

IDENTITY AND MYTH: THE NORMANS

HPHI 6009

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ASSESSMENT 1 - Portfolio Component Two. Commentary on extracts from the Domesday Survey.

Extract from the Domesday survey.

Instructions for collection of the Domesday Returns.

Here is subscribed the inquisition of lands as the barons of the King have made enquiry into them; that is to say by the oath of the sheriff of the shire, and of all the barons and their Frenchmen, and the whole hundred, the priests, reeves, and six villages of each manor; then, what the manor is called, who held it in the time of King Edward, who holds now; how many hides, how many ploughlands in demesne, how many belonging to the men, how many villages, how many cottages, how many slaves, how many freeman, how many socmen, how much woods, how much meadow, how many pastures, how many mills, how many fish ponds, how much has been added or taken away, how much it was worth altogether at that time, and how much now, how much each freeman or socman has had or has. All this threefold, that is to say in the time of King Edward, and when King William gave it, and as it is now; and whether more can be had than is had. ¹

¹ *Inquisitio Eliensis*. Domesday Book: Additamenta, p. 495. Available at: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/domesday1.asp>

This is a commentary of the instructions for the collection of returns for the medieval manuscript known as Domesday Book² which has been variously described as the “*finest administrative achievement of the medieval period*,”³ and “*the single most extraordinary record produced during the Norman Conquest*”⁴, and is one of the most important medieval historical documents. The survey was commissioned in 1085 by William the Conqueror and carried out the following year⁵. It consists of a detailed survey of the agrarian assets and valuation of property in England and recorded landholders and land use at the time of Edward the Confessor and during William the Conqueror's reign.

The first three lines of the extract can be seen to state a hierarchy and provide evidence for the political and social structures of England at the time of the survey. These can be seen to provide support for the introduction of feudalism into England after the Norman Conquest in 1066. Galbraith referred to Domesday Book being the first English record of the introduction of feudal law and feudalism.⁶ The issue of the introduction of feudalism and the Norman Conquest has been the subject of an ongoing discourse and continues to be a matter of debate.⁷ It is interesting to note the use of the word “Frenchmen” as this may indicate that at this period the Normans were seen as French rather than Norman and raises questions as to when a separate Norman identity developed. This may evidence that from an English perspective the incomers were seen as French rather than Norman at this date. Davis⁸ has written of the myth of the Normans and this comment may indicate that at the date of survey a separate understandable Norman identity was still in the process of being forged.

The use of oaths are mentioned at line two. This evidences both the importance of oaths and the place that oaths played within society at the time of the survey⁹. The use of oaths can also be seen to reinforce Norman feudal structures of society and provides further support of the feudal nature of the state. It also evidences the public nature of the way in which the information was collected; perhaps as a way of ensuring accuracy and also to reinforce William's legitimacy by acknowledgment of fealty to William. It is arguable whether this was one of the subsidiary intentions of the survey.

² Domesday Book available at The National Archives (<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/domesday/>)

³ F.M.Stenton in G.N Garmonsey in D Wilkinson and J Cantrell, *Documents and Debates. The Normans in Britain*, (London: Macmillan Education Ltd), p.43.

⁴ R Huscroft, *Ruling England 1042-1217*, (Harlow: Pearson Longman 2005), p. 21.

⁵ Peterborough version (E) of *The Anglo Saxon Chronicle*, trans G.N Garmonsey in D Wilkinson and J Cantrell, *Documents and Debates. The Normans in Britain*, (London: Macmillan Education Ltd), p.50.

⁶ V.H. Galbraith in R.Allen Brown, *The Norman Conquest*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), p. 159.

⁷ Huscroft, *Ruling England 1042-1217*, p.104.

⁸ R.H.C. Davis, *Normans and their myth*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976)

⁹ R Bartlett, *Why can the dead do such great things. Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton University Press, 2013).

Lines 4 to Line 9 provide a detailed checklist of information that the survey was seeking to ascertain and can be split into five areas; who held the land, the amount of land being used, how it was being used, numbers of people, other assets (mills and ponds), and its value. Each area being subdivided into sub- categories. Importantly the instructions stipulated that the information was required at the time of King Edward at 1066; at the time when King William “gave it” and “as it is now”.

It is interesting that the survey instructions reference King Edward and King William but ignore King Harold. There may be good administrative reasons to do this as Harold’s tenure as king was short lived and a time of turmoil, while Edward's reign would provide a suitable point of reference. However, his exclusion can also be seen in supporting William's position that he was the legitimate heir to King Edward. This position is reinforced if you consider the way Harold is referred to in relation to his estates in the survey where he is not referred to as king and was denied this title. This contrasts with the way Harold is referred to in the Bayeux Tapestry where at scene 30 Harold is referred to as “King of the English”¹⁰. This perhaps provides supporting evidence for the tapestry being completed before Domesday Survey of 1086 and also demonstrates how the information in the survey can be used and interpreted by historians.

It is in the breadth and nature of the information collected and particularly as it covers pre and post conquest that has made Domesday Book a mine of information¹¹ and the pre eminent primary source for political, social and economic historical analysis of the period. It is in the details of the information that allows it to be interpreted and give insights into the social structures of society but also the agricultural nature of the English economy. In particular, the pre / post conquest information allows comparison to be made between pre / post conquest and of the impact of the Norman Conquest. Williams¹² described Domesday Book as being an “eloquent testimony to the downfall of the old English Aristocracy.”¹³ In an analysis of surnames only 13 tenants in chief have English names in 1086 and only 4 of these had lands worth more than £100 per annum.¹⁴ Domesday provides clear evidence of the replacement of anglo saxon aristocracy with a new Norman ruling class.

The inclusion of mills and fish ponds (line 7) highlights the importance these played in the medieval economy. Both mills and fish ponds were important economic assets. This

¹⁰ L. Musset, (Trans. R.Hex), *The Bayeux Tapestry*. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002), p. 175.

¹¹ F. Neveux, *A Brief History of the Normans. Conquests that Changed the Face of Europe.* London: Robinson, 2006). p. 142.

¹² A. Williams *'The English and the Norman Conquest,'* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995).

¹³ Ibid. p.98.

¹⁴ Huscroft, *'The Norman Conquest. A New Introduction,'* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2009), p.239.

is evidenced in the Domesday return for Caerleon where 7 fisheries were valued at 7 pounds 10 shillings in 1086 while ploughland was valued at only 2 pounds.¹⁵

In the comprehensive nature of the survey and the complexity of the information being sought, provides evidence of the administrative sophistication, responsiveness and effectiveness of the English State¹⁶ and this can be evidenced in the instructions. Pre Conquest England has generally been regarded by historians as one of the most efficient and well run states in Western Europe.¹⁷ In the complexity of the surveys instructions and in its use of existing institutions and structures of the “Shire” and the “hundred” provides evidence of the Norman ability to use and build on existing structures¹⁸ and develop innovative change as seen in other areas such as architecture and warfare. This can also be seen to evidence the relative internal stability of William’s reign in 1086. However Roffe has stated that Domesday can only be understood within a context and understanding of “social and political uncertainty.”¹⁹

It is in the last line of the extract which perhaps provides the best evidence for the original purposes of the survey. There is general consensus that the main purpose of Domesday Book was to increase royal revenue and this was its principal concern. Domesday has been described as the “Kings rent book”²⁰ and as a private document “for the kings use”.²¹ However, There has been a wider debate around other possible motivating factors involved in the surveys commission. Some historians have highlighted the need for William to finance the defence of England due to a threat of invasion from Cnut of Denmark who had a claim to the English throne²² which would support Williams’ need for revenue. Bates has proposed that its main purpose was to help the Normans in tightening their control of land and the “People of Englnd.”²³

¹⁵ Caerleon was a settlement in the hundred of Edlogon which is mentioned in the returns for Gloucestershire and Herefordshire. Domesday Book available at : <https://opendomesday.org/place/ST3390/caerleon/>.

¹⁶ Huscroft, ‘*Ruling England 1042-1217*,’ p. 35.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 21.

¹⁸ M. Chibnall, ‘*Anglo-Norman England 1066-1166*.’ (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p.15.

¹⁹ D. Roffe in D. Roffe and K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, ‘*Domesday Now. New Approaches to the Inquest and the Book*,’ (London: Boydell and Brewer, Boydell press, 2016), p.299.

²⁰ S. Harvey, ‘*Domesday: Book of Judgement*,’ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.4.

²¹ D. Roffe in D. Roffe and K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, ‘*Domesday Now. New Approaches to the Inquest and the Book*,’ p.303.

²² I. Howard in G.R. Owen- Crocker, ‘*King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry*,’ (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press), p. 36.

²³ Bates in Huscroft, ‘*Ruling England 1042-1217*,’ p. 108.

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