S T E P H E N   B A X T E R

# The limits of the late Anglo-Saxon state

My brief at the conference was to offer some reflections on late Anglo-Saxon England to a session on "Grenzen und Widerstände", "limits and resistance".[1] I interpreted this as an opportunity to consider the limits of the late Anglo-Saxon state, and why it failed to offer greater resistance to the Normans − and so to address a classic problem of eleventh-century history: were there structural flaws in the late Anglo-Saxon state which contributed to its demise?

It is not currently fashionable to answer this question in the affirmative. Recent scholarship has formulated a 'maximum view' of the late Anglo-Saxon state which stresses its power and sophistication.[2] A logical corollary might be to regard the Norman Conquest as an aberration − the result of a dynastic crisis and defeat by the narrowest of margins in a single, decisive battle; and if so, it might seem otiose to seek deeper, structural explanations for its occurrence. This paper develops a different argument. It contends that the Conquest was the outcome of a lengthy process, not a single event, to which a variety of causal factors contributed; that structural flaws in the late Anglo-Saxon state were important among these factors; but that several of these flaws could be, indeed often are, listed among its strengths. A defining paradox of the late Anglo-Saxon state is that its strengths made it vulnerable. This paper identifies some of these strengths and paradoxical weaknesses, and considers how these affected the course of events during three critical phases of the Conquest: the crisis of 1065−1066, the campaigns of 1066, and the period between 1066 and 1071 when the Normans' victory at Hastings was consolidated.

## I.

It may help to begin by sketching how I conceptualize early medieval states. I imagine them comprising three main elements: formal, 'transpersonal' power structures, consisting mostly of institutions; informal power structures, the defining elements of the 'Personenverbandsstaat', consisting of human

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[1] See the programme to the conference „Staat und Staatlichkeit im europäischen Frühmittelalter (500–1050) – Grundlagen, Grenzen, Entwicklungen" (Wien, 18.–21. September 2007).

[2] For particularly forceful statements of this view, see James Campbell, Observations on English government from the tenth to the twelfth century, in: Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 5/25 (1975) 39–54, repr. in: (and cited from) id., Essays in Anglo-Saxon History (London 1986) 155–170; id., The significance of the Anglo-Norman state in the administrative history of Western Europe, in: Histoire comparée de l'administration (IVe–XVIIIe siècles), ed. Werner Paravicini/Karl Ferdinand Werner (Beihefte der Francia 9, München 1980) 117–134, repr. in: (and cited from) id., Essays in Anglo-Saxon History (London 1986) 171–189; id., The late Anglo-Saxon state: a maximum view, in: Proceedings of the British Academy 87 (1994) 39–65, repr. in: (and cited from) id., The Anglo-Saxon State (London 2000) 1–30; and Patrick Wormald, Frederic William Maitland and the earliest English law, in: Law and History Review 16 (1998) 1–25, repr. in: id., Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience (London 1999) 45–69. Of course, this view is not universally accepted. For more sceptical views of late Anglo-Saxon government see, for example, Reginald Allen Brown, The Normans and the Norman Conquest (Woodbridge ²1985) 51–93; Timothy Reuter, The making of England and Germany, 850–1050: points of comparison and difference, in: Medieval Europeans: Studies in Ethnic Identity and National Perspectives in Medieval Europe, ed. Alfred Smyth (London 1998) 53–70, repr. in: id., Medieval Polities and Modern Mentalities, ed. Janet L. Nelson (Cambridge 2006) 284–299; Rees Davies, The medieval state: the tyranny of a concept, in: Journal of Historical Sociology 16/2 (2003) 280–300; Paul Hyams, Rancor and Reconciliation in Medieval England (Ithaca 2003) 71–110; Sarah Foot, The historiography of the Anglo-Saxon 'Nation-State', in: Power and the Nation in European History, ed. Len Scales/Oliver Zimmer (Cambridge 2005) 125–142; Simon Keynes, Re-reading king Æthelred the Unready, in: Writing Medieval Biography 750–1250: Essays in Honour of Frank Barlow, ed. David Bates/Julia Crick/Sarah Hamilton (Woodbridge 2006) 77–97, esp. 82–85.

networks and relationships – the bonds created by patronage, lordship, kinship, friendship, confraternity and so on; and an ideological carapace, consisting of ideas which justified the elite's control of these structures, which were propagated and disseminated in various ways − through the lawmaking, legislation, literature, the ritualized choreography of royal charisma, and so on.[3] These elements were mostly interdependent, not mutually exclusive; and as the various contributions to this volume make clear, their relative importance varies considerably from one polity to another, both historically and historiographically. The historiography of late Anglo-Saxon state has placed considerable emphasis on the development and growth of its formal power structures.[4] However, recent work has begun to explore its ideological foundations,[5] and to examine how informal power structures functioned within it.[6]

The following list of the strengths and paradoxical weaknesses of the late Anglo-Saxon state is drawn from all three elements. That state possessed, or consisted in:

(1.) An effective institutional framework. This was both centralized and devolved, such that it channelled centrifugal and centripetal forces effectively. It consisted of a hierarchy of functioning public courts (meetings of the king's counsellors, and of shire, hundredal and other local courts);[7] systems of administration based on the hide, which facilitated a range of government functions (taxation, mobilisation, the construction and maintenance of fortresses, bridges and other public works);[8] a

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[3] In addition to the papers by Campbell, Davies, Reuter and Wormald cited in the previous note, I have found the following especially helpful in formulating this model: Gert Althoff, Verwandte, Freunde und Getreue. Zum politischen Stellenwert der Gruppenbindungen im früheren Mittelalter (Darmstadt 1990), engl.: Christopher Carroll, Family, Friends and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in Medieval Europe (Cambridge 2004); Susan Reynolds, Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe 900–1300 (Oxford [2]1997); ead., The historiography of the medieval state, in: A Companion to Historiography, ed. Michael Bentley (London 1997) 117–138; Christopher Wickham, Problems in Doing Comparative History. The Reuter Lecture 2004 (Southampton 2005); Patrick Wormald, Germanic power structures: the early English experience, in: Power and the Nation in European History, ed. Len Scales/Oliver Zimmer (Cambridge 2005) 105–124; Patrick Wormald, Pre-modern 'state' and 'nation': definite or indefinite?, in: Staat im frühen Mittelalter, ed. Stuart Airlie/Walter Pohl/Helmut Reimitz (Forschungen zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 11, Wien 2006) 179–189.

[4] For mordant but acute remarks on English historians' predilection for archival evidence and administrative history, see Reuter, Medieval Polities and Modern Mentalities 9–10, 13, 47, 294. For an invaluable survey of the literature on Anglo-Saxon government, see Simon Keynes, Anglo-Saxon England: A Bibliographical Handbook for Students of Anglo-Saxon History (Cambridge [6]2005) 155–181. Classic surveys with a strong institutional emphasis include: William Stubbs, The Constitutional History of England in its Origin and Development (Oxford [2]1875); Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen (ed. Felix Liebermann, 3 vols., Halle 1903–1916); Henry Munro Chadwick, Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions (Cambridge 1905); Vivian Hunter Galbraith, Studies in the Public Records (London 1948); Frank Merry Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England (Oxford [3]1971); Henry Loyn, The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England 500–1087 (London 1984); Ann Williams, Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England c. 500–1066 (Basingstoke/London 1999).

[5] See, for example, Patrick Wormald, The Making of English Law. King Alfred to the Twelfth Century 1: Legislation and its Limits (Oxford 1999) esp. 416–484, which stresses the ideological importance of pre-Conquest legislation. For the ideological responses to two of the most intensive phases of Viking activity in England, see David Pratt, The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great (Cambridge 2007); and Simon Keynes, An abbot, an archbishop, and the Viking raids of 1006–1007 and 1009–1012, in: Anglo-Saxon England 36 (2007) 151–220.

[6] See, for example, Robin Fleming, Kings and Lords in Conquest England (Cambridge 1991); Pauline Stafford, Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England (Oxford 1997); Williams, Kingship and Government 97–151; Stephen Baxter, The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England (Oxford 2007); Julia Barrow, Demonstrative behaviour and political communication in later Anglo-Saxon England, in: Anglo-Saxon England 36 (2007) 127–150.

[7] On which see, most recently, James Campbell, Anglo-Saxon courts, in: Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages: The Proceedings of the First Alcuin Conference, ed. Catherine Cubitt (Turnhout 2003) 155–169; David Hill, The shiring of Mercia – again, in: Edward the Elder, 899–924, ed. Nick Higham/David Hill (London 2001) 144–159; James Campbell, Hundreds and leets: a survey with suggestions, in: Medieval East Anglia, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill (Woodbridge 2005) 153–167.

[8] The best discussion of the hide remains Frederic William Maitland, Domesday Book and Beyond: Three Essays in the Early History of England (Cambridge 1987) 357–520. For its importance in late Anglo-Saxon government generally, see Campbell, Observations 157–158 and 167; id., Anglo-Norman State 171–175, 180–181; id., Late Anglo-Saxon state 2–6. For its use in the mobilisation of armies, see Charles Warren Hollister, Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions (Oxford 1962) 38–58; in the construction, garrisoning and maintenance of fortresses, see The Defence of Wessex: The Burghal Hidage and Anglo-Saxon Fortifications, ed. David Hill/Alexander Rumble (Manchester 1996); for the construction and maintenance of bridges, see Campbell, Late Anglo-Saxon state 182–183; David Harrison, The Bridges of Medieval England:

dense network of royal officials (earls, royal household officials, sheriffs, port-reeves, moneyers, and other agents), who engineered and maintained this machinery;[9] and the use of written instruments which lubricated many of its working parts.[10]

(2.) The capacity to exploit a wealthy and growing economy. Domesday Book proves that the economy was not so much developing as highly developed: one which was, for example, heavily capitalized with about 6,000 mills and 80,000 ploughteams, and which sustained high volumes of long-distance trade, and a significant urban population.[11] The state was able to exploit this wealth above all through an abundant, closely-controlled system of coinage,[12] and high − sometimes oppressively high − levels of taxation.[13]

(3.) An aggressively interventionist approach to law and the administration of justice. Kings' aspirations to make and control law and justice became manifest in a long sequence of royal legislation issued between the reigns of Alfred and Cnut, and were implemented through a system of local courts and locally-based judicial communities, backed where necessary by force.[14] An important feature of late Anglo-Saxon justice was that all free men were obliged to swear oaths of loyalty to the king which, like the oaths given to Carolingian rulers discussed by Stefan Esders in this volume, created an overriding allegiance to the king which took precedence over loyalty to other lords; however, in late Anglo-Saxon England, they also involved a commitment to abstain from serious crime, such that a range of ordinary offences, including theft, could be interpreted as acts of treachery and punished accordingly.[15] All this went together with an unusual degree of civil peace: localized warfare centred on castle-based lordships appears to have been much rarer in England than it was in many of her Continental neighbours in the early eleventh century.[16]

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Transport and Society 400–1800 (Oxford 2004); and Alan Cooper, Bridges, Law and Power in Medieval England, 700–1400 (Woodbridge 2006); and for public works more generally, Andrew Bell, The Organization of Public Works in Society and by the State in Early Medieval England, c. 800–1300 (PhD thesis Oxford 2006).

[9] For the functions of earls in late Anglo-Saxon government, see Baxter, Earls of Mercia 61–124; for royal household officials, Williams, Kingship and Government 91–92, 126–130; for sheriffs, William Morris, The Medieval English Sheriff to 1300 (Manchester 1927) 17–39; and for other officials, James Campbell, Some agents and agencies of the late Anglo-Saxon state, in: Domesday Studies, ed. James Holt (Woodbridge 1986) 201–218, repr. in: The Anglo-Saxon State (London 2000) 201–227.

[10] For the question as to how much the late Anglo-Saxon state depended on practical literacy and the written word, see the revised first chapter of Michael Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307 (Oxford [2]1993), with the literature surveyed there.

[11] The most accessible statistical digest of Domesday Book remains Henry Darby, Domesday England (Cambridge 1977) 336, 361, for statistics on mills and ploughteams. For reflections on the economy of late Anglo-Saxon England, see Peter Sawyer, The wealth of England in the eleventh century, in: Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 5/15 (1965) 145–164; James Campbell, Was it infancy in England? Some questions of comparison, in: England and her Neighbours, 1066–1453: Studies in Honour of Pierre Chaplais, ed. Michael Jones/Malcolm Vale (London 1989) 1–17, repr. in: id., The Anglo-Saxon State (London 2000) 179–200.

[12] David Michael Metcalf, An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman Coin Finds, c. 973–1086 (London 1998).

[13] Campbell, Late Anglo-Saxon State 28 and the references listed at n. 91.

[14] Wormald, English law; Wormald, Legal culture chapters 1, 10, 12 and 13.

[15] Campbell, Observations on English government 162; Patrick Wormald, Oaths and Frankpledge, in: The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England, ed. Michael Lapidge/John Blair/Simon Keynes/Donald Scragg (Oxford 1999) 192–193, 338; Wormald, Legal Culture 12, 55–56, 62, 266, 307, 366–367; Wormald, Pre-modern 'state' 183–184.

[16] As James Campbell has observed (id., Infancy 184): "In England there was no need for a peace movement because the concept of public peace was never broken as it was on the Continent". Cf. The Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious Response in France around the Year 1000, ed. Thomas Head/Richard Landes (Ithaca 1992); Dominique Barthélemy, L'an mil et la paix de Dieu: La France chrétienne et féodale 980–1060 (Paris 1999). For the impact of lordly violence in late tenth and early eleventh-century Francia more generally see, among many, Jean-Pierre Poly/Éric Bournazel, La mutation féodale, X[e]–XIIe siècles (Paris 1980); Thomas Bisson, The 'feudal revolution', in: Past & Present 142 (1994) 6–42; Dominique Barthélemy, La mutation de l'an mil a-t-elle eu lieu? Servage et chevalerie dans la France des Xe et XIe siècles (Paris 1997). There were fortified lordly residences in late Anglo-Saxon England, whose form closely resembled the ringworks built in large numbers in northern France in the early eleventh century – Ann Williams, A bell-house and a burh-geat: lordly residences in England before the Norman Conquest, in: Medieval Knighthood 4 (1992) 221–240; and Robert Higham/Philip Barker, Timber Castles (Exeter [2]2004); however, there is little if any evidence to suggest that such residences functioned as foci for localized warfare or violently sustained seigneurial cells in England before the Conquest. The annal for 1051 is an exception which proves the rule: "The [Norman] foreigners then had built a castle (þa

(4.) A mature and clearly articulated ideological carapace. Over a long period, the English were encouraged to view themselves as a Chosen People with a Covenant with God: ideas which were most powerfully articulated for the *gens Anglorum* by Bede, and periodically revitalized thereafter, most notably in the courts of Alfred, Athelstan, Edgar, Æthelred 'the Unready' and Cnut. This contributed to a strong sense of collective identity, which was partly regnal in character, but more especially focussed around a people, the *Angelcynn*, and their land, *Engla lond*.[17]

(5.) Unified political structures, which were both centralized and broadly based.[18] To borrow Timothy Reuter's helpful phrase, this was a kingdom in which 'assembly politics' mattered a great deal.[19] The witness lists of royal diplomas and the narrative evidence combine to demonstrate that the upper ranks of the English nobility were assiduous in attendance at meetings of the king's counsellors, which remained the principal foci of political activity in the kingdom.[20]

This much is well established in the literature, but three further points need emphasis:

(6.) The royal demesne was substantial, widely distributed, and more extensive than the estates of any noble family. This needs stressing, since it tends against an influential, but flawed, argument: that King Edward held less land than the most powerful aristocratic family in the kingdom, the house of Godwine, and that this undermined his regime with disastrous consequences.[21] If this were so, we might be tempted to compare the relationship between Edward and his earls with the relationship between the last Merovingian kings and the mayors of the palace as described by Einhard: who says that the former subsisted on a single estate and a modest income assigned to them by the latter.[22] However, it is in fact demonstrable that Edward was comfortably the wealthiest landholder in the kingdom.[23]

(7.) In addition − and this is arguably more important for understanding the pattern of late Anglo-Saxon politics − King Edward enjoyed very considerable powers of patronage. There are strong grounds for thinking that late Anglo-Saxon kings enjoyed far more extensive control over aristocratic landholdings than the charter evidence alone suggests. In particular, Domesday Book proves that there was a quantum difference between the wealth of certain earls and the rest of the English nobility; and the speed and frequency with which the structure of English earldoms changed during King Edward's

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    *welisce menn gewroht ænne castel*) in Herefordshire in Earl Swein's province, and had inflicted every possible injury and insult upon the king's men in those parts"; The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Revised Translation, MS E a. 1051 (ed. Dorothy Whitelock/David Douglas/Susie Tucker, London 1961) 119; The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a Collaborative Edition 7, MS E: a Semi-Diplomatic Edition with Indices and Notes (ed. Susan Irvine, Cambridge 2004) 81. Castles are repeatedly linked with oppression in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: see, for example, MS D a. 1066 and MS E a. 1087, ed. Whitelock/Douglas/Tucker 145 and 164.

[17] For the idea of 'Chosen Peoples' in the formation of national identities generally, see Anthony David Smith, Chosen Peoples. Sacred Sources of National Identity (Oxford 2003); and for the particular way it was developed in Anglo-Saxon England, see Patrick Wormald, Bede, the Bretwaldas and the origins of the gens Anglorum, in: Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, ed. Patrick Wormald/Donald Bullough/Roger Collins (Oxford 1983) 99–129, repr. in: Patrick Wormald, The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian, ed. Stephen Baxter (Oxford 2005) 106–134; Patrick Wormald, Engla Lond: The making of an allegiance, in: Journal of Historical Sociology 7 (1994) 1–24, repr. in: id., Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience (London 1999) 359–382. For English identity before 1006, see further: Sarah Foot, The making of Angelcynn: English identity before the Norman conquest, in: Transactions of the Royal Historical Society 6/6 (1996) 25–49; and, most recently, Pauline Stafford, The Anglo-Saxon chronicles, identity and the making of England, in: Haskins Society Journal 19 (2008) 28–50. But for an important corrective, see George Molyneaux, The Old English Bede: English ideology or Christian instruction?, in: English Historical Review (forthcoming).

[18] James Campbell, The united kingdom of England: the Anglo-Saxon achievement, in: Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History, ed. Alexander Grant/Keith Stringer (London 1995) 31–47, repr. in: (and cited from) The Anglo-Saxon State (London 2000) 31–53.

[19] Timothy Reuter, Assembly politics in western Europe from the eighth century to the twelfth, in: The Medieval World, ed. Peter Linehan/Janet L. Nelson (London 2001) 432–450, repr. in: id., Medieval Polities and Modern Mentalities, ed. Janet L. Nelson (Cambridge 2006) 193–216.

[20] The witness list evidence is collected and tabulated by Simon Keynes, An Atlas of Attestations of Anglo-Saxon Charters, c. 670–1066 (Cambridge 1998); Baxter, Earls of Mercia 17–60, 270–297, essays an account of the English nobility and politics between the 990s and the 1070s.

[21] Fleming, Kings and Lords 53–103.

[22] Einhard, Vita Karoli magni 1 (ed. Oswald Holder-Egger, MGH SS rer. Germ. in us. schol. [25], Hannover 1911) 3.

[23] Baxter, Earls of Mercia 128–138.

reign is most readily comprehensible if it is assumed that there were 'comital manors' in each shire which could be transferred from one earl to another with relative ease at the king's command. If so, the amount of land which was available for royal patronage was much greater than is generally assumed.[24] Here it is also relevant that the distribution of the estates of the wealthiest magnates were not concentrated in compact blocks, but were widely distributed across several shires, such that the wealthiest magnates had a tenurial stake in the kingdom as a whole.[25]

(8.) Finally, it is significant that lordship structures tended to work with, not against, the grain of royal government. This is demonstrable in various ways. The formulae and rituals for loyalty oaths were borrowed from and deliberately evoked that of *mannræden*, commendatory lordship.[26] There is little if any evidence of 'private justice' in late Anglo-Saxon England. Kings alienated 'soke' rights, but this gave the beneficiary only the rights to collect the profits of justice done in royal courts.[27] Domesday Book proves that even the most modestly endowed allodial landholders were free to commend themselves (again, in public courts) to lords of their own choosing; and that the majority took the opportunity to commend themselves to lords who did not have their soke. This enabled free men to use commendation to protect themselves from lords with financial incentives to prosecute them, and thus helps to explain the apparent absence of banal lordship from late Anglo-Saxon England.[28] Domesday Book also proves that lords who enjoyed most influence at the king's court also attracted a disproportionately large number of commendations. This meant that lordship had an important political dimension, and was among the factors which encouraged national unity, in that it linked local (shire-focussed) and national (assembly) politics.[29]

With these points in mind, the term 'Staat' seems far more applicable to late Anglo-Saxon polity than does 'Staatlichkeit'. However, since to say may be to expose oneself to charges of 'English exceptionalism', it may be as well to register two points before proceeding further. First, I do not claim that any of the phenomena I have listed are unique to late Anglo-Saxon England; I merely assert that they did exist there, and leave the question as to whether that was also the case in other polities entirely open. It may be that some, perhaps many of the supposedly unique or unusual features of the late Anglo-Saxon state are illusions conjured from exceptional evidence − above all Domesday Book. Indeed, for precisely that reason, the unusual nature of the English evidence raises important comparative questions and problems, not least in expanding the range of possibilities for all early medieval polities.[30] To ask such questions is not to claim that English experience was 'normal', still less

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[24] Stephen Baxter/John Blair, Land tenure and royal patronage in the early English kingdom: a model and a case study, in: Anglo-Norman Studies 28 (2006) 19–46; Baxter, Earls of Mercia 138–151. Wickham, Problems 22–30, makes a persuasive case for explaining the contrasting fortunes of the West Saxon and West Frankish kings in the tenth century on the grounds that the former enjoyed greater landed resources, and thus scope for the exercise of patronage, than did the latter.

[25] See, for example, Campbell, United kingdom of England 35; and Wickham, Problems 26–27 and 34. The estates and lordships of a significant proportion of the English nobility in 1066 are listed by Peter Clarke, The English Nobility under Edward the Confessor (Oxford 1994). For maps of the Domesday estates of the two richest families in Edward the Confessor's England (the houses of Leofwine and Godwine) see Baxter, Earls of Mercia 142–143. The revised edition of The Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England (PASE), ed. Stephen Baxter/Simon Keynes/Janet L. Nelson (www.pase.ac.uk), to be published online in 2010, will enable users to generate tables and maps of the estates of all pre-Conquest landholders in England in Domesday Book.

[26] Cf. Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I, III Edmund 1 (ed./trans. Agnes Jane Robertson, Cambridge 1925) 12–13: "In the first place, all shall swear in the name of the Lord, before whom that holy thing is holy, that they will be faithful to King Edmund, just as it behoves a man to be faithful to his lord (*sicut homo debet esse fidelis domino suo*), without any dispute or dissension, openly or in secret, loving what he loves and shunning what he shuns."

[27] Patrick Wormald, Lordship and justice in the early English kingdom: Oswaldslow revisited, in: Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages, ed. Wendy Davies/Paul Fouracre (Cambridge 1995) 114–136, repr. in: id., Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience (London 1999) 313–332.

[28] Stephen Baxter, Lordship and justice in the early English kingdom: the judicial functions of commendation revisited, in: Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald, ed. Stephen Baxter/Catherine Karkov/Janet L. Nelson/David Pelteret (Farnham 2009) 383−419.

[29] Campbell, Anglo-Saxon state 18; Clarke, English nobility 61–111; Baxter, Earls of Mercia 204–269.

[30] That this is in fact the position of the two scholars most often accused of 'English exceptionalism' is implicit in several of the papers by James Campbell (cf. for instance: Observations on English government, The administrative significance of

'normative', thereby succumbing to 'cultural solipsism';[31] it merely registers the possibility that this experience may have been less unusual than the available evidence might suggest. Second, I do not claim that the phenomena I have listed were inherently Good Things.[32] On the contrary, I assume that the aggressive intrusiveness of the late Anglo-Saxon state caused a great deal of human misery, above all for the peasantry which ultimately shouldered its burden.[33] I further contend that many of the supposed strengths of that state were causally linked to the process by which it was conquered, the point to which we may now turn.

## II.

English politics were volatile for much of King Edward the Confessor's reign. The roots of this volatility were partly dynastic and partly factional. The dynastic crisis was caused by the fact that King Edward's marriage to Queen Edith failed to produce an heir, and was exacerbated by Edward's mishandling of the succession issue. Edward tried to exploit his childlessness for diplomatic gain, but ended up making overtures or commitments to several different candidates in turn, including William and Harold − two of the most powerful and ambitious magnates in northwest Europe. Of course, this situation was an accident of biology and personality, not the result of any structural flaw in the polity. However, the fact that the king enjoyed very considerable powers of diplomacy and patronage meant that his kingdom's fortunes were closely tied to his ability to handle these powers effectively; and Edward appears to have lacked that ability, especially during the last decade of his reign.[34] This dynastic crisis was intensified by a closely-related factional struggle. The fact that the king exercised considerable powers of patronage meant that faction was endemic in late Anglo-Saxon politics, for this created a strong gravitational pull towards his court and the assemblies over which he presided: it was simply imperative for nobles to be present to compete for office, land and power, either by securing the king's favour, or if necessary by controlling the king himself. A combination of charter, narrative and Domesday evidence makes it possible approximately to reconstruct the changing shape of Edward the Confessor's earldoms, and the resulting analysis establishes that they were highly unstable. Edward appointed twelve earls, but only two of them (Harold and Ælfgar) succeeded to their father's earldoms, and at least four of them (Swein, Odda, Waltheof, and Leofwine) acquired newly-created earldoms which consisted of a new combination of shires. Edward also sent five of his earls into exile, two of them more than once: Swein in 1046/1047, 1049 and 1051, Godwine and Harold in 1051, Ælfgar in 1055 and 1058, Tostig in 1065. On each occasion, their earldoms appear to have been reassigned to other earls in their absence, but all five of them were able to mobilize mercenary armies and tried to force their way back into power. In addition, there was a belt of Midland shires from Gloucestershire in the southwest to Lincolnshire in the northeast which were frequently transferred from one earldom to another at the king's discretion: an extreme case is Oxfordshire, which was controlled by as many as seven different earls in the seventeen years between 1049 and 1066. All this made it possible for the king to reconfigure old earldoms, and to carve out new ones;[35] and competition for these

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the Anglo-Norman state, Was it infancy in England?), which have a strong comparative thrust, and is made explicit in a contribution to an earlier volume in this series: Wormald, Pre-modern 'state' 181.

[31] Wickham, Problems 2–3 and 18–20.

[32] For criticism of English historiography along these lines, see Reuter, Medieval Polities 294, 406–407; Davies, Medieval state 288, 296; Keynes, King Æthelred the Unready 82–85.

[33] Perhaps the best explanation for the fact that free peasants occur most frequently in Domesday Book in eastern and northeastern England (Darby, Domesday England 61–68) is that these parts of England were less exposed to the burdens of West Saxon government during the late ninth century and early tenth: Maitland, Domesday Book 339–340. The relationship between government and the peasantry in early medieval England is one of the central themes of Rosamond Faith, The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship (Leicester 1997).

[34] Stephen Baxter, Edward the Confessor and the succession question, in: Edward the Confessor: The Man and the Legend, ed. Richard Mortimer (Woodbridge 2009) 77–118.

[35] For maps illustrating the changing structure of King Edward's earldoms, see Baxter, Edward the Confessor 116–117; and for the evidence on which these are based, see Baxter, Earls of Mercia 62–71, 302–314. For Oxfordshire, see Stephen Baxter, The earls of Mercia and their commended men in the mid-eleventh century, in: Anglo-Norman Studies 23 (2001) 23–46, at 35–36.

commands and their massive tenurial endowments created intense rivalries between − and sometimes within − the most powerful noble families.

King Edward's mishandling of these remarkable powers culminated in crisis. From 1055 onwards, he allowed himself to become overly dependent upon the house of Godwine; and by the end of his reign, two of Godwine's sons, Harold and Tostig, were vying for his throne. In 1065, the men of Northumbria rebelled and demanded Morcar, of the house of Leofwine, as their earl in Tostig's place; Harold seized his chance and allowed this to happen, forcing Tostig into exile; and when Edward died a few weeks later, Harold made himself king of a divided nation. As a result, the English failed to offer a united response to the two invasions of 1066: Tostig returned with the invading Norwegian king Harald Hardrada, defeating Eadwine and Morcar at Fulford Gate. They survived, but did not fight again that year, so Harold was forced to fight on two fronts with a depleted army.[36]

Two further observations about 1066 itself must suffice. First, as Peter Sawyer observed in a justly famous article, it was essentially the wealth of England, and the state's capacity to exploit its resources, which made it such an attractive target to attack.[37] Second, Duke William and his followers benefited from greater experience of warfare. Between his accession in 1035 and 1066, William spent much of his life in command of armies, resisting two domestic rebellions (in 1046−1047, and 1052), repelling two major invasions (in 1054 and 1057), leading two major cross-border expeditions (in 1063 and 1064), and engaging in a whole series of defensive and offensive campaigns along Normandy's southern border.[38] In doing so, he mastered the techniques of attritional warfare: avoiding pitched battle unless absolutely necessary in favour of less risky strategies − sieging, ravaging, plundering, harassing, competing for supplies and supply chains.[39] Contrast the situation in England: between 1035 and 1065, there were three cross-border expeditions by English armies (into Scotland in 1054, and into Wales in 1056 and 1063), though none of these resulted in battle; but there were no large-scale invasions from (as distinct from raids across) the Scottish and Welsh borders; and although it came close on a few occasions, there were no outbreaks of civil war. Armies led by English earls came close to confrontation in 1051, 1052, 1055, 1058 and 1065, but battle was avoided on each occasion. The manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle known as 'D' revealingly says that, when the house of Godwine and their rivals confronted one another near Gloucester in 1051, battle was avoided because

> Þa leton hy sume þæt þæt mycel unræd wære þæt hy togedere comon, for þam þær wæs mæst þæt roteste þæt wæs on Ænglalande on þam twam gefylcum, 7 leton þæt hi urum feondum rymdon to lande, 7 betwyx us sylfum to mycclum forwyrde.

> "Some of them thought it would be foolhardy to join battle, for in the two hosts there was most of what was noblest in England, and they considered that they would be opening a way for our enemies to enter the county and cause great ruin among ourselves."[40]

The Vita Edwardi likewise says that confrontation was avoided in 1065 because *in eadem gente horrebat quasi bellum ciuile* ("among this people there was horror at what seemed like civil war").[41]

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[36] The key near-contemporary narratives are Vita Ædwardi Regis qui apud Westmonasterium requiescit I, 7 (ed./trans. Frank Barlow, The Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster, Oxford ²1992) 74–83; Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MSS C, D and E a. 1065–1066, ed. Whitelock/Douglas/Tucker 137–145. The Chronicle of John of Worcester a. 1065–1066 (ed. Reginald Darlington/Patrick McGurk, Oxford medieval texts, 3 vols., Oxford 1995–1998) 2, 596–607, though written in the early twelfth century, also draws on near-contemporary material. It asserts (ibid., ed. Darlington/McGurk 2, 605) that King Harold marched to Hastings even though "he knew that all the more powerful men from the whole of England had already fallen in two battles, and that half of his army had not yet assembled". For the crisis of 1065–1066 see, among many, Michael Kenneth Lawson, The Battle of Hastings 1066 (London 2002) 19–46; Baxter, Earls of Mercia 48–57.

[37] Sawyer, Wealth of England 145–146, 155, 164.

[38] For the career of Duke William II of Normandy, see most recently David Bates, William I (1027/1028–1087), in: Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford 2004) online edition.

[39] John Gillingham, William the Bastard at war, in: Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. Allen Brown, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill/Christopher Holdsworth/Janet L. Nelson (Woodbridge 1989) 141–158.

[40] Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS D a. 1051, ed. Whitelock/Douglas/Tucker 118; The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a Collaborative Edition 6, MS D: a Semi-Diplomatic Edition with Introduction and Indices (ed. Geoffrey Cubbin, Cambridge 1996) 70.

Such quotations have been adduced as evidence of a sense of national identity in England before the Conquest.[42] Quite so: but in a sense, they are also symptomatic of one of reasons why the enemies of the English did eventually cause them ruin. Put simply, English generals and warriors had not seen much action for a generation before 1066, and this put them at a major disadvantage that year. One of the characteristics which made Duke William a successful general was that he knew when to avoid battle.[43] Harold plainly lacked that wisdom; and doubtless buoyed by his (admittedly spectacular) successes in Wales in 1063 and at Stamford Bridge in 1066, he ventured battle at Hastings with depleted forces against an army which was self-evidently seeking battle: a more experienced general, like William, might well have been less rash. In addition, the English lacked knowledge and experience of crucial technologies of warfare − above all, the offensive value of warhorses and the defensive value of castles.[44] The former probably made all the difference in what was, by all accounts, an extremely close-fought battle.[45] The available evidence suggests that the Normans succeeded in breaching the English shield wall at Hastings using a horseback tactic known as the 'feigned flight'. Allowance must be made for the fact that accounts of the battle were commissioned by, and written for, noblemen who fought on horseback; but the fact that Normans are known to have used this tactic before 1066 strengthens the case for thinking it was used, decisively, at Hastings.[46] The Normans and their allies were used to fighting on horseback in *conrois*: small, well co-ordinated teams of knights who knew one another's capabilities well.[47] The fact that the English lacked experience of this form of warfare proved disastrous. In short, the English were not 'match fit' in 1066; peace and prosperity had made their state vulnerable.

Some of the supposed strengths of that state also help to explain why the English failed to mount effective resistance in the next phase of Norman Conquest, between late 1066 and 1071. To begin with formal power structures: William's regime rapidly secured control of institutional machinery of the Anglo-Saxon state. The annal for 1067 records that *se kyng sette micel gyld on earm folc* ("the king imposed a heavy tax on the wretched people").[48] The salient elements of the coinage system − its centralized die production, system of *renovatio* and network of mints, the size, quality and iconography of the coins themselves − remained substantially unchanged throughout William's reign and beyond.[49] Writs continued to be issued, in identical form and for similar functions using the similar agencies and sometimes the same personnel.[50] This included legislation. King William's writ to the citizens of London is a particularly forceful illustration.[51] According to Patrick Wormald, it is "the only legislative

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[41]  Vita Ædwardi Regis, ed. Barlow 80–81.

[42]  Wormald, Engla Lond 371.

[43]  Gillingham, William the Bastard 144–148.

[44]  For the decisive importance of these technologies in eleventh-century warfare generally, see Robert Bartlett, The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350 (London 1993) 60–84; for the extent to which the Normans in particular mastered them see, for example, Ralph Davis, The warhorses of the Normans, in: Anglo-Norman Studies 10 (1987) 67–82, repr. in: id., From Alfred the Great to Stephen (London 1991) 63–77; Brown, Normans 41–43. For a different view, see Matthew Strickland, Military technology and the Conquest: the anomaly of Anglo-Saxon England, in: Anglo-Norman Studies 19 (1996) 353–382. Strickland accepts that the English lacked experience in the use of cavalry and castles in warfare, but contends that late Anglo-Saxon infantry weaponry and tactics, burhs and navy remained potent forms of warfare in the mid-eleventh century, such that the English were not in a position of "technological inferiority" in 1066. Perhaps so: but it is one thing to possess technologies, but quite another to be experienced and proficient in deploying them; and in any case, the fact remains that it was not these technologies that proved decisive at Hastings. Strickland does, however, concede that William's generalship was superior to that of Harold (ibid. 368).

[45]  The best accounts are Reginald A. Brown, The battle of Hastings, in: Anglo-Normans Studies 3 (1981) 1–21, 197–202; and Lawson, Battle of Hastings.

[46]  Bernard Bachrach, The feigned retreat at Hastings, in: Medieval Studies 33 (1971) 344–347; Brown, Battle of Hastings 14–16; Lawson, Battle of Hastings 216–219.

[47]  Brown, Battle of Hastings 16.

[48]  Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS D a. 1067, ed. Whitelock/Douglas/Tucker 146; MS D, ed. Cubbin 81.

[49]  Michael Dolley, The Norman Conquest and the English Coinage (London 1966); Metcalf, Atlas 72–74.

[50]  Simon Keynes, Regenbald the chancellor, in: Anglo-Norman Studies 10 (1988) 185–222; Richard Sharpe, The use of writs in the eleventh century, in: Anglo-Saxon England 32 (2004) 247–291.

[51]  Facsimiles of English Royal Writs to A.D. 1100 presented to Vivian Hunter Galbraith 15 (ed. Terence Alan Martyn Bishop/Pierre Chaplais, Oxford 1957).

enactment of the early medieval west to be extant in original form: as a writ, complete with seal"[52]. It was probably issued in 1067; and if so, it proves that William issued legislation in the manner, language and form of his predecessors during the first few months of his reign. Continuity in forms of government had been similarly pronounced after Cnut's conquest of England 1016,[53] and during the long period of warfare which had preceded it: such was the "extreme resilience of certain structures of local government through manifold political vicissitudes"[54]. The technologies of the Old English state were only too readily transferred to new masters.

William's writ proclaims to the *burhwaru* (citizens) of London, both French and English as follows:

> *þæt ic wylle þæt get beon eallra þæra laga weorðe þe gyt wæran on Eadwerdes dæge kynges. 7 ic wylle þæt ælc cyld beo his fæder yrfnume æfter his fæder dæge. 7 ic nelle geþolian þæt ænig man eow ænig wrang beode.*

> "That I will that you shall be worthy of all those laws that yet were in King Edward's day; and I will that every child shall be his father's heir after his father's time, and I will not endure that any man inflict wrong on you."[55]

There is a profound though unintended irony here, for the dispossession of English landholders had probably already begun when this writ was issued, and became systematic not long afterwards. This illustrates another crucial dimension of William's regime: its obsession with a legitimating ideology, which asserted continuity with increasing vigour the more radically things changed. George Garnett has persuasively shown that the documentation of the Conqueror's reign repeatedly asserts the Conqueror's dubious claim to be the legitimate, designated successor of Edward the Confessor; that he inherited the whole kingdom as if it were a chattel; and that this justified his claim to be the source of all tenure in England.[56] But a key to the new regime's ideological projection was that many of its elements were inherited, however novel the resulting compounds. For example, William was crowned by Archbishop Ealdred of York, who had probably crowned Harold earlier the same year, using a similar if not identical coronation ordo.[57] Similarly, the pattern of William's seasonal festivals, and possibly attendant crown-wearings, had been set before the Conquest − partly inspired by rituals encountered by Ealdred on a visit to imperial Germany in the mid-1050s.[58] However, there were other, more fundamental, and essentially insular elements of political thought which worked in William's favour. Because the English identified themselves with one another, and with their land, regnal identity was flexible: they had learned to live with foreign kings before, and could do so again. And because the English had been so well indoctrinated into perceiving themselves a nation chosen by God, their response to conquest was one which looked inward, to the sins of the people.[59] It was therefore natural for the English to see William as an agent of Divine punishment. The annal for 1066 in the MS D of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle − now shown to have been composed under Ealdred's auspices – asserts that God granted victory to the Normans at Hastings because of the sins of the people, and subsequently laments: *hit God betan nolde for urum synnum* ("God would not make things better, because

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[52]  Wormald, English law 398.

[53]  Michael Kenneth Lawson, Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century (London 1993) 161–210.

[54]  Campbell, Anglo-Norman state 186; cf. Reuter, England and Germany 290.

[55]  The translation is from Wormald, English law 399.

[56]  George Garnett, Conquered England: Kingship, Succession, and Tenure 1066–1166 (Oxford 2007) 1–44.

[57]  The Chronicle of John of Worcester a. 1066, ed. Darlington/McGurk 2, 600, is the only narrative source to record that Harold was consecrated king by Archbishop Ealdred. For debate as to which coronation ordo was used, see Janet L. Nelson, The rites of the conqueror, in: Anglo-Norman Studies 4 (1982) 117–132, 210–221, repr. in: ead., Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe (London 1986) 388–395; George Garnett, The third recension of the English coronation ordo: the manuscripts, in: Haskins Society Journal 11 (2003) 43–71.

[58]  Martin Biddle, Seasonal festivals and residence: Winchester, Westminster and Gloucester in the tenth to twelfth centuries, in: Anglo-Norman Studies 8 (1985) 51–72; Michael Hare, Kings, crowns and festivals: the origins of Gloucester as a royal ceremonial centre, in: Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society 115 (1997) 41–78.

[59]  Wormald, Engla Lond 371–381.

of our sins").[60] There is an echo here of Ealdred's illustrious predecessor, Archbishop Wulfstan (1002−1023), whose "Sermon of the Wolf to the English" explains the tribulations of the English at the hands of the Danes in similar terms, linking it explicitly to God's judgment on their sins.[61] This idea lay close to the core of the early English state and its people's sense of identity; it also made them better able to accommodate their conquerors.

Finally, informal power structures based on networks of landholding and lordship were also undermined, displaced and often replaced during the earliest phase of Norman colonization − that is, before as well as after 1071. Here again some of the apparent strengths of the old regime were exposed as weaknesses as the new one became established. The fact that estates had been distributed such that there were few tenurial monopolies meant that the English lacked a natural focus around which resistance might be co-ordinated. The absence of castle-based lordships deprived the English of an effective means of resistance. The fact that lordship was closely integrated with the machinery of state meant that it was too dependent on that machinery to exist effectively in its absence, or to constitute a serious threat to those who controlled it. Men had commended themselves to men of national importance in the expectation that, if necessary, they would intervene on their behalf in local and national courts; but it gradually became clear that even the most wealthy Englishmen lacked prestige in William's court and effective power in the localities, and were therefore unable to protect them from the predations of Norman colonization. The bonds of pre-Conquest lordship were strong, but there were limits to the strain they could bear. When the practical advantages of commendation had vanished, the ideal of loyalty went with it. This crisis of lordship was decisive, for English lords discovered they could no longer rely upon their commended men to support them in resistance.[62]


## III.

The central contention of this paper can be arrived at from the opposite direction by considering the Norman 'conquest' of Wales. This was protracted and incomplete: less than half of Wales had been colonized by the mid-1090s, and at that point the Normans were in retreat.[63] This is partly explicable by the point, most eloquently made by Wendy Davies in this volume, that Wales lacked the strengths and paradoxical weaknesses of its easterly neighbour. Because its kingdoms lacked an extensive royal demesne and a well exploited economy, it ranked low on the Norman king's list of priorities, and its colonization was essentially a baronial enterprise. Because those kingdoms lacked powerful institutional frameworks, they were less susceptible to rapid takeover. Because Welsh politics were characterized by endemic political and dynastic violence, its aristocracy was only too familiar with localized warfare and the terrain on which it was fought. Because its power structures were intensely localized − like the physical geography itself − the conquest had to proceed slowly, valley by valley. In short, whereas as the Anglo-Saxon 'Staat' was a victim of its own success, the Welsh kingdoms were to some extent sheltered by 'Staatlichkeit'.

Two further points by way of conclusion. First, to clarify: this paper has argued that the strengths of the late Anglo-Saxon state contributed its fall, but that of course does not mean these were the o n l y causal factors. Several other factors came into play, none of which made the outcome inevitable: the fact that the Normans could easily have lost the battle of Hastings, and very nearly did, will always pull the rug from under any mono-causal explanation of the Conquest. My point is simply that some of the supposed strengths of the late Anglo-Saxon state contributed to the crisis of 1065−1066, made its

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[60] Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS D a. 1066, ed. Whitelock/Douglas/Tucker 144; MS D, ed. Cubbin 81. For Ealdred and MS D of the Chronicle, see Patrick Wormald, How do we know so much about Anglo-Saxon Deerhurst? (Deerhurst 1991) 9–17, repr. in: id., The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian, ed. Stephen Baxter (Oxford 2005) 229–248; MS D, ed. Cubbin ix–cliii; and Stephen Baxter, MS C of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the politics of mid-eleventh-century England, in: English Historical Review 122 (2007) 1189–1227, at 1192 and 1215.

[61] For the text, see Sermo Lupi ad Anglos (ed. Dorothy Whitelock, Exeter 1976); for its date and context, see Keynes, Abbot 203–213; and for its ideological importance, see Wormald, Engla Lond 378–379.

[62] These themes are developed in Baxter, Earls of Mercia 270–289.

[63] John Edward Lloyd, A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest (London 1911) 2, 358–461; and Rees Davies, The Age of Conquest: Wales 1063–1415 (Oxford 1987) 3–107.

response to the invasions of 1066 less united and effective than it might have been, exposed its institutions to rapid takeover, and undermined resistance to the earliest phase of colonization. It is no longer possible plausibly to treat the speed and scale of the Norman Conquest as evidence of the weakness of the late Anglo-Saxon state, but it would be just as idle to contend that its fall was merely the result of a freak dynastic accident, or the flight path of a single arrow at Hastings. The Norman Conquest exposed structural flaws in the late Anglo-Saxon state; the paradox is that these were in large measure a function of its success.

Second, in the spirit of comparison which lies at the core of this volume and its preceding conference, it is tempting to suggest that the logic of this argument may have explanatory force elsewhere in early medieval Europe: in helping to explain, for example, the speed and scale of the Islamic conquest of Visigothic Spain; the fact that the Carolingians and Ottonians were more successful in extending their power to south than to the north and east; and the fact that the Vikings had a greater impact in some parts of northern Europe (England, Normandy, and perhaps Scotland) than in others (Wales again, and Ireland). One of this volume's contentions is that certain early medieval polities were more 'statelike' than others, and that different polities can be located at different points on a spectrum from 'Staat' to 'Staatlichkeit'; and one of this chapter's contentions is that the closer these polities came to the 'Staat' end of this spectrum, the more vulnerable they became.