Government and Political Life in England and France, c.1300–c.1500

How did the kings of England and France govern their kingdoms? This volume, the product of a ten-year international project, brings together specialists in late medieval England and France to explore the multiple mechanisms by which monarchs exercised their power in the final centuries of the Middle Ages. Collaborative chapters, mostly co-written by experts on each kingdom, cover topics ranging from courts, military networks and public finance; office, justice and the men of the church; to political representation, petitioning, cultural conceptions of political society; and the role of those excluded from formal involvement in politics. The result is a richly detailed and innovative comparison of the nature of government and political life, seen from the point of view of how the king ruled his kingdom, but bringing to bear the methods of social, cultural and economic history to understand the underlying armature of royal power.

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Government and Political Life in England and France, c.1300–c.1500

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Preface

The research group France-Îles Britanniques was sponsored by the CNRS from 2000 to 2008. It harboured several projects, and organised and published a series of Franco-British conferences, such as those edited by Lachaud, Lescent-Gilles and Ruggiu; Chassaigne and Genet; Bates, Gazeau, Anceau, Lachaud and Ruggiu; and Genet and Ruggiu. The book we present today is the result of the work of a subgroup, convened by Jean-Philippe Genet, Malcolm Vale and John Watts, which met for the first time in September 2002 to discuss what was to become this project and then regularly met for four years, mostly in Oxford, usually at the Maison Française, and once at Fontevraud. From the beginning the aim of the project was to write a detailed comparative analysis of the ways in which France and England were governed in the later Middle Ages. For most chapters, two authors were selected, and they exchanged their views and their opinions during the meetings. We made the assumption that French and British specialists would deal with the history of their own country, since they had the command of both the sources and the historiography. Many drafts were exchanged between the authors until they could agree on a common text. By December 2007, most of the half-chapters had been sketched out, or even written. But at this point it became apparent that the task of fusing together these pieces into single chapters was much more formidable than had been expected, especially since we were attempting to finalise two interdependent versions, one in English, and one in French. By 2010, several chapters had been completed, but some others were far from being in publishable form. This is where Christopher Fletcher, hitherto author of one of the two single-authored chapters, stepped in, to help us in the editing process and to finalise the English text. Without him there would be no book at all.

In the course of these years, we have benefited from the help and the support of several institutions, and most conspicuously that of the Maison Française in Oxford, to which we owe a special gratitude, a gratitude which extends to its directors, Jean-Claude Sergeant and Jean-Yves Tadić. Gilbert Balavoine, Jacques Chevalier and the office of the
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Scientific Councillor of the French Embassy in London have also been most helpful. Several colleges in Oxford helped us in one way or another, especially St John's College, Corpus Christi College and Merton College. We would also like to thank the Centre Culturel de l'Ouest for its hospitality in Fontevraud, which was in many ways the high point of the enterprise, and Martin Aurell for introducing us to the Centre. But our greatest thanks must go to the authors, who remained committed to this time-consuming enterprise until the end, and to the translators, Christopher Fletcher and Nicole Genet.

Jean-Philippe Genet and John Watts, with Christopher Fletcher