



The Public Defense of the Doctoral Dissertation in Medieval Studies

of

**JAMES PLUMTREE**

on

**‘HOW THE CORPSE OF A MOST MIGHTY KING...  
THE USE OF THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF THE ENGLISH MONARCH  
(FROM EDWARD TO HENRY I)’**

will be held on

**Thursday, 12 June 2014, at 11:00**

in the

**Senate Room – Monument Building  
Central European University (CEU)  
Nádor u. 9, Budapest**

Examination Committee

Chair Victor Karády (History Department, CEU)

Members Paul Hayward (University of Lancaster)

Gerhard Jaritz – Primary Supervisor (Medieval Studies Department– CEU)

Gábor Klaniczay – Associate Supervisor (Medieval Studies Department – CEU)

Daniel Ziemann (Institute for Military History, HAS)

External readers Paul Hayward (University of Lancaster), present  
Sigbjørn Olsen Sønnesyn (Voss, Norway)

## **Doctoral Dissertation Abstract**

**James Plumtree**

### **The Use of the Death and Burial of the English Monarch (From Edward to Henry I)**

Understanding of death in the Middle Ages has been somewhat hindered by modern attitudes towards mortality. This study examines the importance attached to the death and burial of the monarchs of England from Edward (d. 1066) to Henry I (d. 1135). It investigates the division between ‘good death’ (where the dying person, after putting his affairs in order, could be cleansed of his sins) and ‘bad death’ (where the death was sudden – or unprepared for – owing to an ignoring of the portents, leading to damnation). This study examines how this paradigm, taken from monastic attitudes towards death, was used to explain the death of the monarch.

The first chapter, “‘Joyfully Taken Up to Live With God’: The Altered Passing of Edward’, examines the increasing embellished accounts of King Edward’s death. The two main contemporaneous sources, MS C and D of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (in Anglo-Saxon) and the *Vita Ædwardi Regis* (in Latin), both contain two different depictions of the monarch’s demise. Both provide a brief account of the ruler’s death, and then, later, present another. The former text provides a poem that depicts the deceased as an example of heroic kingship; the latter, providing another prose account of details surrounding the monarch’s death, presents the monarch in a more hagiographical mode. This study examines how the second manner became prevalent. After explaining the problematic sources that present Edward’s death in a minor fashion – Sulcard’s *Prologus de Costruccione Westmonasterii* (understood through conventions of the genre it belongs), and the Bayeux Tapestry (comprehended through its

context in the work and by its visual allusions to other visual sources) – it examines Osbert of Clare’s account of the 1102 translation of Edward’s corpse in his *Vita beati Eadwardi Regis*. Following an examination of how ambivalent attitudes to Edward by half-English, half-Norman historians (Orderic Vitalis, William of Malmesbury, and Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon) are expressed in the depiction of his death and burial, the study examines the writings of Aelred of Rievaulx that present Edward’s death – and his remains – in a positive fashion following Osbert’s hagiographical account. The chapter shows how the treatment of the death and the cadaver changed as deceased ruler became a saint.

The second chapter, “‘Thirsting Above All for the Blood of the King’: Killing and Survival Stories of Harold II’, looks at Edward’s short-reigning successor. Though the battle was decisive – or, perhaps, because the battle was so decisive – details of the death of the notable figures of Harold’s army are not clear. The study examines the accounts of Harold’s death, beside his brothers, in two manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, seeing how the event was provided with the motif of punishment for sin (adhering to the earlier writings of Gildas, Nennius, and Wulfstan). It then examines how the The events of Senlac Hill, where the battle took place, reverberated in the historiography, with Harold’s death and burial being a point of contention. In Guy, Bishop of Amiens’s *Carmen de Hastinagae Proelio*, Harold is slain by four mounted Normans who also mutilate his corpse. The defeated ruler is buried by the victor, William, Duke of Normandy, whose burial of Harold stresses both his magnanimity, and, by ordering the corpse to be interred by the sea, his victory. The *Gesta Guillelmi* of William of Poitiers, more conscious of the need to praise the victors, omits the scene of Harold’s demise – in place is rhetorical address to his tomb (following classical models). The study then examines the possible sources for the story that Harold was fatally injured by an arrow in the

eye – assessing the problematic sources of Amatus of Montecassino’s *L’Ystoire de li Normant*, the Bayeux Tapestry, and Baudri of Borgeuil’s *Adalae Comitissae* – before examining the meaning attached to the event in the half-English half-Norman historians (William of Malmesbury, Orderic Vitalis, Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon). It then looks at a text that clearly shows its support for the Anglo-Saxon cause – *De inventione sancte crucis*, written at Waltham Abbey, patronised by the slain king – in how it omits the scene of Harold’s death, explains his defeat with miraculous premonitions, and balances its claims to hold his remains while attempting to suppress any emerging cults. The chapter closes with an examination of one of the curious, ahistorical beliefs attached to Harold: that he survived, and became a hermit. After looking at the generic reasons for including such a myth, the study examines the hagiographic *Vita Haroldi*, which provides for Harold the good religious death that he was denied on the field of battle.

The third chapter, “‘Ought Not Rest in a Place He Had Seized By Brute Force’: The Conquest Seen Through William I’s Demise and Burial”, examines how the depictions of William’s death and burial dealt with the issue of legitimacy and authority. The Peterborough Chronicle and the *Historia Anglorum* of Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, use the Anglo-Saxon historical traditions of poetry and homiletics to raise contemporary concerns that originated from William’s reign in their accounts of his death. William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta Regum Anglorum* and Orderic Vitalis’s *Historia Ecclesiastica*, employing motifs taken from earlier historical texts that had been copied after the Norman Conquest alongside biblical and classical allusions, present the monarch’s death and problematic burial as an *exemplum*. The chapter shows how a death and burial could be crafted for political, pedagogical, and theological reasons.

The fourth chapter, “Considering his Squalid Life and Dreadful Death”: The Strange End(s) of William II’, shows how a sudden event – the accidental death of William by an arrow while hunting in the New Forest – was recast in a new light by authors to provide a negative assessment of the monarch’s reign. The Peterborough Chronicle, Hugh of Flavigny’s *Chronicon*, Eadmer’s *Historia Novorum in Anglia* and *Vita Anselmi*, and Gilo of Paris’s *Vita Sancti Hugonis*, all include premonitions to suggest a divine hand in the monarch’s demise. Later historians – Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury, and Orderic Vitalis – repeated and embellished such details for further moral edification. Their value system is shown by the different presentation of the monarch’s death and burial in Geoffrei Gaimar’s *Estoire des Engleis*. This work, the oldest surviving historiographical work in the French vernacular, presents William’s sudden death as a ‘good death’, following the paradigm of a religious demise. In doing this, it is the anomaly that proves the rule: its contrasting presentation reveals the literary features of itself, and the ecclesiastical authors with which it differs.

The fifth and final chapter, “Then this land immediately grew dark”: Portraying the Close of the Reign of Henry I’, examines the depiction of the death and burial of a monarch who died after the major historical works of the twelfth century were produced. It therefore provides the opportunity to see how these events in the monarch’s life were regarded. The influence of his patronage while alive is shown in the sympathetic portrayal of his demise by those he had supported (Peter the Venerable, Orderic Vitalis), which, given his behaviour being at times akin to his much loathed brother William (II), suggests a ‘good death’ could be bought. Time, also, is shown to be of importance in shaping the depiction, for both sides of the civil war used the account of the monarch’s death for different purposes (*Historia Novella*, *Gesta Stephani*), features shared somewhat by non-partisan viewpoints (the Peterborough Chronicle). Such

changes in depiction could also appear in the work of a single author (Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon), and this movement from the detailed to the embellished appears in the use of the monarch's death in later hagiographical accounts of holy men.

The death and burial of the monarch became a key feature in historical assessments of his reign. The altering and embellishing of the details reveal the techniques employed and the familiarity of the authors with pre-existing forms of historical writing. That the monarchs were frequently depicted in a manner that fell far short of an idealised death – with the use of motifs that appeared oppositional to how one would depict a saint – reiterates the importance of religious paradigms in the mentalities of the era.

## Curriculum Vitae

James Plumtree

### Education:

- 2010- Ph.D. Studies, Department of Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary.  
Martinmas, 2013: Visiting Semester, University of St Andrews, Scotland.
- 2009-2010 MA in Medieval Studies, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary. Distinction.
- 2008-2009 MA in Medieval Studies, University of Bristol.  
Distinction
- 2004-2007 BA in English Language and Literature. Oriel College, University of Oxford.

### Publications

- 2011 (for 2012). 'Stories of the Death of Kings: Retelling the Demise and Burial of William I, William II and Henry I', *Southern African Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies/Die Suider-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Middeleeuse en Renaissancestudies* 21: 1-30.
- Forthcoming. 'The Earlier Paint Schemes and Possible Contexts of the Dauntsey Doom'. *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* 107 (2014): 156-162.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "'The Threshing-Floor Sifts Out the Chaff in the Breeze that Blows": Comprehending the Role of Hungary in the First Crusade'. University College London School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies (UCL SSEES) conference proceedings.

\_\_\_\_\_. 'A Medieval Manuscript in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Regarding Cambridge MS. Ee. 3. 59'. In *From Text(s) to Book(s): Studies in the Production and Editorial Process*. Ed. Nathalie Collé-Bak, Monica Latham and David Ten Eyck. Nancy: PUN - Editions Universitaires de Lorraine.

### **Conference Papers (related to topic)**

2014. 'Fortelling Certain Death: The Deathbeds of William the Conqueror and Henry I', Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies, *The Maladies, Miracles and Medicine of the Middle Ages*, Reading. Supported by the Reading University Travel Grant.

2013. 'Squalid Lives and Dreadful Deaths: The Demise of the Monarch in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Orderic Vitalis', International Medieval Congress 2013, Session 731: *History and Historians in the Anglo-Norman Realm*, Leeds.

\_\_\_\_\_. 'A Surfeit of Lampreys, A Surfeit of Lessons; The Death and Burial of Henry I in Anglo-Norman Literature', 18th Joint Postgraduate Religion and Theology Conference, *Afterlife*, University of Bristol.

2012. "'Let Us Sit Upon the Ground and Tell Sad Stories of the Death of Kings": the Exemplary Bad Ends of William I, William II, and Henry I', 21st Biennial Conference of the Southern African Society for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, *Mortality and the Imagination: The Life of the Dead in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Mont Fleur, Stellenbosch, South Africa. Supported by a CEU Doctoral Travel Grant, and by the Henrik Birnbaum Memorial Scholarship Fund.