

Assessment 3 – Footnote Exercise

Excerpt from “Chronicon Anglicanum” by Ralph of Coggeshall, pp. 27-30

Concerning the capture of Arthur and others at Mirebeau.

Then Arthur, count of Brittany, having been invested with knightly arms by King Philip [II, Augustus, of France], whose little daughter he had betrothed, being now sixteen years old himself [likely he was 15 as his capture at Mirebeau took place in 1202], rebelled against his uncle King John and at the improper urging of certain people, adopting treacherous and very hasty advice, he set out with Hugh Le Brun and Geoffrey de Lusignan, and two hundred and fifty knights, and treacherously besieged the castle of Mirebeau [northeast of Poitiers near the Angevin border], in which Queen Eleanor, Arthur’s grandmother, was staying.¹ Then the queen, afraid of being captured, sent word to her son, the king, to bring help as quickly as possible to the besieged.² So the king marched there with part of his army to the castle. The enemy then entered the castle and had all of the gates blocked up, except a single one, and so protected awaited the arrival of the king, confident in the great numbers of first-class knights and sergeants. Then the king arrived and after a difficult engagement entered the town, and, by God’s will, immediately captured all his enemies who had assembled there. He took his nephew Arthur, and Count Hugh and Geoffrey of Lusignan, and two hundred and fifty-two stalwart knights, not including other reputable sergeants-at-arms; and thus he freed his mother and her supporters from the besiegers. He made it his

¹ Arthur was the son of King John’s older brother Geoffrey and therefore closer in line to the throne than John following the death of Richard the Lionheart, who had previously named Arthur his heir. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, *Arthur, Duke of Brittany (1187-1203)*, 2004 <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/704> [accessed 19 November 2022]. In an effort to destabilize John’s control, Philip backed Arthur, as is evidenced here by Arthur’s investiture and pending marriage to Philip’s daughter Marie. Eleanor had sided with John over Arthur out of her desire to keep the Angevin land unified and from her mistrust of Arthur’s mother, Constance of Brittany; see R. Turner, ‘Securing the Plantagenet Legacy: John’s Reign, 1199-1204’, in *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp.280-298, (p.280). She had stopped at Mirebeau on her way to Poitiers, where she was planning to assert her ownership and prevent Arthur from taking it over. For more on Eleanor’s movements at this time, see A. Weir, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Life*, (New York: Random House, 1999), p. 485.

² Eleanor’s concerns were not unfounded. Though in her eighties by this time, she still held significant power and influence which would have been strong leverage to a captor, as demonstrated by both Arthur’s desire to capture her as well as John’s quick action to relieve her.

business to make this triumph of military talent known to the barons of England by letters, of which this is the format:

‘John by the grace of God King of England, Lord of Ireland . . . etc . . . , to all his barons, greeting. Know that by the grace of God we are safe and sound, and that God’s grace has worked wonderfully on our behalf. For on Tuesday before St Peter in Chains, [July 30], when we were outside Le Mans we heard that our lady mother was besieged at Mirebeau, and so we hurried there as fast as we could, so that we arrived there on the feast of the blessed Peter in Chains, [August 1] and there captured Arthur, our nephew, whom William de Braose handed over to us, and Geoffrey de Lusignan, and Hugh Le Brun, Andrew de Chauvigny, the vicomte of Chatelleraut, Raymond of Thouars, Savary de Mauleon and Hugh Bauge and all our other Poitevin enemies who were there, around two hundred or more, so that not even a solitary foot soldier escaped.³ Therefore give thanks to God and rejoice in our successes.’

Meanwhile King Philip had been besieging the castle of Arques for a long time; although at first he hoped he would capture the castle, the disastrous of the capture of Arthur and the rest of those who were with him reaching him he quickly abandoned the siege, and returned to France, very perturbed by the misfortune which had happened to his men. Then afterwards King John took violent possession of Tours and King Philip’s castle which was in the town, and burnt almost all this famous town, for which reason he was much hated by the people of Tours and the princes of that region. He also burnt the city of Le Mans because it had received his enemies. He transferred all the opponents he had taken at Mirebeau to prison custody, sending them to different places. Afterwards, to his own downfall, he released Hugh Le Brun and Geoffrey de Lusignan from prison at the request of certain nobles, having taken hostages from them and their castles, and he also freed some others whom he had captured at Mirebeau, having first taken the precaution of

³ The feast of St. Peter in Chains was a fitting day for John’s arrival and liberation of his mother. The day commemorates the “miraculous deliverance” of Saint Peter from his captors by an angel. See P. Parsch, *The Church’s Year of Grace*, Vol. 4 (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1959), p. 284. For dating, see C.R. Cheney, *Handbook of Dates for Students of English History* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1955). Le Brun had good reason to be at odds with John, who had recently married the young, and wealthy, Isabelle of Angouleme, to whom Le Brun had been betrothed for many years while waiting for her to mature to a marriageable age. See D. Balfour, ‘Triumph and disaster: King John’s victory at Mirebeau, 1 August 1202’, in *Medieval Warfare*, 1(1) (2011), 10-15 (p. 10).

extracting an oath that they would not rebel against him again: but they did not keep this oath for very long at all, and soon began to harass the king very bitterly, in alliance with many enemy troops.

William des Roches, a certain powerful man from the Angevin nobility, in association with other nobles from all over Brittany earnestly requested the lord king to hand over Arthur to them, whom he was carefully keeping in his own custody.⁴ When he refused they soon conspired together against the king and began a rebellion, collecting around themselves a great army from various provinces which ought to have been obedient to the king's command, devastating his land with rapine and fire, and attacking many castles.⁵ As a result of this it happened that many powerful men left the king and joined their league; amongst these was Robert, count of Alencon, the Vicomte of Beaumont, William of Fougères, and other Bretons. They also had the castle of Angers together with the whole of the city, and in a short time they acquired other fortified places.

Then the king's advisers, perceiving that the Bretons made much disturbance and unrest everywhere in the interests of their Lord Arthur and that no reliable peace treaty would be made, with Arthur surviving, recommended to the king that he should command that the noble youth should have his eyes put out and be castrated, and then when he had in this way been made unfit to govern, then his enemies would relax the folly of unrelenting warfare and submit to the king.⁶

⁴ des Roches was the Seneschal of Normandy and had previously helped to win support in the region for John's claim to the English throne and for his holdings in France. He also is believed to have led the forces which surprised Arthur at Mirebeau and captured him, see D. Balfour, 'Triumph and disaster', p. 13.

⁵ des Roches would have held significant clout with John due to his position and the refusal to relinquish Arthur to his care was clearly not taken lightly. The request by a group of nobles also demonstrates concern over John's temperament and the concern for Arthur's safety. It is soon after this time that King John is alleged to have killed Arthur in order to secure his own position. J. Duncan, *The Dukes of Normandy, From the Times of Rollo to the Expulsion of King John by Philip Augustus of France* (London, 1839) pp 326-7.

⁶ At the time, blinding and castration was an action deemed to render a man unfit to rule as he could not see or produce an heir. Examples of this can be found in other medieval kingdoms, including the Byzantine empire when Empress Irene seized power in Constantinople after her son was blinded. See J. Sypek, *Becoming Charlemagne* (ePublication: HarperCollins, 2006) p.42. It is unclear in the *Chronicon* how Ralph of Coggeshall learned that John's advisors had recommended this punishment as opposed to being an idea John put forth himself as no source for the information is given. As a monk, Coggeshall was not part of the political "inner circle" to hear this first-hand and would have been recounting information he was told from others at court. See D.A. Carpenter, "Abbot Ralph of Coggeshall's Account of the Last Years of King Richard and the First Years of King John" in *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 113, No. 454 (Nov., 1998), pp. 1210-1230. In addition, Roger did not become abbot of Coggeshall until 1207, so his account of the events were written some years after they took place. See F. M. Powicke, "Roger of Wendover and the Coggeshall Chronicle" in *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 21, No. 82 (April 1906), p.286.

And so, provoked by the indefatigable attack of his enemies and exasperated by their threats and improprieties, at length in anger and rage he ordered three of his servants to proceed to Falaise [in Normandy] and carry out this hateful task. Two of the servants hating having to do such an appalling thing to so noble a youth, fled from the king's court; but the third came to the castle in which the royal boy was being carefully guarded by Lord Hubert de Burgh, the king's chamberlain, having three rings around his feet. And when the lord king's order was reported to Hubert, great weeping and lamenting began amongst the knights who were guarding him, because they were moved to great sympathy for the noble youth. Then Arthur learning of the severe sentence imposed on him by his uncle, and fearing in every way for his personal safety, broke down completely into tears and pitiful moaning. And when that man who had been sent by the king to perform the deed was standing around waiting, and when he had become known to that trembling and weeping boy, he [Arthur] was suddenly aroused in the middle of his lamentations and jumped up and violently laid hands avenging his downfall on that man's person, and cried out in a tearful voice to the knights standing around: 'Oh, my dearest lords, for the love of God allow me for a little while to take vengeance on this criminal before he puts out my eyes; for he is the last of all whom I shall see in this life.' Then to calm down this uproar as soon as possible the knights sprang forward and restrained the hands of both of them, and at the order of Lord Hubert, the young man who had come was thrown out of that room; as a result of his ejection and the sympathetic words of those assisting Arthur received a little comfort, his sadness of heart being soothed.

Then Hubert, the king's chamberlain, wishing to give consideration to the king's good name and reputation, looking forward to the king's pardon, kept the royal youth unharmed, considering that the lord king would immediately repent such an order and afterwards regard as odious the man who had dared to carry out such a brutal edict, because he believed that it sprang more from the sudden anger than from the uprightness of equity and justice. And so wishing both to temper the king's anger for the time being and to restrain the savageness of the Bretons, he had it put about in the castle and in the province generally that the order that the king had delivered had been carried out and that the order that the Lord Arthur had died from misery of heart and the frightful pain of his wounds: this rumour was flying around continuously in both kingdoms for fifteen days. Finally a trumpet call was blown in every neighbourhood and castle, as if for his soul; his clothes were given to a house of lepers. It was even given out that his body had been taken to the abbey of St

Andrew, of the Cistercian Order, and buried there.⁷ But the Bretons were not calmed down by such rumours but were more and more worked up, and raged more fiercely than before, where they could; swearing that they would never abandon fighting the king of England, who had dared to commit such a horrible crime against their lord and his own nephew. And so it turned out that it was necessary once again to proclaim that Arthur, whose death they had reported everywhere, was still alive and unharmed, so that in this way the savage ferocity of the Bretons might be lessened a little.⁸ When the king was informed, he was not in anyway angry at that time that his order had not been carried out. Certain of the lord king's knights even said that he would never again find any knight at all who would take custody of his castles, if he had dared to put into effect such an unfortunate sentence on the Lord Arthur his nephew; because if then it happened that any knights were captured by the king of France, or by his [John's] enemies, immediately they would receive the same vengeance, without mercy.⁹

⁷ It is unclear which abbey is referenced. I can not find any records of a Cistercian abbey in England at this time dedicated to St. Andrew and, Arthur having been captured and held in France, it would be more likely be a French abbey of St. André. The only St. André abbey I can find in France is St. André-les-Vergers, which is located southeast of Paris, which was not part of John's holdings, so unlikely to be where Arthur's body would have been sent for burial.

⁸ Although Arthur is reported to have been alive at this point, if he was, it was not for long. Later in the *Chronicon*, Ralph of Coggeshall documents that King Philip of France is furious when he hears Arthur has been killed. What is not mentioned is the rumor that not only did King John sanction the murder, but a near-contemporary manuscript, claims that John personally killed Arthur and dumped his body in the Seine; see *Chronicle of Margam Abbey*, Cambridge, Trinity College Library, M.S. O.2.4, fol. 22v-23r. This sentiment persisted after Coggeshall by historians such as Matthew Paris in his work *The Flowers of History*, ed. and trans. by C.D. Yonge (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853), p.99, and eventually became fact by the fifteenth century when it was written that "Jon sowte [Arthur] out, and killid [sic] him"; J. Capgrave, *'Chronicle of England'*, ed. F. C. Hingeston (London: Longman, Brown, Green, 1858), p.147.

⁹ It is questionable that knights who would have sworn fealty and obedience to King John would have been able to make such demands of him. Retribution would have been an occupational hazard for a knight, so it seems unlikely that they would have asked to keep Arthur alive in order to protect themselves. While the fate of Arthur can not be verified, there were accounts of John's cruelty towards other dissenters he had captured during the various campaigns of this period which lends credibility to the suggestion that John killed Arthur. See A. Knighton, 'What happened to the prisoners of war? The Aftermath of the Battle of Lincoln', *Medieval Warfare*, 7(2) (2017), 37-39 (p.38).

Bibliography

Balfour, D., 'Triumph and disaster: King John's victory at Mirebeau, 1 August 1202', *Medieval Warfare*, 1(1) (2011), pp. 10-15.

Cheney, C.R., *Handbook of Dates for Students of English History* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1955).

Chronicle of Margam Abbey, Cambridge, Trinity College Library, M.S. O.2.4.

Capgrave, J., '*Chronicle of England*', ed. F. C. Hingeston (London: Longman, Brown, Green, 1858).

Carpenter, D.A., "Abbot Ralph of Coggeshall's Account of the Last Years of King Richard and the First Years of King John", *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 113, No. 454 (Nov., 1998), pp. 1210-1230.

Duncan, J., *The Dukes of Normandy, From the Times of Rollo to the Expulsion of King John by Philip Augustus of France* (London, 1839).

Knighton, A., 'What happened to the prisoners of war? The Aftermath of the Battle of Lincoln', *Medieval Warfare*, 7(2) (2017), 37-39.

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, *Arthur, Duke of Brittany (1187-1203)*, 2004
<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/704> [accessed 19 November 2022].

Paris, M., *The Flowers of History*, ed. and trans. by C.D. Yonge (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853).

Parsch, P., *The Church's Year of Grace*, Vol. 4 (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1959).

Powicke, F. M., "Roger of Wendover and the Coggeshall Chronicle", *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 21, No. 82 (April 1906), pp.286-296.

Sypek, J., *Becoming Charlemagne*, (ePublication: HarperCollins, 2006).

Turner, R., 'Securing the Plantagenet Legacy: John's Reign, 1199-1204', *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp.280-298.

Weir, A., *Eleanor of Aquitaine: A Life*, (New York: Random House, 1999).