

Dialogus de Scaccario, and Constitutio Domus Regis/The Dialogue of the Exchequer, and The Establishment of the Royal Household

Review Number: 653

Publish date: Monday, 31 March, 2008

Editor: Emilie Amt

Stephen Church

ISBN: 9780199258611

Date of Publication: 2007

Price: £85.00

Pages: 312pp.

Publisher: Oxford University Press

Place of Publication: Oxford

Reviewer: J. G. H. Hudson

The present volume marks the latest in a succession of modern editions and/or translations of Richard fitzNigel's *Dialogus de Scaccario* and the *Constitutio Domus Regis*, stretching back in the case of the former to the edition by A. Hughes, C. G. Crump, and C. Johnson published in 1902. Most obviously it is the successor to the volume containing both works published by Charles Johnson in the Nelson's Medieval Texts series in 1950, and reissued as an Oxford Medieval Text in 1983 with very limited modifications by F. E. L. Carter and D. E. Greenway. The current volume has entirely new introductory material, what its editors describe as 'freshly collated and arranged' Latin texts and new translations and notes. The *Dialogus* is much the longer text, an administrative manual written by Henry II's treasurer Richard fitzNigel. It provides an excellent description and discussion of exchequer procedure in the last years of Henry's reign. The much shorter *Constitutio Domus Regis* consists of a list of allowances payable to members of the royal household. Its compiler cannot be identified, and it is generally dated to c.1136.

Emilie Amt's introduction to the *Dialogus* concentrates primarily on the establishment of the text, involving some consideration of the process of writing, and on exchequer procedure. To the latter she provides an excellent introductory account that should be widely read. As to the text, she points out that there is no original or early manuscript, but that there are four from the 13th century. She bases her edition on three of them, omitting London, British Library, Hargrave 313. This she sets aside because 'it contains no truly independent readings; it is also by far the most careless and error-ridden of the early manuscripts' (p. xxix). One minor drawback with this decision is that Hargrave 313 is included in the process of editing the *Constitutio* in this same volume.

Of the three other manuscripts, none is clearly the most authoritative. She therefore bases her text on what she considers the best readings, with the aim of not omitting what may be original text. The 1902 editors rejected various passages as interpolations, but she wisely examines these individually, for example, distinguishing between addition and revision. She ends up by including the so-called interpolations, stating that 'I cannot argue that every bit of this material is Richard's own work, but I believe that the great majority of it is, and that its asynchronous nature is outweighed by its factual value' (p. xxxiv). Given the sometimes digressive nature of Richard's style and the uncertainty over the process whereby he reached his final text,

such arguments are persuasive, as are those for the inclusion of the chapter titles and subtitles as Richard's own (pp. xxxiv-vii).

Amt comments of Richard that:

when he digresses into allegedly historical explanations, he is apt to exceed his knowledge or give muddled information, and when he pauses to expatiate on the greatness of Henry II or to draw what he hopes are elegant analogies, the reader may well wish he had instead devoted his efforts to telling us more about the exchequer (p. xvii).

Although there would have been no risk of muddle or of exceeding of knowledge, Amt has followed her own advice to Richard and chosen not to range very widely in her introduction. There is little on Richard's learning or his style; indeed, on the latter her main statement is a quotation from the 1902 edition. More on these aspects might have been desirable, most notably as to why Richard chose the *Dialogue* form. He clearly was a writer with an interest in form, as he also composed a now lost history arranged in three columns: the first contained various matters concerning the English church and some decrees of the Apostolic see in the first column; the glorious deeds of the aforesaid king, which exceed human belief, in the second; and various public and household matters, including judgements of the court, in the third.

Furthermore, Richard's style is not as plain as he promises in his prologue, and study, for example, of how he used biblical quotation and allusion would be interesting. At times he seems to resort to the Bible when he is concerned about justifying clerical participation in royal government, and the *Dialogue* is a vital source for our understanding of the ethos of Henry II's administrators (see esp. p. 2). It is notable, for instance, that he presents treasurer and sheriff as opponents at the exchequer. Nor is there comment on the passages where Richard seems to criticise existing practice (e.g. p. 158), or where he records diversity of opinion (e.g. pp. 46, 176, 184).

In this last respect, as in many others, he resembles the author of the *Tractatus de Legibus*, commonly known as Glanvill. A comparison of the two texts would have been illuminating, not only for understanding of Angevin administrative mentality. In addition, comparison of manuscripts might have produced further suggestions on the development of textual organisation, the presence of headings and of marginalia, and the problems of cross-referencing. It is conceivable, for example, that the possible failings of some of Richard's cross-references arise from restructurings undertaken by the author himself. At the same time comparison of manuscripts would emphasise a major difference between the histories of these two administrative manuals: the *Dialogue* remained very much an exchequer text, the *Tractatus* obtained a much wider readership. [\(1\)](#)

Stephen Church in his introduction to the *Constitutio* considers the possible development of the text, which in its present form probably dates from c.1136. He argues that 'embedded in this document are at least five discernible dates' (p. xxxix). These will take us back to a time when the chancellor was in constant attendance on the king, and therefore received bread in his allowance (p. xl). He is not here arguing that the *Constitutio* went through separate written redactions at all these dates, although he does allow the possibility that a written text was drawn up in the context of Henry I's household reforms in 1108 (p. xli).

Church's introduction also discusses the development of the royal household, drawing upon English evidence and also that of Hincmar, archbishop of Reims. He argues (p. l) that one should not read the *Constitutio* 'in a rigid departmentalized way', and suggests that the departmental headings may be insertions in the text, made in the first half of the 13th century (see also pp. lxii-lxiii). Again, some brief comparison might have been interesting here, for example with the development of obedientiaries within monasteries and the growth of associated documentation; the fact that there were specific allocations of revenue or allowance, it would seem, need not mean that specific officials had very confined tasks. Perhaps in modification of Church's position one can take the *Constitutio* as a departmentalised list without concluding that there was 'a departmentalized domus regis in which each man had his assigned role and no other' (p. lii).

Church then discusses the three 13th-century manuscripts of the *Constitutio*. He bases his edition on the *Little Black Book of the Exchequer*, noting variants in two other manuscripts, the Hargrave manuscript already mentioned and the *Red Book of the Exchequer*. He notes the presence in the text of Latin words that are back-formations from Old French. This is an interesting early example of a practice also present in other 12th-century administrative lists, for example one drawn up at Abingdon Abbey in the 1180s.

In general the body of the Latin texts provided do not differ greatly from those in earlier editions, although the fresh collation and arrangement does have definite benefits. Church's text of the *Constitutio* is freed from the very intrusive formatting that characterised the 1950/1983 text and translation. Very occasionally a different reading might have been preferred, as when a reading given as 'ut thesaurus' (cf. Johnson's reading 'ut Thesaurarius') in the favoured manuscript is privileged over the more obvious 'in thesauro' in the other two (p. 206). This reverses Johnson's editorial decision. For the *Dialogus* the very noticeable and welcome change is inclusion of a full apparatus criticus. In using the 1950/1983 edition, one had often had to return to the 1902 edition for such material.

The translation of the *Dialogus* is in general somewhat closer to the Latin than was Johnson's version. This results in the removal of some overly interpretative translations. For example, at book one chapter seven 'et ratione dignitatis illius hec conferenda decernit, quibusdam hereditarie quibusdam personaliter' is translated as 'and to whom he has decided to grant these revenues by virtue of rank, either personally or hereditarily' rather than 'and to whom by reason of that dignity it decrees that these sums are to be granted, whether in fee or for life.' In other places, some over-interpretation may remain, as when in book two chapter ten 'fundus' is unnecessarily translated as 'fee' rather than 'estate'. Some minor changes of interpretation from the earlier translation are questionable. A passage on reliefs in the chapter just cited mentions 'Quidam enim de rege tenent in capite que ad coronam pertinent, baronias scilicet maiores seu minores.' Johnson rendered this as 'for some of them hold crown lands of the King in chief, to wit, greater or lesser baronies.' Amt loses the reference to baronies, and their differentiation into greater and lesser, by rendering the passage 'For the greater and lesser barons hold crown lands in chief from the king.' Although translation of 'que' here requires some expansion, it seems unnecessary to move far from the literal translation, 'for some hold from the king in chief possessions which pertain to the crown, that is, greater or lesser baronies.' And again in the same chapter something may be lost in the translation of a passage concerning the relative wrongdoing of lay and clerical usurers: 'Laici enim, qui uoti necessitate minus tenentur, ampliolem gratiam promereri uidentur, sicut in peruersis actibus hii, qui uoto religionis inseruiunt, grauius offendunt.' Amt renders this 'laypersons, who are less bound by the restrictions of an oath, are considered more deserving of grace, just as those who live under a religious vow offend more seriously by sinning.' It seems a shame to lose the twin usage of 'uotum' by translating one as 'oath' the other as 'vow', a stylistic point preserved in Johnson's translation which renders both as 'vows.' Another oddity of translation of a single word involves the phrase 'uoce preconia'. At pp. 126-7 'uoce preconia ... denuntiet' is translated as 'have it cried', whereas at pp. 174-5 'uoce preconia requistus' is translated as 'called by the herald'. However, all such issues are minor, and of the type that arise with any extended translation; Amt's provides a very good English version for those wishing to read the *Dialogue*.

The translation of the *Constitutio* also raises some minor queries. It is not explained why 'simenellus' is

translated as 'loaf of the king's bread', even when not accompanied by the adjective 'dominicus'. That adjective seems to differentiate high quality loaves from salted ones in the first entry, concerning the chancellor (p. 196). Regarding the chaplain keeper of the chapel and relics, the phrases 'corridium duorum hominum' and 'duplicem cibum' are both rendered 'double rations' (p. 196). The two surely were distinct in the mind of the compiler, and Johnson's literal translation of the first as 'corrody for two men' could have been retained. The phrase 'homini suo' is sometimes rendered 'for their man', sometimes 'for their men' (p. 202; cf. p. 206). The buttery officers each received three pence for their men, rather than three pence for each of their men (p. 204). Given Henry I's paranoia about possible assassination, one may wonder whether he'd have allowed a man called Ralph the Robber into his hunting entourage; *English Historical Documents* opts cautiously and perhaps wisely for retaining the original 'le Robeur' in inverted commas, whilst Johnson went for the bolder and more sartorial 'Ralf the Rober'.

Both texts are accompanied by useful commentaries in historical notes. A few problems occur with omissions of cross-references (see e.g. pp. xxvi, 16, 18, 22, 54), but in general it is easy to find one's way around the volume. Occasional notes are questionable; when referring to a 'more severe assize' (p. 146) Richard fitzNigel probably had in mind the Assize of Northampton (1176) rather than that of Clarendon (1166). However, the notes are in general very helpful, and one might have liked more of them. For example, there is no comment on Richard's statement (p. 93) that 'if the woods are cut in such a way that someone standing by the trunk of a felled oak or other kind of tree and looking around can see five other felled trees, it is called "waste".' There are also some places where notes were present in the 1950/1983 version, but not in the present one; for example, regarding interesting reference to the account of the total revenue of the realm (p. 36). The frequent references especially to Pipe Rolls in the notes to the 1902 edition give that volume continuing value. However, the editors of the present volume are to be congratulated on presenting this valuable new edition and translation which merits considerable use.

The editors are happy to accept this review and do not wish to comment further.

Notes

1. See now S. C. Tullis, 'Glanvill after Glanvill', Oxford DPhil thesis, (2007). [Back to \(1\)](#)

Source URL: <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/653>

Links

[1] <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/item/3627>