

THE ANGLO-NORMAN CIVIL WAR OF 1101 RECONSIDERED

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In July of 1101, Robert Curthose, duke of Normandy and the eldest son of William the Conqueror, landed in England with the intention of challenging his younger brother, Henry I, for the English throne.¹ Though contemporaries recognised a good story when they saw one, modern historians have shown a reticence to consider the episode with only three detailed studies devoted to the campaign of 1101. The first came from E. A. Freeman in the nineteenth century, who in characteristically nationalist terms saw a 'listless' Curthose momentarily dazzled by the prospect of the English throne, with the English rallying to support the king they had freely chosen.² The second came from C. W. David, who considered the campaign as part of his biography of Curthose, published in 1920, in a chapter entitled 'The Failure to Gain the English Crown'. As one might expect, David relied exclusively upon narrative sources, which meant he saw the outcome of 1101 as much a result of Curthose's personal failings as Henry's success.³ The most important and far reaching analysis has been that of C. Warren Hollister, who turned his attention to what he termed the Anglo-Norman Civil War in the early 1970s.⁴ Like his twelfth-century predecessors, Hollister immediately recognised the importance of the episode. 'Duke Robert Curthose's invasion of England', wrote Hollister, 'might have changed the course of twelfth century history. But in fact it ended anticlimactically, in a truce rather than a battle, and the newly won crown was saved without a blow.'⁵ The posthumous publication of Hollister's biography of Henry I reiterated many of these views, which continue to have an impact on the wider historiography.⁶

The central space occupied by Hollister's discussion should come as no surprise. The 1960s and 1970s represented an exciting and innovative period in the study of

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² E. A. Freeman, *The Reign of William Rufus*, 2 vols, London 1882, ii, 392–415.

³ C. W. David, *Robert Curthose, Duke of Normandy*, Cambridge, Mass., 1920, 137.

⁴ Hollister's articles are most readily accessible in an edition of collected essays, *Monarchy, Magnates and Institutions in the Anglo-Norman World*, London 1986. For the events of 1101 see, 'Anglo-Norman Civil War: 1101', 76–96; 'Magnates and "Curiales" in Early Norman England', 97–115.

⁵ Hollister, 'Anglo-Norman Civil War', 77.

⁶ C. Warren Hollister, *Henry I*, London and New Haven 2001, 103–48; D. Crouch, *The Normans: The History of a Dynasty*, London 2002, 165–9. My thanks are due to Professor Crouch for a personal communication in which he discussed the extent to which Hollister's ideas influenced his account. See also, C. Holdsworth, 'Peace Making in the Twelfth Century', *ANS* 19, 1996 (1997), 3 n. 8.