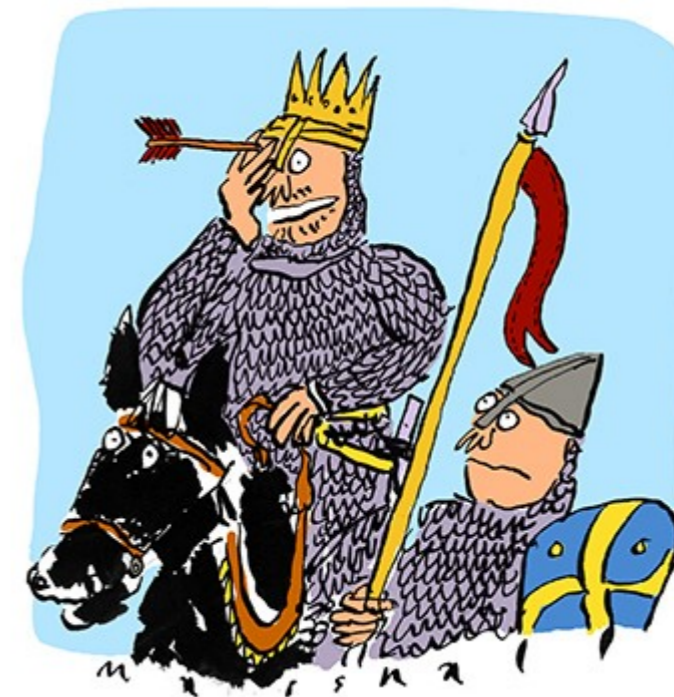


Anglo-Saxon England and the Anglo-Norman kingdom c.1053-1066

Source Booklet

Please bring this booklet to *every* lesson.



*'Well I suppose it's better than a poke
in the eye with a sharp stick!'*

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Scandinavian sources

According to historian Frank Barlow (Exeter University), Scandinavian sources contribute little to mainstream English history and less to the story of the Godwins, partly because of lack of interest, partly because of their relative lateness. However the histories by the German **Adam de Bremen**, the Dane **Saxo Grammaticus** and the Icelander **Snorri Sturluson** provide a little, sometimes untrustworthy, detail.

Anglo-Saxon sources

1. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*
2. *Vita Edwardi Regis* (1060s)

Later English sources

3. *History of the English*, by Henry of Huntingdon (1133-1154)
4. *The Laws of Edward the Confessor* (mid 12th century)
5. *The Deeds of the Kings of the English*, by William of Malmesbury (1125)

Norman and French sources

6. *Carmen Hastingae Proelio* (mid 1060s)
7. *The Deeds of William Duke of Normandy and King of England*, by William of Poitiers (c.1070s)
8. *The Bayeux Tapestry* (1070s)
9. *The Deeds of the Norman Duke*, by William of Jumièges (1070s)
10. *Ecclesiastical History*, by Orderic Vitalis (late 11th century– early 12th century)
11. *Domesday Book* (1086)
12. *The Ten Articles of William I* (early 12th century)
13. *Charters*
14. *Writs*

Scandinavian sources

For a more in-depth discussion of these sources, I recommend reading Brian Golding's *Conquest and colonisation (2001)*, pp.1-9

Anglo-Saxon Chronicles

A year by year account of English history, written in different monasteries and therefore survives in several versions.

One of the most important documents that has come down to us from the Anglo-Saxon/Anglo-Norman period.

It was originally compiled on the orders of King Alfred the Great in approximately A.D. 890, and subsequently maintained and added to by generations of anonymous scribes in a number of monasteries until the middle of the 12th Century.

The original language was Anglo-Saxon (Old English), but later entries were probably made in an early form of Middle English.

Evaluation

The AGC is normally cautious in tone but there are examples of bias, for instance **the Peterborough manuscript** expresses very negative views about Domesday Book. Later on, it also shows the sympathy of the monks for the ordinary people of England. The obituary of William I in the same manuscript is unusually frank.

The different chronicles written in different monasteries can also show differences of fact and opinion. For instance, **the Abington version** is Royalist and hostile to Godwin, while **the Canterbury version** is usually Godwinist.

The Chronicles certainly do not present us with a complete history of those times and are probably not 100% accurate either, but that doesn't diminish their enormous value in helping us to arrive at a clearer picture of what actually happened in Britain over a thousand years ago.

These chronicles supply a uniquely English account of political events before 1066 and allow us to make comparisons with the rather obvious Norman propaganda of William of Poitiers.

Example: a writ, in Anglo-Saxon, from King William I and earl William fitzOsbern, dated March-December 1067, while the king was in Normandy.

“William the King and William the earl to Giso the bishop and Eadnoth the staller and Tofi the sheriff and all my thegns in Somerset, greeting. I make it known that I have granted to Abbot Wulfwold and the church of St Peter at Bath the land at Charlcombe as fully as it ever was. And I forbid anyone to take away anything of what I have given him.”

Example: a writ of William I (1072) concerning Church courts:

“Wherefore I order, and by my royal authority I command, that no bishop or archdeacon shall henceforth hold pleas relating to the episcopal laws in the hundredth court; nor shall they bring to the judgement of secular men any matter which concerns the rule of souls; but anyone cited under the episcopal laws in respect of any plea of crime shall come choose and name...”

Writs

The royal clerks in the chancery wrote the writs of Edward the Confessor, which were issued with great frequency.

A writ was a short, sealed documents with a standard greeting, which communicated commands and grants from the king's household to the provinces of England. It was essentially a letter, a terse statement intended for public notification of royal grants and privileges,

Nothing like it existed in Normandy. The existence of the writ presupposed the fact that such a command could be issued by a sophisticated government and that it would actually be obeyed by a peaceful, law-abiding society. Both these factors were largely missing in Norman government and society before 1066.

Naturally enough, William I seized upon such a powerful tool of state and continued to use them with greater frequency. William used writs to confirm the rights and properties of monasteries and bishoprics, but also to summon armies and give orders to local officials to hear court cases.

The early writs issued by William I were in Anglo-Saxon, becoming Latin after 1070. The use of writs represents continuity with the pre-1066 government and the Norman skill in adapting pre-existing functions of state. [see Part III of the course for more on writs and the changes].

Extra info

The Peterborough Chronicle

Includes an unusually frank assessment of William I by the monks of Peterborough. It also shows concerns for ordinary people that is unusual. Peterborough was the last monastery maintaining a chronicle. It was still being written in the English language when most were written in Latin.

The Worcester Chronicle

The Worcester Manuscript D: as a result of their location, the Worcester monks who compiled the chronicle were extremely well informed about the north of England and Scotland.

Known "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle" manuscripts:

- A-Prime The Parker Chronicle
- A Cottonian Fragment
- B The Abingdon Chronicle I
- C The Abingdon Chronicle II
- D The Worcester Chronicle
- E The Laud (or "Peterborough") Chronicle
- F The Bilingual Canterbury Epitome
- H Cottonian Fragment
- I An Easter Table Chronicle

Extracts

The **Canterbury version** is supportive of Godwin. It described **William I and the harrying of the north** as he *“ravaged and laid waste to that shire.”*...“ *He was a very stern and violent man, so that no one dare do anything contrary to his will. He put any earl who opposed him in fetters. He expelled bishops from their sees and abbots from their abbacies, and put thegns in prison. He did not even spare his own brother, Odo; he was a very powerful bishop in Normandy [his cathedral church was in Bayeux] and had an earldom in England. He was the foremost man next the king, and when the king was in Normandy he was master in this country. But [the king] put him in prison.”*

Above all, **William I was a merciless taxer**. His first act after his coronation was to *“lay on a geld exceeding stiff.”* Close-fisted and grasping—a monk complained that, while the Saxon kings gave their courtiers four meals a day, he gave his only one—he had compiled after 1085, mainly that he might tax his realm more closely, a record of all feudal holdings directly or indirectly liable to the Crown. *“So narrowly did he cause the survey to be made,”* wrote an English chronicler, *“that there was not one single hide nor rood of land, nor—it is shameful to tell, but he thought it no shame to do—was there an ox, cow or swine that was not set down in the writ.”*

It describes **William II:** he was *“hated by almost all his people and abhorrent to God.”*

Charters

This is another type of source relating to land ownership (usually but not always – see example below).

Charters are legal documents drawn up to confirm land transactions.

They were very rare outside the royal courts, reflecting the lack of the written word (ie. transactions were more often done orally).

Example: Coronation Charter of Henry I (1100): *“I abolish all the evils customs by which the kingdom of England as been unjustly suppressed...I restore to you the law of King Edward [the Confessor] together with such emendations to it as my father made with the counsel of his barons.”*

Vita Edwardi Regis ('Life of King Edward'), 1060s

Commissioned by and dedicated to Queen Edith, Godwin's daughter, wife of Edward the Confessor. The author is unknown, but was a servant of the Queen (either as monk or a clerk) and was probably from Flanders.

It was written around 1065-67?. Some of it was written while King Edward was still alive. The latest event to be referred to in the text is the Battle of Hastings of 1066, and the work as a whole must have been completed before the death of Queen Edith and deposition of Archbishop Stigand, 1075 and 1070 respectively.

The work is in two parts: the first deals with the Godwin family and its history. The second part deals with Edward's holiness (hagiographical account of Edward's saintly qualities).

Evaluation

As it was commissioned by the Queen, it is **an eulogy of the Godwin family**. It reflects Edith's point of view, arguing that the family's role was crucial. It celebrates in particular the deeds of her father Earl Godwin of Wessex, her brothers Earls Tostig of Northumbria and Harold of Wessex, but also the deeds of her husband King Edward the Confessor.

Although its evidence has to be used with caution, it provides a livelier, more intimate view of the Godwins and King Edward than can be found in other sources.

It is **the earliest English source that hints at the Norman Conquest**. That there is no more than a hint is the result of stunned shock, for the Queen lost three of her brothers in the battle of Hastings and then had to watch her mother (Gytha), sisters and niece flee to Flanders to escape the wrath of the Normans.

'The Ten Articles of William I', early 12th century

This was an unofficial compilation of laws attributed to William I.

Written in Latin and compiled in the early 12th century.

Copies were held by religious institutions such as the priory of Rochester.

Evaluation

It is generally agreed by historians that it contains some genuine enactments of the king (example: the murder fines).

Extract

3. I will, moreover, that all the men I have brought with me, or who have come after me, shall be protected by my peace and shall dwell in quiet. And if any one of them shall be slain, let the lord of his murderer seize him within five days, if he can; but if he cannot, let him pay me 46 marks of silver so long as his substance avails. And when his substance is exhausted, let the whole hundred in which the murder took place pay what remains in common.

9. I prohibit the sale of any man by another outside the country on pain of a fine to be paid in full to me.

Extract

Description of King Edward the Confessor: *"He was a very proper figure of a man—of outstanding height, and distinguished by his milky white hair and beard, full face and rosy cheeks, thin white hands, and long translucent fingers; in all the rest of his body he was an unblemished royal person. Pleasant, but always dignified, he walked with eyes downcast, most graciously affable to one and all. If some cause aroused his temper, he seemed as terrible as a lion, but he never revealed his anger by railing."*

"When King Edward of holy memory returned from Francia, quite a number of men of that nation, and they not base-born, accompanied him. And these, since he was master of the whole kingdom, he kept with him, enriched them with many honours, and made them his privy councilors and administrators of the royal palace. Among them had come a certain abbot named Robert, who overseas had ruled the monastery of Jumieges, and who, they say, was always the most powerful confidential adviser to the king. [...] through his assiduous communication with him the King began to neglect more useful advice. Hence, [...] he offended quite a number of the nobles of his kingdom by means of another's fault."

Description of Robert of Jumieges: Robert, abbot of the Norman abbey of Jumieges, had known Edward from the 1030s and came to England with him in 1041, becoming bishop of London in 1043. According to the *Vita Edwardi*, he became, "always the most powerful confidential adviser to the king."

*"After England began to have Norman lords', **wrote the monk Lawrence of Durham**, 'the English no longer suffered from outsiders that which they had suffered at their own hands. In this respect they found that foreigners treated them better than they had treated themselves."*

Historia Anglorum ('History of the English') by Henry of Huntingdon, 1133-1154

Henry of Huntingdon was the son of **an English mother and Norman father**. He became **Archdeacon** of Huntingdon in 1100 (so he was a churchman).

His *Historia Anglorum* was written between c.1133 and 1154, so **more than 60 years after the events of 1066**. Henry of Huntingdon lived to be 80 years and was about 40 years old before he began writing his history.

Evaluation

Both Henry of Huntingdon and Orderic Vitalis might have been **re-reporting what they had been told** by people they took to be credible witnesses (even though these witnesses might not have been truthful eye-witnesses). Overall though Henry of Huntingdon has earned a **reputation as a well-informed historian**, who **used existing sources** as well as **adding his own details**.

A modern day version of Dartford's Domesday book entry (1086)

The manor of Dartford belongs to King William. It is situated in the administrative district or half lathe of Sutton in the hundred of Axstane.

The manor is assessed on the basis of 300 acres of taxable land. The arable land within the manor is sufficient to support forty teams of oxen. Two teams of oxen are retained for the exclusive use of the Lord of the manor.

142 peasant farmers and 10 agricultural labourers own 53 teams of oxen between them. There are 3 slaves living in the manor. There is also a mill. Land within the manor of Dartford is made up of 22 acres of meadow and 40 acres of pasture. The manor includes woodland comprising eight small woods and three large woods or dens used for the grazing of pigs. The manor also contains two wharves, which are sited on the river.

In the days of King Edward, the manor of Dartford was valued at £60 and the valuation remained the same when Haimo the sheriff acquired the manor. The English have valued the manor at £60, but the French reeve or overseer who supervises the manor on behalf of King William disagrees. He maintains that the manor of Dartford is worth £90.

The Norman reeve taxes the inhabitants of the manor £70 of coins, 111s made up of silver pennies, and an additional £7.26 made up of silver coins. Therefore, the income from the manor is actually worth just over £82.

The men of the hundred of Axstane have testified that various parts of the manor of Dartford have been taken away. These include one meadow, one alder bed, one mill, twenty acres of arable land and an additional ten acres of meadow land. All these were originally managed on behalf of King Edward. The parts of the manor which have been taken away are valued at 20s.

The men of the hundred of Axstane also report that Oswald who was sheriff in the days of King Edward mortgaged them to Alestan the reeve of London, and the missing parts of the manor of Dartford are now held by Helt the steward and his nephew.

The men of the hundred of Axstane also testify that Hawley, which is assessed on the basis of 100 acres of land, has been taken away from the manor of Dartford. The sheriff originally held this land. When he retired from office, the land remained under the control of the king. It was designated royal land even after the death of King Edward. Now Hugh le Port holds the land with an additional fifty-four acres of arable land. All the land is valued at £15. Six acres of arable land have been taken away from this manor as well as a wood which Oswald mortgaged for 40s.

The bishop of Rochester controls the church in the manor of Dartford and it is valued at 60s. In addition to the church, there are also three chapels in the manor of Dartford.

The Ely Inquest lists the questions asked by the commissioners.

'They inquired:

- What the manor was called
- Who held it at the time of King Edward
- Who holds it now
- How many hides there are (*measurement of land for taxation purposes, between 60 and 120 acres*)
- How many ploughs held by the lord and how many belonging to the peasants
- How many villeins (*the wealthiest of the unfree peasants who had to pay his lord labour service and rent*)
- How many cottars (*an unfree peasant with a holding of land up to 5 acres*)
- How many slaves (*unfree man or woman*)
- How many freemen
- How many sokemen (*equivalent to a freeman but owing dues to his lord for his holding*)
- How much woodland
- How much meadow
- How much pasture
- How many mills

Domesday Book—Extract in English (1086)

The Land of St. Peter of Westminster

In 'Ossulstone' Hundred

In the vill in which St. Peter's Church is situated [Westminster] the abbot of the same place holds 13½ hides. There is land for 11 ploughs. To the demesne belongs 9 hides and 1 virgate, and there are 4 ploughs. The villeins have 6 ploughs, and there could be 1 plough more. There are 9 villeins each on 1 virgate and 1 villein on 1 hide, and 9 villeins on each half a virgate and 1 cottar on 5 acres, and 41 cottars who pay 40 shillings a year for their gardens. [There is] Meadow for 11 ploughs, pasture for the livestock of the vill, woodland for 100 pigs, and 25 houses of the abbot's knights and other men who pay 8 shillings a year. In all it is worth £10; when received, the same; TRE £12. This manor belonged and belongs to the demesne of St. Peter's Church, Westminster.

Extra info

Battle of Fulford Gate:

The one short note that Henry of Huntingdon makes about Fulford suggests that he had passed through the site of the battle, perhaps on a journey from Lincoln sometime between 1095 and 1110 : "*The site of the battle (of Fulford) is still pointed out on the south side of the city.*" He does not say that he visited the site and it is unlikely that he would have seen any physical evidence since he could not have passed through the site until at least 30 years had elapsed since the battle.

Extract

"A.D.1093 William, the younger, fell sick at Gloucester during Lent, in the sixth year of his reign. He then gave the archbishopric of Canterbury to Anselm the abbot [of Bec], a holy man, and the bishopric of Lincoln to his chancellor Robert Bloet, who excelled other men in grace of person, in serenity of temper and in courtesy of speech. The king also promised at this time to amend bad laws and protect the Lord's household in peace; but as soon as he got well he repented of his promises and acted worse than before."

Leges Edwardi Confessoris ('The Laws of Edward the Confessor'), mid 12th century

Written c.1140 by an anonymous writer

This claims to be based on a source from 1070 recording Edward's laws and customs for the benefit of William I. However, the existence of this document from 1070 seems highly doubtful.

Evaluation

Even if its contents is unreliable, the *Leges Edwardi Confessoris* does help shed some light on early medieval attitudes to law and order.

Purpose

The purpose of the survey is open to debate and suggested it was to reform the geld system (national land tax based on number of hides (land measurement) a person owned.) But more likely it was to provide William with information on who owned land.

Extra info

The context of the period was one of national crisis due to possible Scandinavian invasion and therefore William needed his army on alert and organised around the country. He needed to know his resources and who held them. It re-confirmed his landowner's bonds of loyalty to him. See: [Salisbury Oath](#).

Extract



Domesday Book , 1086

The Domesday Book is a great land survey from 1086, commissioned by William I to assess the extent of the land and resources being owned in England at the time, and possibly the extent of the taxes he could raise (there is an on-going debate regarding its purpose). Commissioners were sent into every county with a detailed list of questions. The efficient Anglo-Saxon local government helped make this possible. The information collected was recorded by hand in two huge books, in the space of around a year. William I died a few months after the Domesday survey.

It was written by an observer of the survey that "there was no single hide nor a yard of land, nor indeed one ox nor one cow nor one pig which was left out". The grand and comprehensive scale on which the Domesday survey took place, and the irreversible nature of the information collected led people to compare it to the Last Judgement, or 'Doomsday', described in the Bible, when the deeds of Christians written in the Book of Life were to be placed before God for judgement. This name was not adopted until the late 12th Century.

What information is in it?

The Domesday Book provides extensive records of landholders, their tenants, the amount of land they owned, how many people occupied the land (villagers, smallholders, free men, slaves, etc.), the amounts of woodland, meadow, animals, fish and ploughs on the land (if there were any) and other resources, any buildings present (churches, castles, mills, salthouses, etc.), and the whole purpose of the survey - the value of the land and its assets, before the Norman Conquest, after it, and at the time of Domesday. Some entries also chronicle disputes over who held land, some mention customary dues that had to be paid to the king, and entries for major towns include records of traders and number of houses.

- **Major economic and social source.**
- **A unique record of 1086 England with deliberate reference to pre-1066 England.**
- **A triumph of Anglo-Norman government and administration.**
- **Does not provide an accurate indication of the population of England towards the end of the 11th century.**

Gesta Regum Anglorum ('The Deeds of the Kings of the English'), by William of Malmesbury in 1125 and revised in 1140

1095/96 : William of Malmesbury born in Wiltshire.

He was a monk at Malmesbury Abbey in Wiltshire and along with Orderic Vitalis was one of the leading scholars of his time. His mother was English and his father Norman. He spent his whole life in England and his adult life as a monk at Malmesbury Abbey in Wiltshire, England.

Evaluation

Malmesbury was a conscientious historian. He searched for new primary sources including those produced in other countries and was able to read documents in several different languages.

Malmesbury also used topography and buildings as evidence and was very interested in human character and motivation.

William's willingness to look critically at primary sources and his interest in cause and effect, helped him become one of the most important historians of the medieval period. William of Malmesbury died in 1143.

His writing contains **a strong moral message** and believed Anglo-Saxon England fell because of its decadence (corrupt and immoral lifestyle). He believed the Normans were following God's will but he would condemn them if he felt they were led by power or avarice. He is **not as biased as earlier Norman writers**. He does praise Harold Godwinson for instance.

Further extract:

- the death of William Rufus (textbook p108)
- Henry I (textbook p.111)

Extra info

He said he would, "steer a middle course," when writing of King William because the Normans, "Praise him to excess" while the English have "heaped upon their ruler undeserved reproach." The first abbot of Malmesbury was from Jumieges, Normandy. He visited many places to find sources such as Glastonbury and Worcester. He wrote the *Gesta* at the request of Queen Matilda II, wife of Henry I and herself of **mixed Anglo-Norman heritage**.

Malmesbury's books include *Deeds of the Kings of England* (449 to 1127) and *Recent History* (1128 to 1142). In his work he praised Harold but justified the Norman invasion because of what he called the "sins of the flesh" of the English.

Orderic was **a shrewd commentator on the events of his own time** which covered the rise to supremacy of the Normans in all parts of England (his native land). Like William of Malmesbury **he saw the Norman conquest as a moral story**, illustrating the dangers inherent in not pursuing a godly life. Orderic's description of the Battle of Hastings is **mainly drawn from William of Poitiers and William of Jumieges**. Vitalis **never questions the legitimacy of the Norman Conquest but he is far less partisan and seek to redress the clearest examples of anti-English sentiment put forward by the Norman chroniclers**. Whereas William of Poitiers describes Harold as 'a man soiled with lasciviousness, a cruel murderer', Vitalis presents Harold as a 'brave and valiant man, strong and handsome'.

He was also **not a completely impartial witness for Duke Robert Curthose** in Normandy.

Technically, his narrative is badly arranged and full of unexpected digressions, but he relays **much invaluable information not provided by more methodical chroniclers**.

The **historian C. Warren Hollister** called him, "*an honest and trustworthy guide to the history of his times.*"

Extracts

He wrote of **Harold** that he "*was very tall and handsome, remarkable for his physical strength, his courage and eloquence, his ready jests and acts of valour. But what were these gifts to him without honour, which is the root of all good ?*"

William the Conqueror's harrowing expeditions in the North:

'In consequence so serious a scarcity was felt in England and so terrible a famine fell upon the humble and defenceless populace that more than 100,000 Christian folk of both sexes, young and old alike, perished of hunger. My narrative has frequently had occasion to praise William, but for this act which condemned the innocent and guilty alike to die by slow starvation I cannot commend him....I am so moved to pity that I would rather lament the griefs and sufferings of the wretched people than make a vain attempt to flatter the perpetrator of such infamy.'

Orderic Vitalis says that, "*the fortifications that the Normans called castles were scarcely known in the English provinces.*"

The main source on this period is a supporter of Henry and biased against Robert. He wrote 1127-1130 with hindsight and built a case for Henry's invasion of Norman-

Historia Ecclesiastica ('Ecclesiastical History'), by Orderic Vitalis, 1114-1141

Author

Orderic Vitalis was born near Shrewsbury in 1075 of a **Norman father and an English mother**. He was sent at the age of 10 to the monastery of St Evroul in Normandy. "So, weeping, he gave me, a weeping child, into the care of the monk Reginald, and sent me away into exile for love of thee, and never saw me again." **He remained there for most of his life, making only a couple of visits to England in 1115 and 1137 (historians do not all agree on those two dates)**.

Orderic's first literary efforts were a continuation of William of Jumièges' *Gesta normannorum ducum*, a broad history of the Normans and their dukes from the founding of Normandy, which Orderic carried forward into the early twelfth century.

Between 1110 and 1115 : Orderic's superiors ordered him to write the history of Saint-Evroul. The work, the *Historia Ecclesiastica (Ecclesiastical History)*, grew under his hands until it became a general history of his own age. **Being both English and Norman, he tried to harmonize both traditions.**

Evaluation

Since the narrative of the Conquest is set down in book three of his Ecclesiastical History, by looking at his lifelong corpus, we **can estimate that he was writing within 50 years about the events of 1066 making him one of the first historian-chroniclers of the events of 1066**. It does mean however that he was **not able to gather eyewitness accounts about 1066 itself**. His commentary on the Conquest and the reigns of William II Rufus and Henry I were probably based on stories brought to the monastery from a variety of visitors. Keep in mind that **he was a witness of Robert Curthose's misrule in Normandy**: Orderic's monastery was in Normandy after all and Orderic lived there in the period **1085-1142** (apart from the two years when he might have gone to England – see above).

Since he was not necessarily an eyewitness, **Vitalis used his creativity and wider historical knowledge to bring probable conversations to life**. He throws light upon the manners and ideas of his own age, and sometimes comments with surprising shrewdness upon the broader aspects and tendencies of history. As he was writing later, he also had the **benefit of hindsight**.

Extracts

William wrote of William the Conqueror : *'He was of just stature, ordinary corpulence, fierce countenance; his forehead was bare of hair; of such great strength of arm that it was often a matter of surprise, that no one was able to draw his bow, which himself could bend when his horse was in full gallop; he was majestic whether sitting or standing, although the protuberance of his belly deformed his royal person; of excellent health so that he was never confined with any dangerous disorder, except at the last; so given to the pleasures of the chase, that as I have before said, ejecting the inhabitants, he let a space of many miles grow desolate that, when at liberty from other avocations, he might there pursue his pleasures. His anxiety for money is the only thing on which he can deservedly be blamed. This he sought all opportunities of scraping together, he cared not how; he would say and do some things and indeed almost anything, unbecoming to such great majesty, where the hope of money allured him. I have here no excuse whatever to offer, unless it be, as one has said, that of necessity he must fear many, whom many fear.'*

According to William of Malmesbury, William Rufus was, *"well set; his complexion florid, his hair yellow; of open countenance; different coloured eyes, varying with certain glittering specks; of astonishing strength, though not very tall, and his belly rather projecting."*

William of Malmesbury, who wrote his *Deeds of the Kings and Deeds of the Pontiffs* in 1125, gives a comparable character sketch of the Normans in general: *"They are a race inured to war, and can hardly live without it, fierce in their onslaughts against the enemy; and when brute force fails of success, they resort to strategem or bribery. They live in fine buildings, are envious of their equals and strive to excel their superiors; they plunder those subject to them, but also defend them against others; they are faithful to their lords, though treacherous at the slightest affront, weighing treachery by its chance of success, and always ready to be swayed by bribery."*

TPO

Extracts (cont.)

William of Malmesbury gives **a damning description of the Anglo-Saxons on the eve of the Conquest:**

“Several years before the arrival of the Normans love of literature and religion had decayed. The clergy, content with little learning, could scarcely stammer out the words of the sacraments; a person who understood grammar was an object of wonder and astonishment. The monks mocked the Rule by their fine clothes and wide variety of foods. The nobility, devoted to luxury and lechery, did not go to church in the morning like Christians, but merely, in a casual manner, heard matins and mass, hurried through by some priest, in their own chambers amidst the caresses of their wives. The common people, left unprotected, were prey: to the powerful who amassed fortunes by seizing their property or selling them to foreigners (although by nature this people is more inclined to self-accumulation of wealth)..... Drinking bouts were a universal practice, occupying entire nights as well as days.... The vices attendant on drunkenness, which enervates the human mind, resulted. And so it happened that they engaged William [at Hastings] with more rashness and reckless fury than skill, and so doomed themselves and their country to slavery, by a single – and that an easy – victory.”

Looking back from the 1120s the chronicler William of Malmesbury remembered:

“They would purchase people from all over England and sell them off to Ireland in the hope of profit; and put up for sale maidservants after toying with them in bed and making them pregnant. You would have groaned to see the files of the wretches of people roped together, young people of both sexes, whose youth and beauty would have aroused the pity of barbarians, being put up for sale every day.”

Lanfranc, the new archbishop was soon urging his pupil to abolish the slave trade and the Conqueror complied. It was at Lanfranc’s insistence, explains William of Malmesbury, that the king ‘*frustrated thwho had an established practice of selling their slaves into Ireland*’. Malmesbury noted that William was somewhat reluctant, since he enjoyed a share of the profits, but the record of the king’s own legislation shows that a ban was indeed put in place and that William had found a way of squaring the matter with his conscience.

‘I prohibit the sale of any man by another outside of the country,’ says the ninth law of William the Conqueror, ‘on pain of a fine to be paid in full to me.’ William’s personal attitude towards slavery can also be surmised from his only recorded visit to Wales, glibly reported in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 1081: *‘The e schemes of those scumbags king led levies into Wales, and there freed many hundreds of people.’*

Extract

William of Jumièges, written in or about the year 1070, in which he says *“Harold himself... fell covered with deadly wounds.”*

Gesta Normannorum Ducum ('The Deeds of the Norman Duke'), by William of Jumièges, 1070s

Author

1000 : Probably born.

Just before 1060 : William of Jumièges began writing his history. He was a monk and chronicler from Normandy. Although only a monk with evidently no military training, he wrote with pride of the accomplishments of his people.

In 1070 William I had William of Jumièges extend the work to detail his rights to the throne of England.

In later times, Orderic Vitalis (d. c. 1142) and Robert of Torigni (d. 1186), extended the volumes to include history up to Henry I.

Evaluation

William of Jumièges was contemporary to the events he described (but not necessarily an eye-witness).

He was a Norman writing from a **Norman point of view**. It is the earliest Norman literary source and justifies the Norman conquest. The book was dedicated to King William I and celebrates his achievements and is **propaganda**.

The later additions (in the 1070s) reveal much about changing attitudes towards the Norman invasion of England.

He makes some factual errors, saying King Harold fell at the start of the Battle of Hastings. He rarely gives dates.

Carmen Hastingsae Proelio, mid 1060s

This was a poem on the Battle of Hastings, now securely identified as the work of a non-Norman, Guy Bishop of Amiens (France). **It was produced almost immediately after the battle, in 1067 but it is not an eyewitness account of events.**

It was used by many later Norman writers such as William of Poitiers.



The inscription (partially cut off in the reproduction above) above Odo reads, "Here, Odo the Bishop, with a staff (*baculum*) encourages the young warriors,"



The death of King Harold at the Battle of Hastings (detail), Bayeux Tapestry, c. 1070, embroidered wool on linen, 20 inches high (Bayeux Museum)



Harold's oath



Harold at the Mont Saint Michel



Normans with horses on boats, crossing to England, in preparation for battle

Gesta Guillelmi Ducis Normannorum et Regis Anglorum **(‘The Deeds of William Duke of Normandy and King of England’)** by William of Poitiers, 1070s

Author

1020 : William of Poitiers was born to an influential knightly Norman family. According to Orderic, William of Poitiers originally trained as a knight, which gave him a much greater insight into the details of war than the typical medieval clerical writer.

1049 : he joined the Church and ended up as Archdeacon of Lisieux in Normandy. William of Poitiers wrote the *Gesta Guillelmi* some time After 1066 : William of Poitiers wrote the *Gesta Guillelmi*.

It tells the story of Duke William’s preparations for, and achievement of the Conquest of England. It also justifies William's succession to the English throne. The bulk of the writing probably completed in 1071–1077.

William of Poitiers was not present at the Battle of Hastings but used eye witness accounts. He describes the famous “feigned flight” manoeuvre during the battle of Hastings when the Normans pretended to run away.

Evaluation

Based on eye-witness accounts (William of Poitiers and others)

Pro-Norman (it justifies William's succession to the English throne) but cannot be dismissed; most of the panegyric passages are easy to isolate, and there is a lot of material that William of Poitiers probably reports accurately.

Evaluation

Essentially depicts **a Norman viewpoint**. It is based primarily on William of Poitiers’ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* but the designer(seems to have known *Vita Edwardi Regis* and his treatment of the events is notably **dispassionate**. It is an interpretation: Harold is shown as brave and his soldiers are not belittled.

The narrative extensively covers Harold's activities in Normandy (in 1064or 1065) = the intention was to show a strong relationship between that expedition and the Norman Conquest starting two years later.

In the borders are scenes from Aesop’s fables concerned with treachery.

Created to justify the invasion of England by William – yet immensely useful and insightful. Also a unique visual document of medieval arms, apparel, and other objects unlike any other artifact surviving from this period.

The Bayeux Tapestry, 1070s

A visual account of the final months of Edward's reign, duke William's preparations for invasion and the Battle of Hastings.

It is generally thought that the 'tapestry' was designed and made in Kent in about 1070-80 on the orders of bishop Odo of Bayeux, earl of Kent and duke William's half-brother.

The 'tapestry' illustrates in strip-cartoon fashion Anglo-Norman relations from 1064 or 1065 until October 1066. For instance, it provides a visual account of the story of Harold being shipwrecked and held captive by the count of Ponthieu for ransom and being rescued by William and taken to his court. It also includes the crucial oath-taking scene.

Technically, it's an embroidery, not a tapestry!

Extra info

The historian, R. Allen Brown writes, "William of Poitiers must have known his hero from their joint youth up, and stress that as both former knight and former chaplain of the duke he is able to bring us closer to the heart of Normandy in the mid-eleventh century than any other writer of that age or later"

The historian, Antonia Gransden says he is, "biased, unreliable account of events, and unrealistic portraits of the two principle protagonists."

Orderic Vitalis, who uses the *Gesta Guillelmi* as his principal source in creating his 'Ecclesiastical History', chooses to omit or contradict many of Poitiers' passages in the *Gesta Guillelmi*, including denial of King William's mercy to the conquered English; having been brought up in England from 1075–1085, Orderic knew better.

Extracts

William of Poitiers described Harold as "*a man soiled with lasciviousness, a cruel murderer.*"

William of Poitiers believed that the pre-Conquest English "*all showed love of their country*", suggesting some sort of national identity that was lacking in Normandy.