

Manhood, Freedom and Nation in Later Medieval England^{*}

Masculinidad, libertad y nación en la Inglaterra bajomedieval

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Resumen: Este artículo examina cómo ser “libre” (“free”) interactúa con diferentes constelaciones de ideas, en particular las asociadas con ser un “hombre”, en el contexto específico de la Inglaterra de los siglos XIII y XIV. Se argumenta que la virilidad conlleva potentes cargas emocionales, retóricas y, por tanto, políticas, que eran consecuencia tanto de la herencia latina como de sus diversas adaptaciones en el transcurso de la Edad Media. El artículo evalúa cómo estas implicaciones se superponían a las asociadas a ser libre. Asimismo, se examinan una serie de razones por las que estos temas se volvieron particularmente importantes en los siglos XIII y XIV, antes de analizarlos en detalle en el caso de una crisis política particular de mediados del siglo XIII, en la que los temas de la virilidad, la libertad y la nación interactuaron de forma novedosa.

Palabras clave: Hombría; Libertad; Virtud; Barón; Masculinidad; Nobleza; Nación; Emoción; Política; Enrique III; Mateo Paris.

Abstract: This article examines how being “free” interacts with different constellations of ideas, in particular those associated with being a “man” in the specific context of thirteenth and fourteenth century England. It argues that manhood carried powerful emotional, rhetorical and hence political charges which were the consequence of both the Latin inheritance and its various adaptations in the course of the Middle Ages. It considers how these charges overlapped with those associated with being free. It examines a variety of reasons why these issues became particularly important in the thirteenth and fourteenth century, before analysing them in detail in the case of a particular mid thirteenth century political crisis in which issues of manhood, freedom and nation interacted in a new way.

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Keywords: Manhood; Freedom; Liberty; Virtus; Baron; Masculinity; Nobility; Nation; Emotion; Politics; Henry III; Matthew Paris.

Sumario: 0. Introducción. 1. Masculinidad, nobleza y honor, libertad y sujeción. 2. Masculinidad y Libertad, política y sociedad en la Inglaterra de los siglos XIII y XIV. 3. Masculinidad, libertad y nación en una crisis política de mediados del XIII. 4. Conclusión.

Summary: 0. Introduction. 1. Manhood, nobility and honour, freedom and constraint. 2. Manhood and freedom, politics and society in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England. 3. Manhood, freedom and nation in a mid-thirteenth century political crisis. 4. Conclusion.

0. INTRODUCTION

In a comparative project dedicated to pre-modern practices of liberty or freedom, it is natural to begin by interrogating our own categories and those of the period under study¹. Projects dedicated to themes which are broad enough to be analysed across different regions and different historical traditions (the state, the public sphere, contractualism, urban writing and governing practices...) commonly open with a review of the historiography, sometimes supplemented with recent social or political theory, and perhaps followed by an excursus into legal history, philology and the history of political thought². It can then often be demonstrated that historians have used certain categories in a flexible way which changes over time, with inevitable confusion and slippage, and then to criticize their errors either by means of modern theory or through an analysis of past concepts, before finally returning to historical examples. One limitation with this kind of approach is that past social, political and linguistic practices are complex, changing and multi-centred – much like historians' own categories. Thus although analysis of medieval law, vocabulary and political thought provides an effective means of criticizing anachronistic elements of earlier historical writing, or as a means of delimiting acceptable readings of particular texts, it has proved more difficult to apply as a means of modelling social and political practice. Whereas it might be agreed that certain pre-existing categories are necessary for experience, it is rather less clear how recoverable these categories now are to historians, given the limited and partial

¹ In the context of liberty, the place to begin would be the works of Quentin Skinner and J. G. A. Pocock. See e.g. Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*; Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*.

² For the state, consider for example the range of publications under the auspices of the European Science Foundation in the 1990s, and more recently in the ERC project « Signs and States: Les vecteurs de l'idéal » directed by Jean-Philippe Genet. See esp. Genet, *La légitimité implicite*. For the public sphere, see Offenstadt and Boucheron, *Espace public au Moyen Âge* on the rather confused use of Habermas's Öffentlichkeit by historians. For contractualism, see Foronda, Genet and Nieto Soria, *Avant le contrat social*. Urban written practices, notably « régistres de délibération » are currently the object of a long-term research project *Statuts, écritures et pratiques sociales dans les sociétés de la Méditerranée occidentale à la fin du Moyen Âge (XIIe-XVe siècle)* of which the first publication was Lett, *Statuts, écritures et pratiques sociales*.

nature of our textual sources³. Conceptual history in its purest form risks becoming schematic, especially when the sources used to write it are self-conscious philosophical, legal or theological texts which are themselves in the business of building systems⁴. Our models are improved by diversifying our corpora to include sources which are closer to practice. Nonetheless, however large and varied these may be, every genre has its own distinctive structures and vocabulary, and we must still beware of the impression that we hold the entire “system of communication” in our hands.

Aside from these general considerations, there are a number of reasons why the movement from historiography, to past concepts, to particular examples of social and political practice can be difficult. For purposes of the present article, it is useful to identify three of these. The first problem is that of how concepts are used in practice. Noam Chomsky’s 1959 critique of “behaviourist” linguistics is still very much worth invoking in this context: “more is involved in sentence structure than the insertion of lexical items in grammatical frames”⁵. Language is not reducible to the simple invocation of concepts. An infinite number of semantic possibilities are opened up by the different ways words are combined. One consequence of this is that we need to investigate a range of concepts, including words which do not obviously merit the title of “concept”, such as verbs, adverbs and adjectives. In practice, a “concept”, a “key word” or a *Grundbegriff* often serves as a way of grouping together a whole series of linguistic strategies in which this word (usually a noun) is sometimes used. Second, language does not exist in a vacuum but constantly appeals to unspoken social, political and, for example, emotional connotations created by the contexts in which it habitually occurs⁶. This is not something which is easily revealed by a purely semantic analysis of a word or set of words and how they are used. We need to expand the range of inquiry to include when they were used, and with what consequences⁷. Finally, and importantly for comparative purposes, actors in different contexts achieve similar results by pursuing different linguistic strategies. This can be a matter of homonymy – certain words serve the same purposes as others – but also of rhetorical complexity. Different sets of words can be used to invoke the same connotations, as we see when we examine a large corpus over a long period⁸. These three points taken

³ The idea of a conceptual frame as pre-existing experience might be traced back to Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Arguably more influential on historians has been Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, either directly or through the work of anthropologists.

⁴ E.g. Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture*; Kleinschmidt, *Understanding the Middle Ages*, which although very stimulating in terms of the models they propose remain unconvincing as total explanations of medieval society.

⁵ Chomsky « Review of B.F. Skinner’s Verbal Behavior », p. 54.

⁶ Cameron, « Demythologizing sociolinguistics ».

⁷ Sinclair, « The evidence of usage ».

⁸ See e.g. Fletcher, « What makes a political language? ».

together mean that when we study “liberty” or “freedom” it is not enough to restrict ourselves to these terms, their derivatives or their etymological forebears.

I come to this particular problem from the perspective of a different historiography which has been far less concerned about concepts and far more ready to appropriate a *bricolage* of social theory and modern commonplace assumptions. The history of medieval masculinities has been written since the 1990s on the basis of a series of models – the “crisis of masculinity”, the need to become a social male, the performance of masculinity, the anxiety potentially provoked by each of these, and finally multiple masculinities and hegemonic masculinity – all of which have been drawn from theoretical models tailored for modernity, and especially for late twentieth-century Western modernity. The advantage of such approaches has been to increase the readability and excitement of fields which otherwise might have seemed a little dry – the masculinity of the clergy, for example, its relationship to that of the nobility, and especially the consequences of the reform movement and its insistence on the separateness of the clergy and laity, and on abandonment of violence and of sexual activity. The downside, almost the opposite one to that of the conceptual history outlined above, has been that the importance of language, in the sense both of what words mean and how they contain their own suggestions about how they might be used, has been left to one side.

This is not simply a matter of an academic concern for terminological precision and consistency. It also has important consequences for how the history of medieval masculinity has developed and might develop in the future. In the case of the masculinity of the clergy, for example, the failure to take language seriously has embarked historians on a circuitous journey which risks ending in the self-cancellation of the field itself. Beginning with a series of radical propositions – that the reform movement provoked a crisis of clerical masculinity, or even that the clergy thus ceased to be male at all but instead became an “emasculinity” or third sex – historians then made their way to more nuanced positions⁹. Instead it has been proposed that the fresh insistence on the abandonment of sex and violence provoked anxiety amongst churchmen, leading to an increased use of the language of acting “manly”, like a “man” or showing “manhood” in clerical discourse¹⁰. More recently, continuing work on the sources and on preceding periods have produced what arguably amounts to a historicised undermining of the entire argument. The use of the language of manly resistance to sin was as old or older than Christianity itself and remained a valid way of expressing manly steadfastness¹¹, priests could act as social males like anybody else¹², bishops and

⁹ McNamara, « *The Herrenfrage* »; Swanson, « *Angels Incarnate* ».

¹⁰ Murray, « *Masculinizing Religious Life* ».

¹¹ Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture*; Karras, « *Thomas Aquinas’ Chastity Belt* »; Fletcher, « *Whig Interpretation of Masculinity* ». See also Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire*, esp. p. 88.

other elite clerics had their own masculine honour which they defended much like the lay nobility¹³, and so there is no need to detect any particular insecurity with regards to their lay opposite numbers. Yet throughout this debate little sustained consideration has been given to what it meant to use the language of “manhood” of acting “manly” or being a “man” in the Middle Ages. The words of the sources are taken to be transparent equivalents to our own words in a particular field (masculinity) which interests us. Yet the medieval language of manhood had its own associations, its oppositions and equivalences. It combined deep-running linguistic assumptions with particular nuances which emerged in different social and political contexts.

What I hope to do in the present paper is to suggest a different route, by analysing how certain concepts related in whole or in part to being a man relate to freedom and liberty. To do this, we need to start with languages and practices which relate to being or behaving like an adult-male human-being – a man. This language had ancient roots, but it invoked a set of values and assumptions which remained vibrant throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. I would like to consider in particular how this language relates to freedom, but also to other concepts: nobility, for example, and nation. These concepts had their own associations and resonances which, although again they overlap with similar terms we use, do not wholly correspond with them either.

This analysis provides an opportunity to explore an important interaction between ideas of manhood, nobility, freedom and nation in the specific context of the broader social and political circumstances of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century England. In particular, I will concentrate on one particular moment of crisis in the mid-thirteenth century when the relationship between manhood, freedom, nobility and honour was changing fundamentally. As a result of important changes in the possibilities and limitations open to the English king to finance his projects, especially in war, it was slowly becoming apparent that although the royal government could now tap the resources of the country to an unprecedented extent through direct taxation, this was counterbalanced by new processes of communication and negotiation which involved both the acceptance and even the active involvement of a considerably expanded range of men. These men were adult male human beings, and householders, but they were not necessarily noble. In this context, a range of political strategies emerged around manhood, freedom and nation which had not been available in earlier periods, or had not functioned in the same way. On the one hand, the king argued that he ought to be as free as any adult male householder (and not just a noble), and his opponents insisted on the affront to the free status of all English men implied by the king's reckless projects, and especially by his indulgence of his foreign relatives and intimates.

¹² Thibodeaux, « Man of the church or man of the village? »; Neal, *Masculine Self*.

¹³ Mesley, « Beyond celibacy »; Thomas, « Shame and masculinity »; Miller, « To 'Frock' a Cleric ».

1. MANHOOD, NOBILITY AND HONOUR, FREEDOM AND CONSTRAINT

From the opening centuries of the Middle Ages, the classical associations of being a “man” or “vir” overlapped with those of a noble or a fighting man in a way which would later entwine the status of an adult male with that of a free man. In classical and subsequently medieval Latin, “vir” was believed to derive from “vis”, or strength and force, in an etymology ascribed by Lactantius (c. 250-c. 325 CE) to Varo (c. 250-c. 325 BCE), and passed to the Middle Ages by Isidore of Seville (560/70-636 CE)¹⁴. As Isidore put it, a man or husband (“vir”) was so called because of the superior force (“vis”) in him rather than women (“feminis”), “and from this also virtue/strength/manhood (“virtus”) takes its name”. “Viri” (men or husbands) were stronger than wives (“mulieris”), and so by divine providence wives could not rebuff their husbands, preventing the latter from having sexual recourse to other women or to their own sex¹⁵. It was thus well understood that “virtus” – whose first meaning was physical strength and courage, and only secondarily what we mean by “virtue” – also derived from the qualities of a “vir”¹⁶. As a result, “manhood” often seems a better translation of “virtus” than “virtue”, and this was how it was often rendered into late medieval vernaculars¹⁷. From this point of view, manhood was defined first of all in terms of physical strength and steadfastness. This was then applied by extension to moral and psychological constancy and resilience, by Stoic philosophers, Roman historians and rhetoricians, and also by Christian preachers, writers and polemicists¹⁸. Throughout the Latin Middle Ages, the adverb “viriliter” continued to denote the manly strength and constancy needed to fight one’s way out of a tight spot, both in physical combat or moral struggles, as under the Roman Republic and Principate, and now also in eschatological battles with the devil, the flesh and the world¹⁹. Acting “viriliter” thus enabled one to signal one’s “virtus” and hence receive recognition for it, in the form of “honor”, in this world or the next²⁰.

These etymological beliefs, semantic associations and recurring connotations had a number of consequences. On the one hand, since the primary referent of “vir” was to be a man in opposition to a woman, the attachment of these associations to

¹⁴ Lactantius, *De opificio Dei*, p. 182, 12.16-17, discussed in Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch*, p. 21; Fletcher, « ‘Sire, Uns Hom Sui’ », p. 37.

¹⁵ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive Originum*, vol. 2, XI, 2, 17-19. For the immediate context, see Smith, « Gender and Ideology in the Early Middle Ages ». For discussion see Bullough, « On Being A Male »; Leleu, « Virile Women and Effeminate Men », pp. 87-89.

¹⁶ Hellegouarc’h, *Le vocabulaire latin*, pp. 244-245; McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*; Barton, *Roman Honor*, pp. 34-38; Kuefler, *Manly Eunuch*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁷ Oliva Herrero, « Masculinity and Political Struggle », pp. 162-163; Fletcher, « Whig interpretation of masculinity ? ».

¹⁸ McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, pp. 72-141; Kuefler, *Manly Eunuch*, pp. 111-117.

¹⁹ Fletcher, « ‘Sire, uns hom sui’ », pp. 35-41; Fletcher, « Whig interpretation of masculinity ? ».

²⁰ For medieval development of « virtus » see Schwandt, *Virtus*.

being simply an adult male human being had levelling potential. Since all adult males were apparently men (“viri”) then any adult male human being could claim the “virtus” associated with acting “viriliter”, that is to say by acting vigorously and steadfastly, demonstrating his physical strength. Yet, on the other hand, clearly some men are better equipped to show strength and physical courage, and even moral steadfastness, than others. Even though any man might claim to be a “vir”, strong fighting men were clearly in a better position to act “viriliter” and to demonstrate “virtus” and to win “honor”. Already, in classical Latin, “virtus” as manhood and strength was also a characteristic which was especially to be expected of nobles²¹. The best bet for non-noble, non-fighting men in a Christian universe was perhaps, as countless religious writers argued, to show their manliness by combatting sin²². Even so, the most obviously manly men would be successful nobles and fighting men, and secondarily particularly impressive ascetic Christians, saints and martyrs.

From the early Middle Ages, the associations of the classical Latin “vir” were also taken on by another word, imported from Germanic languages, which was rendered into Latin as “baro”, and which was independent from the classical Latin word of the same morphology²³. This began a process by which the qualities once ascribed to a “vir” became to be more closely associated with a particular kind of man: a fighting man, a free man and a lay noble. To begin with, when the evidence of its usage has to come entirely from its use as importation into Latin, it seems that “baro” most frequently denoted, like “vir”, a man as opposed to a woman²⁴. But also, not unlike “vir”, it already had associations with strength and vigour, with being not just a man but a big man or, we might say, a “made man”²⁵. By the time of Isidore of Seville, “baro” also had links to being a fighting man, although not yet a free man. Isidore associates a “baro” with a “mercenarius” which could be a paid soldier or some other man hired for his physical labour²⁶. As yet, this did not necessarily have links to freedom: a fighting man, indeed, could still be a slave. Yet by the time we start to have evidence of its use in vernacular languages, from the late eleventh and especially twelfth century, the “baro” was not only a fighting man, but increasingly a noble man²⁷. In *The Song of Roland* (c. 1100), for example, the Old French “ber” or “baron” both denote strong fighting men²⁸. To fight “cume ber”, was to show all the qualities associated with “vir”, “virtus” and acting

²¹ Hellegouarc’h, *Le vocabulaire latin*, pp. 242-3.

²² On this theme see Murray, « Masculinizing Religious Life »; Karras, « Thomas Aquinas’s Chastity Belt »; Fletcher, « Whig interpretation of masculinity? »; Smith, *War and the Making of Medieval Monastic Culture*.

²³ Westerblad, *Baro et ses dérivés*.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 15-16, 43-46, 50-51, 123, 135.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

²⁷ Flori, « Lexicologie et société médiévale »; Crouch, *The English Aristocracy*, pp. 48-51.

²⁸ Analysed in detail in Fletcher, « ‘Sire, Uns Hom Sui’ », pp. 45-46.

“viriliter” in classical Latin, and which had also come to be attached to Latinized Germanic word “baro”²⁹. Yet at the same time, although these characteristics could be attributed to the king himself, or to his enemies, “ber” and “baron” were increasingly applied to those worthy fighting men who surrounded him³⁰. Thus in the course of the twelfth century, the simple meaning of “ber” or “baron” to denote first of all a man as opposed to a woman, then a strong, steadfast or worthy man, came to coexist with a use of “baron” to denote a certain status, increasingly the status of a prominent lay nobleman and knight, close to the king³¹. Thus, “ber” and “baron” were at first far wider in their referent than our modern “baron”. They had much the same connotations of “vir”, “virtus” and “viriliter”: that is to say, strength, vigour and steadfastness, as well as connoting the status of an important fighting man, close to the king. Only later did they shed the first group of associations to come to be exclusively associated with a specific noble rank, a process that was still incomplete in the thirteenth and even the fourteenth century³².

In the later thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century England, we start to find evidence of another important semantic change. In pre-conquest Old English, “beorn” had served many of the functions as “baro”, denoting a man (“vir”), but also a prince, a noble, a soldier and also a rich man³³. However, as literary works in Middle English start to appear, from the mid thirteenth century, they use the word “manly” and expressions such as “as a man” in contexts where in Anglo-Norman one finds “ber”, “comme baron” or even different expressions with many of the same meanings but different referents such as “cum leon”³⁴. It is also clear that in Middle English from the fourteenth and fifteenth century, that “manhood” could denote the same qualities as “virtus” – that is strength and steadfastness and the honour they brought with them³⁵. So, at a time when “baron” in French, Latin and English was being reduced to its associations with a particular, noble status, in England the associations of the “vir”, “virtus” and acting “viriliter” were taken on by a word, “man”, whose literal referent was once more an adult male human being.

In classical Latin, then, the fact of being a “man” or “vir” was associated with strength and vigour and, especially, with steadfast courage in a tight spot. The “vir” did not retreat when death threatened, and thus proved his “virtus”, won “honor” and avoided shame. Something else is also worth pointing out for present purposes, interested as we are in freedom. Quite apart from the links that this already brought to that of a fighting man, this had another, more direct, pragmatic link to freedom.

²⁹ Westerblad, *Baro et ses dérivés*, pp. 25, 136.

³⁰ Fletcher, « ‘Sire, Uns Hom Sui », pp. 45-46.

³¹ Westerblad, *Baro et ses dérivés*, pp. 36-42; Flori, « Lexicologie et société médiévale »; Crouch, *The Image of the Aristocracy*, pp. 106-114; Crouch, *English Aristocracy*, pp. 48-49.

³² Westerblad, *Baro et ses dérivés*, pp. 41-42.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 130; Bosworth and Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, « beorn (n.) ».

³⁴ Fletcher, *Richard II : Manhood, youth and politics*, pp. 32-33.

³⁵ Fletcher, « ‘Être homme’ », pp. 52-54, 56-60; Fletcher, « Manhood, kingship and the public », pp. 129-131; Fletcher, « Whig interpretation of masculinity ? », pp. 64-69.

The man of strength, steadfastness and vigour, who did not submit to the blows of his enemy was free in another way: he did not acknowledge the superiority of that enemy or submit himself to his will. This, indeed, was part of its power for noble, Christian converts in the Roman Empire³⁶. By undergoing death in the arena, or other forms of martyrdom, one might think that the saint was subjected to his persecutor. Instead, by fighting external persecution and battling temptation, a man who aligned his will with that of God was truly free, not a slave to sin. Even when the associations of “vir”, “virtus” and acting “viriliter” were also taken on by Germanic imports such as “baro”, the links between manhood and freedom remained. To be free was not to submit to the will of another under the threat of violence or actual violence. This was something to which all adult male human-beings could aspire, but which noble, fighting men might more readily achieve. Some adult-male human-beings could show themselves to be men, but others who did not possess adequate strength and vigour, who did not stay steadfast, and who were subjected to others, might not be men after all. Not all men were “men”, especially not unfree or non-noble men.

Two tendencies in work on medieval masculinities are worth recalling here. On the one hand, historians noted early on how the fact of being a man in many medieval cultures seems to be independent of sex, on the grounds that a woman can be declared to be manly, or be seen to fulfil role normally ear-marked for a man, whereas adult male human beings are just as readily treated as not men: as boys, as womanish, or as effeminate³⁷. On the other hand, more recent studies have insisted on the linkage between manhood, honour, and the male body. Castration, for example, was one clear way of denying that an adult male previously accorded the honour of a man, and especially a noble man, could henceforth claim to be one³⁸. The post mortem castration of Simon de Montfort after the battle of Evesham (1265), for example, was supposed to mark his dishonouring, his reduction to non-manhood³⁹. Another striking example was provided in the late twelfth century, by Lambert of Ardres, in his telling of a supposedly early eleventh century anecdote about the cruelty of a certain Regemar of Boulogne. Regemar allegedly dragged his enemy from sanctuary in Calais, cut him limb from limb and castrated him, and then had his severed genitals kicked about by women and girls. The violent destruction of physical maleness was brought together with humiliation to the female as a means of signalling a total, horrific destruction of manhood⁴⁰. Thus although the status of a man could be denied to males or accorded to females, it would not be true to say that manhood was “independent” or “regardless” of sex.

³⁶ Cf. Kuefler, *Manly Eunuch*, pp. 105-124.

³⁷ Clover, « Regardless of sex »; Clover, « Maiden warriors and other Sons ».

³⁸ Van Eickels, « Gendered violence »; Meysman, « Degrading the male body », pp. 370-2; Westerhof, *Death and the Noble Body*, pp. 115-116, 131.

³⁹ Billoré, « Le corps outragé d'Evesham ».

⁴⁰ Meysman, « Degrading the male body », p. 371.

Adult males, and especially adult male nobles, were supposed to be men, and women were not normally expected to be so, but the way that the associations and use of the idea of manhood went far beyond male sex meant that this expectation was regularly transgressed.

How then do the associations of manhood compare with those of freedom or liberty, and how do the latter relate to nobility or to the status of a fighting man? In fact, the most relevant place to start is not “liberty”⁴¹, but the adjective “frē”, which in turn helps to understand the abstract noun “frēdōm”. In late medieval England, being “frē” could be a certain status, either conferred by birth or earned in life, which was sometimes but not always related to nobility. It could also denote, either at the same time or separately, the absence of constraint, and in particular the absence of submission to the arbitrary will of another. The two are combined, for example, in the 1290s in the life of St Thomas Becket in the South English Legendary, where the saint conceded that a “bonde-man” cannot become a priest without his lord’s consent, since a serf (“thēv man”) could not be made free against his lord’s will⁴². Many early examples of “frēdōm” oppose it explicitly to various forms of servitude or “thraldom”, as something which can be conferred by a lord on a servant whom he releases from his servitude⁴³. On the other hand, the fact of not being a “thral” and not being constrained are less important than the notion of high status where “frē” is used to invoke nobility. Noble birth, for example, and an extra kind of excellence is implied when it is said in a life of St Margaret from about 1275 that “she was born of free kindred, she was the best of all her kin”⁴⁴. The same is true in the poem *Ase y me rod* from about 1350, where both noble qualities and noble blood are invoked when it asserted that “This maiden is suete [i.e. sweet] ant fre of blod”⁴⁵. On the other hand, this being “frē” also appears as a high status

⁴¹ « Liberte » appears later in Anglo-Norman and Middle English than « franc » and « frē ». The first examples given in the *Middle English Dictionary* date from the late fourteenth century. See *The Middle English Dictionary* [henceforth *MED*], « liberte (n.) » at <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/>> (last consulted Nov. 2019). « Liberté » and « libre » are, on the other hand, attested in Anglo-Norman from the mid fourteenth century. See *The Anglo-Norman Dictionary* [henceforth *AND*], « liberté (n.) », 1 (first ex. 1364), and « libre (adj.) » (first ex. 1348) at <www.anglo-norman.net> (last consulted Nov. 2019). They cover some, although not all, of the functions fulfilled by « franc » and « fre », discussed in what follows. « Libre », for example, does not seem to show the recurring reference to nobility or noble qualities found with « fre », although it does denote an absence of constraint or subjection. A « liberté » is also a right, or a district over which a particular jurisdiction pertains, as is a « franchise », although this does not enter as directly into the discussion here. See *AND*, « liberté (s.) », 2, 3, « franchise », 2.

⁴² Horstmann, ed., *Early South-English Legendary*, p. 122, l. 558: « For thev-Man ne mai nought beon i-maket a-ghen is louerdes wille freo ».

⁴³ *MED*, « frēdōm », 1a (earliest ex. c. 1225), 1c (earliest ex. c. 1330).

⁴⁴ *MED* citing Clarke, ed., *Seint Margrete*, l. 39: « ho is boren of cunraden free, of all hire cunne best scal hire bee ».

⁴⁵ Brook, ed., *Harley Lyrics*, pp. 65-66, l. 7. Further uses of « fre » to denote noble character are listed in *MED*, « fre (adj.) », 2a.

which can be obtained in life, as in a mid-thirteenth-century biblical translation which gives “Ghe bed ... To maken him riche man and free”⁴⁶.

In different circumstances, however, “frē” or “franc” could denote a more pragmatic, less clearly status-based idea of freedom. Being free, for example, could mean not being in prison. In the mid thirteenth-century *Prisoner’s Prayer*, its author simply asked “Of prisun thar ich in am, bring me vt and makye fre”⁴⁷. An agreement concluded between Edward III and Sir William Douglas, Lord of Liddesdale, in 1352, similarly provided that “the king by his grace has granted that the said Monsieur William be free (*frank*) and released from his prison”⁴⁸. A devotional poem of around 1275 imagines similar negotiations on a higher plane, asserting that we should appeal on high to make us free of the devil’s net, and so reach heaven: “We schulden to heuene sten ... make us freo, for to bein ther, of the fendes nette”⁴⁹. On the other hand, this freedom could be material, an ability to pass, as when a parliamentary petition of 1376 requested that “all shouts [a kind of flat-bottomed boat] and boats should have good and free (*fraunc*) to come and go on the said water”, that is the River Thames, without being impeded by obstructions or being obliged to pay⁵⁰. The substantive “frēdōm” could be used in a similarly simple way⁵¹. To be “franc” was to be free from coercion, either physical or moral, as when ecclesiastical elections are ordered to be free (“*fraunches*”), which is to say that no one, “great man or another” (“*haut home ne autre*”), can disturb them by malice or force of arms⁵². Many of the collocations of “frē” listed by the *Middle English Dictionary* imply absence of blocking intervention: “fre entre” or “fre issue” (1d(a)), “fre chace”, “fre comun”, “fre fishing”, “fre fold”, “fre warein” (4a). Others imply that the will behind it has not been constrained: “fre aquitaunce”, “fre faculte”, “fre pouer” (4c), “fre wil” or “fre eleccioun” (1c). The idea of absence of constraint meets that of nobility in the sense of “fre” to mean “generous, open-handed”⁵³. Here “frē” means both unconstrained and showing the liberality which demonstrates noble character⁵⁴. Finally, and most generally, to be “frē” of something simply meant to be without it, or not to suffer some constraint it implied⁵⁵. Even in this usage, however, the notion of “being without” overlapped with ideas of both status and the absence of constraint. Thus during the ‘Peasants’

⁴⁶ Arngart, ed., *Middle English Genesis and Exodus*, l. 2018.

⁴⁷ Brown, ed., *English Lyrics*, pp. 10-13.

⁴⁸ *Rotuli Scotiae*, vol. i, p. 75: *par cestes premesse & acordz ... ad le Roi de sa grace ottroiez qe le dit Monsieur William soit frank & relessé de sa prisone.*

⁴⁹ Brown, ed., *English Lyrics*, pp. 46-49.

⁵⁰ Given-Wilson et al., eds., *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England*, , Parliament of April 1376, item 134.

⁵¹ *MED*, « frēdōm », 1b, although the examples given are relatively late, perhaps 1325 at the earliest.

⁵² *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. i, p. 28.

⁵³ *MED*, « fre (adj.) », 2b.

⁵⁴ Note that liberality, too, was associated in late medieval English with manhood. See Fletcher, *Richard II*, pp. 45-59.

⁵⁵ Examples in *MED*, « fre (adj.) », 1d(c).

Revolt” of 1381, the *Anonimalle Chronicle* summarized the demands of the rebels in London in response to a royal proclamation ordering them to return home: “and they all cried with one voice that they did not want to go before they had the traitors who were in the Tower [of London] and charters to be free (*free*) of all manner of servitude (*servage*) and other kinds of articles which they wanted to ask”⁵⁶. On one level, the demand for charters “destre free de toutz maners de servage” simply asks “to be without all kinds of servitude”; on another, however, the idea of a charged “frē” status, comparable to but different from nobility, is not far behind.

In later medieval Anglo-Norman and Middle English, to be “franc” or “frē” might be a certain status and certain qualities, associated ambiguously with nobility, and more clearly opposed to servitude, thraldom or serfdom. It could also denote the fact of being unencumbered, not blocked or constrained. As a result it has proved difficult for lexicographers to categorize these words without either defining them negatively – as the absence of servitude – or by invoking nobility – although it is clear that not everybody who was “frē” was noble – or else simply by dodging the question of definition by referring the reader to the Modern English “free”. “Franc”, for example, is first defined negatively in the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* as “(of status) not held in bondage or villeinage, not servile”, thus proposing a negative definition which presupposes a concept of bondage, villeinage or servility to which being free is the opposite⁵⁷. The *Middle English Dictionary*, on the other hand, first defines “frē” as “Of a person: free in rank or condition, having the social status of a noble or freeman, not a slave or serf”⁵⁸. This definition thus begins by asserting the equivalence of Middle English “frē” with the Modern English “free”, before invoking the status of a noble or a “freeman” (which is tautological, a freeman being a man who is free), before finally ending negatively with “not a slave or serf”. In fact, the examples given, several of which have been cited above, sometimes clearly invoke nobility, with implications of certain qualities as well as a certain status, but sometimes leave it vague exactly what this status is. It does not always seem to be noble, although sometimes it is, and it almost always implies the absence of constraint or submission to the will of another.

The Anglo-Norman “franc” and the Middle English “frē” at their broadest invoked absence of constraint, to be “frē” was to be uncoerced and not subjected to another. “Frē” men and women might also possess higher status, perhaps the ancestry and the qualities associated with nobility, but not all who were “frē” were noble. It is worth noting that this idea of being “frē”, although different from the qualities of “manhood” or of behaving “manly” (an adverb), nonetheless overlapped with them. Not all men were nobles either, and not all those who

⁵⁶ Galbraith, ed., *Anonimalle Chronicle*, p. 143 : *et toutz crierent a une voice qils ne vodroient aler avant qils avoient le traitours deinz la Toure et chartres destre free de toutz maners de servage et des autres maners des poyntes qils vodroient demander.*

⁵⁷ *AND*, « franc (adj) », 1.

⁵⁸ *MED*, « fre (adj) », 1a.

behaved “manly” were noble men or even male, but at the same time, a noble adult male was in the best position to show the strength and steadfastness required of “manhood”. To a lesser extent, non-noble adult male free men might also aspire to the qualities of “manhood”, both by their physical qualities, their street honour, as it were, but also by the irreproachable conduct which implied both trustworthiness and Christian steadfastness in the face of temptation. Both manhood and freedom possessed a tenacious but ambiguous link to nobility, although neither were reducible to it. As we shall see, this gave them both powerful potential in the context of the expanding involvement of a variety of adult males in the rule of society and of the kingdom in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.

2. MANHOOD AND FREEDOM, POLITICS AND SOCIETY IN THIRTEENTH- AND FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

There were a number of reasons why the themes of manhood, nobility and freedom came to the fore in England in this period. First, as Maurice Keen, David Crouch, Peter Coss and others have argued, this was the age that knighthood and nobility came to be strictly defined and identified with one another⁵⁹. In the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, lay nobles came to think of themselves as a members of a well-defined fighting caste with a particular code of behaviour. For Crouch, nobility was a set of behaviours, a *habitus*, closely identified with that of the knight⁶⁰. This same *habitus* was similar in many ways with the characteristics and associations of a “man” which we have just considered. The strength, vigour and steadfastness of a knight were also the ideal qualities of a man, so a knight and a noble ought to be a particularly manly man.

Second, during the same period, the definition of freedom and unfreedom was becoming an important legal issue for other reasons in ways which tended to emphasize the distinction between free and unfree along status lines. Paul Hyams has investigated how the legal definition of freedom and unfreedom evolved in the thirteenth century as a result of the development of the common law⁶¹. Hyams argued that royal judges in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century were obliged to refine a definition of freedom and unfreedom in order to determine who had the right to make use of certain efficient and popular legal remedies which had been systematised during the reign of Henry II (1154-1189). One important consequence of these remedies was that individuals could sue even their own lords if that lord deprived them of lands which were in their possession. Already by the 1170s, however, measures had been taken to avert the potentially revolutionary

⁵⁹ Keen, *Chivalry*; Crouch, « Strategies of Lordship », pp. 1-2, developed in Crouch, *Image of Aristocracy*, pp. 120-163; Crouch, *Birth of Nobility*, pp. 29-86; Crouch, *The English Aristocracy*, pp. 3-19; Coss, *The Knight in Medieval England*; Faulkner, « The Transformation of Knighthood ».

⁶⁰ Crouch, *Birth of Nobility*, pp. 52-56; Crouch, *English Aristocracy*.

⁶¹ Hyams, *Kings, Lords and Peasants*.

consequences of these legal mechanisms by restricting their use to land that was held “freely” and to individuals who were “free”. Thus, if a tenant or group could be shown to be “unfree” – to be “nativi” or even “servi” – they had no right to pursue their case in the royal courts. As a result, in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, a series of procedures, which had first developed to assist prominent lords in retrieving serfs who had left their service to work elsewhere, were now used to rule whether or not an individual was unfree, and thus whether or not they had the right to appeal to royal law for redress.

Later historians, however, have questioned the general applicability of the binary vision of freedom and unfreedom developed by royal judges. Ros Faith, for example, stresses that peasants, even free tenants, could owe services in return for land, without this being considered a mark of unfreedom. What mattered was to demonstrate that the services owed were fixed, the more rigidly defined the better. In the early thirteenth century, to owe, say, two days ploughing and three reaping each year in return for land did not at all mean that the individual who held it was unfree⁶². What was important was the kind of service – whether it involved degrading work like muckspreading and liming – and especially non-specified week works. As the legal treatise known as “Bracton” put it before 1236, pure villeinage applied “where one cannot know in the evening the service to be rendered in the morning, that is, where one is bound to do whatever one is bid”⁶³.

Being free, then, in law, as in ordinary language, as in social practice, was about the limits of coercion. A “free” person could be coerced in certain circumstances, in the sense that he or she was obligated by a contract. Of course, noblemen, free tenants of agricultural land, clergymen and townsmen freely entered into contracts themselves, and even inherited obligations related to land tenure: no one was absolutely free in that sense. But the free man could not be coerced at will: that was an experience reserved for the unfree. Here, again, freedom interacts with manhood, since it was acting with the energy, strength and constancy of the man that one demonstrated the worthiness of respect which delivered one from dishonour and subjection to the enemy on the battlefield, or to the adversary in court. It was thus that the rebels of 1381 bid one another to “stonde manlyche togedyr in trewth” to win their cause against the traitors⁶⁴.

A third set of developments gave added importance to both the status of a man and the status of a free man in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In a number of contexts, in towns but also in villages, and in parishes both in the town and the countryside, the status of a respectable adult male householder became increasingly important to social organization in this period⁶⁵. Part of this took the form of collective peace-keeping on the basis of ancient institutions which granted a central

⁶² Faith, *English Peasantry*, p. 260.

⁶³ Thorne, ed., *Bracton*, vol. III, cited by Faith, *English Peasantry*, p. 261.

⁶⁴ Green, « John Ball's Letters » discussed in Fletcher, « *Manhood* et histoire politique », pp. 58-60.

⁶⁵ For an overview with a slightly later chronological focus, see McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior*.

place to adult male householders. Systems of frankpledge and tithing organized all adult males from adolescence onwards into groups of varying size who swore to ensure each others good conduct, and whose senior members reported on misdeeds at regular meetings, often at Michaelmas, Candlemas and after Easter⁶⁶. The second half of the thirteenth century also saw the development of denunciatory courts for minor offences known as trespasses, which included debt, assault and insult, were organised in a number of ways around adult male householders⁶⁷. On the one hand, any man or woman who was a servant of another, that is to say who lived in his household and worked for him, was cited as these local court records as they were in royal courts. The same applied to young men and women still living in their father's household, who would be cited as X son or daughter of Y. Married women, too, were supposed to be cited with reference to their husband both in local and central royal courts, although the realities of social and economic life often clashed with this prescription, and particular women could also be exempted from it through the status of a *femme sole*⁶⁸. At the same time, the same kind of adult male householders were increasingly called upon in towns and in the countryside, by royal, seigneurial and ecclesiastical authority, as a means to govern these communities. The work of James Masschaele and Ian Forrest has recently brought attention to the use by kings, lords and bishops of juries of local "law-worthy" or "trustworthy" men⁶⁹. In this case, these men were necessarily freemen, even outside of towns, since one of the criteria for being "law-worthy" and hence eligible to take part in this kind of a jury was not being subject to another man, and thus influenceable. Here, then was a tier of adult male householders, who were not noble, but who were not unfree either, and who were acquiring new social and political importance.

This leads to one final issue which links manhood, free status and playing a role in the government of England. The same kind of men were increasingly called upon to rule on their neighbour's behaviour were also being asked to support projects on a different scale, in which it was the honour and profit of the king and the kingdom which was at issue. In the course of the thirteenth century, recourse was increasingly taken by the king to negotiated, exceptional taxation on all the movable goods of his subjects, reckoned as a proportion: a seventh, for example, a fifteenth or thirtieth⁷⁰. Until 1334, the level of this taxation was determined by consultation with local juries who would report on the value of their neighbours'

⁶⁶ Morris, *Frankpledge System*; Hudson, *Leet Jurisdiction*; Rutledge, « Immigration and population growth »; Schofield, « View of frankpledge and the tithing system ».

⁶⁷ Milsom, « Trespass from Henry III to Edward III »; Harding, ed., *Roll of the Shropshire Eyre*; Schofield, « Trespass litigation ».

⁶⁸ Beattie, « Married women, contracts and coverture »; Gastle, « 'As if she were single' ».

⁶⁹ Masschaele, *Jury, State and Society*; Forrest, *Trustworthy Men*.

⁷⁰ For a list, see Jurkowski, Smith and Crook, *Lay Taxes*, pp. 6-29.

goods⁷¹. After 1334, a fixed level of taxation was determined for each community, but even thereafter it was left to local men to distribute amongst taxpayers the taxation they were called upon to pay⁷². Especially before 1334, their assessment of their neighbours' goods made a significant difference to the amount of money the king received for his projects. These projects were, moreover, overwhelmingly military⁷³. As a result, the local worthy-men in towns and villages, free but not noble, were regularly called upon to help to defend the king's honour, and avert the shame of subjection to the enemy, not just to the king, but to the kingdom, in a way which only noblemen had been before. They were asked, in short, to raise the money to bankroll the king's "manhood" – his "virtus" and "honor" – and their enthusiasm for this project relied on them accepting the values that underlay it.

3. MANHOOD, FREEDOM AND NATION IN A MID-THIRTEENTH CENTURY POLITICAL CRISIS

There were thus a variety of reasons why manhood and freedom were becoming more important in thirteenth-century and fourteenth-century English politics and society. This was a change of degree rather than of kind – and especially of a drawing in of new groups into the circle of those men who had a special claim to manhood and to freedom. In the final part of this article, I would like to consider briefly how this led to a subtle change in the way that the themes of manhood, freedom and nation played out in English politics, focusing on the political crisis which broke out in the central decades of the thirteenth century.

The theme of unfreedom and subjection, conceived as a shaming status not just of an individual but of a nation, was already established by the early thirteenth-century as a way of justifying or advocating war, and of forming an "us" opposed to a "them". This theme, and a number of related gendered topics, is found, for example, in a poem composed to celebrate the decisive victory at Lincoln on 20 May 1217 of an army loyal to the nine-year-old King Henry III over a mixed English and French army which supported the rival claims to the English throne of the Capetian Prince Louis⁷⁴. This poem begins by lamenting the madness (*rabies*) of the "English-born ... people" (*Angligenam ... gentem*), a "degenerate people" who subjected themselves to a hostile governor (that is Louis of France) so that they might "enslave liberties"⁷⁵. This, though, was corrected by God, who combined the

⁷¹ Mitchell, *Studies in Taxation*; Willard, *Parliamentary Taxes on Personal Property*, pp. 4-6, 9-11, 54-56.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 11-12; Glasscock, ed., *Lay Subsidy of 1334*, pp. xiv-xv.

⁷³ Willard, *Parliamentary Taxes on Personal Property*, pp. 19-26.

⁷⁴ «The Taking of Lincoln» in Wright, ed., *Political Songs of England*, pp. 19-27. For the circumstances see Carpenter *Minority of Henry III*, pp. 36-40; Vincent, *Peter des Roches*, pp. 136-140.

⁷⁵ Wright, *Political Songs*, p. 19: *Serpserat Angligenam rabies quadranguta gentem... Gens ... degenerans, ut libera serviat ... Vindicat antiquas inimico consule leges.*

“corrections of a father with the love of a mother”⁷⁶. In this poem, the country is first figured as the wife of the king, widowed by the death of Henry III’s father, King John⁷⁷. The widowed land, “fearing to bow the neck to a degenerate husband” sheds a tear, which in turn inspires a different vision of England, as the “English-born” (*Angligenas*) call on a very masculine “strength ... of the English” (*Anglorum ... vires*), which thus comes, as it were, to the assistance of its own feminine personification⁷⁸. Through God’s paternal intervention, the faithful unite around the new king, even though he is a child⁷⁹, and thus “England has grasped her conquering swords by the impulse of God; her castles put forward for the common good the standard-bearing troops, fierce in war, and threatening the enemy”⁸⁰. When the forces loyal to Henry III are victorious at Lincoln, “the peace-bringing sword subdued our pestiferous divisions, in which the grace of God washed out the dishonour that had been brought forth”⁸¹.

There was thus nothing new in invoking the freedom and honour of the English in a gendered way in which manly action averts submission to foreign powers. In this poem on the battle of Lincoln, however, the men being appealed to in these terms were unambiguously nobleman. With growing momentum from the early thirteenth century onwards, for the reasons we have just outlined, these same issues increasingly involved the kind of adult-male householders, free men but not noble men, in town and in villages, who stood as chief pledges, answered for the behaviour of their dependents, stood on juries of inquiries and assessed their neighbours’ goods for taxation. Although at first such men seemed ready to align with the kind of interpretation of manhood which was well adapted to noblemen, gradually it started to create tensions.

Negotiated levies on moveable goods developed rapidly in the early years of Henry III. In the face of the threat of the French king, and of shifting baronial factions which still threatened the stability of the kingdom, various negotiated taxes were granted in 1217, 1220 and 1224⁸². Even after the immediate threat of civil war had subsided, a number of levies on moveables were made in 1225 (a fifteenth), 1232 (a fortieth) and 1237 (a thirtieth), this time to provide resources not for civil war, but the protection of what remained of the English king’s inheritance in south-west France⁸³. Nonetheless, as Henry III emerged into adulthood and took control

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20: *Ubere materno lenivit verbere patris.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21: *Planxerat extinctum regio viduata Johannem, / Degenere timens sua subdere colla marito...*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22: *Invocat Angligenas Anglorum laevima vires...*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23: *Anglia victrices strinxit divinitus enses, / In commune bonum fundunt castella catervas / Signiferas, belloque truces, hostique minaces.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27: *Bellica qua rabies latuit, qua pacifer ensis / Pestiferas domuit partes, qua gratia Christi / Dedecus extersit natum, fideique lavacro / Proluit inscriptum versa de fronte pudorem.*

⁸² Jurkowski, Smith and Crook, *Lay Taxes*, pp. 8-11.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-17.

of his government, this arrangement, and competing interpretations of how the king's manhood should be expressed, started to put this system under pressure. After 1237, a year after the marriage of the thirty-year-old king to Eleanor of Provence, no further grants of a comparable kind were made until 1269. Thereafter, although the king repeatedly asked for fresh grants of moveables from various assemblies of nobles and others, he was not prepared to accept the conditions which were increasingly requested in return for these grants⁸⁴. The king was instead forced to take recourse to a variety of financial measures – all of which had the side-effect of increasing political tension and provoking ever more stringent requests for control over his administration⁸⁵.

It was in these circumstances that the chronicler of St Alban's abbey, Matthew Paris, portrays the king mobilizing arguments in terms of the status of any free man to justify his own refusal to accept constraint. In Paris' account of the events of July 1248, when the forty-one year old king once more gave up attempts to obtain a grant of direct taxation to finance an expedition to Gascony because the attendant obligation to appoint certain officials was unacceptable to him, he made clear why he did so in a way which put both manhood and freedom to the fore⁸⁶. Henry was not prepared to be submitted "to [his subjects'] will as if to a civil lord (*parum civile dominum*)" since this would be to impose upon him a too servile condition. He then continued with an argument that brought in the status not just of a nobleman, but of all free men. After all, he argued: "It is allowed to any father of a family (*quilibet patrifamilias*) to appoint or not to appoint or even to remove from himself or from an office anyone of his household."

Matthew Paris is a frustrating source in that he was very well informed and yet did not hesitate to invent and elaborate on what he knew⁸⁷. It would thus be too much to take Paris' account as a verbatim record of what the king said on this occasion. Nonetheless, it is clear that the king did think in these terms, both from later sources critical of him, notably the *Song of Lewes* (1264) and from Henry's own remarks in the early 1260s on the restraints which were imposed on him⁸⁸. Since Paris died in 1259, it would seem that the king was already thinking and talking along these lines. Indeed, given that Paris brought this section of his chronicle to a conclusion in 1250, before subsequently adding continuations year by year, it is probable that the king was expressing himself in this way already in the later 1240s. It is clear that the king did resist attempts to force him to choose officials, and even more to appoint men chosen by others than himself, as an

⁸⁴ For a survey of the repeated, frustrated demands of these years, see Maddicott, *Origins of the English Parliament*, pp. 173-177, 457-472.

⁸⁵ Barrat, « Finances on a Shoestring », pp. 73-74; Stacey, *Politics, Policy and Finance*, pp. 201-228.

⁸⁶ Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, vol. v., p. 20. For commentary Clanchy, « Did Henry III have a policy? »; Carpenter, « Chancellor Ralph de Neville »; Carpenter, « King, Magnates and Society ».

⁸⁷ Vaughan, *Matthew Paris*, pp. 11-18; Carpenter, « Matthew Paris »; Maddicott, *Origins*, p. 159.

⁸⁸ Kingsford, ed., *Song of Lewes*, ll. 493-513; Sanders, ed., *Documents of the Baronial Movement*, doc. 30, art. 7.

encroachment on the rights which were common to any free adult male, head of his own household and *familia*.

This was a powerful argument. It was recognised as such as political tension worsened, finally resulting in a full-blown political crisis in 1258. It was an argument which resonated not only with the nobility but also with all the free, adult-male householders who were responsible for assessing and raising his taxes on the ground. It is telling that the arguments mobilized against Henry did not deny the king's claims but instead sought to displace debate. They instead played on the associations of freedom and manhood, but this time linked to the opposition between the English and foreigners in a way which reached beyond the nobility. From this point of view, the humiliating submission imposed on Englishmen, and their failure to reassert their freedom by violent revenge, justified their resistance to the king.

A number of incidents which took place in 1252 suggest how such arguments could be elaborated. Once again, our main source is Matthew Paris, so the literal truth of what he says was said and done cannot be taken for granted. Nonetheless, in each case, we know that his interpretation or re-imagining of what occurred did not come out of nothing. In the first of these incidents, Isabelle, widow of Hugh, earl of Arundel, complained to Henry about a wardship which the king had denied her. As the chronicler tells it, the countess, although a woman, replied not "womanishly" but "intrepidly": "O lord king, why do you turn your face from justice? Already in your court what is just cannot be obtained!"⁸⁹.

She went on to say that the king oppressed the nobles of the kingdom. To which Henry replied, mockingly, in what is probably a set-up by the chronicler, asking the countess in misogynist terms if the magnates of the kingdom had given her a charter appointing her, for her eloquence "their advocate and spokeswoman"⁹⁰. To this the countess replied that the magnates of the kingdom had not given her a charter, but the king had, that which his father made (that is, Magna Carta)⁹¹. It seems that this incident did indeed take place, since the king later granted the countess' request, pardoning her a 30 mark fine she had incurred in the course of this case, on the sole condition that she not repeat the "opprobria" she had said to the king at Westminster⁹². Matthew Paris's gendered interpretation of this incident accords with both contemporary assumptions and the political circumstances of the moment. A woman dared to speak out where men, who ought to have displayed manly courage and vigour, did not dare to do so.

⁸⁹ Paris, *Chronica Majora*, vol. V, p. 336: *Unde ipsa comitissa, licet mulier, non tamen muliebriter respondit imperterrita: 'O domine rex, quare avertis faciem tuam a justitia? Jam in curia tua quod justum est nequit impetrari'.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*: *Quid est hoc, O domina comitissa? confeceruntne magnates Angliae cartam, et pepigerunt tecum, ut fieres eorum, quia eloquens es, advocata et prolocutrix.*

⁹¹ Paris, *Chronica Majora*, vol. V, p. 337.

⁹² Carpenter, « King, Magnates and Society », p. 80, n. 23.

The feeling of emasculation associated with not being able to protect oneself against insults of the powerful is confirmed by two anecdotes from the same year. The first occurred when William de Valence went to the bishop of Ely's manor of Hatfield, broke his park and hunted there, before going in search of refreshment⁹³. Demanding something to drink, William was given only beer, which he chose to interpret as an insult. Furious, he broke the doors of the cellar, ripped off the taps of the barrels, and drank his fill of the bishop's fine wine, cursing the beer and all who made it. When he had drunk enough, he distributed the wine to his servants (*garcionibus suis*) and anyone else who wanted it, letting it flow onto the floor. He then insulted the manorial sergeant (*famulus, quem servientem manerii appellant*) when he made a belated appearance with promises of more fitting sustenance. The second incident, told immediately afterwards by Matthew Paris, took place at St Albans abbey itself, when an officer of the king's Poitevin half-brother Geoffrey of Lusignan arrived without warning at the abbey demanding accommodation for his master and his entourage⁹⁴. Having first insisted on the lodgings usually occupied by the king on his visits, this man then went into the stables, violently expelling the horses and grooms of respectable men who were already there, even though there was enough room for all:

“But the abbot had to tolerate all these things patiently in his house, just as the bishop the offence against whom we narrated earlier, most of all when the English are effeminized and ground down, and the foreigners lord over all”⁹⁵.

In this same period, it was becoming clear that not everyone was as willing to turn the other cheek as the bishop and the abbot. Paris relates another incident in 1257, in which a squire of another of the king's half-brothers, William de Valence, was lynched by a London mob after he drew blood from a citizen with his knife “without reason” (*sine causa*)⁹⁶. Despite the squire's threats that his lord would avenge him, and William de Valence's subsequent suite against the Londoners, the mayor simply replied that he could not restrain the common people⁹⁷. Noblemen, too, could take a similar attitude. At the opening of the Westminster parliament, William de Valence alleged that recent incursions by Welsh rebels who threatened Pembrokeshire had been caused “with the consent and favour of English traitors” (*a consensu et favore proditorum Anglorum*). He then singled out the earl of Gloucester and Simon de Montfort, earl of Leicester calling the latter a liar and an “old traitor”, and apparently making a reference to the latter's father, since de

⁹³ Paris, *Chronica Majora*, p. 343.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 344.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*: *Sed haec omnia oportuit abbatem domus patienter tolerare, sicut et episcopum cujus offensionem praenarravimus, maxime cum effeminuntur Anglici et conculcentur, et praedominentur alieni.*

⁹⁶ Paris, *Chronica Majora*, p. 643.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*: *non possum impetus populi plebei refraenare.*

Montfort replied: “No, no, William, I am not the son of a traitor nor a traitor; our fathers were quite different”⁹⁸. Only the physical intervention of the king stopped them from coming to blows.

By 1258, then, nobles, abbots and earls, but also many lesser men, knights and squires, manorial officials, the people of London, or men on business lodging at St Alban’s abbey, all had reason to feel insulted and effeminized by the king’s foreign favourites. Their offence justified the recourse to violence. It justified the expulsion of the king’s most unpopular foreign favourites, his half-brothers, the Lusignans. It set the scene for the putting aside of the king’s claim as an adult male on the grounds that he defended neither his own profit nor that of the kingdom. Their actions effeminized the English nation, which is to say it that it reduced them to a state of subjection and unfreedom, which they must throw off by acting with manly strength and vigour, winning the honour and asserting the rights of a free man.

4. CONCLUSION

I have argued elsewhere that, by the mid-fourteenth century, when the procedure by which the king could request now standardized taxes on moveables for his projects were far more institutionalized, the appeal to the need to promote the king’s honour and manhood was also well-established, if not always effective, as a ways of persuading the representatives of the Commons to grant taxation⁹⁹. Yet earlier on, at a time when this system was not yet established, the interaction between manhood, freedom and nation could work in a different way. On the one hand, the king could argue that any adult, male householder was free to take counsel as he saw fit, and to choose his own advisors. On the other, his opponents argued that it was intolerable for English men to suffer effeminizing submission to the king’s foreign favourites. All parties granted a central place in their argument to the freedom which all English adult male free men ought to enjoy, and both sides were prepared to fight to defend their interpretation of it.

⁹⁸ Paris, *Chronica Majora*, p. 675 : ‘*Non, non, Willemi, non sum filius proditoris sive proditor; dissimiles fuere nostri genitores*’.

⁹⁹ See esp. Fletcher, « Manhood, kingship and the public ».

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