

MEMORY AND GENDER
IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE,
900–1200
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THE MEMORY OF THE NORMAN CONQUEST OF ENGLAND IN 1066

After the thematic approach of the previous chapters where we looked at the acknowledgement of oral witnesses in historiography and hagiography, at women's unofficial role in commemoration and the significance of objects as pegs for memories, we turn now to the memorial tradition of one event. The occasion of the arrival of the Normans in England was a sudden event which caused the death of the ruling class of the English nation and its consequent replacement by another elite. No other event in western European history of the central Middle Ages can be compared for its shocking effects: the carnage on the battlefield, the loss of life and the consequent political upheaval. Apart from the social, economic and cultural consequences, the event caused an explosion of historical writing that finds no contemporary parallel. It is through the pages of the four generations of chronicles, annals, saints' lives and vernacular poetry that we can sense the shockwaves of horror, pain, regret and grief.

From the initial raw shock to the more restrained polished expressions of regret later on, we can follow how, on the victims' side, the English came to terms with defeat and how, on the conqueror's side, the victors' initial euphoria turned to a slow realization of the misery they had caused. Various themes discussed in the previous chapters will re-emerge and illustrate the memorial process: the interaction between oral and written traditions, the reliance on women for the transmission of eyewitness and second-hand reports; the patronage by women of the vernacular texts

on the conquest; and the role played by objects as *memorabilia* of the event. Before we turn to them, a short introduction to the factual history of the Norman Conquest is necessary.

In January 1066 King Edward the Confessor of England died without issue. He was succeeded on the day of his burial by Earl Harold of Wessex, who claimed that he had been chosen as his heir by Edward himself on his deathbed. Harold ruled for just over nine months till his defeat at Hastings. Harold was the eldest surviving son of Earl Godwin of Wessex and his wife Gytha, and had successfully pushed aside his brother and rival Tostig, whom we have met as the first husband of Judith of Bavaria. Almost immediately after Harold's accession to the English throne his action was contested by William, duke of Normandy and later to be the Conqueror. He claimed that Edward the Confessor had chosen him as his successor, first in 1051 and thereafter in 1064 or 1065. On the second occasion, so the Norman version maintained, it had been Earl Harold himself who had conveyed the king's wish. Harold had even sworn an oath, so well illustrated on the Bayeux Tapestry, on the relics of Bayeux Cathedral. Duke William argued that Harold's accession was a flagrant breach of his oath of fealty and from this the charge of Harold's perjury was born.

With backing from Pope Alexander II and Cardinal Hildebrand, later Gregory VII, William recruited an army of several thousand soldiers and had a fleet of about 700 ships assembled. At the end of September 1066 he crossed to England and on 14 October he faced Harold at the Battle of Hastings. Unfortunately for Harold, at the time of William's invasion he was on his way back from the north of England where he had just defeated the alliance of his brother Tostig and King Harold of Norway, both of whom were killed. He and his troops were exhausted and this was a major contributory factor to the English defeat at Hastings. After the battle, where indeed many on both sides had been killed, the Norman duke received the surrender of the English and at Christmas he was crowned at Westminster Abbey in London. Another four years of resistance from small groups of Englishmen followed before the country was finally subdued. The long Norman rule of England had begun and with it the memorial tradition of the Conquest of England.

The anonymous author of the *Battle Abbey Chronicle*, writing in the 1170s, records that on his deathbed the Conqueror bequeathed the amulets he used to wear to Battle abbey.¹ He does not explicitly say that these were the amulets which William had with him at Hastings and which, according to William of Poitiers,² the duke had worn around his

neck, but we can assume that this was the case. Since he founded Battle in atonement for the bloodshed during the battle and out of gratitude to God for victory, it seems reasonable to assume that that is where the relics he had worn on that very day ended up.³ No precise description of the objects has survived, but we know that they were of metal, that they were precious and that they joined others hanging round a larger relic shrine. Within a decade of the bequest, however, the monks of Battle parted with this souvenir and the chain of events which then unfolded illuminates the way in which medieval traditions, oral and written, emerged.

As part of a fund-raising expedition aimed at rich post-Conquest England the monks of Saint-Germer at Fly, a small Benedictine house just a few miles across the border of the French Vexin, pursued King William Rufus (1087–1100) through England and Wales in their quest for money to buy a new chasuble for their church. After several attempts to rid himself of them, Rufus became fed up and directed them to Battle Abbey with an order to Abbot Henry (d. 1102) to pay them. Henry protested poverty to the king but in vain, whereupon he felt obliged to convert the Conqueror's amulets into cash. With the money thus acquired the monks of Fly purchased purple cloth out of which the chasuble was made. About a year later lightening destroyed the garment, but the others lying immediately above and below were left unscathed. The miraculous loss of the garment was seen, both at Fly and at Battle, as punishment by God. A written account of the misfortune was apparently published at Fly and about two decades later, during the abbacy of Abbot Warner (d. 1138) but before 1133, Abbot Odo of Fly and his monk Richard, who was the man who had originally approached William Rufus, came to Battle to perform a public apology. It was witnessed by the Battle Abbey chronicler as a young monk, who wrote in his account that he relied upon what he heard on that occasion rather than on the earlier Fly text.⁴ Sceptics may argue that the amulets had disappeared for other reasons and the chronicler's story was invented to explain the loss, but it was confirmed at the time by the French historian Guibert of Nogent, a former monk of Fly, in his autobiography.⁵

We do not know who orchestrated the public apology and it is possible that it was motivated on the French side by political considerations. It took place after the defeat of King Louis VI (1108–37) of France at the battle of Brémule in 1119, and it may represent an attempt to achieve reconciliation by bringing monks from a French house to a prestigious royal monastery in England. It is, however, on the attitude of the Battle

community that I wish to focus here. I link the apology with the death in 1124, at the age of 84, of perhaps the last survivor of the generation of monks who had experienced the Conquest, Abbot Ralph of Caen.⁶ I link it with the efforts to collect and record 1066 *memorabilia* which followed Abbot Ralph's death – efforts which resulted in the copying of the *Ship List* of William the Conqueror and the early histories of Battle Abbey.⁷ The monks of that time, it seems to me, were acutely aware that 50 or 60 years after the Conquest they were losing touch with the past. In that climate, the loss of a relic dating from the Conquest seemed a much more serious matter than it had seemed to Abbot Henry in the late 1090s. There is a pattern here which can be traced elsewhere. First comes the epic event, a moment of triumph or disaster according to one's point of view. About two generations later comes the realization that aspects of the event which were once common knowledge are common knowledge no longer; hence the urge to collect information and pass it on, usually by oral communication to younger people, but sometimes in writing. About two generations later still come the first attempts at detached historical analysis, such as the account which the Battle chronicler set down in the 1170s.⁸

Likewise at Waltham Abbey, about a century elapsed before crucial information about the true burial place of its one time patron, Earl Harold, was written down, though that information had been collected orally about fifty years earlier. In this case the writer was an elderly canon, who composed his history of the abbey in about 1177 in order to ensure that the memories of his community would not be forgotten if Henry II carried out his threat to close it down. Almost incidentally, he included a number of stories going back to the Norman Conquest, some of which had been told to him in the 1120s by the sacristan Turketil, then about eighty years old. Turketil had witnessed King Harold's visit to Waltham on his way back from his victory at Stamford Bridge after he had been told of the Norman invasion, and he was probably the source of the story, undoubtedly true, that King Harold's remains had been buried in a proper tomb in Waltham by two canons who had brought them back from the battlefield.⁹ The anonymous author who recorded these stories c. 1177 was probably unaware of the Norman accounts which claimed that Harold had been buried on a hilltop in Sussex, but he evidently knew of other rumours in circulation to the effect that: 'Harold dwelt in a cave at Canterbury and that later, when he died, was buried at Chester'.¹⁰ It was to kill off such unfounded speculation that the Waltham canon put the record straight in writing.

At Westminster in the late 1130s, meanwhile, Osbert of Clare took up the cause of King Edward's sanctity as yet another means of preserving in a positive and very personal way the memory of 1066. On evidence which was distinctly meagre, as Frank Barlow has pointed out, he waged a tireless campaign for almost 30 years. Like the chroniclers of Battle and Waltham, Osbert claims to be using oral information from people who witnessed, shortly after Edward's death in 1066, miraculous events attributed to his holiness. Edward's canonization was approved in 1161 and was followed two years later by his solemn translation to a new tomb in Westminster Abbey. King Edward's death, an event which had led to the Norman challenge to the English throne and hence, indirectly, to the bloodbath of 1066, was thereby transformed: having been a fateful tragedy for the English in 1066, it became for Osbert and the Westminster community in the 1160s a triumph of saintly commemoration.¹¹

In Normandy, the main fourth generation contribution to the analysis of 1066 took place in the form of Wace's *Roman de Rou*.¹² Wace was a canon of Bayeux Cathedral and had been educated at Caen. In the 1150s and 1160s he began to translate and adapt the already considerable body of Latin historiography into Anglo-Norman verse. He collected oral stories for the pre- and post-Conquest history of Normandy and built these around the centrepiece of his work, the longest narrative account of the Conquest. I have argued elsewhere that although several stories are clearly anachronistic and of little historical value, his list of the Conqueror's companions is based on what we now would call an oral history project. Most of the people he lists had connections with Bayeux Cathedral or the abbeys at Caen. I believe Wace to have combed through the archives of those institutions and supplemented this material with stories collected orally from his contemporaries, both men and women, about their grandfathers and great-grandfathers. The most striking of them is the story of William Patric, who shortly before the Conquest witnessed Duke William in the company of Earl Harold riding through his village of La Lande Patry on his way to Brittany.¹³ The duke's expedition is well recorded in contemporary chronicles, but without the charming eyewitness account passed on by William Patric's grandson and namesake to Wace.¹⁴

Abbot Ralph and Sacristan Turketil, on whom the chroniclers of Battle and Waltham relied, were quite old in the 1120s and had been grown men at the time of the Conquest. There must, however, have been others still alive at the same period who had been teenagers in 1066. Among those who undoubtedly had stories to tell would have been Robert of

Beaumont and William of Evreux on the Norman side, both of whom died in their late sixties in 1118, and Edgar the aetheling on the English side, who died in about 1125.¹⁵ But from, say, 1130 onwards it was up to the children of the 1066 generation to pass on the stories. Robert of Beaumont's twin sons Waleran and Robert, for example, who died respectively in 1165/6 and 1168, may well have informed Wace about their father's deeds.¹⁶ William the Conqueror himself died in 1087, but several of his children survived until the mid 1130s and may as pensioners have told stories about their father to third-generation historians.¹⁷ Such details concerning age and longevity should be borne continuously in mind when we discuss the transfer of stories from one generation to the next. We need to tread carefully, however, because although the reconstruction of a chain of informants may help to assess how memories are formed, it cannot guarantee that particular memories were accurate.

So far I have concentrated on stories of 1066 which were transferred two generations later by oral means and not written down until the fourth generation. Some stories, however, were written down in the second generation. The first accounts of the Conquest to be written down in England, all of them brief and all of them written by monks, took the form of additions to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: the contributions made by Eadmer of Canterbury (d. c. 1124), John of Worcester (d. after 1140), Symeon of Durham (d. after 1126) and William of Malmesbury (d. c. 1143) are the most significant. In recent years Richard Southern, James Campbell and Antonia Gransden have argued that one effect of the Conquest was to turn English monks back to their Anglo-Saxon past in an attempt to salvage what they could of it.¹⁸ They sought to link that past with the present by interpreting the defeat of the English by the Normans as God's punishment for English sins. In effect, they presented a theological rationalization of the collective national shame, a common enough literary reaction to defeat in battle.

The English monks who first attempted to chronicle the events of 1066 pay some attention both to King Harold and his two brothers, who were all three killed with him at Hastings, and also to members of the English resistance, such as Eadric the Wild, Hereward and Earl Waltheof, but on the whole they are surprisingly silent about individual disasters. In an age of liturgical commemoration, when monasteries were normally scrupulous in recording deaths in memorial books, obituaries or other documents, why did no English monk write down the names of the victims of 1066? All we have is a handful of names preserved by accident in *Domesday Book*, in charters or in later cartulary chronicles. Perhaps this is

due to the fact that monks were writing history. Janet Coleman, in her study on ancient and medieval memories, has argued that the rule of St Benedict aimed at persuading monks to forget their families and personal histories, to live a communal life and to think of themselves as part of a community. Little space was left for any attention to individuals.¹⁹ However, complete disassociation from one's own family is impossible for most of us. In my view, in the two generations which followed the Conquest, English monks experienced a very deep sense of loss and shame which had a national dimension, an institutional dimension and a personal dimension as well; it permeates even their brief accounts which, unsurprisingly, are all pervaded with gloom. Yet, by introducing the theme of national sin and divine punishment, and by depersonalizing their subject matter, they contrived to some extent to counteract the trauma from which they were suffering.

A few fragmentary remarks about 1066 are to be found in sources which predate the monastic versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and those which reflect the English point of view are bleaker still. The earliest such source is the *Life of King Edward*, written at the request of his wife Queen Edith in the years 1065–67. The queen lost three of her brothers in the battle at Hastings and her mother Gytha and other relatives were obliged to flee to Flanders to escape the wrath of the Normans,²⁰ yet the battle is only hinted at in the *Life*. The catastrophe was too appalling and too recent, I suggest, for an author to face it. The various entries in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, all condemning the invasion, are equally brief. Version 'D' may have been written as contemporary comment on events immediately after the Conquest, but due to interpolations, it is difficult to distinguish what was written when in the only available copy, itself known to have been written after 1100. Version 'E', copied at Peterborough, is based on Canterbury material up to 1120, and here too, it is impossible to tell what the annalist wrote in 1066. In both versions revisions therefore date from a time when England was firmly under Norman control.²¹

Amongst this meagre harvest, the E-version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is unique in expressing the anguish and frustration of the English; it seems to have been focused on the aetheling who appears everywhere, but without being able to rally effective groups of resistance fighters around him. The most evocative expression of grief comes in a poem written by the skald Thorkill Skallason for his master Earl Waltheof after he had been executed for treason in 1076. It is written in Old Norse, but may have been based on an Old English version used much later by

William of Malmesbury.²² The most intriguing aspect of this poem is its theme of Waltheof's betrayal by William the Conqueror, which neatly reverses the official Norman charge of treason against the earl:

William crossed the cold channel
and reddened the bright swords,
and now he has betrayed
noble Earl Waltheof.
It is true that killing in England
will be a long time ending.

Here, Thorkill may be avenging Waltheof's death by hinting at the fact that it was Waltheof's wife Judith, William's niece, who betrayed her husband.

The shortage of information about the Conquest in English sources which date from the decades immediately following it, a shortage which I have attributed to the traumatic effects of national disaster, can to some extent be made good by looking at Continental sources. Most of these express horror and moral indignation at the bloodbath and loss of life. English authors would surely have expressed the same sentiments had they been less stunned.²³

There is, however, one exception to the rule of the *tabula rasa* of post-Conquest personal commemoration in England and that is the *Deeds of Hereward*, the biography of Hereward which we have already discussed several times in this book. The Latin text was written between 1109 and 1131 by a clerk at Ely, probably called Richard. He used a now lost Old English biography by Hereward's chaplain Leofric, which he claims to have combined with the reminiscences of several of Hereward's companions, two of whom he names as Siward of Bury St Edmunds and Leofric the Black. Bearing in mind that 1066 veterans survived well into the twelfth century, as has been shown above, there can be absolutely no doubt that Richard of Ely consulted these elderly eyewitnesses. Hereward's adventures cover two distinct phases. During the first in the 1060s, he fought as an exiled mercenary for a variety of masters in Cornwall, Ireland and Flanders, while during the second phase, he led the uprising in the Fenland and the siege of Ely in 1071. His *Deeds* contains the fullest account we have of these events: the kernel of it is substantially corroborated by details from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, John of Worcester and documentary texts.²⁴

Hereward's biography is based on a series of eyewitness reports which

Richard of Ely linked together as best he could. The linking is clumsy, but I take that to be a sign of authenticity, for no forger would have produced something so full of 'contradictions'. The *Deeds of Hereward* is very much an attempt to cope with the trauma of defeat, not by theological rationalization and depersonalization, but by romanticizing heroic behaviour and honourable surrender through the medium of epic narrative. Its personal nature may be partly due to the original version having been written by a secular priest in the vernacular, the language in which most of the oral stories must have been told. Richard, the author of the Latin text, must have been bi-lingual, or even tri-lingual, if he was able to translate the original Old English into Latin and supplement it with vernacular reports.²⁵ He may himself have been a member of the secular clergy attached to Ely rather than a monk and may have felt freer on that account to tell the story of an Anglo-Saxon defeat in personal terms.

If he were a secular clerk, Richard may be compared profitably with two other secular clerks who were responsible for later off-shoots of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Archdeacon Henry of Huntingdon extended the chronicle into the 1150s, rewriting and revising his text continuously.²⁶ His struggle to reconcile the demands of a military society full of worldly vanity with God's plan pervades his brief account of the Norman Conquest. Yet his secular background enabled him to be much more forthcoming about the actual organization of the Conquest. His views on the vital role of William fitz Osbern as the brain behind the logistics of the invasion predates the same opinion held by Canon Wace of Bayeux. Henry is, however, the first historian to focus his thoughts on the military aspects and achievements of the Conquest. He too thought that moral lessons needed to be learned, not in the form of one nation repenting its sinful past, but by soldiers and other groups of population each contemplating their own past. Henry of Huntingdon's contemporary was Gaimar who in 1137-38 translated the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, not like the others into Latin, but into Old French.²⁷ Though he does not contribute much new material to the topic of the Norman Conquest, he includes the longest account of Hereward outside the *Deeds of Hereward*, albeit in a slightly different version.²⁸

There is, of course, considerable irony in the fact that a French clerk appropriated the language of the conquerors in order to present them with a history grafted upon the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This is surely a sign that by the third generation, some grandchildren of the Conquest were prepared to learn the history of their new country from an English

perspective. Henry's and Gaimar's place in society as secular clerks meant a much more intimate contact with the people in England and the effects of the Conquest on the common population than, I believe, the monk historians had. It also meant closer contact with women and their view of the past. Gaimar wrote in response to a request from a lay woman, Constance wife of Ralph fitz Gilbert, who may have had access to members of Hereward's family. Henry of Huntingdon was almost certainly married and one just wonders to what extent his wife's views influenced his account of the Conquest. The down-to-earth tone, attention to the practical side of life and willingness to move away from abstract theological moralizations are surely due to a non-monastic environment.

Thus far I have concentrated my analysis on England and the historians writing in that country, and I have shown how an initial shocked silence was followed by two parallel perceptions of the past: oral stories which were more personal and emotional were circulating at the same time as abstract writings theorizing national guilt. But what was the historiographical development like in Normandy? How did historians writing in the duchy perceive the past during the first four generations? The literature generated by contemporaries, that is first-generation Norman Conquest, is not surprisingly dominated by the Norman view. William of Jumièges added a brief account of the Norman Conquest to his history of the dukes of Normandy, but firmly declined any possibility of writing about England after 1070; instead he promised a future sequel about William the Conqueror's son Robert Curthose.²⁹ William of Poitiers wrote a biography of the victorious duke which contains the Norman story of the Conquest, concentrating on the invasion, battle and subsequent campaigns in England.³⁰ He highlights the careers of the Conqueror's 12 main advisers, but is silent on the 3000 to 5000 participants in the Conquest. His account of the raids in northern England show a particular degree of detail not easily matched elsewhere.

Although his story has survived incomplete, we can reconstruct its last chapters through the *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis who copied the end, but supplemented it with his own comments.³¹ Some aspects of this mixture, normally attributed to Orderic, may in fact have come from William of Poitiers. One of the central characters of the immediate post-Conquest period was Earl Morcar. He had been captured in 1071 during the siege of Ely and brought to Normandy, where he was entrusted to the care of Roger of Beaumont.³² The following 15 years were spent in Normandy, where in 1086 he witnessed one of Roger's charters for the abbey of Saint-Wandrille.³³ In 1087 he was set free as part of a general

amnesty issued by William Rufus.³⁴ William of Poitiers himself knew the Beaumont family intimately and his sister was the abbess of the Beaumont foundation, Saint-Leger at Préaux,³⁵ so it is not at all improbable that he had access to Earl Morcar's memories, in particular for information about his family and the military campaigns in which Morcar and his brother had been involved. An exchange of some sort between the English Morcar and the Norman William may have generated a certain understanding for the English victims and led to William's surprisingly well-informed account with its mild but emphatic flavour.

Thus we cannot exclude an oral exchange between Normans and Englishmen for the specific purpose of historical writing in the immediate post-Conquest period. In this context, we need to remind ourselves that in 1067 several aristocratic Englishmen, who presumably exchanged views with their Norman 'hosts', were in Normandy as the Conqueror's hostages: Archbishop Stigand, Edgar the aetheling, and Earls Edwin, Morcar and Waltheof.³⁶ Even Bishop Guy of Amiens in his celebratory poem on the Conquest, which is our most detailed but not necessarily most trustworthy account of the battle, may have consulted some English informants for his intriguing story about the English negotiators before their surrender.³⁷ Like William of Poitiers, his occasional empathy with the English position could emerge alongside vituperation against the English leader Harold. The passionately negative terms in which he denounces him have recently been characterized by Giovanni Orlandi as typical in writing as an immediate victorious response to a battle.³⁸ The other contemporary source for the Norman Conquest is the Bayeux Tapestry, which alone gives a glimpse of a more positive portrait of Harold, carrying one of his men on his shoulders during the Breton campaign, before he acceded to the throne. But this may simply be an artistic trick to emphasize his later arrogance and fall in terms of sharp contrast. The overwhelming reaction of first-generation Normans was one of legitimizations and justifications which were, in fact, abstract moralizations to bury any sense of guilt or shame.

This tendency to moralization did not stop with the death of the 1066 survivors. If anything it became much stronger. The most important representative was Orderic Vitalis, a monk born in England of mixed Anglo-Norman origins, who worked in Normandy. He interpolated William of Jumièges's *Deeds of the Dukes of the Normans* with details on King Harold's brothers Tostig and Gyrth, the battle and, in general, a revision of William's text aimed at toning down some of the more explicit pro-Norman sentiments.³⁹ Orderic not only fitted the account of 1066

more firmly in a Norman context, but he also expressed empathy with the English losses. At the same time he began his *Ecclesiastical History*, where he transformed a local history of his monastery into a large-scale chronicle of western Europe. For his account of the Norman Conquest, he used William of Poitiers's biography and some passages from his own interpolated version of the *Deeds of the Dukes of the Normans*. He also wove the famous condemnation of William the Conqueror's harrowing expeditions in the north into this account.⁴⁰ Even at an early stage of Orderic's career in 1114–15, he bore witness to the fact that some people on the Continent had refused to accept land or spoils from England on the grounds that they had been gained at the expense of too much bloodshed. He puts into the mouth of Abbot Guitmund of La Croix-Saint-Leufroi words to this effect:

After carefully examining the matter I cannot see what right I have to govern a body of men whose strange customs and barbarous speech are unknown to me, whose beloved ancestors and friends you have either put to the sword, driven into bitter exile, or unjustly imprisoned or enslaved. Read the Scriptures, and see if there is any law to justify the forcible imposition of God of a shepherd chosen from among their enemies.⁴¹

It has long been thought that Orderic put forward these sobering thoughts because of his English origin. But some purely Norman writers certainly shared his ideas. Canon John of Coutances, the author of the biography of Bishop Geoffrey of Coutances written at about the same time, defended his father Peter, who had been Geoffrey's chamberlain, against implicit accusations of greed for English spoils. Having set out Peter's acquisitions for the new cathedral of Coutances, he assures his readers:

... that the venerable bishop had not, as some people believe, acquired all this from the copious abundance of England's bounty ... but that most of the abovementioned lands had been acquired before the English war.⁴²

As a good historian he then proceeded to give evidence by pointing out that the cathedral was dedicated in 1056 and that the English war did not take place until nine years later. John's indignation at the thought that some believed the bishop enriched himself at the expense of the English sounds a little hollow if we read the next paragraph, where he lists the 'precious ornaments, embroideries and goldwork with smaragds and gems' which the bishop had brought over from England after the

Conquest.⁴³ Like the young Orderic and John of Coutances, the anonymous Norman author of the *Short Account of William most noble Count of the Normans*, which was written at Battle Abbey between c. 1114 and 1120, makes moral comments with regard to that English war. He contrasts the haughty Harold, who did not recognize that God was on the side of the humble, with William as a paragon of humility by developing the bible quotation 'pride comes before the fall'.⁴⁴ The author also develops William of Poitiers's story of the Conqueror inadvertently putting on his hauberk back to front and laughing the matter off saying it was not a bad omen. Here he has Duke William say:

If I believed in magic I would not today engage in battle. But I have never put faith in magicians nor loved witches. In all I have ever undertaken I have always commended myself to my Creator.⁴⁵

This emphasis on God's predisposition as opposed to the workings of magic may well be an implicit stab at the Battle monks – mourning at that very moment the loss of the Conqueror's amulets – who thought that the relics did swing the outcome of a battle in favour of the Normans. These three Norman historians all wrote within a decade after the Battle of Tinchebrai, fought on Norman soil in 1106 almost 40 years to the day after the Battle of Hastings, as William of Malmesbury pointed out.⁴⁶ The theme of God and not military prowess or magic deciding the outcome of battles had a curiously topical value.

An entirely different approach to the story of the Conquest can be found in the so-called *Hyde Chronicle*, written in Normandy towards the end of the reign of Henry I by someone, perhaps a chaplain, attached to the Warenne family.⁴⁷ Although there is no doubt about the author's Norman point of view, he is remarkably well informed about the family of King Harold, much more than Orderic was, with the result that the account of 1066 is set in a much more 'English' context than any of the other Norman chronicles. The author clearly knew a great number of sources, including English ones, considering his frequent references to oral and written testimonies which he, unfortunately, does not identify. His sources require further investigation, but suggest a Flemish or northern French link with the community of Saint-Omer, which offered shelter to King Harold's mother Gytha and which had been the home of Gundreda of Warenne. The details on the two families of Harold and Warenne introduce a personal element in an account that is far less moralizing than that of Orderic or the author of the *Brevis Relatio*. The

chronicler's exceptional military information on the battles of Eu and Brémule suggests that he might have been William of Warenne's chaplain. His Latin style is poor and suggests that it came from the pen of someone better versed in vernacular French. As such his work prepares us for the writings of Wace, another secular clerk.

Wace single-handedly transformed writing on the Norman Conquest from a series of moralizations to a triumphant account of the achievements of the Norman soldiers. He used the Latin sources with great ingenuity, but left out all moralizing justifications and legitimizations. Like Henry of Huntingdon, he paid attention to the logistic organization of the Conquest, in the process of which he unwittingly introduced certain anachronisms, and like the author of the *Deeds of Hereward*, he commemorated the names of those who took part in the Conquest. Not only did he list William the Conqueror and his 12 leaders, whom William of Poitiers had compared with Julius Caesar and his senate, he added more than 130 names of local Norman lords, whose achievements had not yet been recorded in writing. Their deeds had survived in the oral tradition, which was the single most important source for Wace's reconstruction of the actual Conquest.

Wace was not interested in the Norman nation or the collective Norman memory, he was a local historian writing the history of the Cotentin soldiers, based on interviews and historical archival research. In fact, he put into practice what two English chroniclers described as the task of a historian. The Waltham chronicler and Walter Map, as we have already seen, stipulated that memories handed down from father to son and from son to grandson constitute valid alternatives in cases where prime eyewitness accounts had been lost. Any information handed down along a recognizable chain of informants within a period of 100 years, so Walter Map says, is admissible evidence for 'our own time'.⁴⁸ Thus, according to this rule, the historians of the fourth generation were the last able to record the memories of 1066 and employ them as substitute eyewitness accounts. At the same time, Henry II's lawyers, for the same reasons, stopped people pursuing land claims going back beyond the Conquest. Officially, no one could go back beyond the reign of Henry I.⁴⁹

The study of the formation of oral and written memories of 1066 clearly shows the circulation of stories about the Conquest down several generations into the reign of Henry II (1154–89). The stories were local, centred on specific aspects of the Conquest and were quite personal. This oral tradition for a time ran parallel to a written tradition which attempted to cope with the past by seeing the defeat of 1066 in terms of

God's punishment for the sins of the English nation. By the reign of Henry II, the theme of 'national guilt' had evaporated and made place for discussions of military matters. Tales of military defeat and resistance survived. But what strikes the modern historian most is the almost total amnesia in the long term of individual loss and grief. Trauma as a psychological reason is as likely an explanation for the complete lack of a memorial to the English dead of 1066⁵⁰ as any other which blame the abbots' fear of being associated with the memory of rebels or the lack of patronage for literary activity in general. In Normandy the situation was different. The written memories concentrated first on the victorious leader, his legitimization of the use of force and the justification of military action. The second and third generation continued and expanded the moral justification of their actions. Meanwhile, oral tradition kept alive memories of fighters lower down the social scale. These were rescued by Wace and incorporated in his vernacular *Roman de Rou*, which became a memorial for those who had fought at Hastings.

Thus far I have occasionally referred to the role of women in the memorial process of the Norman Conquest of England: Queen Edith who commissioned a biography of her husband King Edward the Confessor, the wife of the chronicler Henry, archdeacon of Huntingdon, and Constance fitz Gilbert, the patroness of Gaimar. Edith and Henry's wife were full-blooded English women whereas Constance was probably of mixed Anglo-Norman background. It is worth scrutinizing the position of women in post-Conquest England and Normandy in more detail to see if we can be more precise about their contributions to the formation of memories about 1066.

The most obvious category to look at first is the aristocratic women who lost their menfolk at Hastings. Deprived of the protection of their fathers, husbands and sons, they were in a particularly vulnerable position with regard to the land-hungry newcomers eager to legitimize the acquisition of new land through marriage.⁵¹ A considerable number of widows and heiresses married men of Continental backgrounds, like the heiresses Ealdgyth, daughter of Wigot of Wallingford, who married Robert d'Oilly; Muriel, daughter of Colswein of Lincoln, who married Robert de la Haye; Aelfgifu, daughter of a Warwickshire thegn Leofwine, who married Geoffrey de la Querche; of slightly later date Lucy of Bolingbrooke who married three Continental husbands in succession, Ivo of Taillebois, Roger Fitz Gerold and Ranulf le Meschin earl of Chester; and finally, most famously of all, Matilda II who married Henry I. She was not, strictly speaking, a sole heiress bringing land with her, but she

brought with her the vital link with the Anglo-Saxon royal house through which her husband Henry I could establish an extra claim to legitimize his holding of the English throne.

Evidence for Anglo-Saxon widows remarrying Normans is thin and would confirm the evidence from Lanfranc's letter, which we will discuss below, suggesting that many women fled to nunneries in order to avoid marriage. *Domesday Book*, on the other hand, testifies to a considerable number of them holding on to some of their lands; for example Godgifu, widow of Earl Leofric; Aelfgifu, widow of Earl Aelfgar; and unknown women, like Wulfeva widow of Finn; Saewulf's widow; Wulfweard the White's widow; Edric's widow; and many others.⁵² Whether the women who married foreigners did so out of free will or were more or less forced to accept marriage, we do not know. If there was a strong element of coercion, one would expect the memory of resentment to have lingered on for some while. Is there any evidence for women passing on stories of forced marriages to their daughter or granddaughters? Not directly on the compulsory element of marriage, but certainly on the loss of land associated with marriage into Continental families.

Paul Brand, in particular, has pointed out that amongst the late-twelfth- and early-thirteenth-century claims for land going back to the pre-Conquest period, a high percentage was based on claims through the female line.⁵³ One cannot help wondering whether such claims were kept alive because they were associated with strong feelings about the loss of land and kin. Otherwise, English women were instrumental in keeping alive a tradition of English first names for their daughters in particular. Whereas boys' names very quickly became gallicized, girls retained their English names well into the twelfth century. Clearly, a strong sense of historical tradition, perhaps mixed with latent aggression against the Normans, was thereby expressed by the women. As mothers, women had available a variety of ways by which they could influence their sons. Three of the most important Anglo-Norman historians Orderic Vitalis, Henry of Huntingdon and William of Malmesbury were of a mixed parentage: Orderic and Henry had English mothers, whereas William had one parent, probably his mother, of English origin. All three knew English, read Old English source material and used English eyewitness accounts. Having learned their native language from their mothers, common sense suggests that with the language they also received instruction on customs and manners, which in due course inspired them to write down the history of their maternal inheritance. Tracing similar influences amongst daughters of English women is much more difficult. That such influence

existed, however, must be concluded from the patronage exercised by the second and third generation of children who could claim English ancestry.

In Chapter 4 we discussed the case of a Romsey hagiographical tradition which inspired women to commission their mother's or grandmother's biography. Queen Matilda II, brought up at Romsey, ordered a *Life* of her mother Margaret, while her niece Matilda was probably instrumental in the commissioning of the *Life* of her grandmother Countess Ida of Boulogne. *The mother as the link in a family chain was seen as an important instrument for keeping track of one's ancestry and the Life functioned as a shrine encapsulating memories for posterity.* These *Lives*, however, were mostly private testimonies of the women involved. On a public level, Queen Matilda II commissioned William of Malmesbury to write the *Deeds of the Kings of the English* which still stands as a monument to archival research and a record of oral tradition encapsulating much of what we now know of Anglo-Saxon England. Through her historical interest and dynastic responsibility – after all she embodied the continuation of Anglo-Saxon royal blood after the Conquest – she bridged the gap between life in England before the Conquest and life under foreign occupation after 1066. As queen consort she was of course in a powerful position to exercise such influence as she could.

There were other, more subtle ways in which the women of the Conquest period left a conscious trail of reminiscences. Take, for example, Tostig's widow Judith, whom we have met before as benefactor of the Bavarian monastery of Weingarten in her capacity as wife of Duke Welf of Bavaria. There is no doubt in my mind that she was a prime witness for the 1066 details we find in late-eleventh-century Bavarian chronicles and annals. One of the most persistent stories circulating there must have been generated by Judith's belief that her first husband Tostig, instead of his older brother Harold, should have succeeded to the throne of England. She is undoubtedly the source for the persistent rumour that she was the widow of the king of England, who brought with her a fabulous amount of wealth.⁵⁴ Even her obituary at Weingarten lists the claim of her royal widowhood. The rivalry between Tostig and Harold is independently confirmed by the biographer of King Edward, who says that Tostig was the king's favourite. Clearly, Judith fostered a sense of frustration till the end of her life that her first husband had lost out to his brother Harold in all respects and that he, not Harold, should have been king and she a queen.

Lay women, and in particular mothers, had family links to pass on traditions to their children and grandchildren. But what happened in English nunneries? Did nuns play a role in the transfer of traditions beyond 1066? To avoid union with foreigners, the only alternative for English women was to take up the veil and retreat to a nunnery. This had apparently happened to such a large extent that in the 1080s, Archbishop Lanfranc turned to his Norman colleague Bishop Geoffrey of Coutances for expert advice on canon law.⁵⁵ The problem was that many women, who had become nuns not out of vocation, but 'out of fear for the French', wished to leave the convent. Lanfranc, prepared to be flexible, confirmed that his will was also that of the king, and allowed the women to depart provided that their fellow nuns would testify that they had entered under duress. Two decades later Queen Matilda II, in a conversation with Archbishop Anselm, confirmed the story of the women taking refuge in nunneries, hinting that she had been one of them herself. On balance, many women who could afford the nunnery's entrance fee preferred life within the cloister to sharing a bed with a foreigner. *- would have to do*

One of the reasons why it is difficult to trace evidence for the manner in which 1066 was remembered in nunneries is the paucity of documentary evidence from such houses. What we have are little more than snippets here and there. On several occasions we have looked at the nunnery of Romsey, where the Anglo-Saxon royal cousins Queen Matilda II and her sister Mary were looked after by their Aunt Christina, a sister of their mother Queen Margaret. They were joined by Gunhild, daughter of King Harold, who was apparently left behind while the rest of her family (her grandmother Gytha, her aunt Gunhild and her aunt Judith) went into exile in Flanders. Did the fact that they belonged to rival royal clans make any difference to the way in which they perceived the Norman Conquest? It is interesting to note that in the end, all three aristocratic women left monastic life for marriage: Matilda married Henry I of England; Mary went overseas to Boulogne as wife of Eustace III; and Gunhild, whose further fate is unknown, eloped with Count Alan the Black of Brittany, a feat for which she was severely reprimanded by Anselm.⁵⁶ All three belonged to the category of women who, in a sense, had been forced to retreat to monastic life while the country was in turmoil. Yet the coming and going of these aristocratic women may be explained differently.

As English women they were not alone in the nunneries. They were joined by foreign women, who were established there by fathers and brothers who were busy consolidating their new acquisitions in England.

Having their womenfolk inside rich monastic houses helped to prepare the ground for general acceptance of the newcomers in England. One of them was the unnamed daughter of Stephen fitz Airard, captain of the Conqueror's flagship, the Mora.⁵⁷ One cannot but wonder about the conversations that would have taken place at Romsey between the women representing such different political backgrounds. In Wilton we find similar tensions. There Queen Edith, widow of King Edward the Confessor, retired and died in 1075. A few years later Eve, the daughter of a Danish-Lotharingian couple, who had entered the monastery in 1065, left to take up life as a recluse on the Continent at Angers.⁵⁸ Did political animosity between rival ethnic groups cloud the atmosphere in nunneries or do we envisage the women serenely living a life of prayer and contemplation together? And what did such tensions do to the memorial tradition in monasteries? It must have been extraordinarily difficult – as we know, for example from the monks' community at Christ Church, Canterbury – to rebuild anything resembling a communally satisfying memorial tradition in these establishments. *have to please everybody*

At Barking we find the first hints of a more permanent literary memorial revival much later in the twelfth century. At the beginning of the century, the nun Matilda was actively involved in a miracle performed through the intervention of King Edward, while later on a nun, probably Clemence, wrote a verse life of Edward the Confessor in Old French. The sympathies of these nuns were with the old Anglo-Saxon dynasty more than with the new Norman family. This seems to have been the overriding, lasting sentiment in the English nunneries, for at Chatteris, near Ely, the nun Marie reworked a Latin life of St Etheldreda as a *Vie Sainte Audrée* in French.⁵⁹

Nunneries were not the only monastic houses to offer shelter to beleaguered girls and women in the post-Conquest period. At Crowland, Earl Waltheof's memory was guarded by the English and French monks who offered to bury the body of the only Anglo-Saxon aristocrat to be executed for treason by William the Conqueror. Whether the inspiration for his burial at Crowland, one of the last abbeys to submit to foreign rule, came from the monks or from the earl's widow, Countess Judith niece of the Conqueror himself, remains a mystery. Crowland too was the place where a romantic tale of Judith's refusal to remarry was written down. Allegedly, she refused a landless northern French soldier, Simon of Senlis, whom she passed on to her daughter and heiress Maud.⁶⁰ Considering the fact that for the next three generations only women passed on her line and kept in touch with the monks of Crowland, it is

tempting to believe that the story went the same, female, route before it was committed to writing. It was also Crowland that offered to look after Hereward's Flemish widow Turfrida, if a fifteenth-century tradition is to be believed. Whether or not these late stories are true, they testify to a growing perception in English monasteries that the post-Conquest period took its toll particularly of women. It is therefore no wonder that memories about the conquest, partially fuelled by women's experiences, were kept alive through oral tradition before they were written down three or four generations later.

This case study of the memory of 1066 shows the various ways in which different generations remember the Conquest and its aftermath. In the first place, there is the oral evidence which was passed on through several generations before it was recorded in writing. We have seen how men and women remembered stories, but that it was mostly, though not exclusively, men who put pen to paper. Virtually all oral stories exchanged by the Normans and the English were part of the social process to come to terms with the momentous change in landholding patterns, new customs and above all the intrusion of a new language. Secondly, the quite exceptional circumstances of a complete take-over of one country by the elite of another resulted in personal memories of people from different ethnic backgrounds (Norman, Breton, Angevin, Flemish, et cetera), from both the victorious and the victimized sides, so that from the first down to the fourth generation, each family had its own version of events to tell. Historians from the second generation onwards began to write, though new stories kept emerging well into the late twelfth century. Thirdly, the evidence presented here shows that gender played an important part in the remembrance of things past. Men *and* women were responsible for passing on stories about the events of 1066 and we should not underestimate the role of at least three English women whose sons, Orderic, Henry and William, became the most famous chroniclers of the Conquest.

7

CONCLUSION

Remembrance of things past is inextricably bound up with family life. Medieval people had parents, grandparents and great-grandparents whom they remembered if not personally, then through the stories told by others. Then, as now, the overlapping circles of the three-generation family, and of their wider kin, generated the stories about the past discussed in this book. The evidence for knowledge amongst the noble classes and literate people, that is those groups who have left documentation about their ancestors, is overwhelming. What are the more specific conclusions we can draw if we remind ourselves of the three broad themes which we have discussed in this book: oral tradition, memory and gender?

Oral Tradition

Much information about the past circulated orally before it was written down. Those people who recorded oral stories did so extremely conscientiously, noting down all the links in the chain of informants they could remember. As far as authority was concerned, eyewitnesses were considered the most trustworthy informants and the value of authority decreased the further away one moved from the original informant. In the absence of eyewitnesses, any person knowing someone linked to the original informant or event was useful. Amongst the informants men, and particularly church men, rated highest followed by lay noble men. Women were only quoted if they could not be avoided. In other words, if the sole available informant was a woman she was heard, but a great deal of scepticism was attached to her story.