

Stephen of Rouen's *Draco Normannicus* : A Norman Epic

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When the Normans of the 10th to 12th centuries celebrated their achievements they wrote in the *gesta* tradition, singing the deeds of their vigorous leaders who carved out a settlement in Neustria and then went on to conquer the English. One particular branch of these *gesta* histories has been traced by Elizabeth van Houts. In this particular sequence, a chronicle begun by Dudo of St. Quentin was continued by William of Poitiers, William of Jumièges and Robert of Torigny, who was a monk at Bec in the 1130s. Because Robert did not continue his chronicle beyond the death of King Henry I, van Houts has called these chronicles 'a history without an end'.¹ There is, however, a final chapter to the saga of the Normans in Neustria. It is the *Draco Normannicus*, a poem written in the 1160s by a younger contemporary of Robert's at Bec, Stephen of Rouen. The Norman chronicles provided Stephen with his sources for a reworking of Norman history, in which he places the deeds of Henry II against the backdrop of the *gesta* of the king's Norman forebears.²

Not a great deal is known about the author of the *Draco*. He entered Bec in the 1140s, achieved the rank of deacon and became a poet and scholar of rhetoric. The *Draco* is his only known work on an historical theme.³ Tatlock, who was interested in the Arthurian material in the *Draco*, has drawn attention to the importance of rhetoric in Stephen's formation as a scholar. He says that 'despite (the) slim biography, he is a person clearly defined through

1 E. van Houts, "The *Gesta Normannicum Ducum*: a History without an End", *Proceedings of the Battle Conference*, 1980, pp.106-15.

2 Howlett, Stephen's editor for the Rolls Series, has examined this aspect of the poem most thoroughly. *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, Vol. II, 1885, pp.xviii ff.

3 T. Tatlock, "Geoffrey and King Arthur in *Normannicus Draco*", *Modern Philology*, Vol. XXXI, No. 1, (August 1933), p. 1; and Howlett, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

his writings. His chief intellectual interest was in rhetoric, displayed by his work on Cicero, Seneca, Quintilian, and Martianus Capella, and by his own poetic style from first to last; the wealth of the Bec library in rhetoricians proves rhetoric, next to theology, one of the chief interests there...⁴

Stephen's scholarly interests are very evident in the *Draco*, which is thoroughly rhetorical - in conception, planning and execution, down to the last detail. Rhetoric is, of course, a commodious practice. It can refer to a great many things, from tropes and embellishment, to the patterning of narrative so that it is interspersed with speeches of laudatory intent, etc. These elements are present in the *Draco*, but Stephen's poem is rhetorical also in the broader conception of that term. In relation to the *Draco*, I would suggest that rhetoric be applied in the classical sense of the pleading of cases, for in the *Draco* there is scarcely a line which is innocent of such intent.

As Lanham says in *The Motives of Eloquence*, rhetorical texts are the most difficult to classify.⁵ This has proved true of the *Draco*. In the Rolls Series, the poem appears as part of a collection of Chronicles; and the editor treats Stephen's work as a history, with disparaging comment on the author's alleged deficiencies as an historian.⁶ Groeber describes the *Draco* blandly, if accurately, as a long poem of mixed historical content⁷; and Gibson, in her essay on the production of history at Bec, calls the poem 'a three-decker epic', which presents a 'grand pageant of the Normans in history' written for the entertainment of the noble families who were patrons and protectors of the abbey's independence.⁸

How compelling is Gibson's description of the *Draco* as an epic? Some aspects of the poem certainly seem to support it. Thus, the poem contains sieges, battles, treachery, a disputed succession, the operation of prophecy; there is even the intervention of the fabulous King Arthur, who is depicted as watching over the fortunes of the Breton Celts from his Otherworld kingdom (which, in the *Draco*, is located in the Antipodes).⁹ The title of the poem also has an epic ring to it, conjuring up visions of the longships of the raiders and incomers who established themselves in upper Francia. Stephen of Rouen tells their story, recapitulating the theme of Norman vigour.

4 *Ibid.*

5 R. Lanham, *The Motives of Eloquence*, (New Haven, 1975), p. 16.

6 R. Howlett, *op. cit.*, pp. ix-f.

7 R. G. Groeber, *Uebersicht in die Lateinische Litteratur*, (Muenchen, 1963), p. 324.

8 M. Gibson, "History at Bec in the 12th Century", in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages*, (eds) R.H.C. Davis and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, (Oxford, 1981), pp. 181, 183. Manitius appeared to have no doubts: he dealt with the poem under the heading 'historical epic'. *Geschichte der Lateinischen Litteratur des Mittelalters*, (Muenchen, 1931), p. 690.

9 Bk II: 1171-72.

That the *Draco* is in heroic mode supports Gibson's suggestion that we are dealing with epic, as does the theme of Norman-Frankish hostility which runs through the poem. Certain other characteristics, however, tell against regarding the *Draco* as an epic. To begin with, the poem is in elegiacs, which is not the metre appropriate for epic. How much this would have weighed with the author of the poem is, perhaps, a moot point. Tatlock, who has examined Stephen's overall output, says that he 'shows little familiarity with classical poetry, nor, indeed, a vast deal with later literature'.¹⁰ Renaissance scholars, who immersed themselves in the classical writers, demonstrated careful, even pedantic, respect for the norms.¹¹ However, it may not be reasonable to expect such formal punctiliousness from a poet of the 12th century, most particularly one who, it seems, had little knowledge of classical mentors for prosody. It could be said, on the other hand, that with his grounding in rhetoric, the author of the *Draco* might be expected to have known the conventions and to have followed them if he had conceived his work as being in the epic genre.

Be that as it may, what argues against classifying the *Draco* as an epic is the polemical nature of the poet's discourse. Although the poem unfolds in the form of a narrative, it shapes into an extended political pamphlet and contains also passages which overtly attack some of the author's contemporaries (Becket is one such target).¹² Then, there is the sophisticated nature of the poet's relationship to his text. This is partly a matter of tone. At times Stephen adds an ironic or sceptical comment - for example, on the nature of portents and their usefulness (thereby employing the appropriate topos without appearing credulous as to the predictive power of signs)¹³. The entire Arthurian episode is tongue-in-cheek; and one is conscious throughout of Stephen's selectivity and contrivance. Such authorial interventions draw attention to the poet as knowing fabricator. In epic the teller is servant of the story and the characters who inhabit the drama are treated according to type, be it hero or traitor, loyal servant, etc. In the *Draco*, on the other hand, even Destiny serves the author's purpose.¹⁴ Stephen of Rouen presents us with an heroic saga, but it is the vehicle for exposition of a theme which has immediate political relevance. The *Draco* is intended not merely to recall a more heroic age, but to impose that pattern on contemporary events.

10 *Op. cit.*, p.2.

11 W. Ker, *Form and Style in Poetry*, (London, 1966), pp.105ff.

12 Bk II, Ch. VIII. Stephen calls Becket a simoniac, blames him for the death of Henry I's brother and says he is now fomenting trouble between Henry II and Louis VII.

13 Bk III.165-70.

14 Bk I, Chs.5-11, where Henry II is 'fated' to succeed Henry I as *dux Normannorum*.

Whatever else we may wish to call it, the *Draco* is a tract with a political objective.

Noting the polemical character of the poem, Foreville (who examined it in the context of the papal schism), described the *Draco* as a series of pamphlets addressed to the Pope, Thomas Beckett and Louis VII.¹⁵ What he failed to note is that the poem is addressed also, and above all, to King Henry II. There is not one explicit word of criticism of Henry II in the *Draco*, but when read against his actual deeds, the poem is a thoroughgoing critique of his performance as *dux Normannorum*.

When Stephen produced the *Draco* the fortunes of the Normans were waning. Henry II, the current duke, presented in his person a convergence of dynasties, Norman and Angevin. He was raised in a Norman milieu, carried the title of Duke of Normandy, and had strong ties with his Norman background through his mother, Matilda (from whom he was known to take political advice and who was a politically formidable person in her own right). Henry himself highlighted his *Normannitas*, but this personal inclination did not translate into policies which promoted Norman interests within the larger pattern of the king's English and continental possessions. The author of the *Draco* clearly viewed this with dismay.

What particularly vexed Stephen of Rouen was the erosion of Normandy's independence vis-à-vis the French throne. It is recorded in the Norman chronicles that Rollo and his descendants paid homage to the Kings of France, but this practice was abandoned once the Dukes of Normandy themselves attained royal status in the 11th century.¹⁶ During the period of the Anglo-Norman *regnum* the crowned heads of the Duchy had distanced themselves from Frankish overlordship; and Normandy's political independence was thereby enhanced. It was to be expected that King Henry would follow this precedent: but he did not. In fact, he presided over Normandy's political decline.

The pattern of Henry II's dealings with the French kings has been analysed by William Hollister. This historian does not refer to the *Draco* but his study of Norman and Angevin policy is nevertheless to be recommended as a most useful companion piece to Stephen's poem. Hollister says: 'Normandy under the Angevins was clearly a Duchy, whose dukes acknowledged the lordship of the Kings of France... Now as never before, the

15 R. Foreville, *L'Eglise et La Royauté en Angleterre sous Henri II Plantagenet (1154-89)*, (Paris, 1943), p.243.

16 C. Warren Hollister, "Normandy, France and the Anglo-Norman *Regnum*", in *Monarchy, Magnates and Institutions in the Anglo-Norman World*, (London), pp.17f.,30f.

King of England viewed the monarchy as the ultimate source of his authority on the continent and a Norman spokesman of Henry II could freely admit that Normandy was *de regno Franciae*.¹⁷ (This Norman spokesman was Robert of Torigny, recording that in 1160 Henry II's son paid homage for Normandy at the royal court in Paris.)¹⁷ The Duchy, which had been the heartland of the Anglo-Norman regnum was, during the reign of Henry II, being derogated to the status of a dependency of the French crown and King Henry's sons were being introduced to the practice of viewing the King of France as exercising sovereignty over their continental birthright.¹⁸ Stephen of Rouen was not inclined to ascribe this process to the ineluctable forces of history, and to resign himself, therefore, to ruminating in elegaic mood on the rise and fall of the *gens Normannorum* in Neustria. The lesson he draws from the Norman histories is that the keynote of Norman achievement has been vigorous defence of their own interests. The martial emphasis in the *Draco* derives from the author's repudiation of the soft arts of diplomacy which, in his lifetime, were delivering political ascendancy to the Franks. It was Henry II's departure from the precedent established by the Anglo-Norman kings which was altering the framework of political power on the continent, at the expense of Normandy and in favour of the Capetian royal house.

Stephen's purpose is to rescue the future by means of a reassertion of the past. Rollo, the first Duke of Normandy - suitably reconstructed - William the Conqueror and Henry I are the chosen exemplars for King Henry II's dealings with the King of France. During his reign, Henry II presented himself variously as King of England, Duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, Count of Poitou and Anjou: his coinage and charters testify to a division of titles and powers, and his behaviour to acceptance of Louis VII's sovereignty on the continent.¹⁹ In the *Draco*, however, Henry II's lands are welded into a single *imperium*, which he rules as *rex Anglorum*.²⁰ The parallel with the *regnum* of Henry I is clear: the inference to be drawn is that Henry II should follow the example of his maternal grandfather and disdain to subordinate himself to Frankish authority.

The key to understanding why Stephen was moved to produce his exegesis on Norman-Frankish relations lies in the immediate political circumstances. The question of timing is, from an historian's point of view,

17 *Ibid.*, p.53f.

18 Following Angevin rather than Norman practice, Henry the Younger was given the title of seneschal of France. *Ibid.* This is ridiculed by Stephen: Bk II, Ch.IX, pp.525-40.

19 W.L. Warren, *Henry II*, (London, 1977), frontispiece and passim.

20 Bk II, Chs VIII and IX.

one of the most interesting aspects of the poem. It seems clear that what prompted Stephen to write were developments which must have been most welcome to him as a propagator of the Norman cause, namely a serious deterioration in relations between Henry II and Louis VII. In 1167 a conflict arising from the exercising of lordship in the Auvergne induced confrontation and rupture, leading to armed conflict, which was to continue intermittently until January, 1169. In June, 1167, the rivals confronted each other at Gisors, on the border between Normandy and the French Vexin. Apparently their hostility reached such a pitch that Louis repudiated Henry and 'returned to him his homage'.²¹ Stephen gives the initiative here to King Henry, asserting that it was he who spurned the French throne. The poet says also that Louis ordered his rival to quit the continent. This last is highly improbable and, indeed, the whole story sounds rather like a fabrication. However, that a rupture did in fact occur and did involve the very significant homage relationship is supported by the testimony of John of Salisbury, who is an independent and reliable witness to these matters.

In a letter of 1168, John of Salisbury writes of the current peace negotiations at Soissons. He reports on a projected settlement in the following terms: 'Now let us turn to the conference of our Kings. The illustrious Counts Henry of Champagne and Phillip of Flanders supported the English King's cause in the meeting at Soissons; and in the end they reached agreement according to the English King's request on the following terms of peace. The English King was to return to the French King's homage, to swear fealty before all in his own person and in public that he will serve him as his lord for the Duchy of Normandy as his predecessors as dukes used to serve the French kings...'²²

For the author of the *Draco*, acceptance of the terms drawn up at Soissons would have constituted unconditional surrender. With Henry's homage in abeyance, however, the poet can allow himself to hope. For historians looking back over the reign of Henry II, this break with Louis VII was just one of a number of episodes in their long drawn out struggle for hegemony in Francia. We know the outcome. The saga was to continue into the next generation, when enmity and division within Henry II's family was used to advantage by Louis VII and his successor, Phillip Augustus, who was to reap the benefits of his father's unspectacular but tenacious promotion of Capetian authority.

But a reader of Stephen's poem, which was written in the midst of an

21 Howlett, *op. cit.*, p.lxxv.

22 *The Letters of John of Salisbury*, Vol.2, (Oxford, 1979). Letter 272, p.563.

unresolved political crisis, is given the rare experience of being drawn into a particular moment in time, and can sense that history is hanging in the balance. The dramatic impact of this situation is heightened even further when one perceives that the relationship between the *Draco* and contemporary events was so immediate that the poem actually grew as the political situation evolved. My understanding is that the *Draco* was planned originally as a work in two parts, focussing on the theme of Norman-Frankish relations and with Henry's current defiance of the King of France as the central point and climax. This is supported by the structure of the poem. Books I and II of the *Draco* form a unity, with reflections upon the death of Matilda to open and end the poem and give it closure. Stephen must have begun work after the kings clashed at Gisors; possibly not until after Matilda's death in September of the same year. It would be reasonable to suppose that the poet intended to present his work to King Henry on the occasion of the anniversary of the death of the King's mother. However, in September, 1168, the German Emperor sent an embassy to King Henry, offering terms for an anti-Capetian alliance. Stephen uses this development to advance his own case, the result being a third book, in which he deals with this anti-French project and writes at length on the Papal schism, which had relevance to the German Emperor's terms.²³

The immediacy of Stephen's poem is itself worthy of note. Of greater significance to historians, however, is the insight which the author provides into specifically Norman reactions to the import of Henry II's diplomacy. Stephen's discourse can be described as a journalistic intervention: but the author takes the long view. In the *Draco* we see a Norman patriot, seizing upon a political crisis to urge a course of action which might arrest the gradual extinction of Normandy as the locus of an independent people.

The tenor of the author's thoughts and the significance which he attaches to his project is indicated by the title which he gave to his poem. *Draco Normannicus* is a borrowing from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of England*, which was principally concerned with the fate of the Celts.²⁴ In this book we meet the prophet Merlin, who interprets a dream of the Celtic leader Vortigern. In this dream two dragons are seen fighting by a pool, one is red and the other white. Merlin ponders the dream, bursts into

²³ Bk III, Chs. 6-15. Howlett discusses the alliance in his Preface, pp. lxxxiiif. See also W. Kienast, *Deutschland und Frankreich in der Kaiserzeit (900-1270)*, (Stuttgart, 1975), p. 223.

²⁴ There are no dragons, real or symbolic, in the *Draco*, but Stephen's knowledge of Geoffrey's writings is clear from his use of prophecies from the *Life*, and from his wry comment in Book II on Geoffrey's reliability as an historical source (Ch. XX: 1177-79). Both Geoffrey's *History* and *Life of Merlin* appear in the Bec catalogue.

tears and says: 'Woe unto the Red Dragon, for its end is nigh. The White Dragon, which signifies the Saxons (whom you have brought in) will seize its lair. The Red Dragon signifies the British people, whom the White Dragon shall suppress'. This extract from Geoffrey of Monmouth is referred to by Gibson in her essay on historians at Bec. She refers to the *Draco* and discusses the origin of the title, but she relates it to the Angevins and their control of England, rather than tying it to the content of the poem. Thus, she does not draw the inference that the author of the *Draco* is exercised by the probable fate of the *gens Normannorum* if Henry II fails to act as their champion against the French.²⁵ It was to instruct King Henry in this role that Stephen produced his poem.

Stephen fashions his case from a review of Norman and, to a lesser extent, Frankish history. He suppresses unwelcome facts, such as the evidence that Rollo did pay homage for Normandy to King Charles the Simple; and he passes over the early period of William the Conqueror's career,²⁶ when he depended upon the support of the King of France. Further, the poet colours his material to strengthen his depiction of Norman independence and vigour.

Stephen's case is based in the first instance on his reading of the Norman chronicles, from which he creates a *Siegerlob* - a praise of victors - eulogising the Normans who, as conquerors, acknowledge no earthly master. The second line of argument, which relates specifically to the Capetian dynasty, presents Louis VII as the weak representative of an in any case usurping and therefore illegitimate line, whose pretensions to authority should not now be accommodated.

To cut Louis VII down to size, Stephen presents him as barely capable of controlling even the rump of the once great Carolingian empire. Hemmed in by Henry II's continental territory, Louis aspires to make good the claim to be King of Francia, for which he requires the obedience of the Lord of Normandy, Anjou and Poitou.²⁷ To demonstrate the relative *probitas* of the rival kings, Stephen holds up the contrasting episodes of Chaumont and Andely. At Chaumont, the French arsenal, the flower of the French forces succumbed to Henry in a single day. Louis has no answer to this display of military prowess and must content himself with taking revenge by attacking an undefended town, left open to the French forces on King Henry's order. These episodes did in fact occur. At Gisors, Louis commanded Henry to

25 Gibson, "History at Bec", p.181.

26 Bk I, Chs.XX and XXI; Bk 1, Chs.XXVIII-XXX.

27 Bk II:417-18; 479-82.

yield. At Chaumont he received his answer, presented - in Stephen's depiction - as 'a Norman pledge of love, offered with iron and fire'. Here, in the climax of the poem, Henry is made to assert his own royal status and to align himself with his Norman forebears, who have never been 'cowed by Frankish firebrands'.²⁸

To reach this conclusion, the author has first to transform Henry Plantagenet, the son of the Count of Anjou, into Henry II, a Norman prince. In Book II, King Henry's defiance of the French is presented as an assertion of Norman will. It is in Book I that the poet prepares the ground. To begin with, Stephen reviews the struggle for the succession which followed the death of King Henry I's only legitimate son, who died in the White Ship disaster in 1120. The poet follows the path which led from Henry I to Henry II, stressing that from the moment of his birth, Henry II was welcomed as the heir of his maternal grandfather. Stephen does not suppress the Angevin connection, but plays down the role of Geoffrey Plantagenet, who is presented as the consort of Matilda and the protector of her interests and those of her son.²⁹

At each signal point in this retelling, the prophet Merlin speaks. Stephen uses the prophet's words to gloss the succession, so that it is elevated above the contingent forces of history. To present the story in this light would have been flattering to King Henry II, but it also draws him in and ties his destiny to the fate of the Normans.³⁰

And then the lesson begins. In the review of Norman and Frankish history which follows, the poet demonstrates the responsibilities which attach to the role of *dux Normannorum*. This is what I take to be the function of this section of the poem, which constitutes the remainder of Book I. Here, Henry II is invited to study his part in the mirror of history, as presented to him by the poet. In Stephen's reconstruction, the Norman dukes protect their people, promote their interests, and deal briskly with Frankish attempts to establish mastery over them. Acts of homage play no part in Stephen's historical account.

Book II opens with a brief recapitulation of the theme of the succession, before the poet proceeds to the rivalry between King Henry and Louis VII. Here, in the climax to the poem, Stephen has the wit to colour Henry II's own deeds so that defiance of the King of France appears as an expression of *Normannitas*. So it is that at Chaumont, Henry II is made to speak as if he

28 *Ibid.* Bk II: 489-500.

29 Bk I, Ch. VI: 229-30; Bk I, Ch. VII.

30 Bk I, Chs. VII-XI.

were Henry I reborn.³¹

Modern scholars who have approached the *Draco* as if it were a chronicle have been irritated by the disposition of material. It is a complex poem and the manner in which the author proceeds is, to say the least, *recherché*. Stephen's work is perfectly intelligible however, if read, not as a chronicle, but as an exercise in rhetoric, delivered in demonstrative form. Attend to what the poet says, follow his line of thought and the author emerges, not as a historian with a poor command of the principles of *chronographia*, but as a rhetor shaping his material so that we will endorse what he wants us to accept.

To harden King Henry in his defiance of the French, Stephen appeals to Henry's *Normannitas*, buttressing this with the weight of Norman history, selectively presented. This is the principal burden of his address. In addition, however, the poet sets out a case highly damaging to the King of France. Construing this strategem in terms of the practice of rhetoric, Stephen is attempting to undermine Henry II's rival and to demonstrate that there are no compelling grounds for bowing to Capetian pretensions.

Throughout his poem, Stephen is contemptuous of the French, with Charlemagne being the only Frankish leader he praises. It is, however, Louis VII and the Capetian line which is his principal target. Stephen advances his attack in three phases, each time within the appropriate historical context. In Book I, in his review of Norman and Frankish history, he presents Hugh Capet as a usurper and founder of an illegitimate line. In Book II, which deals with affairs of his own day, he contrasts the broad sweep of Henry II's domains with the meagre territory actually controlled by the King of France; and he ridicules the Capetian's desire to exercise mastery in Francia.³² Here the historical prototype Stephen chooses for Louis VII is Hilderich, the last of the Merovingians and a cypher of royalty cast from the throne.³³ Finally, in Book III, capitalising on the German Emperor's intervention in the conflict, Stephen draws attention to the current French claim to the Carolingian inheritance. (In 1165, Louis VII produced a son, Phillip Augustus. The mother, Adele of Champagne, was distantly related to the Carolingians; it was through her that the French royal family was now promoting a Carolingian connection.) In the *Draco*, Frederic Barbarossa asserts that *he* is the true heir of the Carolingians. Furthermore, he is made to express the view that, as Louis is the representative of a usurping line, it would be perfectly

31 Bk II, Ch.XI.

32 Bk II, Ch.VIII.

33 *Ibid.*, Ch.III-V.

just if he were to be deposed. Indeed, the Emperor goes so far as to offer to perform this service for King Henry II and to tender the throne to Henry the Younger.³⁴

Stephen's attack on Louis VII and the Capetian line has been noted by historians interested in French and German history of this period. Kienast, for example, cites the *Draco* in his study of Germany during the period of Empire, commenting that Stephen's poem has, up to now, not received the attention it deserves.³⁵ (This observation occurs in a footnote, which is where one usually finds references to the *Draco*.) An historian of French affairs, searching for evidence of resistance to Capetian propaganda, says that Stephen produced the most vehement and fully developed polemic against the Capetians in the 12th century.³⁶

The attack on the Capetians is savage, but it is also very amusing. Stephen does not deliver his barbs all at once: the effect is cumulative. The poet takes particular delight in ridiculing the royalist cult, which was centred on the Abbey of St. Denis. Under the direction of Abbot Suger, who had promoted the interests of Louis VI in the previous generation, St. Denis became the powerhouse for Capetian interests. The royal abbey continued in this role throughout the 12th century and beyond. In the *Draco*, however, the abbey figures as a retirement centre for deposed kings. Thus, Hilderich, after being deposed, ends his days at St. Denis. (This accords with the historical record.³⁷) Desiderius, who was also ousted from the throne, was actually exiled to Liege, but in the *Draco* he too is packed off to the royal abbey.³⁸ When Stephen describes Louis VII's attack on Andely which was undefended - he depicts the French king arriving with relics from St. Denis, provided for his protection by the monks.³⁹ So it is that Stephen pillories Louis and makes fun of the cultic practice which promoted St. Dionysius as the national patron and special protector of the French kings.

Cicero recommended wit and ridicule in dealing with one's opponent. Stephen deployed these weapons to some effect in his poem: but it is clear that they had no impact on the actual conduct of the affairs of state. If the poem came to the notice of Henry II at the appropriate time, then it was obviously to no effect.

Modern scholars best acquainted with the *Draco* - the Arthurian scholar,

34 Bk III:255-64.

35 *Op.cit.* p. 223.

36 W. Lewis, *Royal Succession in Capetian France*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), pp.257,273.

37 Bk II, Ch. VI:314.

38 *Ibid.* p.371.

39 *Ibid.* Ch.XV:792-4.

Tatlock, and Howlett, who edited the poem for the Rolls Series - are both of the opinion that Stephen intended to present his poem to Henry II. (Howlett buries this observation in a footnote, but Tatlock makes quite a production of it.⁴⁰) I have to agree with them. Stephen's exercise in rhetoric would have been otiose if not delivered to the one who was currently determining the future of Normandy's standing in relation to the French throne. However, I must say that the thought of Henry II reading the poem makes me nervous on Stephen's behalf. To the poet's contemporaries, above all to Henry II himself, it would have been obvious that the poet's laudatory description of his prince's performance as a Norman champion was not supported by the known historical record. I marvel at Stephen's audacity in implicitly challenging Henry II's conduct of affairs of state. But there the poem stands.

According to Marjorie Chibnall, Stephen spent much of his life in the priory of Notre Dame at Rouen, in which was situated the royal quarters where Matilda lived for the last twenty years of her life.⁴¹ It is more than probable, then, that the poet was known to Henry II's mother. In the *Draco*, furthermore, Stephen gives the impression that he was the messenger chosen to go to King Henry in Brittany with news of Matilda's death.⁴² The poet's standing with the royal family apart, the monks associated with Rouen and Bec had enjoyed a long and mutually supportive relationship with the royal family. In the hundred years since the Conquest, five of the Archbishops of Canterbury had been drawn from Bec. The monks had supported Matilda and her son's claim to Normandy and to the throne of England against Stephen of Blois; and Bec had been and was still the beneficiary of royal patronage. It seems reasonable to suppose, therefore, that if anyone were to presume to hold Henry II to his *Normannitas*, it would be one such as Stephen of Rouen, encouraged and made bold by his monastery's privileged relationship to the royal house. We cannot know who if anyone encouraged Stephen to undertake his project; but as a rhetorician he was most suited to the task - and clearly had the personal daring not to be dissuaded by the prospect of provoking one of Henry II's notorious rages.

However, there is the distinct possibility that, in the end, Stephen did not have the opportunity to present his poem to the king. It is clear, on the evidence of the poem itself, that our long-winded rhetor was overtaken by events. In the final chapters we find that Henry and Louis have been reconciled, under the terms drawn up in 1168. Nothing came of the

40 Howlett, *op. cit.*, p.lxxix; Tatlock, *op. cit.*, no 2, Nov. 1933, pp.123f.

41 M. Chibnall, "The Empress Matilda and Bec-Hellouin", in *Anglo-Norman Studies* X, 1988, p.38.

42 Bk II., Ch.XXIII. Howlett's comments, p.lxxix.

negotiations between Henry and the German Emperor. As Kienast explains, 'The Plantagenet did not want to bring things to a head and hoped for peace with the Capetian. He did order the organisation of a general oath of allegiance to the imperial Pope, but the attempt failed in the face of opposition from a great synod in London'⁴³. Warren, the modern biographer of Henry II, provides additional comment on the English king's dealings with the King of France: 'Henry seems to have appreciated that Louis feared the emasculation of the monarchy by the creation of an overpowerful Angevin "empire" and he sought to allay the anxiety by announcing his intention to divide his dominions among his sons'.⁴⁴

King Henry returned to the homage of the French king and efforts were made to establish conditions for a lasting peace. Stephen makes what he can of this dismal situation, pointing out that it was Louis who sued for peace, because the French forces could make no headway against Henry. Stephen records the main points of the peace agreement. He refers to Richard's betrothal to Louis' daughter, describes the division of lands and titles between Henry's sons and reports that they are to be the vassals of the French king. And so the poem ends.

This, however, is not Stephen's last word. In a postscript he makes a final statement on behalf of the Normans, referring again to Chaumont and Andely.⁴⁵ The tone is defiant, but the author must have been disconsolate. Stephen's hopes have been extinguished by Henry's reconciliation with the French king; and this on terms inimical to Normandy's political independence.

The *Draco* was written in defence of Norman interests when these were under increasing threat. The march of history, however, shows Stephen's efforts to have been in vain. When he spoke on behalf of an independent people, the author of the *Draco* was in fact writing the prologue to the Norman Vespers in Neustria.

43 Kienast, *op. cit.*, p.223.

44 Warren, *op. cit.*, pp.108f.

45 Bk III.Ch.XVI. XXX