<p style="text-align:center">I</p>

Introduction

This is a book about power and the way it was exercised in English society between the late tenth and late twelfth centuries. Power is broadly defined, ranging from the most immediate, coercive forms to indirect methods such as influence or persuasion, consumption, display, and ritual designed both to impress and to involve. The focus is on the powerful, and as such the king and the political context within which he operated take centre stage. The main themes are the internal consolidation and coherence of the realm and the mechanisms by which it was ruled; the parallel internal developments within the English church, and its much greater involvement with the wider Latin church; the changing relationship between lordship and land; the transformation of the built environment by the spread and grandeur of building in stone; and the rise of London as a capital city.

It is argued here that the two centuries between the coronation of King Edgar in 973 and the death of Henry II in 1189 were critical in shaping English society. Edgar's reign was in many respects the apogee of Old English kingship, in its claims to overkingship of its neighbours in Britain, in the intensification of royal rule over England south of the Tees, in flourishing economic activity, especially in eastern England, and in the revival of Benedictine monasticism. Nevertheless, there were distinct limits to this success story, notably the relative fragility of royal rule outside the heartland of Wessex, and, a related point, the looseness of ties between the king and noble families, the unevenness of economic prosperity, and of monastic reform. Moreover, this wealthy kingdom proved vulnerable to external predation, culminating in conquests by Danes and then Normans. Whilst not minimizing the destructive impact of the first of these conquests, the Norman Conquest proved not only more thoroughgoing in rooting out the

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existing elite, but fundamentally recalibrated the relationship between the crown and the aristocracy. Not only that, but beginning in the later eleventh and accelerating in the early twelfth century, the new Norman elite was successful in achieving a much greater penetration of northern England, especially the region to the north and west of Yorkshire, than before. Kings, lords, and churchmen worked in tandem, so that by the mid-twelfth century the north was more firmly integrated into the English kingdom than before. It was in the wake of King Stephen's reign that a third period of fundamental importance in the shaping of English society occurred. The need to stabilize possession of land, to restore order, and to crack down on crime led to the development of a centralized legal system resting on the shoulders of justices, sheriffs, and local juries. The desire for precision in defining spheres of jurisdiction brought conflict with Becket and ultimately a slow clarification of procedure and a greater awareness of the dual allegiance of churchmen to pope and to king. Finally, ever-increasing costs of warfare involved in the defence of Angevin territories led to new ways of raising cash which in turn meant a greater reliance on noble support.

Writing the history of these two centuries raises questions about the chronological limits and the conceptual framework. For twelfth-century chroniclers, this was the history of England and her kings. Picking up the master-narrative of Bede, it was the story of Germanic invasions, and of the early kingdoms giving way to one, Wessex, under the pressure of Viking attack, then William the Conqueror succeeding as the heir of Edward the Confessor: conquest could thus be subsumed under continuity.[1] Between the twelfth and twentieth centuries this perspective remained influential, and in some respects became even more so, with an emphasis on the political and cultural achievements of King Alfred and his successors: his promotion of the Old English vernacular, his law codes, the defence of his realm through the army and through the building of *burhs*, and the levying of general oaths of allegiance binding freemen to the king. His successors went from strength to strength.[2] This was a kingdom with centralized institutions, a sophisticated system of coinage, a means of

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[1] M. Chibnall, *The Debate on the Norman Conquest* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), chapter 1; J. Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past', reprinted version in Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London: Hambledon Press, 1986), pp. 209–28.

[2] Patrick Wormald, 'Alfred (848/9–899)', *ODNB* www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/183, accessed 20 May 2016; J. Campbell, 'Was It Infancy in England? Some Questions of Comparison', reprinted in Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London: Hambledon Press and London, 2000), pp. 179–99.

mobilizing wealth through taxation, and, by the later tenth century, flourishing Benedictine monasteries. The reality seemed to match the chroniclers' rhetoric, and for some historians this amounted to an Anglo-Saxon state.[3] If not a nation-state, this was a kingdom with relatively settled boundaries, a high level of local participation in courts and assemblies, and capable of absorbing external invaders into an English political community. These views seemed to confirm the idea of the lengthy and basically continuous evolution of the English state which was influential for so long in English historiography.[4]

However, terms such as 'state' and 'nation' are inevitably problematic for our period. The nature of royal authority, especially in marginal zones, differed from that in the core. Not only was control of what became the northern counties of England disputed, but along the borders with Wales autonomous marcher lordships were established in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Tenth-century English kings took over regions in parts thickly settled by Danes and Norwegians: in terms of the written record there is much less information about their loyalties and identities than about southern England. That division of the kingdom could be contemplated on several occasions in the tenth and eleventh centuries provides a salutary reminder of the fragility of union.[5]

Moreover, the lengthy periods when England was ruled in conjunction first with Denmark, then Normandy, and finally with Ireland and the French territories of Henry II, has led some historians to frame discussion round the idea of empire. As in the case of state, the term empire also has to be used with caution. The view that Cnut ruled a north-sea empire has attracted support, but some have queried whether this was how Cnut himself saw his rule.[6] Contemporaries knew of the Roman empire and its

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[3] Campbell, 'The Late Anglo-Saxon State: a Maximum View', reprinted in *Anglo-Saxon State*, pp. 1–30.

[4] For an excellent introduction to English constitutional history, see J. Campbell, 'Stubbs, William (1825–1901)', *ODNB* www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36362, accessed 20 May 2016; more generally, J. W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[5] After the death of Eadred in 955, he was succeeded by Eadwig in Wessex and Edgar in Mercia, and it was only after Eadwig's death that Edgar became king of the whole realm, ASC, D, 955; B, C, 959. Cnut and Edmund Ironside agreed to divide the realm in 1016, and once again it was a death, in this case Edmund's, that meant Cnut succeeded to the whole, ASC, C, D, E, 1016.

[6] See, for example, L. M. Larson, *Canute the Great (circ.) 995–1035 and the Rise of Danish Imperialism during the Viking Age* (New York: Putnam, 1912), p. 257; more recently T. Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great: Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2009).

successor, and the term *imperium* could be used of a king's rule over
different peoples. An alternative framework would have been that of the
British Isles. Again, the history of England in the context of her relations
with other kingdoms and principalities in the British Isles offers fresh
perspectives on periodization. The late Rees Davies saw the year 1093,
when the deaths of Welsh and Scottish kings occurred, as a more decisive
date in terms of the history of the British Isles than 1066.[7] The idea of
England as part of a Norman empire was raised by Le Patourel, who
argued quite correctly that Normandy could not just be viewed as an
offshore principality of the English kings.[8] Recently David Bates has
returned to the question of empire in relation to the Normans, discussing
how useful terms such as 'empire' and 'imperialism' are in this context.[9]
Alternative terms for the relationship between England and Normandy
have been used such as 'Anglo-Norman state', 'condominium', or
espace.[10] Finding a term which accurately sums up the larger assemblage
of Angevin territories and claims is even more difficult, but 'empire' seems
to be the most popular.[11]

Sensitivity to the changing political context of English kingship raises
further questions about loyalty to the king and national identity, or about
'Englishness'. How 'English' did the Scandinavian settlers in Yorkshire or
Lincolnshire feel in the tenth century? How important was loyalty to the
English king in the world view of those who, say, lived in Cornwall?
The rise of the papacy within the Latin church was yet another cross-
current, for clergy in England now had to recognize another allegiance
beyond that to the king (who had often secured preferment for them).
At times these loyalties were conflicted, even dangerously so.

Framing the discourse thus helps to determine major themes. In the past, in
an age of nationalism and national history, the two conquests of the eleventh
century, especially that by the Normans, marked the end of one era, that of
Anglo-Saxon England, and the beginning of another, that of Anglo-Norman
England. Even today many books either begin or end round about 1066, and
historians tend to divide into Anglo-Saxonists or Anglo-Normanists, a divide

[7] *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles, 1093–1343* (Oxford:
    Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 4–5.
[8] J. Le Patourel, *The Norman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).
[9] D. Bates, *The Normans and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[10] M. Aurell, *L'empire des Plantagenêts 1154–1224* (Paris: Perrin, 2003), p. 11; for the term
    Anglo-Norman condominium, see, for example, D. Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen
    1135–1154* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), p. 22.
[11] J. Gillingham, *The Angevin Empire*, 2nd edn (London: Arnold, 2001).

reflected in the two major specialist journals, *Anglo-Saxon England* and *Anglo-Norman Studies*. Historical debate still tends to work round ideas of continuity and change across 1066. Here the timescale is different, because the focus is not simply about dynastic and political change, but the way the exercise of power, broadly defined, shaped English society. The starting date of the book is what might be regarded as the apogee of the Old English kingdom, the 'imperial' coronation of King Edgar in 973: the pious, peace-loving king crowned by the archbishop of Canterbury at Bath, a place evocative of the Roman past. At the time of Edgar's death royal power was penetrating much of England, and kings were asserting claims not just over England, but over all Britain. They were able to raise contributions of men and money for their armies. Defended *burhs* provided protection for local settlements, and it was within their walls that moneyers issued coins in the king's name.

Yet that coronation was to be the calm before the storm as the renewal and intensification of Danish raids ratcheted up the pressure on the Old English kingdom. Demands for money, armed men, ships, and defences all increased, and the framework of royal governance developed during those decades was taken over subsequently by the Norman kings. It will be argued that 1066 was an important date for two principal reasons. Firstly was the arrival of an alien, French-speaking elite, and secondly was a different relationship between that aristocracy and the crown. Following from these changes was the gradual penetration by king, south-ern aristocracy, and church of England north of the Humber and Mersey in the twelfth century. In fact, in terms of the greater integration of the realm, a further acceleration of developments in law and finance, the emergence of London as a capital city, and the great boom in stone building, this book needs to continue to the death of Henry II in 1189. There is of course an argument for treating the reigns of all the Angevin kings together, and ending this book in 1215, but the counterargument is that the financial demands of Richard and John, coupled with rising price inflation and John's political methods, imposed a greater degree of pres-sure and discontent than experienced under Henry II. However, change was not a story of linear progression towards a medieval state on Weberian lines with central institutions run by a bureaucracy, which claimed a monopoly of the legitimate use of force, and a prior claim on the loyalty of its inhabitants.[12] Rather, cross-currents, compromises, and

[12] M. Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich, I (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1978), p. 56.

constraints shaped and restricted developments. The remainder of this
chapter considers definitions of power and contemporary sources, and the
main themes of this book are introduced.

For much of the time England's fate was tied into events in Scandinavia
and northern France. The conquests differed in terms of the origins and
numbers of the invaders and therefore in their long-term consequences.
The earlier conquest was the culmination of years of raids and, latterly, of
large-scale expeditions. Consequences included casualties and infighting
in aristocratic families, destruction and pillaging of churches for treasure,
and pressure on royal resources to raise men and ships, to renew defences,
and to fund tributes. How far the rule of King Cnut and his two sons
disrupted English society is not clear. At the apex of English society there
were changes, but not the same degree of upheaval that followed 1066.[13]
The restoration of peace and the potential strengthening of trading links
across the North Sea probably brought a renewal of economic growth.[14]
Cnut's empire may not have been bad news in the Danelaw towns.
The Norman takeover followed only one invading expedition in 1066,
and the widespread building of fortifications in the countryside as well as
the towns made it more difficult to oust the newcomers. The newcomers
soon dominated the upper levels of the church and of civil society, with
far-reaching consequences for language and culture.

Power in this world was vested in men, whether kings, warriors, or
churchmen. Patriarchy was enduring, and in certain areas became more
pervasive, in the stronger exclusion of women from the ruling hierarchy of
the church and from those opportunities for advanced education at cathe-
dral schools which offered the means of social advancement for young
men. There are signs apparently pointing in the other direction. Individual
high-status women were able to exercise real power, and by the twelfth
century there were more opportunities for women as well as men to enter
the religious life. Yet both of these were not necessarily signs that social
change was favouring women. Opportunity to exercise power depended
very much on circumstances and on personality, and could be shut down
speedily, as happened to Queen Emma in 1043 and Eleanor of Aquitaine
in 1174. Greater opportunity to enter the religious life might reflect, in an

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[13] See M. K. Lawson, *Cnut: the Danes in England in the Eleventh Century* (Harlow:
Longman, 1993); A. Rumble (ed.), *The Reign of Cnut. King of England, Denmark and
Norway* (London, New York: Leicester University Press, 1994).

[14] For the wealth of England on the eve of the Conquest, see P. H. Sawyer, *The Wealth of
Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 28–9.

age of rising population, that daughters had greater freedom to pursue a religious vocation, but the foundation of nunneries could also be taken as reflecting concerns that religious women be cloistered. The veneration of female saints of the past like Etheldreda of Ely or Edith of Wilton, it could be argued, was fuelled by the agenda of the (male) communities where their relics were housed. The ever rising cult of the Virgin likewise reflected her perceived importance in religious practice and ritual, especially in the monasteries, and with her role as an intercessor for the sins of mankind, not that she had been in any sense representative of female power.

This was an era when the use of documents as instruments of authority vastly expanded, encouraging some historians to write of the 'rise of bureaucracy'.[15] However, documents did not replace older channels for the transmission of power, ritual, and display: they augmented them. Many documents resulted from developments in law, justice, and taxation. Up to a point these developed in tandem in royal and ecclesiastical government. From the perspective of coercive power, kings worked with the aristocracy, the warrior class, which either directly or indirectly provided the muscle and the men to fight wars, and through whose cooperation money could be raised. Success depended on consensus, and this depended on what has been described as assembly politics. Who was summoned, when, and how consent was achieved all evolved. The important point is that by the late twelfth century the exercise of power by Henry II depended on having the elite on board. The limits as well as the potential of royal authority have to be recognized.

The exercise of power was in certain senses a form of theatre. The setting of ritual and ceremony, whether the king's court or a great church, contributed to and was part of the message. One very striking development was the increasing grandeur of that setting. In the eleventh century more churches were being built in stone and, after 1066, on a vast scale and, it would seem, with an eye on the competition. Experimentation and ambition were the order of the day. In terms of style this was the period of a transition from Romanesque to Gothic. Residential accommodation for the great included great halls for feasting and assemblies.

At the apex of earthly society was the king, sanctified and crowned by the rites of the church. He was at the centre of a spider's web of agents and, increasingly, of agencies. A history of royal power is thus centre-outwards,

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[15] For discussion, see M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 19, 69–70, 329.

as well as top-down, of effective kings subordinating and integrating the provinces into the kingdom, although on the furthest periphery royal authority was necessarily attenuated. A core-periphery approach is too simplistic: the boundaries of the kingdom in the north shifted over time. Internally the kingdom was not unified, but a congerie of earlier kingdoms and regions. Historians of later periods have dabbled with the idea of regions, usually in the end to downplay their importance, but in these centuries England remained a patchwork of regions and jurisdictions.

For most people, the most important social bonds were immediate: family and neighbourhood, lords and men, membership of gilds. Their lateral and vertical aspects shifted over time and according to circumstance. In landed families the strengthening of lineage gave preference to eldest sons. The church's emphasis on the sacramental character of marriage led ultimately to the downgrading of other relationships and their offspring. Lordship became increasingly tied to the position of specific estates, often carved out of larger territories, and relationships between lords and peasants evolved. Increasingly peasants were tied to lords, sometimes as free men, otherwise more heavily burdened by labour service. Peasants who cultivated shares in the common fields of a manor, *villani*, were legally tied to the manor and the lord's jurisdiction. Those who were personally unfree were styled serfs, *servi*, the same word used for slaves, but by the twelfth century the practice of buying and selling slaves was dying out.

The pre-eminence of land as the source of wealth and prestige has in some respects led to an underestimate of the social importance of towns and cities as nodes of power. The fortifications newly built or reinforced in the south and in English Mercia provided defended centres for commerce and trade, and places where moneyers could supply the silver coinage. Towns and cities were communities, which included bishops and chapters, monastic houses and hospitals, lay lords and townsmen. They provided a different kind of theatre of power. Physically dominated by new churches and castles, the landscape of towns was transformed by the twelfth century. Towns do not in themselves seem to have acted as a political entity, with the notable exception of London. By far the largest and wealthiest of English cities, London was protected by its walls, able to raise its own militia, and to organize its own affairs. By the end of our period it had developed into a capital city.

This book aims to offer a different perspective on two centuries by focussing on the powerful, on the collaboration between kings, lords, and churchmen, on changes in the way power was exercised with increasing

use of courts and documents, on buildings as the visible expression of
power, and on the rise of London as a capital city.

POWER TO DO WHAT?

The first issue to be addressed is that of the definition of power. As Steven
Lukes wrote, discussions of power rest on hidden assumptions and leave
important questions unanswered.[16] Are we to concentrate on the nature
of its intended effects, or to include only the actual? Power over other
human beings? Power of individuals or of the state? Power in the Middle
Ages obviously differed in many ways from that in modern society:
individuals had fewer material resources at hand, and could directly affect
fewer people. Relatively little is heard about crowd violence. On the other
hand, power exercised by God and His saints was an ever-present possi-
bility: the veil separating the physical world from the heavenly cosmos
was permeable.

In sketching out the principal characteristics of power in English
society between the tenth and twelfth centuries, it is useful therefore to
think in terms of function and method, or power to do what, to whom,
and by what means? Here the headings are power to compel obedience
and ideological and economic power.[17] Power to compel obedience
includes physical force either demonstrated or implied, charisma, and
tradition. Tradition leads on to a second theme, the power of ideas,
especially hierarchy, patriarchy, and gender. Economic power is wealth,
mainly in the form of land, crucial to which was lordship, and commerce.

Theoretical discussions about power in historical contexts bring us
directly to the concept of the state. Some historians have been ready to
use the term in the context of late Anglo-Saxon England, whilst others
have argued that the term is unhelpful, not least because it was not
employed at the time.[18] It is one of the arguments of this book that

[16] S. Lukes, 'Introduction', *Power*, ed. S. Lukes (New York: New York University Press,
1986), pp. 1–18.

[17] Cf. Michael Mann's four categories: ideological, military, economic, and political, in
The Sources of Social Power, 4 vols., I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

[18] Patrick Wormald and James Campbell have been the chief proponents of the idea of an
Anglo-Saxon state. For the former's views, see 'Germanic Power Structures: the Early
English Experience', L. Scales and O. Zimmer (eds.), *Power and the Nation in European
History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 105–24. J. Campbell,
The Anglo-Saxon State, especially 'Introduction', 'The Late Anglo-Saxon State:
a Maximum View', and 'The United Kingdom of England: the Anglo-Saxon
Achievement'. For a more sceptical view, see R. R. Davies, 'The Medieval State: the

whether or not there was a state in England at the start of our period, in some respects it had become more like a state by the end, if nothing like a nineteenth- or twentieth-century nation-state.

In its most immediate sense, power is coercive, being able to compel someone else by the threat or use of force to obedience and conformity on pain of punishment or death, and to provide labour and payment. Through force or the fear of force people may be enslaved or imprisoned, held to ransom, mutilated, raped, or killed. They may be compelled to provide service or to give money. Violence was not confined to specific social groups, but the mobilization of armed bands, the hiring of professional soldiers, and the building of fortifications was the purview of the social elite. The rationale of the noble class was that they were the warriors. Kings and princes were expected to be warriors, too, and they summoned men to their armies, both on the basis of personal loyalties and in respect of their land. Yet the king did not, could not, exercise a monopoly over the legitimate use of violence. Noble warfare has often had a bad press, but we hear little about how it was justified to contemporaries.

Arms were held widely – indeed, it would have been foolish to go about unarmed – and men expected to avenge wrongs done to them. Often redress took the form of self-help. Kings and lords could not eradicate violent disputes, though they could exert pressure for negotiated settlements. Deaths and injuries not compensated for could lead to feuds, which by the tenth century kings were seeking to regulate. Many forms of homicide remained emendable, though aggravated homicide was another matter.[19]

Self-help was often in fact the most realistic option for securing redress of wrongs: court actions, even if the wronged man had access to court, were lengthy and unlikely to produce a decisive solution. The king had responsibility for dealing with a narrow range of serious offences such as murder and rape, offences against his person, property, and royal rights. Punishments for serious offences were usually death or mutilation, often

Tyranny of a Concept?', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 16 (2003), 280–300, and for a rejoinder, S. Reynolds, 'There Were States in Medieval Europe: a Response to Rees Davies', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 16 (2003), 550–5; S. Foot, 'The Historiography of the Anglo-Saxon Nation-State' (ed. Scales and Zimmer), *Power and the Nation*, pp. 125–42. For a recent review, see G. Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 232–3.

[19] J. Hudson, *The Oxford History of the Laws of England*. II, *871–1216* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 178–9, 183–4, 409–10, 722–5.