



CLASSIQUES
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REVIEW

Charity URBANSKI. *Writing History for the King: Henry II and the Politics of Vernacular Historiography*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013. P. 252. \$69.95. ISBN-13 978-0-8014-5131-7. (Norman Genealogical Table; Map of the Angevin Empire, ca. 1180).

This monograph both reviews the rule of Henry Plantagenet (self-styled “FitzEmpress”) and reassesses the rise of vernacular historiography in the twelfth century. The author scrutinizes dynastic history as elaborated by Wace and Benoît de Sainte-Maure. In a single enterprise, each writer was assigned by the king who hoped, with this new vernacular genre in verse, to propagate an authorized, official, and royalist version of the past. In the circumstance of the contested succession and Civil War of the 1130s, Henry was driven, Urbanski claims, to curb baronial power while seeking a memorializing history for his new dynasty, thus solidifying his claim to England and Normandy. The king supported Wace’s *Roman de Rou* (c. 1160–1174) and Benoît de Sainte-Maure’s *Chronique des ducs de Normandie* (c. 1174–1189) to help cement power for himself and his children. The author is at pains to show convincingly (and repeatedly) how Wace’s *Rou* disparaged Henry’s predecessors, thus challenging his policies and invalidating the legitimacy of his rule. In 1174 the king abruptly dismissed him, turning the task over to Benoît, whose *Chronique* contrastingly provided a staunchly loyalist defense of Anglo-Norman kingship. The volume is divided as follows:

1. Situating the *Roman de Rou* and *Chronique des ducs de Normandie*
Poetry and History
The Origins of Old French Historiography
2. Henry II
Lineage and Regional Rivalries
Stephen’s Reign and the Civil War

- The Restoration of Royal Authority
The Great War, 1173/74
The Succession Question
History and Dynastic Memory
3. The *Roman de Rou*
The Conquest of England
The Death of William the Conqueror
Henry I and Robert Curthose
The Battle of Tinchebray
Wace
4. The *Chronique des ducs de Normandie*
Providence and the Norman Dukes
The Norman Conquest
William the Conqueror
Henry I
The Empress Matilda and Henry II
Benoît de Sainte-Maure
- Conclusion
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