

## **Between Three Realms: The Acts of Waleran II, Count of Meulan and Worcester**

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Waleran de Beaumont (1104–66), the elder of the twin sons of Robert I, count of Meulan and Leicester (died 1118), was an exceptional character even among aristocrats. His sixty-two years of life spanned the reigns in England of Henry I, Stephen and Henry II, and in France those of Louis VI and Louis VII. At the peak of his career, in the late 1130s, his estates included an English earldom focused on Worcester, much of the land between the Rivers Risle and Seine in central Normandy, control of the county of Evreux, and, across the frontier, the county of Meulan and the quarter of La Grève and Monceaux on the right bank of the city of Paris. In the later 1140s, he would add to this complex the lordship of Gournay-sur-Marne east of Paris. His estates reached from the River Trent to the Marne, and he travelled constantly across them.<sup>1</sup>

The extent of Waleran's lands might be reasonably called 'vast': a word that otherwise tends to be overused by medievalists. The fact that his estates were spread across three distinct realms – England, Normandy and Francia – also makes them unique. Quite a number of Waleran's magnate contemporaries had lands spanning the Channel, or crossing the Norman–French border, but none cut such a swathe across three frequently competing powers. In some ways this situation assisted Waleran's political ambitions, though in other ways it was dangerous for him. His situation meant that he was frequently courted by rival princes. He was able to exploit his dominant Norman position to hoist himself to great power at the court of King Stephen of England between 1137 and 1141, and so he achieved an English earldom. Even after the collapse of his faction at Stephen's court, that same influence made him too important to be ignored by Geoffrey of Anjou in his conquest of Normandy, and so he more than maintained his position in the 1140s. His strategic position in the Île-de-France led to his simultaneous manoeuvrings at the Capetian court, and the grant of Gournay-sur-Marne by Louis VII around 1145.<sup>2</sup> The inherent political weakness of his situation meant that, eventually, he came unstuck. In 1152, when he found he had to choose sides between the Capetians and Plantagenets, he made a false step. But in the

<sup>1</sup> For Waleran's landholdings, see D. Crouch, *The Beaumont Twins: The Roots and Branches of Power in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge 1986), 8–12, 39–40, 58–66, and *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Crouch, *Beaumont Twins*, 64.

meantime he had enjoyed the best part of two decades of power and influence astonishing for a lay magnate.

Waleran of Meulan was in many ways a nexus for political power in the mid-twelfth century, but it might be argued that his significance outside the world of politics was considerably greater than the part he played in the contemporary power game. Waleran is notable for our knowledge of the extent of his Latinity. Orderic Vitalis tells us that he was educated in philosophy and the classics as a boy. Stephen of Rouen tells us that he composed Latin verse, and the records of Meulan priory depict him personally researching the privileges and possessions of the house by reading its charters and discussing them in council with the monks.<sup>3</sup> Waleran was the leader in his generation of magnates, a group that accepted literacy in Latin as both desirable and something to boast about. His interaction with the clerical, intellectual elite of his day was one of equals, not that of an ignorant layman receiving instruction *de haut en bas*.

His younger twin brother, Robert II of Leicester (1104–68), was likewise notable for his accomplishments outside the political arena. He was a leading jurist at the early Angevin court and justiciar of England after 1155. His intellectual stature is still attested by tracts and verses that record his interest in astronomy and the advanced theology of his day, the stance represented by the phrase ‘*de contemptu mundi*’: an ostentatious distaste for material possessions and secular success founded on Biblical Wisdom literature. Most interestingly, Earl Robert was one of the first generation of aristocrats who are known to have possessed individual psalters to help them follow the canonical hours of the divine office celebrated in their chapels. His psalter and that of his wife, Countess Amice, were left to his foundation of Leicester Abbey.

On the subject of literacy, we also have a good deal of information about the organisation of Waleran’s clerical household. We know that he had an establishment of four chaplains, one of whom, Roger, carried the title of ‘*cancellarius*’ in 1141.<sup>4</sup> Besides this, he had several eminent followers called ‘*clerici*’, some holding prebends in major churches. At least one of these is named as the ‘*scriptor*’ of his charters.<sup>5</sup> The count’s household, as much as the count himself, was well equipped for literate communication, and it is the business of this essay to see what the evidence of the count’s surviving acts can tell us about how he managed his far-flung estates, spanning three occasionally warring realms. The surviving texts and notices of his acts amount to at least 135: more than for any other of his contemporaries among the magnates. They reveal a good deal about how he managed the problems particular to his situation as magnate, lord and politician.

The letter is a very revealing genre in the context of twelfth-century life, and though it is not very well represented among Waleran’s surviving acts,

<sup>3</sup> Crouch, *Beaumont Twins*, 207–8.

<sup>4</sup> Versailles, Archives départementales des Yvelines 24H9 no. 14, a confirmation to the priory of St Nicaise of Meulan, annotated at its foot by the autograph ‘*Data per manum Rogerii cancellarii*’.

<sup>5</sup> Crouch, *Beaumont Twins*, 153–5.

such representatives of it as do survive give us the most intriguing insight into his peculiar situation. Reference always has to be made at this point to Michael Clanchy's paradigmatic study, *From Memory to Written Record*. Professor Clanchy argued that in England and France there was a major shift away from recall towards literate forms of record-keeping in the early twelfth century. His arguments have had a substantial impact on our understanding of what memory means.<sup>6</sup> Clanchy is dismissive of the importance of the letter, which conveyed ephemeral information in the twelfth century, arguing that the letter was then more of a literary exercise for the cleric ambitious for fame among his peers. Those letters that survive were selected for posterity. By contrast, the spoken word of messengers was the principal means of communication for the daily business of what Clanchy calls the 'missive'.<sup>7</sup> Clanchy certainly had good reason to believe that supplementary information was often repeated to the recipients of written letters by the word of mouth of the messenger. There is reference to such things happening in both historical and literary sources.<sup>8</sup> But that in itself is no argument for playing down the importance of the letter sent for ephemeral business purposes in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The surviving acts of Waleran of Meulan include several letters that have somehow survived, and one of them has some significance both as a counter to Clanchy's rather brusque dismissal of the genre in the early twelfth century and as an indicator of the extent of the count's correspondence in the 1130s. In the archives of Eynsham Abbey is the text of a Latin letter of his (see Appendix no. 1). It does not concern Eynsham so much as a failing community set up near Charlbury in Oxfordshire, in a place called Felley.<sup>9</sup> Waleran acquired rights over it when his friend, King Stephen, added Bloxham to his possessions around 1138, perhaps on the creation of his earldom of Worcester that year. The letter, addressed to the community of Felley, tells us that Waleran had received letters of recommendation from his sister, Countess Isabel of Pembroke, for a monk of Tewkesbury who had attracted her patronage. She wanted her brother to consider the monk for the vacant headship of the community of Felley. Waleran had thought about it and had dashed off a letter to Tewkesbury to make enquiries about the man, but also other letters consulting reputable people about the future of the community. The end result was another letter committing the community of Felley to Eynsham Abbey, as the candidates for its leadership were not adequate to the purpose. Waleran was clearly very apt to communicate on all sorts of issues by letter, and here we have a rare instance of how frequently and for what purposes a magnate might do it in the 1130s. The problem for us is that such

<sup>6</sup> M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066–1307*, 2nd edn (Oxford 1993), 19.

<sup>7</sup> Clanchy, *Memory to Written Record*, 89–90, at p. 90, noting that 'the spoken word of messengers sufficed for conveying the ordinary business of the day'.

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey Gaimar, *L'Estoire des Engleis*, ed. A. Bell, Anglo-Norman Text Society (1960), lines 5811–16; Philip de Remi, *Le Roman de Jehan et Blonde*, trans. S. Lecuyer (Paris 1987), lines 5348–51.

<sup>9</sup> For Felley in Spelsbury, see *The Place-Names of Oxfordshire*, ed. M. Gelling, 2 vols, English Place-Name Society xxiii–xxiv (Cambridge 1971), ii, 380.

letters were ephemeral documents and survive only in rare circumstances. The Felley letter allows us an unprecedented opportunity to postulate that a lay magnate might sit at the heart of a busy network of correspondents, especially a magnate such as Waleran, whose interests and contacts spread so widely. His twin brother Robert – who must have been one of his principal correspondents – can likewise be glimpsed as an assiduous letter-writer. We have reference to several of his letters to ecclesiastical addressees, notably Ailred of Rievaulx, a particularly frequent correspondent, Gilbert Foliot and Pope Alexander III.<sup>10</sup>

Another of Waleran's letters shows him in action in a delicate political situation. He had attempted to found a Cistercian monastery late in the 1140s, on his estate of Le Valasse near Lillebonne in the Pays de Caux. This enterprise fell foul of the Empress Matilda, a particularly difficult character for him to have to deal with, after his energetic involvement in attempts to thwart her claim to the English throne between 1135 and 1141. The empress set herself against the foundation of Le Valasse, and after what seems to have been a bitter struggle, she eventually displaced Waleran as its patron.<sup>11</sup> The letter by which Waleran admitted his defeat survived by being copied into the abbey's cartulary, and it is a unique document (see Appendix no. 2 below). It is in its way an elegant composition, in terms of the economy of its language and the use of the possibilities of Latin syntax. It is dramatic in the concluding passage, which acknowledges both Waleran's defeat and his concern for what he still regarded as his abbey and community. It shows no sign of any fussy concern for the structure of letters taught in the contemporary Italian handbooks on dictamen: no 'exordium' or 'proemium' based on some Classical tag, for instance.<sup>12</sup> It is however correctly structured, with opening salutation, a narration and a rather forceful conclusion, undoubtedly the product of a business-like mind practised in letter-writing. He refers, in the *meiosis* of his contemporaries, to his resources being his 'poverty'. The overall impression is of a direct and decided intellect expressing itself with energy and economy: most likely the intellect of Waleran himself.

Another, almost casual survivor of Waleran's letters is one to Jocelin, bishop of Salisbury, informing him that Waleran had granted the church of Sturminster Marshall, Dorset, to the leper hospital Waleran had founded outside his town of Pont-Audemer in Normandy. Preserved as a copy in the hospital's cartulary, it is a notification of what Waleran had done and a request that the bishop issue a confirmation. It is interesting in that the clerk who wrote it clearly had some dictaminal instruction in the appropriate forms in which a lay magnate should address a bishop, and chose the most elaborate forms by which to do so: 'G. reuerendo Dei gratia Sar(esberiensi)

<sup>10</sup> Crouch, *Beaumont Twins*, 210.

<sup>11</sup> M. Chibnall, *The Empress Matilda* (Oxford 1991), 186 and nn.

<sup>12</sup> For the sources of contemporary dictaminal practice, see *Repertorium der Artes Dictandi des Mittelalters i, von den Anfängen bis um 1200*, ed. F.J. Worstbrock, M. Klaes and J. Lütten (Munich 1992). For the early dominance of the late eleventh-century treatise of Alberic of Montecassino, see F.J. Worstbrock, 'Die Anfänge der mittelalterlichen Ars dictandi', *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, xxiii (1989), 1–42.

episcopo dilectissimo domino suo. G. comes Mell(ent)i salutem' ('Waleran count of Meulan greets the reverend G. bishop of Salisbury his most beloved lord'). Elsewhere the bishop is addressed as 'sanctitas vestra' ('your holiness') and 'pater reuerende' ('reverend father'). Waleran's clerk did not claim divine sanction for his master's comital style via the 'Dei gratia' clause, as is claimed in several other of his acts: an exaggerated form of deference that may also have some root in the fact that dictaminal essays on 'salutatio' did not couple the divine grace to the titles of counts in the way that they invariably did to bishops, abbots and kings.<sup>13</sup>

The same hospital at Pont-Audemer also possessed a letter of Waleran containing an even more elaborate request for a confirmation, this time addressed to no less an authority than Pope Eugenius III.<sup>14</sup> The letter refers to a dossier of other acts that accompanied it to the papal curia, and lists the possessions it wished to be detailed in the papal act. This would seem to account for the letter's preservation in the hospital's muniments, despite the fact that it is not itself a charter of confirmation. This time the influence of florid contemporary dictaminal practice is very evident. It opens '(r)euendo patri ac domino suo Eugenio Dei gratia summo pontifici G. comes Mellenti sue sanctitatis filius salutem et filialis obedientie deuotam supplicationem' ('Waleran count of Meulan greeting and the earnest prayer of filial obedience, to his lord and reverend father Eugenius, by the grace of God high pontiff'). The letter continues with a long-winded 'exordium' on which the premise for a confirmation is justified. In one case it cites scripture. Waleran's clerk indirectly recalls 2 Corinthians 9: 7 ('hilarem enim datorem diligit Deus') as his master's motivation for wishing his grants confirmed by the pope, as God loves and will redeem, as he says, a cheerful giver. But rather more impressively he chooses to begin his 'exordium' by citing St Augustine's sermon on the 103rd Psalm as his 'auctoritas' that one should not just give to a wandering beggar, but heap yet more gifts on those whom society has expelled from its midst.<sup>15</sup> Waleran's secretariat could rally impressive intellectual resources when the need arose.

Effective communication was a prerequisite for the administration of a complex of lands as extensive as those Waleran of Meulan controlled. So also were effective agents. Waleran could not be everywhere. The surviving letters indicate that he communicated with his regional agents by means of letters, most of which have not survived and whose existence can only be inferred. However, some analogous documents do survive in the form of writs instructing his officers to convey rights and property. Their contents

<sup>13</sup> Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale ms. Y200 (Cartulary of St-Gilles Pont-Audemer), fo. 48v, and for the style 'Dei gratia', see the study by G. Koziol, *Begging Pardon and Favor* (Ithaca NY, 1992), 258–67.

<sup>14</sup> The original of this act is still to be found in Pont-Audemer, Musée Alfred Canel ms. Chartes de l'hospice de St-Gilles série A–B portefeuille 29 chemise 1, whence the facsimile in S. Mesmin, 'The Cartulary of the Leper Hospital of St Gilles de Pont-Audemer', unpublished PhD thesis, 2 vols (Reading 1978), ii, 4–17.

<sup>15</sup> 'Nemo vobis dicat: Preceptum est a Christo ut servo Dei detur, mendico non detur. Absit; prorsus impius ista loquitur. Da illi, sed multo magis illi.' Augustine is discoursing in turn on Luke 14: 13–14, whose sentiments in turn link with the passage cited by Waleran's clerk from 2 Corinthians.

meant that they were preserved, where other instructions would not have been. Perhaps the most revealing of these is an act of the count in favour of Worcester Cathedral priory, issued not long before his departure on crusade in spring 1147 (Appendix no. 3).

The count had received a letter from the priory concerning several of its rights but particularly a carucate of land it held of the bishop's fee in Worcestershire. This called forth a letter of instruction to William de Beauchamp of Elmley, whom he calls his 'son' (probably signifying that William, the hereditary sheriff of Worcester, had been betrothed to an infant daughter of the count). William was instructed to exempt the priory from pleas and forest dues on its estate of Tibberton in the forest of Feckenham. He was also instructed to exempt the priory's land there from geld. It may therefore be that it was William's enthusiasm in pursuing the count's rights that had sparked the priory's need to contact Count Waleran. The most revealing point is reached when the count deals with the priory's petition about the carucate in the bishop's fee:

Now about the land concerning which the monks sent to me – the carucate of the bishop's fee. There is nothing I can do because of my journey. But whatever you and my brother, the earl of Leicester, do on my behalf, I agree and grant to the prior and monks. For you know that there are no monks in all my land I love as much or in whose prayers I trust more. And if God permits that I may return from this pilgrimage safe and sound, I will be sure to show them this. For this reason I ask you as my dearest son that you protect and safeguard them and all their possessions on my behalf, as my regard for them merits.

The situation in 1146 and 1147 was that Waleran had been absent from England for five or more years. Waleran had left Worcestershire in the care of the principal magnate of the shire, William de Beauchamp of Elmley Castle, who held the shrievalty, the castle of Worcester and the custody of its forests. To bind William to his interest, Waleran had clearly betrothed an infant daughter to the baron (Waleran had only married in 1141). However, in case that was not enough, Waleran also trusted his twin brother to oversee both William de Beauchamp and Worcestershire. This was all the more remarkable in that, at the time, Earl Robert was a nominal supporter of King Stephen, while Waleran was enlisted in the Angevin interest.

A point of interest relevant to my purpose here is that one of the witnesses to the act is a Gervase, reeve of 'Inkit' (that is, Inkberrow). This place was a castle in the heart of the forest of Feckenham that Bishop Robert de Béthune of Hereford (1131–48) had granted – for whatever inducement – to Count Waleran.<sup>16</sup> Since there is an abundance of evidence that Waleran was in France during the period when the Second Crusade was being planned, the

<sup>16</sup> *The Letters and Charters of Gilbert Foliot*, ed. A. Morey and C.N.L. Brooke (Cambridge 1967), 117. The *5th Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission*, pt 1 (1876), 301, includes a translation of the missing charter from its original, then still in the possession of the Lechmere family, and it interprets the 'Inkit' of the transcript by Ashmole as 'Mell(enti)'. However, Ashmole renders the witness list in facsimile, and his transcription is consequently more to be trusted. It should be noted that a charter of Archbishop Rotrou of Rouen to Meulan Priory datable to 1164 x 1166 has as a witness one 'Gervasius prepositus' among Count Waleran's *familiares*: *Recueil des chartes de St-Nicaise de Meulan: prieuré de l'abbaye du Bec*, ed. E. Houth (Paris 1924), 32.



likelihood is that this act was issued on the continent. So it would seem that Gervase, one of his Worcestershire officers, had carried letters to the count in France and was attesting the reply that he would carry back. We have to assume that the count's acts and letters were carried by one of those 'messengers' who are so evident in vernacular stories of the time. In this case, we may be able to put a name to one of them. Otherwise the network of messengers who maintained communication across the complex of Waleran's estates is more or less invisible.<sup>17</sup>

A most intriguing consequence of the need to communicate is the way in which Waleran's secretariat exported diplomatic forms characteristic of the Anglo-Norman realm into the Ile-de-France. The English administrative writ was adopted and modified by the chancery of the Norman kings of England. Their power and influence eventually extended its use outside England. The writ increasingly appears as an instrument in Normandy under Henry I, and in due course it was also adopted by the clerks of Alexander I of Scotland.<sup>18</sup> An early example of the private use of a writ outside England is found in an act of Waleran in favour of the collegiate church of Beaumont-le-Roger datable to between 1131 and 1142. It opens with an address to three named persons – William du Pin, William the constable and Ralph fitz Durand – and then continues generally to all his faithful men, barons, men and friends. The three named men are known members of his household and can be assumed to have had some responsibility for the administration of the honour of Beaumont-le-Roger. The structure of the act matches that of a contemporary English writ. A notification of a grant follows the opening address clause. This is succeeded by the count's instruction to the addressees that the canons of Beaumont should hold the tithe he had granted 'bene et in pace et honorifice', just as a contemporary English royal writ would have specified. It concludes with a witness list featuring a number of the principal vassals from Waleran's Risle valley lordships.<sup>19</sup>

Waleran of Meulan's clerks had already extended the use of the writ form into new territory up the Seine towards Paris. We can see clearly how this was done in another act, issued at the count's castle of Beaumont-le-Roger on 5 March 1139.<sup>20</sup> It opens with a general address by the count to his *vicomtes* ('vicecomitibus'), *prévôts* ('prepositis'), barons ('baronibus'), officers ('ministris') and all his faithful men ('fidelibus'). Since the matter of

<sup>17</sup> A possible exception is the appearance of Humphrey, one of Count Waleran's chamberlains, as witness to an act of Roger earl of Warwick, Waleran's first cousin, datable to 1136 x 1141: *The Cartulary of Worcester Cathedral Priory*, ed. R.R. Darlington, PRS lxxvi (1968), 12. It is possible that Waleran and Earl Roger might have been in the vicinity of each other at the time the act was issued, but it is notable how *chambriers* are frequently confidential messengers in the romance epics of the twelfth century.

<sup>18</sup> D. Bates, 'The Earliest Norman Writs', *EHR*, c (1985), 266–84; *Regesta Regum Scottorum* i, *The Acts of Malcolm IV, King of Scots*, ed. G.W.S. Barrow (Edinburgh 1960), 132–3. It might be added that the earliest twelfth-century acts of Welsh kings also adopt writ form, notably those from south-east Wales: *The Acts of Welsh Rulers, 1120–1283*, ed. H. Pryce (Cardiff 2005), 660–4.

<sup>19</sup> Paris, Bibliothèque Mazarine ms. 3417 (*Cartulary of Beaumont-le-Roger*), fos 9v–10r. The edition in *Cartulaire de l'église de la Sainte-Trinité de Beaumont-le-Roger*, ed. E. Deville (Paris 1912), 25, has various obscurities.

<sup>20</sup> *Chartes de St-Nicaise*, 13–14.

the notification concerns the grant of the chapel of his castle of Meulan, the writ must be presumed to have been addressed to his vicomtes and officers *outside* Normandy. The rest of the act does not follow the writ form as closely as the previous one, but still it tells us how an alien diplomatic form could penetrate the Ile-de-France.

By the 1140s Waleran's clerks were routinely using the writ form to communicate with his officers in his county of Meulan, in Paris and in his honour of Gournay-sur-Marne. An original writ of his survives addressed to all his *prévôts* of Paris, instructing them to pay the abbey of St-Victor of Paris forty shillings annually from his Parisian rents on the same day as they received them (see Appendix no. 4). It dates between 1141 and 1146, and even includes a version of the penalty clause familiar from English royal writs. At Meulan in 1145 or early in 1146, Count Waleran and his wife Agnes issued a joint writ addressed to all his barons, *prévôts*, officers and faithful men of 'Francia' (by which he would have meant what we would call the 'Ile de France'), in favour of the priory of Gournay-sur-Marne, confirming the church of La Queue-en-Brie and the tithe of the ovens of the town.<sup>21</sup> This is paralleled by another, later writ of the count addressed to his son Robert 'and all his prévôts and justices of Francia', in favour of the abbey of Le Valasse over a vineyard at Vaux-sur-Seine in his county of Meulan.<sup>22</sup> From these instances we can draw two broad conclusions. The first is that these instruments and others like them were a product of Waleran's chancery clerks. If they had been generated by the beneficiaries in the Ile-de-France, the Anglo-Norman writ form would not have been employed. The second deduction follows on from this. It is that Waleran's household borrowed from the English royal chancery the means to communicate its wishes to local officers, and in doing so extended some aspects of English administrative method well beyond the frontiers of the Anglo-Norman realm.

Apart from the need for effective communication, a consequence of the wide spread of Waleran's lands was a parallel need to delegate his authority. We should not see this delegation as in any way institutional, in the sense that Waleran divided up his lands in the three regions of England, Normandy and France into spheres of authority. In fact it is difficult to establish if the arrangements his charters reveal were anything more than *ad hoc*. The address clauses to his charters are the best clues we have as to how he delegated his authority.

The existence of officers called 'vicecomites' supplies the nearest hint of any institutional framework superimposed on the complex of lordships Waleran ruled. In England, Waleran controlled one entire shire, that of Worcester. He had acquired some at least of the shire on his betrothal to King Stephen's infant daughter, Matilda, presumably as an award of her dower. By 1138, the girl was dead and buried at the priory of Holy Trinity Aldgate. But King Stephen made over the shire, the shrievalty and the title of earl to

<sup>21</sup> AN ms. LL1397 (Cartulary of Gournay-sur-Marne), fo. 22r.

<sup>22</sup> Original, Rouen, Archives départementales de la Seine Maritime 18 HP (Fonds du Valasse), carton 1.



Waleran anyway, as a reward for his service to the king in Normandy. Thus the estates of William de Beauchamp, and his hereditary claim on the office of sheriff, came under Waleran's lordship, and, as we have seen, we find William addressed as Waleran's deputy in Worcestershire in Waleran's letter concerning Tibberton, for his decisions were, according to Waleran, to be 'ex mea parte'. We find from the earlier of his charters to his Cistercian foundation of Bordesley that William's lands were subordinated to Waleran by 1139, for the count confirmed William's grant of Osmerley, Worcs, to the abbey.<sup>23</sup> As we have seen, Waleran moved to tie William closer to him in the 1140s, via betrothal to his infant daughter. This may have been a consequence of the defection of William de Beauchamp to the Empress Matilda during the crisis following King Stephen's capture and imprisonment in February 1141. Waleran and William fell out again during the campaigns of King Stephen in Worcestershire in 1150–1, when William allied with Earl Roger of Hereford and attempted to exclude Waleran's other vassals from power in the county – for whatever reason.<sup>24</sup>

Waleran however had officers called 'vicecomites' in both France and Normandy, and these were officers in a different tradition from the English sheriff. The 'vicecomites' of Mantes and Meulan were prominent officers with an executive function. They occupied hereditary offices, which can be traced back in both cases to the mid-eleventh century. In the time of Count Waleran, a marriage between Basilia, daughter and heiress of Walter II Payn, vicomte of Meulan, and Hugh II, vicomte of Mantes, briefly combined the offices in one man. Hugh II's network of influence was further augmented by the marriage of his sister Petronilla to Odo II, seneschal of Meulan. Delegated power in Meulan and Mantes was therefore in the hands of a small coterie of hereditary officers who were also major tenants of the county. The vicomtes of Meulan, for instance, had a major estate centred on their fortified house at Mézy-sur-Seine, where they were able to impose their own toll on the Seine river traffic.<sup>25</sup>

Waleran had other officers called 'vicecomites' working for him in Normandy. Since such officers appear in the Beaumont administration of the family's Norman lands as far back as the time of Waleran's grandfather, the title cannot be an allusion to the comital status of the Beaumonts following Waleran's father's succession to Meulan in 1080. In fact their neighbours, the Montfort family of Montfort-sur-Risle, also disposed of an officer called a 'vicecomes' before 1078, so the name was clearly being attached to Norman honorial officers in the mid-eleventh century. Such 'viscounts' can be found at Pont-Audemer, Brionne and Beaumont-le-Roger as officers distinct from and superior to the *prévôts* of the towns, and would seem from the limited

<sup>23</sup> BL ms. Additional Charter 20419, whence *Monasticon*, v, 410.

<sup>24</sup> For the relationship between Count Waleran and William de Beauchamp, see Crouch, *Beaumont Twins*, 40–1, 50–1, 85; idem, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135–1154* (London 2000), 87–8, 256–7.

<sup>25</sup> Crouch, *Beaumont Twins*, 173–4. In general, for the role of the French 'vicomtes', see *Vicomtes et vicomtés dans l'Occident médiéval*, ed. H. Débax (Toulouse 2008).

evidence to have been officers with honorial responsibilities for administration and justice.<sup>26</sup>

There was therefore a cadre of permanent officers on the Beaumont estates in both England, Normandy and France, who were capable of maintaining the count's administration independently of the man himself. The count's insecurity about how such deputies did their task is hinted at by a number of sources, most notably by the reference to supervisory figures. Waleran's particular worry must have been his cross-Channel estates, and here he was able to call on the services of his twin brother Earl Robert II of Leicester. So we find a writ in favour of Selby Abbey in Yorkshire addressed by Waleran between 1136 and 1141 'karissimo fratri suo R(oberto) comiti Legr' et omnibus baronibus, amicis et fidelibus suis totius Anglie'.<sup>27</sup> Waleran's letter to William de Beauchamp in 1146/7 (Appendix no. 3) makes it perfectly clear that the count's brother has a supervisory duty over Worcestershire, which Beauchamp had to acknowledge. Waleran had reason for his suspicion. Despite the betrothal to the count's infant daughter, William turned against his father-in-law in 1150–1, allying with Waleran's rival, Earl Roger of Hereford. The count's fail-safe arrangements then came into play. William was arrested by another of Waleran's vassals in Worcestershire, Ralph de Manneville, working with other loyalist knights. Earl Robert did his duty to his brother too, frustrating King Stephen's attempts to take advantage of the disorder in the county.<sup>28</sup>

Family was the most obvious resort for an absentee lord who was looking for an *alter ego*, and Count Waleran was lucky in having a twin brother: the most perfect *alter ego* one could imagine. As recent scholarship has emphasised, another popular resort in the circumstances was a wife.<sup>29</sup> Waleran did not have an adult spouse till the winter of 1141–2: Agnes, daughter of Count Amaury of Evreux, a woman who must then have been around twenty years younger than Waleran. Nonetheless, she appears in the address clauses to three of his acts, which would imply that she was regarded as having some role to play in the warranting and execution of his grants.<sup>30</sup> One imagines that

<sup>26</sup> Crouch, *Beaumont Twins*, 172–3, and for vicecomital responsibilities, see particularly *Cartulaire de Beaumont-le-Roger*, 4, referring to the 'forifectura placitorum', part of the profits of the 'vicecomitatus' of Beaumont-le-Roger.

<sup>27</sup> BL ms. Additional 37771 (Selby cartulary), fo. 199r no.4, whence *The Coucher Book of Selby*, ed. J.T. Fowler, 2 vols, Yorkshire Archaeological Association Record Series x, xiii (1891–3), ii, 260 no.1157.

<sup>28</sup> Crouch, *Reign of King Stephen*, 256–7.

<sup>29</sup> For an example, T. de Hemptinne, 'Les épouses des croisés et pèlerins flamands aux XIe et XIIe siècles', in *Autour de la première croisade: actes du colloque de la Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East*, ed. M. Balard (Paris 1996), 89–92.

<sup>30</sup> *Le cartulaire de l'abbaye bénédictine de Saint-Pierre-de-Préaux, 1034–1227*, ed. D. Rouet (Paris 2005), 230–1 ('Gualerannus comes Mellenti A. uxori sue et Roberto de Nouoburgo et prepositis de Ponte audomer ...'); Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale ms. Y200 (Cartulary of St-Gilles de Pont-Audemer), fo. 13v ('G. comes Mell' Roberto filio suo A. uxori sue et hominibus suis ...'); Evreux, Archives départementales de l'Eure G 122 (Evreux chapter cartulary), fo. 22r ('G. comes Mellenti A. comitisse et Roberto de Nouoburgo et omnibus iusticiis suis'). It should be noted that grants made by Waleran out of her honour of Gournay-sur-Marne usually associate his wife with him in the charter address, as for example in *Recueil de chartes et documents de St-Martin-des-Champs*, ed. J. Depoin, 2 vols (Paris 1913), ii, 233–5, 245–6, 290–2.

when Waleran went on crusade in 1147, it might have been Countess Agnes – by then a mother of at least two children – who filled the gap in leadership over the next two years. There is no trace of this in his or her extant acts. However, in each of the three address clauses in which she appears, Countess Agnes is addressed along with another family member, in one case, their son, Robert (II) of Meulan, and in the two others Waleran's first cousin, Robert du Neubourg (d. 1159).

Waleran's eldest son, Robert, must have been born in 1142, and so might have come of age as early as 1160, six years before his father's death. It is interesting therefore to find him prominent in his father's charters. There are hints that he might have had a definite local administrative role in his father's lifetime. Waleran certainly addressed a writ to his son in 1163, when Robert was of age, with orders to stand by the monks of Préaux in their possession of a mill in the honour of Pont-Audemer.<sup>31</sup> An original charter in favour of the abbey of Le Valasse, concerning the county of Meulan, is addressed specifically to 'Roberto filio suo et omnibus prepositis suis et iusticiis de Francia', and might very well be taken to indicate that Robert was regent of the county of Meulan and the French lands in his father's absence.<sup>32</sup> But we must be wary of assuming that this sort of reference implies more than a form of words. For instance, in March 1143, when Robert was probably only just learning to walk, and again in July 1155, when Robert was only in his thirteenth year, his father issued acts, which he said had been done 'with the assistance and agreement of Robert my son and Agnes my wife'.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, when Waleran issued a similar concession in July 1162, the recorded consent of his son would have had more force, and indeed the young man is noted as first witness.<sup>34</sup> The sealing clause to one of Waleran's later acts to Bec-Hellouin has the codicil 'Robert my son being present and agreeing to the same and confirming my seal by his own'.<sup>35</sup> Robert issued at least five charters of his own before 1166, which reveal that he had an embryo household already formed before his father died.<sup>36</sup>

Robert du Neubourg's place in the administration of the lands of Count Waleran is less expected. The two men had a troubled relationship. Robert attacked his cousin's lands in 1119 while Waleran was a minor in the wardship of King Henry I, in pursuit of certain unspecified claims. When Waleran adopted the cause of King Stephen in early 1136, Robert adopted that of

<sup>31</sup> *Cartulaire de Préaux*, 236.

<sup>32</sup> Rouen, Archives départementales de la Seine Maritime 18 H (Fonds du Valasse), carton 1; see also above, n. 22.

<sup>33</sup> Bnf ms. Vexin 8, p. 419 ('Hoc concesserunt Robertus filius comitis et ... comitissa'); *Cartulaire de Beaumont-le-Roger*, 27–8 ('consilio et assensu ... Roberti filii mei et Agnetis uxoris mee'). For a similar clause in a charter relating to Gournay before 1154, see AN ms. L877, no. 19, and for another in 1155, *Cartulaire de Préaux*, 220–1.

<sup>34</sup> Evreux, Archives départementales de l'Eure H 822.

<sup>35</sup> Bnf ms. Vexin 4, p. 219. The act otherwise appears to date after 1152, as the abbot of Préaux attests it as a familiar of the abbot of Bec. Note also an act to Préaux with the codicil 'Ego autem Robertus filius Gualeranni comitis hec omnia que a patre meo concessa et donata sunt concedo et sigilli mei auctoritate confirmo ...': *Cartulaire de Préaux*, 240.

<sup>36</sup> Crouch, *Beaumont Twins*, 176.

Stephen's rival, the Empress Matilda, as he was a close friend of Matilda's husband, Count Geoffrey of Anjou. It was not until the catastrophic defeat of Geoffrey's invasion of Normandy in 1137 that Robert finally defected to Stephen, and when he did there is every reason to believe that his reverse was made easier by Waleran's mediation. Robert then became a leading member of Waleran's political affinity in Normandy. When Waleran himself defected to Geoffrey of Anjou and crossed to Normandy late in 1141, he used Robert as a mediator and the two men came to a settlement about their political futures, a copy of the written text of which survived in the archives of the abbey of St-Pierre-de Préaux, being eventually copied into the abbey's cartulary.<sup>37</sup>

Despite Waleran's fall from favour with Henry II in 1153, and his subsequent exile to the political wilderness, Robert du Neubourg stayed loyal to his agreement. This must have helped Waleran enormously, as Robert served as seneschal of Normandy for Henry II from 1155 until his death in 1159. Despite his own high status, Robert du Neubourg was not above assisting his cousin's administration. We find him sitting at the castle of Brionne as one of Waleran's justices, with William fitz Robert lord of Harcourt, to decide a case relating to land in the honour of Pont-Audemer, and apparently ordering the arrest and imprisonment of a contumacious tenant in 1146 or early 1147.<sup>38</sup> This case and the occurrence of his name in the address clauses and witness lists to Waleran's writ-charters indicates that, until young Robert II of Meulan came of age, there was a seasoned and experienced male member of the family available to supervise the Meulan administration in the count's absence.

Waleran himself was likewise involved in administering others' interests, apart from those of King Stephen, whose lieutenant he was in Normandy between 1136 and 1141. Nicholas Vincent has discovered a remarkable charter of Waleran's addressed to one Elias, seneschal ('dapifer') of 'Eitona' and all the men of Count Ralph of Vermandois. Waleran notifies Elias of the grant by Count Ralph of thirteen librates of rent and a house at Weekley in Northamptonshire to Ralph's hawker, William, and that it is Waleran's wish that this be conceded to William at a rent of sixty shillings a year.<sup>39</sup> The charter has to have been issued before Ralph's death in 1152, as he was clearly living at the time of Waleran's confirmation. Ralph was Waleran's uncle, the greatest magnate in Picardy and Artois. The two men were close, and in 1152 Waleran would become guardian of Ralph's under-age son and heir, Ralph II. The elder Ralph had clearly acquired estates in England from King Stephen, and the assumption is that Waleran was acting as his agent in dealing with them, probably in the period when Waleran was most active in England, between 1136 and 1141.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> For this, see D. Crouch, 'A Norman "Conventio" and Bonds of Lordship in the Middle Ages', in *Law and Government in Medieval England and Normandy: Essays in Honour of Sir James Holt*, ed. G. Garnett and J.G. Hudson (Cambridge 1994), 299–324.

<sup>38</sup> Crouch, *Beaumont Twins*, 160–1.

<sup>39</sup> Original, Northampton, Northamptonshire Record Office ms. Montagu of Boughton Deeds, Box 7, unnumbered, cf. Acta Henry II, no.2831.

<sup>40</sup> For the Meulan–Vermandois relationship, see Crouch, *Beaumont Twins*, 20–1, 71.

Effective communication and effective agents were necessary for the administration of widespread complexes of estates other than those of the king of England. In the case of Waleran of Meulan we can fortuitously see how just such a great cross-Channel magnate came to terms with the same imperatives that informed the expedients of the Norman and Angevin kings.<sup>41</sup> One should not push the parallels too far, but it is clear that the count and his officers did consciously look to the royal administration for ideas, the use of the writ form being the most obvious and spectacular of these. But equally, Count Waleran was able to adapt and use traditional expedients: the use of family as deputies, the existing network of ‘vicecomites’, ‘prepositi’ and those officers vaguely called ‘iusticii’ or ‘iusticiarii’, those authorised to do justice in their lord’s name. So, despite his absence hundreds of miles away across the sea, executive decisions were taken in Count Waleran’s absence, courts met in his name, and his seal carried the image of his authority attached to letters that communicated his desires.

<sup>41</sup> See the recent illuminating comments on such imperatives and expedients by M. Aurell, *The Plantagenet Empire, 1154–1224*, trans. D. Crouch (Harlow 2007), 31–59.

## Appendix

1. *Letters of W(aleran II) count of Meulan, to Godric, a monk of the community of Felley (in Spelsbury, Oxfordshire). Waleran's sister, (Isabel) countess of Pembroke, has sent him a letter soliciting the headship of the community at Felley for Roger of Eu, a monk of Tewkesbury. Correspondence with the abbot of Tewkesbury and others leads Waleran to believe that the community would be better entrusted to the care of the abbot of Eynsham.*

[1138 x 1141, ?1138 x 1139]

Oxford, Christ Church ms. 341 (Eynsham Cartulary), fo. 18r–v, s. xiii.

Printed *Eynsham Cartulary*, ed. H.E. Salter, 2 vols, Oxford Historical Society xlix, li (1907–8), i, 53.

G. comes de Mellent' Godric(o) et aliis fratribus de Feleleia in domino salutem. Soror mea comitissa de Penbroch' per litteras suas requisivit me pro fratre Rogero de Auco, ut locum vestrum qui est in nemore meo si ratio postularet ei concederem. Ego autem per litteras meas mandaui abbati de Theokesberia, cuius monachus est prefatus Rogerus, ut super hac re consilium per litteras suas mihi personas didici predictum fratrem Rogerum vel Hugonem, qui vester prelatus fuit, mitius utiles esse ad curam loci vestri optinendam. Requisivi carissimum patrem et amicum meum Walterum abbatem de Egnesham ut pro Dei et nostro amore, curam loci vestri suscipiat in omnibus que ad me pertinent sicut etiam dom(i)num episcopum Linc' ex sua parte ei iam pridem iniunxisse audiui. Mando itaque vobis ut ad eum amodo intendatis de omnibus que ad me spectat de vobis, et quicquid de vobis aut de vestris possessionibus paterna dispensatione disposuerit, totum ex parte mea concedo et benigno affectu ratum et stabile esse constituo.

2. *Letters of W(aleran II) count of Meulan to the Empress Matilda, requesting that, for the love of God, she maintain their abbey of Le Valasse (Seine-Maritime) and the alms he has given it out of his small resources for the sake of his soul. He urges her to protect the abbey's goods so she may be a participant in its spiritual benefits. He surrenders it to her protection after God's.*

[1157 x 1158]

Rouen, AD Seine-Maritime 18 HP (Fonds du Valasse) Cartulary, fo. 25r, s. xiv.

Printed *Chronicon Valassense*, ed. F. Somménil (Rouen 1868), 119.

For the date of the empress's impropriation of the advocacy of Le Valasse, see the reasoning in Chibnall, *Empress Matilda*, 186 and nn. Waleran's letter would appear to belong to that time.

Domine sue karissime Matildi imperatrici filie magnifici regis Henrici G. comes Mellenti salutem. Nobilitatem vestre pietatis propter amorem Dei postulo quatinus eodem caritatis intuitu manuteneatis abbatiam nostram



Vallis Azonis, et elemosinas quas ille paupertas mea pro salute anime mee benigne contulit, et fideliter ratas esse ubicunque faciatis, ut eorum particeps coram domino esse possitis. Ecce in manu vestra pono eas post Deum ad garantizandum.

3. *Mandate from W(aleran II) count of Meulan addressed to William de Beauchamp, his son. Waleran commands that William acquit the (cathedral) church of St Mary of Worcester of forestry and of all dues and pleas at Tibberton, (Worcestershire), and from danegeld. He appoints William de Beauchamp and the earl of Leicester to take care of the priory's affairs during his absence on Crusade.* [1146 x 1147]

A = Lost Original, recorded in the possession of the Lechmere family, 1876. B = Oxford, Bodleian Library ms Ashmole 833, p. 14, part facsimile by Elias Ashmole from A 'ex evidenciis penes [blank] Lechmere de Medio Templo ar(migerum)', s. xvii.

Printed (from B) H.W.C. Davis, 'Some Documents of the Anarchy', in *Essays in History presented to R.L. Poole* (Oxford 1927), 170–1; (part only, from B) G.H. White, 'King Stephen's Earldoms', *TRHS*, 4th ser., xiii (1930), 70; (translation from A) *HMC 5th Report*, appendix, p. 301.

G. comes Mell(enti) Willelmo de Bellocampo filio suo salutem. Mando vobis et precipio quatenus clametis priorem et monacos ecclesie sancte Marie Wigornensis quietos de forestagio de Tabrituna et de omnibus placitis illius foreste ita ut nullum ius de forestis que ad illam villam pertinet amodo clamabatis, quia sciatis quod pro remedio anime mee et <Agnetis> comitis uxoris mee et Rodberti filii mei et pro animabus patris et matris mee concedo et perdono priori et monachis geldum regis quod ad me pertinet et omnes consuetudines et seruitia et iura forestaria que prius regis erant et postea mea in illa villa. De terra autem pro qua miserunt ad me, scilicet pro una carrucata terre que est de feudo episcopi, non possum intermittere pro itinere meo, sed quicquid frater meus comes de Leircestra et vos faciatis ex mea parte do et concedo priori et monachis, quia sciatis quod non sunt monachi in tota terra mea quos tantum diligo nec in quibus orationibus plus confido, et si dederit mihi Deus ut possim de hac peregrinatione sanus et incolumis redere bene illis monstrabo. Quapropter rogo vos ut filium karissimum que cuius eos et omnia sua pro amore meo in loco meo manuteneatis et custodiat is ut amor meus illis valeat. Testibus Willelmo capellano, Radulfo de Auromonte, Hugone filio Galer(ann)i et Geruasio preposito de Inkit(berga).

4. *Mandate from Waleran (II) count of Meulan to his prévôts of Paris, ordering full payment of an annual sum of 40 sous from his rents in Paris to the abbey of St-Victor, to be made on the same day that Waleran's rents are received. He prohibits late payment upon pain of forfeiture.* [1141 x 1146]

A = AN ms. L 892, no. 20. Endorsed: *comitis Mellenti de .xl. solidis* (s.xiii); *comitis*

*Mellent'* (s. xv–xvi). Approx. 140 x 134 + 20mm. Sealed on white leather tag, double-sided seal impression in natural wax. B = AN ms. K<sup>23</sup> no. 15<sup>20</sup>, copy s. xii.

Printed (from B) *Monuments Historiques*, ed. J. Tardif (Paris 1866), 272; *Cartulaire général de Paris*, ed. R. de Lasteyrie (Paris 1887), 283–4.

Gualerannus comes Mellenti omnibus prepositis suis Paris(iensibus) salutem. Precipio vobis quod per singulos annos bene et plenarie reddatis ecclesie sancti Victoris xl. solidos quos de censu meo quem Parisius habeo eidem ecclesie et canonicis ibidem Deo seruientibus in elemosinam dedi et carta mea sigillo meo signata inperpetuum confirmaui, et eadem die reddatis qua census meos recipietis. Et prohibeo super amorem meum et super forefactum pecunie vestre ne ultra predictum diem detineatis. Testes Rob(ertus) de Nouabur(go) et Will(elmus) de Pino et Rob(ertus) de Fur(mailla) et Rogero capell(anus).