The aristocracy of Norman England

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Introduction

The introduction of a new aristocracy was one of the most decisive changes arising from the Norman Conquest. Land was transferred on a massive scale to the newcomers, French became the language of the elite, and castles were built which, at the time both instrument and symbol of domination, are enduring reminders in today's landscape. It is also a popular, if usually mistaken, belief, that the ancestors of many English aristocratic families 'came over with the Conqueror'. Despite a plethora of works on the Conquest period, studies of individual families such as the Lacys or the Mowbrays, of particular periods, such as the reign of Henry I or Stephen, and of particular themes, such as the image of aristocracy, there is no single work devoted to the aristocracy of Norman England between 1066 and 1166.[1]

This perhaps surprising omission is partly to be explained by the selective preoccupations of historians during the past century. Much attention has been devoted, for instance, to a debate about feudalism. In this respect an agenda was set more than a century ago by J. H. Round, who argued that the Normans introduced a novel form of military tenure into England. The hypothesis was further developed by F. M. Stenton, whose influential Ford Lectures given in 1929, *The First Century of English Feudalism*, had as their focus feudal lordship, articulated through the lordships or honours of the great men.[2] Much ink has been spilt since over feudalism and military obligation in often arid debates about semantics.[3] In the process, however, much has been learned about the recruitment of

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[1] W. E. Wightman, *The Lacy Family in England and Normandy 1066–1194* (Oxford, 1966); *Charters of the Honour of Mowbray 1107–1191*, ed. D. E. Greenway (hereafter *Mowbray Charters*), British Academy Records of Social and Economic History, New Series, I (London, 1972); C. A. Newman, *The Anglo-Norman Nobility in the Reign of Henry I. The Second Generation* (Philadelphia, 1988); D. Crouch, *The Image of Aristocracy in Britain 1000–1300* (London, 1992).

[2] J. H. Round, 'The Introduction of Knight Service into England', *English Historical Review*, 6 (1891), 417–23, 625–45; 7 (1892), 11–24, reprinted in *Feudal England*, reset edn (London, 1964), pp. 182–245; for a bibliography of Round's voluminous output see *Family Origins and Other Studies*, ed. W. Page (London, 1930), pp. xlix–lxxiv; F. M. Stenton, *The First Century of English Feudalism*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1961).

[3] S. Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals* (Oxford, 1994), chapter 8 provides a lively recent introduction to the debate.

armies both before and after the Conquest. Among more recent contributors, Richard Abels has provided a realistic reconstruction of military obligation and has dealt with the knotty problem of how obligation assessed on land matched up to the need for professional warriors and armies.[4] One of the key points of Round's argument, that of the novelty of the Conqueror's quotas of military service, has been subjected to searching reevaluation by John Gillingham and Sir James Holt.[5] More is also understood about lordship in Normandy and the surrounding regions in the eleventh century, and any idea that the Conqueror brought with him to England feudalism of the kind found in twelfth-century England is untenable.[6] Similarly the belief that enfeoffment on great honours was undertaken primarily with a view to fulfilling the requirement of a royal quota of knight service has been reassessed by Richard Mortimer.[7]

There has been a good deal of research, too, into the structure and history of the great lordships. One invaluable work on the period is *English Baronies* by I. J. Sanders, which aimed to identify all the major lordships, and successive holders of them, between 1086 and 1327.[8] William Farrer had earlier inaugurated a series of *Early Yorkshire Charters*, continued by Sir Charles Clay, and this has provided a collection of charters with accompanying discussions of the families concerned, as yet unmatched for any other county.[9] In *Honors and Knights' Fees* Farrer also traced the descent of the constituent parts of several major lordships and, in *Feudal Cambridgeshire*, the descent of fees in a single county.[10] In this context the

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[4] R. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1988).

[5] J. Gillingham, 'The Introduction of Knight Service into England', *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies*, 4 (1981), 53–64; J. C. Holt, 'The Introduction of Knight Service into England', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 6 (1983), 89–106.

[6] D. Bates, *Normandy before 1066* (London, 1982), pp. 99–128; E. Z. Tabuteau, 'Definitions of Feudal Military Obligations in Eleventh-Century Normandy', in *On the Laws and Customs of England. Essays in Honour of S. E. Thorne*, ed. M. S. Arnold, T. A. Green, S. A. Scully, and S. D. White (Chapel Hill, 1981), 18–59; E. Z. Tabuteau, *Transfers of Property in Eleventh Century Norman Law* (Chapel Hill and London, 1988).

[7] R. Mortimer, 'Land and Service: the Tenants of the Honour of Clare', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 8 (1985), 177–98.   [8] I. J. Sanders, *Feudal Baronies* (Oxford, 1960).

[9] *Early Yorkshire Charters*, I–III, ed. W. Farrer (Edinburgh, 1914–16); IV–XII, ed. C. T. Clay, Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series, Extra Series, I–III, V–X, 1935–65. Extra Series vol. IV is Index to first three vols., C. T. Clay and E. M. Clay (eds.), 1942.

[10] W. Farrer, *Honors and Knights' Fees*, 3 vols. (London and Manchester, 1923–5); and *Feudal Cambridgeshire* (Cambridge, 1920).

work of Stenton and, later, that of D. C. Douglas in publishing charters
and texts dealing with the period, must not be forgotten.[11]

Land law and inheritance have also been much discussed. Inspired by
Stenton's view that the great honours of Norman England were
autonomous, S. F. C. Milsom showed how these could have worked as self-
regulating units of jurisdiction. He argued that Henry II's new legal pro-
cedures were not intended to undermine honorial justice, only to make it
work more effectively, even if the consequences proved to be more far-
reaching than was anticipated.[12] He also argued that the right to, as
opposed to the expectation of, hereditary succession to land held by
knight service took root only slowly. There has been a lively debate on the
issue of inheritance, as clearly there was a gradual shift from practice to
enforceable rights, and recent writing has tended to emphasize the
strength rather than the insecurity of hereditary succession.[13]

The political history of Norman England and thus of its ruling elite has
been the subject of a good deal of writing. The motives and identity of
those who supported Rufus and Henry I as opposed to those who sup-
ported their elder brother Robert has been analysed, as has the manner in
which Henry consolidated his hold in England after 1106.[14] Most of all,
however, there has been sustained investigation of the complicated poli-
tics of King Stephen's reign, when the increasing volume of surviving
charters makes it possible to reconstruct aims and alliances in greater
detail than before. Round again was a pioneer here with *Geoffrey de
Mandeville* (London, 1892), but his attempt to use the career of a single pro-

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[11] Stenton's work on texts included *Documents Illustrative of the Social and Economic History of the Danelaw*
(London, 1920); *Gilbertine Charters: Transcripts of Charters relating to the Gilbertine Houses of Sixle, Ormsby,
Catley, Bullington and Alvingham*, Lincoln Record Society, xviii (1922); *Free Peasants of the Northern
Danelaw*; see also *William the Conqueror and the Rule of the Normans* (London, 1908); for Douglas see espe-
cially *Feudal Documents from the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds* (London, 1932); Douglas, *The Domesday
Monachorum of Christ Church, Canterbury* (London, 1944).

[12] S. F. C. Milsom, *The Legal Framework of English Feudalism* (Cambridge, 1976).

[13] J. C. Holt, 'Politics and Property in Early Medieval England', *Past and Present*, 57 (1972), 3–52; 'Feudal
Society and the Family in Early Medieval England', Presidential addresses to the Royal Historical
Society, i, 'The Revolution of 1066', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 32 (1982),
193–212; ii, 'Notions of Patrimony', *ibid.*, 33 (1983), 193–220; iii, 'Notions of Patrimony', *ibid.*, 34 (1984),
1–25; iv, 'The Heiress and the Alien', *ibid.*, 35 (1985), 1–28; J. Hudson, *Land, Law, and Lordship in Norman
England* (Oxford, 1994).

[14] C. Warren Hollister, 'Magnates and "Curiales" in Early Norman England', 'The Anglo-Norman Civil
War: 1101', 'Henry I and the Anglo-Norman Magnates', reprinted in *Monarchy, Magnates and Institutions
in the Anglo-Norman World* (London, 1986).

tagonist as an exemplar of 'feudal anarchy' has not stood the test of time (see below, pp. 291–2).

Other aspects of the aristocracy's history, however, have been relatively little studied, especially kinship and the family. It is true that the study of genealogy has proved attractive – Round, for instance, revelled in the fine detail of genealogical descents, and the role of family in relation to feudalism has been discussed. An early contribution was made by Sidney Painter, in a paper called 'The Family and the Feudal System'.[15] Then in a series of presidential addresses to the Royal Historical Society between 1982 and 1985, Sir James Holt took the theme of feudal society and the family much further, and discussed points of comparison between Norman England and the continent.[16] He suggested that the Norman aristocracy was organizing itself into lineages even before 1066, and that the Normans were already accustomed to the idea of handing on the patrimonial inheritance to one son, while permitting more latitude over the disposition of acquired lands; and he drew attention to the role of heiresses. Prosopographical research, such as that by K. S. B Keats-Rohan, has also highlighted the importance of kinship networks, and her studies are adding to our knowledge of the continental origins of families which settled in England.[17] There is as yet, however, no broadly conceived study of aristocratic kinship and family for the whole Norman period.[18]

Kinship and lineage in contrast have been a major concern of historians of continental aristocracies, and one of the motives for writing this book was an attempt to provide a survey of Norman England to set alongside work on the aristocracies of continental Europe.[19] One problem for histo-

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[15] 'The Family and the Feudal System in Twelfth-Century England', *Speculum*, 35 (1960), 1–16; reprinted in *Feudalism and Liberty*, ed. F. A. Cazel (Baltimore, 1961), pp. 195–219.

[16] Holt, 'Feudal Society and the Family in Early Medieval England'.

[17] K. S. B. Keats-Rohan, 'The Prosopography of Post-Conquest England', *Medieval Prosopography*, 14 (1993), 1–50; K. S. B. Keats-Rohan and D. E. Thornton, 'COEL (the Continental Origins of English Landholders) and the Computer: towards a Prosopographical Key to Anglo-Norman documents, 1066–1166', *Medieval Prosopography*, 17 (1996), 223–62. The standard work on continental places of origin is L. C. Loyd, *The Origins of Some Anglo-Norman Families*, ed. C. T. Clay and D. C. Douglas, Harleian Society, CIII (Leeds, 1951).

[18] For the reign of Henry I see, however, Newman, *Anglo-Norman Nobility*, chapter 2.

[19] It is possible to give only a brief indication of a massive bibliography on this subject. On Germany key figures were G. Tellenbach, *Königtum und Stämme in der Werdezeit des Deutschen Reiches* (Weimar, 1939); Tellenbach, 'Vom Karolingischen Reichsadel zum Deutschen Reichsfürstenstand', *Adel und Bauern im Deutschen Staat des Mittelalters*, ed. Theodor Mayer (Leipzig, 1943) (translated in *The Medieval Nobility: Studies on the Ruling Classes of France and Germany from the Sixth to the Twelfth Century*, ed. T. Reuter

rians of continental aristocracies is how far noble families of the central middle ages were descended from those of the Carolingian era. Another is the timing of the reorganization of noble families into lineages associated with specific lordships and castles. Then there is the role of knights, their relationship with, and particularly their assimilation into, established noble families.[20] The chronological framework for historians of continental aristocracies is, of course, different, in that there is no climactic year of

(Amsterdam, 1978), pp. 39–49; this collection of essays remains an indispensable introduction to the subject); K. F. Werner, 'Bedeutende Adelsfamilien im Reich Karls des Grossen', *Karl der Grosse: Lebenswerk und Nachleben*, ed. H. Beumann, 4 vols. (Düsseldorf, 1965), I, 83–142, translated in *The Medieval Nobility* (ed. Reuter); K. Schmid, 'Zur Problematik von Familie, Sippe und Geschlecht, Haus und Dynastie beim Mittelalterlichen Adel', *Zeitung für die Geschichte des Oberrheins*, 105 (1957), 1–62; Schmid, 'Uber die Struktur des Adels im früheren Mittelalter', *Jahrbuch für fränkische Landesforschung*, 19 (1959), 1–23 (translated in *The Medieval Nobility*, ed. Reuter); and K. Leyser, 'The German Aristocracy from the Ninth to the Early Twelfth Century', *Past and Present*, 41 (1968) reprinted in *Medieval Germany and Its Neighbours, 900–1250* (London, 1982), pp. 161–89; see also J. B. Freed, 'Reflections on the Medieval German Nobility', *American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), 553–75. On France a study which broke new ground was P. Guilhermoz, *Essai sur l'origine de la noblesse en France au moyen age* (Paris, 1902); see also G. Duby, *La société au XIe et XIIe siècles dans la région mâconnaise* (Paris, 1953); Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*; R. Fossier, *La terre et les hommes en Picardie jusqu'au milieu du XIIIe siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1968); O. Guillot, *Le comté d'Anjou et son entourage au XIe siècle* (Paris, 1972); G. Devailly, *Le Berry du Xe siècle au milieu du XIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1973); P. Bonassie, *La Catalogne, du milieu du Xe au fin du XIe siècle* (Paris, 1975); M. Bur, *La formation du comté de Champagne v. 950– v. 1150* (Nancy, 1977); J.-P. Poly, *La Provence et la société féodale (879–1166)* (Paris, 1976); M. Parisse, *Noblesse et chevalerie en Lorraine médiévale* (Nancy, 1982); A. Debord, *La société laïque dans les pays de la Charente Xe–XIe siècles* (Paris, 1984); D. Barthélemy, *Les deux âges de la seigneurie banale. Coucy (XIe–XIIIe siècles)* (Paris, 1984); Barthélemy, *La société dans le comté de Vendôme, de l'an mil au XIVe siècle* (Paris, 1993); L. Génicot, *L'économie namuroise au bas moyen age*. II. *Les hommes, la noblesse* (Louvain, 1960); E. Warlop, *The Flemish Nobility before 1300*, 4 vols. (Kortrijk, 1975–6); for surveys which take account of much of this writing, R. Fossier, *Enfance de l'Europe Xe–XIIe siècles*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1982); J.-P. Poly and E. Bournazel, *La mutation féodale, Xe–XIIe siècles*, translated by C. Higgitt with the title *The Feudal Transformation 900–1200* (New York and London, 1991); J. Martindale, 'The French Aristocracy in the Early Middle Ages: a Reappraisal', *Past and Present*, 75 (1977), 5–45; C. B. Bouchard, 'The Origins of the French Nobility: a Reassessment', *American Historical Review*, 86 (1981), 501–32; Bouchard, 'Family Structure and Family Consciousness among the Aristocracy in the Ninth to Eleventh centuries', *Francia*, 14 (1987), 39–58; for a critique of the view that there was a social revolution see D. Barthélemy, 'La mutation féodale a-t-elle eu lieu?', *Annales*, 47 (1992), 767–75; for a valuable review see T. N. Bisson, 'Nobility and Family in Medieval France: a Review Essay', *French Historical Studies*, 16 (1990), 597–613; for a further important contribution to the debate see Bisson, 'The "Feudal Revolution"', *Past and Present*, 142 (1994), 6–42.

20 In addition to the works cited in the previous note, see also D. Barthélemy, 'Qu'est-ce que la chevalerie, en France aux Xe et XI siècles?', *Revue historique*, 290 (1993), 15–74; Barthélemy, 'Castles, Barons and Vavassors in the Vendômois and Neighboring Regions in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', *Cultures of Power, Lordship, Status, and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. T. N. Bisson (Philadelphia, 1995), pp. 56–68; and for a recent review of the subject see T. Evergates, 'Nobles and Knights in Twelfth-Century France', in the same volume; B. Arnold, *German Knighthood 1050–1300* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 69–75; B. Arnold, *Princes and Territories in Medieval Germany* (Cambridge, 1991); see also works cited below, p. 329n.

1066 to take into account, and the approach adopted has also been
regional. Here one thinks of Duby's seminal work on the Mâconnais
which prompted a whole series of studies of other French regions.[21]

Yet the studies of French regions provide valuable comparisons, not
only between England and France, but also between Normandy and the
surrounding regions, as David Bates pointed out in 1982. We need to
understand fully the nature of the society from which the conquerors
came in order to comprehend their success in England and their impact
on social development. Were there special characteristics of Norman
society which help to explain their success, as they themselves believed,
and if so, what were those characteristics?[22] It used to be thought both
that the aristocracy of early eleventh-century Normandy was 'new', in the
sense that noble lineages can rarely be traced further back than the mil-
lennium, and that that society was permeated by feudalism and thus was
especially well organized. However, David Bates in particular has drawn
attention to similarities between the society of ducal Normandy and that
of surrounding regions.[23]

Another relatively neglected topic is that of aristocratic women in
Norman England. There are two recent studies of female religious, but rel-
atively little hitherto has been written about the provision of land for
women as wives, widows, and heiresses which makes full use of charter
material.[24] Secondly, although much has been written about various
aspects of the church in the Norman period, less has been said about the
lay aristocracy's role overall as benefactors, despite the wealth of charter
material.[25]

Moreover, additional collections of charters of individual magnate fam-
ilies have been published at intervals from the 1970s, and there is a case
for attempting a broader survey which can identify common themes and
experiences. Collections of the charters of the Mowbrays, the earls of

[21] See above, note 19.

[22] See especially R. H. C. Davis, *The Normans and their Myth* (London, 1976); and for a modern view of the
Normans which stresses their special characteristics see R. Allen Brown, *The Normans*, 2nd edn
(Woodbridge, 1994).

[23] D. C. Douglas, *William the Conqueror* (London, 1964), pp. 83–104; Bates, *Normandy before 1066*, pp.
238–48.

[24] S. K. Elkins, *Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England* (Chapel Hill, 1988); S. Thompson, *Women Religious*
(Oxford, 1991).

[25] See however J. Burton, *Monastic and Religious Orders in Britain, 1000–1300* (Cambridge, 1994) which does
look at benefactors.

Gloucester, and the Redvers have been published, and there are as yet unpublished theses on the Mandevilles, the Bigods, the Gants, the Ferrers, and on the family of Montgomery-Bellême.[26] Other scholars have produced studies of individual families based on charters, notably Wightman on the Lacy family, Crouch on the Beaumont twins, and English on the lords of Holderness, while Stringer's *Earl David of Huntingdon 1152–1219*, though its subject is somewhat late for this book, provides valuable insights into the different context in which aristocratic lordship operated by the later twelfth century.[27]

In sum, therefore, whole areas of the subject either have been neglected, or have been discussed only in the context of individual families, or for part of the period, not for the century as a whole. Yet the materials for writing the history of the aristocracy of Norman England are plentiful and, in one respect, the evidence of Domesday Book, unique. In Domesday Book we have a snapshot of the ruling elite at a particular moment in time, with an abundance of detail about their rural estates as yet still imperfectly analysed. In addition there are royal and private charters, narrative sources, the records of royal government, statements of law and custom, and the material remains of castles. In the remainder of this introduction a little more will be said by preliminary about the definition of aristocracy adopted, the timescale chosen, and the principal themes discussed.

The title of this book, the 'aristocracy' of Norman England, rather than the nobility, or the baronage, was chosen to reflect the particular combination of birth, wealth, and power found in England after 1066 which other terms fail to convey. Aristocracy was not a term which contemporaries would have used. Chroniclers writing in the period tended to

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[26] *Mowbray Charters; Earldom of Gloucester Charters*, ed. R. B. Patterson (Oxford, 1973); *Charters of the Redvers Family and the Earldom of Devon 1090–1217*, ed. R. Bearman, Devon and Cornwall Record Society, new series, xxxvii (1994); A. Charlton, 'A Study of the Mandeville Family and its Estates', University of Reading PhD thesis, 1977; S. A. J. Atkin, 'The Bigod Family: an Investigation into their Lands and Activities, 1066–1306', Reading University PhD thesis, 1979; M. Abbott, 'The Gant Family in England, 1066–1191', Cambridge University PhD thesis 1973; P. E. Golob, 'The Ferrers Earls of Derby: A Study of the Honour of Tutbury', Cambridge University PhD thesis 1985; K. Thompson, 'The Cross-Channel Estates of the Montgomery-Bellême Family, c. 1050–1112', University of Wales MA thesis, 1983.

[27] Wightman, *Lacy Family*; D. Crouch, *The Beaumont Twins*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 4th series, 1 (Cambridge, 1986); B. English, *The Lords of Holderness 1086–1260* (Oxford, 1979); K. J. Stringer, *Earl David of Huntingdon 1152–1219* (Edinburgh, 1985).

call leading magnates *nobiles, proceres,* or *optimates.* They did not use these
terms in any precise legalistic sense, but as descriptions of men from
leading families. Orderic Vitalis, who of all chroniclers has most to say
about the aristocracy of Normandy and of England, uses the term *nobilis* of
the Grandmesnil family, of the Tosnys, the lords of Maule, and so on.[28]
Like other chroniclers, Orderic uses the term to convey distinction, some-
times as a personal quality, but often in the context of illustrious ancestry.
Although there is some doubt as to how 'old' the aristocracy of Normandy
was in the early eleventh century, clearly the greatest and most illustrious
families were deemed to be noble.

'Noble' is a term, however, that could have been applied to the upper
ranks only of those who form the subject of this book, because the con-
quest of England gave new opportunities for men of relatively undis-
tinguished origins to acquire great wealth. The term noble was
appropriate for men who were counts or sons of counts, but how appropri-
ate was it for men whose fortunes had been transformed by the Conquest,
like Geoffrey de Mandeville, or Robert d'Oilly (for these men, see below,
pp. 37, 95)? For those with ability and luck, membership of a colonizing
elite obviously threw up opportunities for enrichment beyond their
wildest dreams, as Orderic himself commented: '[King William] made tri-
bunes and centurions from the lowest followers (*clientibus*) of the
Normans.'[29] One of the greatest success stories of the Conquest was that of
Roger Bigod (see below, pp. 84–5). A little can be discovered about his
origins: he came from a family with a certain amount of land in
Normandy, and may have owed his initial advancement to Odo bishop of
Bayeux. He was based in East Anglia, and benefited by being on the spot
during the redistribution of land that followed the revolt of Earl Ralph in
1075. By 1086 he was one of the greatest magnates in Norfolk, and in the
early twelfth century he was sheriff of both Norfolk and Suffolk. He
founded a priory at Thetford, and his son Hugh was later appointed to an
earldom. Even if his family had held more land in Normandy than we
know, clearly the Conquest had made him by modern standards a multi-
millionaire. What is hard to judge is how contemporaries viewed him.
Was he accepted as a social equal by others who had acquired much land
in England, particularly by those who were related to the ducal house of

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[28] OV, II, 74; III, 126, 178.   [29] OV, II, 260.

Normandy in some way, or by those whose ancestry was even more illustrious, perhaps as descendants of Charlemagne? We cannot assume, because Norman England was a melting pot of old and new, that social distinctions did not matter: they may indeed have mattered more.

The Conquest itself had thus elevated some men to unaccustomed wealth and power, and in a broader sense too there were growing opportunities for men to rise in the king's service, the powerful royal *ministri*, men 'raised from the dust' to use Orderic Vitalis's phrase.[30] These were the servants of burgeoning monarchical government, men from relatively humble backgrounds who as sheriffs and justices wielded great power and amassed great wealth. As agents of expanding princely governments they were a new phenomenon of the early twelfth century, and not unique to England. Comments were made not just about Henry I's new men, but also about the humble origins of those at the court of King Louis VI of France.[31] In Flanders there were tensions centring on the powerful but baseborn clan, the Erembalds, and these culminated in the murder of Count Charles the Good.[32] What was significant about Henry I's new men was not so much their origins, for these were often respectable if not distinguished: there is no indication that any were of unfree status like the *ministeriales* of Germany.[33] There is no indication that men like Geoffrey de Clinton or William de Pont de l'Arche (see below, pp. 262, 189–90) ever had a military role, and their rise was indicative of their indispensability as royal agents, administering the king's rights and collecting his revenues. The more successful new men were able to rise upwards, and undoubtedly they formed part of the ruling elite of England in the twelfth century.

Upward social mobility, through a career in royal government or by the pursuit of arms, conflicted at least in theory with the idea of an hereditary transmission of wealth and power. In practice, however, the upper

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[30] OV, VI, 16.

[31] E. Bournazel, *Le gouvernement capétien au XIIe siècle, 1108–1180* (Limoges, 1975), pp. 65–6.

[32] Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles the Good Count of Flanders*, trs. J. B. Ross, reprint (New York, 1967), pp. 96 ff.

[33] The classic work on the *ministeriales* was that by K. Bosl, *Die Reichsministerialität der Salier und Staufer: Ein Betrag zur Geschichte des Hochsmittelalterlichen Deutschen Volkes, Staates und Reiches*, Schriften der Monumenta Germaniae Historica (Stuttgart, 1950–1); but see also J. B. Freed, 'The Origins of the European Nobility: the Problem of the Ministerials', *Viator*, 7 (1976), 211–41; B. Arnold, 'Instruments of Power: The Profile and Profession of *Ministeriales* within German Aristocratic Society, 1050–1225', *Cultures of Power, Lordship, Status, and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. T. N. Bisson (Philadelphia, 1995), pp. 36–55.

echelons of society were less open to complete outsiders than the adverse comments of chroniclers might lead us to suppose. The ruling elite of Norman England established itself by force of arms, and the calibre of their equipment and training must have marked out the elite, those who had fought on horseback at Hastings, from those with more modest equipment. In practice it must have been exceedingly difficult for men not born into aristocratic families to acquire the necessary equipment and training. Yet if by the eleventh century all aristocrats were knights, were all knights aristocrats? In the Mâconnais region Duby found that whereas originally the two were distinct social groups, by about the year 1000 knights had been assimilated into the aristocracy. In other regions the process took longer, however, and in Normandy, the two categories were still perceptibly distinct in the time of Duke William.[34]

In England under William the Conqueror, while it can be assumed that the leading men were equipped and trained to fight on horseback, it is by no means clear that all knights simply by virtue of their skills and equipment were members of the social elite.[35] The word *miles* (strictly speaking the word for 'soldier') occurs not infrequently in Domesday Book, and significantly was applied there to men who held relatively small amounts of land.[36] The prestige of the heavily armed cavalryman was to carry all before him as compared with those who, though possessing horses, fought on foot, with axe and spear like the English at Hastings, or with those who were more modestly armed, about whom less is heard.[37]

[34] For a discussion of the literary evidence see T. Hunt, 'The Emergence of the Knight in France and England 1000–1200', *Knighthood in Medieval Literature*, ed. W. H. Jackson (Woodbridge, 1981), pp. 1–22; J. Flori, *L'essor de la chevalerie XIe–XIIe siècles* (Paris, 1986); for a recent review of the subject see T. Evergates, 'Nobles and Knights in Twelfth-Century France', *Cultures of Power* (ed. Bisson), pp. 11–35; Bates, *Normandy before 1066*, pp. 109–10.

[35] For a recent review of the origins and evolution of knighthood in England see P. R. Coss, *The Knight in Medieval England 1000–1400* (Stroud, 1993), chapter 2.

[36] S. Harvey, 'The Knight and the Knight's Fee in England', *Past and Present*, 49 (1970), 1–43; R. Allen Brown, 'The Status of the Norman Knight', *War and Government in the Middle Ages. Essays in Honour of J. O. Prestwich*, ed. J. Gillingham and J. C. Holt (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 18–32; D. Fleming, 'Landholding by *Milites* in Domesday Book: A Revision', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 13 (1991), 83–98; J. Scammell, 'The Formation of the English Social Structure: Freedom, Knights, and Gentry, 1066–1300', *Speculum*, 68 (1993), 591–618; J. Gillingham, 'Thegns and Knights in Eleventh-Century England: Who was then the Gentleman?', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 5 (1995), 129–53.

[37] Stenton, *First Century*, pp. 17–23. English warriors before the Conquest obviously had horses, but there have been different opinions as to whether they were used in battle. At Hastings the English were clearly fighting on foot, but it was not unknown in the Norman period (e.g. at Tinchebrai in 1106 and Lincoln in 1141) for knights to dismount and fight on foot. Equally it is not clear precisely when the

Techniques of fighting were adapted to circumstances: it might be the case, as at the battle of Tinchebrai, that knights dismounted and fought on foot.[38] Nevertheless an ability to fight on horseback using the technique of the couched lance, already visible in some of the figures depicted on the Bayeux Tapestry, was to remain the distinguishing characteristic of knights. To the techniques of warfare were married a way of life and values which associated knights with the aristocracy by the later twelfth century in England.[39]

A further cross-current in post-Conquest England was created by the survival of old social ranks: earls, king's thegns and lesser thegns. The old title of earl could be equated with that of count, and the same Latin word, *comes*, was often used for both, even if in practice the powers of the two were not identical. Earldoms had appeared in England in the early eleventh century and, although this was probably not Cnut's original intention, three great earldoms, Wessex, Mercia, and Northumbria, emerged. In Edward the Confessor's reign additional, smaller, earldoms were created, but they were dominated by Earl Godwin of Wessex and his sons.[40] In Normandy the title of *comes* was accorded only to a few men, usually closely tied to the ducal house.[41] After Hastings, Edwin and Morcar retained their earldoms, and King William granted the title, shorn of the great power enjoyed by Godwin and Harold, to a handful of others.[42] Rufus and Henry I added a few earls, with even less power. Only in Stephen's reign did the number of earls increase dramatically, and some of them made themselves in effect independent.

Below earls came those who held their lands directly from the crown. The more important came to be called the king's barons, whose status and

new technique of fighting with couched lances was adopted. Again, the Tapestry shows men using lances both as javelins and couched. For recent discussions see j. Flori, 'Encore l'usage de la lance . . . La technique du combat chevaleresque vers l'an 1100', *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale*, 31 (1988), 213–40; S. Morillo, *Warfare under the Anglo-Norman Kings 1066–1135* (Woodbridge, 1994).

[38] OV, VI, 86.

[39] For a useful survey of knighthood, and, more generally, of the trappings of aristocracy, see Crouch, *Image of Aristocracy*, chapters 4, 6, 7.

[40] For counts and earls, *ibid.*, chapter 1; M. K. Lawson, *Cnut. The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (London, 1993), pp. 184–9, where it is pointed out that Cnut probably did not set out to create three great earldoms.

[41] G. Garnett, '"Ducal" Succession in Early Normandy', *Law and Government in the Medieval England and Normandy*, ed. G. Garnett and J. Hudson (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 98–101.

[42] C. P. Lewis, 'The Early Earls of Norman England', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 13 (1991), 207–23, and see also below, p. 268.

authority were analogous with the king's thegns.[43] The word 'baron' had originally meant 'man'. In England, in the context of the king and his tenants-in-chief, it came to be confined to the major tenants-in-chief, whose lands descended impartibly.[44] Earls and barons in turn had their own barons, their major vassals as distinct from the wider group of those holding smaller amounts of land. The comparable rank in the landed hierarchy of pre-Conquest England was that of middling or median thegns, though the honorial barons appear to have been richer, often had jurisdictional privileges similar to those of king's barons, and their lands too usually descended impartibly. Honorial barons were self-evidently the more important tenants of a lordship, sometimes had castles of their own and, by the twelfth century, might well found religious houses (see below, p. 413).

The dividing line between the aristocracy and rest of society probably came somewhere in the social levels below the honorial barons, but it is not easy to pinpoint exactly where. Landless younger sons of leading families, and those who acquired a fair amount of land to hold by knight service, were doubtless regarded as falling inside, while those who held only small amounts of land by knight service, possibly discharged by cash payments, fell outside. In the later twelfth century knighthood began to emerge more clearly as a criterion of social status. Expanding opportunities in royal government gave knights important responsibilities in the shire as members of grand assize juries, custodians of the peace, and assessors of taxes. The obligations of knighthood were also becoming such that only men who were of substantial means could afford them. This development, however, seems to belong to the later twelfth century, and there is little to suggest that knighthood in itself betokened aristocratic status in the mid-twelfth century.[45]

The aristocracy thus encompassed men of widely different wealth and backgrounds. Honorial barons with substantial estates (sometimes on both sides of the Channel), French toponyms, castles, and their 'own' reli-

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[43] *Leges Henrici Primi*, ed. L. J. Downer (Oxford, 1972), 14, 2; D. Roffe, 'From Thegnage to Barony: Sake and Soke, Title and Tenants-in-Chief', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 12 (1990), 158–9.

[44] Sanders, *English Baronies*, pp. v–viii; Stenton, *First Century*, pp. 84–6.

[45] For a discussion of definitions in relation to Yorkshire in the later twelfth century see H. M. Thomas, *Vassals, Heiresses, Crusaders, and Thugs: the Gentry of Angevin Yorkshire, 1154–1216* (Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 7–12.

gious houses, probably had a lifestyle and political perspective not essen-
tially different from that of the great magnates.[46] Priorities and percep-
tions shifted as one proceeded further down the social hierarchy, and
away from the royal court. The likelihood is that lower down the hierarchy
there was English blood, and that attitudes towards England and the
English differed on this account: men and women who were half-English
were less likely to feel that England was a foreign country. Perhaps we
should also take into account that 'the English' was only one way of
describing the inhabitants of England. In certain regions the impact of
Danish settlement or the persistence of Northumbrian tradition may have
been a more immediate influence, certainly more immediate than that of
Normandy. Another variable was the strength and character of lordship:
can we assume that the kind of influence exercised by the king over his
tenants-in-chief was comparable with that which the latter exercised over
their men? In practice honorial barons who held land of two or more lords
may have enjoyed a substantial measure of *de facto* independence, espe-
cially in Stephen's reign, since their loyalties did not belong exclusively to
any one lord (see further below, p. 318).

   One criterion for aristocratic status not so far mentioned is that of lan-
guage: the new elite spoke a language different from that of the mass of
the population.[47] Language alone could clearly be a misleading indicator,
for the new lords had brought with them French-speaking servants, crafts-
men, and traders; nevertheless a knowledge of French conveyed a social
cachet. All the signs are that it continued to do so: it remained the lan-
guage spoken in the royal court, and in aristocratic households, and it was
the medium of a lively written literature. It did not penetrate far into
English society, though presumably the servants of the aristocracy had a
working knowledge of it. The few snippets of evidence which may be cited
to illustrate this point suggest that the ability of Englishmen to speak
French was regarded as surprising, and even miraculous.[48] A deaf and
dumb youth who gained the power of speech as a result of a miracle in

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[46] Crouch, *Beaumont Twins*, p. 115.
[47] M. Chibnall, *Anglo-Norman England 1066–1166* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 211–14 provides a brief survey; for
   the literary language see especially M. D. Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background* (Oxford,
   1971).
[48] R. M. Wilson, 'English and French in England, 1100–1300', *History*, 28 (1943), 37–60; I. Short, 'On
   Bilingualism in Anglo-Norman England', *Romance Philology*, 33 (1980), 467–79.