

Genealogy of the Kings of England
In Latin, illustrated parchment roll on parchment
England, c. late 1370s

Three parchment sheets sewn together to form a roll, written on one side only in ink in a well-formed anglicana script, ruled in lead, with horizontal rules running the full width of the sheet, double vertical bounding lines forming a central column (ignored by the scribe); prickings remain for all the ruled lines on both sides of the roll (width of the written space: 97-95 mm.); royal genealogy occupies the central column, with text inserted to the right and left, as needed, names are in roundels, with the names of the twenty-seven kings surmounted by crowns and connected by informally-drawn brown lines. In excellent condition, with slight damage from damp and stains on the first sheet, unbound, end attached to a wooden dowel. Dimensions 1400 x 135 mm.; first sheet 740 x 135; second sheet 385 x 133 mm.; third sheet 275 x 130 mm.

Rolls from the Middle Ages, while not rare, are always of special interest, since the predominate format for manuscripts was the codex. This historical roll contains the lineage of the English kings from Alfred, who was king from 871-899, to Richard II, who reigned 1377-1399. Its text, which is unpublished, differs from that commonly found in genealogical rolls of the English kings and warrants further study. Its unusually small, utilitarian format and Latin rather than vernacular text suggests it may have been used as a teaching tool in a secular context.

PROVENANCE

1. Written in England during the reign of Richard II (reigned 1377-1399); since none of his children are listed, it seems likely that it was copied early in his reign.
2. Nineteenth-century note in ink on the verso, "Genealogies of the Kings of England, MS 1380"; modern annotation in pencil, "RT42."

TEXT

"Iste Alfredus rex fuit Westsexie omnium antecessorum eminentissimus et prothomonarcha totius Anglie coronatus primitus a Leone pape et inuictus anno gratie 871 ... Ricardus secundus post conquestum; Iste Ricardus coronatus anno etatis sue undecimo et gratie 1377, 17 kalendarum Augusti."

The text of this manuscript is of particular interest because it differs from the most common, or at least most studied, genealogies of English kings on rolls. de Laborderie in his introduction to the subject studied thirty-six rolls (see "Les genealogies..." 1997). Most of the rolls he mentions

differ from the roll presented here in a number of respects. Eighteen of the thirty-two rolls studied by de Laborderie, which preserve their beginning intact, begin the royal genealogy with the Egbert, King of Wessex. An example of a Roll of this type is the Chaworth Roll, which dates from c. 1321-1327 (see Bovey, 2005). Thirteen rolls studied by de Laborderie begin their genealogy with Brutus, the legendary descendant of the Trojan hero, Aeneas, a tradition popularized by the twelfth-century historian, Geoffrey of Monmouth.

This roll, in contrast, traces the genealogy of the kings from Alfred, who reigned from 871-899, to Richard II (reigned 1377-1399). Only two of the thirty-two relevant rolls studied by de Laborderie begin this way, and he has suggested that this may represent an earlier version (see de Laborderie, p. 188; his study does not identify the location of these two rolls). The text of our roll deserves further study; its text is not among those printed in Wright, 1872. It is also noteworthy that the roll described here is in Latin, because most of the surviving genealogies of English kings are in the vernacular (only one-quarter of the rolls studied by de Laborderie are in Latin). Finally, this roll is smaller than most examples of rolls of this type.

Most of the entries in this roll are quite brief, listing, for example, how long the monarch reigned, when he ascended to the throne, and often an additional fact or two. The entry for Edward the Elder, son of Alfred (reigned 899-924) states that he had five daughters, one who became an empress, one queen of France, one queen of Scotland, and two were holy nuns, and that Edward reigned 24 years, as King of Scotland, Denmark and Wales (Edward in fact had more than five daughters, but it is true they married very well). The chronicler records that Edgar the Peaceful, who died in 975, built 3,600 ships around England. Although the entries are in Latin, fragments of English sneak in. Edmund Ironside (d. 1016) is here "Edmundus Yrensid," and Harold I (d. 1040) is "Haraldus Harfoot."

The intervention of the Danish kings, starting with Cnut (d. 1035), prompted the chronicler to add more detail; a long passage traces the complicated genealogy from Edmund Ironside, his son Edward the Exile, his grand-daughter St. Margaret, queen of Scotland, and her daughter Matilda, who ultimately married Henry I (d. 1135), thus linking the Plantagenet kings to the Anglo-Saxons. The amount of detail increases towards the end of the roll; along with most chroniclers, it notes that Edward II (of Caenarfon), who reigned from 1307-1327, favored lowborn people; Edward III (reigned 1327-1377) is given a glowing account, listing his military victories over the kings of France and Wales, and calling him the most fortunate in war of the English kings. The chronicle concludes with his son, Richard II (reigned 1377-1399/1400), who is given a very brief entry, perhaps indicating the roll was made near the beginning of his reign.

Although the dominant form of the book in the Middle Ages, like today, was the codex, manuscripts in roll-format were also important. Medieval rolls, which were written in long columns to be read vertically, beginning at the top of the roll, and ending at the bottom, were used liturgically, the most famous being the Exultet Rolls from Southern Italy, and for private copies of prayers. Rolls were also used for official documents, for literary texts, drama, and for teaching, as well as for secular genealogies and chronicles. Many historical rolls from the later Middle Ages are very long, and handsomely illustrated, and were probably commissioned by noble families. Earlier historical rolls were often copied in monasteries, where they were probably used pedagogically.

This roll stands apart from many historical rolls from the later Middle Ages. It is quite small and utilitarian, and written in Latin rather than the vernacular. It thus falls in neither of the above categories, and it may have been made as a teaching tool for secular use.

Of the rolls studied by de Laborderie, sixteen have extensive decoration. The type of decoration ranges from medallions with carefully drawn seated figures of the kings, to simpler schemes consisting primarily of the heads of the kings and their coats of arms. For the former type see the Chaworth Roll (cited above), and for the latter, see Harvard University Library, bMS Typ 40, New York Public Library, Spencer MS 193, and the Huntington Library, HM 264 (see the Digital Scriptorium site for these three manuscripts). Now bound as a codex, but originally a roll, Stowe MS 73 in the British Library has simple roundels, outlined in red, although the manuscript is of a much larger format than our roll. What distinguishes the present example is its simplicity, the coherence of its text and image, all fluently penned in the same brown ink. These features, along with the small portable form, suggest a pedagogical function.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Digital Scriptorium (an image database of medieval and renaissance manuscripts in some United States collections);

<http://www.scriptorium.columbia.edu/>

Internet Medieval Sourcebook, England

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook1n.html#Norman%20England>

Overview of English History: "Uniting the Kingdoms, 1066-1606"

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/utk/>

Guides to Online Resources of English History, in *ORB: Online Encyclopedia*:

Stephen Morillo, "High Medieval England, A Guide to Online Resources," and

A. Compton Reeves, "Late Medieval England, A Guide to Online Resources"

<http://the-orb.net/encyclop/high/england/engindex.html>

<http://the-orb.net/encyclop/late/england/default.html>