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0521591317 - Henry I: King of England and Duke of Normandy  
Judith A. Green  
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## *Introduction: A surfeit of lampreys*

In late November 1135 Henry I, the youngest son of William the Conqueror, was staying at a hunting lodge at Lyons-la-Forêt in Normandy. At around sixty-eight years of age, he was still in sufficiently good health to be planning to go hunting on the following day when, contrary to his doctor's orders it was said, he dined on lampreys and became ill during the night.<sup>1</sup> Within a few short days he was dead, and the peace that had been a hallmark of his regime in Normandy and England was thrown into jeopardy. What kind of man had been able to assert his claim to the English throne over that of his eldest brother Robert, and subsequently had wrested from him their father's duchy of Normandy? He had been able to command support, fear and, ultimately, respect, in a world that was competitive and at times brutal. He himself had been involved in the summary death of a rebel in 1090, and had lived through the deaths of his first wife, brothers and sisters, and, above all, through the tragic deaths of his heir and two other children in the wreck of the White Ship in 1120. The world changed around him, in some ways permitting a greater degree of material comfort, in other respects posing new challenges, notably in the jurisdictional claims advanced by churchmen which forced him to defend traditional royal rights. A long and eventful life at the heart of this political world is of intrinsic interest, and it gains significance from Henry's achievements as king and as duke, in the fields of administration, law and justice, and also as the centre of a flourishing court culture. The central question with which this book is concerned is: what can be learned of the man behind his recorded actions and achievements?

The biographer of Henry I is not short of source material: the narrative writing is abundant, varied in perspective, and frequently of high quality. It may be supplemented by increasing numbers of documents issued in the king's name, and a record in the form of the earliest surviving pipe roll of

<sup>1</sup> HH, p. 490.

royal finance in 1130. Finally, many of the buildings Henry built or altered survive to the present day. Both the written sources and the buildings reveal most about his career and his actions, in other words his exterior life; and, as we shall see, those authors who do comment on his temperament and personality must be treated with extreme caution. The nature of the sources, and what may be deduced about character and personality, are therefore discussed here first.

The authors of the most important narrative sources which have most to say of an explicitly biographical nature about Henry present the greatest challenges, simply because the authors' agenda was very different from that of modern biographers.<sup>2</sup> They held views on the appropriate conduct for men to whom God had given great power. Their comments are worked into discourses about the nature of good and evil, and God's power to intervene in the affairs of men. The three most important in this context are William of Malmesbury, Orderic Vitalis and Henry of Huntingdon.

William of Malmesbury's *History of the Kings of the English* was initiated at the behest of Queen Matilda, Henry's first wife. It includes a memorable pen portrait of the king.<sup>3</sup> The *History* begins with the arrival of the Angles and Saxons in 449 AD. It continues in two books down to the Norman Conquest, and three further books are devoted to each of the three Norman kings. William describes Henry as of medium height, stocky (and fat in later life), and having hair that was dark and, until his hairline receded, flopped over his forehead; his dark eyes had a kindly expression. This description is very different from that of Rufus, with his 'window-pane' hairstyle – hair parted in the centre so that his forehead was bare – his ruddy complexion, eyes with flecks in them, and stammering speech.<sup>4</sup> William's pen portraits of William Rufus (book four) and Henry I (book five) in particular form a diptych, from which the reader is to draw a moral about the necessity as well as the virtue of self-discipline and moderation. Rufus had had the potential for self-discipline when guided by Archbishop Lanfranc, but this was lost after Lanfranc's death. The king then became extravagant and exploitative, pressing the church for money with which to pay his knights, until he died, unshriven and unrepentant. The author ended his portrait in the Suetonian manner by listing Rufus' public works. There was only one: the building of the great hall at Westminster, probably the largest of its kind in Europe.

<sup>2</sup> For a recent discussion see A. Cooper, "The Feet of Those that Bark Shall Be Cut Off": Timorous Historians and the Personality of Henry I, *ANS*, 23 (2000), 47–67.

<sup>3</sup> WM, *GRA*, i, 709–801.

<sup>4</sup> For an explanation of this hairstyle see F. Barlow, *William Rufus* (London, 1983), p. 99 and Barlow, 'William II (c. 1060–1100)', *Oxford DNB*.

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By contrast, in William of Malmesbury's account, Henry was responsible for building several religious houses, most notably Reading abbey. He had been given an education in the classics, and was thus equipped to handle the experiences life threw at him. He was severe to wrongdoers, generous to his friends, and above all consistent. Even Henry's sexual conduct, which the author could scarcely ignore, was fitted into this theme: the king did not waste his seed but used it for the procreation of children. William's portrait was thus a collection of *topoi*, a disquisition on the need for self-discipline, as well as the picture of an individual. It cleverly avoided praise or condemnation of Henry while writing either at the queen's behest, or, after her death, for another patron.

In Normandy the outstanding author was Orderic Vitalis, a monk of Saint-Evroult. Like William of Malmesbury, Orderic was of mixed French and English parentage. He had been born in Shropshire, was sent by his father at the age of ten to enter the Norman monastery of Saint-Evroult, and spent the rest of his life as a monk there. His first literary effort was an updating of what had become the classic account of the Normans' history, *The Deeds of the Dukes of the Normans*, itself a rewriting of an earlier history.<sup>5</sup> Inspired by this, he embarked on a much bigger project, an *Ecclesiastical History*, in which he sought to follow in the footsteps of historians of the early church. He was almost certainly present when Henry visited Saint-Evroult early in 1113,<sup>6</sup> and the king's interest in the abbey was doubtless one of the reasons why the abbot set Orderic to work on his *History*.

Orderic's avowed purpose was not to write a history of kings or of peoples but a history of Christians. It grew, as he himself explained, from his work on the history of his abbey which included material on 'the good or evil leaders of this wretched age', and his purpose was 'to speak truthfully about ecclesiastical affairs as a simple son of the church'. He was aware that his life as a monk restricted the scope of his narrative, but felt he could explain 'truthfully and straightforwardly' the things which he had seen in his own times.<sup>7</sup> Truth for such an author was more than an issue of strict accuracy and impartial reporting: truth had a moral dimension. For a monk the temporal splendours of kingship were evanescent, and would soon be swept aside by death; what really mattered was what followed – life everlasting.

Orderic is a brilliant narrator of events, particularly of the history of Normandy with which writers based in England were naturally less concerned. He believed that it took a strong ruler to keep the aggressive

<sup>5</sup> *GND*.      <sup>6</sup> As M. Chibnall pointed out: *OV*, i, 43n.      <sup>7</sup> *OV*, i, 130–2.

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characteristics of the Norman people in check. The Norman dukes had been strong until the time of Robert II (Curthose), who had failed in his task and had been found wanting by God. His youngest brother Henry had laid claim to their father's inheritance, and it had been adjudged to him in battle in 1106. He alone could provide peace for the Norman church and people, a peace which Orderic saw evaporating after 1135. Orderic's view was conditioned by personal experience of life in a community situated in the turbulent southern marches of the duchy, where Robert de Bellême, a vigorous and aggressive lord, was a feared neighbour of the monks. Henry destroyed the power of Robert de Bellême, and the protection he accorded the monks won Henry golden opinions. Orderic was notably unsympathetic towards the problems faced by Duke Robert, who did not have the English resources of his brothers on which to call for the maintenance of peace in Normandy, and he was deeply hostile towards those who disturbed the peace like Robert de Bellême.

Although naturally in favour of peace, Orderic nevertheless adopted an ambivalent tone when he came to review the personality and rule of Henry I. The king, he wrote, was a man of tremendous energy, and acquisitive in the pursuit of worldly wealth. He loved hunting, but claimed hunting rights for himself over all England. He was mean in granting hunting privileges to others; he even restricted hunting by his nobles in woods on their own lands, and he ordered the feet of dogs kept near the forests to be mutilated. He wanted to know everything about everyone, and knew so much about the affairs of his servants that he knew everything that was done secretly, hardly a heroic trait. Although Orderic's obituary of Henry was highly laudatory ('lover of peace' etc), this passage – the only one where he writes of the king's personality – is remarkable for both its content and tone.

It was Henry of Huntingdon, however, who wrote most damningly about Henry I; at least, he did until the accession of Henry FitzEmpress was in prospect, when he toned down the remarks he had made in the earliest version of his *History of the English*. In the first version of the beginning of book ten, 'On the present time', he wrote that Henry I had had three virtues: wisdom; military success in beating the king of the French; and riches, in which he far surpassed his predecessors. These qualities, which were in any case dependent on the participation of others, were counterbalanced by three vices: greed in his desire for tribute and taxes, in the pursuit of which he trapped the poor by use of informers; cruelty, in blinding his kinsman, the count of Mortain; and debauchery. Cruelty and debauchery

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unsurprisingly were removed from the later, toned-down version,<sup>8</sup> and the author added that in the dreadful time that followed Henry's death, whatever he had done, whether *tyrannice* or *regie* (in the manner of a tyrant or a king), seemed excellent. That the word *tyrannice* should have been used at all, shortly before or after the accession of Henry FitzEmpress, was striking.

Each of these authors wrote what might be called history with a capital 'H': their intention was to produce a more sophisticated work than a simple recital of events. They wrote within a framework of ideas about peoples and their rulers, about good kings and bad kings.<sup>9</sup> These drew on accounts of kings in the Old Testament, powerful, stern figures who meted out justice and punished evildoers, and on classical authors. William of Malmesbury's discussion of the Norman kings, for instance, was clearly influenced by Suetonius' *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*,<sup>10</sup> and he was also very impressed by the ideal of self-restraint. These authors conceived the purpose of historical writing as essentially didactic: history was meant chiefly to inspire good behaviour and to warn against evil. Old Testament examples and views about the purpose of history meant that their portrayal of kings was not, nor was it expected to be, rounded, in the sense of exploring their subjects' emotional or spiritual lives, unless these bore on their actions. Instead they tried to show their subjects as fitting into the image of what they thought kings ought to be and how they ought to behave.<sup>11</sup>

It is not always easy to see where authors are borrowing and adapting literary motifs. For instance William of Malmesbury provides details of Henry's menagerie of exotic animals housed at Woodstock. He lists some of them, including a porcupine, which he describes in a way that suggests he had seen it.<sup>12</sup> Henry may well have had a particular interest in the zoo, given that he chose to keep the animals and to house them at one of his favoured residences; but the gift of exotic animals to rulers, as a sign of their prestige, was far older: Charlemagne, for instance, received such gifts.<sup>13</sup> William of Malmesbury also tells us that Henry I snored. He may well have done,

<sup>8</sup> HH, pp. 698–700.

<sup>9</sup> In general see R. Morse, *Truth and Invention in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1991), chapter 3.

<sup>10</sup> For this author's ideas of kingship see J. G. Haahr, 'The Concept of Kingship in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum* and *Historia Novella*', *Medieval Studies*, 38 (1976), 351–71.

<sup>11</sup> J. Blacker, *The Faces of Time. Portrayal of the Past in Old French and Latin Historical Narrative of the Anglo-Norman Regnum* (Austin, Texas, 1994), chapter 2.

<sup>12</sup> WM, *GRA*, i, 740.

<sup>13</sup> Einhard and Notker the Stammerer, *Two Lives of Charlemagne*, translated L. Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 70.

but Karl Leyser has pointed out that this might have been a little joke against the idea that kings never rested.<sup>14</sup> One of the best-known anecdotes about Henry is about his death from eating lampreys, against the advice of his doctors. Henry of Huntingdon is one of the few contemporary or near-contemporary chroniclers who mentions the lampreys, but the detail, perhaps inserted to sustain the reader's interest, may have been accurate.<sup>15</sup> The anecdote could have come from the monks of Bec, because the old king's heart and entrails were removed from his body at Rouen and buried at Bec's priory of Notre-Dame-du-Pré.<sup>16</sup> Henry visited the abbey in 1139, and Stephen of Rouen, another author who mentions the lampreys, was probably a young monk at Bec at the time.<sup>17</sup> Another example is the account by Orderic of the grief experienced by Henry when told of the death of his only legitimate son and two of his other children, plus many of his knights and servants, in the wreck of the White Ship in November 1120 (see below, p. 167). In the graphic description provided by Orderic Vitalis, however, the king lamented particularly (*maximeque*) for his knights, and told of their feats of bravery.<sup>18</sup> It seems on the face of it unlikely that Henry would rate the loss of his captains higher than that of his children; Orderic may be echoing the story of Charlemagne's grief in *The Song of Roland* after the battle of Roncesvalles.<sup>19</sup> Despite being grief-stricken, it is surely not without significance that Henry married again on 6 January 1121. In this case, therefore, Orderic's account of Henry's reaction to the White Ship cannot be read with absolute literalness.

Although these three authors have the most to say directly about Henry's personality, there are others writing in the early twelfth century with whom they may be usefully compared. Eadmer, a monk at Christ Church Canterbury, provides a lively if partial account of Henry's difficulties with Archbishop Anselm.<sup>20</sup> Hugh the Chanter, precentor of York, supplies a northern view of the dispute over primacy with Canterbury which led to a protracted struggle between successive archbishops of Canterbury and York,

<sup>14</sup> K. Leyser, 'Some Reflections on Twelfth-Century Kings and Kingship', in *Medieval Germany and Its Neighbours 900–1250* (London, 1982), 264.

<sup>15</sup> HH, p. 490. <sup>16</sup> WM, *Historia Novella*, ed. E. King and trans. K. R. Potter (Oxford, 1998), p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen of Rouen, 'Draco Normannicus', *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. R. Howlett, 4 vols., RS (London, 1894–9), ii, 659; Richard of Hexham, a third source, may well have known the work of Henry of Huntingdon: 'De Gestis Regis Stephani et de Bello Standardii', *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, iii, 39; A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550–c. 1307* (London, 1974), p. 216.

<sup>18</sup> OV, vi, 300–2.

<sup>19</sup> *The Song of Roland*, translated by Dorothy L. Sayers (Harmondsworth, 1957), p. 147.

<sup>20</sup> Eadmer, *Historia Novorum*.

and the exile of Archbishop Thurstan of York.<sup>21</sup> Other monastic chronicles, such as those composed at Worcester, Durham and Peterborough, provide additional details and regional perspectives.<sup>22</sup> The chronicle of Hyde Abbey, for instance, has valuable details about Henry's affairs in Normandy after 1106.<sup>23</sup> The cartulary-chronicle of Abingdon Abbey is illuminating about Henry's early life, and about the favour shown to the abbey by the king and Queen Matilda in the time of Abbot Faritus, a royal physician.<sup>24</sup> Details about the queen are also provided by the chronicle of Holy Trinity Aldgate.<sup>25</sup> By the 1130s there appeared the earliest surviving history of the English in French. Gaimar's *Lestoire des Engleis* ends in 1100, but is valuable for providing a perspective on court life more sympathetic towards lay values than that of monastic writers.<sup>26</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, a canon at Oxford, was writing his *History of the Kings of Britain* at roughly the same time as Gaimar. His portrayal of King Arthur's kingly qualities, and the code of values to which he ascribed, is thought to have been an evocation of the courtly world of early twelfth-century England.<sup>27</sup> In Normandy, too, Orderic's work may be supplemented by his additions to William of Jumièges's *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, later re-revised by Robert of Torigny, who then went on to more ambitious historical works.<sup>28</sup>

Writers based outside England and Normandy offer a different perspective. The principal source for Welsh history, the *Brut*, is thought to record twelfth-century traditions, though the surviving recensions are later.<sup>29</sup> From the *Brut* comes the image of a king who was feared by the Welsh more than any other down to Edward I's reign.<sup>30</sup> The *Life* of King Louis VI of France

<sup>21</sup> Hugh the Chanter.

<sup>22</sup> JW; SD, *Historia Regum, Opera Omnia*, ed. T. Arnold, 2 vols., RS (London, 1882–5); ASC.

<sup>23</sup> *Liber Monasterii de Hyda*, ed. E. Edwards, RS (London, 1866). A new edition by Dr E. M. C. Van Houts for the Oxford Medieval Texts series is in preparation. She has suggested that the chronicle should be dated to the 1140s or 1150s: 'The Warenne View of the Past', *ANS*, 26 (2003), 111.

<sup>24</sup> *Historia Ecclesie Abendonensis. The History of the Church of Abingdon*, ii, ed. and trans. John Hudson (Oxford, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> The chronicle was printed as an appendix to *Cartulary of Holy Trinity Aldgate*, ed. G. A. J. Hodgett, London Record Society, 10 (1970).

<sup>26</sup> Gaimar, *Lestoire des Engleis*, ed. A. Bell (Oxford, 1960); J. Gillingham, 'Kingship, Chivalry and Love. Political and Cultural Values in the Earliest History Written in French: Geoffrey Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*', in *Anglo-Norman Political Culture and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, ed. C. Warren Hollister (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 33–58.

<sup>27</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. L. Thorpe (Harmondsworth, 1966).

<sup>28</sup> *GND*, ii, 196–288; Robert of Torigny, *Chronique* (ed. Delisle). <sup>29</sup> *Brut (RBH)*; *Brut (Peniarth)*.

<sup>30</sup> For a discussion of the portrayal of Henry I in the different versions of the *Brut*, see K. L. Maund, 'Owain ap Cadwgan: a Rebel Revisited', *Haskins Society Journal*, 13 (1999), 73.

by Abbot Suger has much to say about Henry.<sup>31</sup> Suger was particularly well placed to comment on Louis's great adversary: as he himself says, he was the principal emissary between the two for more than twenty years.<sup>32</sup> Galbert of Bruges's *The Murder of Charles the Good* is concerned with the murder of Count Charles of Flanders in 1127 and the ensuing civil war. Although Henry himself had a claim to the county through his mother, his main priority was to frustrate the claim of his nephew William, who was created count by King Louis VI.<sup>33</sup> Had William been able to pacify the county, he could have used its wealth to assert his claim, as Duke Robert's son, to the duchy of Normandy and thereafter to the kingdom of England. 'The Deeds of the Counts of Anjou' and the 'History of Duke Geoffrey' by John of Marmoutier, though composed later in the twelfth century, help to illuminate relations between Henry and the counts of Anjou.<sup>34</sup>

Narratives from the later twelfth century are not without value, either for points of detail or because they reflect different points of view. In the 1160s a canon of Bayeux cathedral, Wace, composed a verse history of the Normans, the *Roman de Rou*. This incorporated local and oral traditions about Norman history, and is particularly useful and detailed about Henry's struggles with his brothers between 1087 and 1100, and about his campaigns in Normandy in 1105 when Bayeux was sacked and burned.<sup>35</sup> As time passed, the likelihood of additional credible material obviously diminished. Stories about the fate of Duke Robert after his capture in battle in 1106 were elaborated. The French chronicler Geoffrey of Vigeois suggested that Robert Curthose had been released on parole and had attempted to raise an army against his brother.<sup>36</sup> This was a story developed further by Roger of

<sup>31</sup> *Vie de Louis VI le Gros*, ed. H. Waquet (Paris, 1929); trans. R. C. Cusimano and J. Moorhead, *The Deeds of Louis the Fat* (Washington, 1992).

<sup>32</sup> A. Lecoy de la Marche, *Œuvres complètes de Suger, recueillies, annotées et publiées d'après les manuscrits* (Paris, 1865), p. 265.

<sup>33</sup> Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles the Good*, ed. and trans. J. B. Ross, Harper Torchbook edition (New York, 1967).

<sup>34</sup> *Chroniques des Comtes d'Anjou et des Seigneurs d'Amboise*, ed. L. Halphen and R. Poupardin (Paris, 1913).

<sup>35</sup> *Le Roman de Rou de Wace*, ed. A. J. Holden, 3 vols., Société des Anciens Textes Français (Paris, 1970–3); for an English translation: Wace, *The Roman de Rou*, G. S. Burgess, Société Jersiaise (2002), revised and reprinted (Woodbridge, 2004); and for a discussion of its value for the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, see E. M. C. Van Houts, 'Wace as Historian', in *Family Trees and the Roots of Politics*, ed. K. S. B. Keats-Rohan (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 103–32; see also Blacker, *Faces of Time*, pp. 114–17; P. Damian-Grint, *The New Historians of the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> *Recueil des Historiens des Gaules et de la France*, ed. M. Bouquet and others, 24 vols. (Paris, 1738–1904), xii, 432; for discussion see C. W. David, *Robert Curthose Duke of Normandy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1920), p. 201.



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Wendover and Matthew Paris, who believed that after recapture the duke was more strictly imprisoned.<sup>37</sup> Walter Map's *Courtiers' Trifles* is a mix of information and stories, some of which purport to relate to Henry's court. These may have some basis in fact, though they smack of a retrospective look at the 'good old days', comparing the decorum of the elder Henry's court with the scrambling way of life at his grandson's.<sup>38</sup>

Documentary sources present different challenges for the historian. The most important in their different ways are the documents or 'acts' issued in Henry's name, the 1130 pipe roll and legal literature. The documents are of different kinds, including solemn charters or diplomas, writs and writ-charters, notices (*notitiae*), agreements (*conventiones*), reports of lawsuits and letters.<sup>39</sup> Royal and ducal acts provide invaluable evidence about royal grants of lands and privileges; their place of issue casts light on the king's travels, and address clauses and witness lists provide information about individuals, especially members of his court. Historians have to rely at present on an incomplete and unsatisfactory calendar of these, rather than a full edition.<sup>40</sup> A full scholarly edition under the direction of Professor Richard Sharpe is under way and this will provide the basis for detailed study of the diplomatic of the texts, and an understanding of how and why they were produced.<sup>41</sup> They include, as well as writs and charters, letters issued in the king's name. These were formal compositions rather than private documents.

Survival of documents, royal *acta*, is uneven: naturally enough, far more survived for ecclesiastics because of the continuity of their archives than those issued for the benefit of laymen whose archives were subject to the accidents of family history, and documents of only short-term importance obviously tend not to survive. Many more survive for Henry's reign than

<sup>37</sup> *Flores Historiarum*, ed. H. O. Coxe, 4 vols. (London, 1841–4), ii, 212–13; Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. H. R. Luard, 7 vols., RS (London, 1872–83), iv, 63.

<sup>38</sup> Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium. Courtiers' Trifles*, ed. and trans. M. R. James, rev. edn by C. N. L. Brooke and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1983), pp. xxxv–xlv.

<sup>39</sup> G. Constable, *Letters and Letter Collections*, Typologie des Sources du Moyen Age Occidental, fasc. 17 (Turnhout, 1976).

<sup>40</sup> *RRAN*, ii. The editors did not make use of the unpublished thesis of Henri Chanteux, 'Recueil des actes d'Henri Beauclerc, duc de Normandie', thèse inédite de l'École des Chartes, 1932. An interim list of errata and corrigenda was published in *University of Birmingham Historical Journal*, 6/2 (1958), 176–96; for comment by recent historians see S. Mooers Christelow, 'A Moveable Feast? Itineration and the Centralization of Government under Henry I', *Albion*, 28 (1996), 188–9; and C. Warren Hollister, *Henry I*, edited and completed by A. Clark Frost (New Haven and London, 2001), pp. 25–6.

<sup>41</sup> For some very pertinent remarks see D. Bates, 'The Earliest Norman Writs', *EHR*, 100 (1985), 266–84; Bates, *Reordering the Past and Negotiating the Present in Stenton's First Century*, Stenton Lecture 1999 (Reading, 2000); R. Sharpe, 'The Use of Writs in the Eleventh Century', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32 (2003), 247–61.

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for his father's or brother's reigns,<sup>42</sup> but these are only the tip of an iceberg. It has been pointed out that almost three hundred are referred to in the pipe roll but have not survived,<sup>43</sup> and a further estimate is that the total of three hundred could be multiplied ten or twenty times to give an idea of the total issued in a single year, or about ten per day.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, many more survive for certain periods than for others. Very few documents at all can be securely dated to the year 1118 and as a result it is very difficult to trace Henry's movements in that year with any certainty. By contrast, after his return to England in 1120, having been absent for more than four years, he was naturally in demand for charters of grant or confirmation.

In the past historians tended to quarry royal *acta* for information without perhaps making enough allowance for the context in which they were produced.<sup>45</sup> The idea that documents are 'objective', in a way that chroniclers are not, does not fully reflect the motives and circumstances of those who requested documents, which are reflected in the texts. For instance, address clauses of writs and writ-charters are more informative in the first half of the reign, when they were addressed to named individuals ('to X the bishop and Y the sheriff of Zshire'), than in the later years, when writ-charters with general address clauses ('to all my barons etc.') were becoming more common.<sup>46</sup> As a result, information about sheriffs for the first half of the reign comes chiefly from writs and writ-charters, whereas we are less well informed in general about the later years, with the exception of the years covered by the 1130 pipe roll.

The information from witness lists also has to be treated with a degree of caution. Solemn diplomas did include long lists of witnesses, but writs might be witnessed by only a single individual, whilst writ-charters might have a few, but presumably only a selection of those present. We cannot be certain that those named were physically present on the day in question: their names may have been recorded because it was deemed appropriate that they should be there. At one level it may be reasonably concluded that

<sup>42</sup> David Bates has edited some 355 for the period 1066–1087: Bates, *Regesta*, p. 3. This edition supersedes *RRAN*, i (1066–1100), ed. H. W. C. Davis (Oxford, 1913). This figure may be compared with the texts issued or attested by the Conqueror before 1066: see *Recueil des actes des ducs de Normandie de 911 à 1066*, ed. M. Fauroux (Caen, 1961) and K. Thompson, 'Une confirmation supposée de Guillaume le Bâtard', *Annales de Normandie*, 34 (1984), 411–12. Until the publication of R. Sharpe's edition of the acts of William Rufus, historians must rely on the calendar of some 198 acts listed in *RRAN*, i (1066–1100), plus 45 in 'Errata and Addenda to Regesta i', *RRAN*, ii (1100–35).

<sup>43</sup> T. A. M. Bishop, *Scriptores Regis* (Oxford, 1961), p. 32.

<sup>44</sup> M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record* (London, 1979), p. 42. <sup>45</sup> Bates, *Regesta*, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> On this subject see R. Sharpe, 'Address and Delivery in Anglo-Norman Royal Charters', *Charters and Charter Scholarship in Britain and Ireland*, ed. M. T. Flanagan and J. A. Green (Houndmills, 2005), pp. 32–52.