

Introduction

MANY DESIRES AND OBLIGATIONS motivated people living in England to travel to France in the period 1180 to the mid-fourteenth century, a span of years that I shall sometimes call, for variety's sake and as others have, the long thirteenth century.¹ In many cases a Frenchman meeting such a person could not have immediately discerned what brought the visitor to his land. A few came for the sights, for then as now there was the physical attraction of the country. Northern France from May through September enjoys quite pleasant weather, and southern France, much of which came under the political control of Paris in the third decade of the century, had an even more agreeable climate. Although from October and sometimes deep into April most of northern France endures overcast, cold, and damp weather, not unlike England's, certain northerly regions, the Loire Valley being one, often enjoy warm and gentle intervals in the midst of wintertime, thanks to the tempering effect of the great river. Summer heat is also moderated by air currents off the Atlantic. It is not surprising that scholars such as Donald Matthew have documented the penchant of medieval English travelers for spending time in France—and sometimes for expressing the desire not to return at all, although perhaps not solely because of the physical environment.²

France also drew people from England in the long thirteenth century for study at the University of Paris, the University of Orléans, and the University of Toulouse and for business—international merchants, government ambassadors and messengers, and clerical dignitaries attending ecclesiastical meetings, such as the Cistercian Order's General Chapters, the annual gatherings of its abbots.³ The roads—or certain

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well-trod ones, the pilgrimage routes—were also crowded with penitents of every station.⁴ In all these cases there was a lodgings infrastructure, ranging from inns for well-to-do and middling sorts of lay people such as traders; apartments in private establishments, monasteries, and episcopal palaces for traveling clerics; boarding houses for their servants; rooms for masters; hostels for pilgrims and students; and doss- and flop-houses for less fortunate travelers.⁵

At the highest social levels there was no language problem or but a minor one.⁶ The post-Conquest English aristocracy and, from the year 1100 or so, most of the kingdom's high churchmen were fluent French-speakers⁷—or they could hire Francophone companions. Less elite travelers—diverse groups of pilgrims, for example, who were visiting France from England—may have counted fewer fluent or passable French speakers among them, but tour leaders were available for leisurely or brisk travel. Indeed, as Margaret Labarge remarked, “[t]he problem of choosing the best itinerary in unfamiliar country was somewhat alleviated by the very common practice of hiring local guides.”⁸ Italian merchants and bankers with branch offices in England—such as the Bardi, Peruzzi, and Riccardi—had ready access, when they traveled to France, to aides employed at the French bureaus of their companies, men who knew the local *patois*.⁹ Of course, many smaller enterprises, in addition to these Italian “super companies,” to use Edwin Hunt and James Murray’s language, would have had knowledge of and exploited similar, if less extensive, cross-Channel networks.

Finally, wherever they may have been born, high churchmen occupying English offices had the advantage of being able to communicate with more or less ease in Latin with their French counterparts, as well as with clerical visitors from beyond the continental borders of France whom they encountered at general chapter meetings and synods.¹⁰ All university students, many of whom were destined for exalted ecclesiastical offices, were supposed, no matter what their vernacular language, to be able to communicate in Latin. Of course, as Hastings Rashdall long ago drolly pointed out, “invariable is the insistence in the [university] statutes upon speaking in Latin. How far such a regulation was really enforced in early colleges or halls it is difficult to conjecture.”¹¹ His doubt is evident from his very choice of words, but even modest achievement in spoken Latin was helpful in educational and clerical circles.

Many English visitors to France were, by and large, welcome guests. They brought money to innkeepers and to the people who provisioned and worked for them (farmers, vintners, and alewives; cooks and serving men and women; horse and wagon dealers, coachmen, stable keepers, stable boys, and farriers) as they passed through on their travels.¹² They spent their coins at booths procuring badges, votive candles, and other tokens that pilgrims craved and that created a virtual “tourism industry” (again the phrase of Hunt and Murray).¹³ Indeed, to some degree pilgrimage routes map nicely onto the geography of economic prosperity.¹⁴ Drunken and riotous students were pests or worse, but students were not perpetually drunk and, in the whole scheme of things, they rarely rioted. Together, masters and students patronized the school-supply shops that sold desks, stools, candles, books, parchment sheets, quills, and ink.¹⁵ Prostitutes and brothel-keepers in the urban centers catered to students, travelers, and sojourners seeking diversion.¹⁶ And great aristocratic caravans traveling through France, like those on their way to crusade in the East, could also produce booms in the local economies through which they passed. True, many estates held by English (Anglo-Norman) aristocrats were lost with the French conquest of Normandy in 1204.¹⁷ There was therefore residual hostility between some Frenchmen and some Englishmen. But long before peace was formally reestablished between the two realms in 1259, English crusaders and their “substantial retinues,” with disposable cash, passed through France and were even greeted without crippling enmity by the French king. This was the case, for example, for the crusade expedition of Earl Richard of Cornwall of 1239.¹⁸

There were four principal categories of less desirable English sojourners in France—less desirable to different degrees—in our period. One constituted the men and women who are at the center of the present study: namely, those sent into exile because of their alleged association with serious criminal activities in England. The other three categories, about which a few words need to be said, were political exiles, demobilized troops, and, as the English regarded them, pariah groups.

Political exiles, typically prelates and nobles, could count on finding temporary shelter with French kinfolk or among French friends and colleagues during periods of personal danger in England, such as the Interdict of 1208–12 and the Baronial Revolt and its immediate

aftermath in 1258–68. Their troubles, including the confiscation of their property by a hostile government back home, probably evoked immediate sympathy in their hosts. Moreover, those refugees who managed to get sufficient resources out of England, to use the Baronial Revolt as an illustration, for a time successfully cultivated locals. Nevertheless, the longer the period they were obliged to stay in France and, with this, the spending down of their limited (nonreplenished) fortunes, the more vulnerable and liable to resentment they became.¹⁹

Unemployed troops were less of a presence and therefore less of a problem in the thirteenth century than before or after, because there was a long period of peace between the two kingdoms. This lasted *de facto* from 1206 until 1259, with two brief interruptions (1214 and a few years after, and 1242), and *de jure* with no interruptions thereafter until 1294.²⁰ The prolonged interval of peace was important because unpaid soldiers, demobilized on the spot, were a major source of both random and terroristic violence in wartime and during short truces, discouraging or compromising commercial expansion.²¹ The thirteenth century was fortunate in this regard; its peace was a fillip to prosperity in both realms. Indeed, it was in this thirteenth-century peace that the Italian super-companies found it possible to establish their far-reaching western commercial and banking network,²² although as we shall see this was not an unmixed blessing for them.

The case of the last category of sojourners, pariah groups, makes this abundantly clear, for Italian bankers in England, such as the Riccardi, were a periodically reviled group. It is true that they played useful and visible roles in certain aspects of royal finance, but this very fact laid them open to blame in even brief periods of fiscal stress. In 1312, King Edward II turned on them, confiscated their wealth, and sent them into exile. They found shelter with the men who ran branches of their banks on the continent, but the latter sometimes also suffered resentment because of their wealth and their association in France with the collection of taxes, making the exiles' sojourn with them all the more worrisome. The woes suffered by the Riccardi have been movingly retold by Richard Kaeuper.²³ Many Italian banker refugees stayed for only a short time in France, preferring to continue their journey homeward to Lombardy and Tuscany, for animosity toward them was also common beyond the borders of England and France.²⁴

The other and far larger pariah group consisted of Jews. King Edward I expelled them, up to two thousand in number, from England in 1290. After their arrival in France (at the port of Wissant) they were burdened with discriminatory legislation, but they rapidly succeeded in integrating themselves into communities of their co-religionists, including some from which their ancestors had emigrated to England in the wake of the Norman Conquest of 1066. These communities extended charitable aid, including the payment of settlement fees. But the presence of these exiles would also play a part in helping their enemies stir up resentment against Jews in general in the continental kingdom.²⁵

Such, then, is an abbreviated taxonomy of groups of people from England who found themselves sojourning in France at different times in the long thirteenth century. Among them were those who voluntarily chose to spend time on the continent. Others were compelled to emigrate. They included native Englishmen and women as well as people whom natives regarded as aliens. In terms of resources their wealth varied from the riches of a great baron like Earl Richard of Cornwall to the almost minimal possessions of common pilgrims. Some of these sojourners were genuine visitors who stayed for only brief intervals in France before returning to England. Others, like the political exiles, existed in a kind of limbo, not knowing when they might be able to return. Still others (I have the Jews in mind) were commanded by the English crown never to set foot in England again.

The group on which perhaps the least amount of work has been done, but whose history is certainly as compelling as that of any other, is the women and men sent into exile because of their putative association with the commission of felonies in England. They constituted, we shall discover, a substantial population. Some aspects of their lives can be reconstructed in a detail rare for medieval subjects, but other aspects can only be surmised from the fragmentary remains of once-huge archives which have disappeared for unknown causes or were destroyed, to a degree unintentionally, during wars. Despite the difficulties, one can employ the “disciplined imagination” as a tool in configuring the less well-documented aspects of their experience.

What one learns as a result of this exercise is that there is a need to revise existing theories about the operation of England’s common law—and by extension the criminal law of other jurisdictions. For exile was a central feature of medieval jurisprudence and judicial

practice throughout Europe. It affected unknown but very large numbers of people (technically, felons) who were the subjects of all these juridical regimes. It had a wider impact still by terrorizing through the rituals of banishment those who submitted to the process. Exile impoverished not only those who departed the realm, but also their spouses, children, and other kin. It forever divided families from their criminal kinfolk, at least in the English case. The system demanded and justified horrendous punishments for those who submitted to it if they later illegally tried to thwart it. In projecting exile as an act of mercy and pardon from exile—restoration of law-worthiness—as an even profounder act of mercy, statesmen arrogated to themselves a kind of majesty that, in its implicit claims, was almost sacral in its nature. Finally the endurance of the system of exile for felons raises tough questions about the nature of medieval states and their evident willingness for several centuries to accept within their jurisdictional bounds criminals from adjacent domains. Let us turn our attention first to the factors that justified kings' and administrators' resort to the exile of large numbers of the criminal population.