

Report to the Aurelius Trust: Database of Anglo-Norman Royal Acta

The Trust's investment in this project has made possible the creation of an invaluable resource. The work originally envisaged has been achieved, and analysis of the documents made accessible by the database has already begun. Moreover, work on the natural extension of the database, a complete edition of the charters of William II and Henry I, is now making brisk progress.

The original intention behind this project was to make accessible to analysis the texts of the charters of the Anglo-Norman kings, which survive in large quantities but are dispersed among libraries and archives throughout England and northern France. No central government archives retained copies of these documents at this period, so that serious study of such matters as the structure of government, the manner in which central and local government was organised, and royal patronage, depends on overcoming the difficulty of access to these documents. Examination of the evolution of Anglo-Norman diplomatic has never before been attempted, for there are printed collections only for the charters of William I (1998) and Stephen (1968), and merely incomplete listings without actual texts for the charters of William II (1913) and Henry I (1956).

The database brings together a very large quantity of fundamental sources for English history in this period. Some 2930 individual charters have been entered. The charters of William I comprise over 75,300 words; those of William II over 29,600 words; those of Henry I over 224,000 words; and those of Stephen over 241,200 words; a total of more than 570,000 words. In the database, occurrences of names in the texts are linked to individual files giving a standardized form for each name; already there are 4214 files for identified and verified individuals and 3075 for identified and verified place-names. All texts (most of which are undated) have had reliable date-ranges assigned to them, the dating, in most cases, being based on the identities of those witnessing the charters and dating in their careers that are mentioned.

Apart from its size, the great asset of the database is the ability that it gives users to analyse the charters in ways that have never been possible before. For the first time it has permitted analysis of the forms of the charters based on the complete surviving corpus rather than on impressionistic judgements based on limited samples; it allows connexions to be drawn between the itineraries of the kings and the local and regional patterns of witnessing by identified individuals; its chronological span facilitates investigation of the development of diplomatic forms used by the royal chancery over an extended period; it provides a secure test of the authenticity of any documents not produced in chancery.

The database's potential for bringing new and more rigorous standards of analysis to charters is enormous; it will underpin an edition of the charters of William II and Henry I of a higher standard than has previously been possible, and this in turn will become one of the fundamental tools of medieval English history.