privileges of her status, as the high costs noted in the Pipe Rolls proved.
[180] Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 125-126.
[181] Cf. Fischer, Richard Löwenherz, p. 306.
[182] Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 126-127; Appleby, Johann "Ohneland", p. 43.
[183] Cf. ibid., p. 45-46, Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 142.
[184] Cf. ibid., p. 134.
[185] Cf. ibid., p. 125-126 and 134.
[186] Cf. Roger of Howden 3, p. 23. Roger of Howden's description "*quia rex Angliae noluit occurrere illi, sicut rex pater suus solebat*" and Rhys' reaction of being *valde indignatus* might be read as indicative of a customary – possibly symbolic – greeting or gesture of respect between the English king and the Welshman.

incident, the *status quo* of the western border was, for the time being, secured, and a hundred years' peace with Scotland safeguarded the north.[187]

With these matters settled, there was only one thing the king's crusading venture still lacked: money. Richard proved highly dextrous in gathering the funds needed. He intensified the Crown's 'usual' demands – feudal dues, the income of the sheriffs, baronial and clerical rights that were in the hand of the Crown and remnants of the Saladin tithe his father had imposed – which more than doubled the royal income from circa 15,000 pounds in 1189 to roughly 31,000 pounds in 1190.[188] As he had done before when he moved against Toulouse, he had many nobles personally pledge themselves to the cause of the crusade – those that did not want to leave for the Holy Land bought themselves free, thus feeding the crusading funds. Since the money he could procure in this way was by far not enough for Richard's ambitious plans, he resorted to a spectacular move: in an unprecedented 'sell-out', the king transferred nearly all English offices and numerous offices on his continental lands to the highest bidder, from administrative offices to bishoprics or the lucrative shrievalties.[189] Only five sheriffs retained the office they had held before.[190]

The result of Richard's efforts was a sizeable fleet that left for the Holy Land.[191] However, the king's arrival was much delayed: royal efforts of fundraising, geostrategic considerations and a marriage caused him to arrive in Palestine nearly a year after he had set out. [192]

Especially the first stop of the voyage, the stay in Messina, held up the king for nearly half a year – aided, but not exclusively caused by the onset of winter that complicated the passage.[193] At first, Richard wanted to wait for his future wife, Berengaria, sister of Sancho of Navarre, who was to replace his former betrothed, Alice of France.[194] While this fuelled the conflict between Richard and Philip II, the stay in Messina, too, was proving troublesome. Unrest and rioting against the crusaders ran high among the populace, and Richard eventually decided to take Messina.[195] The resulting treaty between Richard and Tancred of Sicily, duke of Lecce, did not only, as Richard promised military assistance, interfere with the succession dispute in Sicily,[196] but it also made steps towards setting the course for the future of Richard's domains. The treaty mentions a marriage between a daughter of Tancred and Arthur, duke of Brittany, nephew to the king and his heir should Richard die without offspring.[197]

In April 1190, Richard's host was finally leaving for Palestine. Yet the fleet was caught up in a storm, delivering the shipwrecked future English queen Berengaria and Richard's sister Joan into the hands of the ruler of Cyprus, Isaac Komnenos. Richard dedicated a further month to the capture of Cyprus. The island that was rumoured to have connections to Saladin and be involved

---

[187] Cf. Appleby, Johann "Ohneland", p. 45.
[188] Cf. Barrat, The English Revenue of Richard I, p. 637 and p. 639-640.
[189] Cf. Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 66-67.
[190] Cf. Heiser, Richard I and His Appointments to English Shrievalties, p. 2.
[191] Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 139.
[192] Cf. ibid., p. 154 und Fischer, Richard Löwenherz, p. 307.
[193] Cf. Fischer, Richard Löwenherz, p. 307.
[194] Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 158-159.
[195] Cf. Gillingham, Richard the Lionheart, p. 152.
[196] Cf. Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 69.
[197] Cf. Roger of Howden 3, p. 65.

with attacks on pilgrims to Jerusalem was a valuable price: it added further funding to the costly crusade, provided an important supply base for Palestine and offered Richard an opportunity to marry Berengaria without causing too great a stir – considerations that have given rise to speculations that the bad weather had not been the king's sole reason for conquering the island.[198]

From Cyprus the journey continued (as had originally been planned) to the gates of Acre. Contested for years, the city was caught in a difficult stalemate: while the crusaders laid siege to the city, they were, in turn, beleaguered by Saladin's host.[199] The additional secured a Christian victory. Despite the success, dissension grew among the crusaders and Philip II, prepared to leave shortly after the capture of Acre, although his crusading vow, like Richard's, had promised the capture of Jerusalem and was far from having been fulfilled. Fearing his continental possessions in jeopardy should Philip II return to France, Richard would have him swear not to harm his realm while he was still on crusade. While the rift between the crusaders widened, the smouldering conflict with the command of the Muslim host over the fulfilment of the terms of surrender erupted. When Saladin would not meet his demands, Richard had all but a few of the captured Muslims executed.[200]

From Acre, the ground forces, now under the uncontested leadership of Richard, moved along the coastline, supported by the accompanying English fleet and constantly attacked by the Muslim army that moved parallel to the Christians. In the battle of Arsûf both sides finally collided in battle. The Christian host was victorious, and Saladin retreated to Jerusalem.[201] Shortly after, the crusaders captured Jaffa and began to erect anew the fortifications that had been demolished.[202] Despite the relative success, a foray to Jerusalem was aborted.[203]

When a further march on Jerusalem was abandoned near the gates of the Holy City itself, the Christian army began to slowly disband.[204] The continuing failure of the crusaders to take Jerusalem and the mounting dissent among the members of the host was aggravated by a steady influx of disconcerting news from Richard's domains. Longchamp had been disposed as chancellor, John was attempting to seize power, and Philip II had not kept to his vow. Richard left the Holy Land without capturing Jerusalem – instead, he treated with Saladin. The result was an agreement that mirrored the current military balance of power: while Jerusalem and a major part of the Palestine inland remained in the hands of the Muslims, the Christian coastal outposts between Tyre and Jaffa were secured, and the Christians were to be granted access to their holy sites within Jerusalem.[205]

The return journey of the Plantagenet king proved perilous. Owing to his hectic preparation of the crusade, the king had neglected alliances outside the boundaries of his domains, and his treaty with Tancred, an adversary of the Staufen dynasty, as well as an insult of duke Leopold V of Austria in the aftermath of the siege of Acre had angered princes whose territories now

198 Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 164; Fischer, Richard Löwenherz, p. 130-131.
199 Cf. ibid., p. 137-138.
200 Cf. ibid., p. 141, p. 146.
201 Cf. ibid., p. 110.
202 Cf. ibid., p. 154.
203 Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 179.
204 Cf. ibid., p. 184.
205 Cf. Fischer, Richard Löwenherz, p. 182.

stretched between him and his own realm. Apparently, the monarch decided to take the overland route, possibly to reach the lands of the Welfs, with whom he was on friendly terms.[206] The disguised monarch was discovered, captured and handed over to the Staufen king, who put him on trial for his crimes. On the Imperial Diet in March 1193, the Plantagenet king had to answer to numerous accusations: murdering Conrad of Montferrat, disregarding his feudal duties to Philip II, abandoning the Holy Land to the Muslims through the despicable peace he had made with them; his interference with the succession dispute in Sicily had cost the emperor his claim to the island, he had insulted the duke of Austria and, finally, assumed the leading role within the Christian crusading host that would have been the emperor's privilege. The king refuted the accusations and was at last given the kiss of peace – nonetheless, the emperor required ransom to be paid before he would release his prisoner.[207]

Despite his continuing captivity, Richard was able to remain in contact with his realm – a vital asset in gathering the high ransom. Eleanor and the justiciars set to collecting the sum necessary to free the king.[208] At the beginning of February 1194, Richard was released from captivity, after a major part of the ransom had been paid and the remaining sum vouched for by hostages; the joint efforts of John and Philip II to keep him imprisoned had amounted to nothing. The king used his return journey to cultivate his relations to the princes of the lower Rhine, many of whom he outfitted with pensions.[209]

His first destination was the kingdom of England – there, he renewed his coronation oath in a magnificent ceremony,[210] and moved against the territories being held against him. The king did not stay within his kingdom for long – his wish to recover his possessions on the continent from Philip II had him cross the Channel towards the coasts of Normandy only two months after his arrival, in May 1194. Richard spent the following years, until his death in 1199, grappling with the French king for his lost possessions. In this, he was supported by Henry VI, who freed the last hostages in 1195 and, granting Richard remission of the missing 17,000 marks of the ransom, gave him back much of his former political freedom of action.[211] The king's retaliation campaign seemed a great success: by 1195, Richard had already recaptured about two thirds of the territories that had been taken from him.[212] Death came for the monarch during a siege in Aquitaine when he was hit by a crossbow bolt.

---

[206] Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 187.
[207] Cf. ibid., p. 195.
[208] Cf. ibid., p. 197-198.
[209] Cf. Poole, From Domesday Book to Magna Carta, p. 367; Gillingham, Richard the Lionheart, p. 233; Huffman, Die sozialen Aspekte der Außenpolitik, p. 65.
[210] The most extensive depiction is that of Roger of Howden 3, p. 247-249.
[211] Cf. Poole, From Domesday Book to Magna Carta, p. 366; Berg, Richard Löwenherz. p. 234.
[212] Cf. Fischer, Richard Löwenherz, p. 241. See also Moss, The Defence of Normandy 1193-8, esp. p. 150, for the positive attitude and loyalty towards the king among the populace of the duchy, fostered, not least, by the largesse Richard displayed, drawing on an increased revenue.

*2.7. The Reign of John I*

For much of his early life, John Lackland had been restricted to the background of political events.[213] Although his situation gradually improved from his initial landlessness, owed both to the high mortality rate among the older male Plantagenet-children and the old king's concern for the livelihood of his youngest son, the name stuck.

After Richard's death, John gained the support of William Marshal and Archbishop Hubert Walter who took up his cause in Normandy and England while Eleanor secured Poitou and did homage to the French king for Maine, Anjou and Touraine. His rule over the sprawling domains thus secured, John travelled to England for his coronation. However, he had to return to the continent soon, because many nobles, especially those of Normandy and Brittany, preferred John's nephew Arthur as their future ruler.[214] Philip II realised the value of the young prince, and took him into his care. John paid dearly for peace on the continent. Although he was acknowledged as overlord of young Arthur, who was given Brittany as a fief, he had to agree to severe territorial concessions in favour of France, and had to pay the sum of 20,000 marks in order to be invested anew with his continental fiefs.[215]

Shortly after, the monarch, who had only just been divorced from his wife on grounds of consanguinity, caused a considerable stir in marrying Isabella of Angoulême, who had already been promised to another nobleman. This spontaneous marriage allied the English monarch with the powerful and quarrelsome house of Angoulême, but greatly exasperated the no less powerful and equally quarrelsome Lusignans, and had momentous consequences. In autumn 1201 the family, after having caused unrest in Aquitaine, brought their grievances before Philip II, who, in his capacity as John's overlord, summoned John to appear in court to settle the feudal dispute.[216] Since John did not attend the trial, it was declared that he had forfeited Anjou and Poitou – in consequence, the French king attacked the domains of his 'disloyal vassal'.[217]

The struggle on the continent continued. When John captured his nephew Arthur and some leading nobles of Aquitaine, who had been besieging Eleanor within the fortress of Mirebeau, he had good reason to triumph: not only had he captured many of the ringleaders responsible for the turmoil in his domains, his victory even stalled Philip II's attacks for a while[218] – yet John's success was not built to last. The uncertainty of Arthur's future in the hands of the Angevin and the king's treatment of the captured nobles caused more and more continental vassals to turn from their overlord, while rebellious movements stirred in Brittany, Anjou and Normandy.[219]

---

[213] He earned his epithet – that not necessarily bears witness to extensive political power – because his father, after John's older siblings had been provided for with claims to ample estates, could endow his youngest son with nothing but the county of Mortain and promises for land claims in Ireland, once it had been conquered; see Appleby, Johann "Ohneland", p. 17.

[214] Cf. Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 93. See also Bartlett, England under the Norman and Angevin Kings, p. 26-27, for the events leading up to John's gradual loss of loyalty among his continental subjects and general failure, to which the marriage to Isabella is interpreted as a catalyst.

[215] Cf. Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 94.

[216] Cf. Vincent, Isabella of Angoulême analyses the role of John's queen, particularly against the background of accusations of sexual immorality otherwise raised against the Angevins. See also Powicke, The Loss of Normandy, p. 145.

[217] Cf. Sarnowsky, England im Mittelalter, p. 109.

[218] Cf. Turner, King John, p. 100.

[219] Cf. ibid., p. 101; Powicke, The Loss of Normandy, p. 153-154, p. 157.

When castle upon castle fell into the hands of Philip II, some of them without a fight, John left for England early one morning towards the end of 1203, probably because he feared treachery.[220] Shortly after his departure, Richard's expensive and formidable Château-Gaillard fell, clearing the way for attacks on Rouen. When the city at the Seine capitulated, Normandy came into French possession. Philip II's order – which John was later to repeat – that all princes would have to decide either for their continental or their English possessions broke the last connections between England and the fiefdom in northern France.[221]

Roughly two years after the first assaults on his French possessions, the English monarch planned his re-conquest. His plans, as well as the passage of the Channel upon which he had embarked with only a few followers after a dispute with his barons were abandoned quickly. A further campaign did not succeed in bringing the lost territories back into his hands, but merely consolidated the king's hold on Aquitaine.[222]

Matters were no less problematic in England itself: the search for a new occupant of the most influential of all English archiepiscopal sees, Canterbury, resulted in political turbulences. John had intended to have John Grey take the staff and ring of the archbishopric. The monks of Canterbury, however, had secretly elected their own candidate: their subprior Reginald. When Reginald, despite the secrecy of his election, boasted about his new office, the monks began to distance themselves from their choice and moved, once more, closer to the king's will. In this situation they were to hold a new election before Pope Innocent III. With considerable reluctance, they gave in to the will of the pope, and voted neither for the cleric originally elected nor for John's favoured candidate, but chose the nominee of the Holy See, Stephen Langton. John's reaction was angry: he expelled the objectionable monks from Canterbury and confiscated their goods.[223] While the newly elected archbishop preferred to await the end of the king's anger on the continent, the papal interdict was placed upon England in 1207, in the hope of forcing the king to change his mind. The ban, however, remained in place for years, apparently without any negative consequences for England. Neither did John's excommunication in 1209 effect royal compliance with the authority of the pope. Some clerics did leave the country, but many continued to stand by their king.[224]

The severity of the conflict increased. Allegedly at the behest of Rome, Philip II gathered troops to cross the Channel. In consultation with the English barons, rumours were spread that Innocent III had deposed John in favour of the French king.[225] In the face of a French-led conquest of his kingdom, John decided to not only fulfil the pope's demands by allowing Stephen Langton to enter England as Archbishop of Canterbury, but to go a step further. He took the kingdom of England as a fiefdom from the hands of the pope, thus effectively ending the imminent threat of an ecclesiastically justified French invasion and securing the future support of

---

220 ibid., p. 162, p. 169; see also Appleby, Johann "Ohneland", p. 106-107.

221 Cf. Powicke, The Loss of Normandy, p. 260, p. 263; Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 100.

222 Cf. Turner, King John, p. 109; Appleby, Johann "Ohneland", p. 122.

223 Cf. ibid., p. 116-117, p. 124; Turner, King John, p. 125-127.

224 Cf. ibid., p. 128-130. For an assessment of John's ecclesiastical policy, and a mitigating if not favourable analysis of 'how bad' he really treated the church, see Harper-Bill, John and the Church of Rome. See also Appleby, Johann "Ohneland", p. 163, Berg, Die Anjou-Platangenets, p. 105.

225 Cf. ibid., p. 110; Turner, King John, p. 133.

the Roman see. This new alliance could, however, not counter the problems that were to dominate the last years of John's reign. Increasingly, English nobles turned from the king, and refused to take part in campaigns aimed at regaining the lost continental lands.[226]

With the battle of Bouvines, the continental campaign culminated in a defeat for England, despite the impressive allies that had been called upon: the Welf emperor Otto IV, a nephew of Richard and John that the two English kings had long supported financially, as well as almost all princes of the present-day Benelux countries stood at the side of the English monarch for this battle. John returned to his kingdom having failed to recapture his former possessions, and this last great effort had left his finances in a dismal state.[227]

Back in England, the king had to confront his barons, whose demands increasingly went beyond the mere refusal to perform feudal services on the continent. They appeared armed before the king, then moved on to London and occupied the city. Both sides appealed to the pope as mediator, but received only rather vague answers. The barons publicly defied the king, renouncing all their feudal duties, and in the resulting struggle, resembling a civil war, the king moved against them with the aid of mercenaries from the continent.[228] In June 1215, John gave in to the barons' demands and signed the *Magna Carta Libertatum*, which greatly weakened the royal position in favour of the magnates.[229]

Yet even after the charter had been signed, the unrest did not subside: the barons, still in arms, remained in London. In response to the king's complaints, the pope released John from the obligations of *Magna Carta* and civil war erupted once more.[230] While the king did what was within his power to undo the concessions he had made to the barons, his indignant former subjects offered the English crown to the French king. In spite of papal threats, Philip II's son Louis crossed to England and set to conquering this potential new kingdom, opposed those the defences John could still muster.[231]

After he had lost a major part of his entourage, his treasures and his personal goods when, during the hasty crossing of the mouth of a river between Cross Keys and Long Sutton, the royal train was surprised by the flood,[232] the king abruptly died from the consequences of dysentery in Newark. With his sudden death, he left his son a country in a state of civil war, under the threat of Louis VIII.[233]

---

[226] Cf. Holt, The Northerners, p. 91.
[227] Cf. Turner, King John, p. 95; Poole, From Domesday Book to Magna Carta, p. 464.
[228] Cf. ibid. p. 468-470; Turner, King John, p. 149-167, for a more politically-centered analysis of the baronial demands. For a description of the rebellion and ensuing events with a focus on the northern baronage, see Holt, The Northerners, p. 79-108.
[229] Cf. Turner, King John, p. 179-189; Appleby, Johann "Ohneland", p. 198-199.
[230] For a detailed analysis of the tug-of-war of the two factions between the issuing of Magna Carta and the renewal of civil war, see Holt, The Northerners, p. 129-142; Turner, King John, p. 190.
[231] Cf. ibid., p. 192; Appleby, Johann "Ohneland", p. 210-215,
[232] Cf. Poole, From Domesday Book to Magna Carta, p. 485; Holt, The Northerners, p. 129-142.
[233] Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 262; Carpenter, Minority of Henry III, p. 1; Turner, King John, p. 193.

*2.8. The Reign of Henry III*

In a makeshift affair that lacked much of the usual ceremony, Henry III was crowned thirteen days after the death of his father.[234] Although John's oldest child, he was then only nine years of age and in a highly precarious situation – but preparations had been made. On his deathbed, John had appointed thirteen men who were to help his son recover and defend his inheritance, most eminent among them William Marshal, the knight *par excellence*, famous for his unbending loyalty, political understanding and military cunning. To him he entrusted the guardianship of his son.[235] Henry III's saving grace was the support of the papacy, the innocence of his youth, and the well-considered actions (and numerous concessions) of the regency council. *Magna Carta* was reissued,[236] enhanced by the forest charter[237] – documents that addressed those issues that had lain at the heart of the barons' protests. The contents of the charters were fixed in 1225 and were to remain binding and continually referred to throughout Henry III's reign by both king and subjects.[238] While thus the insurgents' complaints were gradually addressed – by men from their own ranks – Louis VIII, who found it difficult to balance the demands of his French and English followers, lost ground, and eventually made peace.[239]

While the young king and the regency council were absorbed in the pacification of the kingdom and the recovery of the royal demesne to curb the court's dismal financial situation, Louis VIII lashed out at the continental possessions, a move justified by the sentence that had been passed on John more than twenty years before. Poitou's cities, among them the key port La Rochelle, surrendered to the French threat, despairing of the lack of military and financial support from England.[240]

The king, involved since 1223 in the governance of his realm, ended his minority in January 1227,[241] but the powerful figures of the regency council continued to dominate the government until 1234. Henry III was intent on reocvering the former Angevin continental possessions and, for much of his reign, contrived campaigns that might win him back his French inheritance. His eagerness brought him into conflict with Hubert de Burgh, who had, after the Marshal's death, assumed the knight's elevated post at the king's side. Henry III's first foray into Normandy in 1230, delayed after the first attempt to set off had misfired in late 1229, proved a disappointment although the initial situation had been advantageous: Normandy and Poitou had invited the king's invasion, but the hesitant nature of his advance – possibly influenced by Hubert de Burgh's strong disapproval of an attack on Normandy – discouraged rebellions in his favour, and, disheartened, the king left in autumn with but little gain.[242]

[234] Cf. Carpenter, Minority of Henry III, p. 13, 19.
[235] Cf. ibid., p. 13-16; see Crouch, William Marshal, p. 124-127, for a detailed description of how the Marshal rose from one of the regency council to "Keeper of King and Kingdom".
[236] Cf. Carpenter, Minority of Henry III, p. 23.
[237] Cf. ibid., p. 62. For the measures described therein.
[238] Cf. ibid., p. 387.
[239] Cf. ibid., p. 29 for Louis' problems, p. 44 for his eventual defeat. See also Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagnets, p. 125.
[240] Cf. Carpenter, Minority of Henry III, p.370-375; Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 128-129.
[241] Cf. Carpenter, Minority of Henry III, p. 389.
[242] Cf. Ridgeway, Henry III: "The dominance of Hubert de Burgh, 1227-1232"; Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p.131-132.

The rift with Hubert de Burgh, whose enemies, owed to his great influence and extensive possessions, were many, came in 1232, in the wake of massive protest against papal levies in England. The justiciar was ordered before a court and stripped of his offices and much of his lands.[243] Peter des Roches, bishop of Winchester since John's reign, took de Burgh's place. With him, some of the late king's former retinue returned to powerful positions[244] and, allegedly on his advice, the king's governance took a more authoritarian turn.[245] The changes in the king's inner circle, coupled with his changes in conduct, caused wild (and generally unwarranted) stories of a monstrous influx of strangers and foreigners to run rampant throughout the kingdom: Richard the Marshal took up arms against the king, allied with the Welsh, and the bishops jointly demanded that des Roches step down.[246] By the summer of 1234, Henry III complied and, humbly conceding that he, too, was subject to the law, revoked some of the heavily criticised actions he had taken.[247]

Peter des Roches' downfall heralded the beginning of the king's personal rule and a period of relative peace and stability while the king braved the rough waters of the inter-European marriage market. His first investment was marrying his sister Isabella to the Staufen Emperor Frederick II – an alliance from which, although Henry III must have harboured hopes of gaining a powerful ally against France, the emperor profited rather more than the English king[248] – while his second move was closer to the heart, and resulted in his own marriage to Eleanor of Provence.[249] Another disastrous campaign to Poitou in 1242, foiled by the king's problematic financial situation and his own indecisive generalship,[250] let Henry III relapse (reluctantly) into relative peacefulness in England, sending, not least for want of finance, only a small force headed by Simon de Montfort into Gascony in 1248 to secure it against the threat of rebellion and expansionist continental policies by Henry III's opponents.[251] Montfort's harsh rule in Gascony culminated in a costly crisis that forced the king to postpone his crusading plans, although by the end of the crisis, he had at least reached a friendly understanding with Louis IX that would later permit peace between the two parties.[252]

Henry III's financial situation worsened. The infamous 'sicilian business', which, in a crusade towards Sicily, should have secured the Sicilian crown for the king's second son, Edmund, had incurred the ill will of the papacy, as the king proved unable to satisfy the financial demands of

---

243 Cf. Powicke, King Henry III, p. 79-82; Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 132-133; Carpenter, The Fall of Hubert de Burgh; Clanchy, England and its Rulers, p.217.
244 Cf. Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 123; Clanchy, England and its Rulers, p. 219.
245 Cf. Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 124; Carpenter, Justice and Jurisdiction, p. 39; Carpenter, Kings, Magnates and Society, p. 76-77. See Clanchy, England and its Rulers, p. 222-223, for a discussion of Henry III's views on kingship.
246 Cf. Carpenter, Justice and Jurisdiction, p. 39; Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 133-134. The general scare of 'foreigners' characterised the reign of Henry III. For an assessment of policy towards 'foreigners' later in the reign, see Carpenter, King Henry's 'Statute' against Aliens.
247 Cf. Carpenter, Justice and Jurisdiction, p. 39-42.; Weiler, Kingship, Rebellion and Political Culture, p. 17-19.
248 Cf. Weiler, Henry III and the Staufen Empire, p. 85; Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 135
249 Cf. Weiler, Henry III and the Staufen Empire., p. 56; Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 135-136.
250 Cf. Ridgeway, Henry III: "The expedition to Poitou, 1242-1243"; Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 138-139.
251 Cf. Ridgeway, Henry III: "Family, France, and Finance, 1245-1249".
252 Cf. Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 140-141.

the Holy See.[253] Wales rebelled against him, and his military ventures achieved little. The crisis escalated when he refused to bring his widely disliked Lusignan half-brothers to justice when one of their number attacked a royal servant close to the queen. At the Westminster parliament in 1258, the magnates came armed before the king and presented him with an ultimatum. The king was forced to comply with their demands, the justiciarship was revived, and Henry III's power was largely transferred to a royal council of fifteen magnates in the provisions of Oxford. The barons set to work on reforming the kingdom.[254]

In December 1259, the king was in France, in the treaty of Paris renouncing his claims to the lost Angevin territories but receiving Gascony as vassal of the French king.[255] In 1261, Henry III moved against the provisions, procuring their annulment from the papal curia. With arbitrations and concessions, he quieted the baronial opposition, which was tired of instability, and gradually recovered his power. However, Simon de Montfort, figurehead of the rebellion before, had not been reconciled with the king. He returned to England in 1263 and once more incited revolt, winning the support of the Londoners and entrusting barons with control of the government. Yet the new attempt at placing a council over the king met with far less support among the magnates, and the case was brought before Louis IX to mediate. The French king entirely refuted the provisions in the Mise of Amiens. The lack of compromise had rebellion surge up anew in England, and at the Battle of Lewes, Simon de Montfort and his rebels triumphed over the king, henceforth keeping Henry III under close control.[256]

The new regime, however, was unpopular, and gradually alienated its supporters. A year later, the king's son Edward was freed from captivity by an opposing magnate and, with a party of royalists, confronted and slew Montfort at Evesham. A state of civil war, during which the remnants of rebellion were routed, persisted for the next two years. Henry III spent the remainder of his years raising funds to enable Edward to go on crusade – an ambition he himself, though often attempted, never realised – and, after periods of illness, died in 1272.[257] He was buried with the splendour he had often sought in his lifetime.[258]

---

[253] Cf. ibid., p. 141-142.

[254] Cf. ibid., p. 143-145; Ridgeway, Henry III: "The growth of political opposition, 1255-1258" and "Crisis, 1258". See Valente, The Provisions of Oxford, for a note an assessment of their importance as basis for the barons' demands throughout the barons' war. Carpenter, What Happened in 1258? is solely concerned with this fateful year, and analyses the barons' motives and demands.

[255] Cf. Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 145-147; Ridgeway, Henry III: "The rise and fall of the magnate regime, 1258-1262".

[256] Cf. Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 147-150; Henry III: "The rise and fall of the magnate regime, 1258-1262". "Recovery and relapse, 1262-1264".

[257] Cf. Berg, Die Anjou-Plantagenets, p. 150-152; Ridegeway, Henry III: "War and peace, 1264-1267", "The end of the reign, 1268-1272".

[258] See Carpenter, King Henry III and the Cosmati Work, for one of the king's most famous investments, and Carpenter, The Burial of King Henry III, for a detailed analysis of the splendour and symbolism surrounding the burial of the king, none of which, regrettably, found its way into the narrative contemporary accounts with which the following analysis will be concerned. The article, highlighting the items that were to feature in the king's burial, is nonetheless a rewarding study of the way in which royal ideology found its expression in the burial preparations. Clanchy, England and its Rulers, p.228-229, also analyses the king's liking for ceremonial and aesthetic representations of power.

### *3. Creating Reputations: Depicting the King*

The death of Henry III, slightly more than two hundred years after the accession of William I to the English throne, marks the end of this shortened historical narrative. The king had relinquished the claims and links to Normandy, the paternal inheritance of his great-great-great-grandfather, and his son would become (notoriously) famous for tightening the royal hold on the British Isles, before the connection with France would once more turn into a political imperative with the outbreak of the hundred years' war.

What has been re-iterated in the preceding chapter, however, cannot easily be called more than a scaffold to the (after-)lives of these eight kings. While some tendencies in what may become the interpretation of their kingship – often inspired by the pattern of the kings' defeats and victories – can already be discerned at this rough stage, their 'historical character' and uniqueness lives in the details that have been left out. Whether fictive or real, these details – observations, comments, narratives – determine, on the basis of idealised patterns, which position each king was to assume on the scale of contemporary moral judgement.

#### *3.1. The Source Material*

Such ideas need, by nature, a large canvas to be adequately expressed. There is little in the way of narrative depictions to be gleaned from administrative or documentary sources, which are often unadorned, highly formalised in their language and so much to the point that what they leave of royal self-projection is hardly more than the bare bones of titles and the claim to divinely justified kingship.[1] The primary focus in the search for narratives of royal ideals, therefore, are such sources as can be suspected harbouring a need to tell a story: annals, chronicles and occasional literary comments or letters. They are not only our only testimonies of communicative memory, they are, in fact, also the very thing that came to constitute cultural memory, with history being written and re-written on their basis rather than on the basis of documents.

It goes without saying that contemporary source material is invaluable for historical research. The testimony of contemporaries, written down, in its most precious form, just as the events unfolded, is a witness without hindsight: a judge of individual deeds that is still involved in the process of forming an opinion and has not seen the finished picture. These sources are here grouped together with narratives that, while not or not always written this close to events (and thus to some degree possessing hindsight), were written by people who might reasonably be expected to have first-hand memories – not, perhaps, of the entire time period they were describing, but at least of certain proportion of an individual king's reign. Such witnesses can justifiably be regarded as part of their time's communicative memory, the generation-spanning collective memory that fluctuates with the lifetime of its members. As such, they are more prone to both variation and gaps than later sources. They are the closest approximation possible to how royal deeds were perceived; they allow, perhaps, even a glance at the king's own hand in the forging of his posthumous reputation. Of course, the contemporary sources that survived can

[1] In the few instances in which the limited number of published documents assessed yielded something that could be integrated into the analysis, this has been done.

never be assumed to constitute the entirety of the picture that was transmitted to the next generation. For that, there was too great a difference between the individual chronicles: some gained many readers, others none. However, by the strict limitation to contemporary historians, it is at least secure to say that the impressions gathered in the following analysis are, indeed, contemporary ones. Now lost works, oral tradition and perhaps even fancy would enlarge on these impressions after the king's death.

Contemporary source material cannot, of course, be pronounced unbiased and factual. It is influenced by numerous factors, among them the personality of the author, his emotions, world view and rumours that happened to reach him. Yet given an investigative outlook that searches for representations and narratives rather than attempting to distil some approximation of 'the truth' from the source material, this bias is not superfluous. More than that: it is a pity there is not more of it.

For William the Conqueror's reign, there is – not surprisingly – a staggering difference between the aggrandising, legitimating Norman and the relatively sober English source material. The richness of detail found in the Norman sources is, at significant points, met with stony silence from the English side, making the history of the Norman conquest a history that is indeed written by the victorious. While a definite shortcoming for the attempts at sounding historical realities, the overwhelming bias of the Norman sources' powerful narratives of the Conqueror makes them particularly relevant for the analysis of conscious image-making. Yet, however valuable these narratives are, they are not entirely unproblematic for the evaluation of William I as king: only two contemporary chronicles actually span the length of his reign, and of these, one, William of Jumièges' *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, is extremely brief as far as the Conqueror's deeds after the conquest are concerned. The remaining three sources end with William I claiming the kingdom of England. Although they promote the future king's capability to rule, they do not portray that rule; they portray deeds fit for a king, but not the deeds of a king.

Best-known among the sources celebrating the Conqueror's victory is the Bayeux Tapestry, a monumental piece of craftsmanship depicting the Conquest and its prelude of justification in pictures lined with brief Latin descriptions. Produced between 1067 and 1082, its version of the events is similar to that of the Conqueror's panegyrist, William of Poitiers.[2] The king's half-brother, Bishop Odo of Bayeux, is believed to have commissioned the making of this singular piece of memory culture, not least because of the prominent role he occupies on the fabric,.[3]

Another piece of artistry modelled on the Conquest is the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, a Latin poem describing the Battle of Hastings. Listing it as a contemporary source is a matter of some controversy. The poem is usually attributed to Guy, Bishop of Armiens, a hypothesis that is found confirmed in Orderic Vitalis' history,[4] but has often been doubted.[5] Still, as the poem's

---

[2] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 103.

[3] Cf. Bussmann, Historisierung der Herrscherbilder, p. 139-153; especially p 139 and p. 151-152; Wormald, Style and Design, p. 33-34; Albu, The Normans in their Histories, p. 88; on p. 88-105, the author analyses the border of the tapestry with a view to Aesopic fables, presenting them as a "subversive subtext" that highlights the treacherous, wolfish nature of the Normans (p. 105) to a text otherwise dedicated fully to the praise of their achievements.

[4] Cf. Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, p. xvi-xvii.

latest editor expounds at length, the *Carmen* is compellingly close to other near-contemporary accounts[6] – a fact that could, as Barlow argues, point to its genuine value as a contemporary source, but which could just as well be seen as a remarkable literary feat of a later time. However, as no other credible identification has been made, the *Carmen* continues to be associated with the contemporary sources for William I's reign. If Guy of Armiens was indeed its author, its composition can be assumed to have taken place between 1068 and 1070.[7]

Of much better known origin is the *Gesta Gvillelmi* of William of Poitiers, the panegyric work that, constantly heaping praise upon his hero, begins in 1035, follows Duke William to his conquest of England, legitimises his succession to the throne, and remains unfinished, coming to a very abrupt end in 1067. William of Poitiers was probably born around 1020 and studied at the schools of Poitiers, which accounts for his elaborate style and frequent allusions to and quotations of classic and medieval texts as well as the bible. Having himself fought as a knight for William I, he, as a more secular writer with some combat experience, would relish also in the more worldly virtues of his subject. His position as chaplain to Duke William, later to become archdeacon of Lisieux, put him in close proximity to the Norman court, and provided him with access to information and official documents.[8] His history, though definitely used by later writers – most prominently Orderic Vitalis[9] – does not survive in a manuscript, with the only known copy, known to have been seriously damaged, probably having burnt in 1731.[10]

The last of the contemporary Norman historians is William of Jumièges, a monk of Jumièges Abbey, whose *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* is both continuation and reworking of Dudo of Saint-Quentin's flowery history on the origins of the duchy and its rulers. His text, in turn, was to be revised and enlarged by four anonymous authors, Robert of Torigni and Orderic Vitalis,[11] and widely circulated.[12] The date of its completion is disputed – its history of the Conquest was certainly finished between 1070 and 1072, and is traditionally assumed to have been begun after the Conquest, although, given the sheer extent of the work, as its editor Elisabeth van Houts plausibly argues, it seems more likely that is has been written over a longer period of time, a part of it finished before 1060, the concluding years added until the beginning of the 1070s.[13] Although not as fulsomely panegyric or artistic as the other Norman sources, William of Jumièges likewise writes very much in favour of Duke William. The two continuations of this 'living text' carry the narrative as far as 1135.[14]

---

[5] Ibid., p. liii-xci, discusses the value of the poem as a historical source by comparing it to other contemporary sources. Critics maintain that the source's historical value needs to be doubted, seeing that neither the person of the author nor the date of composition can be regarded as certain.

[6] Cf. ibid., p. liii-xci, for Barlow's step-by-step comparison of the Carmen with other near-contemporary accounts, analysing its historical value.

[7] Cf. ibid., p. xl.

[8] Cf. William of Poitiers, Introduction, p. xv-xlv; Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 99-102.

[9] Cf. William of Poitiers, Introduction, p. xxxv-xxxix for Orderic's use of the text..

[10] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 97, William of Poitiers, Introduction, p. xv. The manuscript had been missing pages at the beginning and end, and consequently, virtually all information about the author is taken from Orderic Vitalis.

[11] Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 1, p. xx-xxi.

[12] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 96-97; Gesta Normannorum Ducum 1, p. xxi.

[13] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 94; Gesta Normannorum Ducum 1, p. xxxii.

[14] Cf. ibid., p. lxxi, lxxvii.

On the English side, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle stands, although very much alone, as a remarkable expedient of the conquered culture; its longest version, often referred to as the Peterborough Chronicle, continues to use Old English until its end in 1154. Begun during the reign of Alfred, the chronicle that is actually a collection of individual, localized texts with a common core, is a contemporary witness spanning five centuries of English history, alternating between an annalistic, short-cropped style and fuller, detailed accounts. The version covering the greatest length of the relevant period, the Peterborough Chronicle, was composed in two steps, laid aside in 1131, and completed until 1154, when the civil war on the island had died down again.[15] As such, it remains a relevant source for the reigns until the beginning of that of Henry II.[16]

On the whole, narrative sources during the reign of William II are not as dramatically focussed on a single event as the accounts documenting the reign of his father. An exception to the rule is, at least in its treatment by scholars, the tractate *De injusta vexacione Willelmi Episcopi Primi*. The piece, emerging from the Durham tradition of historical writing, is usually cited as a contemporary account (of startling vividness) of the trial held by William II against his former advisor and traitorous vassal Bishop William of St. Calais, who had joined the ranks of the rebels. This view is not without contestation, and it has been suggested that the account was written in the second quarter of the twelfth century.[17] However, it seems sufficiently likely that the author (a monk of Durham, possibly Symeon of Durham) had witnessed the kingship of William II, and thus the account is here considered contemporary to his reign.

The most celebrated chronicle of the reign of William II is the many-tomed account of Orderic Vitalis. The life of the author, owing to a brief biography he penned at the very end of his work, is relatively well known: born near Shrewsbury in February 1075, he was sent away to become a monk at the Norman abbey of Saint-Évroul in 1085, where he was educated, worked in the abbey's scriptorium, and, eventually, at the behest of his superiors, began his great historiographical work, the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. Originally planned as a history of Saint-Èvroul, the account grew into a vast chronicle, covering, besides the life of Christ, the apostles, various popes and detailed accounts of the abbey's history and benefactors, Anglo-Norman history from the Conquest until 1141; it was aimed primarily at monks, but presumably also hoped to address learned nobility and secular clerks. The bulk of the work was written between 1123 and 1137. At an earlier stage in his writing career, Orderic had reworked and continued William of Jumièges *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, among other additions almost doubling the narrative concerning William the Conqueror.[18] Orderic's chronicle, written with a passion for details, anecdotes and a

[15] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 32-33; Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. xxi-xxvii. Swanton here lists the different manuscripts, their dates of composition and characteristics.
[16] Like all sources discussed in the following that span several reigns, the chronicle will not be referred to individually for each king.
[17] Cf. Offler, The Tractate de Injusta Vexacione Willelmi Episcopi Primi, p. 340-341; Libellvs de Exordio, p. lxxviii.
[18] For overviews of Orderic Vitalis' life and work, see Orderic Vitalis 1, p. 1-45, Gesta Normannorum Ducum 1, p. lxvi-lxxi, Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 151-165. For the chronicle with view to William Rufus, see Mason, King Rufus, p. 15. Orderic Vitalis' immense and detailed work has also sparked other studies, like, for instance, Hingst, The Written World, which analyses the writer's view of the world as mirror for divine plans, largely incorporating the viewpoint of literary studies.

good story, frequently spiced with fictitious dialogues, grows historically ever more valuable as it proceeds; with the final chapters having been written exactly contemporaneous to events, his account of the last years of Henry I and the early years of Stephen is particularly indispensable.[19]

Similarly well-known, but disproportionately more contentious, is the work of Eadmer of Canterbury, whose writing centres on the life of Archbishop Anselm, and can thus act as a bridging narrative between the reign of William II and that of his brother, Henry I. Eadmer, a monk of Canterbury since his infancy, had first met the subject-to-be of his writing in 1079, when Anselm had just become abbot of Bec, and met him again in 1093, from which time on they remained connected until the archbishop's death in 1109.[20] Anselm's long-term secretary and companion took to recording the life of the archbishop on the basis of notes he (presumably) took whilst they travelled. One, his Life of St Anselm, is strongly hagiographical, stringing together episodes from Anselm's life that prove his stainless lifestyle, virtue and character as well as miracles worked by the saintly archbishop. The other, his *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, recounts the secular aspects of Anselm's life as Primate of England. Its main focus is the confrontation between Church and king in the course of the English investiture controversy, and as such, it is a passionate vindication of the ecclesiastical view that reserves scathing remarks for William II especially, with the picture provided for Henry I slightly less hostile. Originally intended to end with Anselm's death, the narrative was later expanded and runs until 1122. The change in his narrative after the death of his mentor and idol is, however, very noticeable.[21] Eadmer's highly partial account was to be read at Worcester and Durham, and at length used by William of Malmesbury.[22]

William of Malmesbury was born around the year 1085 and, when he ceases to rely on Eadmer's account for his historiographical writing (on which he builds for most of his depiction of Rufus' reign), becomes an important contemporary witness for the reign of Henry I. The famed historian penned the *Gesta regvm Anglorvm*, extending from the coming of the Saxons to Britain until 1127, the *Gesta pontificvm Anglorvm* that discusses, with leaps and gaps where he was lacking material, the episcopal history of the English sees from the beginning of the sixth century to 1125 and, his last work, the *Historia Novella* that covers the events from 1128 until 1142, a year before William of Malmesbury's death. His two major works, the *gestae,* were originally planned to be two parts of one book, but developed towards two separate books, each with its own target

---

[19] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 6, p. xix.

[20] Cf. Eadmer, Life of St Anselm, p. ix; for Eadmer's works, particularly where they concerned William Rufus, see also Mason, King Rufus, p. 11.

[21] Not only does Eadmer withdraw from the affairs of the great and powerful in which he was no longer involved and focus instead on what was going on in Canterbury, he also appears to lose his sting and venom. His account of the exile of archbishop Thurstan is largely dispassionate. While that might, with a considerable degree of probability, be attributed to Eadmer's inbred partiality for Canterbury in the dispute over the primacy between York and Canterbury, which was the mainspring in the archbishop of York's clash with the king and his prolonged exile, his treatment of the tragedy of the White Ship is more revealing. Although many writers at least allude to moral shortcomings among the drowned (albeit not always going to the length of accusing them of sodomy, as Henry of Huntingdon did (see Henry of Huntingdon, c. 5, p. 592-595)), Eadmer has a matter-of-fact account of the shipwreck, stating merely that the judgements of God were mysterious. It is entirely impossible imagining the Eadmer who penned William Rufus' moral depravity with every sign of righteous horror not jumping to the chance of criticism such a tragedy offered. (cf. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 288-289).

[22] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 132-135, for Eadmer's Life of St Anselm, and p. 136-142 for the Historia Novorum.

audience: while the *Gesta pontificvm Anglorvm* would be of interest to monks, the *Gesta regvm Anglorvm*, in content and tone, should appeal – and was dedicated to – great laymen, a knightly and courtly audience, its more entertaining and fluid narrative making it the more widely circulated of the two works.[23] Both works had largely been written by 1125, with the author's later years being dedicated to their reworking and extension as well as to the composition of the *Historia Novella* – which, centring on Robert of Gloucester (by whom it was commissioned and to whom later editions were dedicated) as its champion, favours the claim of Empress Matilda in the struggle over the succession after the death of Henry I, thus constituting an interesting contrast to the chronicle supportive of Stephen, the *Gesta Stephani*.[24]

Apart from William of Malmesbury, several other ecclesiastical writers picked up their pen in the reign of Henry I, which is historiographically considerably richer than that of his brotherly predecessor. Among them is Hugh the Chanter (d. 1139), whose History of the Church of York, while stretching from 1066 to 1127, lays particular emphasis on the continuously smouldering primacy dispute between the two metropolitan sees, York and Canterbury. As such, when it touches upon the issue of primacy, the History is the mirror image to Eadmer's *Historia Novorum*, symphatetic to York rather than Canterbury. In the matter of investiture, however, the work displays a much more relaxed attitude when compared to Eadmer. Yet, overall, it only rarely reaches beyond ecclesiastical matters.[25]

Worcester likewise produced historical writing. It has long been assumed that the Worcester Chronicle had been written by Florence of Worcester at the instigation of Bishop Wulfstan, shortly after 1095, and that Florence had written the chronicle from creation up to 1118, as, shortly afterwards, his death is noted in the work, along with an acknowledgement of his contribution. The continuation of the chronicle, then, was attributed to John of Worcester, with the entire work extending until 1140. However, it has been suggested that the monk called Florence had merely gathered the material for the compilation of the chronicle. Writing it was then the work of his successor. The annals are regarded as independent from other sources as of 1121, and the later annals appear to have been written increasingly close to the events, with the annals from 1135-1140 having been written shortly after the events.[26]

The most popular historian of Henry I's reign is Henry of Huntingdon, the secular clerk born around the year 1088 and educated in the household of Bishop Robert Bloet. His *Historia Anglorum* was commissioned by Bloet's successor as bishop, and its first version was finished by 1133. Henry of Huntingdon, who died between 1156 and 1164, continued to work on the narrative, expanding his chronicle, which had originally stretched from the time of Brutus to 1129, to as far as 1154, thus also incorporating Stephen's reign, and in its surviving copies ending with the imminent advent of Henry II. Copies of the book were circulated even before the history was finished. It was a work written for the masses, in a simpler Latin, with a strong sense

---

[23] Cf. William of Malmesbury, Gesta Pontificum 2, Introduction, p. xxii, p. xlvii.For a more recent biography and background of the historian, see Sønnesyn, William of Malmesbury, p. 4-6.

[24] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 166-185.; William of Malmesbury, Historia Novella, Introduction, esp. p. xxii-xxxiii; William of Malmesbury, Gesta Pontificum 2, Introduction.

[25] Cf. Hugh the Chanter, p. xv-xxiii; Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 123-125.

[26] Cf. John of Worcester 3, p. xix-xx; Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 143-148,

of plot, of drama, and composed of short units that might be read in one sitting. Henry of Huntingdon strongly identified himself with the English; his narrative is eloquent, at times waspish, and certainly not always realistic. Yet the book's success was huge – much of it was to reappear in Robert of Torigni's work, in Roger of Howden, in Gervase of Canterbury, through Robert of Torigni in Ralph of Diceto and Roger of Wendover.[27]

Many of the chronicles covering the reign of Henry I reach well into – or even entirely cover – the reign of his successor, King Stephen. William of Malmesbury's *Historia Novella*, supportive of Robert of Gloucester and the Empress, and the *Gesta Stephani* as its mirror image are notable exceptions. The *Gesta* is easily the most valuable source for Stephen's reign – written in two steps, the first covering the years from the beginning of the reign until 1148, and the second, written after 1153, describing its closing years, the chronicle is independent of all other known literary accounts, and distinctly in favour of the king, although decreasing in detail (and, even more notably perhaps, in optimism) as it proceeds. The writer appears to have planned a book dealing with Stephen's accession, defeats and mistakes, with the king's scandalous seizing of the bishops followed by his very own capture at the hand of the Empress' party. A second book was to follow, with the king regaining authority in his kingdom and establishing peace. As time passed, it seems to have become apparent to the writer that the king would not live up to these expectations – and the tone of the chronicle becomes increasingly dark, while the writer's attitude towards the king's opponents improves considerably.[28]

The remaining chronicles contemporary to Stephen's reign do not greatly enlarge the pool of material. The history of Robert of Torigni, writing, as abbot of Mont Saint Michel, in Normandy, became a popular book in France, England and Normandy alike. However, the chronicle is of much greater use for the reign of Henry II, as, until 1147, Robert of Torigni borrows so copiously from Henry of Huntingdon that, at times, the narrative becomes barely distinguishable.[29] A further chronicle, or chronicles, was written in the north: the very brief Hexham chronicle of Richard of Hexham, albeit contemporary, covers only the first four years of Stephen's reign. Bearing a similar name, the chronicle of John of Hexham builds strongly upon this foundation, but its contemporaneousness is debatable, as the author's biographical data has not been successfully pinpointed. He probably began writing in the reign of Henry II, as the information he yields for Stephen's reign are sometimes confused, and not particularly detailed.[30]

The amount of surviving source material increases towards the end of the reign of Henry II; material that is infused with administrative information and, at times, surprisingly close to the inner workings of the courts in question.[31] This material is supplemented by copious letter

---

[27] Cf. History of the English People 1000-1154, pp- xiv-xxx; Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 193-201. See Greenway, Henry of Huntingdon and the Manuscripts, for a discussion of the manuscript tradition of the popular chronicle, which was to precede her publication of her own edition of the chronicle.
[28] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 188-193; Gesta Stephani, Introduction, p. xviii-xix. See also King, The Gesta Stephani.
[29] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 200-202.
[30] Cf. ibid., p. 216, for Richard of Hexham, p. 247, p. 261 for John of Hexham.
[31] See Vincent, The Strange Case of the Missing Biographies, for a short survey of king-centered historiographical writing from 1154-1272 and Short, Literary Culture at the Court of Henry II, for an overview of the less conventual writers.

collections and an ever increasing wealth of administrative record that has earned the Angevin monarchs Henry II (and, from time to time, John) their reputation as progressive administrators.[32]

The *Historia Rerum* Anglicarum of William of Newburgh (1136-1198), a canon regular from Newburgh covers the period from the Norman Conquest to 1198, and is a particularly fruitful source for the history of Henry II and Richard. William of Newburgh is acclaimed as a critical, authentic and relatively impartial source.[33] Of similar value – and great extent – is the chronicle of Roger of Howden, possibly a royal clerk or an ecclesiastic who accompanied Richard on his crusade, and served under both Henry II and Richard. His relatively sober *Chronica*, often a testimony to his administrative interests, is enriched with many letters, charters and governmental documents, and provides a detailed narrative well into the reign of King John.[34] Ralph of Diceto, too, was close to the heart of English politics, and concerned himself with the grand history of king and country. As dean of St Paul's in London, he wrote a very 'organised' chronicle, abbreviating, summarising and even adding signs to make his work more accessible. His chronicle covers the reign of Henry II and Richard, ending a few years after John's accession.[35]

Of entirely different nature than these records is, for instance, the output of Gerald of Wales, who, mutating his early praise to utter condemnation, regarded the Angevin dynasty with unparalleled hostility, possibly because he wished for patronage that he did not receive. His large oeuvre is only partially used here: of main interest is his mirror for princes and his description of the conquest of Ireland. Although some of his works were not finished – or at least published – until after the reign of king John, his main focus lies on depicting Henry II, with only sporadic comments on his sons.[36] Gervase of Canterbury is another writer who was critical of the Angevins. His narrative, less patched than that of Gerald of Wales but often relying on other writers, stretches until the reign of King John, where it ends with Gervase's death, although a continuator would carry his narrative, albeit with extreme brevity, into the reign of Henry III. Gervase of Canterbury – as his name perhaps suggests – was driven by the loyalty he felt for his convent in a similarly striking way as Gerald of Wales was driven by his disappointment. As the Angevin monarchs did not always have the most favourable relationship to the writer's convent, Gervase can be counted among those sources more critical of the kings' reigns.[37]

---

[32] Aurell, Die ersten Könige aus dem Hause Anjou, p. 73-75.
[33] Cf. Gillingham, Historian as Judge, p. 1275-1276; Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 263-268.
[34] Cf. ibid., p. 225-230; Gillingham, Historian as Judge, p. 1280.
[35] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 230-236.
[36] On Gerald of Wales, see ibid., p. 244-246. The writer, living from 1146 to 1223, has raised considerable interest, sparking monographies on his character and work. One such is Bartlett, Gerald of Wales, published in 1982, who, on the basis of the dedications with which Gerald preceded his works, concluded that the writer must have been avidly looking for a better position in life (p. 58). Butler, Autobiography of Gerald of Wales (originally published 1937, reissued 2005), traces the writer's life, collecting and arranging numerous passages from Gerald's work. Putter, Gerald of Wales and the Prophet Merlin, explores how Gerald viewed, interpreted and used the prophecies of Merlin spread by Geoffrey of Monmouth; p. 97-98 notes how Gerald of Wales, so critical of the Angevin regime, would delay the publication of his work until after John's death, aware that the king might look unfavourable upon those who prophesied his downfall. Davenport, Sex, Ghosts and Dreams, p. 137, notes that Gerald's claim to 'Welshness' was a rhetoric device to foster his succession to the see of St David's, previously occupied by his uncle – Gerald himself was a child of Norman parents.
[37] For a discussion of Gervase of Canterbury, see Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 253-260.

For Henry II in particular, there are a number of sources that focus exclusively on one aspect of the king's reign: Walter Map would give a gaudy, humorous and vibrant insight into life at court; a classically inspired work of literature that has often been seen as pointing to the learned court culture of Henry II.[38] Apart from a few letter collections that give similar insights, there is also the remarkable life of St Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln, which, visibly proud of its protagonist's close connection to the royal court, would time and again depict the bishop's confrontations with the successive kings he experienced: Henry II, Richard, and John.[39] The chronicle of Battle abbey, narrative cartulary and casebook rather than 'chronicle', surveyed the legal proceedings of the convent, commenting extensively on Henry II's exercise of justice in relation to the convent, portraying the king 'in action', as lawmaker.[40] Finally, a very special feature of writing in the reign of Henry II is visible in the repercussions the death of Thomas Becket had: until the end of the twelfth century, at least ten biographies had been written on the swiftly sainted martyr, five of them within one or two years after his death. All of these biographies, by necessity, involved the king to some extent, and thus reflect his character from the facet of his reign that contemporaries viewed as the arguably most contentious one.[41]

Uniqueness is a characteristic that is also easily attributed to the writers of Richard the Lionheart's reign. With the *Itinerarium Regis Ricardi*, compiled in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, but relying largely on the contemporary work of the crusade's eye-witness Ambroise on the one hand, and the chronicle of Richard of Devizes on the other, we are left with two works whose main focus lies on the king's involvement in the third crusade, immensely glorifying Richard's deeds.[42] The chronicle attributed to Ralph of Coggeshall is also prone to partial glorification of the crusade – but retains an overall more sober perspective on the king's reign, mixing criticism in with praise. Although its authorship and date of composition is difficult to trace, the *Chronicon Anglicanum*, originating in a Cistercian abbey and thus much concerned with the fate of the white monks, is a source frequently commenting on the king's activities. It covers, partly in ongoing narration, partly in brief annalistic style, the entirety of the reigns of Richard and John.[43]

---

[38] Cf. ibid., p. 243-244.
[39] Cf. ibid., p. 312-317.
[40] Cf. Chronicle of Battle Abbey, p. 1; see ibid., p. 8-14, for an analysis of the chronicler and his world view. Searle indicates that the writer in some way witnessed proceedings from 1125 to 1138, and from the 1150s, appears to have taken part in most cases. The last event he mentions having taken place 1184, the chronicle spans the majority of the reign of Henry II. See also Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 271-272.
[41] For a discussion of the lives and their value as historical narratives, see ibid., p. 296-308. In much greater depth, the individual lives are discussed in Staunton, Thomas Becket and his Biographers. For a more detailed discussion of the background to Richard of Devizes' chronicle, including the author's world view and partial biography, see the introduction by Appleby in Richard of Devizes, p. vi-xviii.
[42] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 248-252, for Richard of Devizes' chronicle; ibid., p. 239-242 for the Itinerarium.
[43] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 322-321. The initial part of chronicle is often viewed, because of its alleged neutrality, as a particularly important source for the first years of the reign of King John. On that issue, see Carpenter, Abbot Ralph of Coggeshall's Account, especially p. 1211 and Gillingham, Historians Without Hindsight, which assesses the value of those historians who lived only during the first years of John's reign, and would thus write without having in mind the later failings of John's reign: the first Coggeshall writer, Ralph of Diceto and Roger of Howden.

As such, the Coggeshall chronicle is a rare treasure: shortly after the accession of John, many of the narratives that had provided ample information on the reigns of his father and brother broke off, leaving us with a dearth of chronicle material that would not abate even in the reign of his son, Henry III. Roger of Wendover is the only historian that would pick up his pen freshly in the reign of John, and his narrative, stretching until the first years of Henry III, is notorious among modern scholars for its criticism of the youngest son of Henry II. Written in the well-connected centre of St Alban's monastery, his narrative is extensive – and also incorporates a number of fairly unbelievable stories, such as accounts of journeys through hell strewn into accounts of the reign's major developments.[44] John's reign has otherwise to be traced in a number of brief, local annals, the lengthier and more sympathetic Barnwell Annals,[45] and the French verse biography of William Marshal which renders individual kings largely in their function as overlord, to which the protagonist displayed chivalrous and unbending loyalty.[46]

This knightly verse history would cover only the very beginning of the reign of Henry III. For the rest, we depend on largely the same brief annals that colour the reign of John, but for the most part, renditions of Henry III come from Matthew Paris' pen. The chronicler, like his predecessor in historiographical writing at St Alban's, Roger of Wendover, is best known for his hostile attitude towards King John, but his massive work, the *Chronica Major*, is invaluable as a source for the reign of Henry III. In a time when there are barely any narratives about the king's surroundings, the richly detailed chronicle, covering numerous aspects of English history as well as events on the continent, is a welcome basis for an assessment of the king – despite the fact that Matthew Paris is openly prejudiced in his judgement of the king and fiercely opposed to royal authority, maintaining an attitude of such utter hostility that, as Gransden puts it, "sometimes he seems to complain for the sake of complaining"[47]. His history ended in 1259, shortly after Henry III's troubles with his barons had become a dominant factor of the reign, but was continued, albeit much more briefly, until well after the death of the monarch.

Presumably the same writer who continued Matthew Paris' narrative, William de Rishanger, also took it upon himself to write a chronicle dedicated exclusively to the dispute between the king and his magnates. The king himself played a more passive role in this narrative. Its true heroes were the baronial rebels, in particular Simon de Montfort, upon whom he often heaps virtues and praise.[48] The writer's opinion is perhaps best expressed in the last words of his narrative of the two wars between the king and the barons: "in the first, upon Lewes, the barons

---

[44] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 359-360 and 368-369. For a rather critical assessment of the value of both Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris, including notes on the biographical background of both writers, see also Galbraith, Roger of Wendover and Matthew Paris.
[45] For these annals, including the Barnwell Annals, see Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 332-345. The Margam Annals are discussed by Patterson, The Author of the 'Margam Annals'.
[46] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 345-355. For further reading, the edition of the History of William Marshal used in the following offers a full volume of extensive introduction and notes on the text. See also Crouch, Writing a Biography in the Thirteenth Century, for an analysis of its compositional structure.
[47] Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 367; Matthew Paris' Chronica Majora is discussed on p. 359-374. See Weiler, Henry III of England and the Staufen Empire, p. 139, for the observation that Matthew Paris, from 1254 onward, utilised events mainly to highlight the king's incompetence and the pope's immorality.
[48] Cf. William de Rishanger, Chronicle of the Barons' War, p. 6, for one instance of his lavish praise of Simon de Montfort, the man who set out to make things right again in England.

had miraculously triumphed and in the second, upon Evesham, they had lamentably succumbed"[49]. Not surprisingly, Matthew Paris, too, had supported the barons' cause – and as the case of his continuator shows, in that, he stood far from alone. At best, the accounts of the reign are relatively neutral, but the majority of writers, to some extent, expressed sympathy for the rebels, if only by taking pity on the 'martyred' Simon de Montfort. There are two further verse witnesses for the reign which stand firmly on the barons' side. One of them is the metrical chronicle of Robert of Gloucester, composed in English, and of not entirely clear origin, but apparently written by several rather than just one author.[50] The other is the Song of Lewes, an account that primarily sought to legitimise the barons' capture of the king by discussing the arguments of the king's cause and the arguments of the barons' cause, firmly holding on to the argument that a king should be bound to the law.[51]

As is perhaps most evident from these last cases, the source material we are left with is exceedingly biased, some of it openly hostile or supportive of the kings it described. All of these chroniclers judged their respective kings – and they did so within a framework that remains yet to be elucidated.

### *3.2. Royal Demeanour and its Assessment*

Any ruler – if he intends to keep his position – will find himself faced with having to justify his elevated status. There is a variety of ways in which he can attempt such self-legitimation, but the staging of princely suitability for kingship is certainly the one that is employed most frequently. The discourse about which qualities a king should possess is quite probably as old as kingship itself.[52]

The most obvious source for princely qualities are mirrors for princes, a genre whose sole aim lies in instructing rulers on the correct exercise of their power. Promoting the idea that a prince should, at all times, act politically responsible, competent, virtuously and ethically sound, these works have a predominantly didactic function and, alongside oral instruction and *exempla* inform the prince (or prince-to-be) of the ethical, political and moral expectations he ought to live up to. As such, they are a product of the political thought of their time[53] and exert influence on what is thought proper for a monarch – even if, as is often the case, they cannot be assumed to have been widely read. The *speculum* of medieval symbolism did not solely reflect the world, but also

[49] Ibid., p. 65: "*Explicit narratio de duobus bellis apud Lewes et Evesham, inter Regem Angliae et Barones suos infra biennium commissis. In quorum primo, scilicet apud Lewes, Barones mirabiliter triumpharunt, et, in secundo apud Evesham, lacrimabiliter occubuerunt.*" For a very dated introduction on the author and his works, see ibid., Introduction.

[50] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 432-438.

[51] For further information on the author and the poem's background, see the rather dated introduction, cf. Song of Lewes, Introduction, p. vii-xxv.

[52] The tradition of compiling mirrors for princes, for instance, can be traced back to the second millennium before Christ, to early Egyptian and Mesopotamian specimens. A greater number of mirrors for princes can be found in the Greek and Roman tradition, in the works of Aristotle, Plato, Cicero and Seneca (Graßnick, Ratgeber der Könige, p. 52).

[53] Hugh of Fleury's Tractatus de regia potestate et sacerdotali dignitate, written against the backdrop of the investiture controversy, is an especially vivid example of how current political thought might influence the writing of mirrors for princes: the treatise, addressed to Henry I, time and again discusses the forced division between sacerdotal and royal powers, and the problems arising from it. See Nederman/Becjczy, Introduction, for a discussion of the value of mirrors for princes as historical sources, and a criticism of the study of virtues often being neglected in the study of political history.

presented it the way it *should* be, thus more often than not adding an aspect of political criticism to the otherwise instructional genre.[54] Traditionally, the genre's English history is seen to begin with the churchman John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, a political treatise finished approximately around 1159.[55] His remarkable work, unprecedented in England and detached from the continental Carolingian tradition,[56] ventures beyond the scope of a traditional mirror, using universally applicable *exempla* from antiquity, the bible and the author's own thoughts and scholarly conversations to justify its author's position and unfold a general ethical code of conduct and political theory.[57]

Yet while there is no continuous tradition of mirrors for princes in England, we are not left entirely without guidance. There are works well before John of Salisbury that shed some light onto the discourse of political thought. Wulfstan, archbishop of York (d. 1023), a homilist who also drafted laws for the king, left his "semi-homiletic/semi-legislative programme"[58], the Institutes of Polity, which were compiled in about 1020/1[59] and describe the qualities a good king ought to possess. He drew heavily on the Carolingian tradition, but significantly diminishes the role of the king in favour of that of the Church.[60] The next similar work falls into the reign of Henry I, composed shortly after 1102: the French monk Hugh de Fleury dedicated his *Tractatus de regia potestate et sacerdotali dignitate* to the English king. In line with the royalist tradition of the abbey and the author's close connections to England,[61] the piece, in answer to the investiture controversy, vindicates the king's strong position in ecclesiastical matters. After this initial statement, the treatise becomes very similar to a mirror for princes, enumerating the duties (and consequently virtues) of a rightful king and drawing the customary line between kings and tyrants. The collection of tractates known as the *Norman Anonymous*, written around 1100, probably in Rouen, is almost parallel to Hugh de Fleury's treatise.[62] Although a compilation of more than thirty texts dealing with a wider range of issues pertaining the Church, such as hierarchical questions, interpretations of canon law or theological disputes, the *Anonymous* is best

---

[54] Gerald of Wales' De principis instructione, the first distinction of which is a rather traditional mirror for princes, is the most notorious example of the mirrors considered here: the second and third distinction, meant to illustrate what has been said about good and bad princes, culminate in a venomously hostile criticism of the reign of Henry II – the divine judgement of a just God, as especially his preface to the second distinction makes clear (Cf. De principis instructione, dist. 2, praefatio, p. 153-154). As a further example, John of Salisbury is time and again found to lament the kings' passion for hunting (Uhlig, Hofkritik im England des Mittelalters, p. 41).

[55] Cf. Berges, Fürstenspiegel, p. 23-24.

[56] Cf. Kleineke, Englische Fürstenspiegel, p. 1. See also Barrau, Ceci n'est pas un miroir, for the special role the Policraticus had among other mirrors for princes, being more of a political treatise than a typical mirror for princes.

[57] Cf. Berges, Fürstenspiegel, p. 4. Kosuch, Abbild und Stellvertreter Gottes, p. 113-118, discusses Salisbury with a view to royal sacrality. For notes on John of Salisbury's biography and interpretational ideas for reading both the Policraticus and the Entheticus, his smaller verse work, see Uhlig, Hofkritik im England des Mittelalters, p. 27-54.

[58] Cf. Wormald, Wulfstan (d. 1023), "As an author". A very brief analysis of the function of the king in Wulfstan's treatise can be found in Loyn, The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England, p. 86-87.

[59] Cf. Wormald, Die frühesten 'englischen' Könige, p. 26.

[60] Cf. Bethurum Loomis, *Regnum* and *sacerdotium*; for a condensation of the argument, see also Dennis, Image-making for the Conquerors, p. 38-39. Dennis discusses the treatise's reflection on the representation of the kingship of William the Conqueror.

[61] Cf. Williams, The Norman Anonymous, p. 59.

[62] The collection of tractates was long believed to be of English origin, and composed at York. After Williams' 1951 study "The Norman Anonymous of 1100 A.D", however, the collection that had been known as the "Anonymous of York" has been placed rather in the vicinity of Rouen, and has consequently been re-baptised "Norman Anonymous".

known (and usually cited only) for its vigorous stance on the king's authority, even superiority, over the Church, and is often named as a late example of christocentric kingship.[63] More than a century later, the *Policraticus* sets in, to be followed, in the thirteenth century, by Gerald of Wales' *De principis instructione liber* – or, more precisely, its first distinction. In its entirety, the book is generally agreed not to have been published until after the death of King John, though parts of it may have been finished much earlier. Throughout the piece, a sullen testament to Gerald's disappointment at patronage denied, Gerald mentions that the time was not yet ripe for a critical book such as his – a book that is a downright condemnation of the Angevin kings while heaping praise upon the French monarchy. Henry III's minority seemed the logical and least dangerous time to publish a book such as this.[64] The first distinction, the didactic (and relatively unbiased) part of the work, drawing largely on Hugh of Fleury's treatise and a variety of classical authors, has often been decried as Gerald's least inspiring effort; the preface to the Rolls Series edition claims that the first book, because of its "wholly didactic and academic" character, is, "from a historical point of view … of little value" [65]; Stevenson's translation of the work appears to agree with that verdict: it skips the first distinction altogether. However, it is this first distinction that, as mirror for princes, offers the insights into the tradition of political thought needed for the evaluation of kings.

Of course, a mere four texts – which are, at that, so unevenly scattered throughout the period in question – cannot be expected to provide a comprehensive overview of kingly ideals for the full time period covered. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that these works, unanimously written by churchmen, do not cover the whole scope of princely ideals and obligations; their focus lies on the spiritual, Christian aspects of a king's rule, thus often blotting out feudal obligations, military functions and the requirements of an appropriately magnificent worldly representation of the king. However, these works, while certainly the most convenient, are by far not the only source of ideals of kingship. Particularly English law books, which frequently remark upon the position and office of the king, can be used as supplements. Among them are the early twelfth century *Leges Henrici Primi* and the popular and often-cited *Leges Edwardi Confessoris*, which despite their misleading title, have not been written much before the twelfth century,[66] the law book, composed between 1187 and 1189[67] commonly known as 'Glanvill', its improved early thirteenth century successor known as 'Bracton' and, of course, the influential baronial demands of that time: the famous *Magna Carta* and the Provisions (of Oxford), the approbation of which the barons rather emphatically demanded of Henry III. Especially the latter cast much-needed light on the expectations and demands of the lay

[63] Possibly one of the most well-known analyses of the Norman Anonymous is that of Kantorowicz, in Kantorowicz, Die zwei Körper, p. 6-81. Kosuch, Abbild und Stellvertreter Gottes, p. 107-110, briefly discusses the ecclesiastic aspects attributed to kingship in the Norman Anonymous.
[64] Cf. Stevenson, Concerning the Instruction of Princes, p. 6. For a discussion of the mirror as far as the reputation of the Angevin dynasty was concerned, see Lachaud, Le *Liber de principis instructione*.
[65] De principis instructione, Introduction, p. ix.
[66] Cf. Leyser, Cultural Affinities, p. 169. See Liebermann, Über die Leges Edwardi Confessoris, p. 10-20, for an early assessment of the supposed author. For an extensive discussion and edition of the Laws of Edward the Confessor, see O'Brien, God's Peace and King's Peace.
[67] Cf. Hall, Glanvill, p. xi.

aristocracy, on whom the king, after all, greatly depended. Remarks in chronicles and the extensive work already done in the field of ideal kings and political thought provide such ample complementation of the sources mentioned that it is possible to establish a broad basis upon which the narrative strategies for the staging of kingly virtues and vices can be analysed.

Ideals of kingship are such an immensely powerful medieval discourse not only because the king was the leading figure in the realm. Kingship had continuity; people, at all times, needed a higher understanding, a princely power to guide them, in that, in the flowery words of Gerald of Wales, they were no different to the cows led by the bull, angels led by the archangels, demons led by particularly evil spirits – men, in their turn, were led by other men.[68] A king's position in his kingdom is often likened to the function the head fulfils for the human body: in a strict hierarchy, every member of society, like an organ or limb in the body, is assigned a certain *officium*, an obligatory task, deviation from which might endanger the integrity of the entire societal order.[69] Yet what makes the discourse of royal ideals particularly powerful are the notions attached to the 'office' of kingship; notions that reach well beyond the personal assets of individual occupants of the throne into the sphere of the divine. They become apparent with the king's accession to the throne, or, more precisely, with his coronation.

The unction of the king, a (if not the) central part of the coronation rite, bears great similarity to the anointment priests receive, and is thus justifiably described as *imitatio sacerdotii*.[70] This act 'made' the king in the first place – until the thirteenth century, regnal years were not counted from the date of accession, but from the date of coronation.[71] A king, when still uncrowned, was not referred to as 'king' but as 'lord'.[72] While unction remained part of the coronation throughout the relevant period, the magnitude of the divine imbuement the king might claim for himself certainly varied – a process brought on its way, not least, by the Investiture Controversy.

It might seem strange that the earliest witness, Wulfstan's Anglo-Saxon king of the early eleventh century, establishes the smallest connection of the king to the divine sphere.[73] The archbishop makes him *Cristes gespeliga*,[74] Christ's preacher, instead of Christ's vicar, as his continental Carolingian models would have done.[75] It is his Christian nature and his virtue and love for all things good and right that will secure, for himself and his people, the best of the divine and worldly. What "befits a Christian king"[76] seems not so much to spring from divine inspiration, but rather from the monarch's nature as 'Christian', his virtue and his love for all things good and right. Christianity provides the value system determining what is thought proper

[68] Cf. De principis instructione, dist. 1, ch. 1, p. 8 -9.
[69] Cf. Berges, Fürstenspiegel, p. 139; Hugh de Fleury entitles the second subsection of his work *"Quod sicut caput in corpore, ita rex in regno suo principatum debeat obtinere"* (cf. Hugh de Fleury, caput II, p. 942).
[70] Cf. Kleinschmidt, Herrscherdarstellung, p. 34.
[71] Cf. Ullmann, Principles of Government, p. 121-122.
[72] Cf. Warren, The Governance of Norman and Angevin England, p. 19.
[73] Bethurum Loomis, *Regnum* and *Sacerdotium*, reaches the same conclusion, arguing that Wulfstan, on account of the tumultous society he had witnessed, did not believe in the stability of princely governance, and thus favoured the Church over the monarch when it came to power and the leading role in the kingdom.
[74] Translation by Rouse, The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England, p. 20.
[75] Cf. Bethurum Loomis, *Regnum* and *Sacerdotium*, p. 136.
[76] Jost, Institutes of polity, p. 40: *"Cristenum cynige / gebyrað swiðe rihte"*. Wulfstan habitually starts the different sections of his work with "*and him gebyreð"*.

in a king, but *cristendom and cynedom* remain two separate entities throughout, suggesting, perhaps, that Wulfstan was well aware of the two differing spheres.[77] Yet Wulfstan acknowledges that if Christianity faltered, so, too, would the kingdom.[78] The archbishop's scant mention of the divine might be attributed to the troubled times he had witnessed – Æthelred's rule had been troublesome, and the beginnings of Cnut's (despite his formidable later years) in the aftermath of the Danish conquest probably made for a bleak outlook,[79] so that Wulfstan may have contented himself with his drawing simple lines between just and unjust,[80] and stressing the king's duty to preserve an intact societal order, as *oratores*, *laboratores* and *bellatores* formed the three pillars upon which any royal throne rests.[81]

Although it is not all that evident in Wulfstan's treatise, the Anglo-Saxon kings had, at least in theory, been imparted their share of the divine; to such an extent, even, that virtually all royal activities were imbued with religious significance. Edward, last of the line, had styled himself king by the grace of God and had (famously) been attributed the priestly virtues of chastity and innocence. Monarchy, at this stage, was not in any sense limited – even the consultation of nobles (or other similarly suitable men) about matters of government was, while certainly desirable, not compulsive.[82]

At the turn of the century, the *Norman Anonymous* stands as an exceptionally vivid, if by then already slightly outdated, testament to christocentric kingship that refutes any Gregorian attempts at secularising royal dignity. The collection bears the marks of a strong scepticism towards the papal assertion to stand as judge over the entirety of Christendom. It is argued that, of all earthly churches, the church of Jerusalem, with its history full of saints and holiness, ought to take precedence over the Church of Rome.[83] The *Anonymous* does not stop there. The author proceeds to explain the nature of the papal cognomen of *apostolicus*: it denotes someone put in the place of an apostle who was supposed to be sent to spread the faith.[84] *Sed si a Christo missus, ad quid missus est?*[85] He is to bring the teachings of Christ to those who do not know them, and thus teach them. If, however, he brings the teachings of Christianity to the Christian world, and strives to teach them, *id superfluo factum est, quia nos scripturas propheticas et euangelicas et apostolicas <habemus>, in quibus omnia mandata Dei continentur.*[86] If the pope assumed the right to pass judgement on other Christians, be they kings or prelates, he moved beyond his station as imitator of the earthly, humbled Christ, presuming to judge God himself, and thus becomes Antichrist.[87] The absolute

[77] Cf. Bethurum Loomis, Dorothy, *Regnum* and *Sacerdotium,* p. 137, draws this conclusion, albeit referencing to Wulfstan's mention of *"for Gode and for worolde",* to be found, for example, in Jost, Institutes of polity, p. 42.
[78] Jost, Institutes of polity, p. 58: *"awacige se cristendom / sona scylf*ð se cynedom".
[79] Cf. Bethurum Loomis, Dorothy, *Regnum* and *Sacerdotium,* p. 130.
[80] Cf. Barlow, Edward the Confessor, p. 161.
[81] Jost, Institutes of polity, p. 55-56.
[82] Cf. Barlow, Edward the Confessor, p. 69, p. 136, p. 162.
[83] Cf. ENAP, tract 12. For a summary of the argumentation, see Williams, The Norman Anonymous, p. 141-143.
[84] CF. ENAP, tract 28, p. 285: "*Romanus pontifex ideo apostolicus cognominatur, quod apostolorum uice et officio fungi creditur ... . Qui, sie uere apostolus Christi est, a Christo utique missus est. 'Apostolus' namque nostra lingua 'missus' interpretatur. Quod, si a Christo missus est, christi mandata adnuntiare, Christi gloriam querere, Christi uoluntatem debet et ipse facere, ut Christi uerus apostolus possit esse.*"
[85] ENAP, tract. 29a, p. 299.
[86] Ibid., tract. 29a, p. 300.
[87] Cf. ENAP, tract 31; Williams, The Norman Anonymous, p. 141.

power that the author would not see in the hands of the pope, he evidently deems acceptable in the hands of a king. The king mirrored most the aspect of *rex* in Christ, the aspect that is to rule in eternity and beyond. The priest predominantly mirrored Christ's more humble aspect of *sacerdos*. The aspect of *rex* is seen as superior to that of *sacerdos*, because the role of priest would no longer be necessary in the heavenly kingdom.[88] Through unction, the king is turned into another man, *id est: in christum Domini*, and henceforth bears the spirit of God and virtue,[89] which allows him to fulfil, judging and reigning, messianic functions for his people in anticipation of the heavenly kingdom.[90] Superior to clerical ordination, which is authenticated by apostolic humility and goodness, royal unction is divinely authorised by the power vested in the king.[91]

In comparison to the *Norman Anonymous*, Hugh de Fleury's treatment of royal power seems almost tame. The author states that the reason for him to take up the quill was the *discrimen discordiae* in which the Church currently languished; with his writing, he states, he aimed to calm the conflict that had arisen, and alleviate the *error qui longe lateque diffunditur* which would result in nothing short of a reversion of the divine order of things: the separation of priestly and kingly dignity.[92] Hugh de Fleury justifies the king's predominance over the bishops with the argument that while the bishops held the image of Christ, the king held the image of God the Father and the Almighty. It was nothing but in accordance with the order of things that the king should subject to himself all the bishops of his kingdom, just like the son was seen as subject to his father; the comparison of the king with Moses and the bishop with Aaron provides the biblical foundation for the argument.[93] Hence, it is evident to Hugh of Fleury how the question of investiture, the bone of contention between worldly ruler and pope, should be solved: since the king had the inspiration of the Holy Ghost at his disposal, he could assign prelatures. When he invested them, they were not receiving rod and ring from the hand of the king, but the temporalities of their office.[94]

Although the English investiture controversy is generally placed in the reign of Henry I, the image of theocratic kingship already began to disintegrate in Rufus' reign, notably by the facilitation of the selfsame archbishop that was to struggle with Henry I. By choosing Anselm, the king had (albeit reluctantly) appointed a reformer to Canterbury, the most influential of English bishoprics; a reformer who was not so easily cowed, and who promoted the freedom of the Church from royal exactions. While Henry I effected a temporary settlement, conflicts about

---

[88] Cf. Williams, The Norman Anonymous, p. 128-129. In making a distinction between the "Royal Eternal Christ" and the "Humbled Earthly Jesus", the Anonymous parallels the interpretation (for example of Hugh de Fleury) of denoting the bishops images of Christ and the king an image of God Almighty; cf. Williams, The Norman Anonymous, p. 164-165, p. 175.

[89] ENAP, tract. 24a, p. 154.

[90] Cf. Williams, The Norman Anonymous, p. 155-156.

[91] Cf. ibid., p. 160.

[92] Hugh de Fleury, prologus, p. 939. The full passage, following the greeting to Henry I, reads: "*Considerans, domine rex, discrimen discordiae in quo sancta versatur Ecclesia de potestate regia et sacerdotali dignitate, quas quidam ab invicem secernunt et dividunt, libellum istum pia cura et fraterno compunctus amore condere statui, quo contentio haec aliquatenus sopiatur, et error qui longe et lateque diffunditur, pariter mitigetur, error, inquam, illorum qui sacerdotalem dignitatem a regia dignitate temere secernentes, ordinem a Deo dispositum evertunt, dum opinantur se scire quod nesciunt.*"

[93] Cf. ibid., caput III,p. 942: "*Verumtamen rex in regni sui corpore Patris omnipotentis obtinere videtur imaginem, et episcopus Christi. Unde rite regi subjacere videntur omnes regni ipsius episcopi, sicut Patri Filius deprehenditur esse subjectus, non natura, sed ordine, ut universitas regni ad unum redigatur principium.*"

[94] Cf. ibid., caput V, p. 947.

the extent of royal influence in ecclesiastical matters continued to arise throughout the following years. The overall impact of the investiture controversy remained small. The idea that the king was, in wielding his power, and particularly his punitive power, to be subject to the priest's command, was well-known in England,[95] but in fact the hold of the Crown on ecclesiastical jurisdiction did not weaken, despite the best efforts of "a papal legate, the bench of bishops, and one of the leading intellectuals of thirteenth-century Christendom"[96]. Nonetheless, the Church had definitely established its foothold in English political thought – the exile of Theobald in Stephen's reign, the king's clash with Thomas Becket in Henry II's reign, the refusal of Stephen Langton and the ensuing interdict in John's reign are among the more spectacular cases of an incessant friction between the two powers.

There were, however, aspects of kingship the investiture controversy would not reach. Although an increasing royal orientation towards administration and justice is traceable – albeit, perhaps, only as a product of a development that was well underway in either case – in the many ecclesiastical associations kingship continued to bear, the monarch remained a conglomerate person, uniting aspects of secular and sacral rule to fulfil ideals of governance.[97] Indeed, if royal transgressions were not too excessive, the whole subject of the king's jurisdictional relation to the Church seemed to have been tacitly avoided – to a point at which Thomas Becket, like Anselm before him, was reprimanded by his fellow bishops because he would not simply submit himself to the king's will and be done with it.[98] A touch of the divine remained with the king, and the reason is most evident when writers contemplate the nature of royal power – Hugh de Fleury sums up the general sentiment in the catchy biblical formula *non sit potestas, nisi a Deo*[99] – despite the author's aggrieved observation that many princes believed otherwise. John of Salisbury comments that there must be great divine virtue in a man at whose nod men would offer up their necks to the axe.[100] Gerald of Wales' prince, depending on how he uses his *desuper potestas*,[101] is granted his triumphs as encouragement, and, through his failures, is admonished not to stray from the divinely-ordained path of virtue.[102] Yet the king is more than a vessel for divine power. An earthly image of divine majesty, his actions mirror God's will. To oppose the king's power, therefore, equals opposing the divine order of things,[103] crimes perpetrated against the king are

---

[95] Cf. Watt, Spiritual and temporal powers, p. 387.
[96] Ibid., p. 391.
[97] Kantorowicz' famous and often reproduced thesis that sacred kingship was driven into a legitimation crisis, increasingly developing towards law-centred kingship, and abandoning the title of *vicarius Christi* for that of *vicarius Dei* on the way (Kantorowicz, Die zwei Körper, p. 81, p. 111) has most recently been refuted by Andreas Kosuch, who, drawing on canon law and political thought, argues convincingly that writers did neither draw a line between the vicar of God and the vicar of Christ nor, indeed, that such a distinction was needed or even desirable – elements of secular and sacral kingship alike remained. See Kosuch, Abbild und Stellvertreter Gottes, p. 15, p. 127-130, for a reflection of how Kantorowicz' thesis has been used and a suggestion of how it should be used with view to future work.
[98] Cf. Warren, Henry II, p. 487-488.
[99] Hugh de Fleury, caput I, p. 941, originating in the Epistle to the Romans 13:1.
[100] John of Salisbury, Policraticus, book IV, chapter 1, p. 512-513: "*Procul dubio magnum quid divuinae uirtutis declaratur inesse principibus, dum homines nutibus eorum colla submittunt et securi plerumque feriendas praebent ceruices, et impulsu diuino quisque timet quibus ipse timori est.*"
[101] De principis instructione, dist. 1, praefatio, p. 5.
[102] Cf. ibid., dist. 2, praefatio, p. 153-154.
[103] Cf. John of Salisbury, Policraticus, book IV, chapter 1, p. 513.

"most severe and approaching sacrilege"[104]. Being both the judge and the guardian of their subjects, kings are not only licensed to, but required to make use of the sword against fellow human beings, albeit without calling upon themselves the grave stain of murder. Indeed, earthly laws and the punishments they endear do not *per se* apply to the king – but a divinely ordained monarch, fountain and passionate lover of justice, is linked with the heavenly *aequitas* to such an extent that he would not act against the just laws of his realm, nor put his own advantage before the well-being of the realm as a whole.[105]

The position of king 'by the grace of God' – perhaps no longer a God unto his people, but an earthly vicar whose actions brought the divine will to fruition – thus provides a monarch with ample scope to act against his subjects' wishes (or even well-being). Indeed, there is a general consensus that even tyrannical kings must be obeyed. Hugh de Fleury explains that such kings had been granted divine licence to rule because of the sins of the people. They were to be tolerated, not resisted rashly, and their injustice was to be humbly accepted as a lesson in justice.[106] John of Salisbury chimes in that even kings who did not perform satisfactorily in virtue ought to be obeyed in all things – as long, he adds, as their vices were not too great.[107] The divine power operating through tyrannical kings punished the bad and trained the good, leading them back onto the path of righteousness.[108] Gerald of Wales makes no mention of the obedience owed to a tyrant, but he makes abundantly (though implicitly) clear that there is no real need to rise against a tyrant: a bad king, after all, receives his just punishment from God in the fullness of time.[109]

A morally questionable king is a problem, not only for those directly affected by his injustice, bad temper or other moral shortcomings. If no longer in possession of messianic qualities, kings in the political theory of the twelfth century onwards serve as an important accessory on their subjects' way to eternal salvation: not only did they judge, correct and punish, they also served as an *exemplum* to the ordinary people. The danger is obvious: in following a bad example, a Christian is risking his salvation. Both Hugh de Fleury and Gerald of Wales state that those insufficient royal specimens are eventually weeded out by God himself. Princes who waved aside divine law, writes Hugh de Fleury, were wont to lose their powers just as Adam lost his privileges, while all their limbs would rebel against them and cause them great pain.[110] Gerald of Wales at length expounds on the dreadful and cruel deaths awaiting tyrants[111] and, indeed, uses two of his book's three distinctions to illustrate what fate might befall a king who did not heed the divine command. At one point, his argument becomes a shade more sinister: the slayer of a tyrant was

---

[104] Ibid.: "*crimen ... grauissimum et proximum sacrilegio*".
[105] Cf. ch. 3, p. 515.
[106] Cf. Hugh de Fleury, caput IV, p. 944.
[107] Cf. John of Salisbury, Policraticus, book VI, chapter 24, p. 622. John of Salisbury's addition reads "*dummodo uitiis perniciosus non sit*".
[108] Cf. ibid., book VIII, chapter 18, p. 785.
[109] The Norman Anonymous, as it might well be noted for interest, remains utterly silent about the possibility of there being an unrighteous king.
[110] Cf. Hugh de Fleury, caput VIII, p. 953. It remains unclear whether he means the king's subjects, although it seems likely.
[111] Cf. De principis instructione, dist. 1, ch. 17, p. 57-75. This chapter, entitled, "*De tyrannorum obitu et fine cruento*", lists many examples.

due a reward, he was promised not punishment, but a victor's laurels.[112] John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* is famous for a similarly drastic approach. While he admits that imploring prayers for God's mercy were the safest and most useful way to destroy the a tyrannical scourge of the people,[113] he proceeds to argue that if it was the only way for a suppressed people to once again obey the will of God, to slay a tyrant *non modo licitum est sed aequum et iustum*.[114] Coronation was not only a conferment of absolute, useable power, it also entailed permanent duties, both ethical and religious, that a king, governing badly, could fail to live up to.[115]

The theoretical constructs of the ecclesiastics aside, a general awareness that a king (whatever moral inclinations he might have) is indispensable in a society, becomes visible in the anxiousness displayed when the English found themselves without a king. The *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, for instance, describes the desperate measures taken after the death of Harold. While the Conqueror was slowly making his way towards the crown, those in power decided to consecrate a boy of the royal lineage just so that they would not be without a king (*ne sine rege forent*). The people had thought to secure their defence with this move, but the boy was kingly only in name, not in deeds (*regali solo nomine, non opere*) – and still, the English populace rejoiced to have king again.[116] After it had become clear that Edgar Aetheling, the boy they had chosen, would not last as king, William of Poitiers describes the leading men of London as begging William the Conqueror to accept the crown of England, since, as they were so used to serve a king, they desired to have a king as their lord.[117] Certainly, the writer was a master eulogist, but the theme is a recurrent one, suggesting that a period without a king was indeed something to be dreaded.

The anxiety of the English populace seems to be grounded in the status of the king as a defender of his people, and as the one to preserve justice. Yet the urgency with which a king had to be procured was even to increase after the conquest. At Salisbury in 1086, William I had all landowners swear fealty to him, thus establishing a feudalism apart from the continental Frankish feudalism: in the English case, the main loyalty of landowners was owed to the king rather than to their immediate lords.[118] In the aftermath of the Norman Conquest, it became customary for tenures – both lay[119] and ecclesiastical[120] – to return into the hand of the king after the death of their incumbents. Likewise, the monarch could also claim back tenure if there was doubt about its rightful tenant; tenured manors might be returned into the king's possession if their owners did not meet the king's monetary demands.[121] The king, as a result of "the Conqueror's attempt to appropriate the English past"[122], was the "source of all tenure", his lordship the most powerful

112 Ibid., p. 56: *"Percussori vero tyranni non quidem poena, sed palma promittitur. Juxta illud, 'Qui tyrannum occiderit, praemium accipiet.'"*
113 Cf. John of Salisbury, Policraticus, book VIII, ch. 20, p. 796.
114 Cf. ibid., book III, ch. 15, p. 512.
115 See also Kosuch, Abbild und Stellvertreter Gottes, p. 24.
116 Cf. Barlow, Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, p. 38-39.
117 Cf. William of Poitiers, ii.28-29, p. 147-149. The Latin reads, "*se quidem solitos esse regi seruire, regem dominum habere uelle*".
118 Cf. Barlow, The Feudal Kingdom of England, p. 109. Likewise Loyn, The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England, p. 180.
119 Cf. Garnett, Conquered England, p. 79.
120 Cf. ibid., p. 57.
121 Cf. ibid., p. 79.
122 Ibid., p. 354.

in medieval Europe.[123] Thus, with the death of a king, all tenure invariably lapsed, and the consequent confusion might be (and was) used by the king's various tenants to redress old grievances and seize property that was deemed unjustly withheld – a state of interregnal disorder that soon also spread to Normandy via the links of the English baronage.[124] This potentially violent situation was but aggravated by the fact that with the death of the king, the King's Peace, proclaimed at his accession to the throne, ended.[125] The particular position of the king in English tenurial organisation might go some way to explain why the people of England seemed to prefer an heir-on-the-spot – Henry I or Stephen of Blois – to a biologically available, but spatially remote rightful heir.[126]

The shift in what is expected of a good king is perhaps even more pronounced in the secular sphere. As the theocratic aspect of kingship gradually receded, owed not least to the developments described above, it was the secular aspect of his rule that grew more dominant. Building upon the well-developed English administrative network, Domesday Book allowed the king to assess landholding in his kingdom, the first Pipe Roll bears witness to a more sophisticated financial administration, writs accelerated royal jurisdiction, the king might remain absent for most his reign and, ultimately, the barons presented *Magna Carta* and the Provisions of Oxford – the development is undeniable. While "the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries were formative periods in the development of chamber, treasury, and exchequer" that determined how the royal lands were to be managed in the future,[127] the twelfth century sees the emergence of a not only spiritually immortal, but also mundanely rather persistent kingship.

Royal estates and rights became increasingly inalienable and formed what was to become the crown demesne – aided, certainly, by the fiefs that fell back to the king after their incumbents' deaths. Possessions and dues were thus handed from one king to the next – remaining securely in the hand of the 'Crown'.[128] In the language of administration, the Crown conducted lawsuits and made decisions, it owned castles, cities and estates.[129] Royal clerks grew into specialised professionals rather than multi-purpose servants as the administrative requirements of the Crown increased.[130] The idea of the Crown as legal entity became so swiftly rooted in common perception that royal clerks endeavoured to protect the *corona et dignitas domini regis* and all that might go with it: in 1194, several judges decreed that the excommunication of a high-ranking royal official was *contra regalem dignitatem et excellenciam*.[131] By 1231, the honour of the Crown had

---

[123] Cf. ibid. and ibid., p. 186.
[124] Cf. ibid., p. 186-203.
[125] Cf. Ullmann, Principles of Government, p. 147.
[126] Cf. Garnett, Conquered England, p. 138.
[127] Green, The Government of England, p. 66.
[128] Cf. Kantorowicz, Die zwei Körper, p. 180-181.
[129] Cf. ibid., p. 343.
[130] This is especially (but not only) visible in the development of professional judges until the reign of Henry II, as documented by Turner, The English Judiciary, which explores the development of who was counted among judicial personnel from 1176 to 1239. See also the essay, Turner, John and Justice, which is concerned in particular with the kind of justices that John employed; see also Richard FitzNigel, Dialogvs de Scaccario, Introduction, p. li.
[131] Turner, King John's Concept of Royal Authority, p. 162.

reached such manifest importance that the barons felt its honour impinged should the king marry a Scottish princess whose older sister was already married to one of his officials.[132]

A conception such as this opens a great range of possibilities for the royal exercise of power. While the 'taxes' of the early Middle Ages were dues to be paid in connection to non-recurring events, such as the knighting of a prince, a daughter's dowry or tax-like services *pro defensione necessitate regni* – which were of course only justified if land, Church and faith were indeed imperilled – 'taxes', in times of an emerging exchequer became tied to the passage of time rather than to specific events.[133] England's Danegeld, originally levied, as its name implies, to raise the tribute necessary to prevent the Danes from ravaging the island, might be seen as an early sort of tax – though it was by far not enough to satisfy the king's growing monetary needs, although it came to be levied at an almost annual rate.[134] By the thirteenth century, following the joint (and successful) protest of the king's subjects against mounting exactions we find Henry III repeatedly appealing to the council of barons to grant him the levying of contributions.[135] The growing importance of the Crown as an 'institution' dispensing – primarily feudal – justice contributed to a different sense of right among the magnates that gradually pulled the king away from his theocratic position above the law and into the mutual lord-and-vassal-bonds of *fides*.[136]

Recapitulating the general development of the ideal of kingship from the early eleventh to the late thirteenth century, we witness a definite shift of the king's status and responsibility towards secular obligations, involving a decrease in the extent of the king's entitlement to partake in the sphere of the divine, becoming a vicar rather than an embodiment; a vicar that was expected to fulfil the multitude of moral, military, judicial and spiritual functions that were the responsibility of the Crown. A king was to perform duties in a number of fields, and show certain qualities as he did so. A selection of the qualities which are particularly prominent in the ensuing assessment of a king's 'goodness' or 'badness' as ruler are discussed in depth in the following, starting with the king's personal conduct to then progressively move away from his person, covering a wider range of royal obligations and the virtues desirable while striving to fulfil them. How well were the individual kings perceived to measure up to the ideals of kingship thus set out for them?

[132] Cf. Weiler, Kingship, Rebellion and Political Culture, p. 92.
[133] Cf. Kantorowicz, Die zwei Körper, p. 289; Holt, The Northerners, p. 188, for the differing opinions in the early thirteenth century to which payments a king was, in fact, entitled.
[134] Warren, The Governance of Norman and Angevin England, p. 68.
[135] Cf. Summerson, Kingship, government, and political life, p. 227.
[136] Cf. Ullmann, Principles of Government, p. 172-174.

*3.2.1. The King's Character and Personal Sphere*

*Contemporary Expectations*

*ideoque rex a regendo dicitur,*
*quia primo se ipsum,*
*deinde populum sibi subditum,*
*regere tenetur*[1].

Whichever place current political thought attributed to the king in the divine order of things – defender of the faith and his people, God's vicar, Christ's helper, and example and inspiration to his people – in a society so deeply ingrained with a Christian value system, the monarch's personal conduct, his own moral integrity, was of paramount importance in the legitimation and assessment of his kingship. How, to take up the initial quotation, could a king be expected to rule a people if he was not even fit to rule himself?[2] The strenuous fight for self-control, the constant correction of character and honing of virtues lies at the very heart of the king's imitation of Christ.[3]

Expectations of Christian virtues in a king remain relatively stable throughout the two centuries in question. The continental Carolingian tradition, which Wulfstan had taken up, and which doubtlessly continued to seep into England via the strong connection to Normandy and the rest of France after the Norman Conquest, demands of a king truthfulness in all matters of his kingdom, patience in his governance, eloquence in his speech, and affability in his dealings with others.[4] Wulfstan's prince correspondingly must be truthful, patient[5] – and wise.[6] *Durh cyninges wisdom* a people would become happy, victorious and healthy, while the *misraede* of an *unwisne cyning* would harm the people.[7] Wisdom thus appears as the king's general leadership quality. His foresight and prudence in dealing with matters of state – similar to the *prudentia* found in later texts – allows him to distinguish right and wrong and ensures that justice is not reversed to cruelty, fortitude to recklessness, moderation to indifference.[8]

---

[1] De principis instructione, dist. 1, ch. 1, p. 9.
[2] Hugh de Fleury's treatise parallels the initial quote in his caput IV, p.943, where he states, "*Unde ille rex merito vocitatur qui mores suos competenter regere et sibi subjectos bene novit modificare*". See also Stone, Kings are different, for the general trend in (Carolingian) mirrors for princes to demand flawless conduct of their king, seeing that kingship was a divinely granted office and the moral failings of kings were seen as the direct cause of the most drastic catastrophies.
[3] Cf. Nelson, Kingship and Empire, p. 242.
[4] Bell, L'idéal ethique de la royauté en France, p. 22; Jost, Institutes of Polity, p. 52 provides the Latin passages mirrored in Wulfstan's work.
[5] Cf. ibid., p. 52.
[6] Cf. ibid., p. 47.
[7] Cf. ibid.
[8] Cf. De principis instructione, dist. 1, ch. XI, p. 39.

Depending on the source, this list grows considerably longer. He is to have an exemplary hold on himself, exercising temperance[9] in all things that he does or, as it were, desires. Temperance, speaking in virtues, thus goes along with modesty[10] and chastity.[11] In dealing with others, the king is required to be patient and affable (tempering, again, his anger[12] and impatience), and, of course, approachable in general. Kings who shut themselves away from the demands of their subjects were subject to criticism for neglecting their duties, especially in the eleventh century, when the administrative apparatus that might to some extent mitigate the problem of a withdrawn king was not as developed as in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,[13] when neither Richard's captivity in Germany – although he was allowed to hold court there – nor the baronial restriction of Henry III's movements seemed to constitute an insurmountable hindrance to the functioning of government.

The most recent aspect in the spectrum of desirable personal traits in a monarch is that of learnedness, especially learnedness beyond the ecclesiastical sphere. Wulfstan stresses the importance of the king paying attention to the teachings of the holy writ so that he might better serve God's will,[14] adding that the soul, without the nurturing words of the scripture, would pine away just like the body would when deprived of physical sustenance.[15] While a fundamental knowledge of the teachings of the bible has thus always figured as greatly desirable in a king, a king's learnedness and literacy attains greater significance in the eyes of the generations to follow. Gerald of Wales, when speaking of the king's prudence, does not fail to note that learnedness in a king is much to be desired, presenting the example of Charlemagne and Alcuin.[16] His preface takes a more direct approach, re-iterating the popular quote that an illiterate prince was esteemed nothing better than a crowned ass.[17] Both John of Salisbury and Hugh de Fleury agree whole-heartedly, Hugh de Fleury noting that the king might inform and fortify himself through the

[9] Temperance is the most comprehensive of the virtues expected of a king, and is applicable to fields beyond what is here labelled the king's 'personal' requirements. Gerald, resorting to food allegories, describes temperance as the condiment (*condimentum*) required in all the king's deeds (De principis instructione, dist. 1, ch. 6, p.18). Moderation is of particular importance in the king's exercise of justice in order to prevent the monarch from pronouncing verdicts of excessive leniency or exorbitant cruelty. Hugh de Fleury, caput VI, p. 948, asserts that temperance for example protected the king's mind from idleness and sloth and helped him to shun luxury.

[10] Cf. De principis instructione, dist. 1, ch. 13, p. 46-48.

[11] Cf. Ibid., dist. 1, ch. 4, p. 13-14; Salisbury mentions the kings being prohibited to lovingly embrace more than one woman in John of Salisbury, Policraticus, book IV, chapter 5, p. 519, so that adultery and fornication might be avoided.

[12] Anger, in particular, is a very versatile vice. It could be just and worthy of praise, overly emotional and perhaps excused, or tyrannic and condemnable. Anger made it easy to get carried away, for instance in particularly harsh judgements. Bührer-Thierry, "Just Anger" or "Vengeful Anger", discusses this ever-present possibility of escalation in an essay on the punishment of blinding. Hyams, What Did Henry III of England Think in Bed about Kingship and Anger, in the same volume, discusses the place anger had in the king's now destroyed elaborately painted bedchamber of Westminster palace, where different virtues were depicted that triumphed over their corresponding vices. See Althoff, Ira Regis, for a general discussion of the the problematic vice of anger in kings, and the resulting clash of political reality and the requirements of Christian morality.

[13] Cf. Bates, William the Conqueror, p. 26-27.

[14] Cf. Jost, Institutes of Polity, p. 48.

[15] Cf. ibid., p. 51.

[16] Cf. De principis instructione, dist. 1, chapter 11, p. 42.

[17] Cf. ibid., dist. 1, praefatio, p. 5.

examples of men, both ancient and modern,[18] and John of Salisbury putting special emphasis on the king's need to be familiar with the divine laws[19].

Another factor that is noteworthy at this point is the role of the queen in the perception of the king's moral conduct. Apart from the king appearing morally more 'settled' as husband and father than as a bachelor, she would not only fulfil the rather more 'political' functions of bearing him children, ensuring allegiance and acting for the king in his absence, but she would also care for guests, arrange ceremonial aspects of court and maintain a standard of morality and, in particular, piety.[20] Sometimes, she may have been perceived as a more gentle counterpart to her husband, and was approached by those seeking the forgiveness or favour of the king, who hoped to find a more sympathetic ear with the queen.[21] The figure of the queen had its very own ideals to live up to – and her performance in fulfilling them would ultimately reflect back on the king, enhancing or impairing his own virtue. The existence of tangible standards for the queen's conduct is nowhere more evident than in the narratives concerning the Empress Matilda. Whatever the reasons behind her ultimate failure to gain acceptance as reigning queen, Matilda's personality was turned into a tool of ideological warfare between the two contending factions, a means by which either side's claim to rightful kingship could be diminished. The portrait of the *Gesta Stephani* is justly famous – her overbearing, arrogant and severe manner of movement and speech after Stephen's capture, when she deemed herself finally queen, was, the author asserts, contrary to the modesty expected in female behaviour.[22] She began to act rashly and arbitrarily, receiving potential allies ungraciously, sending some from her presence with insults and threats;[23] faced with the pleas of the Londoners, indeed, her countenance was marred with such unbearable fury that all female gentleness seemed to have fled from it.[24] She is directly contrasted with Stephen's loving wife – a woman *astuti pectoris uirilisque constantiae*,[25] with a cunning mind and a man's perseverance. While the queen was also ascribed manly traits, her manliness was of distinctly different character, her conduct never overbearing or arrogant.

The enormity of these taunts becomes visible once they are contrasted with the descriptions provided by authors who were friendly to her cause. In his continuation of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, Robert of Torigni at length describes how she, having fallen ill, distributed her imperial treasure, the valuables from her father's English possessions – even the very mattress that served as her sickbed.[26] He also claims the princes of Germany had wanted to keep

---

[18] Cf. Hugh de Fleury, caput VI, p. 948.
[19] Cf. John of Salisbury, Policraticus, book IV, chapter 6, p. 525 (*sapientia*), ibid., p. 522-523 (*lex Domini*).
[20] Cf. Barlow, William Rufus, p. 101.
[21] Cf. Koziol, Begging Pardon and Favor, p. 72. Koziol has made this observation for the ninth and tenth centuries, but, as the following will show, instances in which the queen was approached to circumvent the sternness of her husband can still be found in the time period under scrutiny here.
[22] Cf. Gesta Stephani, p. 118: *"...illa statim elatissimum summi fastus induere supercilium nec iam humilem feminae mansuetudinis motum uel incessum, sed solito seuerius, solito et arrogantius procedere et loqui, et cuncta coepit peragere..."*.
[23] Cf. ibid., p. 120: "*illa .... cuncta coepit potenter, immo et praecipitanter agere et alios quidem, qui regi paruerant, quique se illi et sua subicere conuenerant, inuite et cum aperta quandoque indignatione suscipere, alios autem iniuriis et minis afflictos indignando a se abigere...*".
[24] Cf. ibid., p. 122: *"Talis his modis ciuibus prosequentibus, illa, torua oculos, crispata in rugam frontem, totam muliebris mansuetudinis euersa faciem, in intolerabilem indignatione exarsit, ..."*.
[25]Ibid.
[26] Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VIII-27, p. 244.

her on account of her wonderful character.[27] It is not difficult to imagine the exasperation the author of the *Gesta Stephani* would have felt when confronted with these assertions. In his eyes, the woman was, after all, grabbing everything that was not nailed down. As for her charming character, she "was always superior to feminine softness and had a mind steeled and unbroken in adversity"[28]. Other writers tried their hand at depicting her in a favourable light. William of Malmesbury circumvents the problem of the empress' direct involvement in the fray, morally questionable from the viewpoint of femininity, by placing her in the shadow of the *Historia Novella*'s definite hero and driving force, Robert of Gloucester. The vindication of the empress' soft side gains a downright comical quality more than a century later, when, in the History of William Marshal, she proves a great burden to the fleeing troop by riding "as women do" – whereupon John Marshal admonished her: "My lady, so help me Christ, you cannot get a move on riding side-saddle. You must put your legs apart and sit over the saddle-bows."[29] The author makes it quite clear that the empress thought little of moving about like a man.

Queens could (possibly even when they were riding) polish, with their virtue, piety and generosity, the image of their husbands, tempering their rasher choices and maintaining a certain level of decency at court. Kings were expected to be nothing less than morally flawless – a model for their Christian subjects to follow.

*William I: Character and Personal Sphere*

Contemporary narratives of the Conqueror's activities both before and during his reign are so dominated by warfare and its justification that the king's character and personal conduct outside the field of battle rarely comes into focus. An exception is the panegyric of William of Poitiers, who, fully aware of the marks of a good prince, seized every opportunity to paint the king in any shade of perfected royalty imaginable.

The panegyrist's William is a sapient, much sought-after advisor consulted even by the French king,[30] whose counsel aided Edward the Confessor to become King of England.[31] Apart from his astuteness, he also possesses considerable reserves of cunning – which allow him, still a duke and busy with the vindication of his borders against the French, to demoralise the advancing enemy host with the nocturnal placing of a herald in a tree outside their camp, from whence he was ordered to proclaim a detailed account of the duke's victory to the encamped French.[32] Venerated by his fellow rulers[33] and exceedingly triumphant in war, the duke is portrayed as a man radiating a remarkable inner calm, a deeply rooted trust in God and the belief in the righteousness of his cause – most famously rendered when he is said to have halted in mid-sea and settled down for

[27] Cf. ibid. book VIII-25, p. 240-241; in book VIII-11, p. 216-218, the author declares that she shared both character and name with her mother – a woman that came to be known as Good Queen Maude.

[28] Translation cited from Gesta Stephani, p. 135; Latin, ibid. p. 134: "*Sed et ipsa Angeauensis comitissa, femineam semper excedens mollitiem, ferreumque et infractum gerens in aduersis animum...*".

[29] History of William Marshal, p. 13, lines 213-224.

[30] Cf. William of Poitiers, i.11 (p. 14).

[31] Cf. ibid., i.14 (p. 18).

[32] Cf. ibid., i.31 (p. 48-50).

[33] Cf. ibid., i.59 (p. 96); i.21 (p. 30), has rulers fall over each other to give their daughters' hands in marriage to the duke.

an abundant meal after having realised that his ship had left the rest of the invasion fleet far behind in his wish to join battle as soon as possible.[34] William of Poitiers' Conqueror is a lover of peace, and avoids bloodshed whenever he can[35] – even to such an extent that he proposes to face Harold in a duel rather than allowing the armies to clash, and much innocent blood to be spilled.[36]

Of similar quality is the account of the pre-battle atmosphere in the *Carmen*: seeking to avoid the confrontation, William offers to accept Harold's apology for his treachery, and grant him land as his vassal.[37] William of Poitiers uses the morning after the battle to once more underline William's love for peace, and averseness to bloodshed: surveying the corpse-strewn-battlefield after his victory at Hastings, he is moved with pity, even weeps for the ruin of his rival, Harold.[38] The panegyrist's efforts of idealising his hero culminate when William is offered the crown – and refuses, for the time being. In the aftermath of the bloody battle of Hastings, nearing the end of a narrative that depicts the duke as singularly bent upon attaining what was rightfully his, his sudden reluctance of laying claim on his price is cast in such stark contrast to the events preceding the episode that William of Poitiers' brazen use of the topos of the reluctant ruler stands very much unmasked. Following that particular logic, a reluctant king is a good king, because a king that has been persuaded to take up his office is a king that will stand up for the good of others rather than pursue his own gain.[39] Although the English beg him to rule them, the victorious duke first consults his men, voicing his apprehension of taking up the crown of a realm that was confused and partly insurgent. (As any good ruler should,) he desired rather to bring about the quietude of the kingdom than to lay claim to its crown.[40] As if this narrated expression of selfless compassion was not enough, William of Poitiers attaches a lengthy chain of reasons to the duke's modest refusal that, at least to modern eyes, seems oddly haphazard and off-balance – almost as if the writer himself was not sure whether or not he was overdoing it. "*Praeterea*", besides that, he adds, there was the matter of his wife; if there was to be a coronation (and apparently God wished to bestow that honour), she should be crowned with him. And, in any way, it was not proper to be so rash when climbing so high. He then re-iterates the first argument: it was certainly not the lust for ruling that dominated the king. A repetition of the second argument follows, even more out of place. He had understood the sanctity of marriage, and respected his vows. Further repetition is cut short by his *familiares* who urge him to take the

[34] Cf. ibid., ii.7 (p. 112).
[35] Cf. ibid., i. 25 (p. 38), sees him, then still a duke, defeating his rebellious subjects through a siege and hunger rather than through the sword to avoid bloodshed, as, William of Poitiers asserts, he was wont to do: "*Sane more suo illo optimo, rem optans absque curore confectum iri...*".
[36] Cf. ibid., ii.12-13 (p. 120-122).
[37] Cf. Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, p. 16, line 243-246.
[38] Cf. William of Poitiers, ii.25 (p. 138-140).
[39] Weiler, Rex renitens offers a concise discussion of this topos among kings and bishops. See especially p. 12-13 and p. 18.
[40] Cf. William of Poitiers, ii.28-29 (p. 146-148), for the entire episode. Poitiers chooses the wording *"se potius regni quietem quam coronam cupere"*.

crown, although they do, as a matter of course, appreciate the reasoning that had sprung from his deep, abundant wisdom.[41]

Other writers are far less copious in their depiction of the king's personal conduct. Among the few traceable episodes, his great sternness and his greed are the traits most impressively described. William of Jumièges describes how the duke dealt out a severe punishment to a group among the rebellious citizens of Alençon who had insulted him by beating pelts and skins at him, mocking his humble parentage. In view of all the other citizens, he ordered the hands and feet of thirty-two mockers to be cut off. Having witnessed the duke's great severity, *seuera austeritate*, the inhabitants, fearing for their limbs, surrendered the city to him. The author appears entirely at ease with the king's show of strength, for he continues that the duke, *quibus uiriliter peractis*, this having been bravely done, proceeded to Domfront. There, the citizens, having heard of what the duke had done to their fellow rebels, the town submitted at once, handing over hostages as well as the city.[42]

The duke and later king is indeed not portrayed as a man of forgiving nature. The two sources explicitly referring to the fate of Harold's dead body, William of Poitiers' *Gestae* and the *Carmen* portray him as denying the wishes of Harold's grieving mother for the burial of her son. Both sources attest that Harold's mother came to the future king after the battle and begged for her son's body, promising to weigh it up in gold if he were but to return it to her. From there, the writers tell different tales. The actions of the king as William of Poitiers describes them appear sterner, although he smoothes them out to some degree directly afterwards, when he eloquently grieves for Harold's end rather than vilifying him further. William of Poitiers asserts that the king was, for one thing, aware that it was not right to accept gold in such a trade, and for another that he deemed it outrageous that he should grant the mother the right to bury her son, if innumerable men remained unburied because of Harold's overly great ambition. The eventual fate of Harold's body is left open: the writer specifically singles out Harold's burial, which was to be entrusted to William Malet, and ends the episode with the remark that people were wont to say mockingly that Harold ought to be placed as a guardian of the shore and the sea, which, in his raging, he had earlier occupied with arms.[43] The rest of the English, William of Poitiers graciously adds, were given free license to bury the bodies of their fallen.[44]

---

[41] The moment of ducal uncertainty deserves to be recited in full: "*Consulens ille comitatos e Normannia, quorum non minus prudentiam quam fidem spectatam habebat, patefecit eis quid maxime sibi dissuaderet quod Angli orabant: res adhuc turbidas esse; rebellare nonnullos; se potius regni quietem quam coronam cupere. Praeterea si Deus ipsi hunc concedit honorem, secum uelle coniugem suam coronari. Denique non oportere nimium properari, dum in altum culmen ascenditur. Profecto non illi dominabatur regnandi libido, sanctum esse intellexerat sancteque diligebat coniugii pignus. Familiares contra suasere, ut totius exercitus unanimi desiderio optari sciebant ; quanquam rationes eius apprime laudabiles dignoscerent, ex arcano uberrimae sapientiae manantes.*" Ibid., ii.29 (p. 148).

[42] Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VII-8(18), p. 124.

[43] Cf. William of Poitiers, ii.25 (p. 140). The translation provided by Davis and Chibnall (p. 141) is phrased less drastically, translating *indignum* as "unworthy" rather than "outrageous", but given the amount of criticism William of Poitiers directs at Harold and the dramatic context of the sentence, "outrageous" seems justified. The passage, in its entirety, reads: "*Ipse ... in castra ducis delatus qui tumulandum eum Guillelmo agnomine Maletto concessit, non matri pro corpore dilectae prolis auri par pondus offerenti. Sciuit enim non decere tali commercio aurum accipi. Aestimauit indignum fore ad matris libitum sepeliri, cuius ob nimiam cupiditatem insepulti remanerent innumerabiles. Dictum est illudendo, oportere situm esse custodem littoris et pelagi, quae cum armis ante uesanus insedit.*"

[44] Cf. ibid., ii.26 (p. 142).

The *Carmen*, by comparison, gives a gentler account of the king's deeds: the body of the slain rival had been wrapped in purple linen and carried into the duke's camp. Despite this respectful treatment, William I is depicted as enraged at the grieving mother's request and refuses it at once, swearing he would rather entrust him to the sea shore, under a heap of stones. The king's eventual command, however, is carried out in gesture of reconciliation: a man part Norman and part English "gladly" carries out the task of burying Harold, and his tombstone is inscribed with the words: "By the duke's order you, King Harold, rest here, so that you may remain guardian of shore and sea." [45] Seen in the context of the Conqueror's subsequent policy which was to wholly ignore Harold's existence as king, denoting him as king on his tombstone and allowing him a post-mortem piece of land to guard appears to be a gesture of remarkable goodwill. The episode is not mentioned in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and William of Jumièges only states that William I had returned to the battlefield on the next morning, and that he had buried his own men before he proceeded to London.[46]

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle does not model the king's severity into a tale, but explicitly includes it. Its obituary calls the king wise, "stern beyond all measure to those who opposed him" and ends with a poetic epitaph on the king, setting out how anyone had to entirely follow his will if they wished to have life, land, property or his favour.[47]

More weighty is the chronicle's accusation that the king was greedy, although it must be said that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, throughout the reigns of all the Norman kings, displayed a considerable tendency to close accounts of individual years with a statement of how oppressive royal taxes had been in that particular year. The king's panegyrist did, of course, not endorse that judgement. Interestingly enough, William of Poitiers mentions the great riches of England,[48] the great and costly gifts the king made to the churches of Normandy[49] and the splendid precious vessels from which the king and his followers drank at a banquet.[50] With regard to the source of these much marvelled-at riches, the writer remarks that the Conqueror staged this display of munificence only with the things that were truly his.[51] Indeed, as he expounds, it was a mark of his great moderation and the temperance with which he had adorned his victories from his youth on that he did not – although he could have – at once seize the throne, distribute the booty the kingdom had to offer among his knights and slay or exile the realm's old elite.[52] The verdict of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is a different one. It asserts that despite his promises of good lordship, the new king had demanded a heavy tax of his people prior to his departure to

---

[45] For the entire episode, see Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, p. 34, lines 573-592.
[46] Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VII-16(37), p. 170.
[47] Cf. Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 219-221 (E-version). For the original text, see Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 354: "*He wæs milde þam godum mannum þe God lufedon ⁊ ofer eall gemett stearc þam mannum þe wiðcwædon his willan"* and p. 355: *"Ac he [wæs] swa stið ꝥ he ne rohte heora eallra nið ac hi moston mid ealle es cynges wille folgian gif hi woldon libba oððe land habban oððe eahta oððe wel his sehta.*"
[48] Cf. William of Poitiers, ii.40 (p. 174).
[49] Cf. ibid., ii.42 (p. 176).
[50] Cf. ibid., ii.46 (p. 180).
[51] Cf. ibid., ii.42 (p. 178).
[52] Cf. ibid., ii.26 (p. 142); the writer here uses both moderation and temperance: *"Posset illico uictor sedem regiam adire, imponere sibi diadema, terrae diuitias in praedam suis militibus tribuere, quosque potentes alios iugulare, alios in exilium eiicere, sed moderatius ire placuit atque clementius dominari. Consueuit nameque pridem adolescens temperantia decorare triumphos."*

Normandy.[53] Later it notes that he allowed all of England's minsters to be raided.[54] Nearing William I's death, the narrative lapses into darker and lengthier criticism: the king had given away lands at the hardest conditions he could, always giving them to the highest bidder, no matter how that bidder had acquired the money necessary.[55] The deepest impression, however, has been left by the chronicle's account of the making of Domesday Book, which remains an intensely popular quote – albeit, curiously enough, usually quoted as a mark of the king's efficiency rather than of his graspingness: in order to find out how much land of what worth he had conquered, he sent his officials about the land to make inquiries. Indeed, "he had it investigated so very narrowly that there was not one single hide, not one yard of land, not even (it is shameful to tell – but it seemed no shame to him to do it) one ox, not one cow, not one pig was left out, that was not set down in his record."[56] The contrast to William of Poitiers' description of the king's conduct – though admittedly describing actions almost twenty years prior to the making of Domesday Book – is of an entirely different quality, detailing the clemency he had shown to English commoners and how he had endowed many Englishmen with gifts they would not have received from their former lords or their kinsmen.[57]

What little judgement of character contemporaries integrated into the warfare-oriented narratives of the Conqueror's reign is swiftly summed up: a stern and unforgiving man, albeit not usually in a negative way. And a king who would quite unabashedly take what his newly-won kingdom had to offer.

*William II: Character and Personal Sphere*

When compared to the shallow depth with which his father's personality is described, William II positively jumps from the page – admittedly not much to his benefit, but with rarely-found vividness that makes his character appear almost tangible. The descriptions of the king did, as will be seen, hardly correspond with the virtues set out for the ideal monarch, but, when perusing them, it is evident that, as Frank Barlow remarked, the king tended to be given the "best lines" in any narrative – an observation he made for Orderic Vitalis' treatment of the monarch, but an observation that is easily applicable to the narratives of many contemporaries. Collecting and passing around the king's spluttering outbursts, Barlow attests, must have become an entertaining pastime.[58] And, indeed, they are spread widely throughout the chronicles.

---

[53] Cf. Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 200 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 339.

[54] Cf. Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 204 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 344 and 345.

[55] Cf. Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 218 (E-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 354: *"Se cymg ⁊ a heafod men lufedon swiðe ofer swiðe ⁊ gitsunge on golde on seolfre ⁊ ne rohtan hu synlice hit wære begytan buton hit come to heom."* The chronicle's complaint of the king freely accepting money, no matter how sinfully it had been acquired, is set into a context of perceived divine vengeance for the sins of the people, thus effectively presenting the king and his ministers as similarly guilty for the miserable state of England as the "*folces synna*".

[56] Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 216 (E-version). Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 353: "*Eac he let gewritan hu mcel landes his arcebiscopas hæfdon his ⁊ leodbiscopas ⁊ his abbotas ⁊ his eorlas ⁊ þeah ic hit lengre telle hwæt oððe hu mycel ælc mann hæfde þe landsittende wæs innan Englalande on lande oððe on orfe ⁊ hu mycel feos hit wære wurð. Swa swyðe nearwelice he hit lett ut aspyrian ꝥ næs an ælpig hide ne an gyrde landes ne furðon hit is sceame to tellanne ac it ne þuhte him nan sceame to donne an oxe ne án cú ne án swin ns belyfon ꝥ næs gesæt on his gewrite. ⁊ ealle a gewrita wæron gebroht to him syððan.*"

[57] Cf. William of Poitiers, ii.35 (p. 162).

[58] Cf. Barlow, William Rufus, p. 118. From p. 100 on, Barlow also provides an overview of the virtues and vices attributed to the king, which he develops into an extensive character sketch.

“Consult with your own, because you will have none of mine for your counsel,” the king throws at his treacherous vassal, the bishop William of St. Calais, who, during his trial, had asked to confer with his spiritual brothers, the bishops of the realm. In an almost sketch-like sequence, which, in its basic structure, is found several times throughout the text, this remark of the king insolently rephrases the mitigating, formal reply of Archbishop Lanfranc to the demands of the accused. In this particular case the archbishop had, prior to the king’s outburst, smoothly replied that it would not be possible for William of St. Calais to confer with the bishops because the bishops acted as judges in his case.[59] As the narrative proceeds, the king’s angry comments grow ever more frequent and increasingly impatient; it is entirely possible to picture him sitting by sullenly and barking out a complaint now and then. The appeal the misbehaved king could have for a narrative is easily comprehensible from a modern point of view – and it seems reasonable to assume that contemporaries also found their king’s antics worth recording.

As a particularly striking example, the continuation of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* goes out of its way to describe a memorable quote of the brazen king: the episode is heralded by the announcement that there were many things that might be told about William II and, after the anecdote, finishes with the admission that many things of similar nature could have been recorded, were it not for the fact that the king’s history ought to be passed over quickly – but space (and apparently license) for an anecdote there was. It was an anecdote delivered with relish. Having heard of the siege of Le Mans, the chronicler recounts, the king had gathered a force and rushed to the sea, where he was told that the winds were not good for a voyage to Normandy. William II remarked, albeit not in direct speech, that he had never heard of a king dying in shipwreck, and crosses.[60] Even Anselm’s notoriously hostile biographer Eadmer provides one such memorable quote: when confronted with the fact that the archbishop-unwilling had resolved to cross the sea and consult with the pope, he is reported saying that he could not think of a reason why this should be needed, seeing that he hardly believed Anselm was likely to have perpetrated a sin of enormity nor, he continues, “that he is in want of any kind of advice when we are convinced that, where it is a case of giving advice, he is better able to help the Pope than the Pope to help him.”[61] Given Eadmer’s frequent depictions of the saintly archbishop fastidiously administering spiritually beneficial advice to an increasingly sullen king, the king’s words, if such an assessment can in any way be reconciled with Eadmer’s austere reproachfulness, seem like nothing short of comedy.

Amid the multitude of recorded remarks, William Rufus is never portrayed as a cunning, scheming liar. It does, indeed, appear to be his brutal honesty that scandalised and fascinated his contemporaries. He does not hatch any plots, and, if, in the course of formal trials, he is forced to endure the elaborate, (non-straightforward) speech of his subordinates, he is impatient to see the matter brought to a conclusion, and rarely takes a hand in the proceedings except to cut across them and voice his impatience. There are many instances of this behaviour in the two lengthy depictions of the king making a case against his vassals, namely the account of the trial

[59] De injusta vexatione, p. 184-185.
[60] Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VIII-8, p. 212.
[61] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 79-80; translation by Stevenson, Eadmer’s History of Recent Events, p. 83.

against William of St. Calais and Eadmer's account of the general council of Rockingham, where William II tried to dissuade Anselm from his obedience to Pope Urban. While, in the light of chivalry, the king's honesty might appear in a more favourable light, the critique implied here is not only that of the king's stark lack of patience – most pointedly portrayed by Eadmer. At a second encounter, when Anselm proclaims his wish to seek the advice of the pope, the king and all his court burst out against Anselm's argumentation. "Oh, oh," Eadmer has them stammer, "it is a sermon that he delivers, a sermon it is; on the matter that is dealt with here, there is not anything that might be taken up with prudent reason!" In the face of the ensuing commotion that only subsides when the yelling court has worn itself out *(fatigatis)*, Anselm, instead of rising to the taunts, sits and endures the shouts, before calmly picking up his argument once more.[62] Quite apart from the impatience depicted, which made these episodes illustrations for a royal bad temper ever on the verge of explosion, there is, in the king's demeanour, no hint of diplomatic finesse, cunning, or sagacity. Instead, it is notable how, if it comes to diplomacy and the conception of schemes, the king always draws on others: the truce with the Scottish king is arranged by his older brother in the brief moment of peace between them,[63] Lanfranc is the one chosen to argue against William of St. Calais, said William of St. Calais is the main instigator in the dispute at Rockingham,[64] and, when Anselm's arguments prove watertight, the king is portrayed in angry, urgent conversation, turning first to the bishops, then to the barons, expecting and forcefully demanding a solution to the predicament that the archbishop appears to be impervious to all accusations, without, apparently, the king having anything in the way of an idea to the resolution of his problem himself. "If you had known how strongly supported he was in his case, why did you allow me to begin this suit against him? Go on, confer with each other, because, by the face of God, if you do not condemn him at my will, I will condemn you."[65] It is unlikely that Eadmer witnessed the king's exclamation first-hand, seeing that he sat with Anselm, awaiting the king's judgement, in what can only be assumed to have been another room, but his description neatly suits the overall picture he provides of the king.

Despite such instances illustrative of royal impatience and brazen straightforwardness, William Rufus is not often accused of a fault that would seem to be closely connected to these characteristics: rashness in his swift taking of the crown. The account of his father sending him from his deathbed to acquire the kingdom prevents that.[66] The *Historia Novorum* is the only exception, and even draws the legitimacy of the king's grasp for the throne into question by bringing Robert into play. William II, it says, was keen to snatch the kingdom's highest dignity from his brother Robert, but found Lanfranc, upon whom his succession hinged, not entirely

---

[62] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 85-86: *"'O, o,' dixerunt, 'praedicatio est quod dicit, praedicatio est; non rei qua de agitur ulla quae recipienda sit a prudentibus ratio.'"* Stevenson, Eadmer's History of Recent Events, p. 89, translates: "'Words, words! All that he is saying is mere words!'", which does not capture that extra dimension of irreligion that accompanies the courtly disdain of preaching as something that is of no use to a 'sophisticated' mind.
[63] Cf. Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 226-227 (D-version) and Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 359; Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 22, iii. 394- 397, p. 268-270.
[64] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 59-60.
[65] Ibid., p. 62: *" 'Et sic sciebatis eum tanto in causa sua robore fultum, quare permisitis me incipere placitum istud contra eum? Ite, consiliamini, quia, per Vultum Dei, si vos illum ad voluntatem meam non damnaveritis, ego damnabo vos.'"*
[66] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 4, book VII, ch. 16, iii. 244, p. 96, also ibid., book VIII, ch. 1, iii.256, p. 110.

favourably disposed to his desire. Fearing to lose the possibility of gaining the crown, he himself and others began to make pledges and oaths (*fide sacramentoque*) of how good a king he would be, until finally Lanfranc crowned him. It is an accusation with which Eadmer stands alone, but that fact does little to mitigate other, more condemning elements of the king's character.

Orderic Vitalis introduces him as a king who, similar to his father, reigned with military competence and worldly splendour, and was too much a subject to pride *(superbia)*, lust *(libido)* and other vices, adding, however *(sed)*, that the real trouble lay in his attitude towards the Church.[67] The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle limits its description of the king's character to the mere statement that he was "very terrible"[68]. Eadmer's Rufus is rotten to the core, his vices kept in check solely by the guidance of Archbishop Lanfranc, although even the steadfast archbishop could not bring the king to fulfil the promises of good government he had made. "Who," the king exclaims when he is rebuked, "is there who could fulfil all that he promises?"[69] Although the writer confines the "calamities" that followed the death of Lanfranc as ecclesiastical guardian to the churches of England (whose being targeted admittedly tends to represent the ultimate evil with Eadmer), the image is that of a devil loosened: "for at once the king showed outwardly what he had, while that man had lived, assiduously nourished within himself." The non-ecclesiastical wrongdoings of the king are limited to *alia quae perperam gessit*, other, unspecified wrongs, while Eadmer's focus lies on the despoliation of the church of Canterbury.[70] However, the aura of moral depravity that the chronicler has emanating from the king is strong enough for Anselm, years later, to remark upon it. It is during their very first meeting in Eadmer's saint's life, after the king has received him favourably – in symbolic deference rising from his throne, advancing to meet the archbishop at the door, embracing him joyfully and leading him by the hand to his seat – that the archbishop sends those close to the king away and, in private talk, begins to admonish him. He makes an effort of reporting to the king that all people in the entire kingdom talked about him every day, in private and public, in a way that did by no means befit the dignity of a king.[71] Anselm tries a second time to confront the king with such charges, begging him, while the household is waiting for favourable winds at Hastings, to revive Christian law that was so often violated, and for the correction of the nefarious morals, by which daily the entire human order was overly much corrupted.[72] Even later, the archbishop notes with despair that all the secular houses were falling into the habit of corrupt life, and evil deeds abounded everywhere. Anselm's despair stems from his realisation that it would be impossible for him to attempt to correct these transgressions, because it was obvious that the prince of the entire kingdom either practised or favoured the very

---

[67] Cf. ibid.: *"... patremque suum in quibusdum secundum seculum imitari studuit. Nam militari probitate et seculari dapsilitate uiguit, et superbiae libidinisque aliisque uiciis nimium subiacuit, sed erga Deum et aecclesiae frequentationem cultumque frigidus extitit."*
[68] The citation stands in the context of the chronicle's claim to the king's powerful and strong governance that relied on military strength. Cited from Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p 235 (D-version); for the original, see Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 364: *"He wæs swiðe strang ⁊ reðe ofer his land ⁊ his mænn ⁊ wið ealle his neahheburas ⁊ swiðe ondrædendlic..."*.
[69] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 25.
[70] Ibid., p. 26. The translated passage reads thus: *"Confestim enim rex foras expressit quod in suo pectore, illo vivente, confotum habuit."*
[71] Eadmer, Life of St Anselm, p. 64.
[72] Ibid., p. 69.

evils against which the churchman wanted to strive.[73] In the light of the idea of the king acting as the head to the societal body, the charge is abundantly clear: whose, if not the king's, morals should thus be affecting the entire populace?

It is an accusation that is mirrored in Orderic Vitalis. He records a preacher who, in his sermon *quasi prophetico spiritu* announced that God's judgement would soon put an end to the depravity and evil abounding. Interesting is his allusion to the king: "Unrestrained lust pollutes earthen vessels and even golden ones"[74]. Beyond the preacher's prophetic words, Orderic's own way of putting the matter is even more direct. "William Rufus, the young king of England," he states, "was wanton and lascivious, and droves of his people all too readily imitated his corrupt morals."[75] The chronicler does mitigate this charge by pointing to the king's knightliness, generosity and his strict keeping of internal peace, but a charge it is nevertheless.

The very monarch thus corrupting an entire populace is also ascribed, in matters not pertaining to knighthood or going directly against law, a certain untrustworthiness. Few chroniclers fail to report how he fell seriously ill and, fearing death, made promises to change his ways – promises that he was later to abandon, as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and, more vividly so, Eadmer remark. The nature of these promises is – in some cases very characteristically – elaborated upon by the individual chronicles. Orderic reports that he had an archbishop elected for Canterbury, Eadmer makes the restoration of the churches the main focus of the king's penitent plans, the Worcester chronicle reports the threefold promise of leading a better life, ensuring the freedom of the Church and establishing good laws. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records the king's near-death promises in a similar way, but, in line with its frequent demands for better governance, puts a special emphasis on the king, once restored to health, withdrawing his promise of good laws.[76] The Old English witness also details, at length, the king's failure to hold up his side of the agreement with his brother, out of which he had already gained a peace with Scotland, and that the barons attributed all fault in this matter to Rufus; an accusation that the king negates, whereupon hostilities break out again.[77] In an even greater testament to his untrustworthiness, Orderic reports that, upon Robert's impending return, William II was planning to spring upon his brother with a large force, thus keeping him from entering his pawned inheritance.[78]

The king, so the implication, had become fond of his older brother's part of the inheritance, and, despite the latter's intention of relinquishing his hold on Normandy merely for safekeeping and additional money for his crusading venture, would attempt to remain in control notwithstanding the return of the legitimate owner. This is a familiar theme for William II. There

---

[73] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 79.
[74] Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 14, iv. 85, p. 286-287; translation by Chibnall.
[75] Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 8, iii. 315, p. 178-179; translation by Chibnall.
[76] Historia Regum, p. 220; John of Worcester 3, p. 64; Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 227 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 359; Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 8, iii. 314, p. 176; Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 31-32, for his recovery and undoing of his promises, cf. ibid. p. 38-39.
[77] Cf. Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 228-229 (D-version). The chronicle's wording, in this case, is drastic: it claims that the emissaries of his brother had called the king "faithless and foresworn" (*"hine forsworennne ⁊ trywleasne clypode").*
[78] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 13, iv. 80, p. 280.

is unanimous agreement in the chronicles as to the king's greed. It is clearly depicted in the various complaints of the king prolonging ecclesiastical vacancies in order to draw monetary gain from the vacant Church property. The king suspected, or so is Eadmer's explanation for the royal graspingness, that he did not wholly possess his royal dignity as long as there was someone throughout his entire land who had something that he did not have through him, even if such ownership were by the will of God.[79] The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle additionally complains of "excessive taxes that never ceased"[80], but since that is a grievance brought forth by the chronicler(s) for well-nigh every year and every king, it adds relatively little moral ballast to Rufus' load. The figurehead and executor of the king's avarice became, for many writers, Ranulf Flambard; and Orderic Vitalis even seems to imply that it was that nefarious advisor who first triggered the king's greed, stating that he "unsettled the young king with his fraudulent suggestions"[81].

Contemporaries paint a vivid picture of the king's character – preferably in varying shades of blackness. Yet there is one redeeming trait found in Orderic Vitalis and, surprisingly, even in Eadmer: the king's 'youth'. Seeing that William Rufus was thirty-one when he became king, and his brother, never thus portrayed, but one year older when he succeeded him, it seems unlikely that it was mere lack of biological age that the chroniclers attributed to William II. It could be suspected that the allusion is to the king's prolonged bachelorhood; the lack of a queen's calming influence that might have tamed the wildness of a bachelor's court. Be that as it may, especially when he speaks of the king's vices or arrogance, Orderic furnishes him with the attribute *iuvenis*.[82] More notable even is Eadmer's remark as to the king's unsettled youthfulness. Shortly after Anselm has been ritually forced into the archbishopric by his episcopal brethren, he steps out to them, tearfully, and hurls a dramatic metaphor at them. The plough that was the English Church, he explains, was pulled by two oxen, the archbishop of Canterbury and the king. Himself, he likens to an old sheep, the king, however, to a bull of untameable ferocity, put before the plough when still young. The pairing of both, owed to the sheep's weakness, would lead to the sheep being dragged through thorns and briars by the bull's wildness.[83] Perhaps it is stretching the metaphor of the archbishop a bit too far, especially seeing that the man is portrayed by Eadmer as ever willing to forgive and seeking fault first within himself, but the chronicle seems here to indicate that there is a certain license that must be allowed to the young and wild. It is a reading that the harshness of Eadmer's continuing narrative does not measure up to, but that can be found mirrored in Orderic's more balanced account of the king who had vices – many – and virtues that were all too worldly.

---

[79] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 60: *"Nec enim regia dignitate integro se potitum suspicabatur, quamdiu aliquis in tota terra sua, vel etiam secundum Deum, nisi per eum quicquam habere, nota dico, vel posse dicebatur."*
[80] Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 233 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 363.
[81] Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 8, iii. 311, p. 173; translation by Chibnall. The role of Ranulf Flambard in the perception of William II is discussed in further chapters.
[82] As opposed to *iunior*, which is often used to distinguish William II from his father. Orderic does, for example, use the attribute in two instances cited above: England's people imitating the corrupt morals of their "young" king, the „young man" proudly seeking to deny his brother entry into his duchy and the "young" king incited by Ranulf Flambard to do evil.
[83] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 36: *"... et alius ferocitatem indomabilis tauri obtinens jam juvenis aratro praelatus; et vos loco mortui bovis me vetulam ac debilem ovem cum indomito tauro conjungere vultis?"*

*Henry I: Character and Personal Sphere*

Accounts of the character of William II's younger brother are diverse, and scattered widely across the descriptions of his reign, although, as so often, Orderic Vitalis draws the most comprehensive picture of the king's personal conduct. Most writers agree that, in temperament, Henry I was less belligerent than William II – both the *Ecclesiastical History* and the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* denote the king as a lover of peace.[84] That particular character trait is elaborated upon by William of Malmesbury with a story detailing the king's reluctant warfare. Louis King of France, had invaded Normandy and was spreading destruction there. However, the king remained at Rouen, and did so with such composure that a mass of knights came and harassed his ears with complaints that he should drive out the French king rather than allow him to continue threatening the province. The king, so William of Malmesbury assures his readers, would have preferred to wait until the "dumb Frenchman's" patience had run out; he mollified the tempers of his men by explaining that they should not wonder at his behaviour, seeing that he knew better than to wastefully spill the blood of those who had proven their loyalty to him. Further reassurances, put into the king's mouth by the writer, serve to point not only to his peacefulness, but to his love for his subjects. They had been nourished by his kingdom, sons to his love for it, and thus he "wanted to follow the example of a good prince, who, through his moderation, would restrain the eagerness of those whom he perceived to be prepared to die for him". William of Malmesbury declares the king's policy to be a prudent one *(prudentiam suam)*; and yet the monarch was forced to abandon it, as it was sinisterly interpreted and called idleness *(ignauiam uocari)*. In a single battle, he defeated Louis – war, as we are to understand the depiction, was his last resort, but if he did resort to it, he did so efficiently.[85] The chronicler underlines the message in a second comment: as long as he honourably could, the king was a suppressor of wars, but when he had decided that a situation could be endured no longer, he would become an implacable executor of retribution, overcoming all obstacles in his path.[86]

Implacability is a trait often attributed to the king – in particular in his pursuit and administration of justice, but by no means limited to it. The king's wrath, once unleashed, was something to be greatly feared: in his dramatic account of the sinking of the White Ship, Orderic tells of the royal subjects' despair at the mere thought of confronting the king with the news of the death of two of his sons. Only two men had survived the dreadful collision of ship and rock and clung to a spar to save their lives, while around them crew and passengers alike drowned in the waves. As the night drifted on, the ship's proprietor, who had convinced the king of allowing him to carry his sons, raised his head above the waves, having found his strength again after having been submerged, and, seeing the two survivors, asked them what had become of the king's son. "It is wretched now for me to continue living," he said, when he received the answer that the prince had perished beneath the waves, and preferred to die in that very spot rather than face the wrath of the angered king *(furore irati regis ... oppetere)* for the disaster that had come upon his offspring. Although news of the calamity spread fast, nobody dared to tell the king. The

[84] Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VIII-33, p. 258, Orderic Vitalis 6, book XII, ch. 19, iv. 370, p. 248.
[85] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-405.2-3, p. 732-734.
[86] Ibid., book V-411.2, p. 742.

magnates, although weeping among themselves, put on brave grimaces whenever they faced him. It is, eventually, a ritual of supplication that is used to break the dreadful news to the king. This act of appeasement is used to forestall his anger: a boy, weeping, throws himself at the king's feet *(puer flens ad pedes regis corruit)*, and reports what has happened. The episode is described as a beautifully conscious usage of the 'unwritten rules' of interaction by symbols – a supplicant throwing himself at the king's feet would often experience royal mercy; this, supposedly, was enhanced even further by the fact that the supplicant chosen for this task was no more than a boy. Orderic certainly seems to have believed so, for he asserts that the whole event was staged: it was through the shrewdness of Count Theobald (*sollertia Tedbaldi comitis*) that the boy found himself at the king's lower end. And, indeed, the king did not rage against the messenger – instead, his royal façade broke noticeably. He collapsed with anguish and was led away to a secluded room *(in conclauim ductus)* where his grief erupted even more violently. While Orderic heightens the sense of the king's sorrow by comparing his suffering and laments to biblical figures, he, at the same time, withdraws the king from the reader's direct gaze: his mourning is bitter – but publicly shown it is not.[87] This strategy works very much in favour of the king: he is presented as compassionate, distraught at the death of his son, but by withdrawing the king's grief into his personal chamber, the writer prevents any possibility of criticising his lamentations as being too excessive.

There are other circumstances in which the king would emotionally flare up, especially, if Orderic Vitalis is to be believed, when was faced with treachery and deceit. At this stage, it is worth mentioning that there is not a single chronicler that presents a story of Henry I involved in dishonesty; rash, scheming and underhand behaviour seem to be completely beyond the king; even if he could have benefitted from such behaviour. Orderic provides the perfect illustration for this observation. When the young heir to the throne of France was sent to the English court, he was followed by a messenger carrying a letter that bore the royal seal of France, and requested that the king confine the young prince until the end of his life. The suspect behind so strange a demand is soon found: the prince's stepmother, a woman that Orderic holds capable of all kinds of evil. Taking counsel with his magnates, the king utterly rejects to have a part in such a criminal *(tam scelestam)* plan, and instead sends young Louis home safely and laden with gifts.[88]

It is in this same passage that a quality of the king is praised that subsequent generations would turn into his royal epithet: his alleged literacy and learnedness.[89] Once the letter arrives, it is Henry I who reads it, and Orderic makes a point of stating that the king was literate *(litteratus uero rex epistolam legit)*. William of Malmesbury, likewise, remarks on the king's education, and does so in greater detail: his first steps in the things pertaining letters he had waged in schools, he claims, and with such avidness he had absorbed the sweetness of books that neither wars nor cares could remove it from his heart. Although he read but little openly, written works were for him (*ut uere*

[87] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XII, ch. 26, iv. 411-417, p. 296-302.
[88] Ibid., book XI, ch. 9, iv. 195-196, p. 50-52.
[89] The claim that Henry I was a learned king had acquired its own momentum until it was put to a dead stop in the first half of the twentieth century. For a brief discussion of the development and eventual rebuke of the 'myth' of the lettered king, see Hollister, Henry I, p. 33-35. See Bates, William the Conqueror, p. 159 for a refutation of the claim to Henry I's literacy.

*confirmo*) a treasure when it came to the knowledge of reigning. His praise culminates in the assertion that the king was in line with the saying of Plato that a state would be fortunate if kings were philosophers; he even claims that young Henry, rather rebelliously, was wont to recite the proverb of unlettered kings being but crowned donkeys in the presence of his father.[90]

One would be hard-pressed to find William of Malmesbury criticising Henry I: he could not even be daunted by the king's undeniably lively procreational interest – on which Orderic flatly comments "from boyhood until old age he was sinfully enslaved by this vice, and had many sons and daughters by his mistresses."[91] William of Malmesbury also recognised the king's moral flaw, but, rather than condemning it, he smoothly turned it into a roguish comedy. With what can be interpreted as sarcasm, he praised the king for his temperance in all matters, also those very much of the flesh: as we have learned from confidants, he states intensely graphically, the king did not pour his seed into the wombs of women out of untamed lust, but out of love for the siring of children, deigning it unworthy to indulge in pleasure unless his seed would fulfil its function. The king, writes William of Malmesbury, was master to the effusion of the sexual organ, not obeying lust as a slave.[92] Despite this feat of royal self-control, the king, at the outset of his reign, is described – notably by the writer himself – as counselled by his friends and particularly the bishops that he should embrace a spouse in lawful marriage, far from voluptuousness and the embrace of mistresses.[93] A similar remark is found in the Worcester chronicle when the king marries for a second time: the king, who had been some time ago been released from his legal marriage, was to marry anew so that he would no longer commit fornication *(ne quid ulterius inhonestum committeret)*.[94]

As far as the king's first marriage was concerned, William of Malmesbury's account completely mirrors Orderic's, except that in the latter's words, the king's choice to enter into marriage is made by him alone. Both writers assert that the king had long harboured an interest in the maiden, and praise her highly. The union between Henry I, son of the Norman conqueror, and the daughter of the Scottish king, a descendant of the old English royal family, must have held great symbolic significance for contemporaries, for few writers fail to remark on her descent, and most expound on it at length. Eadmer, William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis name her dignified forbears, and even the sober Anglo-Saxon Chronicle remarks that the king's bride stemmed from the "rightful royal family of England". More than that: the bride was appreciated to such a degree that every stain on her character was dutifully erased. Edith, who was to change

---

[90] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-390, p. 708-710.
[91] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XI, ch. 23, iv. 237-238, p. 98-99; translation by Chibnall.
[92] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-412.2, p. 744-746. Cooper, Timorous Historians and the Personality of Henry I, p. 64-65, argues how William of Malmesbury's depiction of Henry I's sexuality mirrored St Augustine's portrayal of sex in the garden of Eden, and was probably meant as a funny, sarcastic comment to the learned audience the writer wanted to address. The view is not supported by Weiler, William of Malmesbury, p. 166, who maintains that William of Malmesbury portrayed Henry I as a model king (p. 166), but also notes that the history's content and style is noticeably different when Henry I is treated, on the basis of which many had considered the chronicler a flatterer of the king (p. 158).
[93] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-393.2-3, p. 586-588: *"… suadentibus amicis ac maxime pontificibus ut remota uoluptate pelicum legitimum amplecteretur conubium …"*. There is a strikingly similar passage in the Historia Ecclesiastica, where Orderic Vitalis asserts that the king married soon after his accession because he did not to "wallow in lasciviousness like any horse or mule" (Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, iv. 95 (p. 298), translation by Chibnall).
[94] John of Worcester, p. 15.

her name to the Norman 'Matilda', was, by Eadmer, at length absolved from the possibility of having worn the veil as a nun, with Anselm's authority being called upon to establish the moral integrity of the new queen's marriage.[95]

Henry I's choice of queen did not only secure him the legitimating link to the old dynasty. His moral status, rarely tainted as it is, is enhanced by the unusually copious depiction of his two consecutive queen consorts. Eadmer styles Matilda as a counterweight to her husband's sternness, a woman who, after the hard-won agreement between Henry I and the archbishop, would not by any worldly distractions be kept from travelling ahead of Anselm in order to take care that his lodgings were adequately furnished. In the face of the king's severity towards the morally questionable behaviour of the English clergy she is awash with tears, but too frightened to intervene on behalf of the pleading clergymen.[96] Her death prompts William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon to praise her at length; the latter, in an epitaph, calls her beautiful, chaste, powerful and humble,[97] while William of Malmesbury's praise is particularly detailed and attributes to her a great number of acts that signify both her qualities as a queen and her great piety and humility. As a queen, she bore two children and, having done so, ceased to desire them, remaining chaste outside her marriage bed. She maintained the splendour of her position (*nec ... regalis magnificentiae deerat)*, constantly entertaining visitors drawn by the king's generosity and her kindness. A woman of exceptional holiness (*sanctitudinis egregiae)*, she wore a hair-shirt underneath her clothes, walked barefoot within the church during the time of Lent and did not shudder to wash the feet of the sick, nor to touch their festering, oozing sores – she kissed their hands and provided them with food. The only vice – and he mitigates that judgement by claiming that her servants were the primary evildoers – William of Malmesbury can accuse her of is that of prodigality, born from her great liberality in bestowing presents upon scholars and clerks, native and (especially, and probably despicably so) foreign, who would entertain her with verses.[98] Henry I's second wife, Adeliza, features far less prominently in the sources than her predecessor at the king's side, apart from her function as the means by which the king was to lead a morally sound life. The only acknowledgement of her individuality is the remark of Henry of Huntingdon and the Worcester chronicle that she was beautiful – very much so, if Henry of Huntingdon is to be believed.[99]

Most interesting about the descriptions of Henry I's personal conduct are those parts which are lacking: the king may be angry, but he is never rash, nor seen to explode with wrath. Especially Orderic Vitalis' account of how the king wept in seclusion for the loss of his son point to a king who knew how to maintain appearances in the public sphere – certainly a shaky foundation to build on, but well in line with the overall image projected by the chronicles. Apart from the king's taste for women, which, given the number of children he produced and

---

[95] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-393.3, p. 588; Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 17, iv. 95-96; Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 121-125; Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 236; Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 365, in the original wording speaks of "*Eadwardes cynges magan of þan rihtan Ænglalandes kyne kynne.*"

[96] Cf. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 183. For Matilda's meeting with the clergymen, see ibid. p. 173.

[97] Henry of Huntingdon, viii. 30 (p. 462).

[98] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-418.2-5, p. 754-756.

[99] Cf. Henry of Huntingdon, vii.33 (p. 468); John of Worcester 3, p. 148.

profitably married or otherwise endowed, was probably hard to deny, there is barely any moral fault found with Henry I. The king is portrayed as a very smooth – one might even say 'flat' – character, very much in control, not least in control of himself. Remarkable is the singularly positive way in which his first queen consort reflects on him, both in giving him a settled, morally sound background and in ennobling his kingship with the extra legitimation of the old English dynastic line.

*Stephen I: Character and Personal Sphere*

The most famous verdict of Stephen's character is possibly that of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: as "a mild man, gentle and good", the chronicler describes him, in a tone that cannot be read as anything but hopeless against the bleak background of what he apparently perceived to be a world descending from peace into utter chaos and destruction.[100] Notwithstanding the circumstances of his rule, the king's good-naturedness is indeed pointed out most empathically by a number of writers. Orderic comments that spiteful men held the king's gentleness *(mansuetudine)* in contempt, which had led to many of them refusing to attend the royal court.[101] William of Malmesbury, although an avid supporter of the empress, writes, with the very same ink that pens the king's failure, that Stephen was a man who "would have lacked little that adorns the royal character" had he but acquired his kingdom rightfully, and not given in to bad counsellors.[102] When he was but a count, he elaborates, the easy friendliness of his manner *(facilitate morum)*, the way in which he would jest, sit and eat even with the lowest of men, earned such great love as was hardly conceivable.[103] However, these remarks are never genuinely complimentary, but always intertwined with criticism or tinged with negative imagery. Orderic's criticism is clear; the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle remarks that the king's gentleness (and, invariably, the shortcomings of his judicial rigour) led the insurgent wrongdoers into ever greater depravity, and William of Malmesbury joins up his assessment of the royal character with the accusation that he could not be held to his word. Even the *Gesta Stephani*, the chronicle that is most kindly disposed towards the king, cannot communicate his affability entirely without blemish. In an exuberant paragraph on the king's great character and his good influence on his realm, it describes how he was so kind and gentle "that he commonly forgot a king's exalted rank and in many affairs saw himself not superior to his men, but in every way their equal, sometimes actually their inferior." A darker allusion lies in the sentence that directly precedes this quotation: the king, writes the chronicler, presented himself as suitable and able to adapt to all, whatever their age.[104] For Stephen, whose grasp for the crown certainly needed legitimation, there is, of course, immediate profit in this disposition. Yet his efforts of making himself liked by (as the writer suggests) adapting to the varying demands of different age groups stray far from any notion of *constantia* and move well

[100] Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 263 (E-Version); see Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 382: "*he milde man was ⁊ softe ⁊ god*".
[101] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XIII, ch. 37, v. 113, p. 522.
[102] William of Malmesbury, Historia Novella, i. 19, p. 37, translation by King/Potter.
[103] Ibid., i.18, p. 33: *"Erat preterea Stephanus, cum esset comes, facilitate morum et communione iocandi, considendi, conuescendi etiam cum infimis, amorem tantum demeritus quantum vix mente aliquis concipere queat."*
[104] Gesta Stephani, p. 22: "*omnibus cuiuslibet aetatis habilem se et flexibilem redderet*"; p. 4 simply calls the king *affabilis*; for the direct quotation (translation by King/Potter), see p. 23.

beyond the picture of a king readily accepted by all but, perhaps, the low-born malcontents Henry I had raised to new heights. The description would seem to suggest, at least to the modern reader, a certain insincerity in the character of the king.

Furthermore, several remarks in other chronicles also imply – as will shortly be elaborated further – too great an eagerness to please and an inclination towards two-facedness on the part of the king. Together with the scrabbling for excuses and explanation the *Gesta's* writer maintains throughout most of his work, these observations underline the assumption that the *Gesta*'s remark of the king adapting to demands among the populace was intended to be more critical than it would initially seem, given the laudatory context of the comment. Where other kings are stated to have simply taken over the realm in its entirety, Stephen appears to have been labouring; too obviously, perhaps, trying to win favour. The chronicler attempts to amend the king's lack of dominance and strength of character by emphasising, as cited above, how he tended to forget his royal status, becoming, as one might read it, a paragon of humility, caring so little for the dignity bestowed on him that he forgets it. This, however, is also a dangerous tightrope for him to walk: as evident from Henry of Huntingdon's sneer that there was no point in reporting where the king was spending his festivals, because the age-old solemnity of the court and the king's magnificent crown-wearings had ceased altogether,[105] a king who did not maintain a certain standard made himself highly vulnerable for criticism. A king who lowered himself so far that he tended to forget that he was, in fact, a king, must have been similarly problematic.

Apart from the assertion of great humility, there are few ways in which Stephen's conduct in this particular matter could be read to his advantage. Kings who were hesitant, even unwilling, to accept office were generally presented as good kings. Once such kings had (reluctantly) accepted office, their humility and moral impeccability would be enhanced even further if they chose not to parade the trappings of their office.[106] One would, however, be hard-pressed to overlay Stephen's reign with any part of this narrative schematic – even the most spirited panegyrist might not have been up to the task to present Stephen's seizing of the crown as the act of a man reluctant to rule. Neither is the topos' second part readily applicable: the king did not *choose* not to assume the full dignity of his office – he simply forgot. Arguably, it does not seem to entirely befit God's earthly vicar to forget the majesty of the position to which he had been elevated by divine grace.

In another episode, the king comes across as almost absurdly naive: having been approached and asked for his personal intervention against the savage Welsh by the earl of Chester with sweet words, the king happily and vigorously *(laetus et alacer)* consents to lead a campaign into the depths of Wales – but behold *(ecce)*, not only one, but all his counsellors perceive that the earl has spoken in order to deceive, and they at once deter the king from the proposition he has just made (*a proposito regem subito reuocarunt)*. The magnates, in the following lines, call his willingness to enter the domains of a man of unknown allegiance rash (*temerarium)* and excessively foolhardy *(nimisque praesumtuosum)*. In this discussion the king is not allowed a single word – in the end, he unwillingly

[105] Cf. Huntingdon, x. 12 (p. 724).
[106] Cf. Weiler, Rex renitens, which compellingly argues for the widespread use of the topos of reluctant kings (and other occupants of high offices).

*(inuite)* consents into asking the earl to produce sureties and restore the king's land to test his allegiance. Then, it is not the king but only his advisors *(illi)* who approach the treacherous earl; it is them who, in reaction to the earl's evasive answers and obvious guilty conscience, raise their voices in stormy and quarrelsome manner and eventually seize and imprison him. Why, narratively, this had to be the case, is relatively easy to understand. To suggest that the king had a habit of arresting inconvenient vassals at court might, after the infamous arrest of the bishops, well have resulted in more serious repercussions for the royal image and the shaky relationship between him and his insidious nobles. Yet what the author may well have intended as an elaborate excuse why a nobleman was arrested in the security of the royal court does, rather than taking the blame from the king's shoulders, read very much to the disadvantage of said king. By pinning the blame for the arrest of the earl of Chester on the king's advisors, and stressing Stephen's trust in his vassal and unwillingness to double-cross him, the author assures as best as he can that the king was a honourable man and in no way insincere in his dealings with his subjects. However, if the magnates were to take the entirety of the blame upon themselves, there was no way in which the king could be included in the following discussion. As it is, he is the only one at court who does not realise the earl's ever so obvious duplicity and has to be restrained so as not to walk right into the trap and, finally, all the more humiliating because their advice comes entirely unasked for, the magnates all but shower him in arguments to which he is not allowed to respond except for the purpose of voicing grudging consent. He still has, as it were, the last word, but absolutely no say before it.[107]

The Earl of Chester's imprisonment is somewhat differently described in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: they had been reconciled, the writer asserts, and had sworn "oaths and affirmed pledges that neither of them should betray the other; and it availed nothing, because the king, through wicked advice, afterwards seized him in Northampton and put him in prison."[108] Interestingly, the chronicle also makes rather short work of the atrocities the Earl of Chester committed after his renewed reconciliation and renewed rift with the king, stating, rather simply, one might think when compared to the rampages the *Gesta* describes,[109] that he "did worse than he should"[110]. Contrary to the *Gesta*'s much longer description that aims to set off the king as innocent in the imprisonment that occurred at his court, Stephen, in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's version of the events, is the main perpetrator behind the imprisonment, albeit a perpetrator swayed by "wicked" advice, and influenced by even worse advice when he sets his captive free again. While it is made clear that the earl well deserved imprisonment, the chronicler does not in the least way attempt to present the king in a favourable light as he had the earl imprisoned. He is depicted as a breaker of oaths and a breaker of the peace of the court, hearkening to men that should never have had any influence on his opinion.

---

[107] Gesta Stephani, p. 194-197.

[108] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 267 (E-version); cf. Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 384: "*... it ne forstod naht for þe king him sithen nam in Hamtun þurhe wicci ræd* ⁊ *dide him in prisun* ⁊ *efones he let him ut urhe wærse red...*"

[109] Cf. Gesta Stephani, p. 198-201. The earl of Chester, here, is described as a multiply anathematised outlaw who moved across the country with fire, sword and violence, bearing down upon the population and the goods under the peace of the Church with "the tyranny of a Herod and the savagery of a Nero." (Translation by Potter).

[110] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 267 (E-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 384.

Beyond the problematic capture of a nobleman at court, the king's unreliability is a factor that recurs fairly frequently. Henry of Huntingdon ends his summary of Stephen's accession promises with the flat statement *hec principaliter Deo uouit, et alia, sed nichil horum tenuit.*[111] Stephen had vowed much before God, but, until that very day, had kept to nothing of it. The very same failing is commented on by William of Malmesbury in his *Historia Novella*. Exasperated, he exclaims that it seemed to him the king had sworn to his accession promises "to proclaim himself a violator of an oath to the entire kingdom."[112] More than that, the entire narrative structure of this, William of Malmesbury's later history, revolves around that particular flaw of the king. At the heart of these accusations lies Stephen's perjurious taking of the crown that should have belonged to Matilda, but, throughout, the writer laces his narrative with comments that Stephen was a man who would lie and deceive, and should not be trusted. When his hero, Robert of Gloucester, swears allegiance to the king, the chronicler states that he had done so only conditionally, as long as Stephen would keep his faith, thus providing a convenient excuse for the earl to abandon his pledge – an excuse that was promptly used. The earl would later come to champion his half-sister's cause, and the chronicler sees fit to provide him with a good reason for doing so: after he has sworn allegiance to the king, William of Malmesbury adds that "as he had long observed the king's character, he foresaw the instability of his faith."[113] It does not end even there: the chronicler's next criticism of Stephen's natural disposition towards deception shows him, at the instigation of a counsellor, laying an ambush for Robert of Gloucester. The earl is forewarned, steers clear from the ambush and withdraws from the king's presence – although he continues to be invited to court. The king lightens the load of his crime by a bright countenance and confession, even swears the earl that he would never again take part in "so great a crime"; an oath that is sanctified further by the gesture of the king placing the hand of the archbishop of Rouen in the hand of the man he was seeking to placate – but relations between the two parties remained frosty at best, and were loaded with the reproof of dishonesty. When he was with the earl, William of Malmesbury alleges, he jested and talked to him in beautiful words, but behind his back he insulted him with abusive talk, and fleeced him of his possessions.[114]

It is the author of the *Gesta* who does his best to present Stephen in a more favourable light, and, again, the justifications brought up by the chronicle suggest that there was something very seriously amiss with the actions of the king; and again, these deeds concern an arrest made in the middle of his court. Notorious Geoffrey de Mandeville was, among other accusations, rumoured to have become a partisan of the empress' cause, wherefore the barons urged the king to brand him as a traitor and take him prisoner for the benefit of the kingdom. The king, however, for a long time delayed doing anything, for fear of besmirching the royal majesty with the disgraceful reproach of betrayal *(ne regia maiestas turpi proditionis opprobrio infamaretur)*. Yet chance (or possibly providence) was on his side: in a dispute that arose between his magnates and Geoffrey de

[111] Henry of Huntingdon, x.3 (p. 704).
[112] William of Malmesbury, Historia Novella, i. 19, p. 36: *"Nomina testium, qui multi fuerunt, apponere fastidio, quia pene omnia ita perperam mutauit, quasi ad hoc tamen iurasset ut preuaricatorem sacramenti se regno toti ostenderet."*
[113] Ibid., i. 17, p. 32: *"Spectato enim iamdudum regis ingenio, instabilitatem fidei eius preuidebat."*
[114] Ibid., Historia Novella, i. 20, p. 38: *"Itaque coram pulchre iocundeque comitem illum appellans, retro maledicis uerbis mordebat, et quibus poterat possesionibus uellicabat."* Translation based on King/Potter.

Mandeville, he at first tried to mediate, when suddenly Geoffrey was openly accused of treason. The accused did not try to clear himself of the charges, but joked about them, which was seen by the king and his barons as sufficient reason to arrest him.[115]

Such attempts to purge the king's name of any association with treachery re-occur throughout the chronicle, and usually consist of elaborate reasons why an arrest was justified. When Gilbert FitzRichard left the king's court after his request for a number of castles had been denied, the chronicler notes that it was his intention to abandon the king, ally with the nefarious earl of Chester, and attack the king wherever he could. Given this prelude, it is hardly surprising that he notes how the king with suspicion observed the stealth with which the future miscreant vanished from court (*de curia se furtiue subtraxisse)* and how it was obvious to the king that Gilbert was to turn on him *(idque manifestum esse, quod ut sibi et regno aduersaretur abscessisset)*. On the basis of this justification, the king, after (commendable) consultation with his advisors, has his army pursue the man. The whole incident is further elaborated on in the one and only instance of direct speech in the entire chronicle – the king laments that Gilbert of all men should have kept his faith with him, seeing that he had raised him from poverty, heaped riches upon him and granted him his heart's every desire, making his perjury even greater because of the gratitude the man ought to have felt. The particular emphasis on this episode, enhanced by allowing the king to personally voice his despair, stresses that the measures the king had to take were desperate, justified, and, as it were, his only option in the face of such unwarranted treachery.[116] The author further underlines Stephen's sincerity when he reports that the Earl of Hereford had secretly sent messengers to the king asking him to enter on a pact of peace if the king were to help him besiege and win the castle of Worcester, which was then being held by the Count of Meulan. The king entered into the agreement as a consequence of his deliberations rather than the advice of many, believing it to be worthwhile to win over one of his most powerful opponents. However, the earl was duplicitous in his request for peace, and sent another message to Duke Henry in Normandy, asking him to come to the help of his English supporters. Stephen, meanwhile, was aware both of the earl's falseness and Henry's impeding return to England, and thus left Worcester behind. Yet, bent on portraying Stephen as a trustworthy and honest man, the chronicle notes how he weakened his position despite knowing that an alliance would not come to pass. Not wanting to be seen as the first to break the agreement with the Earl of Hereford, he left no small part of his army at Worcester, to continue to aid with the siege. As soon as the king had gone, the earl made a pact with the besieged, recovered the castle, and turned against the king once more.[117] It is especially striking how the story compares to the attempted deception of the Earl of Chester, who had tried to lure Stephen into the wilderness of Wales. The numerous

---

[115] Gesta Stephani, p. 162.

[116] Ibid., p. 200-202. The editor adds the comment that the peculiarity of direct speech at this point is a strong indication that the author had been writing very close to that point in time. Whether that is true or not, from a literary point of view, as rhetorical device, the use of direct speech mostly emphasises the deep despair of the king at the suspected treachery, and goes one step further in justifying the king's decisions.

[117] Ibid., p. 228-231. The relevant passages read: *"Rex autem secum coniciens, immo sibi plurimis suggerentibus, consultum esse et necessarium admodum petitioni comitis assensum praebere..."* and *"Nec regem Stephanum latuit uel comitis mendacium uel ducis in Anglia regressus; ideoque soluta obsidione a ciuitate Wigorniae secessit. Non minimam tamen exercitus sui partem ad suffragium comitis reliquit, ne scilicet statutae inter eos pactionis foedus prior erga comitem dissoluere uideretur."*

magnates, whose intercession had then prevented the king from entering into a harmful enterprise, are not there to help. It is, instead, the king himself who contemplates the matter and reaches a conclusion. Likewise, it is him alone who realises that the earl is a traitor. His willingness to sacrifice his military strength to preserve his good reputation can also be read as a very chivalrous and honourable act – although one could very well imagine other chroniclers happily seizing upon the episode as an example of the royal simplicity.

Against this background, it is interesting to see that the writer often compares Stephen to Saul, whose story also features a certain tendency towards duplicity and failure, and whose throne is eventually taken by a younger, divinely favoured successor[118] – as, in fact, was Stephen's, with the author eventually acknowledging Henry II's position as rightful heir. More intriguing still, especially in the light of modern criticism of the king, would have been Saul's inclination to fear his subjects and follow their wishes, even if they went against divine will.[119] However, it is by no means clear what the *Gesta's* intentions in using this particular biblical example were. The immediate contexts of the quotations seem to favour a reading of Saul as a predestined leader[120] or, alternately, a king who had to brave countless battles.[121]

While the narratives that claim or countermand Stephen's insincerity are a dominating factor in depictions of his character, another factor of his personal life comes into the focus of the chroniclers when Stephen himself vanishes from the scene: the queen. Foremost in praising her qualities is, as might be expected, the *Gesta Stephani*. It details how the queen, *uirilis constantiae femina,* a woman of manly constancy, having been driven off with insults when she requested her husband's liberation, took to arms, and ordered her troops to devastate London, where the empress was staying. It is her ravaging, come as a just punishment for their abandoning their king, which, as the chronicler has it, makes the Londoners change their mind about the new lady they have chosen for themselves.[122] She then once more proves that she could go well beyond the frailty and softness of her sex, and, bearing herself like a man, wins allies for her cause. With a magnificent grasp of what the conventions of symbolically charged supplication demanded in her situation, she beseeches the Bishop of Winchester *humiliter* and with tearful pleas until he, too, is swayed.[123] The Hexham chronicle is less detailed, but also combines the queen leading her forces into battle against the empress' supporters with the supplication by which she was able to gather as many supporters as she did – prayers, promises and fair words made up her entreaties, and God chose to favour the humble rather than the haughty, the queen rather than the empress.[124] The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is rather more curt in its depiction, stating only that the queen

[118] 1 Samuel 9-31, particularly 18:7-10 for Saul's beginning hatred towards David, 18:20-27, 19:1, 5-6, 9-11 for his attempts to kill him or have him killed.
[119] 1 Samuel, 15:24, in which Saul claims to not have heeded the Lord's words on account of fearing the people and 1 Samuel, 24:10 in which David asks Saul why he believed the people who insisted that David would be his downfall.
[120] Gesta Stephani, p. 4.
[121] Ibid., p. 68.
[122] Ibid., p. 122-125.
[123] Ibid., p. 126,
[124] John of Hexham, p. 137-138: *"Regina omnibus supplicavit, omnes pro ereptione mariti sui precibus, promissis, et obsequiis sollicitavit. Et Deus superbae restitit, humili vero dedit gratiam"* and *"... regina adveniens cum suis obsedit ..."*.

besieged the empress and the bishop of Winchester, and eventually drove them out.[125] It is noteworthy how William of Malmesbury chooses to keep quiet about the queen's involvement as general. He had excluded the empress from any military activity by moving her behind the scenes and allowing Robert of Gloucester to take centre stage so that it might be assumed he did not believe it altogether commendable that she should be thus involved. And yet, he failed to elaborate on the role of Stephen's wife, even though he could have styled her forward actions as a point that would have spoken against the king.

There are remarkably few things in which the chroniclers are as consistent and as unanimous as in describing Stephen's character. A gentle, almost quiet man, but all too pliable and inconsistent. The immediate consequences contemporaries saw in his compliancy remain yet to be analysed. There is more to this inconsistency: given the immense amount of justification his favourable biographer brings forth to deny any such charge, it would appear that even during his lifetime he had acquired a fatal reputation for untrustworthiness. This must have been felt especially in his relations towards his magnates, which at times may have made entering the service of the king appear more like a dangerous gamble than an attempt to secure patronage and a future in royal favour. The infamous arrest of the bishops, to be discussed in the chapter on his relationship to the Church, might be seen to have set a precedent of that type of behaviour on the part of the king, as a number of descriptions of highly questionable arrest at court amply illustrate. The only available strategies of lessening these accusations are the incrimination of those imprisoned by the king – and making sure that the king was not the driving force behind their capture. Both strategies were amply used by the king's chronicling defender. He found a third strategy that he may well have aimed to employ to bolster the king's character: while the queen, for many writers, appears to have constituted an adequate replacement of her captive husband that did not merit extensive comment, the *Gesta* is the only chronicle that goes to any lengths to describe the plight of the queen – and there is little to be wondered at in that.

*Henry II: Character and Personal Sphere*

The vibrant accounts surviving of the reign of Henry II, of his court and, not least, his person, make him a personally very tangible king – more so perhaps than any other king considered here. Partly, this is owed to the nature of these narratives, as many of them were not written in the vein of 'standard' chronicles, partly it might be traced back to this writing originating much closer to court than preceding accounts. Depictions of the king's character are numerous and diverse, and have sparked frequent character analyses on the part of historians.

Henry II, at the onset of his reign, must have seemed a very intriguing character indeed – although not necessarily on account of his personal virtues. The coming of the new king that finally put an end to the two-party war for the crown of England was celebrated as an event of messianic proportions. Henry of Huntingdon in particular portrayed Henry II in such a light. He precedes Henry's coming to England by a dialogue in direct speech between the (dying) land and its future king; the land begging Henry II to release her from her suffering, the (future and

[125] Cf. Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 266-267; Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 384.

rightful) king promising to do so against all odds, even at his own peril.[126] It is at the head of his men, his appearance betraying the beatitude of his spirit, that *nobilissimus* Henry marches towards the enemy host amid a raging storm that God, firmly on the side of the future king, had sent so that "his child" might gain England without bloodshed.[127] Advancing unhindered through a storm that kept his enemies from attacking and shining with an inner beauty – a certain sign of virtue – Henry II could hardly have been more effectively displayed as godsend saviour. In hexameters infused with classical imagery, the chronicler praises a king that was yet to come, but whose radiance already kept England at peace, and the land revived as if spirit had once again entered flesh.[128] Others were considerably less verbose, but mirror the general sentiment that pervades Henry of Huntingdon's narrative. It is only after he has sealed the peace agreement with Henry II, embraced him and adopted him as his son that Stephen begins to reign for the first time, purged of the stain of tyranny.[129] The new king had not only brought peace to the realm, he had also brought about the deliverance of his predecessor, by his grace and presence allowing him to become a rightful king at long last. Ralph of Diceto and Ailred of Riveaulx expressed their admiration for the king in other ways, the latter tracing, in the highest tones of praise, the lineage of Henry II back to Noah.[130] Ralph of Diceto did not only borrow this laudatory genealogy, but seemed similarly impressed by the vast territories Henry II had acquired even before he gained the crown of England: apparently delighted with the acquisition the king had made by means of his marriage to Eleanor, he copiously describes the land of Aquitaine – and its cooking habits.[131]

After his grandiose onset, chroniclers gradually found other things to remark about their king. We are indebted to Gerald of Wales, William of Newburgh, Walter Map and Peter of Blois for detailed character studies; and while there are remarkable similarities about these descriptions, each is invariably infused with the author's very personal view of Henry II. Walter Map and Peter of Blois write the most fulsome praises of the king, on appearance, character, achievements – in contrast to that, Gerald of Wales' depiction of the king seems like a bitter testament to the author's deep grudge against the king: the second part of his mirror for princes aims to wholly deconstruct the king as 'good' king – on the basis of the royal virtues he had painstakingly elaborated in the first half of the book. Both sides – condemnation and praise – only augment the impression of the king as a multifaceted character even in the eyes of his contemporaries. It is a

---

[126] Henry of Huntingdon, X. 33 (p. 760-763). "England" praises Henry II as her rightful possessor, to which she would cry, had she but the strength left to do so. Even as she slowly diminshing, she is raised from the dead by the coming of the new king. Henry of Huntingdon underlines that the future Henry II came with few men and stood against much larger odds on the island, while having to fight a second war on the continent. Although the king proclaims his urge to gain glory by pitting himself and his strength against such great odds, Henry of Huntingdon has him maintain that his main reason - and sole cause - for taking on the dangers of acquiring England by force was noble: he wanted to return peace to the land at last.

[127] Cf. Henry of Huntingdon, X. 34 (p. 764). Henry II appears indeed to be positively radiant: "*animi pulchritudinem specie corporis imaginans, quem adeo forme dignitas commendabat, ut si dicere licet eum non tantum arma decerent, quam ipsius decor arma splendificaret.*" By commenting that, for all the dignity he exuded, he added shine to the weapons rather than needing them as tools to make visible his inherent dignity, he singles out the king as a particularly blessed individual, enhanced all the more by distinctly referring to him as God's child ("... *preuidebat Deus quod puero suo terram sine sanguinis effusione contraderet...*").

[128] Cf. Henry of Huntingdon, X. 40 (p. 776).

[129] William of Newburgh, book 1, ch. 30, p. 91.

[130] Ailred of Rievaulx, De Genealogia Regum Anglorum.

[131] Cf. Ralph of Diceto, 1, p. 293-294; for the king's pedigree as taken from Ailred of Riveaulx, cf. ibid. p. 299.

problem of description that William of Newburgh appears to handle most objectively, calling upon both the king's good and bad character traits. Among his chief vices, he names his desire to acquire money, which he amends by acknowledging that he had many wars to fight for which he needed the money. His second chief vice is not alleviated in such a way: his lustfulness, which, after his queen had ceased to conceive, brought him much illegitimate offspring.[132] It was a vice that would have a role to play in the perception of his marriage to Eleanor, and which would find reflection in Henry II's concubine Rosamund who scandalised contemporaries to such an extent that her tomb and the costly arrangements in her memory were removed with exasperation.[133] While comments on Eleanor's questionable morality are more frequent, Henry II is far from being held entirely blameless. The greatest scandal is (not entirely surprisingly) reported by Gerald of Wales, and directly concerns Alice, daughter of Louis VII and sister of Philip II. The French princess and her planned marriage to one of the king's sons remained a recurring element in peace negotiations between Philip II and Henry II. And yet, that marriage was never contracted, despite attempts even of the papacy: a legate had been sent to finally effect that marriage on pain of an interdict, after Alice had (too) long been kept at the English court.[134] Gerald reports to have heard that after the death of his beloved mistress, young Rosamund, the king had taken to the virgin princess left in his care, and had even begun to consider her a possible marriageable substitute for Eleanor, by means of which he would be able to conceive new sons, and ultimately disinherit the ones that had disappointed him.[135] Gerald of Wales' purpose of placing the rumour in his discussion of the reign of Henry II seems sufficiently clear. It illustrates the king's faulty character, tendency to adultery and jealous hatred of his family while glorifying the French royal house. Even if that rumour is not widely reported, the situation certainly was suspicious enough to warrant its existence – and, if not before, Eleanor's lasting confinement after the rebellion must have clearly indicated that things were not at their best in the royal marriage.

Even if not that sombre, an ambivalent aspect of the king's personality is found in several sources. Walter Map, Gervase of Canterbury and Peter of Blois unanimously mention his great restlessness; the frequently cited passages describe him as always moving and working, a man who ceaselessly exercised his body and kept his entire court on its feet. Such bustling activity, connected with the reference to the king's frugality in drink and food,[136] would have certainly cast a good light on Henry II – but not all his energy was directed at seeing to the good of his kingdom: these descriptions are often coupled with remarks that he loved to hunt. A restless

[132] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 3, ch. 26, p. 280. The account is preceded by the dramatic end of Henry II, and serves as an eulogy, summing up the achievements of the king.
[133] The saintly Hugh of Lincoln was to come across Rosamund's magnificent tomb before the high altar of Godstow, and, in exasperation, ordered the body of the "harlot" to be removed from the church, because the "love between her and the king was illicit and adulterous" (Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 231-232). See also Roger of Howden 3, p. 167.
[134] Cf. Roger of Howden 2, p. 143.
[135] Cf. De principis instructione, dist. 3, ch. 2, p. 232-233.
[136] Cf. Walter Map, p. 476 (dist. v, c. 6) for Henry II's hunting and bodily exercise and p. 485 (dist v., c. 6) for the remark that he would not bear quiet and "vexed almost all of Christendom"; see p. 440 (dist. v, c. 5) for his comments on the king being sparing with his food. See also Peter of Blois, Opera Omnia, letter 66 (p. 197-198); Gerald of Wales, Expugnatio Hibernica, book 1, ch. 46, p. 303.

hunter makes for a less virtuous king than a restless statesman, and William of Newburgh, likewise, comments that he "loved the pleasures of hunting more than was right – as did his grandfather"[137].

Juxtaposed to these more critical judgements of the king, there is a further strand of interpretation running through a number of testimonies on the king's character: a notion of learnedness. In the *Vita* of Hugh of Lincoln, he is reported to have loved the saintly bishop for his good conversation, thus indicating that the king was not only intellectually capable of conversing with a learned man on matters of Christianity and state, but also that he craved intellectual discourse.[138] Gerald of Wales, too, remarks that Henry II was, which was rare, a prince of literary education.[139] Walter Map claimed the king's literacy was as large as was due and useful, and went as far as claiming that the king, although he habitually spoke only Latin and French, had knowledge of all languages from the French sea to the river Jordan.[140] Peter of Blois boasts that even if the French king was well-read, Henry II was more literate by far, withdrawing to read when he could, or occupied himself, among numerous clerics, by working to disentangle some question; indeed, thus closes Peter of Blois his treatment of the king's eruditeness, when he was compared to other princes who discarded books for imperial leisure, "with the king of the English, school was commonplace, with the most learned conversation never ebbing and the discussion of problems."[141] It was a matter that lay very close to the heart of Peter of Blois: a second letter, this time to the king himself, expounds the necessity of fortifying Henry the Young King with similarly wide knowledge – an illiterate king was a ship without rudder, a bird without feathers.[142]

A text of another nature beautifully illustrates what the writer may have had in mind when he wrote those lines: it claims to be a transcript of a conversation between an abbot and the king, covering a wide range of topics, from whether or not a king was allowed to display wrath against his enemies to the difficulty of a king living up to the expectations of the scripture and Rome. Throughout, the king does not only appear very much concerned with his salvation, and intend on seeking out the abbot's counsel on matters of his soul, but he also appears to be the secular match to the spiritual argumentation the abbot brings forth, matching biblical quotation with biblical quotation, musings of the contemplative monastic lifestyle with the requirements of kingship. The abbot consecutively addresses topics that can well be interpreted as faults in the king's character, allowing Henry II to justify his behaviour. First among them is the wrath the

---

[137] William of Newburgh, book 3, ch. 26, p. 280: *"Venationis delicias aeque ut avus plus justo diligens..."*. In this eulogy, William of Newburgh, at least with regard to forest law, compares Henry II and his grandfather, Henry I. It is interesting to see that there is no mention whatsoever of forest law customs during the reign of Stephen, which seems to fall in line with what has been accepted to have been the general policy of Henry II's reign from the outset: to recall the times of his grandfather, and 'erase' Stephen as a king to be remembered. For that, see also King, The Accession of Henry II, p 34.

[138] Magna Vita p. Hugonis, book 2, ch. 7, p. 75-77, discusses the closeness of Hugh of Lincoln and the king, their friendship, the counsel and conversation they shared, as well as Hugh's large influence on the king.

[139] Gerald of Wales, Expugnatio Hibernica, book 1, ch. 56, p. 303.

[140] Walter Map, p. 476.

[141] Peter of Blois, Opera Omnia, Letter 66, p. 198: *"Verumtamen apud dominum regem Anglorum quotidiana ejus schola est litteratissimorum conversatio jugis et discussio questionum."*

[142] Ibid., Letter 67, p. 211.

king might feel against his enemies, and his desire to exact vengeance on them. It is one of the few contemporary instances outside the Becket conflict in which the king is attributed (at least to some extent) with what has notoriously become known as the Angevin temper. Becoming angry, he argues, was strength of spirit, a power of nature; every animal, even lambs and doves, would show their anger at times, and he, too, was a child of wrath who perceived the words of the scripture to be contrary to the movements of his own heart.[143] He continues to vindicate his harshness against his enemies, claiming that he could not find sufficient clemency in his heart if they persisted to try everything to harm him.[144]

The king is next granted the possibility of commenting on the accusation that he often put off aiding people who approached him with petitions – a 'charge' he counters by explaining, although he desired nothing more than peace and quiet, there were so many of them following him everywhere, even, in contempt of the sacraments, when he was at church, hearing Mass, and so many of them whose petitions were unjust.[145] The matter remains unresolved, but the portrayal of the king is, since he is allowed to answer, much more positive than in other cases. Peter of Blois was not the first to write about this particular character trait.[146] After a brief discussion of whether or not Henry II was abusing his power over the clergy, the conversation closes more personally, with the king admitting that, despite better knowledge, he felt ill-treated, as the great efforts he invested in his people were returned neither with loyalty nor with love – especially on the part of his sons.[147]

It is this, his family, in particular his sons, that contemporaries most commonly comment on, and it is, with great probability, one of the aspects that have made Henry II such a popular king for modern researchers. His end certainly does not lack tragedy, and the fact that it was at least partly brought about by his own sons only serves to enhance that feeling. To start at the beginning, the marriage of Henry II to Eleanor of Aquitaine, the divorced wife of Louis VII, certainly caused quite a stir – partly because of the questionability of an annulled marriage, partly because of the swift remarriage, partly because of the person of Eleanor, partly because of the massive shift in power and territory involved. As so often, it is Gerald of Wales who lashes out most venomously at the king's marriage. He, an adulterer even while their marriage lasted, had taken her away from her rightful husband, Gerald claimed[148] – and more than that. Where Henry II was morally questionable, Eleanor was positively depraved. Gerald traces this back to her family roots, to her father having taken the wife of another, and consequently portrays the entire

---

143 Ibid., Dialogus inter regem Henricum II et abbatem Bonaevallensem, p. 978-979.
144 Ibid., p. 980-981.
145 Ibid., p. 982-983.
146 Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 382, p. 388, complains that the king had promised to aid Canterbury time and again, without ever actually fulfilling these promises. Only after he has received a letter from the pope, he eventually ceases to put off the fulfillment of his promise. Walter Map, dist. v, c. 6 (p. 478), claims this to be a strategy the king had learned from his mother – to always promise everything, but in truth give nothing, thereby keeping his followers well in check, because they would always hope for a reward that never came. In another passage (dist. v, c. 6 (p. 484). Walter Map continues his treatment of this fault, claiming that the king, according to his mother's teaching, would often take a lot of time to deal with the problems that were brought before him. So much time, in fact, that some supplicants would die before they saw matters settled. Furthermore, the writer adds, the king had a tendency to lock himself up in his chambers, thus severely limiting the possibility of accessing him.
147 Cf. Peter of Blois, Opera Omnia, Dialogus inter regem Henricum II et abbatem Bonaevallensem, p. 984-985.
148 De principis instructione, dist. 2, ch. 3, p. 160; dist. 2, ch. 4, p. 165-166; dist. 3, ch. 2, p. 232-233.

family as corrupted, and does not fail to allude to Eleanor's rumoured immoral behaviour during the crusade as well as towards her first and second husband. Before Henry II, by committing adultery, lured her away from her husband, Henry's father, Geoffrey of Anjou, had slept with her. Among the ancestors of their dynasty, as he famously asserted, was the evil fay Mélusine, who steadfastly refused to attend Mass with her mortal husband. Coerced, one day, to attend the ceremony, she reacted to the presence of the sacred host by grabbing hold of two of her children and vanishing through one of the church windows, never to return.[149] Walter Map was only slightly more flattering: he, too, mentions that Eleanor was rumoured to have committed adultery with Geoffrey of Anjou while married to Louis VII – and had eventually cast her incestuous eyes *(oculos incestuos)* upon Henry".[150]

William of Newburgh likewise alludes to the nimbus surrounding Eleanor: it was because her young husband was so enamoured by her beauty and would not be parted from her when he took off to the Holy Land, that many nobles followed his example, and women were introduced in multitudes to the camp of the Christians, which, instead of being chaste, became a source of scandal. The rest of the story is told relatively dispassionate: the feelings between the king and queen of France cooled, and Eleanor, who had been looking for another husband, eventually had her way, and the bond of marriage was dissolved so that she was free to marry Henry II.[151]

Eleanor's was a nimbus of mythical dimensions: Roger of Howden repeats the prophecy of a Cistercian monk that the womb of his wife would swell against the king, and cause him to end in torment.[152] According to Gerald of Wales, the king was not unaware of that danger himself – in a chamber at Winchester, he had had an eagle painted, the bird beset by its fledglings which sat upon its wings, its body, and its neck, waiting to peck out its eyes. The king himself, when asked what the painting signified, pointed out that the fledglings were his sons, who would hound him to his death.[153] His family constitutes the chief factor of his downfall for William of Newburgh as well, whose assessment of Eleanor at the time of Henry's death is more drastic than at his accession: the annulment of her first marriage had been lawless, and it was divine judgement that she would bear the renowned sons that were to destroy their father. A further reason for his downfall, according to William of Newburgh, was that he loved his sons so much that he did injustice to others while he tried to promote them more than was right.[154]

Remarks about the king's love for his sons positively litter the accounts of his reign. Gerald of Wales asserts that he was a loving father, but loved his sons less as they grew older;[155] Ralph of Diceto mentions that, although he knew his enemies were completely at his mercy, he made peace with them because he deemed that course of action to be more beneficial to his sons –

[149] ibid., dist. 3, ch. 27, p. 298-303.
[150] Walter Map, dist. v, c. 6 (p. 475).
[151] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 1, ch. 31, p. 92-93.
[152] Cf. Roger of Howden 2, p. 356; Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 53.
[153] Cf. De principis instructione, dist. 3, ch. 26, p. 295-296.
[154] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 3, ch. 26, p. 281-282. William of Newburgh offers three reasons in total, and only one of them is not connected to the king's family, namely that he had not sufficiently done penance for the death of Thomas Becket.
[155] Cf. Gerald of Wales, Expugnatio Hibernica, book 1, ch. 46, p. 305-306. See also De principis instructione, dist. 2, ch. 2, p. 159-160.

who had only just rebelled against him.[156] Similarly, in the dialogue with the abbot mentioned above, the rebellion of his sons is mentioned time and again – but Henry II professes that, even if he was allowed to do so, he could never disinherit them, for his heart would not sustain such hardness towards them.[157] Henry II's soft spot for his sons becomes especially noticeable upon the death of Henry the Young King. Because the rebellion of his sons is so universally condemned as attempted patricide, as unbelievable treachery, the king's grief at the death of his eldest son stands out all the more starkly.[158] William of Newburgh describes the anxiety of Henry II torn between seeing his dying, sick son who has asked for his presence, and the fear that it might be yet another ruse to lure him into an ambush.[159] Roger of Howden portrays the king's great grief at his son's death. His account is particularly dramatic, and reveals the contradiction involved in the situation: the king throws himself upon the ground, he alone tearfully wailing for his son, while around him, everyone rejoices that the rebellion has passed, and the rebels return to their rightful lord. Roger of Howden perceives the death of Henry the Young King as divine retribution, and, in rhetorical exasperation, asks the king why he did cry for a son that was no son of his for the way he had violated his father's affection; a son that would have killed him.[160] Robert of Torigni, underlining the king's concern for his son, reports that Henry II was enraged when his son was not buried, as had been his wish, at Rouen, but instead entombed in Le Mans – and ordered him to be disinterred, to be buried again at Rouen with due honour, to the left of the altar among the graves of many religious men.[161]

The rebellion of Henry the Young King was, of course, not the end of the king's struggles with his sons. His flight from the united forces of Richard the Lionheart and Philip II of France leaves him, in the eyes of several chroniclers, a deeply wounded, and spiritually broken man. Gerald of Wales has him watch the burning city of Le Mans, burial place of his father and his childhood home, and portrays him as giving vent to a tirade on the injustice of God, who had taken away from him the city he had loved the most, he promises that he will retaliate upon God by taking away what He loved most in him, the king.[162] While Gerald of Wales aims to portray the king as a man resorting to blasphemy in the desperation he has ultimately brought upon himself, others put the blame very decidedly on his sons.[163] It is once more Roger of Howden

[156] Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 1, p. 393-394.
[157] Peter of Blois, Opera Omnia, Dialogus inter regem Henricum II et abbatem Bonaevallensem, p. 983-984.
[158] Notably, however, the condemnation of the rebellion did little to blacken the reputation of Henry the Young King, who is often (excepting perhaps Roger of Howden, see below) praised for his virtues and chivalrous conduct. See, for instance, Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 304; De principis instructione, dist. 2, ch. 9, p. 173-175.
[159] William of Newburgh, book 3, ch. 7, p. 234.
[160] Cf. Roger of Howden 2, p. 279-280.
[161] Cf. Robert of Torigni, p. 306. The incident is also reported in Roger of Howden 2, p. 280. Roger of Howden, however, remarks that it was the citizens of Rouen that had forcefully demanded the king to be buried in their city.
[162] Cf. De principis instructione, dist. 3, ch. 24, p. 283.
[163] Cf. Walter Map, dist v, c. 6, p. 476, who states that the pain his sons caused him was the only thing he would not tolerate with patience, and which ultimately killed him. Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 71, captures the scene of the king lying in state and Richard visiting him, whereupon blood flows from the dead king's nostrils, because of the anger the spirit felt upon the approach of Richard. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 64-65, sympathetically remarks that an unfortunate prophecy of Merlin had come true in the death of the king, and inserts the inscription on his tomb as well as humble, *vanitas*-themed verses on the dead king into his chronicle that recall the impressive scope of territories over which Henry II had held sway, the wide realm he had once had, whereas now a simply coffin would suffice for his remains.

who provides the most sympathetic and lengthy account. The sick king, having entirely submitted to the demands of Philip II, had asked for a list of the traitors who had forsaken him – and finding the name of his youngest son on the top of the list, he was so surprised and grieved that he cursed the day he was born, and cursed his sons; an oath that the clerics present could not make him withdraw. Death followed soon after, with the body robbed of its possessions, deserted, and only after a while duly buried by his returning servants. Roger of Howden includes the scene in which a grieving Richard approaches his father's dead body, and blood flows from the dead king's body in the presence of his son.[164]

There are many readings of the character of Henry II. He certainly impressed his contemporaries with some aspects of his character, and evoked great feelings of expectation and hope at the onset of his reign. As far as his personality is concerned, judgements are fairly ambivalent – but no matter to what they might eventually have amounted, any assessment of the character of Henry II written after 1170 focuses so intensively on the conflict with his sons and his marriage to Eleanor that every other character judgement inevitably becomes mere background information. Eleanor added greatly to both his fame and infamy. The increase in power she brought was awe-inspiring, and a severe blow to the French. However, her character was thought so questionable that it at times negatively influenced the king's overall moral standing. As far as the conflict with his sons is concerned, Henry II is mostly held blameless, his sons bearing the brunt of the accusations. The end of Henry II was not necessarily that of a bad monarch and evil king, but it was the end a king who, ultimately, was an unlucky king, a man who had been successful for a long time, and at last found himself defeated – and it is this end, its immediate impact as much as its foreshadowing, that colours the descriptions of at least the later part of the king's reign.

*Richard I: Character and Personal Sphere*

If many contemporary chroniclers had remarked upon Richard's part in his father's death, their sinister early remarks did have hardly any influence on their judgement of his character as king. Apart from Gerald of Wales, who was inclined to see Henry II's entire family as tyrannical and devoid of any morality, Ralph of Diceto is the only chronicler to establish any connection between the incidents preceding the monarch's death and his successor's later fate. Disapproval all but dripping from his words, he claims that Richard's imprisonment at the hands of the emperor had been by no means pure chance, but salvific divine ordination to ensure due penance and atonement for the way in which he had assaulted his bed-ridden father.[165]

---

[164] Roger of Howden 2, p. 366-367. Gerald of Wales, in his De principis instructione, offers a similarly detailed, but much more sinister reading, which will be discussed later, in the context of the relationship of Henry II and the Church, as it convincingly reads as a description of a divinely influenced 'evil' death that marked the passing of an impious man.

[165] Cf. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 107. The chronicler's sympathies for the old king, vivid at his death, would seem to shine through once more in this passage. His writing recalls Henry II's troubled end and problematic health, and hints heavily that Richard would have liked to face his father in pitched battle: it was not given to him to personally assault his father with his sword, so he hunted him from Le Mans with frequent attacks. *"Hoc igitur non fortuito sed ultione divina provisum est et salubriter ordinatum, ut Ricardus rex ad poenitentiam et satisfactionem congruam revocaretur, super excessu quo patrem suum carnalem Henricum regem decumbentem in lecto, tam auxilio quam consilio regis Francorum, apud*

As with most aspects of the king, descriptions of Richard's personality pivot on matters of chivalry and warfare; issues of pride, honour, and financing numerous wars continuously surface in the chronicle material on his reign. They are evident even among loftiest praise of the king. Richard possessed, according to the *Itinerarium Regis Ricardi*, the fortitude of Hector, the magnanimity of Achill, a second Titus in what he gave; he had the eloquence of Nestor, the prudence of Ulysses, and was inferior neither to Alexander nor to the virtues of Roland. His flaw, even if dressed up in flattery, was recognised. "If one by chance deigned to accuse him of presumption, he would not be unbecomingly excused; he, whose mind knew not defeat, would not bear insults, would demand what it was due, was spurred by innate nobility."[166] Richard had something that needed to be excused. Even if – as the author suggests – his pride had its origin in his great talents, it remained problematic enough not to be glossed over.

It certainly seems to have caused problems during the crusade. When engaging in a joust with a knight from the French army, Richard, the head-piece of his makeshift lance having been broken by his opponent, furiously and violently attacked him until his saddle unfortunately slipped, forcing him to swiftly dismount (before, it can be assumed, leaving his horse's back in a less dignified manner). His dented pride probably suffered no less when he found that, although mounted on a new horse, he could not throw off his adversary, on account of him holding fast to his steed's neck. The king pushed aside offers of help from his adherents, apparently resolved to regain lost ground, but eventually sent the knight away with threatening demeanour, proclaiming his eternal enmity. The king refused a number of intercessions on the knight's behalf and only yielded when the time for departure had drawn near and – what is more significant – the king of France, as well as the archbishops, bishops, earls and barons of the army approached him in supplication, falling at his feet just so that he might allow the knight to resume travelling with the army despite the grudge he bore him.[167] Richard's behaviour seems to contradict any notions of chivalry. In spite of the ideal of a comradeship in arms that rests on mutual acknowledgement of personal prowess, his joviality was at an end as soon as his superiority was challenged.[168] This, among the other factors named by the English chroniclers, may have contributed to his rift with Philip II – it certainly was not too well received in Germany, where a chronicle remarks that Richard, because of his supreme abilities, disparagingly put all others behind him, usurping dominion over the entire venture.[169]

---

*urbem Cenomannicam obsidione valavit, et licet cum ferro non mactaverit corporaliter, cum tamen crebris et saevis assultibus compulit inde recedere."*

[166] Cf. Itinierarium Regis Ricardi, p. 143.

[167] Cf. Roger of Howden 3, p. 93-95; likewise Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 155-157.

[168] This stands in stark contrast to clearly positive depictions of William II, whose sense of chivalric camaraderie would acknowledge and esteem anyone who was proficient in the use of weapons. William of Malmesbury's Gesta Regum 1, book IV-309.1-2, p. 550, for instance, retells an anecdote of the king being unhorsed by a knight who had not recognised him, a predicament from which he only just escaped unharmed by proclaiming that he was the king and consequently not to be harmed. Rather than punishing the faux-pas, William II is said to have been so impressed with the knight's feat that he enlisted him at once.

[169] See the excerpt from Ansbertus, Historia de expeditione Friderici Imperatoris, printed in Roger of Howden 3, p. cxxxvii. Of course, the chronicler might well have been resentful on account of Frederic I's unexpected death: Richard was, after all, taking on a role of leadership that was usually held by the German emperor.

It is with similar distaste that the king's treatment of the duke of Austria's banner must have been viewed. Unwilling to suffer the duke's claim to the spoils of Acre, his banner, "if not by the order, then with the complacence of the offended king", had been cast into the dirt and trampled upon by mockers in dishonour of the duke, as Richard of Devizes records.[170] The king's fierce pride would not allow for another to lay claim to the spoils of the city whose capture was ascribed to him.

Richard's crusade provoked resentment on another level as well. The huge fleet and generous remuneration were as much a drain on the kingdom's resources as the high ransom that ended his captivity and the near-constant war with France that dominated the last years of his reign. The Lionheart proved inventive in acquiring money. To bolster his finances, he ordered the reintroduction of tournaments, although, as both Roger of Howden and William of Newburgh diligently noted, they had been forbidden by papal decree but twenty years before.[171] More impressive is the king's momentous effort at the onset of his reign: he had, so contemporaries noted, amassed a treasure greater than any of his predecessors had possessed, and done so in a much shorter time span.[172]

The means by which he accumulated such wealth did raise eyebrows. Following his accession, Richard immediately began selling offices, privileges and titles to such an extent that friends thought it necessary to rebuke him – upon which, as Richard of Devizes and William of Newburgh note, he said that he would sell London itself, if only he could find a buyer. William of Newburgh's account is the more intriguing of the two, its much greater detail allowing a glimpse at the reactions the move provoked in England. Many, so the chronicler asserts, doubted his judgement and believed there was something wrong with a king who was so carelessly disposing of his kingdom, who so immoderately gave vital parts of it away. Rumours began to fly around the country, naming various reasons why the king would be unlikely to return from the crusade. Some believed his excessive commitment to arms, exercised since his youth, had tired his body; others believed him to be seriously ill, identifying symptoms in the king's complexion and limbs that supported their assumption. Believing their king to be not fully in command of his wits, many were enticed to buy much from his hands. However, the chronicler concludes, it was later

---

[170] Richard of Devizes, p. 46-47. The episode has, naturally, sparked quite an interest, as it might be regarded as one factor that led to Richard's later captivity. It is discussed, for instance, in Gillingham, Richard the Lionheart, p. 177, and Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 172. Witthöft, Ritual und Text, p. 44-60, provides an analysis of the episode's depiction in Jans Enikel's Fürstenbuch, also explaining the significance of the banner as a symbol, and detailing the 'German viewpoint' of the duke bringing his grievances against the English king before the emperor.

[171] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 5, ch. 4, p. 422-423, and Roger of Howden 3, p. 286. William of Newburgh cites the papal decree even as he mentions the king's venture, noting that the dangerous sport had been prohibited by three councils and three popes, whereas Roger of Howden cites the full decree "*Prohibetur ne tournamenta fiant*" by pope Alexander in book 3, p. 176. Roger of Howden does, however, give the figures for the revenue these events might raise for the king's coffers, listing the entrance fees for counts, barons and knights respectively. Despite his focus on the financial side and William of Newburgh's stern reference to papal decrees, both admitted that the king was pursuing more laudable ends as well: tournaments were, after all, a means to ensure that the kingdom's military force was well-trained, and Richard was fearing that by neglecting their training, he might fall short of the French forces.

[172] Cf. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 73; Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 91.

seen that what he had done, he had either done or feigned with subtle cunning so as to empty the bags of all those who seemed rich.[173]

While there is still an element of intelligent scheming in William of Newburgh's account, it is the Coggeshall chronicle, otherwise supportive of the king, which most drastically criticizes his financial policy as greed. The writer, despite having dedicated much of the preceding pages to recounting (verbosely and with obvious relish) the battles of the crusade judges that the insatiable lust for money had suffocated his generous spirit, so that he desired to scoop out the wealth of each and everyone.[174] Described by the chronicler as especially burdensome are the sums Richard demanded for claiming an inheritance and the confirmation of charters and privileges. There was barely one among the rich, he claims, who could obtain his inherited right if he did not want to buy it off the king.[175] It was a fee that must have felt particularly irksome since it had to be paid twice. Owing to the "less than discreet" use to which the king's chancellor Longchamp had put the king's seal during his absence and the unfortunate conjuncture of the second seal having shared in the vice-chancellor's fate of shipwreck before Cyprus, the king ordered his seal to be renewed. The new seal, "as was added to that entire accumulation of evil", required all charters, confirmations and privileges that bore the impression of the old seal to be re-sealed – against a fee.[176]

The exactions did not end there. The collection of the king's ransom had had its repercussions on the island's secular and ecclesiastical wealth alike, tangible in numerous appalled accounts – most of them, hardly surprisingly, elaborating how churches were stripped of their precious furnishings, how chalices, crosses, coverings, thuribles, everything golden or silver was carried off to satisfy the emperor's demands; albeit, it should be noted, with the acquiescence of the churches. There are some sinister notes in these reports, usually concerning the men who were sent to collect the ransom, but most writers seem anxious to prove that the people of England were zealous, if not enthusiastic, to redeem their king.[177] Richard's reign cannot always have been easy to endure: both Ralph of Diceto and William of Newburgh note the poor being championed

---

[173] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 4,ch. 5, p. 305-306; Richard of Devizes, p. 9. Richard of Devizes' rendering of the perceived outrage is much less dramatic, although he, too, mentions that the king was approached by his familiars on account of his conduct. In Richard of Devizes' words, Richard gave everyone what they wanted – which, by implication, was not usual conduct for a king.

[174] Cf. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 92.

[175] Cf. ibid., p. 92. The practice would appear to have become more and more expensive in the reigns of Richard and John (as opposed to that of their father), when petitioners would at times find themselves offering money for the king to demand an 'acceptable' sum for their inheritance (cf. Warren, The Governance of Angevin England, p. 158).

[176] Cf. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 93: "*Accessit autem ad totius mali cumulum, juxta vitae ejus terminum, prioris sigilli sui renovatio, quo exiit edictum per totum ejus regnum ut omnes cartae, confirmationes, ac privilegiatae libertates, quae prioris sigilli impressione roboraverat, irrita forent, nec alicujus libertatis vigorem obtinerent, nisi posteriori sigillo roborarentur.*" The reason for the new seal is explained in Roger of Howden 3, p. 267: "*…et fecit sibi novum sigillum fieri, et mandavit per singulas terras suas, quod nihil ratum foret, quod fuerat per vetus sigillum suum; tum quia cancellarius ille peratus fuerat inde minus discrete quam esset necesse, tum quia sigillum perditum erat, quando Rogerus Malus Catulus, vicecancellarius suus, submersus erat in mari ante insulam de Cipro. Et praecepit rex, quod omnes, qui cartas habebant, venirent ad novum sigillum suum ad cartas suas renovandas.*"

[177] Cf. Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 519, and William of Newburgh, book 4, ch. 38, p. 399-400, have the most sinister accounts, Gervase speaking of *"exactiones durissimae"* and lamenting the loss for churches, especially Canterbury, and William of Newburgh alluding to speculation among the collecters that resulted in the ransom being collected in several onerous steps. However, he, too, acknowledges that the wealth of the churches was given voluntarily. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 110, has the most positive rendering of the events, with the people being very zealous in collecting the ransom – there was no church, no order, neither rank nor sex that did not give and collect for the king's ransom, he proclaims jubilously.

by a man who chose to strive against the "insolence of the rich"[178], and the Coggeshall chronicler, too, becomes reproachful: Richard would not even shrink from burdening the very people – the English – who had ransomed him at great cost with taxes which no preceding king had afflicted them; taxes that burdened the secular and ecclesiastical alike. It is the most remarkable testament to Richard's popularity that, even after his lengthy criticism of the king's greed, the author finds himself conceding that the royal exactions were to be excused to a small extent.[179]

There are more such testimonies to the king's popularity among his people. Richard's captors, Ralph of Diceto enthusiastically relates, were astonished to see how many bishops, abbots, earls and barons came from diverse and distant locations, drawn by the desire to see their king, of whose return they were despairing.[180] The king's return was celebrated joyously, processions welcomed him to his kingdom, and London, William of Newburgh notes, was so resplendent at the long-expected arrival of her king, that the German envoys stared in wonder at a land they had believed to have bled dry.[181] A similarly fierce pride in the monarch and his (and England's) strength to overcome obstacles is visible not only in the very elaborate depictions of the king at war – but also in the passionate vindication of his honour. The mere possibility that Richard may have had a hand in the murder of Conrad of Montferrat is utterly rejected, dismissed as an attempt by the envious French to blacken the fame of the king – with the letter of the old man of the mountain declaring Richard's innocence proudly quoted despite the large textual and temporal gap between the accusation and the king's moral absolution.[182]

Despite his popularity, it was not the only case in which Richard required absolution. There are a number of statements that his morals were not entirely immaculate. Much to the king's benefit, however, they are usually coupled with intense scenes of repentance, and the return to a morally sound life, both of which are greeted enthusiastically by the chroniclers in question. We encounter the first of these scenes as the crusading fleet neared the Holy Land, and it fits perfectly with the highly stylised and generally positive accounts of the king's part in the third crusade. Like a textbook pilgrim, the Lionheart, on the way to the Holy Land, was inspired by divine grace to contemplate the hideousness of his life. In Roger of Howden's rendering, it was high time that the king repented, for he had turned into a peculiar, albeit presumably metaphorical, shrubbery – thorn bushes of lechery had sprouted from his head that could not be torn out by hand. The merciful Lord bestowed a penitent heart upon him, and, naked, bearing a flail made from twigs, he approached all the bishops and archbishops that he had called together, confessing to the filth of his life and, being humble and of contrite heart, he was absolved by

[178] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 5, ch. 20, p. 466-467 ; Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 143-144. The incident is also reported by in Roger of Howden 4, p. 388.
[179] Cf. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 92-93.
[180] Cf. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 110.
[181] Cf. ibid., p. 114; William of Newburgh, book 4, ch. 42, p. 406.
[182] Cf. Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 5, ch. 27, p. 341, and William of Newburgh, book 4, ch. 25, p. 366-367, both accuse Philip II of having raised false accusations against Richard; William of Newburgh, book 5, ch, 16, p. 457-458, quotes the letter from the old man of the mountain that releases Richard from all guilt; similar Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 127-128.

them. Thenceforth he lived a god-fearing life, did good, and did not relapse into his old ways of inequity. Happy, Roger of Howden jubilantly concludes, the man who could do that.[183]

Unfortunately, the statement seems to not have held entirely true. Several years later, Richard is approached by a hermit and asked to be mindful of the destruction of Sodom, and turn from his illicit conduct. The king, despite all claims to piety, is too caught up in the world, and his disdain for the messenger causes him to ignore the warning for a while. Divine intercession comes less easily this time: the king is visited by a bout of severe illness that, once more, makes him repent of his guilty life and seek absolution. Lustfulness seems, again, to be among the king's most problematic vices. Roger of Howden makes it explicit that the action leading to the king being divinely restored to health was that he took back his wife, whom he had long neglected, and abstained from illicit intercourse. Only after a lengthy interlude on the greatness of God's chastising power, the writer turns his narrative to the other ways in which the king had improved his conduct. He had become, by daily attendances of full Mass services, feeding of the poor and the generous distribution of precious chalices (such as had before been taken from the churches to pay his ransom), an inspiration to Christendom in his realm. By his good example, the chronicler claims, faithfulness was made firm, hope lifted, charity nurtured, pride suppressed, humility safeguarded and devotion augmented.[184] From a moral point of view, the king had become all that he was ideally supposed to be: he had reached a state of such moral perfection that the completeness of his own virtue changed for the better the virtue of his subjects. One divine correction had turned him into a paragon of Christian princedom. Whether Richard really did change his life in the way Roger of Howden claims him to have changed it, is, of course, open to speculation. Concerns about what did and what did not take place in Richard's marriage bed seem to have been fairly widespread: the *Vita* of St. Hugh remarks that the concerned bishop confronted the king with a public rumour that he was not faithfully keeping his marriage. Again, Richard repents – albeit far less spectacularly than in Roger of Howden's rendition.[185]

Richard was not only written up to be a shining Christian and pilgrim. In other contexts, writers made more of the king's courtly character traits. It is especially during his imprisonment – naturally a very problematic situation for a people that felt pride in their king – that Richard's conduct is particularly stylised. Both William of Newburgh and the Coggeshall chronicle assert that the king's flight through the empire was discovered because he maintained a certain

---

[183] Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 146-147. The passage uses the entire verbal arsenal of the language of penitence available to the chronicler, and there is little doubt that he regarded Richard's penance as praiseworthy, as indicated, in particular, by his statement that the king did not relapse into his old ways. "*Interim Ricardus rex Angliae, Divina inspirante gratia, recordatus est foeditatis vitae suae: vepres enim libidinis excreverant caput illius, et non erant eradicantis manus. Sed Solus Deus… dedit illi cor poenitens; adeo quod ille, convocatis universes archiepiscopis et episcopis suis, qui aderant, nudus, portans in manibus tria flagella facta de virgis laevigatis, procidit ad pedes eorum, et peccatorum suorum foeditatem coram illis confiteri non erubuit, cum tanta humilitate et cordis contritione quod credatur sine dubio Illius extitisse Qui respicit terram et facit eam tremere. Deinde peccatum illud abjuravit, et a praedictis episcopis poenitentiam condignam suscepit; et ab illa hora factus vir timens Deum et faciens bona, ulterius non est reversus ad iniquitatem suam. O felicem illum qui sic cadit ut fortior surgat! O felicem illum qui post poenitentiam non est relapsus in culpam."* The passage is also found in Roger of Howden 3, p. 74-75.

[184] Cf. Roger of Howden 3, p. 288-290. The king's unwillingness to hearken to the advice of the uncouth man may well point to his pride; Roger of Howden explains that "*non intelligens quod quandoque Dominus revelat parvulis, quae a sapientibus absconduntur"* and cites biblical examples in which wisdom had come from unexpected sources.

[185] Cf. Magna Vita St. Hugonis, book 5, ch. 6, p. 255: "*De te vero, ... jam publicus rumor est, quia nec propriae conjugi maritalis tori fidem conservas..."*

standard. In one version, he is found out because of a precious ruby set in a ring, in another, because his servants bought delicacies for him at the market; Roger of Howden rather generally remarks that the king was spending a suspiciously great deal of money.[186] Ralph of Diceto's remarks go one step further, pitting the Austrian barbarians against the refined English by remarking that Richard had to endure severe hardships in prison: "for the men of this barbaric region stank most intensely, they were of gruesome speech, squalid bearing, ..., and you should imagine that their way of living was closer to that of wild beasts than that of humans."[187] All of this, so the appeal to national pride, was nowhere near what the king English king was, what the English people were. A similar, but more elaborate scene ensues when Richard is finally brought before the emperor. On his way, Roger of Howden claims, "he bore himself with such strength, elegance and prudence that all marvelled at him"[188]. The trial itself is related by William of Newburgh and Roger of Howden – with interesting differences.

The king was brought before the emperor at the imperial diet, accused of a number of crimes, refuted them with clear conscience, and such constancy and frankness, that the entire assembly was moved in his favour. As all who stood by burst into tears of joy, the emperor, his mind swayed, lifted up the king to make peace with him. Roger of Howden records the entire trial as a typical ritual peace-making, with the king's great virtue and impressive character the centrepiece, the divine truth against which the accusations cannot hold fast. The trial is regarded much more warily by William of Newburgh – so warily, in fact, that it does seem justified to assume the chronicler believed the entire trial a farce, the end of which was already predetermined; a show trial, empty of any significance. Throughout, he explicitly states that the emperor was motivated purely by greed. With Richard captured, he made up lies to sully the reputation of his illustrious captive, and boasted that he would bring this traitor of the Holy Land to justice. Before the assembled court, he "attempted to terrify him by confronting him with his grave crimes" – a strategy that failed because of Richard's excellent virtue. As the court wept at the spectacle and Richard was raised by the emperor, who made him abundant promises, William of Newburgh drily remarks that in reality, the emperor was greedily gaping after the enormous sum of money that had been promised by the king himself – through the mediation of the duke of Austria – for his release. It is, once more, telling for the respect Richard appears to have commanded that the writer, despite exposing the entire trial as set-up show, pauses to praise the king's behaviour in its course – especially since, as he himself writes, the king had already agreed to pay the enormous ransom, and thus must have known that he would eventually be allowed to leave the hands of his captors.[189]

---

[186] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 4, ch. 31, p. 382-383, for the story of the delicacies; Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 54-55 for Richard's attempt to bribe a local lord by sending him a precious ring, on account of which he is recognised and ultimately captured. See also Roger of Howden 3, p. 186.

[187] Cf. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 106.

[188] Roger of Howden 3, p. 199.

[189] Cf. Roger of Howden 3, p. 199, and William of Newburgh, book 4, ch. 33, p. 387-389. William of Newburgh claims that the trial was merely a cover to mask the greedy intentions of the emperor, whom he describes as "another Saladin": *"Qui nimirum avaritiam pallians, et qod foedissime faciebat adumbratae justitiae colore obducens, illustrem captivum concinnatis maculabat mendaciis, et gloriabatur voluntate Dei incidisse in manus suas plectendum severius hostem imperii, et Terrae Sanctae ... proditorum."* The wording of Richard's worthy defence is similar in both accounts. Roger of Howden has

William Newburgh, meanwhile, is not the only one who held a very critical view of the negotiations between Richard and the emperor. Ralph of Diceto, while showing neither a valid ritual peace-making nor a disfigured show-trial, remarks that it was the king's state, rather than his money that was endangered by the commencing negotiations with the emperor: "something was inserted between them that was nefarious from the beginning, something that had undoubtedly been conceived against law, against canon law, against all morality" – an agreement that should by nature be null and void.[190] Accepting Richard's capture and its consequences was apparently not easy – but it was nowhere near diminishing the king's standing. Contemporaries like Ralph of Diceto and William of Newburgh would still, in varying degrees of passion, speak in his defence.

If we consider Richard's behaviour as a whole, the king's great popularity and the anxiety of chroniclers to ensure he was not unjustly accused of any misdeed are puzzling when the most dominant of his identifiable character traits are pride and greed. Apparently, both of these vices could be – and were – excused when seen in conjunction to the assessment of the king's other qualities, specifically on the fields of warfare, representation and religion.

### *John: Character and Personal Sphere*

In the light of his later notoriety, it is remarkable how few direct comments contemporaries make on John's character – only the Barnwell chronicle and, to a small extent, Roger of Wendover present something approaching an assessment of his disposition. It was not until after the king's death, when Matthew Paris picked up his pen, that his character was fitted into a grander narrative and painted in bolder colours. Perhaps owing to the narrative brevity of the reign's historiographical output – much of which was annalistic in style – the writers appear to have preferred to let John's actions speak for themselves rather than specifying to which character traits they pointed. From among the set of actions commented on most frequently, a succession of harsh punishments, distrust towards his barons and the king's approaches to extorting money from his subjects are most prominent. Although they rarely contain judgements beyond the use of judgemental words, they appear to establish a perception of the king's character that implies cruelty, suspicion, greed and a tendency to angry (and eventually costly) outbursts when confronted with opposition or events that displeased him. Many of these incidents will, however, not find their way into this chapter. The depiction of the punishments John chose for rebellious vassals, defeated opponents, and most notoriously his nephew Arthur, is best discussed in the assessment of his justice and warfare. The distrust he is claimed to have displayed towards his barons plays a significant part in the composition and properties of his inner circle. Similarly,

---

*"rex libere, et constanter, et ita intrepide respondit"*, William of Newburgh writes *"Ille vero hilari fretus conscientia, constanti et libera responsione ita objecta diluit"*. Remarkable is his final remark on the trial, of the emperor already grasping after the treasure this – so we were supposed to believe – 'spontaneous' admiration and exculpation of the king was (pre-arrangedly) to yield: *"Multis enim prae gaudio in lacrimas resolutis, inclinatum regem dignanter erexit, uberiorem de cetero gratiam et profusiora solatia pollicens, re autem vera ingenti summae, mediante duce Austriae, ab ipso rege pro sua liberatione promissae, sitibunde inhians."*

[190] Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 113: *"Pactiones initae sunt plures inter imperatorem et regem, ad persolvandam non spectantes pecuniam, sed ad statum regis intervertendum: inter quas quicquid insertum est ab initio vitiosum, quicquid contra leges, contra canones, contra bonos mores indubitanter conceptum..."*.

many of the measures he took to acquire what money he needed – be they described as confiscation, coercion or, rather more simply, taxation – pertained to the goods of the Church, and are often directly linked with the interdict, which arguably moves its discussion to the consideration of John's treatment of the Church.

When compared to the complaints about John's exaction among the clergy, accounts of greed and graspingness in the secular sphere are sparser, but still sufficiently in evidence. Roger of Wendover, for instance, claims that the king, having idly whiled away his time while Philip II was taking his Norman castles from him, at last returned to England, using the opportunity to accuse his barons of having left him among enemies. He claimed that their actions had lost him his castles (which, in Roger of Wendover's version of the events, certainly cannot be considered true), and took a seventh of all mobile goods. "And in this robbery he did not restrain his violent hands from either convent or parish churches, since he had executors of robbery both in matters ecclesiastical, that is, Hubert, the archbishop of Canterbury, and in worldly matters, that is Geoffrey FitzPeter, justiciar of England, who spared nothing in the execution of what has already been said."[191] Such evil executors feature more often: the Barnwell Annals state that prior to their ecclesiastically-advised reform in 1213, the king's sheriffs and their servants had heavily afflicted the populace, violently and fraudulently procuring money for the king, caring only how they might extract money from the "miserable provinces"[192]. The demands of the king made themselves painfully felt in the populace, according to that writer. Only a year before, the king is recorded to have remitted the payment of forest dues that had "much vexed almost all of England" and (to placate the populace) had additionally forced the forest officials to swear that they would exact as much as was custom in the days of his father.[193] In this context, the statement can barely mean anything other than that the fees had risen considerably since his father's time; otherwise, he could not have promised to lower them. Despite the mitigating measures of the previous year, the king's demands were still perceived as harsh.

The Dunstable Annals offer an insight into the perhaps most sinister accusation against John in matters financial: the severe strain on his baronage. For the marriage to the countess of Gloucester, formerly married to the king himself, he had demanded *decem milibus marcarum et amplius, quas nunquam solvere portuit.* To nonetheless pay the exorbitant sum the king demanded, the debtor had to destroy his woods and pawn his manors.[194] Roger of Wendover, in a similar vein, claims that such unjustified measures (*indebitis exactionibus)* had driven nobles to the extremes of poverty.[195] Even the Barnwell Annals, in their pitiful eulogy of the king, call the king a *depraedator suorum* whose generosity only extended to outsiders, not to his own people. His own populace, as

---

[191] Roger of Wendover 3, p. 173: *"Deinde in comites et barones occasiones praetendens, quod ipsum inter hostes reliquerant in partibus transmarinis, unde castella et terras suas pro eorum defectu amiserat, cepit ab eis septimam partem omnium mobilium suorum; nec etiam ab hac rapina in ecclesiis conventualibus vel parochialibus manus coercuit violentas, siquidem habuit hujus rapinae executores in rebus ecclesiasticis scilicet Hubertum, Cantuariensem archiepiscopum, in rebus autem laicis Gaufridum filium-Petri, Angliae justiciarium, qui in executione jam dicta nullo pepercerunt."*

[192] Barnwell Annals, p. 215.

[193] Cf. ibid., p. 207.

[194] Dunstable Annals, p. 45.

[195] Roger of Wendover 3, p. 240-241.

the preceding designation suggests, he bled as much as he could.[196] These cannot have been isolated cases, as *Magna Carta* testifies. As a document written up to remedy royal behaviour that was perceived as oppressive, it paints a vivid picture of how the king (and, it has to be said, his predecessors)[197] must have been seen to utilise their position to extract money from the realm's populace. The charter is concerned with prescribing fixed sums for the payment heirs had to make to enter into their inheritance, and determines that if land had brought in revenue while in the king's hands, no payment should be required from the heirs for claiming it – but the king had to maintain it well, causing no damage to its people and seeing to repairs and maintenance as necessary.[198] The situation was similarly amended for widows, who should neither have to pay for their dower, nor to remarry against their will.[199] There were yet more circumstances that the realm's nobility would see changed: the dues of boroughs were to be reduced drastically, scutage should, in the future, only be levied by the common consent of the realm, even though certain exceptions remained permissible. Among these exceptions, besides such important social occasions as the knighting of the king's firstborn son or the marriage of his firstborn daughter, was the case of a king that needed to be ransomed: even two decades after Richard's capture, his high ransom was apparently still not regarded with resentment – not even by the rebellious barons rising against his brother.[200]

There were more serious charges of immorality advanced against the monarch than mere avarice, an accusation that most kings were hard-pressed to avoid as it was. His choice of wife was viewed as questionable. Although, excepting Roger of Wendover, no chronicler attempted to attach a nimbus to her that could even come close to rivalling that of Eleanor of Aquitaine, the marriage appears to have been viewed as undignified, if not politically unwise. Roger of Wendover's view on the king's choice of queen is the most comprehensive – and the most sinister. On the advice of the king of France (apparently, even John could not be expected to contrive so injurious a scheme), the king married the girl that had been already been claimed by another man – a union from which *magno detrimento* came for the king and kingdom of England.[201] The chronicler's negative view of the queen would culminate in him bringing her into connection with John's loss of Normandy – albeit, it should be noted, a very loose one.

---

196 Barnwell Annals, p. 232.

197 Defences of King John's policy often make a point of elaborating that the measures used by John were nothing more than a continuation of options generally available to a king; options that had, at that, been extensively used by both his father and his brother. The seemingly particular intensity with which such policies had been pursued unter these three kings is labelled "Angevin despotism", a term that has primarily been attached to the findings of. Jolliffe in the 1930s (in particular his "Constitutional History of Medieval England" and the book "Angevin Kingship" which dealt with the inner workings of the Angevin kings' administration, and most prominently so with their financial exactions as arbitrary, despotic acts). Whether or not the practices criticised so heavily in Magna Carta were already present under John's two predecessors, Barratt, The Revenue of King John, provides an impressive glimpse at the mounting quantities of money that accumulated in the king's treasury as a consequence of such measures, although many of these proceeds may well be traced back to the confiscations in the wake of the interdict.

198 Magna Carta, article 2-4 (p. 18). The effect was immediate: when the revenue gained from inheritances, marriages and feudal dues had amounted to 7,000 pounds in the reign of John, after Magna Carta, in the reign of Henry III, these revenues amounted to only 1,500 pounds a year (Barratt, The Revenue of King John, p. 849. For comparative purposes, see also Barratt, The English Revenue of Richard I).

199 Cf. Magna Carta, article 7-8 (p. 18-19).

200 Cf. Magna Carta, article 12 and 25 (p. 19 and 21).

201 Roger of Wendover 3, p. 148.

Following his celebration of Christmas at Caen, the king remained in that place, feasting splendidly with his queen and prolonging his sleep through the morning, until the time would come to eat. In this situation, the king was informed of the scandalously defamatory way in which the king of France had entered and attacked his territories. Philip II was not only taking castles, he was also having their castellans tied to the tails of horses and dragged from the site. John, if portrayed to act in accordance with any given ideal of kingship, chivalry, loyalty or generalship, should immediately have been incited to a terrible wrath and a desire to avenge himself and his men. Even if he *was* confident that he would easily reconquer his losses (as Roger of Wendover claims him to have told his men), he ought to at once have risen to this extremely shameful symbolic degradation of his men. Not only did it touch upon his own honour, it must have greatly diminished the morale of those of his men who were still fighting in the defence of Normandy. A king who would react to the peril of those charged with the protection of his castles with the words, "*Sinite illum facere*", let him do that, could hardly have inspired his troops to a steadfast defence.

Roger of Wendover was sure that the king's actions had an immediate moral impact on his men: when they heard his words, he writes, many barons who had hitherto loyally adhered to him returned to England, leaving him with only a few knights in Normandy. His queer conduct, his happy countenance in the face of all the damage that was being caused to his people and his possessions, his cowardly *(imbellis)* lingering with the queen had caused people to assume that he "had been bewitched by sorcery or witchcraft". Whether the chronicler meant to imply that Isabella was the source of such pernicious influence is not entirely clear. The interpretation of the queen having bewitched the king rests mainly on his repeated mentions that the queen was with the king – an issue that is otherwise rarely commented on; either taken for granted or not believed to have been important enough to be mentioned. Isabella is described as being in the presence of the king, and, while Roger of Wendover uses the singular forms *(epulabatur, protraxit)* for the king's activities, he does add "*cum regina*" to John's feasting – and it is an all too natural conclusion that the queen also was 'with' the king when he slept until noon. If this is indeed the interpretation Roger of Wendover intended for this passage, it reflects disastrously on the king's character – he is described as slothful, gluttonous, and by implication, seeing that he had his queen with him, lustful.[202]

The view that Isabella was harmful to the king's cause is taken up by the History of William Marshal, albeit a shade less dark. It fails to recount any troublesome moral influence on the part of the queen herself. The writer, hinting that there was more to the story, claims that it should be

---

[202] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 171-172: *"Johannes, rex Angliae, celebravit natale Domini apud Cadomum in Normannia, ubi, postpositis incursionibus bellicis, cum regina epulabatur quotidie splendide, somnosque matutinales usque ad prandendi horam protraxit. ... Venientibus denique ad regem nuntiis et dicentibus, 'Rex Francorum terram vestram hostiliter ingressus cepit jam illa et illa castella, et castellanos vestros caudis equorum turpiter alligatos abducit, atque de rebus vestris pro libitu suo sine contradictione disponit;' quibus rex Johannes dedit responsum, 'Sinite illum facere, ego, quicquid modo rapit, uno die recuperabo;' sic nec isti nec alii sibi similia denuntiantes aliud potuerunt habere responsum. Comites vero et barones et alii de regno Angliae nobiles, qui ei eatenus fideliter adhaeserant, talia audientes ejusque desidiam incorrigibilem intelligentes, impetrata licentia, quasi illico reversuri, remearunt ad propria, rege cum paucis admodum militibus in Normannia derelicto. ... Rex Anglorum interea apud Rothomagum morabatur cum regina imbellis, ita quod ab omnibus diceretur ipsum fore sortilegiis vel maleficiis infatuatum; hilarem cunctis inter tot damna et opprobria exhibebat vultum, ac si sibi nihil deperiisset."*

sufficient if he were to say that the abduction and marriage of the girl was the cause of the war in which John was to lose his land.[203] Other writers who venture the slightest slivers of opinion are much more cautious in their claims. Roger of Howden simply mentions that the bride was chosen by the counsel of the king of France, and had already been promised to another man.[204] Ralph of Diceto, who also mentions Isabella's existent engagement, charges the situation with yet another accusation by stating that the king had decided to marry the girl although he had only just sent a number of illustrious men to the king of Portugal, to seek the hand of his daughter in marriage. The king, according to the writer, was thus displaying an unbecoming disinterest into the well-being of his still itinerant envoys.[205]

If Roger of Wendover was the only contemporary to question the king's morale on the basis of his marriage, his character was repeatedly called into question well beyond his 'acquisition' of and relationship to Isabella. Some writers accuse him relatively openly of cowardice, an accusation that, in the individual narratives, often coincides with the portrayal of John's constant fear of treachery from among the ranks of his baronage. The Stanley Annals, for instance, claim that the king feared the barons beyond all measure (*rex expavit eos, extimuit valde)* and went so far as to actually hide (*occultavitque ab eis)* from the men that had – for just such reasons – removed their allegiance from him.[206] Roger of Wendover, on the verge of *Magna Carta*, notes that John acceded to the demands of the barons because he greatly feared that they would attack him, as they had already approached him in military attire.[207] He even portrays the king as ignominiously fleeing his kingdom in fear of his barons, escaping to the Isle of Wight, where, in the absence of any royal pomp (and much to his own debasement), he made preparations to avenge himself on the barons while rumours flew around the kingdom that the king had ceased being a king or had died.[208]

Without doubt, Roger of Wendover's accusations of John are the most extreme. Among these, it is his claim that he harassed the wives and daughters of his nobles that weighs heaviest on the king's character.[209] And yet he is not the only one to heavily incriminate the king. The Coggeshall chronicler claims that the king, by changing individual seals, made false seals which he used to write letters to the king of France in the name of his barons. Within these letters he claimed that (from the assumed barons' point of view) it was not seemly and went against the mutually sought peace that Louis should vex England with his presence. These false letters are portrayed as having a severe impact: they almost proved fatal for the count of Winchester who happened to be in the presence of Philip II when the letters were read, and was menacingly accused of treachery. "Sensing fraud," the count swore on his life that the letters were false. John is claimed to have sent similar letters to the barons of Northumbria so as to stall their advance

[203] Cf. History of William Marshal 2, verses 11983-12004 (p. 98-101).
[204] Roger of Howden 4, p. 119.
[205] Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 170.
[206] William of Newburgh, Continuatio, p. 518.
[207] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 295-296.
[208] Cf. ibid., p. 319-321.
[209] Cf. ibid., p. 240: *"Erant insuper hac tempestate multi nobiles in regno Angliae, quorum rex uxores et filias illis murmurantibus oppresserat."*

towards London.[210] Forging seals, and thereby assuming the identity of another party in matters of such grave importance, was no small crime, and certainly hardly one that befitted a king. Had these crimes been perpetrated by a subject, it is likely to assume that they would have faced execution. The king's repudiation of *Magna Carta* could similarly be read as an act of fraud – or, perhaps worse, perjury: after all, in refusing to accept a charter he had signed, sealed and sworn on, John was breaking an oath. The incident can, of course, be read in a variety of ways – it did not necessarily have to be put in the way the Stanley Annals put it, claiming that John "swiftly repented what he had done, and retracted, saying that he had in no way consented" to the charter's clauses.[211]

A final unsavoury character trait, that of gluttony and lack of temperance, is attached to the king upon his death. Roger of Wendover and the Coggeshall chronicle agree that the king's great voracity brought about or aggravated the illness that led to his death. The picture the two chronicles paint of the hours before the king's death is all but flattering. He had lost many of his possessions when crossing the Wash; people, reliquaries, treasure. In Roger of Wendover's version, that calamity brought on a fever that, worsened by the king's gluttonous feasting on cider and peaches, eventually led to his death.[212] The Coggeshall chronicler maintains that the king had gorged himself into a delirious state *ex nimia voracitate*, which had brought on dysentery. The illness was renewed not least by his grief at losing the contents of his private chapel[213] – a last religious touch that seems remarkable in view of the oppressions of the Church attributed to the king and the, even compared to Roger of Wendover, notoriously unfavourable death the Coggeshall chronicler's narrative grants the king in the following.[214]

As there are so few passages that are directly concerned with the king's character, an interpretation of the personality traits attributed to John will have to recur on the descriptions contemporaries offered on what he did, and the (often rather direct) hints they give on how they wanted their depictions to be interpreted. In this respect, John does not stand up well to their assessment of kingliness: beyond accusations of arbitrary wrath, wanton cruelty and lingering distrust that remain, as yet, to be discussed, John, in the shallow personality sketches that we have of him, is not only suspected to harbour a number of vices; he is portrayed as greedy, distrustful verging on paranoid and, without the slightest pang of remorse, inclined to fraud and treason.

---

[210] Cf. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 176-177: *"Rex quoque Johannes, fraudulosam pro more suo stropham commentatus, literas [sic!] jam direxerat Philippo regi Franciae, sub nomine omnium baronum Angliae sibi adversantium, quas, et transformatis singulorum sigillis, falso sigillari fecit, cum multa gratiarum actione flagitantium non oportere dominum Lodovicum filium ejus in Angliam vexari, eo quod inter se et dominum suum regem Angliae pacifice convenisset super omnibus quae a se mutuo petebant; se quoque plenarie satisfacturos domino L. super impensis quas fecerat ad eorum succursum. Hujusmodi literis [*sic*!] relectis in audientia regis Franciae, comitem Wintoniensem, tunc sibi praesentem, minaciter proditionis accusavit. At comes, dolum praesentiens, caput suum in obsidatum regi obtulit, quod literae [*sic*!] illae mendosae erant. Similis formae literas [sic!] destinavit rex J[ohannes] ex parte R. filii Walteri et aliorum baronum Angliae, ad barones Northanhumbrenses, quibus eorum adventum ad Londoniam retardavit."*

[211] Cf. William of Newburgh, Continuatio, p. 520.

[212] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 384-386.

[213] Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 181-182.

[214] John's death scene is discussed in the chapter on his relations to the Church.

*Henry III: Character and Personal Sphere*

Quite contrary to his father, the character of Henry III is referred to with remarkable frequency throughout his reign; especially Matthew Paris often traces back decisions or actions of the king to particular personality traits – most of them unfavourable at least to some degree. Notwithstanding later judgements, at the beginning of his reign, his character – or lack thereof – stood him in good stead. A boy of no more than nine years, as yet to be tutored in the responsibilities of a king, under the protection of the Church and several magnates and entirely without any previous reigning history, he was a difficult ruler to defy. Robert of Gloucester simply states that men came to love their "natural lord" better than "Louis of France"[215], but others elaborated further on why Henry III came to be loved in this way. The Dunstable Annals, similar to Roger of Wendover,[216] simply state that former rivals of his father changed allegiance "because the king was an innocent youth who had never offended anyone"[217], while Matthew Paris paints him as a perfect paragon of a young noble: a king whose youth and innocence made him loveable, while his golden hair, beautiful face and mature speech ensured the nobles almost flew to his side.[218]

Compared to his predecessors, the reign of Henry III was exceptionally long, and there was more than enough time for the king to flesh out a character beyond the customary praise his youth had merited, although the comments he earned may not have been as positive as desired. They are largely dominated by Henry III's attempts to gather money; an unfavourable trait to which Matthew Paris, in particular, adds deceit and simplicity. There is barely a writer who does not, in one way or the other, remark upon the king's financial activities. The Worcester Annals, for instance, meticulously note the recurring circuits of the king's justiciars and the sums of money paid by the convent,[219] while Bury St. Edmunds compiles an overview of the king's scutages in the forty-two years of his reign.[220] Not all writers were as neutral, but commented that the sums of money demanded by the king were high or burdensome,[221] speak of violent extortions[222] and how the king had attempted to compel the religious into paying with fawning, then with threats and fear.[223] Matthew Paris, who freely admits that he believed the king to be "drying out with the thirst of avarice"[224], in like vein but more drastically, claims that one of the king's forest officials moved across the country with a large, armed retinue, "slyly, boisterously,

---

[215] Robert of Gloucester 2, verse 10,575, p. 714.

[216] Cf. Roger of Wendover 4, p. 3, who states that the nobles made a stand for Henry III because they believed that the "inequities" of his father should not to be ascribed to the son. His depiction of Henry III's first coronation (p. 1-3) places great emphasis on the duties the king was to inherit and the oaths he swore.

[217] Dunstable Annals, p. 48.

[218] Matthew Paris, Historia Anglorum 2, p. 196: *"Regi igitur Henrico III., quem gratia juventutis et innocentia cunctis reddidit amabilem, et venusta facies cum flava caesarie singulis favorabilem, sermo quoque maturus universis venerabilem, nobiles regni certatim convolando promtius adhaeserunt."*

[219] See, for instance, Worcester Annals, p. 439, 442, 443 and 460.

[220] Cf. Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, p. 24. The author also lists the respective amount of money.

[221] Cf. Burton Annals, p. 360, which refers to the taxation as *"gravatus"*. Ibid., p. 390 painstakingly lists the various ways by which the king sought to acquire specifically the clergy's money to alleviate his debts with the pope. Worcester Annals, p. 419, also refers to the king's tallage as *"grave tallagium"*.

[222] Cf. Waverly Annals, p. 345-346: *"... rex Angliae .... immensam pecuniae quantitatem ab omnibus religiosis per totam Angliam hoc anno violenter extorsit"*.

[223] Cf. ibid., p. 348. At that point, it was the Cistercians that the king attempted to exact money from.

[224] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 114: *"... dominus rex siti avaritiae exaruit..."*.

violently" collecting an "infinite sum of money", an "immoderate oppression" that afflicted the northern lords in particular; a series of exactions that would see even the "most noble" "impoverished" for a single small beast that had strayed.[225] But he also styles the king's practices into something well beyond ordinary avarice, into a vain and conceited covetousness. For instance, he claims that the king "blackened his magnificence" when, at the birth of his first son, he scrutinised the gifts that the messengers, who had spread these joyful news, brought back: the presents of those who did not bring enough – even if the gifts were precious – he ordered to be tossed away contemptuously, remaining unappeased until his messengers had procured what he wanted. The chronicler cites an alleged witness's joke: God had given the child, but the king was selling it.[226] It is by far not the only instance in which he depicts the king's attitude towards the affectionate liberality of his subjects as seriously wanting: whether he rewards the donators by extorting even more money, thus ruining a splendid day of festivity[227] or simply takes gifts for granted, without so much as offering satisfactory thanks to the citizens who had presented him with what they thought would be a pleasing offering[228] – the king is far from a gracious presentee.

The king's rapaciousness and the bafflingly bad manners with which he went about satisfying it ties in well with other facets of Matthew Paris' depiction of Henry III; a man he describes as inept, credulous and not to be taken seriously. He has the king's officials directly countermand orders they deem imprudent or injurious to the kingdom[229] and exposes him to the derisive laughter of his own populace when he approaches them with the request to present themselves in

---

[225] Ibid., p. 136-137: *"...quidam miles, domini regis ballivus, inquisitor transgressionum in forestis domini regis factarum.... plures Angliae partes peragrans, adeo astute, adeo proterve, adeo violenter, praecipue partium borealium nobilibus pecuniam infinitam extorsit ... . Oppressio autem haec immoderata, qua rex Boreales afflixit, videbatur ab antiquo odio profluxisse. ... Pro unica enim bestiola, hinnulo vel lepore, licet in invio errantibus, aliquem nobilissimum usque ad exinanitionem depauperavit, nec sanguini parcens vel fortunae."* See also ibid. p. 274, which claims that the king had, as a reaction to the pope's admonition that he should soon set out on crusade (or cease to hold others back from going) began to thirst after money as if dropsical, which led to exactions that made it appear "as if a new Crassus had arisen from the dead." In vol. 4, p. 510-511, when commenting on a hefty payment the king demanded from the people of London, Matthew Paris claims that he was by many seen as a fulfillment of one of the prophecies of Merlin; he likenened Henry III to the lynx whose gaze penetrated everything. This penetration, however, was mainly aimed at people's purses, which the king emptied. The judgement is repeated in Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 451.

[226] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 3, p. 539-540.

[227] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 358-359.

[228] Cf. ibid., p. 485-487. The short summary above does hardly do Matthew Paris' depiction justice. He claims that the king had been rebuked for not showing his thankfulness as he ought to have done, and has the king stating that he was merely receiving his due, and would render thanks if he received a gift worthy of them. Upon being given a new gift, however, the king did receive it *"sereno, ut decuit, vultu"*. Similar to the above case, the king was directly afterwards to exact an immense sum of money from the citizens who had only attempted to please him. In this more drastic passage, he believes this to be his good right, *"vocans eos indecenter servos."*

[229] Ibid., p. 91, tells the brief story of the king wishing to have a charter given to the count of Flanders that was deemed *"contra coronam suam"* and *"in enormem regni Angliae laesionem"*. Master Simon the Norman refuses to sign the charter, for which Matthew Paris lauds him, while (as he asserts) the brave man incurred the king's considerable wrath for this act of praiseworthy inobedience. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 230-231, reports that the king had given the order for those barons who had abandoned him during a campaign in France to be disinherited. That order was pointedly ignored by the archbishop chosen to relay it. The man is described as *"providus et circumspectus"*, who did not wish to bend his constancy into following *"hoc tirannico praecepto"*. Just in case that the archbishop's impeccable character and the well-known justification of the barons' retreat were not enough to legitimise the king's orders being thus ignored, Matthew Paris adds that the king's order had nothing to do with the counsel of the wise men to whom Henry III should have listened, and instead originated from the circle of his notorious inner circle of familiars.

beautiful clothes and clear the streets of debris for the coming of a foreign guest[230] – it is an incident that casts a particularly pathetic light on the king. Festive decorations and jubilant cheers at the arrival of a prestigious foreign guest or the advent of the king are something that simply 'happened' for most writers – spontaneous explosions of exultation and joy, reverence and respect, even though they most certainly needed preparation, were presented as a common occurrence in the vicinity of regal splendour; they are likely to have been (at least to some extent) a narrative tool to heighten the momentousness of the occasion. As a rule, they require no request before they are enacted; at the very extreme, they are simply ordered and, subsequently, put into action. What happened to Henry III is singular. Derisive laughter, in such circumstances, hardly speaks for the monarch's grip on his subjects and the respect he enjoyed in the eyes of the populace.

Henry III is also ridiculed by his continental subjects for whom he expends large sums of money,[231] and it is made abundantly explicit that others – especially the pope – knew how to exploit the king's credulity and stupidity for their own ends. These usage of the king usually entailed deceiving him into spending immense sums of money.[232] And yet, Matthew Paris could do worse to the king's character: in a fully assembled court, he has the king accuse Hubert de Burgh, "*venerabilis comes ... jam senuerat, debilitatus infirmitate*", the very picture of a patient old man who has borne much and will have to bear much more, of a great number of misdeeds, among them treachery, embezzlement, the unlawful seduction of a girl left in his care and the attempted murder of the king himself. As if it were not enough that the earl answers to and refutes all the charges, he mercilessly has the king deconstruct himself in his attempt to use his *versutia*, his own deviousness, to heap such heavy charges on an old, ailing man whose wealth would fall into the king's hands if he were to die while the accusations were still pending. In the hearing of the assembled court he has the king proclaim that among Hubert's crimes was that he had "obstructed the marriage of the king with a noble lady, by secretly informing the said lady and her

---

[230] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 3, p. 616-617: *"De cujus adventu cum rex certificaretur, secus quam deceret laetabundus occurrit venienti, praecepitque cives Londonienses in adventu ejus omnes truncos et sterquilinia, lutum quoque et omnia offendicula a plateis festinanter amovere, civesque festivis vestibus ornatos in equis eidem comiti gratanter occurrer faleratis. In quo facto rex multorum sibilum movit et cachinnum."*

[231] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 230 is but one of the instances in which the writer complains that Henry III was treating England like an "inexhaustible well" to satisfy his needs on the continent (where he enjoyed thoroughly unwholesome company). Ibid., p. 231 notes that his stay in Gascony moved the French to derision. The sad state of the king abroad is illustrated further in ibid., p. 254, where Matthew Paris notes how the king (at long last) realised his error of lavishing his treasury on the Poitevins, who had repaid his annual graciousness with scorn and derisive laughter: *"inde ridentibus, immo derisorie cachinnantibus."*

[232] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 457, in which the pope decides on Henry III as a profitable victim for his troublesome and expensive gift of Sicily, as the king was simple, and always prone concede into the destruction of his property. Ibid., p. 532-533 claims that foreign guests to the court would deceptively neglect to inform the king about current political developments, despite the devastating effect they would have on the king's standing and finances, so that they could exhaust his hospitality and costly presents to the fullest. Despite deception and betrayal on their part, Matthew Paris claims, the king would not cease to be so fascinated with these men that he continued to adhere to their wishes and follow their counsel. Ibid., p. 680-681, has the parliament answer to the king's request for monetary aid for the acquisition of Sicily for his son Edmund that if the king had been so simple as to accept that proposal, he (who should have known better) would have to be the one to live with the consequences. In depicting the king in this way, Matthew Paris may have continued a 'tradition' of his predecessor as St Alban's historian, Roger of Wendover, who also refers to the king as a very simple man who, when confronted with choices, would find himself perplexed and not knowing how to act (Roger of Wendover 4, p. 179), and was prone to believe the lies of his foreign counselors. (ibid., p. 263-265)

family that he, the king, was squint-eyed, silly, and impotent; that he had a sort of leprosy; that he was deceitful, perjured, weak, and more a woman than a man; that he only vented his rage on his followers, and was entirely incapable of enjoying the embraces of any noble lady."[233]

Matthew Paris was not particularly bashful in his criticism of the king, and pointed out royal failings[234] more directly and more aggressively than any preceding writer or other author of his own time, but to have the king thus expose himself in front of not only a vast narrated audience but of what was to become a vast audience of the narrative is exceptional even for him. This is no criticism that comes veiled in the guise of bad counsellors or laced up in elaborate topoi, it is the king himself giving voice to stories and rumours possibly circulating about himself – rumours that, despite their almost hilarious absurdity, he regarded as dangerous and, what is more, which he deems to have been believed by a prospective bride-to-be. They are not gainsaid, and never mentioned again, but in this moment, they unmask the king, at best, as gullible, insofar that he had lent an ear to the people who told him such things[235] and at worst as acknowledging his own despicable character and blaming others for not covering it up.

When abstracted from their content, the accusations raised by the king are depicted as a sly, perhaps even deceitful means to an end. They are dismissed as wrongful. Satisfaction is given to regain the monarch's good graces and not because it would have been right to do so, and, throughout, the king's intentions, explained by the writer at the very beginning of the passage, remain painfully obvious.[236] It is not the only passage in which the king is accused of acting surreptitiously, and Matthew Paris is not the only writer to portray the king in such a way. Both Robert of Gloucester and the Worcester Annals note that the king had attempted to deceive the young Simon de Montfort. In the rendering of the Worcester Annals, the king had ordered the young earl to come to him *in pace*, so that he might receive the inheritance he was due after the recent death of his father. Under such circumstances, Simon should have been free to come and leave, without having to fear any consequences – if the king had held to his promise of allowing him to come "in peace". However, when Simon, who had become a rallying point for the dissatisfied disinherited rebels, came to the king, "ambushes" had been prepared for him by the king's men who seized him "as an enemy of the king" and took him into custody.[237] The chronicle of Robert of Gloucester, more partial to the barons' cause, claims that Simon de Montfort had been warned by a friend that the king's suggestions of finding a solution were *al gile*: in truth, the king wanted him cast into a prison for the remainder of his life.[238] The alleged

---

[233] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 3, p. 618-620; English translation by Giles, in Matthew Paris, English History, p. 237-239.

[234] And he did, of course, by no means restrict himself to these.

[235] It is all too easy to imagine, in this context, the 'foreign' favourites of the king advising him to levy these charges against the old earl, since Matthew Paris accused them (see above) of making a habit of ridiculing the king (and wanting nothing besides his money). Given the waspishness of the chronicler's writing as far as Henry III was concerned, it would be a relatively obvious implication. Advice to this end is not, however, explicitly given anywhere within the narrative.

[236] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 3, p. 618-620. In the end, the earl is advised to surrender four of his castles to the king *"ut regius rancor et ira adversus comitem sedaretur.*"

[237] Worcester Annals, p. 456: *"...rex... mandavit S[ymoni] filio comitis Leicestriae ut in pace ad se veniret, haereditatem suam et ea quae jure haereditario sibi acciderat, accepturus. ... Sed cum ad ipsum regem provenissent, praedicto S[ymoni] tanquam cohortis duci paraverunt regales complices insidias; ipsumque solum ex magnatibus ibidem acceperunt et custodiae velut hostem regis mancipaverunt."*

[238] Robert of Gloucester 2, verses 11,835-11,846, p. 769.

treatment of the Londoners after the king's victory is testament to a similar scheme being employed. The chronicle of Bury St Edmunds criticises that the king had sent his men to them so as to enter into a treaty – or rather, to violate one. The mayor and the many citizens they had brought with them were at once taken and incarcerated.[239] The Worcester Annals are, if anything, more condemning: the king ordered the citizens to come to him *in pace* but "they anticipated peace where there was none, and came to the king; and once they had entered the castle of Windsor, the doors were closed" and many imprisoned.[240]

Even fraud is a level to which the king is depicted as descending if it came to his most pressing problem: his financial situation. Matthew Paris repeatedly claims that the king was trying to lure his nobles into giving him money by protesting the importance of various undertakings he would not, could not, or never intended to realise in the manner in which he announced them.[241] By these false assertions, the king lost the trust of his men in such a way that they would not even believe the solemn ceremonial of his crusading oath: "more secretly, it was said, which was unbelievable for religious minds, that the king took the cross for no other reason than to plunder the kingdom of its goods with so great an argument." Against this background, even the king's solemn manner of oath taking and his kissing of the gospels gain a sour aftertaste. And, the writer adds, it did not render the bystanders more certain, because they were all too aware of the king's "preceding transgressions"[242].

There is yet more. In the face of the debts the king had incurred in the course of his attempts to acquire Sicily for his son, Bishop Peter of Hereford is claimed to have acted, at the instigation of the king (the Bury chronicle adds a careful *ut dicebatur),* as procurator at the court of Rome for the entirety of the English clergy. Abusing this unauthorisedly assumed office, he made a number of ecclesiastical houses in England liable for considerable sums of money with Italians who held debts of the king.[243] Matthew Paris' king did not only delegate such trickery; he was by no means

[239] Cf. Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, p. 32. The author's original word play that seems to emphasise the crime by pointing out what a treaty should be, is unfortunately lost to translation: *"… qui… inter ipsos et regem fedus federantes immo fedantes, tandem maiorem ciuitatis cum pluribus ciuibus ad Windeshoram secum adduxerunt; quo cum peruenissent statim capti incarcerabantur."*

[240] Worcester Annals, p. 455: "*... rex ... mandavit civibus Londoniarum, qui civitatem suam adversus hostes suos fortiter munierant, ut in pace at eum venirent; qui aestimantes pacem ubi non erat pax, venerunt ad regem; ipsisque in castrum ingressis de Windlesore clausa est janua, et accepti sunt majores natu dictae civitatis et carceri mancipantur.*" Robert of Gloucester 2 also writes about the episode in verses 11,776-11,783, p. 767, but places less emphasis on the king's treacherous conduct.

[241]Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 423-425, reports how the king sent messengers to England, proclaiming that he would soon attack Gascony. While at parliament, some of the nobles present pledge their help – but only if the reports were found to be true. When several nobles clamour that the king could not possibly be trusted on the matter, as he had taken both his son and his wife on to the continent, a coincidence that suggested a diplomatic marriage rather than an upcoming war, the council dissolves without any help being given to the king, and Henry III had publicly rendered himself *"incredibilem"*. According to ibid., p. 50-51, the king would even attempt to draw money from his nobles under false pretences – in that case, he also professed to need the money for a war that he was unlikely to ever fight.

[242] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 281-282: *"Unde dictum est secretius, quod piis mentibus est incredibile, ipsum non ob aliud regem crucem humeris suscepisse, nisi et regnum tali argumento bonis spoliaret. ... Et jurans hoc, apposuit manum suam dexteram ad pectus suum more sacerdotis, et postea supra Evangelia apposita, et osculatus est ea more laici. Nec tamen hoc circumstantes reddidit certiores, praeteritarum enim transgressionum memoria suspicionem in praesentibus suscitavit."*

[243] Cf. Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, p. 20; Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 510-513. According to Matthew Paris, who embellishes the story a great deal more than the St Edmund's chronicler, the bishop of Hereford had extorted letters from several prelates that helped him uphold his guise more easily; the effective transfer of some of the king's debts to England's churchmen was accomplished by false letters claiming the churches had had business with Italian merchants they had, Matthew Paris affirms resolutely, in fact never seen in their life.

above using it himself. Following a parliament in which the king had attempted to raise funds for a continental campaign and had steadfastly been refused by the assembled nobility, the king, "making use of the artful guile of the Romans", called his nobles to him one by one, "as a priest calling the penitent to confession". Once they were in his private chambers, the king would beseech them for money again, and, to strengthen his cause, present them with a list stating the amounts several abbots and priors had allegedly promised to render to him – payments to which the putative donors had not agreed; of which they had, in fact, never heard. "With these false examples and ensnaring words" the king compelled several of his unwilling subjects to part from their money.[244]

Despite all these accusations, it was, apparently, not possible to render the king as truly vicious in the way that the St Alban's school of historiography had rendered his father. Henry III's faults may have been stupidity and avarice, but they did not spring from a morally detestable character. There are few instances in which the king displays spectacular outbursts of royal wrath, the absence of which in the otherwise highly critical narratives of Matthew Paris and Roger of Wendover would appear to suggest that frothing rage was not a temper that could easily be attributed to this particular king.[245] He tends to be indignant rather than furious, and his outbursts of compassion and affection leave a much greater impression. Most notable is the king's reaction to the death of Richard Marshall that is given considerable space in a couple of narratives. It is Roger of Wendover who makes most of it: upon hearing of the death of the man with whom he had shortly before been at considerable odds, the king, "to the wonder of all present erupted into tears, claiming that with the death of so great a knight there was none left his par in the kingdom". The king had a solemn Mass arranged for the deceased and distributed sizable alms for the benefit of his soul. "Blessed", the writer comments admiringly, "is such a king who knows to appreciate his enemies, and can with tears implore God for his persecutors."[246] The king is appalled, "greatly saddened and contrite to the point of tears" when it becomes apparent that the Marshall's death may have been brought about by letters instigated by

---

[244] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 181-182: *"Rex igitur, Romanorum usus versutis fallaciis, jussit ut in crastino expectarent voluntatem suam super hoc et aliis audituri. Et in crastino vocavit in secretam cameram suam singillatim nunc hunc, nunc illum, more sacerdotis poenitentes vocantis ad confessionem. … et protendens rotulum, in quo scriptum monstravit, quid ille vel ille abbas vel prior tantum vel tantum promisit se daturum; cum tamen nullus eorum assensum praebusisset, vel ad notitiam cordis devenisset. Talibus igitur falsis exemplaribus et verborum retiaculis quamplurimos rex cautius intricavit."*

[245] Most of Henry III's moments of wrath have the air of conventuality and are mentioned more in passing than being given greater scope. There are a few notable exceptions: the Dunstable Annals, p. 214-215, claims that the king had been overly angry with his son because of a malicious rumour, fled to London and dug himself in there in preparation for a fight that did not come, but soon, moved by the advice of his barons and out of fatherly love, received Edward back into his good graces. Matthew Paris and Roger of Wendover present more dramatic instances of the king losing his temper, but even in their narratives, they remain relatively isolated, cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 326 and 328 and Roger of Wendover 4, p. 204-205. The latter even has the enraged king draw his sword on his justiciar Hubert de Burgh, whom he blamed for the failure of an expedition to the continent.

[246] Roger of Wendover 4, p. 309: *"... unde rex, admirantibus cunctis qui aderant, in fletum prorumpens conquestus est de morte tanti militis, asserens constanter, quod nullum sibi parem in regno moriens reliquisset; et continuo vocatis presbyteris de capella sua, fecit solenniter decantari obsequium deunctorum pro anima ipsius, et in crastino, completis missarum solenniis, largas pauperibus eleemosynas erogabat. Beatus ergo rex talis, qui novit inimicos diligere, et cum achrymis potest pro suis persecutoribus Dominum exorare."* Robert of Gloucester's metrical chronicle, which includes lengthy praise of the late Marshall's prowess, also mentions the king's grief and the Masses and almsgiving he instigated, emotionally moved by the death (vol. 2, verses 10,810-10815, p. 724). In the account of the Waverly Annals, p. 314-315, considerably less favourable in their rendering of this episode, the king's great grief *(vehementi dolore turbatus)* is coupled with the monarch's realisation of his own faults of having accepted so many "aliens" into his court.

his foreign advisors but bearing the king's very own seal – Henry III swears that he did not know the content of the letters that had thus been set before him to be sealed, and Roger of Wendover shows no inclination whatsoever to cast disbelief on the royal statement.[247] Matthew Paris provides other examples of the king being torn by grief: the death of a bishop-elect, the severe illness that befell his father in law, and, perhaps most tellingly, he claims that Henry III fell sick with grief at the successful incursions of the Welsh and the loss of the promised kingdom of Sicily – but also, and that is remarkable about Henry III, at the illness of his wife and the death of his daughter Catherine.[248]

The king's affection for his own kin, at times much to the dismay of contemporary writers and the baronage, is evident throughout his reign: they were granted lands, offices, heiresses or, failing that, were heaped with gifts.[249] The innermost circle of his family features in historiography in extraordinary detail that can only be paralleled by the depiction of Henry II, his illustrious wife and quarrelsome offspring. Henry III appears to have held both of his parents in reverence. There are remarks that he had his mother's body moved to Fontevrault, where he offered costly silk at her grave,[250] and hints at Henry III identifying himself to a considerable degree with his father, John. His body, too, was placed in a new tomb by the king,[251] but more interesting are the statements that are at times put into the king's mouth: not only does Matthew Paris claim that Henry III maintained a hatred towards the northern barons whom he believed to have been instrumental in John's fall,[252] but, when he is told by a Hospitaller that if he were to withdraw certain charters he would not be a king, as this went contrary to justice, he has him ask, exasperated, whether they would chase him from the throne like his father.[253]

The king's familial involvement grows the closer it gets to his most intimate relatives.[254] His eldest son, Edward, takes such a prominent role in historiography during and after the troubles the Provisions of Oxford had caused that, in the later years of Henry III's reign, he begins to largely eclipse his father; his appearances, steadily increasing in frequency, often render him more active and in particular more warlike than the king himself.[255] When he is still a child, Matthew

---

[247] Roger of Wendover 4, p. 311.

[248] At the death of the bishop elect, both the king and the queen are said to have been inconsolable; with Henry III depicted as tearing off his clothes and burning them (cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 3, p. 623-624). See ibid., p. 284, for his grief at the death of the count of Poitou. For Henry III's illness from grief, see Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 643.

[249] This will be discussed further in the chapter on Henry III's court.

[250] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 475.

[251] Tewkesbury Annals, p. 84. Henry III even had several magnates attend the ceremony.

[252] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 569.

[253] Cf. ibid., p. 339: *"O quid sibi vult istud, vos Anglici? Vultisne me, sicut quondam patrem meum, a regno praecipitare, atque necare praecipitatum?"*

[254] The warm relationship between Henry III and his children, as well as an assessment of the role of the royal pair as parents is discussed in Howell, The Children of King Henry III, who incorporates more material than the slim chronical basis presented here.

[255] This is particularly visible in the renditions of the Song of Lewes and the metrical chronicle of Robert of Gloucester, which style Edward as powerful knight. Cf. Robert of Gloucester 2, lines 11.550-11,565 (p. 757), where Edward parades in front of the barons, demonstrating his strength, and rushes away after flamboyantly stating that they should greet his father, who he would soon have out of prison. The Song of Lewes, lines 418-483 (p. 14-15), criticises and characterises Edward with a passion one would be hard-pressed to find in any depiction of Henry III save that of Matthew Paris, and clearly regards him as a man who would very soon be king. Richard of Cornwall, the king's brother, also features largely in historiographic writing. Powicke, Henry III, p. 197, remarks that Richard of

Paris describes how he stood at the seashore at his father's departure, crying, sobbing, and watching until the sails had disappeared over the horizon. The affection is mutual: before his departure, the king had kissed the boy.[256]

If the genuine love between a father and his son merited favourable comments, his wife did not necessarily meet with the same sympathy. For a queen, she is remarkably active and 'present' in the overall narrative of the reign. This is particularly the case, of course, during the king's captivity. She was on the continent when she heard of what had happened, and the Worcester Annals claim that she was disturbed and pondered on how she could speedily free her husband. She sent messengers to possible allies "admonishing, soliciting, and ordering" that the king was not to be denied help in such a state of necessity; she even amassed an army and attempted to send mercenary troops from Ireland and Aquitaine into England, but the wind and the sea – and later the defences readied against her – kept her from crossing.[257] Shortly after, the queen is reported to have caused a number of insurgents to be hanged.[258]

While she could also fulfil the traditional role of a queen, and moderate her husband's severity,[259] she appears to have been a source of intimidation and distrust for some of her contemporaries. Particularly drastic, the Dunstable Annals claim her involvement in the Mise of Amiens to have been downright detrimental: while the king of France had initially leaned towards the barons (which had caused general delight), "by the deception and speech of the snake-woman, that is, the queen of England, he was deceived and led astray" – from good to the very worst, so that he utterly refuted the barons' demands.[260] For Matthew Paris, the queen, although not necessarily a traitorous serpent, was a factor that negatively influenced Henry III. He was not like the kings of France, the chronicler claims, who would not stoop so low as to have their women as well as these women's relatives and countrymen stomp around on their backs – as apparently, it was done in England, where foreigners were allowed to reap the land's goods.[261] The fear of the queen's harmful influence was so great that the chronicler, when he reported that one of her sisters might become the wife of the earl of Cornwall, notes that the entire country was disturbed at the thought, fearing that if it were to happen, England might soon be ruled only at the whim of the queen and her sister, who would act like a second queen.[262] She cannot have been a very popular royal spouse. During the upheavals of the baron's war, we find an account of her being abusively mistreated by the citizens of London, who threw stones after her, and

---

Cornwall is generally remembered "as a loyal, independent, outspoken brother of a distracted king" – which very much mirrors the impression the chronicles convey.

[256] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 383 and 388.

[257] Worcester Annals, p. 452-453. The same incident, slightly shorter, is also reported in the Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, p. 29, which adds that the queen's funds eventually ran out, and the army disbanded.

[258] Cf. Worcester Annals, p. 456.

[259] Cf. Winchester Annals, p. 167, where she intercedes for the citizens of London, as a result of which many are received back into the king's good graces.

[260] Cf. Tewkesbury Annals, p. 176-177: *"Eodem igitur tempore fraude mulieris serpentina, scilicet reginae Angliae, et allocutione deceptus et seductus idem rex Franciae, sicut scriptum est,* Non est fraus super fraudem mulieris, *nam primum parentem, regem Salomonem, David prophetam, et alios multipliciter decepit; mutatum est cor regis ejusdem de bono ad malum, de malo ad pejus, de pejori ad pessimum."* Emphasis in the original.

[261] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 3, p. 388: *"Sic sicque versute elaboratum est, ut rex, relicto magnifici imperatoris regisque Francorum providi, qui uxoribus suis vel earum consanguineis vel compatriotis terga calcanda non submittunt, exemplo, expers thesaurari et penitus attenuatus, regnum suum factus egenus undique permittat lacerare…"*

[262] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 190.

insulted her with disgraceful and foul words as she fled through the city and was eventually forced to take shelter in the palace of the bishop, when even her husband would not allow her to enter into the tower, where he had walled himself up against the insurgents.[263]

The wife of Henry III is presented as a very strong-willed and active, but also an inherently daunting and dangerous person, particularly to be blamed for the increase of foreigners attempting to make their way in the kingdom (by Matthew Paris). She hardly serves as an ornament or moral enhancement to the king. Quite the contrary: she appears to have the narrative function of yet another scapegoat that could be blamed for the wrong decisions a weak but not truly evil king made. And such is the assessment of Henry III's entire character: his faults are cast into strong profile, but they do not render him a monster. He often seems driven, forced into extortion and deception because he found himself in situatiosn that he could not resolve in any other way – Henry III's chief character flaw, then, was his stupidity and credulousness that plunged him into these dilemmas in the first place.

[263] Cf. Dunstable Annals, p. 223 for the fullest account. The queen had originally wanted to leave the city by means of a boat, and was "apprehended" by the Londoners in doing so. For another rich depiction of the episode, see William de Rishanger, Chronicle of the Barons' War, p. 12, which claims that the queen was the only one to stand against the Provisions of Oxford, and was consequently attacked by the Londoners who threw stones at her and assaulted her with "ignominious outcries" which it would "not be permissible to recite". Robert of Gloucester 2, lines 11,376-11,379 (p. 749) also reports the episode, albeit without any of the details.

*3.2.2. The King's Inner Circle*

*Contemporary Expectations*

> *in curia sum, et de curia loquor,*
> *et nescio, Deus scit,*
> *quid sit curia.*[1]

Walter Map chose to begin his depiction of the court of Henry II with a profession of utmost perplexity, using the words with which Augustine had described a concept of such elusiveness as time. And indeed, the royal court is an ephemeral, continuously fluctuating affair. And while one need not go as far as Map, who likens the court to hell, it is easily one of the most complex fields in which to assess the king's actions, as it fulfils a great number of functions. It is, in some ways, the enhancement of the king's personal sphere and his character, the additional apparatus superimposed on his personality that eventually singles him out as 'kingly'. While showcasing his exemplary virtues will underline his divine inspiration and moral integrity and will, ultimately, point to his status as a good Christian and human being, it is not sufficient to 'make' a king – as (theoretically) anyone can exercise masterful self-control and possess strength of character. It is in courtly life that the king's pre-eminent status becomes visible, even tangible, as the king moves among the public of his court, grants favour and withdraws it, lavishes patronage and demands dues.

The more worldly virtues of a king serve as a visible, legitimating representation of kingship, oscillating between the charismatic self-conception of the ruler and his social duties. The magnificent appearance of a ruler, the marvellous staging of his own self, is of great importance among these virtues, as it serves to augment the *dignitas* inherent in the ruler.[2] The shine of the ruler's splendour has a continued tradition since Antiquity, and, in the Middle Ages, is blended with biblical imageries of light: the radiance of a king is a visible sign of his divinely ordained position, a reverberation of his combined powers, and the mark by which to recognize him for what he is.[3] That a king ought to present himself with a certain *splendor* or *magnificentia* is widely acknowledged among contemporaries, albeit often in passing remarks.[4] The twelfth-century chronicle of the canon Richard offers a more detailed excursus on the subject. It was perceived fitting, he writes, that especially the king, also a prince of the earth, should exude such dignity and publicly appear in such a way as befitted the power vested in him; thus his appearance should not be inferior to his power, but be of adequate extent, so that the king might add lustre to the kingdom subjected to him, and his outward appearance might proclaim his virtue.[5]

---

[1] Walter Map, p. 1.
[2] Cf. Kleinschmidt, Herrscherdarstellung, p. 66-67.
[3] Cf. Knappe, Repräsentation und Herrschaftszeichen, p. 237-238.
[4] John of Worcester 3, p. 166-167, for instance, acknowledges a certain splendor as "appropriate". The remark, if feasts were held, marriages conducted and guests cared for, that these things were done "as fit"/"as was appropriate" can be found very frequently in quite a number of works.
[5] Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 2, ch. 13, p. 155. *"Publici moris esse dignoscitur, ut quisque rex praesertim, et princeps terrae, talis tantusque procedat, et tanta fulgeat auctoritate, quanta fuerit praeditus potestate, quatenus non sit minor habitus quam potentia, immo pari conveniant aptitudine, ut rex regio splendescat obsequio et ejus virtutem exterior praedicet apparentia."*

The king's splendour reaches well beyond his attire, encompassing edifices, household, court and even past-time: animals trained for warfare or for the hunt, a well-stocked hunting enclosure or an exotic menagerie were marks of a wealthy, well-connected and logistically apt king; the respective animals were popular gifts between rulers, eating venison a part of noble lifestyle, the right to hunt within the king's forests or to establish a hunting enclosure a form of patronage.[6] The pursuit of hunting symbolises, at the same time, the secular power of king (and nobility) to exert violence and take life – which is also the reason why it is so often criticised by clerical writers.[7] At court itself, a much-commented on aspect of the king's self-display is the ceremonial crown-wearing, which, probably introduced by the Conqueror, became an integral part of the king's court at the high ecclesiastical festivities.[8] These most ostentatious of royal self-stagings aside, the court was a venue for all kinds of displays, although, with the rise of chivalry in the course of the twelfth century, the focus of praiseworthy revels may have gradually shifted from predominantly warfare and feasting to a more pronounced pursuit of knightly past-times, going hand in hand with a greater appreciation of hunting, courting, pomp and ceremony.[9]

Kingly splendour does not solely aim to create an environment in which the monarch is best represented. Among its most crucial aspects is the *splendor liberalitas*, the radiance of royal munificence. Feudal bonds are mutual: land or gifts being exchanged for loyalty, for *consilium et auxilium*. For the young nobles of a realm royal generosity could find wives, lands, favours. Offices, likewise, both high ecclesiastical and within the evolving administration of court, could propel such people far.[10] The king repaying allegiance and service has a long tradition; traceable in England, for example, in the figure of King Hrothgar in *Beowulf*, who, having been favoured by the fortunes of war, aims to build a mead-hall so great it would become a wonder of the world, where, in his throne-room, "he would dispense his God-given goods to young and old"[11]; like other good kings in the epic, he is famed as a ring-giver, someone who hands out treasure.[12] As another Old English example, the exiled narrator of the poem "The Wanderer" laments the loss of his lord, bemoaning his sad existence without the gifts of treasure, the revelling and the feasting in the halls.[13] The idea is clear: if a ruler wanted to have a loyal entourage, he must be able to maintain it. Followers did not fall over each other to offer their allegiance to the king out of sheer reverence for him. If no profit was forthcoming, or greater profit was to be expected elsewhere, they might attempt to find their luck there. A king's munificence thus becomes especially emphasized if he is not the only claimant to the throne. The need for the king to lavish patronage upon his court and adherents was intensified further by the emerging importance of chivalric virtues, as mirrored in the romance tradition. The role of the king as dispenser of

[6] Schröder, Macht und Gabe, p. 143-152; also Vincent, The Court of Henry II, p. 321-323.
[7] Cf. Vincent, The Court of Henry II, p. 322; Barlow, William Rufus, p. 119-123, elaborates on the different types of hunting nobility would commonly engage in, and the clerical criticism thereof.
[8]Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 256; Warren, The Governance of Norman and Angevin England, p. 17.
[9] Cf. Bates, Kingship, government, and political life, p. 76.
[10] Cf. Turner, King John, p. 17.
[11] Cf. Heaney, Beowulf, p. 5, lines 65-73.
[12] Cf. ibid., p. 5, for Hrothgar's giving away treasures after Heorot Hall is finished.
[13] Cf. The Wanderer, p. 284-286, lines 32-40, line 35 referring to his lord as "*goldwine*", likewise lines 92-95; line 95 even laments that he can no longer look upon his lord's majesty: "*Eala þeodnes þrym!*"

unending gifts was, of course, a financial burden on the court, and balancing how much could be given without ripping a hole into royal finances must have been no mean feat.[14]

As a gesture of generosity towards loyal noblemen grand receptions, providing appropriate entertainment for the worthy guests, holding sumptuous feasts and giving exquisite gifts were not only expressions of the host's fair-mindedness,[15] but also, to a great extent, a means of symbolic communication: a munificent ruler cares for the groups that are socially dependent on him; his gifts strengthen the bonds with his entourage, they are, as opposed to disruptive avarice, a factor that compensates social differences.[16] Royal *largitas* is not only welcomed by the king's vassals. Gerald of Wales explains that a king who handed out gifts would gain favour and thankfulness – yet he ought not to empty his treasuries nor squander his inheritance in the excessive pursuit of these prospects.[17] Hugh de Fleury, likewise, asserts that an ideal king is a munificent king.[18] Yet especially rewarding followers with landed property might confront a king with serious problems: for one thing, land was a painfully finite resource; for another, distributing it among the 'wrong' recipients might cause unrest among those who felt they had deserved more. A king thus had to find a careful balance between endowing his faithful servants and the great nobles of his realm, lest he alienate one of the groups or create overly mighty subjects.[19]

Seeing that all tenure came from him and inevitably also returned to him, the king, if not in desperate need for favour or faced with rivalling claims, generally had the upper hand when dealing with his magnates. This becomes noticeable especially in the royal exploitation of feudal rights, such as the payment for coming into inheritances, the selling of wardships or the remarriage of widows. Beyond these more domestic concerns, the Crown also had the right to demand military aid from their vassals.[20] Given the importance of mercenary warfare especially in the conflicts on the continent, it seems hardly surprising that this, too, was increasingly turned into a due that could be levied. War looming, kings increasingly came to accept a scutage payment rather the actual bellicose participation of their liegemen. Doubtlessly fuelled by the daunting extent to which the king's realm had grown under the sway of the Angevins, the possibility to make a monetary contribution came to be the preferable option – albeit not only for the king. The right to the payment of scutage was, by John's reign, also a demand of the barons.[21] Nevertheless, the implementation of these possibilities for royal extortion clashed, as a matter of course, with the ideal image of a feudal lord, who used only such resources as his vassals willingly gave him, and financed his governance predominantly from the coffers of his treasury[22] – an ideal which was not necessarily reconcilable with the Crown's growing involvement in centralised administration and justice.

---

[14] Cf. Ashe, William Marshal, Lancelot, and Arthur, especially p. 29 and p. 35, for the problematic role assigned to the king in traditional romance literature, which Ashe claims to have been less demanding in English romance, where the king's role focussed more on the defence of his people and his lands and the maintainance of peace.

[15] Cf. Althoff, Prologomena, p. 60.

[16] Cf. Kleinschmidt, Herrscherdarstellung, p. 67.

[17] Cf. De principis instructione, dist. 1, ch. 8, p. 27-28.

[18] Cf. Hugh de Fleury, caput VII, p. 950.

[19] Cf. Turner, King John, p. 17.

[20] Cf. Jolliffe, Constitutional History, p. 134.

[21] Cf. Holt, The Northerners, p. 91.

[22] Cf. Jolliffe, Angevin Kingship, p. 14.

Greed certainly is not something mirrors for princes would seek to encourage in a king; yet even here we find a mitigating voice – though, admittedly, it is that of a royal servant. The *Dialogvs de Scaccario*, a late twelfth century work on the practice of the English Exchequer, claims that a king should be served, not only by the maintenance of his dignities, but also by conserving the wealth that he were due because of his rank,[23] for in this wealth was a power that could at times ensure a speedy progress even better than the combination of the king's (laudable) virtues. Even if he acquired wealth *sue uoluntatis arbitrio* – by despotic judgement rather than adhering to laws – it was to be tolerated, for those who had been entrusted with the care of God's people were ultimately judged by divine rather than human judgement.[24] The author dutifully proceeds to elaborate the many good and worthy causes the king might support with the money thus won.[25]

Beyond the mere financial, there was another sphere in which the king might find himself at odds with his magnates. While he was usually eager to claim the *auxilium*, the matter of the *consilium* proved to be a frequent bone of contention between magnates and king. As the king was ultimately free to choose with whom he wished to confer,[26] his choice did not always find their approval. Nor, incidentally, did it necessarily find the approval of others: the image of counsellors ranging from merely bad to downright evil on whose advice the king acted in a certain way, is recurring almost incessantly in the narrative sources – a formula that, while overtly disapproving of the king's actions, does not blame the divine representative himself. Since, however, the king was the man who had chosen the advisors and chosen to listen to what they said, a sizeable amount of blame is always attached to the monarch when his advisors are criticised.

The king's inner circle is the very heart of royal policy. Here, decisions are made, the elite of the realm is forged, maintained or antagonised, and here is the king's venue in which he could be seated, as it were, in majesty. In terms of virtues and ideals, the king, when moving in this sphere, has to find the balance between commendable *liberalitas* or largesse and damnable *avaricia*, between appropriate *splendor* and contemptible *luxuria*. The scope of this chapter is wide: it is concerned with the relation between king and magnates on all levels as well as with the representation and enactment of royal life at the king's court.

*The Inner Circle of William I*

The Conqueror's court is arguably the most exclusive of the courts of Norman and Angevin kings. Its members were those who had accompanied the king on the conquest.

Before William I had a royal court to manage, the Bayeux Tapestry allows for a glimpse of the ducal court as the setting within which Harold's deep obligation to Duke William (and thus the extent of his later treachery) is portrayed. Having been retrieved from the captivity of Count Guy de Ponthieu, Harold is taken into the duke's household and accompanies him on an expedition to

---

[23] Cf. Richard fitzNigel, Dialogvs de Scaccario, p. 2: *"copiis que eos sui status ratione contingunt"*.
[24] Cf. ibid.
[25] Cf. ibid., p. 4.
[26] Cf. Vincent, The Court of Henry II, p. 312; Dunbabin, Government, p. 502: the king's free choice of counsel did not end until 1376 when a measure was introduced by parliament to move against counsellors perceived as harmful.

fight the rebellious Conan at the castle of Dinan.[27] After the defeat of Conan, William honours his guest by presenting him with arms.[28] If this episode underlines the duke's hospitality and acknowledgement of due splendour, the expedition itself and Guy's surrender of the valuable captive, achieved at the bidding of messengers, stresses his power over his magnates. The incident is reported in greater detail by William of Poitiers, who states that Harold had to be freed from Guy's clutches by entreaties as well as threats, but freed he was – and Guy, "who had been compelled neither by force nor reward" surrendered the man whom he "could have tortured, killed or sold as he pleased", and, for that, was lavishly rewarded by the duke, who gave him rich and extensive lands, and large gifts of money besides.[29] William of Poitier's rendering casts William I into the model of a ruler who knew full well how to bind magnates to him, and rewarded good services with boundless magnanimity, fulfilling the ideal of a generous king. As far as the duke's self-representation beyond the giving of gifts is concerned, the tapestry has more to offer: in court, he is always portrayed as enthroned, in most cases holding a sword,[30] emphasising his power and prominence as the ruling figure. Once he has arrived in England, he settles down with his magnates to a sumptuous meal opulently prepared.[31] While these depictions do speak of the king's wealth and splendour, the greatest testimony the tapestry gives to which forces exactly the duke was able to command is given in the industrious efficiency with which it shows the conquest to have been prepared. The preparation scene culminates in the large panorama of eleven ships sailing towards England, fully manned (and horsed) with Norman warriors (and their horses), the sails of the large ships and the smaller ships taking over even the otherwise mostly ornamental upper border of the tapestry.[32] Here was a ruler who could afford to assemble a copious fleet of warriors in – as the industrious building of ships that precedes the voyage suggests – a remarkable short time.

The Conqueror's relation with the great among his subjects cannot at first have been easy. Not even William of Poitiers can omit the serious upheavals in Normandy that dominated his youth, although of course he does his utmost to portray that tumultuous phase as a succession of well-deserved ducal triumphs against the rebellious lords, the count of Maine and the French. Once his narrative nears the conquest, everything is as it should be: William leads and his nobles follow. Yet his vassals – as they should – are portrayed as having an active role in the making of his decisions. Time and again, William of Poitiers refers to the king having reached decisions after taking counsel with his magnates; after his arrival at Pevensey, he meets Harold's representative sitting among them, *in medio primatum suorum*, and bids the messenger to repeat his missive in the presence of these men.[33] William here is shown as involving the magnates in his decision-making, allowing them access to information that had originally been meant only for him. The magnitude

[27] Cf. Bayeux Tapestry, plates 20-26.
[28] Cf. ibid., plate 27.
[29] Cf. William of Poitiers, i.41 (p. 68-70).
[30] Bayeux Tapestry, plate 14, 18, 29 portray him holding the sword; it has vanished on plate 37, where he using his hands to gesticulate while involved in council with Odo of Bayeux.
[31] Cf. Bayeux Tapestry, plates 48-49.
[32] Ibid., plate 42-44.
[33] William of Poitiers, ii.11 (p. 118).

of this ideal counselling relationship between the king and the magnates is portrayed by the writer when they urge him to take the crown – and he, eventually, complies.[34]

Not all was to remain in such harmony after the accession. William I had to face down rebellions among his new subjects as well as problems abroad. Yet the matter did never wholly appear to slip out of his hands: William of Jumièges remarks that the smaller uprisings of 1067 dissolved in panic when the rebels learned that their king, the great warrior, was about to return;[35] while the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle dispassionately recounts how easily the "unadvised" plan of the rebels in 1075 came to nothing, seeing that they were resisted from within the country and seized by the king as soon as he returned from Normandy.[36] Most telling are the letters Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury, sent to the king during the rebellion of 1075. He should feel insulted if the king were to cross the sea because of these traitors, who were already fleeing before the king's forces. His next letter announces that the rebels had been routed.[37] Rebellious vassals were clearly of little concern to the king and his close lieutenants. Other than that, William I seems to have taken a tough stance on vassals who crossed him, albeit not one that was perceived as overly oppressive. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is alone in remarking that the king was so stern and violent "that no one dared to do anything against his will. He had earls in his bonds who went against his will; bishops he put out of their bishoprics and abbots out of their abbacies – and thegns into prison", not even sparing his own brother, Odo.[38]

Notwithstanding these rebellions that needed to be dealt with, the king was otherwise found adequate in his relation to those loyal to him. While Domesday Book can be regarded as a reliable testimony to the king's lavish rewards to his most loyal followers, references to the king's munificence in narrative sources are more typically used as a means of praising the king. As so often, William of Poitiers is an outstanding example for the depiction of royal virtue in the Conqueror. The narrative leading up to the conquest abounds with depictions of the king's great generosity towards Harold. With "most adequate honour", Harold is led to Rouen, where manifold hospitalities are bestowed upon him.[39] After the oath, William, now his liege-lord, confirms Harold's possessions in England and receives him as his vassal. This having been done, Harold is further showered in honour – he is now treated to an opportunity to prove his mettle and win renown: he and those with him are given knightly arms and the most selected horses in order to accompany the duke on his expedition to Brittany. The author even states the alleged purpose of these actions: by this honour, he meant to make Harold "more faithful and beholden to him"[40]. Harold eventually leaves the duke's hospitality, laden with gifts and even one of the hostages he had given as confirmation of his oath. The duke's generosity could hardly have been

---

[34] Cf. ibid., ii.48 (p. 148), discussed above.
[35] Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VII-19(40), p. 178.
[36] Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 210 (E-version) translates "foolish plan" for the endeavour of the rebels; Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 349 refers to the plan as "*unreode*".
[37] Cf. Letters of Lanfranc, letter 34 (p. 124) and letter 35 (p. 124-126), both dated 1075.
[38] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 220; cf. Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 355. Bates, William the Conqueror, p. 82 argues that the Conqueror stayed well within the conventions of tolerated hard-handedness when it came to dealing with his magnates, and the ones that suffered the harshest punishments tended to be his own relatives.
[39] Cf. William of Poitiers, ii.42 (p. 70).
[40] Cf. ibid., ii.42-44 (p. 70-73). The quote is taken from the English translation, ibid., p. 73.

portrayed as greater, and William of Poitiers consequently uses the end of Harold's visit to severely criticise the later king for a treachery made even more despicable because of the magnanimous treatment he had received at the duke's court.[41] William of Jumièges' account of Harold's treatment in Normandy is much briefer, but he agrees on the main points: Harold had stayed with the duke for some time, sworn fealty to him, and received gifts.[42]

Reports of the Conqueror's displays of munificence increase substantially after he has taken the crown. England, William of Poitiers states, had amassed remarkable riches, and these the new king (notwithstanding the panegyrist's assertions that he only gave away what was truly his) put to much better use than the English, who had presumably (so the writer surmises) kept them for the vain enjoyment of avarice and shamefully wasted them on luxury.[43] The account of the distribution of the prizes of the conquest certainly portrays William in the most favourable light – even if the gifts of money he made to his followers were most likely aimed at preventing spoliation and the main benefactors of his giving of the greatest part of the treasures (and the most precious at that) to the poor and the monasteries "of different provinces" turned out to be the monasteries of Normandy. The assistance of the papacy he repaid by gifts of money (thought to be referring to the reestablishment of the payment of Peter's pence), ornaments and the precious banner of the defeated usurper.[44]

It would appear that the court, besides being showered in gifts, also found itself sufficiently entertained: the Rime of King William, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's short poem-like epitaph on the king's death, describes at length how the king, much to the distress of his nobles and the wretched people, had established large game-preserves, in which, through strict regulation, hares, deer and boars were allowed to roam freely. The punishment for the killing of stag or hind was to be blinded; the king, the Rime states, "loved the stags so very much, as if he were their father"[45].

Munificence is a trait valued in any feudal overlord. Yet the inventory of self-display available to a monarch is of considerably larger scope – and William I appears to have taken to these possibilities like a fish to water. "He was", the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states, "very worshipful. He wore his royal crown three times each year, as often as he was in England. At Easter he wore it in Winchester, at Pentecost in Westminster, at midwinter in Gloucester, and there were then with him all the powerful men over all England: archbishops and diocesan bishops, abbots and earls, thegns and knights."[46] It remains uncertain whether these crown-wearings were introduced by the Normans or whether they had been known to England before,[47] but they formed, together

[41] Cf. ibid., i.46 (p. 76).
[42] Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VII-13(31), p. 160.
[43] Cf. William of Poitiers, ii.31 (p. 152).
[44] Cf. ibid., ii.31 (p. 152); the interpretation of the individual items is to be found in the footnotes. A variety of the king's gifts to the Norman churches are enumerated ibid., ii.42 (p. 176).
[45] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 221 (E-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 355.
[46] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 219-220 (E-version); cf. Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 355: *"Eac he was swyðe wurðful þriwa he bær his cynehelm ælce geare swa oft swa he wæs on Engelande. On Eastron he hone bær on Winceastre on Pentecosten on Westmynstre on Midewintre on Gleaweceastre ⁊ þænne wæron mid him ealle þa rice men ofer eall Englaland arcebiscopas ⁊ ledbiscopas abbodas ⁊ eorlas egnas ⁊ cnihtas."* The pattern of these crown-wearings has been shown to be ideal rather than reality, seeing that judging by the king's itinerary, William I did not visit these places too often, and would at times spend the high festivals in the 'wrong' place, cf. Bates, William the Conqueror, p. 167.
[47] Cf. Warren, The Governance of Norman and Angevin England, p. 17. See Dennis, Image-making for the Conquerors, p. 35, for the Conqueror's use of crown-wearing in the consolidation of his status as king.

with coronations, the central legitimation ritual of the fledgling dynasty. The coronation itself stood for the sanctification of kingship; during the ceremony, the king would acknowledge his responsibility as protector of the Church and the people of his realm. The re-enactment of the coronation in the ceremonial crown-wearings reinforced, by calling to mind the act of anointing, the king's claim to legitimate rule. As the crown-wearings tended to coincide with the king's full court sessions, many magnates were present to witness the self-display of their lord; the solemn atmosphere of Mass, the display of regalia, the rich attire of the king seated in majesty, the lavish feast with rich vessels and the *laudes regiae* being sung in acclamation and praise of the king served as the perfect stage for the display of royal magnificence, underlining the king's elevated status as well as the authority and sanctity of his office.[48] The places for the crown-wearings also carried their share of the symbolical weight: Winchester, Gloucester and Westminster were all Benedictine churches adjoining a royal palace, and all of them were burial places to dead kings[49] – places that emphasised William I's connection to the old royal line of England.[50]

It may well be that the crown-wearing ceremonies were of greater splendour than the original coronation had been. By then, the king had acquired greater wealth, and there was more time and routine to prepare the individual festivities. Indeed, the depictions of the coronation ritual are relatively brief; briefer, at least, than they might have been, seeing that the coronation was the pinnacle of the Conqueror's rise to power. The account of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is indeed short: the author bitterly remarks that the king had been consecrated in Westminster by archbishop Ealdred, swearing, before the crown was put on his head, "that he would hold his nation as the best of any kings before him did, if they would be loyal to him". Directly afterwards, he "charged men a very stiff tax, ... went across the sea to Normandy" and the deputies he left behind "built castles widely throughout the nation, and oppressed the wretched people; and afterwards it always grew very much worse"[51]. William of Jumièges briefly summarises that he was elected by all the magnates, anointed by the realm's bishops and crowned on Christmas Day 1066.[52] William of Poitiers' account of the coronation is the most memorable one, and the one most often cited. The congregation is asked, bilingually, first by the archbishop of York, then by the bishop of Coutances, whether they wished to have William crowned, to which the English at once cheerfully agree as if with one voice, soon to be joined by the Normans. Yet the guards outside, ignorant of the language, mistake the shouting for something sinister, and lay fires close to the city. The flames are not given any further heed by the panegyrist, as he is concerned with much more important matters: William, he claims, was crowned by an archbishop esteemed both for his saintly life and for his unstained reputation, having refused to be crowned by Archbishop Stigand of Canterbury, who had earlier been excommunicated by the Holy See.[53]

---

[48] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 256, p. 289; Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 249, p. 3ß5;
[49] Cf. Mason, William Rufus and the Benedictine Order, p. 126-127.
[50] Cf. Green, Henry I, p. 289.
[51] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 200 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 339.
[52] Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VII-16(37), p. 170-172.
[53] Cf. William of Poitiers, ii.30 (p. 150).

The ritual itself is described at its greatest length by the *Carmen*, preceded by a detailed account of the marvellous crown fashioned for the new king. Made by a Greek artisan from Arabian gold and gems from the river Nile (all, apparently, in the space of little more than two months), the sparkling headdress is claimed to resemble the crown of Solomon. The same smith crafted a sceptre and a rod, which are attributed a more concrete symbolic value than the reference to Solomon as a good royal ideal: the sceptre would temper the realm's turmoil; the rod would gather those who had strayed, and call them back.[54] The poem then lapses into a description of the coronation ritual itself, although unfortunately it breaks off just as the king is being anointed. A procession of clergymen enters the church, followed by bishops who are, in turn, followed by the secular nobility, with the king bringing up the rear. The *Carmen* also recounts the double acclamation of the king by the people – once made by an English and once by a Norman bishop, before the king prostrates himself together with the prelates and is then raised again by the archbishop to be anointed.[55] The rite detailed here has been identified with the English coronation ordo since the reign of Edgar, albeit with the added element of the question being posed to the congregation. [56]

Beyond the use of ritual and displays of majesty, the king employed other means of self-display emphasizing his royal position – and, most notably, its justification. It remains unclear whether William I had had a seal as duke of Normandy, but he certainly acquired one as King of England.[57] Contrary to English seals before the conquest, which bore the enthroned king on either side, his seal featured him both seated with sword and orb, circumscribed as king of England, and as riding knight, circumscribed as master of Normandy; the twofold depiction was to remain the standard royal representation on the seal.[58] In his diplomas, the simple title of *rex* is predominant, sometimes augmented by the *Dei-gratia*-phrase, sometimes complemented by various titles pointing to his position as ruler of Normandy – the latter noticeably more often for Norman than for English diplomas. Most fascinating, however, are the various justifying titles he assumes in English writs – and their complete lack in Norman documents. He is *iure hereditario Anglorum patrie effectus ... basileus*, *Dei dispositione et consanguinitatis hereditate Anglorum basileus* and *Dei omnipotentis gratia operante Anglorum rex*, to name but a few.[59] The diplomas frequently stress the king being a relative of the late Edward, further enhancing his rightful claim to the throne.[60]

William I seems to have been well aware of how to work his court. The relations to his magnates, in the rare cases in which they are described, appear effortless, with the major rebellions after his accession to kingship mentioned in the sidelines rather than the major strands of the narratives. It is unfortunate that the chronicles are that silent on the Conqueror's treatment

[54] Cf. Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, lines 755- 786 (p. 44-46).
[55] Cf. ibid., lines 787-835 (p. 46-49).
[56] Cf. Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 248-249; Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, p. 47, footnote 5. There is a mention of the laudes regiae being sung at the coronation, but while it has been accepted that they were to become part of the coronation and were a regular feature of the crown-wearings, it is doubted that they were actually sung at the coronation of the Conqueror. On the significance of the laudes for the representation of kings, see Kantorowicz, Laudes Regiae.
[57] Cf. Bates, William the Conqueror, p. 172.
[58] Cf. Warren, The Governance of Norman and Angevin England, p. 19.
[59] The Acta of William I, p. 85-92, offers a splendid overview of the different styles used in William I's diplomas.
[60] For only a few instances, see The Acta of William I, no. 2, no. 115, no. 135, no. 159, and no. 181.

of his nobles after his accession to the throne, leaving posterity with little besides the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's sinister hints. Yet it would appear evident that the king was aware that he had to buy the allegiance of the great men of his realm, if it was his wish to have them by his side. Especially interesting is the Conqueror's relationship to ritual and self-display, a potential for the demonstration of power that he is claimed as having used from the very day of his coronation. While the symbolical embellishment of the individual incidents remains, in general, an open question, seeing that the only surviving contemporary testimony of such a display of royal magnificence is the fragmented account of the coronation in the *Carmen*, it has been generally accepted that the Conqueror's courts were a splendid affair.[61] No contemporary account details the proceedings of a court and the crown-wearing enacted there, so that we are left with little option but to trust the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's verdict on the Conqueror's majesty: he was "more worshipful ... than any of his predecessors were"[62].

*The Inner Circle of William II*

The court of William Rufus has always been a fascinating affair. Home to garishly dressed effeminates who prance around in pointed shoes (reminiscent, Orderic comments, of scorpion's tails and snakes) and by their sweeping mode of dress are rendered unable to do anything decent, consequently whiling away their nights in feasts, chatter and games, growing long hair they curled with hot irons as well as small beards, lewdly pursuing women and, as their goat-like beards indicate, sinking to even filthier lusts and indulging in sodomy. Most of Orderic's famous rant is not directly aimed at the English king. Indeed, two other men feature in the emergence of the kind of fashion culture so detestable to the Norman monk: Count Fulk of Anjou, who had the first pointed shoes made, and a man called Robert, admittedly part of Rufus' court, who had the idea of stuffing and bending the shoes' points. The famous piece is a critique of the entire western society, degrading after the death of *principum religiosorum*, the religious-minded princes, two of which he names as William the Bastard and Pope Gregory.[63] Whatever experience may have incited Orderic to write such passionate lines, he was not the only one to thus take offence. Eadmer has Anselm dedicate a Lent sermon to the subject of the majority of the young men at court wearing the well-combed long locks of girls and walking about in entirely unmanly fashion, in the course of which he manages to bring many of the courtiers to repent, shear off their locks and assume again a manly manner.[64] As the court represents, in a very visible way, royal government as such, the description chimes in well with the verdict of the monarch's lack of morals attested elsewhere. The world of the court, as an extension of the king's personal sphere, thus becomes symbolic for what was festering at its centre.

While in his first assessment, Orderic's critique aims at the ungodly ways of courtiers and noblemen everywhere, his second jab at the king's court is more explicitly critical: the dead king, he describes graphically, was lamented by no one but mercenary knights, wastrels (alternately

[61] Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 286, p. 305.
[62] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 219; Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 354. The Old English wording of the passage has already been cited in the chapter on the king's character.
[63] Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 10, iii. 323-325, p. 186-190.
[64] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 48.

lechers) and coarse whores, all of whom had lost their wages through the death of the king, on whose vices they had lived, and bewailed the passing of their protector not out of compassionate loyalty, but out of greed.[65] These hangers-on indicate darkly what a rough place the court must have been perceived to be. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle offers a picture of court life from an outsider's perspective, describing how the rough personnel that surrounded the king affected the impression the court left when it stayed somewhere: while the king was waiting for a favourable wind to bear him to Normandy, "his court did much greater harm within the shires where they lay than a court or raiding-army ever ought to do in a land at peace."[66] Orderic adds to that another complaint that might point to the lack of discipline at the royal court, stating that the king had neglected to protect the peasants from knights, allowing their possessions to be devastated by their armed underlings. Since there is no mention of the perpetrators coming from any other sphere than the king's immediate surroundings and, in his next sentence, the monk comments on how the king managed to establish internal peace, it seems likely that the incidents were not extraordinary unlawful activity, but may be considered 'collateral damage' that might occur in the wake of the king's assembling court.[67]

Who were these men that were so hard to discipline, so prone to violence, with which the king surrounded himself? The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle sums them up briefly as "evil men, who were always agreeable to him". It was their advice that guided him in pressing money from the populace.[68] Such bad advisors – a frequently used literary device of implicit criticism – also figure in Eadmer's account, where they urge the king, who had been about to gladly accept the amount of money offered by Anselm to help him in buying Normandy off his brother's hands, to exert pressure on the archbishop to offer yet more money than the "measly" amount he was willing to part with. Given the writers very definite fixation on the figure of Anselm, it is little surprising that the *Historia Novorum*'s bad royal counsellors are men who are ill-disposed towards the archbishop.[69] A leading figure among them is the cunning (as contrasted to truly wise) William of St Calais, whose motive for pressing the condemnation of Anselm is the desire to obtain the archbishopric of Canterbury himself, after Anselm had been goaded into renouncing it – or so, Eadmer for once carefully amends, it was said *(ut dicebantur)*.[70]

Bad counsellors also figure very prominently in Orderic Vitalis. Most nefarious among them is Ranulf Flambard, whom Orderic believed to have triggered greed in the young king. Of base origins and detestable vices, burning with ambition, and acting presumptuously on his own initiative rather than the orders of the king he served, Ranulf is styled a perfect villain to bear the brunt of government criticism; prophetically nicknamed "torch-bearer" (Flambard), he was to oppress people and Church alike, taking possessions of vacant churches and impoverishing the

[65] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 15, iv. 90, p. 292.
[66] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 233-234 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 363.
[67] Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 8, iii. 315, p. 179.
[68] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 235 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 364: *"...þurh yfelra manna rædas þe him æfre gecweme wæran..."*
[69] Cf. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 43-44.
[70] Ibid., p. 59-60.

populace to the very verge of starvation.[71] While William II is re-conquering his father's former possessions across the channel, Flambard and the other royal servants plunder England, without mercy and worse than bandits; taking from peasants, merchants and even seizing upon the treasures of dead prelates while extorting taxes from living ones, amassing wealth to send to the king across the sea. Flambard does not cease to haunt Orderic's narrative even after the death of his master. His numerous evil deeds are recalled once more when he craftily escapes from the prison into which Henry I had put him, by means of a rope smuggled to him in a flagon of wine. While Flambard is being conveyed to Normandy, where he will plunge Robert into foolishness with his bad counsel, Orderic even introduces the former bishop's mother, as a means of further increasing the man's wickedness: a sorceress, missing an eye from the many times she has been in familiarity with a devil. Her purpose thus fulfilled, she vanishes from the narrative directly after she has been mentioned for the first time, stranded in Normandy because of a pirate attack.[72]

Flambard, although the most prominent, is not the only bad counsellor whose advice the king takes. As the defeated Count Helias de la Flèche, stylised as a knightly hero and worthy opponent by Orderic, humbly begs the king that he might be taken into the royal household, there to serve until he might one day be worthy to receive back as fief the city of Le Mans or the castles of Maine that Rufus had taken, the generous king *(liberalis rex)* is about to agree. However, Robert of Meulan, chief among his counsellors, jealously wishing to prevent an equal or superior from being admitted into the king's inner circle, speaks to the king of the liability of the men of Maine to treachery, and the likeliness that Helias only wished to be closer to him so as to be able to rebel more efficiently. Rufus is swayed by these words, and ultimately sends the count away.[73]

While it is made clear that sending Helias de la Flèche away was a mistake, the king had reason to fear rebellion. Twice during his reign he faced down plots that had aimed to depose him. Following Orderic, who provides the fullest account of both incidents, the fault lay, in neither case, with the king, although he certainly was the cause. The monk's account of the first rebellion is preluded by a lengthy debate of the magnates about the ill fortune that had struck them with the accession of William II. Now that Normandy and England were divided, those among them who held lands on either side of the Channel would have to serve two rulers and – Orderic has them recount numerous biblical examples for that – such an arrangement could never prove fruitful. They decide, in the end, to make Robert their lord, having already once sworn fealty to him, and believing him to be of more pliable character than his brother.[74] Once the rebellion is beaten down, Rufus severely punishes some and ignores the guilt of others, thus effectively ensuring the enduring fidelity of the spared rebels: "the more gravely some had erred in the royal majesty, the more fervently they were subservient to him, and sought in many ways to please him with gifts as well as with services and flattery."[75]

---

[71] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 8, iii. 311-312, p. 172-174; Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 9, iv. 54, p. 250.
[72] Cf. ibid., book X, ch. 17, iv. 98-iv.110, p. 310-315.
[73] Cf. ibid., ch 8, iv. 51-52, p. 246-249.
[74] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 2, iii. 268- 270, p. 120-124.
[75] Ibid., book VIII, ch. 2, iii. 280, p. 134: *"Porro quidam quanto grauius se errasse in regiam maiestatem nouereunt, tanto feruentius omni tempore postmodum ei famulati sunt et tam muneribus quam seruitiis ac adulationibus multis modis placere studuerunt."*

Harmony at court lasted but for a while. Orderic explains that the second rebellion broke out for similar reasons. Many rich Normans were, in their pride and greed, uneasy to be under the sway of a king who was bold and fearless, and strictly ruled all his subjects. They thus formed a conspiracy against him. The initiator of the plot is named as Robert de Mowbray, earl of Northumbria. The king became aware of something being amiss for the first time when the earl, having robbed several merchants of their goods, refused to answer to the king's summons.[76] The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle does not mention this prologue, but directly states that the earl would not attend the king's court at Easter, whereupon the king grew angry, ordering him to attend the next court at Pentecost if he wished to be entitled to security. Yet the wayward vassal failed to turn up a second time, because he was neither given hostages nor granted safe-conduct as safeguards against the king's wrath.[77] This diplomatic intermezzo is, much to the benefit of the king's positive portrayal, not mentioned in Orderic, who depicts the king as wisely moving against a potentially dangerous man who had already waylaid merchants. While the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle soberly recounts the building of a siege castle, the eventual capture of Robert de Mowbray and the threat to put out his eyes that effected the surrender of his castle,[78] the Norman monk spins a grander tale, of an ambush waiting for the king in a forest, a trap he only just avoids when one of the traitors throws himself at his feet and warns him. He reports the rebels' resolve wavering in the face of the king's advance, when many of them crept back into royal service silently, for fear of discovery. As king, nobles and populace jointly undertake the siege of Mowbray's hiding-place (thus pointedly symbolising the isolation of the rebels), the trapped earl stands upon his battlements and calls out to his fellow conspirators. The rebels who had re-entered royal service are thus shamefully discovered and fear the outcome, while the king and his loyal followers laugh as they witness the scene.[79] Strong, in control, and breaking down resistance even before actual warlike actions began – William II is the very picture of efficiency in this rebellion.

Neither of the witnesses imply that there was a closed front of rebels that stood against the king; more than that, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle even keeps silent about the (rumours of) conspiracy that surround Mowbray's rebellion in other texts. The result is that the king's court is presented very much as a unity, and the rebellions are not the only example for that. Both the trial of William of St Calais and the council that dealt with Anselm's papal obedience show a very striking similarity: the entire court, bishops and magnates alike, back the king against the accused. In the account of William of St Calais' trial, it is remarkably none other than Lanfranc who bolsters the king's position, testily replying to the statement of the accused that clerical vestments ought to be worn during the process to show that everything was done with canonical rightness that they might well deal with his case thus vested, as vestments would not impair the truth.[80]

---

[76] Cf. ibid., book VIII, ch. 23, iii. 405- 407p. 278-280.
[77] Cf. Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle p. 230 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 361.
[78] Cf. Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 231 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 361-362.
[79] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 23, iii. 407- 409, p. 280-282.
[80] Cf. De injusta vexatione, p. 179: *"Cui Lanfrancus archiepiscopus respondens, 'Bene possumus,' inquit,'hoc modo vestiti de regalibus tuisque negotiis disceptare, vestes enim non impediunt veritatem.'"*

In Anselm's case, both the princes of the realm and the bishops advise the king to the best of their abilities, expressing their regret when they cannot help him in accomplishing his designs because of (this being Eadmer's narrative) the insurmountable ingenuity of the archbishop's replies, and the Christian loyalty they owed him. It is only the bishops' lack of backbone that eventually shatters this cohesion of the court: having promised the king to deny loyalty and friendship to the archbishop, they witness the barons saying that they, in their turn, could as Christians not possibly do so, whereupon the episcopate grows confused and headless, by this answer effectively stamped as traitors – if not godless. Their predicament does not end there. The king questions them closely on how far they had renounced allegiance to the archbishop, and re-arranges the symbolic pecking order of his court according to the answer the bishops gave: those who answered they had unconditionally abjured the archbishop he placed as friends and loyal followers in honorific position close to himself, while the others, enemies to and traitors of his will, were angrily banished to a remote corner of the house, far from him, there to await his condemnation. But at once they took recourse to an innate, salutary counsel they used to rely on; that is, Eadmer acidly remarks, the offering of a large amount of money, and they were received back into the king's friendship.[81]

Nor, if Eadmer is to be believed, were such payments in any way exceptional. It was, he states, the king's habit to try and press money from all he ruled by changing his manner towards them until, driven by terror, they would pay to restore royal benevolence. Even if their payment had been initially a voluntary one, he would not receive them back into his friendship if they did not increase their initial offer to the amount he desired.[82] When Anselm finds himself utterly perplexed at the king's answer that he could find no fault in him, but would nonetheless not receive him back into his favour because he had no reason to, these workings of the court are explained to Anselm by his spiritual brethren, the bishops. The way to win back the king goodwill was to pay money; they had never found another. It is an advice the bishops twice urge Anselm to follow. The first time it is voiced, the archbishop, in a passionate speech, declares that friendship ought not to be something given at a price, and, rather shrewdly, that if he were to thus placate the king now, who for no reason was displeased with him, similar anger might again stir, and would again require that type of appeasement to subside.[83]

What is lacking in Eadmer's account – and not surprisingly so – is the king's side of the feudal relationship. There are no contemporary witnesses satisfactorily depicting the ceremonial of the court of William II. It is tempting to assume from the silence of the sources that the king's court fulfilled expectations to such an extent that comment was not deemed necessary; indeed, with a writer as critical as Eadmer among the contemporary historians, it might even be safe to do so, since the monk was quick to seize upon every opportunity to depict the king in an unfavourable

---

[81] Cf. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 62-65.

[82] Cf. ibid., p. 43-44, starting with the courtiers' advice, followed by Eadmer's comment: *" 'Sed paulurum sustine, faciemque tuam super eo commuta; et videbis quod, consueto aliorum ductus terrore, ovans, ad tuam benignitatem recuperandam, quingentis quas offert totidem libras adjiciet.' Siquidem hunc ipse rex morem erga cunctos quibus dominabatur habebat, ut quando quivis eorum aliquid ei pecuniarium, etiam solius gratiae obtentu, offerebat, oblatum, nisi quantitas rei voto illius concurreret, sperneret, nec offerentem in suam ulterius amicitiam admittebat, si ad determinationem suam oblatum munus non augeret."*

[83] Cf. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 50-51. The second time the bishops advise the archbishop to give money to the king is found ibid., p. 70.

light. When he feels he should comment that the methods Rufus employed in gathering money were not befitting the dignity of a king,[84] and has Anselm relate that the rumours flying about were damaging said dignity,[85] it is plausible to assume that he would readily have criticised a miserly court – since that most certainly would have impaired royal dignity.

Judging by the popularity of the royal court for knights both foreign and native, they at least appeared to find it suitable, and various remarks scattered throughout the chronicles point to William II having definite ideas about what a king ought to possess. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, for instance, complains about the king's extensive building being detrimental to the populace. The wall around the tower of London and particularly his great hall at Westminster in which he might hold court and entertain guests certainly were grand projects, mirroring the king's liking for grandeur.[86] Orderic Vitalis remarks, in passing, that on a visit to Normandy, the king lived in royal style *(regali more)* with his followers.[87] It is likewise indicated that the king made the effort to have a precious tomb erected for his father.[88]

While these are hints at a certain level of splendour at the king's court, the fact that William II did, usually, care for trappings befitting a king can be seen in an episode in which he foregoes them. Hearing of the siege of Le Mans, the king, out hunting just then, at once veers his mount about and gallops towards the sea to help his men. He finds an old boat there and boards it – without royal pomp *(sine regio apparatu)*, like a mean commoner *(uelut plebeius)*. Waiting neither for a good wind, his companions nor other things befitting kingly dignity *(nec alia quae regiam dignitatem decebant)*, as Orderic underlines once more, he sets off across the Channel in the simple craft. Upon his arrival, he is met by people waiting for news from England, who are astounded to find the king himself on board of the ship, laughing and answering their queries in such good spirits that joy spreads among those who had thus unexpectedly stumbled across the man of whom they had sought news. The king's adventure does not end there: as if to top it off, the king enters the country on a priest's mare (explicitly: *cuiusdam presbiteri equa*) – definitely not a mount fit for a king – accompanied by cheering crowds of priests and peasants.[89] As an episode signifying the king's daring and boldness, and perhaps also because of the astounding idea that a king should in such a way forsake all usual protocol, the crossing of the Channel is found not only in Orderic's history, but also in the Gesta Normannorum Ducum, as the one episode the writer 'had' to relate about a king who should not be written about,[90] and in Eadmer's veiled (but still recognisable) allusion that even the winds and the sea seemed to obey him: when the king had wished to cross to Normandy, raging storms had calmed, leaving a miraculous tranquillity during his crossing.[91]

Yet the figurehead of the king's splendour was his munificence. It opened doors and drew followers. As usual, Orderic's descriptions are the most copious and range from disdainful to admiring. After elaborating on Flambard's nefarious methods of money-collection, Orderic

---

[84] Cf. ibid., p. 43.
[85] Eadmer, Life of St Anselm, p. 64; cited earlier on William II's character.
[86] BELEG FEHLT!!!!
[87] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 16, iii. 366, p. 236.
[88] Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, De Obitu Willelmi, p. 189.
[89] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 10, iv. 58-59, p. 256.
[90] Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VIII-8, p. 212; see above.
[91] Cf. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 116-117.

grumbles that foreigners were enriched with the wealth wrung from the wretched population for vain praise *(uana laude)*.[92] In his struggles with Robert, the nobles of Normandy, he claims, were supportive of the king because of his wealth; citizens were won over with gifts – not a drastic accusation from Orderic, who tended to regard Robert as a greater evil than his younger brother.[93] It is a generous *(magnanimus)* king who asks the merchants robbed by Robert de Mowbray for the price of their goods and repays them from his own treasury,[94] a king, at the same time, who is willing to take responsibility for his vassals, and even to do so from his very own coffers. Indeed, Orderic proceeds to describe the king's munificence as a veritable magnet for retainers coming from well outside his own country:

> "Soon almost all the Norman magnates eagerly flocked to the king, ingratiatingly offering him gifts in the hope of receiving greater ones. Frenchmen, too, Bretons, Flemings and many others from the neighbouring provinces, on hearing that the king was staying at Eu in Normandy, flocked to him. They soon experienced his munificence, and on returning home declared him to be far above all their princes in wealth and generosity."[95]

The fame of his wealth had such an extent that, after Robert had already pawned his duchy to him and left for the crusade, the ruler of Aquitaine contemplated a similar undertaking, wishing to exchange the temporary stewardship of his lands for financial aid from the English king's treasure stores to go on crusade.[96]

The verdict given by Eadmer is much briefer, and less differentiated than the more numerous depictions of Orderic Vitalis. With contempt he remarks that the king's messenger had, in the face of the papal threat to excommunicate his master, worked to gain what support he might at the Roman curia, giving gifts to those he thought willing to receive them, and in that way making the pope reconsider and defer the judgement of the king.[97]

For those in the king's good books (even if they had bought themselves into them), court does indeed (sinful indulgencies aside) seem to have been a merry affair. The king is portrayed as affable, even comradely – notably so in the description Orderic offers of the king's very last hours. He eats with those close to him, laughs, jokes, pulling on his boots while evidently still standing among them, and, as a smith comes to present him with arrows for the hunt, he commends him for his work, and, praising Walter Tirel for his skill in archery, even hands him two of the arrows he has received.[98]

In more official settings, William II seems to have been well aware of the rules protocol dictated. He received Anselm with all due dignity and honour,[99] he saw Malcolm, King of the Scots, off with gifts after their agreement had been reached.[100] The only crass breach of these unwritten rules of behaviour is reported by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. In the aftermath of the treaty Robert had helped accomplish, Rufus summoned the Scottish king to his court at

---

[92] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 9, iv. 54,p. 250.
[93] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 15, iii.351-352, p. 220.
[94] Cf. ibid., book VIII, ch. 23, iii.407, p. 280.
[95] Ibid., book VIII, ch. 16, iii. 366, p. 237. Translation by Chibnall.
[96] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 13, iv. 79-80, p. 280.
[97] Cf. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 111.
[98] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 15, iv. 86, p. 288.
[99] Cf. Eadmer, Life of St Anselm, p. 64, p. 67; cited in greater detail above.
[100] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 21, iii. 396, p. 270.

Gloucester after said king had demanded that Rufus fulfil his side of the treaty. The Scottish ruler was honourably conducted to the king (still in accordance with protocol), but was then denied his demands, and, more than that, William II even refused to speak to him.[101] Whether this behaviour was a show of strength, an open affront, a lack of time or a simple whim is hardly fathomable, but had Malcolm survived his first avenging raid of northern England, the king's conduct would certainly have seriously soured relations with the north.

The court of William II worked. The king knew how to play his part; he was lavish in giving, and, it would seem, entirely conscious of how much he could take in return: in a very enlightening scene (which does more than underline the sanctity of the archbishop, which is very likely to have been the prime intention behind it), Eadmer has the bishops reveal to Anselm why they would not follow and counsel him as he wished. They had, the bishops admitted, relatives to support and there were many worldly things that they loved, which prevented them from rising to the heights of the archbishop's ideals. They had, in a nutshell, wealth, plans, pursuits; they were caught up in the world of the court, and had fully accepted its mechanisms. If Anselm deigned to descent to their level, their argumentation continued, then they could counsel him, could treat his concerns like their own[102] – if, in fact, as we are reminded by their constant urging the archbishop to give in to the king's demands for money, the archbishop accepted that this was the way court worked. Seen in conjunction with the bishops never standing up to the king's rule, and the magnates doing so only once, if the king's harsh government that Orderic names as the reason for the conspiracy and the rebellion of Robert de Mowbray can be taken at face value, this is made even clearer. According to Eadmer, the magnates' consent with the king stopped only when they were asked to do something they could not reconcile with their Christian ethics; for the bishops, it did not even stop there. William Rufus assuredly had control of his court – but whether he chose to keep it in check was quite a different matter. It was not only the court's behaviour, but also its individual members that went starkly against the ideals of the ecclesiastics – too worldly, too indifferent, too showy. Orderic flatly refers to the king's adherents as *suis parasitis*.[103] For knights, it most certainly held great attraction. In splendour, majesty, in the taking of counsel, the court is entirely in line with the ideals applicable to it. It is the court's morals and the dubious subjects found therein that form the basis of its condemnation.

*The Inner Circle of Henry I*

On his accession to the throne, William of Malmesbury remarks, Henry I had prohibited the unjust practices that had been introduced by his brother and Ranulf. What is more, he expulsed the effeminates from court and reinstated the use of lamps during the night, a custom that had

[101] Cf. Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 227-228 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 359-360: *"Ac þa þa he to þam cynge com ne mihte he beon weorðe naðer ne ure cynges spæce ne þæra forewarde þe him ær behatene wæron ⁊ forði hi a mid mycclon unsehte tohwurfon ⁊ so cyng Malcolm ham to Scotlande gewænde."*

[102] Cf. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 82-83.

[103] Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 15, iv. 86, p. 288.

been interrupted during the time of his brother. The royal court of England is, under the sway of Henry I, once more made a bright place.[104]

It would seem that this was not only metaphorically the case. Mentions of the king's use of ceremonial, pomp and splendour abound among contemporary writers – ceremonial appears to have been so built into life at Henry I's court that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle sees fit to remark for 1111 that "the king Henry did not wear his crown at Christmas [1110], nor at Easter, nor at Pentecost"[105]; a remark that would have been entirely out of place had crown-wearings not belonged to the established ceremonial of the royal court. Eadmer, who probably witnessed the king's courts from time to time, stated that the king celebrated his Pentecost court in great worldly glory and rich expenditure *(in magna mundi gloria et diviti apparatu celebravit)*; at the same time indicating that the festivities surrounding the king's great court were essentially divided into two parts. The first part were the festive days of his crown *(festivioribus coronae suae)*, presumably those days on which he ritually wore his crown; days, consequently, that were consciously dedicated to the king's self-staging in full regal vestments. The second part to the courts were the days in which he took counsel with the great of his realm, discussing and deciding matters of government.[106] Another one of the high courts, this time at Christmas, Eadmer reports to have been held with great and exalted ceremonial (*magna solemnitas habita est atque sublimis*). When it comes to the courts held at the great festival days, the Worcester chronicle likewise talks of rich expenditure *(diuiti apparatu)*.[107] Henry of Huntingdon, by contrast, comments only briefly that he king had worn his crown at Pentecost, together with his queen.[108]

The courts were not the only occasion at which the king presented his regal splendour and his wealth, of which, we are assured, he possessed very much.[109] His marriage, witnessed by the entire nobility of the realm and the lesser people, was conducted with the *honore* befitting king and queen.[110] Orderic Vitalis comments very similarly, stating that they had married *regali more*.[111] Similar splendour was lavished on his children: Henry of Huntingdon in his admittedly rather prejudiced tract *De contemptv mvndi*, comments that the king's son was wearing garments of silk, stitched with gold, and was constantly surrounded by guards and servants.[112] Matilda, the king's only legitimate daughter, also received such attentions, but in her case, they also carried representational functions to the world outside Henry's inner circle, staging the court for the world – potential allies and rivals alike – to see. To ask for her hand in marriage, the German

---

[104] Cf. William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-392.1, p. 710: *"Itaque edicto statim per Angliam misso iniustitias a fratre et Rannulfo institutas prohibuit ...; effeminatos curia propellens, lucernarum usum noctibus in curia restituit, qui fuerat tempore fratris intermissus..."*.

[105] Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 243; Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 369.

[106] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 207. In Eadmer's example, the governmental business specifically to be discussed was the consecration of the Archbishop of York, in Eadmer's words *"Qui, transactis festivoribus coronae suae diebus, coepit agere cum episcopis et regni princibius quid esset agendum de consecratione electi ecclesiae Eboracensi."*

[107] John of Worcester 3, p. 164-166.

[108] Henry of Huntingdon, vii.33 (p. 468).

[109] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XI, ch. 23, iv. 238, p. 100, states that the king had ammassed a "tremendous" (*ingentes)* treasure trove; Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VIII. 22, p. 236, declares that he surpassed almost all other princes of his time in wealth; in Henry I's epitaph, ibid. book VIII. 33, p. 258, the Gesta declares him to have been above all other western princes in wealth.

[110] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 125.

[111] Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 16, iv. 95, p. 298.

[112] Henry of Huntingdon, c.5 (p. 592).

emperor had sent impressive envoys to the English court, men of massive built and marvellous apparel – a display of power and prosperity that Henry I countered by receiving them at his court in London, which had never before been held with more splendour (*qua numquam splendidiorem tenuerat)*. She was married in the next year, *sicut decuit*, as Henry of Huntingdon puts it. The emphasised brevity of the statement indicates that there was very definitely more to tell and, judging by the context, it must have involved all manners of festivity and ostentation. After all, for the realisation of the wedding, the king did collect money from every shire.[113] Matilda's dowry, as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (seeing that it came from the people's purses, perhaps grudgingly) remarks, consisted of "manifold treasures"[114] The king's splendour was, in return, augmented through the links he forged to the powerful beyond his kingdom: he was asking, William of Malmesbury writes, foreign kings to send him animals not found in England, like lions, leopards, lynxes, camels, and even a porcupine, all of which he gathered in a park at Woodstock, a testimony to his power and wealth.[115]

The showcasing of royal wealth could serve more purposes besides building a prestigious diplomatic link to the German empire. It secured allies and kept them in line. When he visited the few fortresses in Normandy that were his foothold in what, then, was still his brother's duchy, he did so *ingenti apparatu*, with tremendous expenditure; an intimidating display that would encourage supporters and might entice the doubtful, especially since the king was out to prove that his brother was an inept and inefficient ruler, whereas he could offer full royal protection – boosted by the island kingdom's wealth. He was received in kind by his supporters, honoured with rich gifts following royal custom.[116] Some believed that it was eventually the king's money that won him Normandy: the magnates, Eadmer remarks scathingly, had deserted the pious Robert, put the fealty they owed him behind them and ran after the king's gold and silver; a statement quoted almost verbatim in the Worcester chronicle, albeit over a preceding erasure.[117] Wealth might also alleviate potential menaces: "making use of threats and pleas and an enormous quantity of gold and silver and other valuables" the king saw to it that his envoys secured the pope's sentence that the marriage of William Clito with the daughter of Fulk of Anjou lay within the prohibited degree of consanguinity, a move that bereaved Henry I's most potent continental rival of land, allies and power.[118]

Those on the king's good side, however, would receive the beneficial aspects of the royal treasury: his loyal supporters, Orderic asserts, were rewarded with riches and honours. He may have brought down many among the high and mighty, but others he raised from humble beginnings *(ignobili stirpe)* to the summit of power *(fastigio potestatum)*; men that, as the often quoted dictum has it, he raised from dust *(de puluere)*.[119] William of Malmesbury judges similarly, albeit less

[113] Henry of Huntingdon, vii.27 (p. 456).
[114] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 242; Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 369.
[115] Cf. William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V- 409, 2-3, p. 740.
[116] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XI, ch. 10, iv. 199, p. 56.
[117] John of Worcester 3, p. 106; Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 165.
[118] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XI, ch. 37, iv. 294, p. 167. Translation by Chibnall.
[119] Ibid., book XI, ch. 2, iv. 164-167, p. 16.

dramatically, that the king raised his friends and supporters so high that their exaltation caused jealousy.[120]

In the relationship of Henry I and the nobles of his realm, jealousy was, initially, the smallest of the problems. As a consequence of the marriage with Edith, William of Malmesbury attests, he was mocked by his own men, the royal couple being derisively referred to by as Godgifu and Godric.[121] The tense situation was not much improved when Robert, a hero of the crusade, returned from the Holy Land, and strict lordship as well as the division of Normandy and England began to smart once more, so that almost all of the English magnates *(omnes pene ... optimates)* forsook the fidelity they owed to their king and went over to the duke. Eadmer, and, following him closely, the *Gesta Pontificum*, both trace back the magnates' unrest at the outset of Henry's reign to the arrival of Robert. Characteristically, it is Archbishop Anselm who remains steadfast in his support of the king; styled as the saviour in which the king can continue to place his trust despite the ongoing defections, he is continually brought, by his humble royal supplicant, suspect magnates who he, with stern words, exhorts to abandon their treachery and stand by their king, thus making a major contribution to the crisis being overcome.[122] Although stabilised for some time, the relationship was to remain uneasy. When rumours of his impending excommunication spread, allegedly much mischief was planned for him, a powerful man not greatly loved *(potesti non adeo amatae)*. It certainly is an assertion that Eadmer uses to highlight the immense power an excommunication issued by Anselm would have had, but given the tendency for unrest the king's Anglo-Norman subjects had hitherto shown, it is, as a reference to a fragile political balance, very easily believable. The reaction of the king, well aware of what was going on, was to ostentatiously honour the archbishop by always being the one to seek him out when he needed to contact him rather than (as would have been his regal due) demand that the archbishop come to him. Eadmer interprets this as a sign of the king's delight at the reconciliation – more publicly, it might also be seen as a deliberate acknowledgement of Anselm's powerful position – and, to prove that this power was one that the king did not intend to have against him, a display of the good relationship that had been re-established between the king and the highest prelate of the realm. Henry I was, although he is presented as abundantly grateful about it, once more in full control, showing such respect to the archbishop that an excommunication ought to be utterly out of the question.[123] Yet warding off ecclesiastical punishment did not secure a stable relationship between the king and his magnates. Orderic reports him in 1118 as not having enough manpower to support a long siege, as being unable to trust even the men who ate with him, who would pass on knowledge of his inner counsels to the supporters of his nephew, William Clito. The story is confirmed, with less detail, by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which re-iterates the troubles with

[120] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-411.1, p. 742.
[121] Ibid., book V-394, p. 716.
[122] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 127; William of Malmesbury, Gesta Pontificum, i. 55.3ß11.
[123] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 166.

treachery among the Norman nobles in support of William Clito during the second rebellion in 1124.[124]

Despite these frequent rifts between king and magnates, Henry I seems to have maintained a firm hold on his court. Most famous are Henry of Huntingdon's descriptions of the awe the king commanded among the great of his realm: having returned in victory from Normandy, his enemies crushed and the matters of state ordered to his pleasure, he held his Easter court at Windsor. The Norman and English nobles attended it with fear and trembling *(cum timore et tremore)*, for this was the first time their king was strong, and when he had been younger, they had held him in greatest contempt *(in maximo habebatur despectu)*. But God who, the chronicler assures us, judges differently from men, had chosen to raise Henry I above them, taking Robert from everyone's favour.[125] The theme of fear pervades another of the writer's depictions of the king. Illustrating the vanity of earthly fame, he describes how the bishop Robert Bloet, justiciar of all England and high in the king's favour, was twice sued by the king before a judge of ignoble origin, and twice condemned to pay a heavy fine, which forced him to lower the clothing standards of his household servants. Despairing of the loss of the royal friendship, he is reported as saying that the king had words of praise for one of his men only if he had decided to completely destroy that man. The allusions to the practices of royal favour certainly sound dire. Henry of Huntingdon explains this episode no further than stating that the king was a man of greatest guile *(summe simultatis)* and inscrutable purpose *(mentis inscrutabilis)*. Malevolent royal plans for the bishop are certainly not visible when Bloet dies in the presence of the king who (being powerful only in earthly things) could not help him.[126] William of Malmesbury likewise alludes to the king's grip on his nobles: his prudent justice had helped win their respect; if any among the great forgot the oath he had sworn and swerved from the loyalty he owed, the king would bring him back with effective counsel and persistent labour. Others (presumably those who could not be thus moved by lighter measures), he recalled by the severity of the wounds he caused them, expending much labour on the rebellious, suffering nothing to go unpunished that might have impaired his dignity. This practice, the monk concludes, ensured that the king was only once betrayed from within, by a servant who suffered a rigorous punishment for his treachery. He thus remained secure for most of his life, holding fettered the hearts of all in fear, their speech in love.[127]

Henry I had no qualms about putting his adamant hold to use. The *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* reports that the king, having seized frontier fortresses of his magnates, would often fortify them as if they were his own,[128] while the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle remarks that the king married his daughter off to Geoffrey of Anjou "despite the fact that it offended all the French and the English", seeing in it a possibility to achieve both peace and an ally against his nephew William

---

[124] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XII, ch. 5, iv. 328, p. 200; Anglo-Saxon Chronice, p. 248, p. 253; Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 369 and p. 375 respectively. John of Worcester, p. 143, also mentions the treachery among the Norman magnates.
[125] Henry of Huntingdon, vii. 26 (p. 454-457).
[126] Ibid., c. 2 (p. 586-588).
[127] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-411. 3-4, p. 742-744.
[128] Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VIII- 31, p. 252.

Clito.[129] Although he might have been wont to endow his favourites with lavish gifts, hunting rights he withheld for himself, famously ordering that the feet of dogs living close to forests had to be mutilated. Only few of his nobles and familiars were conceded the privilege of hunting even within their own woods.[130]

It is noteworthy that depictions of the workings of Henry I's court comprise, far more often than in the time of his father and brother, descriptions of the court becoming a stage for the balancing of the kingdom's symbolic hierarchy. One of the most well-known incidents, presumably because of Stephen's later conduct, is the struggle between Robert of Gloucester and Stephen of Blois about who should be the first to have the honour of swearing fealty to the king's daughter and designated heiress. It was not the only discord within that particular ceremony. The Worcester chronicle fastidiously details the proceedings, describing how first the archbishops and then the bishops according to their rank *(per ordinem)* swore their allegiance, and how it then moved on to the secular lords, yet not without bemoaning the fact that the assembly was proceeding not in the traditional way, in which the abbots would have taken precedence over the laity. Willfully, not out of necessity *(non necessario sed pro uelle commutatus)*, this order had been reversed, the chronicler states, and, when the abbots' turn to swear finally comes – after the entire laity, earls, barons, sheriffs and knights, had sworn the oath, they complain bitterly about the breach in ceremonial, the perverted order of the ritual *(preposterum ordinem)*. The abbots, contrary to ecclesiastical law, had been held in low esteem, placed below even such laymen that were subject to them. The king is not willing to tolerate discussion of precedence at this moment, drowning the rising argument by stating, simply, that the abbots should let the matter stand as it had been done and swear the oath as all the others had done. They do so, and the council is concluded. It is when the great among the laity are pledging their fealty that the incident between Robert of Gloucester and Stephen of Blois occurs. King David of Scotland had sworn, and so had the English queen. The one who conducted these proceedings then called on Robert of Gloucester, sitting on the honourable place to the left of the king *(ad sinistrum pedem regis sedentem)*, to come forward and swear the oath. Robert states that Stephen should take precedence over him, since he was the older of the two (*maior natu)*. Stephen was also sitting, as Robert points out, in the even more honoured place at the king's right *(hic ad dextrum pedem regis sedens)*. Without further ado, this is accepted, and Stephen pledges his faith before Robert of Gloucester. The entire account is written in hindsight, hinting heavily at the fraudulence with which Stephen was to acquire the crown. The chronicler may well have been using the outrage at the perverted order, the disdained abbots, whose plight he underlines with a number of allusions to the psalms, to heighten the sense of foreboding: he closes with the sinister words that he would (if he did not fear that the king might condemn his head for doing so) deign to call all who had sworn at the assembly as guilty of perjury.[131] The *Historia Novella* also mentions the exchange between Stephen and Robert of Gloucester. His depiction is far from the version the Worcester chronicle presents,

---

[129] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 256; Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 377.
[130] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XI, ch. 23, iv. 238, p. 100.
[131] John of Worcester, p. 176-183.

as he has the two striving for the honour of swearing fealty first, one claiming the privilege of a son *(piuilegium filii)*, the other the dignity of the nephew *(dignitatem nepotis)*.[132]

It was by far not the only collision about matters of rank and prestige at the court of the king. The Worcester chronicle describes the faux pas of the Bishop of York. The prelate had arrived at the king's magnificent Christmas court with a cross borne before him, and claimed equality with Canterbury and the right to crown the king, as his predecessors had allegedly done. His demand was unanimously refused, and, worse than that, his cross-bearer was unceremoniously thrown out of the chapel when the assembled bishops affirmed that a metropolitan bishop had no right to have a cross borne before him when he was moving beyond the confines of his own diocese.[133] With understandable bias for the York side of the Canterbury-York dispute, Hugh the Chanter has the archbishop of York withdraw humbly at the king's request: following a complaint of the archbishop of Canterbury that he would not attend court if the archbishop of York was to have his cross borne before him, the king had feared that the solemnity of his court might be disturbed by the dispute, and consequently requested that the York prelate stay at his lodgings.[134]

Prelates appeared to positively vie for the privileges of rank and public acknowledgement that the royal court had to offer. Eadmer records how, after Anselm's death, the archbishop of York and the bishop of London fought over the right to celebrate Mass and crown the king at the Christmas court in the place of the deceased archbishop of Canterbury. The island's second archbishop expected the honour to be his, and had already "presented himself entirely prepared" for the occasion. Ignoring the northerner's technically higher rank, the London shepherd had already claimed both privileges for himself, asserting, as Eadmer adds later by means of an explanation, that he was dean of Canterbury and had, at that, been consecrated earlier than his spiritual brother. When they had proceeded to the king's table and the time had come for them to sit down, dissension arose between them about who was to sit where, the archbishop apparently not willing to accept a further slight to his honour, after he had already suffered the humiliation of coming "fully prepared" – which, it might be assumed, comprised full ceremonial vestments – just to watch another celebrate the office. The king finally grew tired of this, and, "not wanting to listen to them" ordered them both to take their meal in their own lodgings. Eadmer rather snidely remarks that the London bishop's upward social mobility possessed an element of planning: without doubt, he sneers, this very priority was the reason for all the haste he had displayed in cunningly attaining consecration. The dispute, he closes, remained unresolved, to be decided by a future archbishop of Canterbury – apparently, sorting out the inter-ecclesiastical hierarchy was not the king's task, although certainly not for lack of trying: the dispute between York and Canterbury would often have recourse on the royal opinion, whether Henry I was willing to hear

---

132 Historia Novella, i.3, p. 8.
133 Cf. John of Worcester, p. 164-167.
134 Cf. Hugh the Chanter, p. 216.

it or, as in this case, was not.[135] While this particular incident shows the king in total control of the hierarchical pecking order at court, this is not always the case – even he had to comply with the rules that were in place with regard to ceremonial.

Such a cutting-down-to-size of the king occurs in the *Gesta Pontificum* as well as in the *Historia Novorum,* from where William of Malmesbury presumably borrowed it. It was the king's marriage that was to take place at Windsor, and therefore the right to officiate was claimed by Bishop Roger of Salisbury, as the chosen place for the festivities lay within his diocese. The claim was challenged by the archbishop of Canterbury: Eadmer has him claim the royal couple as special parishioners, the care of whom always lay with the primate – William of Malmesbury, who uses the episode to depict the hot temper of the old archbishop, skips these reasons, and simply records the humiliation of the upstart bishop as he is, although most powerful (being Henry I's key administrator), forced to strip off the sacred vestments that he had already dressed in. The archbishop then, being impaired by illness, delegates the actual task the privilege of which he had just obtained – but the point is made. The festivities do not proceed as planned even after this incident. When he approaches the altar, the archbishop notices (William of Malmesbury has someone point it out to him) that the king is sitting on his throne, wearing the crown – which, depending on the writer, bemuses or angers him. The king humbly (or respectfully) *(suppliciter assurgente / dignanter assurgente)* rises as the archbishop, in full ceremonial vestments, swerves from his path to the altar, bears down on him, and demands to know who had crowned him. The king does not know, and in Eadmer's case answers particularly sheepishly: with bowed head *(demisso vultu)* and meek voice *(modesta voce)* he admits that he must have forgotten in all the humdrum of the big court. Whoever had done it, the archbishop declares, had done so unjustly; and William of Malmesbury's vengeful prelate adds the threat that either the king was to take off the crown or he would refuse to celebrate Mass. That, of course, is not the outcome the king wants: "If, as you declare, it has been done unjustly, make it so that you will recognise it as justly; you will have no contradiction from me." William of Malmesbury's version reads: "No, lord father, correct what has been done wrongly, and do not neglect what ought to be done." The archbishop pulls off the crown while the king undoes the chinstrap, and does so in such a brisk way that the bystanders feel compelled to restrain him.[136]

The king is thus shown to honour the ceremonial rules of court – a far more pragmatic scene depicts him as also obeying more general rules of courtly conduct. When Henry I demanded that a rebellious Norman vassal hand back the *domus* he had been given, said vassal arrogantly refused to comply with the king's wishes. Although the royal vengeance was exceedingly swift and very

---

[135] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 212, a passage that deserves to be quoted in full: "*Ipsa die archiepiscopus Eboracensis se loco primatis Cantuariensis regem coronaturum, et missam sperans celebraturum, ad id omnio paratum semet exhibuit. Cui episcopus Lundoniensis non adquiescens coronam capiti regis imposuit, eumque per dextram induxit ecclesiae, et officium diei percelebravit. At cum ad mensam regis ventum esset et de loco sessionis inter eosdem episcopos dissentio mota fuisset, noluit eos rex audire, sed utrumque a prandio suo remotum pransuros hospitia suae praecepit adire. Et quidem quod episcopus Lundoniensis ita fecit, ut alia taceam, ea ratione usus est quod et decanus est ecclesiae Cantuariensis, et item, juxta institutionem beati Gregorii Anglorum apostoli, tunc prior alterius extitit quia prius eo fuerat ordinatus. Cujus nimirum prioratus gratia se sub tanta festinatione, ut supra diximus, licet aliud in populo praedicaretur, in pontificatum ordinari gnarus expetiit... . Sed de sessione prandii regalis tunc inter episcopos res ita remansit, determinanda judicio futuri pontificis Cantuariorum.*"

[136] Ibid., p. 202-203; William of Malmesbury, Gesta Pontificum, i.71, p. 210-212.

rigorous, it was not exacted at court: "You have come to my court, and I will not seize you here."[137]

There are few complaints about the court of Henry I. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's lament, as drastic and condemning as it sounds, that "always wherever the king went, there was, because of his court, wholesale raiding upon his miserable people, and with that very often burnings and slaughter of men"[138], stands very much alone. Remarks concerning 'bad counsellors' are scarcely found. The court's personnel often seems volatile, easy to incite to rebellion, swift to leave the king, but is vigorously held together when, for the time being, they have no other option but to follow their king. When chroniclers emphasised, for the court of William II, the king's lavish gifts to followers, his ability to draw knights and retainers to his court by his sheer wealth and munificence, the descriptions of the court of Henry I are much more centred on the magnificence of the king himself, the splendour with which he surrounded his person, the courtly festivities and the symbolic hierarchy within the court. Especially the latter aspect may have become particularly significant at the court of a king who was less of a warrior than his father and his brother had been; it might point to the king's awareness of how his royal prestige might be increased by symbolic representations and stylisations. The definite shift, in historiography, towards lengthily describing practices that are classically associated with the field of 'symbolic communication' and 'ritual' may or may not indicate that the court of Henry I set greater store by such displays. Certainly, if there was no increase in gestures of symbolic value, writers seem to have been more aware of them. Eadmer's work might be taken as a case in point that Henry I's court was, indeed, a more intricate affair than that of his brother (if not that of his father's, where written sources for the courtly business of the reign *per se* are very regretfully lacking), as the quarrelsome chronicler pays attention to such details, and finds more to report on Henry I.

*The Inner Circle of Stephen*

Between the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's sordid, greedy leeches, William of Malmesbury's money-loving schemers, the *Gesta Stephani*'s last bulwark of order and Henry of Huntingdon's band of traitors, Stephen's court has a tendency to appear volatile. With the king, as the chronicles depict him, constantly on the move, incessantly embroiled in battle or learning of another treachery, there seems little narrative space left for the less obviously dramatic incidents at court. It has already been commented on that the king's relationship to his vassals was uneasy at best. We cannot, of course, be sure whether this was, as the *Gesta Stephani* alleges and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle at times affirms, the fault of particularly insurgent and treacherous subjects who strove for their own gain against the good of the kingdom, or, as a number of other writers present it, due mainly to Stephen's unreliability, faithlessness and tendency to imprison political dissidents in the putative security of his court. Whatever we may choose to assume, there is a further hint that Stephen might not have had entirely the right touch when it came to matters and standards of the court. The Hexham chronicle, usually well-informed on matters of the north

[137] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 6, book XII, ch. 11, iv. 339-340, p. 214-216. Royal vengeance struck the wayward vassal almost as soon as he himself reached his castle, because the king had swiftly readied his troops and sent them there.
[138] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 239 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 367.

and far less detailed where the rest of England is concerned, provides a rare glimpse into a feast day at the royal court at the end of the king's consolidation journey through the Northern provinces. He had met up with King David of the Scots, who had invaded England (supposedly) as a consequence of his allegiance to the empress. The two monarchs reached a serviceable agreement, with the Scottish prince swearing allegiance to Stephen, and afterwards accompanying him at his Easter court. Stephen, to show his regard for the recently acquired ally, seated him at the most honourable place, to his right. The gesture was the cause for much contempt among the potent members of the court: the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Earl of Chester – who was to take a prominent role as a switcher of allegiances and enemy of Stephen – and a number of other nobles speak scornfully of the princeling, obviously offended that the young man, only recently won as an ally, should take precedence over them in the king's favour. Their statement of discontent does not end there. Very decidedly and very publicly, the malcontents draw the line at this behaviour of the king that they were not willing to tolerate. They withdraw from court, thus refusing to acknowledge the hierarchy of favour the king had presented there.[139]

Such glimpses into the machinery of Stephen's court are rare. Depictions of the court as perceived from the outside, however, abound – and they are, generally speaking, not very flattering. Of those describing the king and his adherents, Henry of Huntingdon, in his greatest set-piece scene, the battle in which the king is eventually captured, offers certainly the literarily most elaborated narrative, and the most intriguingly apparently objective condemnation of the king and his adherents.[140] The Earl of Gloucester addresses his followers in a rousing battle speech: Stephen had cruelly usurped the realm against his sacred oath *(contra sacramenta ... regnum crudeliter usurpauit)*, thrown it into a disorder in which thousands died, plundered men of their possessions to give away lands unjustly. He calls upon God, exhorts his men that there can be no retreat for them, that fighting is their last resort and that for that reason, God would be with them. The following scenes are almost cinematic, underlining Henry of Huntingdon's purpose to produce history for the masses, and his great narrative skill. One by one, he enumerates Stephen's adherents, the men against whom the rebels have to fight, switching to present tense to heighten the suspense, describing them as if they had just come into focus, had just stepped onto the stage: "there appears in arms against you Alan, duke of the Bretons" *(Alanus Britonum dux contra uos ... procedit armatus)*. The effect is heightened even further by the writer's use of "*procedere*" – one is compelled to imagine the barons of whom he speaks walking forward one by one. And thus, one by one, Stephen's nobles assemble before the reader, and each of them is branded with a dire crime:

Alan is "an abominable man, stained with every kind of crime, not acknowledging an equal in evil, whose impulses are unfailingly harmful, who regards it as the one supreme disgrace not to be incomparable in cruelty." Without pause, he plunges on: "there also appears against you the count of Meulan, an expert in deceit, a master of trickery, who was born with wickedness in his blood, falsehood in his mouth, sloth in his deeds, a braggart by nature, stout-hearted in talk, faint-

[139] Cf. Richard of Hexham, p. 72-73.
[140] For the entire description, see Henry of Huntingdon, x. 13-17, p. 724-737.

hearted in deed, the last to muster, the first to decamp, slow to attack, quick to retreat."[141] There is not a crime that is left out: Earl Hugh is a notorious perjurer, the one constancy of the count of Aumale lies in wrong-doing, and his wife had fled from him because of his scurrility – next to him steps onto the stage the adulterer who had stolen said fugitive wife *(predicto sponsam abripuit)*, a lecher that reeks of wine. He is followed by a man who talks and promises, but never follows up his words with action – wary of not overworking his style, Henry of Huntingdon then 'zooms out' to have the earl condemn the rest of the host in one fell swoop: robbers, pillagers, murderers, every last one of them a perjurer. His men, so he resumes his address, had been lifted up and favoured by the great King Henry, but thrown down and destroyed by Stephen *(... quos magnus rex Henricus erexit, iste deiecit, ille instruxit, iste destruxit...)*, and they were now to take arms and have their vengeance, carrying out the judgement of God.[142]

This would seem like a most eloquent condemnation of Stephen and his adherents, and clearly in favour of Henry II, were Henry of Huntingdon not to include the king's side as well. He has a pious Stephen witness the omens of his impending downfall: as he attends Mass, a broken candle heralds the contrition he was to experience (*contritionis)*, the breaking of the pyx' chain and its consequent fall his downfall (*ruine)*. The royal efforts are described as most vigorous *(strenuissimus)*, but invariably appear pitiable: his lines are small, the false earls not having brought sufficient forces with them; the only banner flying above the royal line belongs to the king himself. The king cannot address his host himself, for he lacks the solemn voice *(rex Stephanus festiua caret voce)*, and the task of the battle speech is instead taken up by a knight. The cause, he reminds the host, was a just one, as they stood with the king, the troops were powerful, and those standing within the ranks valorous. He praises the king above all the other participants – he, the Lord's anointed (*unctus domini*), would in his own limitless valour equal thousands of them *(virtus autem ipsius regis infinita uobis loco perstabit milium)*. Then, absolutely mirroring the rebels' battle preparations, this speech also moves on to an enumeration of the faithless *(infidos*) in the enemy host. A rabbit-hearted duke, a reckless, traitorous earl with ideas far above his station – but in this case, Henry of Huntingdon's narrative 'zooming out' to view the entirety of the enemy host comes much earlier, with only two rather than six combatants being detailed before. Neither are these men granted entirely the same 'presence' the vicious followers of Stephen are given in Robert of Gloucester's speech, they are not introduced with the customary and very memorable "*procedit"*; an inkling, perhaps, that Henry of Huntingdon's sympathies lay with Henry II. "Deserters and vagabonds", the enemy troop is denounced, less dramatically than in the rebels' sweeping battle-speech, and with that, the cinematic 'distance shot' is finished. While both sides are apparently treated to the same pre-battle display, the writer's partiality for the rebels manifests itself in the length of the individual scenes, their literary elaboration, and, finally, the arguments –

141 For both quotations: Henry of Huntingdon, x. 15 (p. 728-729); translations by Greenway. The Latin reads thus: *"Alanus Britonum dux contra uos – immo, contra Deum – procedit armatus, uir nefandus et omnium scelere generum pollutus, malicia parem nescius, cui nunquam nocendi defuit affectus, cui se non esse crudelitate incomparabilem solum et suppremum uidetur obprobrium. Procedit quoque contra uos comes Melensis, doli callidus, fallende artifex, cui innata est in corde nequitia, in ore fallatia, in opera pigricia, gloriosus corde, magnanimus ore, pusillanimis opere, ad congrediendum ultimus, ad digrediendum primus, tardus ad pugnam, uelox ad fugam."*

142 Cf. ibid. x.15 ( p. 730).

for the king's men do not accuse (implying that they cannot accuse) the earl's men of the same moral depravity of which these, in turn, accuse the king's adherents. The narrative deals the final blow to the king's attendants when the writer shatters the scene just as the royal orator draws his speech to a close – even before he can finish it, "the enemy's din was upon them, the blare of trumpets, the snorting of horses, the thundering of the ground."[143] The king's host and with it its justifications are, both literarily and literally, overrun.

Henry of Huntingdon's narrative feat is, of course, an isolated case. Most depictions of the king and his adherents are far less copious, and focus on the general topos of bad advisors. Although laying the blame for unwanted royal decisions at the door of the king's advisors is usually employed as a criticism aimed at the king himself, many of these instances suggest that there was something more fundamentally wrong with the men surrounding the king. Both the *Gesta Stephani* and the Hexham chronicle agree that the king was deliberately misled by men who, in secret, favoured the cause of his opponents. Neither incident reflects particularly favourable on the king. The Hexham chronicle claims that Stephen had been "cajoled" into believing counsel that would benefit his enemies rather than his own cause – what is more, these advisors were "young" earls, and thus, given the universally accepted folly of youth, nowhere near the ideal counsellors a king should heed. Stephen is, indeed, made to appear very much influenced by them – he scorns the other nobles, who give sounder advice, and exclaims that his enemies, the "cowardly boys", would not dare to do as was feared. In the *Gesta*'s case, the king is eventually kept from attacking the rebels at Bristol, after having been given the rather pointless advice to try and block a river that speedily washed away any such attempts. In both cases, the king, one feels, ought to have realised that he was being misled.[144] William of Malmesbury criticises that the king was gullible *(credulus)* in trusting the bad advice of men who "desired nothing less than peace"; men who were able to lord it over the king for their very own needs *(ei dominari ad utilitates suas ualerent)*.[145] By then, the accusation was levied for the second time – already when he dealt with Stephen's accession, the chronicler had expressed such grave doubts. Men flocked to the new king whom they could, with but little effort, bend to their own advantage (*quem leui negotio ad sua commoda inflectere possent)* – and what kinds of men they were! Primarily men from Flanders and Brittany, mercenaries that were particularly feared and loathed, but also men born in England who had despised the peace of Henry I; men that were violent, greedy, plundered churches, rode down and captured members of the clergy.[146] Henry of Huntingdon is the one who goes furthest in this criticism – he uses the king's great fault, his tendency to hearken to malicious advice, to give in too easily to plots aimed at the destruction of peace, as the very reason for his divinely ordained downfall:

> "Certain ... men ... made it their greatest concern to sow the seeds of discord between the king who was on the spot and the duke who was absent. The king was scarcely able to withstand their persuasive arguments, and it was thought by some that as the time passed he was beginning to

[143] Henry of Huntingdon, x. 17 (p. 736-737), translation by Greenway. *"Sed iam antequam orationis seriem terminaret, clamor adest hostium, clangor litorum, equorum fremitus, terre sonitus."*
[144] Cf. John of Worcester, p. 143; Gesta Stephani, p. 66.
[145] William of Malmesbury, Historia Novella, ii. 40, p. 78; translation by Potter/King, p. 79.
[146] Ibid., i. 18, p.32.

> yield. Not unwilling, yet pretending to be so, he listened too freely to the counsels of the wicked. But the sons of men thought one thing and God thought another: bringing what He had begun to its proper conclusion, He reduced to nothing the counsels and perverse machinations of the wicked. ... While he [the king] was talking with him [the count of Flanders] he was struck by illness and then by death..."[147]

The king here is barely more than a puppet, unable to make a stand (*restare)* against the force of the persuasions *(uix eorum persuasionibus)*, and, what is more, he even appears to be fully aware that what he is about to embark on is something that he should very decidedly not be doing – for he is trying to conceal *(dissimulans)* that he is inclined towards these whisperings. And, as if it were not bad enough that the king entertained thoughts that needed such concealment, he is competent not even in his deception, as, apparently, people around him begin to suspect that the king will soon give in to the untoward suggestions – they seem well aware of this fault of his.

The perfidy of his attendants thus described does not stop at wrecking havoc in the kingdom to the detriment of its inhabitants: it ruins the king himself. With the sole exception of the Worcester chronicle, which appears to recall one visit of the king particularly emphatically, all chronicles share a common theme as far as the majesty and splendour of the royal court is concerned. There was a show of wealth to begin with, which dwindled to almost nothing as the civil war wore on, and reappeared when peace between the future Henry II and Stephen has been made. Characteristically, the *Gesta Stephani* does not pass comment on the possible impairment of the royal splendour, but recounts it with great relish once it appears: soon after his accession, Stephen is depicted as moving through England splendidly, as it befitted the royal honour *(splendide, sicut regalem decet honirificentiam)*, surrounded by a densely packed, numerous throng of knights, greeted everywhere with great enthusiasm, and doing much for the peace of England, which, as the *Gesta* has it, had been disturbed greatly by Henry I's demise. He expended much in the way of gifts to restore concord between his subjects *(pro concordia inter subiectos restauranda non minimum largiri)* and spent much sweat and much money in the pacification of England and Wales.[148]

His expenses and gifts, mentioned with praise in that instance, were, indeed, to prove a problem in the eyes of other writers. Henry of Huntingdon remarks how the king, after his accession, held the most splendid of courts at Easter, "more splendid for its throng and size, for gold, silver, jewels, robes, and every kind of sumptuousness, than any that had ever been held in England"[149]. The wealth of the king, as he assumes the crown, is great, and puts a stop to many of Stephen's troubles: the count of Anjou found himself "for the present" forced into a truce with the king, not, so it can easily be read between the lines, because the king was particularly apt, but because of the sheer size of his army, and the money that was still left from the deceased king's treasure *(pecunie, que adhuc ex habundantia thesauri regis defuncti supererat)*[150] – Stephen lived on a dead king's expert statesmanship. He does not seem to have been good at it. William of Malmesbury also mentions the gigantic treasure trove *(immensam uim thesaurorum)* that had been

[147] Henry of Huntingdon, x. 39 (p. 772-775), translation by Greenway.
[148] Gesta Stephani, p. 14.
[149] Henry of Huntingdon, x. 4, (p. 707). Translation by Greenway.
[150] Ibid., x. 5 (p. 708-711).

built up primarily by Henry I; he even elaborates on the nature of the abundant wealth, describing fine coins and vessels of both gold and silver. With such treasures at his disposal, he adds laconically, the king could not but have supporters, as he was affluent in giving *(in dando diffusus*). The choice of words should be noted: there is no virtuous *largitas* here, no *magnaminitas* – the king simply pours out wealth, and this irks the chronicler: Stephen was, not at all fitting for a king, a spendthrift.[151]

This is not a trait that can be maintained for long without damage, even given a exceptionally well-filled treasury at the beginning of the reign, and to William of Malmesbury it fuelled entirely the wrong expectations: already by 1138, but four years after the death of Henry I, many, for various despicable reasons (such as high birth and the boldness of youth) began to ask Stephen, as the chronicler, visibly exasperated in his choice of words, complains, here for estates *(hi predia)*, there for castles *(hi castella)*; finally, for whatever caught their fancy *(quaecumque semel collibuisset)*. When the king would not give them what they wanted, saying that he would not want the Crown lands to be mutilated, deferring cases in which others had claims or were in possession, these people would immediately rebel, and take what plunder they could. It is true that in the following the writer praises the king for his unbroken spirit and the vigorousness with which he counters these troubles, but there can be no doubt that the source of this outrage is the king. After the king had vainly expended much effort, he continues, he would give *(datis)* them honours or castles, and for a while not gain peace, but a semblance of it *(simulatam ad tempus pacem)*. They demanded more and he gave more – and again William of Malmesbury uses derogating words "*profusior ad dandum*" to denote the king's gift-giving – when the rumour came up that Robert of Gloucester was about to join his sister's side.[152] Evidently, the king was buying the allegiance of the realm's finest, but they would desert him as soon as the money stopped to flow. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle follows along similar lines, but brings up even less disguised accusations against the king: he went to Normandy, where he "distributed and scattered" the treasury of Henry I "stupidly". Worse than that, he showed not the slightest respect for custom (or his predecessor even): while kings who had newly acceded to the throne in the wake of a monarch who had, at least by general standards, reigned well, tended to make splendid tombs and gifts for the benefit of the soul of their predecessors to show that they honoured the past efforts (and thus aimed to emulate or surpass them), Stephen, apart from being present at Henry's funeral, did, in the eyes of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, definitely not live up to these standards: "King Henry had gathered a great amount [in] gold and silver", it remarks, "and no good was done with it for his soul"[153]. After the earl of Chester had begun to rebel against the king because he had not received all that he had asked for, the description of how fruitless the royal endeavours were is almost pitiful to read: "the more he gave them, the worse they were to him"[154]. Henry of Huntingdon's

---

151 William of Malmesbury, Historia Novella, i. 17, p. 30-33.
152 Ibid., i. 21, p. 40.
153 Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 263 (E-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 382: *"Micel hadde Henri k. gadered gold ⁊ sylver na god ne dide me for his saule tharof."*
154 Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 266 (E-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 384: *"... oc æfre þe mare he iaf heom þe wærse hi wæron him."*

analysis of the situation is short and brutal: the royal festivals, the crown-wearing, the splendour of the court – they ceased as soon as the treasury, vast though it had been, had been emptied.[155]

Instances of courtly ceremonial are few and far between. The *Gesta* offers a triumphant procession of magnates as the king is freed from captivity and the knighting of Eustace, whom it describes as an exemplary knight.[156] Henry of Huntingdon offers a particularly dramatic episode in the king's self-display. Despite his former assertions that crown-wearings had disappeared altogether, he describes briefly how the king, boldly and unafraid despite the superstitions which Henry of Huntingdon (alone) claims to be attached to the place, appeared in Lincoln at Christmas, decked in his regalia.[157] More copious is the Worcester chronicle, which twice describes the coming of Stephen to town, his splendid royal entry and magnanimity towards the local church. The visits appear to have genuinely impressed the collective memory on which the author was drawing. Following Easter, Stephen neared Gloucester, where he was greeted with an *adventus* ritual by its citizens. With great joy, they met him more than five miles outside the city and accompanied him with fitting acclamation *(cum fauore propriam conducunt)* to the city. The king was delighted, and put his royal ring upon the altar as an offering which was redeemed by one of his chaplains for 500 shillings the day after. Having thus presented the local church with a gift, the king was conducted to the local palace, where the citizenry pledges its faith to him.[158] Stephen ended his visit to Gloucester by taking part in masses and processions to honour the feast of the Lord's Ascension[159] – a move that seems to display his gratitude for the warm welcome, the pledges of faith, and a move that does, not least, represent his piety and humility.

The second such entry into a town is described not long after, and follows the very same pattern – with the exception of some local pride the chronicler may have thrown in for good measure, as the town that the king was then visiting was Worcester. Again, the king (a *magnificus rex*, splendid, and accompanied by a royal retinue; a king that lacked none of his majesty) was received by the people and the clergy in festive procession *(festiua ... processione)*. His entry was followed by prayers and benediction as was custom *(ex more)*, which indicates strongly that the king was following acknowledged royal behaviour in such situations. Again, he offered his ring on the altar – but instead of having it bought free, the people of Worcester unanimously agree to return it to him, much to this wonder.[160] While the last aspect of the episode, in which the king admires the devotion and humility of the good people of Worcester, is easily identified as beautified so as to throw a particularly good light on the town, the two narrations can be seen as an indicator that the king was still perceived as setting store by the correct protocol and courtly behaviour; and that his majesty might not have been seen as forlorn and bedraggled as William of Malmesbury or Henry of Huntingdon suggest.

Nonetheless, against the splendid courts and abundant descriptions of ritual that surround the figure of Henry I, Stephen pales dramatically. The often short-cropped accounts of royal

155 Cf. Henry of Huntingdon, x.12 (p. 724).
156 Cf. Gesta Stephani, p. 136 and p. 208, respectively.
157 Cf. Henry of Huntingdon, x. 25 (p. 748).
158 John of Worcester 3, p. 240-243.
159 Ibid., p. 242.
160 Ibid., p. 266.

ceremonial testify that ceremonial, indeed, was still valued and enacted (although, perhaps much less splendidly than it ought to have been, on account of the king's dire financial situation). But then, against the backdrop of the civil war, of constant changes of allegiance, troop movements, and varying stages of general despair, any act of – if we choose to accept that that was indeed the function of ritual – publicly acknowledging the divine order of things must seem, if not absurd, than at least as a feeble attempt to preserve normality. This would suggest that there may have been ample ceremonial, ritual and disputes of rank at Stephen's court, but that little of it was eventually depicted, as the events of the day turned out to be too eventful to ignore. Yet while the court may not have lost all of its majesty, its members certainly posed serious problems to the king; problems which, and here there is universal consensus, the king could not easily solve, on account of his pliability and his need to secure allies. Stephen never seems in control of his magnates, and even his most private circles are pervaded by people who wish him ill. With a strong rival to the throne and the crumbling loyalty of his magnates, the king's court is portrayed less as a platform for the display of majesty, and much more like a 'place' where tactics were laid out and allegiances changed; a place that did not exude divine lordship, that was not a safe haven.

*The Inner Circle of Henry II*

Compared to Stephen's fleeting court, the inner circle of Henry II is much more tangible, especially given the writing of his time, which – even in the case of many 'standard' chronicles – was remarkably close to the court and the king.

In modern scholarship, Henry II has become famous for the gesture of laying down his crown upon the altar of Worcester, where he and Eleanor had just solemnly been crowned in the wake of the Pentecost festivities, "for the third time", as Roger of Howden remarks. This coronation, in the fifth year of the king's rule, coincides with the conclusion of the consolidation of the British territories. Placing their crowns on the altar, the king and queen vowed to God never to be crowned *(coronarentur)* again.[161] There have been attempts to interpret this passage as the king relinquishing the custom of ceremonial crown-wearings due to his natural aversion of courtly decorum.[162] However, many of Roger of Howden's further comments hardly testify to a momentous change in royal ceremonial. The great seasonal courts are reported very frequently, and very much in the same way as they were reported for Henry I, and (not) reported for Stephen: often with the simple remark that the feast (and court) days were celebrated solemnly *(solemne ... celebravit).* The accounts, of course, vary to a certain extent in their wording and the number of details mentioned, sometimes including the mention of royal splendour, sometimes listing the illustrious guests that attended these festivities.[163]

---

[161] Roger of Howden 1, p. 216.

[162] Strickland, The Upbringing of Henry, the Young King, p. 196, argues that the gesture of the royal couple laying down their cowns could have been a sign that "from the early 1160s, Henry had intended to use his eldest son as the primary vehicle for Angevin regal display, replacing Becket, who, as chancellor, had excelled himself in providing the pomp and circumstance that Henry normally eschewed." Vincent, The Court of Henry II, p. 326, proposes that crown-wearings were not necessarily abandoned, but that the gesture "may instead have been motivated by a desire to replace the expensive and dispute-ridden ceremony of coronation at the hands of the archbishop of Canterbury with no less lavish display of alms-giving to the poor".

[163] See, for a selection of examples, Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 3, p. 4, p. 175, p. 198, p. 333; Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 3. Similar is Robert of Torigni, p. 255, who states that Henry II's court was held *regaliter*.

These accounts do signal that the court and its ceremonial was running smoothly, but do not give much in the way of details. Walter Map provides a glimpse of what these festivals may have entailed. In his rendition of a Christmas court, which, he asserts, a great number of people attended, natives of the region and strangers alike, there was some discord among those assembled about who had the right to attend on the king with water to wash his hands. A jealous fight, culminating in a hearing of the man who had snatched the silver basin and attended on the king ensued. Numerous charges of mounting severity had been heaped on the head of the accused. More interesting than the outcome of the dispute are the circumstances under which the affront had occurred. Map describes that Henry II had had the court announced *(proclamatum fuit)* with much heralding *(multo preconatu)*, and that, consequently, a great multitude had come to attend. The king, thus, was advertising his presence; and it is safe to assume that a certain protocol was maintained. Map fastidiously lists the illustrious personages attending the court, and, when the alleged miscreant-to-be makes his entrance to seize upon the duty he perceived to be rightfully his, the writer remarks that he was escorted by many knights as he was wont to do. This alone gives an impression of the kind of affair the king's courts may have been, and the space allocated to the offender's defence suggests not only a jibe at the court's malevolence, but also the importance ascribed to ceremonial offices.[164] The king was no exception in this attention to ostentatious detail: Map professes that he was always wrapped, as was his due, in the most precious of cloths – but, the writer is swift to assert (seeing that his purpose is writing a critique of the ostentatious poverty of the Carthusians), the king was nonetheless of highly modest disposition, and nowhere near self-elation and pride.[165]

If this flattering praise was applicable to the king's person, Henry II seems to have known little modesty when it came to having his court represented in the outside world.[166] This is particularly noticeable in the highest form of diplomacy: arranging marriages. To fetch the bride of the young king, Thomas Becket, then still chancellor, arrived in Paris *in apparatu magnu,*[167] indisputably sent to demonstrate the wealth of the future bridegroom's family and to intimidate the constant rival France. William Fitzstephen, in one of the lives on Becket, describes the embassy with more attention to detail, listing the numerous attendants in the chancellor's train, the two hundred and fifty men that, singing, went before him, the hawks and hounds that accompanied him, the eight wagons, each pulled by five fine horses in the strength of their youth, which bore not only the chancellor's personal belongings, but also English beer as a gift to the French. The chancellor seems to be accompanied by his entire household. More horses bore vestments, books, crockery, gold and silver, while he himself walked at the end of the lengthy procession. The French showed themselves sufficiently impressed, saying: "*Mirabilis est ipse rex*

[164] Cf. Walter Map, dist. v, c. 6, p. 488-495.
[165] Cf. ibid., dist. i, c. 28, p. 116.
[166] Schröder, Macht und Gabe is an entire book dedicated to Henry II's royal representation and particularly the giving of gifts in the context of his court.
[167] Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 1, p. 302.

*Anglorum, cujus cancellarius talis et tantus incedit*'. The splendid embassy, then, was a definite success: the chancellor's ostentation impressed upon the foreigners the greatness of his employer.[168]

A similar attention to ostentatious detail is described by Benedict of Peterborough upon the marriage of the king's daughter Joan to the king of Sicily. There could hardly be a better occasion to display wealth and generosity than in the transfer of a bride-to-be, and Henry II did his best, displaying material wealth, the extent of his domains, and his influence on his *fideles*. Besides "preparing her necessities", he outfitted her envoys with "horses and clothes, gold and silver, and precious vessels" and only when he had fulfilled everything according to his honour and custom, he permitted them to leave – and, on the way to Sicily, made effective use of his vast 'empire'. He ordered the Young King to receive the bride and her envoys in Normandy with the highest reverence of honour, then to escort her to Poitou, where she was to be received by Richard, who in turn was to receive her with honour, and conduct her through his lands. The division of duties among his sons effectively demonstrated the family as a closed front that diligently guarded the individual pieces of the huge realm. The king did not only outfit his daughter with valuable objects and had her escorted through his possessions, he also ordered her to be accompanied by ornaments of a more animate nature: with her went the archbishops of Canterbury and Rouen, the bishops of Ely and Evreux and two further nobles.[169]

Ostentatious regal splendour and relations to foreign courts would often go hand in hand. For the coronation of Philip II of France, Henry II, while not present himself, sent great gifts of gold and silver, and game. The last of the gifts being perhaps the most regal, seeing that live game must have been difficult to transport and was, of course, the distinguishing mark of noble pasttime. Instead of Henry II, the Young King was present at the coronation – but he, too, was made to represent his father's court well. Not only was he accompanied by a large entourage of knights, his father had also "ordered him to bear so much with him that he did not need to take up anything during both the festivity and his travels"[170] – the prince, in short, was given ample money to pay for both his large entourage and himself.

In his own court, Henry II would prove lavish, too. Gerald of Wales appreciatively notes that he received the prince of Leinster with great kindness, and diligently listened to his pleas for aid. The king did not only outfit him with a letter that would allow him to search for support among Henry's vassals, but also sent him on his way laden with honourable gifts.[171]

The king's most impressive feat of generosity in his relation to other courts might be his Woodstock court in 1186. In the course of the festivities, the king of Scotland was married to the daughter of a viscount, whose hand in marriage Henry II had promised to the northern monarch. The bride-to-be and her parents were received "with the honour and excellence as royally

[168] William Fitzstephen (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, vol. 3, p. 29-33). The author also includes Becket's munifience as he resided in Paris. There can, of course, be little doubt that Fitzstephen's description is exaggerated, seeing that many of Becket's biographers were wont to juxtapose the splendid life of the chancellor to the sanctity of the archbishop's life. The embassy is also discussed in van Eickels, Vom inszenierten Konsens zum systematisierten Konflikt, p. 335, and Schröder, Macht und Gabe, p. 202, with special attention to beer as a gift as opposed to wine.
[169] Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 120.
[170] Robert de Torigni, p. 287.
[171] Cf. Gerald of Wales, Expugnatio Hibernica, book 1, ch. 1, p. 227.

befitting". The court a few days after their arrival seems to simply have been extended to include parts of the Scottish court, with the Scottish king, his brother, the bishop of Glasgow and "some counts and barons of the Scottish kingdom" being present for the ceremony held in the king's chapel. The nuptials were celebrated in Henry's palace, which he had caused to be provisioned with everything necessary, and the celebrations lasted for four days.[172] There may, of course, have been more to that marriage than simple generosity and display of wealth. In the aftermath of the rebellion of 1173/1174, during which the king of Scots had been captured, Scotland – not only its king, but also its nobility and clergy – had been sworn to the king of England, and Henry II, described by Roger of Howden as William the Lion's *dominus*, was exerting a lord's control over the conquered king. His readiness to do so becomes clear in other episodes, and one, especially, casts a darker light on the wedding. Only six years earlier, William the Lion had been at odds with the bishop of St. Andrews. The pope had excommunicated an alternative candidate, but the king flatly refused to be reconciled with the bishop, saying, even, "that as long as he lived, never would he and John [said bishop] reside in the kingdom of Scotland at the same time". That said, he seized the bishop's goods and see and John and his relatives, among them the bishop of Aberdeen, fled the country. Together with the papal legate, they fled to Henry II in Normandy. His reaction to the bishops' pleas was prompt: he ordered *(postulans)* the king to entirely renounce the anger he might bear against the bishops as a token of love and admonition – and, which was more, to either appear himself in Normandy, prepared for his defence, or to send sufficient delegates to do so.[173] The episode remains unfinished, but the message is clear enough: it is very close to being the same humiliating situation which King John would some twenty-four years later find himself in, when he was summoned to the court of the French king. Henry II had still allowed the king to send representatives, but the demand is harsh enough: the Scottish king, who must have treasured his control over his Church at least as much as Henry II treasured his, would have to travel all the way to Normandy – even perhaps traversing England on the way – to answer to charges laid against him by his own vassals.[174] Henry II was effectually depriving William the Lion of the control over his kingdom. The way in which Roger of Howden stresses the king's rage at the bishop, his outcry to never suffer him in his lands again as long as he lived, only accentuates the total setback and humiliation for the king of Scotland. The attempt of Henry II to raise the Saladin tithe in Scotland may have failed,[175] but seen as a whole, he was noticeably using his overlordship in Scotland. Interpreting the marriage of William the Lion as another step in this direction becomes easier if one imagines (although it is quite impossible) Henry II being married in the private chapel of Louis VII.

[172] Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 351. The description in Roger of Howden 2, p. 309-310, is briefer.
[173] Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 265-266.
[174] At this stage, it is perhaps needless to points out the remarkable irony of two bishops fleeing from royal persecution into the arms of none other than Henry II.
[175] Cf. Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 44. The Scottish barons had refused to pay the tithe, forcing the king's envoys to return to England unsuccessfully.

Not all of the king's generous acts came at such a price, and, among foreign princes, he seemed to have enjoyed an excellent reputation.[176] "All the princes also of the earth", comments Gerald of Wales, "Christian as well as infidel, and as Frederick of Germany, so Manuel of Greece, and as Noradin in his own time, and after him Saladin, and as these of Asia, so also those of Europe and of Spain, as well those of the household of faith as infidels, were accustomed to honour and to visit him by valuable presents and by frequent ambassadors."[177] Robert of Torigni, in like vein, remarks that Henry II was even sent gifts by the heathen king of Valencia – gold, silk and other wares on horses and camels.[178]

What was the court like that possessed such a wide influence? It is remarkable that there are so few comments on the king's counsellors or *familiares*. Roger of Howden notes that the Irish came to the king to complain about the nobles he had selected as their superiors, alleging that they had unjustly and violently treated them – their clamour, so the chronicler writes, moved him to wrath, and "for a long time he removed them from his former *familiaritate*"[179]. Critique at the governance of Henry II often aims, if not at the king himself, then at his officials – who are, one is inclined to surmise, farther removed from the king himself than his courtiers and counsellors would be. The closest we can get to the king's court in narration is in Walter Map, and, to a small extent, in John of Salisbury's *Entheticus*. the writer, after extensively lamenting the rottenness of the court during the reign of Stephen, finds some words for the court of Henry II – and they, too, are not altogether favourable. His comment bears some criticism for the rashness of youth, drunk on fortune, that would believe everything legitimate and possible; but overall seems resigned to the sentiment that courts, whoever may rule them, will always be turbulent places abounding with snares for the virtuous, filled with trifling courtiers and their lust for all things sinful.[180] Walter Map, too, concedes that the court was a place that may have been too vibrant for its own good, but for which, ultimately, the king could not be blamed, as the task set before could only be performed by God himself.[181]

Despite an unprecedented depth of record, the nature of the inner circle of Henry II as seen through the eyes of contemporary narration is difficult to determine. Remarks about the moral integrity of those who served the king would swiftly move into a much wider group of people than the close circle of counsellors and selected favourites one is wont to expect: the king's officials, who are rarely associated with the many faces of court. In its representative functions, however, the court of Henry II is much easier to trace. If his 'domestic' courts seem to have sported all the regality expected, while, as the lack of comments suggests, not being overly impressive, he outdid himself when it came to representing England abroad. It was under such

[176] Much of this reputation will be discussed in the chapter on the justice of Henry II, as it directly concerns the king's reputation as a mediator and man of justice.
[177] Stevenson, Concerning the Instruction of Princes, ch. 1, p. 12. Translation by Stevenson. For the original, see De principis instructione, dist. 2, ch. 1, p. 157-158. The next chapter, ch. 2, p. 158-159, continues this praise of the king's fame abroad.
[178] Cf. Robert de Torigni, p. 215.
[179] Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 221.
[180] Laarhoven, Entheticus Maior and Minor 1, part III, par. 95, line 1463-1474. Vol. 2, p. 389-390, identifies the court of the young (*puero*) king with that of Henry II, who was 21 at his accession to the English throne.
[181] Cf. Walter Map, dist. i, c. 10 (p. 24). See also dist. v, c. 7 (p. 510-513). The focus of Map's criticism, however, lies on the king's officials, and is hard to compare to earlier (and later) comments on counsellors and *familiares*.

circumstances that he might become abundantly munificent – a trait that may have been crucial in the formation of the positive image his court had beyond the isle.

*The Inner Circle of Richard I*

Compared to the vibrant and well-documented court of his father, Richard's inner circle is difficult to pinpoint. To this day, the king is notorious for having spent a remarkably short time of his reign within England itself. Constantly on the move, spearheading military campaigns both within his territories and far away, it is admittedly difficult to conceive how he could possibly have maintained a court of such high profile as that of Henry II, whose illustrious familiars, having to follow an itinerant court, did of course also need to travel certain distances, but these were nowhere near the scale of the distance that the crusade put between remaining close to Richard and their seeing to their lands. It is symptomatic of Richard's character and the way in which he was perceived that the few discussions of his followers that we find date from the onset of his reign, when he was still in England. Once the king had set out on the crusade, the focus of historiographic narration shifts dramatically. It is no longer an account concerning a reigning king, but the itinerary and *gestae* of a knight and crusader who had a dazzling impact on those who retold his story. Advisors simply do not feature.

In one of those few examples in which we encounter Richard building or maintaining a circle of familiars, Roger of Howden informs the reader appreciatively that Richard had honourably retained those of his father's followers who had remained faithful in the war, but conceived a hatred for those who had sided with the winning side – Philip II and himself.[182] The king chose, so the message, to surround himself with followers who had remained faithful; valuing trustworthiness above opportunism or services rendered. He did, however, not always choose his followers with such foresight. Of all possible wrong decisions, it was his choice of chancellor that most agitated England during his absence. For that time, Longchamp, who had been entrusted with the king's seal and, as bishop of Ely, papal legate, chancellor to the king and justiciar of all England, dominated the accounts of England's internal affairs. The complaints are remarkably similar. According to Roger of Howden, Longchamp ignored those who had been selected to advise him, robbed clergy and laity of their possessions to distribute these among his followers and travelled with such a vast train of men and animals that even houses that endured him for a single night needed three years before they could be restored to their former state[183]

William of Newburgh is no less dark, claiming that he kept sees vacant, abused a church council for self-display, arrogantly ordered about both laity and clergy, and pranced across the country with a thousand horses, like a swarm of locusts devastating the monasteries whose hospitality he abused in his role as papal legate.[184] Despite the universal groan that the chancellor's exploits elicited from England's chroniclers, William of Newburgh is the only one who proposes to attach any significant blame for these incidents to the king – remarking that in

---

[182] Cf. Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 72.

[183] Cf. Roger of Howden 3, p. 72. See also Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 144; ibid., p. 214 has England rejoice at Longchamp's eventual fall.

[184] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 4, ch. 14, p. 331-334.

the course of his overly hasty, unadvised and unceremonious departure from England he had made a foreigner of obscure name administrator to the kingdom.[185] Others remarked that the king had attempted to take care of the situation as soon as he heard of it, but the letters that should have admonished the wayward chancellor to hearken to his advisors had not been relayed, the timorous messengers fearing possible consequences, so that Longchamp continued to spurn the king's orders.[186] The king, in short, was not the one to be blamed for the turmoil in England.

Longchamp is the only one of Richard's retainers who plays a significant role after his immediate accession. During the crusade, decisions appear to have been made by war councils, with many chroniclers noting the detrimental influence of the French in these councils. It is only towards the end of the venture – when many narratives turn to apologetically explaining why Richard had to leave the crusade unfinished – that individual interest groups, like the Templars, become visible as advisors and decision-makers.[187] A chapter from the *Itinerarium* even hints that advising the king was something exceptional. An obscure Poitevin chaplain – rather than a high-ranking noble – hovers at the edge of a tent in which Richard sits in silent mediation, and, weeping, does not dare approach the king until asked to do so. Only after Richard has sworn that he would not be angered by what he was to say does he admit that he feared how the king's reputation would suffer from a decision to return to England, before lapsing into a lengthy, fulsome praise of the king and his deeds that closes with declaring Richard the father of the crusaders; the *patronus et defensor Christianitatis*.[188] The narrative purpose of the passage is of course abundantly clear, but it beautifully underlines the overall mode of presentation adapted for Richard: he is cast into the mould of a lone fighter, standing at the contested position at the very top of a pyramid of chivalric exchange, neither allowing nor needing interference. Of course, this brought the advantage that the king was never criticised as having hearkened to bad advice.

Richard himself, as far as it is possible to tell, seems comfortable in this position, and there is barely an account in which he does not radiate self-confidence. Paradigmatic for the king's unshakable confidence in the strength of his position is his exchange with two worried abbots who visited him during his captivity, bringing him the alarming news that his brother John was attempting to incite a rebellion against him. Richard did lament the treachery of his brother, who had broken the bonds between them only to enter into a pact with death and the devil (personified in Philip II of France) – but soon added in a consolatory voice the derogatory statement that his brother was not the man to subjugate a country, as long as there was someone who offered the slightest resistance to him.[189]

---

[185] Cf. ibid., book 4, ch. 3, p. 306-307.

[186] Cf. Roger of Howden 3, p. 96-97; Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 158. The messengers were none other than Walter of Coutances, archbishop of Rouen, and William Marshal. Judging by the standing of these two, it would be difficult to maintain that Richard thought the problem not worth his notice.

[187] For instance, the Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 5, ch. 1, p. 308, describes that a council, at the instigation of the Templars, decided to rebuild Ascalon rather than proceed to Jerusalem, much to the disappointment of many of the crusaders.

[188] Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book V, ch. 46, p. 361-364. The passage is the climax of the entire chronicle's extensive 'retarding moment' before the elaborately embellished 'catastrophe', the well-excused failure of the third crusade. This apologetic narrative will be discussed in connection to the 'story' of Richard the Lionheart.

[189] Cf. Roger of Howden 3, p. 198.

Such confidence was likely to have had repercussions on how the king deigned to present himself in public. And although the possibilities for the lionhearted monarch of establishing and maintaining an elaborate courtly ceremonial or decking himself in symbols of power and wealth were relatively limited on account of his frequent campaigning, there is more than ample proof that the king knew well how to stage himself, and in which ways he could cast the most favourable light on his person. Especially at the onset of his reign the Angevin monarch was everything but modest in the representation of his person. Roger of Howden attests a splendid coronation, recorded with such detail and elaborate care that during the entire period considered here, there is none like it.[190] Before the king went a procession of the realm's clergy, which was followed by four eminent nobles, each of which carried one of the golden insignia. John, the brother of the Scottish king and the Earl of Leicester bore three swords from the realm's treasuries, followed by six earls and barons who brought with them the royal robes. A further earl who bore a huge and heavy golden crown, bedecked with precious stones, walked before Richard. The king himself was flanked by two bishops, and walked underneath a silken canopy that four barons held aloft with lances. After the king followed the remainder of what must have been a grand procession: *omnis turba sequebatur*, earls, barons, knights, clergy and laity. Having taken his coronation oath, ritually divested himself of his clothes and received ointment, Richard, once again clothed, took, in another gesture of great confidence and power, the crown from the altar himself *(ipse cepit coronam de altari)* and handed it to the archbishop, who finally placed it upon the king's head. In later coronations, it would always be the archbishop who took the crown from the altar.[191]

The opulently orchestrated ceremony must have been sufficiently effective. Upon his return from captivity, back in his kingdom that had only just resisted John's attempts at seizing the crown, Richard resolved to underline his fiercely vindicated claim to the crown by a ceremony that was strikingly similar to his coronation, and is also reported in detail. The king wore his royal robes and his golden crown; in his right hand he carried the sceptre topped by a cross, in the other a golden rod that bore a dove at its end. Once more, he is sheltered by a canopy and a grand procession follows him, and Roger of Howden takes care to name the most important participants. Having reached the altar, the king received the benediction of the archbishop of Canterbury and heard Mass, before the procession, *ut superibus*, as the writer rather unceremoniously abridges, conducted him to his chamber, where he changed into lighter robes, and picked a lighter crown to wear during the feast that followed.[192]

It would be naive to assume that a king who took so much care in his own representation would abandon ceremony and pomp while he was engaging in warfare, and, indeed, Richard did not. While he could not stage elaborate ceremonies or hold ostentatious courts while far from his territories, he certainly did not fail to make an impression. More than that: accounts of his journey to the east appear to attempt to constantly surpass each other in their descriptions of the

[190] For the entire account, see ibid., p. 9-11, and Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 78-88, for a longer list of illustrious attendees and additional details. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 68-69, is less detailed than Roger of Howden's accounts, but also takes care to name the prelates taking part in the ceremony and attests the event's solemnity.
[191] Cf. Gillingham, Richard the Lionheart, p. 129.
[192] Cf. Roger of Howden 3, p. 247-249.

pomp and majesty with which the king travelled, in accounts of his remarkable generosity towards the entirety of the crusading army and the way in which he treated and was treated by the foreigners he encountered. Richard's journey is made a spectacle of feats of arms and royal largesse, and the king's splendour must have been a source of pride for the chroniclers documenting the journey, for there are few who do not pit their king's wealth against that of Philip II of France, and one needs to look far to find any criticism of the king's extravagant spending.[193]

The *Itinerarium*'s account of Richard's arrival in Messina is perhaps the most revealing of this attitude. The author begins the passage with the statement[194] that kings ought to maintain a certain splendour about their person to properly reflect the powers invested in them. The entrance of the king of France, he writes, was awaited eagerly by many among the populace, who had gathered at the port to witness the arrival of a great prince. The king, however, the author describes with disdain, was content with a single ship and clandestinely entered the port "as if wanting to escape from the sight of the people". The disappointed people began to grumble that a king who was shy to meet the gaze of onlookers would hardly turn out a doer of great deeds. The arrival of Richard is conveniently juxtaposed to that of Philip II, and its depiction, written from the spectators' point of view, could hardly be more different. The *innumeris* ships appear first at the horizon, heralded by the sound of trumpets; as they gradually draw into view, the sea boiling from the labour of the oarsmen, they reveal their cargo of arms and fluttering banners and are distinguishable by the paintings on their prows. On the highest of these, at last, the king comes into view, standing in the full view of the crowd, *tanquam ignota visurus, sive ab ignotis videndus,* facing not only the dockside watchers, but also the challenges ahead. As the king disembarks and proceeds through the crowds to his lodging, the author makes a point of proving the initial argument of the chapter: in the aftermath of Richard's great display, the people talk amongst themselves that here was a king who was fit to be an emperor.[195]

Owing to its nature, the *Itinerarium*'s presentation of the king is, of course, as stylised and panegyric as can be. In the course of the capture of Cyprus, it has the king don a heavily gold-spangled armour, set off with red, which – together with the marvellously mettlesome horse the king mounted – receives as much written attention as the entirety of the conference with the Cypriote emperor for which the king allegedly wore it.[196] Nonetheless, the king's liking for a pompous entry is also attested by Richard of Devizes, who similarly points out the lack of pomp on the part of the French king,[197] and in Roger of Howden's chronicles, which also describe Richard's magnificent entry into Messina with its numerous ships, the admiring populace and the sound of trumpets that made the ground shake.[198]

---

[193] Ralph of Coggeshall, p.51, is a very isolated exception. The chronicler claims that the king's treasury was emptying fast because of his imprudent spending.

[194] Quoted in the introduction to his chapter on the king's inner circle.

[195] Cf. Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 2, ch. 13, p. 156-157.

[196] Cf. Ibid., ch. 36, p. 196-198.

[197] Cf. Richard of Devizes, p. 16.

[198] Cf. Roger of Howden 3, p. 55; Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 126.

Richard's royal splendour was not limited to the staging of his own self. If the desire to acquire money was among his faults, a compulsion to keep it was not. Particularly accounts of the third crusade are positively littered with Richard's liberality, to a point where the reader may easily be left with the impression that the chroniclers meant to portray him as financing a large part of the army all by himself. Foremost in these accounts is of course the *Itinerarium*, which has Richard hosting a sumptuous feast not only for his own retainers but also those of the king of France, with delicacies served on golden and silver dishes, the guests drinking from precious vessels set with gems, and each of them being given a gift according to his respective rank. The writer concludes that the king would regard a day as lost if he did not bestow any gifts.[199] The rest of the chronicle provides ample proof for this claim: the king does not only freely share the spoils he gains from his exploits (the controversial claim of Richard and Philip II to the entirety of Acre after its fall is reported without further comment) and distribute money and gifts during festivities, he also bestows his conquest of Cyprus on Guy de Lusignan, who had lost the struggle for the crown of Jerusalem.[200] In the course of the narrative, it is made abundantly clear that Richard's liberality made him a benefactor of his entire army. After the capture of Messina, finding his host impoverished by the long detour on the way to the Holy Land and querulous because they had been ordered to return the spoils taken from the city, he bestows, *regali munificentia*, *largissime donariis aureis sive argentis* on his host – and even a number of ailing noble Palestine women.[201] The steady flow from his coffers is presented as the king's trump card among the ordinary fighters – but it may not necessarily have increased his popularity with his fellow commanders.

Seeing that Philip offered his men three gold pieces per month, Richard "who would not bear to be seen having a superior in anything, nor even an equal", had it proclaimed to the entire army

---

199 Cf. Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 3, ch. 24, p. 172-173.

200 Ibid., book 2, ch. 21, p. 169-170, depicts the king dividing even the spoils gained from his deal with Tancred which he did not by right have to divide – the payment for the dowry of his sister. He furthermore orders (on the advice of the archbishop of Rouen) that the crusaders return what they had stolen, thus restoring tranquillity to the captured Messina. The division of the spoils of Acre – prisoners and two palaces – is reported entirely free of judgement. Roger of Howden, however, notes that the decision of the two kings had not only led to grumbling, but also forced men to abandon the crusade for reasons of poverty (Roger of Howden 3, p. 120 and Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 181; for the Itinerarium's dispassionate rendering, see Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 3, ch. 18, p. 233-234). It is likely that the chronicler glossed over this less glorious episode; however, he makes very much of Richard's capture of a caravan: upon his return, so the writer, the king had distributed – like David – the spoils equally among those of his men who had accompanied him on the capture of the caravan and those who had remained behind. The scene culminates in the knights feasting on the meat of young camels (ibid., book 6, ch. 6, p. 392-393). For the king's liberality at festive occasions, see ibid., book 2, ch. 5, p. 142-143, which describes Richard's coronation. The festivities are supposed to have lasted three days, and "with befitting munificence" (*munificentia ... decenti*) inestimable and inumerable gifts were given to each participant according to his rank. In ibid., book 5, ch. 17, p. 329, Richard keeps Easter at Ascalon by putting up tents outside the city in which he supplies everyone with food and drink. Ibid., book 5, ch. 37, p. 350-351, finally recounts what may be the climax of Richard's reported liberality, merited by the writer with a lengthy description of the superior qualities of Guy de Lusignan and the hard times he had fallen on, becoming, eventually, *"rex sine regno"* until Richard, "*motus pietate"*, bestowed the kingdom of Cyprus on him, although he had already had an agreement with the Templars, who would have paid money for the island. William of Newburgh's short remark on the giving of Cyprus to Guy de Lusignan also stresses Guy's qualities and that the gift was one made out of liberality, cf.William of Newburgh, book 4, ch. 29, p. 378.

201 Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 2, ch. 23, p. 172-173. The women who happened to be in the vicinity are described as women bereft of their heritage, exiled from their homeland, as widows and virgins. With customary competitiveness, the writer adds that the king of France followed Richard's example and also distributed gifts among his host.

that any knight, of whatever nation, would receive four gold pieces if he were to serve under him.[202] Only slightly less explicit, the Coggeshall chronicler remarks that Richard used his copious treasure to make the powerful men of the king of France favourably disposed towards him[203] – a strategy that is unlikely to have increased mutual goodwill between the princes. Setting such potential for conflict aside, many of the *Itinerarium*'s descriptions remain on the level of describing the joy of individual men – whether powerful or ordinary – who profited from the king's liberality. Other chroniclers move one step further away from the events, and describe the influence of Richard's financial input on the army as a whole. According to Richard of Devizes, Richard's copious gifts – among them 4000 measures of wheat, 4000 cured pig carcasses and 4000 pounds of silver to the count of Champagne – ensure that the entire multi-national host *regem in ducem recepit et dominum*, accepted Richard as their lord and leader, excepting only those who had followed Richard's lord, and remained *cum ... paupere rege Francorum* – the lesser of two choices, without doubt.[204] As the internal cohesion of the crusading host began to crumble, it was Richard's liberality that kept it together: although his attempts to monetarily persuade the king of France to stay in the Holy Land remained fruitless,[205] he successfully rallied the ailing host by agreeing to provide for all of them,[206] and as the army began to slowly diminish from poverty, weariness and fear, he successfully delayed the host breaking apart fully by offering to pay those in need for remaining with the crusaders.[207]

The monarch's contribution to the army was honoured by many writers, often as if in assertion of their own national pride, seeing that many of the statements emphatically point out the benefactions received by 'non-native' members of the crusading army. The zeal for the crusade as such and the idea that their king could not unreasonably lay claim to lead the entire third crusade apparently overrode any concerns that he might be spending money acquired from his faithful subjects to fund undeserving foreigners. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the monarch's encounters with foreign notables are greeted with similar enthusiasm. Richard is shown giving the famed sword Excalibur to Tancred of Lecce[208] and, after his release from captivity, making powerful friends and allies among German nobility. One episode of this diplomatic mission is particularly elaborated on: the king was splendidly received by the archbishop of Cologne who honoured him to such an extent that he, "casting off his own majesty, assumed the office of *praecentor*, and stood among the cantors in the choir", singing that the lord had sent an angel to rescue him from the hands of Herod.[209]

---

[202] Ibid., book 3, ch. 4, p. 213-214: *"Qui postquam didicerat regem Franciae singulis mensibus erogasse singulis militibus tres aureos, et inde omnium obtinuisset favorem et gratiam, rex Ricardus, ne quem in quibuscunque gerendis videretur habere superiorem, immo nec parem voce praeconaria in omni jussit exercitu denunciari, ut milites singuli, cujuscunque regionis oriundi, qui stipendiis egerent, ab ipso reciperent singulis mensibus quatuor aureos, certa conditione statutos."*
[203] Cf. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 93.
[204] Richard of Devizes, p. 42.
[205] Cf. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 95.
[206] Cf. Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 188.
[207] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 4, ch. 23, p. 360.
[208] Cf. Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 159; Roger of Howden 3, p. 97.
[209] Ralph of Diceto,Ymagines 2, p. 114; less detailed in Roger of Howden 3, p. 235; see p. 234 for the king's acquisition of friends and allies among the nobles of the Empire.

Richard's relations to the emperor himself were (perhaps understandably) viewed with considerably more caution and less relish.[210] However, what excited contemporaries the most were not the king's successes in securing (possible) allies for England, but his relation to the Saracen army, in particular Saladin and his brother Saphadin. The development of this peculiar connection begins, in the *Itinerarium*'s rendition of the events, with Saladin angrily confronting his defeated troops who – to excuse their failure – bring him reports that the Christian army was led by an incredible, seemingly undefeatable man who always charged at the forefront of any assault.[211] From this first glimpse into the enemy camp, the chronicle develops a lengthy exchange between Richard and Saladin's brother Saphadin, who had initially been sent with false promises, numerous gifts and an air of friendship to lull the king into a false sense of security while Saladin was using the time to cause damage. As the narrative wears on, Richard knights one of Saphadin's sons on a Palm Sunday and eventually, a messenger of Saphadin turns up in mid-battle, offering the hard-pressed Richard two "most noble" Arabian horses, asking him to mount and put them to good use, in the hope that he would recompense the donor after he had, by God's grace, escaped from his current predicament.[212] In Richard of Devizes' account, Saphadin is an experienced, civil and wise Saracen who had come to love the king and favour his side for his magnanimity and munificence. Similar to the chaplain who approached Richard in the *Itinerarium*'s account, he lapses, shortly after he has appeared, into a speech that is as much synopsis for Richard's incomparable greatness in mind and deed as it is a prelude to an apology for his return home. This tearful Saphadin, almost beside himself with grief because the king had contracted a serious illness, even prays to the *Deus Christianorum* to not let Richard die, "*si Deus es*"[213]. The Saracen's admiration and respect for the Christian king was, apparently, so great that he would even question his 'pagan' faith.

Neither Roger of Howden nor William of Newburgh go this far, nor does either of them introduce Saphadin into their narrative. Roger of Howden, instead, notes a continuous exchange of presents between Saladin and Richard, while in William of Newburgh's account it is Saladin himself who grieves for Richard as he falls ill. In a speech that might be seen as a radically

[210] Roger of Howden 4, p. 37-38, notes that Richard was summoned to Cologne to elect a new emperor but had, rather than coming himself, sent representatives to do so because he *"timebat plurimum illuc ire"*.The king was afraid to once more fall into "their hands" if no security was given for his safe return. While the election process and the modes in which the king of England could take influence on such a momentous event are elaborated on and eventually climax in the coronation of the king's nephew Otho (p. 39), it seems, judging by the dispassionate tone, that the memory of the king's captivity was still too vivid to fully appreciate Richard's connection to the emperor.
[211] Cf. Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 4, ch. 32, p. 278-280. A similar scene occurs in book 6, ch. 14, p. 424. Both scenes depict a Christian victory in a situation that had not, initially, seemed particularly advantegous for them. Saladin's first address of his defeated captains follows their crushing defeat in the Battle of Arsûf, the second their failed attempt at capturing Richard while he was sleeping.
[212] Ibid., book 4, ch. 31, p. 295-297, describes the first negotiations between Richard and Saphadin, revealing Saphadin's initial reason for treating with Richard, and the discontent of the crusaders at the king's entering into negotiations with him. The knighting is only a short remark in ibid., book 5, ch 12, p. 325. Saphadin's gifts of the horses turns up during the surprising assault that ought to have taken Richard captive while he and his army were sleeping, and might thus be seen as a veritable act of support; cf. ibid., book 6, ch. 22, p. 419.
[213] Richard of Devizes, p. 75.

condensed version of what Richard of Devizes has Saphadin say, Saladin offers to grant the Christians a truce – out of admiration for Richard's spirit and virtue.[214]

Admiration is a sentiment that pervades most accounts of Richard's immediate surroundings. The absence of a 'court proper' is more than compensated by the sheer impact of the king's person and story that utterly dominates any chronicle reports incorporating the crusade. While some proportion of these accounts may well be attributed to the zeal with which chroniclers viewed the crusade, it still seems safe to say that Richard appreciated the impression royal pomp and bearing could have on his contemporaries. Whether he consciously fulfilled these ideals cannot, of course, be said for certain, but splendour in whatever form – appearance, magnanimity or the treatment of foreign notables – is a central feature of his reign. Richard's generosity certainly was without par – as Roger of Howden puts it: "he profusely distributed his treasures amongst the knights and servants of the entire army, so that many said that what none of his predecessors had given away in a year, he gave in that month alone. And it was certainly believed that in his sharing, he secured the favour of those who had been thus endowed, as it is written 'God loves those who give gladly.'"[215] So, apparently, did Richard's contemporaries.

*The Inner Circle of John*

Considerably less glad giving is recorded for the reign of Richard's brother. Roger of Wendover twice makes a note of the king distributing vestments to his knights at Christmas and he also points out that John was well aware of the significance of such gifts for his own standing, and was determined to be seen without par in his generosity. For the year 1201, the chronicler remarks that John was moved to considerable anger when the archbishop of Canterbury, *quasi cum rege a pari contendens*, as if he were contending with the king as his equal, also distributed vestments at Canterbury.[216] Despite this meagre evidence for gifts, the court itself cannot have entirely lacked splendour. As John's death approaches, both Roger of Wendover and the Coggeshall chronicler note that the king had lost a considerable quantity of treasure when crossing the Wash. Not least among the treasures were precious reliquaries, which the king was apparently still carrying around with his entourage, despite the prolonged nature of his conflict with the barons or Roger of Wendover's claim that he had spent a considerable time in self-imposed exile on the Isle of Wight.[217] The precious items that the king carried with him during the civil war are unlikely to have betokened the last desperate effort to save what remained of his wealth. In 1214, the chronicler remarks that the king was met by the count of Flanders at Canterbury, where he received his homage for all of Flanders, and, with royal munificence, loaded both the count and those who had come with him with ample presents of gold, silver and precious stones. Directly after the encounter, the writers reports the king to have moved on –

[214] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 4, ch. 29, p. 377; Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 171, p. 176 and p. 188, for the exchange of gifts between the two parties.

[215] Roger of Howden 3, p. 95; Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 156-157.

[216] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 165, for the Christmas of 1201 and p. 220 for the Christmas of 1208, where the king distributed "festive" vestments.

[217] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 384-386 and Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 181-182.

taking with him his *thesauro inestimabili auri, argenti et lapidum pretiosorum*.[218] How much, of course, was left of that treasure after it had met its unlucky fate in the Wash, remains open to interpretation.

A sense of royal magnificence is also palpable at the very beginning of the king's reign. The Coggeshall chronicler reports that John was crowned *cum maxima civium pompa*[219]*,* Gervase of Canterbury reports a coronation *in magna gloria* and a later crown-wearing to similar effect;[220] observations that Roger of Howden seems to second when he describes the king's coronation. When John acquired the title of duke of Normandy, he reports him to have been crowned with a golden circlet adorned with golden roses previous to his oath "on the holy relics and the sacrosanct gospels" that he would preserve the holy Church and her dignities, destroy unjust laws and institute good ones.[221] While the solemn ceremonial of the coronation oaths is not included into Roger of Howden's description of John's coronation as king of England, the account features other details pointing at the solemnity and magnificence of the occasion. Although nowhere near as long as the depiction of Richard being crowned, the account includes a long list of worldly and ecclesiastical dignitaries attending the king's coronation, and also mentions the king lavishing his grace on followers on the day of his accession. According to Howden, the king used the occasion to gird both William Marshall and Geoffrey Fitz Peter with the swords of their earldoms, and also bestowed the office of chancellor upon the archbishop of Canterbury.[222]

If royal grandeur and munificence is recorded for the first days of John's reign, it is strangely lacking for the remainder of it, although, as has been shown, the king was still believed to move around with a vast quantity of treasure. Why are there no further instances of the king lavishing his wealth on his followers? From what can be gathered from the chronicles, it seems justified to assume that gifts and favours were still distributed, but such acts rarely found their way into the narratives because the writers disapproved of the recipients. The Coggeshall chronicler, for instance, remarks that when, following the death of Geoffrey fitz Peter, the king gave away the post of justiciar to a new occupant, his action had "the entire kingdom's nobility murmuring under their breath that a man of foreign origin was preferred over them."[223] Other chronicles take a step further, finding considerably more condemning words for the king's policy in populating the kingdom's high ranks. The Stanley Annals, when introducing abstracts from Magna Carta, claim that the entire populace had complained that "all justice and good customs of the kingdom, which had been cherished since old times, had been perverted by the severity of the king and the cruelty of the perverse alien men, who the king loved and made into masters and justices and

[218] Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 168. The original is more grandiose in its wording: *"Anno MCCXIV., Ferrandus comes Flandriae venit in Angliam, et occurrit ei rex in Cantuariam, et recepit ibi rex homagium ejus de tota Flandria, et tam ipsi quam his qui cum eo venerant effudit munificentiam regiam in donariis largifluis auri, argenti et lapidum pretiosorum."*
[219] Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 99-100.
[220]For John's coronation proper, see Gervase of Canterbury 2, p. 92. The crown-wearing is, at the same time, also the coronation of John's new queen Isabella, and found on p. 93. The event is described as a festivity *"cum gloria et apparatu multo"*.
[221] Roger of Howden 4, p. 87-88.
[222] Cf. ibid., p. 89-90.
[223] Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 168: *"Obiit Gaufridus filius Petri, jusitiarius Angliae, et episcopus Wintoniensis ei in officio illo successit, submurmurantibus totius regni proceribus, quod homo alienigena eis praeficeretur."*

sheriffs and castellans, holding in contempt the natural and free men of his lands."[224] These men were the king's 'bad counsellors' in those few instances in which he is mentioned to have hearkened to the advice of evil men. Roger of Wendover calls them *consiliarios inquissimos*[225] while Gervase of Canterbury claims that John, during negotiations for peace, had been incensed by the tongues of *malignantium detractorum* and turned from peace.[226] The king's policy of favour is generally held to have not only disgruntled the realm's nobility, but also alienated the king's followers from his court. The writer to voice these connections most clearly is the Barnwell annalist: "he was munificent and liberal to foreigners, but a depredator of his own men, trusting more in aliens than his own, and because of that he was left by his own before the end, and his end was only moderately lamented."[227]

Much ink, indeed, was dedicated to the problematic relationship between the king and his nobles. The writers indicate that John's preference for foreign officials was not the only reason for the continuously worsening relation between the two parties. An episode from the History of William Marshal illustrates the behaviour of which John was suspected to be capable. As such, it is as biased as it could possibly be, seeing that the biographer was laboriously attempting to justify the Marshal's precarious situation of having sworn homage to the king of France so as not to lose his lands in ailing Normandy, but it is the sinister tone it maintains even after the Marshal's loyalty has been amply proved that makes it an interesting impression of John's treatment of his barons. Initially, the king had, claiming that he trusted in the Marshal's loyalty, allowed him to pay homage to the king of France, lest he suffer the loss of his lands for his refusal. In the aftermath of a failed attempt to make peace, the king, goaded on by advisors who had given him a very unfavourable rendering of the events that had taken place in Normandy, denied ever having given the Marshal such a permission. The writer moves back and forth between the king's blunt accusations of treachery, and the Marshal's more elaborate attempts at defending himself, until, at last, the king demands to have him judged by his peers. The Marshal consents, but turns to his peers and claims: "My lords look at me, / for, by the faith I owe you, / I am for you all this day / an exemplar and model. / Be on your alert against the King: / what he thinks to do with me / he will do to each and every one of you, or even more, / if he gets the upper hand over you." The Marshal's sinister warning enrages the king, who swears and turns to the barons to have him judged – but finds that none of them are willing to do so.[228]

It is by far not the only recorded instance of the barons refusing to do the king's bidding, but it illustrates beautifully the conditionalities contemporaries appear to have suspected behind the

---

[224] Cf. William of Newburgh, Continatio, p. 517-518: *"Hoc anno convenerunt in unum archiepiscopi, episcopi, comites, barones, milites, omnisque populus simul querimoniam facientes, quod omnia jura regni consuetudinesque bonae, quae solebant esse antiquitus, perverterentur propter duritiam regis et crudelitatem alienorum perversorum hominum, quos rex amavit et constituit magistros et judices et vicecomites et custodes castrorum suorum, parvipendens omnes naturales et liberos homines terrae suae."*

[225] Roger of Wendover 3, p. 237.

[226] Gervase of Canterbury 2, p. 104.

[227] Barnwell Annals, p. 232: *"munificus et liberalis in exteros, sed suorum depraedator, plus in alienis quam in suis confidens, unde et a suis ante finem derelictus est, et in fine modicum luctus."*

[228] History of William Marshal 2, lines 12948-12966 (p. 148-149), has the initial exchange between the Marshal and the king, in which the Marshal is granted the permission to avert the loss of his possessions by paying homage to Philip II. The lengthy struggle for the Marshal's legitimation in the eyes of the king stretches from line 13029 to line 13190 (p. 152-161). The passage quoted is found in lines 13167-13174 (p. 159); translation by Gregory.

increasing alienation of the barons and the king. John's trust in them was shaky at best. The Coggeshall chronicler notes that the king had not wanted to come to the aid of the besieged Château Gaillard, which, guarded by *multis praeclaris militbus et servientibus* was still withstanding the onslaught of Philip II's troops, but suffering from a severe shortage of food. "Always fearing betrayal from his men", he left the castle that, as the chronicler makes a point of noting, had not only cost Richard a fortune, but also incurred him the wrath of an archbishop and had been believed to be unconquerable, thus "leaving behind all Normans perturbed by great fear".[229] The Barnwell Annals describe how the king was wont to react to these perceived threats: having learned of rumours that his barons were conspiring against him, already having elected a new king in his stead, and were now attempting to drive him from his kingdom, thus condemning himself to eternal captivity or even death, he gathers those few around him that he regards as *familiarissimi* and begins to seize castles throughout the realm. The barons, "fearing the wrath of the king or the scruples of their own conscience" thereupon secretly fled the kingdom.[230]

The depiction of the annals still seems somewhat sympathetic, as it makes clear that the king's fears were not entirely unfounded. A number of sources illustrate the problematic counter-measures the king took to maintain some loyalty among the baronage: the confiscation of goods as well the extortion of hostages and oaths of fidelity. The practice would eventually have the Marshal's biographer equip his innocent hero, when faced with the demands of the king who had pursued William de Barose to Ireland, with the statement: "You have my sons as hostages / and you hold all my castles in England". In the narrative, the Marshal freely offers to surrender yet more hostages and castles if such was the wish of the king[231] – but not all of the king's demands were met with such equanimity. Roger of Wendover has the king demand hostages soon after he has received two letters warning him of treachery from among the baronage, and presents the king's venture as a test of loyalty. Although he is given a number of the hostages he demanded, the measure falls short of its intention: the ones who had been accused of treachery and were suspected most heavily by the king fled the country.[232] A shade more sinister is another comment from Roger of Wendover: he remarks that, although the king had been excommunicated in person, all magnates of the realm did nonetheless appear at his Christmas court and commune with him. Far from any assumptions of loyalty, the chronicler claims that there had been a rumour throughout England that the king would set malicious schemes in motion against those who withdrew from him.[233]

Under these circumstances, it is little surprising that the writers report the gradual falling apart of all allegiances John still had – with disastrous consequences for his attempts to keep

---

[229] Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 144.
[230] Barnwell Annals, p. 207.
[231] History of William Marshal 2, p. 217-219; cited here are the lines 14334-14335; translation by Gregory.
[232] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 239-240. On p. 224, Roger of Wendover notes another instance of the king taking hostages from his barons. In that particular case, the chronicler claims John to have been afraid that his impending excommunication would absolve his barons from the oaths of featly they had sworn to him, and had them thus not only swear homage to him, but also hand over a number of hostages. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 181, adds another instance of the king's policy of securing trust, but wraps it into far less elaborate words, simply stating that the king had "extorted oaths and hostages".
[233] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 231.

Normandy or defend England. The fortunes of war in Normandy, according to Gervase of Canterbury, shifted swiftly for the king, and he was "once more rendered unwarlike and weak when the traitors among his own men, in whom he had placed the highest trust, handed over his castles to the king of France. In this way the king of England now lost this and now that, and then rarely regained what he had lost." "He had hardly any friends".[234] It is the same verdict that William Marshal's biographer puts into the mouth of the ever-faithful knight, who approaches the king to tell him that he did not have many friends.[235] While John had had to live with some defections among the baronage when he had resolved to reconquer his territories on the continent,[236] his refusal to adhere to *Magna Carta* was followed by a veritable wave of defections as his nobles transferred their allegiance to the French prince Louis. The barons' decision for a new overlord is reported by many chronicles, and a great number of them fit it into a wider narrative of tyrannical actions on part of the king that preceded the decision. The Stanley Annals, for instance, claim that John had, after repudiating *Magna Carta*, allowed his mercenaries to ravage wildly across England. "After they had patiently borne the plunder of their goods," the writer claims, the barons sent to the king of France asking for help, that he might, in compassion, send his son Louis to aid them.[237] According to the Worcester Annals, the barons resolved to ask Philip II for aid because they were "oppressed beyond measure by the king's tyranny and bereft of ecclesiastical service"[238]. As often, Roger of Wendover's account is the most dramatic, claiming that the barons had lost all that was dear to them and, out of sheer desperation of finding any other way to amend their situation and possibly regain what they had lost, were determined to find a strong man as king to rule them.[239] Towards the end, men, *multi et proximi,* left the king's side.[240] The divide between John and his barons became practically insurmountable, as Roger of Wendover testifies: shortly before the death of John himself, the barons were informed by a dying Frenchmen that they themselves would be branded as traitors and exiled as soon as Louis came to power; their castles had, at that time, already been given to Louis' French followers, and they were suffering under the sentence of excommunication that had been laid upon them. "Many from their number", writes the chronicler, "thought about returning into the fidelity of John; but they feared greatly that he, whom they had with so many and so great insults provoked into hatred against them, would not admit them if they came penitent."[241]

---

[234] Gervase of Canterbury 2, p. 95: *"Verum, quia varii sunt eventus bellantium, et nunc istum nunc illum varius involvit eventus, rex Angliae Johannes iterum inbellis et inbecillis effectus est, cum a suis proditoribus, in quisbus summam habebat fiduciam, regi Franciae castella sibi tradita traderentur. In hunc modum rex Angliae, nunc haec et illa perdebat, deinde sed raro perdita recuperabat. Hoc autem certum est quod proditores praecipue regi Anglorum plurimum nocuerunt, dum vix paucos haberet amicos, quibus vel modicum credere valeret."*

[235] Cf. History of William Marshal 2, line 12721-12723 (p. 136-137). The earl's verdict had been provoked by the king's deliberation to have a prisoner freed who had helped save the tower of Rouen from fire, and is coupled with the warning that the king should avoid strengthening his enemies, as his position was (by implication) bad enough as it was.

[236] See, for instance, Barnwell Annals, p. 217, which describes how the northern barons had both refused to pay scutage and accompany the king on his campaign. John's problems to gather enough allies for military campaigns will be discussed in greater depth in the chapter on his warfare.

[237] Cf. William of Newburgh, Continuatio, p. 520-521.

[238] Cf. Annals of Worcester, p. 402.

[239] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 359.

[240] Barnwell Annals, p. 231.

[241] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 383-384.

Despite the many negative depictions, John's court, when still perceived as extant, could also draw respect and admiration from foreign dignitaries. The Worcester chronicle remarks that the king's nephew, Henry, duke of Saxony, sought out the king in England to pay him homage and left none other than his firstborn son in the care of the king.[242] More gestures of esteem, even of subjugation, are recorded for the king's connection to the 'Celtic fringe': in Roger of Wendover's account, John browbeats the king of Scotland into entering into a treaty that did not only bring considerable profit into the king's coffers, but also, as security, placed two Scottish princesses in his care. It was not the only success: the notoriously rebellious Welsh*, quod anteactis temporibus fuerat inauditum*, came to the king at Woodstock to pay homage to him.[243] The agreement with Scotland is reported in similar terms by the Worcester Annals, which claim that the king hat received illustrious hostages from among the Scots "at his will" and *in perpetuum*.[244] John's court could be as masterful and proud as that of Henry II had been – and its regal pride becomes particularly visible in an incident reported by the Coggeshall chronicler. Following the marriage of John and Isabella and the complications it entailed, Philip II ordered John to appear in his court at Paris to subject himself to the sentence of his liege-lord. John maintained that as duke of Normandy, his rank ensured that he would never have to come to any interview at Paris, as by right such parleys should take place at the border between the duchy and the kingdom. Philip argued that John was not supposed to appear in court as duke of Normandy but as count of Aquitaine, where the offence had taken place, and eventually declared John's territories forfeit[245] – but the king had made a stand, refusing to be symbolically slighted in the rights that pertained to his position.

The splendour and pull of John's inner circle is difficult to estimate on the basis of the chronicles, as it is vastly overshadowed by the problems the king's policy of patronage and the treatment of his barons had caused. From what little contemporaries remarked about regal splendour (and the lack of derogatory comments on that matter), it seems easy to assume that John's court, as such, did not lack anything – not the respect of other courts, neither wealth, nor splendour, nor the regular keeping of feast days – but it was lamentably short of the right people.

*The Inner Circle of Henry III*

The wrong sort of people was also very much present at the court of his son, and the aversion of the baronage against them caused Henry III similar problems that John had had to endure. The overwhelming majority of narrative sources on the reign complains to some extent of the involvement of outsiders, particularly Poitevins, Savoyards and the Italian clergy in the business, and especially the wealth of the realm. Royal grants to such 'outsiders' were viewed with contempt and distrust – there was, after all, only so much of the king's wealth to be distributed. The redistribution of castles, particularly of those fortifications that held strategical importance, constituted a part of the petitions the barons brought before the king at Oxford. These petitions

[242] Cf. Worcester Annals, p. 397.
[243] Roger of Wendover 3, p. 226-227.
[244] Worcester Annals, p. 398.
[245] Cf. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 135-136.

were also concerned with the future of the English nobility in general: like the castles the kingdom's heiresses, too, should only be given in marriage to Englishmen.[246] It is a concern that seems to be particularly close to the heart of Matthew Paris, who contemptuously notes how the king would, on their advice, marry adolescent nobles whom he had raised in his court to Provençal ladies, causing "no slight" murmuring and indignation throughout the entire kingdom.[247] These unknown girls, he notes in another passage, were even brought in from the "faraway" parts by the king's favourites, a scheme that was viewed as "bothersome and absurd" by the "natural and indigenous English".[248] His concerns reach well beyond simple envy for the king's grace being bestowed on someone else: in a singular tirade, he calls the king the "industrious supplantor of native English who wants to degenerate all nobles of his kingdom" "by marring their noble blood with the scum of foreigners". To reach his despicable aims, the king, in this particular episode, would expend a considerable sum of money to persuade the earl of Gloucester's son (whose family, much to the king's regret, was not yet "tainted") to marry his son to one of the king's Poitevin nieces – who was, "anticipating the manner of the Poitevins, void of faith and beauty".[249]

There was more to the widespread contempt of the foreign influx than the diffuse fear of the demise of English people. The impression left is summed up emphatically by Robert of Gloucester's chronicle: through the king's brothers and the queen "much French folk was brought into the place", "and the king let them their will that each was as a king and took poor men's goods and paid nothing"[250]. It is not particularly surprising that these unwanted newcomers were assumed to be the driving force behind royal decisions that were not approved of by the writers. They took on the stereotypical role of 'bad counsellors'.[251] Yet their depiction moves well beyond that. The behaviour of these men was sorely criticised, their presence seen as a direct threat to the general good of the kingdom. They were claimed to behave like tyrants,[252] and have sinister plans for the future of the kingdom: "had their power lasted, they would have extinguished all great persons of England with poison, and, once Henry was bereft of his kingdom, they would set another of their choice in his place, and in this way subjugate the

[246] Documents of the Baronial Reform Movement, no. 3, 4-6, p. 81.
[247] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 628.
[248] Ibid., p. 598: *"... Petrus de Sabaudia comes Richemundiae, ad curiam regiam Londoniis perveniens, secum de partibus suis longinquis incognitas nobilibus Angliae, quos in custodia sua dominus rex educaverat, puellas adduxit maritandas. Quod multis Angliae naturalibus et indigenis, qui se spretos censuerunt, molestum videbatur et absurdum."*
[249] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 363-364: "*... indignarum Angliae argumentosus supplantator, volens omnes regni sui nobiles degenerare, ad sic totam Anglorum in eorum excidium propaginem annullare genealem [*sic!*], atque eorundem sanguinem generosum melancolicis faecibus alienorum perturbare, doluit quod saltem Ricardus comes Gloverniae et ejus progenies ex fonte sulphureo non coinquinaretur."* The passage describing the prospective bride refers to her as "*...puerilem, immo infantulam et, ut praesumitur more Pictavensium, fidelitatis ac speciositatis expertem".*
[250] Cf. Robert of Gloucester 2, lines 10,987-10,995 (p. 732-733).
[251] See, for instance, from the relatively large pool of passages that describe the king as ill-advised, the Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, p. 26-27, which claims that it was the advice of the queen and "*maxime*" of the aliens that made the king obtain papal absolution from the barons' provisions, which reignited their former quarrel. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 205, claims the king's Poitevin advisors to have positively confunded the king's ability to think, causing him to spurn a sensible peace agreement. For a more conventional comment on evil advice being administered to the king, see Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 727, which speaks simply of the king trusting on *"perverso ... consilio".*
[252] Cf. Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, p. 23.

entirety of England to their eternal enrichment."[253] Even without the success of such future plans, what they had already done was bad enough: "elevated beyond measure by their dignities and riches, they ravaged among the English with the intolerable arrogance of pride, afflicted them with many and various cruel injuries and abuses, and there was no one who would oppose their presumptuous actions for fear of the king." What ensued was overall terror: countless exactions, the corruption of the ancient laws and customs of the kingdom, the casting aside of penalties, and nowhere could justice be obtained without money.[254] William de Rishanger attests that there were "many outsiders" in the kingdom, who were called the king's advisors and were preferred before his natural subjects. These men were the cause of much injustice, and caused the oppression of both laity and clergy, making it hard for any judicial remedy to be acquired against their overpowering dominion. As example of this outrage against which the baronial struggles were aimed he presents the case of a youth who had accidentally killed a hen, and, via the intervention of one of the king's powerful uterine brothers, was sacked and carried off to prison, where he died within a few days.[255]

As an unconditional supporter of the barons' cause, the author even has the foreign instigators of injustice acknowledge their own crimes: once the protest against the 'aliens' had started in earnest, the elect of Winchester, although he himself was detested by the people of England as an outsider, "tearfully" addressed his "brothers", bemoaning that this tribulation had "justly come upon them", because they had afflicted the English with various oppressions. Eventually, they themselves come to the conclusion that they had to leave.[256] Roger of Wendover lacks this rueful introspection on the part of the outsiders, but certainly countersigns the judgement passed on their activities: the entirety of England was subjected to the whim of the men who surrounded the king "like a wall" wherever he went.[257] What is more, he, in an argument in direct speech, has the earl deliberately separate the king and his advisors: having been pressed to submit himself to the king's mercy, the earl answers: "it may well be that the king is merciful, but he is led astray by the counsel of those by whom we feel ourselves gravely injured. And that the king is trustworthy is evident as far as he himself is concerned – however, as far as his counsellors are concerned, I say that nothing that has been promised to me has been observed by them."[258] The earl marshal makes his stand not against the king, but against the king's crowd of advisors. Like so often with Henry III, narrations seem reluctant to fully blame the king for what was happening in the kingdom, overcome as he was by men that wished the realm ill, and to whom he was bound by

---

[253] Waverly Annals, p. 349.
[254] ibid., p. 350.
[255] William de Rishanger, Chronicle of the Barons' War, p. 3-4.
[256] Cf. ibid., p. 8-9.
[257] Roger of Wendover 4, p. 268. Roger of Wendover otherwise reiterates that the king had brought an unbelievable multitude ("legions of foreigners that filled almost all of England") of these favourites into the country, and that, by their instigations, the king's heart had turned in hatred against his natural subjects so that it was his wish to exterminate them: *"Circa dies istos, cum Petrus, Wintoniensis episcopus, et complices ipsius in odium gentis Anglorum pariter et contemptum cor regis ita immutabuliter perverterant, ut eorum exterminium modis omnibus moliretur, invitavit paulatim tot Pictavensium legiones, quod totam fere Angliam repleverunt, quorum rex agminibus quocumque pergebat vallatus incessit; nec quicquam fiebat in regno, nisi quod Wintoniensis episcopus et Pictavensium turba disponebant."*
[258] Ibid., p. 285-286: *"Ad haec respondens Marescallus dicit, quod 'bene potest esse quod rex misericors sit, sed seductus est consilio eorum per quos nos graviter laesos sentimus. Et quod rex sit credibilis patet quantum in se ipsi; sed, quantum ad consilium ejus pertinet, dico, quod nulla mihi promissio fuit hactenus observata.'"*

ties of kinship. Throughout, writers, rather than stressing the king's bad character, create the impression that Henry III needed, in some way, to be 'rescued' from these men by the intervention of the fair-minded barons who (contrary to their king) could still tell right from wrong.[259]

Despite the strong resentment to foreigners within the kingdom, contemporaries did value Henry III's extraordinary connections to other European courts, and would elaborate on them for what value they could bestow on the court of their king. Roger of Wendover's account of the marriage of the king's sister with the German emperor Frederick II elaborately traces the nuptials from the initial arrival of the emperor's messengers with their gold-sealed letters to the actual marriage. Probably in a mixture of pride and an urge to compensate for the perceived gap of prestige between the sister of an English king and the German emperor, the chronicler does not only cite the illustrious descent of the bride-to-be to king Alfred (and thence, albeit without mentioning individual names, to Adam), he also styles her to the best of his ability: beautiful, distinguished by the flower of her virginity and decorated with clothes and manners that befit royalty, she impressed the messengers to such an extent that they judged her "in everything most worthy of imperial wedlock". The marriage itself is narrated in a profuse display of royal splendour and wealth. Henry III had a golden and gem-beset crown fashioned for her that incorporated the four English king martyrs and confessors into its design, "to whose custody he specifically assigned his sister's soul". Rings, necklaces, silken garments, a richly furnished bed, precious drinking cups and even cooking pots of silver – Roger of Wendover does not hesitate to enumerate and extensively describe the immense wealth with which the king outfitted his sister. A splendid procession wound its way to the sea, where she embarked for Germany. The chronicler does not leave her there, proceeding instead to describe her arrival at Cologne, where an enormous crowd (no less than 10,000 people, he claims) greeted her joyfully and led her in procession through the city. When the bishop of Exeter and the other nobles that had accompanied the future empress on her journey eventually left Germany, they brought with them not only "three leopards, with other precious gifts that were not abundant in the western regions" but the emperor's promise of counsel and aid against the French king.[260] Roger of Wendover was not to know that the connection to the emperor would benefit the kingdom of England little, except perhaps in terms of prestige, and there is no other writer who viewed the wedding with comparable enthusiasm and subsequent stylisation.[261]

---

[259] Björn Weiler has drawn a similar conclusion from the depiction of Henry III throughout the conflict about Peter de Roches and his influence on the government, noting that the chroniclers widely supported the opposition, but would not condemn the king: the "simple" Henry III was presented as entirely exploited by his bad advisors, as a king desperately in need of good counselors; if any accusation of guilt had stood against him, he was redeemed by the remorse he felt for what he had done. Cf. Weiler, Kingship, Rebellion and Political Culture, p. 81-83.

[260] Roger of Wendover 4, p. 332-339.

[261] The Annals of Tewkesbury, p . 95-98, for instance, provide an account that is entirely without splendour, and simply states, in three utterly isolated sentences, the facts that a) the bride left for Germany, b) was accompanied by several nobles, and c) eventually married in Worms. Even briefer are the Waverly Annals, p. 316, which only note that the marriage had taken place. Matthew Paris would record gifts of the emperor to the king (Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 3, p. 369), and include Frederick II's repeated admonitions that Henry III should render him support against the pope, which were just as frequently answered by Henry III that his allegiance to the pope came before his obligation to the emperor (Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 4-5 and p. 16-19). For a recent elaborate

It was Henry III's connection to the king of France that received more attention and admiration of contemporaries. In that context, the visit of the royal couple to France receives the most attention. While many writers would point out the splendour of the occasion and the honour with which the king and queen were greeted on the continent,[262] Matthew Paris' depiction of the event is by far the most elaborate, and features a wealth of details on the king's stay in France. Otherwise critical of the king spending money, he appears to relish the splendid proceedings. Louis IX had ordered everything to be made clean and orderly for his arrival, and the English king was met by a country ornamented with flowers, leafs and boughs, and greeted joyfully with singing and trumpets by festively clad citizens. As magnificently received Henry III was by the citizens, Louis IX did not fall short of this reverence, and upon their meeting, Matthew Paris claims, they rushed towards one another as soon as they had caught sight of each other, embraced, kissed and lapsed into affable conversation. The king of France provided handsomely for his guest: Henry III was accommodated in the spacious rooms of the Old Temple, had an overwhelmingly sumptuous banquet prepared for him by the king of France and, upon his departure, was given extraordinary gifts, a precious basin shaped in the manner of a peacock and a live elephant – the first ever seen in England, as the writer remarks. Yet the English king himself was not so easily outdone in parading his regal splendour when abroad: he rode with a retinue so large that the onlooking French were "stupefied with amazement" at the sight of the train that would only just fit into even the roomy quarters they had been given. The morning after the king had taken his abode, he feasted an "infinite number" of poor in his lodgings, each of whom, despite their number, was provided with "meat, fish, bread and wine in abundance", made offerings to Paris places of devotion and, after the banquet, sent precious gifts to the French nobles, among them silver cups, golden clasps and silken belts, gifts "as were fitting for so great a king to give and such men to gracefully receive".

An immense sum of money was spent on the visit, as Matthew Paris claims, and the treasury was "mutilated" from the gifts the king had given –"however, the honour of the lord the king of the English and all of the English was in no small way exalted, and much augmented". Such 'profit', apparently, would justify large expenses, as they did not only reflect well on the English, but also ensured healthy relations to other courts. The connection between Henry III and Louis IX, then, is presented as perfectly amicable and respectable, with Louis IX claiming that he and the king of the English were like brothers, on account of their having married two sisters. The chronicler intersperses the narrative with hints that the king of France would like nothing better

---

analysis of the relationship between the empire and England, see Weiler, Henry III of England and the Staufen Empire.

[262] These depictions possess strongly varying degrees of detail, courtliness and splendour. The Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, p. 20, for instance remarks very dispassionately that the king and queen were received "*honorifice*" by the monarchs of France. In a similar vein are the Winchester Annals, p. 95, who put *"magno honore"*. The Waverly Annals, p. 346, more elaborate, point out that the king, after a visit to the tomb of Saint Edmund, was received in Paris with "highest honours and a solemn procession", in the presence of four bishops; the annalist refers to the king's voyage as "*peregrinatione*". The Dunstable Annals, p. 194, add the reception with the kiss of peace, "great joy" and a comment that during that time, the three sisters of the queen of France were all present. Among the shorter works, the account of the Burton Annals, p. 327-329, is the most elaborate, describing how Louis IX met the couple at Orleans in solemnity and joy, even giving a direct speech exchange between Henry III and a french noble and noting the French king's spectacular gift of an elephant to Henry III.

than to reinstate Henry III into his continental property: at the banquet, when Henry III graciously persisted on the seating arrangement that placed the king of France, as his lord, in the middle of the kings of England and Navarre even though Louis IX had endeavoured to place Henry III in the middle, he is made to say, in a low voice, that he would that anyone could receive his right so freely, but that the arrogance of the French would not allow it. The same is affirmed after the banquet.[263]

Apart from raising his reputation, Henry III may not have achieved his diplomatic aims in France, but he was considerably more successful with regard to the kingdom of Scotland and the kingdom of Navarre. In another exuberant abundance of splendour, Matthew Paris describes the marriage of the young king of Scotland to the king's daughter Margaret in her father's court: the king knighted the Scot and twenty with him (the ceremony had to be secretly performed in the morning for fear of too many pressing in to see the grand sight) and the chronicler indulges himself in a lengthy description of the magnificent garments worn and the sumptuousness of the feasts, which the two kings and the archbishop of York turned into a contest of splendour.[264] The marriage, apart from showcasing the king's wealth and power, forged a strong tie with Scotland: when Henry III found himself confronted with reports that Margaret was not treated accordingly under the tutelage government, he was not only able to send inquirers into Scotland to check on the treatment of the king and queen, but also had the power to have these delegates eject the tutors and leave them to face the royal wrath (and subsequent fines and loss of property).[265]

While he could thus masterfully interfere with the regency of Scotland, his second political marriage helped him in establishing a passably peaceful solution with the kingdom of Navarre, to whom the Gascons had appealed against Henry III. The marriage of Edward and the sister of the Spanish king is judged with appalling difference: while the Dunstable Annals present the union as brought about by the king's desire for peace, his being counselled, and the mediation of notable nobles,[266] Matthew Paris is nowhere near as positive; indeed, he can be said to have been utterly abject to the king's new alliance. He does report the courtly decorum built around the marriage – the splendour with which Edward was sent to the Spanish king, his honourable reception, his being knighted by the king of Spain himself, the gold-sealed charter that confirmed his relinquishment of any claims to Gascony and the grants Henry III had bestowed upon his son for the marriage – but then proceeds with a drastic outburst against the Spanish and the king's plans. By the grants, he had turned himself into a mutilated *regulus*, for an alliance that would not

[263] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 475-483 and p. 489 for the elephant and the peacock-shaped basin.
[264] Cf. ibid., p. 266-270. The chronicler emphasises that he could not possibly relate the splendour of the occasion for fear of being accused of exaggeration or irony.
[265] Cf. Dunstable Annals, p. 198. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 504-507.
[266] Cf. Dunstable Annals, p. 188. The king had initially sent the bishop of Chichester, but had only managed to achieve the negotiation of the union after he had sent the bishop of Worcester in his stead. The account, although very sobre, seems, from the solemn messengers to the king taking counsel and not least the author's pointing out that Henry III was driven by a desire for peace, largely approving: *"Sed rex Angliae pacem cupiens et confoederationem, misit nuntios suos sollemnes; scilicet, episcopum Cistetrensem, et dominum Johannem Mansel, ad regem Hispaniae, ut filiam ejus si haberet vel sororem, Edwardo, filio regis Angliae, in uxorem caperent* [sic!]. *Qui, cum in modo et forma contrahendi non possent convenire, ad regem Angliae sunt reversi; et accepto pleniori consilio, rex iterum remisit episcopum Wigorniae et Johannem Maunsel, qui sororem regis Hispainae Edwardo in uxorem recipientes, negotium consummaverunt, excepta ecclesiae sollemnitate."* On p. 193-194, the annalist lists the gifts the king bestowed on Edward on the occasion of the marriage, albeit without any marked judgement of the proceedings.

profit, but rather harm the kingdom, as the king of Spain was too far removed to render substantial aid against the French, and the Spanish themselves were "the filth of men, ugly of face, and of contemptible habit"[267].

These diverging opinions on the unions the king arranged are an indication of one of the major problems of Henry III's reign. Any historiographical representation of him, to an extent far greater than any of the other kings analysed here, danced a precarious ballet on the very edge between prodigality and largesse, now inclining to the one side, now to the other. His finances, perhaps because of their frequent discussion in sessions of parliament, were continuously subjected to close scrutiny, and often found lacking. His court was certainly not without decorum. There is an abundance of testimonies to the ceremonial and air of splendour that commonly surrounded the royal court. The diligence in reporting the king's whereabouts at feast days hints, as much as actual accounts of specific days with gifts, splendour, and many noble attendants, at the festivity of these occasions.[268] Henry III is received with solemn processions as he moves about the country[269] and bestows the honours of knighthood in sufficiently illustrious atmospheres.[270]

The king staged himself carefully and was, in turn, carefully staged. When he came of age, the Barnwell Annals report, the pope ordered a second coronation to be undertaken, because the first one, having taken place in the turmoil of civil war, "had been less solemn than it ought to have been" – and had, on top of it all, been celebrated in the wrong place. The impending second coronation was made public throughout the realm, and the king was crowned "in the presence of lord Pandulph the legate, Stephen Archbishop of Canterbury, while the suffragans of that church and other prelates of the Church with many magnates of the kingdom stood by". He took his coronation oaths of keeping the peace, the clergy, the populace and the good laws of England intact, and was outfitted by the archbishop with "the mantle and diadem of the most holy king Edward" (fashioned for that very purpose). It was a coronation, the chronicler seems keen to ascertain, "that was held in such great peace and munificence that the older magnates of England asserted [that they could not remember] that any of his predecessors had been crowned in such peace and tranquillity."[271] Especially the last sentence evokes the impression that the chronicle,

---

[267] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 449-450. His distaste for the alliance was not to change. At a later stage, he would scathingly complain of the king taking pride in his useless Spanish connections when he orders a honourable reception for the arrival of the bishop of Toledo (ibid., p. 509).

[268] The Winchester Annals, for instance, report often where the king spent feast days (cf., e.g. p. 106, p. 109, p. 111). Matthew Paris and Roger of Wendover are considerably more elaborate, repeatedly making note of particularly splendid feast days in which nobles were in attendance and gifts were distributed among those present (Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 357, p. 421, p. 661; Roger of Wendover 4, p. 92, p. 99, p. 207-208 and p. 232). See also Dunstable Annals, p. 84 and p. 127 for notices of the king's solemn Christmas courts.

[269] Cf. Waverly Annals, p. 301; the Dunstable Annals, p. 229, even report the king to have been admitted *"cum processione"* while he was campaigning. See also Winchester Annals, p. 85, p. 98 and p. 106, where the writer states that the convent welcomed Henry III with a "solemn procession".

[270] The Worcester Annals, p. 417, very briefly note the knighting of Richard of Cornwall in the course of a "council" held in London at which the king also confirmed Magna Carta. The Tewkesbury Annals, p. 90, report that the king girded three nobles with the sword of knighthood in the course of his "solemn" celebrations of Pentecost. The Dunstable Annals, p. 94, report that Richard of Cornwalll had been knighted *"cum magna solemnitate*".

[271] Barnwell Annals, p. 244. The pope had *"mandavit, ut rex Henricus ... secundum consuetudinem regni debita sollemnitate secundo in regem sublimaretur, quia coronatio ejus prima, propter regni turbationem et ejus intestinam divisionem, minus solleniter quam debuit vel decuit, et in alio loco quam mos regni exigebat, facta fuerat."* The account of the coronation itself reads: *"In illo die*

which would only just witness the end of Henry III's minority, clung to the hope of peace a new king could give to England, and, stressing the unprecedented tranquillity of the coronation ceremony itself, may have attempted to express the wish that the political upheavals shaking the island might similarly become becalmed. The Dunstable Annals, by comparison, are briefer, but also confirm the great solemnity that was enacted on the occasion, describing how the legate, the archbishop, and numerous illustrious men attended the coronation, and how "never in our days a greater solemnity had been seen as far back as memory would reach."[272] The annalist proceeds to recount how the barons swore an oath of allegiance to the king, affirming they would return their castles and wardships into the king's hands and abstain from rebellion.[273] The message of both accounts can hardly be clearer: England had seen enough of turmoil. Nothing heralded stability quite as much as ritual, especially a ritual as elaborate and established as the coronation of a new king. The coronation oaths promised safety, the regalia of Edward the Confessor, even if still fresh from the making, recalled times in which, supposedly, everything had been better.

It was a feeling of optimism that would not last throughout the entirety of the reign, but the solemnity that had marked Henry III's (second) ascension to the throne of England became visible once more in his marriage of Eleanor of Provence. Even the rather brief Waverly Annals remark that the coronation of the queen had taken place in the presence of "almost all great men of England" and was undertaken *cum tanta solemnitate* that none who had seen or heard of it could, in recounting the proceedings, do justice to even half of it.[274] Matthew Paris, while no less full of praise, is considerably more elaborate, describing how the city overflowed with the crowds of people attending the festivities, how it was magnificently decorated, cleared of everything offensive, and the citizens greeted the king and queen in procession and vied for the right to serve them. He details the individual rights different prelates had in the coronation of the royal pair and lists even the honorific duties undertaken by several distinguished nobles of the reign: the carrying of a sword, the carrying of the pall over the king's head, the duty of keeping overly curious onlookers from blocking the path of the procession and arranging the cups on the table – the chronicler's list of duties is long and elaborate, and he continuously remarks how the individual duties were contested among those present. Everyone wanted to serve the king in a particularly honourable way. Matthew Paris closes his account of the festivities in an almost exasperated sweep at depicting the magnificence of the proceedings: how would he go about

---

*igitur sacramentali, scilicet Pentecostes, in praesentia domini Pandulphi legati, Stephanus Cantuariensis archieposcopus, astantibus ejusdem ecclesiae suffraganeis aliisque ecclesiarum praelatis, cum magnatibus regni plurimis, in ecclesia Sancti Petri Westmonasterii, a rege Henrico sacramentum exegit, scilicet quod ecclesiam Dei tueretur, pacemque tam cleri quam populi et bonas regni leges custodiret illaesas. Praestito itaque sacramento, archiepiscopus eundem regem schemate et diademate sanctissimi regis Dewardi insignivit, anno aetatis ipsius tertio decimo non tunc ex toto completo. Coronatio autem ista regis cum tanta pace et munificentia facta est, quod hii qui interfuerunt ex senioribus procerum Angliae asserebant, se nunquam aliquem praedecessorum suorum in tanta concordia et tranquillitate coronatum [meminisse,* added by the editor*]."*

[272] Dunstable Annals, p. 57: "*Eodem anno, die Pentecostes, Henricus tertius rex Angliae apud Westmostre solemniter coronatus est, praesentibus P[andulfo] legato, et S[tephano] Cantuariensi archiepiscopo missam celebrante, et sermonem ad populum faciente; praesentibus etiam multis episcopis, comitibus, baronibus, abbatibus, et prioribus, et aliis, quorum non erat numerus. Nec est visa diebus nostris major solemnitas ante tempus memoratum."*

[273] Cf. ibid.

[274] Waverly Annals, p. 316: *"…cum tanta solemnitate una cum domino rege coronata, quod a nemine qui viderit vel audierit, digne valeat vel dimidia pars explicari."*

describing the sounds, the tastes and sights, when simply everything that was pleasurable had been assembled in that very place?[275]

Few would begrudge the king his splendour and largesse within the inner circles of his court or in his more prestigious connections to the continent. However, the borders of tolerance towards royal spending are brushed time and again throughout the accounts of the reign. Matthew Paris, whose accusations against the king weigh hardest, calls him a small beggar-king that contested with the poor for an abbot's alms,[276] claimed that he was burdened down with so many debts on the continent that he could barely go there without being clamorously assaulted by his creditors,[277] and points out the drastic consequences the king's lasting poverty had on the decorum of his court: in a desperate effort to save money for his crusading venture, he had decreased the splendour of his table and the amount of his alms to such an extent that he was accused of avarice[278] and ceased his habit of giving away precious garments on the great feast days, instead taking meals with the lower clergy to save money, and demanding costly presents from everyone to bolster his finances.[279]

Henry III, by virtue of *Magna Carta*, had to rely, much more urgently than his predecessors, on the goodwill and assent of the kingdom's nobility to acquire the money he needed. While most of the smaller chronicles and annals still depict Henry III's financial needs as an inescapable, periodically imposed drain on their respective houses, Matthew Paris records many individual instances of the king asking his barons for money, and he does not hesitate to make it appear as if the king was desperate for money, begging and supplicating the unapproachable barons for their goodwill (and purses), always meeting with disapproval, and usually either abasing himself in the process or receiving derisive comments on his financial capability or his general aptitude as king in return.[280] The source for the king's poverty is swiftly found, as far as the chronicler is concerned: not only did the king cherish giving money away to undeserving foreigners to such a degree that barely any among them could leave the island without being laden down with vast quantities of it,[281] he also tended to squander it uselessly if ever he did possess it.[282] Particularly humiliating is the verdict hurled at the king by his own counsellors when he had to concede that he did not have the finances necessary to counter the Welsh incursions: "If you are poor, blame

---

[275] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 3, p. 336-339.
[276] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 51-52; the term Matthew Paris uses is the very demeaning *"regulo mendicanti"*.
[277] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 395. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 466-467 notes how the king remained in Gascony, heaping debts upon debts (to such an extent, the writer claims, that if Gascony was for sale, the debts the king had incurred would still be more than the price demanded for it), and attempted to repay them with the goods of abbacies that had lost their abbot.
[278] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 114.
[279] Cf. ibid., p. 199.
[280] There is a staggering mass of such comments in Matthew Paris' work. For a particularly scathing passage, see Matthew Paris. 3, p. 380-381, in which the chronicler states that the king *"suppliciter … postulat"* monetary aid. As a response, the nobles severely reprimand him that he had wasted his funds on decisions that he had made without them, and, more injurious, they add the claim that he was utterly inept in matters of war.
[281] Cf. ibid., p. 413; Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 20; Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 205 or ibid. p. 229 as only a few instances of very many. Matthew Paris would comment on the king's untoward largesse towards foreigners with considerable frequency; and a number of these incidents will be or have been cited in other contexts.
[282] Cf. ibid., p. 627, for the claim that Henry III was wasting England's wealth; see also Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 34, the writer claims that the king was sending justiciars through England to collect an (as usual) "infinite" sum of money for the king to squander.

yourself for it, for you transfer all the vacant honours, trusts, and dignities on others, and so alienate them from the exchequer, that you cannot be called a king from your riches, but only in the name; for your ancestors, who were noble and rich in the glory of their wealth, collected an endless amount of money from the produce and emoluments of the kingdom."[283]

Other chronicles, too, would bemoan the king's careless relationship with money. Apart from his preference for giving it to his tyrannical relatives who swamped England, the Waverly Annals, for instance, complain that the king had received parts of his inheritance from Louis IX, only to sell it, give it away, and thus finally rob himself (and his heirs) of it entirely.[284] But there was nothing that overshadowed the king's financial activities as much as his attempts to acquire the crown of Sicily for his son Edmund. When, according to Matthew Paris, Richard of Cornwall had refused the offer if he were not given sufficient security and compensation, the pope turned to the king as a second resort "to take advantage of his simplicity, since he knew him to always be credulous and inclined to the destruction of his property". The pope offered nothing less than to order all crusaders to follow Henry III to that purpose rather than to proceed to the Holy Land, and while these were "pained to death" by the suggestion, "hating the Roman deceptions" the king was "so exhilarated by the pope's shadow promise, his heart so wide with empty joy that his exultation openly showed in his voice, gestures and laughter, and he openly called his son Edmund the king of Sicily". For the purpose of swiftly acquiring the kingdom, Henry III sent immense sums of money – everything he could scrape up in a hurry. Once the papal coffers had been drained of the royal money (which was rather fast, owing to the pope's vast expenses), the king, on a renewed request for further funds, sent the pope "on the instigation of the devil and avarice" letters patent bearing his seal to the effect that he could abundantly borrow money from the Italian merchants, fearing neither quantity nor interest, for the king would account for the debts on the pain of disinheritance.[285]

Matthew Paris is not the only writer to be critical of the king's involvement in Sicily. While the Burton Annals ascribe the papal offer of the kingdom of Sicily to Henry III to the "consideration and acknowledgement" that the papal court gave to "the astuteness and power of the king of England" and cite the respective papal letter,[286] the writer also lists the community's numerous reasons for rejecting the plans for taking Sicily once the drawbacks of the venture had become evident.[287] The Dunstable Annals mention the inglorious end of Henry III's hopes for the

---

[283] Cf. Roger of Wendover 4, p. 244; the English translation is quoted from Giles, The History of England vol. 2, p 553.

[284] Cf. Waverly Annals, p. 350-351.

[285] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 457-459. The passages cited read: *"Cum igitur certificaretur Papa, quod frustra jecisset rete ante oculos pennatorum, missis secretis nuntiis ad dominum regem Angliae, ut simplicitatem ejus circumveniret, quoniam sciebat semper ad dampna propria pronum et credulum, optulit et concessit ei regnum Siciliae et Apuliae"*; *"Unde haec audientes Templarii et Hospitalarii, patriarcha Jerosolimitanus, et omnes Sanctae Terrae praelati et incolae, ... usque ad mortem doluerunt, Romanas fallacias detestantes. Rex autem de promisso Papali umbratili adeo exhilaratus est, et adeo dilatatum est cor suum inani gaudio, quod voce, gestu et risu exultationem protestans, filium suum Edmundum regem Siciliae palam vocaret, credens profecto se jam de ipsi regno subarratum."* and *"Rex autem, instinctu diaboli et avaritiae, rescribens Papae ..."*.

[286] Burton Annals, p. 339-340.

[287] Ibid., p. 387. The comprehensive list of reasons includes, among other others, the king being more than occupied with his own kingdom, problems in Wales, Ireland, Scotland and Gascony as well as the immense funds required to gain Sicily and the fact that the matter had been entered upon by the king without the advice of his magnates, who "could and would not" support him in his endeavour.

kingdom: he had not managed to uphold his side of the bargain and pay the immense sum of money in time; but neither had the pope fulfilled his promise of ensuring Edmund's kingship.[288] When the king demanded the "entire sum that had all been spent in vain, and unfortunately lost" from the populace, while still endeavouring to pursue his son's claim, he was met with a elaborately phrased refusals similar to those named by the Burton Annals, although in a narrative rather than a list.[289] The king's venture to expand his boundaries did not raise his popularity: it was expensive and not crowned with success – but its bitterest aspect must have been the loss of money, perceived to have been drained from the kingdom without any sizable profit.

As in most aspects of his kingship, money remained an – if not indeed 'the' – essential part of how Henry III was judged by contemporaries. It played a significant role in the grudge that was borne towards his favourites, who gained the royal patronage that was denied others, it determined the splendour that Henry III could expend in the representation of his court at home and abroad, and it defined the scope with which he could act in the grander schemes of European policy. As the king was notoriously short of money, each of these fields was proportionally contested: while the pomp of his court and the magnificence with which he met foreign leaders did, in some cases, incite lengthy depictions or even praise, it would, in other cases, be regarded as squandering; as the pointless waste of an inept king. His splendour was not found wanting, but was thought wasteful in some instances, the criteria for which, however, are notoriously hard to pin down. A marriage or other prestigious event may be found to have been recorded with the proper attention to detail and ostentation of wealth, only for the king to be criticised on account of his poverty or his financial exactions shortly after. As far as Sicily was concerned, the criticism and swiftly waning support of the populace may, coupled with the widespread distrust for the Roman *curia*, be attributed to the failure of the venture – at least as soon as it had become foreseeable. The distaste the baronage had for the king's choice in attendants and favourites is even easier to understand – there was only so much royal patronage, whether it encompassed lands, inheritances, money, favour or offices: once it had been distributed, it would be lost for those who had not been there to benefit from it.

It must be said that much of the criticism that is less easy to understand stems from Matthew Paris, particularly the sneers at 'good-for-nothing foreigners' entering the country in search for money and leaving it with bags full of riches – visits, which, in other circumstances, may well have been deemed an indicator for the court's good connections to other nations. His utter disdain for the people of Spain and southern and western France in particular render him a highly biased source, even if, of course, he remained a voice of his time, and provides singular insights into how society may have perceived its king. Perhaps he was alone in regarding these visits as a disastrous waste of funds, and perhaps he was not; it remains impossible to tell for certain. What is left to say, then, is that Henry III was well aware of the dignity that befitted a king, and of the actions that would allow him to shine resplendently. He saw to it that his court was maintained in accordance with these standards. It was when his funds ran out that cracks appeared in the façade

[288] Cf. Dunstable Annals, p. 197.

[289] Cf. ibid., p. 199-200; the list includes the scarcity of money, the distance of the place, the daunting number of foes on the way and the power and wealth of Manfred, Edmund's rival to the throne.

of his public appearances. His inclination to lend his ear to men that were universally perceived as oppressive foreigners caused even greater cracks – albeit not in the visual splendour of his court, but in the relation to the realm's nobility.

### *3.2.3. The King's Justice*
#### *Contemporary Expectations*

*In rege qui recte regit necessaria*
*sunt duo haec,*
*arma videlicet et leges,*
*quibus utrumque tempus bellorum et pacis*
*recte possit gubernari.*[1]

The remarkable judicial infrastructure of Anglo-Saxon England, the "network of hundred and shire courts",[2] appropriated by the Conqueror, is a testament to the importance of law-giving for the pre-Conquest English kings. The administration of justice – inevitably coupled with the maintenance of peace – makes the king's power visible throughout the entirety of his realm, well beyond the limited radius of his personal presence. The king's role as dispenser of justice, the capacity in which, in imitation of the highest judge,[3] he comes closest to fulfilling divine functions as God's representative, is certainly among the ideals emphasised most often. Not without reason: it is both a criterion on the basis of which the effectiveness of a king's governance is very easily assessed – if (non-foreign) plundering hordes raid the countryside, it is evident that the king has failed to some extent – and an ideal of which it can be assumed with relative certainty that it was deemed worthwhile by the vast majority of the populace. We need to differentiate between everyday justice, which would usually operate quietly in the background, without chroniclers taking much note of it, and the spectacular displays of justice that involved the king personally. These would often occur in the context of defeated rebellions or successful sieges. There was a crucial difference between the king rigorously bearing down upon miscreants in the general populace and this clientele: if a misjudged step across the thin line between adequate and inappropriate violence would generally have little consequence in 'everyday' justice, apart perhaps from occasional comments that criticised king's severity, it could be positively fatal if the men on the receiving end of the misjudged judgement were among the realm's powerful and could seriously destabilise the situation within the realm. These situations, thus, were extremely decisive moments for rulers, and could determine not only their later reputation, but also the success of their reign.[4]

Wulfstan's treatise, in that respect a typical product of Anglo-Saxon thought,[5] is convinced that the king establishing a *rihtre lage*[6] is of greatest significance for the greater good of the kingdom and its people, claiming that it would bring about peace and reconciliation among

---

[1] Bracton, De Legibus, vol. 2, p. 19.
[2] Canegem, Government, law and society, p. 184.
[3] Bell, L'idéal ethique de la royauté, p. 19. For the king's obligation to do justice, see also Vollrath, Ideal and Reality, p. 93.
[4] This tension that always surrounded royal rigour, and the question which measures could benefit the king has been discussed at length in Broekmann, Rigor iustitiae, who frequently draws on English examples in his treatment of the subject, demonstrating how individual kings would handle such precarious situations. Vollrath, Rebels and Rituals, discusses the difficulty of legitimation in a conflict between rebels and kings – on both sides – and the subsequent use of ritual behaviour to establish legitimation.
[5] Cf. Nelson, Kingship and Empire, p. 240.
[6] Cf. Jost, Institutes of Polity, p. 42-43.

Christians.[7] The administration of justice is, indeed, the king's right (*riht)* and custom (*gewuna*), in the exercise of which he is to be stern with the wicked and benign towards the good.[8] Both ecclesiastical and worldly reprimands are at the king's disposal, as he is to "cleanse his people for God and for the world"[9]. Wulfstan further stresses the importance of the king's justice as he nears the end of the part of his treatise dealing with royal power, naming it one of the eight pillars of kingship[10] and clarifying how justice should be administered as he enumerates seven things befitting a just king. To those aspects of royal justice that have already been mentioned, he adds that the king must thoroughly love justice and pronounce an equally just, unbiased verdict for both friends and strangers.[11]

Always with view not only to such mundane matters, but to the greater good of the populace, Hugh de Fleury remarks that fear of the king's power achieved what the holy teachings of priests could not do as easily: correct the people in their faults, so that life on earth might draw closer to the kingdom of heaven.[12] The king ought to strive to not only lead his people in justice (*iustitia*), but in *aequitas*, higher, divine justice. His *prudentia* allowed him to separate right from wrong.[13] John of Salisbury[14] and Gerald of Wales[15] follow in a similar vein, although John of Salisbury puts considerably more emphasis on the king's connection to the divine *aequitas* than the royally disappointed Gerald of Wales, who stresses rather the importance of just laws for the well-being of society. All normative writers emphasize the same qualities desirable in princely justice: it should curb the overbearing, be impartial in its verdicts, and be mild and forgiving so as to gain thankfulness, but by no means so lenient as to lose respect.[16]

A central part of the coronation oath,[17] the making of just laws was as much the king's duty as correcting the bad customs that invariably seemed to seep (back) into the governance of the realm and the administration of justice.[18] From the standpoint of an ecclesiastical theorist, as has just been seen, there was but little change in expectations towards royal behaviour. On a more secular level, however, the change was momentous.

As the more assertive post-investiture controversy Church gradually forced the king out of his theocratic role, he began to accentuate other royal responsibilities to showcase his power – in the English case, it was the administration of justice onto which the king's searching glance fell.[19] Although conviction of an 'Angevin leap forward' is fading, with the development being seen as less of a leap and more of a sort of jigging walk that started well back in the English past, there was a noticeable increase in judicial activity as the years pass by, and by the reign of Henry II, this

[7] Cf. ibid.
[8] Cf. ibid., p. 46.
[9] Ibid., p. 50, "*clænsige his þeode / for Gode* and *for worulde*" (emphasis by Jost).
[10] Cf. ibid., p. 52.
[11] Cf. ibid., p. 53-54.
[12] Cf. Hugh de Fleury, caput IV, p. 943.
[13] Cf. ibid., caput VI, p. 948.
[14] John of Salisbury's view of the king's exercise of justice has, in connection with the divine *aequitas* and the king's place above the bonds of earthly laws, been discussed above, chapter 3.3.
[15] Cf. De principis instructione, dist. 1, chapter 10, p. 32.
[16] Cf. ibid., chapter 7, p. 21-27; John of Salisbury, Policraticus, book IV, chapter 8, p. 530.
[17] Cf. Bartlett, England under the Norman and Angevin Kings, p.125.
[18] Cf. Canegem, Government, law and society, p. 194.
[19] Cf. O'Brien, God's Peace and King's Peace, p. 18. See also Vollrath et al., Introduction, p. 15-16,

development had become exceptionally pronounced. Jurisdiction had become increasingly centralised, more accessible, developing schematic writs and procedures had added much to its reliability and routine, justices were becoming professionalized and more and more involved in the lives of ordinary people as the king's justice permeated the country.[20] In the 1120s, Henry I sent the first royal Justices in Eyre that toured the countryside and heard the pleas that had formerly been heard by local justices and sheriffs; a practice that was to be revived and expanded by his grandson.[21] By the 1180s, coroners held inquests in the shires concerning violent deaths.[22] Both King John and Henry III maintained the supervisory *coram rege* court that ran alongside the court for common pleas, alike in procedure, but with the king's court often seen to act rather as a court for higher justice and matters of feudal law.[23] Even querulous *Magna Carta* would have the king's justices visit more often – albeit, of course, not without locally elected officials being present at the trials.[24]

The king was coming to be acknowledged as a lawgiver. As such, the occasional well-staged act of divine *clementia* towards the weak and defeated or the exertion of the full *rigor iustitae* to the overbearing and brazen would not suffice any longer, although it may well have been enough for the earlier kings analysed here. John of Salisbury had still squirmed to maintain that the king was above the law, while arguing that the king's love for justice and inspiration by divine *aequitas* would prevent him from ever moving against the law anyway. The judicial treatise known as Glanvill some thirty years later describes laws, in a parallelism to arms in wartime, which subdue rebels and nations, as the instruments which allow the king to adequately govern his subjects – using, depending on the situation, either mercy or force.[25] Glanvill's successor Bracton, though also reiterating the theme of arms in war and laws in times of peace,[26] displays a definite change in attitude by firmly placing the king in the precincts of law. The king, he argues, is subject to no man, but to God and law. Interestingly enough, Bracton both uses "*Dei vicarius*" to describe royal duties *and* justifies the subjection of the king to the law by paralleling him to Christ, in whose stead he governed on earth; Christ, after all, had chosen to redeem humanity by willingly placing himself under the law to which the humans to be redeemed, too, were subject.[27]

Nonetheless, Bracton maintains a certain judicial detachedness of the king: though he is under the law, and his power should be bridled by the code of law, no one surpasses him as dispenser of justice, no writ can be directed against him; petition is the only way to plead with the king to amend his ways as his acts are not to be questioned or counteracted, since God will in the end take vengeance on him.[28] At a later stage in his treatise, Bracton partially retracts, making the king

[20] Cf. White, Restoration and Reform, p. 211-212.
[21] Cf. Carpenter, England in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, p. 108.
[22] Cf. ibid., p. 107.
[23] Cf. Turner, The English Judiciary, p. 205.
[24] Cf. Carpenter, England in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, p. 119.
[25] Cf. Glanvill, p. 1.
[26] See the initial quotation to this chapter. Bracton, De Legibus, vol. 2, p. 19.
[27] Bracton, vol. 2, p. 33: *"Et quod sub lege esse debeat, cum sit dei vicarius, evidenter apparet ad similitudinem Ihesu Christi, cuius vices gerit in terris. Quia verax dei misericordia, cum ad recuperandum humanum genus ineffabiliter ei multa suppeterent, hanc potissimam elegit viam, qua ad destruendum opus diaboli non virtute uteretur potentiae sed iustitiae ratione. Et sic esse voluit sub lege, ut eos qui sub lege erant redimeret."*
[28] Cf. ibid.

more vulnerable again. Among a list of virtues a king ought to possess, he makes the judiciary expectations towards the king quite clear: although it has been said that the princely will had the force of law, his laws originated from consultation with his magnates.[29] Of the powers he exercises, only the power of justice comes from God – injustice is a power pertaining to the devil and, in acting unjustly, the king is acting as a minister to the devil, not to God.[30] Bracton concludes this powerful statement with a twist on the recurrent explanation of the king's title. The king, he states, was not called *rex* from the masterful *regnando*, but from *bene regendo* – he is a king to govern, not to dominate – for oppression and domination are tools of the trade not of kings, but of tyrants.[31]

The king's exertion of justice, always a central aspect of his rule, became increasingly centralised, professionalised and institutionalised in the time span between 1066 and 1272. It might, indeed, be said that justice grew more dominant at the expense of a more 'traditional' kingship – and within this expanding royal justice, the king's direct and personal intervention grew less frequent and less visible: grievances were redressed by writs and procedures rather than by personal appeals to the king.[32] With this greater dominance of justice, it can safely be assumed that the level of what contemporaries regarded as the basic overall domestic peacefulness that every king ought to be able to maintain rose noticeably between the eleventh and the thirteenth century. However, as long as no cases of gross injustice surfaced, as long as perceived crime was kept within certain limits and people knew who to appeal to, the administration of justice was a device that whirred quietly in the background, serving as a handy source of income. It was when things did go horribly wrong with justice that chroniclers – and thus posterity – took note of it beyond ascribing a general level of domestic peacefulness to a king. And yet, on the positive side, they would also take note in those cases when justice became spectacular – then, the king might act so as to be painted in the image a true *vicarius Dei*: weighing, as *aequitas* demanded, necessary rigour against laudable mercy and mildness, balancing between leniency and oppression, between a show of strength and a display of cruelty.

*The Justice of William I*

"Among other things not to be forgotten is that good peace he made in this land", the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle almost grudgingly admits. The Conqueror's justice, it continues, allowed men to walk across the country with their bosom full of gold, no man dared to kill another, and rapists did not go unpunished.[33]

---

[29] Cf. ibid., vol. 2, p. 305: *"Nihil enim aliud potest rex in terris, cum sit dei minister et vicarius, nisi id solum quod de iure potest, nec obstat quod dicitur quod principi placet legis habet vigorem, quia sequitur in fine legis cum lege regia quae de imperio eius lata est, id est non quidquid de voluntate regis temere praesumptum est, sed quod magnatum suorum consilio, rege auctoritatem praestante et habita super hoc deliberatione et tractatu, recte fuerit definitum."*

[30] Cf. ibid.: "*Exercere igitur debet rex potestatem iuris sicut dei vicarius et minister in terra, quia illa potestas solius dei est, potestas autem iniuriae diaboli et non dei, et cuius horum opera fecerit rex eius minister erit cuius opera fecerit.*"

[31] Cf. ibid.

[32] Mason, William Rufus and the Benedictine Order, p. 142-143.

[33] Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 355: "*Betwyx ðorum þingum nis na to forgytane ꝥ gode frið þe he macode on isan lande swa ꝥ án man þe himsylf aht wære mihte faran ofer his rice mid his bosum full goldes ungederad.*" Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 220 (E-version).

William of Poitiers' customary praise aside, which, apart from foreseeable laudation of his just laws and just punishments focuses strongly on his ability to discipline his magnates and his soldiers,[34] the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's concluding verdict on the justice exerted by England's new king stands very much alone. William I is portrayed as an avenging bringer of justice rather than its patient steward: he, rightful heir to the realm, wrests the bleeding land from the claws of the tyrannical fratricide Harold, avenging not only the injustice done to him, but also the death of the Confessor's brother Alfred, who had so treacherously been sent to his death by Harold's father Godwin.[35]

There is but one narrative of the Conqueror's more everyday exercise of justice, and it is not a favourable one. Whilst the "foolish" rebellion of 1075 was developing, Waltheof, last of the English earls, who was involved in the rebellion, is reported by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle to have crossed to the king in Normandy, confessing his part in the rebellion, asking for the king's forgiveness and offering treasures to him. "But the king made light of it until he came to England – and then had him taken afterwards." The Breton rebels, who had been attending a bride-feast at Norwich, were punished; some exiled, some blinded, some "reduced to ignominy". It is, however, Waltheof's fate that the chronicle laments: he is reported as being beheaded in 1076 and is afterwards buried in Crowland, where he had been a benefactor. Miracle stories surround his tomb, marking him as a martyr,[36] and the king's punishment, by implication, an act of extreme injustice. In an idealised narrative, Waltheof's acts of seeking out the king, confessing his guilt and offering compensation should have secured him royal mercy. The secretive behaviour ascribed to William I when met with the noble's admission of guilt only serves to incriminate him further. Again, in an imagined idealised version of the passage (which, despite prior considerations, would include Waltheof's capital punishment), the king's punishment would have been buffeted by just anger and the need to make an example of the rebels – but it would have been swift, its declaration public and its justification transparent.

A second episode from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle details another act of injustice that was even closer to the king than the 'mere' ordering of an execution – for which he is promptly struck down by heaven. He had entered Mantes, raiding "against his own lord, Philip the king", as the author stresses, and had torched the town. In the conflagration, the churches of Mantes were consumed by fire, and two anchorites burnt to death in their cells. Without further comment, the chronicle adds: "this thus done, the king William turned back to Normandy. He did a pitiful thing, and more pitiful happened to him. How more pitiful? He became ill and that afflicted him severely."[37] The episode is immediately followed by the king's death and his epitaph – the

[34] Cf. William of Poitiers, ii.33 (p. 158-160).
[35] The death of Alfred, betrayed and sent to the king by Godwin, who had given him the kiss of peace and shared his meal with him (which, of course, only heightened the heinousness of the crime), is reported by both William of Poitiers (i.3 (p. 4)) and William of Jumièges (Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VII.6(9), p. 106). William of Poitiers even openly adds the promise that the Conqueror will take revenge for this act of injustice by opposing Harold (i.4 (p. 6)).
[36] Cf. Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 210 (E-version and D-version); p. 212 (E-version and D-version). The accounts differ; D tends to put greater stress on Waltheof. See, respectively, Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 349 and p. 350.
[37] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 218 (E-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 354.

chronicle could barely have given a stronger hint at the divine judgement that followed two unjust acts: the burning of churches and the defiance of his rightful lord.

The Conqueror's justice seems to have worked well enough most of the time, if even the critical Anglo-Saxon Chronicle admits it. Only two more spectacular narratives puncture his reign – and it seems particularly striking that the harrying of the north, to be demonized by later writers such as Simon of Durham and Orderic Vitalis, was not among them.

*The Justice of William II*

According to Orderic, William II knew well how to strike the right balance between mercy and rigour. The accounts of both rebellions during his reign each end with a remark of how the punishment the king chose was suitable to prevent further discontent. As the first rebellion is ended, Orderic concludes that the king, punishing some miscreants, ignoring others and sparing those who were already old, effectively ensured the loyalty of many men, the deterrent of the punishments strong enough to keep the others in line.[38] At the end of the second rebellion, the king was not as forgiving, and the monk's depiction not as openly supportive, although he still maintains that the king's cause was the cause of justice, and that he was wise in moving against the rebels. The chronicler lists various punishments: confiscation of lands, banishment, heavy fines, and the blinding and castration of William of Eu. Two of the punishments he enlarges on, stating the king's reason for choosing them, namely the fines and the fate of William of Eu. The exaction of fines, and huge ones at that (*ingentem pecuniae massam)*, was conducted in private – the earl of Shrewsbury, the only of those fined whom Orderic names, is reprimanded by the king in a personal talk, and received "warmly" back into the king's friendship after the payment of 3,000 pounds. Many others were punished similarly, the king, with foresight, concealing what he truly wanted, in deference of the noble kin in Normandy that might seek retribution. This statement might be interpreted in two ways: either the king was eschewing a greater punishment, because he did not wish a retaliation of the families, or he was – which seems more plausible, because of Orderic's use of positively connotated words like *reverentia* and *providus* – deliberately keeping the fines a matter of diplomatic talk in the political backyard so as not to damage the standing of these noblemen, of which, again, their families might disapprove enough to move against the king. The latter would, of course, reflect more positively on the king.[39]

Orderic's focus lies on the effects of the fate of William of Eu. He probably thought the sentence just, but still harsh enough to require some explanatory accessories. He states that the punishment had "surely" prevailed at the incitement of Hugh of Chester, because the rebel had been married to his sister, but proved an adulterer, producing three children with a mistress. Not only is the blame for the punishment thus shifted from the king's shoulders, the rebel also gains a nimbus of moral depravity. The verdict surely had its uses, and Orderic does not hesitate to name them: once that most powerful of the rebels had been destroyed, the others, already ashamed of

[38] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 2, ii. 279-230, p. 134.

[39] Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 23, iii. 411, p. 284. The passage in question reads: "*Hugonem Scrobesburiensium comitem, priuatim affatus corripuit, et aceptis ab eo tribus milibus libris in amiciciam calide recepit. Sic et alios plures ingentem pecuniae massam accipiendo castigauit et pro nobilium reuerentia parentum qui talionem in Normannia recompensare possent uelle suum prouide dissimulauit.*"

their part in the conspiracy, pined away for fear of being crushed in similar punishment. The king astutely *(subtiliter)* took note of that, and, on the advice of wise men, spared these traitors, not wishing to increase their anger and provoke a new, harmful rebellion.[40]

Yet Orderic trumps this depiction of the king shrewdly adjusting the scope of punishments to successfully secure the situation at hand. The king had even more spectacular means of ensuring the kingdom's lasting peace. In the most exuberantly positive contemporary description of the exploits of William II, he describes the king's campaign against the malcontents of 1088 as an expedition in the name of justice. It would be an arduous task to find an element of equitable praise that had not been employed by the author – with the exception perhaps of a full-fledged vision sent to advise the king, the account exhausts any possibility of stylising the campaign as just, widely-supported and divinely approved. "When King William realized that his subjects in his own land were planning treason and going from bad to worse in their lawless acts, he never for one moment thought of slinking away to some dark refuge like a timid fox, but resolved to crush the rebellion with the utmost ferocity, like a brave, strong lion".[41] The king's first impulsive reaction to the rebellion is exactly the reaction a king should show, a brave and strong resolve. Orderic builds upon that initial praiseworthy resolve by adding another constituent to good kingship a monarch should never be without: sufficient counsel. His first act is to confer with Lanfranc, the bishops, the earls and, interestingly, also the native English. All of them urge the king to move against the rebels, passionately promising their aid and loyalty, exclaiming how heinous an act it was to rebel against a known king in favour of a foreign enemy. The rebel town of Rochester is besieged and, as a mark of the king's righteousness, Orderic does not only stress that both the bishops and the native English stood firmly behind the king – as great an assertion of approved-of popular support that he, as an ecclesiastic, distrustful of secular nobility and openly sympathising with his half-English heritage could possibly give – he also employs a sign of divine approval. A plague "similar to one of the plagues of the Egyptians" broke out inside the town; the besieged being pestered by swarms of flies just like the Egyptians had been harassed by lice. A hellish turmoil unfolds inside the walls of the town, diseases spreading, corpses of men and animals rotting in the hot summer air – all of which but increased the plague of flies. At last, the besieged deigned to surrender, but their demands – the restoration of all their property, to further serve him as their lord – provoked the king's dreadful anger, who wished to take the town by force, and see the rebels hang. It is at this junction that the chronicler stages one of the decisive moments associated with placing the king on the scales of ideal royal justice. As surrender had been offered, the king could generally[42] no longer maintain the initial vehemence and just anger that had propelled him to commence the assault. He needed to think, argue, and make a decision. It is a phase that Orderic's William Rufus mastered with bravado.

Those with the king, fearing for their friends and kin among the besieged, attempted to persuade him to change his mind. They expound the nobility of mercy towards the vanquished

[40] Cf. ibid., iii. 412, p. 284.
[41] Ibid., book VIII, ch. 2, iii. 271, p. 125. Translation by Chibnall. The passage discussed in the following is, in its entirety, found in ibid., iii. 271-280, p. 124-134.
[42] There are, of course, exceptions to that rule, which will be discussed at a later stage.

with biblical examples of the conduct of King David, the most exemplary of the scripture's kings. William Rufus responds with an impressive speech, citing the arguments against a merciful conduct: the sparing of robbers, traitors and all kinds of wrongdoers would take away the peace and tranquillity from the innocent, damning and destroying the good and defenceless. He had in no way provoked the behaviour of the rebels who sought his death – and consequently, William II argues eloquently, he thought it right to imitate the judgment of David, the very king his nobles would have him follow, and have these traitors to the kingdom terribly punished, so that the knowledge of this punishment might serve to deter and castigate those living now and those yet to come.

It is altogether remarkable that a king who is often portrayed as irreligious as William II should not only have so well borne in mind the examples of the scripture, but should also so ingeniously use them, coming up with a counter-example that confuted the very arguments brought up against him. Within the narrative, the strategy works well: the magnates admit that they cannot contradict any of the royal arguments, true and just (*uera et iusta*) as they are. They then proceed to try another method to change the king's mind, stating he could not possibly be willing to spill the blood of a consecrated bishop – Odo of Bayeux – who had, with so many others, been loyal and steadfast in his service to the Conqueror. Yet even as they argue, they seem to acknowledge that their line of argument is at least partly faulty, and scale down their petitions to mere safe-conduct if the king was not willing to let the rebels re-enter positions of trust, emphasising that they might yet prove loyal followers. The king is swayed by that, and agrees to let the rebels go, but utterly rejects the demand of Odo to not have the trumpets sounded as a mark of having captured an enemy stronghold by force. The king does not see the rebels hang, but he sees them thoroughly humiliated. They emerge to the triumphant blaring of the trumpets, and the English that have supported the king cry out for halters to be brought to hang the traitors who had no right to live because of their atrocities. Similar abuses rain down upon the defeated, and, Orderic concludes complacently, *iusto Dei iudicio*, by the just judgement of God, the bishop was left bereft of his possessions and never returned to England.

Away from the monk's exemplary tale of an excellently vindictive king striving for what was right, depictions of William Rufus' everyday exercise of justice are contradictory. Orderic Vitalis does assert that, with his "tenacious memory and burning will for both good and evil, he tremendously pressed thieves and bands of robbers, and successfully enforced a serene peace to be kept throughout the realm subject to him. All inhabitants of his realm he either seduced with his largesse, or subdued them with force and fear, so that no one dared to murmur anything against him."[43] And yet, directly opposing that claim to justice prevailing throughout the realm, we find the same author's accusation of the king not protecting the peasants and the numerous depictions of Ranulf Flambard's unjust extortions in the name of the king, directly connecting to them the flight of Archbishop Anselm, whose entreaties for improvement had failed to change

[43] Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 9, iii. 315, p. 178: *"Tenacis memoriae et ardentis ad bonum seu malum uoluntatis erat, terribilis furibus et latrunculis imminebat pacemque serenam per subiectam regionem seruari ualenter cogebat. Omnes incolas regni sui aut illexit largitate, aut compresit uirtute et terrore ut nullus contra eum auderet aliquo modo mutire."*

the king's stubborn mind.[44] The bishop's escape, explained with similar reasons, is also reported by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which states that the bishop had left because "it seemed to him that in this nation little was done according to justice"[45] The chronicler seems very much in support of Anselm's alleged view on the matter, since, in Rufus' epitaph, he states that "in his days all right fell and every injustice before God and the world arose"; placing said injustice between complaints about the king's taxes and his treatment of the Church.[46]

In less general contexts, that is, in the two trials in which we see William II actually act in the making of justice, he does not cut a particularly good figure, constantly interrupting the formal proceedings with his impatient remarks, and, more incriminatingly, heavily pressing his advisors to find a way to turn the case in his favour.[47] He does not, it should be said, go up against the letter of the law in the pursuit of his demands, but it is made abundantly clear what he really wants – and that he is determined to do his utmost to achieve it. In Anselm's case, Eadmer explicitly phrases the king's desired outcome of the trial. The archbishop should either renounce his allegiance to the pope and, with that blemish in his name, remain in England or, an option more to the king's favour, renounce his archbishopric and be forced to leave the kingdom[48] In the case of William of St Calais, the king, whose wishes are given voice by Eadmer rather than the king's own direct speech in the *Historia Novorum,* is far less discreet about what he wants. After a long series of evasive answers from the bishop, he eventually snaps at him: "By the face of Lucca! Never will you leave my hands before I have the castle."[49]

With the king's intentions thus unmasked, and, more than that, not being entirely in line with what could be considered a king's zealous wish for justice to be done and tranquillity to be restored, the scene is rendered problematic for the king's reputation. However, the entire trial is a rather dubious affair in terms of where justice lies, which makes it difficult to determine exactly how it was meant to reflect on the king's exercise of justice. On the one hand, the court is evidently with the king, but it is not a good court; on the other hand, so is Lanfranc, and he normally is portrayed as a paragon of canonical rightness. The accused bishop time and again complains that he has been unjustly treated, that his possessions had been seized, his lands harassed by the king. This claim is generally refuted, and, at the same time, the bishop is rebuked for not answering the charges laid against him.[50] While the king's conduct may not be entirely commendable, neither is the bishop's: his refusal may be steadfast and tied to canonical authorities, but as one charged with treason, it seems that he is bent on making his situation as bad as in any way possible. He even refuses the conciliatory offer of Lanfranc to settle his scores with the king in a gesture of symbolic deference and submission (rather than paying a great amount of money, which might have amazed Eadmer): the archbishop advises him that he would

---

[44] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 9, iv. 54-56, p. 250-252.

[45] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 233 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 363.

[46] Ibid., p. 364: *"... on his dagan æle right afeoll 7 æle unriht for Gode 7 for worulde úp aras.";* Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 235 (D-version).

[47] For the questioning of Anselm at the council of Rockingham, see Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 53-76; the trial against William of St Calais is depicted in the entirety of *De injusta vexatione.*

[48] Cf. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 59-60.

[49] De injusta vexatione, p. 186: *"Per vultum de Luca! numquam exibis de manibus meis, donec castellum habeam."*

[50] Cf. ibid., p. 179, p. 181, p. 184, p. 188.

do better if he gave himself entirely into the mercy of the king, and he, Lanfranc, would gladly put himself at the king's feet for his sake. The bishop refuses the proposed ritual *deditio*, not believing in its power at this stage – for the king, William of St Calais says, stubbornly rejected pity.[51] If either variation of an outcome – Lanfranc's proposition or the refusal that the accused bishop prophesied – had been included in the account, it would be far easier to judge on how the king was meant to be depicted. However, just as there are no direct comments on the justness of the proceedings by the author, the text lamentably does not include such a passage. It is in another narrative that William II proves his capability for royal mercy: Orderic's William Rufus did, unconditionally, accept the *deditio* of Gilbert of Tonbridge, one of the rebel conspirators of the Mowbray-rebellion. The king did at first hesitate when he heard the request of the man who had thrown himself at his feet: in return for what he was about to disclose, the supplicant asked that the king would forgive him the wrong he had done. William II may have hesitated, but, much to his credit, he did forgive him.[52]

The darkest account, as often, is Eadmer's. He believed Rufus to be entirely capable of fabricating cases in order to attain his desire. He notes how the king had reprimanded Anselm that the knights he had sent for the royal campaign against the Welsh were insufficiently trained, for which he ought to come before the royal court. Eadmer has a ready explanation for the king's accusation which, as a matter of course, he thought unjust and detrimental to the cause of the archbishop. Anselm was not to gain his heart's desire of aiding the Church because from an evil impulse this quarrel had been born, which was in no way generated by a matter of truth, but maliciously conceived to prevent the archbishop from being able to address the matter of God. He enlarges on that, addressing the matter of the king's justice in general, which, he asserts, hinged entirely on the nod of the monarch. More than that: absolutely nothing was considered at the court but the king's own will, and its judgement was built not on law, not on *aequitas*, not on reason.[53]

These narrative efforts of blighting the royal reputation as far as matters of justice were concerned culminate in a particularly memorable scene at Anselm's trial in the king's court that can be viewed as symptomatic for Eadmer's view of William II's justice as a whole. At the trial, Anselm admits that he had, as the king says, promised to protect the royal customs and practices. However, he says that he distinctly recalls, and here it is indicated that Anselm is quoting, having made the promise of protecting, as God willed, such customs held by the equity and after the will of God. The king and court interrupt, saying that neither God *(Dei)* nor equity *(rectitudo)* had in any way been mentioned when Anselm had made the oath. "Upon my soul!" Anselm interjects,

---

[51] Cf. De injusta vexatione, p. 189: *"'Melius ageres si in misericordiam regis totum te poneres, et ego ad pedes ejus libenter tui causa venirem.' Et episcopus, 'Misericordiam,' inquit, 'ejus obnixe deprecor, ...'"*. What has been classically identified as the ritual of deditio, most often classified as a symbolic act that allowed to come out of situations of conflict without risking an escalation, is usually made up of the core elements of prostratrion, confession of faults, and a plea for forgiveness. Numerous variations of the core ritual have been identified. See Krause, Konflikt und Ritual, p. 183-197; Althoff, Variability of Rituals, p. 75-81.

[52] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 23, iii. 407-408, p. 280.

[53] Cf. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 77-78, particularly: *"Sed, ne cordis ejus affectus perveniret ad effectum, orta est instinctu maligni quam dixi causa discidii, utique non ex rei veritate producta, sed ad omnem pro Deo loquendi aditum Anselmo intereludendum malitiose composita. Quod ille dinoscens, et insuper cuncta regalis curiae judicia pendere ad nutum regis..."* and *"... curiali judicio, quod nulla lex, nulla aequitas, nulla ratio muniebat"*.

"if there has been, as you say, no mention of either God or equity, what then has been mentioned? Far be it from all Christians, far be it to maintain or defend what is known to be against God or equity." Murmurs arise among the court, but nothing is voiced clearly – Anselm had dealt a formidable blow. By implying that equity was in no way involved in the workings of the king's court when it dealt out justice, by thus questioning the basis of royal justice, the writer was not only challenging the righteousness of the king's practices, he was attacking the very thing upon which his kingship was built: the dispensation of justice, central to royal self-depiction and the legitimation of power, was bound inseparably to his connection to the divine. If this connection was denied – and just that is being implied here – "what then", to quote Anselm, *was* left?[54]

It is hard to conciliate the different views on the justice of William II. The overall impression is that he was more readily inclined to be a stern as opposed to a merciful ruler – albeit not excessively so, and apparently without incurring too much blame in the form of negative depictions of cruel punishments. Orderic renders his handling of the campaigns against the rebels as a triumph of royal justice. Other depictions are fairly scant, apart from general comments on dissatisfaction with the state of justice in the realm, expressed most prominently in the complaints of exactions and the flight of Anselm. The king's exercise of justice is cast into stronger relief primarily in the depictions of the trials he held; and in these, he does not incur a portrayal anywhere near as positive as that presented by Orderic. Most striking, perhaps, is that the king is presented as using justice more as a means to an end than as an end in itself – not entirely the best basis for legitimate kingship.

### *The Justice of Henry I*

Few aspects of the rule of Henry I are more generously commented on than how he handled the justice of the realm. There are no great trials which show the king in the seat of justice; rather, remarks and brief episodes permeate historiographic writing about the king. On his death, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle sinisterly comments that the "land immediately grew dark, because every man who could immediately robbed another." The king had ensured that "in his time no man dared to do wrong against another; he made peace for man and beast; no man dared say anything but good to whoever carried their load of gold and silver."[55] His death meant a lapse in justice and security, it heralded the 'lawless' days of the 'anarchy'. The king, it would seem, was eager to portray himself as particularly intent on justice, especially at his accession – having cemented his legitimacy by his marriage into the old royal family, he also at once promised to address the perceived shortcomings of his brother's rule. It falls, again, to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle to remark that on the Sunday following his designation as king, Henry I stood "before the altar in Westminster, [and] promised to God and all the people to put down all the injustices which there were during his brother's time, and to hold the best laws which had stood in any king's day before him." It is only after this promise, made at the grandiose royal site of Westminster which

[54] Ibid., p. 83-84. The quoted passage by Anselm read thus: "*Pape, si nec Dei nec rectitudinis mentio, ut dicitis, facta fuit, cujus tunc? Absit ab omni Christiano, absit leges vel consuetudines tenere aut tueri quae Deo et rectitudini contrariae esse noscuntur.*"
[55] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 262 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 381.

his brother had so recently chosen to grace (much against, it must be said, the goodwill of the writer of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle who described this act) with a splendid hall, that the king is consecrated, the land "submits" to him, and the great swear their oaths of fealty. If the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's resentment at the late king's grand building schemes (and the funds and manpower they required) is anything to go by, the site of Westminster, where construction had ceased not too long before, is quite a symbolic place to announce a fresh start and the abolishment of injustice done. Indeed, the king's next steps seem to confirm that such gestures had been on the mind of Henry I, who had to entrench himself deeply as king before the impending return of his crusading brother, Robert. "Soon after" his coronation, the chronicle continues, he had the notorious Ranulf Flambard seized and imprisoned in the Tower of London, and straightaway he sent for the exiled Anselm to return.[56] Flambard had become a figurehead for all that was considered unjust under William II, and his capture indicated a decided break with the government of the dead king. And, seeing that Flambard, in spite of having escaped from prison, fled to Normandy and allied with Robert Curthose against Henry I, was later re-instated as bishop without much publicity,[57] it seems entirely justified to view these actions were meant to aid the new king in gaining the acceptance of his kingdom, and gain it fast.

The royal strategy seems to have worked, if the reign's narratives are read as reflecting the general mood within the kingdom. Both William of Malmesbury and the Worcester chronicle jubilantly report that the king was going to bring justice back to the realm, mirroring the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in all but the king's promise before the Westminster altar – in William of Malmesbury's case, the gesture seems to be replaced by the king sending a proclamation through the realm. The chronicler particularly exults in the governmental change, likening the king's coming to the dawning of a bright day, cheered by the gladness of the people; rejoicing that the scum of depravities (*nequitiarum fece*, that is to say Flambard) had been thrown into the darkness of prison. The Worcester chronicle seizes the opportunity to recount the many crimes of the late king's minister, and asserts that the (hitherto nebulous) laws of King Edward were given back to the people, albeit with the changes made by William the Conqueror.[58] Henry I was doing his best not only to turn over a fresh leaf – he was positively tearing out the old one.

He certainly took a radical approach in what he was doing. Eadmer recounts the atrocities perpetrated by the court of William II and, not without a certain righteous relish, narrates how the king, having published an edict, vigorously punished, with firm justice *(constanti justitia),* those who could be proved to have committed any of the atrocities listed before: he had eyes gouged out, hands, feet or other limbs amputated. When the others saw this justice done to many they, cherishing their own unscathedness, were deterred from further injustice.[59] It would be tedious to recount all such instances of the hard-handedness of Henry I when it came to dispensing justice,

[56] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 236 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 365.
[57] Cf. Hollister, Henry I, p. 489-491.
[58] Cf. John of Worcester 3, p. 94-97; William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-393.3, p. 714.
[59] Cf. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 192-193: "*Huic malo rex Henricus mederi desiderans, indicto edicto omnibus qui aliquid eorum quae dixi fecisse probari poterant aut oculos erui, aut manus, vel pedes, vel alia membra constanti justitia strenuus faciebat amputari. Quae justitia in pluribus visa caeteros, integritatem sui amantes, ab aliorum laesione deterrebat.*" Eadmer, who, apart from indicating the positive consequences, speaks *of "constanti justitia"* and calls the punishment *"strenuus*", could hardly indicate more clearly that he approved of the king's approach to the matter.

as there are many of them. What is remarkable, however, is their context: seen in conjunction with the praise contemporaries tend to lavish on the king's justice, it must be concluded that these very episodes of royal rigour, although they appear cruel from a modern point of view, were fitted into the narrative precisely because they exemplified the king's excellent justice – a justice that was always unbending, always applying to everyone and which did not eschew bringing down even the harshest of penalties on any- and *every*one who had done wrong.[60] Only rarely do chroniclers feel incited to explain why the king was dealing out a certain punishment; otherwise, the incidents simply punctuate their narrative, sometimes lauded, sometimes without remarks: the king was doing what kings (ought to) do.

Orderic does recount a particularly frightful instance of the king's sense of justice: the king had sought to bind his son-in-law to him by exchanging hostages. In return for the son of one of his liegemen, the king received his two granddaughters in custody. However, in the throes of the Norman rebellion, the king's son-in-law had the boy's eyes gouged out and, thus maimed, sent him back to his father. The report by the angry father deeply grieved the king *(uehementer inde doluit)*, and he handed over his two granddaughters to the furious parent so that he might take his vengeance. Thus, "with the permission of the angry king" *(permissu regis irati)*, he cruelly exacted his vengeance on the girls, putting their eyes out and cutting the tips of their noses. The chronicler does believe this punishment to be cruel. He uses *crudeliter* to describe the mutilation, and he adds that "Alas, innocent children had to wretchedly atone for their fathers' injustice" – but he does not necessarily blame the king. While the king is acting in anger, which he certainly should not do, his anger is not presented as robbing him of rational thought; he is simply conceding to an injured vassal what he is due. Additionally, in the king's ensuing move against his daughter Juliana, the bitterly enraged wife of the initial offender who held one of the castles in his stead, Orderic makes abundantly clear who is in the superior moral position. Not only does he quote Salomon to attest the nefariousness of women, but he also describes how the king was divinely protected from her crossbow-assault on him.[61]

Both William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis are found explaining (and defending) the king's harsh decisions. In the latter's case, the king, having captured a number of rebels, sits in judgement over them, condemning two of them to have their eyes put out for treason, one to be blinded for mocking him. One of the nobles in attendance is bold enough to approach the king (implying that others may well have thought along the same lines) to tell him that what he was doing was unusual according to "our customs" (*nostris ritibus inusitatam ... facis)*, that knights captured while in the service of their lord were not usually subjected to mutilation. Instead of remorsefully acknowledging his fault, the king is willing (and allotted the room in the narrative) to

[60] The question of whether or not Henry I could be regarded as cruel has been discussed repeatedly. The notion has been maintained for a long while, but modern historians have taken to accepting, in very much the same way as this analysis has, that Henry I was fulfilling the expectations of his time in the rigour with which he punished, or else was utilising extreme punishment to counter intense situations. For recent renditions of the discussion, see Green, Henry I, p. 238-239 and p. 314-316; Broeckmann, Rigor iustitiae, p. 143-144. See also Hollister, Henry I, p. 254 for a brief discussion of the episode in which Henry I handed over his granddaughters for corporeal punishment to satisfy the need for revenge of Ralph Harnec. The background of the episode and the reasons that had forced Henry I's hand, so Hollister, had been frequently omitted by twentieth-century historians, presenting Henry I as a cruel monster.

[61] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XII, ch. 10, iv. 336-338 p. 210-214.

give a profound explanation that his conduct is entirely just. In direct speech and at some length he recounts the history of misdeeds the culprits had accumulated, how two of them had sworn homage to him and deliberately committed treason, how the third had been pardoned by the king's mercy only to move against him again once he was free to do so, and, on top of that, how he had composed songs of mockery on the king which he sang in public. That man, Henry I concludes on the most contentious of the judgements, had been delivered into his hands by God himself, so that he might make an example of him to deter others from taking the same path. "Upon hearing this", Orderic writes, the man who had thus spoken up "was silenced, for he had nothing that he could reasonably bring forth as a counter-argument."[62]

While Orderic's story, although approving, remains on a relatively neutral level, William of Malmesbury is found to more directly praise the king's judicial rigour. At the beginning of his reign, he comments, the king was more prone to exact loss of limbs, so as to brand the guilty as a fearful example; later, he would accept monetary payments. This prudence of his conduct *(pro morum prudentia)* ensured that his magnates felt reverence for him, ordinary folk admiration.[63] Only two truly critical voices can be singled out: Henry of Huntingdon, in his *contemptu mundi*, a piece that differs very significantly from his main historical work – particularly in the judgements passed on Henry I – provides a list of the wicked crimes of the king including the mutilation of his granddaughters, the imprisonment of his brother and the killing of many men.[64] For the year 1124, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle notes that the king had had a great number of thieves hanged and many blinded or castrated, punishments that, as "many honest men said", contained much injustice; God knew that men were first robbed of their goods (by courts and taxes), and then killed.[65]

However, the chronicler most certainly did not disapprove of this type of punishment in general, as he demonstrates in his entry for the following year. Seeing that, as the chronicle laments, one could hardly buy anything for the debased money at the market, the king had all moneyers seized one by one, then had their right hand cut off and ordered them to be castrated. "And that was all done with much right", the belligerent chronicle states with obvious satisfaction, because of the men's "great falsity". [66] Clearly, the pity for men who were driven to unbearable lengths in the face of cruel taxes might still encompass thieves but stopped at the money-makers. It was an act of mutilation that was greeted with much general approval. Almost as gleefully as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Henry of Huntingdon remarks that "it was good to hear how severely the king bore down on the wicked."[67] William of Malmesbury comments that, with the moneyers, the king "showed particular diligence"[68]. Eadmer states that through the

[62] Ibid., ch. 39, iv. 459-461, p. 350-354. The quoted passage reads: *"His auditis Flandriae dux conticuit quia quid contra haec rationabiliter obiceret non habuit."*
[63] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-412.3, p. 742-745.
[64] Henry of Huntingdon, c.12 (p. 604).
[65] Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 376; Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 254 (D-version).
[66] Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 376. Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 255 (D-version).
[67] Henry of Huntingdon, vii. 36 (p. 474): "*Opere uero preicium est audire quam seuerus rex fuerit in prauos."*
[68] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-399, p. 724: "*Contra trapezetas, quos uulgo monetarios uocant, precipuam sui diligentiam exhibuit, ...".*

king's measure "much good was, at that time, effected for the entire kingdom."[69] The Worcester chronicle follows Eadmer in this passage, taking over the statement of the great benefit for the kingdom while admitting that the king's punishment was a particularly severe one *(... sub tanta animaduersione)* and noting that the moneyers were not allowed any other way of redeeming themselves.[70] The very idea of the king not taking money from this, in all probability, very lucrative source is expanded upon by the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*. The great defender of justice and most rigorous punisher of injustice, it lauds, could have made many thousands of talents by accepting a ransom for the moneyers' limbs, but, the narrative concludes jubilantly, the king spurned money out of love for justice.[71]

Compared to the great concentration in which the king's rigorous justice is described, depictions of him showing mercy are exceedingly rare, and tend to revolve around the king and his conduct towards his family. William of Malmesbury assures us that the king had held his brother Robert in open confinement, where he had to suffer nothing but (and that only to a certain extent) solitude.[72] The imprisonment of his brother left the king to deal with his nephew, William Clito, then but a child – a confrontation in which Orderic Vitalis describes a compassionate and kind king. His mercy for the child must, seeing that Orderic wrote with hindsight, have set off Clito – already then a potential threat and, with manhood, to become a very real one – as one who had once profited from the king's grace, and who would, having chosen rebellion, not do so a second time. When the child, trembling with fear, was brought before the king, he looked at him, and "consoled it with kind promises, as he had, in his tender age, already been assaulted with manifold afflictions". The king seems to have been well aware which impact his conduct towards the child would have on his reputation. Well aware, as Orderic asserts, that it would be held against him if the child was to come to any harm while under his tutelage, he did not take on the child himself, but instead entrusted it to Helias of Saint-Saens.[73] The move was most certainly a very prudent one: children enjoyed (and continue to do so) a nimbus of innocence and could not be judged by the wrongs of their parents. Confinement, if it was honourable, dictated that the prisoners should be kept in good health, particularly against the growing ideological background of chivalry. For a child, especially one that would grow into a potential rival for power, this must have counted doubly so; and for it to 'mysteriously' come to harm while imprisoned would cast a most unfavourable light on its jailer, as evidenced most disastrously by the death of Arthur (possibly) at the hands of King John roughly a hundred years later – at once, rumours then began to grow as to how the boy had found death at the hands or at the orders of the king.

Henry I's decision left William Clito to grow up on his own and, ultimately, to be the one responsible for his conduct, so that, when the boy turned out to become dangerous to his

[69] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 193: *"Ex quo facto magnum bonum ad tempus toti regno creatum est."*
[70] John of Worcester 3, p. 113-115.
[71] Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VIII-23, p. 238: "*O uirum defensorem iustitie et iniquitatis acerrimum punitorem! O si uelet redemptionem accipere pro tot hominum impiorum menbris, quanta milia talentorum posset inde lucrari, sed, ut diximus, spreuit pecuniam amore iustitie!*"
[72] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book IV-389.10-11, p. 706.
[73] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XI, iv. 232, ch. 20, p. 92.

position, the king could move against him without having to bear the blame for injuries he had done to the boy, for indeed he had done 'no more' than to take away his father. Orderic comes to the same conclusion when he reports the boy's end. Although mourning the fate of the young man and honouring him with an epitaph, he makes clear that it was not the king who was in the wrong. On his deathbed, the young man had a letter written to the king, begging his uncle to forgive all the wrongs that he had done to him, and asking the king to take back into his good grace those who had rallied to his cause. The king, mercifully and "in prudent kindness" *(sollerti benignitate),* agreed to do so. The statement is, in this case, followed by the repentant and ultimately salutary life story of one of the magnates with which the king thus chose to be reconciled, whom he even granted a prestigious marriage.[74] Such brief stories of good ends to lives are often included by Orderic Vitalis to showcase the rightness of certain decisions. And Henry I certainly had done right in adhering to William Clito's last wishes. How, after all, as vicar of God's justice on earth, could he possibly countermand a dying, repentant man's wishes?

A second entreaty for mercy, admittedly made not on the deathbed, but no less dramatic than William Clito's plea because of the abundance of gestures of repentance and humility the supplicants displayed, is that of the king's daughter Juliana and her husband Eustace, who had rebelled against Henry I in Normandy, with Juliana even attempting to kill the king after he had allowed her daughters to be mutilated. On the advice of friends, they hurried to the king during a siege, entered his tent barefooted and threw themselves at the king's feet. "Why have you dared to approach me without my conduct, when you have vexed me with so many and so great injuries?" the king asks of them. Eustace replies "You are my natural lord. Therefore I come to you, my lord, unworried, to render you my loyal service and so that justice will be done for all the times I have erred, according to the judgement of your clemency." In approaching the king secretly, without first asking for safe conduct, they were both putting themselves entirely at the king's mercy – he could have seized them there and then as the traitors they were, and could hardly have been condemned for it. But being thus beseeched, in humility and trust, it was clear which conduct would betoken greater royal grace, greater divine mercy. Others present also pleaded that the king should show mercy, and, at last, he is won over, clemency stirring in his heart, and he becomes more benevolent. The king forgives them – and again Orderic adds the successful and salutary story of how their life continued after this act of penitence. While Eustace lives in great wealth, Juliana, embellished earlier as an epitome of female wickedness and fraud, eventually even becomes a nun – like the mercy of God that might bestow second chances upon

[74] Ibid., book XII, ch. 45-46, iv. 483-486, p. 378-380. The description of Clito's petition reads thus: *"Iohannes ... primus Henricum regem adiuit, eique casum nepotis sui nunciauit, et sigillatos apices de parte eius supplex optulit, in quibus moriens adolescentulus a patruo suo malorum quae contra illum fecerat indulgentiam postulabat, eumque ut omnes qui ad se confugerant si ad illum remearent benigne susciperet obsecrabat. His itaque rex preceptis annuit et plures ad illum reuersos recepit."*

sinners, the king's mercy had turned two more lives from insurgence, and ultimately aided in bringing them to a salvific conclusion.[75]

In the love of justice attested to him, the king also undertook a foray into a field in which balancing the approved conduct in the eyes of chroniclers was far more difficult than in the case of mercy and rigour: ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The bone of contention was the question of how to deal with clerics who had mistresses, and the king's involvement with the Church's jurisdiction is received quite differently by individual writers. While the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle laments that clerics could keep their wives "by leave of the king" in spite of all decrees issued,[76] William of Malmesbury criticizes that the king moved against the clerics: when the king was contemplating imposing fines upon the priests who had recalled their former mistresses or sought new ones after the decrees of the council of London, he is reprimanded by Anselm in a letter that the servants of the Church were to be corrected solely by other servants of the Church.[77]

Remarkably, it is Eadmer who delivers, eventually, the most positive image of Henry I. The king's first venture into ecclesiastical jurisdiction is radically criticised: the king had imposed heavy fines on both the guilty and the innocent, since his real motive was the quest for money. In London, he is confronted with the pleas of two hundred clergymen who come to meet him barefooted, but wearing their priestly vestments, thus emphasizing their status as persons outside the king's jurisdiction while at the same time humbly imploring the king to have mercy. The king's reaction, however, is not the one anticipated: he simply orders them to be driven from his sight. As to the reasons, Eadmer hazards that either the king was too distracted by other concerns to be moved to pity by their prayers or regarded them as men far from any religion, whom he did not deign to grace with an answer. The clerics, utterly confused, try to persuade the queen to intercede, but although she is deeply moved, she does not dare to do so. Eadmer disapproves sharply of the king's attempt to exercise ecclesiastical jurisdiction for the benefit of his treasury, but his strong bias towards the English clergy, whom he believes to be entirely corrupt, has him portray the king's refusal to accept the priests' submission in a rather more positive light by giving an explanation for the king's conduct that put Henry I into a morally superior position.[78]

The matter is treated quite differently when the king approaches ecclesiastical jurisdiction guided by the advice of Anselm and the bishops, and "with royal authority and power" strengthens them in their quest to root out evil. The measures may well have led to a similar result, but the legitimacy of the king's actions is entirely unquestioned because he first obtained

---

[75] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XII, ch. 22, iv. 393-394, p. 278: *"Porro Eustachius et Iuliana uxor eius cum amicis consiliati sunt et ad obsidionem amicorum instinctu properauerunt, nudisque pedibus ingressi tentorium regis ad pedes corruerunt. Quibus repente rex ait, 'Cur super me sine meo conductu introire ausi estis, quem tot tantisque iniuriis exacerbastis?' Cui Eustachius respondit, 'Tu meus es naturalis dominus. Ad te ergo dominum meum uenio securus, seruitium meum tibi fideliter exhibiturus, et rectitudinem pro erratibus secundum examen pietatis tuae per omnia facturus.' Amici pro genero regis supplicantes affuerunt ... clementia uero cor regis ad generum et filiam emolliuit, et benigniter reflexit ... . Post haec prefatus heros in pace zetis et muris Paceium muniuit, multisque diuitiis abundans plusquam xx annis uixit. Porro Iuliana post aliquot annos lasciuam quam duxerat uitam habitumque mutauit, et sanctimonialis in nouo Fontisebraldi coenobio facta Domino Deo seruiuit."*

[76] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 260; Thorpe, Anglo.Saxon Chronicle, p. 379.

[77] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Pontificum, i. 60. 4-5, p. 184.

[78] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 173.

the consent of the clergy, and especially that of the Archbishop of Canterbury.[79] After this, the king can do no wrong: Anselm had died, but the decrees were still strictly enforced, even more so than when he had lived. Many of the clerics had delightedly promised themselves that they might return to their earlier behaviour, *sed in contrarium res lapsa est* – but quite the contrary happened, "for the king, whom many feared more than God, bound them by his law, whether they wanted or not", to adhere to the decrees of the council of London.[80] The king had taken it upon himself to enforce ecclesiastical jurisdiction – and that, apparently, was a good thing.

The praise contemporaries had in store for Henry I's justice is overwhelming. Time and again, the chronicles stress how he enforced a firm peace throughout both England and Normandy, how his name inspired fear in the hearts of evildoers; William of Malmesbury's judgement is symptomatic of the predominant opinion: "although the king would long and often be absent from England due to the disorders of Normandy, the peace of the island remained intact, because the rebels were kept in check by the mere fear of his name; even foreigners would gladly call upon the island as a safe haven of peace."[81] The rigorous pursuit of justice and maintenance of peace is the much-appreciated central characteristic of the rule of Henry I. While the king, especially at the onset of his reign, when he attempted to banish (and blacken) the image of Rufus' reign, set the greatest store by making fearful examples of offenders, he appears to have known that, at times, mercy could be more beneficial for his cause – Orderic Vitalis' description of both instances of royal clemency contain an element of strategy and awareness on the part of the king. If the Norman monk was aware of the value of the king's gestures and attributed their conscious use to Henry I's own schemes, it should be assumed that the monarch must have known about their significance himself, and evidently knew to work them in his favour to such an extent that, possibly already during his lifetime, Orderic Vitalis felt he could identify him as the "lion of justice" foretold in the mysterious prophecies of Merlin which, at that time, had only just begun to circulate.[82]

[79] Stevenson, Eadmer's History of Recent Events, p. 207; Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 193: *"Quod incontinentiae crimen rex subvertere cupiens, adunatis ad curiam suam in solemnitate Pentecostes apud Lundoniam cunctis majoribus regni, de negotio cum Anselmo archiepiscopo et caeteris episcopis Angliae tractavit, eosque ad malum illud extirpandum regali auctoritate atque potentia fultos roboravit."*

[80] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 213: "*Rex enim, qui plus Dei a multis timebatur, sua lege eos constrinxit quatinus, vellent nollent, concilii Lundoniensis, quod supra notavimus, saltem in oculis hominum fierent executores."*

[81] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-410.1, p. 740: *"Illud preter cetera Henricum insigniebat, quod, quanuis pro tumultibus Normannicis sepe et diu regno suo deesset, ita timore suo rebelles frenabat ut nichil pacis in Anglia desiderares; quocirca etiam exterae gentes illuc, uelut ad unicum tutae quietis portum, libenter appellebant."* Similar judgements are scattered widely – for instance in Orderic Vitalis 6, book XI, ch. 7, iv. 192, p. 46, where Norman churchmen flee to the king's court to recuperate from the disorder there. Ibid., book XI, ch. 20, v. 232, p. 92, describes how evildoers were distraught at the king's conquest of Normandy, which put an end to their crimes; ibid., ch. 23, iv. 236-237, p. 98, details the peace he established in the country. Similarly, on the firm peace that reigned in Normandy once Henry I had taken over, see Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, viii-13, p. 222); Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 239; William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-399, p. 724. General praise of the king's peace and justice can be found in John of Worcester 3, p. 95; Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VIII-33, p. 258, Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 16, iv. 91-92, p. 294-296.

[82] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 6, book XII, ch. 47, iv. 493-494, p. 386-388.

*The Justice of Stephen*

Justice and justification are also the most compelling narrative themes associated with Stephen's kingship; infusing every last chronicle dealing with his reign, the subject is rendered in a kaleidoscope of different shades and perspectives. Beginning with the justification of the very claim Stephen laid to the throne and inextricably tied up with the legitimation of the rebels' cause, the scope ranges from the blatant injustice with which individuals tore at the realm's foundations to the king's acts of mercy and rigour which aimed to curb such excesses and, finally, the desperation with which writers perceived the ultimate mirror of royal justice: the state of the realm and its people.

An inkling of the importance the question of the legitimacy of the royal succession held for the perception and the depiction of Stephen as king can be gleaned from the sheer amount of space that is dedicated to these circumstances in the chronicles that were decidedly partial in the conflict of Stephen and the Empress. Orderic Vitalis, as an instance for a fairly neutral view on the two parties, describes the king's accession in a very sober, matter-of-fact tone – and only once he refers to the oath Henry I had his nobles swear to his daughter: as the cause that had led David of Scotland to join the insurgents in England. Not one mention is made of Stephen having sworn such an oath.[83] And yet, this was the very element that would turn a rightful king into a perjurer, the rebels into defenders of what was right. This is most impressively visible in the direct juxtaposition of the narration as presented by the *Gesta Stephani*, in favour of Stephen, and that of William of Malmesbury's *Historia Novella*, which supported the cause of the empress and her champion Robert of Gloucester. William of Malmesbury is among the sources that mention Stephen and Earl Robert of Gloucester vying with each other for the honour of being the first to swear fealty to the empress,[84] thus adding weight to the king's later perjury. As the earl, in full conformity with the traditions adequate for these occasions*, more maiorum,* renounced the homage he had (only conditionally, as we are assured) given to the king, William of Malmesbury elucidates the reasons the earl named for doing so justly *(iuste)*: the king had claimed the throne contrary to right *(illicite)*, had scorned, even deceived (*neglexerat, ne dicam mentitus fuerat)* all the faith that had been sworn to him. The king himself had even, the writer enhances his argument *(ipsemet quin etiam)*, acted against the law, or, more precisely, against the oath *(sacramentum*) he had sworn to Matilda. If this is not enough proof of the justness of the earl's cause – and William of Malmesbury must have known the arguments the king's side employed against the accusation of oath breaking – he buttresses his claims with the opinion of those who knew all too well how one was to go about *sacramentum facere*: the Church. It is not only on the advice of many religious men (*multorum religiosorum)*, but on a decree of the pope himself *(apostolici decreti)* that the earl was to hold true to the oath he had sworn to his sister. Despite his promise to the contrary, William of Malmesbury fails to include the alleged letter from the pope, of which no trace has been found.[85]

The opposing narrative can be found in the *Gesta Stephani*, which, once more, in its elaborate affirmations reveals so much of the accusations that must have been brought up against the king

[83] Cf. ibid., ch.37, v. 111, p. 518.
[84] Cf. William of Malmesbury, Historia Novella, i. 3, p. 8.
[85] Ibid., i. 21, p. 40-43.

that it is barely necessary to read the actual criticism of the king's deeds. After the death of Henry I, the author unfolds a panorama of atrocity that reads as if, rather literally, all hell had broken loose in England: rebellion, disorder, perversity, bonds of friendship and relationship alike shattered, men flying into a passion of violently and cruelly attacking their neighbours, law being abandoned, robbery abounding, and not even the creatures of the forest being safe. The man on the spot, landing with but little adherents, is Stephen; a noble of illustrious descent and the most beloved of nephews to Henry I *(omnium nepotum solum carissimus).* Sheer chance (read: divine will) brought him a wind that carried him to England, where he sped towards London, and was received by the city as the successor of Henry I: "whereas it had been sadly mourning the grievous death of its protector Henry, it revelled in exultant joy as though it had recovered him in Stephen." The Londoners, who, in their need, believed Stephen to have been led to them by divine approval *(diuina .... nutu inter eos adductum),* claimed the privilege to select a new king, and deemed it necessary that such a step be taken as soon as possible, to re-establish peace for the good of the kingdom. In this justification, the oath is given its due place. When his supporters protest that the new king should be anointed, it is, notably, the greedy, money-hoarding archbishop of Canterbury who, despite his background, meets the petitioners with a sensible answer: such things should not be undertaken in haste, and a weighty decision like the accession of a new prince should first be discussed and weighed by all. The self-same archbishop mentions the oath that had been made; stating that it seemed presumptuous *(praesumptuosum)* to act contrary to the orders of the late king when his daughter was both alive and not lacking in heirs. Stephen's supporters argue their case valiantly: in its essence, their argumentation is that Henry I had compelled the leading men of his kingdom to swear the oath, therefore rendering it invalid. This line of argument rests on a number of supports. It mentions the discord that had long existed between the Normans and the Angevins; a state of hostility which Henry I had attempted to end by marrying his daughter to Geoffrey of Anjou. It evokes the character of a king who had ruled a long time, and who was doubtlessly still very present in collective memory: the king's imperious, thundering voice that nothing could withstand had compelled rather than informed, making the nobles swear to accept Matilda as his heir. The author claims that the king was aware that his nobles were swearing unwillingly (*inuite*), but that he was so intent on making peace that he accepted this fault in his design. Masterfully, the vindication of Stephen's right to the throne closes with an assertion that few who might have wished to do so could challenge, seeing that few of them were present: the narrative enters the dying king's most private sphere. In his last living moments, the king is reported to have confessed his errors in front of many attendants standing by his bed; and among that which he regretted is, very prominently, the imposition of the oath on the nobles of his realm. Even the king himself, so we are led to believe, knew the oath to be null and void. It is this argument – and a number of others not mentioned for the sake of brevity by the author (who had hitherto shown remarkable attention more to detail than to any concept of brevity) – that eventually sways even the archbishop, and Stephen is consecrated as king.[86]

[86] Gesta Stephani, p. 1-7 and 10-13; the direct quotation translated by Potter/King.

It is also worth noting how the explanation given by the *Gesta* circumvents any descriptions that might make the king appear eager to assume office, while apparently not daring to openly make use of the topos of the reluctant king. As this topos was especially virulently in use in cases of disputed succession, when not presenting a king as a hesitant ruler was tantamount to inviting others to style him a rash usurper, it would have been another step in proclaiming the rightfulness of Stephen's accession. Yet, as it is not used, it seems reasonable to assume that making Stephen reluctant to assume office would have stretched 'reality' just a bit too far to still be believable. However, Stephen's direct involvement in becoming king ends as soon as he has entered London: once he has arrived there, the Londoners and his supporters take over, and argue his cause, so that Stephen is left as a figure who set out to make peace, and was gladly received as a peacemaker. While this does not suffice to create a reluctant king, it does, at least, render Stephen a king who had allowed himself to be pulled into the office, rather than fighting to acquire it for himself.

Both sides muster divine or ecclesiastical approval, but the judgement of Stephen as a justly made king ultimately comes to rest on the question of whether or not the oath on Matilda was to be interpreted as a valid oath, and this question remains as disputed today as it was in the Middle Ages. Yet no matter the rightfulness of his accession, once Stephen had become an anointed king, this status could not be ignored, and not even his greatest critics fail to acknowledge him as such. Consequently, his are also the duties of a king, and, after his accession had been firmly cemented by having received unction, it is by the fulfilment of these duties that he is measured. With Stephen captured, William of Malmesbury seeks to explain why the empress should be the one to succeed to the throne, and has the bishop of Winchester declare that, with Matilda detained in Normandy, Stephen had been allowed to reign *(regnare permissus)* in the interest of preserving the kingdom's peace. However, the king failed dismally at his task: no justice was done *(nulla iustitia exercitata)*, peace was at once entirely abolished, bishops captured, ecclesiastic institutions despoiled, advice of the wicked heeded – there was virtually nothing Stephen had done right.[87] The message is clear: a kingdom does not belong into the hands of a king who cannot do justice.

Like all other writers of his time, William of Malmesbury does not hesitate to describe the injustice he perceived to have been perpetrated under Stephen's rule, although he remains comparatively mild in both quantity and quality of his depictions. Especially compelling is his paragraph on a very "barbarous and terrible" man, who was wont to smear his prisoners with honey and expose them naked in the heat outside, so that insects came to sting them.[88] It is but one example to illustrate the type of people that England now harboured – there were numerous castles all over England, each originally meant to defend its own district, but now, "to speak more truthfully", devastating it. Not only goods were plundered: the people dwelling in these districts themselves were captured, imprisoned, tortured and not released until they paid ransom,

---

[87] Malmesbury, Historia Novella, iii. 47, p. 92. The bishop's lengthy address of complaint reads thus: *"... piget meminisse, pudet, narrare, qualem se in regno exhibuerit: quomodo in presumptores nulla iustitia exercitata, quomodo pax omnis statim ipso pene anno abolita; epuscopi cati, et ad redditionem possessionum suarum coacti; abbatiae uenditae, aecclesiae thesauris depilatae; consilia prauorum audita, bonorum uel suspensa uel omnino contempta."*

[88] Ibid., ii. 39, p. 74-76.

many of them dying in the process. Against these malefactors, the Church was powerless; its sentences of excommunication for those who plundered churches and laid hands on churchmen simply not heeded. Such misdeeds, as a matter of course, fall back onto the king, who should have surpressed them – for, as the chronicler alleges, directly contrasting the circumstances of the two kings' rule, under King Henry I many had come to the island in search for peace, whereas now, under Stephen, the men from Flanders and Brittany (forever notorious, it should be noted, as cruel mercenaries) came for the plunder they hoped to gain.[89]

William of Malmesbury does not stand alone in his assertions of injustice abounding during Stephen's reign. The state of the realm as the civil war raged has indeed always captivated the interest of historians; especially so for modern historians since the depictions appear to be both far too numerous and far too homogenous to be called mere propaganda. Even the *Gesta Stephani* refers continuously to the outrageous circumstances England found itself faced with, but, by making the king and his actions its focus, it differs dramatically from the entirety of the remaining chronicles. Stephen's mighty efforts of pacifying his realm are always in the centre of attention, and they fail through no fault of his own. A particularly memorable passage likens the king's fight against the troubles of his kingdom to the fight of Hercules against the Hydra, with the monster forever growing new heads. These tasks dragged him, "without pause, hither and thither over all parts of England". It is not Stephen's success (which was lacking) that the chronicler wants to praise, but instead his unconquerable spirit and the toil he invested in the tasks that lay ahead. Subsequently, he compares the labours of King Stephen to those of Saul, the Macabees and Alexander the Great, declaring them both greater and more grievous to bear, as they originated from the treachery of his own countrymen and vassals.[90]

Abandoning his classicist analogies, the author, in another passage, attributes Stephen's failure to maintain peace to divine judgement. Mustering biblical quotes and apocalyptic imagery, the chronicler portrays the strife, crimes and wars that so torment England as having their cause in a severe divine punishment for the exceedingly proud and sinful behaviour of the English. Stephen's efforts were bound to be in vain: despite his great military skill and the continuous efforts he made, he could not gain the outcome he desired, because the land still toiled under divine punishment – against which, of course, a king could (and should) do nothing.[91] While the author still strives to portray the king in the best possible light in these two entries, decidedly removing all blame from him, an entry some five years later seems more desperate, and less intent on praise, and, indeed, more on saving what might still be salvaged of the king's reputation. It describes the dreadful famine plaguing England that followed the alternate raging of the royal forces and the adherents of the earl of Gloucester across England's turf, which always left the land desolated as crops withered on their fields, their owners already starved. Pillaging mercenaries roamed the land, extorting levies from the Church, threatening and robbing

---

[89] Ibid., ii. 37, p. 70-73.

[90] Gesta Stephani, p. 68-71.

[91] Ibid., p. 84-87; especially: *"Vnde licet rex Stephanus plurime militandi artificio ad regnum pacandum inuigilaret, licet immenso decertandi sudore se et suos contra aduersarios continuo fatigaret, non tamen ad uotum profecit; quia, ut prophetae utar uerbis, in omnibus, quae eis contigerant, 'non fuit auersus furor Domini, sed et semper adhuc manus illius extenta', semperque graue Domini onus magis et magis illos deprimens...".*

ecclesiastics. It is interesting that, in this passage, no mention is made of the king. The complaints, instead, are carried to the ears of the bishops, who do nothing about the situation, although their station and duty as pillars and wardens of the Church, bolstered with numerous metaphors and citations from the bible, was not only to hold up and strengthen the Church, but to bravely defend it from its enemies *(... sed et ab aduersariis fortiter semper et inexpugnate debent defendere)*. The criticism amounts to a scandalised tirade about the behaviour of the bishops, who either cowered in basest fear *(illi timore uilissime depressi)* and only brought forth soon-revoked sentences of excommunication, partook in the plunder from their well-stocked castles, or even rode out, armoured and girt with swords, to claim spoils of their own, putting the blame on their knights rather than on themselves.[92] Whether the chronicler was severely disappointed by the bishops' conduct, or whether he had hoped that they, at least, would support the king they had consecrated, is difficult to fathom. Whatever else the passage does, it does, once more, distract from the accusations of the king not establishing justice within his kingdom – and it does so quite contrarily to the other chronicles of this time.

Most famous is the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's verdict of Stephen's reign as a time when "Christ and His saints slept", that "lasted the 19 years while Stephen was king, and ... always grew worse and worse." Hunger abounded as villages were plundered, burnt and abandoned, crops universally failed, Jews bought a Christian child, subjected it to the tortures of Christ's passion and buried it after having crucified it, every man robbed every other, villagers fled when they saw men approaching, and the curses of the clergy amounted to nothing "because they were all accursed and foresworn and lost". Especially graphic, and in their narrative structure remarkably close to the passage from William of Malmesbury detailed above, are the chronicle's depiction of the tortures devised by "devils and evil men" who would, at night, issue forth from their castles to imprison people and extort ransom from them.[93] Henry of Huntingdon chooses a more classicist approach, proffering elegiac verses on the dismal state of England; the land toiling under robbery, extortion, arson, famine, torture and great treachery, a glimpse of Styx *(ecce Stigis facies)*, whose underworldly darkness had engulfed the land.[94] The Worcester chronicle once more mirrors the common description of injustice, with plunder, oppression and devastation everywhere, but puts considerably more emphasis on the building of fortifications, describing wealthy lords literally walling themselves in while outside the populace suffered. It is this chronicle that most directly puts the blame on the king, emphatically appealing for royal justice to be done: a kingdom, the chronicler points out, should be at peace out of royal terror, comparable to a lion's roar, but now devastation and plunder never ceased in many parts of the realm. From that, the writer continues, one could see with how little prudence and with what weak strength England was ruled, more with injustice than with the justice to which the king was obligated.[95] It

[92] Ibid., p. 152-157.

[93] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 264-265 (E-Version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 382-383.

[94] Henry of Huntingdon, x. 12, (p. 724).

[95] John of Worcester 3, p. 216-218: *"Dum autem ob regium terrorem, rugitui leonis comparandum, omnia deberent paci cedere, iam in pluribus locis, et maxime in Walia, depopulatio et depredatio minime cessat. Hinc conicere quis poterit, quod mediocri prudentia imbecillique fortitudine, et magis iniustitia quam iustitia a quibus regi deberet, regitur Anglia."*

gets even more direct than that: “Stephen is the king of peace. If he were only the king of firm justice, crushing his enemies under foot, assessing all things with the balanced lance of judgement, protecting and strengthening with his mighty power the friends of peace.”[96]

To find peace and justice thus opposed is exceedingly rare; one would generally assume being referred to as a king of peace to be thoroughly positive. Henry I, after all, was referred to as such, to express that he resorted to warfare only when it was evident that no other way was available. In Stephen’s case, however, the title of *rex pacis* must seem more like a mockery than a compliment; and contrary to the case of Henry I, it is not coupled with strength in warfare, and the refusal to risk an armed conflict when it was not absolutely necessary, but with the inadequacy of the king’s justice, and the severe deficiencies of the protection he could offer his subjects. With this judgement on Stephen, we find the rare idea, not voiced under any of his predecessors since William the Conqueror, that there can be such a thing as a king who is too peaceful. How did such a verdict come to pass? A king’s perceived ‘peacefulness’ was not only dependant on his reluctance to engage in warfare, but also hinged on how he chose to resolve situations that demanded his decision for either mercy or rigour. It can be assumed that these decisions were of particular importance for the perception of Stephen, given the circumstances of his reign. Against a background of disorder and unrest royal acts of justice could make a lasting impression that they could never hope to have in times of peace. If the king was seen doing justice, making peace, exercising his right and duty as keeper of justice, his actions could become significant as rallying-points, as signs of hope, as deterrent to wrongdoers. It is more than evident that the king cannot possibly be everywhere at once, and consequently it is on single, especially ostentatious displays of kingly justice that the effect and perception of royal jurisdiction depends.

Stephen’s reign, with its numerous sieges and, consequently, a large number of garrisons that could be punished or spared, presents countless opportunities for the king to show rigour or mercy. And, as a matter of fact, there are indications that the king knew very well the moral and symbolic impact such displays could have both on the rebels currently under siege and those still roaming free. The *Gesta Stephani* records how Stephen’s men, while besieging Brampton, had caught a miserable wretch who had attempted to escape by lowering himself from the wall, and the king had him hanged high in the sight of all his comrades, assuring that they would suffer just such a punishment if they did not surrender soon. At once, they feared for their life and returned the castle to the king. For their surrender, they were set free by royal mercy, but had to roam the kingdom as exiles until such a time that royal clemency would recall them.[97] The episode could be called a textbook example of the power the king’s rigour could exert once it was unleashed, with Stephen balancing the emotional outburst of threats and severe punishment against the not too mellow leniency towards those who had surrendered themselves into his hands. A second such successful incident, but two years later, after the siege of Shrewsbury, is portrayed most emphatically by Orderic Vitalis. Because, as Orderic alleged, many of the realm’s great men scorned the royal court and the king’s gentleness, the king commanded angrily *(iratus)* that ninety-

[96] Ibid., p. 268-269; translation by McGurk. *“Rex est pacis, et o utinam rex rigoris iusitie conterens sub pedibus inimicos, et equa lance iudicii decernens omnia in robore fortitudinis conseruans et corroborans pacis amicos.”*
[97] Gesta Stephani, p. 30.

three of the men who had defied him were to be hanged or otherwise put to death. The men begged for their lives, offering great amounts of money to be spared, but the king preferred to have revenge on their misdeeds rather than gold, and had them executed. Again, the king's unyielding rigour makes a tremendous impression on the remaining rebels: as they hear of the king's severity *(seueritate regis audita)* they are greatly terrified *(nimis territi sunt)*, and within three days, bringing up excuses for their lateness, surrender the keys to their castles and imploringly offer their service to the king.[98]

In both of these instances, the king's policy of rigour proves highly successful, his insurgent subjects coming to heel almost immediately. However, there were a great many decisions to be made, and the line was a difficult one to tread – thus we find Stephen criticised for his decisions more often than we encounter praise for them. At the end of a lengthy siege, Henry of Huntingdon remarks tersely that "making use of the worst counsel, he did not exact revenge on the traitors. For if he had done so then, fewer castles would have been held against him later."[99] The siege is presented in great detail in the *Gesta Stephani*, which describes the dreadful plight of hunger and thirst that the besieged had to endure, with the king hardening his heart even against the tearful, bare-footed supplication of the besieged rebel's wife, following the advice of his brother, the bishop of Winchester, that the besieged were so tormented by hunger and thirst that they would soon surrender on whatever conditions he demanded. This course eventually falters when the king is approached by a number of his barons, who are either driven by compassion for their relatives within the beleaguered walls or are secretly accomplices of the rebels' cause, and indignant that such a severe siege should be carried out against those who shared their views. It is with numerous arguments that they approach and eventually persuade the king, and the tone of these arguments underlines the predicament in which the king found himself with regard to justice. It is their core argument that, having obtained a complete triumph over his enemies, it would be more appropriate for his dignity, more adequate for his royal piety, if Stephen granted life to the besieged rather than inflicting punishment. Eventually, the king yields.[100]

It is difficult to interpret these this as simply another variation on the theme of bad counsellors standing for implicit criticism of a king. Instead, the blame seems to be placed on the magnates; for the king starts out with the "right" idea of approaching the problem. The treacherous (and compassionate) nobles of the *Gesta Stephani*'s version of the events know exactly how to handle the king's insecurities about what was proper royal behaviour; insecurities that every monarch must have faced at some stage. Orderic Vitalis explicitly states the problem: "had

---

98 Orderic Vitalis 6, book XIII, ch. 37, v. 113-114, p. 522.

99 Henry of Huntingdon, x. 4 (p. 708): *"Sero tamen redditum est ei castellum, et uindictam non exercuit in proditores suos pessimo consilio usus. Si enim eam tunc exercuisset, postea contra eum tot castella retenta non fuissent."* It is particularly interesting that Henry of Huntingdon does explicitely not speak of justice or punishment here, but of revenge. His choice of words might be regarded as a marker for how problematic the relationship between Stephen and his magnates had become by that time; and does, to some extent, testify to the helplessness at the circumstances that is so ubiquitous in all narrative sources.

100 Gesta Stephani, p. 38-43, especially: *"Dicebant namque regi plenum se de hostibus conquisisse triumphum, dum quod sui erat iuris, praeualentibus uiribus suis, tandem conquisisset; ideoque dignitati suae esse aptius, regiaeque pietati competentius, captiuis supplicibus uitam donare, quam usque ad mortem punitis, quod parum uitae supererat immisericorditer auferre."*

the sly magnates deigned to abandon their sordid ambitions, he would have been a liberal and benevolent protector of the realm."[101]

However, Stephen is not always the victim. He must have greatly misjudged what was expected of him when he allowed the empress, only just arrived in England, and basically helpless at his hands, to go free and join her brother in Bristol. The outraged outcry following this decision of the king reaches as far as the Hexham chronicle, which, otherwise, only rarely passes judgement on the king, but, in this situation, remarks that it was "out of indiscreet simplicity of mind" that he had let her go.[102] Orderic Vitalis chimes in, visibly despairing: "in granting this licence the king showed himself either very guileless or very foolish, and prudent men must deplore his lack of regard for both his own safety and the security of the kingdom", for, he continues, the king "could easily have stamped out the flames of terrible evil that were being kindled if he had acted with the foresight characteristic of wise men and had immediately driven the wolf from the entrance of the sheep-fold ... and had struck down with the sword of justice *(gladio iustitiae)*, after the fashion of his ancestors *(more patrum)*, the pestilential strength of those who desired rapine and slaughter and the devastation of their country."[103] It is a criticism both of devastatingly bad judgement on the part of the king as well as – linked to that – his incapability on the field of administering justice, as he was obviously lacking the divine foresight which ought to have shown him which was the right course to take. The criticism must have weighed heavily, for the *Gesta Stephani* attempts bravely to justify the king's actions, stating that he had only acted in the way he did because he wanted to prevent being attacked from two sides – by the earl of Gloucester and the empress – preferring rather to concentrate his efforts and military strength on a single opponent.[104]

A second instance of what Edmund King so fittingly termed "misplaced chivalry"[105] is reported solely by the *Gesta Stephani*: the future Henry II, on a foray into England, had found himself stranded with neither mercenaries nor money, deserted by his men when he could no longer pay them. He had turned to both his mother and Robert of Gloucester for help, but was unable to obtain the money he needed to return home. At last he resorted to a stratagem that seems incredibly insolent, and asked Stephen for money. The narrative setup contains all the significant expressions that mark a plea of favour which deserves to be heeded: Henry called upon the ties of blood that bound him to the king, and, in friendly and supplicatory fashion *(benigne ... et suppliciter)* appealed to the king's compassion, asserting that he was well disposed to the king as far as he personally was concerned. The *Gesta* continues that the king, *erat semper compassionis et pietatis abundans*, sent the requested money, thus turning an action that was as suitable a target for Stephen's critics as the safe conduct he granted to the empress many years earlier into a demonstration of the king's Christian virtues. However, against the background of

---

[101] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XIII, ch. 43, v. 129, p. 544: *"Et si dolosi optimates paterentur abolitis suis prauis conatibus, liberalis tutor patriae fuisset ac beniuolus."*
[102] Cf. John of Hexham, p. 125-126: *"ex indiscreta animi simplicitate"*.
[103] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XIII, ch 41, v. 121-122, p. 534-535; translation by Chibnall.
[104] Cf. Gesta Stephani, p. 88-91.
[105] King, Introduction, p. 19. King here refers to the empress' initial arrival at Arundel and subsequent leave to go to Bristol, as discussed above.

Stephen's reign, a simple reference to Christian ideals does apparently not suffice to point out the reason behind the royal decision, for the chronicle lapses into a more elaborate explanation that renders Stephen a devout Christian of apostolic qualities. Some, the author continues, called it childish and unwise to thus support his rival and opponent, but the deeper meaning behind his action was to overcome evil by doing good, to weaken his enemy by inducing him to remorse and reformation.[106] The episode is revealing insofar as it shows exactly how much circumstances had changed: when Stephen had allowed the empress to go free, the chronicle draws on military advantage to justify the actions of the king. Years later, the war practically having ground to a tiresome standstill, with all calamities possible already having hit the kingdom, and the future Henry II having been generally accepted as successor to the throne, such arguments were either no longer needed or no longer believed. The fact that the king was thus helping the enemy had become either acceptable – or completely irrelevant.

From his troubled accession to the way he attempted to deal with the disorder in his kingdom, justice, during Stephen's reign, is a precarious topic; and just how difficult it was for the king to strike the right balance is seen easily from the examples given here. Even leaving aside the disputed nature of his claim to the throne, the state of justice in his realm did and does not reflect well on the king – and even when disregarding the more obviously prejudiced writers, there is no gainsaying the widespread and homogenous accounts of disorder and injustice that describe England under King Stephen. It is, perhaps, because of this uniform, overpowering impression that displays of royal justice, of which the *Gesta Stephani* valiantly brings forth several examples, appear so forlorn and scarcely convincing.

*The Justice of Henry II*

Comparing comments on the justice of Stephen and Henry II is almost inevitable, since contemporaries themselves were wont to contrast the two monarchs, especially at the outset of the reign of Henry II. The negative echo the turmoil during the civil war had left in a number of chronicles was picked up again when this time was perceived to have come to a close: Henry of Huntingdon had closed his account on Stephen's reign with a poetic praise of the new king, and the "bliss of that time" *(cuius temporis beatitudine)*. The most prominent theme in these verses is the ability of Henry II, though as yet absent and not reigning as king, to do what Stephen had not been able to achieve despite being present in the kingdom: bringing peace.[107] Considerably less metaphoric than Henry of Huntingdon, who likens the new king to a radiant sun whose beams bring virtue, punishment and correction, Robert of Torigni states that there was *pax summa*, the greatest peace, throughout the country, for fear and love of the new king.[108] Similar remarks

---

[106] Gesta Stephani, p. 206-209. The explanation for the king's behaviour reads thus: *"Et quidem licet rex a quibusdam in hoc notaretur, quod non solum imprudenter immo et pueriliter egisset, qui eum, quem maxime persequi debebat, data pecunia tantopere fulciebat, ego altius eum et consultis fecisse sentio: quia quanto benignius quis et humanius se erga aduersarium continet, tanto eum et debiliorem reddit et amplius infirmat; ideoque secundum Psalmistam, noluit retribuentibus sibi mala inferre, sed ut Apostolus praecipit, sic in bonum malum deuincere, quatinus per bonum aduersario bene impensum carbones compunctionis et correctionis in mente illius ingereret."* Noteworthy is especially the strong reference to the bible, the notion that the king was obeying commands set out directly in the Holy Scripture in doing what he did.

[107] Cf. Henry of Huntingdon, x.40 (p. 776).

[108] Robert of Torigni, p. 181.

come from the Chronicle of Battle Abbey: the reign of Stephen is likened to the land suffering under a "storm of hostility"; hostility that was "expulsed" under Henry II, who "recalled the peace that had long been banished" from the land, and under whom "justice was seen, gradually, to vigorously resume its flourishing". The king, it comments, brought back the times of his grandfather, which it fondly recalls for the justice that had prevailed then.[109] William of Newburgh gives the most comprehensive account of Henry II's accession, at which, he comments, many hoped that the new king would improve the dismal state of affairs, especially since "prudence, constancy and a zeal for justice were seen to be within him".[110] He also details just what might have been understood as bringing back the days of Henry I. Following the king's accession to the throne, the mercenaries that had served in the civil war were cast out, vanishing *quasi phantasmata*; with but few exceptions, the castles newly erected in the reign of Stephen were demolished, new officials appointed, the royal demesne reclaimed – in the process of which the king declared void charters of Stephen that were produced against the new king retaking land. Here, William of Newburgh arrives at his most drastic comment in favour of the new king: these charters, he claims, brought them no security, for the charters of an intruder *(invasoris)* ought not to be able to harm the rights of a legitimate prince.[111]

If William of Newburgh's verdict, in its entirety, is taken at face value, we are driven to conclude that Henry II knew which problems he needed to address to satisfy his new subjects, as each of his actions corresponds to a severely criticised feature of Stephen's reign, from the (allegedly) rampant continental mercenaries whose reputation remained catastrophic throughout the Middle Ages, to the unlicensed castles from which power-hungry magnates were said to have preyed on the innocent and the drastic diminishing of the Crown lands, which eventually impoverished the king. The general tone of contentment in the other chronicles suggests that Henry II had managed to have an exemplary and, as far as his reputation as just king was concerned, very beneficial start.

Much of the king's contemporary reputation for jurisdiction rests on documentary evidence. If we consider only chronicles, they seem – compared to the reputation Henry II still enjoys – curiously (and perhaps tellingly) void of lengthy discussions of the king's standing on justice and related virtues. The most extensive commentary on Henry II engaged in the actual exercise of justice comes from the Battle Chronicle; an account deeply conscious of the way in which justice

[109] Cf. Chronicle of Battle Abbey, p. 224, for the renewed flourishing of justice and peace: *"Rege Stephano decedente, et pacifico rege Henrico secundo succedente, hostilitas expellitur, pax iampridem expulsa reuocatur"*, and: "*...quippe cum iustitiam paulatim uigore resumpto reflorere uideret*". The statement that justice flourished 'again' is easily connected to the assumption that Henry II was using his grandfather, Henry I, as yardstick and ultimate measure of what was 'right', emphasising his succession while obscuring Stephen. On that, see Graeme, Restorationa nd Reform, p. 121-129. Shortly before that praise of Henry II, the Battle Abbey chronicle gave a brief summary of the three reigns (p. 212), which can be boiled down to there being justice (and subsequently, as it is the main concern of the chronicle, the just granting (and vindication) of privileges to monastic houses) in the reign of Henry I, no justice in the reign of Stephen, and justice again in the reign of Henry II.

[110] William of Newburgh, book 2, chapter 1, p. 101: *"Prioris quippe regni, sub quo tot mala pullulaverant, infelicitatem experti, de novo principe meliora sperabant, praesertim cum praeclara illi prudentia atque constantia cum zelo justitiae inesse viderentur"*.

[111] Ibid., chapter 1-2, p. 101-103. The sentence on Stephen's charters reads: *"Sed quoniam chartae invasoris juri legitimi principis praejudicium facere minime debuerunt, eisdem instrumentis tuti esse minime potuerunt."* Despite this damning verdict, the chronicler acknowledges that the charters had, at least partially, been extorted *(extorserant)*, thus offering at least a scrap of redemption for the late king's reputation. However, it was not a very sizeable scrap – the other charters had been granted on account of services.

was administered at the royal court – at least as long as it concerned the abbey's privileges. Its tone is thoroughly positive, presenting a king who was not only very much interested in the legal procedures surrounding the granting of privileges, but who would also personally preside over such cases, offer ideas and suggestions of his own and very much serve as the beating heart of the administration of justice. The chronicler has the king sit among his trusted *familiares*, officials and churchmen and personally examine the charters presented to him, has him listen to the pleas of both conflicting parties and, while most judicial talk is done by his chancellor and other officials, has him frequently comment on the matter at hand, demonstrating that he is alert and following the proceedings.[112] In the end, the archbishop of Canterbury offers to settle the differences through the custom of the Church, but the king, unwilling, would rather bring the matter to a *fine recto*, a just end, taking the counsel of the churchmen and his officials present. It is the king who confers, at length, with the complainant, and, on his nod, the offended bishop publicly declares his voluntary resignation of any claims concerning the abbey. In the end, the long-contested matter finally settled, the king is granted an opportunity to present his regal qualities in merciful conduct. Begged by the archbishop to be forgiving towards the complainant, who had, at an earlier stage in the proceedings and much to the king's exasperation, called into question the royal charters and rights, the king, in a gesture of magnanimity, proclaims that he would give him the kiss of peace not only once, but a hundred times over, forgiving all there was to forgive. The ceremonial conclusion of the matter continues, as the king commands the parties involved to bestow, in the presence of a number of prominent witnesses, the kiss of peace upon each other as a sign of their consent and friendship.[113]

The chronicle does not only portray the king as a merciful dispenser of justice, it also, apparently very pleased with the king's actions, has him act as an innovator of procedure at a later stage. Explaining that any charter of privileges, renewed over the years, would inadvertently include references to its predecessors, thus making it necessary for the validation of said charter to present it together with the older charters, the author states that the king would put no such clause of reference into his new charter. Instead, he himself dictated a hitherto unused clause (*aliam antea inusitatam ipse dictauit)* that called on the king's own person having witnessed the preceding charters. The "famous prince" explained that this clause would serve to validate the privileges of Battle Abbey even if all the other charters should be lost, as it made no mention of the former charters. The innovation is picked up delightedly, and the abbot requests more charters with the same clause to be produced for the lasting security of his abbey's privileges.[114] From the very same chronicle stems royal a statement that the author deigned to call *memoriale*. Confronted with the claim that a charter bearing the seal of Henry I might be false, the king exclaimed that if that might be proved, he could make immense profit in England; but that, with

[112] The king's interjections may appear insignificant at first glance. However, if they are juxtaposed to the conduct, for instance, of William Rufus throughout the trial of William of St Calais as discussed above, they are rather remarkable, presenting Henry II as portraying genuine interest and, more than that, an almost unshakeable patience through the lengthy proceeding. He only loses his patience when he feels that his royal prerogatives are being put into question, and, as quickly as he has flared up, he settles down again.
[113] Chronicle of Battle Abbey, p. 176-209, recounts the lengthy judicial process over the prerogatives of Battle Abbey and its special significance as part of the royal demesne, which had been questioned by the bishop of Chichester.
[114] Cf. ibid., p. 310-313.

such a charter in the monks' hands, he would not even be able to justly withhold from them possessions he dearly loved if the charter in question told of their claim to it.[115] It is not surprising that the author thought this statement worth preserving: the king was acknowledging that he himself was bound to certain laws and, more so perhaps than any of the other actions with which he had invoked the times of his grandfather, this one, being to the king's detriment, underlined that he treasured a mode of governance that appears, by the time of his reign, to have gained almost legendary status. The justice of the reign of Henry I does seem to have become by the reign of Henry II what the laws and justice of Edward the Confessor had been in the time of Henry I.

While the Battle Chronicle provides a valuable glimpse into what royal justice may have looked like if the king did take a personal interest, for the everyday experience of the administration of justice in the realm the king's officials are likely to have left a more lasting impression. Ralph of Diceto provides a more distanced view of the king's judiciary endeavours, including said officials, but still remains full of praise. A lengthy passage of his, pertaining to the middle of Henry II's reign, concerns the king's officials and their selection. The king, writes Ralph of Diceto, had found that many of the men in public functions were concerned primarily with their own well-being, and he thus grew increasingly apprehensive of the kingdom's welfare, eventually resolving to see that justice was carried deeply into the provinces. Apparently in favour of the idea, the author proceeds to list what was expected of this intention of the king, detailing in which ways miscreants might offend, and in which ways the king would bring justice to them, striking terror, as he puts it, in the hearts of the guilty and boldly invading the dens of the feral wrongdoers; fining, incarcerating, hanging, exiling or mutilating in accordance with the punishment the crime called for.[116] The king, according to Ralph of Diceto, did most keenly search for fitting judges, surveying men from all professions as to their love of justice and ability not to be corrupted by presents. In this way, clerics had found their way into the ranks of the royal officials, three bishops being made chief justices. Notably, the writer takes the time to explain why the bishops might take up work for the king, bringing forth the example of Roger Bishop of Salisbury who had retained obedience to the archbishops of Canterbury as well as the Church of Rome despite holding a high position in Henry I's governance.[117] He clearly supports Henry II's choice in justices: not only does he underline the king's pious intention, its much-lauded pleasingness to God; he also anticipatorily defends it against criticism by drawing on a glowing example from the reign of Henry I.

By all means not all comments on the king's officials were as complimentary. While Roger of Howden would concede that in selecting officials whose prudence and loyalty he trusted, Henry

[115] Cf. ibid., p. 214-217.

[116] Cf. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 1, p. 434. The passage can be read, in a very generalised sense, as a summary of what royal justice could and should encompass, as it lists various crimes and (rather vaguely) also the punishment they deserve. Starting out with crimes that concerned predominantly the king – offending the royal majesty or burdening the kingdom's treasury – the list becomes more general as it proceeds, encompassing murder, treachery and minor offences.

[117] Cf. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 1, p. 434-435.

II was providing in every way he could for the honour and security of his kingdom,[118] he would also lash out at perceived mistakes. In the wake of the inquest of sheriffs, he lamented that it had resulted in great harm *(magnum damnum)* for the people of England, because several of the offending officials were allowed to resume office, and committed as many cruelties as before.[119] He also reports the case of a knight who was about to be hanged on the unjust judgement of Ranulf de Glanvill, who held a grudge against said knight. The hanging is only interrupted by the bishop of Worcester rushing towards the scene and forbidding the execution on the appointed (holy) day on pain of excommunication. Although the executioners are torn between their fear of the king's justice and their fear of divine punishment, they eventually relent. The execution is deferred until the following morning. The king, moved by piety and counsel, and, well knowing Ranulf de Glanvill's disposition towards the knight, spares his life. However, the innocent delinquent is kept in prison until the death of the king.[120] The king, we can deduct from this episode, was aware that he had officials that would at times act against justice, and could countermand their actions – however, either the king's power over his justice was limited in some inconceivable way, or he relied too much on these men to entirely put a stop to unjust activities. Neither option reflects particularly well on the king's relationship to his officials.

There is more severe criticism, particularly so when forest offences are concerned. The Battle Chronicle singles out the king's chief forester Alan de Neville as a particularly loathsome official, who "maliciously vexed many provinces of England with innumerable and unaccustomed inquests". The blame is largely put on the official, not on the king. The chief forester did not shrink away from offending the heavenly king in order to please (by considerably enriching) the earthly king, the chronicler states, and places the forester's greatest crimes into a time when the king had left England, thereby implying that the forester was aware that the king would not approve of such extortions. The entire comment is turned into a moral lesson by the closing sentences: while the king would take the money, he was neither grateful nor particularly well-disposed to his forester, who had thus, despite all his crimes, managed to please neither king.[121] Walter Map remarks that the king would not suppress the foresters. Even until after his death,

---

[118] Cf. Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 198. *"Itaque Henricus rex Angliae honori sui et regni sui securitati modis omnibus quibus potuit providens, justitias suos et rectores, de quorum fidelitate et prudentia confidebat, in Normannia et in caeteris terris suis transmarinis constituit."*

[119] Cf. ibid., p. 4-5, which paraphrases the text of the inquest, explaining how the king had all his tenants question their villains about the practices of their sheriffs. For a general commentary on the inquest of sheriffs, see for instance Warren, The Governance of Norman and Angevin England, p. 112-120.

[120] Cf. Roger of Howden 2, p. 286-287. Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 314-316, also reports the episode, at greater length but less judgemental and less dramatic. In that rendition, the author more thoroughly explains the circumstances that had led to Ranulf de Glanvill harbouring this grudge against the knight, elaborating how said knight had married a heiress that Ranulf de Glanvill had wanted to profitably marry to someone else. In this version, Henry II relents out of his reverence for the bishop, and is apparently unaware of the injustice perpetrated. However, this version ends as soon as the man is saved – by envoys sent with greatest haste, and a praise of God that the man had been saved from the hateful hands of Ranulf de Glanvill. There is no mention made of the life prison sentence mentioned in Roger of Howden.

[121] Cf. Chronicle of Battle Abbey, p. 220-223. The episode retains a certain ambiguity nonetheless. The king's opinion on his forester is only revealed when Alan is dying, and several monks approach the king with the intention to bury the former forester, thereby earning a share of his wealth. The king reponds: *"His wealth is going to be mine. You may have his corpse. The devils of hell may have his soul."* Translation by Searle. The forester's ruthless extortion did not gain him the king's goodwill, might even have displeased him, as his dispassionate estimation of Alan's posthumous fate may suggest. Yet Henry II did have no qualms about accepting the money it generated.

they would go on sacrificing the flesh of people and drinking their blood.[122] Map, however, mitigates his criticism. He concedes that not all of the king's officials were of such condemnable stock, but that he was speaking only of the wilder part among them. At a later stage in his work, he largely absolves the king from these faults. As a minister of justice, Henry II was unsurpassed in his time; esteemed so highly that kings settled their disputes in his court, but nonetheless justice was sold even under his sway. The unjust officials, Map explains, were cautious and fearful of him, because he was a far swifter avenger than God. They would cunningly hide their wrongdoing from him – notoriously by sending him out of doors "to play with birds and dogs", so that he would not see what they did within. Upon the king's return, he would share his haul with them while they kept theirs secret. In a realm as wide as that of Henry II, with a household so big, there was little wonder that the king was thus deceived.[123] Map's criticism, while not without comedy and sympathy, is barbed, seeing that the king's passion for hunting was a thorn in the side of many ecclesiastic writers. Exploiting the, in this episode, rather comically innocent king's vice in such a way is nothing short of deepest satire; it may well be a jab in the direction of the clerics who condemned the royal passion for hunting – but overlooked the much more drastic consequences festering at the heart of the court, which, by implication, they were not particularly familiar with.

Besides the everyday administration of justice in the realm, Henry II, like any other king, was also placed in situations of great symbolic significance; situations that could more easily be connected with the king's virtues than the administrative humdrum of the realm's justice. Following the shattering defeat of an enemy or rebel, he would be faced with humble surrenders – pleas for forgiveness that he could either answer or dismiss. Walter Map presents an outstanding example of a divinely merciful king. He had captured and sentenced to death a crafty forger that had created a perfect copy of the king's seal. However, as the man was about to be hanged, the king saw the brother of the culprit, an old and just man, weeping. The king, at once conquered by pity, weighed the goodness of the one higher than the deed of the other, and, in tears, returned joy to the tearful man by setting free his brother. For the sake of justice (and, by implication, to safeguard the kingdom from future fraudulency), the criminal was to spend his life in a monastery, but remained alive.[124] The king is shown to strike a perfect balance between mercy and rigour, and, more than that, in this display embodies the Christian grasp for and believe in redemption. A more godlike show of mercy is barely conceivable.

It is mercy that seems to suit the king best. Nowhere is royal mercy more palpably and abundantly described than in the rebellion of the king's sons and their subsequent surrender. Gerald of Wales, when still lauding Henry II, proclaimed that the king, when his dungeons were teeming with the many prisoners he had made after the 1173/1174 revolt, governed his own anger at the rebels and restored them to their honours, sparing their lives. Despite his complimentary tone, there is a note of incomprehension, perhaps, in Gerald of Wales'

[122] Walter Map, dist. i, cc. 6-9 (p. 10).
[123] Ibid., dist. v, c. 7 (p. 510-513).
[124] Cf. ibid., dist. v, c. 6 (p. 494).

assessment, as he states that the sons' professions of friendship proved to have been false.[125] Indeed, judging by the extensive comments on the treatment of the rebels, there may have been a certain bewilderment among contemporaries about the way Henry II treated those who had betrayed him, tying in well with the verdict that he loved his sons too fervently. This is especially noticeable in the accounts of 1174. Roger of Howden presents the tearful, prostrate *deditio* of Richard before his father, who, *paterna pietate commotus*, received him back into his love with the kiss of peace, thus ending the war in Poitou.[126] The submission of Henry the Young King is the more interesting of the two: Roger of Howden writes that, although defeated, he had at first refused to go to England with his father, fearing that he would be imprisoned. Henry II sends messengers *iterum et iterum*, and mollifies his son with mild and gentle words until at last he sees the error of his ways, and follows the will of his father. In the presence of bishops and noblemen, he tearfully prostrates himself before his father. At this stage, however, the *deditio*, so clear in Richard's case, takes an unexpected turn. Instead of putting himself entirely at his father's mercy, Henry the Young King actually demands *(postulans)*, albeit admittedly with tears, that Henry II accepts his homage "as he had done with his brothers, and he added that if the king would not want to receive his homage, he could not believe that he loved him."[127] The formulation, threatening as it is, seems outrageous in the framework of what ought to have been an unconditional surrender, with a great number of the king's household men and dignitaries lined up as witnesses. However, the episode passes without further comment from the writer, and the king, moved by clemency and the appeals of the onlookers, receives his son back into his grace.

The episode becomes more palpably negatively charged when taking into consideration a description of Ralph of Diceto that is evidence to Henry II's taking such surrenders seriously. Following a transcript of Henry II's triumphant peace agreement with his sons, Ralph of Diceto comments that Henry II demanded no ransoms for the release of the men he had captured,[128] "retaining only those few in custody whose crimes had been enormous, whose perfidy had been so detestable that it provoked the prince's gentlest of hearts to anger, and whom he deigned to force to supplication *(supplicio)*"[129]. Their crime, then, was not something that would be easily amended, and, in the case of severe crimes, the king would indeed value supplication. The Young King can certainly be counted among the main instigators of the rebellion against his father. It would thus stand to reason that he had committed an adequately enormous crime to justify an unconditional supplication – which, if Roger of Howden is interpreted as above, was not what he delivered. Consequently, the Young King's conditional homage in ceremonial conditions may well have irked the king. The Young King's actions were hardly likely to cause anything but ill-feeling. Ralph of Diceto's passage runs on with yet another affront: Henry II had not exacted ransom for the prisoners made in the course of the rebellion, but Henry the Young King did.

---

[125] Gerald of Wales, Expugnatio Hibernica, book 1, ch. 45, p. 300-301.
[126] Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 76.
[127] Ibid., p. 82-83. The passage reads: *"... et ibi coram Rothomagensi archiepiscopo et Henrico Bajocensi episcopo, et comite Willelmo de Mandevilla ... et aliis quampluribus familiaribus domini regis, procidit pronus in terram ad pedes domini regis patris sui, cum lacrymis postulans ut ab eo homagium et ligantiam reciperet, sicut fecerat a fratribus suis, et subjunxit, quod si rex homagium suum recipere nollet, non posset credere, quod illum diligeret."*
[128] Similar to Gerald of Wales' praise, see above.
[129] Translated from Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 1, p. 395.

Among the many hundreds he and his helpers had captured, the writer comments, only few were eventually allowed to go free.[130] This, too, is a heavy slight against the old king, since, given the nature of the conflict, the men captured by the Young King were, in all probability, followers of Henry II. Seen in this light, the king's gestures of mercy towards his sons are indeed feats of magnanimity, albeit perhaps not entirely approved of by contemporaries. Neither were they necessarily as merciful as the acts, taken by themselves, would suggest: in the aftermath of the rebellion, Henry II would see to it that their disobedience was repaid in kind – with humiliation.[131]

These aspects of royal justice may have induced the sentiment that he was too lax with his sons, but it did little to harm his reputation as a dispenser of justice. That, indeed, could hardly have been better. Gerald of Wales, while describing Henry II's triumphs, wrote that the kings of Castille and Navarre had sent judicially learned delegates to the king's court so that he might pass judgement on a matter of discord that had arisen between them.[132] The fact that this diplomatic feat is counted among the king's greatest triumphs with which Gerald begins his treatment of Henry II is symptomatic for the way in which most writers perceived this episode, or, indeed, the king's function as a mediator between different courts. The sheer amount of space dedicated to descriptions of how Henry II received foreign ambassadors or made peace between princes is an indication of how exceptional – and perhaps impressive – this must have felt for contemporaries. On the conflict between Castille and Navarre, Gervase of Canterbury notes, rather close to Gerald of Wales, that men worth seeing were sent to the king of England, marvellous advocates, learned in law, who approached his throne to explain the grievances of their masters to him. "When they had received, after Easter", Gervase ends his description, "the judgement in their cause by the king's great subtle ingenuity, they joyously returned home; their lords and kings and the kings' subjects restituted in peace and tranquillity."[133] In Gervase's rendition, the king is presented as distributing, like Salomon, a perfectly just judgement after a span of quiet deliberation. The focus lies on the king's wisdom and capability as a dispenser of justice.

The more administratively inclined chronicles of Roger of Howden re-iterate the proceedings at much greater length, their accounts constituted chiefly by transcriptions, such as the statement on the nature of the conflict, statements on the lineage of the kings at conflict and their claims, until, ultimately, they reach a charter proclaiming the king's judgement in detail. While not as idealising as narratives, the extensive insights into diplomacy yielded by these accounts evoke an idea of just how spectacular the proceedings must have been, as evidenced by the extensive listing of the multitude of high-ranking witnesses and the emphatic statement on the importance of the persons seeking the aid of the English king. The details between the proceedings speak of courtly grandeur: "there came two knights of marvellous virtuousness and audacity, with horses and arms of war, one on behalf of the king of Castile, the other on behalf of the king of Navarre,

---

[130] Cf. ibid.

[131] Since these are more subtle than the gestures of mercy discussed here, and only acquire their meaning in a wider context, they will be discussed in the chapter on Henry II's conduct in war.

[132] Cf. De principis instructione, dist. 2, ch. 2, p. 158-159.

[133] Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 261; in Latin: *"Accepto tandem post Pascha de causa sua tanta versutia intricata regis judicio, laeti reversi sunt, dominosque suos reges regumque populos paci restituerunt et tranquillitati."*

to undertake trial by battle in the king's court, if such should be the judgement."[134] The entrance made by numerous foreign envoys and these stately knights, all come to seek out the king, must have been a sight to see. Seen in this light, the chroniclers' abundant description of the case expresses, like Gervase's rendition, respect and admiration for the king, albeit in a slightly different way.

Henry II passing judgement between the two Spanish kings is one of the episodes detailed at greatest length, but it is by far not the only case in which the king is approached by foreign dignitaries. Especially noteworthy is the king's relation to Philip II of France at the onset of the French king's reign. With his father, Louis VII, paralysed and dying soon after, the young king, rule thrust upon his shoulders, is reported to have hearkened to the tyrannical advice of the count of Flanders. It was Henry II to whom his cast-off advisors appealed for help, and the king of England entered France with his son. After he had set across the channel, "the queen of France and count Theobald, and many of the kingdom of France, who harboured a grudge against the afore-mentioned new king [Philip II], came to Normandy, asking help of them."[135] The king made sure they would abide by his judgement, summoned his forces, and mediates with the young king. Roger of Howden makes a point of emphasising who was in charge of the proceedings: "now coaxing, now stern, the old king of England mollified the mind of the young king of France"[136]. His choice of words in this situation puts the reader in the mind of a father sternly admonishing a son; a grown statesman showing a wayward apprentice how things were done. Peace is arranged between the kings of France and England, Philip II is made to take back his 'good' counsellors. The outcome is triumphal, with the count of Flanders doing homage to Henry II against the king's pledge to recompense him with money, but also pledging military service of five hundred knights for the span of forty days when the king should require them. The count of Clermont, too, does homage to the king of England – and these deferential gestures, this exercise of lordship, occurs *coram Philippo novo rege Franciae* – at the very heart of another king's power.[137] The king in whose court Henry II is exercising kingship is, at that, a king whom Henry II owed liege obligation for Normandy, and whose father had long and often been at war with him. It must have been an ultimate victory. And it does not stop there. Henry II would return to offer his advice in the mediation of peace between France and Flanders,[138] and these his continental 'apprentices' in statesmanship would *similiter* implement his Assize of Arms

---

[134] Cf. Benedict of Peterborough 1, 139-154, and Roger of Howden 2, p. 120-131. The quotation is translated from Roger of Howden, p. 120: *"Venerunt etiam duo milites mirae probitatis et audaciae, cum equis et armis bellicis, unus ex parte regis Castellae, et alter ex parte regis Navarrae, ad suscipiendum duellum in curia regis Angliae, si judicatum esset."*. It is very similar in the other chronicle, which adds *"strenuissimi viri"* to the description of the knights and a humble *"ut dicebatur"* to the statement on their virtuousness and audacity.

[135] Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 245: *"... ad quorum adventum regina Franciae et comes Teobaldus, et multi de regno Franciae, quos praefatus novus rex odio habuit, venerunt in Normanniam, postulantes ab eis subsidium."*

[136] Ibid., p. 246: *"... in quo colloquio praefatus rex Angliae senior animum novi regis Franciae nunc blandis nunc asperis adeo emollivit"*. Roger of Howden's other chronicle is similar, but leaves out the almost paternal relationship that the Peterborough version implies in his choice of words in favour of a far more powerful Henry II who seems to be dictacting the peace, cf. Roger of Howden 2, p. 197: *"In quo colloquio rex Angliae, nunc blandis nunc asperis, effecit versus regem Franciae..."*.

[137] Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 244-249. Similar, but considerably shorter Roger of Howden 2, 197-199.

[138] Cf. Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 277 and p. 334; Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 297 (*"...regis tamen Henrici... tam adventum quam consilium expectabant utrimque.")* and ibid., p. 309 and 326; Roger of Howden 2, p. 260.

in their territories.[139] Henry II would also mediate even further abroad, intervening on behalf of his son-in-law Henry the Lion, whose exile the German emperor would shorten *pro amore et interventu regis Angliae*.[140] He is also instrumental in the eventual reconciliation between the Lion and Frederick I, only shortly after also having reconciled Henry the Lion and the archbishop of Cologne.[141]

The justice of Henry II, then, has many facets. He is generally viewed as a man of justice, with a strong sense of what was right, and an interest in law and jurisdiction. Yet while the royal love for justice was repeatedly testified, contemporaries were also aware of the faults in the system – faults that mostly manifested themselves in the very corporeal form of self-serving officials. However, it should be noted that these complaints are of an entirely different nature than comments that the entirety of justice had broken down and the strong dominated the weak; they picked at details in a system that seems otherwise to have run smoothly – at least smoothly enough for Walter Map to relentlessly satirise the circumstances he met with. Henry II rarely seems vindictive, but his merciful acts are also not entirely complimentary because of their direct connection to another recognised fault of his: the love for his notoriously unfaithful sons. It is not the king's mercy or rigour, however, which is appreciated by contemporaries as the most regal facet of his justice, but its universal fame and application. Henry II does not simply administer justice within his kingdom, he is also very highly regarded as an arbiter for foreign princes – a fact of which contemporaries seem to be rather proud, not least, perhaps, because a king who could afford to concern himself with the maintenance of peace and justice in far-off provinces was a king who had mastered his problems at home. This function as arbiter would significantly add to Henry II's reputation as a lover of peace and a peace-making king. He was seen as a monarch who would appreciate and foster peace not only within his own kingdom, but also abroad.

*The Justice of Richard I*

Richard's reign began with a universal gesture of mercy, the freeing of prisoners throughout England, instigated by Queen Eleanor while Richard was still on the continent. Although this measure, by the distinct emphasis Roger of Howden's description lays on the freeing "of all who had been captured for forest offences" and "all who had been captured *per voluntatem regis* or his justice", called to mind the more contested aspects of the late king's justice, Eleanor, herself only just freed from prison by the mandate of her son, had the act of grace proclaimed *pro anima Henrici domini sui*.[142] While not an altogether unusual gesture to set off the beginning of a new reign, it did provoke mixed reactions. Roger of Howden – doubtlessly as royally intended – uses the general amnesty as an opportunity to lapse into lengthy praise of Richard. If his father, according to the metaphor, had been the sun, Richard was its radiance.

139 Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 270; Roger of Howden 2, p. 253.
140 Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 287
141 Ibid., p. 318-319, p. 322-323.
142 Roger of Howden 3, p. 4; Bendict of Peterborough 2, p. 74-75.

"The son therefore growing to immense greatness, vastly augmented the good works of his father, but abolished the bad. For those who his father had disinherited, the son put back into their former state; those whom the father had exiled, the son recalled; those who the father had held in chains, the son allowed to walk away unharmed; those who the father had afflicted with different penalties out of justice, the son brought comfort to out of piety."[143]

William of Newburgh, on the other hand, once more portraying more cynicism than respect for symbolism, comments that the new king "had caused by his edict all prisoners throughout England to be released, so that naturally there would be universal rejoicing at the entrance of the new prince. For a multitude of accused had then languished in the dungeons, awaiting hearing or sentence: but upon his entrance into the kingdom, these pests left those dungeons by his clemency, perhaps more confident of causing further havoc."[144] The writer's concerns about the possible consequences aside, the gesture did what the chronicler had identified as its purpose, even if he did not approve of it: according to Roger of Howden, the people of the kingdom rejoiced at the entrance of the new king, hoping that he would change things for the better.[145]

As already indicated by his orchestrated accession, Richard appears to have been well aware of the use to which gestures of mercy could be put. While his forgiveness for the treachery of his brother is presented as little more than a customary (and tearful) *deditio*,[146] other acts of mercy would leave a much greater impression. The king's treatment of the defeated emperor of Cyprus, for instance, is most elaborately described in the *Itinerarium*. Utterly defeated, the emperor had humbly followed the king, and eventually fell to his knees before him, putting himself at his mercy, if only he would not be cast into iron chains. Richard accepted the supplication, honoured the emperor with a seat at his side, and had his daughter, who had previously been captured, brought to him. Yet it is the end of the episode that appears to have impressed contemporaries the most: *imperatorem autem non in ferrea, sed in vincula conjecit argentea*[147]. The precious fetters of silver (rather than the iron against which the emperor had protested) were as much testament to the king's magnanimity – in granting the wish of a supplicant and acknowledging his elevated social status – as to his wealth and power.

Roger of Howden's account, while less elaborate, is similar to that of the *Itinerarium*, and describes the desperate emperor's *deditio* before the king as well as his entreaty to not be put into iron chains. Thereupon, the king orders ankle shackles and manacles to be made from gold and silver.[148] In Richard of Devizes' account, the request not to be put in iron fetters is the besieged emperor's condition for surrender, and Richard's having these shackles made is the monarch's

---

143 Ibid., p. 75-76: *"Filius itaque in immensum crescens, patris sui opera bona perampliavit, mala vero resecavit. Nam quos pater [ex]haeredavit, filius in pristina jura restituit; quos pater fugavit, filius revocavit; quos pater causa justitiae diversis poenis afflixit, filius causa pietatis refocillavit."*; Roger of Howden 3, p. 5-6.

144 William of Newburgh, book 4, ch. 1, p. 293: *"...cunctis ex eju edicto custodiis per Angliam relaxatis, ut scilicet ad introitum novi principis esset laetitia generalis. Quippe aestuabant tunc carceres reorum multitudine, sub exspectatione vel discussionis vel suplicii: sed eo regnum ingrediente pestes illae carcerum per ejus clementiam sunt egressae, confidentius fortasse de cetero grassaturae."*

145 Cf. Roger of Howden 3, p. 5-6; Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 75-76.

146 Cf. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 64

147 Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 2, ch. 40, p. 202-203.

148 Cf. Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 167: *"Qui cum audisset adventum regis exivit ei obviam, provolutusque ad pedes regis posuit se in misericordia regis de vita et membris, nulla mentione facta de regno. Sciebat enim quod jam omnia essent in manu regis et potestate. Sed hoc solum petiit a rege ne permitteret eum mitti compedibus et manicis ferreis. Audivit rex petitionem ejus, et tradidit illum ... camerario suo, custodiendum; praecipiens compedes et manicas fieri de auro et argento ad opus illius, in quibus praecepit illum mitti."* See also Roger of Howden 3, p. 111.

granting of this request.[149] William of Newburgh's account contains mercy as much as sternness: Richard had repented having been lenient with the emperor, who had seized the opportunity to flee and once more move against the king. Betrayed by his own people who hate him he is captured. Yet, when he is about to be bound in chains, he (is reported to have) said that if he were bound in iron chains, he would die. It is William of Newburgh's reading of the episode that comes closest to the way it seems to a modern observer – as a witty half-compliance with a demand that, while fulfilling it, does not necessarily seem to be what the supplicant may have hoped for. In that he is alone: the choice of words of the other chroniclers implies that they saw the king's act as a genuine show of mercy. It is only William of Newburgh who has Richard say: "Well spoken; because he is noble, I do not want for him to die: but to ensure that he lives on without causing harm, let him be bound in chains of silver."[150]

More spectacular is the act of mercy that came with the king's death: the pardoning of Bertram de Gurdun, the crossbowman whose bolt had eventually taken the king's life at Châlus Chabrol. Mentioned only briefly in the Coggeshall chronicle,[151] it is given considerably more room in Roger of Howden's chronicle, fashioned into a dramatic last exchange between the king and his killer.

> "When the said Bertram was called into the presence of the king, the king said to him: 'What wrong have I done to you? Why have you killed me?' That man answered him bravely and as if he was undaunted: 'You have killed my father and two of my brothers with your hand, and now you wanted to kill me. So take any revenge on me that you want: I will gladly bear them, the greatest torments you can devise, if only I have killed you, who have brought so many and such great wrongs to this world.' Then the king ordered him to be released, and said: 'I forgive you my death.' And the youth stood at the feet of the king, with defiant expression, and in courage demanded the sword. Sensing that punishment was searched and mercy feared, [the king said]: 'Live, even if you do not want to, and by my grace behold the day, let there be good hope for the part of the defeated, and my example.'"[152]

The king did not only let him go, but also ordered money to be given to him. The gesture of mercy is rendered in a narration of epic proportions and mirrors the chivalric respect for bravery often attributed to Richard, his closing words signifying a way in which he may have wanted to be remembered. The story suffers but little from the unsatisfactory end to the king's good intentions: *rege nesciente*, the crossbowman was seized by the king's mercenary Mercadier and, after the king's death, flayed alive. Even Gervase of Canterbury, whose rendition of the siege casts a singularly negative light on Richard, does not begrudge him this final act of mercy. In his version, the king calls the trembling youth into his presence, who falls at his feet in supplication and tearfully asks for mercy. The king grants the request, and forbids his retainers to harm the youth.[153]

---

[149] Cf. Richard of Devizes, p. 38: *"... promittit deditionem obpressus si tantum modo in uincula ferrea non poneretur. Annuit rex precibus supplicantis, et fecit ei fieri argenteos compedes."*

[150] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 4, ch. 20, p. 351.

[151] Cf. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 96: *"Mortem etiam sibi illatam percussori suo libenter indulsit."*

[152] Roger of Howden 4, p. 83. The scene is adapted in the Stanley Annals, cf. William of Newburgh, Continuatio, p. 503-505.

[153] Cf. Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 593.

It is Gervase's version that reveals the ferocity the king's justice could take. Although the garrison had surrendered and petitioned the king for their lives the king "had cast aside piety and only through violence wanted to obtain what the besieged had offered to surrender to him on their own". The archer is even presented as praying to God to direct his arrow, so that the innocently besieged might be rescued from such dire oppression.[154]

An incident of which chroniclers took much wider notice was the beheading of the Saracen hostages, led before their former army and beheaded in full sight of their comrades, with only a few prisoners spared for ransom. It is evident, by the lengthy explanations provided for the judgement, that Richard's decision needed explanation, and may not have been seen as just at the first glance. In Roger of Howden's account, the beheading of the prisoners follows an exchange of threats concerning the prisoners, with Richard resolving to behead his captives when he learns that Saladin had killed the Christians he had held captive.[155] In Richard of Devizes' account, one of the shortest, the king beheads the prisoners after negotiations with Saladin about the return of the Holy Cross had failed because of the Saracen's refusal to surrender the relic.[156] Ralph of Diceto maintains that Saladin had, when the day came on which he had agreed to free the Christian prisoners and return the Holy Cross, "in no way (*nichil*) implemented what he had promised", and Richard had executed the prisoners in revenge.[157] The *Itinerarium* adds to this explanation that Richard had made the decision in concert with a council of the crusade's leaders – shifting any possible blame of arbitrary cruelty further away from the king by involving others in the decision – and argues that the act was a vindication of the Christian religion, aiming at destroying the false pagan belief and their arrogance.[158] It is William of Newburgh who does not seem to see any need for explaining the king's judgement: he, too, remarks that Saladin had failed to meet the terms agreed on, but he had the king give the order for the mass death sentence *justo ignitus zelo*.[159]

Away from the grand gestures of mercy and rigour, it is rare to find Richard engaged in 'everyday' judicial activities. In an admiring tone, Richard of Devizes suggests that it was among the first actions after the king's arrival in Messina to build gallows outside the fortress, and hang brigands and scavengers. Primarily, this act must have aimed to stabilise the situation in the city, and prevent the crusaders from plundering its inhabitants – this, at least, is suggested by Richard of Devizes' remark that, contrary to the king of England, the king of France tried to conceal what his men did or suffered within the city. Richard is shown as a ferocious dealer of justice, considering people of every age, sex and estate his to judge, and leaving no injustice unpunished

---

[154] Cf. ibid.

[155] Cf. Benedict of Peterborough, p. 188-189; Roger of Howden 3, p. 127-128.

[156] Cf. Richard of Devices, p. 47.

[157] Cf. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 94-95.

[158] Cf Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 4, ch. 2, p. 240-241, describes the reluctance of Saladin to comply with the agreement and his negligence of the hostages by not keeping to the appointed time. Ibid., ch. 4, p. 243, details the execution itself: *"Postquam revera constitit regi Ricardo, transacto jam termino et ultra, quod obdurato corde Salahadinus nihil ultra curaret de redimendis obsidibus; coacto consilio majorum in populo, decretum est nihil ulterius frustra expectandum, sed ut obsides decollarentur... . Rex Ricardus in opprimendis Turcis funditus semper aspirans, ad conterendam ipsorum protervam arrogantiam, et legem Mahumeticam confundendam, Christianitatem vindicandam; ... jussit educi Turcorum obsidum vinctos duo millia et septingentos ad decollandum."*

[159] William of Newburgh, book 4, ch. 23, p. 359.

*(omnem hominem suum reputans, nichil iniuriarum reliquid inultum).* He had assumed complete (juridical) overlordship over the city, dispensing justice even to the people who did not naturally fall into his area of competence. In the chronicler's interpretation, it was an act that inspired great awe among the populace. Again very unfavourably contrasting Philip II and Richard, he claims that one was called a lamb by the locals, the other a lion.[160] It is entirely clear who is supposed to represent what.

It is Gervase of Canterbury, never entirely on the king's side, who points out a much less flattering side to the king's pursuit of justice. In the midst of a lengthy arbitration between the archbishop of Canterbury and his monks, the king at last burst out, swearing: "By the throat of God, not a single foot of yours will remain in the church." Before the king departed indignantly, leaving the assembled in total confusion, he swore the monks that while they could retreat, they would not get away. He would, wherever he saw them go, be at their heels, pursuing them. Such a drastic lapse in patience – even though Richard had behaved commendable throughout the preceding negotiations – did not reflect well on the king as a dispenser of justice. It is alleviated by the rarity of such occasions: Richard's reign barely allowed for much domestic justice to be done.

Richard was also, as the chronicles suggest, at times prone to arbitrarily demanding sums for his continued goodwill. The financially exploitable royal anger did not even stop at family members: before Richard returned the archbishopric of York to his disseized half-brother at the onset of his reign, he demanded his love *(amore ejus)* to be bought by the promise of three thousand marks of silver.[161] When the cleric got behind on his payments, he soon had to face the consequences of royal dissatisfaction again; consequences that did, according to a letter found in Roger of Howden's chronicle, last until 1194. Therein, Richard informed his subjects in England that his half-brother had sought him out with a further third of the pending sum, and excused the long absence of any payment. A messenger from the king accompanied Geoffrey's messenger on his way back to the island to supervise the acquittance of the remaining debt. The payment once more warmed the king's heart towards his wayward relative. Not only did he regain his goods and lands, but he was also "received back into our grace and protection, granting our full benevolence."[162] The agreement did not last particularly long: barely a year later, the king and his half-brother were once more at odds, Richard again had to relinquish his *ira et malivolentia* towards his brother; and even then Geoffrey continued to address the king "overly brazenly", which led to further disagreement. The mention of Geoffrey's behaviour is one of the few indications of where the royal wrath that needed to be removed financially might have come from.[163] The bishop of Coventry suffered a similar fate: although he had been able to monetarily free his bishopric from the disfavour and wrath of the king, he had to live with his brother being left in the king's custody – and eventually dying there.[164] The troublesome temperament of the king caused the Coggeshall chronicler to critically declare that in the course of time such ferocity and

---

[160] Richard of Devizes, p. 16-17.
[161] Cf. Roger of Howden, 3, p. 27-28; Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 100.
[162] Cf. Roger of Howden 3, p. 273-274.
[163] Cf. ibid., p. 287.
[164] Cf. ibid..

insolence manifested in the king that all the virtues he had at first exhibited were diminished through overly great severity. If he chanced to be disturbed in his dealings, his eyes would become threatening, his voice, stance and countenance wild and boisterous, the ferocity of a lion showing in his face and gestures and nothing but money and promises would placate his raging spirit.[165]

It is this description that conveys an impression of how the king's wrath may have been incited, sparking apparently arbitrary distraint for which little more explanation than the king's displeasure is given. They are not recorded as outrageous violations of justice, but nonetheless – at least judging by the verdict of the Coggeshall chronicler – it is reasonably certain that they were hardly welcomed. Richard is not portrayed as a man of ordinary justice; Richard of Devizes' account of his meting out justice among the citizens of Messina is singular, and part of a chronicle that inclines to the panegyrical. However, the king did hardly have the time to engage in lengthy judicial proceedings as his father did, and at least for the time of the crusades, administration is so clogged with accounts of Longchamp's exploits that everyday justice found little place in it. However, Richard was definitely a monarch for grand gestures of mercy and rigour – and judging by the way in which he employed them, he must have been well aware of the effect these gestures could have.

*The Justice of John*

Contrary to his brother's accession, John's right to the throne was not entirely uncontested: the birth of Arthur, son to his deceased older brother Geoffrey, and Richard's move to declare the young boy his successor had seen to that. The problem was not entirely pressing at John's accession, and most writers would report his coronation without much comment as to its legitimacy or deservedness. Two remarkable exceptions may be seen to point to the difficult nature of John's kingship that would surface more clearly when Arthur was old enough to campaign. One, the History of William Marshal, appears to use John's accession as yet another assertion of its protagonist's importance – it has the Marshal and the archbishop of Canterbury discuss the possible next king of England after Richard's death. With the claim of either candidate accepted as valid, the situation is resolved by deliberating who of the two would prove the better choice as king. Arthur, although initially favoured by the archbishop, is dismissed by the Marshal on account of his troublesome character and bad advisors. The choice of the two men to support John's claim having been made, the archbishop warned William Marshal that he would come to regret his decision as he had regretted nothing else in his life.[166] Even if the decision had been made on that rather high level, it appears to have by no means been easy to realise, especially among those that would later incline towards Arthur. With a reasoning that seems much more plausible than the dialogue between the earl and the archbishop, the History later claims that John found no acknowledgement of his overlordship on any of his continental

[165] Cf. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 92: *"Tantae autem ferocitatis ac protervitatis proocessu temporis exstitit, ut omnes virtutes, quas in regni primodio ostentaverat, nimia severitate offuscaret, ita ut quoslibet de negotiis suis eum interpellantes minaci oculo transfigeret, proterva ac feroci voce reverberaret, leoninam feritatem in vultu atque in gestu praetenderet, nisi, pro libitu suo, pecuniis et promissis tumidum animum delinire satagerent."*

[166] History of William Marshal 2, lines 11877-11908 (p. 94-97).

possessions – with the single exception of Normandy. The history has John attempt to coax the unwilling portion of his subjects into assent by momentous concessions "that ever after he regretted what he had done, / and ever after they feared him less as a result."[167] John had, in other words, lost the respect of his notoriously rebellious subjects in the south by granting them their wishes – a course of action to which he had found himself forced by his contested claim to the throne; complying with the wishes of his subjects lest he lose them altogether.

The matter is presented in a much more sinister light in the Margan Annals. In crowning him king, the writer claims, everyone had sinned heavily, since John had no right to the kingdom while Arthur lived. As if that was not accusation enough, John's kingship is also questioned on a moral level: he was crowned "against the sentence of the archbishops, bishop, counts, barons and all other magnates of England, which had been made at Nottingham in the presence of his brother Richard; where because of the treachery against king and kingdom into which he had entered with the king of France, he was deprived and disinherited, not only of all the lands he held in the kingdom, but also of all the honours he hoped and expected to hold from the Crown of England." With similar distaste, the annals remark that although summoned to answer to the charges and defend himself, he neither appeared nor sent a representative. With this unjust coronation, all, according to the writer, had most grievously offended God, for which they were to be punished – and most heavily among them William de Braose who was, "by the just judgement of God", to be punished with his entire household.[168]

The claim that William de Braose's fate was divine punishment, and a just one at that, is remarkable because, together with what happened to Arthur, John's conduct towards the Braose family is among the most heavily commented and most heavily criticised episodes of his reign, by many, apparently, regarded as symbolic for the injustice of which John was capable.

What happened – or did not happen – to Arthur must be foremost in any considerations of how John measured up to the ideal of justice; or more so, the ideal of *aequitas* – for it is difficult to say whether John can justifiably be said to have been in the wrong from a judicial point of view. The question of whether or not he was entitled to his crown and other lands was made to pivot on the accusations raised against him for his treatment of Arthur, not least because Philip II was using Arthur, the preferred candidate for a number of dissatisfied continental vassals of John, as a rallying point against his adversary. The best defence on his part is given, perhaps surprisingly, by Roger of Wendover, who has the pope treat with Louis' messengers, in an

[167] Ibid., lines 11924-11940 (p. 96-97); translation by Gregory.

[168] Cf. Magran Annals, p. 24-25: *"Johannes frater ejus ... coronatur in regem in die Ascensionis Dominicae... contra judicium archiepiscoporum, episcoporum, comitum et baronum et omnium aliorum magnatum Angliae, quod factum fuit apud Nothingham praesente rege Ricardo fratre suo; ubi propter proditionem ejusdem regis et regni quam fecerat cum rege Francorum, abjudicatus et exhaeredatus erat, non solum de omnibus terris quas habuit in regno, sed etiam de omnibus honoribus quos se habiturum speravit vel expectavit de corona Angliae. Judicatum quoque fuit ut summoneretur per tres quadragenas, venire in curiam regis Angliae ad respondendeum et defendendum corpus suum si posset, de guerra et proditione praedicta, quas machinatus fuerat dum rex frater suus fuit in peregrinatione et carcere imperatoris Alemanniae; sed nec venit, nec responsalem pro se misit: unde tres comites pares sui missi fuerant ad curiam regis Franciae, ut in ea de saepe dicta proditione cum convincerent; sed nec ibi comparuit, nec respondit, nec se defendit: contra hoc inquam judicium coronatur, Willelmo de Brause, cum fautoribus suis ad ejus coronationem vehementis instante. In qua coronatione omnes graviter peccaverunt, tum quia idem Johannes nullum jus in regno habuit, vivente Arthuro filio senioris fratris sui Gaufridi comitis Britanniae; tum quia licet aliquando haeres regni fuisset, propter memoratam tamen proditionem abjudicatus fuit et exhaeredatus. Et quia omnes gravissime Deum offenderunt, omnes postea per eum tanquam instrumento suae offensionis puniti sunt et afflicti. Sed Willelmus de Breusa, qui in ejus coronatione plus omnibus offendit, justo Dei judicio cum omni domo sua plus omnibus aliis punitus est."*

attempt to avert Louis setting out to England. In that argument, the French party maintains throughout that John was no longer king – which would have ruled out that John could have given his kingdom to the papal see and would have meant that Louis could well go into England to claim his inheritance and follow the barons' call. The initial claim, brought forth by Philip II against a papal legate, recurs on the verdict already mentioned by the Margan Annals. John had forfeited his kingdom earlier, and could, on that account, never have been a true (*verus*) king. Even if he had, at some stage, been such a king, he would then have forfeited his kingdom for the death of Arthur, which he was found guilty of having brought about in the French court.[169] A knight chosen by Louis to argue his defence, aggravated that accusation by claiming that John had committed treachery by Arthur, more so, "killed him with his very own hands", and had been condemned to nothing short of death by the trial of the French court.[170] The pope repudiates every charge made against John and, remarkably forthright and with a sullen jibe against the French, states that "many emperors and princes, and even French kings, have, as we read in annals, killed many innocents, and yet we do not read that any of them was abandoned to death; and when Arthur was captured at the castle of Mirebeau, he was not captured as innocent, but as guilty, a traitor to his lord and uncle, whom he had done homage and sworn allegiance, and he could lawfully be condemned to even the most disgraceful death without trial."[171]

The pope's reasoning appears sound enough. And yet, reason does not seem to significantly enter the debate on Arthur's death. The differences in depiction between contemporary chronicles are a testament to the amount of stories that must have been circulating about the fate of the young heir. They range from neutral to condemning. The Barnwell Annals merely notes that Arthur had vanished "in obscure circumstances" while in John's custody, and adds that his grave had not been found to this day. This, the chronicler maintains, did not happen entirely without divine judgement which came down on all the overbearing – for the Britons, taking his name for prophecy, had imprudently and shamelessly assumed Arthur to be none other but the returned ancient king, come to see to it that the kingdom of England was given back to them.[172] Considering the wide dissemination of Geoffrey of Monmouth's version of Britain's past and its not altogether winsome account of the Britons, the writer implies a not altogether favourable view of Arthur's supporters. From there, accounts of the fate of Arthur increase in accusatory tone. Gervase of Canterbury merely mentions, as if in passing, that Arthur had been captured and kept in close confinement, and that soon rumours began to circulate that he had been killed by the king's own hand.[173] The Coggeshall chronicler presents a particularly lengthy piece of

---

[169] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 364.
[170] Ibid., p. 365.
[171] Ibid., p. 374. P. 373-378 have the entirety of the charges brought against John and their repudiation by the pope. The pope's remarkable advocacy for a dreadful death reads, in the original: *"Multi imperatores et principes, et etiam Francorum reges, multos in annalibus occidisse leguntur innocentes, nec tamen quenquam llorum legimus morti addictum; et cum Arthurus apud Mirebellum castrum, non ut innocens, sed quasi nocens et proditor domini et avunculi sui, cui homagium fecerat, captus fuerit, potuit de jure morte etiam turpissima sine judicio condemnari."*
[172] Barnwell Annals, p. 196: *"Arthurus in prisona patrui sui Johannis regis angliae, dubium quo casu, de medio factus est, nec est inventum sepulcrum ejus usque ad diem hunc, ut dicitur, sed non absque vindicta Dei, qui frangit omnem superbem. Britones quippe quasi de nomine augurium sumentes, Arthurum antiquum in isto resuscitatum impudenter et imprudenter jactitabant, et Anglorum internecionem [sic!], regnique ad Britones per istum imminere translationem."*
[173] Cf. Gervase of Canterbury 2, p. 94.

narration as to the fate of Arthur, elaborating on the cruel considerations of the king's court. Many Bretons had demanded that Arthur be handed over to them, and, meeting with the king's refusal, had begun to rebel. John's advisors were sure that they would not stop while Arthur was whole and potentially fit to rule, and suggested to the king that he might have the young man bereft of his eyes and genitals, and thus return him entirely unfit to rule. The king (although not entirely master of his own senses, because he was severely pressed by the gathering of his enemies and their threats), ordered, *in ira et furore*, that *opus destabile* to be carried out. Two of the servants he sent escaped from his court, because they refused to "perpetrate such a detestable deed on so noble a youth", three reached the castle in which the youth was kept in triple chains. Yet when they brought the news of the order they had received, lamentation began among the knights guarding Arthur. Following a tumultuous interlude between the guards and the potential executioners, Hubert de Burgh, Arthur's jailor, decided that it would be better for John's reputation and respectability if the sentence, surely pronounced out of sudden wrath, were not carried out, because the king would sooner or later come to regret it, and bear a hatred against those who had carried out the cruel order. De Burgh had it made public that the sentence had been put into effect, and Arthur died from the grief in his heart and the heavy wounds he had sustained. His mortal remains, so the purposely-spread rumour continued, had been buried at St Andre de Gouffern. Yet what may have been intended to dishearten the rebels only served to fan their rebellion further.[174]

The chronicler also points out the role the youth played in the following. He recounts that Arthur was transferred to Rouen, and that Philip II demanded John surrender him; upon his refusal, he invaded Normandy and took a number of castles.[175] The king of France refused any peace negotiations unless he was handed the living prisoner, having heard that Arthur had been plunged into the Seine.[176] From there, it is not far to Roger of Wendover's claim that Arthur had, in negotiations, put such unreasonable demands before John that the king had him imprisoned. He vanished not long afterwards, and a rumour swiftly spread that the king had killed him with his own hands.[177] There is nothing left of rumour in the account of the Margan Annals. John had kept Arthur for a time in a tower in Rouen until one "Thursday before Easter, after his meal, drunken and full of a demon, he killed him with his own hand, and, having tied a great stone to his body, threw him into the Seine; it was found in the nets of fishers and, having been dragged to shore, recognised; and was buried secretly for fear of the tyrant."[178]

Whether true or not, these rumours and stories give ample testimony of what John's application of justice was perceived to be like. There are no grand staged acts of mercy in his reign. Narratives of John's justice are narratives of harshness and cruelty, behind which the king's temper was the driving force. One of the most impressive of these accounts of the king's whims

---

[174] Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 139-141.
[175] Cf. ibid., p. 143.
[176] Cf. ibid., p. 145.
[177] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 170-171.
[178] Annals of Margan, p. 27: *"... cum rex Johannes cepisset Arthurum, eumque aliquamdiu in carcere vivum tenuisset, in turre tandem Rothomagensi, feria quinta ante Pascha, post prandium, ebrius et daemonio plenus, propria manu interfecit, et grandi lapide ad corpus ejus alligato, projecit in Secanam; quod reti piscatorio, id est, sagena, inventum est, et ad littus tractum, cognitum; et in prioratu Becci, qui dicitur Sanctae Mariae de Prato, occulte sepultum, propter metum tyranni."*

that lead to cruel and unusual punishments is Roger of Wendover's claim that John had caused an archdeacon who had spoken privately of the king's excommunication to be put into prison. According to the chronicler, he had a cope of lead made for the clergyman, so that he eventually died as much under its weight as for want of food.[179] This depiction remains singular.

An incident, however, that would, as far as its spread among writers was concerned, come to carry almost as much weight as the death of Arthur was the fate of the Braose family. One of his most treasured favourites, William of Braose fell out with the king to such an extent that "no peace could ever be made between them".[180] The reason, as far as the writer of the History of William Marshal is concerned, remained unknown – and even if it were known, it would not be wise to speak of it.[181] That hint at the unfathomable arbitrariness of John's judgement given, the writer, alone among contemporary historians, recalls the flight of the former favourite from the king's harassment and hatred. Having braved a crossing in dismal weather, William the Braose is taken into the Marshal's household in Ireland, which infuriated the king (who had been informed by the island's justiciar) even further and caused him to search for a cause to "find an opportunity / to do him [the Marshal] harm, and without cause."[182] The king's sudden withdrawal of favour is rarely elaborated on by other contemporary writers. Roger of Wendover claims that it was the insolence of Braose's wife that caused the family's downfall: when John demanded hostages to ensure his subjects' loyalty in the face of a looming excommunication, he has Braose's wife tell the messengers "with female insolence" that she would not give her sons away to a man who had basely killed his nephew, whom he should have guarded honourably. William's rebuke for his wife's speech comes too late: the family has to flee from the enraged king.[183] If falling out of favour at court was a continuous risk courtiers ran, the consequences for Braose's family must have seemed scandalous enough to be far more widely reported: there are few writer who would not record the death of his wife and child by starvation while in the king's captivity, albeit to varying degrees of accusation and specification of victims.[184]

---

179 Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 229: *"Sed cum post paululum ea, quae facta fuerant, ad regis notitiam pervenissent, non mediocriter pertubatus misit Willelmum Talebot militem cum armata manu, qui ipsum archidaconum comprehensum et vinculis asperrimis constructum sub carcerali custodia recluserunt; ubi post dies paucos, rege praefato jubente, capa indutus plumbea, tam victualium penuira quam ipsius capae ponderositate compressus migravit ad Dominum."*

180 History of William Marshal 2, line 14150 (p. 209), translation by Gregory.

181 Cf. ibid., lines 14152-14156.

182 Ibid., lines 14144-14246 (p. 208-213). The lines cited here are 14245-14246; translation by Gregory.

183 Roger of Wendover 3, p. 224-225: *"... Matildis, uxor ejusdem Willelmi, procacitate muliebri verbum rapiens ex ore viri nuntiis respondit, 'Pueros meos domino vestro regi Johanni non tradam, quia Arthurum nepotem suum, quem honorifice custodisse debuerat, turpiter interfecit.'"*

184 The Barnwall Annals, p. 202, mention that while William de Braose was exiled, his wife and son were killed by starvation (*"uxore etiam cum filio fame necata"*). Even more brief is the Coggeshall chronicle, which simply mentions that his wife and sons [*sic!*] had died in a castle after he had fled (Ralph of Coggeshall, p.164), and the Worcester Annals report the story in similar terms (Worcester Annals, p. 399). The Margam Annals, going one step further, make it clear that it was the king himself who had them starved "at once" after receiving knowledge of William de Braose's flight to France (Margam Annals, p. 30: *"... quo comperto, confestim rex uxorem ejus et filium fame necavit in carcere..."*). Similar is Roger of Wendover's rendition, which points out that they starved on the king's express orders, and adds that it was not only Braose's wife and her son, but also the son's wife that had been killed (Roger of 3, p. 235: "*Eodem tempore Matildis, foemina* [*sic!*] *nobilis et uxor Willelmi de Brausia, et filius ejus et haeres Willelmus, et uxor ejusdem Willelmi, apud Windleshores carcerali custodiae deputati, jubente Anglorum rege, fame perierunt."*). The single most accusatory version is found in the Stanley Annals, which increases the number of victims by a young child, son to Braose's son, and claims that Braose's wife and son (not, apparently, the son's wife and child) were killed by "hunger and misery" (William of Newburgh, Continuation, p. 511: *"... uxorem Willelmi de Brause cum Willelmo filio et herede illorum, cum uxore sua et parvulo*

It even appears that the family's fate had become a matter of such speculation and harmful rumour that John himself saw the need to remedy the situation. An exceedingly lengthy letter went out to his subjects that explained everything that had happened: it speaks of William of Braose's initial debts to the king, of his failure to keep any of his promises, of his attacks on royal castles, of him causing a number of the king's officials to be slain. It has a patient king concede the rebellious noble's demands, granting him multiple chances to answer for his misdeeds and have them forgiven. "We could no longer sustain such great and numerous excesses", the king's letter explains an armed assault on Braose, while the latter proves utterly incorrigible: "he did us what ill he could", and, although the miscreant had been given a further chance to better himself the king states that Braose, "at once after we left Ireland, ... began to do evil and burn our land". Even when the king (as need dictated) had captured the man's wife and children, had allowed him to speak with them privately and William of Braose had promised to finally settle his debts with the king for their sake, he, "forsaking to honour the aforesaid, secretly fled from England, without having returned to us any of the aforesaid money". His wife, still in the king's hands, asserted that she could not pay, and William of Braose *secundum legem & consuetudinem Angliae est utlagatus*. The fugitive debtor, after a great number of concessions, had been outlawed, with the full justification of the English law. "And so that you may find the veracity of this matter more securely proved, we and [those of] our counts listed underneath attach our seals to this document in testimony of the truth" – these are the closing words of a document that aimed to dispel any ill rumour that may have befouled the name of the king in that affair. That purpose could hardly have been more doggedly pursued than with this document: not only does it give an elaborate, logically narrated and remarkably gapless explanation of what (the king wanted to have his kingdom believe) had happened, it laboriously gives places and, above all, names, thus imbuing the account with as great a sense of reality (and thus, truth) as possible. One very important gap, however, remains: the document does not even hint at the fate of Matilda of Braose and her children.[185]

The king had a good reason to thus attempt to salvage what was left of his reputation. Anger is presented as the driving force behind the punishments dealt out to Arthur and William de Braose's family. And it is anger that dominates the overwhelming majority of the accounts of the king's judicially questionable measures. Roger of Wendover, for instance, portrays the king's anger as a problem that kept him from exercising justice in the ostentatious way that could be so vital for the progress of a campaign. Having taken the castle of Rochester after a lengthy siege, the king, burning with overly great rage *(nimio furore succensus)* at the multitude of men whose life the siege had cost and the infinite sum of money he had invested in capturing the keep, ordered all the nobles to be hanged on the gibbet. The king is kept from putting this decision into effect by a nobleman who advises him that the war against the barons was far from its end, and that if he were to deal thus with the captured defenders, there was nothing that would, in turn, keep the rebel barons from inflicting similar punishments on the king's nobles when captured. The king

---

*filio, cepit et in vinculis tenuit: uxorem vero Willelmi senioris, scilicet Matildem de Sancto Walerico cum filio, apud castrum de Windlesores fame et miseria peremit.")*

[185] The document is found in Foedera 1, part 1, p. 52-53.

consents, *licet invitus*, and has the men merely imprisoned.[186] According to the Dunstable Annals, he did take his revenge nonetheless: the writer remarks that the barons were released only after much torment *(multa tormenta)* and against a heavy ransom.[187] The Barnwell Annals present a different view altogether, in which the king's anger is considerably more moderate and understandable: when the besieged began to expel the less warlike among their number, the king had their hands and feet amputated; later, when had captured all of them, he had those who claimed to be clerics put into chains, kept knights and noblemen and allowed the lesser men to go free. "Only one he ordered to be hanged", a bowman, who, "it was said", had incurred the bitterness of his death because the king had nurtured him since his youth, and was thus enraged to find him among the rebels.[188]

Yet John's wrath was not exclusively impulsive. The Coggeshall chronicler hints darkly at a practice that has become prominently known as Angevin despotism: the fiscalisation of royal anger, wrath as a means of exerting pressure on subjects that were reluctant to pay. The Cistercian order, although vowed to poverty, had been called upon by the king to pay dues, contrary to previous custom. When the monks refused to pay, seeking refuge in the excuse that they needed time to deliberate on that matter, the king's reaction was devastating, revealing the full extent of 'justice' at his disposal. "Overly exasperated by their answer, the king, in anger and fury (*in ira et furore)* ordered his sheriffs to aggravate and harass the men of this order in any way they could". They should be shown no justice (by the oppressors and detractors of the king – which against all probability did not improve matters, if these were the only people to turn to for justice), they should find no assistance in their affairs. All this, the writer remarks, was done in the absence of any written documentation – the orders were purely verbal.[189] Any exercise of justice, thus the message, was at the beck and call of the king, it could be as easily withdrawn as granted, and this could be done without any written proof as to the injustice suffered. Consequently, the monks, to redress the problem, did not approach the courts – they knew they would be of no use for them as long as the king's indignation loomed over them. They approached the king himself – a rocky path. The archbishop of Canterbury, who was serving as mediator between their order and the king, was sent away by a king who asked him "not to anger him today" before he could speak up on behalf of the monks.[190] For the resolution of the matter, the king appears to have required a formal *deditio*, and in a deliberately chosen setting at that. Through their mediator, the archbishop, the Cistercian abbots were informed that they should approach the king after Mass. They do: "humbly crawling at the king's feet so that he might take pity on their order, lamenting

[186] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 335; the entire account of the captures of Rochester castle stretches from p. 333-336.
[187] Dunstable Annals, p. 44.
[188] Barnwell Annals, p. 227. The king's punishment for the bowman is the only punishment that is in any way commented on as to its severity.
[189] Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 102: *"Ex quorum responsione rex nimium exasperatus, in ira et furore praecepit vicecomitibus suis (cum praesentibus agens verbo, et cum absentibus scripto,) ut viros ordinis illius quibuscumque valerent modis gravarent, ac molestias inferrent, ut de depressoribus ac calumniatoribus eorum nullam justitiam exhiberent, nec in aliquo negotio eis assisterent, sed totum ad regem referrent."*
[190] Cf. ibid., p. 107.

with sighing and tremulous voices". For the reconciliation, mediated by the archbishop, that was to climax in the king's humbling himself before the abbots, they were led into a separate room.[191]

The king had amply demonstrated his power: the monks had had no choice but to put themselves at his mercy, and while their supplication, directly after Mass, when the king's attendants are likely to have still hovered on the edge of the scenery, was as public as it could possibly be, the king's concession is removed into a separate room. While it did still, of course, have its audience, the secluded atmosphere might have given the proceedings the shine of personal piety – after all, the king's penitent gesture was amplified by his declaration that he wanted to build a Cistercian abbey which he desired to eventually become the site of his burial.[192] Considerably briefer, but also including the accusation that the king was using justice as he saw fit, is the remark of the Stanley Annals: the king had taken to vexing the Cistercians *voluntate sua*.[193] The annals do, however, expound more elaborately on the moves the king took to oppress the order: turned to great anger and fury (*in iram magnam et furorem)* by the abbots' answer to his demand for money, he ordered (*per literas*, in this case, so not quite as menacingly as in the Coggeshall account) that all charters and liberties that they had been granted by his predecessors should be regarded as null and void, that whoever wished to do so could do them evil and injustice without punishment. Then he stole away all their goods, their pastures and lands, the wood from their forests and their food for cooking.[194] There was nothing, the message states clearly, that the king's justice could not take.

It is, notably, with these uses of justice that the barons justify their rebellion. Reformation, the liberty of the realm, and abolishing the bad customs introduced since the time of Henry II, which had led to the oppression of the Church and the people – such were their goals, according to the Coggeshall chronicler.[195] Other writers, while less elaborate about these demands, would quintessentially agree to that assessment.[196] As one would expect, *Magna Carta* made a point of correcting exactly those measures that were perceived as the king abusing justice. It moved to put an end to the entirely arbitrary level of the fines that could cripple a nobleman's fortunes,[197] the practice of parting an indebted offender of his entire lands even if his moveable wealth was sufficient to pay the fine,[198] the passing of sentences without trial[199] and the purchasability of royal justice.[200] It also required the immediate release of all hostages and charters that had been

---

[191] Ibid.
[192] Cf. ibid., p. 109.
[193] Willam of Newburgh, Continuatio, p. 513.
[194] William of Newburgh, Continuatio, p. 511: *"Unde rex in iram magnam et furorem conversus praecepit, ut omnes cartae illorum ac libertates ab antecessoribus suis illis datas vel concessas in irritum haberentur, et quicunque vellet illis malum vel injuriam facere impune faceret. ... Praecepit etiam per literas suas vicecomitibus suis et justiciariis et forestariis, ut nullus eorum aliquod rectum vel justitiam illis teneret, ipse quoque per se et per alios bona eorum et pasturas ac terras, et ligna de forestis suis ad coquendos cibos illorum, et omnia alia aisiamenta, quae pater illius eis dedit et carta sua confirmavit, illis abstluit."*
[195] Cf. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 170.
[196] Cf. Dunstable Annals, p. 43, cites the king's "overly great oppression" *(nimia regis oppressione)* as the reason for the barons' conspiracy against John. Surprisingly flattering for the king's side are the Worcester Annals, p. 404, which claim that the disturbance between the king and the barons began "under the pretext *(sub praetextu)* that the liberties of England were not being observed".
[197] Cf. Magna Carta, art. 20, p. 20.
[198] Cf. ibid., art. 9, p. 19.
[199] Cf. ibid., art. 39, p. 22.
[200] Cf. ibid., art.40, p. 22.

given to the king as a security of peace within the realm,[201] thus effectively taking away much of the leverage the king had gained on the barons.

Despite all the oppressions attributed to John, the realm is not found to descend into chaos until the interdict and the looming civil war. It is then that accounts of the dismal state of the kingdom begin to surface. The acts criticised in this manner pertain to John's treatment of the Church after the proclamation of the interdict, and to the ravages caused by his army. Although the confiscation of Church property and the escalation of violence within the realm have distinct elements of the king's exercise of justice, they will be discussed in the chapters on war and John's treatment of the Church, where they constitute an essential part of the image contemporaries conveyed of the king's behaviour.

Suffice it to say for now that the kingdom, especially during the years of civil war, was not seen as a haven of peace and justice – some of the depictions, indeed, range close to some of the comments on the state of the realm under Stephen's rule, when a similar civil war was waged on the island. Even without that aspect, John's justice is cast into a very sharp, very definite profile: it was perceived as harsh, often cruel, and generally motivated by wrath rather than reason – especially the latter casts a grim light on these assessments: anger was from a good judge, and being seen angered this often and this impulsively reflected as badly on the king's capacity as dispenser of justice as it did on his very personal, moral character. John's actions appear as devoid from any concept of divine *aequitas*, motivated by *ira*, *furore* and, lastly, his very own *voluntate* rather than divine inspiration. There can hardly be a more damning assessment by churchmen than that.

*The Justice of Henry III*

Henry III was left with his father's legacy: the magnates' trust had to be regained, and the promise of Magna Carta was still fresh in their minds. The document, supplemented by the forest charter, was repeatedly brought forward as a standard that the king ought to follow with regard to what he could and could not freely do. It caused Henry III to be tied more firmly to a given set of rules (and limitations) than his predecessors had been. Under these circumstances, the king's reign gained a peculiar quality: in the chronicle reception, the disagreement between him and the nobility became a continuous legitimatory struggle that pivoted on the questions of whether the king acted justly, and how, if this was found not to be the case, he could be restrained – and, last but not least, whether, in doing so, the barons, in their turn, were justified. The majority of the accounts favours (albeit, of course, to varying degrees) the cause of the barons rather than that of the king, and, consequently, their suggested answers to these questions are relatively unambiguous.

Henry III was certainly not portrayed as entirely adverse to unjust behaviour, especially in the minor and major struggles with his magnates. The Dunstable Annals bemoan that the king, *Sathana fabricante*, at the instigation of the devil (and on the advice of the Poitevins), had "stolen" a manor of Gilbert Basset, "disregarding the process of justice" and, even when admonished to

[201] Cf. ibid., art. 49, p. 23.

return it, refused to do so, in a rage sending the ill-wanted advisor away.[202] Robert of Gloucester claims that he had "destroyed" the lands of three lords, "and did them shame".[203] Apart from such occasional slights – which were reported far more frequently in Henry III's treatment of the Church – his character and inclination to (in)justice are revealed in greater depth in his answer to the barons' wishes, which are universally held to be acceptable, if not worthy of support. Just before the Battle of Lewes, the metrical chronicle claims that the barons, waiting before the town, had sent to the king with the plea for good laws, for him "to have pity on his land", and the promise that they would serve him well if only he complied. The king, however, showed little inclination to follow their proposition: he sent a reply without greeting – thus offending his adversaries – in which he rejected their entreaties, declaring, among other slights, that he cared nothing of their service. It is made clear by the chronicle that it was the king's obstinacy and spitefulness that left the barons (who were inclined to peace) with no other choice but to enter into battle.[204]

The barons' demands, both their insistence on the king's promise to uphold the two charters and, later, their very own demands for change, the Provisions of Oxford, are widely endorsed in the reign's historiography. Robert of Gloucester refers to the charters as "the good laws of [the] forest and others that were well."[205] The charters were not only used as a standard demand almost customarily brought before (and promised by) the king,[206] they could also serve as powerful symbolic gestures with which the king would attempt to assert his goodwill and lasting benevolence. It is at one of the parliament meetings at which the king was implored to keep the charters in return for what pecuniary aid he needed that Matthew Paris reports a remarkable ceremonial being built around the confirmation of the charters – which, he remarks sourly, the present king had often sworn upon so as to "squeeze out an infinite sum of money". At Westminster Hall he gathered the nobles and the great number of prelates that had been present for the parliament. In pontifical robes and with lighted candles, the assembled bishops, in the presence of the king, excommunicated all who violated England's liberties – and particularly those written down in the two charters. The chronicler gives the full (and consequently lengthy) wording of the prelates' ban, after which the original charter of John was produced and the liberties therein recited. As he listened, the king held his hand over his heart, and maintained a cheerful, determined face. As the recitation of liberties had come to an end, the candles were cast

[202] Dunstable Annals, p. 136: *"Eodem anno, Sathana fabricante, dominus rex abstulit quoddam manerium Gilleberto Basset, ordine juris praetermisso, de consilio Pictaviensium. Rex vero monitus ab R[icardo] Marscallo, ablata restituere noluit; sed iratus ipsum licentiavit."* The matter led to an insurrection of Richard Marshall, who took the side of the thus unjustly bereft, and pitted himself against the king.
[203] Robert of Gloucester 2, lines 10,763-10,764 (p. 722).
[204] Ibid., lines 11,352-11363 (p. 748-749).
[205] Ibid., lines 10,639-10,640 (p. 717).
[206] Matthew Paris particularly often reports the king being confronted with the promise of the charters, and elaborates on his problems in keeping them. The charters usually feature in baronial demands or else as a recurring promise of the king, often renewed when Henry III wished to obtain monetary aid from his barons. See, for instance, Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 6; or Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 3, p. 382-383, where the king, struggling to regain the goodwill of the barons, denies ever having tried to negate Magna Carta. Matthew Paris 5, p. 375, mentions the king's promise to adhere to the charter almost offhandly after the pronunciation of grants to be made. The Dunstable Annals, p. 189, for instance, note that a parliament refused the king the monetary aid he had requested unless he consented to fully adhere to Magna Carta. The Burton Annals, p. 225-236, place enough value on the two charters to give them in full.

down and extinguished, and as the bells tolled, the king renewed his promise that he would, so God help him, faithfully observe these terms as the human, Christian, knight and crowned and anointed king that he was. Henry III, as the writer adds diligently, resolved to give this ritual, impressive in itself though it was, a further, more personal touch: he would take the candle that was offered to him as it was to all others present, claiming that he should not bear it, since he was no priest. Instead, he professed that his heart would provide greater attestation, and kept his hand upon it throughout the entirety of the ritual pronunciation of the sentence.[207] Seen in the context of the ritual as a whole, this gesture conveys the impression that the king was attempting to render this promise of fidelity to the charters more trustworthy. Matthew Paris himself, even in the course of depicting this considerable solemnity, twice reminds the reader that the king had repeatedly failed in keeping up with his promises regarding the charters.[208] It seems logical to assume that the king was well aware of this crack in his reputation, and sought, by whatever means he could, to remedy it. He had assembled much of the realm's nobility and the greatest part of its prelates for a meticulously orchestrated ritual that did not only include ceremonial vestments, the threat of the Church's most severe penalty, but also, on a more worldly scale, was staged in the representational heart of the king's power, Westminster Hall, and involved a document that had, ever since its composition almost forty years before, greatly excited the minds of his magnates. As the only one not holding a candle, the king must have stood out; in placing his hand upon his heart, he made himself visibly vulnerable while at the same time emphasising his own sincerity. In the synchronised framework and publicity of ritual, gestures that stood apart from the usual were doubly potent. Matthew Paris has the king, in direct speech, underline the significance he wanted to be attributed to the gesture, and the chronicler apparently deemed the king's behaviour important enough to remark not only *that* the king had kept his hand upon his heart for the entirety of the recital, but *how* he had kept it there: *manum expsansam ad pectus*, his hand stretched openly above his heart. As powerful as the display may have been, it did not prevent the barons' further dissatisfaction – although, even with the barons having drawn up their provisions, the charters still remained an integral part of what was expected of the king.[209]

---

[207] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, 373-378. The most interesting passage is probably the king's oath on the John's original charter: *"Prolataque fuit in medium carta patris sui J[ohannis], in qua iterum concessit idem rex J[ohannes] mera voluntate, et recitari fecit libertates supradictas. Dum autem rex memoratam sententiam audisset, tenuit manum suam ad pectus suum sereno vultu, voluntario, et alacri. Et cum in fine projecissent candelas extinctas et fumigantes, et diceretur a singulis, 'Sic extinguantur et foeteant hujus sententiae incursores in inferno,' et campanae pulsarentur, dixit ipse rex, 'Sic me Deus adjuvet, haec omnia illibata servabo fideliter, sicut sum homo, sicut sum Christianus, sicut sum miles, et sicut sum rex coronatus et inunctus.' Et sciendum quod in principio sententiae ferendae, cum traderentur omnibus candelae accensae, tradita fuit [regi] et una; et cum accepisset eam, noluit eam tenere, sed tradidit cuidam praelatorum, dicens, 'Non decet me candelam talem tenere, non enim sum sacerdos. Cor autem majus perhibet testimonium.' Et ex tunc tenuit manum expansam ad pectus, donec tota sententia finiretur."*

[208] See Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 375, for the writer's remark that the king had sworn on the charter *"unde infinitam emunxit pecuniam"* and ibid., p. 377-378, for a brief account of how the bishop of Lincoln, after the closing of the ceremony, solemnly proclaimed the sentence once more within the borders of his own diocese, since he "feared that the king might recoil from the arrangement."

[209] This becomes evident in Robert of Gloucester's metrical chronicle 2, lines 11,015-11,028 (p. 734), in which a very similar ritual excommunication (this time, however, the king does bear a candle) takes place after the king had promised "to grant good laws and also the old charters that had so often been granted and so often been undone". The Worcester Annals, p. 245, name the keeping of the charters as among the integral parts of the outcome of the parliament of Oxford. See also Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 696.

The provisions themselves were widely reported, and are often interpreted as a positive step forward that did not only lead to the expulsion of the much-loathed foreigners but also to a renewed affirmation of good laws and liberties.[210] Not all of the more elaborate chronicles depict the changes as having arisen from the barons' dissatisfaction, or as having been pushed through against the king's resistance: the Dunstable Annals present them as a closed string of measures springing from a parliament that the king had called together. While the king, touching the gospels, swore to the good old laws and the charters, and the barons, in turn, swore their observance, the troublemakers were the king's detestable brothers, who refused to take the oath on the new measures that was required from them and were hunted down and exiled by an alliance of the barons.[211] The antagonism between the king and the barons is made much more evident in the Burton and Waverly Annals as well as Matthew Paris' chronicle. With arms and horses, the magnates come to the parliament at Oxford, and lay their demands for change before the king, elaborating (to varying degrees, depending on the narrative in question) on the king's financial misgovernment, injustice, and particularly his favouritism of foreigners.[212] Matthew Paris' king acknowledges his mistakes as the barons confront him with their complaints and "humbles himself", "with a great oath, pledging upon the altar and grave of St Edward" that he would amend his ways. By then, however, the barons regarded him as untrustworthy on account of his "numerous transgressions". The account also ends in a showdown between the nobles and the king's foreign brothers, who refuse to join the king's affirmation of the provisions or to relinquish the grants they had accumulated, but eventually flee before the barons' offensive front. Less elaborate, the Waverly Annals condense the entire conflict from the provisions to the Battle of Lewes into one single chain of events, which, besides briefly listing the grievances that had led to the insurrection, also ascribes an unfavourable role to the queen, who is claimed to have withdrawn from her agreement on behalf of her countrymen and to have worked her influence on the king to the end that he, too, rejected the provisions. The king himself was not idle: he sent messengers to the pope to absolve him from the oath he had taken and excommunicate those who went against him.[213]

Thus, with the widespread support that the barons' cause engendered, the faults of the king are almost universally recounted. His own motivation is given by only one single account: the Song of Lewes. While the political poem also cites the king's transgressions and primarily appears to aim at building a legitimatory basis for the barons' cause by expounding, at length, on the need for a king to act in accordance with justice, it does not neglect elaborating on the royal

---

[210] Cf. Annals of Tewkesbury, p. 174-175, which particularly emphasises the expulsion of foreigners who had held goods in England. The Worcester Annals, p. 445, also mention the expulsion of foreigners, but add the confirmation of good laws and the safekeeping of the charters of liberties.

[211] Cf. Dunstable Annals, p. 208-210.

[212] Cf. Burton Annals, p. 438-439, in which the demands of the barons "for the reformation and ordering of the kingdom for the better" are listed; Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 688-690. The amount of imploring promises on the king's part is worth noting (and cited in the following): *"Rex autem ad se reversus, cum veritatem redargutionis intellexisset, licet sero, humilavit se; asserens se iniquo consilio saepius fuisse fascinnatum, promisitque sub magni juramenti obtestatione super altare et fererum Sancti Edwardi, quod pristinos errores plane et plene corrigens suis naturalibus benigne obsecundaret, sed crebrae transgressiones praecedentes se penitus incredibilem reddiderunt."* See also ibid., p. 695-698, for the continuation of the proceedings and the expulsion of the king's brothers.

[213] Cf. Waverly Annals, p. 355-356.

standpoint. Henry III regarded it as his right to be free of the magnates' advice and intervention, claiming that he "would cease to be a king if bereft of a king's right and if he could not do whatever he wanted".[214] The argument runs on: the realm's nobility was entitled to manage its affairs as it saw fit, without interference on the part of the king. If the king were to become subject to the provisions, he would effectively possess rights inferior to those of his subjects – an enormity the like of which none of his predecessors had had to experience, and which would rob him of his princely dignity. The king's argument, the writer acknowledges (albeit, of course, before moving on to the infinitely more justified cause of the barons), rang true.[215]

The legitimatory struggle between the king's cause and that of the magnates was present on a number of levels. The two parties thus at odds did of course constitute a threat to the general safety of the country, particularly when the dispute turned into civil war. However, renderings of the consequences are remarkably brief. The barons "revolted against the said king and his followers, dispersed armed and violent through England and subjugated castles, cities and burghs"[216], a "lamentable and miserable discord" arose between the two parties.[217] Slightly more critical is the Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, which reports how, towards the end of the conflict, bands of disinherited barons roamed the countryside, hid in the woods and robbed what they wanted or viewed as useful.[218] The conspicuous lack of dramatic depictions of civil war may be another result of the support of the barons' cause – although, of course, it is also possible that the dissension did not cause as much tumult as earlier wars between the king and nobility had done.

The lack of turmoil becomes particularly significant when the king's actions of retribution are considered: with regard to the leading figure of the rebellion, Simon de Montfort, they are presented as especially harsh. Matthew Paris diligently follows the development of the disparagement between the king and the earl – at the onset of the narrative a valued ally who had been richly rewarded for his services and loyalty to the king. Throughout Simon de Montfort's assignment to quell the insurgencies in Gascony, he portrays the king's treatment of the earl as unjustified. The earl's conduct, of which the Gascon subjects complained, did not merit criticism, as the king himself had ordered him to approach the Gascon problem with severity.[219] Although the chronicler would not live to record the Battle of Lewes, and, more so, the Battle of Evesham

---

[214] Song of Lewes, lines 489-492 (p. 16): "*Rex cum suis uoluit ita liber esse, / Et sic esse debuit, fuitque necesse, / Aut esse desineret rex priuatus iure / Regis, nisi faceret quicquid uellet".*
[215] Cf. ibid., lines 492-526 (p. 16-17).
[216] Worcester Annals, p. 448.
[217] Ibid., p. 449.
[218] Cf. Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, p. 34.
[219] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 276-278, for the Gascon complaints of Simon de Montfort's tyrannical harshness, greed, and treacherous severity against even the most loyal Gascon subjects of Henry III, which had been of such severity that the king sent a man to investigate, and began to hold Simon de Montfort in suspicion. The earl, of course, professed his innocence and sailed back to reduce the Gascons to obedience. Matthew Paris reports further accusations following these first complaints (ibid., p. 287, 288-289) and narrates Simon de Montfort's defence against the accusations in the king's court, during which both he and the king erupt in rage, with the earl accusing the king of having broken their agreement and not being a true Christian (ibid., p. 289-291). He proceeds to narrate how and why the king himself had ordered Simon to treat the Gascons harshly, in the process of which he claims that it was ungrateful of the king to now turn against the earl in favour of the Gascons, whom he knew to be treacherous (ibid., p. 291-294). At court, where he is not met with becoming honour and the king stares at him with "bewitched" eyes, Simon de Montfort validly defends himself against the accusations (ibid., p. 295-296).

that ended Simon de Montfort's grasp at royal authority, he clearly designated the earl as the main opponent of Henry III. This constellation is highlighted with a dramatic scene: the king, who had been travelling on the Thames, fled to land when the sky clouded over with a thunderstorm. As chance and poetic licence dictated, he landed close to a spot where the earl was staying, who, ever the loyal subject, came out joyfully to meet the king. To console the king, he asked him what he was fearing, since the storm had already passed. The king, with serious words and mien, replied "I fear thunder and lightning beyond measure, but by God's head, before you I tremble more than before all the thunder and lightning of the world." The earl replied "benignly" that it was unjust and incredible that the king did fear him, his firm and loyal friend, rather than the enemies which he ought to fear. The episode could hardly be a better set-up for the two characters to be cast into profile, their opposition to each other made visible. Since the encounter is narrated very close to the parliament at Oxford at which the provisions had been proclaimed, it is likely that the writer had sought to associate the king's present troubles with the magnates with the thunderstorm – troubles that, as Simon de Montfort's speech appears to suggest, had ceased after the root of the problem had been taken care of and the foreigners had been expulsed. The king's utterance, in turn, suggests that he had clearly identified Simon de Montfort as the ringleader of his rebellious barons and a threat to his own majesty – and that the tension between the two was still smouldering, and thus could be reignited. Matthew Paris himself could not resist offering a minimal interpretation of the scene: everyone was astounded at these words, and attributed them to the fact that Simon de Montfort had been instrumental to the realisation of the barons' provisions and the banishment of the king's brothers from the kingdom.[220]

The earl, thus rendered the king's prime adversary, gained yet more fame in death, stylised even by otherwise brief annals. The Dunstable Annals profess their support for Simon de Montfort by claiming that, before the Battle of Lewes, he (and his followers) "had God before their eyes and justice" and, ready to die for truth, "fought the war of the Lord"[221]. This inclination towards the divine is seamlessly continued in the earl's death. Slain and dismembered, he reached instant martyrdom. Robert of Gloucester calls the battle "the murder of Evesham, for it was no battle". He describes the earl's gruesome dismemberment and covers the battlefield with blackened skies and rain.[222] The Waverly Annals bemoan the "shameful" dismemberment of his body and call the earl "a martyr for the peace of the land and the restoration of the kingdom and

---

[220] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 706: *"Rex autem hujusmodi tempestatem plus omnibus formidans, jussit ilico se poni ad terram. [... comes] consolansque ait, 'Quid est quod timitis? jam tempestas pertransiit.' Cui rex non jocose sed serio respondit, vultuque severo; 'Supra modum tonitrum et fulgur formido, sed per caput Dei, plus te quam totius mundi tonitrum et fulgur contremisco.' Cui comes benigne respondit; 'Domine mi, injustum est et incredibile, ut me amicum vestrum stabilem, et semper vobis et vestris et regno Angliae fidelem, paveatis; sed inimicos vestros, destructores et falsidicos, timere debetis.' Haec autem verba stupenda suspicabantur omnes inde erupisse, quod scilicet comes Legrecestriae virilius perstitit et ferventius in prosequenda provisione, ut scilicet regem et omnes adversantes suis astare consiliis cogerent, et ejus fratres totum regnum corrumpentes funditus exterminarent."*

[221] Dunstable Annals, p. 232. The annalist's account of Simon de Montfort's death, p. 239, however, is nothing but a simple notice that the earl had died.

[222] Robert of Gloucester 2, lines 11,726-11,747 (p. 764-765).

the mother Church"[223]. There is even the mention of a number of miracles posthumously being worked through him.[224]

Simon de Montfort's case is unquestionably the most outstanding example for ill-received royal rigour. In general, Henry III, although certainly not portrayed as a monarch inclined to cruelty, was not particularly squeamish in dealing with rebels. Most notable is the dispossession and exile of Falkes de Breauté, who had rebelled and held Bedford castle against the king. Henry III had a considerable number of defenders hanged after the lengthy siege, however, just as the exile of their noble leader, their punishment was not considered particularly noteworthy as far as the king's inclination towards mercy or rigour was concerned: the siege had been long and, on account of the losses owed to the defender's crossbowmen, bitter. As Henry III, even while the siege lasted, had announced he would have them hung should he have to take them by force, the execution of the punishment was only to be expected.[225] Of the king's punishments, only his treatment of the citizens of London is narrated with a distinct accusatory tone; doubtlessly owing to the fact that the king was claimed to have acted deceitfully.[226] While disinheriting the insurgent barons had caused a certain amount of unrest throughout the kingdom, the Dictum of Kenilworth that allowed them to receive back their lands against a payment appears to have sufficiently smoothed out the end of the baronial rebellion without causing a greater stir among contemporary writers.[227] Misplaced acts of mercy, on the other hand, are entirely in the domain of the St Alban's chroniclers.[228]

Justice is attributed an overwhelming role in the baronial rebellion. Yet, although overshadowed by these more momentous events, notices of Henry III's involvement in everyday justice are frequently found on all levels of royal jurisdiction. The Worcester Annals, by regularly noting the circuits of the itinerant justices, make everyday law enforcement particularly visible.[229] Under such preconditions, the king could swiftly act if something went amiss: when dissension arose between the monastery and the citizens that led to the buildings being set on fire, "he came not long after to these parts, and made a diligent investigation into the wrongdoers, who he had dragged by horses, others burnt by fire, and others hanged and incarcerated"[230]. There are a number of instances in which the king acted swiftly and thoroughly to see that peace was re-established. After a festivity that had gone so far out of hand that it ended in a massive brawl between citizens, he imposed severe penalties: not only were people hanged and mutilated, the

[223] Waverly Annals, p. 365: *"Symon de Monteforti, capite truncato, mebratim decisus, pudibundis suis, proh pudor! ablatis, martyrium pro pace terrae et regni reparatione et matris ecclesiae, ut credimus, consummavit gloriosum"*.
[224] Cf. Matthew Paris, Flores Historiarum 3, p. 5-6.
[225] Cf. Worcester Annals, p. 416-417; Roger of Wendover 4, p. 95-97.
[226] The incident has been discussed in the chapter on the character of Henry III.
[227] Cf. Worcester Annals, p. 460 and p. 372, for very brief ad neutral notes on the Dictum of Kenilworth.
[228] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 396, records the king capturing a castle in Gascony with great expenditure – and, against all reason and the precept of the gospel that demanded to slay such transgressors, spared these *"manifestis inimicos"* out of *"misericordia"*. Through that act, which, the chronicler notes with distaste, again favoured foreigners, the king lost glory and his good name. See also Roger of Wendover 4, p. 66-68, where the author describes the siege of Biham castle and notes that, by showing leniency to the rebels, the king was giving others a bad example to rebel in a similar cause..
[229] See, for instance, Worcester Annals, p. 439, p. 442, p. 443 and p. 460.
[230] Winchester Annals, p. 111, and Worcester Annals, p. 461; the annals are identical on this incident. See also Matthew Paris, Flores Historiarium 3, p. 24-27.

king also ordered the entire magistrate of the city to be replaced.[231] Similarly, the Dunstable Annals report how, in response to robberies that had become so frequent throughout England "that nobody could safely sleep in villages", justices were sent out that "hanged many, and at their coming, an infinite number fled, leaving their fatherland".[232] Fleeing inhabitants were an occurrence with which the king's justices were also confronted in Cornwall, where "everyone, out of fear, fled to the woods". The officials, however, appear to have been masters of the situation: appreciatively, the annalist remarks that they did their best to make the people "return to the king's peace", to "learn and live according to the laws of the kingdom of England".[233]

Not always did the king's men thus commendably fulfil their duties. Matthew Paris recalls an incident in which the king was forced to move against some of his own men. The precarious state of the country, where robbery was commonplace, was brought before him by Brabantian merchants, who complained that they had been robbed by men whom they had seen at the king's court. In counsel with his advisors, the king attempted to understand how it came that the matter had hitherto escaped his notice, despite the frequent circuits of the itinerant justices. The king summoned his bailiffs and the free men of the province in question before him and, "fiercely returning their gaze", sternly reprimanded them. In this situation, even Matthew Paris finds only approving words for the king, styling him as the very embodiment of what royal justice should be. He has him profess his great distaste for the crimes that had taken place even in his presence, while at the same acknowledging that he needed (and would make use of) "wise men" to help him tackle the problem, as the populace was suspected of being confederate with the robbers, thus effectively hiding the crimes from royal persecution. In smoothly operating union with the bishop of Winchester, who had excommunicated all of the thus accused, the king extracted the truth of the matter by individually questioning groups of citizens. When the first had been cast into chains and had been condemned to the gallows, the second group divulged the entire extent of the confederacy, accusing not only wealthy and well-esteemed persons, but also officials appointed by the king to keep the peace. After reporting that a considerable number of people was to be hanged, or cast into prison so as there to await similar punishment, Matthew Paris fulminantly closes his account with a reference to divine vengeance having come down upon those who deserved it.

Despite the king's most exemplary conduct throughout, a single stain is cast on the proceedings nonetheless: the chronicler records that those who had been in the king's service blamed him for their crimes and subsequent deaths, since he had withheld their pay for a long time. The truth of the matter is acknowledged by the king being portrayed as sad and ashamed upon hearing the accusation.[234] Notwithstanding this criticism, Matthew Paris seems to have entertained a high opinion of the king's administration of justice. Among other episodes, he recounts a second instance in which the king moved with considerable severity against one of his

231 Cf. Roger of Wendover 4, p. 79-82.
232 Dunstable Annals, p. 95.
233 Ibid., p. 135.
234 Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 56-60.

officials. Only an intercession before the king of Scotland, for instance, could save a criminal sheriff from royally prescribed death on the gallows.[235]

The king is thus portrayed as having done his best to re-establish peace throughout his kingdom, even if, at times, it was broken again once the monarch had left the vicinity.[236] Although Matthew Paris sometimes found Henry III's attention to the proper dispensation of justice lacking as soon as his familiars were in any way involved,[237] the picture of the king's everyday administration of justice is a positive one. It stands in a strikingly dramatic contrast to his depiction before, during and after the barons' war, when he was portrayed as the unjust oppressor of a just cause who would not hold to his constant promises – and (although indirectly) the man guilty of the barbarous murder of a political martyr.

---

[235] Cf. ibid., p. 577-581. Ibid., p. 720, jubilantly reports severe measures against sheriffs that had proved oppressive; Matthew Paris, Chronia Majora 4, p. 377-378, reports how the royal bailiffs made some Jews read the inscription on a boy presumably murdered by other Jews.

[236] The Dunstable Annals, p. 118-124, for instance, record a rather lengthy episode in which the king has been approached by the convent's prior to see to it that the dissension between the convent and the town was settled peacefully. Although peace is established In the presence of the king, hostilities soon break out again – and the king can do little more than to send writs to try and settle the situation. Peace is, at last, restored by the archeacon of Bedford, but the peace agreement itself is made in the king's court, acknowleding the role he had played in re-establishing friendly relations.

[237] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 233-234, for a complaint of the justice the king exercised in a suit concerning St Alban's. The chronicler does, however, also exemplify the king's good justice, e.g. in Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, 152-155, where the king peacefully and skillfully settles a dispute about ecclesiastical dignities. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 95, sees the king re-establish peace between the bishop and convent of Westminster.

*3.2.4. The King at War*
*Contemporary Expectations*

*Vincere certetus,*
*solum si uiuere uultis.*[1]

As a dispenser of justice, it was the king's arm that wielded the sword to correct his people for the benefit of all. A sword within, the king had to be a shield without. Justice could pacify the kingdom from within its boundaries, but the outward defence of said boundaries was not accomplished by laws, courts or procedure – and in an age in which devastation of the countryside and wholesale destruction of everything that happened to be contained in it was a frequent military tactic,[2] an unimpeded hostile campaign might wreak considerably more havoc than 'domestic' offences going unpunished. The outcome of the king's attempts at defending his subjects and preserving his kingdom is an extremely crucial aspect of how later generations would come to judge him. It stands to reason, too, that the king's subjects considered their ruler's military capability a factor of some importance. Outstanding military prowess had great potential to live on after the death of a king, and, like juridical rigour, it would compel chroniclers to compare individual kings to lions, or call them by that name. Whether or not this title would stay with the king, however, was up to posterity.[3]

The classical area of responsibility for the king is to provide defence and protection for his people and, especially, serve as a protector of the Church and the weak – namely orphans and widows.[4] For that purpose, according to Wulfstan's societal model, one of the three pillars supporting his throne was the pillar of the *bellatores*, who, warlike and armed, are to defend the land.[5] An ideal Christian king is a peaceful king, a defender rather than a conqueror.

This being said for theory, in practical application, defining which actions constituted acts of defence was a matter open to interpretation. Royal forays into enemy territory that bore semblance to aggressive warfare could be justified as an "intimidation for the purpose of keeping peace, not permanent conquest"[6] or else, they may have aimed to defend or recover territory to which the king or his vassals held some legal claim. If such a claim did not exist in an area of particular strategic importance, Stephen Morillo observes laconically, "a few well-arranged marriages or induced rebellions could usually create one".[7] Consequently, even ecclesiastics might find it in themselves to praise a king for extending the boundaries of his realm. For a war to appear just, however, more than merely a good cause was needed. Princes had to appear personally on the field of battle, accompanied by a number of their foremost liegemen and their sub-vassals. An army comprising only mercenaries (who had a rather sinister reputation either

[1] Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, p. 26, line 460.
[2] Cf. Strickland, War and Chivalry, p. 284-304; Hollister, The Aristocracy, p. 51.
[3] Cf. Jäckel, Der Herrscher als Löwe, p. 4. Jäckel's work explores the use of the lion-comparison throughout much of the middle ages, and often draws on English history and the depiction of English kings as lions, including William II, Henry I, Henry II and Richard the Lionheart.
[4] Cf. Jost, Institutes of Polity, p. 40; Hugh de Fleury, caput VI, p. 948.
[5] Cf. Jost, Institutes of Polity, p. 56.
[6] Morillo, Warfare under the Anglo-Norman Kings, p. 31.
[7] Ibid.

way) would invariably reflect badly on the prince leading them,[8] even though they may have been the more comfortable option in warfare, as compared to the troops rallied by feudal service, whose obligation ended after forty days, and who were not always provided in the number or quality that had been expected.[9]

Since in the time period between the late eleventh and the late thirteenth century the crusading movement was at its zenith, the crusade can be considered as a further form of waging a just war. As such, it allowed the king not only to demonstrate his prowess in battle, but also his piety and devotion. A monarch's dedication to this cause, however, could prove a double-edged sword: it might strengthen his authority, but likewise, his ambition might count little in his own country, with his nobles refusing to pay the contribution necessary to furnish an expedition towards the Holy Land.[10]

Once a cause had been found and warfare had commenced, individual battles were generally interpreted as a form of trial, the manifestation of justice.[11] With chivalric piety interpreting battles as judicial combat on a grand scale in which victory was granted to the side that had the juster cause, the side whose morale was more pleasing to God, a spectacularly won battle might well be stylised a divine judgement. The fighters employed various ways of increasing divine benevolence on the eve of battle: prayer, confession and Mass were central, as God would not aid the sinful, invocations of God and prayers for saintly help preceded military action, while banners, relics and pious war cries were to secure divine aid on the field of battle itself.[12]

The expectations towards a king's conduct during a campaign were fundamentally the same as those applicable to any military leader. It was his personal example – or rather his reputation built by personal style and, to some extent, extensive boasting – that helped him attract followers.[13] In battle, these followers had to be inspired and commanded to perform to their best abilities, between battles, they had to be kept disciplined so as not to turn into a violent, looting mob.

With the gradual development of the chivalric code of conduct in the late eleventh and early twelfth century,[14] a greater variety of more personal qualities were deemed desirable in the king, whose ideal image developed beyond that of the domineering commander to that of the courtly *roi-chevalier*[15], in whose understanding of piety feats of arms equalled rendering service to God.[16] Revolving around the concept of personal honour, the societally acknowledged claim to worth and pride,[17] chivalry, in its essentials, was a code of conduct based on an awareness of an overarching fellowship in arms among members of nobility who shared a common background

[8] Cf. Vollrath et al., Introduction, p. 20.
[9] Cf. Prestwich, Money and Mercenaries, p. 132, 135.
[10] Cf. Vollrath et al., Introduction, p. 23.
[11] Cf. ibid., p. 19.
[12] Cf. Strickland, War and Chivalry, p. 59-67, especially p. 60 and 67; see also Vincent, Pilgrimages, p. 24-25.
[13] Cf. Morillo, Warfare under the Anglo-Norman Kings, p. 45.
[14] Cf. Gillingham, Conquering the Barbarians, p. 51.
[15] Chauou, L'idéologie Plantagenêt, p. 169.
[16] Cf. Kaeuper, Chivalry and Violence, p. 48.
[17] Cf. Strickland, War and Chivalry, p. 99. Strickland here follows the definition of honour by Julian Pitt-Rivers as "the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his *claim* to pride, but it is also the acknowledgement of that claim, his excellence recognized by society, his *right* to pride." Emphasis in the original.

and profession.[18] As a direct consequence, unbridled slaughter on the field of battle, the killing of men who shared, to some extent, the same background, was becoming increasingly problematic – even if bloodlust and draconic post-battle punishments had been morally questionable acts even before the rise of chivalry.[19] Chivalry encompassed unwavering loyalty to lord and kin, largesse especially towards vassals and companions in arms, a spirit of magnanimity, piety, and, from the twelfth century onward, adequately gallant behaviour in courtly circles. The key virtue, however, was the knight's prowess, his conduct in combat, his feats of arms, his bravery.[20] The considerable influence these ideas exerted can be deduced from the fact that even ecclesiastical chroniclers mentioned them. Orderic Vitalis, in his account of the Battle of Brémule 1119 notes that the fleeing knights were captured rather than killed because of the fellowship of arms they shared,[21] and Gerald of Wales includes *audacia et animositate*, boldness and courage, among the virtues that made a military foray praiseworthy, albeit adding a warning against imprudent recklessness.[22] Although chivalry flourished especially in the twelfth century, reverence for courage, loyalty, largesse and prowess in combat, can definitely be traced back to earlier times[23] – it might even be argued that they are not specifically chivalric, but virtues that are genuinely feudal or in general central to successful leadership. Specific aspects of what is usually subsumed under the heading of chivalry are thus applicable to the entire time period in question.

Given the extent of his powers, magnanimity might well be considered the most significant of chivalric virtues in a king. It was he who might show his noble spirit and appreciation for the valour of a beleaguered garrison by granting them respite of fighting or allowing them free egress with arms and horses,[24] it was he who could graciously allow the defeated to surrender. With knightly combatants being taken captive and held for ransom rather than being killed, a special privilege fell to the king: already in the late eleventh century, he could lay claim to especially valuable and important prisoners. While this right to prisoners allowed the king to perform powerful acts of collective vengeance or clemency, it could only work if the initial captor thought himself fittingly rewarded. In handing his captive over to the king, he was, after all, relinquishing a ransom the height of which corresponded with the prominence of the captive.[25]

The treatment of said captives in the course of their confinement was another matter that reflected on the captor and his honour as knight. How captives were treated mirrored their standing with the captor: rather frequently, they were mistreated to exact larger ransoms or force the surrender of castles.[26] Rebels, thus, might be found to be treated especially harshly, with

---

[18] Cf. Gillingham, Conquering the Barbarians, p. 52 and 55, see also Strickland, War and Chivalry, p. 137.
[19] For an exploration of this, especially with view to the efforts going into the legitimation of the "slaughter" that was the battle of Hastings, see Gillingham, 'Holding to the Rules of War'.
[20] Cf. Strickland, War and Chivalry, 99. See also Beczy, Cardinal Virtues, p. 52-53, for an interpretation of the virtue of fortitude in the contexts of battles as the willingness to strife for greater, better goals.
[21] Cf. Gillingham, Conquering the Barbarians, p. 52. Orderic Vitalis uses the phrase "*notitia ... contubernii*", see Orderic Vitalis 6, book XII, ch. 18, iv. 362, p. 240.
[22] Cf. De principis instructione, dist. 1, ch. 14, p. 48.
[23] Gillingham, Conquering the Barbarians, p. 51, traces the admiration for these particular virtues back to ninth century Francia.
[24] Cf. Strickland, War and Chivalry, p. 124.
[25] Cf. ibid., p. 185-190.
[26] Cf. ibid., p. 196-203.

extreme punitive measures inflicted upon them as a measure of intimidation if the king deemed that the often effective approach of showing clemency would not suffice.[27] Indeed, rebellious acts, such as the breach of fealty and treason, contempt of the king and his orders or the unlicensed construction of fortification were offences that placed the rebel at the mercy of the king, and allowed the monarch to part him from life and limb, if he so wished.[28]

The expectations a king at war had to face were diverse: in the first place, he was a commander to his troops, a tactician and general; he had to rally them, pay them, discipline them. Although it was ultimately the outcome of his efforts that counted – the (adequately justified) acquisition of new territory as well as the defence of the land in his keeping – stupendous acts of royal bravery, fortitude and feats of arms usually made for a good tale. While the king's ferociousness as warrior was likely to evoke awed respect at all times, the rise of chivalry added further dimensions to the role of king and knight beyond his strength in combat. Especially honorary conduct during as well as after the battle and the fair treatment of captured enemies were added to the list of the traits a king ought to display.

*William I at War*

Contemporary narrative sources of the Conqueror's reign abound with descriptions of warfare, whether for defence or (adequately justified) conquest, with the duke and later king usually in the thick of battle. What is striking is how meticulously his more aggressive military ventures are justified – explicitly exempting the royal suppression of rebellions or the defence of frontiers, which were legitimate *per se*. As a prelude to the acquisition of Maine, William of Poitiers spins a frightful tale of tyranny and betrayal, of the country being oppressed by Angevin tyranny, of its rightful lord being expelled from his lands, in fear of his life fleeing to the safety the Norman duke might provide. The count becomes the duke's vassal, names him his heir if he should die childless, and, to further strengthen the bond, seeks his daughter's hand in marriage. He dies before his marriage plans come to fulfilment, but his dying voice urges his men to accept William I as their lord. After the customary praise of William I's qualities as overlord, the drama enters into the second act: the men of bad faith (*homines malefidi*) receive an interloper as their lord. The duke is angry and takes to arms. He had, William of Poitiers explains (notoriously untruthfully), more than one right to succeed, since the dukes of Normandy used to be lords of Maine.[29]

The justification preceding and accompanying the conquest of England is more impressive still, incorporating, one might say, all possible layers of legitimation: the kindness and hospitality of the duke, Harold's bond to him through his oath of fealty, the lawful justification of the duke's claim through the late king's designation, the divine judgement expressed in the successful conquest and the frequent reference to moral soundness and piety of the conquering host and its leader. The extent to which Harold is slandered in the Norman sources is too vast even to report: a murderous slayer of his own brother, a traitor, a usurper steeped in every kind of moral failure – the list would be long.

[27] Cf. ibid., p. 248.
[28] Cf. Leges Henrici Primi, p. 108-109 and p. 116-117; Strickland, War and Chivalry, p. 241.
[29] Cf. William of Poitiers, i.36-38 (p. 58-60).

William of Poitiers and William of Jumièges jointly report Edward the Confessor's wish to have Duke William succeed him,[30] and together with the Tapestry of Bayeux, they report Harold's visit to Normandy, his capture by Count Guy of Ponthieu, his stay at the ducal court and his eventual oath concerning the kingdom of England.[31] The Tapestry shows the oath being sworn on two reliquaries – and although he does not report this dimension of Harold's oath, William of Poitiers claims that the Conqueror was humbly wearing around his neck the very relics Harold had sworn on and whose grace he had forfeited when he had violated his oath.[32] Seen in conjunction with the relics, the Conquest bears all the marks of a divinely favoured mission, it would even seem to take, as Douglas has suggested in his biography of the Conqueror, the appearance of something similar to a crusade.[33]

William of Poitiers boldly suggests that it was not so much the king's wish to increase his power and glory which compelled him to strive for England, but his intention of remedying the Christian practice in those regions.[34] The narratives certainly do their utmost to assert the goodwill of the Church for the venture: Duke William had requested and been granted the papal banner;[35] beyond that, his devotion and great zeal in churchly matters are something William of Poitiers never tires to report. The Conquest is heralded by a star shining in the heavens, although it does appear to have been sent as a dire warning for the English rather than a good portent for the Normans, regarded with awe and anxiety in the Tapestry of Bayeux, proclaimed as a herald of English ruin in the *Carmen*.[36] When William has gathered men around him and makes ready to embark there is a retarding moment in the narrative, a soft prick of doubt: the right winds will not blow, the crossing is made impossible, the conquering army is stuck at the mouth of the Dives. The men wait, murmurs rise, some even flee, but the situation is saved by the Conqueror's pious judgement and the right measure of devotion: after many devout prayers, at last the relics of St Valery are brought out of the church. After a great show of humility from the assembled, divine favour shines upon the venture once more, the much-needed winds blow, [37] making the episode appear, in the end, more like a final test of resolve than a serious setback. Having arrived, battle is joined soon – but even then, William of Poitiers asserts that ecclesiastical preparation is made, with the duke was hearing Mass, and the clerics that came with the invading host speaking prayers.[38]

The impression of a divinely favoured army is deepened by the exceptionally good behaviour

---

[30] Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VII-13(31), p. 158-160; William of Poitiers, i.14 (p. 18-20) and i. 41 (p. 68-70).

[31] Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VII-13(31), p. 160; William of Poitiers, i.41-46 (p. 68-78); Bayeux Tapestry, plates 1-29.

[32] Cf. William of Poitiers, ii.14 (p. 124); Tapestry of Bayeux, plate 29.

[33] Douglas, William the Conqueror, p. 188.

[34] William of Poitiers, ii. 5 (p. 108): "*... qui non tantum ditionem suam et gloriam augere, quantum ritus christianos partibus in illis corrigere intendit.*"

[35] Cf. William of Poitiers, ii.3 (p. 105), is the only written contemporary source to mention the papal banner; the Tapestry of Bayeux, plate 69, depicts a cross-banner being borne by the advancing Norman cavalry.

[36] Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, p. 8, lines 125-126; Tapstry of Bayeux, plate 35.

[37] Cf. William of Poitiers, ii.6-7 (p. 108-112). The Carmen reports merely that the Conqueror had made an oath to God (besides offering his prayers) before having been granted favourable winds out of divine pity, cf. Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, lines 52-75 (p. 6). Neither William of Jumièges nor the Bayeux Tapestry report the delay.

[38] Cf. William of Poitiers, ii. 14 (p. 124).

that William's troops display – but here, the credit is not given to their piety and Christian restraint but rather to the Conqueror's strong grip on his men, his skills of leadership and the unwavering discipline he imposed on his soldiers. His exceptional capability of controlling his men is emphasized time and again by his panegyrist.[39] There is a passage William of Poitiers seems to regard as a particularly good piece of writing – seeing that he uses it word for word both for the discipline within the host during the involuntary wait at the mouth of the Dives and for the time when William I had returned to Normandy, after England had been conquered. They were provided for and moderated to such an extent that

> "The cattle and flocks of the people of the province grazed safely whether in the fields or on the waste. The crops waited unharmed for the scythe of the harvester, and were neither trampled by the proud stampede of horsemen nor cut down by foragers. A man who was weak or unarmed could ride singing on his horse wherever he wished, without trembling at the sight of squadrons of knights."[40]

Strict morals were allegedly imposed upon the conquering host after William had been crowned king. Besides reminding his magnates of the honourable conduct they ought to display towards their fellow Christians, conquered though they may be. Soldiers were prevented from too intimately associating with women (whether the encounter be with their morally crooked consent or, worse yet, without it), and were only grudgingly and rarely allowed to drink to prevent strife from arising.[41]

The king did more for his men than maintaining their discipline. In the depictions of battle itself, William I is usually to be found in the thick of things. It is hardly surprising that the most vivid accounts of his conduct in war are to be found in the *Gesta Guillelmi* and the *Carmen*, most notably of course (not least because the *Carmen* has nothing else to offer) in their accounts of the Battle of Hastings. He is portrayed a ferocious warrior, fighting on although his horses are slain beneath him – three horses are killed in William of Poitiers' account, two in the *Carmen*'s.[42] The *Carmen's* description is the most bloody, with the Conqueror, fighting even fiercer on foot than he had on horseback, tearing the slayer of his first horse limb from limb; he dismembers, he mutilates, his sword devours, the souls of his opponents are sent to hell.[43]

Despite his great ferocity in battle, an emphasis on his role as general is maintained throughout the narratives. He is displayed as devising the tactic guiding the attack, rallying his men, encouraging them; it is he who saves the day as the courage of his French host wanes, his men overwhelmed by the great number of the English defenders (and, depending on the account, disadvantaged because of the higher ground from which the English were able to fight). His men believe him dead, and turn to flee, but the duke lifts his helmet, baring his head in the sight of his troops to show them he is still alive – an incident reported in the *Carmen*, William of Poitiers and the Tapestry of Bayeux alike. William confronted his quailing men; checking their flight,

---

[39] Evidenced, for instance, in the behaviour of Count Guy of Ponthieu (i.41 (p. 68)). Ibid., i.45 (p. 74-76), describes how there was no damage to the peasants' crops and belongings asa result of William's campaign against Conan, since he took care not to lead his hungry army through populated strips of land. In p. 74, during that same campaign, he prevents his host from wanton plunder, afraid that they might otherwise despoil church goods.
[40] William of Poitiers, ii.2 (p. 102-104), and ii.45 (p. 180).
[41] Cf. William of Poitiers, ii.33 (p. 158-160).
[42] Cf. Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, p. 28, lines 471-475, p. 30, lines 503-509.
[43] Cf. ibid., p. 28, lines 471-484.

according to the *Carmen*, with his lance and sharp admonishments, turning in fury upon his own vassals, the Normans, and beseeching the other members of his host, the French. In a masterful speech that is similar in both sources, he asks whither they would run, with the enemy in front of them and the sea behind them, impressing upon them that their only chance of survival lay in conquest. They were shamefully fleeing, he states in the *Carmen*, from sheep rather than from men, while William of Poitiers, equally demeaning to the English defenders, has him assert that they could (if only they would) slaughter the English like cattle.[44]

The military conquests of William I were legitimated with outstanding diligence, giving them the appearance of similar justification as the defence of his already acquired dominions – in which he likewise strikes a good figure. He is, throughout, portrayed as a man who had his troops well in check, who could restrain them and, by the use of superior tactics, could lead them to victory. His warlike demeanour and personal feats of arms mark him down as a worthy knight – though not, it should be noted, a particularly chivalrous one. The lack of chivalric praise is not too surprising, seeing that these notions had not yet fully manifested themselves. The Conqueror certainly had a fearsome reputation as warrior; this much speaks clearly from the contemporary chronicles. William of Jumièges records that the 1067 rebels, after their plans had been discovered, panicked and fled, *repentinum domini sui magni debellatoris formidantes aduentum* – filled with horror at the sudden return of their lord, that great conqueror.[45] William of Poitiers asserts that the combined armies of the English and Danish feared the Norman invader so greatly that they did not dare to face him on a level field, taking instead to higher ground – they feared him more than the Norwegian king (whom they had, after all, repelled before the Norman invasion).[46] William I was about war, and especially the Battle of Hastings that had won him the epithet of Conqueror.

*William II at War*

"He cherished military renown", writes Orderic, "and entirely favoured it out of worldly pride."[47] There is little doubt that William II was seen as a king inclined towards knighthood. It was an inclination at which he proved talented. No chronicle, however hostile, manages to entirely circumvent mentioning the king's military success. Eadmer concedes that the king had subdued the Normans and forced the Welsh to surrender, thus making peace with all his enemies.[48] He enlarges on that when describing how God had favoured the king: "he had such success in subduing and subjecting enemies, in acquiring lands, ... that you might have believed everything was smiling upon him."[49] The *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* briefly lists some of his greatest military exploits in what might be admiration,[50] and, finally, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle remarks, far less

[44] Cf. Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, p. 26-29, lines 441-459; William of Poitiers, ii. 18-19 (p. 130-132); Tapestry of Bayeux, plate 68.
[45] Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VII-19(40), p. 178.
[46] Cf. William of Poitiers, ii.16 (p. 126).
[47] Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 7, iii. 315, p. 178: "*Militiae titulis applaudebat illique propter fastum secularem admodum fauebat.*"
[48] Cf. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 77.
[49] Ibid., p. 116.
[50] Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VIII-8, p. 212.

favourably, that "he was very strong and violent over his land and his men and with all his neighbours"[51]. For descriptions of the king at war that go beyond such brief statements, it is almost always necessary to resort to Orderic Vitalis' *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

In some ways, Orderic's William II is an early representative for many of the knightly virtues that would come to be grouped together under the name of chivalry.

> "King Philip [of France] was indolent, fat, and unfit for war ... . The king of England, on the other hand, was wholly devoted to knightly deeds, had a special affection for captains at arms and experienced champions, and kept around himself companies of chosen knights as a mark of distinction. While he was protected by such men, if Gaius Julius Caesar and his Roman legions had opposed him in an attempt to wrong him in any way, he would undoubtedly have dared to test the strength and courage of his knights by joining battle with Caesar."[52]

The assertion that William II would have been ready to take on Caesar, the classical and continuously reused paragon of efficient and successful warfare, points to his daring, and his great trust in the men with which he surrounded himself, even though Orderic neglects to inform his readers who of the two generals he would have thought capable of winning that confrontation. He was not the only one to have employed that comparison: William of Malmesbury asserts that if such a thing were permitted by Christian religion, he would be inclined to say that Caesar's very soul had wandered, and took William II's body as its new abode.[53] The monk stresses repeatedly that the king enjoyed the company of warlike knights, claiming that prowess in arms was a quality that would move a man into the king's inner circle.[54] Orderic's numerous expressions of the affection the king had for these retainers strongly suggest the existence of a sense of a 'companionship in arms' that was to become a central aspect of chivalry. This sense of comradeship came complete with an underlying code of honour, the breaking of which might cause sanctions that smarted, even they were largely social and symbolic. That William II held such views of his fellow knights – whether friend or foe – is eloquently embellished by Orderic in several episodes depicting the king's conduct towards the enemy.

Helias de la Flèche, captured by Robert of Bellême in an ambush, is held in honourable captivity, with the writer remarking that the king was "not cruel towards knights, but courteous and generous, joking and friendly"[55]. This companionable treatment was not only granted to prisoners, but also extended to potential enemies on the field of battle – much to the king's credit, since such actions, chivalrous as they were, meant forsaking a possible asset in the confrontation that might yet follow. For instance, when he starts his campaign towards Le Mans, he is approached by a vicomte, who asks him to grant a truce until he has received an answer on the proposed line of action against the king, fearing to plunge himself into shame for disobeying his lord if he made peace with the advancing king without obtaining his lord's counsel before he acted. The king not only grants his request, but also commends his words.[56] More than simply caring about the observation of conventions, the king is shown to truly care about other knights

---

[51] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 235 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 364.f

[52] Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 4, iv. 20, p. 215. Translation by Chibnall.

[53] Cf. William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book IV-320.4, p. 566.

[54] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 15, iv. 86, p. 288, states that Walter Tirel was mettlesome in war and therefore *(ideo)* one of the king's closest companions.

[55] Ibid., ch. 8, iv. 44, p. 238: "*Non enim militibus erat crudelis, sed blandus et dapsilis, iocundus et affabilis.*"

[56] Cf. ibid., iv. 45-46, p. 240.

he respected. Upon his return home after having made peace with William II, the Scottish king is ambushed near the border of his kingdom and slain unarmed. "Hearing the news, the king and his magnates are said to have been greatly distressed, and were much ashamed that such disgraceful and cruel deed had been done by Normans."[57] It is not easy to say whether the king feared repercussions, as the perpetrator pertained to his kingdom's nobility or whether he was truly moved – but the gesture certainly is respectful, very 'knightly', and Orderic's narrative presents it as nothing if not positive. Most memorable of this entire bundle of depictions of the king's feeling of companionship towards other knights is the triumphant and jubilantly greeted arrival of the king to relieve one of his garrisons, where captured knights call out to him to grant them freedom. The king orders to have them released for the duration of a meal, to be taken in the courtyard among his own men. His retainers remark that they might easily flee, but Rufus counters, entirely in line with the spirit of chivalry: "Far be it from me to believe that a proper knight would break his word. If he did so, he would for all time be despised as an outlaw."[58] There can be no clearer expression of the king regarding even the captured enemies as essentially part of a group that he esteemed highly.

It is not the only mark of chivalry by which the king is distinguished. Orderic Vitalis frequently highlights his personal bravery. In his fight against the rebels of 1088, Rufus is compared to a brave lion ready to face down the insurgents. Neither does he hesitate even a moment before crossing over to Normandy to come to the aid of his besieged garrison at Le Mans. Daring is not a department in which the king is ever found wanting. Even the retreat from his one great defeat, the siege of Mayet, is described as honourable, carefully worded so as not to dent the king's reputation. According to the chronicle, the siege was failing because of the great ditch around the castle, and a man standing right next to the king had been struck dead by a stone hurled by the besieged. The king had taken counsel with his prudent and wise *(prudentes, sollertes)* magnates who had given the foresighted, useful *(prouide, utile)* advice to retreat, doing what they thought sensible *(salubre)* for the defenceless besiegers, providing for the well-being of his people *(suae genti sospitatem)*.[59] Such profuse adjective use was in all likelihood aimed to ward off any accusation of cowardice.

Even more interesting for the illustration of the king's standpoint on chivalric issues as well as for the legitimation he drew on to justify his wars is his verbal exchange with Helias de la Flèche. The lengthy episode commences, in Orderic's rendering, when the count approached the king, hoping to gain his guarantee for peace, as he had taken the cross and wanted to leave for the Holy Land. William II, however, had different intentions, and declared that the count might well leave, but that he should first return the county of Maine and the city of Le Mans to him, as these had belonged to the Conqueror, his father, and should be returned now to his son. Helias is described appalled at the king's words, but offers him to settle the dispute judicially. The king savagely answers: "I will plead my suit against you with swords and lances and showers of

---

[57] Orderic Vitalis 4, book VII, iii. 396-397, p. 270: *"Quod audiens rex Anglorum regnique optimates ualde contristati sunt et pro tam feda re tamque crudeli a Normannis commissa nimis erubuerunt."*

[58] Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 8, iv. 49, p. 244: "*Absit a me ut credam quod probus miles uiolet fidem suam. Quod si fecerit omni tempore uelut exlex despicabilis erit.*"

[59] Cf. ibid., ch. 9, iv. 60-62, p. 258-260.

missiles."[60] Helias, radiating righteousness, launches into a lengthy speech that he would refrain to go on crusade in order to protect his people from a closer enemy of Christ, that he would brand his shield, helmet, arms, saddle and bridle with the holy cross and, thus fortified, defend his lands. Against the count's crusader zeal, the king presents a show of military strength, remarking that the count would do better to repair the walls of his ramparts before the royal army advanced. "I will show them," he says, "a hundred thousand lances with banners before their gates, and will not leave you unchallenged in the enjoyment of my inheritance. I will have carts laden with bolts and arrows drawn there by oxen, but I myself with many troops of soldiers will be at your gates ahead of them, even as the shouting oxherds hurry them along."[61]

The king's tone is masterful, his threats show formidable strength and confidence, and yet Helias is in the morally superior position. Orderic adds to this superiority by providing a character sketch of the count as peace-loving, devout and upright, and states that many nobles at court feared their pompous *(turgidum)* king, and pitied the eminent *(egregio)* Helias. In this context, it is tempting to see William Rufus as an exponent of an older, more imposing form of 'chivalry' (if, indeed, that term can in any way be applied), deeply rooted in warrior culture, with Helias juxtaposed to him as a representative of a chivalry ecclesiastically ennobled by the spirit of the crusade. Whether this was Orderic's intention or not, the king's reason for warfare against Maine, although entirely in line with common justifications fully accepted elsewhere, are given a slight disapproving twist through the characterisation and motivation of the king's opponent, albeit without particularly overt criticism.[62]

Criticism is entirely absent several years earlier, when William II proposed to 'free' Normandy of his brother's tyranny. Since he bore his father's name and crown, he saw it as his duty, he is allowed to explain, to protect Normandy as his father had, and he stresses the intrigues and rebellions Robert Curthose was to blame for. His ultimate argument, however, is that "the holy Church in Normandy has sent a cry of distress to me because, lacking a just defender and patron, its daily lot is mourning and weeping, for it is surrounded by enemies like a lamb among wolves. ... We ought not to allow bands of robbers to grow strong enough to oppress the faithful and destroy the monasteries of holy men"[63]. The fate of the Norman Church was something very close to Orderic's heart; and he clearly considered Robert to be the greater evil in comparison to his brothers, voicing not the slightest hint of disagreement with the king's motives.

Whether his motivation was approved of or not, the king is depicted as someone who could inspire and lead his men. Noteworthy is especially the king's good reputation with even the lowest of his subjects, evidenced by the crowds of cheering peasants and clerics that accompany the king on his campaign to Maine[64] and the passionate proclamation of loyalty that thirty thousand Englishmen deliver to him when he seeks counsel on how to best confront the group of rebels around Odo of Bayeux.[65] This loyalty was not always to their advantage, as the Anglo-

[60] Cf. ibid., ch. 8, iv. 37, p. 231. Translation by Chibnall.
[61] Ibid., iv. 38, p. 233. Translation by Chibnall.
[62] For the entire episode, see ibid., iv. 37-39, p. 228-232.
[63] Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 9, iii. 316, p. 179-181. Translation by Chibnall.
[64] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 10, iv. 59, p. 256.
[65] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 2, iii. 271-272, p. 126.

Saxon Chronicle, in a more critical voice than Orderic Vitalis, asserts: William II had ordered 20,000 Englishmen to support his struggle in Normandy, but when they had made their way to the sea shore, waiting to cross the Channel, they were asked to deliver their money (half a pound per man) and sent back home rather than being drawn on to fight with the king, for which they had come.[66]

On the field of warfare, the portrayal of William II was least controversial. While the overwhelming majority of chroniclers was reluctant to offer details on the king's involvement in military campaigns, no writer failed to mention the success the king enjoyed. In-depth depictions of the king's conduct in war are presented exclusively by Orderic Vitalis. They point to a king for whose bravery, prowess, honesty, for whose belief in a companionship of arms and his high esteem for those who would do well in battle words of praise could easily be found. He certainly defended his lands from both inside and outside threats, and also managed to enlarge his dominions – although some of his acquisitions are portrayed as less rightfully obtained than others. It is his pride, his pompous, boasting manner, which provokes criticism. Throughout Orderic's portrayal, the king appears utterly confident in the power of his army. With the words "go and do whatever you can against me"[67] he sends the captured Helias from his court to try and re-conquer Maine – convinced that, in the end, he would be the one to triumph.

*Henry I at War*

The king, writes William of Malmesbury, preferred to fight through counsel rather than with the sword, being an embodiment of Scipio's saying "My mother bore me for command, not for combat".[68] There are, indeed, few depictions of Henry I actively embroiled in warfare, the only one to praise the king's prowess with a weapon is Henry of Huntingdon, who reports him, having suffered a double blow to his head that had injured him, as hitting his attacker with such force that both rider and horse were thrown over, to be captured at the king's feet.[69] In Orderic Vitalis' version of the story, the king is struck fiercely, but remains uninjured thanks to his hauberk. His assailant, however, has to be protected from the king's adherents, who were set on avenging the assault on their lord by seeking the death of the man who had attempted – Orderic elaborates with outrage – the blasphemous imprudence of striking down the man who had been anointed and crowned while *laudes* were sung in his name.[70] As the scene suggests, William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis depict the king as a devoted general. "He himself saw to everything", Orderic writes, "like a young squire he ran everywhere, and invigorated everyone by vigorously insisting that things were done." Instructing the carpenters in building a siege-tower, reprimanding some mockingly for a lack of effort and with praise spurring others to work harder,

[66] Cf. Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 229 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 360-361.
[67] Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 8, iv. 52, p. 248.
[68] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-412.1, p. 744-745, translation by Mynors/Thomson/Winterbottom.
[69] Cf. Henry of Huntingdon, vii. 31 (p. 464).
[70] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XII, ch. 18, iv.360-361, p. 238.

the king is presented the driving force of a (swiftly successful) siege.[71] William of Malmesbury reports how Henry I, grateful for the loyalty of his subjects in the face of the hostile approach of his brother Robert, showed himself concerned for the wellbeing of his soldiers. For that reason, he went through the ranks and showed them how they might put forward their shields and return blows so that they might dodge the ferocious attacks of knights. The royal instructions allegedly so invigorated the men that they lost all fear of the Normans and were eager to fight.[72]

Henry I's greatest and most iconic campaign was his fight to wrest Normandy from his brother. Most interesting about his – ultimately successful – attempt is that, at least in the depiction of Orderic Vitalis, both he and his older brother had the very same explanation for their plan to gain Normandy: the plight of its people and its Church under the utterly inept rule of its duke; a noble endeavour naturally far from any ill feeling or even greed. However, Henry I was to succeed where his brother did not – not so much in the case of acquiring the duchy itself, where the respective situations are too different to allow a direct comparison, but in the legitimacy attributed to the individual campaigns of takeover. Both monarchs fought with what might well be considered dishonourable means, using English gold to bribe castellans and vassals into abandoning their lord. Yet while Rufus' legitimation remains limited to a single instance of the king talking to his magnates, written by a single author, one is compelled to view the efforts lavished on legitimating the attack of Henry I as a much grander undertaking: they found their way into three chronicles, and are reported on a much more impressive scale.

In Orderic's work, Robert is styled as tainted with every vice imaginable in a ruler: a weak, irresponsible, pathetic replacement for a prince who has neither the strength nor the determination to stand up against the injustice perpetrated in his realm, who is dominated by bad counsellors, an unwise spendthrift, and, so the writer has a bishop reveal in a zealous sermon, a man who was regularly unable to come to church because the buffoons and harlots that often accompanied him had jeeringly stolen his breeches, shoes and socks while he slept drunkenly, so that he had no choice but to remain in bed. As any good conqueror, Henry I is presented as very reluctant to, as it were, conquer. His hand was forced, compelled, as he was, by the countless beseeching (and tearful) petitions of Normans, from both the laity and the clergy, who implored him to but visit his paternal inheritance *(paternam hereditatem)* so that he might take up again the rod of justice *(uirga iusticiae reciperet)* against the miscreants. This choice of words suggests a still-existent association of Henry I and the duchy of Normandy, even if William the Conqueror had given it to his eldest son. The king's first attempt to make his brother see reason is not so much a campaign as a demonstration of strength and superiority. Arriving in royal state, he, after a circuit of the fortresses already under his control, summons his brother to a conference where he lays charges against him of – contrary to the treaty they had made – making peace with the insurgent Robert de Bellême and of misgoverning the duchy. The procedure certainly was humiliating for the duke: although not in a state of open war, he was, on his very own ground, thus challenged and scolded from a superior moral standpoint by an outsider who had been (and still was)

[71] Ibid., ch. 36, iv. 449-450, p. 340-342. The quoted passage reads: "*Ipse profecto sollerter omnia prouidebat, ut iuuenis tiro ubique discurrebat, et uiuaciter agendis rebus insistens cunctos animabat.*"
[72] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-395.1, p. 716.

inciting his subjects to rebellion. Nothing of this humiliation is visible in Orderic's very tendentious account, where the duke takes quick counsel with his adherents, fearing that he might be convicted in a real investigation and deservedly despoiled of the duchy that he held by name, not by deeds, or else forced into a frightful armed conflict with his sceptre-bearing brother that would result in his irrevocable fall.[73] In other words: even Robert himself is portrayed as knowing that Henry I not only had the military means, but the full moral justification of robbing him of his duchy.

The entire campaign is a judgement rather than a conquest, with the king as an instrument of peace and justice. As a token of his goodwill, Robert offered the king one of his loyal subjects, a count, together with his lands and dependents. This appeasement, in itself, is not viewed as a particularly honourable move on the part of the duke. As Orderic writes, the count, "hearing that he was to be given away like a horse or oxen" *(quasi equum uel buem dandum audiuit)*, stepped forward himself, declaring to the entire assembly that he had loyally kept the faith of the late Conqueror and had, after that, been loyal to Robert; it was a bond that he was only going to forsake because, and he cites the bible, it was impossible to serve two lords who were at odds. Rather than being merely handed over, like a hostage would be, the count is thus shown as renouncing his fealty to Robert. He does so not in insurrection, but in an honourable way, instigated by his lord and with the assent of an assembly that approves of his words *(dictum ... omnibus placuit)*. The momentary peace is settled when Robert offers the count's hand to the king.[74] The gesture consolidated the image of a transfer of homage from one lord to the other, not only by the consent, but by the personal action of the man who was thus giving up a vassal's fealty to him. The show of consent did not effect a lasting settlement, but it credited the king with having first attempted a peaceful solution.

It was not long before the tearful lamentation (*lacrimabilis planctus)* of Normandy again reached the king. In addition, the peace treaty had once more been broken by retainers of the duke seizing men of the king and holding them captive – both to extort ransom and to show their contempt for him. Henry I crossed to Normandy – again, not of his own desire, but compelled by circumstances – where Orderic stages one of the most impressive gestures of the king's reign. In a church, crammed with the possessions of peasants who had sought refuge within its walls from the tumult raging outside, he seats himself and his magnates with great humility in a menial place among the stacked boxes.[75] There, he is directly addressed by the bishop of Séez, who colourfully describes the many hardships the Norman Church had to suffer, how it had become a storehouse for the desperate and yet was not wholly safe from the ravages of men like Robert de Bellême. The bishop details the inefficiency of the weak duke and ultimately demands of Henry I to stir himself to productive anger *(utiliter irascere)* and take up arms for the defence of his

[73] Descriptions of Robert's misrule are scattered far and wide. The ones cited here are found in Orderic Vitalis 6, book XI, ch. 10-17, iv. 199-221, p. 56 -81. The tearful petitions of the Normans are found ibid., iv. 199 (p. 54-57), Robert's anxiety at losing the duchy ibid., ch. 10, iv. 200, p. 58, paraphrased above, reads thus: *"Metuebant enim tam ipse quam fautores sui ne manifesto examine deprehenderetur, atque ducatu quem nomine non actione gestabat merito spoliaretur, aut formidabilem guerram per arma sceptigeri fratris ad irreparabilem usque deiectionem pateretur."*

[74] Ibid., iv. 200-201, p. 58.

[75] Ibid., ch. 11, iv. 204-205, p. 60: *"...regi qui satis humiliter inter cistas rusticorum in imo loco sedebat cum quibusdam magnatis..."*.

fatherland *(patriae)*. The words invigorate the king, who, hearkening to the opinion of the magnates seated around him, swears to work for peace and the tranquillity of the Church "in the name of the lord".

The bishop, meanwhile, is not finished with his address and, taking recourse on a topic that was very dear to Orderic's heart, passionately speaks of the evils pertaining to men wearing beards, long hair and shoes reminiscent of scorpion tails. When he finishes his sermon, he calls upon the king to set an example by showing how his subjects should 'prepare' themselves. It would not have made a good display had the king refused – and hence, the scene shows him making the best of it: elated by the bishop's words, he, the nobles and his household comply with the demands. The determined bishop at once whips scissors from his satchel and, with his own hands, cuts first the hair of the king, then that of the majority of the magnates. Thus prepared, the king, after the Easter feast had been celebrated, set out to "manfully wreak vengeance on the enemies of the Church of God."[76] He is, rather literally, cut into the shape of a defender of the Church, a reformed character about whose legitimacy to action there could be no doubt: he had humbled himself by sitting lowly amid crates, he had been ignited by the words of a bishop, responded to a personal plea for help from an ecclesiastic and then, he and the greatest of his court, agreed to change their appearance so as to defy that which against they were to fight. By losing their hair, treasured before, they became marked as morally superior vindicators, almost, one might be induced to say, crusaders; their campaign was blessed by their celebrating the highest Christian feast before they set out.[77]

The progress of Henry I through Normandy as depicted by Orderic, is, in every way, a divinely favoured campaign against the duchy's depravity, and he brings justice even before he actually becomes ruler of the duchy. Notably, he does so not only in the secular sphere, but also, with great vigour and absolutely without any remonstration on the part of the writing monk, in the spiritual sphere. On his way to the conclusive battle of the campaign, Henry I is shown to purge an abbey into which a monk (branded as a simoniac and *inuasor* into the abbey's life) had tried to lure him by treachery, intending the place to become a trap for the king. When he becomes aware of the treachery, the king in anger *(iratus)* commands his men to attack. Abbey and castle are burned down, the traitorous monk banished. All of this, as the chronicle implies, was done by the just judgement and will of God, as these men had defiled a house of God and had deserved to perish.[78]

Immediately preceding the battle of Tinchebrai, the king is once again made to declare the motivation behind his intended conquest of the duchy. He emphasizes that it was not greed that led him to seek war, and offers a peaceful end to hostilities to the duke. Henry I had "prudently considered" all aspects of the situation with which he was confronted, he had "taken to heart the advice of the learned" and long pondered the diverse counsels. The proposition he offers his

[76] Ibid., iv. 204-210 (60-69), for the entire scene. Translations by Chibnall.
[77] In a footnote (p. 66-67, footnote 4) to her translation, Chibnall suggests that the king may have intended this display as one step towards the reconciliation with Anselm, who held the same views on courtly fashions; it seems very reasonable to believe that this may have been the case since the reconciliation of king and archbishop was effected not long after the hair-cutting.
[78] Ibid., ch. 19, vi. 222-223, p. 80-82.

brother instead of war is that he, Henry I, was to be given control of all castles, justice and administration within Normandy as well as half of the duchy. The second half would go to Robert, *sine labore et cura*, without him having any work or care to do therein, with a sum equivalent to the first half of the duchy that would allow him to enjoy feasts and games while the king himself would shoulder the burden of ensuring peace, of ensuring that the population – *populum Dei*, as Orderic has it – remained safe.[79]

The offer is declined, and Henry I is depicted as commending himself to God, praying for his victory so that he might protect the duchy's people. The battle is, indeed, swiftly won, as parts of the duke's army flee. Once more, it is made abundantly clear that the battle was one fought with legitimacy, and won righteously. The captured opponent, the duke, says so himself: he had been misled by treacherous Normans, who had drawn him away from the counsels of his brother that would have been salubrious for him, had he but followed them. Before he is whisked away into captivity, he even aids the king in attaining one of the fortresses that he had ordered to be submitted to no one but him.[80] The justification is one that remains untarnished for a long time – when, years later, the pope would ask the king to free Robert, and hand the duchy back to father and son, the king, in a sprawling monologue, would explain the entire background of his grasp for Normandy, in just the way Orderic has previously depicted it. The pope, having listened to the entirety of it all, would find himself amazed (*obstupuit)* and, having gained knowledge of the context, would commend Henry I for what he had done. In the very same scene the king is allowed, also in direct speech, to justify his war on France, which, with the help of the pope and to the general rejoicing of the people, he would bring to an end.[81] The approval and understanding of the pope is the crowning end to Orderic's narrative of a justified war that was swiftly won, and greatly enlarged the king's dominions.

The depiction of William of Malmesbury is remarkably similar, although he appears to be more uncomfortable in accepting the king's decision to fight for the duchy: he writes that the king, in doing what he did, supported the opinion of Caesar that, if a law had to be broken, it should be broken for the benefit of the citizens.[82] Contrary to Orderic, he openly acknowledges that, technically, the king was committing an act of unrighteousness. Like Orderic, however, William of Malmesbury produced a lengthy and redeeming explanation of the king's conduct. Before the king finally moved to capture Normandy, he had pondered long and hard on what he should do; considering the love he ought to feel for his brother, but pained and worried at the state of the duchy, its people and particularly its Church. He reprimanded Robert several times to change his ways, and also intervened in Normandy with an armed force. Almost, William of Malmesbury claims, the king had been swayed by brotherly love, but the pope himself (here he diminishes the claim to reality of his writing, adding "*ut aiunt*", for he does not know the content of the pope's alleged message to the king) urged him to take action. The conquest of Normandy,

[79] Ibid., ch. 20, vi. 227-228, p. 86: the translated passage reads *"denique rex multiplices casus sollerter inspexit uerbis sophistarum animo perceptis diuersos consultus subtiliter reuoluit…".*

[80] Ibid., vi. 228-232, p. 88-92.

[81] Ibid., book XII, ch. 24-24, iv. 398-406, p. 282-290.

[82] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book IV-389.9, p. 706: *"Ille Cesarinae sententiae assistens: 'Si uiolandum est ius, gratia ciuium uiolandum est".*

so the pope supposedly argued, would not be a civil war, but a great and praiseworthy profit for the fatherland. The king was finally won over and crossed to Normandy which he swiftly gained (or rather, as the writer puts it, regained), as all the people flock to him. Although the king lost a number of his friends (and worthy soldiers) in the fight for Normandy, the final battle was won effortlessly. The chronicler's glorifying finish is his statement that the conquest of Normandy was completed on the very same day on which, some forty years before, William I had landed at Hastings. The conquest of those who had conquered by those who had been conquered, he believes, might have been a judgement of divine providence.[83] A conquest begged for by the conquered, a war urged on by the pope himself and a battle fraught with providence and divine judgement – William of Malmesbury, too, leaves little doubt as to the legitimacy of the king's grasp for Normandy.

Similar to the explanations found in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the *Gesta Regum*, the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* describes, albeit more briefly, how the king had to intervene on behalf of Robert's dramatic misgovernment, and how, by divine judgement (*sicut quondam Theodosio imperatoris*) he was granted a bloodless victory in the battle of Tinchebrai.[84] The comparison to Theodosius, a figure symbolic for the unity of Christianity, is particularly striking, and reveals just how much the king was associated with the long-awaited rescue of the Church of Normandy.

God seemed to be favouring him, and the victory of Tinchebrai was a victory that Eadmer, rarely commenting on such mundane things as wars, attributed to the king's reconciliation with Archbishop Anselm, integrating into his work a letter by the king in which he humbly praises God for the triumph bestowed upon him and begs the archbishop to pray for him that he might be able to turn his conquest to a good end for the Church.[85] If the letter was indeed written, it was, as far as the king's image in posterior reflection was concerned, a stroke of genius: the correspondence of great men of the Church tended to be preserved, and one might assume that the king had been aware of Eadmer, who had been trailing Anselm for years, quite possibly writing or taking notes very frequently. It is thus possible to speculate that the king knew that, in bestowing this honour upon the archbishop (and, through him, upon God), he was setting a decidedly positive example. What appears certain, however, is that the king, in writing this letter, impressed both Eadmer and Anselm – and particularly Anselm was an important ally to have in the king's relationship with the Church.

The king is far from being portrayed an enthusiastic warrior, although he certainly comes across as an effective one once he decided to wage war. Both William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis equip him with a sense for chivalry. In the battle of Brémule, Orderic reports to have been told, nine hundred knights fought, but only three of them were killed, for they rejoiced in victory rather than killing, sparing each other out of fear of God and a sense of fellowship. The king himself had acquired the French standard, which he kept as a token of the victory granted to him, but in an act of chivalric grace, he returned the French king's mount on the day following the battle, furnished with its saddle, bridle and all the decorum befitting a king. His son,

[83] Ibid., book V-398, p. 720-724.
[84] Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VIII-13 (p. 220-223).
[85] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 184.

mirroring the act of his father, returned the palfrey William Clito had lost during the battle, together with, at the suggestion of his foresighted father, other things necessary to one in exile. Seeing that weaponry, harnesses, horses and their equipment acquired in tournament or battle were the basis of knightly wealth, the king and his son were underlining their status of not being dependent on such perks while, at the same time, treating the French king and Robert's son as equals, as fellow knights – and acknowledging their special status within the community of knights.[86] William of Malmesbury reports a second "excellent" act of chivalrous "kingly piety" that would be "contemplated by those to come": as the man who had forcefully sought to install William Clito in the duchy of Normandy lay dying in the aftermath of assailing one of the king's Norman castles, the king sent the most skilled of his doctors to the sick man. When the man died, the chronicler reports, somewhat sceptically (*si credimus*, he inserts into his narrative), the king shed tears, for, as an admirer of valour, he would have preferred to see his opponent come back to health.[87]

The conflicts that dominated the rule of Henry I, and thus the reports of his military feats, centre on his acquisition of Normandy, his fights against rebellions and William Clito's attempts to seize his inheritance. He is styled a general rather than a soldier, and a reluctant warrior at that. It might have been this very reluctance that made his claims to wish for nothing but the well-being of the people and the safety of the Church seem so very believable in the eyes of contemporaries, especially when compared to his brother William II who, while using the same rhetoric, was so obviously enjoying feats of arms and prestigious campaigns. While chivalrous deeds might (and would) appeal to chroniclers, the pious, humble varnish with which Henry I coated his warfare must have been infinitely more alluring, which is attested by the very detailed descriptions available on his campaign through Normandy. Nor, given the general consensus between the different chroniclers as far as the king's motives and conduct are concerned, does it seem likely that Henry I was not aware of the image he thus projected of himself. Rather, his warfare is striking for the claims to legitimacy it so continuously made, so that it seems reasonable to believe that he himself had a hand in this. While chroniclers were stressing the pious background of his fighting, they would also, at times, highlight the virtues associated with chivalry – a continuation, it might seem, of the symbolically highly elaborated life at his court in the world of knighthood, which was just as receptive for grand gestures and magnanimity as the court was. Other than that, the king is sufficiently successful, his record of military activity without any crushing defeats. In the end, he is not portrayed a warrior king – but a king who knew how to come out of a war looking his very best.

[86] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XII,ch. 18, iv. 362, p. 240: *"Mannum autem regis in crastinum ei remisit cum sella et freno et omni apparatu ceu regem decuit. Guillelmus quoque adelingus Guillelmo Clitoni consobrino suo palefridum quem in bello pridie perdiderat remisit, et alia munera exulanti necessaria prouidi genitoris instinctu destinauit."*

[87] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-403.3-4, p. 730: *"Hic intuebuntur posteri eximium regalis pietatis exemplum, quod medicum peritissimum decumbenti miserit, illacrimatus (si credimus) morbo perire quem pro ammiratione fortitudinis saluari maluisset."*

*Stephen at War*

While the civil war offered many possibilities for Stephen to present himself both as a general and fighter, the depictions of his warfare are as varied and as inconsistent as many aspects of his reign. Here, the largest gulf does not gape, as so often, between those chronicles supportive of Stephen's claim to the throne and those supporting the empress. The differences in depiction seem rather to lie between writers sharing a taste for stories and a strong sense for plot – and writers who are less cohesive and plot-driven in their work. As such, particularly the *Gesta Stephani* and Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia* enlarge on valour and personal bravery, and exult in spectacular battle scenes in which both the king and his host are shown from their best side.[88] This is most strikingly visible in the depiction of Stephen's capture at Lincoln. William of Malmesbury, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Worcester Chronicle rather dispassionately make note of the fact that the king was captured; in the case of the Worcester chronicle noting that it happened by God's just judgement *(iusto Dei iudicio).* Beyond that, their narratives are of little consequence for the king's reputation.[89] Entirely of a different nature is Henry of Huntingdon's depiction, which was to enter into Robert of Torigni's chronicle almost word for word. The king's capture concludes the writer's greatest and most dramatic scene, and as such, it is not lacking the corresponding literary imagery. The area around the king remained, on the entire battlefield, the only place where his followers might hope to gain some respite and breathing space from the onslaught of the enemy, because where the "mightiest king" stood, his enemies shrunk from the "incomparable ferocity of his blows".[90] His deeds were of such greatness that the earl of Chester became jealous of his glory, and turned on him with the mass of his knights – but still the king stood, revealing his shattering strength *(uis ... fulminea)* as he confronted his enemies with his battle-axe in hand. More and more turned against him, the battle becoming a struggle in which all strove against the king; the axe shattered from the blows the king dealt with it, and so does the sword, with which he presented himself as no less efficient and warlike, performing wondrous things *(rem mirabiliter agit)* until this weapon, too, was shattered. Only with no weapons left the king, at last, was captured. Matching their king in this fulminant display of knightliness was the rest of his troops, which continued fighting until they were either slain or captured.[91] Orderic Vitalis, considerably more prosaic in style, recounts that the king fought bravely (*fortiter dimicauit)* with both sword and axe and surrendered only when he was alone and worn out.[92]

The *Gesta's* rendition of Stephen's capture seems intent on implying something well beyond physical prowess and bravery. Within the author's conceptualised framework of his chronicle as a book of two parts, the first describing Stephen's defeats, the second his deserved rise and

[88] To go through all such descriptions of battle scenes would be tedious and amount to very little. Therefore, the rather brief episodes discussed in the following will have to suffice, although both Henry of Huntingdon and the Gesta Stephani offer a great many more that depict Stephen as skilled warrior and general.
[89] Cf. John of Worcester 3, p. 292; William of Malmesbury, Historia Novella, iii.43, p. 86; Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 266 (E-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 384.
[90] Henry of Huntingdon, x. 18 (p. 736-738): *"Nulla eis quies, nulla respiratio dabatur, nisi in ea parte qua rex fortissimus stabat, horrentibus inimicis incomparabilem ictuum eius immanitatem."*
[91] Cf. ibid.
[92] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 6, book XIII, ch. 43, v. 128, p. 544.

triumph, Stephen's capture is one of the narrative's great turning points; the ultimate fall which humbles the king, only to have him afterwards rise to greater heights. The author does not ignore the dictates of knightliness: when the king learns of the approach of his enemy, he refuses to flee, not wishing to tarnish his glory – and, preceding his capture, he fights back powerfully and most steadfastly.[93] However, it is the despair of the situation, the king's humility, and his realisation of fault on which the focus lies most intensely, beyond all chivalric exploits. The greatest part of the battle is ignored in favour of highlighting the moment in which Stephen's captors take possession of their king: while he is being disarmed, he cries out to them humbly and plaintively, bewailing that God was now vindicating the injustice he had perpetrated. Yet, while the king acknowledges that he has been at fault in the past, he also severely admonishes his assailants, who had broken their faith with him, overstepped the homage they had done to him, and were rebelling against the very man they themselves had chosen as king. Such exclamations of despair at the infidelity of the kingdom's great pervade all positive accounts of Stephen's reign, and are especially frequently voiced in the *Gesta* to justify the helplessness of the king by portraying others as guilty. The king's remarks hit home: his captors, moved with pity and compassion, lament and weep, their hearts and demeanour full of repentance.[94] They may not support the king in the struggle for the throne, but, evidently, they are aware that what they are doing is unjust. Not the king, who is so often accused of it, but *they* are the ones who are faithless oath breakers.[95]

With the king's anguished admission of guilt, he vanishes from the narrative of his defeats for the time being, and the chronicler, as if writing an epilogue, moves on to interpret the events for the benefit of the reader, citing the highest authority: as he had done with both the king of Babylon and King David on account of their sins, God had chosen to cast down and humiliate King Stephen, only so that he could later be elevated higher and more wonderfully. As before, exactly what the king had done to deserve such divine punishment is not made explicit. The writer, however, was sure that exaltation would follow atonement. Exceedingly confident, he remarks that how and how marvellously the king's elevation was to come about would be more clearly divulged in the narrative to follow.[96] And Stephen does return to re-assume his place in book two, very much like a phoenix rising from the ashes or, as the chronicler puts it, like one

---

[93] Gesta Stephani, p. 112: *"Audiens autem rex hostes in proximo affuturos ... noluit gloriam suam fugae opprobrio deturpare..."* and *"...regem tandem ualide et constantissime repugnantem ceperunt."*

[94] Ibid., p. 112-115. The passage paraphrased here reads: *"...cumque eum tandem exarmassent, humiliter et querulose saepius inclamantem, hanc sibi improperii notam, offensarum suarum uindice Deo, accidisse; nec tamen eos criminis praemaximi fuisse immunes, qui rupta fide, spreto iuramento, nihili penso quod sibi pepigerant hominio, in eum, quem sibi regem et dominum spontane praefecerant, tam dire tamque scelerate insurrexissent; tanta omnes pietatis et compassionis teneritudine frangebantur, ut non solum in lacrymas et eiulatum omnes prorumperent, sed et cordis et oris poenitudine quam maxime afficerentur."* The editor suggests that Stephen's misdeeds for which God was presumably pursuing revenge in having him captured primarily encompassed his arrest of the bishops. Although the author at length attempts to absolve Stephen from the fault of having arrested men of the church in his court by painting the bishops in the darkest shades of worldliness available for prelates and detailing how Stephen strove to do penance for the deed, it may well be that this is the very incident the passage refers to, seeing the stir the arrest caused in many other chronicles. A further discussion of this will follow in the chapter on Stephen's treatment of the Church.

[95] Additionally, the emphasis on them having chosen Stephen to be their king once more refutes any claim to Stephen having greedily acquired the crown. The king's integrity is thus doubly secured.

[96] Gesta Stephani, p. 114. Of the Babylonian king's and David's misconduct, it simply states that the latter had been found at fault for his sins, the first for his arrogance and pride. The ultimate verdict of what is to become of Stephen reads thus: *"...ipse idem secreto illo, quo nihil agit sine causa, consilio, regem Stephanum ad mimentum uoluit deici, ut excelsius postea et mirificentius posset eleuari. Sed quomodo illud et quam mirabiliter contigerit, clarius in sequentibus dilucidabimus."*

who had only just roused himself from sleep. Then, after his atonement, he is again shown to excel in combat. Having demolished Cirencester castle, and taken two further cities, he moves to Oxford, where the empress abides with her troops. So as to better describe the king's sudden thirst for action and his vigorous campaigning, the chronicler draws on Lucan's rendition of Caesar, thus associating an epitome of supreme generalship with the king of England. What follows is an account of extraordinary prowess. Having elaborated on the impregnableness of Oxford castle, its high tower, strong palisade and the deep water which surrounds it, the author has the king approach the castle with a powerful force. His foes, on the opposite bank of a river, taunt the royal host, and send arrows flying across the river to harm Stephen's men. He does not long endure this. He is shown an old, very deep ford, and "most boldly plunged into it himself among the first of his men", swimming across rather than walking – during the last days of September, it should be added. Once he reaches the other side, he "manfully assails" the defenders, and, his men infiltrating the town by mingling with the enemy troops, the resistance is swiftly overcome. What remains, then, is to conquer the empress, who holds out within the castle. It is fascinating to see just how carefully the author constructs a narrative that comes to grips with the unhindered escape of Matilda while maintaining the interpretation of the king's time finally having come, and which, at the same time, keeps the basis for criticism as small as possible. The king had stationed sentinels all around the castle, and the garrison within was on the very brink of surrender, having been reduced to great hunger through the three-month siege. Just then, "God suddenly changed to the contrary what the king had determined to achieve by valour" by allowing the empress to escape in the moment of her greatest hopelessness, and to arrive, among her supporters. Her successful flight, the *Gesta* emphasises, was evidently owed to a miracle, as she was able to cross the crust of ice upon the waters surrounding Oxford entirely dry-footed and without wetting her garments. Once more, he stresses that she managed to escape only through greatest effort, and, recounting the three times she had been able to miraculously escape her enemies' clutches, wonders as to what purpose God might have rendered the king unsuccessful in this matter. The conclusion is clear: the only reason why the king, in spite of his valour and prowess, did not capture the empress there and then, was that God had simply not seen fit for this to happen at that time and place.[97]

With her gone, the chronicle approves of Stephen ending the now "useless" siege as quickly as possible to turn to more pressing matters. "Wise counsellors" advise him to accept the surrender

---

[97] Gesta Stephani, p. 138-144. As to Stephen's 'awakening', the chronicle remarks that *"...quasi tunc demum a somno experrectus, a pigritiae torpore uiue se et audacter excussit..."*, implying, perhaps, that inaction might also have been counted among the faults of the first phase of the king's reign. That, however, would stand in direct contradiction to the way in which the author portrays the energetic and restless struggles with which the king sought to contain the rebels from the very outset of his reign. His passage through the river ford is filled with adjectives of valour: *"...cum primis seipsum audacissime immersit, transitoque confestim natando, potius quam uadando, meatu, uirili cum impetu in hostes impegit ..."*. The empress' escape is laced with expressions of wonder and miracle. Embedded in a description of the strict security of the king's camp and the frequent assertations of the great physical effort of plight, her escape is understood to have been achieved *"mirandis … modis"* or *"mirabiliter";* her dry-footed crossing of the lake is viewed as *"manifesti … miraculi indicium"*. In keeping with topoi employed to stress divine intervention in a situation of danger and flight from hostile clutches, the author also sees fit to abundantly mention that she escaped unharmed, without a mark on her (*illaesa, indemnem, incolumiter, sane).*

of the remaining garrison.[98] The *Gesta* stands alone in judging Stephen's warfare so well-thought out. Especially Henry of Huntingdon's narrative and the accounts found in the Worcester chronicle portray the king's moves as erratic and haphazard. It was the king's habit, Henry of Huntingdon sneers as a siege fails catastrophically, to energetically begin much, but carry it out negligently.[99] Similar remarks follow frequently. When, for instance, the earthworks the king had ordered to be built against a rebel castle are collapsed and eighty workmen are buried beneath them, the chronicler remarks dispassionately that the king's reaction was to go away confusedly, leaving the siege unfinished.[100]

Stephen is busily engaged throughout the kingdom, but tragically little, in the eyes of his critics, seems to result from it. The Worcester chronicle remarks resignedly that the king set out to Northumbria, which was being devastated, but did not remain there for long, returning as soon as he had only just accomplished what he had wanted to do. For almost six months, the writer continues, while remaining very vague about whether he refers to the impact of the Scottish incursions before or after Stephen's intervention, the land witnessed all kinds of cruelties, despoliation of ecclesiastics and murder, with the number of the slain barely to be accounted for.[101] This tone of resignation remains palpable, and the chronicle turns even more critical. With extraordinarily exasperated personal agitation, the Worcester chronicle comments the king's decision to move to Ely in attempt to quell rebellion and bring peace, was, in his eyes, utterly pointless and to be regretted, since it did nothing but increase the arrogance of his soldiers as they pursued empty glory.[102]

Against these sombre accounts, it is illuminating to read the *Gesta Stephani*'s take on the king's warfare. It seems almost anxious to present the royal efforts as anything but slothful or vain, stressing Stephen's personal involvement, his building and usage of numerous powerful siege-engines in meticulously planned assaults; offering detailed accounts of the tactics he employed in battles, right down to the very formations his men were supposed to assume for the confrontation with the enemy.[103] While Henry of Huntingdon drily remarks that Stephen "spent much time in the construction of many siege-engines and used up much of his treasure"[104], the *Gesta's* intention behind presenting these details of warfare must be an entirely different one. Often enough, the space dedicated to elaborating the preparations for combat is larger than the space allocated for combat proper. The king had to be seen strenuously doing something, and doing it well. If this depiction succeeded, failure would not be attributed to a lack of dedication or skill on the king's part, but would, instead, point to the impossibly great odds against which he was striving so hard, so intensely, so manfully – and losing nonetheless, but through no fault of

---

[98] Cf. ibid., p. 144.

[99] Henry of Huntingdon, x.31 (p. 756): "*Sed quia mos regius erat quod multa strenuiter inciperet et segniter exsequeretur, arte consulis de Legecestria castella regis obsidentia demolita sunt, et obsessum callide libertatum est.*"

[100] Ibid., x. 22 (p. 744): *"Re igitur inperfecta rex confusus abscessit."*

[101] John of Worcester 3, p. 236: *"Quo non diu moratus, uix ad uelle suum pro quibus ierat peractis, rediit."* See also footnote five for a discussion about the placing of the chronicle's lament as to the atrocities inflicted on the populace.

[102] Ibid., p. 280: *"Et ut paci satisfaceret, ad sedandum militare negotium, penitus inquam inane, ad Helo mouit expeditionem. Negotium sane deplorandum, quod ad militiam suam in satisfaciendo uane glorie frequentat militum grandis arrogantia."*

[103] For a particularly lengthy description of the king's military vigour and tactics, see Gesta Stephani, p. 34. The chronicle proudly lists the many sophisticated approaches Stephen had utilised in assailing the castle.

[104] Henry of Huntingdon, x.4 (p. 708-709), translation by Greenway.

his own. However, towards the end, this narrative construction, too, begins to crumble. Not long after the chronicler has acknowledged the later Henry II to be the king's rightful successor, he begins to visibly despair of the situation. His portrayal of Stephen as he contemplates how the war should continue read thus:

> ... at last it seemed to him sound and judicious to attack the enemy everywhere, plunder and destroy all that was in their possession, set fire to the crops and every other means of supporting human life, and let nothing remain anywhere, that under this duress, reduced to the extremity of want, they might at last be compelled to yield and surrender. It was indeed evil, he thought, to take away the sustenance of human life that God had vouchsafed, yet far worse for the kingdom to be constantly disturbed by the enemy's raiding and impoverished by daily pillage; it was more endurable to put up for a time with whatever troubles cruel fate might offer than bear so much continually from each one of the enemy. And no wonder, either, if he must rage with such cruelty against the enemy, as many opponents cannot be wiped out without much slaughter.[105]

The paragraph mirrors as much despair at warfare as is visible in the bleak lamentations of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and, albeit less often cited, leaves a very sombre impression, especially when viewed against the chronicle's otherwise positive narrative framework. The vigorous defence of Stephen's moves is maintained; it is made abundantly clear that he had no other choice but to resign himself to this evil *(malum)* which went against nature. The statement attributes neither glory nor chivalry to warfare, but accepts slaughter and cruelty as inescapable part of it. *Ferali crudelitate,* with deadly cruelty, the king's host raged across England, and the narrative recounts with horror the burning of houses, churches and crops, and the destruction of beautiful districts. Only an urgent report of rebel incursions into Lincolnshire stopped the ravaging. The royal host threw itself against the enemy – but "never without the greatest injury to the county, never without loss and harm to its people."[106] In the end, the author's words might as well have come from William of Malmesbury's or Henry of Huntingdon's pen, the entire positive attitude with which Stephen had been treated throughout the chronicle gone. With a sense of abject dread, he describes how the armies of Duke Henry and the king faced each other across a river, ready to spill each other's blood – the blood, he emphasises, of kinsmen and relatives. Men on both sides of the army called for a truce. The king's chief men, among them his son, who was greatly enraged at the war not being brought to a decent conclusion, died as a sign of divine intervention. Still the king was determined to fight Henry at the instigation of barons who desired war and discord, and was dissuaded only by the Bishop of Winchester.[107] The depiction of evil counsellors who would drive the king to war rather than peace is so strikingly close to chronicles supportive of the empress and her son that it seems scarcely imaginable they should have come from the pen of Stephen's staunchest supporter.

At surface level, the accounts of royal warfare during Stephen's reign leave little to be desired. Variations in the depictions, even amounting to overt criticism, are only to be expected with such a diverse field of writers and another contender to the throne. There are more than enough instances in which the king is vigorous, brave, a skilled general, and sufficiently successful in individual confrontations. What the depiction of Stephen's warfare ultimately lacks is peace.

[105] Gesta Stephani, p. 218-221, translation by Potter.
[106] Ibid., p. 221, translation by Potter.
[107] Cf. ibid., p. 238-240.

Three of the contemporary writers would never see peace; the remaining authors saw its advent only with the accession of Henry II, who, in stark contrast to Stephen, is portrayed as positive through and through, and given most if not all credit for the making of peace. Inevitably, the role that is left for the king is that of one who had struggled much, but achieved little, if anything at all – and such an impression is only reinforced by Henry of Huntingdon's very influential praise of Henry II, the soon-to-be-king who could keep the tumultuous kingdom in complete peace by the mere promise of his coming.

*Henry II at War*

If the onset of Henry II's reign had been peaceful, it was not to remain that way. The decisive conflict of his reign was the great rebellion, which contemporaries amply commented on. Much to Henry II's favour, the rebellion and the motives behind it were almost universally condemned.[108] There is little to be wondered at in that, since the Young King was going against the natural order on two levels – he was rebelling against his lord, and, which was worse, against his father, even waging war on him despite the ties of blood and affection that should have bound them. Roger of Howden deals most copiously with the prelude to the rebellion, elucidating that the Young King had been entirely unwilling to yield territory for the endowment of his brothers; rather, unsatisfied that his father had not assigned him any land within which he might stay with his queen, he had demanded Normandy, England or Anjou. It was a demand, the writer explains, that had been made on the advice of the king of France and the counts and barons in England and Normandy who hated his father and were always looking for an opportunity to rebel. Eleanor was also among the *nefandae proditionis auctores*[109] – the rebellion, to sum up the verdict, was base treachery, incited by enemies of the realm, enemies of peace, and the king's own licentious wife. William of Newburgh's depiction is similar, from the goading of the French king and Eleanor to the condemnation of the son's waywardness. The Young King, he states, was going against nature, and about to repeat the crime of Absalom. He has Henry II realise that it had been foolish to crown a successor whom all malcontents might follow.[110] There was something fateful about the rebellion, and the scandal of a son rising against the father did not only mean that chroniclers almost unanimously took sides, but, compounded perhaps with the nimbus of the king's family situation, meant also that contemporaries drew parallels to the prophecies of Merlin. Roger of Howden would liken the rebellion to the awakening of roaring

[108] The exception being mainly Gerald of Wales' condemning mirror for princes, which draws upon the rebellion as yet another instance in which Henry II could be portrayed in an unfavourable light. It not only praises the Young King as the one who, as opposed to his hateful father, was beloved by everyone (De principis instructione, dist. 2, ch. 8, p. 172-173), but also claims that Henry II himself was continuously engaged in fabricating quarrels between his sons by which he sought to acquire peace for himself (Cf. ibid., ch. 10, p. 176). The view that the king, and especially his numerous changes to the inheritance his sons were to receive, was not to be held blameless in the uprisings that ensued between his sons, has found its supporters until this day, but contemporaries predominantly side with the old king.

[109] Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 41-42. A later manuscript includes an even more drastic verdict of the Young King, describing him as one who had utterly lost his mind, fled innocence and lusted after the blood of his own father (Roger of Howden 2, p. 46).

[110] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 2, ch. 9, p. 170-172.

cubs that begin to seek their prey,[111] Map would identify the Young King with the lynx that desired the destruction of its own family, as someone who repeatedly heaped treason upon his head – a man who ultimately was the antagonist of Henry II, a "peaceful king", who stirred up war when his father "had calmed the entire world into peace".[112]

His reputation for peace – which also lends justification to the king's victories in Wales and Ireland[113] – is likely to have had an impact on the way in which Henry II's struggles against his sons were perceived, if the accusation of disobedience, subversion and treachery did not sufficiently speak in favour of the old king. Yet when Henry II was at war, he was masterful. This is particularly noticeable in the campaign that overthrew the rebellion of the Young King. Buttressed by the reconciliation with the spirit of the martyred Becket and the capture of the King of Scots as the sure sign of this reconciliation, Henry II resumed warfare on the continent. Almost gleefully, William of Newburgh details how he approached the "arrogant" French who put faith in their superior numbers with a threat to either lift the siege or face a pitched battle. He was scorned at first, but then fearfully considered. Henry II continued his approach, and the messengers of the French king found him walking in front of his host, giving orders, armed and displaying the greatest confidence *(multa confidentia ostentans).* The royal show of warlike power did not end there. *Vultu feroci et voce terribili,* with ferocious gaze and terrible voice, he sent the messengers back with the proud declaration: "Go and tell your king that I am here, as you can see." The French swiftly confer, and break camp – the victorious king, "content with the shameful flight of the haughty enemies", did not deign to pursue these lions turned hares, but rather entered the city to congratulate its defendants.[114] Apparently, Henry II had been well aware of how to best make an entrance. The threat of a pitched battle (and all the risks it entailed) is here exposed as what could be considered as a game of poker, with either side trying to display determination, strength and ferocity. Through his demeanour, Henry II was apparently able to impress upon Louis VII that he would indeed risk a battle, and was confident of winning. And this was not the end of the king's moral warfare.

William of Newburgh continues to expound that he took his noble captives – foremost among them, of course, the captured Scottish king – to Normandy, where he was greeted exultantly by its people. Henry II was flaunting his triumph: *in conspectu hostium* he entered the besieged city of Rouen, *pompatice.*[115] Such behaviour was doubtlessly meant to be disheartening. Not only was the king's coming unexpected, but the capture of rebel leaders (and influential

---

[111] Cf. Roger of Howden 2, p. 47.
[112] Cf. Walter Map, p. 282. Henry II is described as *rex pacificus* and juxtaposed to the son as *"pater suus totum sibi sedauerat ad pacem mundum".*
[113] Gerald of Wales, Expugnatio Hibernica, book 1, ch. 34, p. 280-281, claims that the king's presence had filled Ireland with tranquillity, although the official legitimation for the conquest of Ireland is the restoration of the Irish Church; an endeavour backed by the bull "Laudabiliter" and notoriously undertaken while Becket's murder had not been settled with the papacy. Gerald of Wales would also refer to him as a maker of peace within the framework of a lengthy discussion of his character (book 1, xlvi, p. 304). Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 162, has the king meet up at Oxford with a sizeable array of Welsh princes, and promises them to keep *"pacem regno Angliae*", whereupon they not only swear fealty to him, but also swear to preserve said peace. William of Newburgh, too, in his final epitaph on the king, claims that Henry II always sought peace, and often preferred money over arms as means to achieve his ends (William of Newburgh, book 3, ch. 26, p. 282).
[114] Ibid., book 2, p. 174-175.
[115] Ibid., p. 195.

sympathisers) must have been a severe blow to morale. It can be assumed that displaying the prisoners, thus confirming rumours that might already have reached the enemy camp, was a part of the king's coming; that he entered the town in a "pompous" manner very much suggests that the royal train was there for all to see. Henry II ended the siege by continuing moral warfare and hunger (and, as William of Newburgh asserts, also aided by God's grace): he ordered his Welsh troops to locate and intercept the French supply chain. Despite the superior size of the enemy army, the painful lack of food and rumours that the forests were filled with Welshmen eventually forced the army to depart, leaving Henry II victorious.[116] In Ralph of Diceto's rendering of the same siege, the defenders of Rouen muster a dauntless defence in the firm belief that their prince will bring them relief. Henry II advances Rouen in confident power, accompanied by frightening rumours that he would infiltrate the borders of France and lay siege to Paris so that he might have hostages to trade in for those of his men that had been captured. Not only is the French king *versus ... in stuporem* at the approach, on the advice of his men, the siege engines are set on fire, the tents pulled down and the siege ended – not, Ralph of Diceto remarks, *sine detrimento famae*.[117] The emphasis of the narrative is different to the one told by William of Newburgh: in Ralph of Diceto's version, the king does not win the day by cunning and superior strategy, but in a much more warlike way, through the fear his name and military capability inspires,[118] and through the unfailing trust his men place in him as their lord. William of Newburgh's king, then, is a man who knows the value of tactics; Ralph of Diceto's king is an accomplished warrior and general. Both characteristics would classify the king as a war leader of some distinction.

In the rendering of Roger of Howden, this very same siege casts a chivalrous light on the character of the king, and renders the French troops even more sinister. The chronicle also reports the king's tactic of cutting of the French supplies by sending his Welsh troops out to locate them, and, in doing so, includes considerably more action than Ralph of Diceto had. News of the king's strategy reach the French camp, and the enemy is greatly frightened of such a rumour *(tali rumore perterriti), jam nihil nisi de fuga cogitabant.* While the French are thus paralysed with fear and cogitating nothing but flight, Henry II has the city gates opened and leads out an army that begins to fill the ditch between the city and the French camp, so that the knights might cross it for an attack. In this version, the two armies actually clash, and it is the English that have the upper hand. Humbled by the attack, the archbishop of Sens and the count of Blois approach Henry II as mediators, asking that the French king and his host be granted the possibility to withdraw, in peace, to another place, where they might have a parley the following day. The king grants the request and has his tent pitched up at that place. However, *noctem vero mediam*, the French king orders his knights to arm themselves, and surreptitiously they steal away, "and he did not cease to flee until they had reached his land", notwithstanding the oath made by the archbishop and the count on his behalf. It is with a certain smugness that the author announces the infamous nocturnal flight of the French king: *Et sciendum est quod rex Franciae fugit a Rothomago*

[116] Ibid., p. 195-196.
[117] Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 1, p. 386-387.
[118] If, indeed, Ralph of Diceto does not mean to imply that the rumours that had Louis VII fear for Paris originated in a stratagem of the royal army.

*cum exercitu suo, nonodecimo kalendas Septembris*. A new date for the conference is soon made, and the author continues his narrative with the king as a formidable war leader. Fighting against his son Richard in Poitou, he hounds him to submission: "he fled from all the places to which he himself had ventured; left castles and fortifications which he had taken before, not daring to hold them against his father." When he hears of the truce between his father, the king of France and the Young King, Richard submits, throwing himself at his father's feet. The conclusion drawn by the author is as concise as if there could not have been another outcome: Henry II received his son back into his love, gave him the kiss of peace, "and so did the king end his war in Poitou."[119] Roger of Howden's king is a victorious and feared war leader – but also a man honouring agreements, and more inclined to peace than war.

There is only one writer whose rendition of the king is more bellicose. Owed, in all probability, to the epic nature of the narrative and the literary tradition of the Norman myth that gained new momentum in the reign of Henry II, the *Draco Normannicus* depicts him as what can only be referred to as a warrior king. Calling, time and again, upon his warlike forbears, the king addresses his men in battle speeches brimming with pride and the promise of glory, he is likened to Caesar and, when he fights, is repeatedly referred to as a lion or lion-like. His campaigns are depicted as swift, successful, and largely unstoppable owed not least to the king's indefatigability in leading his troops – he moves about "strong in men and weapons, a lion everywhere"[120]. Neither was he personally holding back. According to a Norman saying, power pertained to the one who was victorious, glory to the king; but the former was a prize Henry II would not surrender to his men. Consequently, "he bolted into the middle of the phalanx, that lion".[121] The pro-Norman bias of the narrative makes it abundantly clear that the author thought any warlike action against the French utterly justified, indeed, wished for – the question whether Henry II's warfare against the king of France followed an accepted legitimation strategy does not even arise. Stephen of Rouen's epic praise of the king's wars culminates in Henry II's near-contact with the legendary king Arthur, who is called upon by the Britons to defend them against the English monarch's incursion. Stirred by the pleas of his subjects, Arthur writes to Henry II to the effect that he would do better to leave Brittany in peace – a message that he reinforces by expounding, at some length, his own feats of arms. The king of the English reads the letter to his nobles, "smiling, not in the least frightened". Refusing to be intimidated even by the legendary king's prowess, Henry II writes in answer that he would maintain his claim on Brittany; however, out of respect for his recently deceased mother and Arthur, he proposes to hold the land, for the time

---

[119] Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 74-76.

[120] Draco Normannicus, liber 1, cap. IX, line 308 (p. 603), line 311 (ibid, p. 604) calls him *"Julius alter"*. The lion-description is reiterated in liber 1, cap. XII, line 435 (p. 608), cap. XIII, line 471 (p. 609). Liber 2, cap. XI, starting at line 617, is entirely taken up by a battle speech of the king calling upon the noble deeds of Rollo, the ferocity of the Normans in battle and the enmity between France and Normandy (p. 682-684). Liber 2, ch. IX (678-679; starting in line 489) is written in a like vein, with Henry II holding the specialness of Normandy against the French king's demand that he do homage for it.

[121] Ibid., ch. XII, line 695-698 (p. 685): *"Normannos similis tum vis tum gloria tangit: / Vis sibi, si vincunt, gloria regis erit. / Seque suosque premi rex non tulit; ut tulit ardor, / In medias acies irruit ipse leo."*

being, under Arthur's law and *pax nobis*.[122]

There can, of course, be no question that the account as found in the *Draco* is infused with the conventions of its genre. It is not often that chroniclers would measure the king's actual combat strategies against ideals. Usually, we are confronted with accounts that are devoid of verdicts, or, which is more interesting for the depiction of a king, accounts in which the king is presented as already having won the day. These accounts focus on how he dealt with the defeated.

When Henry II had quashed the rebellion, his triumph was absolute, and the Young King must have been (made) painfully aware of it. Henry II proceeded to take his son with him in the time that followed, humiliating him, as has been suggested, not only by receiving the surrender of his allies in his presence, but also by taking him along for a visit of the tomb of Thomas Becket, by whose saintly intervention, so the widespread belief, the revolt had been brought to an end.[123] "Almost all the great men of England", writes Ralph of Diceto, had assembled at Westminster, where Henry II read out, in the presence of his defeated son, the letter announcing said son's surrender. The narrative reiterates the Young King's *deditio*, his humiliation, prostration, the tears, names those who had witnessed the scene, and stresses their great number. It is noteworthy that the wording of the surrender given in the letter is different to the wording Roger of Howden used when he described the original scene.[124] If Roger of Howden's *deditio* had been insolent, with the Young King demanding to be reinstituted, otherwise threatening that he would not believe his father loved him – the letter read out by Henry II was perfectly humble. The Young King still "demands" *(postulans)* something from the king, but what he demands is not – like the acceptance of homage – an action the king has to perform, it is clemency and mercy; virtues inherent in an ideal king. Neither does this demand of royal virtues aim at the benefit of the claimant, but asks for clemency towards his supporters. It is an 'overture' of the actual aim of the supplication. Instead of demanding the king accept his homage, the Young King requests *(rogavit)* it. Instead of accusing his father of not loving him, he proclaims that he would not be able to accept his father's wrath as a wrath that had been forgiven if he would not be allowed to render homage to him. These are the two points most significantly different in the two descriptions, and the difference lies exactly in the words that make Roger of Howden's *deditio* so problematic.[125] The passages, although from different authors, are so tantalisingly similar to suggest that the wording had been deliberately changed so as to have the king appear in a better light. Where Roger of Howden's wording suggests a king who was lax with his sons, Ralph of Diceto's presents a

[122] The episode begins in ibid., cap. XVII, line 941 (p. 695), with Henry II quelling a rebellion in Britanny. The exchange of letters is concluded in ch. XXII, line 1282 (p. 707), with the proposal of Henry II.

[123] Cf. Keefe, Shrine Time, p. 118.

[124] The questionable deditio of the Young King is discussed in the chapter on the justice of Henry II.

[125] Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 1, p. 399-401. *"Venit ad me filius meus ... cum archiepiscopo Rotomagensi, et Bajocensi et Abricensi et Redonensi episcopis, et cum comitibus et baronibus et fidelibus meis quamplurimis, cum multa lacrimarum effusione et singultibus multis prostravit se ante pedes meos, misericordiam postulans cum humilitate, et veniam de iis quae commiserat erga me ante guerram, et in guerra, et post guerram, ut paterna pietate ei condonarem. Rogavit etiam cum omni humilitate et quanta potuit devotione, quatinus homagium ejus et ligantiam acciperem, sicut dominus et pater, asserens se nunquam rediturum indignationem meam sibi condonatam, nisi idem ei facerem quod et fratribus suis feceram, ad eorum patientiae et humilitatis instantiam"*. The passage in Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 82-83, given here for direct comparison, reads: "*... et ibi coram Rothomagensi archiepiscopo et Henrico Bajocensi episcopo, et comite Willelmo de Mandevilla ... et aliis quampluribus familiaribus domini regis, procidit pronus in terram ad pedes domini regis patris sui, cum lacrymis postulans ut ab eo homagium et ligantiam reciperet, sicut fecerat a fratribus suis, et subjunxit, quod si rex homagium suum recipere nollet, non posset credere, quod illum diligeret."*

perfect supplication, a remorseful son, and a king who reacted in exactly the way he should have reacted. It can, of course, only be guessed at whether Henry II had the wording changed himself; but his subsequent conduct towards the Young King suggests that he was very much concerned with being seen as rigorous and in full control of his son.

This would also seem to be supported by the peace treaty of late 1174 between the king and his sons. In the full versions given by Roger of Howden, the king does not want his eldest son to do homage to him, *quia rex* erat, on account of his being a king.[126] Several months later, that very same man lies prostrate in front of his father, after, according to Roger of Howden's narrative, having hesitated about accompanying his father to England out of fear. While Richard was sent to fight against his former allies in Poitou and reduce their castles, with the officials of the county rather ironically being ordered to follow the orders of their own count,[127] the Young King had to be present at the humiliatingly orchestrated surrender of the King of Scots. At York, seemingly the entirety of Scotland did homage to Henry II and the Young King – the clergy, the nobility and even the king himself. This subordination to victorious England that bears every trace of having been executed in this way to ensure the greatest triumph and humiliation, including illustrious hostages, castles to be surrendered and a clause as to the English persecution of criminals who had fled into Scotland. With the requirement of the clergy promising fealty not only to the king of England, but also to the English primacy, Henry II was securing an irksome security strap: should the king of Scotland retreat from the agreement, the clergy was obliged to place his territories under the interdict. The realm's secular nobility was, in turn, obliged to stand by the king of England against the king of Scotland should a conflict arise.[128]

While these examples suggest a vengeful victor, Henry II is also portrayed as displaying an inclination to chivalry. Ralph of Diceto reports how the Philip II, King of France, had rather ungraciously received an embassy from Henry II – treating them with less reverence that his majesty or that of the king of England would have demanded. Henry II, in turn, as the chronicler claims, did not pay him back in kind, but, instead, received the men sent by France *omni venereatione.*[129] A second, much more intriguing but also, regrettably, ambiguous episode can be found in Roger of Howden. Shortly after the beginning of the rebellion, the keeper of the Young King's seal, together with a number of other servants Henry II had placed in his son's household, returned to the old king. Yet Henry II did not want to keep them at his court, and sent them back. With them, he sent precious gifts, "silver vases, horses and cloth" and ordered them *ut ei fideliter servirent.*[130] If indeed, as the context suggests, this can be interpreted as the old king

---

[126] Cf. Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 77; Roger of Howden 2, p. 67-69 and, in an abbreviated version, Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 1, p. 394-395.

[127] Cf. Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 81.

[128] The circumstances of the treaty are reported relatively widely; see Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 94-99; Roger of Howden, p. 79-82; William of Newburgh, book 2, ch. 38, p. 197-198. Both of Roger of Howden's chronicles report the text of the treaty, while William of Newburgh is considerably shorter – but he also does not fail to repeatedly emphasise that the entirety of Scotland's nobility had come to do homage to the king of England.

[129] Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 43.

[130] Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 43. The passage, in its entirety, reads: "*Post dicessum vero juvenis regis, Ricardus Barre, qui sigillum ipsius portabat, ad regem patrem ejus rediit, et tradidit illi sigillum filii sui, quod ille ei ad custodiendum commiscrat: et illud recipiens praecepit bene custodiri. Similiter servientes quos ipse posuerat in domo regis filii sui, ad illum redierunt, adducentes secum carectas et sumarios cum hernasio regis, qui recesserat. Rex vero noluit illos secum retinere, sed remisit eos ad regem filium suum cum toto*

commanding his son's former retainers to support him in his rebellion (and not vice versa), it would be a gesture of tremendous chivalry – and condescension. Henry II would thereby express his distaste for the broken faith of deserters, and, in sending them back, would weaken his own cause in favour of a fair, chivalric contest in arms. By sending gifts usually exchanged between different courts, he would acknowledge his son's standing as prince in his own right. However, the catch to this gesture is that the court of the Young King is not the court of a foreign prince, but the court of a son; and a court, at that, which had (as the frequent complaints of the Young King testify) no means of support, no land on which it could live, but which depended entirely on what the father deigned to give to his son. Seen in this light, the old king's gesture is no longer necessarily as chivalric; it could almost be considered to constitute a calculated affront. Henry II was evidently sure that his son, whether with retainers or without, would not be able to seriously endanger his position, and thus could afford to send back the deserters – many of whom had been selected by Henry II in the first place, and might thus not have entirely suited the requirements of the Young King. Sending precious gifts, in this light, is but a reminder of where the Young King's status and wealth was coming from – and who might, given a reason to do so, withdraw it again. The same applies to the king's taking of the seal. True, he did neither destroy, order to withdraw, or misuse the seal, but he kept it rather than return it. The Young King *was* a king, *had* a court, only at the nod of his father – nowhere in this episode is this more evident than in Henry II receiving his son's seal. At the first stirrings of rebellion, the man whom the Young King had trusted with his effectual judicial power, his seal, returned to the man he considered his superior. What he 'returned' to this superior was the power which, by right, belonged to Henry II; the son's defection had rendered his privilege of bearing a seal, thus exercising actual power, void. In the way Roger of Howden presents the episode – apart from the ambiguity of whether the retainers swore to serve Henry II or Henry the Young King – he seems to have read it as an act of chivalry on the part of Henry II, noting, with a certain amount of exasperation, that the Young King made his retainers swear against his father as soon as they arrived back at his court. The ones who would not do so were sent away and, thus given leave by the Young King, were received at the court of Henry II and allowed to stay there.

Henry II is presented, while, the stylised *Draco Normannicus* aside, not as a warrior himself, as a highly efficient and intimidating commander. Writing the king at war seems, for most chroniclers, to inadvertently have meant writing the king as a victor, dealing with the defeated in a royally acclaimed manner. This, indeed, was a role in which Henry II excelled; merciful, chivalrous and not overtly vindictive, he punished with a subtlety that, judging by the details given in the chronicles, was not lost on contemporaries, but was deigned appropriate, if not mild. The exception may have been Eleanor's lasting imprisonment – but seeing that she significantly enters

---

*hernasio suo. Et praeterea misit ei per illos vasa argentea, et equos et pannos, et praecepit eis ut ei fideliter servirent. Sed cum ad eum venissent, statim fecit illos qui cum eo remanere volebant, jurare ei fidelitatem contra patrem suum. Illos autem, qui hoc sacramentum facere nolebant, secum retinere noluit, sed abire permisit... et ipsi ad regem redeuntes cum eo remanserunt."* The passage's ambiguity lies in Henry's order to swear fealty to *"ei"*, combined with the strongly opposing (*sed / statim)* statement that the Young King required the retainers to swear fealty to h i m (read: not his father). However, with Roger of Howden using *ei* decidedly for the Young King in the same sentence, and the fact that the retainers are offered the choice of maintaining or withdrawing their allegiance to the rebel cause, the interpretation as given in the main text seems by far the more plausible one.

chronicles as a (former) prisoner only after Richard has acceded to the throne, there seems to have been small concern over whether this was the right way to treat the queen. In the prose chronicles, there is no military bravado, no personal feats of arms to be mentioned. Stephen of Rouen's *Draco* is a notable exception in portraying Henry II as a king who would personally and vigorously take part in the battle proper. He reaches a common thread with the prose chronicles in depicting the king as an almost effortless victor – whose victories were mostly defensive. There were little land gains throughout the king's rule: the conquest of Ireland was certainly viewed as a success, but neither Ireland nor Wales would stir so much sentiment as matters on the continent would. Consequently, laudatory reports on royal warfare, in that respect, are relatively scarce – there were no conquests that needed justifying, and the king's 'empire' had reached gargantuan proportions even before he succeeded to the throne of England. Henry II fought defensively – and, in the view of contemporaries, he did fight well.

*Richard I at War*

*Quid plura? Rex Ricardus uno impetu citius jure belli occupaverat Messanam, quam quilibet presbyter catasset matutinas.*[131]

The *Itinerarium*'s statement on the capture of Messina could hardly be shorter – nor more symptomatic of the way in which Richard's military prowess was regarded. Warfare is inextricably linked with the king, and among all the fields of royal duty, it is the one that utterly dominates any account of his reign. These accounts – complimentary with remarkable exclusiveness – touch upon many different facets of Richard's behaviour in war: his personal prowess, his generalship, the way in which he could inspire his troops, his fearsome reputation and his commendably chivalry.

Richard had established his reputation as able warrior well before his accession to the throne of England, when he stormed the apparently impregnable fortress of Taillebourg in 1179, then twenty-one years of age. Ralph of Diceto describes the siege as *opus desperatissimum, et quod suorum nullus antecessorum attemptare praesumpsit.*[132] When the venture succeeded after just three days despite these glum forebodings, the impact was immediate. Richard had before beleaguered the city of Pons for three months and remained unsuccessful, but after overcoming Taillebourg, the barons of Aquitaine surrendered swiftly, and, his domain pacified, Richard could return to his father.[133] Reports of the king's feats of arms were to remain frequent throughout his entire reign, eagerly collected by chroniclers.

Many depictions play with pitting Richard against his overlord, Philip II of France, rejoicing in the Angevin's superiority in strength, wealth and kingliness while condemning Philip II's alleged

---

131 Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 2, ch. 16, p. 163.

132 Cf. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 1, p. 431-432. Ralph of Diceto also elaborates on the strength of the fortifications and the favourable position of those within. The fortress did not only contain a mass of fighters, it was also stocked well enough to endure even a lengthy siege. The chronicler elaborates on Richard's tactic of first luring out the defenders, and then defeating them when they were retreating.

133 Cf. Gillingham, Richard the Lionheart, p. 181; for an analysis of the impact the fortress's capture had, see Fischer, Richard Löwenherz, p. 41.

jealousy and deceit.[134] And yet these depictions pale against the sheer exultation in the prowess and military success of the Lionheart. Despite the double retreat before even reaching the walls of Jerusalem, the third crusade is presented as if it had been a single triumphal procession for the English king. Descriptions of his arrival in Acre attribute messianic properties to him, with the king being received by the people with joy and the sound of trumpets, while at the same time striking fear into the hearts of the besieging Saracens – the fact that Richard had sunk a supply vessel may have had its part in this claim. Roger of Howden refers to the king as *magnificus triumphator* even before he had begun to take a hand in the siege, and Richard of Devizes claims that he was received "as if he were Christ who had returned to earth to restore the kingdom of Jerusalem".[135] These hopes were not dashed. After his arrival, Acre, besieged for years, fell into the hands of the Christian besiegers within four days; the king, although sick, had, according to the *Itinerarium,* still persisted on taking part in the assault: carried on a stretcher, as much to burden the Saracens as to encourage his own men, he shot down foes from the distance.[136]

The battle of Arsuf, although the king had attempted to avoid the confrontation, is stylised by the *Itinerarium* into one bloody proof of his great generalship, the turning of an impending defeat into a victory by his involvement on the battlefield. The chronicler claims the king to have carved ample space for himself from the ranks of his enemies that was soon filled with headless corpses and the dying; he was mowing down Saracens on either side like a reaper with a sickle – 7,000 lay dead at the end of the encounter.[137] While such descriptions are only to be expected from the *Itinerarium* and that particular battle was also rendered much less elaborately and not nearly as glorifying,[138] it stands far from alone. The Coggeshall chronicle provides a particularly drastic impression of a battle that received plenty of attention: the capture of Jaffa. In its tone, the chronicle does in no way fall behind the depictions of the *Itinerarium*, albeit without the latter's emphasis on the act of chivalrousness that led to the deliverance of the city and a greater emphasis on the king's overawing generalship. It pictures the king, having learned that some

---

[134] Richard of Devizes, p. 42, claims that Richard's coming eclipsed the king of France, like the sun outshone the moon. Ralph of Coggeshall states that Philip's reason for abandoning the crusade was that Richard was greater in everything he did: in bravery, fame, wealth, gifts, ferocity, the strength of his army (p. 33-34). William of Newburgh, too, sees the main reason for the growing dissent between the two kings in the envy of the king of France (William of Newburgh, book 4, ch. 21, p. 352-354). Both Roger of Howden and the Itinerarium agree with the verdict (cf. Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 171; Roger of Howden 3, p. 113-114; Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 2, ch. 18).
[135] Richard of Devizes, p. 39: *"... et exceptus est ab obsidentibus cum gaudio tanto, ac si esset Christus qui reuenisset in terram restituere regnum Israhel".* See also Roger of Howden 3, p. 113 (and Benedict of Peterorough 2, p. 169). The Itinerarium's account is the grandest, and depicts the king's arrival as accompanied by music and singing, and the lighting of countless torches in the night (cf. Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 3, ch. 2, p. 211-212).
[136] Cf. ibid., book 3, ch. 12, p. 224-225: "*Subtus erant sui balistarii peritissimi; seque illuc fecit deportari in culcitra serica, ut Saracenos sua oneraret praesentia, et suos animaret ad pugnandum. Inde sua utebatur balista, cujus erat peritus, et plures jaculis peremit emissis et pilis."* A mere twenty pages later (ibid., book 4, ch. 4, p. 243), the author would disapprovingly remark that the Saracen hostages Richard had executed before Acre had slain Christians with ranged weapons, for which the Christians were, in the execution, taking divinely approved revenge. Apparently, the somewhat problematic use of ranged weapons by chivalrously-inclined knights did not extent to kings attacking while lying on a sickbed. Presumably they were sufficiently handicapped.
[137] The battle and its prelude, in which the Hospitallers in particular show themselves greatly agitated at the perceived "shame" of Richard's strategy that required them to bear the assaults from the pagans until the time had come to attack, stretches over fourteen very eventful pages, cf. Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 4, ch. 18-19, p. 262-275. The passage referred to here is found on p. 270, the numer of Saracens defeated in the encounter on p. 275.
[138] Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 95-96, does not give the battle much room in the narrative, and neither does it lay particular emphasis on Richard's involvement in the battle.

defenders were still alive in the besieged city, nimbly jumping off his ship and, his advance covered by his men's arrows, throwing himself against the lines of the enemies *velut leo furibundus,* crushing his enemies to his left and to his right. But it is the king's spirited defence of the newly captured city against the Saracen's retaliation strike that most captivated the chronicler. While the numbers of the enemy that had drawn up at night had woken and terrified the Christians, the king "at once put on his harness, and mounted his horse as if he was flying on wings"; and, "as if emboldened by the great number of foes", he began the task to make his army fit for battle. Much of this demanded psychological rather than strategic finesse. The situation was delicate, and the king well aware of what a break in morale could mean to the outcome of the battle: when a man came fleeing towards him, and, with wretched and lamenting voice bemoaned that they surely were all going to die, he ordered him with great reproach to be quiet, and swore he would have his head cut off if he dared to spread word among the troops. After he had expelled the pagans from the streets of Jaffa with a handful of his knights, he, aware that he had given them a small victory to cling to, addressed the demoralised (and to a great extent unhorsed) host in a rousing battle speech that called upon past victories and yet also exhorted his men. As a punishment for fear, betrayal and flight, the king claimed he would cut off the offender's head in a swift stroke if he became aware of it. The chronicle meticulously details the king's stratagem and the failed first assault, after which Richard once more addresses his army, this time laughing and shouting encouragement before it lapses into a king-centred account of the battle that could hardly be more gory. The king darted here and there with lance and sword, around him a hundred slain pagans that had leapt at him; he beheaded his foes with a single stroke, hacked shoulders from bodies, until the pagans fled before his lion-like face. The account closes with a triumphant statement on the small numbers of men with which the king had prevailed against the pagans.[139]

Richard appears to have had remarkable talents in generalship – and they did by no means always depend on a threat of decapitation.[140] During the siege of Acre, Richard of Devizes claims, the king had been everywhere at once, criticising, instructing, encouraging – all that had been achieved ought to be ascribed to him alone.[141] Similarly rousing was the appeal to his countrymen's national pride that the chronicler ascribes to him before the assault on Messina, where they had allegedly been gravely slighted by the populace who not only denied them the right to trade, but also attempted to kill them whenever they found them unarmed. The speech was heralded by the lion king "roaring horribly" with rage. Not only does he evoke a sense of unity by addressing them as *mei milites* and enumerating the perils they had braved together, he

---

[139] The entire account stretches over ten pages in Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 41-51.Cited here in particular are p. 43, in which the king jumps off his ship, p. 45, with the lamenting man who had to face the king's oath to behead him for his faltering courage, p. 46-47, in which the king adresses his host and p. 49, which details the king's remarkable prowess in battle. The Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 6, ch. 14-16, p. 404-411, emphasis that Richard, although he had wanted to depart, was driven to deliver Jaffa because he would not bear deserting the besieged when they had not yet been defeated. Ralph of Diceto, Ymgines 2, p. 105, acknowledges that Richard had been exceptionally valiant throughout the battle, but his account remains very brief. The account of Roger of Howden (vol. 3, p. 183) is also rather brief, but creates the impression that Richard had delivered the city single-handedly.

[140] Strickland, War and Chivalry, p. 101, analyses the impact of Richard's sometimes perceived 'recklessness' on the morals of his men.

[141] Cf. Richard of Devizes, p. 44.

also appeals to their sense of chivalry. If they would suffer such insults without retribution, they would not only lose their reputation and be made fools of, they would hardly be able to stand up to Saladin's troops if they were known as men who ran from their enemies, against whom even old women and children would boldly rise. Once he finished talking, the only concern of his followers was that their king felt that he could not put his entire trust in them. No one abstains from joining the battle, although the option had been explicitly offered by the king.[142]

Apart from such speeches,[143] that which lifted the morale of the army and secured victories was also the king's undaunted personal courage. Even William of Newburgh, whose account is otherwise rather sober, notes appreciatively that when Richard came to the aid of a besieged town in his continental lands, he rode at the forefront of his men – while Philip II preferred to ride at the back of his.[144] Richard was taking great personal risk, but at the same time communicating trust and a sense of belonging to those who charged with him. It is difficult to imagine that this behaviour did nothing to lift the spirit of his troops. It was an example that could also incite others to follow: the *Itinerarium* claims that, during the attack on Cyprus, the king noticed that his men did not have the courage to leave their ships and confront the army of the emperor waiting on the sea shore, wherefore he himself leapt into the water from the first barge, and *audacter invasit* the Cypriotes. His constancy (*constantia)* was swiftly imitated by his men, who followed suit, and forced the enemy host to flee. The king, swept up in the action, swiftly mounted a packhorse that he happened to come across and followed the emperor, shouting: "Lord emperor, come and enter into single combat with me!"[145]

The king's absolute trust in his own abilities, made visible in his search for single combat is found repeatedly, and on a much grander scale. Roger of Howden claims that when Richard was sent a message by Saladin that challenged him to a pitched battle, the message *plurimum placuit regi.*[146] A similar situation occurs after the king's return from the Holy Land. Engaged in the lengthy campaign to wrest his lost territories from the French king, Richard, according to Roger of Howden, had made camp outside a town that was utterly without fortifications – "as carefree as if he had been within closed walls", waiting for a message from Philip II who had told him that he would come to him with hostile intent. *Cujus mandatum rex Angliae laetus suscipiens,* and more than that: Richard was not only glad at the prospect of a pitched battle (which, if this was the place where Philip II would confront him, was likely to take place, seeing that he had no defences that could have been besieged), he also had a message sent to the king that if he did not come, he himself would do it on the following day. Richard's preparations for battle suffice to turn the king to flight. The thus disappointed English monarch is left with the great treasure that Philip II had to leave behind when he hurriedly left, among it the charters of all his subjects

[142] Cf. ibid., p. 19-21.
[143] A further notable speech can be found in Roger of Howden 3, p. 106-107 (Benedict of Peterbourough 2, p. 161-163), in which the king encourages his troops to join him in battle against the emperor of Cyprus. It has the king recurring on a rhetoric of saving the innocent. The knights who would follow him, he claims, would aid him in vindicating the wrongs of the false emperor, "*qui peregrinos nostros contra Dei justitiam et aequitatem in vinculis tenet."*
[144] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 5, ch. 17, p. 461.
[145] Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 2, ch. 32, p. 190-191.
[146] Roger of Howden 3, p. 184.

(including Richard's brother) who had conspired with the French king against him.[147] Despite this streak of recklessness, also recorded (with a measure of both critique and admiration) in a few episodes from the *Itinerarium*, in which Richard needlessly puts himself into danger,[148] there is a prevalent tone that while Richard would take risks, he would take them on himself as well – and exhibited considerable loyalty to his men.[149]

It is thus that the military aspect of Richard's reign is described, while much more copiously than it has been presented here, relatively uniformly. While there are differences in emphasis – the portrayal of the king as knight *par excellence*, as dedicated crusader or simply as victorious general – it is hard to find any verdict that deviated from general opinion. There were no conquests to justify: the crusade was amply justified in itself; and hardly anyone begrudged Richard the right to reclaim the territories taken during his absence. The single voice raised against the king's warfare is William of Newburgh's, and he criticises neither Richard's methods nor the justification behind his war, but rhetorically despairs of war as such, in particular the ceaseless conflict between the kings of France and England.[150]

It is against the background of the remarkable military reputation that Richard enjoyed among his contemporaries that the effective failure of the crusade's goal to reclaim Jerusalem and the supposedly indefatigable king's agreement to a truce becomes particularly interesting. Coming to grips with the failure of the ever-victorious king consumed ink, thoughts – and also required a certain amount of fantasy and story-telling. These attempts to understand what had happened to make the third crusade end in a truce with Saladin cannot be separated from Richard's military reputation, but they deserve to be regarded in the context of the 'complete' image of Richard built by the individual chronicles. The various explanations chroniclers would come up with to justify exactly what had happened without retrospectively staining the memory of a warrior king are part of an emerging image that had, apparently, found its shape already while Richard was still alive and doing what he did best: fighting.

---

[147] Cf. ibid., p. 256. Philip II's flight and the loss of his treasure are also recorded in Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 117. The flight of the king of France before Richard is, as could hardly be expected otherwise, a popular topic for chroniclers to dwell on. Roger of Howden, for instance, revisits another of Philip's flights in great detail in book 4, p. 55-56, from which the chronicler moves on to listing the illustrious prisoners Richard had made. The entire episode, which involved Philip almost drowning when he crossed a bridge during his flight, is re-iterated (including the plunge into the river) on p. 59-59.

[148] Cf., for instance, book 4, ch. 28, p. 286-288, in which Richard sets out to hunt with only a few men. He encounters a troop of Saracens and would have been captured, had it not been for one of his companions who pretended to be the king, and was taken hostage by the enemy in his stead. Upon his return to camp, Richard is admonished by his friends for his recklessness, bur refuses any such advice. In ch. 30, p. 293-294, Richard is on his way into a battle, but is stopped (at least briefly) by his friends, who advise him to avoid the conflict, so as not to put himself at risk. The king's reply to this request is more elaborate (and chivalrous): he claims that he would not be kept from following the comrades whom he himself had sent into battle. Naturally, the encounter, despite the initial fears, ends with an utter defeat of the Saracens.

[149] In addition to the examples already given above, Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 192, has Richard cross an entire battlefield full of enemies to reach and rescue the duke of Burgundy, whose cries he had heard. Another such episode is found in the Itinerarium. In a surprise attack after the capture of Jaffa (Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 4, ch. 22, p. 418), the king rescues two of his men in the midst of battle - of course while (and by) continuously assaulting the enemy.

[150] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 5, ch. 25, p. 483-484.

*John at War*

Unlike his brother, John did not have a sizeable reputation for warfare to draw on at the onset of his reign. His failed campaign to Ireland had done little to advertise his military reputation,[151] and while his exploits during Richard's absence had been considerably more fruitful, they could not really be drawn upon to build anything resembling a savoury reputation. John seemed little inclined to war at the onset of his reign, settling for a truce with Philip II rather than continuing his brother's war. By some, this was viewed in a sympathetic light. The Coggeshall chronicler remarks that the king was a lover of peace who would rather spent his life in tranquillity than on the battlefield, who, aware of the incommodities caused to his father, his brother and the entire kingdom through frequent warfare, sought to take precaution against the insidious elements within the realm.[152] However, it was not a view that everyone shared. Gervase of Canterbury claims that the king's efforts of making peace were subject to derision. They had caused those who despised him for his slight build and his prudence to opt for peace rather than war to everywhere call him "John Softsword". But, the chronicler continues, with the passing of time, this softness turned into a cruelty so great that none of his predecessors could match him.[153]

Compared to other writers of the reign, Gervase of Canterbury's narrative falls short of fulfilling the expectations this foreboding introduction evokes.[154] In relation to him, most other writers provide an infinitely more appalling array of testimonies to the king's capacity for cruelty in warfare: particularly his use of mercenaries of (proverbially) base morality and the merciless trail of devastation their advance scoured through England find ample elaboration.

Roger of Wendover describes the gathering of the king's troops as something that would strike fear and horror in everyone who witnessed it. While his description of the continental nobles who came to the king's aid remains relatively objective, he claims that the soldiers from Louvain and Brabant "thirsted after nothing more than human blood", and the mass of fighters coming from Flanders and other regions desired the property of others.[155] Later, he would refer to them as perverse people, who neither feared God nor honoured man.[156] The Dunstable Annals calls those who came to the king's aid "barbarians"[157]. According to the Stanley Annals, after the king had repudiated *Magna Carta*, these foreigners – knights, crossbowmen and mercenaries, who

---

[151] Roger of Howden claims that John had met with such ill success in Ireland because he insisted on avariciously pocketing every coin rather than paying his army (Roger of Howden 2, p. 305; Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 339).

[152] Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 101: *"Postquam rex Johannes hanc pacis concordiam in transmarinis formaverat, utpote pacis amator et qui disponebat tranquillam a praeliis ducere vitam, perpendens quantos habuerit regni insidatores, et quanta incommoda patri et fratribus suis et omnie regno ex frequenti praeliorum congressione accidissent, ad Angliam regreditur."*

[153] Gervase of Canterbury 2, p. 92-93: *"Contempserunt etenim in eo malivoli quique juvenilem aetatem et corporis parvitatem, et, quia prudentia magis quam pugna pacem optinebat ubique, 'Johannem mollegladium' eum malivoli detractores et invidi derisores vocabant."*

[154] Nonetheless, Gervase also points out injustice during John's reign, albeit not quite as elaborately as other writers. In a summarising paragraph, he laments that many were hanged, killed, incarcerated, enchained, that hostages had to be given and bought free for immense sums of money, eventually causing "innumerable men and women, rich and poor" to flee from John's England (Gervase of Canterbury 2, p. 102).

[155] Roger of Wendover 3, p. 331.

[156] Ibid., p. 348.

[157] Dunstable Annals, p. 43-44: *"Interim etiam idem rex misit pro barbaris nationibus multis, ad fomentum guerrae inter se et subditos suos"*. This particular choice of words becomes clearer when the writer scathingly reports the death of Hugo de Boves (*"dux multorum barbarorum"*) who had done great harm to the church of Dunstable. Given the attestation that the unfortunate man "sunk like lead" in the rough waters of the sea, it seems hardly surprising that the writer had no friendly word to spare for his adherents.

had come to England with their horses and arms to damage the kingdom – were placed in the royal castles, secreted in the realm's fortifications, although the king had promised to expel them. From there, they wreaked "confusion and destruction for the holy Church and all the people". Their adversaries were those who wanted and loved peace and justice, and honoured the Church, while John's impious force "did not know God, nor honour man". What follows is a string of accusations as to the barbarity with which the king's soldiers conducted that war: they stole cattle, incinerated towns that would not pay as they demanded, tied men to the tails of their horses, subjected them to "various, great and unheard of" torments, hanged them from their genitals until dead and threw the dead into cesspits and "the most vile places", all of which they perpetrated for the sole purpose of extorting money from them.[158] Only Roger of Wendover's depiction is more drastic. The king and his army, he claimed, moved about the country, burning the property of the barons and stealing their cattle, "and if, perchance, the day did not satisfy the king's malice [which demanded] the desolation of things, he would order his men to set fire to hedges and villages they passed so that he might at least invigorate his sight by the damage done to his enemies, and by robbery sustain the most worthless ministers of inequity that he harboured." People who did not flee in time were captured, subjected to torture, and released only against a heavy ransom. While John thus ravaged in the north, another part of his army committed similar atrocities in the south.[159]

Roger of Wendover's descriptions would become even more graphic than that. In a passage that is reminiscent of the crimes the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle attributed to the time of civil war in King Stephen's reign, he claims that the king's army, "limbs of the devil, covered the entire surface of the earth like locusts", bent on nothing but wholesale destruction for the sake of monetary gain. He maintains that even priests standing before their altars fully vested were subjected to the universal rapine, torture and extortion and churches were plundered along with everything (and everyone) else- Slightly contradicting himself, he claims that churches remained the only safe haven: out of fear, few people dared to venture beyond the borders of ecclesiastical buildings, and dared to offer their goods for trade only within the churchyards. He details the torture to which, as the ravages of the army enveloped England, brothers sold brothers and sons their fathers. He speaks of people hung up by various body parts, blinded with vinegar and salt and placed over glowing coals only to be tossed into ice-cold water, and die therein.[160]

The accounts of the Stanley Annals and Roger of Wendover are fashioned in such a way that the king's warfare against the barons is held to be the height of inequity. While they certainly do draw on common topoi to portray a kingdom in utter disarray and torn by war, it is remarkable that there is no opposing view to these depictions, no attempt to render the king in a more favourable light as there had been in the case of Stephen. While the other chronicles are not entirely as drastic in their descriptions, they, too, report the king's practices as something fearful, and out of the ordinary. William Marshal's biographer claims that the king failed to win the hearts of his men because he allowed his war leaders to ravage, plunder and rape and without any

[158] William of Newburgh, Continuatio, p. 520-521.
[159] Roger of Wendover 3, p. 348-350.
[160] Ibid., p. 351-352.

compensation.[161] Almost offhandedly, the Worcester Annals remark that supporters of the king took Worcester castle, and *per exquisita tormenta* robbed the citizens of whatever they had "and more".[162] The Barnwell Annals remark that the king moved about, plundering what enemy territory he found, and setting fire to so many things that few remembered a time in their lives when so much had been burned.[163] The Coggeshall chronicler, more elaborate, dwells on how a division of the royalist forces had pursued those that fled before them, plundered churches, sparing no one, and subjecting people to torture so as to extort money from them.[164] His tactics, the writer suggests, cost him the loyalty of his people: when hearing of the advance of Louis, he set fire to four parts of Winchester before leaving the city. Rather than fleeing, the citizens put out the fires and ran towards Louis, delivered the city unto him and swore him fealty.[165]

As despised as John's use of mercenaries in his later years was, the problem had a history. Especially after the loss of Normandy, the king is repeatedly reported to have had problems in ensuring the support of his vassals for his military campaigns. Partly, this may well be traced back to the king's mounting distrust and his tendency to put his faith in hired mercenaries rather than his barons. In May 1201, when the nobles were still willing to join him and had assembled at Portsmouth to cross with him to his continental possessions, the king took their money rather than their services, and "allowed them to go home", crossing with only two of the realm's powerful and a sizeable number of knights to defend his borders.[166]

The loss of Normandy was a heavy blow to the king's reputation. While not reiterating the story of Roger of Wendover's bewitched king, the Coggeshall chronicler also describes the deeply-felt despair of Normandy's defenders at the lack of help they received from the king: having agreed on a temporary truce with the king of France, messengers sought ought the king, because if he would not or did not want to give aid, they contemplated surrendering to Philip II without a fight. Messengers came to the king with tearful laments, relating to him the miserable state of Normandy and demanding his protection. Yet John would not give them protection, on account of suspecting some of their number of treason, and they returned to their cities, pained and anxious, and delivered them to the king of France. Neither would the defenders of Chateau Gaillard receive the king's protection, as he "always feared treason" and preferred to leave Normandy in fear and disorder rather than running such a risk. It is not without reproach that the chronicler claims that in John's loss of Normandy (and many other cross-channel properties, as he adds), a prophecy of Merlin had come true, the sceptre being separated from the sword. Emphasising the king's failure (and rather errantly recollecting history), he notes that the kings of England had always simultaneously held the duchy of Normandy and the kingdom of England since William the Conqueror, and for one hundred and thirty-nine years the two realms had been

[161] Cf. History of William Marshal 2, lines 12595-12606 (p. 130-131).
[162] Worcester Annals, p. 406.
[163] Cf. Barnwell Annals, p. 231.
[164] Cf. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 178.
[165] Cf. ibid., p. 182.
[166] Cf. Roger of Howden 4, p. 163.

conjoined.[167]

A much more sympathetic view is provided by the Barnwell annalist: he claims that when Philip II had taken many of the king's continental possessions without much death or bloodshed, John, abandoned by his men, preferred to temporally cede possessions and titles rather than allow himself and his household to be extinguished.[168] As hindsight tells, the loss of Normandy was not temporal, albeit not for lack of trying on the king's part. His vigorous attempts are even acknowledged by the Coggeshall chronicler, despite his unfavourable rendering of the king's earlier inaction. He had readied a great fleet and army to cross over to Normandy when he was approached by William Marshal and the archbishop of Canterbury, freshly come from the continent, who attempted to dissuade the king with a vast array of reasons from crossing to the continent: the lack of a safe refuge, the large host Philip II had assembled, suspected treachery, the danger of leaving the kingdom without defence and heir – and if the king would not be dissuaded from his venture, they even claimed they would attempt to restrain him with force. The king, weeping and wailing, implored the archbishop to give him advice that was more useful and salubrious to the kingdom and the king's honourable reputation. While they were deliberating to send a vanguard of nobles and knights to the continent, the large army and fleet the king had amassed was already disintegrating, the nobles, in view of the great costs they had incurred by gathering at the coast, cursing the advice that had been given to the king and returning home. The king shared their disappointment: in great grief, his heart touched by great regret and pain, he embarked on a ship with his household, and sailed near the Isle of Wight for two days until he was dissuaded from crossing without an army.[169] Roger of Wendover's account is considerably briefer, and considerably more negative. The archbishop and "many others" had forbidden him to do so from the very start. John's return to England, in this account, it not a much-regretted necessity, but the outcome of a whim of the king, followed by heavy extortion in England.[170]

As time passed, John had to come to grips with more and more defections. By 1215, the barons of Northumbria would flatly refuse to cross with him.[171] Roger of Wendover reports a successful campaign of the king in Brittany, in the course of which he would have stood a good chance of defeating the king of France in a pitched battle. However, the barons of Poitou refused to join him, claiming that they were not ready for such a battle, and thus the king, overly suspecting their treachery, had to retreat from a battle he might have won.[172] A particularly remarkable defection is give by Gervase of Canterbury: the king of Scots (described by Gervase as a man of outstanding holiness) had refused John's order that he return three castles to him and give him his son as hostages. The king set out with a force, "wanting to wrest from him [the king of Scots] what he could not obtain by asking". Yet even as he approached Scotland, many in the army began to murmur: "Where will we go? What will be do? Without the law of God and

---

[167] Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 145-146. The surrender of Chateau Gaillard has been discussed at greater length above, in the context of the king's relation to his barons.
[168] Cf. Barnwell Annals, p. 197.
[169] Cf. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 152-154.
[170] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 182.
[171] Cf. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 167.
[172] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 285-286.

Christianity, we are like pagans. In which way then can we attack the a holy man like the king of Scots? For sure the lord will fight for him against us." The conflict was eventually settled in more peaceful fashion.[173]

References to John acting as successful general are rare. Roger of Wendover has a single count speak up on account of the king before the battle of Bouvines in reaction to taunts, confirming his unwavering loyalty to John and his willingness to fight for him even on a Sunday, and even unto death.[174] The Barnwell Annals report that John, on his way through England, steadied the wavering hearts of the populace, and comforted those of his followers that he had posed in towns and fortresses.[175] Even if he is not depicted as an outstanding leader, the king was not without military success. His victories in the so-called Celtic fringe are reported widely, although often in a rather dispassionate manner.[176] Symptomatic for these depictions is an account of Roger of Wendover, who, compared to other writers, gives an immense wealth of details on the king's swift and successful submission of much of Ireland, noting how he introduced English laws, customs and money before embarking "triumphant" to cross back to England. Roger of Wendover, however, sours the account of the successful campaign by claiming that as soon as he returned to England, the king extorted an impossibly immense sum of money from his subjects and starved the Braose family who had been among the Irish captives.[177]

In much the same way in which Roger of Wendover would dampen John's military success with darker aspects of his reign, other accounts are found to be overshadowed. The Barnwell Annals recall how the king of Scots fled *(confugiens)* to seek John's aid because he found he could not pacify his rebellious country;[178] "there was no one", the annalist wrote, "in Ireland, Scotland and Wales who did not comply with the king's nod; which, as is most well known, none of his forebears had achieved; and he would have been seen as lucky, successes flourishing as wished, if he had not been robbed of his territories overseas and subjected to excommunication."[179] Gervase of Canterbury is similar, but brings his verdict to a considerably sharper point: "the sixth king [to attempt to conquer Ireland] was John, who won it, but in all other things he was vain and useless."[180]

---

[173] Cf. Gervase of Canterbury 2, p. 102-103.
[174] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 289.
[175] Cf. Barnwell Annals, p. 228.
[176] See, for instance, Ralph of Coggeshall, p.164. The annalistic passage simply notes that John had accepted the submission of the entirety of Ireland. Similarly brief are the Worcester Annals, p. 499, which remark that John moved into Ireland, where he disposed of everything to his liking, and drove back the Welsh to the farthest boundaries of their territory, recalling also the submission of Llewellyn at the king's feet. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 235, includes a brief account of the king moving into Wales and subjecting all its kings and nobles "without opposition".
[177] Roger of Wendover 3, p. 233-235.
[178] Barnwell Annals, p. 206.
[179] Ibid., p. 203: *"Jam in Hibernia, Scotia et Wallia non erat qui regis Angliae nutui non pareret; quod nulli patrum suorum contigisse notissimum est; felixque videretur, et successibus pro voto pollere, nisi transmaris spoliatus esset terris et anathemati subjectus."*
[180] Gervase of Canterbury 2, p. 106. The chronicler points out that John's conquest of Ireland was referred to in one of Merlin's prophecies, according to which "the sixth will overthrow the fortifications" and "the beginning of it will be subject to tottering success." The prophecy, as presented by the chronicler, brought to mind once more the earliest failure of John's military career, which further darkens the unfavourable verdict. The Latin reads thus: *"Dixerunt plurimi quod jam esset completum quod Merlinus prophetavit dicens: 'Sextus Hiberniae moenia subvertet,' et illud 'initium ejus vago effectui subjacebit.' Willelmus primus, Willelmus secundus, Henricus primus, Henricus IIdus, postea Ricardus. Sextus est Johannes, qui Hiberniam adquisivit, sed in omnibus aliis vanus erat et inutilis."*

The most notorious example of a military victory thus gone sour is John's intervention at the castle of Mirebeau, where his nephew Arthur was besieging Eleanor. The king and his contemporaries were well aware to what use for his reputation the victory could have been put. The Coggeshall chronicler claims that John had "by God's will" swiftly captured his enemies; and gives the gist of a letter the king sent to his nobles after the successful venture. In it, he stressed the grace of God that had "miraculously" been with him in the venture and had not only preserved him entirely unscathed by war, but also rendered unto him a number of important nobles (whom he lists by name) and "all other of our enemies in Poitou that were there, about two hundred knights and more, so that not a single one evaded." The summary of the letter ends with the king's remark that the nobles should render thanks to God and be glad of their king's successes. The rumour of the victory was enough to cause Philip II to break off a siege and return to France.[181] However, John would not profit from the victory in the way he might have. As the History of William Marshal comments: "King John won so much glory / and honour that day / that the war would have been at an end, / had it not been for ill luck / and that abiding pride of his / which was always the cause of his downfall."[182] John's triumphal claim that not a single of his enemies had escaped would gain a bitter aftertaste: "of the [captured knights] he killed twenty-two [men], most noble and most proficient in arms, through starvation; and thus not a single one of them escaped."[183] John had not picked his moment of rigorous punishment right, and neither his methods. He did not make a public example of the traitors, did not deal with them in a manner that his triumphant letter might have suggested, did not stage a show of his victory. His influential captives, rather than being branded for treachery and judged with righteous anger for all the world to see, died an ignominious, slow and cruel death in a dungeon – and even if none of them escaped, rumours of John's cruelty must have all but flown through his realm.

John's reputation in matters of war, then, was dismal. He may have displayed the best intentions and may have had a reasonable amount of success – but he was nowhere near the showman that Richard had been. After his brother's capacity for verse-worthy fighting, John must have looked pale to contemporaries from the very beginning. The slow loss of loyalty that he suffered and which incurred him many defeats may be linked to a wide variety of factors, but it seems reasonable to assume that his weak performance in the defence of Normandy had dealt a crippling blow to his reputation. John might have made up for it by ostentatiously parading his victories, complete with public trials of traitors. While this is, of course, mere speculation, it is all too easy to imagine Henry I or Richard I in that situation, and in which way chroniclers might

---

[181] Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 137-138: *"Hunc autem virtutis triumphum illico baronibus Anglicanis mandare per litteras curavit, quarum iste tenor est: … Sciatis nos gratia Dei sanos esse et incolumes, et gratiam Dei nobiscum mirabiliter operasse. Die enim Martis ante Vincula Sancti Petri, cum fuissemus ante Cinomanas, accepimus dominam matrem nostram apud Mirabel fore obsessam, et quantum potuimus illuc properavimus, ita quod illuc venimus ad festum beati Petri ad Vincula, et ibi cepimus Arturum nepotem nostrum, quem Willelmus de Braosa nobis reddidit, et Gaufridum de Lucinan, et Hugonem Brunum, et Andream de Caveni, et vicecomitem de Castro-Eraldi, et Reimundum Tuarz, et Savarium de Mauleun, et Hugonem Baugii, et omnes alios inimicos nostros Pictavenses qui illic erant, circa ducentes milites et plures, ita quod non unus solus pes evasit. Ideo Deo gratias referatis, et successibus nostris gaudeatis."*

[182] History of William Marshal 2, lines 12105-12110 (p. 106-107).

[183] Margam Annals, p. 26.

have picked up *their* proclamations of victory. This might well have worked in favour of John. In one instance, it almost did: the Coggeshall chronicler had seized upon the king's attempt at self-display, and reported his triumphant but still sufficiently humble announcement of victory. There is little reason to assume that he (and perhaps others) would not have picked up a pompously righteous trial for the rebels or other warlike demonstrations of royal power and authority, thus lending far greater publicity and popularity to John's war efforts. They did not, however, and it seems reasonable to assume that such attempts were not made. As matters stood, the king appears to have offered little basis for aggrandisation.

*Henry III at War*

If chroniclers found little to aggrandise about John, the military prowess of his son seems to have found even fewer admirers. Already by 1237, although the king was still in his best years, Matthew Paris puts a condemning judgement into the mouths of his nobles. When the king had humbly (*suppliciter)* approached them for pecuniary aid, he was not only rebuked for his spending, but insulted to no small degree:

> "they declared that it would be unworthy of them, and injurious to them, to allow a king so easily led away, who had never repelled or even frightened one of the enemies of the kingdom, even the least of them, and who had never increased his territories but rather lessened them, and placed them under foreign yoke, to extort so much money, so often, and by so many arguments, from his natural subjects, as if they were slaves of the lowest condition, to their injury and for the benefit of foreigners."[184]

It was an exhaustive condemnation of the king's military efforts, claiming him to have failed in every conceivable aspect of royal warfare, and it is by far not the only such judgement to be found in the lengthy chronicle.

At another instance, having been again implored for money by the king, who professed that he would undertake a military expedition for the common good and try to pacify Gascony, the nobles looked at each other and, "speaking secretly", brought to each other's ears serious doubts about the prowess of the king – both as far as his future crusading plans and his hopes for regaining his territories on the continent were concerned. "Which sensible hope lifts up this petty king *(regulus)*, who has never been educated in the art of war, has never mounted a horse to fight, drawn a sword, brandished a lance or swivelled a shield that he could triumph where the king of France has been captured and the knighthood of France has succumbed? And in what rashness does he trust to strongly win the transmarine territories that he had not known how to keep when he had still held them?"[185]

As if it were not enough that his English subjects ridiculed him behind his back, and had serious doubts as to whether the king could in any way defend them if the need arose, Matthew

---

[184] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 3, p. 380-381: *"... asserentes indignum nimis fore et injuriosum, permittere regem tarn leviter seducibilem, qui nunquam unum ex inimicia regni, etiam minimum, repulit vel exterruit, nec fines regni unquam ampliavit, sed arctavit et alienis subjugavit, ut a naturalibus hominibus suis, quasi a servis ultimae conditionis, in detrimentum eorum et alienorum juvamen tantam pecuniam, tot, totiens, extorqueret argumentis."* Translation by Giles (Matthew Paris's English History 1, p. 43-44).

[185] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 335: *"Et sese mutuo intuentes, secreto auribus instillarunt dicentes; 'Quae spes rationabilis istum erigit regulum, qui nunquam militari edoctus disciplina in Martio certamine equum admisit, gladium eduxit, hastam vibravit, aut clipeum ventilavit, ut triumphet, ubi capto Francorum rege occubuit militia Gallicana? Aut in qua confidit temeritate terras transmarinas potenter adquiere, quas possessas nequit retinere?'"*

Paris inserts various instances in which even the non-English expound on their impression of Henry III's ill reputation for warfare. The Poitevins, requesting that he should cross over with money rather than knights, are suspected to see in the king a mint official, moneychanger and peddler rather than a king, who should be a leader of knights and a magnificent commander.[186] The Gascons sneer that the king was employing old women's warfare by ravaging the countryside[187] and the French deem him far beyond war, calling him a king *imbelli*.[188] This impression is confirmed by the king's reaction to their warlike threat of terrible resistance and defence should he attempt to take back his continental lands: q*uod multum abhorruit rex Anglorum, nec mirandum*[189]. It is open for interpretation whether the chronicler sought to imply that it was no wonder that Henry III feared so terrible an oath – or that it was nothing out of the ordinary that he was afraid in the first place.

While Henry III did not wage overly many wars, it is clear from his reputation that he was not a massively successful general, nor is there any significant narrative stylisation of his own involvement in battle. Noteworthy victories occurred mostly within the framework of a series of border disputes with the Welsh, in which victory tended to be of a very temporary nature. Many of them are – at best –simple notices of the king's success.[190] More elaborately, the Worcester Annals report a series of expeditions to Wales. They note that after the king had led an army into their territory, the great among the Welsh submitted themselves to him,[191] that Henry III returned there to lay waste to a stretch of land and to fortify his castles[192] and that he made peace with two Welsh princes, sharing Wales between himself and them.[193] These reports are short, of barely any narrative consequence, and what little success they convey is soon overshadowed by renewed troubles in the region.[194] Scarcely more informative are the Winchester Annals: they report that the king had subjugated Wales, and instituted English laws.[195] It is Matthew Paris who offers the only passage that can be called a success narrative at all – ironically, it does not in fact involve a war. Henry III had led an army towards Wales, marching as if he were to immediately enter battle. However, "greatly fearing the king's attack", his nephew in Wales, David, complied with the demands of Henry III, and the two made peace at London. It was "by God's grace" that the king thus subjugated Wales to himself, "without the shedding of blood and the uncertainty of war".[196]

Far more often, Henry III's military ventures are not crowned with success. His expeditions to

---

[186] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 190-191: "*... aesi potius rex Anglorum esset nummularius, trapezita, vel institor, quam rex et militum dux et praeceptor magnificus"*.
[187] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 409-410: *"... exterminium plantarum et domorum incendis, pugnam anilen, non virilem reputantes"*. Worse still, they compare him unfavourably to the military style of Simon de Montfort, whom the king had sent to subdue them before.
[188] Ibid., p. 280.
[189] Ibid., p. 281.
[190] See for instance the Tewkesbury Annals, p. 79, which note disturbances at the Welsh border, and that the king went there "*cum magno exercitu*" and fortified a castle.
[191] Cf. Worcester Annals, p. 433, for the year 1239.
[192] Cf. ibid., p. 436, for the year 1244.
[193] Cf. ibid., p. 436, for the year 1247.
[194] Cf. ibid., p. 444, for the year 1256, in which the annals report that the Welsh entered the March, laid waste to the greatest part of it and killed many.
[195] Winchester Annals, p. 89: "*Henricus rex subjugavit sibi Walliam, et constituit ibi leges Anglicanas."*
[196] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 150-151.

Wales are referred to in a brief and sombre way. Reports involve many casualties on the king's side and few on that of the Welsh,[197] the army being ridiculed by the Welsh for achieving little,[198] and the eventual return *sine honore* to England.[199] A particularly humiliating episode is provided by Matthew Paris. The most negative aspect of this narrative is that the struggle of the Welsh against the king is repeatedly portrayed as just and justified – all they wanted was to retain their ancient laws, and not to be "given away or sold like cattle". Matthew Paris stages them as the righteous party in this war. He has their leader, Llewellyn, address his people in a rousing speech, in which he points out the divine support that pertained to his party, the lack of mercy they would receive at English hands – for Henry III had not the least respect for his English subjects, and most certainly would not treat the Welsh with more kindness. Appeals to Henry III for peace are ignored, instead, the king, "like a dragon which does not know how to spare anyone" continued to proceed against them with his army, having their *exterminium generale* in mind.[200] The king's show of ferocity did not lead to (even unjustified) success: he had to return to England when his reinforcements did not come, food became scarce, and winter approached.[201] His return, as the chronicler points out, was *inglorius,* the Welsh host with laughter and derision pursuing the retreating army to kill possible stragglers lagging behind the main host. Nonetheless, the king "marched handsomely armed in the midst of his army, with the royal standard unfurled, and encouraged his fellow warriors to slaughter those dregs of the human race, the Welsh."[202]

The depiction is hardly different for Henry III's attempts to retake his continental possessions – the king tried to achieve something but failed. The account of the Waverly Annals is perhaps symptomatic of the attitude towards the royal endeavours: the king had gone to Brittany to re-conquer the territories lost during his father's reign – "yet what he did there is superfluous to say, since the matter is open for almost anyone who wishes to know."[203] Depictions of these campaigns are boiled down to an absolute minimum, and the campaigns themselves remained unsuccessful until the very end. It appears that barely a writer believed that the king would eventually regain his lost inheritance. Only the Burton Annals criticise the king's loss in earnest rather than accepting it as inevitable. It claims that the title of duke of Normandy had been

---

[197] Cf. Annals of Dunstable, p. 110 and p. 168; the latter states *"... plures de suis perdidit, paucos de Wallensibus occidit."* Similar is ibid., p. 203, in which the king's army loses many men due to a corruption of food and drink, "*sed Walensibus parum aut nihil nocere praevaluit."* Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 385-386, is more drastic, claiming that the king *(usus consilio muliebri*) would rather indulge himself at London than fight against the Welsh, thus encouraging them to assault and leaving the few knights he had sent out against them to perish. Ibid. vol. 5, p. 645-646 describes a particularly successful attack of the Welsh on the English.

[198] Cf. Annals of Dunstable, p. 203.

[199] Ibid., p. 204.

[200] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 646-648. He had earlier inserted another passage proclaiming the predicament in which Wales found itself on p. 591-592. The Dunstable Annals, p. 200, too, assert that the Welsh were confident of the rightness of their incursions.

[201] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 649.

[202] Cf. ibid, p. 651; translation by Giles, Matthew Paris's English History 3, p. 248,

[203] Waverly Annals, p. 308: "*Quid vero ibi gesserit superfluum est dicere, cum res sit in propatulo omnibus fere scire volentibus*." Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 193 mentions that the king had twice crossed to retake Normandy, and twice returned "ingloriously and confused", without having achieved his aims, but a poorer man for trying. Ibid. p. 382, describes how the king had amassed a number of ships to cross over to Gascony, but could not leave on account of no favourable wind blowing. The chronicler draws the conclusion that the king's endeavour was not divinely approved. The Margan Annals, p. 38, simply state that the king went into Poitou to recover his lost inheritance, but while he lost many of his men and expended much money, he acquired "little if any" of his lands.

"ignominiously" deleted from the king's notation and seal, and the prophecy of Merlin, of the sword being separated from the sceptre, had been fulfilled.[204]

A frequently cited factor for the ill success of the king is the lack of dependable forces – he seems to have fallen prey to treachery and broken promises more than once. The Dunstable Annals report that, when he was crossing the lands of the count of La Marche, he was "deceived by that very count, and but for God's providence, almost captured". On his return from the trap, where he had lost many men and goods, he was abandoned by "almost all his English magnates, without whose consent he had left England."[205] His reliance on the wrong people – or his reluctance to heed the advice of the right people – cost Henry III the allegiance of the nobles he would have needed for his ventures. The men with which he was customarily left were of little trustworthiness, and just as prone to leaving the king abandoned. Matthew Paris describes a particularly precarious event of treachery. When the two camps of the armies[206] that were to join battle had already been arranged and the king approached his allies for the aid they had promised, they suddenly backed out of the agreement, leaving him destitute of any chance to win. Notably, it is not the king, but his brother who arranges for a truce to be made – the king himself, in a manner entirely unchivalrous and not particularly kingly, flees the field with his entire army. On his retreat, he is forced to acknowledge that one of the towns in which he had wanted to stock up on provisions and rest had made peace with the king of France, and Henry III, without provisions, had to rapidly flee to the next town. The deserters, the chronicle asserts with habitual resentment, had been men on whom he had heaped large amounts of money. They had left him to join the ranks of the king of France, and although their treachery is far from being approved of, the guilt, ultimately, rested with the king: he had trusted on a reed staff to carry his weight, but the staff, as reed does, had splintered and wounded him.[207]

Henry III did have one single important narrative role to play on the battlefield: being captured by the barons in the Battle of Lewes. Even this takes place without much relish: where Stephen had made a heroic last stand with whatever weapon he could grasp, Henry III is simply taken by his adversaries. There are only two very isolated instances of the king being involved in the action, one of which even allows for the king to actively take part in the battle. The continuator of Matthew Paris does allow a horse to be killed underneath the king before he is captured, thus accounting for at least a minimal measure of royal involvement on the battlefield.[208] And there is one single sentence that implies that Henry III possessed some sort of prowess in battle: the Winchester Annals note that the king, although pierced with three arrows,

---

[204] Burton Annals, p. 487. The quotation had already been attributed to John's loss of Normandy by the Coggeshall chronicler (Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 146). By comparison, the continuation of Matthew Paris' chronicle (William de Rishanger, Chronica, p. 1-2) and the Dunstable Annals, p. 213, interpret the king's relinquishing of Normandy (and Anjou, in the continuation's case) as an inevitable consequence of the problems in which the kingdom found itself. In the Dunstable Annals' version, the king is even claimed to have given up Normandy "on the advice of his barons", and to have received a sum of money from the French king in return.

[205] Ibid., p. 158.

[206] French and English.

[207] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 217-223, for a number of defections and the king's despair at the traitors.

[208] Cf. William de Rishanger, Chronica, p. 27.

still killed "many" in the Battle of Lewes.[209] The episode remains singular to the extreme. Since most chronicles sided with the barons, the king's imprisonment is not styled into something noticeably more spectacular either:[210] their treatment of the king had to appear respectful if they were to retain their positive standing within the depiction, they could not treat an anointed king with too much roughness.

The captured Henry III was to be rescued by his son Edward, who featured largely in the battles of the later reign, while his father faded more and more into the background. The king's involvement in military stratagems and battle itself had, at no time of his reign, been particularly momentous. He tended to select the wrong allies and, in doing so, alienate the ones that might have remained faithful – if the rampant fear of strangers dominating the period's historiographic writing can be considered as basis for evaluating the trustworthiness of any of his supporters. Whatever the reason for his continuous failure: Henry III was in no way rendered a warlike king. He was not perceived as a glowing general, not considered a brilliant strategist, nor even a man to lift a sword, and there are no triumphant victories to his name.

[209] Winchester Annals, p. 102: *"Dominus Edwardus submisit se in obsidium pro domino rege patre suo, qui in illo conflictu tribus vicibus inimicorum suorum acies penetrando multos interfecit."* Although the passage has a certain ambiguity, since both Henry III and his son might be the subject of the relative clause, the way the sentence is constructed, with "*qui"* following so directly after "*patre suo"*, strongly implies that it is indeed Henry III, not Edward, who had fought so valiantly.
[210] For renderings of the king's capture, see William de Rishanger, Chronica, p. 26-28; the Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, p. 28-29, emphasises that the king was treated courteously by his captors as he went about with them, having to go where they went. Similarly, the Worcester Annals, p. 452, claim that the king was captured with reverence. See also Winchester Annals, p. 101 and Robert of Gloucester 2, lines 11,398-11,400 (p. 750).

*3.3.5. The King and the Church*
*Contemporary Expectations*

*... si nec Dei nec rectidutinis mentio,*
*ut dicitis, facta fuit,*
*cujus tunc?*[211]

It is quite impossible to separate the aspect of religion from the assessment of royal conduct, as the entire notion of kingship, even if considerably more institutionalised by the thirteenth century, was permeated by the divine. The king's foremost duty in regard to the Church, as the coronation oath amply testifies, was to protect it, but the exact extent of this protection, of course, was a matter of interpretation, and the king's involvement with ecclesiastical matters far more intricate. How the king dealt with the Church – whether politically or personally – reflected to an immense extent upon his reputation, seeing that the vast majority of contemporary writers assessing the king were themselves ecclesiastics.

On a personal level, kings inadvertently exhibited a level of conventional piety, as court routine was not only tied up with religious ritual and the regular hearing of Mass, but also encompassed the king's "itinerary of shrines, churches and saints"[212]. The itinerant court would often carry relics with it, kings were often present at the translation of saints or the dedication of churches.[213] The giving of alms, the feeding of the poor and donations to monastic houses and churches was an expense regularly featured on the royal balance sheets. Beyond this almost 'institutional' level of piety, kings could give expression to their piety by increasing or emphasising the already existent parameters: especially lavish or a larger-than-usual number of grants, the founding of monastic houses, a more fervent interest in Mass and confession, pilgrimages and gestures of particular humility (that most pious of personal virtues), repentance or devotion. Especially a humble king who orchestrated his humility with befitting gestures might find words of praise.[214]

On a political level, the perception of a king's relationship to the Church depended largely on the two factors of the king's treatment of Church officials and his involvement in ecclesiastical policies. The progressive secularisation of kingship and simultaneous adoption of wider competences on the part of the papacy meant that the Holy See was to a much larger extent competent to interfere with the affairs of kingdoms, overriding unwanted elections and presenting candidates more to its preference – and (at times rather successfully) threatening princes with excommunication and interdict if their conduct deviated too strongly from the expectations held by the Church. At the same time, canon law was making considerable progress, and its increasing clarity and claim to universality was making it more and more difficult for kings

[211] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 84.
[212] Vincent, Pilgrimages, p. 42.
[213] Cf. ibid., p. 43.
[214] Althoff, Christliche Ethik, p. 40-45, notes how humility was a difficult virtue to assume for nobility and kings. Since the giving of alms was commonplace, kings could demonstrate their Christian especial devotion by humbling themselves in public or, rather than giving conventual alms, would seek to establish personal contact to individual poor.

to press legal claims against their bishops, or, indeed, impede their chosen course of action if the prelates were determined enough.[215] The king's personal effort in the promotion of ecclesiastical reform was praiseworthy, but it would seem that it was not considered particularly problematic for him to abstain from it, as long as he deigned not to stand in its way, and allowed reform to run its course, with all the legates, councils and visits to the Holy See it might entail. Compared to that, a matter that was of considerably more consequence for the king's reputation with the Church was the way in which he treated the abbacies and bishoprics of his realm. As they fell back into the hand of the king when their incumbents died and, in most cases, the king's consent to the election of a successor, let alone his ceding of the temporalities of the respective benefice, was required, he could exert a certain level of control over whether or not a benefice became and remained vacant.[216] As vacant benefices were a source of royal profit, too many and too lengthy vacancies would quickly incur the conclusion that the king was being greedy at the expense of the pious.

How the king chose to handle the Church had a twofold impact: immediately on his relations to the prelates of his realm and the papacy and, through the eyes and pen of the chroniclers, on his afterlife.

*William I and the Church*

"The one proposition I have accepted", reads a letter of William I to Pope Gregory VII from the summer of 1080, referring to the paying of Peter's pence, "the other I have not. I have never desired to do fealty", the letter continues, in answer to the pope's request that William I swear fealty for his newly-won kingdom, "nor do I desire it now; for I neither promised on my own behalf nor can I discover that my predecessors ever performed it on yours."[217] Whatever the Conqueror's behaviour towards the Church was – meek it was not.

Contrary to those of many of his successors, the Conqueror's reign featured no spectacular confrontation between king and Church. Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury proved a loyal right hand man, and even the imprisonment of his half-brother Bishop Odo of Bayeux did not reflect overly much on the king's reputation: the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, otherwise reporting quite unabashedly that he allowed churches to be raided or burnt, clearly puts Odo's secular power into the foreground, using his imprisonment rather as an illustration of the king's great severity towards his magnates than of his disrespect for the Church. William of Poitiers and William of Jumièges, while eschewing the narration of memorable episodes[218] state unanimously that the duke had, since his childhood, been a devout worshipper of God.[219]

Of these two writers, William of Poitiers, naturally, provides lengthier praise, expounding, in a series of paragraphs, the king's model piety: he was deeply aware of the transience of earthly matters, ever contemplating eternal life beyond his worldly office, an eager listener to the

[215] Cf. Chibnall, Anglo-Norman England, p. 92-93.
[216] Cf. ibid., p. 38, p. 71.
[217] Letters of Lanfranc, letter 39. Translation by Clover/Gibson.
[218] Apart from their frequent blatant flaunting of signs of divine approval for the Conquest, which has already been remarked upon.
[219] Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VII-7(17), p. 120; William of Poitiers, i.47-52 (p. 78-86).

teachings of the Scripture, a believer in the true spirit of communion, a persecutor of heathens, a generous donor to churches, a great admirer of pious ecclesiastics, and both an eager advisor and participant in ecclesiastical synods and judgement, who set much store by preserving the morals of the more holy of his subjects. Indeed, the panegyrist describes Normandy under the Conqueror's sway as a land of milk and honey for the Church – rivalling Egypt with its countless monastic communities.[220] The writer offers another such powerful image when he describes the king celebrating Easter Sunday at Fécamp. A great crowd of bishops and abbots had gathered for the feast day; the king himself did not, as might have been expected, position himself among them, in a place of particular honour, nor indeed was he seated. He was, the author asserts, standing humbly next to the choirs of the religious orders, and by this gesture alone he compelled crowds of knights and people to interrupt their merrymaking and hurry to divine service.[221] Though meagre in comparison, the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* furthers its initial praise when the king returns to Normandy after the conquest, remarking in a short passage that the king had had the Church of St Mary at Jumièges dedicated and, as an eager worshipper of most pious spirit (*semper studiosus cultor deuotissimo animo*), the king was present at the festive dedication service.[222]

All in all, the relationship between William I and the Church, as mirrored by contemporary narratives, appears to have been one that worked well enough, even with occasional added praise for the king's great piety. Compared to the momentous effort of legitimising the Conquest – which, as has been indicated, also involved a considerable display of devotion, unwavering faith in divine judgement and the maintaining of good relations to the Church – the challenge of displaying sufficient religious zeal must have paled. Consequently, we find but little endeavours to place the Conqueror in a positive light as far as his reputation in dealing with the Church was concerned. Neither ecclesiastical reform movements nor opposition forced William I to make a stand and benevolent chroniclers to stage his Christian virtue beyond habitual praise.

*William II and the Church*

His treatment of the Church is the aspect of William Rufus' reign that reflects most badly on him. There are – at least in Orderic Vitalis' narrative – some redeeming descriptions of the king's behaviour towards the Church, many of which have already been cited. Even the thoroughly negative Eadmer once allots space for him to say something favourable: when several bishops, hoping to please the king, stirred up complaints against Anselm and attempted to make him consecrate a bishop without first receiving his profession of obedience, William II declared that, whatever his quarrel with the archbishop, he would not see Canterbury deprived of any privileges.[223] Yet the majority of statements of the king's behaviour towards the Church portray him in a very different light.

Orderic Vitalis notes that the king had, on the advice of Flambard, taken the revenues of vacant bishoprics into his own hand, and had begun using them for secular purposes, a custom

---

[220] Cf. ibid.
[221] William of Poitiers, ii.44 (p. 178): *"Humiliter adstans ille choris ordinum religosorum ludicra intermittere, concurrere ad diuina militum plebisque turbas coegit."*
[222] Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VII-17(38), p. 172.
[223] Cf. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 47-48.

unheard of before the Norman conquest.[224] Not only did he take the revenues, he also laid his hands on more palpable Church property: when he was gathering money to buy Normandy off his brother, Orderic claims that he plundered the churches of their ornaments of gold, silver and precious gems that been devotional gifts by earlier kings and nobles. The king did not wish to deplete his own stores of treasure.[225] In the king's obituary, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle bitterly complains that the king had wanted "to be the heir of every man", either granting bishoprics and abbeys in return for money, or taking them into his own hands altogether and putting them out at rent: at the time of his death, the chronicler expounds, the king had held the archbishopric of Canterbury, the bishoprics of Winchester and Salisbury, and eleven abbacies.[226] The same accusation is found in the *Historia Novorum*. Beginning with the death of Lanfranc, William II had taken the temporalities of Canterbury – after having estimated and deducted what the monks would need for survival – into his own hand, and every year rented out the lordship over the church to the highest bidder he could find. Nor, Eadmer adds, was this practice limited to the Church of Canterbury; this novelty, not practised in the reign of the Conqueror, as the monk asserts (slightly contradictory to Orderic), harmed bishoprics and abbeys throughout the kingdom.[227] When Anselm asks the king to fill the vacant abbacies, the king puts his views into words: "Are not the abbeys mine? You do as you like with your manors and shall not I do as I like with my abbeys?"[228] The archbishop's queries for reformatory councils are met with similar resentment, and blocked by the king: "When it will seem right to me, I will deal with this, not following your will but mine. Yet that will be considered at another time."[229] There was absolutely no respect for ecclesiastical property in these remarks – not even an acknowledgement that such a concept existed.

Eadmer's most drastic remarks on the king are preceded by a small *caveat* that he was merely telling the stories just as he had heard them from travellers, lacking any proof as to their truth. In these stories, the king, in his lust for money, does not even shrink back from taking an active role in apostasy: at Rouen, he is approached by several Jews, who offer him money to compel some Jews who had recently become Christians to return to Judaism. The king agrees. *Quid plura?*, Eadmer resignedly remarks, as if there was no question of the outcome, "he made many of them, broken with threats and terror, deny Christ and resume their original error."[230] The scandalous length to which the king was prepared to go is exposed in Eadmer's next tale of a young Jew who had been converted to Christianity after witnessing the appearance of a saint (Stephen, who, incidentally, is held to have been persecuted until death by Jews). The young man's desperate father implored the king to return his son to him (and Judaism). The king, at first, remained silent

[224] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 8, iii. 313-314, p. 174-176.
[225] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 4, iv. 16, p. 208.
[226] Translation by Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 235 (D-version); Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 364.
[227] Cf. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 26-27.
[228] Stevenson, Eadmer's History of Recent Events, p. 51; Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 49-50. Translation by Stevenson.
[229] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 48-49. "*'Cum,' inquit, 'mihi visum fuerit de his agam, non ad tuam sed ad meam voluntatem. Sed in hoc aliud tempus expendetur.'*"
[230] Ibid., p. 99: "*Plures ex illis minis et terroribus fractos, abnegato Christo, pristinum errorem suscipere fecit.*"

to the request "as he had not yet heard any reason why he should intervene in such a matter".[231] The line is familiar: Eadmer had used the very same words to explain why the king would not take Anselm back into his good grace, despite the lack of any grievance against him. Like the bishops, the Jew very soon understood the cryptic message, and offered money to the king. As the king proved very much purchasable, the young (former) Jew was brought before him. "Lord King", he said when faced with the king's demand, "I believe you are joking." The king threatened to put his eyes out if he did not obey, and the young man, quite unshaken, replied that he would not and stated quite blandly: "But you should know that, if you were a good Christian, never would you have brought forth such (words) with your mouth." It was the task of a Christian to lead unbelievers to Christianity and not the other way around. The king, disconcerted *(confusus)* by this reply, sent the man away. He then, descending even further into ignominy, haggled with the father whether or not he should be paid for his service – and obtained half of the money initially promised.[232]

The 'tales' that reach Eadmer in his continental exile gradually amount to blasphemy. The king, in his pride, did not want to hear that anything done or ordered by him was done under the condition "by the will of God", but "wanted that everything, things that had been done as well as those that were yet to do, was ascribed solely to his own industriousness and aptitude."[233] William II, as the rumours had it, went brazenly on to declare publicly that the saints could achieve nothing before God, and that it was useless to call upon St Peter or any of them for help. That said, he proceeded to proclaim that he did not believe in God's judgement as it was unjust, because either God knew nothing of the deeds of men, or because he did not want to weigh them with the scale of equity. The series of the king's blasphemous acts climaxes after he had some falsely accused poachers tried by the ordeal of iron, and it is found that their hands are not scorched. "What is this?" the king exclaims, "God a just judge? Perish the man who after this believes so. For the future, by this and that I swear it, answer shall be made to my judgement, not to God's, which inclines to one side or the other in answer to each man's prayer."[234]

*Haec et hujusmodi plura his atrociora,* that and more similarly abominable things Eadmer bleakly claims to have heard about the king, but he closes the string of anecdotes with this last of the king's outbursts that openly challenges the justice of God, upon which his kingship is supposed to rest. It is certainly tempting to interpret the king's statements in the way of theologically advanced thinking– but, whether true or not, it is clear that in Eadmer's narrative, they serve the purpose of heightening the sense of a king who, without a personal ecclesiastical counsellor, would plunge deeper and deeper into an abyss of evil. Anselm, the good shepherd who should have served as the king's moral tether, was in exile, and, consequently, Eadmer viewed the kingdom and its ruler's morals as rapidly deteriorating. A similar chain of events had been

---

231 Stevenson, Eadmer's History of Recent Events, p. 104. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 100-101. Translation by Stevenson.

232 Cf. ibid., p. 100-102. The quoted passages read: "'*Domine rex,' ait, 'ut puto jocaris'* and '*Verum noveris quia si bonus Christianus esses, nunquam de ore tuo talia protulisses.'*"

233 Ibid., p. 101: *"Praeter haec quoque per id temporis forebatur eum in tatam mentis elationem corruisse, ut nequaquam patienter audire valeret, si quivis ullum negotium quod vel a se vel ex suo praecepto foret agendum poneret sub conditione voluntatis Dei fieri; sed quaeque, acta simul et agenda, suae soli industriae ac fortitudini volebat ascribi."*

234 Ibid., p. 101-102; Stevenson, Eadmer's History of Recent Events, p. 105-106. Translation by Stevenson.

presented by Eadmer after the death of Lanfranc, and a very similar interpretation is given by William of Malmesbury, who had read the chronicler's works avidly, in his *Gesta Pontificum:* the good in the king's heart, he asserts, needed to be kindled by words of faith. One of the chronicle's manuscripts adds, in the way of a grave afterthought, that, had Anselm remained alive for longer, Henry I, the second king to whom the archbishop should have acted as ecclesiastical counsellor, would not have let himself be carried away by his fierce spirit, and the realm would have had hope.[235] Without a pious counsellor, we are lead to believe, a king would easily fall into highly ungodly ways.

Yet this admittedly very strong critique is not the only instance in which Eadmer remarks on the king's irreligion. Throughout his narrative he displays William II as a man who has neither respect nor understanding for anything divine or pertaining to the Church. When he is approached by some of the elite of the realm with the petition that they might have prayers spoken in churches to the effect that God might put it into his heart to fill the ecclesiastical vacancies, the king, although angered, concedes into their request, but tells them that he would do whatever he wanted, no matter the prayers of the Church.[236] Even the pope, in Eadmer's narrative, is not safe from the king's scorn. When he is told that Urban has passed away, he comments: "And God's hatred with him who cares."[237]

The king's treatment of Anselm, however, was a matter much closer to the heart of the chronicler than what he thought of the pope. On the very day of Anselm's accession, the king is reported to have sent Flambard to institute a suit against Anselm, thus disrupting the festivities of the day, much to the distress of all present.[238] The king was effectively disturbing not only a day of celebration, but undermining a part of the ritual that confirmed the archbishop as the new occupant of the see and introduced him to the convent he was henceforth to govern. The intrusion of the king's ministers on such a day must be read as a gesture that not only lacked respect, but also underlined the total control that the king claimed over 'his' ecclesiastical property. This is fully in line with the king being portrayed as showing absolutely no qualms about publicly and very humiliatingly asserting his dominance over Anselm: although his clerk had spent days in the company of the archbishop, never speaking a word of his purpose, he does not begin to search Anselm's possessions until his ship is about to leave, searching through every item of the luggage in front of the crowd that has assembled for the departure of the ship – doubtlessly, or so Eadmer attests, searching for money.[239] Not only would the king stoop so low to embarrass and humiliate Anselm, he is shown as being entirely unimpressed by the archbishop's famed sanctity. Talking with one of his magnates, he maintains (against the latter's protestations) that (even) Anselm would come running if he were offered the archbishopric of Canterbury. Yet, the king adds, it would not matter presently, for he would have no archbishop there but himself.[240] At this remark, he is struck down with the illness during which he appoints

[235] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Pontificum Anglorum, i. 63.1, p. 188.
[236] Cf. Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 29.
[237] Ibid., p. 115: *"Et Dei odium habeat, qui inde curat."*
[238] Cf. ibid., p. 41.
[239] Cf. ibid., p. 88.
[240] Cf. ibid., p. 30.

Anselm as archbishop. This story is mirrored in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, although there it loses the aspect of praise for Anselm. Orderic simply claims that God had struck down the king because of the long-enduring vacancy of the see of Canterbury.[241]

The king's profound disrespect for the divine does not halt at omens or prophetic dreams, of which there are plenty that precede and foretell his death. Every writer agrees with the interpretation of his death in the New Forest as a judgement of God.[242] The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle precedes the king's death with a particularly destructive flood and blood welling up from a pool.[243] Orderic Vitalis fills the New Forest, whose creation under William I had necessitated the demolition of (a very much exaggerated) 60 parishes, with terrible visions of divine anger,[244] and precedes his account of the king's hunting trip with countless dream visions occurring to monks, a preacher scolding the effeminate ways of the elite, proclaiming that God's judgement would soon strike them. He even adds the very straightforward dream of a monk who witnesses the shining virgin of the Church throwing herself before Jesus, enthroned and surrounded by the armies of heaven and a choir of saints, begging to be relieved of William Rufus' yoke. The Lord, within the dream, replies that she would soon be avenged. Orderic masterfully shapes the story: an abbot writes a letter of warning to the king, explaining the vision. The king, who had just unwittingly given the sharpest arrows to the man who knew how to fire deadly shots – and who eventually would kill him with one of these very arrows– bursts into roaring laughter *(cachinnum resolutus est)* when he hears of the abbot's warning, derisively mocking it, and setting off.[245] The message is clear: he is offered a last chance of salvation and utterly discards it. His end is far from what a good Christian might wish for: he dies suddenly, without any possibility of arranging setting his affairs in order, obtaining the sacrament or confessing his sins. After his noble attendants have fled, he is covered by servants with cheap rags and dragged, like a wild boar, towards the next town. The prelates proclaim him beyond redemption, no alms are given to the poor, no bells are sounded to mourn his passing.[246]

Going even further, Eadmer turns the king's death into a lesson in divine justice. Recalling that the king had said, after he had broken the promises made on his sickbed, that God would not see him become good in return for the evil he had done to him, he explains, God had heaped good upon the king, to see whether he would become good in return. Hence his successes in war, hence his fortune with the winds of the sea, hence his universal prosperity – instead, however, the king only became a worse man. Thus, as the monarch was not to be disciplined by either good or bad fortune, God had him struck down, so that he could no longer corrupt good men.[247]

---

[241] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 4, book VIII, ch. 8, iii. 314, p. 176.
[242] Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VIII-10, p. 216; Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch.15, iv. 86, p. 286-288; Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 116-117; Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 364; Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 235-236 (D-version).
[243] Cf. Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 364; Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 235 (D-version).
[244] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 14, iv. 82-83, p. 284. The Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VIII-9, p. 216, repeats the story, claiming, like Orderic, that the forest took the lives of two of the Conqueror's sons for that very reason.
[245] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 5, book X, ch. 15, iv. 83-86, p. 284-288.
[246] Cf. ibid., iv. 89-90, p. 292.
[247] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 116-117.

There can be no doubt that Eadmer, and to a certain extent also Orderic, used the king's death as an opportunity to stage, one last time, the king's notoriety with regard to his morals and treatment of the Church. Especially Orderic's death scene is a meticulously polished example of a narrative of evil, unchristian death. Such elaborateness and care in the depiction does not reflect particularly well on the king's behaviour as a whole. The critique of William Rufus' treatment of the Church, although not always as entirely damning as the interpretation penned by Eadmer, is present in every chronicle, and in its most crucial points – the prolonged vacancies, the renting out of the churches, the death by divine judgement – as unanimous as in any way conceivable.

*Henry I and the Church*

When it came to matters ecclesiastical, the reign of Henry I started very advantageously, with the king seizing upon the chance of grandiosely and ostentatiously turning over a fresh leaf, overriding and countermanding his deceased brother's policy. New bishops were appointed, and Anselm was recalled from exile. The fact that he was to leave again soon after did not prevent such exultant comments as that of the Worcester chronicle: "on the day of his anointment, he made free the Church of God"[248]. Apart from his role as a preserver of peace and saviour of the Norman Church, reports of the ecclesiastical affairs of Henry I are centred on his confrontation with Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury (thanks to Eadmer's diligent pen, very graphically so) and Archbishop Thurstan of York; in political terms, the ecclesiastical policy of the reign revolved around the issue of investiture and the primacy dispute between Canterbury and York in which the king, probably unwillingly, had to take an arbiting role.

The road towards the investiture compromise, as Eadmer describes it, is a rocky one; it sports a vengeful pope, a deceitful prince, and, most prominently, a humble, saint-like archbishop, over whose tender head the struggles of the mighty raged, while he himself remained a tower of strength and loyalty. Anselm had, as single remaining ally to the monarch, helped to thwart the advance of Robert Curthose by reprimanding the king's nobles of wavering loyalty. While doing so, he had been most solemnly promised obedience to papal decrees and all rights in handling the affairs of the English Church. Only shortly after, he was summoned to the king's court – not, as many expected (read as implicated: "as would have been proper"!), to receive the due reward for his help, but to be confronted by a king who demanded that he do homage and consecrate the royally chosen bishops and abbots. To underline the enormity of this demand, Eadmer inserted a very verbose letter of the pope stating that the right of investiture could and would not be granted as a royal privilege. With ever new and more distinguished envoys and threats to have Anselm driven from England, the king proceeded to try and browbeat the pope into submission. Exasperated, the pope refuted the king's demands, sending the envoys home with one letter for the king and one for Anselm. Particularly interesting is that, although the royal threats went as far as to the revocation of English submission to the Church of Rome, the pope still placed Henry I's treatment of the Church well above that practised by William Rufus. He is made to state that the new king had left behind the impiety of his brother. The continuing investiture of bishops

[248] John of Worcester 3, p. 94: *"Qui consecratione die sanctam ecclesiam ... liberam fecit."*

was blamed on counsellors of perverse mind, allowing the king, should he eventually decide to comply with the pope's wishes, an elegant egress from blame. The pope's letter to Anselm is even more direct, contrasting the new king *(novi regis)* Henry I to the evil king *(perversi regis)*, William II.[249]

Despite the commending words of the pope, the king's demands were not granted. Henry I attempted another, less honourable route. When he, once more, asked Anselm to either cease withholding the customs of his father or leave the kingdom, the archbishop bid him to have the pope's letter publicly read. "Neither do I deal with the letters nor will I do so", the king replied flatly, to the great astonishment of many, who had their suspicions as to the contents of the letter. The bishops who had been sent as messengers swiftly confirmed that the king had been granted the privilege of investiture, albeit only in a verbal command, so that other princes would not demand the same treatment. Outrage ensued over the nefarious duplicity thus attributed to the apostolic see, and a fiery dispute flares up as to who was to be given greater credence: the words of monks and a papal letter or the words of bishops.[250] Eadmer himself did not explicitly judge the king's behaviour – but by the way he chooses to present the episode, it seems reasonable to assume that the meant the king's approach to be interpreted as deceitful.

Henry I would not stop his determined grasp for investiture there. The king's schemes, as presented by Eadmer, climaxed in an illegitimate and unfinished ritual. Although pressed hard by the king, Anselm refused to undertake the consecration of two out of three bishops, as the two in question had only recently been invested by the king. The task of consecration is thus delegated to the next highest prelate, the archbishop of York. Bereft of one of its most essential elements, the presence of the primate of England, the façade of the ritual began to crumble: having heard that the archbishop of York was to consecrate them, one of the future bishops returned staff and ring to the king, regretting that he had unjustly taken them *(injura suscepisso dolebat)*, knowing that he would receive a curse rather than a blessing *(sciens quia maledictionem pro benedictione susciperet)* if he condescended to receive such an office from the hands of the archbishop of York. The angered king excluded him from court and favour, and proceeded to have the two remaining candidates consecrated – but the ritual's legitimate basis had long gone. When the bishops had assembled and were ready to interrogate the candidates, one of the bishops-to-be, remorseful out of his love for justice, trembled, and rather chose to be bereft of everything than to bow his neck to such a great mystery being administered in the course of such a hideous service *(...et suis omnibus spoliari quam tam infando ministerio sub tanti mysterii administratione collum inclinare delegit)*. The consecration ceremony was broken off by the confused bishops, who, by the masses attending, were decried as "not bishops, but subverters of justice", and flee to the king, laying complaint before him of what had happened. The offending bishop-to-be then stood accused before the king, was despoiled of his possessions and driven from the kingdom, despite Anselm's frequent petitions to let him have a trial and justice. When the scene is seen as a narrative, Eadmer could

---

[249] The entire episode analysed here, from the king's threats and the royal letters to the failed ritual is found in Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 128-149. For the papal appeal to Henry I, see ibid., p. 128-131; for the papal letter to Anselm, see p. 135-136.
[250] Ibid., p. 137-138.

hardly have found a more effective way to point out the extent of the king's error. The stable, time-honoured framework of the ritual provided the perfect stage to demonstrate the inefficiency of royal wilfulness. The king had attempted, by means of his faithful henchmen, the bishops of the realm, to subvert ecclesiastical ritual in direct contradiction of the pope's orders. In that, he had failed fatally, the sacredness of the ritual not bearing such abuse. Headstrong as he was, he even punished a man whose only crime was to have listened to his conscience, abandoning all justice as he does so. A further parley with Anselm, but little later, had the exasperated king exclaim that the pope had no say in things that were his, and if he wanted to rob him of them, he was his enemy. Ultimately, the patient Anselm left England, not having been able to resolve the matter before the king, but not bereft of his possessions and cast out, either.[251]

While no one reports these events quite as emphatically as Eadmer, the story of the bishops' refusal to be accepted into their office by such wrong means is retold in both the *Gesta Pontificum* and the Worcester chronicle, the act being described as a crime *(scelus)* in the first instance,[252] its acceptance as an insult to God (*se Deum offendisse)* in the other.[253] Of the two, only William of Malmesbury alludes to one of the bishops retracing his steps at the very verge of the consummation of the ritual. Indeed, his entire depiction closely follows that of Eadmer, but, while reiterating the same chain of events, is noticeably more sober in its narration.[254]

The writer does, however, in a more detailed fashion describe the attempts of the king's envoy William Warelwast to coax and threaten the pope on behalf of the king. The envoy is shown to underline the specialness *(peculiarem)* of England among the pope's provinces, a kingdom that paid its tribute yearly. Its king, he cajoles, was magnanimous and generous. The pope would do well to be careful of the honour of a king *(prouideret ... regis honori)* who exceeded his forebears in wealth and greatness of spirit, and see to his own interests as well, for undoubtedly he would find himself robbed of a large source of revenue if he did not relax the severity of his canons. He closes his threats and assertions of the king's terrible greatness with the statement that his lord would not suffer the investitures to be taken from him, not even if it should lose him his kingdom.[255] It would have been interesting to see how (and if) this dialogue had been reported, had the pope answered the king's threats with anything but indignant rejection. As it is, William of Malmesbury presents the pope as remaining steadfast in the face of an awe-inspiring, powerful king, for whom such threats might otherwise well have worked, seeing how often his wealth and power a remarked upon.

Not all chroniclers shared the hard stance of Eadmer (and William of Malmesbury, respectively). Hugh the Chanter, in his history of York, presents an infinitely more relaxed view on the entire matter, stating that the king eventually gave up investitures, which hardly infringed his power. The concession, he writes, may have cost him a little of his royal dignity (*parum regie dignitatis)*, but took nothing of his power to enthrone any candidate of his choice. He proceeds to

---

[251] For the failed ritual and the stage of the investiture dispute analysed here, see Eadmer, Historia Novorum, 128-149. The failed ritual analysed here is found on p. 144-146.
[252] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Pontificum, i.58.3, p. 178.
[253] John of Worcester 3, p. 104.
[254] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Pontificum, i. 55.3/58-i.58.3, p. 168-179.
[255] Ibid., i. 58.4-6, p. 180.

declare that it mattered little exactly how investiture was done – whether by ring, hand, staff or crumb, as it was not a sacrament that was conferred, but a transfer of secular possessions bestowed by the generosity of kings and princes *(munificencia regum et principum)*. The crucial point was rather that canonical election and free consecration were guaranteed, and no simony involved.[256] While this depiction can certainly also be read as a criticism of the king's great power, it is interesting to see the writer considering the temporalities conferred through investiture as a generous boon rather than possessions due to the churches by right, and setting so little store by the symbolic struggle taking place between Rome and the king. A testament, perhaps, that to those who were either not fervent followers of ecclesiastical reform (like many of the bishops, who continued to support their king) or far removed from the epicentre of the struggle, the matter of investiture mattered relatively little.

The second greater ecclesiastical dispute the king had to face, the matter of Archbishop Thurstan of York and his refusal to make his profession to Canterbury, reflects far better on him, although it, too, involves a cleric of the highest rank being exiled from the kingdom. There is little to wonder in that. Small, after all, was the connection between the interests of Henry I and the inner hierarchy of the island's bishoprics, around which the conflict with Thurstan revolved. It is Thurstan's absence that reveals some of Eadmer's heavy bias: in favour of the Canterbury primacy, he treats Thurstan's absence with a degree of sobriety that is highly unusual for him, presenting the pontifical letters to the case, but not displaying any of the passion that so feverishly pervades his accounts of an exiled Anselm and the ensuing dismal state of shepherdless Canterbury. Shepherdless York, by comparison, he could apparently suffer easily.[257]

Where the *Historia Novorum* is passionless, the Worcester chronicle is disapproving, but not of the king. After hearing that he was either to submit to Canterbury or lose his see, the archbishop had renounced his bishopric hastily (*impremediatius)*, promised he would never try to reclaim it while he lived, and then, foregoing another pledge *(fide)* to the king that he would not do so, ultimately bribed his way to consecration at the Apostolic See – which caused the king to angrily forbid him entry into his domains.[258] In direct opposition to this view, Hugh the Chanter, in his history of the Church of York, quite naturally stands firmly behind his prelate, and employs a highly respectful and emotional king for the legitimation of Thurstan's actions. With the king (although it was he who was responsible for this wrong *(crimen)*) and all spectators in tears, Thurstan took the monarch's hand in his and resigned the archbishopric.[259] Thurstan crossed with the king to Normandy, where Henry I treated him honourably and did not want anyone to call him anything but archbishop, thus contradicting his own acts. The resigned archbishop himself, not desiring a long vacancy, asked the king to fill his seat with one who would not so obstinately go against the customs of the kingdom, but the king justly (*recte)* replied that he did not (yet) consider the see vacant.[260] Not only are the king and his archbishop apparently

---

[256] Hugh the Chanter, p. 22-25.
[257] Eadmer, Historia Novorum, p. 238-244. It must be said, however, that this latter part of the chronicle, after Anselm's death, is generally much more subdued in tone.
[258] John of Worcester 3, p. 138; ibid., p. 146.
[259] Hugh the Chanter, p. 70.
[260] Ibid., p. 76.

communicating on one level, the king is presented as a sympathetic figure rather than as an oppressor, himself prey to the pretentiousness and scheming of Canterbury. If we compare this version of Henry I with the angry king from the Worcester chronicle and the uncaring account Eadmer, it becomes clear how little the incident would reflect on the king's reputation: he was a neutral figure of authority that was cast into whichever role supported the views of individual authors.

Generally, the king is depicted as dominant in his dealings with the Church. Orderic writes that, when he eventually condescended to allow his clerics to attend the council of Rheims, he set them rather clear limits, specifically when it came to beseeching the pope in suits against one another: "In my land, I will do fully right by all who bring forth a plea. Every year, I pay the Roman Church the revenues fixed by my predecessors, and still I hold on to the privileges that have, in the same way, been granted to me since ancient times. Go. Greet the lord pope on my behalf, and humbly listen to all the papal precepts, but do not desire to bring superfluous support into my kingdom."[261] He also did not flinch at claiming Canterbury's possessions for himself while the archbishop was in exile, but did so, as William of Malmesbury asserts, more "moderately" than his brother, assigning the see's administration work to the archbishop's men rather than to strangers.[262]

However, there is one instance in which Henry I does gain a nefarious aura. The aftermath of his death scene, as described by Henry of Huntingdon, is gruesome, and the royal death foretold in dark omens. While Henry I did not have to die alone and without having confessed, the circumstances under which his death was brought about are an accusation in itself. With a fatal lack of temperance, that key virtue, the king indulges in too much of the luxury food of lampreys, contrary to his doctor's orders, which brings on a malady from which he was not to recover. It is the post mortem fate of the royal body that suggests reading the narrative as not only a condemnation of all things worldly, but also as divine judgement passed on a bad. With gruelling detail that only underlines the frailty and vanity of the mortal shell, the writer depicts the king being gutted, salted and sewn up for transportation. Thus prepared, the royal body, despite its costly adornments is presented as a pestilential, oozing cadaver whose foul stench causes the death of men, in much the same way that Henry I, while alive, had taken the life of many men.[263]

---

[261] Orderic Vitalis 6, book XII, ch. 21, iv.373, p. 252: *"'Omni plenariam rectitudinem conquerenti faciam in terra mea. Redditus ab anterioribus meis constitutos Romanae aecclesiae singulis annis erogo, et priuilegia nichilominus ab antiquis temporibus pari modo michi concessa teneo. Ite. Dominum papam de parte mea salutate, et apostolica tantum precepta humiliter audite, sed superfluas adinuentiones regno meo inferre nolite.'"*

[262] Cf. William of Malmesbury, Gesta Pontificum, i. 60, p. 182.

[263] Cf. Henry of Huntingdon, x.2 (p. 702-705). For his death as such, still without the dire warnings of the transitory state of life that Henry of Huntingdon's later depiction would add to it, see ibid., vii.41-44 (p. 488-493). The dramatic death scene has, of course, been frequently interpreted. See Lohrmann, Tod König Heinrichs I. for an interpretation that is entirely in favour of Henry I, vindicating that medieval authors aimed to imply the "weak" reign of Stephen by portents in the reign of Henry I. A more recent essay, Clarke, Writing Civil War, p. 33-34, interprets Henry I's fetid death not only as criticism of the king's moral character, but also maintains that the unburied, corrupting body may have been intended as a suggestion of future evils, "a suggestion of the dereliction of proper duties and abandonment of ordinary decency to come". Ignoring the dark portents Henry of Huntingdon included in his work, Church, Aspects of the English Succession, p. 32, notes that the burial of Henry I was much more elaborate and ceremonially adequate than that of any of his predecessors, with more than a month elapsing between his death and the burial. It is difficult to see, however, why Henry I should be assumed to have been buried with more ceremonial than, for instance, his father had been. The chronicle material is, admittedly, much briefer, but the burial of William

Henry of Huntingdon's death scene is the only instance in which the king is presented in such a way, and it differs from the rest of the writer's assessment of the king. Still, it is there – and constitutes a definite stain on the royal character.

The king that fiercely argues and browbeats his way to a compromise in lay investiture in the *Historia Novorum* is a wilful and domineering personality, bent on maintaining his power at (almost) any cost, not even eschewing to instrumentalise the sacredness of ecclesiastical ritual, but, and that is crucial, he is never portrayed as irreverent. It is made clear that the king has no wish for papal interventions in his domains, will not suffer any of his customs and rights to be touched, and often treats the Church as a partner on eye-level rather than as a superior shepherd. Yet such declarations are usually bound up with a reference to the dues he was annually paying to the Holy See, never with the king professing his disregard for churchmen or the Church. Henry I is portrayed as giving reverence where and when he saw it was due: it is with the contemptuous sneer that his mercy was due to nothing but the respect for the monastic habit he was wearing outwardly that he allows an abbot who had attempted to lure him into a trap to go free;[264] and, meeting Pope Calixtus II in Normandy, he honourably receives him and falls prostrate at his feet in humble acknowledgement of the man's great office.[265] Beyond such gestures, Henry I's royal piety is expressed mainly in financial bequests and foundations.[266] William of Malmesbury writes of the king building monasteries in England and Normandy, especially celebrating the foundation of Reading Abbey.[267] The *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* jubilantly proclaims how the king built a number of monasteries, endowing the religious with foundations and donations – and recounts how the royal patronage was not confined to his own realm, but rather extended well beyond it. The king, the writer recounts, had made donations to a number of monastic houses in France.[268] While the gesture might be read as portraying the king as so devout that his interest in erecting ecclesiastical buildings goes beyond pleasing and awing his subjects, it can also be read as both an appropriating gesture towards Normandy and a humbling gesture towards other realms: here was a king of such wealth that he could spread it even beyond the confines of his realm. In his dealings with the Church, Henry I generally fulfilled what was expected of him – and it is advantageous for his depiction that the greater conflicts of his time were, eventually, resolved.

I, even with its disturbances that were to be recounted in detail by Orderic Vitalis and William of Malmesbury (see the chapter on William I as story), seems a ceremonially thoroughly sound affair.

264 Cf. Orderic Vitalis 6, book XI, ch. 19, i. 223, p. 82.

265 Cf. ibid., book XII, ch. 24, iv. 398-399, p. 282.

266 Green, The Piety and Patronage of Henry I, explores the reasons behind the patronage of the king, noting that it did not seem exceptionally noteworthy to chroniclers (p. 4), that it increased after the tragedy of the White Ship (p. 1) and may often have been motivated by political considerations (p. 9-10).

267 Cf. Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book V-413, p. 746; Gesta Pontificum, ii. 89 (p. 304) lauds the abbey of Reading without mentioning any of the king's other foundations and donations.

268 Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 2, book VIII-32, p. 252-257.

*Stephen and the Church*

Not unlike his predecessor, Stephen is involved with the Church primarily on what might be termed a 'political' level. Motives of governance and cooperation rather than portrayals of personal piety dominate the depictions of his treatment of the Church. His relationship to the Church being of such a pragmatic nature, it is hardly surprising that it is interpreted in a variety of ways, bent into whatever shape seems suitable – and there is no event in which this is more clearly visible than in the capture of the bishops in the king's court.

Accounts of the event find their way into every contemporary chronicle, and cover the entire range from objectivity to condemnation and guilty praise.[269] The Hexham Chronicle, in a rather fatalistic manner, describes the capture – including irreverent treatment and food deprivation in its description – as barely more than the top of an iceberg; as symptomatic of a society that thought little of the Church, and was severely in need of correction.[270] It is remarkable to see how Orderic Vitalis, perhaps one of the most neutral sources on Stephen's reign – not least because he was writing without hindsight, having died in the first half of the king's rule – describes the event. The bishops, he writes, were suspected of betraying the king and supporting the Angevins, they had amassed vast quantities of wealth and power, and had begun to harass the neighbouring magnates. Thus plagued, many conspired against them. According to Orderic, this was done by inciting a quarrel between the party of the bishops and the vengeful magnates, in the aftermath of which two bishops were captured. The matter ends on a conciliatory note with the contested castles being given up in the face of the king's threats, and the bishops returning "in peace to their parishes".[271]

There are yet more versions. "The action of the king", writes William of Malmesbury so very fittingly, "opened the mouths of many to express different opinions." There were some who thought the bishops' capture justified on account of them having built and maintained castles in defiance of canon law, and some who claimed that, no matter what they had done, the king had no right whatsoever to judge them for it, especially not if it was evident that he acted out of self-interest rather than righteousness, and gave the castles to laymen rather than to the churches who had paid for their construction. The author's opinion – despite his efforts of portraying the proceedings against the bishops fairly objectively, and allowing space for the king's arguments for

---

[269] The accounts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Worcester Chronicle are not discussed in the following, as they do not overtly attempt to portray the king's actions in a certain light. While the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle uses no more than a sentence to sum up that the king had seized and imprisoned several bishops (cf. Thorpe, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 1, p. 382; Swanton, Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 263, E-Version), the Worcester Chronicle uses considerable more space for the incident, detailing the king's disparaging treatment of the bishops, one of whom was allegedly housed in a cowshed's crib, the other in a mean hut, and the the king threatened the hanging of the third (cf. John of Worcester 3, p. 244-249). While these are, of course, points that might be seen to damage the king's reputation, they are, contrary to the other examples drawn up here, not 'utilised' as such within the narrative framework of the Worcester Chronicle.

[270] Cf. John of Hexham, p. 124-125.

[271] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 6, book XIII, ch. 40, v. 119-121, p. 530-534: *"Denique pacificatis omnibus oppidum regi redditum est, et episcopi cum pace ad parrochias suas reuersi sunt."* The main antagonist of Orderic Vitalis' description of the bishop's capture is the "haughty" bishop of Ely, who is proclaimed a "public enemy" after the death of his uncle. It should be noted that the account does feature Stephen advancing, in a rage, against the castle of Devizes, and that the fortress was only surrendered after the mother of Roger le Poer, whom the king would have hanged, broke under the strain and caused the surrender of the castle. Nonetheless, the depiction of Stephen's behaviour in the conflict remains remarkably neutral.

the seizing of the ecclesiastics – is made abundantly clear in the prelude he inserts before his copious rendering of the episode: it was the "poison of malice", long nurtured in Stephen's heart, that at last became visible for everyone as he tried to recompense for the losses he had suffered when many deserted his cause to join the empress. Only later does William of Malmesbury add that it was the magnates' envy of the bishops' castles that made them persuade him to take action. That, however, is no absolution in the proper sense: the chronicler criticizes that the king was too easily persuaded out of his favour for these magnates, and that his hesitation before seizing upon the bishops was due more to fear of exposing himself than out of any true regard for religion. He sharpens this criticism by turning the victims into 'proper' churchmen. The bishop of Salisbury, criticized elsewhere for his inclination to worldliness, is portrayed as calling on Mary, professing, with a sense of foreboding, that he was reluctant to set out to the king's court but knew not why; stressing his ecclesiastical status and disregard for worldly things by claiming to be "as useful at court as a colt in battle".[272]

What follows the bishops' capture is devastating for the king's cause, as his brother, papal legate and bishop of Winchester, begins to unravel the royal crimes against canon law in a blazing speech – the crimes of a king, he notes, that had been raised to the throne by the Church. He elaborates on the humiliation the bishops had suffered, the breaking of the court's peace and ensuing plundering of churches. He asserts that the incarceration and disowning of bishops were crimes of such magnitude that they were quite unheard of; deeds truly belonging to the times of pagans *(gentilium quippe seculorum opus esset)*. Notwithstanding various bishops having been incarcerated in the more recent past, and about to be incarcerated again in the not-so-distant future, the case is argued in a council which the king had agreed to attend, and is, arguments for either side having been brought forth, pronounced concluded in favour of the king by the archbishop of Rouen, who rules that either the bishops were not allowed to possess castles in the first place, or, if indeed they had been allowed to do so by the grace of the king, they were obliged to open them to him if he required them for the keeping of peace. After a royal threat not to appeal to Rome, the meeting breaks up, and the way in which it does so does not reflect well on the king: the bishops hear and see swords being drawn, the game of words having become a struggle for life and blood. The legate and the archbishop of Canterbury embark on a last attempt to resolve the quarrel, and, weeping and supplicatory at the king's feet in his private chamber, beg him to take pity on the Church, his soul and reputation – despite the promises they

[272] On proclaiming utter incapability in dealing with secular matters as a mark of good prelate, see Weiler, Rex renitens, p. 22. Since the main argument against the bishop of Salisbury was his alleged worldliness as well as his courtly schemes and castle-building that aimed to amass power, this statement, recurring lightly on the topos of a man of the church lost and useless amid the fickleness of court, appears aimed to destabilise any such arguments brought forth in the king's defence. For the incident of the bishop's capture until this moment, see William of Malmesbury, Historia Novella, ii. 22-24, p. 45-51, translated quotations by Potter/King.

could elicit through this act, evil advice saw to it that the king fulfilled none of them.[273] The sequence is remarkable: on the one hand, because it takes place not in public, but rather in the king's private chamber (*cubiculo)*, after the official meeting has been disbanded and (so the implication), the majority of the audience is no longer present. The king, despite having graced the *deditio* with his promises, seems rather unabashed about not adhering to what he had said. On the other hand, despite this privacy, the king's refusal threatens to have very real consequences: nothing less, the two ecclesiastics proclaim, than the *discidium inter regnum et sacerdotium*, an interpretation of the events that a number of historians have come to share. What is less remarkable about the proceedings is that, like so many things that transpire in private chambers, the exchange seems to have rather soon passed into general knowledge.

It is Henry of Huntingdon who also presents the scene of supplication, albeit taking it out of its private context and adding a considerable number of participants. In his version, not only the legate and the archbishop fall at the king's feet, but also all the bishops present at the council, entreating the king to return the bishops' possessions to be forgiven his offences. The outcome is the same, but the king even sterner: omitting the redeeming show of royal grace still present in the *Historia Novella*, which should be the response to such symbolic supplication, Henry of Huntingdon remarks tersely: *nichil eos impetrare permisit.* With the king's utter disregard for the adequate formulae of such events thus portrayed, the chronicler feels justified to prophesy darkly that this was the reason for the house of Stephen being eventually exposed to condemnation.[274] His treatment of the capture of the bishops is much shorter, allowing no room for the king's arguments, speaking instead of an act of infamy: the king violently seized the bishops after he had peacefully received them into his court, denied them the trial they begged for, and tortured them into giving up their castles – all that despite the services they had rendered him when he acceded to the throne.[275]

With this background, it is not overly surprising that the infamous council that pronounced the king as free of guilt is not given much room in the *Gesta Stephani*. The writer chooses a different way to present Stephen in a favourable light. One part of this strategy is to portray the king as penitent. At the council, the king makes his excuses, and, the arguments of either side being neither recited nor refuted, the case is decided rather quickly with the simple sentence that, no matter the reasons, the king was not to lay hands on a man of the Church. And Stephen is sufficiently remorseful, mollifying the Church's judgement by a submission that is perfect in every degree of its performativity: the king puts aside his royal garb to humble himself, and his deep inner repentance is shown by his lamenting spirit and remorseful heart; marked, by the

[273] Ibid., ii. 25-30, 52-59. The supplication scene deserves to be quoted in full: *"Suppliciter enim pedibus regis in cubiculo affusi, orauerunt ut misereretur animae et famae suae, nec pateretur fieri discidium inter regnum et sacerdotium. Ille dignanter assurgens, quanuis a se facti eorum amoliretur inuidiam, malorum tamen preuentus consiliis, nullam bonarum promissionum exhibuit efficatiam."* William of Malmesbury's statement that the king had removed what the ecclesiastics' act had laid upon him indicates that he did conform to the prescribed course of the supplication by raising the supplicants and agreeing to their request. That he kept none of these solemn promises is a severe accusation. Stephen's acts, according to William of Malmesbury, did have even more unpleasant effects: at a later stage, he reports that Roger bishop of Salisbury had died because of the mental damage he had sustained in his confrontation with the king (cf. ibid. p. 64).
[274] Henry of Huntingdon, x. 11 (p. 722): *"Ob quod patefacta est domus regis Stephani finitime condempnationi."*
[275] Cf. Henry of Huntingdon, x. 10 (p. 719-721). Robert of Torigni's account is a downsized version of Henry of Huntingdon's account, and therefore largely similar, see Robert of Torigni, p. 136.

explicit reference to his emotions, as something that is not simply 'for show' but heartfelt. His submission done, he accepts the sentence the Church passes on him[276] – a sentence which, after this interlude, is bound to be much less harsh than it might otherwise have been.

The prelude leading up to the capture in the *Gesta* is considerably longer, and more elaborate than that of any other contemporary writers, and it constitutes the second part of the *Gesta's* strategy in whitewashing Stephen: incrimination. Roger of Salisbury is described as a duplicitous villain, perfunctorily keeping faith with the king while maintaining a spirited exchange with the children of Henry I, for whom he filled his castles with weapons and supplies. Like his nephews, unbecomingly dedicated to warfare and worldly pomp, he prances about with a large retinue of guards. It is not the king but his advisors who conceive the plan to arrest the bishops. Their argumentation is clear and biblically founded: the bishops were to be arrested not as bishops, but as "violators of episcopal placidity"; their castles by right pertained to Caesar and should be restored to him. At long last, the king yields; and despite the *Gesta's* frequent assertions of the bishops' perfidy, it does not deem the move entirely justified, attesting that he was doubtlessly *(nimirum)* overcome by the most foolish *(stultissimo)*, even insane *(insano)* advice which would eventually lead to a display of irreverent violence *(irreuerentiam uiolentiae)* against the Church's highest ministers. What follows, however, is surprising. Far from attempting to maintain any justification for Stephen, the chronicler works himself into a righteous rage more condemning than anything the empress' supporters had mustered, citing an abundance of passages from the Bible that illustrate both the absolute scandal of going against God's ministers and the disgrace suffered by those who did not respect them. When he returns to the narrative, he portrays the king's magnates and knights attacking the bishops, capturing, slaying and putting to flight their retainers and violently seizing them and their property – all of which passes without so much as a suggestion of the king or his reaction. Stephen does not enter the action until he perceives the defensive reaction of the Bishop of Ely, in which he inevitably recognises that of which his counsellors had warned him, and is consequently stirred to greater indignation *(uehementiori indignatione)*.[277] While the narrative makes the king's anger seem reasonable, it does not omit any of the hardships the bishops suffered: their dishonourable lodgings, their being exposed to tormenting hunger and threatened with one of their number being hanged unless they surrender their castles. At last, they rendered to Caesar what was his – laying off *inanis gloriae pompositatem* and returning to holding their property in the simple manner of churchmen. That last jab at the bishops' worldliness precedes the king's supplication and promise of atonement.[278] The *Gesta* retains this conciliatory tone on the king's actions, later practically revelling in the death of Roger Bishop of Salisbury as it once more uses the occasion to denounce the bishop's style of living which swallowed up his otherwise abundant virtue, and almost gleefully discloses the incredible

[276] Gesta Stephani, p. 80: *"Sed quia ab omni clero iuste prouisum et discrete fuit diiudicatum, nulla ratione in christos Domini manus posse immittere, ecclesiastici rigoris duritiam humilitatis subiectione molliuit, habitumque regalem exutus, gemensque animo et contritus spiritu, commissi sententiam humiliter suscepit."*

[277] That the king's sentiment was, if perhaps not justified, then at least comprehensible, might also be indicated by the use of *indignatio* rather than *furor* or *ira* to describe his feelings, as the latter tend to be used more often in conjunction with unreasonable turmoil of emotion, while *indignatio* more frequently bears the connotation of an anger that is, in a way, more considered.

[278] Gesta Stephani, p. 72-81.

amount of money and treasure that his passing left to Salisbury Cathedral. This allows for Stephen to be presented from his most pious side, as the church's canons willingly offer the treasure trove to him. The king puts the treasure to ecclesiastically approved use by roofing the church, seeing to the needs of the canons and restoring pastors to the churches the late bishop had put to other uses, thus restoring two churches to their former splendour.[279]

Rather than elaborately exculpating Stephen, the chronicler plunges ahead, admitting everything Stephen's adversaries blamed on him, and more. Ultimately, Stephen is presented as a man with good intentions, who found himself in unfortunate circumstances and surrounded by suspicious counsellors. This is a direct parallel to the depiction of the king at the onset of his reign, when the grievances of the Church were laid before him in the hope of improvement. It was, according to the chronicle, owed to the dictates of need and perverse counsellors that the king's promises could not be kept.[280]

Rendering Stephen a king who would be a ruler to the Church's liking if only he had been given a chance is a viewpoint relatively unique to the *Gesta Stephani,* but it should also be noted that complaints of irreligion and irreverence – apart from the capture of the bishops – are scarce. William of Malmesbury, with much greater pragmatism, comments that Stephen's way to the throne had been eased by his brother, the legate of the apostolic see, in the hope (and demanding the promise) that the new king would treat the Church as it should be treated, but that he was quick to disregard these promises.[281] Dutifully, the chronicler inserts Stephen's coronation charter, which elaborately sets out, confirms and swears to protect the privileges of the Church – only to comment resignedly that there was no point in listing the witnesses, as the king kept nothing of what he had promised; churches, through the fault of his counsellors, soon being plundered, sold and pressed for money.[282] Henry of Huntingdon is considerably more critical, styling the king's attempt to have his son crowned as his successor as an episode reminiscent of the bishops' capture. As the clergy had received orders from Rome not to crown Eustace, the king finds his plan foiled, and, *ira nimia feruescens*, seething with fury, the king has the realm's leading ecclesiastics locked up so as to compel them to follow his orders. The clergymen thus imprisoned are very much intimidated, even fearing for their lives in their resistance, "for King Stephen had certainly never loved the clergy and some time before had put two bishops into prison." Yet the king's attempt is a feeble one, and as the bishops maintain their resistance, they are soon released, albeit bereft of their possessions, which the king, penitently, returns to them later.[283]

The renditions of the bishops' capture and the king's attempt to forcefully break the resistance of his prelates are the very definite dents that can be made out in Stephen's relation to the Church. For the rest of his reign, criticism that could be considered to be of similar magnitude is

[279] Cf. ibid., p. 96-99. Since the churches concerned are Malmesbury and Abbotsbury, one is tempted to ask why William of Malmesbury mentions none of the relief that might have come from the church being assigned a pastor again.
[280] Cf. ibid., p. 27-29.
[281] William of Malmesbury, Historia Novella, i. 15, p. 28-30.
[282] Ibisd., i. 18-19, p. 34-36.
[283] Henry of Huntingdon, x.32 (p. 758-759); quoted translation by Greenway, p. 759.

scarcely found at all, as writers strove to capture the ever-changing fortunes of the war with Matilda. Neither, however, did they record spectacular acts of piety on Stephen's part, or comment verbosely on the foundations of monastic houses that the king undertook. Indeed, apart from the re-allocation of the treasury of the Bishop of Salisbury, the only chronicle even remotely impressed with the king's religious generosity is the Worcester Chronicle, which favourably notes the king presenting his ring as a gift while visiting the city.[284] However, one thematic complex associated with religion abounds in narratives of Stephen's reign: omens – most of them bad. William of Malmesbury orchestrates Stephen's initial arrival in England with a completely unseasonal bout of thunder and lightning, so severe that it seemed as if the world was about to end. He also foreshadows his impending capture with an eclipse of the sun.[285] The Hexham Chronicle remarks that the kiss of peace was omitted during Stephen's coronation, and later claims that it was providence that caused Henry II to come to the rescue of the kingdom, and either helped or hindered Stephen's moves.[286]

The use of these omens is best illustrated in the singular example of the celebration of Mass before the battle of Lincoln, which, the incident being recorded by three independent writers, must have been a fairly widespread tale. Orderic Vitalis, Henry of Huntingdon and the *Gesta Stephani* recount the misfortune that befell the king when he was holding a candle during the service, but each writer puts the episode to another narrative use. In Orderic's version, the candle breaks and falls three times, which, in the balanced and compassionate narrative, is interpreted as a sign of the king's impending capture, which was to bring misery upon many.[287] For Henry of Huntingdon, who favoured the king's opponents, it heralded Stephen's defeat, downfall and ruin.[288] In the *Gesta Stephani*, finally, the candle never actually fell, but rather went out and broke in the king's hand while he held onto it. Even as he held on, it was mended and relit. In stark contrast to Henry of Huntingdon's version, which sees not only the candle break but also witnesses the pyx tumbling to the ground, and also in contrast to Orderic's exclamation of despair, *this* depiction of the omen does not break off with the candle dramatically in the focus of attention, does not leave the congregation staring breathless at the incapacitated stick of wax while doom unfolds overhead, but breaks the dramatic tension by simply continuing the ceremony in a way in which it might quite probably have been continued. The most crucial ritual that is Mass is not broken off, merely interrupted. Thus, the broken candle can take on a much more positive meaning, the chronicler assuring that while it meant Stephen would lose his kingdom, it also signified that, because it was mended, he would receive it back – and, because he did not let go of the candle, that he would continue to bear the name of king even though among

[284] For a discussion of the episode, see the chapter on Stephen's court, where it is analysed in conjunction with the royal splendour the king maintained.
[285] Cf. William of Malmesbury, Historia Novella, i. 15, p. 26-28, and ii. 38, p. 74.
[286] Cf. John of Hexham, p. 113: *"In cujus consecrationis celebritate omissum est dari osculum pacis."* See John of Hexham, p. 161-162, for Henry II being received by a priest with the kiss of peace, and the statement that he was perceived as the instrument of justice chosen by divine wisdom: *"Ingrediensque basilicam subito obvium habuit ministrum altaris, acceptumque a presbytero celebrante Divina misteria osculum pacis oblatum ab eo primus omnium ipse accepit. Contulit se ad eum Rodbertus comes de Legacestria, et sanioris consilii quidam proceres regni, videntes in eo sapientiam Dei ad faciendum judicium."*
[287] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 6, book XIII, ch. 43, v. 129, p. 544.
[288] Cf. Henry of Huntingdon, x.16 (p. 732). The incident is also discussed in the chapter dealing with Stephen's inner circle.

his enemies.[289]

All in all, the way in which Stephen's relation to the Church reflected on his reputation is difficult to judge. The capture of the bishops was seen, by many, as a scandal quite unprecedented and to be condemned in at least general terms, and caused a stir much greater than the capture of 'mere' secular magnates. Beyond this incident, which, given the background of the men thus captured, appears to have signified to contemporaries rather Stephen's lack of regard for the sacred ranks of the episcopacy rather than rampant irreligion. Religion does rarely feature in Stephen's reign, least of all as a virtue possessed or not possessed by the king. The simplest reasons might be that either there was nothing particularly remarkable about Stephen's practice of religion – or that there were more monumental things to report than the monarch's everyday piety. What is left, owed to various allusions of prophetic nature, is the vague feeling that, on a divine level, Stephen's kingship was not entirely approved of.

*Henry II and the Church*

If Stephen's capture of the bishops caused a stir, the actions of Henry II had even greater impact. Then as now, and very similar to the case of William Rufus and Anselm of Canterbury, it is notoriously difficult to separate contemporary views on the relation of Henry II to the Church from the way in which he treated Thomas Becket; difficult, and entirely counterproductive. For the majority of contemporary authors, Becket's struggle and martyrdom was the central element of the king's relation to the Church. Pages upon pages are filled with the Becket dispute, and even after his death, the martyred archbishop continued to be a decisive factor in many narratives. The events, certainly, made for great telling, and unquestionably the king himself – whether wittingly or unwittingly – was among those who made sure that it was a story that was worth the effort.

The figure of Thomas Becket and his struggle for the rights of the Church polarised even within the very restricted circle from which verdicts survive. William of Newburgh is an outstanding example of these diverging opinions. On the origin of the disparity between the king and his archbishop he commented that Henry II had been confronted with reports that a multitude of grave crimes – theft, murder and robbery, a hundred murders alone throughout his reign – had been and were committed by the English clergy, who stood outside his jurisdiction. "Severely agitated for that reason, and in the spirit of passion, he put down laws against the clerical malefactors, in which he did indeed have the zeal for common justice, but in their fervour immoderately exceeded moderation." But, he immediately concedes, lapsing into a sharp critique of the mannerisms of the clergy, the blame for the king's immoderation was to be attached to the bishops, who hoarded their privileges rather than correcting faults. William of Newburgh meticulously records that Henry II erupted in rage against the archbishop, who alone was unwilling to sign the Constitutions of Clarendon at the Council of Northampton, and how, raging *plusquam deceret principem*, he banished all those close to Becket. And yet, the writer maintains, he, for one, could find nothing to praise in the archbishop's actions, although they

[289] Gesta Stephani, p. 110-113.

certainly sprang from laudable zeal, for they served no purpose, but only aggravated the king's fury.[290] William of Newburgh's verdict is rather outstanding, but juxtaposed to the rendition of the events as they are portrayed, for instance, in the collected letters of Thomas Becket, it serves to accentuate how controversially the tug-of-war on the liberties of the Church between the king and the archbishop must have been seen.

If William of Newburgh stands at one end of the spectrum, Thomas Becket's collected letters certainly map out the other. They picture a king who would forcefully insist on the privileges he had obtained, which, according to the general opinion, were utterly preposterous and likely to contribute to the ruin of the entire Church, should other princes follow his example and attempt to obtain similar prerogatives.[291] The monarch is easily roused to great anger,[292] crowing about the temporary defeat Becket had suffered at his hands,[293] contemptuous of ecclesiastical punishment, unsparing in threats towards clergymen who interfered with his schemes[294] and willing to rage widely across the kingdom to assert his privileges.[295] Between the two ends of the spectrum, there is a variety of other views; even Becket's lives frequently included criticism of the archbishop.[296] A certain tone prevails: Becket's cause was just, but his ferocity in pursuing his ends would disconcert the more politically-minded, even on his own side – foremost among them the pope himself, who, in his letters, would continually urge the archbishop to exercise moderation and patience, with said archbishop continuously exhorting the holy father to abandon his laxity towards an altogether preposterous prince.[297]

Whatever stance contemporaries may have taken on the motivation and manner of his

---

[290] William of Newburgh, book 2, ch. 16, p. 140-143. The quotation translated above reads: "*Quamobrem acri motu turbatus, in spiritu vehementi contra malefactores clericos posuit leges, in quibus utique zelum justitiae publicae habuit, sed fervor immoderatior modum excessit.*"

[291] Cf. The Correspondence of Thomas Becket 1, letter 123, p. 586-594.

[292] Cf. ibid., letter 161, p. 752, in which Becket claims that the king would not even suffer his name to be spoken in court; letter 26, p. 80-85, which describes the king's explosive temper. See also The Correspondence of Thomas Becket 2, letter 227, p. 984.

[293] Cf. The Correspondence of Thomas Becket 1, letter 172, p. 788-791, describing how Henry II had Becket's suspension pronounced aloud everywhere in a show of triumph.

[294] Cf. ibid., letter 109, a letter written in defence of the English bishopric; p. 508-511 describes colourfully how the assembled bishops of England were threatened by the king's retainers when they conferred together at Clarendon, the men claiming their bodies were entirely at the king's disposal – as were, by implication, their weapons. Ibid., letter 166, p. 764-767, testifies the conflict the pope faced, as Henry II put forth *"terribiles minas"* to accompany the demands with which he confronted the pope, and the bishop of Rome feared the king might abandon the Church. The Correspondence of Thomas Becket 2, letter 227, p. 980, puts the rather sinister threat into the king's mouth that he would "do something" about the obstinate behaviour of the pope, mounting to more direct threats on p. 984, when Henry II claims that he feared neither excommunications nor interdicts – as one who might capture castles, he would well be able to capture single clerks. Ibid., letter 238, p. 1024, details how the king was planning to punish anyone who would carry the sentence of the interdict into England by death or mutilation.

[295] Cf. The Correspondence of Thomas Becket 1, letter 169, p. 771-773; ibid., letter 170, p. 778, with Becket prophesying that the king would keep up his awful extortions while the pope requested him to wait; The Correspondence of Thomas Becket 2, letter 177, p. 805-807 and ibid., letter 320, p. 1333-1335, especially detail the extortions Canterbury was subjected to at the hands of the king.

[296] For a thorough discussion of a selection of lives primarily as works of literature, with the criticism of Becket's struggle they entailed, see Staunton, Thomas Becket and his Biographers.

[297] Cf. The Correspondence of Thomas Becket 1, letter 119, p. 572, The Correspondence of Thomas Becket 2, letter 187, p. 828-833, letter 200, p. 868-869 and letter 277, p. 1180-1183. Alan of Tewkesbury similarly includes an episode into his narrative in which the cardinals of Rome, having received an embassy of Henry II, argue amongst themselves whether Becket should be regarded as a defender of the liberties of the Church or as a perturber of peace for provoking the king to an anger that might possibly prove to be destructive, cf. Alan of Tewkesbury (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 2, p. 337).

struggle, they did record it avidly, meticulously outlining the details, aware of unfolding a grand narrative in their writing.[298] The material certainly is impressive. In its consequences for the depiction of the king, it can be divided into several stages at which the king's behaviour was judged: at the proclamation of the Constitutions of Clarendon, the question was whether the king was justified in thus infringing the privileges of the clergy in the name of justice; at the Council of Northampton, it was his demeanour towards the accused archbishop; after Becket's flight and throughout his exile, the king's efforts to make peace counted as much as how he treated the exile and the land he had left behind; and, finally, with the assault of the four knights upon the archbishop, the focus lay very decidedly on the question of guilt, on determining whether or not the king had, in some way, willed or otherwise provoked the murder.

As far as the Constitutions of Clarendon were concerned, the one redeeming argument in the king's favour was his worry that justice might be disturbed by criminal clerks. Apart from the verdict given above, some of Becket's biographers would also testify the king's good intent. Herbert of Bosham lamented that the king's zeal for the public peace and good stood against the archbishop's zeal for the liberty of the Church, a prelate and a monarch, *quorum utrumque Dei apprehendit emulatio.*[299] Both were striving to do the right thing, emulating God in the way in which they understood their duty. Edward Grim allows the king to comment on the matter in direct speech, and has him maintain that he had sworn to keep peace and justice within the kingdom that had been entrusted to him by divine dispensation. In a passionate speech, the king outlines the harm enemies of justice who sought harbour with the Church did to the kingdom of England and its laws.[300] While there may have been multiple viewpoints as to the motivation that sparked them, the Constitutions themselves were clearly perceived as an outrage – there are many writers who either cite them in full or give the most crucial paragraphs.[301]

What was happening between Thomas Becket and Henry II after the initial discord was, according to the narratives, nothing short of symbolic warfare. At the council of Northampton, the memorable scene of Thomas Becket, summoned to court, who bore his cross into the presence of the king, thereby emphasising his status as clergyman (which ought, if he were to have his way, make him untouchable by the king's punitive justice) is widely and elaborately narrated; the significance of the scene wholly acknowledged by the individual writers. Most

[298] Staunton, Thomas Becket and his Biographers, p. 1-18, explores why the story of the chancellor-archbishop-martyred-saint provoked such great interest among contemporaries, causing an usually large number of biographies to be written shortly after the murder, and an immense collection of miracles to be accumulated. One of his most plausible theses is that Becket with his worldly onset and highly controversial struggle was simply such a contradictory saint that the lives were ways of coming to grips with what had happened, of understanding the man and the martyr. Arguably, the events were remarkable enough to justify such broad literary output even if the martyr had been a 'normal' saint. Contemporaries must have been aware that something of considerable import was happening; the murder of an archbishop in his cathedral being a rather unprecedented outrage that had, in some way, to be discussed and made sense of in writing.

[299] Herbert of Bosham (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 3., p. 272-273).

[300] Cf. Edward Grim (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 2, p. 386-387).

[301] On the perception of the Constitutions, see also Staunton, Thomas Becket and his Biographers, p. 97-106. An exception from the rule is, for instance, the Chronicle of Battle Abbey, p. 272-275, which only comments that the king was attempting to suppress the privileges of the Church, and that Thomas Becket stood against this attempt as a defensive bulwark. It should, however, be noted, that the primary interest of the chronicle lay in another field entirely, and in depicting the struggle, the author even concedes that he was including this very brief depiction of the events although they might seem to lead him far from his original topic.

included Becket's recitation of the Mass of Saint Stephen before he left for the king's court – in the best knowledge that their readers would be familiar with the saint's martyrdom, his passionate vindication speech of Christendom before assembled judges and subsequent murder. Many, to heighten the effect, would include the beginning words of the Mass "e*tenim sederunt principes, et adversum me loquebantur*" to make doubly sure the message came across.[302] The detail did not elude those present: Roger of Howden notes that the bishop of London had celebrated the Mass *per artem magicam, et in contemptu regis*.[303] It is a strange accusation for a bishop to bring forth against his metropolitan, but certainly provides testimony as to how charged the atmosphere had already become – and that Becket's act was understood as symbolic provocation. It portrayed the king as an unjust persecutor of a dedicated Christian; the claim that Becket had been stricken with illness the day before he was to meet with Henry II only adds to this accusation. The clash of symbols was taken to the next level in the archbishop's Christ-like bearing of the cross, an act from which various bishops sought to dissuade him, even tried to wrest the cross from him. Becket's mode of entrance is repeatedly referred to as *armatus cruce*. The king, of course, had other weaponry at his disposal, as the archbishop is reminded: he had a sharper sword.[304] To some extent, he did exercise it. With Becket fleeing England over night, Henry II was free to deal with the remnants of his life and see. One of his actions was to banish those close to the former chancellor; an action that was seen as condemnable fit of rage or irrational cruelty throughout.[305]

Yet Henry II, too, would use whatever symbolic means at his disposal to damage the archbishop. His greatest slight to the prelate's honour was the coronation of his son, Henry the Young King. Although the coronation was, by tradition, a (hotly vindicated) privilege of the archbishops of Canterbury, he had his son crowned by the archbishop of York – traditionally the rival for Canterbury's privileges. It was an affront that gave a further edge to the conflict, and resolving it had to precede any attempts at making peace. There have been numerous discussions of how the king withheld the kiss of peace at the conferences that were to re-establish amicable relations between the two,[306] thus effectually signalling that he was neither ready to forgive Becket, nor to accept the peace arrangements in the way in which they were presented to him.

---

[302] Staunton, Thomas Becket and his Biographers, p. 134-135, outlines the implications of this Mass, and how biographers, while pointing out which Mass Becket held, did not mention that the day would have called for a Mass to Edward, which would have underlined Henry II's claim to divinely endorsed kingship. See below for a discussion of how individual sources commented on the bearing of the cross and the reading of the Mass of St Stephen.

[303] Roger of Howden 1, p. 226.

[304] Ibid., p. 227. William of Newburgh also reports the Mass of Saint Stephen, but mentions the bearing of the cross without the exhortations of the other bishops, cf. book 2, ch. 16, p. 142. See also Alan of Tewkesbury (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 2, p. 330-331) for the Mass with its beginning words and the even more sinister (and prophetic) warning that if the king saw Becket thus armed, he would expose his stronger sword on Becket's head. Similar Edward Grim (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 2, p. 393-394), which includes Becket's protestations that the cross was not a weapon but a sign of peace, and he bore it because he wished for peace. See also William Fitzstephen (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 3, p. 56-57), Herbert of Bosham (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 3, p. 304-306) and Anonymous I (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 4, p. 45-47).

[305] See William of Newburgh's criticism above; Alan of Tewkesbury (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 2, p. 313-314) claims that the like had never before been read. The Chronicle of Battle Abbey, p. 274, calls the punishment of all those close to the archbishop the greatest crime (among innumerable others) committed by the king, as it turned even the aged and pregnant women to homeless wanderers.

[306] Reuter, 'Velle sibi fieri in forma hac'; Schreiner, Osculum pacis, p. 185-187, and, from the same author, "Rituale, Zeichen Bilder", p. 117-121. See also Warren, Henry II, p. 485-506.

Even at their long-awaited (and much longed-for) reconciliation, when both of them had descended from their horses, embraced with glad faces, and the king had held Becket's stirrup so that he might more easily ascend his horse, a gesture that caused the bystanders to erupt into tears, the king would not bestow the kiss. "Then the king was asked to give him the kiss of peace", Becket's biographer Fitzstephen writes, "for long before, when a settlement had been discussed between them, when the return and the restitution and all other such articles had been conceded by the king, he still refused the kiss alone, peace long faltered; then the king said that he had, at some time, sworn, in a rage, that he would never kiss him." The king is absolved from this oath by the pope, but nevertheless chooses to defer the kiss to a time when he would again be on his own turf. The reason for that, as given in the narrative, has something to do with how the king himself wanted to be perceived, as he expresses in direct speech: "In my land, I will kiss him a hundred times; mouth, hands and feet; a hundred times will I hear his Mass; but the manner would be different. I do not speak falsely. It is my reputation that I am perceived to defer in everything; and in my land, my giving of the kiss will be seen as done out of greater grace and benevolence than if it were done here, out of compulsion."[307] In the presence of so many powerful men – among them, prominently, the pope and the king of France, the English monarch's spiritual overlord and temporal liege lord, Henry II was not yielding an inch of control over the situation. By turning the finalisation of the agreement into an act of royal clemency that would take place on his own turf, he was removing the ultimate gesture of peace-making from the potentially threatening context of a conference that included men in some aspects his superiors. He was underlining that it was not only his personal decision, but also that the gesture of reconciliation was performed, ultimately, on his incentive: he had gone to the continent, brought Becket back, and would receive him back into his grace once they were both in England.

Not all were so understanding of Henry II's motives: Herbert of Bosham's rendering of the events is more sinister. He also mentions that the king claimed to have sworn, "in anger" and "publicly" that he would not bestow the kiss of peace on the archbishop. With Becket having been advised – at great length – that he should accept nothing but the kiss of peace as the ultimate sign of reconciliation from the king, he has the conference peter out in royal anger and dark forebodings of the martyrdom.[308]

The king may not have cut the best figure in giving to understand that a reconciliation between the archbishop and his royal self was his most sincere of wishes. He is portrayed neither as desperate for want of spiritual guidance, nor as trying all that lay within his power to recall Becket. Still, in the question that was the most decisive of the Becket dispute as far as the reputation of the king was concerned, viewpoints diverged. Who had caused the murder of the archbishop? By no means every writer would readily attach the blame to the king, although the vast majority agrees that it was an unbecoming fit of rage on the king's part that eventually

---

[307] William Fitzstephen, (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 3, p. 110-111). The king's interesting speech translated above reads: *" 'In terra mea centies ejus osculabor os, manus, et pedes; centies ejus audiam missam; sed modo differatur. Non loquor captiose. Honor mihi est, ut in aliquo mihi deferre videatur; et in terra mea osculum dare de majore videbitur gratia et benignitate, quod hic fieri videretur de necessitate.' "*

[308] Cf. Herbert of Bosham (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 3, p. 449-451).

caused the knights to set off towards Canterbury.[309] William of Newburgh can be seen as exemplary for a number of renditions. In his words, the king, "enraged beyond measure and who in this surge of rage was barely in control, spew forth from his churning heart words that were not rational." Spurred on by the fury they had imbibed *(concepti furoris stimulis agitati)*, the knights hastened towards Canterbury, but, the deed done, they came to consider that their deed might displease the very person for whom they had done it, and retreated from England until they would know their prince's mind.[310] There are those who, like William of Newburgh, exculpate the king of any part in the knights' design. These retainers are shown as having misinterpreted the king's emotional outburst, and having left entirely without his knowledge.[311] Yet there are also those who claim that the king had sent the knights, that they bore an order from him, or that they were otherwise aware of doing his will.[312]

Whatever his role in the murder, the deed reflected disastrously on Henry II. William of Newburgh describes a man who had before been greatly renowned suddenly finding himself hated and feared. Roger of Howden includes a number of letters from illustrious men – the king of France, the archbishop of Sens, the count of Blois – that address the pope, denouncing the king and demanding he be adequately punished.[313] The king, meanwhile, began his counter-campaign: William of Newburgh details his anguish of mind in determining how he should deal with the murderers to salvage what he could of his reputation. If he were to spare them, the deed would be seen as having been performed on his authority, but were he to punish them for a deed that they, as was believed, had done not without his command, he would be seen as most worthless (*nequissimus diceretur)*. The writer has the king resolve the issue with diplomatic tact: he pardoned them, but, "bearing in mind his own reputation and their salvation, he ordered them to appear before the apostolic seat to undertake solemn penance."[314]

Of Becket's lives, only Edward Grim's account records the manner in which the king turned the disaster of the archbishop's death to an asset.[315] Those not writing hagiographically picked it up much more readily. It was a dramatic turn of events that turned this (alleged) enemy of the Church into the saint's blessed, and it made for a story that was almost as good as that of Becket's murder. Having received the news of the murder, the king "grieved greatly, and more

---

[309] For this verdict, see for instance William of Newburgh, book 2, ch. 25, p. 162-163 (as cited in the following), Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 11 (who, rather unobtrusively, claims the king was *"commotus ... in iram"*); Edward Grim (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 2, p. 428-429), Herbert of Bosham's testimony is perhaps the most effusive, vivivdly underlining the burning rage and exasperation of the king, coupled with the famous outcry why no one would "free him of the one priest who troubled him and his kingdom" and sought to take his privileges from him (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 3, p. 487); Anonymous I (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 4, p. 69) and one of the passions (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 4, p. 197).

[310] William of Newburgh, book 2, ch. 25, p. 162-163.

[311] See Edward Grim (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 2, p. 429), Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 11; Passio (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 4, p. 198).

[312] Cf. Chronicle of Battle Abbey, p. 54; Benedict of Peterborough's Passio (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 2, p. 2-3) who, after much menacing in the king's name even has the knights shout out their victory cry "King's Men" after they have committed the murder. Staunton, Thomas Becket and his Biographers, p. 198, points out the biblical parallel that turns this scene into yet another allusion that Thomas Becket's passion was similar to that of Christ.

[313] Cf. Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 14-19; Roger of Howden 2, p. 18-25.

[314] William of Newburgh, book 2, ch. 25, p. 163-164.

[315] Cf. Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 2, p. 444-448. See also below.

than I can say", Roger of Howden writes, "he would not eat for three days, nor speak to anyone, but led a solitary life behind closed doors for five weeks until Rotrou the archbishop of Rouen and the bishops of Normandy came to console him."[316] It is remarkable that, considering the crime Henry II was believed to have perpetrated, such dignitaries – and ecclesiastical ones to boot – would come to stand by the king in his grief.

The king's situation was indeed precarious: in Rome, the pope initially refused to hear out his messengers, while as many opted for the king's condemnation as wanted to see him redeemed. And yet, the king prolonged his meeting with the cardinals sent by Rome by not only prohibiting them to set foot into his realm without giving security that they did not want ill for either king or country, but also setting off to (successfully) conquer Ireland, meeting them only as soon as he saw fit. It is difficult to determine what Henry II hoped to achieve by his sojourn in Ireland – it may have been a demonstration of strength, a way to ensure papal favour by seeing to the reformation of the Irish Church, or simply a measure of buying time so that tempers might cool down before he would have to face the papal verdict. Certainly, there was something bold, a hint of swagger in the king's conduct: even before facing the cardinals after his return from Ireland, he had his son crowned by the archbishop of Rouen. Since the coronation of the Young King had been such a great slight to Becket's cause, and had been the trigger of a number of excommunications among the English clergy, the act can readily interpreted as yet another assertion of rights and power by the king. If he wanted to have his son crowned as his successor, he would find, somewhere within his domains, an archbishop that would perform the coronation at his request. The act may bear even greater significance: the ceremony of coronation, especially the ritual unction, stressed the connection between the king and the spiritual, underlined his position as God's anointed and vicar on earth. The king insisted on sacral kingship, his affiliation to the divine, which must have implied not only his elevated status, but also the impossibility of a deliberate murder of a minister of the Church. In addition to the spiritual aspect of the coronation, there was also a very secular one: in thus gathering his magnates in what, effectually, was the celebration of their overlord and king, Henry II may have been assuring himself that the nobility of the realm still supported him. At last, in his own time, the king would cross to the continent to meet the papal court – rather than having the cardinals enter his territory. It is through concessions that the king averts excommunication. Having sworn that he neither wished nor desired the archbishop's death, he effectively revokes the Constitutions of Clarendon, takes the cross, promises aid to the Templars and restores the exiles to the kingdom and Canterbury to its possessions.[317]

Despite the king's preceding display of mastery, William of Newburgh notes that it was with gestures of humility that he subjected himself to the judgement of the Church. After the king had appeared *humiliter* before the assembly, and sworn that he had neither wanted nor ordered the murder of Becket, that there was not a thing he regretted more, the remainder of the chronicler's

[316] Translated from Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 14. William of Newburgh, book 2, ch. 25, p. 163, also comments that the king grieved and would not eat for days.
[317] Cf. Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 20-32; William of Newburgh, book 2, ch. 25, p. 164-165; Roger of Howden 2, p. 26-35.

account reads like a speech made in the king's defence. Verbosely, the king is reported to have stressed that he would never have uttered such incautious words had he been in his right mind and not in the grip of immoderate fury. "And for that", William of Newburgh has Henry II lapse into direct speech, "I will not flee Christian discipline: pass judgement as you see fit, I will devoutly embrace the verdict that follows." The king then cast off his clothes, and, "in the manner of public penance, submitted himself naked to ecclesiastical discipline." His great humility so gladdened the cardinals that they cried for joy, praised God, and comforted the prince's conscience before dissolving the conference.[318]

If a ritual submission and humiliation marked the king's reconciliation with the Church as institution, an act of penance on an even grander scale would mark his reconciliation with the saint, and, through Becket, the divine sphere as such. Edward Grim, singular among the lives of Becket for the length of his narrative, would connect the rebellion of the Young King with the death of Thomas Becket, dramatically describing the great turmoil, desolation and warfare of son against father as a direct consequence of the martyrdom; a time, he asserts, when no one hoped for peace without great bloodshed. Like every single historiographer of the time, he would meticulously record the astounding turn matters took when Henry II approached the site of Becket's tomb, a gesture interpreted by many as *peregrinatio*. Roger of Howden, for instance, writes that as soon as the king came within sight of the church, he descended from his horse, took off his shoes, and walked, barefoot and dressed in woollen rags, with contrite heart and great humility, to the sepulchre of the martyr, where he spent the night in prayer. Stressing how extraordinarily this show of penitence must have seemed to contemporaries, Grim describes that the Canterbury convent was wont to receive the king with a splendid welcome, a festive procession in which they would solemnly show their commitment with great reverence, but were forbidden to do so, the king saying that he was he visited in sorrow and grief. Subverting royal ritual, Henry II was casting himself entirely into the role of a penitent pilgrim, who approached the at that time most popular and powerful saint for forgiveness, kissing and wetting with tears the ground upon which Becket had died, then prostrating himself before his tomb, weeping and praying effusively. He took off his outer clothing, and with bowed head and shoulders received, in such utter devotion that everyone was turned to tears, five blows from the prelates, and one from each of the eighty monks, and was thus solemnly absolved. Neither eating nor washing himself, the king remained naked on the ground, and passed the night in prayer. William of Newburgh, too, records that the king was castigated by the Canterbury monks; and that a dream was bestowed upon one of them that the great humility of the king had pleased the king of kings, and that soon the trouble that had burdened him would be over. "It would not be easy", concedes Grim, "to find at any time in Christian history anyone who was more humble and devout in penance." According to him, Saint Thomas mediated on the king's behalf, easing the severity of divine judgement. This divine intervention soon bore fruits. The king's overt humility and castigation alone would have been the stuff of legends, but the most remarkable coincidence of the capture of the king of Scots qualified it as a sign of divine favour bordering on the

---

[318] William of Newburgh, book 2, ch. 25, p. 165.

miraculous, a reconciliation between the saint and the man instrumental in his death. Following the capture of the king of Scots – which most writers were swift to concede occurred on the very day the king left Canterbury after his nightly vigil, Henry II obtained a total, crushing victory over the rebels that had beset him on many sides.[319]

Whether the public, emotional act of penance was pure calculation or motivated by genuine hope and belief – if it was anything, it was believable. And it was usable: the immediate confirmation of divine favour handed the king a trump card in demonstrating piety, and turned Becket into his personal saint. The king would include visits to the shrine at Canterbury into his routine,[320] but the most extraordinary sign of what Henry II had achieved was the pilgrimage of Louis VII to the martyr's tomb. Philip, his son and heir to the throne had fallen seriously ill, and a dream vision of Thomas Becket had revealed to him that his son would recover were the king to come to Canterbury. Despite warnings of the possible danger and counsel to the contrary, Louis VII and a number of noblemen crossed to England, where they were met *cum gaudio magno et honore* by the king. Henry II himself led the party to Canterbury, where Louis VII offered precious gifts and privileges. The king also brought his prestigious visitor back to Dover when he had concluded his pilgrimage. Henry II certainly knew how to be a munificent host. As Robert of Torigni comments, "but with what great honour, what gladness, and with what largesse of a multitude of gifts king Henry received him is not given us to say." Ralph of Diceto stresses the magnificence of the proceedings: "whatever of honour that could be thought of or made expenses for by anyone, was all presented to the French." He claims that archbishops, bishops, counts, barons, clergy and people came running together, to form a procession that proceeded with hymns, chants and highest gaiety.[321] Henry II had, in a way, 'annexed' the saint that had but five years before helped him defeat Louis VII to his royal person; the pilgrimage of the French king was a show of graciousness and serene triumph for the English king. Two kings, adversaries for almost their entire life, visited a saint's tomb together, with Henry II not only admitting the foreign king into his land, but giving him a festive welcome. The great significance of the scene did not elude contemporaries: most captured the episode, many elaborated on it. Here was a king at the height of his power, basking in the reflection of a famous saint, and displaying the most

---

319 Edward Grim (Materials for the History of Thomas Becket 2, p. 444-448) has the most elaborate account of what happened within the cathedral walls; William of Newburgh, book 2, ch. 35, p. 187-188, includes the scourging and adds the prophetic dream; Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 72, gives little detail on what happened within the cathedral and omits the ritual beating; Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 248-249, adds the additional details of Henry II visiting the altars of Canterbury before attending the morning Mass and receiving a vial of water (sanctified by Becket's blood) before leaving for London. Gervase also draws the perhaps most direct connection between the finalisation of the king's penance and the capture of the king of Scots, stating that he was captured the very same day. Robert of Torigni, p. 264, gives both the king's humble advent and a short summary of his absolution within the cathedral; Roger of Howden, p. 61-63, is very brief, but includes the most notable details; singular is Gerald of Wales (De principis instructione, dist. 2, ch. 4, p. 164-165), who acknowledges the king's great piety in the act as well as the beneficial consequences that sprang from it, but ties the episode into his overall narrative of the king's failure.

320 Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 1, p. 399, p. 426, and Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 23-24, mention "pilgrimages" or simple visits to Canterbury.

321 Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 240-242; see also Roger of Howden 2, p. 192-193. Other accounts of the pilgrimage are provided by Robert of Torigni, p. 282-283, including the translation given here of *"Quo autem honore, quo gaudio, et quam multiplici donorum largitate rex Henricus eum suceperit, non est nostrum edicere.",* Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 293, provides a very brief account and Ralph of Diceto, 1, p. 432-434, the most elaborate one in terms of the ostentation with which Henry II greeted his guest. The quote translated above reads: *"Quicquid honoris ab aliquo potuit vel excogitari, potuit vel impendi, totum Francis exhibitum est."*

generous of welcomes to a life-long enemy in need.

Despite its brief duration, the Becket dispute is so central to contemporary judgement of the king's ecclesiastical policy that any other actions throughout his lifetime pale by comparison. Its outcome had left the king in such favourable light that Gerald of Wales, in his hostile narration of the king's life, had to choose a different decisive point in his narrative from which Henry II's fall from grace might begin. According to the writer, the king had 'only just' averted divine punishment for Becket's murder by repenting in time. While he carried himself virtuously through the triumph after the rebellion, he soon ascribed all that had happened to his own skill, and his vices surfaced again, worse than before. For Gerald of Wales, it was the king's refusal to go on crusade that dealt him the crippling blow: both in the Conquest of Ireland and in his mirror for princes, Gerald eloquently elaborates on the king's failure. The patriarch of Jerusalem had come to England, imploring Henry II for help, offering him the crown of Jerusalem – a great honour, comments Gerald, that he should thus prefer the secluded king of England over all the princes of Europe – while in tearful supplication falling at the king's feet, explaining the need of the Holy Land. The answer the patriarch receives is far from satisfying: Henry II would contribute money, but, given the danger the French posed to his realm, would not come himself. The patriarch is described as gravely disappointed, as beseeching Henry II that they needed a prince much more than they needed money, begging that he at least send one of his sons. In an unusually flattering comment, Gerald of Wales claims John had thrown himself at his father's feet, entreating him that he might go to the Holy Land rather than to Ireland, where he was supposed to go at that time, but his father rejected his pleas. Finding, at last, that he would not reach the desired conclusion, the patriarch publicly addressed the king in words of dark foreboding:

> '"Great king, you have hitherto reigned gloriously above all the princes of the earth, and your honours continually augmenting, have raised you to the highest pitch of royal dignity. But you were evidently reserved for this trial, in which you have been found wanting; and for this, the Lord whom you have forsaken, will desert you, and leave you destitute of heavenly grace. From henceforth your glory shall be turned into sorrow, and your honour to reproach, to the end of your days."'

The patriarch would repeat the prophecy three times as he withdrew from England, but the king did not change his mind.[322] For Gerald of Wales, going on crusade was an essential part of the king's repentance for the murder of Becket; that he vowed to do so but never did was

[322] Gerald of Wales, Expugnatio Hibernica, book 2, ch. 26-27, p. 360-364; Gerald of Wales, The Conquest of Ireland, ch. 25-26, p. 295-299, translation by Thomas Forester. See also De principis instructione, dist. 2, ch. 28, p. 210-212, for an even more critical version of the narrative. In that version, the patriarch, before leaving, confronts Henry II with a number of serious accusations, among them that he had snatched Eleanor from Louis VII, that his children had come from the devil and that he was guilty in the murder of Thomas Becket. When the king looked at him with rage in his eyes, the patriarch offered his head and commanded him to do to him what he had already done to Thomas, stating that Henry II was worse than any Saracen that might otherwise cut off his head in the Holy Land. Like much of Gerald's work, this passage on the king is astonishingly drastic. It is not discussed in greater depth here because its influence on the contemporary image of the king was comparatively minimal – not least, perhaps, because it was not published until the death of King John.

scandalous, his compensation was no less despicable.[323] To stress the gravity of the king's failure, the visit of the patriarch is preceded by a number of other visions and revelations that warn the king to amend his life and are ignored.[324] As Gerald makes explicit, the royal refusal marked the end of an exceedingly prosperous reign – and heralded a demise that would climax in the king's gruesome death. His portrayal of the patriarch's visit is singular. No other chronicler saw it in such a negative light, despite it being widely reported. In Ralph of Diceto's version, for instance the king, upon being confronted with the patriarch's request, gathers his men to ask them for advice. In this assembly, Henry II is told that he could not leave the kingdom of England, and is reminded, in great detail of his coronation promises. Neither would it be seemly to send his sons. The decision on the king's refusal of the patriarch's request for aid is thus made by the magnates, and, by listing the many duties of the king to which he had bound himself during his coronation is rendered entirely legitimate. Gervase, too, notes that the king had been advised not to go to the Holy Land, but adds, a shade more darkly, that he knew his land to be in immediate danger should he leave because of the brutality of his sons. The rendering of William of Newburgh is very similar; Roger of Howden is less explicit about the king's fear to abandon his country, but later includes a passionate letter of Henry II promising a new crusade to relieve the Holy Land.[325]

If many chroniclers displayed a relaxed view about their king going on crusade, there is more overt criticism of his handling of ecclesiastical affairs within England. There are a number of attestations that Henry II had a very direct approach in ensuring that ecclesiastical elections met his preferences, refusing to accept candidates selected by the chapters, imposing his own choice upon the electors and flaring up angrily at any protest that ensued.[326] The Chronicle of Battle Abbey gives particularly elaborate testimony to this. When the convent was asked to send delegates to court to elect an abbot, it was ordered to also bring its charters of privileges – which caused them to fear that the king might take away their hard-won rights. The prior and four monks were summoned to appear before the king. Upon arriving at court, they were called before Gilbert, bishop of London and other persons, whom "the king and the archbishop had sent to find out what was in their hearts, or, rather, to convince them of accepting the will of the king (*regie voluntatis*)". In this interview, the brothers are informed that the king did not endorse their convent's wishes, *utque eos de uoluntate regis plenius instruerent*, are presented with many names of candidates that the king would deem fitting. The Battle delegation found itself in a desperate situation: they had sworn to their convent that they would not assent to the election of anyone but the agreed candidates, but these vindicators of the royal will *(regie uoluntatis fautoribus)* kept urging them to accept a person who was unknown to them, and a plea to discuss matters with

---

[323] De principis instructione, dist. 2, ch. 6-7, p. 169-170, complains that the king, after long deferring the matter, had at last promised to build three monasteries as a compensation for the pilgrimage he never undertook. Gerald of Wales righteously explains that the king had indeed 'founded' two of these monasteries – albeit by reducing canons and casting out nuns, actually 'founding' only one (small) Carthusian monastery.

[324] Cf. Gerald of Wales, Expugnatio Hibernica, book 1, ch. 40, p. 289-292; De principis instructione, dist. 2, ch. 12-13, p. 180-186.

[325] Cf. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 32-34; Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 325; William of Newburgh, book 3, ch. 13, p. 247; Roger of Howden, p. 299-302, p. 304 and p. 342-343; Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 335-336, p. 338, and Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 38-39.

[326] Cf. Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 346, and Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 310. Both are examples in which the force of the king's will in ecclesiastical elections becomes visible.

their convent was denied. At last, the procedure having taken a good part of the day, the king himself came angrily into the room, inquiring why the matter was taking so long.[327] The atmosphere described in the account can hardly be seen as consistent with the idea of free elections, with the king, while not actively browbeating the monks at first, fully aware of what is going on, seeing that he is described as sitting in a room close by to await the (favourable) outcome. Throughout, the words *voluntate regis* are mentioned with such frequency that there can be little doubt of what really (and unjustly) governed ecclesiastical policy. [328]

The counter-narrative to the masterful prince portrayed in this excerpt of the Battle Chronicle would be the way in which the king is portrayed in the life of Hugh of Lincoln. Reminiscent of descriptions of the relationship of Lanfranc of Canterbury and William I, or Henry I and Anselm of Canterbury after their reconciliation, the relation between Henry II the bishop is cast into the mould of a worldly prince tempered by his spiritual counterpart – the very same connection idealised by Anselm as the ideal relationship between the archbishop of Canterbury and the king of England. The Life claims that Hugh and the king had become steadfast friends, as Henry II loved men who would make for good conversation; they had become so close, even, that Hugh, counselling him on matters of the Church, Christianity and his own salvation, dared to criticise and confront him openly, and could easily influence the king, resulting in an overall much more positive ecclesiastical policy.[329] The theme of the friendly and good-humoured relation between the two sparks a number of (by now) popular anecdotes within the life,[330] and even Hugh of Lincoln's acquisition of a bishopric *voluntate regis* is portrayed in a favourable light: Henry II, shipwreck imminent, had beseeched Hugh to pray for their safe return, promising him a bishopric if he should arrive safely back on firm soil. The fact that the vessel is saved does not only legitimate Hugh's position as bishop of Lincoln – which, in all probability, was the primary objective of the episode – it also justifies Henry II's giving of the bishopric. Had the see not been the king's to bestow, the vessel would certainly not have had divine favour carry it safely back to the shore.[331]

As far as the more personal piety of the king was concerned, there are several attestations of

---

[327] Chronicle of Battle Abbey, p. 280-285.
[328] The chronicle does not convey a fully consistent image of the king, and might be seen as the more reliable for it. Although highly partial as far as Battle Abbey (and specifically its privileges) are concerned, its portrayal of the king oscilliates between that of a man prone to angry outbursts such as this one and a calm, exemplary law-maker with a deep interest in justice, as elaborated on in detail in the chapter on the justice of Henry II.
[329] Cf. Hugh of Lincoln, book 2, chapter 7, p. 75-80.
[330] Among the most prominent ones is Henry II's gift of the Winchester bible to the Carthusian monks of Withun after he had made note of the bishop's eagerness to procure a bible. Upon learning that the bible had been taken from another convent, Hugh insisted it was returned to them (ibid., chapter 13, p. 91-95). The significance of a book as particularly valuable and, above all, lasting gift is discussed by Müller-Oberhäuser, Das Buchgeschenk. Of interest to the study of the king's character has been Hugh approaching the angry king after he had refused to bestow a benefice on one of the king's courtiers. Finding the king utterly ignoring him, sitting among his magnates and sewing, he diffuses the tense atmosphere by jokingly allluding to William the Conqueror's rumoured descent from a tanner's family (ibid., book 3, ch. 10, p. 127-130).
[331] Cf. ibid., book 2, chapter 8, p. 80-81.

royal benefactions, but these are not presented as something extraordinary.[332] The king's end, however, does not cast a positive light on his standing with the divine sphere. His lamentable flight, unconditional surrender, realisation of betrayal by all his remaining sons, even the one most dear to him, his plundered, naked, forsaken and only eventually buried corpse suggest, in their narrative impact, a man punished by God – a conclusion that Henry II himself seems to draw, as he curses his sons, and, in Gerald of Wales' darker version, even God himself.[333] Gerald of Wales, in a fitting conclusion to his condemning narrative of the king's fall from grace, does indeed map out the king's funeral in the darkest colours. He specifically remarks upon the poverty the ever-abundant king experienced in death: his naked body scarcely covered by a youth's cloak and no regalia available to outfit the corpse for the funeral, the king left his riches to the man he hated above all others – his son Richard. There is not a detail that is not, in some way, significant to the author. "As if through divine vengeance", he died in the very place in which he had wanted to imprison queen Eleanor as a nun. A plethora of dark prophecies throughout the king's entire life is annexed to the account of his death, signs foretelling his imminent death, visions, prophecies and portents proclaiming his tyranny and the hatred of his sons, the most drastic among them including all the lights around the king's corpse extinguished while raven birds flew around it, the corpse asking monks to carry him from the church, leaving behind a broken altar stained by human excrement, even Henry II engaging in battle with Jesus, and gravely insulting him as they fight. Gerald places the violent death of Henry II in a line with the death of William Rufus, on whose shortcomings he lengthily comments, and claims that, in accordance with divine revenge, no king of Norman stock had ever found a peaceful end, being tyrants to the last, and consequently suffering the death accruing to tyrants.[334] The author's damning conclusion to his work is the very blueprint of an unchristian death, a symbol of divine vengeance upon an unworthy ruler.

Had Henry II died in more favourable circumstances, he might have been viewed as fully reconciled with Becket, and might have been described as a man generally at peace with the Church. Indeed, with the matter of Becket having been brought to so beneficial a conclusion during Henry II's lifetime, the reconciled saint's intercession so apparently gracing the monarch, many were wont to blame his death on his sons rather than on the king's personal failure in the spiritual sphere. William of Newburgh, who blames Henry's ruinous end on a combination of his sinful marriage to Eleanor, his overly great love for his sons and a lack of grief for the rigorous conduct he had displayed towards the archbishop is a notable exception.[335] Throughout the Becket dispute, the king stands as a severe vindicator of his rights, prone to anger, hard to appease, and harbouring little respect for the rights and privileges of the Church. Not all of this stain on his reputation was removed by his narratively orchestrated, divinely inspired

[332] Cf., for instance, Benedict of Peterborough 1, p. 169; there is a rather large number of passages in Robert of Torgini commenting on smaller benefactions, such as the building of a house for lepers or the provision for a convent (p. 206, p. 209-210, p. 221, p. 232-233). De principis instructione, dist. 2, ch. 17, p. 191-193, lists the distribution of money for just causes as among the clauses of the king's will. Finally, Walter Map, dist. v, ch. 6, p. 482-485, refers to the king as a more than munificent almsgiver – albeit in secret.

[333] Roger of Howden 2, p. 366-367.

[334] De principis instructione, dist. 3, ch. 28-31, p. 304-329 ; the quoted passage can be found in ch. 28, p. 306.

[335] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 3, ch. 26, p. 280-282.

reconciliation with the saint, but his name was cleared to such an extent that few chroniclers would continue to maintain negative characterisations of the king when describing his conduct towards the Church, and even fewer would unfavourably mention the Becket dispute in their final words on the king. What survives of the king's conduct towards the Church is primarily his masterful attitude – and the 'Angevin temper' that was to become notorious.

*Richard I and the Church*

Richard's reign was shaken by no such troubles, and the influence of the divine in what he did was emphasised much more strongly by contemporaries; particularly, perhaps, because he built a reputation for earnest, personal piety. The most prominent expression of his religiousness was, for contemporaries, his evident dedication to the crusade. It did not only make him a figure of mythical proportions but also earned him the support of the Church. Participating in the crusade, especially in a role as distinguished as that the Angevin king took, could greatly influence the verdicts of chroniclers: the scathing remarks of Gerald of Wales about Henry II's reluctance to join the crusade are proof enough of the type of sentiments that the crusade could (and would) rouse. According to William of Newburgh, the king took the cross "without any deliberation, soon absorbing the praiseworthy purpose with his entire heart" after hearing of the fall of Jerusalem – although the decision was little to his father's liking.[336] Put like this, the king's motives can hardly be called into question.[337] During the crusade itself, Richard's memorable gestures of penance would only add to the image of an exemplary crusader and pilgrim.

The dramatic last words ascribed to the king by the Coggeshall chronicler, although with sufficient certainty hardly more than an anecdote, are a testament to the piety of which Richard was thought capable. Richard's death is a good one, by narrative and Christian standards: without ever so much as flinching or allowing his face to betray his pain, the king returned to his tent after he had been hit by the crossbow bolt and endured the inefficient surgery that could not prevent his eventual death. His demise is slow enough for him to make his peace with God and even allow for a salutary conversation with the man who wounded him fatally.[338] The chronicler's final words on Richard are full of references to the king's customary piety; they recall him walking among the cantors in the choir, urging them with entreaties, gifts and his presence to sing more enthusiastically, or remaining silent throughout silent Mass, even if he was spoken to by someone. On his deathbed, according to the chronicle, he confessed that he had abstained from the Eucharist "out of reverence for so great a mystery" for a span of almost seven years, because he had "carried a deadly hatred for the king of France in his heart". The deeply pious reverence expressed in the statement is likely to have had a part in the final verdict of the chronicler, who,

[336] Ibid., book 3, ch. 23, p. 271.
[337] Compared to the depiction of the Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 1, ch. 17, p. 32-33, William of Newburgh's account is very reserved. The Itinerarium, among its narrative motives the stylisation of the king as the one and only saviour of the Holy Land (and Christendom in general), as God's chosen destined to restore what had been lost, sees Richard's taking of the cross as an act that inspired many Christians. The king, it claims, had, as an example to everyone, been a factor in an ensuing tremendous taking of crosses everywhere that caused even monks to emerge from their monasteries to receive the sign of the cross.
[338] That particular episode is not recounted by the Coggeshall chronicler, but finds entry into other accounts. It is discussed above, in the context of Richard's justice.

after acknowledging that the king had filled vacancies and constructed an abbey during his reign, closes his elaborate account of Richard's demise by stating that his pious works fought with his evil deeds, alleviating the greatest of his punishment. He closes his account of the king in the hope (*ut speramus*) that God's mercy would extinguish his sins altogether.[339]

Richard, meanwhile, would not only repeatedly call upon God before a battle, but also consider a victory something that was worth his gratitude. Roger of Howden, for instance, remarks that Richard had dedicated the banner, woven with gold, which had been left behind by the fleeing emperor of Cyprus, to the king and martyr Edmund[340] – a small gesture that benefited a type of spirituality in the tradition of which Richard may well have wished to place himself, as Edmund was a favoured saint for English kings. The king is not only presented as devout, but also as open to religious debate. The same author includes a passage in which Richard converses with a Cistercian abbot who expounds on his reading of the revelation, and prophecies the king's victory over Saladin. The king is interested, and asks the abbot a number of questions, but he does not agree with the interpretation that the Antichrist had been born in Rome and would occupy the Holy See, brushing it aside with the remark that if that were the case, he knew the Antichrist to be the current pope – for whom, the chronicle explains, the king harboured a hatred (which would explain his comment). The king then proceeds to present his own opinion concerning the place of birth and the prospective life of the Antichrist on earth. After stating that there were conflicting opinions on the matter of the Antichrist in particular, the writer cites two further passages that confirm the king's reading of the events: the Antichrist would be born and walk in Israel, not in Rome.[341]

However, Richard's religious conviction and devotion does not appear to be bound up with the Church as institution, nor its prelates, and especially not its privileges and possessions. Roger of Howden provides a particularly witty glimpse into the king's attitude in the answers he gives to the preacher Fulk of Neuilly, who had approached him asking that he finally married off his most foul three daughters.

> "'Hypocrite,' the king answered, 'you are deluded in your head, for I have no daughters.'
> Fulk answered:
> 'I certainly do not err, for you have three most foul daughters, one of which is pride, the other greed and the third prodigality.'
> Having then called to him many counts and barons, who had come, the king said:
> 'Hear you all the agitation of this hypocrite, who claims that I have three most foul daughters, namely pride, greed and prodigality; and he orders me to marry them off. Therefore I give my pride to the proud Templars, my greed to the monks of the Cistercian order, and my prodigality to the prelates of the Church.'"[342]

---

[339] Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 94, for Richard's wounded trip back to his tent; p. 96-97 for his confession and the chronicler's brief assessment of the reign.
[340] Cf. Roger of Howden 3, p. 108; Benedict of Peterborough 2, p. 164.
[341] Cf. ibid., p. 151-155; Roger of Howden 3, p. 75-86.
[342] Cf. Roger of Howden 4, p. 76-77 "*Praedictus autem Fulco quadam die accessit ad Ricardum regem Angliae, et ait illi: 'Dico tibi ex parte omnipotentis Dei, ut tres filias tuas, quas habes pessimas, citius marites, ne aliquid deterius tibi contingat.' ... Cui fertur regem respoendisse: 'Hypocrita, mentitus es in caput tuum, quia filiam non habeo ullam.' Ad quod Fulco respondens ait, 'Certe non mentior; quia, ut dixi tres habes filias pessimas, quarum una est superbia, altera cupiditas, tertia luxuria.' Convocatis igitur ad se comitibus et baronibus multis, qui aderant, ait rex: 'Audite universi commonitionem hujus hypocritae, qui dicet me habere tres filias pessimas, videlicet superbiam, cupidatem, et luxuriam; et praecipit ut eas maritem. Do igitur superbiam meam superbis Templariis, et*

Beyond such mirthful criticism, which, in all likeliness, the chronicler felt he could put into the mouth of the king because of Richard's indisputable position as someone who had really 'achieved' something for the Church, the king would also turn to more concrete forms of disrespect as far as the possessions his realm's prelates are concerned. This is perhaps best illustrated by the widely documented case of Richard building Chateau Gaillard at the site of Les Andelys, which belonged to the domain of the archbishop of Rouen. The conflict is documented, for instance, by William of Newburgh, Roger of Howden and by Ralph of Diceto, the latter including many letters from the harassed archbishop who could not wrest back his lands from the king. The letters detail the plight the prelate had found himself in: neither humbly approaching the king nor threatening and putting into effect an interdict over his lands would deter the king from building on this site. While Ralph of Diceto documents the conflict meticulously by inserting the archbishop's letters into his chronicle, he does not voice his opinion except maybe in a small detail at the end of the conflict: directly after he has inserted the letter from the archbishop that contained the agreement which adjudged the place to the king, he inserts a report of a rain of blood that came down on the castle's building site – a sign of divine disapproval if ever there was one.[343] What is even more remarkable than the king's disrespect for the possessions of a powerful prelate, however, is that, in the end, Richard not only got his way, but even the support (or at least the sympathetic acquiescence) of the pope for his venture.

William of Newburgh recounts the journey of the archbishop of Rouen towards Rome to put his complaints before the pope, among them in particular that Richard refused to repay him for the loss of his land while he was still at war with the king of France. The pope's answer is not what he had hoped for: "The world knows of the injustice borne grudgingly by the king of the English, the capture on his return from the east, where he had fought for Christ, and returned bearing the sign of His knighthood, and the plunder; how he has long and grievously suffered on the chain of Germany. It is fitting therefore, that you feign restraint for the time being, even if he were to attempt greater things in the necessity of war than that which you have brought forth [against him]." Rather than aiding the archbishop who he sent home "consoled and appeased by other means", the pope "strove to please the prince, who was so worn out by injuries and the

---

*cupiditatem meam monachis de ordine Cisterciensi, et luxuriam meam praelatis ecclesiarum.'"* Naturally, the criticism is likely to have been at least as much that of the chronicler as that of the king.

343 Cf. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 148-150, includes a letter from the exasperated archbishop of Rouen to the chronicler, in which the prelate claims that he had attempted all he could think of – including supplication – to persuade the king to rethink his conduct and restore his possessions. Having failed in that, the archbishop would set out for Rome to seek the judgement of the pope. P. 153-158 contains a letter in which the archbishop declares that he had reached an agreement with the king concerning Les Andelys, which, among the reasons that entitled the king to the place, cites the threat of war from France in the region (a reason also found in Roger of Howden). The archbishop also details how the negotiations had been conducted. P. 160-162 contains another letter citing the charter that confirmed the king to be in possession of the spot. Directly after this charter, Ralph of Diceto inserts a notice on a rain of blood that went down on "the castle being built at Les Andely in the territoriy of the archbishop of Rouen" (*"...pluit sanguis undatim super aedificantes turrim apud Andeleium in territorio Rothomagensi").* Roger of Howden 4, p. 14, only remarks briefly that Richard had fortified Les Andelys against the will and prohibition of the archbishop, thus incurring an inderdict on Normandy as the prelate set off towards the pope. Once in Rome, (p. 17-18) he lays his complaints before the pope. However, the king's messengers – bishops, abbots, counts and barons – are also there, and excuse the behaviour of their lord by stating that the building of the fortress in Les Andely was a military necessity because of the threat to Normandy from France if Les Andelys was not fortified. Eventually, the archbishop agrees on receiving compensation from the king: wise men had opted that a king or any potentate was well allowed to fortify a weak region in his lands, so as not to expose himself and his people to damage.

waging of a just war".[344] It is tempting to hazard what else the pope would have allowed the king to get away with, if his answer to the unjust dispossession of an archbishop was that said prelate should be ready to forgive (at least temporally) even worse slights. William of Newburgh, too, inserts the rain of blood over the castle's building site into his chronicle, also locating it directly after his report on the reconciliation reached between archbishop and king – but he does report it in much greater detail. It had been claimed by not unknown men who affirmed that they had been there to have happened while the king was present on the site, urging on and directing the builders, and having great joy in overseeing the work: droplets of blood suddenly came down in a shower. But the king, the chronicler remarks drily in the very last sentence of his chronicle, would not in the smallest way cease to pursue the venture in which he took such great joy; even if an angel were to descend from heaven and attempted to persuade him to stop, the thought would be anathema to him.[345] The king, by implication, was acting even against divine portents, no matter their clarity, but while reproach is easily imaginable in Ralph of Diceto's narrative, it is hard to discern it in William of Newburgh's last statement. Perhaps the king was indeed due some indulgence after his effort in the crusade.

It is an assumption that does seem to have been true with regard to the stance the papacy took: Richard's capture and imprisonment of the bishop of Beauvais did neither create an uproar nor was it in any way condemned. Quite the contrary: the bishop's very indignant letter to the pope, in which he listed his grievances, and described the turmoil Richard was inflicting on the country with his mercenaries, ravaging the land and plundering churches, in open rebellion against his lord, the king of France, was replied to curtly in a papal letter that did not only confirm that Richard was in the right, but also reprimanded the bishop for his conduct, claiming that he had brought his predicament upon himself.[346] William of Newburgh's account is similar: when faced with the bishop's chaplains' attempts to secure a favourable treatment for their master at the hands of his captor, Richard pointed out that the very same bishop had visited the emperor during his captivity, and caused the conditions of his imprisonment to be much aggravated. The bishop was therefore kept in chains, *tractabatur ab hostibus mitius forte quam meruerat, sed plane durius quam episcopum decebat*: treated more gently than he deserved, but definitely harsher than befitted the office of bishop. Despite this criticism of the authority the king had assumed over the spiritual order in thus imprisoning the bishop – even if the said prelate had proceeded against him with worldly (rather than spiritual) weaponry – the pope's reaction remains indulgent. Considering that Richard had captured the bishop on a battlefield, and the man had exchanged the peaceful attire of the prelate for war gear, the pope refused to comply to the bishop's demand of enforcing his freedom by ecclesiastical authority – promising only that he would petition it when the time was fitting. The carcer, William of Newburgh remarks with satisfaction, had an

[344] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 5, ch. 28, p. 488-489. The original reads: "'*Nota est orbi terrarum injusta regis Anglorum vel captivatio ab Oriente, ubi Christo militaverat, cum signo ejusdem militiae revertentis, vel spoliatio, grave et diutinum sub catena Alemannica taedium patientis. Debuit ergo tua discretio pro tempore dissimulare, etiam si majora quam proponis ratione necessitatis bellicae attentasset.' Haec dicens, principi quidem tanquam fatigato injuriis et justum bellum gerenti morem gerere studuit; pontificem vero alias delinitum atque placatum ad propria remisit.*"

[345] Ibid., ch. 34, p. 499-500.

[346] The two letters can be found in Roger of Howden 4, p. 21-24.

inciter of war, a hater of peace, pine after that which he had loathed before: peace between the kings of France and England was the only thing that would free him from his chains.[347]

Not all of the king's maltreatments of clergymen were as easily forgiven. Short notes of the king confiscating property or exacting his *ira et malevolentia* against prelates who would not comply with his wishes punctuate almost every narrative at some point. Chronicles make particular mention of Richard's long dispute with the archbishop of York, his half-brother Geoffrey, who was repeatedly seized and disseised of his property because he either failed maintain the instalments in which he was to pay the large sum for his entry into the archbishopric or had in other ways incurred the king's displeasure.[348] The most famous instance of the king's wrath against a member of the clergy is, however, the conflict between Richard and the saintly Hugh of Lincoln documented in the saint's *Vita*. Hugh had incurred the king's displeasure by refusing to dispatch military aid to the king on the continent, maintaining that his obligation ended at the shores of England, a view in which he was supported by the bishop of Salisbury. The king, *in ira et furore*, ordered "everything that belonged to the [two] bishops" confiscated. "What more? The bishop of Salisbury at once offered himself for sale: going to the king, he at last redeemed his peace and possessions against the greatest sum of money, after wrongs, harm and vexations and much abuse." Hugh, whose lands had allegedly not been touched for fear of the anathema the bishop would pronounce on those who laid hands on his possessions, is reported to have travelled to the continent and sought out the king. Confronting him while he was hearing Mass, he demanded to receive the kiss of peace from the reluctant king, seizing him by his vest and shaking him vigorously before the king finally relented, smiling, out of admiration for the bishop's confidence.[349]

Despite the *Vita*'s anecdotal take on the king's habit of dealing with his bishops' possessions as he pleased, a critical undertone to Richard's handling of ecclesiastical affairs is certainly present. However, none of the accusations in these matters exceed the scope of brief mentions; they are not fitted into an overarching narrative of the king, nor do they find entry into the verdicts on the reign that came with the king's death. Any dissatisfaction with the way Richard dealt with the clergy was eclipsed by his outstanding efforts in the crusade, dwarfed by the image of personal piety with which the king had been infused. While most narratives would not go as far as the *Itinerarium* did in proclaiming Richard God's chosen for the deliverance of the Holy Land, [350] there was not a chronicler who did not acknowledge approvingly what the king had done. Richard may not have possessed a carte blanche to deal with the Church as he saw fit, but he does appear to have come close enough.

[347] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 5, ch. 31, p. 493-494.
[348] The case of Geoffrey of York has already been discussed in the chapter on the king's justice. See William of Newburgh, book 4, ch. 2, p. 300-301, for the chronicler's assessment of the way in which Geoffrey had acquired his office as archbishopric; and his hardly vague accusations of simony and fraud involved.
[349] Cf. Magna Vita s. Hugonis, book 5, ch. 5, p. 248-251.
[350] The verdict is found throughout the account. For one of the most concise renditions, see Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 5, ch. 45, p. 361-364.

*John and the Church*

John did not have the comfortable reputational padding that Richard had enjoyed. His reign was complicated considerably by clashes with the Church, which had a very direct influence on his reputation. He was criticised for his harshness and disregard for the liberties of the Church – a criticism that would grow exponentially with his refusal to admit Rome's choice for the archbishop of Canterbury into the realm and the ensuing interdict. The papal sentence had a very tangible influence well beyond political and juridical aspects of his reign, it also reflected on John in a very personal way. He did not have a particular reputation for personal piety, and the willingness to bear both the interdict laid on his realm and his own excommunication for considerable time before finally (albeit spectacularly) surrendering to papal authority did little to improve that impression. The king did not seem overly concerned with the ecclesiastical punishments inflicted on him – he is even said to have "less despised the sentence that had been inflicted on him a long time ago" upon hearing that the German emperor had likewise been excommunicated, because now he had a "companion of such greatness" in enduring the sentence, and set about taking further measures against the papal influence in England.[351]

Cases in which John portrayed a measure of respect and piety are scarce, but the few incidents writers would point out are reported very widely through a range of chronicles. For one thing, John appears to have developed a certain sense of respect towards the generally admired Hugh of Lincoln, but it is not clear whether contemporary writers would see their anecdotes as commending the king's admiration for the sanctity of a churchman or commending the churchman's sanctity that earned him the admiration of a king that was otherwise quite unbearable. While a number of writers would point out that John humbled himself to the point of carrying the coffin of the dead bishop,[352] the author of Hugh's *Vita* is, doubtlessly with view to John's unsavoury reputation, very reluctant to admit a good connection between the bishop and the king. This is remarkable: Henry II, although so notoriously connected with the murder of Thomas Becket, enjoys, in the *Vita*, the role of a sometimes too harsh monarch who was nonetheless capable and willing to learn (under the careful ministrations of the bishop, of course) and enjoyed the holy man's conversation and company. John, who is presented as having made a point of seeking the bishop's opinion and goodwill, is met with disbelief at his good intentions, a chilly reception that ignored the respectful gestures due to a king[353] and boundless criticism. The *Vita* deals harshly with John, depicting him as a thoroughly impious man who attempted to win the bishop's goodwill by what, ultimately, can only be viewed as deception, as the king's notoriously bad nature always shone through.

Shortly after his accession, the bishop proclaimed that he believed John's good intentions and promises of ecclesiastical benefactions to be lies, he rebuked him for superstition because he

---

351 Barnwell Annals, p. 202.

352 See, for instance, Roger of Howden 4, p. 142-143, who also mentions that John took the time to visit Hugh on his sickbed (p. 141); Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 111 remarks that the king ran towards the coffin, "casting aside the pride of a king". See also Magna Vita s. Hugonis, book 5, ch. 17, p. 352-353, for the king being among the mass of nobility that the writer claims to have attended Hugh's funeral, and ch. 19, p. 370, for the king's carrying of the coffin.

353 Cf. ibid., ch. 11, p. 288-289, has a freshly-crowned John and the bishop visit Fontevrault, where Hugh doubts that he would ever live up to his promises. Ch. 16, p. 335 claims that when John visited the bishop of his sickbed, Hugh would neither rise nor sit up to honour the king (as was usually done) although it was still in his power.

wore an amulet that was supposed to prevent his losing the kingdom, and, as the reader reads on, the saintly bishop attempts to turn John into a worthwhile Christian and ruler. The author knew – and wrote – that it was a task that was bound to fail. After the bishop's admonishments, however, John presented himself (*ostendabat)* as humble and submissive, "so that he appeared to go beyond measure" *(ut videretur excedere modum)*. This commendable demeanour lasted but three days. At the Mass of Easter Sunday, John stared long at the golden coins he was going to offer to the bishop, and stared at them so long that everyone looked in wonder at the monarch who was standing at the very front of a crowd of nobles come to give their offerings and effectively impeding the entire queue. When asked about the reason for his peculiar behaviour, he claimed that but a few days before, he would have kept the coins for himself. The bishop was furious, and denied the king the honour of taking the coins from his hand, nor would he allow himself to be kissed by the king. In a lengthy sermon that was enthusiastically received by the congregation, he then expounded on the mannerisms of good and bad princes, and how their behaviour could influence their afterlife. The sermon, so very decidedly aimed to edify John, fell tragically short of achieving that aim: thrice, the preaching bishop is interrupted because the king wishes to finally attend dinner. Eventually, the monarch leaves without having received the sacrament, and, the writer claims, it was said by *familiaribus ejus* that he had never received it after having reached legal age.[354] Even that sombre comment is not the last: the author renders John utterly unfit for any ecclesiastically-inspired ritual. During his investiture with the duchy of Normandy, he claims John to have turned and responded to the boyish laughter of his friends rather than being immersed in the sacredness and momentousness of the ritual in which he was just starring so prominently. All that joking caused him to grip the lance of the duchy not firmly enough, and he subsequently "allowed" it to fall to the ground. A bad sign, the author notes, that bystanders interpreted to the end that he would lose the duchy – and Aquitaine to boot.[355]

While John's show of piety and his good intentions towards Hugh are firmly refuted by the saint's life, other writers reported the king's reconciliation with the Cistercians with considerably greater favour – despite the extortions that preceded it, the king's kneefall and humiliation before the abbots had the effect he (quite probably) desired: Roger of Howden, for instance, maintains that when the abbots had fallen to his feet and begged for mercy from the tribulations of his foresters, he ordered them to rise only to, *Divina inspirante gratia*, fall at their feet himself to beg for forgiveness, to promise remedy and announce the foundation of an abbey for the sake of his soul, the souls of his ancestors and the stability of the realm.[356] Even the *Vita* and the Margan Annals, otherwise relatively ill-disposed towards the king, mention the king's clemency. Remarkably enough, the author of the *Vita* claims the king's generosity to have sprung from his

[354] Cf. ibid., ch. 11, p. 288-293. Something approaching a translation can be found in Appleby, Johann "Ohneland", which translates much of the original passage.
[355] Cf. Magna Vita S. Hugonis, book 5, ch. 11, p. 293-294: *"... cum solenni [*sic*!] ei daret archiepiscopus lanceam in manus, vexillum praeferentem quo duces Neustriae honoris sui investituram solebant percipere; ille, audito tumultu applaudentium et pueriliter cachinnantium adolescentium quondam sodalium suorum, ut erat divinis animo parum intentus, ad eos post tergum levitatis instinctu conversus, dum jocantibus et ipse arrideret, hastam quam minus firmiter aprehenderat decidere permisit in terram. Quod sibi ominis fuisse signum infausti, consona pene universorum qui aderant interpretatio asserebat. Jam vero rei hujus praesagium clarius enitescit, dum, illo enerviter lasciviente, non solum ducatus Normannici, immo et, cum aliis provinciis et comitatibus, Aquitanici etiam ditionem amisit."*
[356] Roger of Howden 4, p. 144-145.

divinely induced compunction at the death of the saintly bishop,[357] and ends his book with this apparent 'last good deed', or, when seen from the point of view of the afterlife a saint was expected to have, as Hugh's 'first miracle': the (temporary) conversion of an impious, bad man.

As the clash with the Cistercian order testifies, John would not necessarily shy away from approaching the Church for money, even if, in doing so, he was disregarding ecclesiastical privileges. However, such accounts would, until the complicated election of the archbishop of Canterbury, hardly exceed ordinary complaints of churchmen being afflicted with taxes they felt they should not be required to pay. Neither did the election portray more than a common anxiety of convents hoping to circumvent the king's intervention in ecclesiastical elections, except maybe that these monks had a more elaborate plan to make their election irrevocably valid before the king could interfere. John's reaction when he learned of the conspirative activities the monks had engaged in is not as stern as it might have been expected, either: Roger of Wendover reports that the king "at once and without opposition" granted the request of the monks for a new election, although "speaking to them more secretly, he declared" that he would like them to elect the bishop of Norwich into the office. The obvious request was made more palatable by the promise of "many honours" to be bestowed on the convent should they comply. While Roger of Wendover remarks that the monks elected the bishop of Norwich to reconcile themselves with the king "whom they had offended", it was not a feeling of offence that manifested itself in any palpable oppressions.[358]

The situation began to escalate when the pope proposed and consecrated his own candidate, Stephen Langton. Now the king, according to Roger of Wendover, seized upon the earlier fault of the Canterbury monks, in his great rage *(iratus est vehementer)* accusing them of treason, of having infringed his rights, of having spent his money on a travel that cumulated in the election of a man that was his *inimicus publicus*. The king sent two knights, "most cruel and ignorant of any humanity", with an armed retinue to the monks of Canterbury, to either drive them from the kingdom or sentence them to capital punishment, "as if they were guilty of lèse maiesté". What follows can only have evoked memories of the martyrdom of Thomas Becket, and it is unlikely that Roger of Wendover was not aware he was drawing these parallels as he wrote. The men entered the monastery with bared swords and, in a furious voice, ordered the monks to leave the kingdom like the traitors to the king's majesty they were. If they refused to do so, one of them "affirmed with an oath", he would set fire to the monastery and its buildings, and burn the monks along with the edifices. The monks left "unadvisedly" without any attempt at defence, to be replaced by Augustinian canons; their property was confiscated and distributed, their lands remained uncultivated.[359]

---

[357] Cf. Magna Vita S. Hugonis, book 5, ch. 20, p. 377-378 and Magran Annals, p. 25. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 102-109 reports the conflict between the king and the Cistercians and their reconciliation in great depth. His description has already been analysed in the chapter on John's exercise of justice.

[358] Roger of Wendover 3, p. 183-185. Gervase of Canterbury 2, p. 98-99, affirms this undramatic encounter between king and convent. Only after the second group of monks has met the first at Canterbury, there is any notion of force being involved: the newcomers are accused by their bretheren who had left before them that their candidate had not been selected by the convent but introduced by the king's violence, which should make the election void.

[359] Roger of Wendover 3, p. 213-215: "*... dixit enim, quod in praejudicium suae libertatis sine ipsius licentia suppriorem suum elegerant, et postmodum, ut quod male gesserant quasi sibi satisfaciendo palliarent, elegerunt episcopum Norwicensem, et pecuniam de fisco*

John is reported to have tried to browbeat the pope into withdrawing his choice of Langton, insisting on the rights of his crown while threatening to withdraw the payments the Roman Church obtained from England and to cease traffic between Rome and the island.[360] Roger of Wendover inserts a small episode before the pronunciation of the interdict, in which three English bishops, acting as legates, entreat the king humbly and with tears to take the archbishop back into his good grace so as to avoid the pitfall of an interdict. The king reacts in an unsettling way, angrily "erupting into blasphemous words against the pope and his cardinals and swearing by God's teeth" that, should his lands be laid under an interdict, he would sent all of England's clergy to the pope and confiscate their property. He adds that if he found clerics of Rome or of the pope, he would have them sent back to Rome with their eyes gouged out and their noses cut. Faced with threats themselves, the bishops flee from his presence and proclaim the interdict.[361] From that point on, John's conduct towards the Church failed to find sympathy with most writers. Accusations of exactions, confiscation, imposed exile and heavy taxes crop up in every account, in varying degrees of exasperation and outrage, with the king repeatedly being referred to as cruel or tyrannical.[362] It is hardly surprising that among these comments, Roger of Wendover's are the harshest and the most rich in anecdotal value. He notes, for instance, that the king's satellites made a habit of molesting and robbing clergymen when they found them, and

---

*accipientes ad itineris expensas, ut electionem de episcopo memorato factam apud sedem apostolicam impetrarent confirmari, in cumulum iniquitatis suae elegerunt ibi Stephanum de Langetune, inimicum suum publicum, eumque fecerunt in archiepiscopum consecrari. Ob hanc quoque causam idem rex in furorem versus et indignationem misit ... milites crudelissimos et humanitatis ignaros, cum ministris armatis, ut monachos Cantuarienses, sicut crimine laesae majestatis reos, a regno Angliae expellerent vel capitali sententia condemnarent; illi autem mandatum domini sui non segniter exsequentes Cantuariam profecti sunt, et nudatis ensibus monasterium ingressi voce furiosa priori et monachis ex parte regis praeceperunt, ut, velut proditores regiae majestatis, incontinenti de regno Angliae exirent, et, si hoc facere noluissent, affirmaverunt cum juramento, quod ipsi, injecto igne tam in ipso monasterio quam in aliis officinis, omnes illos cum ipsis aedificiis concremarent.*" The Stanley Annals confirm the expulsion of the Canterbury monks, but their description is far less elaborate, and neither does itbear any narrative resemblance to the martyrdom of Thomas Becket (William of Newburgh, Continuatio, p. 509). The Barnwell Annals, p. 199, are similar in that respect.

[360] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 215-216.

[361] Ibid, p. 221-222.

[362] Gervase of Canterbury 2, p. 100-102, is one of the more elaborate ennumerations of complaints, describing how many bishops (except one who was still in the king's good graces), how rich and poor alike, who would not bear the king's tyranny *(regis tyrannidem)*, fled from England, until there was not a single man left in the country who would resist John in his will. The chronicler laments the hardships brought on by the interdict for the general populace and makes note of how the king oppressed the monks of Canterbury yet further by chasing them into exile, imprisoning them, or demanding large payments from them. Heavy taxation burdened the already oppressed people, and the king witheld even Peter's pence, which had been paid since the time of King Cnut. The Margan Annals, p. 28-29, rather briefly remark that the discord between the pope and "John, tyrant of England" led to the exile of the archbishop, the expulsion of the Canterbury convent, the persecution of the clergy "and many other evils". According to the Barnwell Annals, p. 200, religious or ecclasiastical persons in England were, after almost all the bishops had been exiled, vexed beyond measure, property of monasteries was confiscated, and lay clergy were punished according to ecclesiastical or worldly law. The annals also report that the king demanded hefty sums from the monasteries, specifically from the Cistercians, "under the pretext of war" (p. 201). The very same incident is reported in quite similar terms by Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 163, who adds that the Cistercian abbots were not allowed to go to the annual chapter of their order. The writer also remarks that John caused an overall destruction of the property of those bishops who had been the executors of the interdict, destroying their houses, felling their woods and razing their hunting enclosures. The Dunstable Annals, p. 30, confirm that the king ordered the goods of the clergy to be seized, and have anyone who would abide by the interdict (and "did not want to sing") exiled from his lands – but, the annals claim as one of the few, the king's rage abated after four days, and he placed the goods thus gained under the guard of his constables; two years later, the annalist notes that the king forced the clergy to remit per letter the goods that the king had previously extorted from them (p. 34). The Worcester Annals are more forgiving: upon hearing of the interdict, the king had disseised all ecclesiastical persons of their possessions, but later restituted their property to them (p.396), but the annals also mention that the bishops who had proclaimed the interdict underwent "grave exile" in France.

that the king himself, when a bandit was brought into his presence who had robbed and murdered a priest, declared that the man should be allowed to go free because he had murdered one of his enemies.[363]

Perhaps the greatest mark of how John's standing with the Church had suffered is the papal acquiescence into a crusade led by Louis of France that aimed to depose John. Throughout, the pope maintained that John would still find absolution in the eyes of the Church if he repented[364] – which he eventually did. His submission to the papal see helped John acquire the unconditional support of the pope for the remainder of his reign; a support so steadfast that in 1215, the Coggeshall chronicler even reported that the king had sent a messenger with papal letters to Brabant and the adjacent territories to preach and, against the promise of the remission of sins, gather fighters to support the king in England. The chronicler notes that he is uncertain whether or not the letters had really been granted by the pope, but he did apparently not believe it to be entirely impossible.[365]

The submission itself was disputed. The Barnwell Annals note that John "as believed" acted on divine inspiration when he made his submission and, while many perceived the act to have been ignominious and an enormous burden of servitude, the writer maintains that he believed that there had been no other way and that it was prudently done, seeing that under the protection of the papal see, no one would dare to move against him or invade his lands because everyone feared the pope.[366] Roger of Wendover was decidedly with those who believed the submission to the pope had been demeaning, calling it *non formosa sed famosa*[367] – and he felt he could name the reasons behind the king's decision. They were not all too flattering: he was afraid for his soul after having been excommunicated for five years, he was afraid of the impending attack of the French, he feared that if he dared to fight, his own men would desert him, and, most of all, he feared that a prophecy that he would soon lose his kingdom was about to come true.[368] In his assessment, Roger of Wendover branded John a frightened, weak king, who knew that he was in the wrong, and could not trust even his own subjects to follow him. The Stanley Annals are even a shade more drastic, claiming that the king, apart from being afraid to lose his kingdom to the French invasion, feared, on account of the prophecy pertaining the impending end of his reign, that demons might come to take him with them.[369]

---

[363] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 223-224. The passage also claims that John had given orders to confiscate all church property upon being informed of the interdict, but that his officials had stopped short of fulfilling the king's full orders, which had also included expelling the realm's monks from their monasteries, because they refused to quit their premises unless driven from them by force. Since the king's servants had not been authorised to use force against them, they settled for simply confiscating so much of the clergy's money that the ecclesiastics were left with scarcely enough money to cover their ordinary living expenses. Even relatives of the bishops who had laid England under the interdict were thrown into prison.

[364] Cf. ibid., p. 241-242. The Dunstable Annals, p. 45, note how Louis, upon landing at England's shores, was received by a priest, and kissed the cross before entering the island. The Barnwell Annals, p. 209, however, simply state that the king of France followed the pope's wishes out of hatred for the king of the English.

[365] Cf. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 174.

[366] Cf. Barnwell Annals, p. 210.

[367] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 275.

[368] Cf. ibid., p. 247-248.

[369] Cf. William of Newburgh, Continuatio, p. 515: *"Putavit enim propter verbum prophetae sui, quod demones venturi essent rapere illum et ducere secum, vel rex Francorum veniret cito per mandatum domini papae ad destruendum illum et regnum illius invadere…"*.

Nonetheless, John's absolution that also heralded the end of the interdict in England, was received with general joy and enacted in some magnificence. He was absolved "solemnly and publicly, after the manner of the Church" by the very archbishop who had been the reason for the crisis. The king received him, and also a number of other bishops, with the kiss of peace, heard Mass, "and there was great joy among the people".[370] In Roger of Wendover's account, the absolution is even grander: the prostrate, weeping king is lifted by the archbishop of Canterbury and the bishops that have returned from exile and led into a church, where he is absolved in the presence of the magnates who weep for joy. John is not only reinstated as Christian in this ceremony. According to the writer, he also renewed his coronation oaths – to protect the Church and its ministers, to renew good laws, abolish bad ones, judge his subjects by the just judgement of his courts and to return to them what belonged to them by right.[371] In its symbolic dimension, this absolution ceremony made John once more a king, and a king, at that, who could not be a king 'by the grace of God' more than John was now, for he had been forgiven by those who he had wronged, and now possessed his kingdom at the mercy of the pope himself, whose grace was as near to that of God as could possibly be. Despite the obvious effort put into the finely orchestrated show of deliverance, neither the absolution nor John's taking of the cross appeared to help him against the barons or Louis, who continued to fight him despite being subjected to papal exhortation and excommunication. John's motives were, apparently, all too obvious. While this is only carefully hinted at with regard to his submission to the papacy, his attempts to make himself a crusader were questioned intensely. The Barnwell Annals state that when he had himself signed with the cross, like his brother and father before him, his act was "interpreted sinisterly" by others, who claimed that he did not do it out of piety or love for Christ, but to feign a noble purpose to the barons – who at this point began to prepare for war, believing that they could no longer enter into negotiations with the king.[372] Both Roger of Wendover and the Stanley Annals claim that John's motivation behind taking the cross was fear, not piety.[373] The continuation of Gervase of Canterbury's chronicle alone attaches no blame to John's taking of the cross, claiming it to have taken place *ante discordiam inter ipsum et barones suos*[374] – before the king could be said to have had any reason to take it to evade the barons.

With these judgements pronounced on John, it is hardly surprising that the reign had its share of divine signs of disapproval. The most 'popular' was the prophecy, made by Peter, commonly surnamed "the Hermit" (but also bearing other names), that John's reign was about to come to an end. John's harsh treatment of the allegedly prophetic man – incarceration, and, in many

---

[370] Barnwell Annals, p. 213.

[371] Roger of Wendover 3, p. 259-260: *"Rex autem, cum adventum eorum cognovisset, venit obviam illis, et, viso archiepiscopo et episcopis, cecidit pronus in terram ad pedes eorum, lachrymis profusis obsecrans, ut de se ac regno Angliae misericordiam haberent. Videntes ergo archiepiscopus et episcopi tantam regis humilitatem, cum lachrymis illum de terra levaverunt, ducentes a dextris et a sinistris ad ostium ecclesiae cathedralis, ubi cum psalmo quinquagesimo, videntibus magnatibus cunctis et ubertim prae gaudio flentibus, sicut mos est ecclesiae, illum absolverunt. In hac autem absolutione juravit rex, tactis sacrosanctis evangeliis, quod sanctam ecclesiam ejusque ordinatos diligeret, defenderet et manuteneret contra omnes adversarios suos pro posse suo; quodque bonas leges antecessorum suorum, et praecipue leges Eadwardi regis, revocaret, et inquas destrueret, et omnes homines suos secundum justa curiae suae judicia judicaret, quodque singulis redderet jura sua."*

[372] Cf. Barnwell Annals, p. 219.

[373] Cf. William of Newburgh, Continuatio, p. 518; Roger of Wendover 3, p. 296.

[374] Gervase of Canterbury 2, p. 109.

accounts, death by hanging – must not only have given rise to speculation about the king's fears, but also raised a few eyebrows. From among the many accounts, two opposing ones are, perhaps, most interesting: Roger of Wendover's rendering of the story and that of the Barnwell Annals.

According to Roger of Wendover, the hermit made his prophecy before the king, offering him to do with him as he wished if his prophecy was not to come true. The king had him incarcerated and put into chains in the custody of one of his familiars.[375] When the prophesied day came and went, and John was still king, he ordered to have the hermit bound to the tail of a horse, dragged through Wareham and hung, alongside his son. Many, the author claims, believed that he did not deserve to be punished thus cruelly for an affirmation of the truth for it could not be said that he had lied.[376] Roger of Wendover had seen the king's surrender to the pope as an effectual loss of the kingdom, and therefore believed the hermit to have been wronged by John's revenge.

The Barnwell Annals paint a different picture entirely. The "simple and rustic" man – not a hermit, and hence without religious connection – was generally held by the people to be able to foretell the future, and spoke to the king in vague terms, claiming that John would not be reigning on the next Ascension day, but unable to tell him in what manner he would have ceased to be reigning. The king had him seized and imprisoned. The author makes it clear that he thought the man to be a false prophet – only the capture by the king, he claimed, had made a man, who had hardly been known before, even despised, so famous that his name was universally known.[377] He believes the punishment to have been just, because the prophecy had agitated the realm, daunted the heart of the people and encouraged his enemies; had even spread as far as France, where it was believed to have acted as incentive for the invasion. The writer merely claims that John "overdid it" when, alongside the father, he also hanged the son, who had had nothing to do with the prophecy.[378]

As different as these appraisals of John's handling of divine signs of warning are, so are the accounts of his death. It is very remarkable that of all chroniclers to describe his death in a narrative depth sufficient to draw any conclusions as to the general assessment of his life, Roger of Wendover is the one who allows the king to die the most 'reasonable' death. Although he brings a part of his anguish in death upon himself by eating and drinking too much, he is granted enough time for a good Christian death. He confesses, receives the Eucharist, arranges for his son Henry to become his heir, has the barons swear fealty to him and finally chooses his place of burial. His body is dressed in clothes of royal fashion, and honourably *(honorifice)* buried at Worcester. There even arrived, Roger of Wendover claims, messengers bearing letters of about forty barons who wanted to come back to the king's peace – even though John is pointed out to have been too close to death to concern himself with these letters, it is a gesture of reconciliation and goodwill that seems surprising after the scathing words that the writer had often used for the king.[379]

---

[375] Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 240.

[376] Cf. ibid., p. 255-256: *"... unde multis videbatur indignum quod tam crudeli morte pro assertione veritatis puniretur, si enim ea, quae superius gesta leguntur, subtiliter perpendantur, comprobabitur ipsum mendacium non dixisse."*

[377] Barnwell Annals, p. 208.

[378] Ibid., p. 212.

[379] Roger of Wendover 3, p. 385-386.

The History of William Marshal mainly utilises John's death as an opportunity to pour further praise on its hero. The last thing the king does, before being reduced to utter incapability by his disease, is calling his familiars to him and asking them to entreat William Marshal to forgive the many wrongs he had done to him in the course of his reign, with his last desperate breath begging them to have the Marshal take care of his young son. Although John does not receive a typical Christian end, the writer assures the reader that John was "most truly repentant" on his death, even if there is no mention of the king confessing or receiving the Eucharist.[380] The king's renewed faith in the History's main protagonist, the use of his last dying breath to praise the Marshal, is by far sufficient enough to ensure that the reader (or listener) finds himself reconciled with John.

It is the Coggeshall chronicle that draws a drastic, highly unfavourable account of John's death that is reminiscent of the death of William II. After John's death, his familiars are said to have robbed him of everything he had, leaving not even enough for the body to be covered as far as modesty demanded. Then, in the middle of the night, in the hour in which John had died, the chronicler claims a dreadful wind had come up, so strong that citizens feared it would destroy their houses. Moreover, many would afterwards tell of dreadful and fanciful visions, which, however, the author declines to elaborate upon.[381]

The death the Coggeshall chronicle had in store is the death that, from a narrative point of view, was to be expected after the life John had led. He had been regarded as impious, oppressive and insincere in his dealings with the Church. His submission secured him the support of the papacy, but by that time, he had already alienated his followers to such an extent that even the long arm of the Church would no longer aid him. In religious affairs, John's motives were forever questioned – when he attempted, though late, to use the Church for his own benefit, it could no longer open those doors for him that he might have wished it to open.

*Henry III and the Church*

Contrary to John's standing with the Church, there was practically[382] no one who doubted the piety and devotion of his son. Comments, albeit often brief, on Henry III's devotion are scattered throughout most accounts of the reign, and cover a wide range of pious acts. They include the royal couple being present at the dedication of churches,[383] the king's tour through France with the especial purpose of visiting, praying at and donating to the churches of the country,[384] the

[380] History of William Marshal 2, lines 15172-15204 (p. 260-261).
[381] Cf. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 184.
[382] The one exception is found in Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 289-291, in which the king, during an argument with Simon de Montfort over the latter's conduct in Gascony, is accused by Simon de Montfort of never having confessed, or, if he had done so, of never having truly repented. The king, of course, denies the accusation. The matter remains unresolved, as the two quarreling parties are dragged apart, and the chronicler does not comment on (his view of) the truth or falseness of the matter.
[383] Cf. Annals of Tewkesbury, p. 166, which note the presence of four members of the royal family and a number of nobles at the dedication of the church of Salisbury, and Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 262, which reports the royal couple being present at the dedication of a church founded by Richard of Cornwall.
[384] The details of the depictions of Henry III's visit to France are as varied in their references to the king's religious activities as they are in respect to the splendour with which he moved in the circles of the court of France.Thus, the Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, p. 20, simply remarks that, during his stay, he visited the shrine of St Edmund the Confessor at Pontigny. The Waverly Annals, p. 346, also add the stay at Pontigny to their account of the king's visit,

king praying "day and night among lights and with great devotion to the blessed Alban"[385] and his rebuilding of Westminster Abbey in which he himself laid the first stone.[386] Even the critical work of William de Rishanger, despite its aim of depicting the wars with the barons, found the time to note the king's especial religiosity, noting that in his personal devotion to St. Frithuswith, no other king had been his equal.[387] In his continuation of Matthew Paris' chronicle, the same writer would even recite an anecdote to praise the king's devotion. Besides granting a peaceful, flawlessly Christian death to the dying king, the narrative makes note of the king, who, it claims, was deemed imprudent in secular acts, having been esteemed for his great devotion; the king was wont to hear three Masses a day, would hear more in private, and would kiss the hand the priest that elevated the host. As an anecdote underlining the king's devotion, the author also includes a brief exchange between Louis, the king of France, and Henry III, in which the English king explains why he preferred Masses over sermons: he would much rather see a friend than hear him talked about.[388] Interspersed with these notices are more lengthy accounts of the king's generosity to religious houses and his especial devotion to St Edward the Confessor.

In the narratives of the reign, the devotion of Henry III to his sainted predecessor is expressed in the king's customary festivities for St Edward's day. Matthew Paris frequently reports how the king celebrated the feast day, how he ordered the attendants to come dressed in fineries, compelled his nobles to attend, used the day for knighting ceremonies and even required the realm's nobility to celebrate the day without him if he were not present.[389] The most outstanding token of the king's veneration of the martyr was to have a precious tomb fashioned to which the saint's body was eventually translated – a ceremony to which the king invited the

---

adding that Henry III visited the shrine "for the love and devotion" which he felt towards the martyred archbishop. The Burton Annals, p. 327-229, claim the foremost intention of the visit to have been a pilgrimage to the martyr's tomb that was then followed by a visit to the French court. Matthew Paris' account (Chronica Majora 5, p. 475-483) is the most elaborate account. The chronicler begins by stating that the king prayed at the tomb of his predecessors at Fontevraud and, while ill, "devoutly prayed" at the tomb of St Edmund, where he received back his health and left precious gifts. When the king proceeded towards Paris, the writer declares that Henry III had "long avidly desired" to see the kingdom of France, its king and queen, the cities, churches and habits of the kingdom, as well as the private chapel and relics of the king of France. While much of the account is devoted to regal splendour, the theme of religion does crop up again during his stay: he feasts a great number of poor at his abode in the Old Temple, prays and offers up "kingly" gifts at the private chapel of the king of France and, with "devout veneration and gifts" visits "other places" of the city.

385 Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 489-490: *"... ubi qualibet die ac nocte cum multo luminari et magna devotione beatum Albanum, tanquam regni sui prothomartirem, oravit pro se et filio suo E[dwardo] et aliis amicis suis"*. The chronicler would seem to imply that these devout prayers lasted through all of Henry III's six days at St Alban's, since he links the quoted sentence directly to the statement that the king spent six days at the religious house, and adds no further activities of Henry III during the time in question.

386 Cf. Robert of Gloucester 2, lines 10,658-10,659; Matthew Paris, Historia Anglorum, p. 242. See also Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 427, which notes that the king undertook the rebuilding of the church because of his devotion to St Edward the Confessor, but does not note that it was him who laid the first stone.

387 Cf. William de Rishanger, Chronicle of the Barons' War, p. 22.

388 Cf. William de Rishanger, Chronica, p. 73-75, for the entire death scene. The king's devotion is phrased thus: *"Hic nempe Rex quantum in actibus saeculi putabatur minus prudens, tanto apud Deum majori devotione pollebat. Singulis namque diebus tres Missas, cum nota, audire solebat, et, plures audire cupiens, privatum celebrantibus assidue assistebat; ac cum sacerdos corpus Dominicum elevaret, manum sacerdotis tenere, et illam osculari, solebat. Contigit autem aliquando Sanctum Lodowicum, Francorum Regem, cum eo super hoc conferentem, dicere, quod non semper Missis, sed frequentius Sermonibus, audiendis esse vacandum. Cui faceta urbanitate respondens, ait, se malle amicum suum saepius videre, quam de eo loquentem, licet bona dicentem, audire."*

389 Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 85: *"Die vero sancti Aedwardi, quem rex miro cultu et ampliato honore sollempnizando studet serenare"*; Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 270; ibid., p. 395, notes how the festivity was celebrated most splendidly at the command of the king.

realm's magnates and, as the Winchester Annals allude and the Worcester Annals proclaim, to which he might have worn his crown but decided not to. He did, however, give copious gifts, and a solemn Mass was read on that day.[390]

Henry III seems to have been an accomplished donator to religious houses. When Matthew Paris recorded a visit of the king to his convent, he would list the gifts offered by the king: often silk, vestments, palls or precious necklaces.[391] Presenting the places he visited – specifically, of course, churches – with gifts can certainly be considered a part of royal routine. Thus these painstakingly detailed descriptions of the king's customary gifts to St Alban's could easily point more to the chronicler's fastidiousness in recording than to the king being perceived as spectacularly generous towards the church. They become more out of the ordinary when the chronicler finds himself commenting on the extent of the king's generosity rather than the fact that the king was generous: at the end of 1244, he remarks that Henry III offered a precious mantle and three golden necklaces "in his memory and for the honour of the martyr, although he had offered seven before."[392] At another such visit of the king (which, as always, entailed costly presents), he remarked that "it should be known that never another king of England, not even king Offa himself, the founder of St Alban's, or any other of his predecessors, indeed not even all of them, had contributed so many palls to ornament the walls of the church as he alone had"[393]. The Dunstable Annals, while noting that the king bestowed costly gifts upon a visit,[394] also report another, more singular instance of royal generosity: when the priory of Luffild had been robbed of its gold, silver, vessels and ornaments (and everything that could be found within), the king, "hearing of the unfortunate event, consoled the monks, and ordered them to be given three chalices", ornaments and money.[395]

Henry III did not stop at such ordinary gifts. His more spectacular donations were, however, reserved to a matter much closer to his heart: furnishing Westminster Abbey and supporting the cult of Edward the Confessor. The Abbey was given a block of white marble from the Holy Land which dated back to the time of the incarnation and, more than that, bore the footprint of Christ which had been left there by him before he ascended to Heaven, so that his disciples might remember him until he should return to earth. The *nobile donativum* henceforth graced the church – albeit not as much as another relic, around which Henry III constructed a considerably greater show than around the saviour-footed piece of marble: the Westminster Holy Blood relic.[396]

---

[390] Cf. Dunstable Annals, p. 252; Worcester Annals, p. 458; Winchester Annals, p. 107-108. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 156-157, also notes the king having a new shrine fashioned at his own expense.

[391] For instance Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 402, Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 319-320, p. 574, p. 617, p. 724.

[392] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 402: *"Et cum de more ad majus altare ascendit oraturus, optulit unam pallam preciosam et tria monilia aurea, feretro apponenda, in sui memoriam et martyris ad honorem, cum tamen ante septem optulisset."*

[393] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, 489-490: *"Et sciendum, quod nunquam aliquis rex Angliae, nec ipse rex Offa, coenobii Sancti Albani fundator, vel alius de praedecessoribus, immo nec omnes, tot contulerunt pallas ad ornandum faciem ecclesiae, sicut ipse solus, videlicet Henricus tertius Anglorum rex...".*

[394] Cf. Dunstable Annals, p. 173, which notes both the gifts presented to the king and his family upon their visit as well as the king's gifts of silk and money to the convent.

[395] Ibid., p. 165.

[396] In much greater depth than in any way possible (or relevant) here, the Westminster Blood Relic is discussed in Vincent, The Holy Blood. Besides elaborating on Henry III's considerable efforts to establish a lasting cult around

For the presentation of this remarkable acquisition, the king had a meticulously planned framework and programme in mind. The day he had selected was the translation of Edward the Confessor, the king's favourite saint, and he wrote to the entire nobility of the kingdom to attend the celebrations he had planned for the day. Apart from the customary solemnities in honour of the saint, he wanted them to "witness the gladdest news of the holy blessing newly bestowed by the heavens upon England", to be present for the knighting of his half-brother William de Valence, with whom a number of other young noblemen were to be knighted. The king thus laid the foundations for a splendid festival, a *festum multiplex*, as Matthew Paris calls it. The nobles arrived and inquired as to the nature of the news they had come to witness, and were told that their king, as the *princeps Christianissimus* that he was, had taken "the example of the king of France" who worshipped another relic from the Holy Land, a piece of the true cross, at Paris: Henry III had acquired a portion of the blood that Christ had spilled at the cross. The relic was to find its new home in England, accompanied by the testimony of the seals of the master of the Temple and the Hospitallars as well as the Patriarch of Jerusalem, archbishops, bishops, abbots and other prelates and nobles from the Holy Land. Meanwhile, the king, far from revelling nobles, held a lone vigil. "With devout and contrite spirit", fasting on bread and water and devoutly praying among a multitude of lights, he prepared himself "prudently" for the solemnities on the following day.[397]

The king's preparation was not without reason: he took *the* central role in the translation of the relic – and it was as staged, symbolically charged and visually powerful as can be. The king received the vessel holding the relic "with the highest honour, reverence and awe" before he embarked on the strenuous task of carrying it to its new home: he walked the mile from the Church of St Paul to that of Westminster on foot and without stopping, "wearing a humble habit, that is, a poor cloak without a hood". During that trip, he carried the vessel with both hands, and "always" kept his eyes fixed on either the vessel or the heavens. "Two helpers supported his arms, so that he would not falter from such great exertion". Nor did the king set his burden down as soon as he reached the church (*nec adhuc cessabat dominus rex)*. He "indefatigably" continued to bear the vessel, making a circuit of the church, the palace and his own sleeping quarters. Henry III was effectively sanctifying the place that he appears to have regarded as the heart soul of his realm, adorned not only by the prestigious Westminster Hall but also by Henry III's building project, Westminster Abbey, which housed the shrine of Edward the Confessor. With the king as the centrepiece, the rest of the procession was just as impressive – an effort that was honoured by the chronicler with a drawing that did not only show the king

---

the holy blood at Westerminster, the study also discusses the history, questionability and depiction of blood relics in general.

[397] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 640-641. The king's solitary preparations are particularly significant for his display of devotion: *"Dominus autem rex, utpote princeps Christianissimus, ab Augusto Eraclio victoriosissimo ac piissimo imperatore, crucem sanctam exaltante, et a rege Francorum tunc superstite, crucem eandam, ut praescribitur, Parisius honorante, sumens exemplum, devoto spiritu ac contrito in vigila sancti Ae[dwardi] in pane et aqua jejunans, et nocte vigilans, cum ingenti lumine et devotis orationibus se ad crastinam sollempnitatem prudenter praeparavit."* It is questionable whether Matthew Paris, in claiming that the king was taking the example of the king of France, was regarding the royal efforts as inferior to that of Louis IX, and propelled by the credulity he commonly attributes to Henry III. The writer himself states that the holy blood relic was doubted even as its acquisition was being celebrated (see below), contrary to the cross relics, of which Louis IX possessed one, and which were far less controversial.

walking underneath a pall, eyes fixed upon the relic, but also the bishops in attendance. They had been ordered by the king to come dressed in their festive vestments, with their trappings, crosses and lighted candles to accompany the procession. The pall was borne by four people and the entire procession entered Westminster to the singing, exultation and tears of other churchmen "estimated to be more than a hundred".[398]

Even as the "great solemnity" in Westminster was proceeding magnificently, Henry III, having exchanged his humble garb for the representative outfit of a king, in most "precious clothing" and wearing a golden diadem, "sitting gloriously on his royal throne" knighted his half-brother and a number of other noblemen. It is difficult in any way to doubt that the king was deliberately staging so great a combination of festivities. Matthew Paris even notes how the king, after the knighting, had espied him and called him towards his throne, where he urged him to commend to writing all that which he had seen that day, which the writer agrees to do.[399]

Although he noted down the solemnity of the event in considerable detail, the account is not entirely as flawless as the king might have hoped it to be. While the bishop of Norwich is preaching a sermon to the people on the preciousness of the relic thus received, and advertises the remission of penance worshippers would be granted, the chronicler actively undermines his words by his insertions. On the onset of the sermon, when the bishop preaches that the blood was the most holy of relics, the writer surmises that he, the bishop, made the a statement so that England would have no less joy and glory in the possession of such a treasure than France had in the possession of the fragment of the cross. He then inserts an agitated interjection by a prior of Jerusalem who asks the assembled people why they would still waver, when so many (illustrious) people had attested the worth of the relic by affixing their seals. While the words are approved of, the relic retains a certain dubiousness: as Matthew Paris' narration leaves the actions within the church, he has a number of people question how Christ could possibly have left blood on earth if he had been resurrected whole and unimpaired on the third day after his passion.[400] Although a cautiously planned and splendid display of his religious devotion and earthly splendour, the problematic relic appears to have been sufficient to at least partially undermine the divine legitimation of the episode. At best, the king had acquired a contested holy object; at worst, he had fallen prey to a false relic in his ambition to build a reputation to rival that of Louis IX.

Even if his prudence might thus be called into question, Henry III's devotion was beyond doubt. However, this did not always guarantee the basis for an entirely flawless relation to the Church – at least not to English Church. The kingship of Henry III stood under papal protection from the very start, and contemporaries noted the efforts the pope expended in his protection by

---

[398] Ibid., p. 641-642. As to the king's role in the procession, Matthew Paris writes: *"Quo et ipse rex venit, et cum summo honore et reverentia ac timore accipiens illud vasculum ..., tulit illud ferens in propatulo supra faciem suam, iens pedes, habens humilem habitum, scilicet pauperem capam sine caputio, praecedentibus vestitis praedictis, sine pausatione, usque ad ecclesiam Westmonasterii, quae distat ab ecclesia Sancti Pauli circiter uno miliari. Nec praetermittendum, quod ambabus manibus illud deferens, cum per stratam salebrosam et inaequalem pergeret, semper vel in caelum vel in ipsum vas lumina tenebat defixa. ... Supportabantque duo coadjutores brachia sua, ne in tanto forte labore deficeret. ... Nec adhuc cessabat dominus rex, quin indefessus ferens illud vas, ut prius, circuire[t] ecclesiam, regiam, et thalamos suos."*

[399] Ibid., p. 644-645.

[400] Cf. ibd., p. 642-644.

portraying Louis VIII as hostile, invasive force against which the island kingdom stood (albeit in some cases reluctantly) united under the auspices (and with the considerable urging) of the legate. There was barely a swing of the spiritual sword that was not employed in the defence of the young king's claim to the throne. According to the Barnwell Annals, the legate exercised "the sword of Peter" against all those who went against the king in such a way that he pronounced excommunications, proclaimed the interdict on the lands that adhered to Louis VIII, compelled the prelates of England to side with the king, even promised the remission of sins for those who supported Henry III. These men, "as if they were to fight against infidels, bore the sign on their chest."[401] While the annalist's account also includes criticism of the Church's cupidity that was suspected to lie at the heart of the legate's great efforts to keep Henry III on the throne,[402] Roger of Wendover expends his narrative capability to style the assault on the forces of the French king with all the rhetoric of a crusading battle. "To animate all to fight, the legate, clothed in white robes, with the entire clergy excommunicated Louis by name together with his accomplices and followers". Those supporting the young king's cause were granted full pardon of the sins they had confessed; as reward for the just, he promised eternal salvation. Having received absolution and benediction, the army "flew to arms" and departed swiftly, "rejoicing" as they went (*moverunt ovantes)*. When they advanced upon the enemy "they feared nothing but that [the enemy] would take flight before they reached the city", "everywhere banners and shields sparkled" that struck those who beheld them with great terror.[403]

Inspiring at the onset of his reign, the papal support for Henry III did not retain its popularity throughout the remainder of it.[404] Matthew Paris would make extremely scathing remarks on the king's tendency to "buy" or, by men in the right places, otherwise acquire the pope's favourable judgement. He is portrayed as having put claims before the pope that, while ascertaining that he got his will against the payment of money, incurred him the contempt of the "experienced" for complaining to the pope.[405] Most drastic is his comment on the king wishing to detain his nobles from embarking on the crusade without him. When they prepared to set sail, Matthew Paris writes: "and lo! the king, who like a small boy that, whining, runs back to his mother when he has been hurt or offended, swiftly sent messengers to the pope, begging that their journey was

[401] Barnwell Annals, p. 233-235.
[402] Cf. ibid., p. 235-236.
[403] Roger of Wendover 4, p. 19-20.
[404] Henry III's favourable relations to the pope pale against the complaints over the Roman extortions and the impact of the king's good standing. A few notices do, of course remain: the Dunstable Annals, for instance, report how the legate protested (in vain) against Louis VIII being crowned unless he restored Normandy to Henry III (p. 81), how he demanded the return of the continental lands (p. 100), and how a papal legate was sent to England in support of the king and queen against the insurgent barons, bearing the power of two swords – to excommunicate as well as to disinherit (p. 233).
[405] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 109-110. The king had put a complaint before the pope because a bishop had excommunicated one of his sheriffs, and received as letter in return that forbade prelates to force royal officials to try causes before them if they pertained to royal jurisdiction. Ibid., p. 102-103, contains a similar episode in which the crusaders, having pledged their lands, sufficiently supplied themselves and made ready for departure, are detained by the king, who, by means of payment, had obtained letters from the papal see that allowed him to set the date for their departure. Matthew Paris claims that the delay caused by this intercession was the cause for the "mutilation" and "unhappy languishing" of the crusade.

prevented."[406] In general, his depiction of the king's relation to the pope is highly unfavourable. Particularly in the first third of the king's reign, the chronicler assembles an unflattering array of depictions of Henry III's submissive, credulous and undignified behaviour towards the legate.[407] The very climax of this portrayal is a passage in which he claims that the king spurned the advice of his subjects, "became more and more insane; and consigned himself to the will of the Romans, especially of the legate, to such an extent that it seemed as if he were worshipping his footsteps; he declared in public and in private that he could dispose, change or alienate nothing in the kingdom without the consent of his lord the pope or the legate, so that he might not be called a king, but a vassal of the pope."[408]

It is to this overly great attachment and obedience to the Church that Matthew Paris attributes the severity of the exactions imposed upon the churches of England and the extent with which they were given as benefices to Romans. The relationship between Henry III and the Church of Rome is one of the few instances in which the chronicler, as time progresses, alters his depiction of the king. From the subservient, adoring wastrel who allows simoniacs to plunder the kingdom,[409] the king's character is shown to perform a veritable volte-face, becoming a manful defender of his clergy against the oppressive Romans: "then finally, although late, the king, when he had reflected a little while, began to hate the insatiable cupidity of the Roman court" and its practices of robbery.[410] Entirely contrary to the passivity depicted earlier, he springs into action, writes a letter to the pope against the extortions, and, what is more, even confronts the legate with regal wrath. The legate, threatened to no small degree by the barons, had asked the king to leave the kingdom under free conduct, whereupon Henry III is reported to have said to him: "May the devil conduct you to hell and through it."[411] The king began to stand "firmly" for the

---

[406] Ibid., p. 134-135: *"Et ecce dominus rex, qui sicut puerulus laesus vel offensus ad matrem querulus solet recurrere, ad Papam miserat festinanter supplicans, ut hoc iter impediret".* The chronicler stresses how wrong the king's decision was by pointing out that, if he had let his nobles leave in advance, he would have impressed all onlookers by the immense power a mere advance force of his constituted.

[407] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 3, p. 530-531, where the writer claims that the king had done his utmost to keep the legate in England, fearing that he might die while the papal messenger was not within the kingdom. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 35-36, describes an incident in which the king, when met with the complaints of the realm's abbots about papal extortions, calls out the legate to deal with them, as they were going against the will of the pope; he even threatens to have them imprisoned. Ibid., p. 83-84, describes the final days of the legate's stay in England and how the king, much to the displeasure of other nobles and dignitaries present, placed the legate in the royal seat, arranging himself and the other attendants of the court around him. While Henry III is portrayed as greatly lamenting the departure of the legate, Matthew Paris claims that the entire kingdom rejoiced at his departure because of his frequent exactions in the name of the pope.

[408] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 3, p. 411-412: *"Sed rex, tam ejus quam aliorum naturalium hominum suorum spreto consilio, magis ac magis, ut incepit, deliravit; et se voluntati Romanorum, praecipue legati, quem inconsultius advocaverat, mancipavit adeo, ut videretur quasi vestigia sua adorare; affirmans se tam in publico quam secreto, sine domini sui Papae vel legati consensu, nil posse de regno disponere, transmutare, vel alienare, ut non rex, sed feodarius Papae diceretur."*

[409] The king is not directly characterised as such, but Matthew Paris establishes this picture in the depiction of the king's subservience to the legate and the pope, and, even more drastically, in his recurring portrayal of England as a land that has been left open to the plunder of the Roman Church, a land where simony abounds, true faith perishes, and revenues are carried off to distant places. Cf. ibid., p. 50-51, which can be seen as a model passage for these comments.

[410] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 4, p. 419: *"Tunc vero, licet sero, dominus rex, aliquantulum conversus ad se, coepit detestari Romanae curiae insatiabilem cupiditatem, et totius regni, immo etiam et ecclesiae, per eam factas injuriosas occupationes illicitasque rapinas."*

[411] Ibid., p. 420-421: "*Cui rex, commotus et iratus nimis, ait;* [sic!] *'Diabolus te ad inferos inducat, et perducat.'"* The episode, in its entirety, has the king reflect on his previous mistakes, and endorse the conduct of the barons, who had attempted

realm's liberty, refusing to pay any further tribute to Rome.[412]

Other writers regard the relationship between king and pope with more mixed feelings, but, on the whole, are far less condemning of the king's initial 'subservience' and convey a greater sense of the papal curia as an oppressive force in the background. The Dunstable Annals, for instance, report that the king had called together the clergy of the realm to discuss the numerous afflictions the English Church suffered through Rome. The discussion concludes with the king setting up a letter on the complaints that is sealed by the abbots and priors.[413] The Burton Annals, with more distinctive criticism of the king's behaviour, note that a mutual love connected king and pope – but it was a love of the money from the purses of the kingdom of England. Both seemed bent rather upon extorting and exploiting the populace rather than leading it to salvation.[414] The Tewkesbury Annals, in like vein, note that the king, at the demands of the pope, began to levy grave exactions through the kingdom.[415]

If the dues demanded by the papal see were not universally seen to be extortions attributed to some fault of Henry III, his good relationship to Rome ascertained him something else that was viewed infinitely more critical: largely free sway in the administration of the English Church. This finds ample expression in the king's filling of vacancies. The king would introduce foreigners to high ecclesiastical offices, often against the complaints made by the individual convents. While such complaints recur with relative frequency, Matthew Paris is, once more, the most radical: he portrays the king as having grieved for a dead bishop more out of show than anything else, and then to have attempted to make a foreign relative bishop, despite the latter's utter incapability of performing as needed. The depiction climaxes when the writer portrays the king as walking straight into the cathedral, seating himself in the prior's chair and beginning to "preach" to the assembled convent; bringing forth a barbed entreaty that lured with promises and shocked with threats to which the monks fearfully complied.[416] While the chronicler would also report the

---

to expulse the legate with threats. Henry III affirms before the legate that, owed to the exactions of the Roman curia, he had long had difficulty in restraining his magnates in (justly) tearing the papal envoy limb from limb.

412 Ibid., p. 479: *"Unde cum dominus rex hoc audisset, in maximam iram excandens, juravit, quod etsi episcopi turpiter sint incurvati, ipse formiter staret pro regni libertate; nec unquam dum vitales carperet auras, censum sub nomine tributi curiae Romanae persolveret."* The king's rage succeeds a papal order to the bishops of the realm to affix their seals to "that detestable charter ... of lamentable memory" set up in King John's time. When the bishops, who Paris claims to have become "effeminate by fear" sign the charter, the king shows this outburst of rage. In the chronicler's rendition, he is thus turned into the last line of defence for the kingdom after the bishops have broken down – a quite remarkable achievement for the narrative figure that is the king, given his previous depiction.

413 Cf. Dunstable Annals, p. 169-170.

414 Cf. Burton Annals, p. 323: *"Cum inter dominum Innocentium summum Pontificem, et dominum Henricum regem Angliae, esset amor reciprocus, prout populus praedicabat, magis ob amorem pecuniae de Anglorum marsupiis utriusque videlicet populi exhauriendae sive extorquendae, quam propter patriae caelestis regnum et gloriam adquirendae ..."*.

415 Cf. Tewkesbury Annals, p. 163: *"... pro domini Papae demanda grave exiit edictum et jugum oneris inauditum, dirissimumque a liberis ac servis totius Angliae attemptarat exigere tallagium, scilicet omnium mobilium et immobilium totius Angliae tertium denarium."*

416 Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 178-185. The Annals of Worcester, p. 435, note, albeit without judgement, that Boniface, an uncle of the queen was elected to the archbishopric of Canterbury. The detestable conduct of this particular archbishop towards his monks, against which the king is portrayed as protesting only very feebly, is described at length by Matthew Paris (Chronica Majora 5, p. 468-470 and 537). The Tewkesbury Annals, p. 110, remark how the king had wanted to introduce an "*alienigena*" to the bishopric of Winchester, which was protested against by the monks of the convent. Matthew Paris, of course, makes much more lengthy comments; see, for instance, Chronica Majora 3, p. 489-491, Chronica Majora 5, p. 55 and 329-330.

rapacious behaviour of the king with regard to the property of churches,[417] the Burton Annals add another offence to the king's tally: he was actively undermining clerical privileges, and summoning clergymen to the jurisdiction of his court, where he "absolved or condemned, and thus, against the divine and natural law, turned a head into a tail."[418]

Generous alms and a publicly shown personal piety: Henry III's relation to religion stands unquestioned – it was his relation to the religious that stirred protest against him. Coupled with the widespread dislike of the papacy's grasp for more power and control, the compliance of the king with the Roman curia could only lead to criticism, and the king's preference for continental familiars did little to lighten the tension. It is worth noting, however, that these complaints ebbed away in the course of the king's reign with the changes that were – albeit forcibly – brought about in his inner circle, leaving Henry III as a deeply devout king possessed of the very same failures in matters ecclesiastical that he was claimed to have in other respects: a love for foreigners, greed and credulity.

[417] Cf. Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 5, p. 466-467, for the king's use of the property of abbeys whose abbots had passed away to alleviate his own debts; ibid. p. 394 depicts the king's officials plundering the goods of an abbey after its abbots had died. In a drastic passage on p. 539-540, the king, directly after having prayed at a bishop's tomb at Durham, has his officials force his way into the church to obtain a large sum of money that had been deposited there, against the opposition of the monks.

[418] Cf. Burton Annals, p. 413: *"Quia igitur saepe contingit archiepiscopos, episcopos, et alios praelatos inferiores, per literas domini regis ad saeculare judicium evocari, ut ibi respondeant super his quae mere ad ipsorum officia et forum ecclesiasticum pertinere noscuntur"*. See also 422-423: *"... dominus tamen rex vocat ad suum forum ecclesiasticas personas super actionibus carum personalibus, responsuras, judicium suscepturas, et in suo foro absolvit vel condemnat; sic contra legem divinam et naturalem, caput convertens in caudam."*

*3.4. The King as Story: the Emerging Image*

The relationship of the individual kings to the Church closes the last of the spheres in which monarchs were judged against virtues and ideals. It does inevitably lead back to the beginning: personal piety was often found linked to the general reputation of a ruler's morality.

There are a number of further influences that would contribute to a king's emerging reputation. Collective memory housed a number of royal forebears that, as was the natural thing for it to do, was ever growing as time proceeded. Their rule might stand for particular traits desirable in kingship or simply for the 'good old times', but, perhaps most crucial of all, in a time when tracing origins back as far as was decency would in any way allow, when having a history was tantamount to possessing legitimacy,[1] emphasising the connection between present and past monarchy greatly added to a king's nimbus of justified dominance – not least because, although succession was a generally tumultuous affair with no decently fixed rules.[2] Kingship was, after all, passed on by hereditary right. The line of old kings, with eyewitness recollection of their reigns gradually dwindling (or having long since fossilised) into wider cultural memory, acquired aspects of idealisation and mystification – and was interspersed with genuinely mythical figures. These figures, like myths of origin and, indeed, often part of these myths themselves, could help create a common, unifying basis of identification for the members of a kingdom, and a source of legitimacy in themselves.

The kingdom of England, whether ruled by the Norman or the Angevin dynasty, both of whom were new to the throne, faced a full-blown mythical identity crisis in the period of investigation; a shortcoming that must have appeared especially virulent when compared to the Capetian kings of France, who continued to hold the throne in unbroken male succession, potently touched for scrofula, and traced the roots of their kingdom back to ancient Troy, while being able to claim Charlemagne, legendary ideal king, as their dynasty's founder.[3] William the Bastard's conquest might well be regarded as usurpation, realised through violence. Not only had the Conquest bloodily eradicated England's noble elite, replaced it with William I's predominantly Norman continental followers and, for centuries to come, reduced English to the status of the language of the common people,[4] it had also turned the question of the legitimacy of kingship to a rather thorny issue.[5]

Where the Norman kings sought to emphasize continuity and tradition, embracing the ideological legacy of their Anglo-Saxon predecessors,[6] particularly Edward the Confessor, under the Angevin kings, these figures had apparently lost much of their relevancy. A new figure appeared on the stage: the mythical King Arthur. Arthur, presumably a military commander who

---

[1] Cf. Goetz, "Konstruktion der Vergangenheit", p. 241.

[2] Cf. Barlow, Edward the Confessor, p. 54; a problem that had persisted throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, with the process eventually becoming so confused that no "orderly, generally accepted, and efficient practice" was observed in making kings.

[3] Cf. Berg, Richard Löwenherz, p. 271.

[4] Cf. Jucker, History of English, p. 29-30.

[5] Dennis, Image-making for the Conquerors, p. 33-34, also notes that England, twice conquered by foreign rulers in the course of the twelfth century, was a land with a special need to project the image of its kings, with the (re)presentation of a fittingly royal image vital to the success of kingship.

[6] Cf. Green, Kingship, Lordship, and Community, p. 2.

had fought against the Saxon invasion around the year 500,[7] had been used by English historiographers since the eighth century when it came to explaining their origins. It was, however, a twelfth century writer who provided the template that would make Arthur a national hero during the reign of the Plantagenêts. Geoffrey of Monmouth's exceedingly popular book, the *Historia Regnum Britanniae*, written in 1136, survives in over two hundred manuscripts, more than the writings of the island's famed historian, Bede. Fifty of the manuscripts date from the twelfth century, a third of the total having spread as far as the continent.[8] It traces back the kingdom's roots to the days of the fall of Troy; a singularly potent myth of origin that filled a gap in the island's mythical landscape: while English and Celtic origin myths were, at the beginning of the twelfth century, vying for interpretational sovereignty in the early British past, there was as yet no Anglo-Norman version to compete alongside them.[9] Geoffrey of Monmouth's book did not simply compete with them, but constituted an outright nullification of any British claim to legitimate rule, asserting that the British had long since abandoned the isle for the continent, leaving it to the degenerated, the barbaric, the depraved; a sordid no-man's-land that could only hope for 'help' from the continent.[10] The *Historia*, dedicated to Robert of Gloucester and Waleran Count of Meulan, was aimed decidedly at a courtly audience, an audience among which Arthur would soon figure as historical reality.[11]

The legendary king depicted by Geoffrey of Monmouth is an ambitious ideal: with his sword Caliburnus, not using more than a single blow, he killed 460 Saxons,[12] he stands, a kingly master of war, as the last bulwark of civilisation against the barbarian hordes, a conquering king, after the defeat of the Scots and Picts on par with Charlemagne and Alexander the Great.[13] This particular Arthur figure is not content with the boundaries of England; increasingly styled as *rex totius maioris Britanniae*, he does not even limit himself to England and its Celtic neighbours, but builds an empire that reaches from Iceland and Scandinavia to the Alps, that even challenges the power of Rome.[14] Not merely a master of war, Arthur is also portrayed as a thoroughly Christian ruler, whose court maintained the highest moral standards.[15] Similar to Charlemagne's paladins, the twelve Knights of the Round Table mirrored the apostolic number.[16] The additional affiliation of the king with chivalric ideals made him, contrary to Charlemagne, a ruler apt to act both at court and in war.[17]

Geoffrey of Monmouth's material, especially the figure of Arthur and the prophecies of Merlin, was reproduced, cited and referred to time and again after its publication, indicating how

---

[7] Cf. Fischer, Richard Löwenherz, p. 101.
[8] Cf. Grandsen, Historial Writing, p. 201. See Gilingham, Context and Purposes, for a discussion of the history's background.
[9] Cf. Busse, Brutus im Albion, p. 209.
[10] Cf. ibid., p. 210-212. Geoffrey of Monmouth, book 11, 184-188, p. 256-258.
[11] Cf. Higham, King Arthur, p. 222-226; Grandsen, Historical Writing, p. 204; Geoffrey of Monmouth, Introduction, p. 15.
[12] Cf. ibid., book 9, 120-130, p. 198.
[13] Cf. Chauou, L'idéologie Plantagenêt, p. 34-35, p. 43.
[14] Cf. Higham, King Arthur, p. 219. See Geoffrey of Monmouth, book 9-10, 159-164, 216-222, for Arthur's claim to tribute from Rome.
[15] Cf. Higham, King Arthur, p. 220.
[16] Cf. Kleinschmidt, Herrscherdarstellung, footnote p. 47.
[17] Cf. Chauou, L'idéologie Plantagenêt, p. 169.

rapidly it had become part of a collective recollection. William of Newburgh, famous for his sneer that Monmouth had simply dressed up the old British tales of Arthur in fanciful Latin and freely spiced them up with his own imagination,[18] mentions the Bretons hoping for the return of the legend-king at the birth of the Plantagenet prince Arthur.[19] The Coggeshall chronicle, in turn, refers not only to the 'discovery' of Arthur's tomb, but, with a casualty that bears evidence to how widely-known the material must have been, states, when Normandy was lost during the reign of John, that the sceptre had been separated from the sword, that is Normandy from the kingdom of England, just as the prophecy of Merlin had foretold.[20] It has long been debated to which extent the Angevin rulers attempted to utilise the growing popularity of the legend of King Arthur. While Henry II is attested to have come into contact with the myth, and to even have fostered it to some extent by ordering the search for Arthur's tomb, it does not appear that he actively used the myth for his own, legitimatory purposes – his sons, however, did, most prominently of course Richard the Lionheart who was claimed to be in possession of Excalibur.[21]

While the strife for legitimate rule burrowed deeply into the English past, the two dynasties, Normans and Angevins, additionally had a mythical nimbus of their own that was tied to their family, to their people.

> " 'Let any of the Englishmen whom our Danish and Norwegian ancestors have conquered in a hundred battles, come forth and prove that the nation of Rou, from his time until now, have ever been routed in the field, and I will withdraw in defeat. Is it not shameful to you that a people accustomed to defeat, a people devoid of military knowledge, a people that does not even possess arrows, should advance as if in battle order against you, O bravest?' "[22]

Thus, if Henry of Huntingdon were to have his say, would the pre-battle of speech of William the Conqueror have sounded when he rallied his host upon the field of Hastings. Recalling past victories, in particular the defeat of the English at the hands of the forbears of the Normans and evoking the unsurpassable military expertise of William I's people, the chronicler's words breathe the spirit of what is commonly referred to as the 'Norman myth': the stylisation of the Normans as indomitable, fierce fighters, proud, skilled in the art of war, and united by a strong sense of identity. The Normans as a people – their momentous successes as much as their silent disappearance from the main stage of European politics, arguably a consequence of their capability to absorb (and adopt to the point of assimilation) the cultures they conquered – continue to entice researchers, and most of the works tracing the history of the Norman people sooner or later also touch upon the 'Norman myth'.[23] A ragtag band of former raiders that occupied, Christianized and slightly Frank-ified, the north-western edge of France, the Normans could nevertheless – or precisely for that reason – call a strong sense of group identity their own.

---

[18] Cf. Clanchy, England and its Rulers, p. 28.
[19] William of Newburgh, book 3, ch. 7, p. 235.
[20] Cf. Ralph of Cogeshall, p. 146: *"... itaque hoc anno, juxta prophetiam Merlini, 'Gladius a sceptro separatus est,' id est, ducatus Normanniae a regno Angliae."*
[21] For a recent discussion, see Aurell, Henry II and Arhurian Legend.
[22] Henry of Huntingdon, vi. 29 (p. 391-393); Translation by Greenway.
[23] See Jäschke, Anglonormannen, and Brown, Die Normannen, for a more general history of the genesis of the Norman people; for the myth, see Plassmann, Normannen, p. 288; Chibnall, The Normans, part IV (p. 105-125.), Davis, The Normans and their Myth, particularly p. 49-69; Crouch, The Normans, p.283-296. Alibu, The Normans in their Histories, focuses exclusively on the myth and its making, analysing Norman histories from Dudo of Saint-Quentin to Wace. Unless otherwise stated, the following overview is drawn from these sources.

The need to set themselves apart from both their Scandinavian roots and their Frankish present sparked a series of 'Norman' histories; works that, in one way or the other, put the Norman myth into words. The first in this line, taken up by all of the subsequent histories, is the notoriously flowery work of Dudo of Saint-Quentin, who claimed to have been persuaded by Duke Richard I of Normandy to record the still relatively recent history of the Normans in their new home.[24] Dudo approached the task boldly, and, if glorification and legitimation was the desire of his alleged patron, he certainly performed well – William of Jumièges, writing his version of the Norman Dukes' deeds some fifty years later, was to state that he had omitted some information, particularly on the duchy's first duke Rollo, who, he remarked, was not a particularly reputable role model; consequently not all of his actions were worth preserving. He did, however, preserve Rollo's prophetic dream that pointed him towards abandoning plunder and embracing Christianity. Neither did he omit the momentous depiction of Norman mettle when the former raiders came into possession of Normandy: the Frank king Charles, when he was about to entrust the foreigner with some of his land, had demanded that his foot was kissed in reverence. Rollo, as the story has it, refused, and ordered a soldier to kiss it. Instead of bowing, the soldier picked up the king's foot and kissed it, toppling the monarch.[25] The king thus impudently overturned was to become prototypical for the depiction of the Normans. More than a century later, Orderic Vitalis has William I describe his people on his deathbed:

> " 'If the Normans are disciplined under a just and firm rule they are men of great valour, who press invincibly to the fore in arduous undertakings and, providing their strength, fight resolutely to overcome all enemies. But without such rule they tear each other to pieces and destroy themselves, for they hanker after rebellion, cherish sedition, and are ready for any treachery.' "[26]

A people that might achieve anything by military power and great valour, but also a people in which an undercurrent of aggressiveness, treachery and destructiveness was nonetheless always present; an undercurrent that might break forth at any time, if not restrained by a strong lord. The Normans made for a good tale, and they were cut out to be conquerors.

A shade more sinister is the myth concerning the Angevin kings, of the evil fay Mélusine, once countess of Anjou, who fled from the church so as not to face the Eucharist. The story has certainly left its imprint on Angevin family matters. Especially the struggles between the ageing king and his sons acquired magical attributes, the legendary quarrelsomeness of the dynasty was readily traced back to ill-fated wives, similar to the mythical fay-bride.[27]

Yet stories were not only concerned with the distant past. As might be expected from a position so laden with connotations and symbolism, kingship inspired awe and raised interest – history, after all, was often written to the end that the deeds of the high and mighty would not pass into oblivion. But history was not all that kings might inspire: they became, deliberately or unwittingly, the fuel of rumours, the stuff of legends, around which, gradually, their image was built up.

---

[24] For this information on Dudo, see *Gesta Normannorum Ducum,* p. xix.
[25] Cf. Gesta Normannorum Ducum 1, book II-5, p. 40-42; book II-11(17), p. 66.
[26] Orderic Vitalis 4, book VII, ch. 15, iii. 230, p. 83. Translation by Chibnall.
[27] Cf. Aurell, Die ersten Könige aus dem Hause Anjou, p. 85-89; Gillingham, Richard the Lionheart, p. 24.

What we must assume to have been the basis of this gradually growing image of a king are the observations that were passed on by contemporaries. As time progressed, these impressions passed from communicative into collective memory, gradually ceasing to accumulate new facets. It is in this transition that the development of kings becoming 'stories' must be searched. To that end and purpose, we need to recall the overall image of each individual king that was transmitted by contemporaries, and observe how it weathered the times that followed. In a first step, each reputation will be considered within the time span of fifty years after the respective king's death to glean an insight into which components had been added to royal reputation while it was still moved, debated and in flux in communicative memory. While this first point of investigation necessarily shifts with each king, considering the works of different writers as time progresses, the second point at which the reputations will be assessed is much more fixed. This 'point' is the assessment of four chronicles from the early fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth century that might be regarded as some of the 'last' representatives of the writing culture which produced their precursors, being written before the invention of the printing press sped up the process of solidifying memory. One consequence of this approach is that, naturally, the temporal distance between the accounts and the kings varies; at times to such a great extent that they even fall within the 50-year generation span set for the first step. However, the value of these later narratives (and the prominence of at least one of them) as last representatives of the tradition-building process before the invention of printing far outweighs this drawback.

The most prominent of these is Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*, a massive work of universal history and encyclopaedic knowledge that spanned the time from Creation to the middle of the fourteenth century and was widely used. Since Higden probably began writing around 1327, his work is still within the proposed generation-span for Henry III,[28] but the afterlife of his work is of such momentousness that he might as well have been writing straight into collective memory: none of the other selected chronicles is without the *Polychronicon's* influence. One, the author of the *Eulogium Historiarum*, viewed him critically although he was massively influenced by him as a basis of his own work. Of the five books of his universal history, only the fifth, which concerns the history of England, is of interest for the purpose at hand. Often, the places where the author's judgement deviated from the *Polychronicon* are the most intriguing, as they reveal which aspects he wished to be perceived differently. The work is contemporary as of c. 1354.[29] Some forty years later, another writer of monastic origin, Henry Knighton, wrote a chronicle that extended from the tenth to the late fourteenth century and made avid use of the *Polychronicon*, copying large passages, but also including judgements of his own.[30] The last writer, John Capgrave, is separated from the other authors by further sixty years. His work is different from the other chronicles not only because it is written in English, but also because of its great brevity. Its extremely condensed accounts of the reigns of the eight kings in question may be seen as throwing a last spotlight on what was regarded as the most important facet of each king.[31]

---

[28] Cf. Gransden, Historical Writing 2, p. 43-57.
[29] Cf. ibid., p. 103-104.
[30] Cf. ibid., p. 159-160.
[31] Cf. ibid., p. 389-389.

*William I as Story*

Little, if indeed anything, of the narratives here analysed, rivals the propagandist efforts put into the Conqueror's bid for the English crown. Heralded by the glare of Halley's Comet, sanctified by the papacy, acquiesced into by the powers of Europe and justified by the English past, a broken vow and a saintly dead king's wish, it is hardly surprising that any historiographical treatment of the Conqueror, until this day, pivots on the conquest itself. The surviving contemporary sources only serve to heighten the sense of momentousness surrounding the conquest – among them, the Bayeux tapestry and the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* deal so exclusively with the justification and implementation of the conquest itself that its aftermath does not even enter these accounts. By comparison, the remainder of his reign has had little repercussions in the renderings of contemporary chroniclers. Both William of Jumièges and William of Poitiers treat the conquest at considerable length, and both sources culminate in its completion, the latter breaking off soon after and William of Jumièges treating the remainder of William I's reign with extreme brevity. The impression that is passed on is invariably one of a warrior, as this peculiar focus make the Conqueror's reign appear to be wholly dominated by warfare.

The accounts that deviate from that overall picture are the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the panegyric chronicle of William of Poitiers. The latter, however, employs such fulsome – and often highly conventualised – praise that, in its entirety, his depiction of William I remains, despite its considerable scope, oddly flat; possessing, except for a scant number of anecdotes, little overall memorability. It is in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's more critical view that individual character traits are more distinctly highlighted. It adds the magnificent splendour of a court that was freely distributing the riches of its latest conquest as much as the greed of the insatiable man who made these riches his own, and was determined to make the most of what his new acquisition had to offer. It also adds to its imagery the formidable presence of a man whose sternness was imposing, who maintained a firm grip on his subordinates and would deal severely with deviation, crushing rebellions under his heel.

Viewed in concert, the Norman sources also appear to establish the king as a pious man; a trait that is most easily traced back to the considerable efforts invested into securing papal backing for the venture of taking England, the constant emphasis onto the acquisition of said backing, and, not least, the ultimate success of the campaign itself that spoke of divine grace.

The result was most definitely worth the effort – the story of William I undergoes an extraordinary development after his death. Instead of rapidly decreasing, as would be 'normal', the details of his reign actually increase after his death. Especially when compared with the stark dearth of elaborate narratives during his lifetime, the richness of narration attributed to William I posthumously is astounding. Writers would elaborately embellish and take over the Norman, justified version of the conquest, but they would also add a wealth of detail in any of the spheres of kingship. What emerged were narratives, particularly those found in the narratives of William

of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis, that had been completely unheard of in strictly contemporary chronicles. For many chroniclers, the battle of Hastings would remain the main focus of the life of William the Conqueror, but the king himself, within a generation of his passing, would receive a depth of character, description, anecdotes and stories that seems inconceivable, considering the rather scant notices of his deeds during his lifetime. William I, whose contemporaries wrote so little about their king, was, apparently, a figure that needed further elaboration. While the analysis of William the Conqueror as king in the eyes of his contemporaries, as presented above, is relatively shallow, an assessment of the gradual making of his reputation must take these later writers into account. The analysis will in the following largely maintain, for the sake of easier accessibility, the previous distinction between different royal spheres of action.

All of these later writers accepted the narrative of the Norman Conquest that emphasised the Norman duke's claim to the throne, presenting Harold as a perjurer who had broken his sacred oath, and stood for the depravity of England and the murderous and sinful deeds committed by its people, in the land where treachery and savagery and crimes in the dark abounded – and, not least among the tales of horror, and included in many renditions, also the land where William I's kinsman Alfred had been treacherously and brutally murdered by Godwin and his sons.[32] William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis make the most of what might be considered the 'crusading-motif' of the Norman Conquest by presenting the taking of England as an endeavour during which the body of Saint Valery was brought forth so as to ensure a safe crossing, Mass was read, the sacraments taken and the Conqueror wore the relics upon which Harold had sworn around his neck.[33] William of Malmesbury goes farthest in this, claiming that while the English spent their night before the battle not sleeping, but singing and drinking, the Normans spent the nocturnal hours in confessing their sins and, when morning came, taking the Eucharist.[34]

With regard to the event that took centre place in any depiction of William I's reign, the acquisition of England, later sources are relatively close to the already narratively embellished and very detailed depictions of contemporaries. In other aspects of the reign, particularly the depiction of the king's personal sphere, justice, warfare and religion, we encounter differences and find the king enhanced to an astounding degree.

It is the personal sphere in which these differences are at their most palpable, with later writers, especially William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis, styling the king's character to a depth that would have been utterly impossible to infer from the surviving contemporary accounts. William of Malmesbury even offered a vibrant characterisation of the king himself: he

---

[32] Cf. Henry of Huntingdon, vi. 25-27 (p. 380-387). Henry Huntington writes that Harold "chose" (*elegit*) the crime of perjury before he lapses into a rendition of the awful justices of England, who would have another's family slain and his possessions taken if jealousy took hold of them. For the murder of Alfred, see ibid., vi. 20, p. 372. See also William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book II-228, p. 416-418, for Edward the Confessor's intentions about the succession of the kingdom and Harold's journey to Normandy, where he made his oath to duke William; cf. ibid., book III-238, p. 446, for Harold's breaking of his oath. Orderic Vitalis 2, book III,ch. ii. 118-119, p. 136-138, would likewise report Edward's decision to bequeath his kingdom to the duke of Normandy, Harold's visit to Normandy and subsequent oath, his perjurious succession and coronation at the hands of an apostolically suspended archbishop, and the ensuing tyranny throughout England under which the populace suffered greatly.

[33] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 2, book 3, ii. 144-147, p. 168-172. See also William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book III-238.7-238.9, p. 248-250, for a very similar rendering, albeit lacking the mention of the relics.

[34] Cf. ibid., book III-241-242, p. 252-454.

described him as tall, immensely corpulent, of ferocious face and balding forehead, healthy, much given to the chase and of such remarkable strength that he could, while sitting on a galloping horse, bend a bow that no one else could draw. He remarked that the king possessed great dignity whether he stood or sat, and celebrated his feast days in luxury and the brilliance of splendidly entertained guests who returned home with tales of majesty and generosity.[35] While the king's 'royal' qualities, his severity and greed (which is "the only" vice William of Malmesbury ascribes to him, albeit adding the mitigating comment that the king was driven to extract money where he could out of fear from his numerous enemies),[36] were characterised as his central character traits during his lifetime, these writers were apparently searching for something different in the rendition of the Conqueror, and gave a glimpse at matters hitherto unseen: the king's family life.

In these narratives, we encounter the king answering Robert's wish to rule the duchy of Normandy with jeering and dreadful voice, incensing the young man to such an extent that he fled to Normandy and began harrying the country that he wanted to rule. The king is shown as abounding with self-confidence and disdain for his son's endeavours: he laughed off the war waged against his superiority, and mocked Robert who would be a hero. It is in this context that William of Malmesbury explains how Robert had acquired his nickname: it had been given to him, by implication the reader might surmise by William I himself, because of his size – or lack thereof.[37] The writers provided further insights into a family life that was not entirely harmonic, and particularly not so with regard to the oldest son. Orderic Vitalis presents a further scene which he claims to have escalated so far that Robert, driven to indignation by the constant urging of his adherents, left the court in a rage and attempted to seize Rouen in spite of his father. The future William II and Henry I, united in their disdain for their brother's superior airs and claim to the entire inheritance, had settled down on a gallery above the meeting of their older brother and his followers, and had began to noisily play dice *militibus moris*. When the noise was apparently not satisfyingly disruptive enough, they began to pour down 'water' on their older brother, a possibly euphemistic term for whatever a young man and a child may have thought funny of pouring onto another's head. The reaction of Robert's followers, who urge him not to accept such treatment, such injury and "befouling" does imply that clear water may not have been the weapon of choice. The ensuing noise of Robert taking on his younger sibling cased their father to come and put an end to the quarrel.[38]

In this tense atmosphere of injured pride and jealousy Orderic draws up a scene reminiscent of the retarding moment in a play: Robert approaches his father, full of the righteousness of his cause, demanding his due inheritance, and claiming that he would not bear lordship as a mere servant to his father. He is met with his father's very eloquent refusal, which draws not only on his wisdom of how wealth and power should be distributed, but reprimands Robert to display

[35] Cf. ibid., book III-279, p. 508.
[36] Cf. ibid., book III-280, p. 508.
[37] Cf. ibid., book IV-389.1-2, p. 700-702: *"Quod cum ille negasset, terrisonae uocis roncho iuuenem abigens, iratus abscessit Rotbertus, multisque assultibus patriam infestauit, primo quidem genitore cachinnos excutiente et subinde dicente: 'Per resurrectionem Dei! Probus erit Rotbertus Curta Ocrea. Hoc erat eius cognomen, quod esset exiguus, ceterum nichil habens quod succenseres...'"*.
[38] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 2, book IV, ii. 295, p. 356-359.

becoming subservience, and earn that which he seemed to take as granted. The duchy was the Conqueror's by inheritance, and England had been given to him by God – he would thus not relinquish his hold onto any part of his realm until God saw fit to move him to another kingdom. If Robert was unwilling to accept this, he should call to mind exemplary rebellions of the bible. Robert proclaims his unwillingness to bend his head to his father's lecture, and storms from his presence – albeit not without embellishing his speech with a classical reference to his self-imposed exile.[39]

It is the queen, rarely glimpsed at all in contemporary narratives, who plays a mediating role in the struggle between father and son. Orderic describes her as a woman abounding with numerous virtues, but especially endowed with a fervent love of Christ and good works, with her generous alms bringing untold support to her husband, who ever laboured in the "province of war".[40] William of Malmesbury, in turn, claimed that there was love between the royal couple, and love to such an extent that William I was entirely free of any accusations of infidelity. While he does record a rumour of the king, after assuming the crown, taking pleasure in the daughter of a priest, he strongly refutes the truth of it: "but believing that of so great a king I ascribe to folly." He concedes that they came to disagree over what was to be done with the rebellious Robert, but maintains that the quarrel did not lessen the king's affection for her, as the splendid preparations for her funeral and the king's own deep grief at her death had shown.[41] Orderic is more verbose about the conflict between king and queen: in another lengthy passage enlivened by multiple conversations in direct speech, William I at last finds out that his wife had been supporting the insurgent Robert with generous gifts in gold, silver and valuables. Exasperated with the betrayal of the woman who he "loved like his own soul" he remains seething in anger over her affirmations that she dearly loved her firstborn son, and would always do whatever was in her power to help him. The king's intention to vent his rage by having one of her servants blinded is only foiled by the timely information of this servant from sources near the queen – and Matilda is left to seek the aid of a prophetic hermit, who impresses upon her, notwithstanding her husband's angry outbursts, that Robert was the true culprit of the unfolding events. While the king was the proud stallion who watched over the flowering meadow of Normandy, Robert was like a weak cow who would, once his father died, allow the surrounding greedy beasts to enter and devour everything, trampling underfoot what they would not consume.[42]

In his conduct towards the queen it becomes obvious that, while William I clearly retained the moral superiority in the conflict with his oldest son, the most prominent character traits ascribed to him by contemporaries were still present. His greed, in Orderic Vitalis' work, is largely swathed

[39] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 3, book V, ch. 10, ii. 377-380, p. 96-100. Besides evoking the troublesomeness of his Norman kinsmen, which Orderic Vitalis refers to repeatedly, William I reminds Robert of the example of Absalom, who rebelled against his father David, and Rehoboam, who hearkened to the foolish advice of youths. He also draws upon Luke's gospel to impress upon Robert that a kingdom should not be divided within itself. Robert, in turn, as he leaves his father's court, compares himself to Polynices from the Theban legend.

[40] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 2, book IV, ii. 188-189, p. 224. William of Malmesbury also praises the queen, albeit in much briefer words, claiming simply that she was remarkably prudent and the very peak of modesty (cf. William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book III-234-2, p. 436).

[41] Ibid., book III-273, p. 500-502.

[42] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 3, book V, ch. 10, ii. 382-385, p. 102-108.

in abundant praise, which was not only inspired by William of Poitiers' panegyric, but greatly enhanced the already lavish laud;[43] and yet his severity remains a recurring element throughout both his and William of Malmesbury's narrative. A very unflattering view to the king's harshness is presented by the latter, who claims that the king found his newly conquered subjects far from trustworthy, and, "his ferocious mind exasperated at that", took from the mighty among them their money, their lands, and, at last, their lives. His further calculation in the usage of the English is not directly criticised, but, given the ideal of a lord taking care of the entirety of his subjects, it seems difficult to assume that the writer was approving of the king's conduct: when he found himself under attack from the Danes, he had set an English general over the English, and kept the Normans out of the fight. Whoever was to win the battle, so the reasoning, the king could only profit.[44]

While there are attestations that the king maintained a firm justice,[45] the voices that criticise his application of this most vital royal virtue are far more interesting – especially since they sketch out the king' injustice far more boldly than the weak complaints of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle had done. We find claims that William I had deprived the English of all that he could, levying heavy taxes, sending unjust officials to deprive people of their goods and plundering even the goods of churches.[46] The two most significant narrations of the king's exercise of justice,

[43] See Orderic Vitalis 2, book III, ii. 158, p. 184, for the writer's praise of William of Poitier's narrative on William the Conqueror. The "eloquent", stylisitcally honed and profound work had described, in perfect manner, the virtues of this king; while his deeds in battle had been, according to Orderic Vitalis, preserved in an epic poem (the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*). Book 4, ch. 1, ii.162-169, p. 190-199, then lapses into a summary of the Conqueror's reign that is just as laudatory as the version written up by William of Poitiers. The praise also encompasses the otherwise delicate matter of William I endowing churches in Normandy with the riches he had conquered for himself in England. Leaving out the lustre of Orderic Vitalis' rendition of this particular feature of the Conqueror's early reign, Henry of Huntingdon, for instance, remarked that the king had acquired his riches "*siue iuste, siue iniuste"* (Henry of Huntingdon, vi.37, p. 402).

[44] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book III-254, p. 470.

[45] See, for instance, Orderic Vitalis 2, ii. 237, p. 284, in which the impeding coming of the king alone is sufficient to set all wrongdoers trembling. Ibid., ii.177- 181, p. 208-214, recounts the king's suppression of a rebellion among the English (whose cause is far from being described as rightful), which he resolves with diplomacy, and mercy towards those who had surrendered to him. Henry of Huntingdon, vi. 39 (p. 406), notes, notwithstanding his earlier stark condemnation of the injustice perpetrated by William I and his officials, that there was such peace in the land that young girls, laden down with gold, could walk across England without being assaulted, and that murder and rape were severely punished.

[46] Henry of Huntingdon, vi. 38 (p. 402-404), is closest to the account of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, but more elaborate and with stronger criticism. He reiterates the lament of unjust taxes, and renews the claim that William I sold land as dearly as he could, overriding previous agreements whenever he got a better offer, and his sheriffs and justices roamed the land like thieves and robbers. It should be noted at this point that Henry of Huntingdon stood on the narrative standpoint, also expressed in this passage, that the Normans, unsurpassed in their savagery, had been sent as a divine punishment upon the English. It may thus be that, criticised though it was, his narrative logic may have viewed William the Conqueror's tribulations as something that had not come upon the English populace undeservedly, and was thus, to some extent, to be justified. Any such interpretation, however, must remain mere speculation. John of Worcester 3, p. 10, records that William I had the monasteries of the realm stripped of the treasures that the English had hoped to secure there in the face of his ravaging conquest. William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis are remarkably quiet on the more general justice of William I, although Orderic Vitalis 2, book IV, ii. 222-223, p. 266, notes that Odo of Bayeux was given to robbing monasteries of the treasures pious men had bestowed upon them. At the onset of the rebellion of the English earls in which Waltheof was so famously and unluckily involved, Orderic has the English rebel leaders formulate more crimes of the Conqueror: he had poisoned many among the nobility, even of his own kin, on the continent, slain or exiled the true heirs of England, and shown ingratitude to those who had supported him in the venture, insufficiently rewarding their investments (cf. Orderic Vitalis 2, book IV, ii. 259-260, p. 312).

however, are his treatment of the rebel Waltheof and the measure referred to as the harrying of the north.

Waltheof had already been mourned by contemporaries, but Orderic Vitalis was to give him a more definite place in the king's personal story. Claiming that he had been asked to write an epitaph on the dead rebel, the monk styled Waltheof's death into a turning point of the Conqueror's rule. The king, according to Orderic, had been reprimanded by many for the killing of Waltheof, and "by the just judgement of God", had afterwards been beset with rebellions. In the years that remained him, he would never again sent an army fleeing from the battlefield, or take a castle by storm, and would not be able to enjoy lasting peace again before his own death.[47] These final words on the fate of Waltheof are a token of the narrative effort invested in the story as a whole: Orderic Vitalis recounts how the rebellion was started by the flaming accusation of two English earls, how they had tempted and lured the reluctant, pious and loyal Waltheof, but had ultimately failed in their designs because of his steadfastness, and only bound him with an oath not to reveal their conspiracy. After William I had beaten down the rebellion, Waltheof was nonetheless caught and kept in prison. His prolonged detainment was utilised by the writer to praise his frequent tearful confessions, his handsome physique and great virtues, all of which clearly denoted him a worthy Christian. His end was just as worthy: having been dragged to the place of his execution, he distributed his rich clothes among the poor, wept and prayed; and although his executioners denied him his last wish by beheading him in the second to last verse of the Lord's prayer, the dead earl could not be bereft of this last pious will: his severed head, Orderic asserts, spoke the last verse and the concluding amen. William I, although the chronicler was to blame him for the unjust death of Waltheof, is not portrayed as directly involved in the sentence, which is depicted as a product of the machinations of jealous and greedy Normans at court, and a fortnight after the unfortunate execution, he even allowed the (wholly uncorrupted) body to be retrieved and honourably buried.[48] By comparison, the verdict of the Worcester chronicle is much darker: Waltheof had been forced into the conspiracy against his will and had sought absolution from Archbishop Lanfranc at the earliest possible opportunity, but when he appealed to the king for mercy, he was nonetheless imprisoned, and later beheaded *indigne et crudeliter*.[49]

If Waltheof's case had been lamented as needlessly harsh justice, the harrying of the north appears to have appalled later writers. The Worcester chronicle states, with horror, how William I, as retaliation on a Danish attack, had borne down upon the north of England, devastating it as he went, and killing whoever he found. For three years, the chronicle claims, the Normans, laid waste to "nearly all of England", causing such severe famines that the inhabitants resorted to eating the flesh of horses, dogs, cats and even humans.[50] Orderic Vitalis' account is even more

---

[47] Cf. ibid., ii. 289-290, p. 350.

[48] Cf. ibid., ii. 258-268, p. 310-322.

[49] John of Worcester 3, p. 24-27.

[50] Ibid., p. 10: *"Quod ubi regi innotuit Willelmo, exercito mox congregato in Northymbriam efferato properauit animo, eamque per totam hiem deuastare, hominesque trucidare, et multa mala non cessabat agere. ... Normannis Angliam uastantibus in Northymbria et quibusdam aliis prouinciis anno precedenti, sed presenti et subequenti fere per totam Angliam, maxime per Northymbriam et per contiguas illi prouincias, adeo fames preualuit, ut homines equinam, caninam, cattinam, et carnem comederent humanam."*

intense. With an urgency and (very eloquent) terror, the monk describes scenes of absolute devastation. "Never had William used such great cruelty", he states: the king was combing the land for his hidden adversaries, reducing houses to ashes, "succumbing" to the vice of rage so that he punished not only the guilty, but the innocent with them. He ordered the herds, crops and foodstuffs of the region to be gathered and burned, an order that had such a drastic impact on the food supply that Orderic claims more than 100,000 Christians of all ages and both sexes to have died of hunger. For this injustice, the monk hoped there might be punishment. He could in no way commend William I for this deed, although he had so frequently praised him.[51] Upon the king's approaching death, the writer would again evoke these horrors: he has the king repent that he had, "in immoderate fury", descended upon the north and caused widespread starvation, "murderously slaughtering" many of these fair people. William the Conqueror's acknowledgement of the guilt he had incurred through the harrying of the north is strategically placed in his deathbed monologue, reflecting the importance the writer placed on the episode: it is the very last example from his bloodied life that he calls upon in his penitent monologue, just before he commends his kingdom to God.[52] In this way, allowing the king the narrative space to recount and repent, Orderic Vitalis was going a step towards absolving William I of what he considered his greatest injustice and sin.

If his justice was thus given darker facets, in matters of warfare, William I remained the same indomitable, fierce warrior who rode with his troops and encouraged them with fiery battle speeches – but was also outfitted with the additional, more 'modern' characteristic of chivalry. The Conqueror, William of Malmesbury writes, would always retain the upper hand, had such great trust in his own fortitude that he never once chose a surprise attack over the before-named day, "as if the greatness of his soul disdained the practices of our time."[53] More than that: the writer would even turn the Battle of Hastings into a clash of two exemplarily bold and valorous knights. Harold himself could only be felled by an arrow, as no man could approach him on the field without at once losing his life, and when William I saw a knight hacking at the fallen, he cast the perpetrator from knighthood for this shameful act.[54] Beyond these new attributions, later writers shared in the relish with which contemporaries had related the king's military feats, in terms of embellishment and praise lacking none of the effort expended by contemporaries, complete with all possible divine portents and signs of approval.[55]

[51] Orderic Vitalis 2, book IV, ii. 195-196, p. 230-232; see especially: *"Nusquam tanta crudelitate usus est Guillelmus. Hic turpiter uitio succubuit dum iram suam regere contempsit, et reos innocuosque pari animaduersione peremit. ... In multis Guillelmum nostra libenter extulit relatio, sed in hoc quod una iustum et impium tabidae famis lancea aeque transfixit laudare non audeo."*
[52] Orderic Vitalis 4, book VII, ch. 16, iii. 243, p. 94.
[53] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book III-234, p. 434.
[54] Cf. ibid., book III-243, p. 454-456: *"... unde a Willelmo ignominiae notatus, quod rem ignauam et pudendam fecisset, militia pulsus est."*
[55] For the respective accounts, see Henry of Huntingdon, vi.29-vi.30 (p. 388-395), which also includes a speech of William I to his followers, recalling the great deeds of the Norman past and evoking the ferocity and superiority of his people before the writer launches into his dramatic rendition of the battle, including the appearance of the man called Taillefer, who drew all attention on himself, tossing swords as if for show, and then killed an English standard bearer. See also William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book III-242-244, p. 454-456, which claims that no fewer than three horses were killed under William I. The duke had ridden on, refusing to listen to any advice at holding back, and not received a single wound that day because he had been protected by the hand of God. See Orderic Vitalis 2, book III, ii.147-153, p. 172-180, for another rendition of the events, which includes William I baring his

Already present in his warfare both among contemporaries and later writers, the sphere of the divine was given much more ample room by later writers – far beyond any of the implications contemporary writers had made. These later chronicles make note of the harsh government of the Church that William I exercised in his newly won realm: prejudiced against the English, he would gradually replace the clergy with Normans, not allowing any Englishmen to aspire to higher dignities, as William of Malmesbury asserts.[56] The Worcester chronicle affirms that William I was wont to use this measure to strengthen his hold on the kingdom, and adds critically that he deposed many abbots, and stripped bishops and abbots alike of their offices, keeping them in prison for life on mere suspicion, without any ecclesiastical judgement on their cases.[57] As often, Orderic Vitalis clothes the accusations in the form of a lengthy, citation-infused monologue directed at the king: a monk whom he had deigned to appoint to an English bishopric told him plainly that he viewed England as plundered spoils distributed among the greedy; that he saw not how he would have the right to be set, as foreigner, over unwilling subjects when he should only have attained that office by canonical election, and he reminded the king, at length, that his conquest had been bestowed upon him by God and he would eventually have to render account for all that he had done with it.[58]

As so often, divine disapproval took the guise of gruesome death. One of the king's sons, Richard, met such a fate while riding in the New Forest, an area formerly abounding with human settlements (and the veneration of God practised within them) that the Conqueror had reduced to a place where wild beasts took their lair. While out on the hunt, the young man caught a sickness from the "debilitating and hazy air" inside this woodland testament to his father's disrespect, and died – as would, in fact, William II and one of the Conqueror's grandsons, William of Malmesbury adds.[59] The death of William I himself was also coloured as crime against the divine. While sufficiently 'good' that he was granted a slow enough death to make his peace with God, give orders as to his inheritance and request how alms for the benefit of his soul should be distributed, there is more than an inkling of punishment in the manner in which his death came about. The Worcester chronicle reports that he was afflicted by strong pain after his return from Mantes, which he had burned down in its entirety, including its churches and two recluses.[60]

William of Malmesbury describes the actions preceding the king's rapid demise at greater length: lying ill at Rouen, the plump Conqueror had been insultingly compared by the king of France to a woman lying in childbed, and had set out on a campaign to devastate the country in revenge. In his fury, he had set fire to the city of Mantes, burning the Church of St Mary with one of its recluses who did not dare to leave her cell – a grave accusation, even if he was to assign

head so that his discouraged troops could see he was still alive. Orderic claims that William I had frequently encouraged his army, and also maintains that no less than three horses, whose deaths he swiftly avenged, were killed underneath the future king.

[56] Cf. William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book III-254, p. 470.

[57] Cf. John of Worcester 3, p. 12. These accusations are made in the framework of a synod at which Wulfstan was styled as the single man unafraid to stand up to the king despite the risk of losing his honours.

[58] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 2, book IV, ii. 272-232, p. 272-278.

[59] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book III- 275, p. 502-504.

[60] Cf. John of Worcester 3, p. 46.

money for the rebuilding of the burnt church. For the strong pain that forced him to retreat, the writer suggests two causes: either his horse had jumped a ditch and he ruptured his organs in a collision with his saddle, or he had been taken ill with heat when he stepped too close to the fire as he was urging his men to add more fuel to the flames that devoured the city. Of course, neither cause is in any way complimentary.[61] Nor is the scene at his funeral, which William of Malmesbury styled into a lesson of humility: before the king could be interred, a knight turned up to exclaim loudly that his inheritance had been taken from him, and that the king should not be buried in that ground without any sort of compensation having been paid. Even with this interruption having been dealt with, it was a melancholy affair: with Robert waging war on his fatherland and William II having swiftly left to secure his inheritance, the only child of the Conqueror to attend the funeral was his youngest son, the future Henry I.[62]

There are no burnt recluses in the depiction of Orderic Vitalis, who has William I launch an attack on Mantes to vindicate his justified claim to the Vexin, and he maintains that the king's death was "just as dignified" as his life had been. Retaining full possession of his mental faculties, he set his affairs in order, ordered fixed amounts of money to be given as alms, gifts and for the rebuilding of the churches he had burnt in his attack on Mantes; he confessed his sins and conferred with bishops, abbots and monks who waited upon his bedside.[63] In a repentant and humble monologue, the king, aware that he is soon to stand before the judgement of the Lord, recounts the entirety of his eventful life: his troubled childhood, in which the young duke had to be moved at night to save his life from his own kin and people, the rebellious Normans; his warlike youth, in which he had to protect his hard-won inheritance from the king of France, and, finally, his time as king, in which he had to defend his conquest. The brutal nature and bloody conflicts of his life rue him deeply, and, as redress for his life of bloodshed, he holds up the learned religious men of his realm, his foundations and lavish alms. It is with repentance and humility that the king at last leaves the kingdom to the will of God, hoping that his second-eldest son might come to inherit it, and foretelling the bad reign of Robert in Normandy and the future kingship of Henry I, who had tearfully asked his father why he was not to inherit any lands.[64]

Only after pages upon pages of the king giving counsel, setting his affairs in order, and repenting the cruelty of his life does Orderic at last allow the king to die. It is a peaceful death, the king glimpsing the first sunrays of a new day and hearing the bells of the nearby cathedral, as he commends his soul to Mary and breathes his last. However, this narrative would also turn the king's death, as splendidly and ruefully prepared as it was, into a lesson of humility: the body was robbed and left almost naked as fear, terror and the rejoicing of the wicked seized the populace. There was no royal attendant to care for the funeral of the king; a mere knight took the preparations upon himself. The funeral itself was far from the venerable act it should, by rights,

61 Cf. William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book III-282, p. 510-512. Both the Worcester chronicle and William of Malmesbury, in the passages here indicated, elaborate on how the king was able to sort out his succession and set the things in order before death took him, but William of Malmesbury is the only of the two to mention that William I had money set aside for the rebuilding of the burnt church.
62 Cf. William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book III-283, p. 512.
63 Orderic Vitalis 4, book VII, ch. 14, iii. 226-228, p. 78-80.
64 Cf. ibid., iii. 228-245, p. 80-96.

have been: the first attempt at a ceremony was disturbed by a fire ravaging through a large part of Caen, leaving only the monks to bear the bier while the surrounding congregation rushed to see the fires put out. After the solemn address of a bishop, a man named Ascelin stepped forward and forbade to inter the body of the man who had robbed his father of this particular plot of land until he was properly compensated. In Orderic's more conciliatory narrative, it is the monks of Caen, rather than young Henry I, who pay the irate troublemaker – and they do it out of reverence for their lord, and in the best hope for his salvation. As last testament to the fleetingness of mortal glory and humiliation of a man who had been larger than life, the body, when it has to be bent to fit into a sarcophag that had been built too small for the king's massive frame, burst open and released so powerful a stench upon the congregation that the monks hurriedly finished their service before they fled home. Orderic Vitalis attests that he had been recording nothing but the truth, and maintains that the king's ignominy in death was a most valuable lesson in the transience of life.[65]

And yet, as the time given to him before his death may indicate, William I was not found to be beyond redemption. He is much praised for his appointment of the highly esteemed Lanfranc to the archbishopric of Canterbury, and described as a man humble towards churchmen, even if he was unforgiving towards rebels; a man who practised the Christian faith as far as a layman could, daily attending the religious services and building two monasteries.[66] He is even presented as the saviour of monasticism (and, by implication, good Christianity as a whole) who had reinstated canonical discipline into the debauchery-ridden congregations of England.[67]

On the whole, these later writers portrayed the king as a strong-willed, fearsome and harsh monarch, whose failings lay in the fierceness that led him to swift and fatal strikes of retribution and cruel judgements, but whose strong hand, Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis would seem to unanimously agree, was just what England needed at that time, even if it did grasp too firmly from time to time. What they did beyond these renditions, at their core still close to the way in which contemporaries depicted the king but so infinitely more detailed and rich in anecdotes, was to turn him into a more 'human' character, particularly by casting into relief his piety, family life and devotion to his wife, outlined in – at least for today's reader – much more memorable narratives than the eloquent panegyric of William of Poitiers. What they also contained was the very seedling of an exemplary story, a myth in the making. With the frequent allusions to Norman prowess, the ongoing glorification of the Conquest and the recounting of his troubled childhood, William I was already shaping up as a formidable tale. The elements of the mythic added predominantly by William of Malmesbury gave a final polish to the story: the writer claimed not only that Herleva had been kept by William I's father as lawful wife *(iusta uxor)*, but also that she dreamed how her inward parts would extend and spread so as to cover the entirety of England and Normandy. The child, right after its birth, grasped at

[65] Cf. ibid., iii. 248-255, p. 100-108.
[66] Cf. William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book III-267, p. 492.
[67] Cf. Orderic Vitalis 2, book IV, ii.209-213 p. 248-254. The passage also praises, at length, the king appointing Lanfranc to the archbishopric of Canterbury, much against the latter's pious resistance.

and clutched tightly the rushes that covered the floor. Both incidents were portents that foretold great things were in store for young William.[68]

These foundations were amply built upon. Moving further in time, Geoffrey Gaimar took up the story, albeit with great differences. Despite the work's great partiality for the Conqueror's son William Rufus and the secular virtues of chivalry, the writer evidently found little to praise in the first Norman king of England. Gaimar's Conqueror is a harsh and oppressive ruler, opposed to the native English, wasting and plundering the land while his Norman adherents seem out of control, violating truces without receiving any punishment.[69]

The rendition as presented by Wace's *Roman de Rou,* a work allegedly requested by Henry II as a history of his ancestors, could hardly be more different.[70] His first act in the depiction of the Conqueror is to give his birth a glossy finish: the king's father had fallen in love with a fair virgin maiden of Falaise, and the writer follows the two straight into bed – where, the duke lay awake while she slept until she woke with a start and told of her dream of a tree growing from her body and covering all of Normandy and England.[71] The child, cherished just like a legitimate son by the duke (although not quite as accepted among others), was laid in a bed of straw, which he gathered and pulled towards him until he was covered with it, and had his arms full of it. That, along the lines of William of Malmesbury, was interpreted by the woman who minded him as a sure sign that he would grow up as a man who conquered and acquired what, by right, should be his.[72] With narrative relish and a depth of detail by far surpassing the account of William I's early days as given in Orderic Vitalis' lengthy royal deathbed monologue, Wace recounts how the young duke, distressed at the death of his father, found himself faced with a country full of warmongering barons, who fought each other and oppressed the weak, and he could not

[68] Cf. William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book III-229, p. 426: *"...deinceps unice dilexit et aliquandiu iustae uxoris loco habuit. Puer ex ea editus Willelmus a nomine abaui dictus, cuius magnitudinem futuram matris somnium portendebat, quo intestina sua per totam Normanniam et Angliam extendi et dilatari uiderat. Ipso quoque momento quo, partu laxato, in uitam effusus pusio humum attigit, ambas manus iunco quo pauimenti puluis cauebatur impleuit, stricte quod corripuerat compugnans. Ostentum uisum mulierculis laeto plausu gannientibus, obstetrix quoque fausto omine acclamat puerum regem futurum."*

[69] See Gaimar, Estoire des Engleis, lines 5375-5404 (p. 292), for a story of how William I offered the people of York their inheritances should they acknowledge him. Despite the king's promise of peace and safe conduct for those who would come to him, he had them put into prison when they appeared as summoned, gave the lands of the local barons to his French followers and devastated the countryside, leaving a trail of blazing towns in his wake. See ibid., lines 5604-5626 (p. 304), for a part of the story of Hereward, who had made a truce with the king and was travelling with great riches, for which the Normans, deciding to break the truce, attacked him even as he was eating. Ibid., lines 5701-5710 (p. 308) recounts how two of his companions, having surrendered to the attackers, at long last died in prison, having there undergone such suffering that it would have been better for them to have been killed on the very day they had been attacked. The story of Waltheof, told ibid., lines 5721-5740 (p. 310), is relatively brief, admitting that Waltheof had been involved in a conspiracy to overthrow the (certainly oppressive) king, was captured, imprisoned and executed, and claims that numerous miracles were witnessed at his tomb.
As a source, Gaimar has hitherto not been discussed. The French verse romance, composed in the later years of the 1130, endeavoured to span a wide period of time, and lingers particularly long on Arthur's court. As it is, it stretches until the accession of Henry I, and thus, in the context of this work, offers information on only two kings, William I and William II. For more detail, see Gillingham, Gaimar, the Prose *Brut* and the Making of English History, p. 113-114; Gransden, Historical Writing 1, p. 209-212.

[70] For a discussion of the *Roman de Rou* as a source, see Glyn, Wace's Roman de Rou, Introduction and Bennett, Poetry as History? The Conqueror's depiction in the work is briefly discussed in Herzfeld, "Vérité historique" & vérité humaine.

[71] Cf. Glyn, Wace's Roman de Rou, lines 2823-2866 (p. 122-123).

[72] Cf. ibid., lines 2367-2922 (p. 123-124).

confront them nor bring them to justice.[73] They even attempted to kill the young ruler, forcing him to flee, only half-dressed, into the night.[74]

After the duke had passed these troubles of his childhood and adolescence, the story continues with the Norman legitimation of the Conquest, even if it presents Harold in a better light: when in Normandy, had been duped into swearing (which he was clearly reluctant to do) on numerous relics that had been cunningly covered up so as not to be seen. Although Edward, entreated by his barons that the land could not go without a king, at last accepted Harold as king because William I was not attainable at the moment, the work still presents him as a perjurer who harmed the kingdom.[75] Consequently, Wace follows up on the depiction of the Conquest with all the legitimation, glory, rousing speeches and military feats he (like his predecessors in writing) could muster, in one of his most impressive scenes having the future king, magnificently bearing his arms astride a most noble charger that had been sent to him by the king of Spain, rearing in full sight of the attending army in the culmination of his pre-battle speech.[76] Wace's depiction of the latter part of William I's reign is close to that of Orderic, including the king burning down Mantes in its entirety, his great regret at his wrongful taking of England, as well as the fire and complaint of the robbed Ascelin at his funeral.[77]

Within (when including Wace a few decades more than) a generation after the death of William I, the story of the Conquest and the Conqueror had gained considerable momentum, broadened in richness, detail and legend-building, but, with exception of the hostile rendition of Geoffrey Gaimar, had largely retained its original orientation: it endorsed and fully legitimised the Conquest as a divinely approved endeavour, praised the beneficial changes it had brought, and considered the Conqueror a firm, but just and pious man. The remarkably strong cohesion of this story finds its continuation in Higden's *Polychronicon*, which largely adapted William of Malmesbury's version of the events. It numbers the crimes that justified the conquest, retells the bad and good omen of the duke's unfortunate fall upon landing in England, notes how the Normans spent the night prior to the battle in praying and confessing their sins while the English drank and sang; it attests the piety of Waltheof, repeats the French king's taunting that led to the

[73] Cf. ibid., lines 3241-3284 (p. 127).
[74] Cf. ibid., lines 3641-3760 (p. 131-133).
[75] Cf. ibid., lines 5543-5604 (p. 153) for Edward's decision to make young William his heir; see lines 653-5724 (p. 154-155) for Harold's splendid reception in Normandy and his oath; lines 5725-5840 (p. 155-156) for Edward being beseeched by the barons to accept Harold, and lines 5925-5954 (p. 157) for the claim to Harold's perjury and his causing harm to the land.
[76] Cf. ibid., lines 7531-7574 (p. 175-176), for the duke presenting himself fabulously on his horse. See also ibid., lines 6293-6328 (p. 161), for duke William applying to the pope in his quest to secure his inheritance, and being sent a banner and ring beneath the stone of which a tooth of Saint Peter was embedded as token of the papal approval for his endeavour. The same passage recalls the appearance of Halley's comet shining for fourteen days – a sign, the writer claims, that a king was to receive a kingdom. See lines 6399-6464 (p. 163) for the magnificent mass of 3,000 ships setting out for England, and the momentary setback during which offerings were made at the relics of Saint Valery to secure a safe passage. See lines 6574-6616 (p. 164) for a very detailed version of the story that William I, upon landing in England, fell forward onto his hands. What was taken by many as a bad omen is interpreted as the king "having taken" England into his hands (in lesser detail, this bad omen turned into a positive one is already reported by William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book III-238, p. 450). For the future king's rousing battle speech, in which he reminds his men that there was no turning back for them and forbids them to seek booty in England, as he would later distribute it among them, see 7381-7486 (p. 173-174).
[77] Cf. ibid., lines 9056-9162 (p. 193-194) and 9223-9340 (p. 195-196) for the account of his funeral.

fateful burning of Mantes, and the protest of Ascelin at the funeral.[78] His judgement of William I is his own: he, the writer remarks, who had been the terror and honour of Europe, could now not even find a burial without incident; the king had been "unwise but astute, wealthy but greedy, glorious but given to fame, affable towards the servants of God, but unyielding towards those who opposed him". He had been prone to at time ferocious judgements, had villages and churches torn down to create the New Forest, ordered those who took game to lose their eyes, those who violated women to lose their genitals.[79] A note of sullen patriotism also crept into this rendition of the king: taking up Henry of Huntingdon's idea of the king as some sort of heavenly scourge to afflict the English, the *Polychronicon* claims that God had sent a ferocious people to decimate the English – and that during the reign of the Conqueror, it was a shame to be called English.[80]

Henry Knighton copies large sections of Higden's work on William I, and the few additions of his own are largely positive, including the nightly apparition of a voice that told the king to build a church on the field of Battle.[81] The *Eulogium Historiarum* recurs to the same, well-known narrative: the unborn child whose future kingship was foretold to his mother in a dream, whose elaborate battle preparations were ecclesiastically endorsed, whose men did not plunder and prepared themselves for battle with prayer.[82] Like Knighton, the author mentions the king's dream vision that initiated the building of Battle Abbey,[83] and, as successor to William of Malmesbury's historiographic work, includes the description of the king as imposing character with astounding strength and a deep piety that moved him to distribute lavish alms to monasteries.[84] This praise, however, would not keep him from reporting, in unison with Higden, the burning of Mantes and the disturbed funeral service.[85] The last of these late chronicles, John Capgrave's work, has little judgement at all to offer on William I – and, in terms of reputation-forging factors, mainly repeats the justification for the conquest of England.[86]

The reputation of William the Conqueror, then, remained stable to the last, presenting a stern, but justified ruler, who had subjugated himself a kingdom, and manfully secured, defended and improved it. Particularly the acquisition of England – ever the focus of any historian treating the reign of William the Conqueror – gained and retained legendary status. It was greatly enhanced by those writers picking up their pen after the death of the king, and these additions, full of omens, anecdotes and tales of great prowess, would retain their place in the narrative in successive works of historiography. Particularly William of Malmesbury's laudatory, chivalry-

[78] Cf. Polychronicon 7, book 6, ch. 29, p. 232-234; ibid., p. 236; ibid., p. 240; ibid., book 7, ch. 3, p. 290-292; ibid., ch. 4, p. 310-314.
[79] Ibid., p. 314: *"Erat nempe Willelmus iste conquestor insapiens sed astutus, locuplex sed cupidus, gloriosus sed famae deditus, affabilis Dei servis, sed rigidus sibi resistentibus. Apud novam forestam in Hamptuensi provincia ad spatium xxx. miliarium villas et ecclesias eradicans feras instituit, ita ut qui feram caperet oculum amitteret, qui mulierem vi opprimeret genitalia amitteret."*
[80] Cf. ibid., p. 318.
[81] Cf. Chronicle of Henry Knighton, book 2, ch. 2, p. 57.
[82] Cf. Eulogium Historiarum 3, book 5, ch. 98 -99, p. 34-38 contains the prophetic dream and swiftly moves on to the legitimation of the Conquest and the battle itself.
[83] Cf. ibid., ch. 101, p. 39-40.
[84] Cf. ibid., ch. 102, p. 41-43.
[85] Cf. ibid., ch. 103, p. 43-45.
[86] Cf. Capgrave, Chronicle of England, p. 128-129.

infused account of the Conqueror's reign survived, partly copied verbatim into Higden's massive history. These stories, and the reputation of the king as a whole, possess an astounding cohesion – and the fact that the *Polychronicon* would still invest so much space and emphatic narration into the retelling of his reign shows one thing: the propagandist efforts made for the legitimation of the Conquest had certainly been worth its ink and, in the case of the Tapestry of Bayeux, thread.

*William II as Story*

The image of William II that is transmitted by contemporaries is unanimous in a number of aspects: the comments on his irreligion, climaxing in his unfavourable death scene, the at times grudging admission of his success in war, the condemning judgement of his court and, not least, the depiction of the king himself, whose morals are portrayed as far from exemplary, and whose greed, especially, fuelled unjust exactions throughout the realm. However, it seems wrong to conclude that contemporaries fully condemned the king. The main reason for that is that he plays such a prominent and entertaining role in even the most hostile of narratives. Judging by the series of anecdotes preserved of him, it seems impossible to dismiss the notion that he fascinated those who experienced his reign and wrote about him. He is an appealing figure to have in a narrative – a king who blundered across the stage of the realm's politics rather than domineering it; a brutally honest character that was beyond cunning and scheming, but was free to voice thoughts without having to observe protocol or even political common sense. His chivalric exploits would at times ennoble him beyond that role, and allow a more fittingly royal depiction of him.

William II thus remains hard to pin down. A notoriously bad king with the irresistible ability to fascinate and capture attention, an irreligious, blundering simpleton with moments of shining chivalric virtue. For Orderic Vitalis, he is still preferable to Robert; for Eadmer, he is the ultimate opponent against which Anselm's virtues can be styled. For the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, he is yet another king, albeit one with a bad habit. He is undoubtedly successful in war, and, despite the rebellions, his court holds to him. Internal peace, apart from the royal efforts to collect taxes, is largely perceived to have been preserved intact. However, while the king would make a formidable story, he could never, ultimately, be judged a good king: his moral failings and lasting discord with the archbishop of Canterbury as well as the Church in general made that impossible.

The generation after his death would deal much less passionately with the king than, for instance, Eadmer had done. Two very different ways in which the king was commonly described began to emerge: some writers, especially those from a courtly background, would highlight his military prowess and adherence to the ideals of chivalry, while others would retain the highly negative view of the king's character. Of the latter group, it is Henry of Huntingdon who comes closest to condemning Rufus, but despite his negative depiction of the king, he, like other later writers, was far from painting a picture anywhere near as vile as that left by contemporaries. He notes how the king went back on his sickbed promises, and behaved worse than he had been wont to do after his recovery,[87] he calls him a depraved king *(rex prauus)* who would allow nothing "right" *(nihil recti)* to be done in his kingdom, and oppressed the people with his rapacity and

[87] Cf. Henry of Huntingdon, vii.3 (p. 416).

taxes to finance his building projects.[88] Like so many other writers, it is with the king's death that the condemnation of William II is at its fullest. He precedes the king's 'hunting accident' by omens of blood welling up from the ground and, otherwise, leaves little doubt that he believed Rufus to have been judged by God: "rightfully," he claims, the king was "wrested away in the middle of his injustice". The king had listened to evil advice, been malicious towards his people, frequently waged wars on his neighbours, harassed his kingdom with taxation, let crimes go unpunished, sold ecclesiastical dignities, and allowed all kinds of moral perversions to be perpetrated in broad daylight – William II was a "hated king" *(inuisus rex)* "most evil towards God and the people" *(nequissimus Deo et populo)*.[89] For many writers, the place in which the king was struck down, the manner of his death and the awful visions preceding it were enough to pass a final, unfavourable judgement on him. Beyond that, their accusations pivoted on the king exacting, through his minister Ranulf Flambard, who takes a dominant role in quite a few renditions, far too much money from the populace; they report justice being suppressed and ecclesiastical dignities being sold (often by means of Ranulf Flambard).[90]

However, just like their predecessors, these writers could not deny a certain amount of interest in the more positive, dashing stories of the king. They would bask in these episodes; they would report how the king entered the great hall of Westminster, saying, when he saw it for the first time, that it was not large enough by half;[91] they recount how the king hastily rushed to the sea when hearing of the need of Le Mans and, faced with the sailors' concern about the stormy sea, claimed that he had never yet heard of a king drowning.[92]

There were writers who would carry this apparent fascination with the king to much greater heights, and their accounts, so strikingly different to any contemporary rendition of William II,

---

[88] Cf. ibid., vii.19 (p. 444); for the accusation of greed, see also vii.20 (p. 444), where Henry of Huntingdon claims that William II was not fleecing but flaying the people of England *(....exactionibus pessimis populos Anglorum non abradens sed excorians)*.

[89] For the omens, see vii.20 (p. 444) and vii.22 (p. 446-449), which encompasses the death scene as such.

[90] See John of Worcester 3, p. 92-95. While the chronicle depicts the rest of William II's reign in very neutral tones, albeit with massive descriptions of rebellions and battles (in the course of which, see p. 50, William II's qualities as warleader are appreciated, and the rebellions against him depicted as nefarious), it does, upon the death of the king, make a decisively negative judgement of him. The writer reports omens of blood welling from the ground, omens of the moon, the stars and destructive floods, of the devil appearing to a number of Normans and speaking to them of the king and Ranulf Flambard, on whom he places a large share of the blame for the evils perpetrated. He claims that this man, acting on the king's wishes, saw to it that no justice was done and that ecclesiastical dignities were habitually sold. Roger of Howden 1, p. 155-157, also reports numerous signs foretelling the king's death, among them, again, the devil showing himself to people and speaking of Ranulf Flambard, who is very prominent in Roger of Howden's judgement of the king's reign as the perpetrator of inequity, seller of abbacies and bisoprics and exacter of exactions. No such condemnations are found in Robert of Torigni's work, despite his extensive use of Henry of Huntingdon's history. Robert of Torigni's sole criticism of the king is that he forbade Anselm to do "anything right" within the kingdom and raised intolerable taxes for his building projects (p. 56).

[91] Cf. Henry of Huntingdon, vii.21 (p. 446). Henry of Huntingdon does colour the anecdote negatively, stating that although such was the speech of a great king, it honoured him little. Robert of Torigni, p. 58, copies this episode.

[92] This episode is particularly vibrant in Henry of Huntingdon, vii.21 (p. 446), where it is spiced with adjectives to make it more compelling. The writer seemingly found himself very much impressed by the story of the king's daring: he adds that the king had done nothing in his lifetime that had brought him such great fame, such glorious honour. His judgement is copied by Robert of Torigni, p. 58-59. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 1, p. 231, whose overall depiction of William II is, apart from his quarrel with Anselm, relatively neutral, also reports the episode very positively, claiming that the king did not only survive the crossing, but acquired great fame in so doing. The anecdote is styled to great heights by Glyn, Wace's Roman de Rou, lines 9783-9846 (p. 202) and Gaimar, Estoire des Engleis, lines 5823-5839 (p. 314-317).

are the most compelling to read with regard to the post-mortem role of the king. William II, a generation after his death, was styled as a chivalric hero. In this, the accounts of Geoffrey Gaimar and Wace would almost appear to vie with each in the presentation of William II as an exemplary king – it was in these poetic works of Anglo-Norman French that the king celebrated his greatest triumphs. Their William II is an embodiment of chivalric virtue. He excels in personal prowess and bravery,[93] but, most of all, he takes exemplary care of his men, who, Gaimar asserts, never knew poverty, were always well-equipped and wont to arrive, with the king, in due splendour.[94] If he had heard of any knight's prowess, Wace elaborates, he would not "fail to mention him in his register and give him some annual reward"[95]. As logical narrative consequence of this angle, a point that these two writers put much emphasis on is the bond William II shared with his knightly courtiers, with the extent of their mutual affection made very visible in their writing. The king is repeatedly shown as joking with his knights in good humour: he laughs off their mocking comments on how he had held fast to his saddle during a joust[96] and, with diplomacy and a touch of humour, resolves a quarrel over the symbolic display of social standing at his court, where Hugh of Chester had been too proud to bear the sword that had been his to carry, and was made by the king to carry the royal golden rod instead – an honour for which the initially unruly noble promised to remain forever faithful to the king.[97]

It is this love for the king as master of knights that characterises Rufus' end in both accounts. Beyond the lengthy praise allotted to the king's feats of arms and chivalry while he was alive, the death scene reveals how the writers believed the king ought to be judged. The king's death, unexpected, without communion or confession, had proved the perfect background for many other writers against which they could elaborate on the depravity of the king, and the deservedness of his end. That the king died in the middle of the forest was not easily denied – and yet, Geoffrey Gaimar expends all narrative capability at his disposal to reverse the impression created time and again by the rendition of the king's death in other chronicles. His depiction is a direct reversal and refutation of even the most elaborate negative death scenes, appearing to almost methodically cancel out all aspects that pointed to the king having had a bad death. Gaimar's is a story of a perfidious, untrustworthy criminal who harboured ambiguous plans as to the king's future. With the king thus struck down by the nefariousness of humankind, even if the writer does not explicitly say that Walter Tirel had planned to kill the king, some of the divine judgement is taken from William II's death. Even more crucially, rather than dying at once,

[93] Gaimar, Estoire des Engleis, lines 5963-5974, glories in the king's triumphs in France, where every baron would submit to him, and adds that doubtlessly, had he lived longer, William II would have marched on Rome to realise his claims there. See Glyn, Wace's Roman de Rou, lines 10007-100036 (p. 204), and Gaimar, Estoire des Engleis, lines 5925-5947 (p. 320-323), for two renditions of the king's self-assured release of Helias de la Flèche. See also Glyn, Wace's Roman de Rou, lines 9699-9728 (p. 201), for an assertion of the bravery of William II, and how he was universally feared and protected, bringing peace and justice. The mode of depiction that Geoffrey Gaimar chose for his depiction of William II has been analysed in depth by Gillingham, Kingship, Chivalry and Love, p. 241-257, who, apart from analysing how Gaimar styled William II into a chivalric hero, argued that Gaimar's history should be more frequently used to 'rectify' the dismal image of William Rufus.
[94] Cf. Gaimar, Estoire des Engleis, lines 5843-5850 (p. 316).
[95] Glyn, Wace's Roman de Rou, 9341-9374 (p. 197).
[96] Cf. ibid., lines 9531-9572 (p. 199).
[97] Cf. Gaimar, Estoire des Engleis, lines 6005-6037 (p. 324-327).

Gaimar's king is allowed some last minutes. In these minutes, the king cries out four times, begging to be given the host. His wish could not be attained, as they were so far from a church, but his dutiful, loving adherents did what they could, and gave him a handful of grass and flowers to eat in the place of Holy Communion. Whether this could entirely replace the sacred act, Gaimar left to the judgement of God. Yet he notes that only on the preceding Sunday, the king had properly received the host. Once he has died, instead of being abandoned and dragged back to a church, his corpse is the subject of great grief, described at length by the writer in a most effusive display of emotion. When his attendants had at length ceased to wail, swoon and cry over the death of their lord, they set to work to construct him a wonderful bier from young saplings and their own equipment with which they conducted him to Winchester. Rather than being refused by the clergy, the king's body, once it had arrived there, was watched over by a bishop, monks, clerics and abbots, who celebrated solemn Masses and distributed alms in honour of the king. In spite (or maybe because) of the great effort Geoffrey Gaimar had invested in the stylisation of his narrative, he appears to have been well aware that his was an not entirely uncontested rendition: he closed his account by stating that "anyone who does not believe this need only to go to Winchester, where they will be able to hear just how true it is."[98]

It is fair to say that both views – the condemnation of William Rufus and the glorification of his exploits – had its impact on the depiction of later chronicles. His reputation, rather than crystallising into a definite shape, was to remain remarkably two-sided. The most extensive account, as in many cases, is that of the *Polychronicon*, which includes a large amount of episodes that were also recorded by contemporaries. Hidgen recorded many of the negative facets of the king's reign: how he would heavily tax England,[99] how he quarrelled with Anselm over the issue of holding synods and correcting wrongs,[100] and how he was prone to sell churches.[101] The king's death is recorded with much of the condemnation that contemporaries mustered: there were floods and apparitions of the devil that foretold the king's nearing end, but William II, although warned, set no store by them; when he was killed, few men mourned his death, the man who killed him fled without pursuit and the king's body was dragged, dripping blood, to Winchester, where the tower of the local church collapsed over his grave. Higden notes that he had sold churches, but he remained ambiguous about what he thought of the king: he did great deeds, the chronicler asserts, and had his life sufficed, he would have done greater still. As much as he was reckless in deeds, he was stable in words, and if he promised good or ill, it would come to pass. Upon the king's death, the chronicler even recorded a favourable episode of the king's handling of churches that appears to countermand any accusations of greed and simony previously raised, and stresses the honourable character Higden attributed to him. When three monks were standing before him, one promising more than the other for the dignity of an abbacy, the king asked the third, who had remained silent, what he was willing to give. "Nothing", the monk

[98] See ibid., lines 6299-6434 (p. 340-349); quote translated by Short.The depiction of Wace is not nearly as long, nor does it attempt to ecclesiastically reconcile the king. He does, however, note that upon the king's death, there was grief, tears, confusion and much sorrow (Glyn, Wace's Roman de Rou, lines 10075-10116 (p. 205)).
[99] Cf. Polychronicon 7, book 7, ch. 7, p. 346.
[100] Cf. ibid., ch. 9, p. 382 and p. 384.
[101] Cf. ibid., p. 384.

answered, and the king bestowed the dignity upon him, claiming that he alone was worthy to carry out so holy an office.[102] It is not only after his death that Higden would cast the king into a positive light. The most popular anecdotes of William II litter his account. He records how the king claimed Westminster Hall was too small for him,[103] how he would hasten to the rescue of Le Mans without followers but with confidence, demanding a crossing and declaring that kings did not drown; he records, in full direct speech, the dialogue between Helias de la Flèche and William II, at the end of which the king sent him away with the words that he should go and do whatever he could to overcome him. "This and similar things could be found in the king", claimed Higden. If Christian religion allowed for it, we read the obvious influence of William of Malmesbury in the chronicle, one might believe that Caesar's soul had transcended into the king.[104] Many of the exactions attributed to the king, the selling of churches, the taking of heritages and the accumulation of riches, is traced back to his chancellor Ranulf Flambard, making the king seem less guilty by comparison.[105]

Neither Knighton nor the *Eulogium* nor Capgrave deal as favourably with the king. While Knighton does copy the majority of his account from Hidgen's chronicle, thus naturally taking over some of the positive characterisations of the king – including the 'bad' death scene and the 'good' judgement devised by Higden[106] – his own depiction of the king, although brief, is nowhere near as positive as Higden's final words. He notes that no other king before William II built as much and as aggressively and that he had read of him that he was always prone to evil. His death is presented as on par with these accusations. Knighton attributes the pulling down of churches to establish the New Forest to William II rather than to his father, which gives him convenient grounds to add a new shade of evil to the king's death and allows him to raise the accusation that the king's animals caused devastation throughout the area, but that hunting them was severely punished. The king himself had urged Walter Tirel to shoot; and when he died, no one pursued the archer, nor was the king mourned, hardly anyone shed a tear for him – more than that: everyone was happy about his death.[107]

Capgrave's judgement of the king is similarly negative, albeit without the recited gloss of the *Polychronicon* narrative: he claims that he had demanded severe tributes for his buildings, that he had quarrelled with Anselm because he would not allow any corrections to be done in his kingdom, and, what is more, the arrow that killed the king is a very specific arrow. On the night before, when they had checked on their gear, the king had thrown that very arrow at a cleric's newly shaven crown, relishing the sight of the hurt ecclesiastic. A more fitting end for a disrespectful, 'bad' king than to be slain by that very arrow is hard to imagine. However, despite

---

[102] Cf. ibid., ch. 9, p. 410-414. See especially: *"Vir iste ingentia praesumens et ingentiora proponens si fatum vitae suppetisset"* and *"At quamvis operibus fuisset levis, in verbis tamen stabilis fuerat, adeo ut si cui bonum vel malum protteret, inde securus esse posset."* The king's dialoge with the monk reads thus in the original: *"Cumque coram rege illi duo starent, et unus altero plura promitteret, rex a tertio monacho tunc tacente quid dare vellet inquisivit; at ille se nihil promittere aut dare velle respondit. 'Accede,' inquit rex; 'tu solus dignus es tam sacrum onus subire.'"*
[103] Cf. ibid., ch. 9, p. 394.
[104] Cf. ibid., p. 388 and 390. For the original, see William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum 1, book IV-320.4, p. 566.
[105] Cf. Polychronicon 7, book 7, ch. 9, p. 382 and 386.
[106] See Chronicle of Henry Knighton 1, ch. 7, p. 105, for the passage with the king's claim that kings were not wont to drown. Ibid., p. 109-110 for the king's death.
[107] Cf. ibid., p. 110-112.

this highly unfavourable depiction of the king, Capgrave, too, does not remain entirely without the popular anecdotes: he would remark that the king claimed Westminster Hall to "not be big enough by half".[108]

The darkest version, perhaps, is that of the *Eulogium*. The author informs the reader that William Rufus' great largesse, his need to pay the knights that flocked to his kingdom from far and wide, had eventually sparked greed in his mind; a vice whose primary executor was Ranulf Flambard.[109] "Under him", the author writes, a great number of misfortunes had befallen the kingdom. It is these misfortunates that he lists in the place of much of the reign's more political occurrences. An earthquake, droughts, thunderstorms, a church tower struck by lightning, houses crumbling down, roofs of churches blown away by violent winds, heavy rains, severe frosts, pestilence, meteor showers, a flood, apparitions of the devil and blood welling up from a fountain: these, spiced up with a monk's vision of the king's impending death which the monarch laughs off, are the images that precede Rufus' detailed and unrepentant death, and, since there is no other mention of the events that took place in his reign, the recollection is sombre indeed.[110]

As these observations into the development of William II's reputation amply testify, he was a king who remained a paradox to contemporary writers as well as to later writers: he was too bad, too morally unsound, to praise; and yet he seems to have been too good to condemn. From the way in which the history of his reign was being passed on by historiographers, with the same, remarkably stable anecdotes cropping up time and again, it is tempting to assume that he remained thus two-faced, thus vibrant, because he made for a good story. His was a narrative that would never have worked as well if he had painted a villain through and through. Just as even his contemporaries would not deny the positive facets of his character, later writers, too, did not see fit to cut them out entirely. Doubtlessly, without these aspects, his tale would have become very flat: none of the evils he conceived were inventive enough to have made him appealing as a king who was 'simply' bad. There could be further explanations for the persisting lack of total condemnation. The king's 'crimes' necessarily paled in the course of the years. Many of these crimes had pivoted on the quarrel with Anselm, and consequently a quarrel about the investiture dispute. It was an issue about which even contemporaries harboured strongly differing opinions, ranging from fervent followers of the pope like Eadmer to non-committed clerics like John of Worcester and even supporters of royal power, like Hugh de Fleury. While the quarrel with the Church that lay at the heart of William Rufus' condemnation gradually lost its explosive nature the further that particular struggle drifted off into the past, other qualities of the king never truly became outdated: royal splendour, dashing bravery and chivalrous loyalty retained their importance, just as their negative counterparts of prodigality, recklessness and worldliness did. Whether William Rufus needed to be seen on the side of chivalry or that of worldliness had,

---

108 Cf. Capgrave, Chronicle of England, p. 131-132. The passage of the king's death and the very specific arrow reads thus: *"He schuld hunte in the Newe Forest: and, in the nyte before, he lay in a Personage, and there thei assayed her arowes. The Kyng had on in his hand, and the Person stood before him with a new shave crowne. The Kyng took a arow, and threw it at the prestis crowne, and hurt him, and seid, 'This is a fayre site.' On Walter Tyrel stood beside, and asked that arow for his fe: and the nexte day, as he wold a smet a hert, he smet the Kyng to the hert."*

109 Cf. Eulogium Historiarum 3, book 5, ch. 104 (p. 47-48).

110 Cf. ibid., ch. 105, p. 49-53.

apparently, not been perceived as entirely fixed – his narrative remained open for interpretation, as did his reputation as king, but it certainly did have a dark tinge to it.

*Henry I as Story*

Arguably, the trait that is most prominently ascribed to the governance of Henry I is his fierce pursuit of justice, which might sometimes border on draconic means of punishment. It is a trait that appears to have predestined him for the role of a good prince, as contemporaries were wont to attribute a range of further positive qualities to the king that were, in one way or the other, connected to his exercise of justice – or derived from his innate royal sense for it. When considered in this light, many of the episodes that were deemed, and consequently also styled, as being of particular legitimatory value for the king's representation seem positively streamlined to fit the image of a just and justified king. Among them were the studious proclamation of planning to turn over an entirely new leaf at the onset of his reign that set off his reign against the 'unjust' one of his brother, his marriage into the Anglo-Saxon royal line that consolidated his hold on the kingdom in much the same way that William the Conqueror's constantly claimed consanguinity to Edward the Confessor had done, his implacability in bringing rebellious magnates back under control and his campaign to capture Normandy, which was in such a way buffeted by claims to justice that, in some renderings, it acquired a rhetoric that would well have been suited for a crusading venture.

Beyond the marked emphasis on justice, Henry I is presented as a strong and wilful monarch also in other aspects of his reign, in particular in his relation to the Church, where his initially domineering, even perhaps oppressive stance is ultimately mitigated and turned agreeable by the resolution of the most iconic conflict of his reign: his clash with Anselm over investitures. Contemporaries underlined the power of the king with copious depictions of the splendour, ceremonial and immense wealth of his court, where issues of rank and hierarchy were hotly debated within the gilded framework of crown-wearings and royal ostentation.

In the development of the king's reputation after his death, the influence of Henry of Huntingdon's narrative is very much visible: especially the impressive death scene, the fetid, oozing body that appalled, repelled and even killed gave many narratives of Henry I a dark twist that might otherwise not have been there, given the generally very positive attitude of contemporaries towards their king. Ralph of Diceto (whose chronicle for that period is of almost annalistic brevity) is remarkably alone in describing the king's death without any mention of noxious fluids or self-inflicted illness.[111] Others showed themselves much more enthusiastic about adapting Henry of Huntingdon's narrative pattern: Roger of Howden conscientiously copied out much of the death scene, including the king's feasting on lampreys that led to his demise and the classic epitaph in which Henry I is likened to and bewailed by an array of Roman gods and goddesses. Although he would omit the sombre claims to the deathliness of the king's corpse, he adopted Henry of Huntingdon's general assessment of the many different opinions that had been held on the king: that he had had wisdom, victory and wealth, but had been

[111] Cf. Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 1, p. 247.

avaricious, cruel, and lustful. However, Henry I, as Roger of Howden closes his account on the king, in both his laudable and despicable aspects, seemed excellent when compared with the perjured and ill-fated reign of his successor, Stephen.[112]

Not all writers found themselves compelled to sugar-coat Henry of Huntingdon's narrative. Gervase of Canterbury and William of Newburgh deliberately selected those passages that reflected most negatively on the dead king: they recounted how the stinking body brought disease and even death upon bystanders, and only Gervase includes Henry of Huntingdon's original, mitigating moral lesson behind the miserable death of the great king, the mention of the transitory nature of life that may well have implied that the despicable death was not *only* meant to discredit the king.[113] Without this reference being made, the ungraceful death must seem as an end that the king had deserved for his misdeeds in life, for there is a great moral difference between a king dying a wretched death and a great man being torn down contumeliously by death, the great leveller of all things worldly.

The wide dissemination of Henry of Huntingdon's death narrative was to shroud the king in an ambiguity that was not quite as evident in the eyes of contemporaries – except in those of Henry of Huntingdon. Later writers, when narrating his ignominious end, would sometimes also depict his glorious beginning: according to William of Newburgh, Henry I had been the only child of William the Conqueror that was born when his father had attained royal dignity, he was preferred over his elder brother Robert, whose incapability was clearly visible in his misadministration of the duchy of Normandy; he recalled Anselm, abolished the depraved customs of his brother, and promised laws of equity and peace, although he began prudently began his overhaul slowly, so the sudden rigour would not terrify people; Normandy he conquered in response to the pleas of the local magnates, "more out of a charitable inclination than a hostile one"[114]. Roger of Howden enumerated that upon his accession, he freed the Church, abolished bad customs, imprisoned Ranulf Flambard, recalled Anselm and restored the laws of Edward the Confessor.[115] Beyond these brief remarks on the king's accession, he would also draw upon the tradition that had envisioned Henry I as lion of justice. He chose to laud the king's "firm peace and laws" on the basis of his rigorous punishment of the kingdom's false moneyers, who "lost their eyes and the lower parts of their body without any way of redeeming themselves"[116].

While there are relatively few early thirteenth-century-observations on the king that give some indication on how he 'worked' as story, further aspects had surfaced by the time of the later chronicles. While Capgrave's account of the king's reign is very brief, the *Polychronicon*, and,

---

[112] Cf. Roger of Howden 1, p. 187-188.
[113] Cf. Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 93-94; William of Newburgh, book 1, ch. 3, p. 30.
[114] Cf. ibid., p. 26-27: *"Qui mox salubri usus consilio venerabilem Anselmum ab exsilio revocavit; pravas consuetudines, quae sub fratre inoleverant, abrogavit; pacis et aequitatis jura, quoad regi novitio licebat, firmavit. Multa enim adhuc pro tempore prudenter dissimulabat, ne regiore subito subditi terrerentur..."* and *"...invitatus a majoribus ejusdem proviniciae rex Henricus civili magis animo quam hostili affuit, et plurima ejus parte in deditionem recepta..."*.
[115] Cf. Roger of Howden 1, p. 157.
[116] Cf. ibid., p. 165: *"Rex Anglorum Henricus pacem firmam legemque statuit, ut si quis in furto vel latrocinio deprehensus fuisset, suspenderetur. Monetam quoque corruptam et falsam sub tanta animadversione corrigi statuit, ut quicunque falsos denarios facere deprehensus fuisset, oculos et inferiores corporis partes sine ulla redemptione amitteret..."*.

consequently, Knighton's chronicle, incorporate many episodes beyond the iconic scenes from Henry of Huntingdon's narrative, thus presenting a more detailed and varied impression of Henry I as king. Still, there was only one royal death without the notorious surfeit of lampreys,[117] and, likewise, Henry of Huntingdon's classically inspired eulogy on Henry I, the foul stench of his body, and the differing opinions on his virtues and vices were incorporated with great proximity to the original.[118] Yet the old and, when compared to those writers penning Henry I's life within a generation after his death, also decidedly 'new' elements in the depiction can hardly be overlooked. It is in these chronicles that the basis for Henry I's later epitome *Beauclerc* surfaces again and with greater emphasis, buffeted by the attestation that the king had occupied himself with the "liberal arts" in the early years.[119] He is referred to as "*iste Henricus clericus*"[120] and "*Henrico Beauclerk*"[121]. As a man who fought with counsel rather than the sword, and eschewed the shedding of blood, in wisdom, the *Eulogium* lauds, none of his successors could measure up to him – and maybe not even his predecessors could.[122] These later chronicles would report the king's terrifying nightly visions originating in the Worcester chronicle, in which the three orders assailed him in his sleep, and place the nightmare so as to perfectly match their narrative: the dream acquires a prominent position directly preceding the account of the king's death. It had retained great narrative density: it has the king spring up in alarm, seeking to strike with his sword an assailant that was not there; it mentions the king's physician by name, who gave the perturbed king the advice to amend his sins before it was too late.[123] Just like in the earlier renditions of the king, these dark premonitions turned his death into a negative counterpart to a thoroughly positive accession. The *Polychronicon* recreates the feeling of joy at much-needed change and improvements: although he kept the forests in his hand, he freed the holy Church, established Edward's laws, restored light to the court of his late brother and cast out the effeminate men that had dominated it, imprisoned Ranulf Flambard, recalled Anselm of Canterbury and, after their strife, eventually resigned investiture into the hands of God. For the benefit of the common people, he saw to it that false measurements were abolished, and introduced the length of his own arm as a standard measurement.[124] Especially such information as the last one, in character similar to anecdotes, filled the depiction of the king with a certain vivacity that had not been present a generation after his demise. There was another popular anecdote that Higden would

---

[117] For the death of lampreys, see Chronicle of Henry Knighton, ch. 9, p. 127; Polychronicon 7, book 7, ch. 17, p. 476; Capgrave, Chronicle of England, p. 135. Only the Eulogium provides an entirely 'clean' death for the king, with Henry I preparing his soul for death, and then being buried. There is neither any mention of lampreys nor any mention of the unpleasantness other writers attributed to the corpse. Cf. Eulogium Historiarum 3, book 5, ch. 109, p. 63.

[118] Cf. Polychronicon 7, book 7, ch. 17, p. 474-476. Virtues (wisdom, victoriousness, wealth) and vices (avarice, cruelty, lustfulness) have been cited above.

[119] Cf. Polychronicon 7, book 7, ch. 12, p. 416.

[120] Cf. Chronicle of Henry Knighton, ch. 9, p. 128.

[121] Cf. Eulogium Historiarum 3, book 5, ch. 106, p. 56.

[122] Cf. ibid. ch. 107, p. 57.

[123] Cf. Polychronicon 7, book 7, ch. 17, p. 470-472, for a fuller account, in which the king casts about and shouts for help; Capgrave, Chronicle of England, p. 134-135 for a briefer account, which, however, still retains considerable length and coherence despite the otherwise brief nature of the chronicle.

[124] Cf. Polychronicon 7, book 7, ch. 12, p. 418. Slightly shorter is the Eulogium's praise at the accession of Henry I, but it still retains the claim that with the new king, everything had become better, brighter and more rightful. Cf. Eulogium Historiarum 3, book 5, p. 56.

include: how the king, when he was found to be unduly crowned, cowed sheepishly before the imposing archbishop who threatened to abandon his saying of Mass if the king were not to remove the crown that was sitting quite unrightfully upon his head.[125]

Not only Henry I was outfitted with characteristics that made him more palpable. They would also commemorate his wife. She was the good queen Maud, whose descent, possible life as a nun and, particularly, the great piety with which she would wash the feet of the sick, kiss and touch them, attend the service of the Church and lavish patronage on scholars far and wide turned her into a detail well worth mentioning, much to the benefit of her husband.[126] Despite her gleaming reputation, such post-mortem grace was not bestowed upon her son: William, the king's only heir and victim of shipwreck, was declared by Capgrave to have found his death because he had practised sodomy – a cause on which the Polychronicon had spectators only speculate. However, the alternative offered as to why God had chosen to sink this ship was not much more favourable: Higden claimed that some thought William had planned to treat Englishmen as oxen walking before the plough as soon as he would have acquired dominion over them – a fate that could clearly not be tolerated.[127]

It is the latter part of his reign, and, in particular, his end that would reflect negatively on the reputation of Henry I, a tendency the origin of which seems to lie in the popularity of the chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon. Yet while Henry I's death certainly was a lesson in morality (and, in terms of food, frugality), there is no sense of divine punishment, no pinpointing of the king's faults. The monarch's nightly vision and his physician's exhortation that he should repent his sins stand in no way connected with any faults of the king, and might just as well be seen as a sense of prae-mortem foreboding that every Christian could only benefit from. The death scene pales to a reminder that Henry I, while he effected much good, was also stern and strong-willed, and had characteristics that might be criticised. Yet these were not sufficient to turn him into a bad monarch. "He was", Henry Knighton sees fit to add to the *Polychronicon's* account of Henry I's death, "a virtuous man, good and true towards God and the people"[128] – no amount of cadaverous stench could change that.

*Stephen as Story*

A legally questionable accession, a reign characterised by widespread unrest and civil war, a tensed, distrustful relationship to many of his magnates and a court that began lavish, but whose wealth soon dried out – for most writers, the picture that was to be transferred of Stephen's kingship was fairly unanimous, and far from positive. The best even the spirited defence of the *Gesta Stephani* could make of the monarch was portraying him as a king who would have been a

125 Cf. Polychronicon 7, book 7, ch. 15, p. 452.

126 Cf. ibid., ch. 16, p. 458-460, for most of the attributes listed here; Capgrave, Chronicle of England, p. 133, commemorates her thus: *"Soon aftir this bataile deied Maute, the good qween, of whos curtesie, and humilite, scilens, and othir good maneris, the Englisch poetes at tho dayes mad ful notabel vers."*

127 Cf. Polychronicon 7, book 7, ch. 16, p. 462: *"Et dicebatur quod paene omnes illi sodomitae fuerant ... . Insuper et ille Willelmus regis primogenitus palam comminatus fuerat Anglis quod, si aliquando dominium super eos accuperet, quasi boves ad aratrum trahere [eos] faceret."*

128 Cf. Chronicle of Henry Knighton, p. 128: *"Iste Henricus clericus regnavit xxxvj. annis, et devenit probus homo, benignus et verus erga deum et homines."*

good ruler, but, ultimately, could not fulfil his potential for a variety of reasons. The king's good nature, the rampant wickedness among the magnates, the ongoing struggle over who was the legitimate heir of Henry I – these reasons were all presented as having contributed to a period that was, by common consent, pronounced problematic. It is not the observation of turmoil within the kingdom, but the degree to which it is blamed on the king himself by which supportive writers can be distinguished from those who regarded Stephen as a failure, or viewed his reign with relative neutrality. To facilitate their depiction of the king as the main reason for the dismal state of the realm, adverse writers endowed him with characteristics that would allow his actions to be interpreted in a much more negative way. He was, at his accession, made a perjurer; and in his later treatment of the magnates, he became the man who could not be trusted and would arrest powerful nobles – even bishops – in the alleged safety of his court. These interpretations of the king's character, however, almost universally stay on the level of presenting individual actions in a certain light rather fully condemning him.

While Stephen, whose good character is underlined by several chroniclers, is far from being reported as a man who abounded in vices and negative qualities, he is depicted with almost painful frequency as a king who was simply not able to master the tasks at hand. He may not have been perceived a bad man, but with regard to managing the affairs of the kingdom, he most certainly was believed to have been the wrong man in the wrong place: a 'bad' king, if not a bad man. Even the supportive *Gesta Stephani* finds itself, at long last, forced to acknowledge that Stephen may have been a good man – but not the one who would restore peace to the kingdom.

Within a generation after the king's death, Henry of Huntingdon's narrative proved the widely accepted version of Stephen's reign. Both Gervase of Canterbury and Roger of Wendover rely heavily on the chronicle. As a result, they portray the king's accession as questionable if not perjurious, but maintain that Stephen had ultimately been absolved from his oath, and thus had been free to take the crown.[129] For much of the laborious history of the struggle between the supporters of the empress and the king, these two chronicles 'zoom out', choosing to highlight certain, particularly memorable episodes rather than closely following the events. Stephen's reign is found to be overshadowed by dark omens, from the kiss of peace being forgotten at his coronation ceremony[130] to the fateful breaking candle and tumbling of the pyx during the Mass preceding his capture in the battle of Lincoln.[131] These signs are part of the much more grim observation on the entirety of the reign: "in these days", judges Gervase of Canterbury, "all of England was in turmoil with the deafening noise of war, exposed to arson and robbery".[132] According to Roger of Wendover, after the empress' arrival in England, "all royal courts and solemn festivities ceased, there was no peace, everything was obliterated with murder and fire, wailing, lamentation and horror resounded everywhere"[133] and "the heinous robbers paid no respect or reverence to the Church of God or its ordained, but captured and kept in chains both

[129] Roger of Wendover 2, p. 216-217; Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 94.
[130] Cf. Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 94.
[131] Cf. ibid., p. 113-115; Roger of Wendover 2, p. 228.
[132] Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 142.
[133] Roger of Wendover 2, p. 227.

laymen and ecclesiastics to hold them for ransom"[134]. While there is a general agreement on the dismal state of the realm, the king himself is only rarely characterised. While he is blamed for the capture of the bishops and the earl of Chester within the supposed safety of his court,[135] his other discernible traits are that, hearkening to evil counsel, he allowed rebels to go free[136] and that he possessed an indefatigable bravery in arms, exemplified most spectacularly in his valiant defence before his capture,[137] and is referred to as "distinguished knight" of "most noble spirit"[138].

While Gervase of Canterbury's and Roger of Wendover's works, as summaries or abridgements of Henry of Huntingdon's narrative, are not altogether revealing on the progression of image-shaping, there is another that offers much more interesting insights into how Stephen was remembered: the History of William Marshal. The writer notes that Stephen had ruled laboriously over England, and weakly over Normandy, which he later foolishly lost, and that the stronger claim to the throne was Matilda's,[139] but it is his intensely personal characterisation of Stephen that is most intriguing. In the most droll way imaginable, the History portrays the king's utterly incapability in consistently carrying out his threats. A rebel baron had given his second son to the king as hostage, but failed to observe the agreement with the king and barricaded himself in the very castle that he was supposed to give up. Confronted with the threat that his son was to be hanged, he answered curtly that they could do as they pleased, since he still had hammer and anvil to produce even better son. When the young boy – the later paragon of knighthood, William Marshal – was brought before the gallows, the king changed his mind and took the boy into his arms. Shortly after, when a catapult was being erected for the siege, the king's advisors proposed, by its means, to launch the child into the city. Upon young William's exclamation that it surely would be great to take a swing on so big a swing, the king, once again, found himself unable to bear the cruelty of the proceedings and recalled the boy. In a final attempt at intimidating the rebels, the king threatened to have the boy put to death. The besieged, rather unabashed, brought out a millstone to take the matter into their own hands. When young William, with suicidal innocence, inquired into the nature of this new and interesting toy, the king gave up, swore that the innocent child would not come to harm at his hands, and took him into his private quarters. Shortly after, they both engaged in a play of knights – a game, in which, incidentally, the king's first 'knight' loses its head.[140]

This trait in the king, remembered in a colourful anecdote that was sure to make listeners and readers smile, exemplifies a common judgement of Stephen: he was a good man, but his kindness would often stand in the way of the firm and rigorous kingship that the land needed. Much to the detriment of his ongoing reputation, later chronicles do not record the memory of Stephen's

---

[134] Ibid., p. 232.

[135] Cf. ibid., p. 226-227; Roger of Wendover also maintains that it was partly grief at the fate of his nephew that claimed Roger of Salisbury's life in the following year. For the capture of the earl of Chester, who, the writer affirms, had come to the court *pacifice*, see ibid., p. 236.

[136] Cf. ibid., p. 219.

[137] Cf. ibid., p. 229 and p. 226, where Stephen, *ut miles egregius*, rescues his Scottish hostage during a siege. Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 113-118, copies a great amount of Henry of Huntingdon's literarily ambitious preparation and execution of the battle of Lincoln, including the king's phenomenal prowess with sword and axe upon his capture.

[138] Cf. Roger of Wendover 2, p. 272.

[139] Cf. History of William Marshal 1, lines 23-26 (p. 2-3) and lines 133-140 (p. 8-9).

[140] Cf. ibid., lines 485-619 (p. 26-33).

good character, which, while universally attested during his lifetime, was apparently not found to have enough narrative potential. All three later accounts are very brief, Capgrave's being condensed to a mere page that encompassed Stephen breaking his oath in taking the crown, the broken candle and tumbled-down pyx that heralded his capture and a brief notice of the agreement for the succession as well as the king's death.[141] The only description of Stephen's character, apart from Henry of Huntingdon's battle speeches that condemned his court and the king's falsehood in its entirety,[142] that can be found is that of a *vir ... strenuus et audax*; otherwise, there are no attempts to characterise Stephen through any means other than his actions. These do not make for a particularly favourable picture: he seized the crown against an oath he had taken,[143] he put to flight and incarcerated bishops and used the money left behind by Roger of Salisbury for his own means rather than the good of the Church[144] and his reign was accompanied by bad omens. To those already mentioned, Higden added that all of the great men of the realm who had sworn to abide with Stephen had come to a bad end, and that, on the day on which he was crowned, he was to take the Eucharist, yet when the it was brought before the king, it vanished suddenly.[145]

The only lasting pieces of narration that, with relative cohesion, had managed to remain associated with the king were those that painted him, if not bad, then unlucky and unwise. While the wide array of omens, so dutifully reported (and even enhanced by a vanishing host), stood as a testament to divine disapproval at the reign of this king, the single cohesive piece of narration, Henry of Huntingdon's dramatic pre-battle speeches of the party of Robert of Gloucester and the party of the king, in which both sides vindicate their position, pointed to Stephen's failure in worldly matters. Although both sides are allowed to voice their arguments, Henry of Huntingdon had made the side of Robert of Gloucester the superior one; and this partiality is far from lost in the Ranulf Higden's considerably later version. The king stands as false, his court as a band of sinful wastrels.

The primary drive behind writing Stephen's reign, the issue that made it controversial, was the two-party war for the crown that contemporary writers had witnessed or were witnessing as they wrote. Once that struggle had been resolved, and, what is more, had been resolved with mutual agreement, leaving no victor to be explained, and no loser to be vindicated, there was little left to provoke narration. The victor had been generally accepted as superior, and Stephen had found himself universally disapproved-of, albeit not condemned. Stephen's reign had become colourless, and, as a consequence, Stephen lost all appeal as king: he had neither had victory nor interesting vices.

---

[141] Cf. Capgrave, Chronicle of England, p. 136-137.
[142] Cf. Polychronicon 7, ch. 18, p. 486-491.
[143] This is reported in the Chronicle of Henry Knighton, ch. 10, p. 138, and of course also in his passage on the king's reign borrowed from the Polychronicon (found ibid., ch. 9, p. 129) and in Polychronicon 7, book 7, ch. 18, p. 478. The characterisation of Stephen is found in the Polychronicon (ibid.), and, respectively, also in Henry Knighton's chronicle. See also Eulogium Historiarum 3, book 5, ch. 110, p. 65, which describes Stephen as usurper, having before reported him taking the oath to acknowledge Matilda as successor (ch. 108, p. 60).
[144] Cf. Polychronicon 7, book 7, ch. 18, p. 484. The passage does not specifically mention that the capture of the bishop had taken place in Stephen's court.
[145] Cf. ibid., p. 478-481.

*Henry II as Story*

The reign of Henry II was long and provided contemporaries with a wide range of situations and circumstances on the basis of which they could judge him as king. For much of his reign, he cut a striking figure in most of the aspects that constituted the basis of good kingship. He was initially hailed as saviour of almost messianic proportions, a bringer of peace who would return justice to a land in deep turmoil, and, after his accession, would maintain a sufficiently high interest in the dispensation of justice throughout his reign, even if his officials were, at times, criticised for their behaviour. The ostentation of his court, especially in the way it was made visible for foreign dignitaries, was described with admiration, without any accusations of wastefulness; his diplomatic relations were proudly highlighted. Henry II was portrayed as an effective general, and as merciful to the defeated once he had sufficiently asserted his dominance.

In fact, the king was perceived as having but few shortcomings: acknowledged as his major faults were his rebellious sons and his marriage to Eleanor, who, while politically an astounding match, reflected badly on her husband as far as his moral perception was concerned. Had Henry II died under less unfavourable circumstances, it is altogether conceivable that his lustfulness, eagerness to hunt and overriding of Church privileges would have been seen as his characterising faults; the drawn-out conflict with Becket as a trial by fire that tested his true faith and remorse and, eventually, reconciled him with saint and Church. As it stands, however, the king is presented as a man hounded to the death by his own children and the licentious wife who bore them. A troubled death that made for great storytelling, but implied that something, after all, had been wrong with the king. There is no unanimous interpretation among contemporaries as to what this fault may have been, but spiced up to no small extent by England's then most popular martyr, the story of his reign made for a compelling tale: a comet that rose fast and high, and burned dramatically as it fell.

The story of Henry II was still captivating within a generation after his death, which manifests itself most impressively in the elaborate rendition of Roger of Wendover. The writer recounts the king's impressive genealogy,[146] and retells the mood of expectation and the promise of better times to come at the accession of the king, claiming, close to Henry of Huntingdon's narrative, that the land waited peacefully and untroubled out of love and fear for the king that was to come and change his predecessor's errors for the better.[147] Roger of Wendover scatters other memorable episodes of Henry II through his text, of his refusal to continue wearing the crown,[148] his reluctance to attack his liege lord,[149] how the kings of Castile and Navarre would appeal to him for intercession,[150] and how he was offered the kingdom of Jerusalem, but declined on the advice of his council that deemed it better for him to look after his own people.[151] Ultimately however, the main story worthy event of the king's reign was the martyrdom of Thomas Becket.

---

[146] Cf. Roger of Wendover 2, p. 279-280.

[147] Cf. Ibid., p. 273-274. Wendover claims that the initial actions of Henry II upon receiving the crown were to reclaim crown possession, drive out foreigners, and depose those endowed by Stephen.

[148] Cf. ibid., p. 287-288.

[149] Cf. ibid., p. 288-289.

[150] Cf. ibid., p. 386-387.

[151] Cf. ibid., p. 415-418.

His election to the archbishopric of Canterbury "changed his heart as it changed his clothes"[152], making him a fighter for the cause of the Church that came into conflict with the king, a struggle that is carefully traced as it unfolds, albeit in a relatively neutral tone that incorporates both the arguments of the king and the archbishop. Roger of Wendover cites many letters from both parties, and has the conflict culminate in a lengthy rendition of the archbishop's bravery in the face of the men who had come to slay him, noting even how Becket's brains were scattered across the church floor. The image of Henry II, however, is left consistent with contemporary notions: both parties had their part in the quarrel, and the chronicler does not fail to report the king's deep distress at the incident, his assumption of sackcloth garb and exclamation that he in no way intended the death of the archbishop[153] – and he would give the king's spectacular plea for reconciliation with the martyr all the room he had allotted to the archbishop's martyrdom. The sea voyage of Henry II is depicted as safe from the roughness of the seas because of a prayer of the king, and Henry II, as soon as he has set foot on the soil of England again, fasts, refuses to enter any city, and at last approaches the tomb of the martyr bare-footed and penitent to donate lavishly, to spend his time in prayer and receive absolving lashes from the assembled clergy. The effort secured divine goodwill: "God gave into his hands the king of Scotland" on the very day that he had thus prayed, and granted him a stupendous victory over the rebels.[154] Roger of Wendover does not interpret the king's eventual death, although he acknowledges both Richard's fault in it, and the bitter end that the king had thus suffered, ill and cursing his life. He ends his account of the king's death with an epitaph on the transience of worldly existence – and a remark that he made many good laws for the kingdom, which it would, however, be too wearisome to list.[155]

The second work that offers a more in-depth representation of Henry II is the History of William Marshal. In its perspective, the biography could hardly be more different from Roger of Wendover's account: where the St Alban's chronicler focussed on the martyrdom of Becket, the History's narrative pivots on the conflict between Henry II and his sons, portraying the old king, to whom the protagonist owed absolute allegiance, as a wise and courteous monarch,[156] who finds himself bitterly betrayed by those he loved and slowly descends into defeat. The History acknowledges that the conflict between the king and his sons had been instigated by the king of France, and it draws the dismal picture of a king who has to realise that his sons would never do any good, that he had raised a brood of evil.[157] Sick and humiliated, the king receives the list of

[152] Ibid., p. 292-293.
[153] Ibid., p. 205-296; see p. 298-304 for the full Constitutions of Clarendon, Becket's regret at having agreed to them, and the absolution from his oath granted to him by the pope; see p. 304-305 for the king's desire to exercise justice on clerks as well as laymen; see p. 305-306 for the council of Northampton; the arguments and counter-arguments of the struggle, incorporating a great number of letters, continue on p. 306-339. The forbidden coronation of Henry the Young king is found on p. 354-355, from where the conflict is traced until the death of the archbishop (p. 360-363).
[154] Ibid., p. 377-381.
[155] Ibid., p. 444-445.
[156] Cf. History of William Marshal, lines 2328-2334 (p. 118-119).
[157] Cf. ibid., lines 8198-8201 (p. 416-417); ibid., lines 8267-8271 (p. 420-421).

traitors that he had requested, and, finding John upon it, says nothing but "you have said enough", before his illness worsens and he eventually dies in great pain.[158]

Other writers of the period were, owed not least to the annalistic nature of their work, much less elaborate in their portrayal of the king. The Burton Annals judge that the king prudently preferred to defend Normandy from the French with money rather than with arms.[159] The Margan Annals provide a very ecclesiastic standpoint, illuminating mainly the Becket dispute, albeit without directly blaming the king beyond the complaint that he had inadvisedly had the Young King crowned.[160] A last acknowledgement of the 'story' of the king's reign comes from the Dunstable Annals, which incorporates both the lengthy genealogy tracing the king's descent back to Noah and notes Henry II's assertions that he not intended Becket's death and his subsequent penitence at the martyr's tomb.[161]

The view of which episodes were deemed most significant to the reign of Henry II was to shift massively. The depictions of Higden and Capgrave rely noticeably on Gerald of Wales' highly unfavourable account of the king, which colours their narratives in a way that sets them apart noticeably from contemporary views and the writers a generation after his death. The invariably hostile view provided in any of Gerald of Wales' works, and particularly in his mirror for princes, on which Higden and Capgrave appear to have relied the most, negated some of the importance the death of Thomas Becket had held for the life of Henry II: Gerald of Wales himself had decided on the king's refusal to accept the crown of Jerusalem as the ultimate turning point of the king's fortunes, as (most likely) the events after Becket's death did not measure up to the depravity he sought to ascribe to the king. The adaptation of this view is seen most clearly in Capgrave, who styles the meeting of the king and the patriarch into a condemning, threatening confrontation. The king had excused himself with his need to do war in France and had promised to send money, whereupon the patriarch had complained that all the world was sending money when what they needed was a prince. The king's visitor foretold that Henry II, who had hitherto reigned in joy, would henceforth reign in misery. There, the depiction departs from Gerald of Wales' account to even greater condemnation: "To the king of France you have been false", the patriarch exclaims, "Saint Thomas you have killed; and now you forsake the protection of all Christians!" The king grew angry, and the patriarch, perceiving it, said: "Do with me as you have done to Saint Thomas. I would as much be killed by you in England as of a Saracen in Syria; for I hold you worse than any Saracen." The king replied angrily that no man in his court dared say what the patriarch had said – and with the words "they follow the pay and not the man" the patriarch departed,[162] leaving King Henry II's fortune to plummet. Soon after the event, Capgrave

[158] Cf. ibid., lines 8967-9028 (p. 454-459), for the king's serious illness; lines 9051-9164 (462-465) for the king receiving the list of traitors, his following afflictions in great (and painful) detail, and the subsequent robbery of his body by those who should have watched over him.
[159] Cf. Burton Annals, p. 188.
[160] Cf. Margan Annals, p. 8 (in a comment on how the liberties of the Church had repeatedly caused strife between the English kings and the archbishops of Canterbury), and p. 16-17.
[161] Cf. Dunstable Annals, p. 20-21. The annalist relies mostly on Ralph of Diceto, whose rendition of the reign of Henry II was much broader, so that it can be assumed that he picked the passages he deemed most necessary for the depiction of Henry II.
[162] Capgrave, Chronicle of England, p. 141. The passage given here is translated and abridged from the text.

records, a vision of the crucified Christ was seen at Dunstable, from noon until the evening, which was understood to be a sign that the lord was angry with those who would not *venge His cause*.[163]

Beyond the shifting perception of what Henry II had done to deserve the end that he suffered, the king's morals, entirely in accordance with Gerald of Wales' model, were severely questioned. Both chronicles clothe Henry II in the fiendish nimbus spawned by the story of his being descended from the evil fay Melusine, whose frightful escape from the sacred host they recount in detail; both chroniclers quote Richard in saying that there was little wonder that, in his family, all strove against each other, given that they had come from the devil and would return there again.[164] The *Polychronicon* goes one step further in its reception of Gerald of Wales' mirror for princes, citing, at times verbatim and across several pages, the writer's venomous characterisation of the king. Henry II had been full of guile, open-handed to foreigners but penurious to those familiar to him; he had always nourished strife between his sons and had married a licentious wife that had before lain with his own father.[165] While Higden mentions that the king of Scotland had been taken after Henry II's visit to the martyr's tomb, he cuts out the king's repentance entirely, and directly goes on to claim that he imprisoned Eleanor, and henceforth lived as an open adulterer; a vice that he had previously wallowed in secretly. One token of the king's lustfulness was the *puella spectatissima* Rosamund, for whom the king had a wonderful chamber fashioned at Woodstock, lest the queen should easily find and take her from him;[166] another was his affair with Richard's bride-to-be Alice, who, the chronicler reports, he had planned to marry after divorcing Eleanor, hoping thereby to regain the favour of the French.[167]

While the rendition of the *Eulogium* is at first curiously annalistic and without judgement,[168] it later adds some darker colour to the king. It notes that Henry II was warned by signs to amend his life: a peasant, who vanished after he had made his speech, warned him just before the king's sons – their father apparently not having measured up to the divinely set criteria of reformed behaviour – allied with the king of France; a "most secret" sign revealed to him by a "certain Irishman", and, finally, articles presented to him that accused him of overall bad governance and demanded that he amended what he was doing wrong – when he did not do so, his sons, the king of France and many magnates rose against him. The writer also, with relish and embellishment, recounted how Henry II had been drawn to Rosamund, and kept her as concubine while he imprisoned his own wife. After her death, he abused Alice, the French princess who had been promised to Richard.[169]

---

[163] Ibid.

[164] Cf. Polychronicon 8, book 7, ch. 21, p. 32-34; Capgrave, Chronicle of England, p. 139.

[165] Cf. ibid., p. 22-29. The story of Eleanor having slept with Henry II's father is also reported in Capgrave, Chronicle of England, p. 139-140, as an (unheeded) warning that the king should not consider taking her as wife.

[166] Cf. Polychronicon 8, book 7, ch. 22, p. 52-54.

[167] Cf. ibid., p. 23, p. 58-61.

[168] Cf. Eulogium Historiarum 3, book 5, ch. 111 (p. 68-81), which comprises the full (and dispassionatly recounted) reign of Henry II, often deviating to legends and continental history.

[169] Cf. ibid., ch. 113-114, p. 88-90. The articles presented to the king are the "usual" accusations that pertain to bad kingship. They reprimanded the king to keep his coronation promises, to abolish bad customs in law, see to the church, give back inheritances that had been unjustly taken, and a number of further, similar demands.

Knighton alone, in the brief passages that he does not copy from the *Polychronicon* (thus displaying a stark contrast in judgement that is not altogether rare in his work) views the king apart from the judgements derived from Gerald of Wales. "That Henry", he writes, "reigned his people well and prudently with correct justice, and severely and swiftly brought vengeance down on plunderers, thieves and robbers", even denying them the privilege of sanctuary in his desire to do justice, which was part of the reason why he and Thomas Becket quarrelled for so long. The brooding threat of the king's unhappy end is curiously absent from these passages. Rather than portraying a man hounded to death by his own son, Knighton chooses to recount, upon the king's death, his illustrious descent – despite having previously included Higden's account of the king being robbed and left naked after death, with blood flowing from his nostrils upon the approach of his son Richard.[170]

The influence Gerald of Wales' mirror for princes, published long after the death of Henry II, in the reign of his grandson Henry III, exerted on the way Henry II entered these later chronicles is stupendous. Little is left of the king that has been portrayed by contemporary writers, the good aspects of Henry II and, particularly, his character, having been stripped away, leaving only very much unfavourable traits: pride, lustfulness, greed and an unyielding attitude that would not care for the troubles of the (Christian) world. Even if these traits had already been present in contemporary writing, their impact, when all the good aspects of the king's rule had been pruned away, is much greater. Instead of portraying a prosperous reign that ended in ruin, they focus exclusively on the latter part of Henry II's reign, where ruin was imminent and ubiquitous.

*Richard I as Story*

If the contemporary story of Henry II – a man beset and hounded by his offspring – was pieced together at his death, Richard's narrative is of another quality, and singularly so. It is visibly being negotiated while the king is still (very much) alive, and it pivots on Richard as fighter and crusader. Every last aspect of the king's depiction appears streamlined to form a coherent picture of a fighting pilgrim, and almost universally, contemporary chronicle accounts strive to tell a story as narratively and literarily captivating as they could. It is not rare that the king's deeds are styled in such a way that the resulting depiction might just as well have been taken from the pages of a work of literature rather than one (primarily) of historiography – Richard's life was written up to conform with the conventions of court poetry and its stories of chivalrous *aventures*. Richard's faults of character were amended by displays of pious repentance; his greed diminished by the unquestionable need to finance the crusade and his chivalrous largesse; his at times questionable treatment of the Church mitigated by the services he had rendered to the Holy Land, any of his actions justified by the cause for which he was fighting or the enormity of what he, despite being a pilgrim to Jerusalem, had suffered at the hands of the German emperor and the French king.

There was a remarkable consensus in the image contemporaries sought to convey of the king, and nowhere is this more palpable than in the momentous effort the *Itinerarium* expends on

[170] Cf. Chronicle of Henry Knighton 1, p. 153-155.

explaining the overall failure of the third crusade without tarnishing the memory of the proud warrior king. Throughout the entirety of the account, the author avoids allowing any questionable decisions or failures to be attributed to Richard. The very unpopular decision to abandon the march for Jerusalem in favour of fortifying Ascalon is traced back to the persuasion of (primarily) the Templars.[171] While the presumably temporal setback in the capture of Jerusalem was still relatively easy to justify, the departure of Richard the Lionheart, the man previously styled as the ultimate saviour of the Holy Land, was much harder to legitimate. Richard's eventual decision to return to England is preceded by a whole range of events that present the king as a victim of circumstances, whose fateful return was brought about not only against his will, but by factors both honourable and utterly out of his control. Messengers arrive, more than once, informing the king of the dismal conditions back in the kingdom – the expulsion of his chancellor, the attempts of John to seize the crown – and ask him to return and restore order. Each message greatly consternates the king, until, after long and laborious deliberation, he does at last have to come to grips with the realisation that he must return home to save his kingdom.[172] The final turning point in the narrative is extensively prepared with a chaplain, weeping for the thought of royal glory lost pouring out his heart to the king who sits in quiet contemplation in his tent. The visit of the chaplain, followed by the announcement that the king would remain until after Easter, is but a retarding moment before he eventually leaves the Holy Land, but it is orchestrated with great effect for his reputation: as closing argument in his appeal to the king, the visitor again reiterates past triumphs, highlighting the king's great achievements for the cause of the crusade.[173] Subsequently, Richard is shown as slowly withdrawing from his leading role in the crusade and refuses to resume generalship[174] until, at long last, the truce is made. Of course, it is made only when the king found his health to be deteriorating to such an extent that he did not know whether he would regain it and had but few troops left with which to face the Saracens. It is clear that the treaty was not entirely unproblematic: after describing the course of events, the writer closes the passage with the words "if anyone insists on holding another opinion of the conclusion of this peace, he should know that he incurs the charge of perverse lies."[175] According to William of Newburgh was concluded only out of Saladin's veneration for the (distressingly ill) English king, whose accomplishments he valued, despite the hostility between them. His rendition of the truce is concluded by the image of multitudes of pilgrims peacefully visiting the holy sepulchre. The king himself remains behind, out of fear for his safety, but the bishop of Salisbury goes in his stead, and, with an effusion of tears, performs Mass in that holiest of places, thus fulfilling his vow as well as that of the king.[176] Richard's fervent admirer Richard of Devizes went even one

---

[171] Cf. Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, book 5, ch. 1, p. 308. The passage (rather pointedly, seeing that it continously refers to everything the king did) makes absolutely no mention of Richard's involvement in the decision.
[172] Cf. ibid., ch. 12, p. 333-334; ibid., ch. 42, p. 358-359.
[173] Cf. ibid., ch. 45, p. 361-364.
[174] Cf. ibid., book 6, ch. 1, p. 379-381.
[175] Cf. ibid., ch. 27, p. 426-429: *"Quisquis super hujus pacis contractu contenderit aliter sentiendum, perversi mendacii se noverit incurrisse reatum."*
[176] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 4, ch. 29, p. 376-379. The depiction of Roger of Howden is very similar, claiming that Richard had been struggling with his failing health, and had concluded the truce on the advice of the entire army. Cf. Roger of Howden 3, p. 184-185.

step further, asserting that the truce had been made while Richard lay ill, out of the fear that he would not regain his health. While the king, having recovered, was making plans to renew the assault, great parts of his army defected and caused the king to erupt in an explosion of wrath. Richard of Devizes renders him as chewing a pine staff that he carried into small bits while asking God for an explanation of what had happened. His advisors urge him to agree to the treaty that had already been agreed on, and it is Saphadin who could "barely" convince the king to agree to the truce, for, as the writer points out, "he had such strength in his body, such virtue in his heart, such faith in Christ" that he would have continued fighting, alone, even against a thousand pagans.[177]

Accepting Richard's failure as crusader appears to have been so inconceivable that William of Newburgh even employed supernatural forces in explaining how it came to pass. A demon, having proven his hellish descent by burning the hair of a pilgrim and blackening his hands and arms, finds himself bound by the presence of the apostle Jacob that had inspirited the man, and gives ample information about his previous engagements as emissary of the inferno:

> "'I am a demon,' he said, 'hostile to mankind, and learned in a thousand harmful arts. I have accomplished the loss of the Christian possessions in the Orient: in the promised land, I sowed despicable discord between the Christian kings, so that nothing was done by them, and the work of God did not prosper in their hands. After the king of the English had left Syria, I had him captured by a minister of my nefariousness, that is, the duke of Austria, thereby calling down manifold evil on the Christian kingdoms; and even as the king returned to his property from captivity I have accompanied him, remaining now in these parts, and I frequently stand by the royal bed like a familiar servant.'"[178]

The episode, recorded in the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* for the year 1195, did not only conveniently explain how the crusade could possibly have failed, it could also be seen as elucidating any problematic behaviour the king might have been seen to exhibit after his return from captivity.

Richard could not be blamed for anything that had gone amiss. His life, indeed, remains wrapped up with the divine. Among contemporaries, the death of the duke of Austria – his leg crushed underneath a fallen horse – is almost gleefully expounded upon, perceived as a divine judgement for the wrongful capture of the righteous crusader. A lengthy rendition is found in Roger of Howden's *Chronica*. He notes that the lands of the excommunicated duke were visited by plagues of almost biblical proportions: fires incinerated "all cities", with no one knowing the cause of the conflagration. A river overflowed, killing thousands of people, his lands withered, the seeds of corn turned to worms and the nobles of his domains were smitten with mortality. Despite the divine warnings, the duke refused to repent, and was visited with more personal vengeance. The events leading up to his death are depicted with elaborate detail that includes even the gruesomeness of the wounds the duke had incurred. His foot having been crushed

[177] Richard of Devizes, p. 81-83.

[178] Cf. William of Newburgh, book 5, ch. 9, p. 435-436: "*'Daemon,' inquit, 'sum generi humano infestus, et mille nocendi artibus instructus. Ego ... Christianae possessionis jacturam in Oriente patravi: ego inter reges Christianos in Terra Promissionis, ut nil ab eis ageretur, nec prosperaretur opus Dei in manibus eorum, detestabilem discordiam seminavi; regem Anglorum a Syria digressum per ministrum nequitiae meae, ducem scilicet Austriae, captivavi, multimodam exinde malorum occasionem regnis Christianis concinnans; eundem quoque regem de captivitate ad propria revertentem comitatus, in partibus istis nunc consisto, cubili regio tanquam familiaris minister frequenter assisto...'*".

underneath his horse, he could find no one to amputate the blackened limb from which bones protruded. A desperate operation in which the duke himself had applied the axe to his leg, and his chamberlain struck upon it with a mallet to sever the foot left him with no hope of life. He was denied absolution from the sentence of excommunication until the realm's bishops had extracted from him the promise to release the English hostages and remit the sum Richard was still owing him; a promise that his heir wished to oppose – upon which the clergy refused to bury the body of the dead duke, which had to remain unburied for eight days before the late duke's successor relented.[179]

Contemporaries fiercely vindicated the reputation of their king, reinforcing and preserving the image of an excellent warrior who fought in the name of piety. In this respect, Richard remains an outstanding, singular figure. Within a generation after his death, little had changed in that remarkably unanimous depiction of the king. The brief annals of that period left little of Richard's reign but the observation that Richard was a bellicose monarch and that the churches were stripped of their valuables for his ransom,[180] but even among them, Richard's reputation was taken note of: the writer of the Burton Annals comments, at the king's accession to the throne, that he was "bellicose and fortunate against his adversaries". While the annals' account of the crusade, abridged from Roger of Howden, is unfortunately rather patchy, the full narrative impact of the king is realised in the elaborate retelling of his death scene. It includes everything: the dignified retreat of the wounded king, the royal order to hang every last man except the archer, the desperate attempt at removing the bolt from the king's flesh, and, in full, the dialogue between the king and his assassin in which Richard grants him absolution and orders money to be given to him before it lapses into noting the place of the king's funeral and an epitaph mourning his passing.[181] If such relative depth of story has survived in the annals, the more narratively inclined works, particularly Roger of Wendover and the History of William Marshal presented the story of Richard at its fullest.

The major traits that contemporary writers attributed to the king are still very visible in these narratives, but they have undergone certain embellishments. As might be expected from the work's main character, Richard, as presented in the History of William Marshal, is mainly defined by his chivalry. As the author writes up the Marshal's loyalty as one of his most noteworthy character traits, the Richard described before the death of Henry II is a fierce adversary of his father, whose ferocious pursuit of the old king's train is halted single-handedly by the Marshal who kills Richard's horse beneath him when the young count had protested that (presumably in terms of chivalry) it would be a "bad" thing to kill him, seeing that he was unarmed. Yet, he is

[179] Cf. Roger of Howden 3, p. 274-278. For other versions, see William of Newburgh, book 5, ch. 8, p. 431-434, which is as elaborate as Roger of Howden's version. See also Ralph of Diceto 2, p. 124, and Gervase of Canterbury 1, p. 528-529. Ralph of Coggeshall, p. 65-66, depicts the death of the duke of Austria, and, on p. 73-74, adds the death of the German emperor as yet another example of how the wrongdoers in the case of Richard the Lionheart were struck down by divine justice.

[180] The Dunstable Annals, p. 24-27, for instance, cut the otherwise often elaborately detailed depiction of the crusade, and thereby a large part of Richard's reign as a whole, extremely short, their brief annalistic notices leaving no narrative structure.

[181] Burton Annals, p. 188: *"Hic fuit bellicosus et fortunatus in adversis"*. See 188-192 for the account of the crusade, p. 195-196 for Richard being summoned to Germany and p. 196-197 for the account of his death.

not without his later glory: springing up from the ground, where his horse lay dead, he called out to his men that they should stop the pursuit, and not one moved a foot out of line.[182] Once Richard was king, he could be portrayed with considerably more lustre. His most defining quality in the History is his boldness,[183] which is expanded beyond the known scope of Richard's exploits as the writer pits the king's audacity against that of the Marshal, claiming Richard to have been seething with anger when the Marshal charged forward alone to rescue a fellow knight in need while Richard himself was held back from doing so by his advisors.[184] The anger is easily understood within the context of Richard's depiction in the History: otherwise, he would be the first to storm into battle, leaving his men to rush after him as he charged head-on into the enemy lines.[185]

Beyond the field of battle, the king is presented as generous, merciful and acutely aware of the dictates of chivalry, which allows him to share a remarkable bond with his men. They follow him with dedication and (vainly attempt to) compete with him in matters of prowess. A particularly memorable passage shows him being enthusiastically received by his Norman people, relieving a castle under siege and personally kissing each defender that had helped defend the fortress.[186] The author, too, asserted that Richard would never have lost the struggle for Jerusalem but for the machinations of the king of France.[187] He laments Richard's death as a tragedy brought about by the poisoned arrow of a "demon, a traitor, a servant of the devil" that killed "the best prince in all the world".[188] Rather than reiterating the king's last act of forgiveness,[189] the author plunges the court into confusion and despair, and mourns the greatness that was not to be: had he not died, he asserts, Richard would have won the entire world for himself.[190]

It is little surprising that Roger of Wendover, more elaborate and so close to the testimony of contemporary authors that his account lacks little of the individual episodes that excited writers during Richard's reign, chose a slightly different angle in his depiction of the king. If the author of the History had highlighted the king's chivalric virtues, the St Alban's chronicler would put greater emphasis on the king's connection to the divine. Audacity, chivalry and fulminant

[182] History of William Marshal 1, lines 8831-8864 (p. 448-451).
[183] ibid., lines 9976-9982 (p. 506-507), in which Richard is claimed to have surpassed, in courtliness, wisdom, boldness and bravery, all other nobles who attended the crusade; surpassed them to such a degree, even, that all of them taken together would not even come close to his valour.
[184] Cf. History of William Marshal 2, p. 58-61, in particular lines 11193-11198.
[185] Cf. ibid., lines 10957-11009 (p. 48-51).
[186] For Richard's generosity, see History of William Marshal 1, line 11304 (p. 65). Scenes of mercy or forgiveness are found in vol. 1, lines 9320-9344 (p. 472-475), in which Richard graciously forgives the Marshal for killing his horse; vol. 2, lines 10379-10428 (p. 18-21), has the king lengthily and lovingly forgive his brother John; ibid., lines 10273-10288 (p. 15), praise Richard's merciful conduct towards prisoners. Ibid., lines 10432-10508 (p. 22-25), describe the king's joyful reception in Normandy, with dancing crowds surrounding him, and his deliverance of the besieged castle.
[187] The rather impressive scene, but a small part of a long discussion of the perfidy of the king of France, involes a cardinal sent to mediate between the two kings, who uses the argument that the kings should not hold on to their hostilities while Jerusalem remained in the hands of pagans. Richard bends down towards the cardinal to tell him that if his lands had not been attacked, the entirety of the Holy Land would have been liberated for the Christians (ibid., lines 11500-11517, p. 74-77).
[188] Ibid., lines 11759-11772 (p. 89); translation by Gregory.
[189] Which may have felt out of place either way, seeing that the archer had been identified as spawn of the devil.
[190] Cf. History of William Marshal 2, lines 11816-11876 (p. 90-95).

victories are, of course, still present, together with Richard's most story-worthy exploits,[191] but have, as it were, a halo around them. Richard's fleet, as three visions of St Thomas received during a tempest testify, was under the protection of the martyred archbishop, St Edmund and St Nicholas the confessor, appointed by the Lord themselves to see to a prosperous voyage of the English royal fleet as long as the crusaders guarded against sin.[192] The king stood under especial protection: a disease assailed him and his men, and all who were smitten with the disease perished – except for the king, upon whom protection had been bestowed (*sospitatem conferente)*.[193] Richard was not idle in the face of such obvious divine favour – from his own coffers, he paid for the redemption of all the relics of the Holy Land, which had fallen into the hands of the Saracens.[194] The king's stain was that he had sinned in his youth and fought against his father,[195] but his imprisonment appears to purge him of that, for, when he returns, his coming is heralded by most splendid light in the heavens, after which he devoutly seeks out the shrine of St. Thomas,[196] and Roger of Wendover, too, would report the wretched death the duke of Austria suffered for having captured Richard.[197] Richard's death perfectly balanced the divine and the chivalrous. Having received a wound from a poisoned weapon, the king pays no heed to his injury, but continues to energetically assault the castle that is finally taken. Only then does the severity of the wound become apparent, and, as the blackish swelling increases, the king piously makes his peace with God. With contrite heart, he makes a pure, spoken confession, receives both the body and the blood of the lord, allows his assassin to go free and determines where he wishes his body, his heart and his entrails to be buried. His end is perfect: just as he has spoken his last words, the swelling from the wound reaches his heart and takes his life – there was no time for him to harbour even so much as a wicked thought. Even the betrayal of his father is (once more) atoned for: Richard himself is reported to have said that he wished his body to be buried with his father in acknowledgement of what he had brought upon him. With the "unconquerable king", Roger

---

[191] The chronicle of Roger of Wendover encompasses most of the 'major events' of Richard's reign, depicting them in a way that is very similar to that of favourable contempoaries of the king. See, for instance, Roger of Wendover 3, p. 5-7, for an exhaustive account of the splendid ceremonial employed at Richard's coronation; p. 16 criticises the violent rapcity with which the king gathered money for the crusade, but his second efforts of raising money after his return from captivity are excused by the fact that he wanted to free the remaining hostages and fight against Philip II of France (p. 81). The depiction of Richard's exploits in the Holy Land draws again on the image of a brave and successful crusader. The king is depicted as capturing the Saracen vessel and triumphantly entering Acre and generously dividing its spoils (p. 40-42), with people of all nations flocking under his banner as the fame of his prowess grows, much to the jealousy of the French king (p.42-44). Richard graciously distributes the treasure found on a caravan of 7,000 camels (p. 54-55) and captures Joppa by jumping into the water and rushing towards the city to relieve the besieged Christians (p. 59-63).

[192] Cf. ibid., p. 28-29.

[193] Ibid., p. 64.

[194] Cf. ibid., p. 47-48.

[195] It is with these interpretations that Roger of Wendover explains why Richard was captured in the first place.The author takes the description of Henry II's dreadful last stand word for word from Ralph of Diceto, Ymagines 2, p. 107; discussed above in the chapter on Richard's character. However, contrary to Ralph of Diceto, he allows also for the possibility that Richard might have been made to suffer captivity because of the sins of his subjects: *"Quod miserabile infortunium non absque omnipotentis Domini judicio, licet nobis occulto, evenisse arbitrandum est; sive pro ipsius regis lubricae aetatis erratis castigandis, sive pro subditorum suorum culpis feriendis, vel etiam ut idem rex ad poenitentiam et satisfactionem congruam revocaretur super excessu, quo patrem suum ... vallavit."* (Cf. Roger of Wendover 3, p. 68-70).

[196] Cf. ibid., p. 80.

[197] Cf. ibid., p. 87-89.

of Wendover reports, many believed the splendour and honour of knighthood to have been buried.[198]

Roger of Wendover found himself so intrigued with the lionhearted king that, much later in his chronicle, he would incorporate new embellishments to the king's life that must have been circulating. In 1232, when the bishop of Rochester was holding Mass, he suddenly turned upon the congregation and told them to rejoice, for three visions had come upon him had others telling him that Richard king of England had left purgatory and ascended to heaven.[199] And since, the chronicler somewhat sheepishly remarks, *mentio facta est de magnifico rege Richardo*, he was going to remark on an episode from the king's life. He recounts a just king, who had softened the harsh penalties for the breach of forest law because he did not believe it right to mutilate men, who were fashioned in the image of God, on account of beasts. A knight he had exiled for such an offence had attempted to find the king and seek forgiveness from him. Richard witnessed him praying to the image of Christ, and repeatedly saw Christ on the cross bending his head and shoulders towards the knight. Intrigued by what he had seen, he demanded the knight come before him, and asked of him his history, and whether he had ever done something out of reverence for Christ. When the knight recounted that he forgiven his father's murderer, who sought shelter underneath the cross, the king restored the night to his former possessions. Since he was already speaking of Richard, Roger of Wendover notes, he saw fit to include another episode speaking of the king's great piety: he has Richard, at an assembly of all his realm's prelates, whisper to his attendants that if these prelates knew how, out of reverence for God, he afraid he was of them, how much he was loath to offend them, they would trample all across him as one would trample a shoe, old and tossed away. The chronicler annexed a sweeping praise of the king that summed up his reverence, justice, virtue, how he had held clerics in the highest regard and allowed no benefice to fall vacant. Reiterating the king's life, he portrays the king as one who had entirely dedicated his life to the crusade. His lifetime achievement was the service he had rendered to God and the Holy Land, and he had returned only because money had failed him, but had resolved to return to the Holy Land, to leave behind his Western possessions, fight against the enemies of the Cross for the remainder of his life, and be crowned king of Jerusalem. Richard's wish to become an eternal crusade was stalled by the fiendish machinations of his

---

[198] Cf. ibid., p. 135-136: *"Tandem rex sapientissimus, cum periculum sibi cerneret imminere, exitum suum cordis contritione, oris pura confessione, corporis et sanguinis Domini communione munivit; et necis suae auctori, Petro scilicet, qui eum percusserat, mortem suam condonavit atque liberatum a vinculis abire praecepit. Corpus vero suum apud Fontem-Ebraudi secus pedies patris sui, cujus proditorem se confitetur, sepeliri jubens ecclesiae Rothomagensi unexpugnabile cor suum legavit; sicque apud castrum praefatum viscera sua in ecclesia recondi praecipies, haec pro munere Puctavensibus concessit. ... et his dictis, tumore ad cor ejus subito perveniente, octavo idus Aprilis, die Martis, vir Martio operi deditus apud castrum praedictum spiritum exhalavit ... ."* In the same passage, Roger of Wendover also gives an explanation why Richard had distributed his body in this way. Apart from acknowledging his betrayal of his father, he felt that the citizens of Rouen had earned the right to be the resting place of his heart because of their fidelity, while those of Poitou were entitled merely to his intestines because of their well-known treachery. Before he includes a lauding epitaph, Roger of Wendover notes, as cited above, *"... cum quo etiam multorum judicio Hesperiae decus et honor militae pariter sepulta sunt"*.

[199] Cf. Roger of Wendover 4, p. 234. On his liberation from purgatory, Richard was accompanied by the late Stephen Archbishop of Canterbury and one of the latter's chaplains. The bishop's joyful proclamation reads: *"Gaudete omnes in Domino fratres … scientes indubitanter, quod nuper uno et eodem die exierunt de purgatorio rex quondam Anglorum Richardus et Stephanus, Cantuariensis archiepiscopus, cum uno capellano ejusdem archiepiscopi, ad conspectum divinae majestatis, et eo die non nisi tres illi de locis poenalibus exierunt; et ut his dictis mes fidem adhibeatis plenissimam et certam, quia vel mihi vel alii tertia jam vice hoc per visionem revelatum est ita manifeste, quod ab animo meo omnis dubitationis ambiguitas removetur."*

captors. But even as he endured their barbarous captivity, his thoughts were with his purpose, and he longed to return to the Holy Land, there to achieve martyrdom in his death. His wonderful patience in enduring his captivity, the chronicler closes his exuberant excursus, was, in addition to his other virtues, that which made him so worthy in the eyes of God, and allowed for his ascension to heaven. Now, according to Roger of Wendover, the king was rejoicing in the company of the very saints whose relics he had redeemed, with his own money, from the hands of the Saracens.[200]

The difference between Roger of Wendover's narrative of the king's reign, which was thoroughly positive and laudatory, but not noticeably more so than the accounts of contemporaries, and this later insertion into his chronicle is striking. Its praise of the king is more fulsome, its focus is more intensively trained on the crusade, and it styles Richard into a would-be martyr and king of Jerusalem, who cared for nothing more than the service he could render unto God in the Holy Land. There can be no more convincing proof that Richard was rapidly becoming not only a hero, but a myth, a king of legend.

Despite these efforts, it was Richard the knight (and not Richard the divinely inspired pilgrim) that found entry into the chronicles of the late Middle Ages. While the image of the brave king is consistent, the accounts vary greatly in terms of detail. Most extensive is the *Polychronicon*, which preserves quite a large number of episodes from Richard's reign, albeit in a much more sober voice than the original chronicles. Many of the episodes have been stripped down to the bare bones. It is these – narrative 'catchphrases' one might almost say – that characterise Richard in Higden's depiction, and they are enough to outline, if not the glorious hero, then at least the admired, confident warrior who would collect money in vast quantities and find himself a victim of the treachery of others. He has the king, selling dignities and land as if he did not intend to return, state that he would sell London if only he could find a buyer,[201] compares him unfavourably to Philip II in terms of dealing out justice among his followers,[202] claims the French king's envy for Richard's glory to be the reason for his premature departure from the Holy Land and has Philip II, in the hatred born from envy, attempt to blame the murder of Conrad of Montferrat on Richard, so that he might brand him as traitor – a decision from which his counsellors dissuade him, on account of Richard being a pilgrim and not to be harmed.[203] The death of the duke of Austria, Richard's second Christian opponent, is elaborately recorded, underlining the duke's guilt in the capture of the king,[204] but Higden also records the shameful treatment of the duke's banner that the king acquiesced into,[205] which constituted an insult that merited revenge. The flamboyancy of Richard as icon of chivalry is found preserved in Higden's rendition of the king as the man who lay bonds of silver onto the captured emperor[206] and

[200] Cf. ibid., p. 234-240.
[201] Cf. Polychronicon 8, ch. 25, p. 88
[202] Cf. ibid., p. 106. The passage recalls the landing of the two kings in Sicily, where Philip II would condone transgression, acquiring the name of lamb for himself, while Richard would leave nothing unpunished, being called a lion as a result.
[203] Cf. ibid., ch. 26, p. 112-114.
[204] Cf. ibid., ch. 29, p. 138.
[205] Cf. ibid., ch. 27, p. 112.
[206] Cf. ibid., ch. 26, p. 108.

matched Fulk (of Neuilly's) demand that he ought to marry off his three personified vices blow for blow.[207] It is in the king's death scene that the otherwise prosaic account reveals its appreciation of Richard the Lionheart. Higden repeats the well-known dramatic last encounter between Richard and his assassin word for word and includes epitaphs on the king that praise him as an epitome of chivalry: one states that Richard was buried in three parts for he was greater than just one, the other claims that if death bore arms, he would have yielded victory to the king out of fear for Richard's warlike prowess.[208]

Knighton and Capgrave are much briefer in their rendition of the king, but maintain the central feature of royal prowess and the treachery by France. Knighton's doubtlessly most memorable (and, in historiography, rather unique) anecdote of Richard is that a ferocious, starving lion had been let loose upon him while he was a captive, whereupon the king, with the grace of God and his audacity on his side, reached up to the arm into the gaping maw of the hungry beast and tore out its heart, which, bloody and warm, he ate – a feat for which he was called Richard the Lionheart.[209] Capgrave, in his turn, preserves the king (in a flamboyant show of cunning, not mercy) putting fetters of silver onto the captured Cypriote emperor,[210] and, as if as judgement on the entirely of the crusade, claims, on the occasion of the capture of Acre, that *Kyng Richard had there alle the worchip. And thei too, Philip and Richard, departed the tresore of the cite, and eke the prisoneres. Philip sold his prisoneres: Richard hung his.*[211]

The *Eulogium's* recognition of the king's 'story' is brief in an otherwise neutral narrative. It is upon the death of the king that he begins to narrate in detail, recollecting how the king acquired his wound, and even incorporating the final pardoning of his killer, who accused him of having killed both his father and two brothers. In this rendition, there is nothing bleak to the king's pardon: there is no report of anything untoward happening to the pardoned after the king had died. As if in acknowledgement that there would have been more to tell of Richard, he ends his depiction of the reign by reciting the epitaph on the king already recorded by Higden: death himself would have yielded to the king.[212]

As these examples amply show, Richard the Lionheart, as story, is likely to be the most uncomplicated and consistent of any of the kings regarded here. What little ambiguity he had among contemporaries, he lost in the course of time, becoming, if not the ecclesiastically charged pilgrim that Roger of Wendover had attempted to make him, a shining chivalric hero whose deeds were legend. The fascination with the bold crusader king holds, largely uncontested, until this day.

---

[207] Cf. ibid., ch. 31, p. 158.

[208] Cf. ibid., p. 164-168. The epitaphs read thus: *"Viscera Careolum, corpus fons servat Ebrardi, et cor Rothomagum, magne Ricarde, tuum. In tria dividitur unus quia plus fuit uno nec superest uno gratia tanta viro*" and "*Christe, tui calicis praedo fit praeda Calucis aere brevi deicis qui tlit aera crucis. Hic, Ricarde, jaces; sed mors, si cederet armis, victa timore tui cederet arma tuis."*

[209] Cf. Chronicle of Henry Knighton 1, ch. 14, p. 167.

[210] Cf. Capgrave, Chronicle of England, p. 146. There is nothing of merciful treatment towards a high-ranking prisoners left: *"... and the Kyng graunted to make amendis o that condicion, that Richard shuld not put himin no fetteris of yrun. He graunted his peticion: but whan he had him, he put him in fetteris of sylvyr. So kept he the Kyng, and disposed al the ylde at his pleasuns."*

[211] Ibid.

[212] Cf. Eulogium Historiarum 3, ch. 112, p. 84 and 86 respectively.

*John as Story*

In John's case, it is particularly rewarding to see how individual chroniclers would ascribe strongly diverging motivations and characterisations to the king; characterisations coloured with rumours that varied greatly in the degree to which they vilified the king. These degrees of vilification, ultimately, are the variable that distinguishes one writer's view from that of another, since the overall evaluation of John as a king is fairly unanimous. The king was morally questionable, much inclined to brutality and cruelty, prone to lavish his favour on entirely the wrong people. His judgements were infused with arbitrariness and anger, his successes in war were dampened not only by the great loss of property he suffered, but also by the mass defection of his nobles and his own failure to turn his victories into something worth remembering. His irreverence and ultimate break with the Church, in the context of these narratives, does not lie at the heart of John's 'bad' kingship. Rather, it appears to have been perceived as the pebble that started the avalanche: after the rift with the papacy and the ensuing excommunication and interdict, the pent-up cruelty within the king was released in angry outbursts that plunged his domains into chaos even as the barons at last turned from him and rebelled openly.

John, then, was not a 'good' king, very decidedly not. Unlike William Rufus, he was not granted a single redeeming trait; not a single outstanding performance in even one of the fields that constituted the duties of a king. His reputation was so dismal that Roger of Wendover, stepping beyond the usual condemnation of a king at his death, incorporated a scene into his chronicle that pursued and commemorated the king's atrocity even well beyond the grave. He employs a motif that might as well have been taken straight from Dickens' Christmas Carol. In a literary prelude to the death of the bishop of Durham, he describes a monk having a nightly vision.

> "Whilst this monk then was sleeping ..., the before-named king stood before him in his royal robes of the cloth called imperial; the monk at once recognized him, and, recollecting that he was dead, asked him how he was. The king replied, 'No one can be worse than I am, for these robes of mine, which you see, are so burning and heavy that no living being could touch them on account of their heat or wear them on account of their weight without being killed; but I nevertheless hope, by the clemency and unspeakable grace of God, at some time to obtain mercy. I therefore earnestly beg of your brotherhood, to tell Richard Marsh, now bishop of Durham, that unless, before his death, he alters his wicked life, and amends it by proper repentance and atonement, a place is prepared for him in hell; and if he refuses to put faith in your words and my message, let him lay aside all doubt by these tokens, namely, that when we were alone together in a place well known to him, he proposed to me ... that I should take from the Cistercian monks their crop of wool for a year, and that he proposed to me many other wicked designs, for which I now suffer unspeakable torments, which also await him. ...' With these words the king disappeared, and the monk awoke in astonishment."[213]

There is redemption in this ghost of kingship past: the torments of hell had obviously caused John to repent the misdeeds of his life, and had made him attempt to prevent others from suffering the same fate. The episode, inserted into the chronicle ten years after the king's death, called to mind the enormity of the late king's crimes, but also the salvific grace of (ultimately) God, who would allow even the most nefarious of sinners to eventually see the light. This is in some ways consistent with the way John was depicted by contemporaries. He was painted in a

---

[213] Roger of Wendover 4, p. 127-128. Translation by Giles, The History of England 2, p. 477.

wide variety of black shades that ranged from dreaded tyrant to a desperate man who, while he did not fulfil the personal prerequisites of good kingship, was also a victim of circumstances.

In a way, John's story was sealed as soon as Matthew Paris entered the stage, and re-wrote his predecessor's chronicle. He solidified John's narrative into that of a king who had stepped well beyond the bonds of 'bad' and, without stopping, proceeded to 'evil'. He did so by adding a crucial aspect to his depiction of the king that contemporaries had largely failed to include. Where they had been reluctant to incorporate the king's character into their narratives, the most personal aspect of King John is where we find the majority of Matthew Paris' eloquent additions to his predecessor's work. Thus fitted into a widely disseminated narrative, they formed a comprehensive, compelling picture of John as story that was all the more powerful for that hint of a twisted personality that stood behind the atrocities perpetrated during the reign. This king, so Matthew Paris' overall portrayal, was a cruel coward who considered nothing to be holy in his search after power and protection from his foes both imagined and real. The *Chronica Majora* thus reports an embassy being sent to the Muslim king of Africa, Morocco and Spain to the purpose of giving up the kingdom of England to said king when the demands of the barons had begun to become pressing; John would even relinquish the laws of Christianity, which he deemed *vanus*. Narrative causality would have it no other way: the embassy does not encounter a wicked Saracen, but a ruler in the cast of a handsome and learned "noble savage", who they in fact encounter reading (and enjoying) Christian philosophy written in Greek. The man sets great store by moral values, believing especially in unwavering religious faith, and swiftly suspects a depraved monarch behind the embellishing reports of the knightly emissaries, and, on hearing of John's age, he dismisses his proposal as that of a "petty king *(regulus)*, senile and confused" who he considered unworthy of an alliance. It is only when he has already cast the messengers from his presence that his eyes fall upon a clerk that he deemed more intelligent than the knightly emissaries, and of whom he, at last, acquired the truth about king John. On his word as Christian, the monk affirmed that the king was a tyrant, a destroyer, an oppressor of his people who violated the daughters and sister of his nobles; the king was slothful, had lost many of his territories and was eager to also lose, or, failing that, destroy England; he had begotten no strong children, only such that took after their father; he hated his evil, incestuous and adulterous wife, who hated him in turn, and often the king had ordered her lovers to be strangled upon her very bed. It is with distaste that the Muslim king remarks that the English must be weak indeed to allow such a man to rule over them.[214]

---

[214] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 2, p. 559-564; it is likely that the book the Muslim king is reading concerns Paul the Apostle. Matthew Paris unfortunately does not characterise it any further than stating that it was book written in Greek, by a wise Greek and Christian named Paul, of whose words and deeds only one displeased the emir: Paul had not adhered to the religion into which he had been born.
The clerk's account of John encompasses even more accusations as above listed, and reads thus: *"Dixit igitur assertive, quod 'potius tirannus fuit quam rex, potius subversor quam gubernator, oppressor suorum et fautor alienorum, leo suis subjectis, agnus alienigenis et rebellibus; qui per desidiam suam Normanniae duactum et alias multas terras amiserat; et insuper Angliae regnum amittere vel destruere sitiebat; pecuniae extortor insatiabilis, possessionum suorum naturalium invasor et destructor; paucos vel potius nullos strenuos generavit, sed patrissantes. Sponsam habet sibi exosam et ipsum odientem, incestam, maleficam, et adulteram, et super hoc saepius convictam; unde rex sponsus ejus comprehensos laqueo jussit super stratum ejus suffocari. Ipse rex nihilominus multos procerum suorum et etiam consanguineos zelotipavit violenter, et filias corrupit nubiles ac sorores. In cultu autem Christiano, prout audistis, fluctuans et diffisus.'"* In the aftermath of the Muslim king's accusation against the English, the clerk maintained that

This kaleidoscope of vices ascribed to the king is given a more compelling twist in a later stage of the narrative, a twist that allows some introspection into the despairing monarch's mind, revealing a king haunted by his fears of losing his kingdom and dignity, who is at the same time trapped in the whispers of his malicious familiars. The king's darkest hour took place after he had signed *Magna Carta*, when, according to the chronicler, people began to believe that by God's intervention, the king had been given a heart of flesh to replace his heart of stone, and were rejoicing at the change that had come to pass within the king. It was only a brief respite from their struggle. The war-loving "sons of Belial" with whispers instilled words of discord into the ears of the king. "See", they said derisively, "the twenty-fifth king of England; see [he who is] now not a king, not even petty king *(regulus)*, but a disgrace of kings; better he was no king at all than to be such a king." They continue whispering to the king that he had become a king without kingdom, loathed by his people, a slave; one who had fallen from the greatest position to the lowest condition – "nothing", they sneer, "is more unfortunate than to have been fortunate," as John had formerly been. The king is deeply troubled by these taunting insinuations (whether they are interpreted as some phantoms of his own mind or as having come from the mouths of his evil foreign advisors), and thrown into a miserable fit of doubt and self-pity, wondering why his unchaste and unfortunate mother had brought him into the world and raised him; claiming that he would rather have had the sword than the aliments thus prepared for him. Rage worked its way into his mind, and as it began to seize him and change his heart, he gnashed his teeth, chewed on and broke sticks, and glowered about with his eyes, finally conceiving the plan to arm his castles secretly, so that the barons would not learn of his change of heart.[215] Matthew Paris would close his account of the evil king on a conciliatory note. King John, he wrote, departed his life in great bitterness of mind, after many troubles and useless efforts, possessing no lands, nor, indeed, even himself.[216] And yet it was to be hoped that the good works of his life – his construction of a monastery and the land he had given the monastery of Croxton upon his death – would plead for him after his death. He also inserted a verse on the dead king: "As England until today reeks of the foul stench of John, so will stinking hell be befouled by John." Matthew Paris remarks that the verse-maker was to be condemned, but he *did* quote the verse.[217]

---

indeed the patience of the English had lasted long, but that they were now endeavouring to rise against their vicious king. He alone among the messengers is sent back to England with rich rewards. The passage is also interesting insofar as it describes the physical appearance of John, with the emissaries claiming the king to be of strong but compact stature and (by then) entirely grey.

[215] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 2, p. 610-612; especially the thoughts whispered into the king's ears: *"Ecce enim filii Belias, diabolo procurrante qui successibus hominum ex antiqua sua consuetudine [invidet], videlicet, ruptarii nequissimi, qui bella potius quam pacem voluerunt, regiis auribus verba discordiae susurrando instillarunt. Dixerunt enim gruniendo et derisionibus multiplicatis subsannando, 'Ecce vigesimus quintus rex in Anglia; ecce jam non rex, nec etiam regulus, sed regum opprobrium; malle deberet non rex, quam sic rex esse. Ecce rex sine regno, dominus sine dominio; ecce alficus nauci et angularis, rota quinta in plaustro, regum ultimus, et populi abjectio. Heu miser et servus ultimae conditionis, ad quam servitutis miseriam devolutus! Fuisti rex, nunc fex; fuisti maximus, nunc minimus. Nihil infelicius quam fuisse felicem.' Et sic iram provocantes, adddendo flammam vento ab igne sulphureo scintillas excitarunt."*

[216] Seeing that he had become a "slave" to Rome, as the chronicler frequently puts it.

[217] Matthew Paris, Chronica Majora 2, p. 668-669: "*Cum autem regnasset rex Johannis annis octodecim, mensibus quinque, diebus autem quatuor, ab hac vita, post hujus saeculi multas perturbationes et labores inutiles, in multa mentis amaritudine subtractus, transmigravit; nihil terrae, immo nec seipsum possidens. Sperandum est autem et certissime confidendum, quod quaedam bona opera, quae fecit in hac vita, allegabunt pro eo ante tribunal Jesu Christi...*" and "*Quidam autem versificator, sed reprobus, de eodum ait: Anglia sicut adhuc sordet foetore Johannis / Sordida foedatur foedante Johanne gehenna.*"

Besides Matthew Paris, who wrote much sooner after 'his' king's death than most other chroniclers considered here for that purpose, there is a lamentable scarcity of accounts that might be considered as betokening how John was discussed in communicative memory. The one that might be counted as the closest approximation is the metrical chronicle of Robert of Gloucester. In his depiction of John's reign, the writer is particularly concerned with the rights and the state of the Church. His portrayal of John, consequently, lacks favour. He blames the king for the murder of Arthur,[218] and portrays him as a fearful man whose actions were often motivated by anger: the observation that the king was angry, or even *wroþore þan he was er*, angrier than ever, precedes almost every event in which he undertook an action not approved of by the author: the expulsion of the Canterbury monks, the confiscation of episcopal goods or the annulment of ecclesiastical charters.[219] This depiction culminates in the claim that the conflict between the king and the barons began *noȝt vor noȝt*, for he had molested their wives and daughters and, out of wrath, hanged innocent men "all day long".[220]

The chronicle also recounts John's ruthless government practices. When the Cistercian monks, on account of their poverty, responded they could not raise funds to fuel his war, he had the entirety of their charters annulled; and others who crossed the king, the writer claims, would suffer the same fate. The king would see to it that they would receive no help either from bailiffs or foresters. He exploited the possessions he had wrested from the archbishop: meadows were mowed, and he even had every single tree uprooted so that nothing would grow there anymore.[221] The king seems entirely unperturbed by the tragic scenes that were going on in his kingdom. At the onset of his troubles with the papacy, when an interdict began to loom on the horizon, the bishops fell weeping and crying piteously at his feet, beseeching him to change his mind, and he would do nothing. Across the land, men were driven out of churches by the bishops, who closed the doors to the holy places under the strain of tears.[222] John was not only utterly indifferent at the plight of the people and the clergy, he venomously refused any hope for change. In conversation with the papal legate Pandulf, who had come to warn the king to amend his ways lest a crusade should be started towards his kingdom, the king threatened that if Stephen Langton were to come into the kingdom, he would see to it that he was "hanged on high" – a fate that he

---

[218] Cf. Robert of Gloucester 2, lines 10,112-10,125 (p. 699-700) recount that Arthur had a right to the crown, and how he was captured at Mirebeau. On the murder of Arthur and its consequences he writes:*"Me sede uor is heritage þat þe king him let sle / Vor þis slaȝt þe king of france orn vpe þe king Ion"*.

[219] For the king's angry actions, see, for instance, ibid., line 10,156 (p. 701; this is the passage quoted above in which John drives the Canterbury monks out of their monastery after learning of the consecration of Stephen Langton), line 10,192 (p. 702), where he confiscates the goods of the archbishopric, mowing the meadows and forbidding the land to be sown. In line 10,253 (p. 704), he annuls the charters of the Cistercian monks after they had claimed their poverty forbade them to aid him in sustaining his war. In line 10,360 (p. 708), he wrathfully orders prisoners to be brought before him with whose execution he wanted to frighten the papal legate.

[220] Ibid., lines 10,489-10,491 (p.-711): "*Contek began bi tuene hom &* noȝ*t vor noȝt ich wene / Vor hor wiues & hor doȝtren þe king ofte vorlay / & hangede men gultless vor wraþþe al longe day."*

[221] Ibid., lines. 10,253-10,264 (p. 704): *"Vor wraþþe he let in al is lond þat alle hor chartren ywis / þat hadde of is fader & of oþere heiemen al so / Of franchise & of oþer þing al clene were vndo / & alle þat wolde him ssame do aday oþer aniȝt / Robbi oþer quelle þat nomon ne dude hom riȝt / Ne þat bailif ne forester ne soffrede hom nower com / To sowe ne to oþer þing þat hor bestes nere inome / So harde hii were iharled þat ne miȝte at om abide / Bote wende to purchasy hor mete aboute ech in his side / þe erchebissopes wodes ek þe king het echon / þat me morede al clene vp þat þer ne bileuede non / þat ech tre were vp mored þat it ne spronge namore þere"*.

[222] Ibid., lines 10,165-10,171 and 10,182-10,190 (p. 701-702).

could clearly also envision for the papal legate himself.[223] The king at last attempted to demonstrate his strength to the legate by citing a number of prisoners to be brought into their presence, and would have them hanged right before their eyes *as him vorto afere*, to frighten the legate. However, it was the papal emissary that retained the upper hand in this power struggle, intervening and forbidding the king's servants, under pain of excommunication, to lay hands on the clerk.[224] Rather than the reports of such confrontation and the plight of his people, it is the prophecy of Peter the Hermit that seems, in the chronicle's narrative, to finally change the king's mind. It drew on the king's dread and fear of losing his kingdom.[225]

The "good old laws", however, that the hard-won charter of the king should have ensured, would not last long, for John was an "unstable" man, and soon called upon foreigners from beyond the sea, who massed into the country, were given land by the king, and struck out of their castles at people; they pillaged, burned houses and other goods, had people dragged by horsetails, tormented them and hanged them into trees by their body parts. King John took part in their cruelty: he "robbed in the north country and did the land woe enough" before, at last, he died.[226]

From this unfavourable depiction that portrayed the king as wrathful, irreligious and entirely ruthless, the curve of John's reputation knew only one direction: downward, and rapidly so. The one single redeeming episode in the entirety of the later chronicles is Henry Knighton's observation that the king had established the laws of England in Ireland and had easily subjected Wales.[227]

Other than that, they found him guilty on all charges that had condemned him earlier. He had, they maintain, killed his nephew Arthur to ensure his continued possession of the throne,[228] and they avidly recounted his character faults: excommunication and interdict, according to Capgrave, had been pronounced because of *many myschevous dedis whech he ded in manslauth, gloteny, and lecchery, and specialy robbyng and spoilyng of monasteries.*[229] Henry Knighton accused the king of avarice, luxury and voluptuousness,[230] and his is the narrative that most conscientiously recounts the king's faults, proclaiming him a failure on three fields: religion, justice and character. In matters religious, John utterly refused the papally endorsed election of a "noble, generous, able and most learned" Stephen Langton, and, when he heard of it, sent the convent and prior of Canterbury into exile.[231] After the election of Stephen Langton, another writer claims, he had developed "a hatred towards all ministers of God that would not be moved by piety or pity" and subsequently treated them badly. The houses of Canterbury, from which he had driven the inobedient monks,

---

[223] Ibid., lines 10,291-10,293 (p. 705), and 10,330-10,359 (p. 707); especially: "*ȝe mowe me makie sueri wat owe wille be / Ac inel neuere þe erchebissop in engelonde auonge / þat inelle wan he comþ late him heye an honge*".
[224] Ibid., lines 10,360-10,377 (p. 708).
[225] Ibid., lines 10,392-10,423 (p. 709); the prophetic man and his son being dragged along on a horse's tail and being hanged is reported in lines 10,474-10,478 (p. 711).
[226] Ibid., lines 10,493-10,559 (p. 713-714).
[227] Cf. Chronicle of Henry Knighton, ch. 15, p. 190-191.
[228] Cf. Capgrave, Chronicle of England, p. 147, and Chronicle of Henry Knighton, ch. 14, p. 177 (and, again, ch. 15, p. 199), state that the king had his nephew killed to ensure his succession, Capgrave explaining that John was so universally hated that Arthur had been Richard's chosen heir. The Polychronicon 8, ch. 33, p. 184, is less elaborate, stating simply that John had taken and slain his nephew at Mirebeau.
[229] Capgrave, Chronicle of England, p. 148.
[230] Cf. The Chronicle of Henry Knighton, ch. 14, p. 178.
[231] Cf. Eulogium Historiarum 3, book 5, ch. 115, p. 92.

he gave into the hands of his Brabantian mercenaries. He drove the executors of the interdict, the bishops of London, Worcester and Ely into exile, and "did much other evils at the instigation of the devil."[232] Not even an array of bishops, pleading to him in tears and on their knees, could sway him in his obstinate refusal of the papal decrees,[233] and the king persisted in what the *Eulogium* refers to as *malitiam nefandi regis*.[234]

The magnates of England, according to Knighton, rose against the king because of his inequity, forced by necessity because the king would not allow the laws of St. Edward to be observed, instead disinheriting his magnates without trial. At long last, his magnates approach him and ask him "Why do you perpetrate such evil against your people? Why is the law of God transgressed by your very own mandate? For we do not live under the law of God but are made to be like heretics." Their straightforward approach frightened the king into granting them a charter that he soon broke.[235] The *Eulogium*, in its account close to Matthew Paris, recounts how the furious king, after the papal legates had absolved his subjects from their allegiance to him, had convicts brought into the court, and, to frighten the papal messengers, caused eyes to be gouged out, arms, noses, ears, calves or feet to be cut off – only the punishment of a cleric he had to stop when the papal legate Pandulf threatened excommunication to anyone who laid hands upon the clerk.[236] Finally, the king's character also had its part in this revolt: repeatedly he had violated the wives of his nobles,[237] lusting after them with hateful vehemence, in his flesh maintaining none of the cleanliness that appeared so evident outwardly, in his fine frame.[238]

The king's depravity in matters sexual apparently bore such repellent fascination that it is his lechery that Knighton makes the primary cause of his death – a death caused not by voracity, as the Coggeshall chronicler and Roger of Wendover had put it, but by poisoning. The king was about to visit an abbey that was subject to an abbot who – unfortunately – had a very beautiful sister, a prioress, and he intended to send out his familiars to fetch her. The abbot is smitten with sadness for the fate that was in store for his sister, a bride of Christ, and a converse who had come to console him resolves to poison the king, at once proceeding into the garden to gather pears for which the king had a particular liking. He poisons one of three pears that he sets upon the table. When he sits at dinner with his knights, the king proves his despicability by the promise that he would see to it that the price of bread should rise twelvefold, scandalising all present – including his adherents, who conspire with the converse as to the king's death. Lauding the king

---

[232] Chronicle of Henry Knighton, ch. 14, p. 180: *"Monachos etiam caeteros a claustro ejecit, committens curam ejusdem domus mercatoribus Brabantinis, qui responderent ei de exitibus universis. Caeterosque clericos ejusdem provinciae male tractavit, et universos dei ministros exosos habuit nulla flexus pietate vel misericordia. ... Hujus autem interdicti executores Londoniensem scilicet Wygorniensem et Heliensem episcopos egit ipse rex in exilium, et multa alia mala instigante diabolo perpetravit."* The author of the Eulogium likewise attests that John perpetrated much evil against the Church in his refusal of the papal demands, *in ira accensus* taking all their lands and posessions, devastating them as far as he could, and even driving the Cistercians into exile when they claimed they could not give him anything. Of course, he confisacted whatever they left behind (Eulogium Historiarum 3, book 5, ch. 116, p. 97).
[233] Cf. ibid. p. 94.
[234] Ibid., p. 97.
[235] Chronicle of Henry Knighton, ch. 15, p. 186.
[236] Cf. Eulogium Historiarum 3, book 5, ch. 117, p. 100-101.
[237] Cf. Chronicle of Henry Knighton, ch. 15, p. 186.
[238] Cf. ibid., p. 193; p. 194-195 recounts one of John's attempts to get hold of a particular beautiful wife of one of his magnates.

for his deeds, the man steps forward and asks whether the king would like a taste of the new fruit; to which the king answers with the affirmative. The plot is almost uncovered as precious stones that were in the presence of the king began to sweat as the fruit was set upon the table. "What have you brought, brother? Are you offering poison?" asked the king. "No poison", answered the converse, "but the best of fruit." "Eat", the king ordered, "of your fruit." The converse brother was made to try all three pieces of fruit, until at last the king could hold back no longer and ate from the poisoned pears. He passed away in the night – and the brother's deed had thus prevented *iniqui praedictam*, that the bride of Christ should have become the bride of the devil.[239]

There is not the slightest hint of disapproval in the chronicle's depiction. More than that: Henry Knighton even adds a divine stamp of approval to the king's murder. A priest who had been one of John's familiars during the king's lifetime, continued to pray for him out of love; frequently pleading of God with an effusion of tears and prayers to show him a sign that he would deal mercifully with the soul of his lord. Divine intervention – a nightly vision – at last commands him to cease the prayers for the wicked king.[240] John's descent into ignominy and condemnation had been fast and absolute. There was no one to mourn the evil king's passing, and the murder of John needed no words of justification whatsoever. The utterly bad king, after all the atrocities of his life, had met the end he so richly deserved.

*Henry III as Story*

It is a rather sad observation: Henry III was not much in way of a story. Indubitably, the scarcity of narratively rich contemporary depictions of his reign had its part in it. Still, in those few characterisations that survive, Henry III falls short of many of the aspects that could have rendered him a king to remember. Much of his kingship, his inner circle, his relations to the papacy, even his own moral failings tend to be portrayed as things over which Henry III himself had little control. He stands as credulous, as manipulated into poverty (and, since he sought to fill the metaphorical holes in his pockets through the only means available to him, the kingdom's coffers, was subsequently rendered greedy) and as the centre of a disastrously destructive court of foreign leeches; his credulity used by foreigners, the pope and, perhaps most distressingly, by his very own wife. The fact that he reigned throughout a relatively peaceful period seems to have been put down largely to his utter ineptitude to start a decent war. This perceived ineptitude

[239] Ibid., p. 200-201. With lesser narrative flourish, the episode is also narrated in the Polychronicon 8, book 7, ch. 33, p. 196. There, the king's licentious cause for visiting the monastery is omitted; instead, the sole reason for a monk to poison the king is his unbearable intent of raising the bread price. The episode does also feature drink instead of pears as the bearer of venom. Hidgen appears to have regarded the episode as not very believable. He reports it almost as an afterthought on John's death, and calls it *vulgata fama*, which might explain his reluctance to engage into its recounting with any of the narrative efforts displayed by Henry Knighton. The entire episode is rather short, and can thus be given here in full: *"Tradit tamen vulgata fama quod apud monasterium de Swynesheved alborum monachorum intoxicatus obierit. Juraverat enim, ut asseritur, ibidem prandens, quod panem tunc unum obolum valentem faceret infra annum si viveret duodecim denarios valere. Quod audiens unus de conversis fratribus loci illius venenum confecit, regi porrexit. Sed et ipso prius sumpto catholico viatico simul cum rege hausto veneno interiit."* The writer of the Eulogium had no such qualms with the story. While he also omits the detail of the king's lusting after a woman, and, like Higden, makes the bone of contention the price of bread, he narrates the tale at greater length, and closes with the statement that a Mass continued to be said for the monk who had thus killed the king. Cf. Eulogium Historiarum 3, book 5, ch. 125, p. 109-111.

[240] Cf. Chronicle of Henry Knighton, ch. 15, p. 201-202.

likewise caused depictions of the king's warfare to be boiled down to the absolute minimum as he failed to regain the lost continental possessions of his father. *Within* the kingdom, the peace of Henry III could have stood for his qualities as a keeper of justice, had this aspect not been so persistently overshadowed by the partiality of most chroniclers for the barons' cause.

It is on the field of piety that Henry III excels – but he does not seem to have been able to carry his faith to a level at which he would have become anywhere near as famed for it as Edward the Confessor. Perhaps the annals were too brief, or Matthew Paris too great a cynic and critic to style the king's devotion in a way that would have lent lustre to Henry III. As the one and only trait that sets him apart as originating within his own character rather than having been caused by the influence of others, it was not enough to turn Henry III into anything more than a perceived weak, externally 'driven' king who displayed no conduct that would have lent itself to stylisation or lengthy depiction. There was no military bravado to report, no dramatic battles of defence, no tyrannical harshness; the one central question of his reign – reform by the barons' demands – was swiftly decided in favour of his adversaries, whose cause required so much in way of justifications that there was little narrative room for Henry III to be anything other than a colourless adversary.

The only common thread in depictions of Henry III is that of failure. Failure to choose the right attendants, failure to cope with his court, failure to succeed in war – as a narrative strand, it does not make Henry III a 'good' king, but neither is it enough to make him a 'bad' king. Character-wise, he appears to fall in at a sorry state of paleness. Henry III's life did not excite – to such an extent that the Waverly annalist did not even deem it necessary to mention that he died.[241]

The unfortunate trend continued well beyond the reign of Henry III; and the few chronicles writing a generation after his death that deal with a time other than their own recount his reign with dispassionate brevity. Even Higden's passion for collecting stories did not unearth any new or particularly memorable episodes from the king's deeds. He would concede that Henry III had accomplished a religious feat – which, however, judging by the scope it is given in the narrative, must have seemed rather minor: the procession for the blood of Christ reliquary. What had been a major royal show of ostentation in the time of Henry III, was boiled down to a simple sentence in the rendition of the *Polychronicon*: "in this year, a solemn procession for the blood of Christ, which had been sent to the king by the patriarch of Jerusalem, was made at London."[242] Beyond that, the chronicle hardly deals favourable with the king: he had made a "shameful pact" with the king of France that conceded Normandy and other transmarine territories to said monarch;[243] it notes that the miracles surrounding the tomb of Simon de Montfort were kept silent for fear of

---

[241] Henry III ought to have died somewhere between Waverly Annals, p. 386 and p. 389, where his son has already taken over. Other obituaries, not all of which have been discussed earlier, can be found analysed in Carpenter, An Unknown Obituary.

[242] Cf. Polychronicon 8, book 7, ch. 36, p. 238: *"Hoc anno apud Londoniam facta est solemnis processio versus sanguinem Christi, qui missus est regi Henrico a patriarcha Jerosolomitano..."*.

[243] Cf. ibid., p. 244-246: *"... et facta pudenda concordia cum rege Francorum remisit ei Normanniam cum caeteris terris transmarinis, ita quod sibi remaneret integraliter terra Vasconia."* It would appear that the chronicler either deemed it unworthy of the king to consent to such a scheme in the first place, or that he thought Gascony not worth the tremendous sacrifice.

the king,[244] and, finally, records that Henry III died on St Edmund's day, "and it was deemed just that he should end in his life on that feast day, because he had unjustly vexed him when he was alive"[245] by exciting, at the instigation of the devil, the convent of Canterbury against him.[246] In comparison, the *Brut d'Angleterre* is much closer to what might have been expected to 'become' of Henry III after his death. Its main focus, in its epitaph on the king, lies on his piety, which is interlocked with a prophecy of Merlin: Henry III *was an holy man, and of god conscience*, who he identified with a "lamb" from the prophecies, which *shulde haue pees þe most tyme of his regne*, for Henry III was never "annoyed through war" until but a short time before his dead. The king, who had made the *fairest place of [the] world*, Westminster cathedral, *þat is fairer of sight þan eny cherch þat men knoweþ þrouȝ al Cristendome*, would suffer great harm through *a wolf of a straunge land*, which the writer, in very royalist fashion, associated with Simon de Montfort, whose death he nonetheless bewailed before he moved on to praise Edward I as remarkable knight and crusader.[247]

The third chronicle that can be counted into this period, the *Croniques de London*, seems to have been even farther removed from any collective memory of Henry III. While it does seem to recount the momentousness of Simon de Montfort by heralding the battle of Lewes with a fiery comet,[248] it unabashedly associated the mistress of the (by then very) late Henry II with his grandson, Henry III, which of course stands in stark contrast to any traits otherwise attributed to the king – lusty occupation outside the marriage bed certainly was never among the king's characteristics. The writer begins by recalling how the queen – then truly Henry III's Eleanor, whose plight at the hands of the citizens is also described by contemporaries[249] – was assaulted by the Londoners, but, having narrated that episode, he directly lapses into a story that belonged to Eleanor's nimbus: the queen had murdered the most beautiful woman of the world, the king's mistress, Rosamund. The distraught king, he claims, had searched for the body of the treacherously murdered girl, and had at last seen to it that it was cared for by monks.[250]

Such commemorative disarray recedes slightly with the later chronicles, and Capgrave's and especially Knighton's accounts are noticeably closer to contemporary accounts. There is barely any judgement in Capgrave's brief summary of the reign, with the writer not even choosing a side in the civil war, his only inclination to any narrative elaboration of the proceedings being that he noted that Simon de Montfort had died *schamfully*, with his head, arms and legs hewed off, leaving only the torso.[251] It also provides a glimpse at Henry III's religiousness besides the almost

[244] Cf. ibid., ch. 37, p. 250: *"De quo fert fama celebris quod multis post obitum radiaverit miraculis, quae propter metum regium non prodeunt in publicum."*
[245] Cf. ibid., p. 258: *"Hoc etiam anno obiit Henricus rex Angliae, die sancti Edmundi Pontiniacensis. Et juste, ut creditur, vitam suam in ejus festo terminavit, quem injuste dum viveret vexavit."*
[246] The episode is recounted in the chronicle's very lengthy account of the life of St. Edmund, ibid., ch. 35, p. 228-230.
[247] Cf. Brut or Chronicles of England, ch. 160, p. 177-178.
[248] Cf. Croniques de London, p. 6.
[249] Cf. Dunstable Annals, p. 223 and Robert of Gloucester 2, lines 11,376-11,379 (p. 749). The account of the Dunstable Annals is the more detailed one, describing how the queen was assaulted with shameful words, how stones were thrown at her, and she eventually had to flee to the bishop's palace.
[250] Cf. Croniques de London, p. 3-4.
[251] Capgrave, Chronicle of England, p. 159-160: *"Than had thei the third batail at Evesham. There was Simon taken, and shamfully ded; for thei smet of first his head; and than his armes, and than leggis: and so lay the body lich a stok."*

customary remark that the king had built Westminster abbey,[252] narrating how the king was *gretly offendid* at the torching of the monastery at Norwich, and personally came to Norwich to have the malefactors drawn, hanged and burnt.[253]

The writer of the *Eulogium* is even less judgemental, although its narrative of the reign is much longer, and even incorporates letters from the barons, the king and Edward. He does visibly take a side in the barons' war, claiming simply that the magnates fought against those courtiers that had been introduced by the queen, "who were called aliens"[254]. It is only upon the king's death that he gives an inkling as to the king's reputation. "That king", he remarks, "was less prudent in secular acts", but had a fierce devotion to God, hearing three Masses a day, and wishing to hear more privately. When asked by the king of France why he would not listen to sermons rather than attend Masses, he is claimed to have said that he would rather behold a friend than to hear of him. While he may have been "a sturdy man, but ineffective prince", many saw in him the manifestation of one of Merlin's prophecies: that of the all-penetrating lynx, because the king (despite his ineptitude, one is inclined to add) was fortunate in all that he did.[255]

Henry Knighton's narrative of the king's reign is more aggrandised than these last words of the *Eulogium's* writer, and the exact opposite to the brief and reputation-wise 'unexcited' accounts. He evokes a strong sympathy for the young Henry III, whose succession to the throne is decided upon in dramatic speeches and joint resolve. "We have", the earl Marshal begins his speech to the assembled barons and counts, "persecuted the boy's father for his bad deeds, and justly so, but this boy is in his early youth and innocent of his father's deeds. Truly, sin and guilt must bind the perpetrators, and according to the word of God, but a son does not bear the inequity of his father. Now since he is the son of the king, and our future lord and successor to the kingdom, come, let us invest him as king and cast out Louis, son of the king of France and his people, from our land." From the earl of Gloucester came the hesitating question how they might do that, having already sworn fealty to Louis – and having called him to the island in the first place. "We can, and we must do it", the Marshal answered, "for our fealty has been abused; we have called for him and wanted to set him over us, but elevated in arrogance, he disdains and scorns us; and if we do not drive him away, he will overthrow our land, and we shall be like the shame of mankind, and the contempt of his people." And, "as if inspired by divine will", all cried out together "*Fiat sic, fiat rex, fiat rex*'."[256] Knighton lost nothing of this enthusiasm when young Henry III himself entered the scene: he is lauded as a boy of tender years, bearing the signs of humility, innocence, purity of conscience; who so excelled in the gentleness and dignity of his bearing that from among his predecessors, for him alone the name of king was fitting, like a saint he reigned among humans, and was seen as an angel on earth.[257]

---

[252] Cf. ibid., p. 162.
[253] Cf. ibid.
[254] Eulogium Historiarum 3, book 5, ch. 130, p. 121.
[255] ibid., ch. 139, p. 137: *"Erat autem staturae mediocris, ... robustus viribus sed princeps infectus. In quibus tamen quia fortunatos et felices exitus habuerit putant eum multi Merlini Fatidicum per lincem designatum omnia penetrantem."*
[256] Chronicle of Henry Knighton, book 2, ch. 15, p. 203-204.
[257] Cf. ibid., ch. 16, p. 205: *"Rex vero novus qui patri barbato impubes successit praeventus est a deo in benedictionibus dulcedinis a teneris innocentiae suae annis, superni regis amorem fervoremque concepit in tota vita, titulo humilitatis et innocentiae, puritate*

This divinely inspired representation of the king remains a common thread in the narrative. As he ages, and loses the characteristics of youth and innocence, he is outfitted with other attributes pertaining to 'religious' kings. Knighton refers to Henry III as *devotus dei cultor,*[258] and, upon his death, notes that the great innocence, patience, devotion and the countless good deeds the king had performed and exhibited in his lifetime were testified by miracles at his tomb.[259] In the tradition of religious kings, Henry III is referred to as a man who was not at home on the battlefield: at the battle of Evesham, at which the king was present in the custody of the barons, he had to cry out loudly that he was the king and not to be killed to avoid any further harm to come to him after he had been hit on the shoulder – "for he was a simple man, not a man of war".[260] As a *rex pacificus*, he was inclined to try and establish peaceful relations to his neighbours, by talks and solemn messengers persuading, for instance, the king of France to peace.[261]

Yet these characteristics could also have negative effects. "Led by bad counsel, the simple king" made an agreement that lost him Normandy – a decision that he was to repent.[262] Despite the saint-like rendition of Henry III, the conflicts of the reign are thus not withheld. Following that ill-advised agreement, the king's court is reported to have been overran by "innumerable" Frenchmen who oppressed the native English and the nobility so that it almost seemed as if England had become tributary to them. It was from there, the chronicle argues, that Simon de Montfort's rebellion had sprung, after appeals to the king that had not come to fruition as hoped.[263] The rebel leader's martyrdom for his cause is given ample stage in the narrative, complete with his last words,[264] making Knighton's narrative an intriguingly balanced one, which depicted the king's failings and his admirable religiosity portrayed side by side.

The memory-making of Henry III as king seems pale and barely solidified; a circumstance that might be traced back either to the king's noticeably small appeal as story, or, as quite probably applicable in the case of this analysis, to the chronicles chosen being written – at most – a mere 150 years after his death. Quite contrary to the fate suffered by his father, the venomous judgements of Matthew Paris did not recognisably find their way into later chronicles. It seems to have been clear which characteristics of the king would survive: his sanctity on the one hand, and his easily swayed nature, personified in the myriad of Frenchmen that were to storm his court on the other hand. Between these two poles, negotiating the reputation of Henry III appears not to have been an easy affair – or a task that writers were not genuinely interested in.

---

*conscientiae, morum suavitate et gravitate sic excellit, ut iter praedecessores suos quibus solo nomine regio congruebat, quasi sanctus et inter homines imperabat, et terrenus quidem angelus videretur."*

[258] Cf. ibid., ch. 15, p. 204. The comment coincides with the coronation of Henry III, and is obviously meant as a comment made in hindsight, foreshadowing the following narrative and the king's standing within it.

[259] Cf. ibid., ch. 16, p. 268.

[260] Cf. ibid., p. 254: "*Conserto itaque gravi praelio corruerunt multi ex parte comitis, sed et ipse rex percussus in scapula, clamavit fortiter, 'Ego sum Henricus de Wincestria rex vester, non occidatis me.' Erat enim vir simplex non bellicosus."*

[261] Cf. ibid., p. 229: *"Mane autem facto misit rex Franciae nuncios solennes qui loquerentur de pace, et hoc cum effectu, Qui cum rege pacifico pacifice loquentes ipsius animum ad bonum pacis reduxerunt; et restitutis eis omnibus reversus est in Angliam circa festum sancti Michaelis."*

[262] Cf. ibid., p. 236.

[263] Cf. ibid., p. 236-237.

[264] Cf. ibid., p. 254-255.

*4. Forging Kings*

While each occupant of the throne had his very own and unique process of image-making to go through that would often result in a solidified memory identity, they all were judged on the basis of a value system that shifted only very slowly. As, in a number of aspects, the depiction of an ideal king remained relatively consistent, there are shared traits that can be deduced and generalised as an indication of common modes of narration implying certain judgements – or, to put a finer point to it, there are some narrative conventions that would 'make' good kings and bad kings.

A factor that always needs to be considered with regard to evolving reputations is the 'memorability' of actions, persons and events. Questions of legitimation, of guilt, disputes over rights and claims might become irrelevant to later chroniclers once the respective issues had been resolved. If that was the case, topics that had been highly controversial for contemporaries, but meant little to their successors in writing, might cease to be recorded altogether. For kings whose written representation revolved around a particular thematic complex that was hotly disputed at their time, the impact would be greatest. Stephen, as the best case in point, appears to have very much felt this impact. Contemporaries who had written about the king had focussed on his legitimation, the two factions that that had been contending for the throne, and the horrors of civil war. The appeal of all of these topics appears to have faded with the years: the succession question was, ultimately, resolved peacefully, issues of legitimation were no longer of tantamount concern, and the horrors of different wars were, presumably, closer to the heart of later writers. Not surprisingly, a similar fate awaited Henry III, whose struggles with the barons remained of interest only as long as there were still factions that strived against each other, that needed their argumentation set out and their controversial moves explained or justified. More intriguingly, even Henry II appears to have become a victim to such a shift of interest. Neither the struggle with his sons nor the question of who was ultimately responsible for the murder of Thomas Becket would retain their narrative importance over time, as much of a 'story' quality they appear to have (and certainly had, for contemporaries). Possibly, the rebellion was found to be too tied up with the life and death of Thomas Becket, and maybe the telling of that story was a task left hagiographical writing. Remarkably, however, a different 'story' of Henry II, hardly used within a generation after his death, surfaced and proved dominant. Instead of paling, the king was rendered vividly, but differently so, a development owed to the belated popularity of Gerald of Wales' narrative that ascribed to him a dreadful moral character that certainly made for a good tale. Truer, deeper evil than mere politics and martyred dead saints would never get old.

Such 'true' evil was moral depravity (or the claim to it). Morality, and subsequently character, was the most compelling factor in judging kings, both for contemporaries and those who succeeded them in chronicle writing. Like no other aspect, it could make or break a ruler, albeit not entirely in such a way as might be expected: although it would be tremendously logical to assume that, in the eyes of chroniclers, a morally accomplished prince equalled a good prince, the assumption is far from the truth.

'Bad' kings are relatively easy to explain. William Rufus, for instance, was not altogether lacking in qualities that, according to contemporary standards, might have made him a king of formidable proportions: he was chivalrous, generous, wealthy, warlike and successful in what he did. Despite his positive qualities, the claim to his lack of piety, the unresolved rift with Anselm of Canterbury and the Church as a whole would disqualify him as 'good' king. Even worse, as far as the depiction of character was concerned, was the fate, narratively speaking, that was in store for King John. Their posthumous fate is remarkably different. Part of this may be because, contrary to John, William II, while irreverent, was not perceived as personally cruel, and, while his morals were criticised, his character possessed outstanding narrative potential, the lure of which was not lost on later writers. John was not without narrative allure – but his was of a different nature. To him, later writers, with the St Alban's tradition leading the way, were to attribute tales that, in terms of graphic cruelty and blood-curdling depravity, go well beyond anything modern Robin Hood adaptations would even dare to bring to the screen. The negative tendencies in the reputation of these two kings are relatively easy to understand. Their morals were found faulty, and hence, so were they – no amount of administrative success or military bravado would purge them. Others, however, bear evidence to condemnation not being handed out quite as predictable as that.

Few things, for instance, are as well documented as the good character of King Stephen. Many denote him as a king of peace – and, coming from churchmen, this is a high praise if ever there was one. And yet, it seems that 'but's litter the accounts of his reign. They ranged from complaints about his lack of judicial rigour and control of his vassals to problematic advisors and the perjured acquisition of the kingdom of England that some writers attributed to him. Despite his admirable moral soundness, Stephen would not make a good king. The crowning glory, however, of good men failing at good kingship is Henry III – a man whose saintliness, piety, regard for the Church and affability would seem to fulfil any prejudiced modern expectations of medieval kingship. His values being presented as what they were, it seems little surprising that he would not be counted among the 'great kings' of English history by secularised modern historians, but it is astounding that he apparently also failed to measure up in the eyes of his contemporaries. Matthew Paris' account of his reign is sharp-tongued, even waspish; there are many heroes in his chronicle, but the king, with absolute certainty, is not among them. In repeated remarks on the king's alleged stupidity and weakness, he would mercilessly deconstruct a king he portrayed as otherwise thoroughly peaceable and devoted. Others would not go that far, but there remains a very strong tendency to either forget Henry III, or present him as not in control of the situations at hand.

The narratives surrounding William II and John underline strongly the huge importance of moral conduct for the emerging reputation of a king. And yet, Stephen and Henry III are sufficient proof that a king who fulfilled these standards would not automatically be judged a good king. Amid all the ever-present ideals of morality, there could very well be too much of a good thing, a veritable inversion of moral standards. Kings could be perceived as being too peaceful, too religious, too mild, too generous. With astounding ease, these apparently good men

had fallen prey to accusations of bad or weak kingship. When analysing the reputational constructs built around them, however, it needs to be borne in mind that while a good man could easily not be a 'good' king, he was never truly pernicious. At worst, he would have been described as ill-advised, foolish, weak – at best, he was gradually forgotten. Some of these judgements certainly hinged on the circumstances and relative 'success' of a reign – yet that influence is difficult to determine. Exiled archbishops, discord with the pope, rebellions, dead contenders to the throne and often even civil war can be found in the reigns of many medieval kings, but the depth to which they were blamed for the shortcomings during their reign is strikingly different. What we can say for certain is that perceived breaks with moral values could become the fatal flaw in the assessment of one king, but conformity with moral standards would, by no means, salvage the reputation of another, if he was perceived as royal failure otherwise. Character could not entirely make up for competence, but in turn, competence would always be toppled by a faulty character.

The rules appear to have been more flexible when it came to the royal treasury and the uses to which it was put. One would be hard-pressed to find even a single instance in which the personal splendour – the decorum of court, dress, table, the magnificence of rituals – was criticised. Adequate royal self-staging and befitting magnificence were expected, and, as the cases of Henry III and Stephen show, there were sore complaints when the royal court was found lacking in that respect. Criticism as to the expenditure of time and money is more easily found when the king indulged in that ecclesiastically-criticised pastime of royalty, hunting, or when his momentous building projects – for instance William II's Westminster Hall and wall around the Tower of London – could be linked directly to taxes that were thought of as too harsh. Even more palpable is the criticism of a drain on the king's resources that had little to do with how he presented himself, but everything with how he was perceived: his following. Lavish grants to members of the king's inner circle were a subject of close scrutiny, and the way in which they were perceived appears to mirror the overall sentiment of the populace towards the king's court. More than that: as primary means of establishing bonds between the king and the magnates, criticism aimed at the royal distribution of gifts often indicated instability, or even a rift within the realm. This is particularly clearly seen during the reign of Stephen: the *Gesta Stephani*, as the single supportive source, remains silent on the king's expenses in gifts, while other writers vividly outlined the destructiveness of the king's behaviour for the realm (and, by implication, for those magnates not favoured by the king's largesse). Likewise, Henry III was sorely criticised for the sums he chose to entrust to illustrious people from the continent, indicating, in a strikingly similar way, that there were large parts of the baronage that were being neglected when it came to royal favour. A similar observation, concerned more with the softer currency of trust than with that of money (although we can be sufficiently certain that one would be connected to the other sooner or later) can be made for John and his confidence in 'outsiders'.

Critique aimed at royal grants and repeated accusations of the king surrounding himself with the wrong sort of advisors would thus, if they overstepped a certain limit within which they could be seen as bound to individual situations, indicate that the king was not on the best terms with

his baronage.[1] Henry II, and, most notably, William II, for whom it was claimed that knights flocked from far and wide to his court, would never face accusations that they were heaping their wealth on the wrong sort of people, even if the recipients were similarly 'alien' (and in all due probability just as sordid) as those who were thought entirely unworthy of royal patronage during other reigns. It seems sensible to assume that the reason behind this is that these kings enjoyed relatively stable relations to the baronage.

Stability is a factor that also played a decisive role in the judgements of kings when the field of justice was concerned. Lasting peace contributed to an impression of a peaceful king more than sporadic depictions of the king engaging in everyday justice ever could. Beyond that, it was again the relation between king and magnates upon which judgement hinged. In particular, it was important how the monarch treated defeated rebels. When taken out of their individual narrative contexts, comments on such judgements must seem haphazard, with situations of basically the same parameters being judged vastly differently. Within their narrative context, we are forced to concede that there seem to have been no common principles on which punitive actions were approved of or condemned. Rather, it appears that chroniclers, usually commenting on events with hindsight, were approving, to put it rather simply, of whatever it was that worked, in the end. If a show of force brought rebels to heel for a sufficient amount of time, it would be generously applauded, if, however, it hardly stalled rebellion, or even fanned it, it was written off as ill-advised, pointless savagery. The main circumstances that appear to have had an influence on these depictions are notoriously hard to grasp in the surviving material: the 'propagandist' efforts invested in the representation of punitive actions on the one hand and the support rebel efforts could engender among the (writing part of the) populace on the other hand. The demise of Arthur of Brittany, supposedly a great factor in the subsequent collapse of John's reputation, could certainly be seen as an unwholesome combination of failure in both aspects: an incapability of sufficiently legitimising and staging retribution, and a widespread support for the youthful rival heir. A parallel case, even if he was considerably older and thus did not 'enjoy' the sympathetic benefit of youth, is William Clito's death during the reign of Henry I. He, too, was a contender to the throne and allied with the French king against his uncle. Rather than suffering royal retribution for his rebellion, William Clito died while campaigning. No one could, of course, blame Henry I for his death. But, if matters had been otherwise, it is more than probable that Clito would have had to fear for his life had he been captured. It is hard to imagine Henry I receiving the same condemnation for such an act as John.

Less ambiguous than the comments on the exercise of royal justice are the views expressed on kings in battle. If violence, in jurisdiction, was accepted as means to an end, invariably also as a means of ensuring peace, it would be found positively savoured in depictions of the king at war. Beyond the 'mere' success in defending the realm and acquiring new territories, which, of course, contributed much to whether or not a king could be judged positively on the field of warfare, it is the narrated battlefield that provides the canvas on which kingship can most poignantly become an art, and historiography begins to overlap with the epic and the mythical. In spite of the aim

[1] And, possibly, that writers perceived the realm to have been in a problematic financial situation.

and self-professed ethical standards of most chroniclers, their works appear engrossed with the king at war. For instance, notwithstanding all the disapproval his actions otherwise earned, there is not a single writer would not comment favourably on William II's military successes. Like no other field in which the king was customarily engaged, the depiction of war drew on secular ideals. In the acts of mercy and rigour after a battle, and in the considerations and justifications before it, traditional Christian notions of ideal kingship and its virtues constituted the benchmark of ideal royalty. However, in the course of a battle itself, we find, in some cases, such values eclipsed by an apparently greater narrative need to capture the unfolding story and its hero. This type of narration surfaces in the depictions of William I raging on the battlefield, in the admiration for William II's warlike spirit, in the *Draco Normannicus'* bellicose rendition of Henry II moving against the French army, and they culminate in the figure of Richard the Lionheart during the third crusade.

The most striking is the comparison between William the Conqueror and Richard the Lionheart. Historiography on both reigns features intense, even gory depictions of the king engaged in warfare, taking an active part in the fighting. Both kings are famed for their prowess battle. While William the Conqueror was turned into the stuff of legends not least by Wace's *Roman de Rou*, Richard the Lionheart attained the status of a hero even within his own lifetime. Presumably, the tendency towards the narrative mode of the epic palpable in depictions of these kings at war contributed directly to their lasting fame as war icons. This narrative mode, however, was by no means always possible. Legitimacy certainly played a role. Without the extensive demonisation of Harold and the elaborate vindication of the Conqueror's claim to the crown of England, the Norman invasion could never have been styled in the way it was styled, and neither is it in any way imaginable for Richard to cut so vigorously through the ranks of his enemies if they had been Christians rather than Saracens. However, at Stephen's capture, notwithstanding the widespread condemnation of his perjured grasp for the crown, writers would feel they could lapse into an epic mode of narration, depicting the king as fierce warrior bravely cutting down his foes. The same can be said for William II.

There was even more to it than the problematic question of legitimation. The preceding crusades did not lack the justification of the third, and yet it would be taxing to find a crusading hero of similar proportions as Richard the Lionheart. What we also find is a sense of national pride: few writers could resist massive land gains or the splendid representations of their bellicose king abroad. Just like the *Draco Normannicus* would describe Henry II throwing himself among the ranks of his enemies like a raging lion without losing so much as a word about the justification of his war, a majority of chroniclers would have Philip II of France withdraw from the crusade out of envy for the English monarch's prowess and wealth, and would fiercely vindicate Richard's innocence in the murder of Conrad of Montferrat, a righteous vindication that would culminate in the gruesome death scene of the duke of Austria, which, incorporated into a vast number of works, had writers narratively gloating over the detestable end that the persecutor of their king had met.

Success, of course, was crucial. Painful defeats, such as the loss of the continental possessions in the reigns of John and Henry III, would reflect very negatively on a king's overall reputation. However, when smaller prizes were at stake, the verdict passed on defeat and victory seems to be connected more with the overall impression that a king otherwise left with his contemporaries than on the outcome of campaigns. The failed campaigns of Henry III into Wales were ridiculed, while those of William II were reported without further comment; what is more, the latter's retreat from the failed siege of Mayet was given ample justification that relieved the king of any blame. It is Stephen's effort to secure the crown for himself and pacify the kingdom that is the most impressive testament to how defeats and victories would be interpreted in line with the overall depiction of the king: lauded as strenuous efforts by the *Gesta Stephani*, they were dismissed as vain and useless by the chronicles less favourably disposed to the king. Consequently, a ruler's successes in battle remained ambivalent. Through victories throughout his reign, he could acquire a reasonable reputation as efficient general without ever ascending to the outstanding status of a king ennobled by his conduct in battle as described above. That particular judgement would not only require the king's active participation in matters of warfare, but also coincide with writers identifying royal conduct with virtues of chivalry, imbuing their works with a sense of national pride and sufficiently demonised (or at least disdained) foes against which the king could test his mettle.

We are on more stable ground with the representation of royal religiousness. As one of the most visible elements of royal devotion, the crusade proved a tremendous bonus for Richard the Lionheart, and, through Gerald of Wales eloquent condemnation of Henry II, it was highly detrimental for the latter's reception. A second element that would always take centre stage in any representation of kings is a conflict with a high-ranking man of the Church. Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Becket and the papal legate Pandulf for the reign of King John as depicted by the St Alban's tradition were such men; the pope himself would, until the reign of Henry III, remain largely in the background, as an authority that would watch and judge, while writers focussed their energy on the confrontation between the two figures – the king and his opponent – around which the conflict crystallised. In these conflicts, the later judgement of the king would not only depend on the tone he was perceived to employ: the resolution of the conflict within royal lifetime might become a massive asset to the king's reputation, even if, as in the case of Henry II, this resolution meant the martyrdom of one of the main protagonists.

Beyond such extraordinary factors, a king's personal piety would often remain largely uncommented, unless of particularly remarkable extent, as that of Henry III. Personal acts of devotion, particularly the foundation of monasteries or churches, would often find only an honorary mention in the very last words passed on each king. Yet, it is in these last words that both the reputation of the king with the Church, and the reputation of the king in general find the most direct expression we can glean from contemporaries. The death of a king, whether he was able to make a good Christian end or not, whether his death was heralded by awful omens or followed by universal lamentation, would serve as the chroniclers' means of last judgement that generally expressed their overall evaluation of one king.

While the reputation of each king can be taken apart into individual, traceable strands, it is very probable that we will never be able to fully understand the motivation that led individual writers to pen the vast array of aspects and narrative episodes that would so dramatically reflect on a king's reputation. In almost all of the fields in which a king customarily engaged, it seems that a positive judgement would originate in the perception that the monarch was in control of what was going on, justified in what he was doing and, perhaps most importantly, fulfilling his contemporaries' existing expectations of a worthwhile story – the story of an exemplary monarch, for which there had been so many precursors. Interestingly enough, these precursors, or expectations of story worthy behaviour, existed also for bad kings. Such a king, once he had acquired a certain 'nimbus', would swiftly accumulate a plethora of faults, a mass of vices that makes it all but impossible to say which came first, irreligion or debauchery, let alone to seek for some approximation of 'character' amid these attributions. Nonetheless, these powerful pre-conceived images appear to have been moulds into which royal behaviour could – and would – be constantly fitted.

This quality of fulfilling narrative expectations is highly elusive, a quality that might also be called charisma, that might be interpreted as a king's talent for self-staging, if such a thing can in any way still be supposed to have been tangible behind the vastly warped version of events that must have reached contemporary writers through the long communication channels that stretched between them and the reigning monarch. Whatever the story that, eventually, thus reached them: in any field in which kings were judged, there was a certain behaviour, a certain set of actions, a certain cast of character that would, ultimately, appeal to contemporaries. These characteristics, in whatever format they may have reached them, would inspire them to pen their respective king as – decidedly – kingly.

## 5. Bibliography

5.1. Primary Sources

Ailred of Rievaulx, De Genealogia Regum Anglorum, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Patrologiae Latinae Tomus, 195), Paris 1855, col. 711-739.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, translated by Michael J. Swanton, London 1997 [1996].

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, edited and translated by Benjamin Thorpe (Rolls Series), 2 vols., London 1861.

Annales de Margan, edited by Henry Richards Luard, in: Annales Monastici (Rolls Series), 5 vols., vol. 1, London 1864, p. 1-40.

Annales Monasterii Burtonensis, edited by Henry Richards Luard, in: Annales Monastici (Rolls Series), 5 vols., vol. 1, London 1864, p. 183-500.

Annales Monasterii de Theokesperia, edited by Henry Richards Luard, in: Annales Monastici (Rolls Series), 5 vols., vol. 1, London 1864, p. 43-181.

Annales Monasterii de Waverleia, edited by Henry Richards Luard, in: Annales Monastici (Rolls Series), 5 vols., vol. 2, London 1865, p. 129-411.

Annales Monasterii de Wintonia, edited by Henry Richards Luard, in: Annales Monastici (Rolls Series), 5 vols., vol. 2, London 1865, p. 65-128.

Annales Prioratus de Dunstaplia, edited by Henry Richards Luard, in: Annales Monastici (Rolls Series), 5 vols., vol. 3, London 1866, p. 3-420.

Annales Prioratus de Wigornia, edited by Henry Richards Luard, in: Annales Monastici (Rolls Series), 5 vols., vol. 4, London 1869, p. 355-564.

The Chronicle of Battle Abbey, edited and translated by Eleanor Searle, Oxford 1980.

Benedict of Peterborough, Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi, edited by William Stubbs, in: Gesta Regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti Abbatis. The Chronicle of the Reigns of Henry II. and Richard I., A.D. 1169-1192 (Rolls Series), 2 vols., London 1867.

Beowulf, edited by Seamus Heaney, Seamus, London 1999.

Bracton, De Legibus Et Consuetudinibus Angliae (Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England, attributed to Henry of Bratton, c. 1210-1268), edited by George Woodbine, translated by Samuel E. Thorne, published online on http://bracton.law.harvard.edu/ [last accessed April 2014].

The Brut or The Chronicles of England, edited by Friedrich W. D. Brie, with introduction, notes and glossary, 2 vols., London 1906-1908.

The Correspondence of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1162-1170, edited and translated by Anne J. Duggan, 2 vols., Oxford 2000.

Chronica Buriensis. The Chronicle of Bury St Edmunds, edited and translated by Antonia Gransden (Nelson Medieval Texts), London and Edinburgh 1964.

Croniques de London, depuis l'an 44 Hen. III. jusqu'à l'an 17 Edw. III, edited by George J. Aungier, London 1844.

The Carmen de Hastingae Proelio of Guy Bishop of Amiens, edited and translated by Frank Barlow (Oxford Medieval Texts), Oxford 1999.

Documents of the Baronial Movement of Reform and Rebellion 1259-1267, selected by Reginald F. Treharne, edited by Ivor J. Sanders, Oxford 1973.

Eadmer, Historia Novorum, edited by Martin Rule, in: Eadmeri Historia Novorum in Anglia et opusculo duo de Vita Sancti Anselmi et quibusdam Miraculis ejus (Rolls Series), London 1884.

Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England. Historia Novorum in Anglia, translated by Geoffrey Bosanquet, with a foreword by Richard W. Southern, London 1964.

Eadmer, The Life of St Anselm, edited with introduction, notes and translation by Richard W. Southern (Nelson Medieval Texts), London, Edinburgh, Paris, Melbourne, Toronto and New York 1962.

Eulogium (historiarum sive temporis): chronicon ab Urbe conditio usque ad annum domini m.ccc.lxvi., a monacho quodam Malmesburiensi exaratum (Rolls Series), edited by Frank S. Haydon, 3 vols., London 1858-1863.

Foedera, conventiones, literae, et cujuscunque generis acta publica, etc.; or Rymer's Foedera, edited by Thomas Rymer, Robert Sanderson, 3rd edition, vol. 1, part 1, Neaulme 1745 [originally published in 16 vols., 1704-1735).

Geoffrey Gaimar, Estoire des Engleis. History of the English, edited and translated by Ian Short, Oxford 2009.

Geoffrey of Monmouth, The History of the Kings of Britain. An Edition and Translation of De gestis Britonum [Historia Regum Britanniae] (Arthurian Studies LXIX), edited by Michael D. Reeve, translated by Neil Wright, Woodbridge 2009 [2007].

Gerald of Wales, Concerning the Instruction of Princes, translated by Joseph Stevenson, Felinfach 1991 [1958].

Gervase of Canterbury, the Historical Works, edited by William Stubbs, in: The Historical Works of Gervase of Canterbury (Rolls Series), London 1879.

The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni (Oxford Medieval Texts), edited and translated by Elisabeth M. C. van Houts, 2 vols, Oxford 1992.

Gesta Stephani, edited and translated by Kenneth R. Potter, with a new introduction and notes by Ralph H. C. Davis, Oxford 1976.

Giraldus Cambrensis, De principis instructione liber, edited by George F. Warner, in: Giraldi Cambrensis opera (Rolls Series), 8 vols., vol. 8, London 1891.

Giraldus Cambrensis, Topographia Hibernica et Expugnatio Hibernica, edited by James F. Dimock, London 1867, in: Giraldi Cambrensis opera (Rolls Series), 8 vols., vol. 5, London 1867.

The Treatise on the Laws and Customs of the Realm of England Commonly Called Glanvill, edited with Introduction, Notes and Translation by George D. G. Hall, with A Guide to Further Reading by Michael T. Clanchy (Oxford Medieval Texts), Oxford 1993 [1965].

Henry of Huntingdon, Historia Anglorum, edited and translated by Diana Greenway, in: Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, Historia Anglorum, the history of the English people (Oxford Medieval Texts), Oxford 1996.

Henry Knighton, Chronicon, edited by Joseph Rawson Lumby in: Chronicon Henrici Knighton vel Cnitthon, Monachi Leycestrensis (Rolls Series), 2 vols., London 1889-1895.

The History of William Marshal, edited by Anthony J. Holden, translated by Steward Gregory, with notes by David Crouch (Anglo-Norman Text Society. Occasional Publications Series, 4), 3 vols., London 2002-2006.

Hugh de Fleury, Tractatus de regia potestate et sacerdotali dignitate, edited by Jacques Paul Migne (Patrologiae Latinae Tomus, 163), Paris 1893, col. 939-976.

Hugh the Chanter, The History of the Church of York 1066-1127, edited and translated by Charles Johnson. Revised by Martin Brett, Christopher N. L. Brooke and Michael Winterbottom (Oxford Medieval Texts), Oxford 1990.

Itinerarium Regis Ricardi, edited by William Stubbs, in: Chronicles and Memorials of the Reign of Richard I (Rolls Series), 2 vols., London 1863-1864, vol. 1: Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi; auctore, ut videtur, Ricardo, canonico Sanctae Trinitatis Londoniensis, London 1864.

John Capgrave, The Chronicle of England, edited by Francis Charles Hingeston, in: The Chronicle of England by John Capgrave (Rolls Series), London 1858.

John of Hexham, Chronicle, edited by James Raine, in: The Priory of Hexham, its chroniclers, endowments and annals, 2 vols., Durham, London, Edinburgh 1864-1865, vol. 1, p. 106-172.

John of Salisbury's Entheticus Maior and Minor, edited by Jan van Laarhoven (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters XVII), Leiden, New York, Kobenhavn, Köln 1987.

The Chronicle of John of Worcester, edited and translated by Patrick McGurk, 3 vols., vol. 3: the Annals from 1067 to 1140 with the Gloucester Interpolations and the Continuation to 1141, Oxford 1998.

The Letters of Lanfranc Archbishop of Canterbury, edited and translated by Helen Clover and Margaret Gibson (Oxford Medieval Texts), Oxford 1979.

The Laws of Edward the Confessor, in: O'Brien, Bruce R., God's Peace and King's Peace. The Laws of Edward the Confessor (The Middle Ages Series), Philadelphia 1999.

Leges Henrici Primi, edited and translated by Leslie J. Downer, Oxford 1972.

Magna Carta Libertatum von 1215. Lateinisch-deutsch-englisch mit ergänzenden Aktenstücken, edited by Hans Wagner, Bern 1951.

Magna Vita S. Hugonis Episcopi Lincolniensis (Rolls Series), edited by James F. Dimock, London 1864.

Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury (Rolls Series), edited by James C.Robertson, 7 vols., London 1875-1885.

Matthew Paris, Flores Historiarium, edited by Henry R. Luards (Rolls Series), 3 vols., London 1890.

Matthew Paris, English History, translated by John A. Giles, 3 vols., London 1852-1854.

Matthew Paris, Historia Anglorum, edited by Frederic Madden, in: Matthaei Parisiensis, monachi Sancti Albani, Historia Anglorum sive Historia Minor (Rolls Series), 2 vols., London 1866.

Norman Anonymous, edited by James R. Ginther, digitally published as ENAP, Electronic Norman Anonymous Project, Center for Digital Theology at Saint Louis University (http://normananonymous.org/; last accessed April 2014).

Orderic Vitalis, The Ecclesiastical History, edited and translated by Marjorie Chibnall, in: The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis (Oxford Medieval Texts), 6 vols., Oxford 1969-1980.

Petri Blesensis Bathoniensis in Anglia Archidiaconi Opera Omnia, edited by Jaques Paul Migne (Patrologiae Latinae Tomus, 207), Turnhout 1969.

The Later Letters of Peter of Blois, edited by Elizabeth Revell (Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi, XIII), Oxford 1993.

Ralph of Coggeshall, Chronicon Anglicanum, edited by Joseph Stevenson, in: Radulphi de Coggeshall Chronicon Anglicanum (Rolls Series), London 1875.

Ralph of Diceto, Opera Historica, edited by William Stubbs, in: Radulfi de Diceto Decani Lundoniensis Opera Historica (Rolls Series), 2 vols., London 1876.

Ranulf Higden, Polychronicon, edited by Joseph Rawson Lumby, in: Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century (Rolls Series), 8 vols., London, 1865-1882.

Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum. The Acta of William I (1066-1087), edited by David Bates, Oxford 1998.

Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum. Regesta Willelmi Conquestoris et Willelmi Rufi 1066-1100, edited by Robert J. Whitwell, Oxford 1913.

Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum. Regesta Henrici Primi 1100-1135, edited by Charles Johnson, Oxford 1956.

Regesta Regium Anglo-Normannorum. Regesta Regis Stephani ac Mathildis Imperatricis ac Gaufridi et Henrici Ducum Normannorum, 1135-1154, edited by Henry A. Cronne, Oxford 1968.

The Chronicle of Richard of Devizes of the Time of King Richard the First (Nelson Medieval Texts), edited by John T. Appleby, London, Edinburgh, Paris, Melbourne, Toronto and New York, 1963.

Richard of Hexham, Chronicle, edited by James Raine, in: The Priory of Hexham, its chroniclers, endowments and annals, 2 vols., Durham, London, Edinburgh 1864-1865, vol. 1, p. 1-105.

Richard FitzNigel, Dialogvs de Scaccario. The Dialogue of the Exchequer, edited and translated by Emilie Amt; Constitvtio Domvs Regis. Disposition of the King's Household, edited and translated by Stephen D. Church, Oxford 2007.

The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester, edited by William Aldis Wright (Rolls Series), 2 vols., London 1887.

The Chronicle of Robert of Torigni, Abbot of the Monastery of St. Michael-in-Peril-of-the-Sea, in: Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II., and Richard I. (Rolls Series), edited by Richard Howlett, vol. 4, London 1889.

Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houedene edited by William Stubbs (Rolls Series), 4 vols., London 1868-1871.

The Annals of Roger de Hoveden. Comprising the History of England and of Other Countries of Europe from A.D. 732 to A.D. 1201, translated by Henry T. Riley, 2 vols., London 1853.

Rogeri de Wendover Chronica, sive Flores Historiarum edited by Henry O. Coxe, 5 vols., London 1841-1844.

Roger of Wendover's Flowers of History, comprising the history of England from the descent of the Saxons to A.D. 1235, formerly ascribed to Matthew Paris, translated by John A. Giles, 2 vols. London 1849.

The Song of Lewes, edited, with introduction and notes, by Charles L. Kingsford, Oxford 1890.

Stephen of Rouen, The "Draco Normannicus", edited by Richard Howlett, in: Chronicles of the Reign of Stephen, Henry II., and Richard I. (Rolls Series), 4 vols., vol. 2, London 1885.

Symeon of Durham, Libellus de exordio atque procursu istius hoc est Dunhelmensis ecclesise. Tract on the origins and progress of this the church of Durham, edited and translated by David Rollason (Ocford Medieval Texts), Oxford 2000.

Symeon of Durham, De Injusta Vexatione Willelmi episcopi primi, per Willelmum regem filium Willelmi magni regis, edited by Thomas Arnold, in: Symeonis monachi opera omnia, 2 vols, 1882-1885, vol. 1, p. 170-195.

Wace, Roman de Rou. The History of the Norman People, translated by Glyn S. Burgess, with notes by Glyn S. Burgess and Elisabeth van Houts, Woodbridge 2004.

Memoriale Fratris Walteri de Coventria. The Historical Collections of Walter of Coventry edited by William Stubbs, 2 vols., London 1872-1873.

Walter Map, De Nugis Curialium (Oxford Medieval Texts), edited and translated by James R. Montague, revised by Christopher N. L. Brooke, Oxford 1994.

The Wandered, printed in Bruce Mitchell, Fred C. Robinson, A Guide to Old English, Seventh Edition, Oxford 2008 [1964].

William of Malmesbury, Gesta Pontificvm Anglorvm. The History of the English Bishops, edited and translated by Michael Winterbottom, with the assistance of Rodney M. Thomson (Oxford Medieval Texts), 2 vols., Oxford 2007.

William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regvm Anglorvm. History of the English Kings, edited and translated by Roger A. B. Mynors, Rodney M. Thomson and Michael Winterbottom (Oxford Medieval Texts), 2 vols., Oxford 1998.

William of Malmesbury, Historia Novella, the Contemporary History, edited by Edmund King and Kenneth R. Potter (Oxford Medieval Texts), Oxford 1998.

William of Newburgh, Historia Rerum Anglicarum, edited by Richard Howlett, in: Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II., and Richard I. (Rolls Series), 4 vols., vol. 1-2, London 1884-1885. (Also includes the continuation referred to as "Stanley Annals".)

William of Poitiers, The Gesta Gvillelmi, edited and translated by Ralph H. C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall, Oxford 1998.

The Chronicle of William de Rishanger, of the Barons' Wars. The Miracles of Simon de Montfort, edited by James Orchard Halliwell, London 1811.

William de Rishanger, Chronica Monasterii S. Albani, edited by Henry T. Riley, in: Willelmi Rishanger, quondam monachi S. Albani, et quorundam anonymorum, chronica et annales, regnantibus Henrico Tertio et Edwardo Primo (Rolls Series), London 1865.

5.2. Secondary Sources

Alexandru, Stefan Anca, Herrschaftliche Repräsentation und kaiserliches Selbstverständnis. Berührung der westlichen mit der byzantinischen Welt in der Zeit der ersten Kreuzzüge (Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme. Schriftenreihe des SFB 496, 31) Münster 2010.

Alibu, Emily, The Normans in their Histories: Propaganda, Myth and Subversion, Woodbridge 2001.

Allen, Martin, Henry II and the English Coinage, in: Harper-Bill, Christopher and Vincent, Nicholas (eds.), Henry II. New Interpretations, Woodbridge 2007, p. 257-277.

Althoff, Gerd (ed.), Formen und Funktionen öffentlicher Kommunikation im Mittelalter (Vorträge und Forschungen - Konstanzer Arbeitskreis für mittelalterliche Geschichte 51), Stuttgart 2001.

Althoff, Gerd et al., Medieval Concepts of the Past. Ritual, Memory, Historiography, Cambridge 2002.

Althoff, Gerd, Christliche Ethik und adliges Rangbewusstsein. Auswirkungen eines Wertekonflikts auf symbolische Handlungen, in: Stollberg-Rilinger, Barbara and Weller, Thomas (eds.), Wertekonflikte – Deutungskonflikte. Internationales Kolloquium des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 an der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität Münster, 19.-20. Mai 2005 (Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme. Schriftenreihe des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 16), Münster 2007, p. 37-50.

Althoff, Gerd, Das argumentative Gedächtnis. Anklage- und Rechtfertigungsstrategien in der Historiographie des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts, in: Althoff, Gerd, Inszenierte Herrschaft. Geschichtsschreibung und politisches Handeln im Mittelalter, Darmstadt 2001, p. 126-149.

Althoff, Gerd, Demonstration und Inszenierung. Spielregeln der Kommunikation in mittelalterlicher Öffentlichkeit, in: Althoff, Gerd, Spielregeln der Politik im Mittelalter. Kommunikation in Frieden und Fehde, Darmstadt 1997, p. 229-257.

Althoff, Gerd, Die Kultur der Zeichen und Symbole, in: Althoff, Gerd, Inszenierte Herrschaft. Geschichtsschreibung und politisches Handeln im Mittelalter, Darmstadt 2001, p. 274-297.

Althoff, Gerd, Empörung, Tränen, Zerknirschung. Emotionen in der öffentlichen Kommunikation des Mittelalters, in: Althoff, Gerd, Spielregeln der Politik im Mittelalter. Kommunikation in Frieden und Fehde, Darmstadt 1997, p. 258-281.

Althoff, Gerd, Gloria et nomen perpetuum. Wodurch wurde man im Mittelalter berühmt? in: Althoff, Gerd, Inszenierte Herrschaft. Geschichtsschreibung und politisches Handeln im Mittelalter, Darmstadt 2001, p. 1-24.

Althoff, Gerd, Inszenierte Herrschaft. Geschichtsschreibung und politisches Handeln im Mittelalter, Darmstadt 2001.

Althoff, Gerd, Ira Regis: Prolegomena to a History of Royal Anger, in: Rosenwein, Barbara H. (ed.), Anger's Past, The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages, Ithaca and London 1998, p. 58-74.

Althoff, Gerd, Spielen die Dichter mit den Spielregeln der Gesellschaft? in: Althoff, Gerd, Inszenierte Herrschaft. Geschichtsschreibung und politisches Handeln im Mittelalter, Darmstadt 2001, p. 251-273.

Althoff, Gerd, Spielregeln der Politik im Mittelalter. Kommunikation in Frieden und Fehde, Darmstadt 1997.

Althoff, Gerd, The Variability of Rituals in the Middle Ages, in: Althoff, Gerd et al., Medieval Concepts of the Past. Ritual, Memory, Historiography, Cambridge 2002, p. 71-87.

Althoff, Gerd, Zur Einführung, in: Althoff, Gerd (ed.), Formen und Funktionen öffentlicher Kommunikation im Mittelalter (Vorträge und Forschungen - Konstanzer Arbeitskreis für mittelalterliche Geschichte 51), Stuttgart 2001, p. 7-10

Appleby, John T., Johann "Ohneland". König von England, Stuttgart 1965.

Ashe, Laura, Fiction and History in England, 1066-1200 (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature), Cambridge 2007.

Ashe, Laura, William Marshal, Lancelot, and Arthur: Chivalry and Kingship, in: Lewis, Christopher P. (ed.), Anglo-Norman Studies XXX. Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2007, Woodbridge 2008, p. 19-40.

Assmann, Jan, Die Katastrophe des Vergessens. Das Deuteronomium als Paradigma kultureller Mnemotechnik, in: Assmann, Aleida and Harth, Dietrich (eds.), Mnemosyne, Frankfurt 1991, 337-355.

Aurell, Martin, Die ersten Könige aus dem Haus Anjou, in: Vollrath, Hanna and Fryde, Natalie (eds.), Die englischen Könige im Mittelalter. Von Wilhelm dem Eroberer bis Richard III., München 2009 [2004], S. 71-101.

Aurell, Martin, Henry II and Arthurian Legend, in: Harper-Bill, Christopher and Vincent, Nicholas (eds.), Henry II. New Interpretations, Woodbridge 2007, p. 362-394.

Barber, Richard, R. Allen Brown Memorial Lecture. The Norman Conquest and the Media, in: Gillingham, John (ed.), Anglo-Norman Studies XXVI. Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2003, p. 1-20.

Barlow, Frank, Edward the Confessor, Berkerley and Los Angeles 1984 [1970].

Barlow, Frank, The Feudal Kingdom of England 1042-1216 (A history of England in eleven volumes, 4), London and New York 1979 [1955].

Barlow, Frank, William Rufus (Yale English Monarchs), New Haven and London 2000.

Barratt, Nick, Finance and the Economy in the Reign of Henry II, in: Harper-Bill, Christopher and Vincent, Nicholas (eds.), Henry II. New Interpretations, Woodbridge 2007, p. 242-256.

Barratt, Nick, The English Revenue of Richard I, in: English Historical Review 116, June 2001, p. 635-656.

Barratt, Nick, The Revenue of King John, in: English Historical Review, 1996, vol. CXI, p. 835-855.

Barrau, Julie, Ceci n'est pas un miroir, ou le Policraticus de Jean de Salisbury, in: Lachaud, Frédérique and Scordia, Lydwine, Le Prince au miroir de a littérature politique de l'Antiquité aux Lumière, Mont-Saint-Aignan 2007, p. 87-112.

Barrow, Geoffrey W. S., The Scots and the North of England, in: King, Edmund (ed.), The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign, Oxford 1998 [1994], p. 231-254.

Bartlett, Robert, England under the Norman and Angevin Kings: 1075-1225 (The new Oxford history of England), Oxford 2000.

Bartlett, Robert, Gerald of Wales 1146-1223, Oxford 1982.

Bates, David, Kingship, government, and political life to c.1160, in, Harvey, Barbara (ed.), The Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, 1066-c.1280 (The Short Oxford History of the British Isles, general ed. Paul Langford), Oxford 2001, p. 69-100.

Bates, David, The Conqueror's Earliest Historians and the Writing of his Biography, in: Bates, David; Crick, Julia; Hamilton, Sarah (eds.), Writing Medieval Biography 750-1250. Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow, Woodbridge 2006, p. 129-142.

Bates, David, William the Conqueror, Stroud 2004 [1989].

Bates, David; Crick, Julia; Hamilton, Sarah (eds.), Writing Medieval Biography 750-1250. Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow, Woodbridge 2006.

Beczy, István P., Cardinal Virtues in a Christian Context, in: Medioevo. Rivista di storia della filosofia medievale 31 (2006), p. 49-68.

Bell, Dora M., L'idéal ethique de la royauté en France au moyen age, d'après quelques moralistes de ce temps, Genève/Paris 1962.

Bennett, Matthew, Poetry as History? The Roman de Rou of Wace as a source for the Norman conquest, in: Brown, Reginald A. (ed.), Anglo-Norman Studies V, Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1982, Woodbridge 1983, p. 21-39.

Berg, Dieter, Die Anjou-Plantagenets. Die englischen Könige im Europa des Mittelalters, Stuttgart 2003.

Berg, Dieter, Regnum Norm-Anglorum und Englisches Königtum. Zur Entwicklung der anglonormannischen Herrschaftsideologie im 11. und 12. Jahrhundert, in: Berg, Dieter and Goetz, Hans-Werner (eds.), Historiographia Mediaevalis. Studien zur Gechichtsschreibung und Quellenkunde des Mittelalters. Festschrift für Franz-Josef Schmale zum 65. Geburtstag, p. 168-180.

Berg, Dieter, Richard Löwenherz, Darmstadt 2007.

Berges, Wilhelm, Die Fürstenspiegel des hohen und späten Mittelalters, Stuttgart 1952 [1939].

Bethurum Loomis, Dorothy, Regnum and sacerdotium in the early eleventh century, in: Clemoes, Peter and Hughes, Kathleen (eds.), England before the Conquest. Studies in primary sources presented to Dorothy Whitelock, Cambridge 1971, p. 129-145.

Bode, Christoph, Domsch, Sebastian and Sauer, Hans, Anglistentag 2003 München Proceedings, Trier 2004.

Bolton, James L., Inflation, Economics and Politics in Thirteenth-Century England, in: Coss, Peter R. and Lloyd, Simon D. (eds.), Thirteenth Century England IV. Proceedings of the Newcastle upon Tyne Conference 1991, Woodbridge 1992, p. 1-14.

Bouet, Pierre, La 'Felicitas' de Guillaume le Conquerant dans les 'Gesta Guillelmi' de Guillaume de Poitiers", in: Brown, Reginald A. (ed.), Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies 4, 1981, Woodbridge 1982 , p. 37-52.

Bradbury, Jim, Philip Augustus and King John: Personality and History, in: Church, Stephen D. (ed.), King John: New Interpretations, Woodbridge 1999, p. 347-361.

Brand, Paul, Henry II and the Creation of the English Common Law, in: Harper-Bill, Christopher and Vincent, Nicholas (eds.), Henry II. New Interpretations, Woodbridge 2007, p. 215-241.

Broekmann, Theo, Rigor iustitiae. Herrschaft, Recht und Terror im normannisch-staufischen Süden (1050-1250) (Symbolische Kommunikation in der Vormoderne. Studien zur Geschichte, Literatur und Kunst), Darmstadt 2005.

Buc, Philippe, Die Krise des Reiches unter Heinrich IV., mit und ohne Spielregeln. „Par malvais roi est mains frans hom honnis“ (Raoul de Cambrai, v. 650), in: Garnier, Claudia and Kamp, Hermann, Spielregeln der Mächtigen. Mittelalterliche Politik zwischen Gewohnheit und Konventionen, Darmstadt 2010, p. 61-94.

Buc, Philippe, Political Ritual: Medieval and Modern Interpretations, in: Goetz, Hans-Werner (ed.), Die Aktualität des Mittelalters (Herausforderungen. Historisch-politische Analysen, 10), Bochum 2000, p. 256-272.

Buc, Philippe, The Dangers of Ritual. Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory, Princeton and Oxford 2001.

Bührer-Thierry, Geneviève, "Just Anger" or "Vengeful Anger"? The Punishment of Blinding in the Early Medieval West, in: Rosenwein, Barbara H. (ed.), Anger's Past. The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages, Ithaca and London 1998, p. 75-91.

Burke, Peter, Geschichte als soziales Gedächtnis, in: Assmann, Aleida and Harth, Dietrich (eds.), Mnemosyne. Formen und Funktionen der kulturellen Erinnerung, Frankfurt am Main 1991, p. 289-304.

Burns, James H. (ed.), The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350 - c. 1450, Cambridge 1988.

Busse, Wilhelm G., Brutus im Albion, Englands Gründungssage, in: Wunderli, Peter (ed.), Herkunft und Ursprung. Historische und mythische Formen der Legitimation. Akten des Gerda Henkel Kolloquiums veranstaltet vom Forschungsinstitut für Mittelalter und Renaissance der Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, 13. bis 15. Oktober 1991, Sigmaringen 1994, p.207-223.

Busse, Wilhelm, Thomas Castleford, Zur städtischen Rezeption englischer Geschichte im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert, in: Laudage, Johannes (ed.), Von Fakten und Fiktionen. Mittelalterliche Geschichtsdarstellungen und ihre kritische Aufarbeitung (Europäische Geschichtsdarstellungen, 1), Köln, Weimar, Wien 2003, p. 353-370.

Bussmann, Benjamin, Die Historisierung der Herrscherbilder (ca. 1000-1200), Köln, Weimar, Wien 2006.

Butler, Harold E. (ed. and trans.), The Autobiography of Gerald of Wales, with an introduction by C. H. Williams and a guide to further reading by John Gillingham, Woodbridge 2005 [1937].

Caenegem, Raoul C. van, Government, law and society, in: Burns, James H. (ed.), The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350 - c. 1450, Cambridge 1988, p. 174-210.

Carpenter, David A. , England in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, in: Haverkamp, Alfred und Vollrath, Hanna (eds.), England and Germany in the High Middle Ages (Studies of the German Historical Institute London), London 1996, p. 105-126.

Carpenter, David A., An Unknown Obituary of King Henry III from the Year 1263, in: Carpenter, David A., The Reign of Henry III, London and Rio Grande 1996, p. 253-260.

Carpenter, David A., Justice and Jurisdiction under King John and King Henry III, in: Carpenter, David A., The Reign of Henry III, London and Rio Grande 1996, p. 17-44.

Carpenter, David A., King Henry III and the Cosmati Work at Westminster Abbey, in: Carpenter, David A., The Reign of Henry III, London and Rio Grande 1996, p. 409-426.

Carpenter, David A., King Henry's 'Statute' against Aliens: July 1263, in: Carpenter, David A., The Reign of Henry III, London and Rio Grande 1996, p. 261-280.

Carpenter, David A., The Burial of King Henry III, the Regalia and Royal Ideology, in: Carpenter, David A., The Reign of Henry III, London and Rio Grande 1996, p. 427-262.

Carpenter, David A., The Fall of Hubert de Burgh, in: Carpenter, David A., The Reign of Henry III, London and Rio Grande 1996, p. 45-60.

Carpenter, David A., The Reign of Henry III, London and Rio Grande 1996.

Carpenter, David A., What Happened in 1258? in: Carpenter, David A., The Reign of Henry III, London and Rio Grande 1996, p. 183-198.

Carpenter, David, A., The Minority of Henry III, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1990.

Chauou, Amaury, L'idéologie Plantagenêt. Royauté arthurienne et monarchie politique dans l'espace Plantagenêt (XIIe - XIIIe siècles), Rennes 2001.

Chibnall, Marjorie, Anglo-Norman England 1066-1166, Oxford 1986.

Chibnall, Marjorie, Introduction, in: Dalton, Paul and White, Graeme J. (eds.), King Stephen's Reign (1135-1154), Woodbridge 2008, p. 1-10.

Chibnall, Marjorie, The Empress Matilda. Queen Consort, Queen Mother and Lady of the English, Oxford/Cambridge 1991.

Chibnall, Marjorie, The Normans (The Peoples of Europe), Oxford 2000.

Church, Stephen D. (ed.), King John: New Interpretations, Woodbridge 1999.

Church, Stephen D., Aspects of the English Succession, 1066-1199: The Death of the King, in: Lewis, C. P., Anglo-Norman Studies XXIX, Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2006, Woodbridge 2007, p. 17-34.

Clanchy, Michael T., England and its Rulers 1066-1272. Foreign Lordship and National Identity, Oxford 1983.

Clarke, Catherine A. M., Writing Civil War in Henry of Huntingdon's Historia Anglorum, in: Lewis, Christopher P., Anglo-Norman Studies XXXI. Proceedings of the Battle Conference, Woodbrige 2008, p 31-48.

Claus Uhlig, Hofkritik im England des Mittelalters und der Renaissance. Studien zu einem Gemeinplatz der europäischen Moralistik (Quellen und Forschungen zur Sprach- und Kulturgeschichte der germanischen Völker 56(180)), Berlin, New York 1973.

Clauss, Martin, Kriegsniederlagen im Mittelalter. Darstellung – Deutung – Bewältigung (Krieg und Geschichte, 54), Paderborn 2010.

Cooper, Alan, 'The feet of those that bark shall be cut off': Timorous Historians and the Personality of Henry I, in: Gillingham, John (ed.), Anglo-Norman Studies XXII. Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2000, p. 47-68.

Crouch, David, King Stephen and Northern France, in: Dalton, Paul and White, Graeme J. (eds.), King Stephen's Reign (1135-1154), Woodbridge 2008, p. 44-57.

Crouch, David, The March and the Welsh Kings, in: King, Edmund (ed.), The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign, Oxford 1998 [1994], p. 255-290.

Crouch, David, The Normans. The History of a Dynasty, London 2007 [2002].

Crouch, David, The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154, Harlow 2000.

Crouch, David, Writing a Biography in the Thirteenth Century: The Construction and Composition of the 'History of William Marshal', in: Bates, David; Crick, Julia; Hamilton, Sarah (eds.), Writing Medieval Biography 750-1250. Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow, Woodbridge 2006, p. 221-236.

Dalton, Paul and White, Graeme J. (eds.), King Stephen's Reign (1135-1154), Woodbridge 2008.

Dalton, Paul, Allegiance and Intelligence in King Stephen's Reign, in: Dalton, Paul and White, Graeme J. (eds.), King Stephen's Reign (1135-1154), Woodbridge 2008, p. 80-97.

Dalton, Paul, Churchmen and the Promotion of Peace in King Stephen's Reign, in: Viator. Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 31 (2000), p. 79-120.

Davenport, Tony, Sex, Ghosts, and Dreams: Walter Map (1135?-1210?) and Gerald of Wales (1146-1223), in: Kennedy, Ruth and Meecham-Jones, Simon (eds.), Writers of the Reign of Henry II. Twelve Essays, New York (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire) 2006, p. 133-150.

Davis, Ralph H. C., King Stephen 1135-1154, London and New York 1990 [1967].

Davis, Ralph H. C., The Normans and their Myth, London 1976.

Davis, Ralph H.C., Engels, Lodewijk J. et al., The Carmen de Hastingae Proelio: a discussion, in: Brown, Reginald A., Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Satudies II, Woodbridge 1979.

Dennis, Chris, Image-making for the Conquerors of England: Cnut and William I, in: Bolton, Meek (eds.), Aspects of Power and Authority in the Middle Ages (International Medieval Research 14), Turnhout 2007, p. 33-52.

Dinzelbacher, Peter, Warum weint der König? Eine Kritik des mediävistischen Panritualismus, Badenweiler 2009.

Dörrich, Corinna, Poetik des Rituals. Konstruktion und Funktion politischen Handelns in mittelalterlicher Literatur (Symbolische Kommunikation in der Vormoderne. Studien u Geschichte, Literatur und Kunst), Darmstadt 2002.

Douglas, David C., William the Conqueror: the Norman impact upon England, London 1964.

Duggan, Anne J., Henry II, the English Church and the Papacy, 1154-76, in: Harper-Bill, Christopher and Vincent, Nicholas (eds.), Henry II. New Interpretations, Woodbridge 2007, p. 154-183.

Dunbabin, Jean, Government, in: Burns, James H. (ed.), The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350 - c. 1450, Cambridge 1988, p. 477-519.

Dunbabin, Jean, Henry II and Louis VII, in: Harper-Bill, Christopher and Vincent, Nicholas (eds.), Henry II. New Interpretations, Woodbridge 2007, p. 47-62.

Eaglen, Robin J., The Evolution of Coinage in Thirteenth-Century England, in: Coss, Peter R. and Lloyd, Simon D. (eds.), Thirteenth Century England IV. Proceedings of the Newcastle upon Tyne Conference 1991, Woodbridge 1992, p. 15-24.

Eales, Richard, Local Loyalties in Norman England: Kent in Stephen's Reign, in: Brown, Reginald A. (ed.), Anglo-Norman Studies VIII. Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1985, p. 88-108.

Eickels, Klaus van, Gleichrangigkeit in der Unterordnung. Lehensabhängigkeit und die Sorache der Freundschaft in den englisch-französischen Beziehungen des 12. Jahrhunderts, in: Vollrath, Hanna (ed.), Der Weg in eine weitere Welt. Kommunikation und „Außenpolitik" im 12. Jahrhundert (Neue Aspekte der europäischen Mittelalterforschung 2), Berlin 2008, p. 13-34.

Eickels, Klaus van, Vom inszenierten Konsens zum systematisierten Konflikt. Die englisch-französischen Beziehungen und ihre Wahrnehmung an der Wende vom Hoch- zum Spätmittelalter (Mittelalter-Forschungen 10), Stuttgart 2002.

Eickels, Klaus van, Wo man im Mittelalter zwei Herren dienen konnte - und welche Folgen dies hatte, in: Jussen, Bernhard (ed.), Die Macht des Königs. Herrschaft in Europa vom Frühmittelalter bis in die Neuzeit, München 2005, p. 165-178.

Eley, Penny, L'image du Conquérant et de ses opposants chez Benoît de Sainte-Maure, in: Guillaume le Conquérant face aux défis. Actes du colloque de Dives-sur-Mer des 17 et 18 septembre 2005 organisé par Claude Letellier (Medievalia 66), Orléans 2008, p. 17-30.

Epp, Verena, Von Spurensuchern und Zeichendeutern. Zum Selbstverständnis mittelalterlicher Geschichtsschreiber, in: Laudage, Johannes (ed.), Von Fakten und Fiktionen. Mittelalterliche Geschichtsdarstellungen und ihre kritische Aufarbeitung (Europäische Geschichtsdarstellungen, 1), Köln, Weimar, Wien 2003, p. 43-63.

Erll, Astrid and Nünning, Ansgar (eds.), Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft. Theoretische Grundlegung und Anwendungsperspektiven, Berlin, New York 2005.

Erll, Astrid and Nünning, Ansgar, Literaturwissenschaftliche Konzepte von Gedächtnis: Ein einführender Überblick, in: Erll, Astrid and Nünning, Ansgar (eds.),Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft. Theoretische Grundlegung und Anwendungsperspektiven, Berlin, New York 2005, p. 1-10.

Erll, Astrid, Literatur als Medium des kollektiven Gedächtnis, in: Erll, Astrid and Nünning, Ansgar (eds.), Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft. Theoretische Grundlegung und Anwendungsperspektiven, Berlin, New York 2005, p. 249-276.

Esposito, Elona, Soziales Vergessen. Formen und Medien des Gedächtnisses der Gesellschaft, Frankfurt 2002.

Field, Rosalind, Children of Anarchy: Anglo-Norman Romance in the Twelfth Century, in: Kennedy, Ruth and Meecham-Jones, Simon (eds.), Writers of the Reign of Henry II. Twelve Essays, New York (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire) 2006, p. 249-262.

Fischer, Robert-Tarekt, Richard Löwenherz 1157-1199. Mythos und Realität, Wien, Köln, Weimar 2006.

Galbraith, Vivian H., Good Kings and Bad Kings in English History, p. 119-132, in: Galbraith, Vivian H., Kings and Chroniclers. Essays in English Medieval History (History Series, 4), London 1982.

Galbraith, Vivian H., Roger Wendover and Matthew Paris. Being the eleventh Lecture on the David Murray Foundation in the University of Glasgow delivered on March 9th, 1944, Glasgow 1944.

Garnett, George, Conquered England. Kingship, Succession and Tenure, 1066-1166, Oxford 2007.

Garnett, George, 'Franci et Angli': The Legal Distinctions between Peoples after the Conquest, in: Brown, Reginald A. (ed.), Anglo-Norman Studies VIII. Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1985, p. 109-137.

Garnier, Claudia and Kamp, Hermann, Spielregeln der Mächtigen. Mittelalterliche Politik zwischen Gewohnheit und Konventionen, Darmstadt 2010.

Garnier, Claudia and Kamp, Hermann, Vorwort, in: Althoff, Gerd, Inszenierte Herrschaft. Geschichtsschreibung und politisches Handeln im Mittelalter, Darmstadt 2001, p. VII-XIV.

Gillingham, John, Conquering the Barbarians: War and Chivalry in Twelfth-Century Britain and Ireland, in: Gillingham, John: The English in the Twelfth Century. Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values, Woodbridge 2003 [2000], p. 41-58.

Gillingham, John, Gaimar, the Prose Brut and the Making of English History, in: Gillingham, John, The English in the Twelfth Century. Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values, Woodbridge 2003 [2000], p. 113-122.

Gillingham, John, Historians Without Hindsight: Coggeshall, Diceto and Howden on the Early Years of John's Reign, in: Church, Stephen D. (ed.), King John: New Interpretations, Woodbridge 1999, p. 1-26.

Gillingham, John, 'Holding to the Rules of War (Bellica Iura Tenentes)': Right Conduct before, during, and after Battle in North-Western Europe in the Eleventh Century. Reginald A. Brown Memorial Lecture, in: Lewis, C. P., Anglo-Norman Studies XXIX, Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2006, Woodbridge 2007, p. 1-16.

Gillingham, John, Kingship, Chivalry and Love. Political and Cultural Values in the Earliest History Written in French: Geoffrey Gaimar's Estoire des Engleis, in: Gillingham, John, The English in the Twelfth Century. Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values, Woodbridge 2003 [2000], p. 233-258.

Gillingham, John, Richard the Lionheart, London 1978.

Gillingham, John, The Angevin Empire, London 1984.

Gillingham, John, The Art of Kingship: Richard I, 1189-99, in: History Today 35:4, 1985, p. 17-23.

Gillingham, John, The Context and Purposes of Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain, in: Gillingham, John, The English in the Twelfth Century. Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values, Woodbridge 2003 [2000], p. 19-40.

Gillingham, John, The Cultivation of History, Legend, and Courtesy at the Court of Henry II, in: Kennedy, Ruth and Meecham-Jones, Simon (eds.), Writers of the Reign of Henry II. Twelve Essays, New York (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire) 2006, p. 25-52.

Gillingham, John, The Cultivation of History, Legend, and Courtesy at the Court of Henry II, in: Kennedy, Ruth and Meecham-Jones, Simon (eds.), Writers of the Reign of Henry II. Twelve Essays, New York (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire) 2006, p. 25-52.

Gillingham, John, The English in the Twelfth Century. Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values, Woodbridge 2003 [2000].

Given-Wilson, Chris, Chronicles. The Writing of History in Medieval England, Hambledon and London, 2004.

Goetz, Hans-Werner (ed.), Die Aktualität des Mittelalters (Herausforderungen. Historisch-politische Analysen, 10), Bochum 2000.

Goetz, Hans-Werner, "Vorstellungsgeschichte": Menschliche Vorstellungen und Meinungen als Dimension der Vergangenheit. Bemerkungen zu einem jüngeren Arbeitsfeld der Geschichtswissenschaft als Beitrag zu einer Methodik der Quellenauswertung [1982], in: Goetz, Hans-Werner, Vorstellungsgeschichte. Gesammelte Schriften zu Wahrnehmungen, Deutungen und Vorstellungen im Mittelalter, edited by Anna Aurast, Simon Elling, Bele Freudenberg et al., Bochum 2007, p. 3-18.

Goetz, Hans-Werner, Selbstdisziplin als mittelalterliche Herrschertugend [1999], in: Goetz, Hans-Werner, Vorstellungsgeschichte. Gesammelte Schriften zu Wahrnehmungen, Deutungen und Vorstellungen im Mittelalter, edited by Anna Aurast, Simon Elling, Bele Freudenberg et al., Bochum 2007, p. 329-354.

Goetz, Hans-Werner, Vorstellungsgeschichte. Gesammelte Schriften zu Wahrnehmungen, Deutungen und Vorstellungen im Mittelalter, edited by Anna Aurast, Simon Elling, Bele Freudenberg et al., Bochum 2007.

Goetz, Hans-Werner, Wahrnehmungs- und Deutungsmuster als methodisches Problem der Geschichtswissenschaft [2003], in: Goetz, Hans-Werner, Vorstellungsgeschichte. Gesammelte Schriften zu Wahrnehmungen, Deutungen und Vorstellungen im Mittelalter, edited by Anna Aurast, Simon Elling, Bele Freudenberg et al., Bochum 2007, p. 19-32.

Görich, Knut, Die Ehre Friedrich Barbarossas. Kommunikation, Konflikt und politisches Handeln im 12. Jahrhundert (Symbolische Kommunikation in der Vormoderne, Studien zu Geschichte, Literatur und Kunst, Darmstadt 2001.

Grandsen, Antonia, Historical Writing in England, vol. 1, c. 550 to c. 1307, London 1974.

Grandsen, Antonia, Historical Writing in England, vol. 2, c. 1307 to the Early Sixteenth Century, London and Henley 1982.

Graßnick, Ulrike, Ratgeber des Königs. Fürstenspiegel und Herrscherideal im spätmittelalterlichen England, Köln, Weimar, Wien 2004.

Green, Judith A., Henry I and the Origins of the Civil War, in: Dalton, Paul and White, Graeme J. (eds.), King Stephen's Reign (1135-1154), Woodbridge 2008, p. 11-26.

Green, Judith A., Henry I. King of England and Duke of Normandy, Cambridge 2009.

Green, Judith, Die normannischen Könige (1066-1154), in: Vollrath, Hanna and Fryde, Natalie (eds.), Die englischen Könige im Mittelalter. Von Wilhelm dem Eroberer bis Richard III., München 2009 [2004], p. 41-70.

Green, Judith, Kingship, Lordship, and Community in Eleventh-Century England, R. Allan Brown Memorial Lecture, in: Lewis, Christopher P., Anglo-Norman Studies XXXI. Proceedings of the Battle Conference, Woodbrige 2008, p. 1-16.

Green, Judith, The Piety and Patronage of Henry I, in: The Haskins Society Journal 10 (2002), p. 1-16.

Greenway, Anna, Henry of Huntingdon and the Manuscripts of his Historia Anglorum, in: Brown, Reginald A. (ed.), Anglo-Norman Studies IX. Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1986, p. 103-126.

Harper-Bill, Christopher and Vincent, Nicholas (eds.), Henry II. New Interpretations, Woodbridge 2007.

Harper-Bill, Christopher, John and the Church of Rome, in: Church, Stephen D. (ed.), King John: New Interpretations, Woodbridge 1999, p. 289-315.

Harvey, Barbara (ed.), The Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, 1066-c.1280 (The Short Oxford History of the British Isles, general ed. Paul Langford), Oxford 2001.

Hasberg, Wolfgang, Erinnerungs- oder Geschichtskultur? in: Hartung, Olaf (ed.), Museum als Geschichtskultur: Ästhetik, Politik, Wissenschaft; Bielefeld 2006, p. 32-59.

Haverkamp, Alfred and Vollrath, Hanna (eds.), England and Germany in the High Middle Ages (Studies of the German Historical Institute London), London 1996.

Heiser, Richard R., Richard I and His Appointments to English Shrievalties, in: English Historical Review 112, 1997, S. 1 - 19.

Herzfeld, Claude, "Vérité historique" & vérité humaine: le cas Guillaume traité par Wace, in: Guillaume le Conquérant face aux défis. Actes du colloque de Dives-sur-Mer des 17 et 18 septembre 2005 organisé par Claude Letellier (Medievalia 66), Orléans 2008, p. 51-68.

Higham, Nicholas J., King Arthur. Myth-Making and History, London and New York 2002.

Hingst, Amanda J., The Written World. Past and Place in the Work of Orderic Vitalis, Indiana 2009.

Hollister, Charles W., Henry I (Yale English Monarchs Series), New Haven 2001.

Hollister, Charles W., Henry I and the Anglo-Norman magnates, in: Brown, Reginald A., Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies II, Woodbridge 1979, p. 93-108.

Holt, James C., 1153, The Treaty of Winchester, in: King, Edmund (ed.), The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign, Oxford 1998 [1994], p. 291-316.

Holt, James C., King John, London 1970 [1963].

Holt, James C., The Northerners. A Study in the Reign of King John, Oxford 1992 [1962].

Howell, Margaret, The Children of King Henry III and Eleanor of Provence, in: Coss, Peter R. and Lloyd, S. D. (eds.): Thirteenth Century England IV. Proceedings of the Newcastle upon Tyne Conference 1991, Woodbridge 1992, p. 57-72.

Hüe, Denos, Guillaume le Conquérant et la Vierge, in: Guillaume le Conquérant face aux défis. Actes du colloque de Dives-sur-Mer des 17 et 18 septembre 2005 organisé par Claude Letellier (Medievalia 66), Orléans 2008, 69-91.

Huffman, Joseph P., Die sozialen Aspekte der Außenpolitik, Diplomatische Beziehungen zwischen englischen und deutschen Herrschern im 12. Jahrhundert, in: Vollrath, Hanna (ed.), Der Weg in eine weitere Welt. Kommunikation und „Außenpolitik" im 12. Jahrhundert (Neue Aspekte der europäischen Mittelalterforschung 2), Berlin 2008, p. 59-84.

Hyams, Paul, What Did Henry III of England Think in Bed and in French about Kingship and Anger? in: Rosenwein, Barbara H. (ed.), Anger's Past. The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages, Ithaca and London 1998, p. 92-124.

Jäckel, Dirk, Der Herrscher als Löwe. Ursprung und Gebrauch eines politischen Symbols im Früh- und Hochmittelalter (Beihefte zum Archiv für Kulturgeschichte 60), Köln, Weimar, Wien 2006.

Jäschke, Kurt-Ulrich, Die Anglonormannen (Urban-Taschenbücher, 334), Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln, Mainz 1981.

Jolliffe, John E. A., Angevin Kingship, London 1963.

Jolliffe, John E. A., The Constitutional History of Medieval England from the English Settlement to 1485, London 1954 [1937].

Jones, Michael and Vale, Malcom (eds.), England and her Neighbours, 1066-1435, Essays in Honour of Pierre Chaplais, London and Ronceverte 1989.

Jost, Karl (ed.), Die "Institutes of polity, civil and ecclesiastical": Ein Werk des Erzbischofs Wulfstans von York (Swiss Studies in English, 47), Bern 1959.

Jucker, Andreas H., History of English and English Historical Linguistics, Stuttgart 2000.

Jussen, Bernhard (ed.), Die Macht des Königs. Herrschaft in Europa vom Frühmittelalter bis in die Neuzeit, München 2005.

Jussen, Bernhard, Diskutieren über Könige im vormodernen Europa. Einleitung, in: Jussen, Bernhard (ed.), Die Macht des Königs. Herrschaft in Europa vom Frühmittelalter bis in die Neuzeit, München 2005, p. XI-XXIV.

Kaeuper, Richard W., Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe, Oxford 1999.

Kamp, Hermann, Die Macht der Spielregeln in der mittelalterlichen Politik. Eine Einleitung, in: Garnier, Claudia and Kamp, Hermann, Spielregeln der Mächtigen. Mittelalterliche Politik zwischen Gewohnheit und Konventionen, Darmstadt 2010, p. 1-18.

Kantorowicz, Ernst H., Die zwei Körper des Königs. Eine Studie zur politischen Theologie des Mittelalters, München 1990.

Kantorowicz, Ernst H., Laudes Regiae. A Study in the Liturgical Acclamations and Mediaeval Ruler Worship, Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1958.

Keefe, Thomas K., 'Henry II (1133–1189)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12949, accessed 6 Jan 2012]

Keefe, Thomas K., Shrine Time: King Henry II's Visits to Thomas Becket's Tomb, in: The Haskins Society Journal 11, 2003, p. 115-122.

Kennedy, Ruth and Meecham-Jones, Simon (eds.), Writers of the Reign of Henry II. Twelve Essays, New York (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire) 2006.

King, Edmund (ed.), The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign, Oxford 1998 [1994].

King, Edmund, Introduction, in: King, Edmund (ed.), The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign, Oxford 1998 [1994], p. 1-36.

King, Edmund, The Accession of Henry II, in: Harper-Bill, Christopher and Vincent, Nicholas (eds.), Henry II. New Interpretations, Woodbridge 2007, p. 24-46

King, Edmund, The Gesta Stephani, in: Bates, David; Crick, Julia; Hamilton, Sarah (eds.), Writing Medieval Biography 750-1250. Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow, Woodbridge 2006, p. 195-206.

Kleineke, Wilhelm, Englische Fürstenspiegel vom Policraticus Johanns von Salisbury bis zum Basilikon Doron König Jakobs I., Walluf bei Wiesbaden 1973 [1937].

Kleineken, Wilhelm, Englische Fürstenspiegel vom Policraticus Johanns von Slaisbury bis zum Basilikon Doron König Jakobs I., Tübingen 1937.

Kleinschmitt, Erich, Herrscherdarstellung. Zur Disposition mittelalterlichen Aussageverhaltens, untersucht an Texten über Rudolf I. von Habsburg, Bern und München 1974.

Knappe, Karl-Bernhard, Repräsentation und Herrschaftszeichen. Zur Herrscherdarstellung in der vorhöfischen Epik (Münchener Beiträge zur Mediävistik und Renaissance-Forschung 17), München 1974.

Kosuch, Andreas, Abbild und Stellvertreter Gottes. Der König in herrschaftstheoretischen Schriften des späten Mittelalters (Passauer Historische Forschungen 17), Köln, Weimar, Wien 2011.

Koziol, Geoffrey, Begging Pardon and Favor. Ritual and Political Order in Early Medieval France, Ithaca and London 1992.

Krause, Ingmar, Konflikt und Ritual im Herrschaftsbereich der frühen Capetinger. Untersuchungen zur Darstellung und Funktion symbolischen Verhaltens (Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme. Schriftenreihe des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496, 13), Münster 2006.

Lachaud, Frédérique and Scordia, Lydwine, Le Prince au miroir de a littérature politique de l'Antiquité aux Lumière, Mont-Saint-Aignan 2007.

Lachaud, Frédérique, Le Liber de principis instructione de Giraud de Barry, in: Lachaud, Frédérique and Scordia, Lydwine, Le Prince au miroir de a littérature politique de l'Antiquité aux Lumière, Mont-Saint-Aignan 2007, p. 113-142.

Laîne, Stéphanie, La Fuite de Valognes: comparaison des différentes versions en langue vernaculaire, in: Guillaume le Conquérant face aux défis. Actes du colloque de Dives-sur-Mer des 17 et 18 septembre 2005 organisé par Claude Letellier (Medievalia 66), Orléans 2008, p. 93-134.

Laudage, Johannes (ed.), Von Fakten und Fiktionen. Mittelalterliche Geschichtsdarstellungen und ihre kritische Aufarbeitung (Europäische Geschichtsdarstellungen, 1), Köln, Weimar, Wien 2003.

Laudage, Johannes, Die Bühne der Macht. Friedrich Barbarossa und seine Herrschaftsinszenierung, in: Hülsen-Esch, Andra von (Hrsg.), Inszenierung und Ritual in Mittelalter und Renaissance (Studia humaniora 40), Düsseldorf 2005, p. 97-134.

Le Saux, François, Guillaume l'illégitime? La bâtardise de Guillaume le Conquérant dans le Roman de Rou de Wace, in: Guillaume le Conquérant face aux défis. Actes du colloque de Dives-sur-Mer des 17 et 18 septembre 2005 organisé par Claude Letellier (Medievalia 66), Orléans 2008, p. 149-164.

Legros, Huguette (ed.), Guillaume le Conquérant face aux défis. Actes du colloque de Dives-sur-Mer des 17 et 18 septembre 2005 organisé par Claude Letellier (Medievalia 66), Orléans 2008.

Legros, Huguette, Naissance d'un héros: de la bâtardise à la légende dans la Chronique de Benoît de Sainte-Maure, in: Guillaume le Conquérant face aux défis. Actes du colloque de Dives-sur-Mer des 17 et 18 septembre 2005 organisé par Claude Letellier (Medievalia 66), Orléans 2008, p. 135-148.

Lehmann, Joseph, Johann ohne Land. Beiträge zu seiner Charakteristik, Berlin 1965 [1904].

Leyser, Henrietta, Cultural affinities, in, Harvey, Barbara (ed.), The Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, 1066-c.1280 (The Short Oxford History of the British Isles, general ed. Paul Langford), Oxford 2001, p. 167-200.

Leyser, Karl, Communications and power in medieval Europe. The Gregorian revolution and beyond, ed. Timothy Reuter, London 1994.

Lloyd, Simon, King Henry III, the Crusade and the Mediterranean, in: Jones, Michael and Vale, Malcom (eds.), England and her Neighbours, 1066-1435, Essays in Honour of Pierre Chaplais, London and Ronceverte 1989, p. 97-119

Lohrmann, Dietrich, Der Tod König Heinrichs I. von England in der mittellateinischen Literatur Englands und der Normandie, in: Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch 8 (1973), p. 90-107.

Loyn, Henry R., The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England 500 - 1087 (The Governance of England, 1) London, Melbourne, Auckland 1984.

Lyon, Bryce, Henry II: A Non-Victorian Interpretation, in:  Hamilton, Jeffrey S. and Bradley, Patricia J., Documenting the Past. Essays in Medieval History Presented to George Peddy Cutting, Woodbridge 1989, p. 21-31.

Markowski, Michael, Richard Lionheart: Bad King, Bad Crusader? In: Journal of Medieval History 23-4, 1997, p. 351-365.

Marritt, Stephen, King Stephen and the Bishops, in: Gillingham, John (ed.), Anglo-Norman Studies XXIV. Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2001, p. 129-144.

Martindale, Jane, Succession and Politics in the Romance-speaking World, c. 1000-1140, in: Jones, Michael and Vale, Malcom (eds.), England and her Neighbours, 1066-1435, Essays in Honour of Pierre Chaplais, London and Ronceverte 1989, p. 19-42.

Mason, Emma, King Rufus. The Life & Murder of William II of England, 2008.

Mason, Emma, William Rufus: myth and reality, in: Journal of Medieval History 3 (1977), p. 1-20.

Maurice, Philippe, Guillaume le Conquérant, Paris 2002.

Meecham-Jones, Simon, Introduction, in: Kennedy, Ruth and Meecham-Jones, Simon (eds.), Writers of the Reign of Henry II. Twelve Essays, New York (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire) 2006, p. 1-24.

Menzel, Michael, Predigt und Geschichte. Historische Exempel in der geistlichen Rhetorik des Mittelalters (Beihefte zum Archiv für Kulturgeschichte, 45), Köln, Weimar, Wien, 1998.

Michael Richter, Sprache und Gesellschaft im Mittelalter. Untersuchungen zur mündlichen Kommunikation in England von der Mitte des elften bis zum Beginn des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts, Stuttgart 1979.

Moos, Peter von, Geschichte als Topik. Das rhetorische Exemplum von der Antike zur Neuzeit und die historiae im "Policraticus" Johanns von Salisbury (Ordo. Studien zur Literatur und Gesellschaft des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, 2), Hildesheim, Zürich, New York 1988.

Morillo, Stephen, Warfare under the Anglo-Norman King 1066-1135, Woodbridge 1997 [1994].

Moss, Vincent, The Defence of Normandy 1193-8, in: Gillingham, John (ed.), Anglo-Norman Studies XXIV. Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2001, p. 145-162.

Müller-Oberhäuser, Gabriele, Das Buchgeschenk zwischen Largesse und Buchmarkt im spätmittelalterlichen England, in: Stollberg-Rilinger, Barbara and Weller, Thomas (eds.), Wertekonflikte – Deutungskonflikte. Internationales Kolloquium des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 an der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität Münster, 19.-20. Mai 2005 (Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme. Schriftenreihe des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 16), Münster 2007, p. 124-142.

Nagy, Piroska, Religious Weeping as Ritual in the Medieval West, in: Social Analysis 48 (2), 2004.

Nederman, Cary J. and Bejczy, István P., Introduction, in: Nederman, Cary J. and Bejczy, István P. (eds.), Princely Virtues in the Middle Ages 1200-1500 (Disputatio 9), Turnhout 2007, p. 1-8.

Nederman, Cary J., The Changing Face of Tyranny: The Reign of King Stephen in John of Salisbury's Political Thought, in: Nottingham Medieval Studies 33 (1989), p. 1-20.

Nelson, Janet L., The Rites of the Conqueror, in: Brown, Reginald A. (ed.), Anglo-Norman Studies IV: Proceedings of the Battle Conference, Woodbridge, p. 117–132.

Nünning, Ansgar, When Literature and Cultural Memories Meet: Five Concepts of Memory in Literary Studies, in: Bode, Christoph; Domsch, Sebastian; Sauer, Hans, Anglistentag 2003 München Proceedings, Trier 2004, p. 301-306.

Oakley, Francis, Kingship. The Politics of Enchantment, Oxford 2006.

Oesterle, Jenny R., Kalifat und Königtum. Herrschaftsrepräsentation der Fatimiden, Ottonen und frühen Salier and religiösen Hochfesten (Symbolische Kommunikation in der Vormoderne. Studien zur Geschichte, Literatur und Kunst), Darmstadt 2009.

Offler, Hilary S., The Tractate De Iniusta Vexacione Willelmi Episcopi Primi, in: The English Historical Review (CCLX, July 1951), p. 321-341.

Patterson, Robert B., The Author of the 'Margam Annals': Early Thirteenth-Century Margam Abbey's Compleat Scribe, in: Chibnall, Marjorie (ed.), Anglo-Norman Studies XIV. Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1991, p. 197-210.

Pethes, Nicolas, Kulturwissenschaftliche Gedächtnistheorien zur Einführung, Hamburg 2008.

Plassmann, Alheydis, Die Normannen. Erobern – Herrschen – Integrieren (Kohlhammer Urban Taschenbücher 616), Stuttgart 2008.

Poole, Austin L., From Domesday Book to Magna Carta. 1087-1216 (The Oxford History of England, 3), Oxford 1958 [1951].

Powicke, Frederick M., King Henry III and the Lord Edward. The Community of the Realm in the Thirteenth Century, Oxford 1966 [1947].

Powicke, Maurice, The Loss of Normandy 1189-1204. Studies in the History of the Angevin Empire, Frome and London: 1963 [1913].

Putter, Ad, Gerald of Wales and the Prophet Merlin, in: Lewis, Christopher P., Anglo-Norman Studies XXXI. Proceedings of the Battle Conference, Woodbridge 2008, p. 90-103.

Reuter, Timothy, 'Velle sibi fieri in forma hac'. Symbolisches Handeln im Becketstreit, in: Althoff, Gerd (ed.), Formen und Funktionen öffentlicher Kommunikation im Mittelalter (Vorträge und Forschungen - Konstanzer Arbeitskreis für mittelalterliche Geschichte 51), Stuttgart 2001, p. 201-226.

Ridgeway,Huw W., 'Henry III (1207–1272)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Sept 2010 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12950, accessed 8 Jan 2012]

Rouse, Robert Allan, The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England in Middle English Romance (Studies in Medieval Romance), Cambridge 2005.

Sarnowsky, Jürgen, England im Mittelalter, Darmstadt 2002.

Schenk, Gerrit J., Zeremoniell und Politik. Herrschereinzüge im spätmittelalterlichen Reich (Forschungen zur Kaiser- und Papstgeschichte des Mittelalters. Beihefte zu Böhmer, Johann F., Regesta Imperii 21), Köln, Weimar, Wien 2003.

Schmitt, Jean-Claude, Die Logik der Gesten im europäischen Mittelalter. Aus dem Französischen von Rolf Schubert und Bodo Schulze, Stuttgart 1992 [1990].

Schramm, Percy E., Geschichte des englischen Königtums, Weimar 1937.

Schramm, Percy Ernst, Herrschaftszeichen und Staatssymbolik. Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte vom dritten bis zum sechzehnten Jahrhundert (Schriften der Monumenta Germaniae Historica (Deutsches Institut für Erforschung des Mittelalters) 13/I-III), Stuttgart 1955.

Schramm, Percy Ernst, Sphaira – Globus – Reichsapfel. Wanderung und Wandlung eines Herrschaftszeichens von Caesar bis zu Elisabeth II. Ein Beitrag zum „Nachleben“ der Antike, Stuttgart 1958.

Schreiner, Klaus, Frommsein in kirchlichen und lebensweltlichen Kontexten. Fragen, Themen und Tendenzen der frömmigkeitsgeschichtlichen Forschung in der neueren Mediävistik, in: Goetz, Hans-Werner (ed.), Die Aktualität des Mittelalters (Herausforderungen. Historisch-politische Analysen, 10), Bochum 2000, p. 57-106.

Schreiner, Klaus, Osculum pacis. Bedeutungen und Geltungsgründe einer symbolischen Handlung, in: Garnier, Claudia and Kamp, Hermann, Spielregeln der Mächtigen. Mittelalterliche Politik zwischen Gewohnheit und Konventionen, Darmstadt 2010, p. 165-204.

Schreiner, Klaus, Rituale, Zeichen, Bilder. Formen und Funktionen symbolischer Kommunikation im Mittelalter, herausgegeben von Ulrich Meier, Gabriela Signori und Gerd Schwerhoff, Köln, Weimar, Wien 2011.

Schröder, Sybille, Macht und Gabe. Materielle Kultur am Hof Heinrichs II. von England (Historische Studien 481), Husum 2004.

Schwendler, Gerhard, Herrschertreffen des Spätmittelalters. Formen – Rituale – Wirkungen (Mittelalter-Forschungen 21), Ostfildern 2008.

Short, Ian, Literary Culture at the Court of Henry II, in: Harper-Bill, Christopher and Vincent, Nicholas (eds.), Henry II. New Interpretations, Woodbridge 2007, p. 335-361.

Siep, Ludwig, Der Streit um die wahren politischen Tugenden in der italienischen Renaissance, in: Stollberg-Rilinger, Barbara and Weller, Thomas (eds.), Wertekonflikte – Deutungskonflikte. Internationales Kolloquium des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 an der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität Münster, 19.-20. Mai 2005 (Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme. Schriftenreihe des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 16), Münster 2007, p. 161-174.

Sønnesyn, Sigbjørn Olsen, William of Malmesbury and the Ethics of History,Woodbridge 2012.

Spiegel, Gabrielle M., The Past as Text. The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography (Parallax. Re-visions of Culture and Society), Baltimore and London 1997.

Staunton, Michael, Thomas Becket and his Biographers (Studies in the History of Medieval Religion), Woodbridge 2006.

Stenton, Frank (ed.), The Bayeux Tapestry. A Comprehensive Survey, with 150 illustrations, London 1965 [1957].

Stenton, Frank, The Historical Background, in: Stenton, Frank (ed.), The Bayeux Tapestry. A Comprehensive Survey, with 150 illustrations, London 1965 [1957], p. 9-24.

Stollberg-Rilinger, Barbara and Weller, Thomas (eds.), Wertekonflikte – Deutungskonflikte. Internationales Kolloquium des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 an der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität Münster, 19.-20. Mai 2005 (Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme. Schriftenreihe des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 16), Münster 2007.

Stollberg-Rilinger, Barbara, Einleitung, in: Stollberg-Rilinger, Barbara and Weller, Thomas (eds.), Wertekonflikte – Deutungskonflikte. Internationales Kolloquium des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 an der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität Münster, 19.-20. Mai 2005 (Symbolische Kommunikation und gesellschaftliche Wertesysteme. Schriftenreihe des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 16), Münster 2007, p. 9-20.

Stone, Rachel, Kings are different: Carolingian mirrors for princes and lay morality, in: Lachaud, Frédérique and Scordia, Lydwine, Le Prince au miroir de a littérature politique de l'Antiquité aux Lumière, Mont-Saint-Aignan 2007, p. 69-86.

Strickland, Matthew, On the Instruction of a Prince: The Upbringing of Henry, the Young King, in: Harper-Bill, Christopher and Vincent, Nicholas (eds.), Henry II. New Interpretations, Woodbridge 2007, p. 184-214.

Strickland, Matthew, War and Chivalry. The Conduct and Perception of War in England and Normandy, 1066-1217, Cambridge 1996.

Stringer, Keith J., The Reign of Stephen. Kingship, Warfare and Government in Twelfth-Century England (Lancaster Pamphlets), London and New York 1993.

Summerson, Henry, Kingship, government, and political life, c.1160-c.1280, in, Harvey, Barbara (ed.), The Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries, 1066-c.1280 (The Short Oxford History of the British Isles, general ed. Paul Langford), Oxford 2001, p. 201-242.

Thomas, Hugh M., Violent Disorder in King Stephen's England: A Maximum Argument, in: Dalton, Paul and White, Graeme J. (eds.), King Stephen's Reign (1135-1154), Woodbridge 2008 p. 139-170.

Tschacher, Werner, Königtum als lokale Praxis. Aachen als Feld der kulturellen Realisierung von Herrschaft. Eine Verfassungsgeschichte (ca. 800-1918) (Historische Mitteilungen im Auftrage der Ranke-Gesellschaft 80), Stuttgart 2010.

Turner, Ralph V., Good or Bad Kingship. The Case of Richard Lionheart, in: Haskins Society Journal 8 (1996), p. 63-78.

Turner, Ralph V., John and Justice, in: Church, Stephen D. (ed.), King John: New Interpretations, Woodbridge 1999, p. 317-333.

Turner, Ralph V., John's military reputation reconsidered, in: Journal of Medieval History 19 (1993), S. 171-200.

Turner, Ralph V., King John. England's Evil King? Stroud, 2009 [1994].

Turner, Ralph V., The English Judiciary in the Age of Glanvill and Bracton, c. 1176-1239, Cambridge 1985.

Turner, Ralph V.: King John's Concept of Royal Authority, in: History of Political Thought 17:2, 1996.

Ullmann, Walter, Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages, London 1961.

Valente, Claire, The Provisions of Oxford: Assessing/Assigning Authority in Time of Unrest, in: Berkhofer, Robert, Cooper, Alan and Kosto, Adam J., The experience of power in medieval Europe, 950-1350. Essays in honor of Thomas N. Bisson, Aldershot, Burlington 2005, p. 25-41

Vincent, Nicholas, Introduction: Henry II and the Historians, in: Harper-Bill, Christopher and Vincent, Nicholas (eds.), Henry II. New Interpretations, Woodbridge 2007, p. 1-23.

Vincent, Nicholas, Isabella of Angoulême: John's Jezebel, in: Church, Stephen D. (ed.), King John: New Interpretations, Woodbridge 1999, p. 165-219.

Vincent, Nicholas, Pilgrimages of the Angevin kings of England, in, Morris, Colin and Roberts, Peter (eds.), Pilgrimage. The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan, Cambridge 2002, p. 12-45.

Vincent, Nicholas, The Court of Henry II, in: Harper-Bill, Christopher and Vincent, Nicholas (eds.), Henry II. New Interpretations, Woodbridge 2007, p. 278-334.

Vincent, Nicholas, The Holy Blood: King Henry III and the Westminster Blood Relic, Cambridge 2001.

Vincent, Nicholas, The Strange Case of the Missing Biographies: The Lives of the Plantagenet Kings of England 1154-1272, in: Bates, David; Crick, Julia; Hamilton, Sarah (eds.), Writing Medieval Biography 750-1250. Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow, Woodbridge 2006, p. 237-258.

Vollrath, Hanna (ed.), Der Weg in eine weitere Welt. Kommunikation und „Außenpolitik" im 12. Jahrhundert (Neue Aspekte der europäischen Mittelalterforschung 2), Berlin 2008.

Vollrath, Hanna and Fryde, Natalie (eds.), Die englischen Könige im Mittelalter. Von Wilhelm dem Eroberer bis Richard III., München 2009 [2004].

Vollrath, Hanna et al., Introduction, in: Haverkamp, Alfred and Vollrath, Hanna (eds.), England and Germany in the High Middle Ages (Studies of the German Historical Institute London), London 1996, S. 1-31.

Vollrath, Hanna, Ideal and Reality in Twelfth-Century Germany, in: Haverkamp, Alfred and Vollrath, Hanna (eds.), England and Germany in the High Middle Ages (Studies of the German Historical Institute London), London 1996, p. 93-104.

Vollrath, Hanna, Rebels and Rituals. From Demonstrations of Enmity to Criminal Justice, in: Althoff, Gerd et al., Medieval Concepts of the Past. Ritual, Memory, Historiography, Cambridge 2002, p. 89-110.

Warren, Wilfried L., Henry II, New Haven and London 2000 [1973].

Warren, Wilfried L., King John, London 1961.

Warren, Wilfried L., The Governance of Norman and Angevin England 1086-1272 (The Governance of England, 2), London, Melbourne, Auckland 1987.

Watt, John A., Spiritual and temporal powers, in: Burns, James H. (ed.), The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350 - c. 1450, Cambridge 1988, p. 367-424.

Weiler, Björn K. U., Henry III of England and the Staufen Empire, 1216-1272 (Studies in History New Series), Woodbridge 2006.

Weiler, Björn, Kingship, Rebellion and Political Culture: England and Germany, c.1215 - c.1250 (Medieval Culture and Society), Basingstoke, Hampshire [u.a.] 2007.

Weiler, Björn, Symbolism and Politics in the Reign of Henry III, in: Prestwich, Michael; Britnell, Richard; Frame, Robin (eds.), Thirteenth Century England IX. Proceedings of the Durham Conference 2001, Woodbridge 2003, p. 15-42.

Weiler, Björn, The Rex renitens and the Medieval Idea of Kingship, ca. 900-ca. 1250, in: Viator. Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 31 (2000), p. 1-42.

Weiler, Björn, William of Malmesbury, King Henry I, and the Gesta Regum Anglorum, in: Lewis, Christopher P. (ed.), Anglo-Norman Studies XXXI. Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2008, p. 157-176

Weinfurter, Stefan, Authority and Legitimation of Royal Policy and Action: The Case of Henry II, in: Althoff, Gerd et al., Medieval Concepts of the Past. Ritual, Memory, Historiography, Cambridge 2002, 19-38.

Wenzel, Horst, Höfische Repräsentation. Symbolische Kommunikation und Literatur im Mittelalter, Darmstadt 2005.

White, Graeme J., Restoration and Reform, 1153-1164. Recovery from Civil War in England (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, series 4, 46), Cambridge 2000.

Williams, Ann, Henry I and the English, in: The Haskins Society Journal 17 (2007), p. 27-38.

Williams, George Huntston, The Norman Anonymous of 1100 A.D. Toward the identification and evaluation of the so-called Anonymous of York (Harvard Theological Studies, XVIII), Cambridge, London 1951.

Witthöft, Christine, Ritual und Text. Formen symbolischer Kommunikation in der Historiographie und Literatur des Spätmittelalters (Symbolische Kommunikation in der Vormoderne. Studien zur Geschichte, Literatur und Kunst), Darmstadt 2004.

Wormald, Francis, Style and Design, in: Stenton, Frank (ed.), The Bayeux Tapestry. A Comprehensive Survey, with 150 illustrations, London 1965 [1957], p. 25-36.

Wormald, Patrick, 'Wulfstan (d. 1023)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/30098, accessed 29 Jan 2012]

Wormald, Patrick, Die frühesten 'englischen' Könige: von den Anfängen bis 1066, in: Vollrath, Hanna and Fryde, Natalie (eds.), Die englischen Könige im Mittelalter. Von Wilhelm dem Eroberer bis Richard III., München 2009 [2004], p. 11-40.

Zierold, Martin, Gesellschaftliche Erinnerung. Eine medienkulturwissenschaftliche Perspektive (Media and Cultural Memory 5), Berlin, New York 2006.

Zotz, Thomas, Zusammenfassung, in: Althoff, Gerd (ed.), Formen und Funktionen öffentlicher Kommunikation im Mittelalter (Vorträge und Forschungen - Konstanzer Arbeitskreis für mittelalterliche Geschichte 51), Stuttgart 2001, p. 455-472.