



**Gemma Wheeler**, *Gaimar's Estoire des Engleis. Kingship and Power*. Cambridge, Brewer 2021. 228 S.

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Gaimar's work has attracted increasing scholarly attention recently, and WHEELER's study bears witness to the growing interest in the 'Estoire des Engleis'. Long dismissed as a poor historian, Gaimar's work deserves more attention and WHEELER sets out to demonstrate that a holistic study of his work will not only establish him as a pioneer in historiography, but also as a writer who explores ideas of kingship through a depiction of various kings across English history while at the same time providing a commentary on kingship and constructing his own model for kingship.

Geffrei Gaimar's 'Estoire' is the first surviving historiography written in French (Anglo-Norman). Commissioned by Custance, wife of Ralph FitzGilbert, a nobleman living in Lincolnshire, the work consists of some 6,000 octosyllabic verses. It survives in four manuscripts and dates from the late 1130s to the mid-1340s. Thus, it was written during the reign of king Stephen, a period dominated by civil war. The 12th century also saw a renewed interest in history and historical writing, factors which likewise play a role in Gaimar's construction of his work and in WHEELER's analysis.

After a concise introduction discussing date, genre, method and structure of Gaimar's work, the book under review presents four chapters corresponding to four central parts and kings of the 'Estoire': Haveloc, Edgar, Cnut and William Rufus. WHEELER's first chapter deals with the Haveloc interpolation depicting the career of the legendary ruler and his foes and thus introducing Gaimar's major themes, images and models of kingship which then serve as a basis for WHEELER's ensuing discussion of the later kings. She succeeds in showing that this often-neglected episode is crucial to an understanding of the 'Estoire' and its construction of kingship. Therefore, historical veracity does not play a role here,

and rather than trying to connect the legendary material with contemporary events (despite allusions and parallels) one should seek to identify “narrative and thematic patterns” (30) which Gaimar will use throughout his ‘*Estoire*’. Thus, Edelsi and Edulf serve as models of failed rulers, albeit for different reasons. Note by contrast the portrayal of Cuaran/Haveloc and the key role of Argentille’s dream and its layers of meaning, or the Arthurian sub-text which continues to resonate right down to the reign of William Rufus.

In her second chapter, WHEELER focuses on the reign of Edgar. This interpolation (Edgar’s love for *Ælfthryth*) is of particular interest since Gaimar diverges from his main source, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Using romance imagery, he portrays Edgar as a powerful ruler turned into a tyrant by his lust. Chapter 3 is devoted to Cnut, another tyrant, whose pretensions to divine right will lead to his downfall. Gaimar’s account not only contains numerous allusions to the Haveloc episode, it also picks up themes and images he has deployed before.

In Chapter 4, WHEELER analyses Gaimar’s depiction of William Rufus in greater detail. At first sight, he appears in a positive light; but Gaimar’s real opinion of him emerges through references to previous rulers. These references undermine the superficially positive account of Rufus. Thus, Gaimar also presents Rufus’ death by an arrow in the New Forest ultimately as a consequence of Rufus’ behaviour. In her ‘Conclusion’, WHEELER points out that although Gaimar’s account ends with Rufus’ death and does not tackle more recent history, this ‘hanging thread’ might yet have been meaningful for Gaimar’s audience with possible implications for an assessment of Henry I.

WHEELER’s study of Gaimar’s work is not merely a reappraisal of the ‘*Estoire*’, but the first in-depth analysis of Gaimar’s portrayal and role of kingship based on 12th-century concepts of kingship. She succeeds in showing that Gaimar is a writer concerned with larger historical themes; by presenting historically distant episodes and by criticising particular figures, Gaimar simultaneously creates possible models for more recent rulers. WHEELER’s book bears witness to the multilingualism and multiculturalism of 12th-century England, operates on the interface of different languages and genres, and is therefore of interest to scholars from different fields. Select bibliography and index are helpful tools and, like WHEELER’s study as a whole, invite fresh readings of and approaches to Gaimar’s ‘*Estoire des Engleis*’.