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Peter Rex, *1066: A New History of the Norman Invasion*. Stroud, UK: Amberley, 2009. Pp. 286. ISBN 978-1-84868-106-4.

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The Battle of Hastings, fought on 14 October 1066 between the Anglo-Saxon army led by King Harold Godwinson and a Norman and allied army led by Duke William II of Normandy, ranks among the most decisive battles in the history of the West. King Harold, his two brothers Garyth and Leofwine, and many of the leading noblemen in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom were killed that day. Just over two months later, on 25 December 1066, Duke William had himself crowned king of the English at Westminster Abbey. Within two years of the battle, the administrative cadres of the advanced Anglo-Saxon state were gathering vast sums of cash for King William's coffers and English soldiers for his armies. Within a decade of the battle, the indigenous Anglo-Saxon nobility had been removed from virtually every secular and ecclesiastical office in the kingdom. By 1075, Latin, the administrative language of the Norman duchy, had supplanted English in every facet of public life, from government documents to law courts and church councils. Over the next several hundred years, the influence of French and Latin radically transformed the language spoken by much of the population down to the names they gave to their children.

Because of its impact on the political and cultural landscape of England, the Battle of Hastings has received enormous scholarly as well as popular attention, making it exceptionally hard to write a "new history" of the period. This is the challenge that author and retired history teacher Peter Rex has set for himself in this fast-paced political and military account of the battle and the subsequent decade, during which King William I consolidated his rule in England.

Following a brief introduction and prologue, chapter 1 turns to the "Norman D-Day," describing the morning of 28 September 1066 when Duke William's ship sat off the coast Sussex as he awaited his fleet. The following thirteen chapters provide a chronological account beginning with King Harold's coronation at Westminster Abbey (6 January 1066) and ending with the execution of Earl Walteof of Northumbria (31 May 1076), which formally concluded the last revolt against William's rule in England. Chapters 2-5 consider, respectively, the competing claims of Harold and William to the English throne, the difficulties William encountered in crossing the English Channel, King Harold Hardrada of Norway's invasion of northern England, and finally the Battle of Hastings itself. The remaining nine chapters, the bulk of Rex's account, describe in considerable detail William's gradual securing of power throughout England, beginning with London.

Rex ties together his main arguments in a brief epilogue, followed by six appendices. These consider, in turn: the succession to the English throne over the course of the eleventh century before Hastings; castle construction in England after the conquest; the topography of the battlefield of Hastings; what Harold Godwinson did or did not promise to Duke William while imprisoned in Normandy in 1064; what can be known for certain about Hereward, a prominent Anglo-Saxon rebel against William's rule; and finally, the Bayeux Tapestry. There are endnotes, a bibliography,¹ and an index as well as fifty-seven illustrations, including twenty color plates of the Bayeux Tapestry.

Besides relying heavily on contemporary and near-contemporary narrative texts, Rex makes good use of the large corpus of surviving charters issued by King Harold, by William as both duke and king, and by ecclesiastical institutions. Finally, he astutely uses the Domesday Book in describing the radical transformation of the political order in England between 1066 and 1086. Especially valuable (though, unfortunately, lacking source citations) is his meticulous discussion of the geography and climate of the south and north

1. The scholarly apparatus is thin: the notes are mostly limited to source citations and the short bibliography lists only English-language scholarship and translated narrative texts.

coasts of the England Channel, southern Sussex, and the region of the Fens as these affected both the Hastings campaign and the ensuing operations that firmed up Norman rule.

Among the book's strengths are the placement of the Battle of Hastings within the broader context of military and political affairs before William's initial victory and the close attention to the difficult and protracted period of the Norman consolidation of power. In this regard, two chapters stand out: the first, chapter 4, treats the political maneuvering that led to Harold Hardrada's descent on northern England in the summer of 1066 and the campaign that culminated in his death in battle at Stamford Bridge (27 September 1066). The second, chapter 11, sheds light on Hereward's revolt and William's operations against the rebel stronghold on the island of Ely in 1071.

Rather than arguing a thesis, Rex writes a narrative account of the conquest from what documentarians call a point of view—that of the Anglo-Saxons. He presents William as lacking any claim whatsoever to the English throne and engaging in actions at best illegitimate, at worst outright war crimes. The entire work is colored by Second World War terminology: William and his Normans take the role of the Germans, while the Anglo-Saxons who cooperate with William are collaborators, indeed, quislings (92). Regions under Norman domination are an "occupied zone" (100). Anglo-Saxon resistance is like the French *maquis* (131). William even institutes a "Final Solution" in dealing with the revolt of the English (aided by the Danes) in the north (144).

This sort of approach leads Rex to read contemporary sources through the prism of his own preconceptions. Those that paint a bleak picture of William's motives or his troops' actions he treats as straightforward presentations of reality; those that tend to favor William's claims and policies are discounted as special pleading. Thus, for example, Rex regards as an objective depiction of reality the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's account of William's merciless robbing of monasteries (98), with no consideration of the broader framework of the Norman effort to reform the Anglo-Saxon church under the auspices of papal authority. So, too, Robert de Commines, who was sent to govern the city and region of Durham in 1069, is said to have committed a war crime by supposedly permitting his men to run riot and massacring the local population (133), without any supporting source citation for such a claim. Rex makes no effort here to explain why William and his military commanders, contrary to the norms of contemporary wars of conquest, did not work diligently to maintain the physical and human resources of the lands they hoped to exploit. Instead, we are left with the impression that the Norman conquerors simply foreshadowed SS scum intent on mindless destruction and gratification of their immediate desires. By contrast, Rex labels Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury, one of the most respected churchmen of his day, a "truly fanatical supporter" of King William, whose testimony must be rejected as that of an exceptionally biased partisan (193).

In addition, Rex adheres to a now discredited² scholarly tradition of treating medieval politics and warfare as "feudal." This is most jarringly apparent in his characterization of putative differences between Anglo-Saxon and Norman views of the "vassal status" of a man who has taken an oath of loyalty to his lord (92). Such a model of the differing conceptions of lordship and public responsibility is utterly inconsistent with the political and governmental realities of the eleventh century. Both Anglo-Saxon England and Normandy were Carolingian successor states, sharing a common understanding of the role of the government in society and the relationship between all men and their ruler.

From a military perspective, Rex relies on outdated models of pre-Crusade warfare generally and Norman warfare more specifically. It is not the case, as Rex suggests, that William's army depended heavily on cavalry (168). Warfare in the eleventh century, indeed during the entire medieval millennium, was dominated by sieges, where mounted troops played only a very limited role. Moreover, the relatively few battles that Norman troops fought in the field during the reigns of William and his sons were infantry conflicts, where any mounted fighters usually dismounted for combat.

One further problem is Rex's consistent use of the term "knight" to translate the Latin *miles* (soldier). The modern word "knight" connotes a bundle of social, juridical, and economic characteristics not present

2. By, e.g., Susan Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (NY: Oxford U Pr, 1994).

in the eleventh century. Only at the end of the twelfth-century did authors in England begin to associate *miles* with traits that ultimately led to the romantic image of the knight in his shining Sunday armor. At the time of Hastings, and for a century afterward, *miles* denoted no more than a man who earned his living by fighting. Such a man usually had a horse, although frequently he did not own it and normally fought on foot.

In sum, Rex offers a well-written and brisk account of the Norman conquest of England and the succeeding decade of consolidation. With the caveat that students be warned of its pronounced biases, it is a book that could be used in undergraduate surveys of western civilization, medieval history, and English history. Scholars, however, will not find much of interest here, as Rex does not adduce new sources or theories.