



Map 1 England and France



Map 2 England and the Mediterranean

England's Place in Medieval Europe



Map 3 Edward I's kingdom in Britain

This book concerns the rulers of England and their aspirations in the period between the Norman Conquest of 1066 and the death of Edward I in 1307. During these two and a half centuries England was dominated by men from overseas. This trend had begun before 1066 with the rule of the Danish king Cnut (1016–35) and of the half-Norman Edward the Confessor (1042–66), and it lingered on after 1272 in the French-speaking court of Edward I (1272–1307) and his successors. Nevertheless the most significant period of overseas domination of political and cultural life in the English kingdom followed the Norman Conquest and continued into the twelfth century and beyond. When the Norman dynasty failed in the male line with the death of Henry I in 1135, England became the battleground between two of William the Conqueror's grandchildren, Stephen and the Empress Matilda. On Stephen's death the kingdom was inherited by Henry II (1154–89), who was count of Anjou in his own right and duke of Aquitaine by marriage. The area of the king of England's political concern had therefore widened beyond William the Conqueror's Normandy to include Anjou and the huge lands of Aquitaine and Poitou south of the Loire. This extension of power is described by historians – though never by contemporaries – as the 'Angevin Empire', implying an overlordship by the dynasty of Anjou over England and half of modern France. According to Gerald of Wales, Henry hoped to extend his rule beyond France to Rome and the empire of Frederick Barbarossa.

In leading Christendom in the crusade against Saladin, Richard I (1189–99) was following in the footsteps of the Angevin kings of

Jerusalem as well as fulfilling promises made by Henry II. His death in the struggle with Philip Augustus of France and King John's subsequent loss of Normandy to Philip did not bring an end either to overseas influence in England or to the ambitions of its kings, as John hoped to regain Normandy from his base in Poitou and Aquitaine. He established the strategy, which was vigorously pursued by his successor Henry III (1216–72), of using Poitevins as administrators and war captains in England. Through them and the support of the papacy Henry hoped to construct a system of alliances which would win his family the huge inheritance in Italy and Germany of the greatest of the medieval emperors, Frederick II, and thus surpass the achievements of Henry II and Richard I. 'We wish', wrote Pope Alexander IV in 1255, 'to exalt the royal family of England, which we view with special affection, above the other kings and princes of the world.'¹

The rebellion of 1258 against Henry's Poitevins and papal ambitions compelled both king and barons to recognize the separateness of England: the king by conceding the Norman and Angevin lands to Louis IX of France in 1259, and the barons by forming their revolutionary commune of England. As if to emphasize the persistence of overseas influence, that commune was led by a Frenchman, Simon de Montfort. This period of rebellion and civil war marked a turning point in the definition of English identity. Its rulers thereafter continued to pursue overseas ambitions, first in France in the Hundred Years War and then as a worldwide maritime power, but they did so now as heads of an English nation and not as alien warlords like William the Conqueror and Henry II. In order to emphasize the influence of outsiders and at the same time to provide a chronological framework, this book is divided into parts comprising three periods each of about seventy years' duration: the Normans (comprising the reigns of William the Conqueror, William Rufus and Henry I); the Angevins (the reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I); the Poitevins (the reigns of John and Henry III). The titles 'Normans', 'Angevins' and 'Poitevins' are not intended to suggest that the rulers came exclusively from these regions, but that the king of England's predominant overseas connections shifted from Normandy in the eleventh century through Anjou in the twelfth to Poitou in the thirteenth. Edward I gave as high a priority as his predecessors to his possessions in France, while at the same time conducting large-scale wars in Wales and Scotland.

England and its conquerors

The English had developed a settled identity precociously early among the European powers. The Anglo-Saxon kings of the tenth century, building on the achievements of Offa in Mercia and Alfred in Wessex, had created a single kingdom. At its best, a sacrosanct king headed a well-defined structure of authority (consisting of shires, hundreds and boroughs), which used a uniform system of taxation and coinage and a common written language in the Anglo-Saxon of writs and charters. Even the fragility of these achievements, in the face of the Danish and Norman invasions of the eleventh century, encouraged a sense of common identity in adversity, as the kingdom's misfortunes were attributed in such works as Wulfstan's *Sermon of the Wolf to the English* to the sinfulness of the people rather than to the shortcomings of the political system. Monastic writers were therefore able to transmit to their successors the hope that the English kingdom would emerge intact from foreign domination. Thus Orderic Vitalis, who was sent to Normandy when still a child to become a monk, nevertheless identified fiercely with England's woes. Describing Norman atrocities after the rebellion of Edwin and Morcar, he upbraids the Normans who 'did not ponder contritely in their hearts that they had conquered not by their own strength but by the will of almighty God, and had subdued a people that was greater, richer and older than they were'.² This sense of Englishness, transmitted like the English language as a mother tongue despite its disappearance in official circles, persisted as a powerful undercurrent throughout the twelfth century to emerge as a political force in the thirteenth. The isolated monks who continued with the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle after the Norman Conquest, noting for example that the year 1107 was the 'forty-first of French rule in this country', and the gregarious mothers and wet nurses who naturally spoke to their infants in English had together saved the nation's identity.

The unity of the English kingdom at the time of the Conquest was a sign not of its modernity by eleventh-century standards but of its antiquity. Its centralized government was based on the models of imperial Rome and the Carolingian empire, whereas the tendency of the tenth and eleventh centuries had been away from royal centralization and towards aristocratic feudalism. Power had shifted from kings and their hierarchies of officials towards self-sufficient knights in their

castles. Similarly the clergy were beginning to question the value of sanctified kings as their protectors and were demanding instead to be free from lay domination. 'Who does not know', asked Pope Gregory VII in 1081, 'that kings and dukes originated from those who, being ignorant of God, strove with blind greed and insufferable presumption to dominate their equals, that is their fellow men, by pride, violence, treachery and murder? And when they try to force the priests of the Lord to follow them, can kings not best be compared to him who is the head over all the children of pride? The devil.'³ With the Norman Conquest and the civil wars of Stephen's and Henry II's reigns, England was therefore brought into the mainstream of European politics, where knights waged war from stone fortresses and clergy, educated at reformed monasteries and the new universities, claimed to be above royal power. The values and style of life of the two most admired Englishmen of the twelfth century, William the Marshal, the model of the new knighthood, and Thomas Becket, the martyr of the reformed clergy, would scarcely have been comprehensible to an Anglo-Saxon thane or bishop of a century earlier.

Such was the power of the new knights and clergy that they reshaped the traditional order of Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. England was not unique in experiencing foreign conquest. At the same time as William the Conqueror was establishing Norman rule in England, other Normans led by Robert Guiscard were forming a new lordship in southern Italy and Sicily by overawing the pope and the abbot of Monte Cassino and defeating the Byzantines and the Moslems. Similarly in 1085 Alfonso VI of Castile and Leon entered Toledo as conqueror of the Moslems and in 1099 the army of the First Crusade triumphantly entered Jerusalem. Although these conquests were not directly related to each other, they were due – whether in England, Italy, Spain or Palestine – to the superiority of mounted knights when inspired by a militant clergy.

In the opinion of the conquered people such invaders were no better than a rabble of robbers. This is how at first the English saw their Norman conquerors, how the Byzantines and the popes saw Robert Guiscard, and how the Moslems saw the Cid in Spain and the crusaders in the east. But in each case the invaders demonstrated that they were more than raiders and looters, as they established strong and resilient forms of government which, while depending on the use of force,

tempered and directed it through the disciplines of feudalism and the idealism of the reformed clergy. Feudal values, as enunciated in the *Song of Roland* (which is contemporary with the Norman Conquest and may have been sung at the battle of Hastings), gave knights a sense of hierarchy and of loyalty to their lords as well as an irrepressible pride and delight in their warhorses, armour and other instruments of bloodshed. Clerical idealism, as enunciated by Pope Urban II in his sermons launching the First Crusade (and before him by Gregory VII), acknowledged the savagery of knights but aimed to point them in a similar direction to the *Song of Roland*: they would be a *militia* fighting for Christ instead of a *malitia*, the servants of the devil and the embodiment of malice. Although the knights' new sense of righteousness brought only misfortune to those whom they killed, maimed and ransomed, it did make them a sufficiently disciplined and motivated force to build on the ruins of war. Often, too, their sense of realism as fighting men encouraged them to learn from those they conquered. The Normans in England took over and strengthened the Anglo-Saxon taxation and writ system, just as their counterparts in the Moslem lands of Sicily, Palestine and Spain benefited from the superior civilizations over which they ruled.

This book concentrates on the rulers of England and not on the peasants, or 'natives' as the lords called them. The peasants were 'natives' in the sense both of belonging to a subjugated nation, the English, and of being tied by their inferior birth to the land on which they lived and worked. This social and economic structure is described in Marjorie Chibnall's *Anglo-Norman England* and Richard Mortimer's *Angevin England* in the Blackwell 'History of Medieval Britain' series. Unlike the great majority of the population who were rooted to the soil, the lords exhibited their superior status by moving freely on horseback from place to place, as their life was spent in hunting and collecting levies of money and produce from their tenants. They exercised their power not only through physical force as knights but through intellectual superiority as clergy. The ideology and resources of the church were as essential to lordship as the skills and equipment of knighthood. The local bishop or abbot was often the brother or kinsman of the lord of the land. King Stephen, for example, depended frequently on his brother, Henry of Blois, who was bishop of Winchester for more than forty years (1129–71). This book therefore

includes the higher clergy within its purview because they were worldly lords and rulers despite the insistence of ecclesiastical reformers on being a caste apart.

The power and aspirations of lordship, both clerical and lay, were manifested in buildings and works of art as well as through the personal presence of the knight on horseback and the cleric with his sacred scripture. Much of what most impressed people at the time has disappeared: the burnished war helmets and jewel-encrusted reliquaries, the robes and hangings of silk and ermine, the iron strong-boxes filled with gold. Nevertheless enough remains, particularly in the outer forms of castles and churches, to recall this lost way of life. Above all, illuminated manuscripts, many of which are almost perfectly preserved, radiate from their pages not only the colour and brilliance of Romanesque and Gothic art but the thought-worlds of their medieval creators. These works were the supreme products of lordship, the legacy which was deliberately left to posterity as a tribute to divine power from men who recognized their own skills. 'I am the prince of writers,' the inscription in the frame around Eadwine of Canterbury's portrait declares in c.1150, 'neither my praise nor my fame will die hereafter . . . The beauty of this book displays my genius; God accept it as a gift pleasing to him.'⁴ The book which this portrait accompanies is a text of the psalms with three variant Latin texts (Gallican, Roman and Hebrew) and English and French translations. It illustrates very well the mastery of the rulers and the way they were part of the civilization of western Christendom as well as building on English traditions.

Europe and the world

Knowledge of England's place in space and time was the speciality of monks and other clerical writers who inspired the men of action to their pilgrimages and crusades and recorded their deeds in chronicles and histories. Although much of this knowledge was inaccurate and some of it was fictitious, like Geoffrey of Monmouth's popular *History of the Kings of Britain*, which elaborated the story of King Arthur, it nevertheless gave the rulers a yardstick by which to measure their endeavours and achievements. Varying Voltaire's epigram, if Arthur did not exist it would be necessary to invent him. The monks of Glastonbury recognized this in 1191 when they discovered and exhumed

the alleged bodies of Arthur and Guinevere. Arthur or no Arthur, it is a mistake to underestimate the range of knowledge which medieval writers claimed to have or to dismiss altogether the existence of now lost books such as the one which Geoffrey of Monmouth said he had used. His contemporary, the historian William of Malmesbury, assumed a wide knowledge in his reading public. Defending in 1125 his decision to produce a history of the English bishops, he wrote: 'It was certainly slothful and degrading not to know the names of the principal men of our province when our knowledge otherwise extends as far as the tracts of India and whatever lies beyond, open to the boundless ocean.'⁵

In William's time the world was pictured schematically in *mappae mundi* as a circle with Jerusalem at the centre and the three continents of Asia, Africa and Europe placed around it. Asia occupies the top half of the circle while Africa and Europe are placed in the bottom right- and left-hand quarters respectively. (Neither medieval Europeans, nor the Romans and Greeks who preceded them, had any certain knowledge of Africa south of the equator or of America and Australasia.) The whole circular landmass is surrounded by the 'boundless ocean' to which William of Malmesbury refers. What he meant by saying that our knowledge extends to India is that the conventional representation of three continents had been handed down from ancient geographers via the encyclopedist Isidore of Seville. William and his fellow western Christians had no knowledge from experience of either Asia or Africa, although that was beginning to change now that crusaders and Italian merchants were establishing themselves all around the Mediterranean. Representations of the earth in the form of Jerusalem-centred world maps were a step back rather than forwards from the point of view of geographical science. Thus the large circular wall-map at Hereford cathedral, attributed to Richard of Haldingham and drawn in the late thirteenth century, is less accurate in its representation of Britain, though it is more detailed, than the square map in the British Museum (MS Tiberius B.v) which dates from about AD 1000.

Jerusalem-centred maps showed the world as planned by God rather than according to what was known about it by physical scientists. Sometimes God, as the creator of heaven and earth, is depicted hovering protectively above the map with his angels in the star-filled universe. Such maps represent with accuracy not the relationships of places as measured by fallible men but the words of scripture: 'Thus saith the

Lord God: this is Jerusalem; I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her.' St Jerome comments on this passage from Ezekiel (5: 5) that Jerusalem is sited in the centre of the world because it is the umbilical cord which connects divine life with earthly life. Jerusalem-centred maps, which become the standard form in the twelfth century, also represent contemporary aspirations. In William of Malmesbury's account of Urban II's speech at Clermont launching the First Crusade the pope uses the image of the *mappa mundi* of three continents, with Asia occupying half the circle and Europe only a quarter. He describes how the Moslems are threatening to take over the whole world, as they already have Asia, which was the cradle of Christianity, and Africa, which produced so many of the fathers of the church. 'The learned will know what I am talking about,' the pope assures his audience: 'thirdly there is the remaining region of the world, Europe, of which we Christians inhabit only a small part.'⁶ The pope's comment is strange at first sight, as the Moslems in 1095 possessed only the southern half of Spain together with the Balearic islands and Sicily. But it becomes explicable in the light of his next statement: 'For who will say that all those barbarians who live in the remote islands of the glacial ocean are Christians, as they lead a monstrous life?' Northern Europeans, some of whom in Norway and Sweden had indeed not been converted to Christianity at the time of Urban's speech, are therefore equated by the Mediterranean pope with the sea monsters who live at the world's end.

According to the Jerusalem-centred world view, England bordered the remote islands in the glacial ocean such as Iceland and the Orkneys. England was on the perimeter of the circle, 'the outer edge of the earth's extent' as the Anglo-Saxon Aelfric had described it.⁷ Wales and Ireland were consequently on the furthest borders of the world (according to Gerald of Wales), and beyond Scotland there was no habitation (in the words of the Declaration of Arbroath). In the thirteenth century the schoolman Robert the Englishman was obliged to acknowledge in his lectures on cosmology that England was too far north to be included in the recognized climes or regions of geographers. 'But the reason for this', Robert explains, 'is not because it is unfit to live in, as some will have it, but because it was not inhabited at the time of the division into climes.'⁸ This slur on England's good name leads Robert, like other medieval writers, to launch into a paean praising the country's fertility and climate.

The elements of such patriotic descriptions had remained much the same since Bede (himself drawing on the works of Nennius and Gildas) set the pattern for them in the opening chapter of his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in the early eighth century. Indeed just as Jerusalem-centred maps of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were less accurate than those of the earlier Middle Ages, so descriptions of England's geographical characteristics show a decline in precision. This is because even those learned in astronomy and the physical science of the time, like Robert the Englishman, preferred Geoffrey of Monmouth's exaggerations to the circumstantial work of Bede. Geoffrey, describing Britain rather than England as such, calls it 'the best of islands'.⁹ It provides in unflinching plenty everything that is needed: all sorts of minerals, all kinds of crops from the rich soil, every variety of game in its forests; there are fat cattle on its pastures and green meadows, bees gathering honey from its beautiful flowers, plentiful fish in its rivers and lakes, and people lulled happily to sleep on the banks of its babbling brooks. (Geoffrey borrowed this last image from Gildas, who had written in the sixth century.) Britain also – and this is Geoffrey's main subject – has an extraordinarily distinguished history, beginning with its formation by the Trojan Brutus and progressing through Lear and Cymbeline to Arthur who had dominated Europe.

All this is of course exaggerated and some of it is absurd. Nevertheless such optimism was echoed by other writers. For example Richard of Devizes in the 1190s describes a French Jew persuading a fellow Frenchman to go to England, that land flowing with milk and honey where no one who strives to make an honest living dies poor. Although by modern European and American standards life in the Middle Ages was poor, nasty, brutish and short, that was not the universal opinion of those who experienced it. They veered between extremes of delight in the bountifulness of the earth and its seasons, like William the Conqueror's fellow ruler the troubadour William IX of Aquitaine, and by contrast deep awareness, among reforming monks like St Bernard in particular, of the transitoriness of life and the immediacy of divine retribution. Over the centuries patriotic historians and writers developed Geoffrey of Monmouth's ideal of the best of islands into the famous description in Shakespeare's *Richard II* of:

This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings ...

In one way at least England actually was pleasanter in the twelfth century than now, and that was in its climate. In his description of the Vale of Gloucester, William of Malmesbury comments that 'the frequency of vines there is more concentrated, their produce more fruitful, and their taste sweeter than in any other area of England.'¹⁰ This implies, and there is other evidence to support it, that viticulture was quite common in twelfth-century England. Even the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's pessimistic account of how things went from bad to worse during the nineteen years of Stephen's reign concludes with a description of the Norman abbot of Peterborough, Martin of Bec, planting a vineyard as part of his improvements to the abbey. William of Malmesbury adds that the wines from the Gloucester area could bear comparison with French ones, whereas by implication those from less favoured areas could not. He wrote this in the 1120s when northern Europe was still enjoying a relatively warm period before cold and rain began to predominate in the latter half of the thirteenth century. At the time therefore when England was ruled by incomers from France, its climate (in the south at least) would not have made such a strong contrast with their own. Nevertheless England never was a large wine-producing country. Medieval Englishmen characteristically drank beer and they were notorious abroad for consuming too much (see pages 233-4 below).

England's destiny

England's place in the medieval world could be viewed in different lights. Certainly England was physically remote from the centre and seemed to those who had only theoretical knowledge of it to be on the outer periphery of civilization. On the other hand it was reputed to be rich, in both minerals and agricultural produce, and its climate was benign. Although the wealth of England was probably exaggerated both at home and abroad, it served as a strong inducement to conquerors and adventurers. Eadmer of Canterbury tells a story of how in the reign of Cnut the bishop of Benevento in central Italy went on a fundraising tour on behalf of his church, which claimed to possess the body of the apostle St Bartholomew: the bishop was offering for sale an arm from this precious relic. Passing through Italy and France he decided to proceed to England when he heard talk of its wealth and of how

he was likely to get a better price there than anywhere else. In this the bishop succeeded, selling the arm to Queen Emma for several pounds of silver. Eadmer uses this story to illustrate how in those days, before the coming of Lanfranc and the Norman reformers, the English valued relics above everything. For us the story illustrates England's reputation for wealth, which Eadmer thought a commonplace as he was writing in the reigns of William Rufus and Henry I when the treasures of England and the loot amassed by its Norman conquerors were the talk of Europe.

Throughout the twelfth century the kings of England were reputed to be wealthier than the Capetian kings of France. William Rufus, writes Abbot Suger of St Denis, was 'opulent, a spender of the treasures of the English and a marvellous dealer in and payer of knights', whereas his own king, Louis VI, was short of money.¹¹ To display their wealth and power the Norman kings built on an unprecedented scale. The Tower of London, completed by Rufus in 1097, was the greatest stone keep yet built in western Europe. Similarly Westminster Hall, which was also the achievement of Rufus, was the largest roofed space (238 feet × 68 feet), being more than twice the size of the emperor's hall at Goslar. Yet Rufus is reported to have commented that it was only 'half as big as it should have been'.¹² The new cathedral at Winchester (533 feet long), where Rufus was brought for burial after being killed in the New Forest, was surpassed in length only by the third abbey church of Cluny, which was nearing completion at the same time.

Such displays of power gave a sense of reality to beliefs that the kings of England were destined to play a dominant role in European politics. William of Malmesbury states that, if belief in the transmigration of souls were permitted, the soul of Julius Caesar had entered Rufus. 'He had huge ambitions,' writes William, 'and he would have achieved them if he could have spun out the tissue of the Fates, or broken through and escaped from the violence of fortune. Such was his force of mind that he was audacious enough to promise himself any kingdom whatsoever.'¹³ The best monastic historians like William enjoyed composing obituaries of this sort which evoked the antique world of pagan heroes striving against the gods. Such writing in a classical idiom was as Romanesque as the sculpture and painting of the time; it used classical motifs but the essentials were medieval. The image of Rufus as a conquering Caesar, cut off in his prime, was taken further by Gaimar in his romantic history of the English, which was

written in c.1140 in French rhyming couplets and is here translated into prose: 'On account of his great nobleness all his neighbours were subject to him, and if he could have reigned longer he would have gone to Rome to claim the ancient right to that country which Brennius and Belinus had.'¹⁴ Gaimar here associates the career of Rufus with Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, which had just been published. Brennius and Belinus, the sackers of Rome in 390 BC, were (in Geoffrey's version) British kings who had first conquered the Gauls and the Germans before uniting against Rome. The fantastic achievements of this pair, like those of Arthur himself, fulfilled (in Geoffrey's story) the prophecy of the goddess Diana, who had told the Trojan Brutus to seek an island in the ocean beyond the setting of the sun and the realms of Gaul; there he would found a second Troy and from him would descend a line of kings who would make subject the 'circle of the whole earth'.¹⁵

Geoffrey's prophecy of Diana is a myth which explains the ambivalent position of Britain. It is an island which lies on the periphery of the earth, beyond the setting of the sun as seen from the centre, but its rulers originate from the centre and are destined to return there to rule. It is impossible to know how much of this myth Geoffrey made up and how much of it derived from oral traditions or writings in books now lost. What is not in doubt, however, is the popularity of Geoffrey's work: it is extant in over two hundred medieval manuscripts (more than Bede's *History*), fifty of which date from the twelfth century. It was translated from Geoffrey's Latin into French, English and Welsh and one-third of the total number of manuscripts are in continental Europe. These facts make Geoffrey's history the most popular work emanating from medieval Britain and perhaps the most popular of all medieval histories.

As significant as Geoffrey's popularity is the credence he was given by reputable and scholarly writers. Thus Robert the Englishman includes Geoffrey's prophecy of Diana in his lectures as an explanation of why England is prosperous despite its lying beyond the climes. By his time Geoffrey's history had been incorporated into numerous English chronicles, along with the Old Testament and miscellaneous late Roman sources, in narratives of the seven ages of the world from its creation up to the Christian era. This illustrates the medieval scribal tendency to add new information to old rather than to evaluate it critically. The acceptance of Geoffrey is the more remarkable consider-

ing that William of Newburgh in the latter half of the twelfth century had put forward the objections which modern critics repeat. William compares Geoffrey's narratives with Bede's and concludes that Geoffrey 'has dressed up in colourful Latin style under the honest name of history tales of Arthur taken from old British legends and augmented by his own inventions'.¹⁶ Geoffrey's history triumphantly survived such criticism because William's comments had a very limited circulation (a problem for any critic of a popular work before the invention of printing) and also perhaps because Geoffrey told people what they wanted to hear. He put the history of Britain into a grand and dynamic context which fed the ambitions of the Anglo-Norman conquerors. Although Geoffrey's book concerned Britain rather than England and might have been interpreted as Celtic propaganda against the Normans, it was dedicated to Robert earl of Gloucester, Henry I's distinguished bastard son. Indeed Geoffrey went further and wished to attribute the work not to his humble self but to Earl Robert, so that it too would be the offspring of the illustrious king.

The best illustration of how Geoffrey's history inflated Englishmen's sense of their own importance is William Fitz Stephen's description of London in the time of Becket. It is the most famous city in the world according to William. To it merchants bring gold from Arabia, oil from Babylon, gems from the Nile, silk from China, wines from France, and furs from the Baltic lands and Russia. The references to gold from Arabia and gems from the Nile were certainly clichés of the time rather than a factual description of trade goods. On the other hand French wines and a variety of northern furs were imported. As in Geoffrey's work fact, fiction and classical allusions are inextricably mixed together in William's account. He reveals his debt to Geoffrey by stating, 'on the good faith of chroniclers', that London is far older than Rome because it was founded by the Trojan Brutus.¹⁷ William likewise cites the prophecy of Diana concerning Brutus, though he ascribes it to the oracle of Apollo. In this version the second Troy of the prophecy is London, and the ruler from Britain in particular who subjected the world is Constantine, the greatest of the emperors from a Christian point of view.

A modern scientist rightly dismisses as nonsense medieval *mappae mundi* which make Jerusalem the centre of the world and histories which claim that London was founded by the Trojans. Nevertheless appreciation of such ideas is essential to a historian because they gave

twelfth-century people, however erroneously, a concept of their place in space and time. England's rulers believed that they lived on the edge of the world and increasingly in the twelfth century they aspired to reach the centre, that Jerusalem which was both a real place and a symbol of contact with the divine, the umbilical cord of the earth. Viewed in this way, the aims of Richard I in particular can be seen in their medieval perspective. His ten-year reign (1189-99), of which only six months were spent in England, was not an aberration from the practice of his predecessors but a progression from it. The Norman kings (William the Conqueror, William Rufus and Henry I) had spent less than half their time in England and Richard's father, Henry II, did likewise. Richard was not much criticized by chroniclers for going on crusade and taxing England so heavily. On the contrary, his exactions were blamed on his counsellors and he himself was written about as a hero who had raised England's name by fighting for Jerusalem. His successors, King John and Henry III, spent much more of their time in England but that was not from choice. Rather it was because they were being driven out of their continental lands and out of Mediterranean politics by their rivals, the great French kings, Philip Augustus and St Louis.

The ambitions of England's rulers were fed by a variety of historical myths and chance circumstances. Paradoxically they were given literary shape during Stephen's reign (1135-54) when the kingdom was torn by civil war. This is the time of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, of Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, and of the speech made at the battle of the Standard in 1138 which celebrated the defeat of the Scots. In the earliest report of this speech, which is attributed to the bishop of the Orkneys, the 'great men of England and the distinguished men of Normandy' are reminded of their pre-eminence: 'No one resists you with impunity; brave France has tried and taken shelter; fierce England lay captive; rich Apulia flourished anew under your rule; renowned Jerusalem and noble Antioch both submitted themselves to you.'¹⁸ This is one of the few sources which explicitly links the Normans who conquered England with the achievements of Robert Guiscard in Italy and of his son, Bohemond, who became prince of Antioch during the First Crusade. If this speech were made by the bishop of the Orkneys (in another version it is attributed to the Yorkshire baron Walter Espec), it would have served also to link these islands on the edge

of the world with the centre in Jerusalem, as the Normans had reached both. In the versions in which it has come down to us this speech, like Urban II's at Clermont before the First Crusade, is too literary and learned to have directly inspired knights on the battlefield. What it does indicate, however, is the way the Norman victories of the eleventh century had developed into a mythology of conquest in the twelfth which united English and Norman ambitions. All the people of England, according to the chronicler Henry of Huntingdon, replied 'Amen! Amen!' to this speech.

Interpretations of English history

Historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, like their medieval counterparts, have reacted ambivalently to the fact that England was placed on the edge of the medieval world. Some Victorians proudly emphasized England's splendid isolation, while others welcomed the Norman Conquest. Thomas Carlyle's approach was as extravagant as anything in Geoffrey of Monmouth. Without the Normans and Plantagenets, he asked, what would England have been? He trenchantly replied: 'A gluttonous race of Jutes and Angles, capable of no great combinations; lumbering about in potbellied equanimity; not dreaming of heroic toil and silence and endurance, such as leads to the high places of the Universe and the golden mountain-tops where dwell the Spirits of the Dawn.'¹⁹ Edward Freeman, on the other hand, with prejudices almost as explicit, saw the strength of England coming not from the forceful drilling of the Normans but from its endurance of this fiery trial. For Freeman England belonged to the Teutonic north; indeed it is a more purely Teutonic country than Germany itself. 'We Englishmen', he wrote, 'live in an island and have always moved in a sort of world of our own.'²⁰ This gave the natives the strength to resist and absorb the incomers: first the Normans, then the accession of the Angevins 'which was almost equivalent to a second conquest', and finally the 'fresh swarms of foreigners under Henry III'. Where Carlyle and Freeman agree is in crediting the conquerors with encouraging English unity.

Popular Victorian historians like Carlyle and Freeman could not avoid a polemical style when discussing England's medieval identity because they wrote for an audience imbued with national feeling.

Historians of all the European powers in the nineteenth century laboured to produce scholarly editions of the records of their peoples and to explain their national significance to the public. The problem was that the facts of medieval history were often at variance with the pattern of nineteenth-century national states. Who did Charlemagne belong to, for example, France or Germany? And how did the most powerful government of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the papacy, fit into this nationalist scheme? French and German scholars coped with the overlap in their record sources sometimes by agreement but more often by printing the same documents in the *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France* and in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. English historians faced a more manageable task, as the Anglo-Saxon kingdom had developed a distinct identity precociously early and some medieval writers had believed (with Freeman) that Englishmen moved in a sort of world of their own. The special problem for English national history came with the Norman Conquest, as it appeared at a stroke to destroy the distinctiveness of England and subject it to continental domination in military, ecclesiastical and cultural terms. Furthermore, as Freeman points out, this domination persisted beyond the Normans through the Angevins and into the reign of Henry III.

The most influential Victorian historian to tackle the problem of England's medieval identity was William Stubbs in his authoritative *Select Charters*, first published in 1870, and in the three-volume *Constitutional History*, which followed between 1873 and 1878. These works were overtly nationalist, as their purpose was to make English students understand their own institutions as well as those of ancient Greece and Rome on which they had been reared. These institutions, Stubbs argued, 'possess a living interest for every nation that realizes its identity, and [they] have exercised on the wellbeing of the civilized world an influence not inferior certainly to that of the classical nations'.²¹ In other words, English national consciousness was to be identified and nurtured by studying the origins of its monarchy, law courts and parliament. At his most ambitious Stubbs was proposing an alternative curriculum for higher education in which the future rulers of England at Oxford and Cambridge would read their Latin in Magna Carta and Matthew Paris instead of Cicero and Livy. This would serve to make history respectable as a subject for academic study and it would also be a better preparation for governing because (in Stubbs's opinion at

least) English history was more relevant than that of Greece and Rome.

Stubbs was too knowledgeable and intelligent a scholar not to know that the flaw in his approach was that in the period on which he concentrated, between the Norman Conquest and the reign of Edward I (the same period as this book concerns), many English institutions were similar to continental ones in their outward forms and nomenclature. Royal courts of justice, fiefs, ecclesiastical councils, parliaments, communes and liberties were not unique to England. Although Stubbs admitted the deep and wide basis which medieval England shared with the continent, he argued that it was a mistake to think that customs 'are borrowed or derived in their matured form by one national system from another'.²² Taking his metaphor from the railways, which were such a prominent feature of Victorian England, he argued instead that 'the history of institutions, as of nations, runs through occasional tunnels'.²³ These hide the continuous line by which for example medieval boroughs grew out of Anglo-Saxon burghs, or parliament out of the witan. Twelfth- and thirteenth-century institutions were of course connected with their Anglo-Saxon predecessors. Stubbs was mistaken not in this assertion but in his insistence that institutional practice could not be derived by one system from another. Boroughs and parliament in his view had to progress in a single line from their Anglo-Saxon beginnings, even if parts of the line were concealed from view. They could not be significantly influenced by Flemish towns or the French *parlement*, however close the similarities and nomenclature might appear to be, because it was an axiom that each national system created its own institutions and gave to its people a unique and inimitable character. This axiom derived from the fashionable Hegelian philosophy of the time and it also justified Stubbs's hope that English students would realize their identity by studying their history. If that identity were confused with that of France, Germany or Spain, the wrong conclusions might be drawn.

To ensure that only the right message reached his readers Stubbs avoided expressions which belonged in his opinion 'more properly to French and German history'.²⁴ He disliked the word 'commune', for example, as a description of an association because it was French. Consequently when the rebel barons of 1258 formed 'le commun de Engleterre' Stubbs translated this as 'the commonalty of England'. Whereas 'commune' had associations with revolution and France, both

in the thirteenth century and in the nineteenth, 'commonalty' was an archaic English term for a corporation (the mayor and 'commonalty' of a borough) and also for the common people (the commons as distinct from the lords). These usages suited Stubbs's purpose, as 'commonalty' sounded distinctively English and its archaism suggested something conservative rather than revolutionary. Nevertheless this translation was misleading, as the 'commune' of 1258 was in origin a conspiratorial association of barons associated in particular with the Frenchman Simon de Montfort (as explained in chapter 13 below). Its antecedents were in revolutions in continental towns in the twelfth century rather than in the common folk of England.

Although the materials for medieval English history have not substantially changed since the Victorian period, attitudes to it have. The medieval past no longer has to bear the burden which Stubbs imposed on it of justifying England's imperial mission and demonstrating the unique value of its constitutional arrangements. Instead of insisting on a linear growth of institutions from Anglo-Saxon roots, this book emphasizes how England's rulers were influenced by movements of power and ideas from overseas. These influences would have been felt even without the Norman Conquest and the Angevin kings, as they were transmitted by clergy and scholars as much as by knights. Nevertheless the fact that England, like southern Italy and the kingdom of Jerusalem, was conquered by aliens helped to accelerate and reinforce change. Highlighting foreign rule in this way does not obscure England's identity. On the contrary, it clarifies and accentuates it by viewing it as far as possible through medieval eyes. In that Jerusalem-centred world England stood on the outer rim of Europe and its rulers were drawn towards the centre. They knew the world was round, but they viewed it not as a mere fact of modern cartography but as an image of faith and hope. Like the rose windows and circular mazes found in the great Gothic cathedrals, or the round table of King Arthur, the Jerusalem-centred world radiated supernatural power and mystery.

England and Britain

What exactly was meant by England? Where were its frontiers? How did it fit into Britain? These were contentious questions which went

far beyond geography. Britain could be readily represented on a medieval map as the island on the edge of the world which the Romans had called *Britannia*. England's boundaries were not so easily defined. The word *Englaland* is not recorded in Old English until the eleventh century, when it describes the territory of 'the kingdom of the English' (*regnum Anglorum* in Latin). The ideal of a united English people (the *Angelcynn* in Old English) had brought together the different Anglo-Saxon kingdoms into a single unit which by 1050 formed a country called 'England'. The territory of this English kingdom was clearly defined to the south and the east by the sea, though it was also true that the greatest threats of invasion came from these directions: from Normandy, Flanders, Denmark and Norway.

Within Britain there were no firm land frontiers to the west and north designating the limits of England, though there were old boundary lines in the form of Offa's Dyke and Hadrian's Wall. The English described their opponents to the west as the Welsh, which originally simply meant 'foreigners'. They were perceived as different especially because they spoke their own language, which fed a whole literature and rich culture with its roots in the Romano-British past. Welsh intellectuals described themselves as Britons. In the north was the kingdom of the Scots, which was growing in power by 1050 as it incorporated part of English Northumbria as well as the old Pictish-Scottish kingdom. Whereas the Welsh were relatively homogenous in their Celtic culture, the Scots were extraordinarily diverse as they incorporated Anglo-Saxon, Celtic, Pictish and Norse elements. The Norwegian kings were as great a threat to the Scots as the English, as their sea power extended all round the Scottish coasts and islands. In 1098 King Edgar conceded to Magnus Barelegs king of Norway all the islands to the west of Scotland, including the holy island of Iona which was the burial place of the early Scottish kings.

The characteristics which made the English a distinct people or nation had been articulated in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in the eighth century and constantly repeated by historians since. The message of Bede's history, which was all the more effective because of his careful chronology and use of documents, was that the English people were deservedly superior to the Britons and Celts, who had betrayed the incoming English by neglecting to convert them to Christianity. By the just judgement of God, the argument ran, the Britons had been driven westwards to the peripheries of the island (to

the shores of Cornwall and the Atlantic Ocean and to the inhospitable mountains of Wales and Scotland), where they eked out a wretched existence as herdsmen and shepherds. This made sense of the political and economic geography of Britain where the English had by far the most arable land.

The English sense of their predominant power within Britain had led Anglo-Saxon kings to lay claim to the whole island, even though they could not enforce such a claim on the ground. The significance of the Norman conquerors was that they might succeed where their predecessors had failed. By establishing himself as the lawful successor of Edward the Confessor (1042–66), William the Conqueror took on his purported role as king of the whole of Britain. Most remarkably, in a document from Winchester Edward the Confessor had been entitled 'the industrious king of the English and of all the islands and all the peoples existing roundabout'.²⁵ If the English king were to make good this claim he would have to defeat the Norwegians' sea power as well as a variety of kings in Wales, Scotland and Ireland. Nevertheless the Normans were quick to take up the English claim to jurisdiction over the whole of Britain, even in its extended sense of the British Isles. At the council of Winchester in 1072 Lanfranc, the lawyer from Italy and Norman abbot who was William the Conqueror's archbishop of Canterbury, had passages from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* read out loud in order to demonstrate that Canterbury had jurisdiction 'over the whole island which they call Britain and over Ireland as well'.²⁶

In response, Pope Gregory VII authorized Lanfranc in 1073 to extirpate vice among the Irish in particular, 'but also in the island of the English'.²⁷ The papal injunction to extirpate alleged Celtic sexual vices was significant, as this was the justification in the twelfth century for Henry II's invasion of Ireland. In calling Britain 'the island of the English' the drafters in Rome of Gregory VII's letter were probably not making a careless geographical error. Rather, prompted by Lanfranc's envoys who had learned their Anglo-Saxon history, the pope was making a political claim. The Latin translation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle done in the 980s by Ealdorman Aethelweard declared that 'Britain is now called England, thereby assuming the name of the victors'.²⁸ By describing Britain as English and giving the see of Canterbury moral authority over the Irish, Gregory VII gave the Norman conquerors authority to extend their power throughout the British

Isles. Paradoxically the Normans attempted to conquer Britain in the name of the English whom they themselves had conquered.

This was the complex ideological basis for the remarkable expansion of 'England' within the 'British Isles', which Sir Rees Davies has called *The First English Empire*. He dated the beginning of this empire from 1093, when Normans were involved in the killing of Máel Coluim Cennmór (Malcolm III 'Canmore'), king of Scots, and Rhys ap Tewdwr, king of Deheubarth or South Wales. In the long term the struggles of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were to show that Britain could not be reduced to an 'island of the English'. War and colonization clarified and emphasized the cultural differences between England and its neighbours. In place of an undifferentiated island of Britain, the maps made by Matthew Paris in the thirteenth century (see p. 236 below) show England (*Anglia*), Wales (*Wallia*) and Scotland (*Scotia*) as distinct territories. This was to be the enduring reality of English history and identity.

PART I

The Normans (1066–1135)

The Normans took their name from the 'Northmen', the Viking pirates who had attacked both England and France in the ninth century. In the same way as King Alfred acknowledged Viking settlement in the northern part of England, the Frankish king, Charles the Simple, ceded his northern territory at the mouth of the Seine in 911 to Rollo, whom the Normans recognized as their first duke. Norman history in the next century is very obscure. By the time William the Conqueror was born, however (in 1027 or 1028), the Normans had created a distinct identity for themselves. Their earliest historian Dudo of St Quentin recorded a story about the homage done by Rollo to Charles the Simple. The Frankish bishops insisted that Rollo should kneel down and kiss the king's foot. Rollo refused, although he permitted one of his warriors to approach the king. This man indeed kissed the royal foot, but he did so without kneeling down by tipping the king backwards off his throne amidst the laughter of the Normans.

This story reveals more about the Normans of William the Conqueror's time than about the events of 911. They were proud and ferocious warriors without respect for rank or tradition other than their own. It was as a typical Norman that Robert Guiscard took the pope prisoner at Civitate in 1053 and went on to become duke of Apulia and Calabria ostensibly by the grace of God and St Peter. His son Bohemond impressed himself similarly on the memory of Anna Comnena, the daughter of the Byzantine emperor Alexius, when he towered above both crusaders and Greeks in the imperial tent inspiring admiration and terror: 'A certain charm hung about the man but it was marred by a general sense of the horrible. For in the whole of his

body he showed himself implacable and savage both in his size and glance. He was no man's slave, subject to none of all the world; for such are great natures, people say, even if they are of humble origin.¹¹ These Mediterranean Normans, descendants or followers of Tancred of Hauteville, were only remotely connected with the conquerors of England. Nevertheless there were contacts between them. When William the Conqueror's half-brother, Odo of Bayeux earl of Kent, was arrested in 1082, he was believed to have been planning an expedition to Italy to make himself pope, which would have linked up the Normans in England with those in Italy. The similarities between the two groups moreover were noticed by medieval writers, even if only as wishful thinking. William of Poitiers in his account of the conquest of England (written within a decade of the battle of Hastings) mentions Norman triumphs in Italy and Byzantium, and the author of *The Song of the Battle of Hastings* (which may not be strictly contemporary) has William the Conqueror exhort his men before the battle as: 'Apulian and Calabrian, Sicilian, whose darts fly in swarms; Normans, ripe for incomparable achievements!'¹²

The Normans had a mixture of contradictory qualities which chroniclers delighted to describe. In Italy Geoffrey Malaterra (who may have been of Norman origin himself) commented on their passion for wealth and power, though they despised what they had and were always looking for more. Another contradiction was their love of flamboyant dress and their impulsiveness; and yet, when necessity demanded, they could endure all the rigours of a disciplined military life. In England William of Malmesbury, independently of Geoffrey, described similar contradictions: 'The Normans were – and still are [William was writing in about 1125] – proudly apparelled and delicate about their food, though not excessively. They are a race inured to war and scarcely know how to live without it ... They live in huge houses with moderation. They envy their equals and wish to excel their superiors. They plunder their subjects, though they defend them from others. They are faithful to their lords, though a slight offence makes them perfidious. They measure treachery by its chance of success.'¹³ Such contradictions were resolved by the logic of war. The Normans were so formidable because they were warlords operating in a Europe that was beginning to be more settled and prosperous. As descendants of the Vikings they were the last barbarian invaders. But they had learned a great deal since the time of Rollo's legendary act

of insubordination to the Frankish king. The art of war, like the art of building in stone or the 'liberal arts' of the schoolmen, had become more sophisticated in the eleventh century, and Norman knights were its chief exponents.

The best monument to Norman military methods is the Bayeux Tapestry, though it was probably made by English artists. Its most striking and recurrent features are the groups of knights in chainmail, equipped with long shields and lances, charging on their warhorses. They give the same impression of vigour and ferocity which Anna Comnena observed in Bohemond. The 'general sense of the horrible' is conveyed too in the Tapestry in its lower border where the dead are depicted in terrible postures lying amid a litter of abandoned shields, broken swords and wounded horses. The importance of eating well, which William of Malmesbury had commented on, is also graphically illustrated in the Tapestry. The first action the Normans take on landing on English soil is to seize livestock, slaughter it with their battle axes, roast it on spits and serve it up at a banquet presided over by the warrior bishop, Odo of Bayeux. From there the Normans move on to building a castle at Hastings and burning villages. The Tapestry's emphasis on the practicalities and daily routines of war indicates the Normans' professionalism. Duke William, like the duke of Wellington, knew that battles are won by attention to details of supply. A large section of the Tapestry shows the Normans' thorough preparation for the invasion: trees being cut down and made into planks; ships being specially built and launched; the loading of supplies (coats of mail, swords, lances, helmets); and finally the putting into the ships of the Norman knights' most precious possession, their highly trained warhorses. Almost as many horses as men are shown in the ships crossing the Channel and Duke William's own charger is individually depicted at the start of the battle.

In the Bayeux Tapestry the invaders are not described as 'Normans' but as 'Franci', that is 'Franks' or 'Frenchmen'. Similarly the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle describes them as 'Frencyscan'. In its account of the events of 1066 King Harold defeated the Normans (the 'Normen', that is, the Norwegians) at Stamford Bridge, before himself being killed by the French at Hastings. Similarly the Norman kings of England invariably addressed their people in charters as 'French and English' and not as 'Normans and English'. These usages raise doubts about the cohesion of Norman identity, despite Norman and other chroniclers'

descriptions of themselves. The solution lies in the relative position of the observer. The Normans were generally described as Frenchmen in England to distinguish them from the Northmen and because they came from France (Francia). Furthermore a fair number of the 'French' who fought at Hastings were not Normans anyway, but men from Brittany, Maine, Picardy and Flanders. In France itself, on the other hand, they were described as Normans to distinguish them from Angevins, Poitevins, Gascons and so on. Although the Normans are called a 'race' (*gens*) by some contemporaries (Orderic Vitalis, for example), their cohesion lay essentially in their beliefs about themselves rather than in genealogy or blood relationships. Scarcely any Norman family could reliably trace its descent back before the year AD 1000, and their greatest duke was generally known in the Middle Ages not as the Conqueror but as William the Bastard.

Their lack of distinguished ancestry made the Normans' ideology of war and power all the more important to them. They had to fight all the harder to dominate the oldest institutions in Europe (the papacy, the Byzantine Empire and the Anglo-Saxon kingdom) and they were ready to absorb men and ideas from any quarter which would help them. In military terms they embodied the greatness of the barbarian Franks who had conquered Roman Gaul and created the Carolingian empire. But they reflected too the new French knighthood whose prowess was enshrined in the *Song of Roland*. By the twelfth century, as a consequence rather than a cause of their success, the victors of Hastings were: 'You whom France famed for nobility has bred, chivalrous warriors, renowned young men whom God chooses and favours!'

Although the Normans were essentially warlords, they were a force much more complex than mere barbarians or brigands. A contradiction at first sight is the way they succeeded in attracting the two greatest churchmen and intellectuals of their time, Lanfranc and Anselm from south of the Alps, to their cause. These two men built up the new monastery at Bec in William the Conqueror's time into one of the most famous and enterprising schools in Europe, and they became in succession archbishops of Canterbury. This paradox between the Normans' love of war and their advancement of religion did not escape the notice of William of Malmesbury. He says, exaggerating the contrast between the old and the new, that 'by their arrival in England they revived the observance of religion which had grown lifeless.

Everywhere you see churches in villages, and monasteries in towns and cities, erected in a new style of architecture.'⁵

The great Norman churches, epitomized by Durham cathedral above all, are now the best memorial to the aspirations of the Normans. Their ambition and love of display are seen in the massive proportions of the nave; their blend of the traditional and the new in its Romanesque arches and cylindrical pillars on which is imposed the first rib-vault to roof a European cathedral; the demands of war dictate the choice of site on a precipitous peninsula, which is further defended by the bishop's huge castle alongside the cathedral. The Normans built their churches and castles beside each other on fortified hills, as if the surrounding population were pagan hordes instead of native Christians of long standing. Building stone had never before been massed on such a scale to symbolize both man's mastery of his environment and the individual's puniness in the face of power. In a brilliant and ultimately inexplicable interlude the Normans commanded the forces of their time and identified divine authority with themselves.

The Norman Conquest (1066–87)

In the centuries before 1066 England had experienced numerous overseas invasions and it was ruled by the Danish dynasty of Cnut between 1016 and 1042. William the Conqueror's invasion was the second of the year. A few days before William crossed the Channel in September 1066, Harold of England had defeated at Stamford Bridge in Yorkshire as formidable an invasion force led by the Norwegian king Harold Hardrada and Earl Tostig, who was Harold of England's brother. Duke William moreover came ostensibly not as a foreign conqueror but as the recognized heir of Edward the Confessor. Nor as a Norman was he entirely a stranger. Edward the Confessor, whose mother was a Norman, had introduced Normans into high places, most notably by making Robert of Jumièges bishop of London and archbishop of Canterbury. According to Edward's biography men from France became his most secret counsellors and the controllers of business in the royal palace. Seen from this viewpoint, Harold's death at the battle of Hastings was simply the elimination of a usurper and Duke William was crowned king of the English in Westminster abbey on Christmas Day 1066 as the lawful successor of Edward the Confessor. William described Edward as his kinsman and he claimed to rule over the 'country [*patria*] of the English by hereditary right'.¹

Immediately after the Conquest

If these were the circumstances, it is surprising that the battle of Hastings became so memorable and that William of Malmesbury and other

English writers of the twelfth century looked back on it as 'that fatal day for England, the sad destruction of our dear country [*dulcis patria*]'.² The change of attitude is best accounted for by the events of the decade following William's coronation. In the Normans' opinion the English were disloyal to their lawful king and betrayed him by rebelling. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle on the other hand maintains that William did not behave like an English king, as he let his foreigners oppress the people. The coronation itself had not gone smoothly and it was a presage of what was to come. The Normans had introduced a new element into the ceremony whereby the congregation were asked, as in France, whether it was their wish that William should be crowned as their lord. But this acclamation of the new king only emphasized the division between the English and the Normans, as the question had to be put twice: first by the archbishop of York in English and then by the bishop of Coutances in French. Furthermore the shouting within the church sounded so sinister that the Norman guards outside took fright and started setting fire to London.

Much of the Normans' oppressive conduct in the next decade can be explained by nervousness of this sort. They found they were unwelcome and so they took steps to defend themselves. This 'primitive state of the kingdom after the conquest' is graphically recalled by Richard Fitz Nigel in the twelfth century: 'What were left of the conquered English lay in ambush for the suspected and hated race of Normans and murdered them secretly in woods and unfrequented places as opportunity offered'.³ Such killers subsequently became the heroes of folk legend, like Hereward the Wake, and then merged into the Robin Hood tradition of free Englishmen lying in wait under the greenwood tree for cruel Norman sheriffs and fat prelates. The Normans themselves reacted by punishing whole districts with murder fines when one of their men was killed. The crime of murder now meant killing Normans. In these early years the Normans were obliged to behave as an army of occupation, fortified in their new castles and sallying out in groups to interrogate people and cow them into submission. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle concludes its annal for 1066 with the comment that the Norman regents, Odo of Bayeux and William Fitz Osbern, 'built castles far and wide throughout the land, oppressing the wretched people, and things went continually from bad to worse'.⁴

Immediately after the Conquest things went from bad to worse for the Normans as much as for the English. William was in a most

hazardous position. His rule in England was threatened not only by sporadic native rebellions but by the Scots and the Welsh and much more seriously by the Danes. Furthermore in the long term he was far from secure in Normandy where his own family, the outlying areas of Norman rule and the French monarchy were all potential threats. After 1073 William spent most of his time in Normandy, not peacefully at home enjoying his triumphs but in wars with the men of Maine (1073), the Bretons (1076), the Angevins (1077-8 and 1081) and the French (1087). In the years 1067-72 he had spent more time in England but this too was primarily in order to suppress rebellions. The earliest of these occurred in 1067-8 and were directed against Odo of Bayeux in Kent and William Fitz Osbern, and then in 1068 Exeter rebelled. In 1069-70 there were larger risings which looked in retrospect like a national rebellion. The Northumbrians joined forces with a Danish fleet and with the English claimant to the throne, the Atheling ('prince') Edgar, and captured York where they killed 'many hundreds of Frenchmen' (according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle).

This led to the notorious 'Harrying of the North', when King William in the winter of 1069-70 systematically burned the countryside and destroyed villages so that Danish or Norwegian fleets in future would find nothing to live off. How permanent such damage was and whether the numerous deaths of men and livestock from disease were directly caused by William's policy are matters for debate. Certainly wastelands were prominent in the north in Domesday Book fifteen years later. Although William showed himself ruthless towards the peasants of the north, he was lenient towards the English earls, Gospatric and Waltheof, who had taken part in the revolt. This proved a mistake, as they both subsequently betrayed William and in 1069 two other English earls, Edwin and Morcar, also rose in rebellion. From 1070, the year in which William suppressed these rebellions and appointed Lanfranc (a Lombard by origin and a Norman monk by adoption) as archbishop of Canterbury, government in England became more ruthless and more closely identified with Norman rather than native interests. This is the time too when English was superseded by Latin as the written language of government, presumably because Lanfranc and other foreign clerics found it uncouth and could not understand it anyway. William's most impressive achievement was to march up into Scotland as far as the Tay in 1072 and compel King Malcolm to submit to him. This action was essential for controlling

Northumbria and it also helped Lanfranc's claim to be primate of all Britain.

In retrospect in the twelfth century these rebellions against William and his suppression of them were seen in nationalistic terms. For example, Orderic Vitalis described the beheading of Earl Waltheof for treason in 1076 as if he were a martyr. The execution was held at dawn to prevent the English rescuing 'so noble a compatriot' and Waltheof was venerated as a saint at Crowland abbey where he was buried.⁵ His head was miraculously restored to his body and in a vision this man who had been an earl on earth appeared as a king in heaven. Orderic himself composed an epitaph stating that Waltheof had been done to death by Norman judges. Despite Orderic's enthusiasm Waltheof was not a simple English patriot. His father was a Dane, he himself had supported the Danish invasion of 1069, and he was suspected of doing the same in 1075. He had twice been pardoned and reinstated by William, once after the battle of Hastings and again after the rising of 1069-70. The opposition William faced from earls like Waltheof was directed against him not necessarily as a Norman oppressor but as an English king. Edward the Confessor had experienced similar rebellions. The difference was that William suppressed them with such vigour and ruthlessness that his methods were felt in retrospect to be un-English.

Debates about the Conquest

No event in English history has been more continually or fiercely debated than the Norman Conquest. Disagreement started at the time of the Conquest itself in the contrast between the eulogy of William the Conqueror by William of Poitiers and the harsh verse obituary given him in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Many of the essential facts, let alone interpretations, are in dispute and the truth is now impossible to establish. Did William have a legitimate claim to the throne, for example? William of Poitiers, the Bayeux Tapestry and other Norman sources imply that William had been promised the kingdom by Edward the Confessor, whereas the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Florence of Worcester make no mention of this. Did the English chroniclers suppress this information, or not know about it, or did they fail to mention it simply because Edward never made such a promise? The right answer

is anybody's guess and any answer implies that someone was a liar. The Normans themselves overcame this problem in the end by arguing that they ruled by right of conquest anyway. They were accustomed to testing disputed evidence by appealing to the supernatural through an ordeal. God would allow the just man to be unharmed by hot iron or water or to triumph in trial by combat. The ordeal of the battle of Hastings was the supreme trial and the result proved who had the better right.

In the twelfth century, however, such appeals to the supernatural began to be distrusted and schoolmen argued that it was better to inquire into things by human reason. Thenceforward debating about the Norman Conquest became a matter for academics and there it has remained. Commentators in the twentieth century have been less concerned with the rightness or wrongness of William's claim than with the effects of the Conquest. This discussion gives scope to the most diverse points of view. As with the succession question, it is more useful to state the problems than to attempt to resolve them. The following contradictory statements by professional historians illustrate how opinions can differ. 'At the level of literate and aristocratic society,' Sir Richard Southern says in a presidential address to the Royal Historical Society, 'no country in Europe, between the rise of the barbarian kingdoms and the twentieth century, has undergone so radical a change in so short a time as England experienced after 1066.'⁶ On the other hand H.G. Richardson and G.O. Sayles in *The Governance of Medieval England* state that 'if the Conqueror's will had prevailed and the dukedom of Normandy had gone to his eldest son (Robert) and his line and the kingdom of England to his second son (William Rufus) and his line, the Norman Conquest would have been a transitory episode and the foreign element it had introduced would, we make bold to say, have been absorbed into English society almost without trace'.⁷

Such diversity is possible because opinions differ about what made society distinctively English or Norman. If castles, feudalism, bureaucratic government, foreigners in high places, monastic reform and an active urban life were all characteristics of Anglo-Saxon England (as is argued by some), then the Normans cannot have been responsible for cataclysmic change because these were already features of their own society and indeed of all advanced European states of their time. The significant time of change, it can be argued, was not 1066 but the rule

earlier in the century of Cnut and his Danes, or the period earlier still when Alfred and his successors organized a unified kingdom in reaction to the first Danish invasions. Just as plausibly on the other hand it can be argued that the significant period of change reflecting overseas movements came in the twelfth century with the government of Henry I, the civil wars of Stephen's reign and the reorganization of the kingdom by the Angevin Henry II. The first Norman conquerors could be absorbed (Richardson and Sayles argue) 'almost without trace', just as the Danes had been absorbed before them, whereas the cross-Channel monarchy of the twelfth century made greater demands and transformed English society.

Southern and others who argue the case for radical change as an immediate consequence of 1066 marshal equally attractive arguments. The Old English aristocracy was eliminated by William the Conqueror. Although this was not an immediate consequence of the battle of Hastings, by the time of the Domesday survey in 1086 only two Englishmen, Thurkill of Arden and Colswein of Lincoln, held tenancies of the first order under the king himself. Some aristocrats had been killed, many dispossessed, and others were exiles: in Scotland and Denmark, and even in Russia and in the imperial guard in Byzantium. In 1081 English exiles defended the Byzantine territory of Durazzo against Robert Guiscard and his Normans. Similarly nearly all bishops and abbots were foreigners by 1086 and as a consequence the English language ceased to be used as the written language of government and of the religious life. The few who persisted with English, like the writers of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, were therefore making a deliberate effort to preserve their culture in the face of foreign hostility. Such a cataclysmic and pessimistic view of the consequences of the Conquest also reflects medieval opinion. For William of Malmesbury the day of Hastings was that *dies fatalis* for England.

But even William of Malmesbury's words can be interpreted in another way. The day was fatal, he says, because of the changeover to new lords. Historians have argued that the new Norman lords had neither the wish nor the ability to change everything. On the contrary, they readily stepped into the places of their predecessors and they did their best to maintain and strengthen Anglo-Saxon institutions because they had no governmental ideology of their own. The fact, for example, that the royal Chancery used Latin instead of English for its writs from

the 1070s onwards was simply a change in the medium of communication. The form and meaning of the writs, with their stark instructions, continued to reflect the authoritarianism of Anglo-Saxon royal government. Similarly the basic institutions of counties and hundreds, with their officers and courts, remained essentially unchanged. The Norman rulers simply called earls 'counts' and sheriffs 'viscounts'; such well-established royal offices were too useful to abolish. Above all, William the Conqueror continued with the English taxation and coinage systems because from a king's point of view these were the best in Europe. They gave England its reputation for huge wealth and allowed the Norman kings to pay their armies.

If this line of thought is pursued very far, however, it raises the question of how the Normans overcame a kingdom that was so well organized. The answer often given is to argue that, once William had become king, he could use the strength of the royal administration to advance the Conquest. At the regular meetings of county and hundred courts, for example, he and his men could discover who the property-owners were and who opposed the Normans. Domesday Book on this line of argument is the greatest monument to the efficiency of Anglo-Saxon government and it underlined continuity by asking how things stood on the day that Edward the Confessor had died. It may even have been based on Anglo-Saxon documents which were simply translated into Latin by the Normans. William's success therefore arose from his initial victory at Hastings and not from superior Norman administrative talents. It is not even necessary to argue that the Normans were superior warriors, as their success at Hastings can be attributed to luck. Harold and his men were exhausted and unprepared because they had just rushed down from the battle against the Norwegians at Stamford Bridge.

The argument that William was lucky comes back to the medieval notion that his victory was a divine judgement, either to punish the Anglo-Saxons for their sinfulness or to demonstrate William's righteousness, or both. The concept of the Anglo-Saxons' sinfulness which was expounded by William of Malmesbury (for example, he says that the nobility had been drunken and lustful, while the clergy enjoyed food and fancy vestments), has been developed by some historians into the larger idea that the Anglo-Saxons were politically decadent. Thus D.C. Douglas, a leading authority on the Norman Conquest, put forward as an agreed proposition that 'there can be little doubt that

England was politically decadent in 1066' and that this explained why it was unable to defend its civilization.⁸ As Douglas knew, this notion went back to Carlyle's 'gluttonous race of Jutes and Angles' (see page 15 above) and this in its turn (via Milton and others) back to William of Malmesbury. As a foil to the decadent Anglo-Saxons, the Normans have sometimes been seen as supermen (either admirable or vicious according to taste) and this view too can be found in medieval sources in the Normans' opinion of themselves: Orderic Vitalis describes them as a warlike race, who continually struggle for mastery, and in the battle speeches recorded by their chroniclers Norman leaders insist on their superiority.

The Norman Conquest supplies a point of interest and identification for almost any point of view and this explains the variety of the problems and the difficulty of resolving them. Those who believe that battles can decisively alter history point to Hastings, while those who think change comes slowly and imperceptibly can argue that the battle by itself had little effect. Similarly those who favour authority and military discipline can recognize these traits in the Normans, while liberals and democrats (particularly in the nineteenth century and earlier) feel some kinship for the Anglo-Saxons. (In fact both Normandy and Anglo-Saxon England were warrior societies and all medieval groups had consultative assemblies.) Nationalist sentiments can likewise be used in a variety of guises. The Normans are either the oppressors of the English nation and language or its revivifiers. Although the Normans might not have recognized themselves in some of these guises, they would no doubt have been pleased that an interest was still being taken in them a thousand years later, as they liked to be noticed and intended to be remembered.

English feelings about the Normans

Judging from the evidence of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and of twelfth-century monastic writers, the Norman Conquest caused bitter resentment. The difficulty is to gauge how long this continued and to evaluate the testimony of monks who themselves lived under Norman rule. Orderic Vitalis, for example, describes England as being 'subjected' to William as a conqueror and to the foreign 'robbers' who were his supporters. Orderic's most recent editor, Dr Chibnall, finds

this too inflammatory a statement and translates the Latin *praedonibus* not as 'robbers' but as 'invaders'.⁹ Nevertheless it was probably robbery that Orderic meant, as later on in his book he reports that the Norman monk Guitmund refused preferment in England and told William the Conqueror to his face that 'the whole of England was like the hugest robbery [*praedam*]'.¹⁰ According to Orderic, the words of this monk who had called the Norman acquisition of England 'robbery' were repeated all over the country. The distinction between plunder and legitimate spoils of war was a fine one. The Normans made no secret of the spoils they took. William of Poitiers says that English treasures were distributed to churches up and down France as well as in Normandy itself. King Harold's banner, which was woven of the purest gold, was sent as a thank-offering to Rome. The penances which were imposed by the Norman bishops on the invaders – for war of any sort was recognized to be a lapse from Christian perfection – are realistic about the conditions which prevailed at the time of the invasion. Not only are those who killed or wounded men in the battle itself to do penance but also those who killed resisters when foraging through the countryside or plundering.

Like the distinction between plunder and legitimate spoils, the difference between lawful taxation and theft depended on one's point of view. In its verse obituary of William the Conqueror the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle makes avarice his besetting sin and accuses him of piling up gold and silver taken from his subjects without justice or need. The arbitrariness of taxation is one of the Chronicle's continual themes, as is injustice. But the writer's tone is rhetorical rather than specific and inconsistencies are self-evident. Under the year 1086, for example, the collapse of law and order is castigated (the more just laws were talked about, the more unlawful things were done), whereas the entry for the next year admires the harshness of William's rule, which instilled such fear that an honest man could travel throughout the country with his pockets full of gold. Considering how much the king and his Normans coveted gold and silver in the Chronicle's opinion, it is surprising that there was anything left for honest travellers. The voice of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which had always been pessimistic because it had started at the time of the Danish invasions in Alfred's reign and was composed by monks who looked forward to a better life in heaven, reached new depths of depression after 1066. The writer frequently

concludes his record of the misfortunes of the year (storms, famine, disease, oppression) with an invocation to God to relieve the wretched people.

Such misfortunes were not necessarily new and neither were they all caused by the Normans, though William the Conqueror did use destruction of the countryside as a defensive tactic, not only in his Harrying of the North in 1070 but also in reaction to the threatened Danish invasion of 1085. The peculiar circumstances of the Norman Conquest, which made the lords of the land into an alien people as well as a ruling class, give this part of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle its distinctive tone. Although it was written by monks who normally identified with the rulers, alienation after 1066 caused them to enunciate something which came close to a peasant or popular voice. The writer describes the sufferings of the people in the countryside and castigates the robber barons, most notably in the description of the troubles of Stephen's reign. This unusual tone disappears from English writing later in the twelfth century, once Norman and English ecclesiastics had begun to cooperate, and it does not reappear until the fourteenth century with the Peasants' Revolt and *Piers Plowman*. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle therefore articulates a feeling which may have been deeper and more widespread than national sentiment. It voices the bitter helplessness of the labourers in the fields, who contended with the arbitrariness of nature exacerbated by the demands of lords.

A particular point of resentment against William the Conqueror was his introduction of the forest laws. The Chronicle's verse obituary devoted its principal attention to this. William protected deer and wild boar and let the hares run free by contrast with his meanness to people. In fact both Cnut and Edward the Confessor had maintained royal forests. Nevertheless the strict regulation of areas like the New Forest was undoubtedly Norman. The purpose may have been governmental as much as protective of royal prerogatives and pleasures. William was certainly not a modern conservationist, as his ravaging of the countryside makes clear; but the forests were the refuge of the patriots and outlaws, in both legend and fact, who carried on a guerrilla war against Norman rule and lordship. By the end of the twelfth century the royal forests covered about a quarter of England and they can therefore be seen as the most important Norman innovation. They gave the king

revenue and recreation as well as jurisdiction over dangerous terrain. Furthermore, as head of a hunting band, the Anglo-Norman king represented the most ancient form of authority known to man.

Given the significance of the forest, it was appropriate that the destiny of England in 1066 should have been symbolized by a green tree. The earliest biographer of Edward the Confessor, who wrote at the time of the Norman Conquest, described how when the king lay dying he had a vision in which God cursed the English kingdom for its sinfulness. Edward asked when there would be a remission of God's anger and received the reply that the troubles would continue until a green tree, which has been cut down, is restored to its trunk and begins once more to bear fruit. The green tree was understood to symbolize the English nation, which had been cut down by the battle of Hastings. The interest of the dream lay in the conditions it required for a restoration between the ancient trunk and the severed top. William of Malmesbury interpreted the dream to mean that the tree would never be restored: 'We now experience', he wrote in 1125, 'the truth of this prophecy, as England today is made the home of foreigners and the domain of aliens.'¹¹

Nevertheless when Ailred of Rievaulx came to consider the same dream in his new life of Edward the Confessor (written in the 1160s), he found in it the symbolism of reconciliation and pride in being English: 'The tree signifies the kingdom of the English, adorned in glory, fertile in riches and delights, excelling in the sublimity of royal dignity.'¹² The green top had been restored to its trunk by the marriage of Henry I to Matilda, who was descended from the English royal family, and it had borne fruit in Henry II. 'He, rising as the light of morning,' wrote Ailred, 'is like a cornerstone joining the two peoples. Now certainly England has a king of the English race.' This was special pleading, as few of Henry's roots were in England. But Ailred's interpretation fits other comments of the latter half of the twelfth century which suggest that the distinction between Normans and English no longer mattered. Thus Richard Fitz Nigel explained that 'nowadays, when English and Normans live together and intermarry, the nations are so mixed that it can scarcely be decided who is English by birth and who is Norman'.¹³ Fitz Nigel made the significant proviso, however, that he was speaking of freemen only. Serfs, *Anglicani* (English) or *nativi* (natives) as they were called, were still a living reminder of how lords were essentially Norman and peasants were English.

Names and languages

One reason why it was difficult to decide who was Norman and who was English by Fitz Nigel's time was that most freemen by then used non-English personal names like 'Richard' and 'Robert'. Striking evidence of this comes from Winchester, where information is available from the years 1066, 1110, 1148 and 1207. At the time of the Norman Conquest 29 per cent of property-owners in Winchester had foreign names. This proportion increased to 62 per cent by 1110, 66 per cent by 1148 and 82 per cent by 1207. Comparable rates of increase occur at Canterbury, where about 75 per cent of the names listed in the rent surveys of the 1160s are non-English and this increases to about 90 per cent by 1206. Greater foreign influence would of course be felt in Winchester and Canterbury than elsewhere, as these two cities were respectively the governmental and ecclesiastical centres of the Anglo-Norman lordship. What is most significant in these figures is the increase in the twelfth century. Evidently each new generation gave a larger proportion of its children foreign names, as Norman rule and French fashions became more normal, until by 1200 the great majority of freemen in southern England at least had ceased to bear English names. This information, because it is derived from a large number of individuals, is a better indicator of attitudes to foreign rule than are isolated statements in chronicles. A fact of comparable significance is that 'William' became and remained the single most common recorded name in the twelfth century, which suggests that William the Conqueror and William Rufus were not as unpopular as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle made out. Peasant families in the countryside (most of whose names are unrecorded), as distinct from householders in cities like Winchester and Canterbury, were presumably much slower to adopt foreign names although they can be found doing so by the thirteenth century.

The increasing use of foreign names by the upper classes has a parallel in the way the English language lost status in the century after 1066. As with other changes in the wake of the Conquest, there is considerable room for debate as to how quickly and how profoundly the language was affected. Because William the Conqueror claimed to be the legitimate heir of Edward the Confessor, he at first issued his written instructions in English just like his Anglo-Saxon predecessors. But in the 1070s, after the numerous rebellions had caused William to rely