**Reviewed Work: *King Stephen* by Donald Matthew (Jstor)**

**Review by: T. N. Bisson**

***The English Historical Review***

**Vol. 118, No. 479 (Nov., 2003), pp. 1311-1312**

Impatient of ‘prejudices’ and ‘myths’, Donald Matthew argues that misrepresentation of the facts were very much present within recordings of the day. He has little use for the clergy, who, because they wrote our texts, are responsible for misleading us. He is quoted as stating ‘The clergy simply fails us as basic witnesses to military matter’ p1311

One of Matthew’s characteristic contentions is that Stephen and the barons ‘governed’ England collectively. A notion that the administrative complexity of the crown was decentralised. P 1312

Knightly status, in England as on the continent, was hardly yet a benign lay order of Christian service, but rather an opening for armed men in pursuit of lordship and nobility. P1312

**Wikipedia**

The three main [Anglo-Norman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Norman) historians, [John of Worcester](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_of_Worcester), [William of Malmesbury](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_of_Malmesbury), and [Henry of Huntingdon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_of_Huntingdon), each had a copy of the *Chronicle*, which they adapted for their own purposes.[[42]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Saxon_Chronicle#cite_note-ASE_36-46) [Simeon of Durham](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simeon_of_Durham) also had a copy of the *Chronicle*.[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Saxon_Chronicle#cite_note-EHD_113-4-13) Some later medieval historians also used the *Chronicle*, and others took their material from those who had used it, and so the *Chronicle* became "central to the mainstream of English historical tradition".

**RHC Davis 1967 (book)**

To the people at the time, the essential question would not have been whether officials were appointed and courts held, but whether they were effective. Though the twelfth century was a brutal age and the 1140s turbulent throughout Europe, conditions in England seem to have been worse than elsewhere, because the country was renowned for its wealth and attracted the more predatory type of mercenary; and if, as is probable, there were times when neither king nor empress could pay their soldier’s wages. **Donald Mathew** argues that research of Stephen’s documents can shine a different light on his reign, and apparently shows that the royal chancery was actually working at only 10 per cent below the average level of Henry I’s reign. However, it is difficult to truly take this on board when taking into account the lack of stability the incursions from Scotland, the new threat from Normandy and rebellious nature of the local barons would have had on England’s economic viability.

**Reviewed Work: *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154* by David Crouch**

**Review by: Bruce R. O'Brien**

***Speculum***

**Vol. 77, No. 2 (Apr., 2002), pp. 501-503**

Broad studies of Stephen of Blois, King of England from 1135 to 1154 have been few. The earliest modern study, J.H. Round’s Geoffrey de Mandeville (1892), centred not on the king but on one of his controversial earls as a way of illustrating (and condemning) Stephens misrule.

Stephens’s failures in Wales and Normandy would have lasting effects. When observed, accounts on Stephens reign tend to be Anglo-centric in nature and that England itself was only ‘one factor in a large equation’ governing the events of Stephens reign. In Wales and Normandy, crises early in the reign “unmasked Stephen’s most serious weaknesses”. Stephen ignored a Welsh uprising and his Marcher lords to fend for themselves (and die), while he focused his efforts on England. The survivors nursed their bitterness, and during the war between Stephen and Matilda, they quickly turned against the king and may have ensured his defeat at Lincoln in 1141. **(p 502)**

**RHC Davis 1967 (book)**

The first difficulty that Matilda had to face was that she was a woman; the second was her husband. The trouble with him was not simply that he was only a count whereas her first husband had been an emperor; nor simply that she was eleven years old than he; nor even that their personalities were incompatiable. The real trouble was that Geoffrey was an Angevin and proud of it, making no attempt to disguise the fact that it was typically Angevin ambition to conquer Normandy. **(pg 36)**

When he invaded Normandy after Henry I’s death, he made no pretence of acting merely on his wife’s behalf. He claimed the ducy for himself, invaded it at the head of his Angevin army, and kept his wife firmly in the background. It would not be easy to persuade the Normans that the leader of such an army was their rightful duke; and if he was to succeed at all, the first essential was to win the support of a noble who was essentially Norman and whom other Normans would respect. The man ideally qualified for this role was Robert Earl of Gloucester. **(pg 36)**

**The Anarchy of King Stephens reign King**

The evidence of civil war is manifest in the coinage, showing with surprising clarity the area and extent of baronial independence **(pg 145)**

During Stephens reign no less than five popes occupied the see of Peter and Paul: Innocent II, Celestine II, Lucius II, Eugenius III and Anastasius IV. There was very little continuity in the church as well as in England**. (pg 208)**

(Continuity of Government) Stephens government in England was severely criticised by those subjected to it. The Battle Abbey chronicler was one of many to complain:

Everywhere the whole liberty and prosperity of the country was thrown into confusion by malevolent men, who too advantage of the ingenuous and gentle king… In his time justice seldom prevailed, he who was strongest got most… Peace was driven out, everything lay open to plunder. **(pg 117)**

The urgency of Stepehn’s fight for survival in England, beginning in 1138, and his subsequent capture at Lincoln in 1141, left Normandy largely unattended and therefore highly vulnerable. Twice the Norman landholders had appealed to Theobald, count of Blois, to come to their rescue and take charge of their defence agains the Angevins and other potential enemies, and twice he had declined. After Stephens one unsuccessful forage into the ducy in 1137, he left it virtually ungoverned. **(pg 62)**