Earl Robert of Gloucester became chief sponsor of the Empress Matilda’s claim to the throne of England in 1138 only after engaging in earlier disloyal political acts. He repudiated his homage to King Stephen mainly because of losing his former curial status and possibly from fear of Stephen’s seizure of his lands. As his sister’s commander-in-chief, the earl enjoyed both political and military authority. His military record is mixed. His great victories were at Lincoln, where Stephen was captured, and Wilton, which contributed to the earl’s establishment of a quasi-dominion in the southwest, where silver pennies were issued in his own name by barons who were members of his affiliate. However, Robert’s career included embarrassing defeats, one of which occurred just before his death. His efforts, nevertheless, made an Angevin succession possible.

This chapter examines the role of Normandy in the so-called anarchy in the reign of King Stephen of England. It suggests that John Horace Round’s biography of Geoffrey de Mandeville failed to mention important details relevant to the anarchic reign of King Stephen. These include de Mandeville and Empress Matilda’s conquest of Normandy in 1144, where
they established a base from which they might launch an attack against England. Another detail missed by Round is the Empress's key fortress of Argentan and the castles of Caen and Rouen.

Introduction

Edmund King

in The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign

Published in print: 1994 Published Online: October 2011
Publisher: Oxford University Press
DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198203643.003.0001
Item type: chapter

This introductory chapter explains the coverage of this book, which is about the anarchy in the reign of King Stephen in England from 1135 to 1154. The reign of King Stephen has been popularly called a period of weak government mainly because of his competition for power with his cousin Empress Matilda. His rule was characterized by the breakdown of public order and eventually a civil war. This book examines the aristocracy of King Stephen, his acquisition of religious castles, and the Treaty of Winchester.

The Earl and the Chronicler

Robert B. Patterson

in The Earl, the Kings, and the Chronicler: Robert Earl of Gloucester and the Reigns of Henry I and Stephen

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Publisher: Oxford University Press
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Earl Robert fought for the Empress Matilda’s succession to England’s with quill as well as sword. He commissioned William of Malmesbury to write a history of their succession-fraught era. The result was the Historia Novella. The earl’s education and literary habits and previous patronage experience were among the likely influences behind this role. The work is an apologia for Matilda’s claim and for Robert’s sponsorship and, as such, biased; it also features other of the author’s faults but also his virtues as a historian. The first edition contains evidence that Robert, directly or indirectly, was one of Malmesbury’s sources; the second, in the form of the copy given to Margam Abbey, Earl Robert’s foundation, may well have been produced under the auspices of his son, Earl William (1147–83).
Maternal Lineage and Anglo-Norman Succession c.950–c.1150
Sara McDougall

in Royal Bastards: The Birth of Illegitimacy, 800-1230
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Scholars regularly identify 1126 as a critical moment in the history of illegitimate birth. In that year, King Henry I of England designated his daughter Empress Matilda as heir to his throne, passing over her elder half-brother, Robert of Gloucester. It is typically assumed that Henry chose Matilda because she was his only remaining legitimate child, while Robert was born to one of Henry’s many extramarital liaisons. However, legitimate marriage played only a supporting role in this story. Henry’s reasons for choosing Matilda had far more to do with lineage than with marriage law. The child Henry chose as heir to his kingdom was his only remaining child with royal West Saxon lineage, lineage she inherited from her mother. As this and other examples from succession practices in France, England, and Sicily demonstrate, maternal lineage mattered far more than the presence or absence of a marriage between the parents.

The Earl, the Kings, and the Chronicler
Robert B. Patterson

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This book is the first full length biography of Robert (c.1088 × 90–1147), grandson of William the Conqueror and eldest son of King Henry I of England (1100–35). He could not succeed his father because he was a bastard. Instead, as the earl of Gloucester, Robert helped change the course of English history by keeping alive the prospects for an Angevin succession through his leadership of its supporters in the civil war known as the Anarchy against his father’s successor, King Stephen (1135–54). The earl is one of the great figures of Anglo-Norman History (1066–1154). He was one of only three landed super-magnates of his day, a model post-Conquest great baron, Marcher lord, borough developer, and patron of the rising merchant class. His trans-Channel barony stretched from western Lower Normandy across England to South Wales. He was both product as well as agent of the contemporary cultural revival known as the Renaissance of the Twelfth Century, bilingual, well educated, and
a significant literary patron. In this last role, he is especially notable for commissioning the greatest English historian since Bede, William of Malmesbury, to produce a history of their times which justified the Empress Matilda’s claim to the English throne and Earl Robert’s support of it.