University of Badji Mokhtar -Annaba-English Department

Civilization and the Target Language: LMD First Year

The Norman Conquest 1066: a brief history

To understand who the Normans were, we have to go back a little to 911. In this year a rather large Viking chief (reckoned to be so big that a horse could not carry him!) called Rollo accepted the 'kind' offer of a large area of Northern France from the then king of France, Charles II ('The Simple‟) as part of a peace treaty.

Rollo and his 'North Men' settled in this area of northern France now known as Normandy. Rollo became the first Duke of Normandy and over the next hundred years or so the Normans adopted the French language and culture.

On 5th January 1066, **Edward the Confessor**, King of England, died. The next day the Anglo-Saxon Witan (a council of high-ranking men) elected **Harold Godwin**, Earl of Essex (and Edward's brother-in-law) to succeed him. The crown had scarcely been put on his head when King Harold's problems started.

In Normandy **Duke William** did not agree with the voting of the Witan. William claimed that years earlier, Edward had promised the crown of England to him. In addition, he believed that he had strengthened his claim still further when in 1063 he had tricked Harold into swearing to support his claim to the English throne. More than a little annoyed, William prepared to invade.

King Harold also had problems to the north of England - sibling rivalry. Harold's brother **Tostig** had joined forces with **Harold Hardrada**, King of Norway, and had landed with an army in Yorkshire. Harold marched his own English army north from London to repel the invaders. Arriving at Tadcaster on 24th September, he seized the opportunity to catch the enemy off guard. His army was exhausted after the forced march from London, but after a bitter, bloody battle to capture the bridge at **Stamford**, Harold won a decisive victory on 25th September. Harold Hardrada and Tostig were both killed.

On October 1st Harold and his depleted army then marched the three hundred kilometers south to do battle with Duke William of Normandy who had landed at **Pevensey**, **Kent** on the 28th September. Harold's sick, exhausted Saxon army met William's fresh, rested Norman troops on October 14th at Battle near **Hastings**, and the great battle began.

At first, the two-handed Saxon battleaxes sliced through the armor of the Norman knights, but slowly the Normans began to gain control. King Harold was struck in the eye by a chance Norman arrow and was killed, but the battle raged on until all of Harold's loyal bodyguard was slain.

William could truly now be called '**The Conqueror**'! On Christmas Day 1066 Archbishop **Ealdred** of York crowned William King of England.

The early years of William's English rule were a little insecure. He built castles across England to convince everyone who was the boss, meeting force with even greater force as rebellious regions like **Yorkshire** were laid waste (the harrowing of the North).

By around 1072, the Norman hold on the kingdom was firmly established. Normans controlled most major functions within the Church and the State. The **Domesday** Book exists today as a record, compiled some 20 years after the Battle of Hastings, showing all landholder's estates throughout England. It demonstrates the Norman genius for order and good government as well as showing the vast tracts of land acquired by the new Norman owners.

Norman genius was also expressed in architecture. Saxon buildings had mostly been wooden structures; the French 'brickies' at once made a more permanent mark on the landscape. Massive stone castles, churches,

cathedrals and monasteries were erected, these imposing structures again clearly demonstrating just who was now in charge.

Feudal system under William I:

William had promised his barons land in England, but he had to be sure that a baron wouldn't use his land and wealth to get above himself and try and take the throne. "Feudalism" comes from the French word *feu,* which the Normans used to refer to land held in return for duty or service to a lord. The basis of feudal society was the holding of land, and its main purpose was economic.

First, William declared that all the land in England belonged to him. Then he appointed several of his trusted barons as *tenants-in-chief,* but they had to pay William rent, just like any other tenant. That obligation could be in money; it could also be in loyalty. Tenants-in-chief were supposed to provide the king with a lot of men in time of war. Down at the bottom of the feudal system were the peasants, or villeins, who had to work the land and pay rent – and who were always Saxons.

a. The Bayeux Tapestry

Strictly speaking, of course, the Bayeux Tapestry isn‟t really a tapestry: It's a very long (70- meters) piece of embroidered linen. The tapestry is also a very long piece of propaganda; it tells the story of the Battle of Hastings from the Norman perspective. William's brother, Odo, bishop of Bayeux, was probably the one who had the tapestry made, and it probably hung on the wall in his palace

b. The Domesday Book

A written record of the ownership and value of land in England in 1086. It was made for William the Conqueror in order to calculate the size and value of the king's property and the tax value of other land in the country. The book is of great historical importance because it tells us a lot about England at that time. It can be seen at the Public Record Office in London.

c. Oath of Salisbury:

In August 1086 William I summoned „landowning men of any account‟ to attend at Salisbury and swear allegiance to him and to be faithful against all other men. The oath was demanded at a time of crisis when the Conqueror was facing revolt and invasion. There seems little doubt that it was intended as a practical assurance and reminder rather than as a constitutional statement.

The Impact and Legacy of the Norman Invasion of England

On October 14th, 1066, the English army, led by King Harold II, was defeated by Duke William and the Normans at the Battle of Hastings. Most people will remember this famous story from their school days, particularly the gruesome image of King Harold with an arrow in the eye. But Hastings was more than just a battle; it was the start of a new chapter in England's history. The Norman Invasion may seem like a very distant event in our nation's past, but it is one worth remembering.

1. Land and Wealth:

When Duke William first approached his men with the idea of invading England, he received a cool reception. It took the promise of foreign lands and titles to persuade them otherwise. After the Battle of Hastings, William kept this promise and rewarded those who had fought alongside him at the expense of the native English aristocracy. To illustrate the full extent of this, just look at one of William's greatest achievements, the Domesday Survey of 1086. By this point, William had been king for 20 years and whatever his motivations for completing a survey on this scale, it shows a dramatic reversal of English fortunes.

For example, in 1086 William controlled 17% of the land in England (double that of his one of his Saxon predecessors, Edward the Confessor) and the Church owned a mighty 26%. The remaining 54% of land in England was controlled by the aristocracy. Statistics from the survey show that 40% of the total land was concentrated into the hands of ten laymen and twelve members of the clergy. It was with these few men that the real power lay and not one of them was of English descent. As the historian Robert Bartlett has argued, this was "the swiftest and most thorough replacement of one ruling class by another in English history."

2. Landscape:

Castles may seem synonymous with Medieval England but, prior to 1066, not one castle could be found in the whole of the country. It was the Normans who brought the castle to England and they commenced building within days of their arrival. Such fortifications became symbols of Norman dominance and served a dual purpose; they housed the new aristocracy and provided a base from which the Normans could effectively establish control. Estimates suggest that William I built up to 86 castles in his 21-year reign. These structures dramatically altered England's landscape and many of these castles can still be seen today.

The Normans also remodeled many of England's churches and cathedrals to create some of the country's most monumental and impressive structures. The cathedrals of Ely and Durham are some of the finest examples of Norman buildings in England. William was also responsible for building the White Tower in London (pictured), with the primary function of defending his supply ships sailing up the Thames River. It was an immense structure using specially imported stone from Normandy. The building work was supervised by Gundulf, the Norman Bishop of Rochester, but the labor was provided by English men of the shires. The country had never seen anything like it.

3. Language and Culture:

The English language suffered as a result of the Norman Invasion as French and Latin became the new languages of the government, Church and the nobility. English was now associated with the uncivilized and uneducated. The Normans also brought their drinking habits with them; gone were the days of the famous Anglo-Saxon mead-hall, eclipsed by the new French fashion of wine-drinking.

One of the most enduring cultural changes was the adoption of French names, at the expense of the more traditional Anglo-Saxon ones. In an attempt to imitate their new conquerors, many English chose to abandon the traditional names like „Godwin", „Harold", or „Ethelred", in favor of names French names like „William", „Henry" or „Robert".

Even in the last decade, William still features in the top 10 baby names for boys in England and Wales. These are just a few of the changes brought about by the new regime. But it was changes like these which left an indelible scar on the country and would ultimately ensure that England and her people would never be conquered.