

Richard Mortimer, *Angevin England, 1154–1258* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994)

Angevin England, by Dr Richard Mortimer, summarizes and analyzes the situation in England over a tumultuous century. He argues that the political and social changes in English society are linked and, through detailed use of primary sources, makes a compelling argument that these changes were both profound and led to a growing English idea of self-identity.

Richard Mortimer is the Keeper of the Muniments at Westminster Abbey in London, England. Educated at the Universities of Surrey and London, he later taught History at universities including London and Cambridge before taking up his current position in 1986. This position involves the scholarship and management of one of the largest private collections of medieval documents in England. Much of these documents concern the medieval abbey of Westminster and its associated properties and give Dr Mortimer a particular insight into the Church in the period. This is reflected in the subjects covered in his other works: all concern the English Church and Westminster in particular.

Angevin England describes and analyzes the Angevin period of history during which England was ruled by Henry II and subsequently, his two sons Richard I and John, and John's son, Henry III. This was a turbulent time in the nation's history, as external and internal pressures rocked the country. Troubles with the French and with the Papacy exist alongside internal developments including the inception of common law, expansion of education, growing national identity and religious reform. Dr Mortimer details all this using a sensible structure. He begins the work by analyzing the political situation and how the various powers – church, aristocracy and other nations – interacted with the King and his court. This provides a useful background to the second section of the book, in which Dr Mortimer looks at the effects of the era on the ordinary people. He

portrays English rural and urban life before discussing intellectual and spiritual life. Finally, he discusses the place of England within the “Angevin Empire” and how concepts of ethnicity developed in the period.

Dr Mortimer wrote this book to provide a broad overview of this interesting period. He argues that while English politics are certainly interesting, they are not the whole story. The period was one of rapid change and the author seeks to highlight these changes and place them within the overall context. Dr Mortimer uses a large range of sources in this book including an interesting number of primary sources. These include chronicles, church documents, scholarly treatises, legal documents, letters and exchequer rolls. He also uses a limited but useful number of visual sources: the images of cathedrals are an excellent illustration of medieval religious architecture. His list of secondary sources is shorter, but comprehensive, and as a bonus, Dr Mortimer provides a list of recommended books for further reading for each chapter of his book.

Dr Mortimer seems very systematic in his use of the evidence and manages to include a lot of detail to support his arguments. In particular, his attempt to link the political and social changes is convincing, and leaves the reader with a broad understanding of the flux within English society during the period. He seems to analyze the evidence carefully and while he often draws conclusions, none seem unviable. If a conclusion cannot be drawn, he speculates, but marks these speculations clearly.

Angevin England by Richard Mortimer is an excellent introduction to this interesting and crucial period in English history. Written in clear English, it is especially suitable for students who want a cogent overview of the forces at work in England and the ties that bind them all together.