

## MODULE 6

# NORMAN CONQUEST

### OBJECTIVES OF THE MODULE:

This module will try to focus on the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 and discuss why this event is considered to be such a significant occurrence in both the history of England and the history of the English language. Apart from discussing the impacts and consequences of this Conquest on diverse spheres of English social life, this module would try to give a detailed analysis of the effect of this incident on the English language.

### INTRODUCTION:

The Norman Conquest of England in the eleventh century is a landmark event both in the history of England and that of the English language. It was an occupation of England by the Norman, French and Breton soldiers led by Duke William I of Normandy, later William the Conqueror. William's hope to ascend the English throne was largely motivated by his relationship with the childless Anglo-Saxon King Edward the Confessor. However, after his death, the throne was succeeded by Harold Godwinson, the brother-in-law of Edward. In September 1066 northern England was invaded by the Norwegian king Harald Hardrada who emerged victorious at the Battle of Fulford. But he was defeated and killed by Harold at the Battle of Stamford Bridge on September 25, 1066. After this, William came to southern England where Harold went to confront him at the Battle of Hastings in October. Incidentally Harold was killed and William emerged victorious.



### MEASURES ADOPTED TO GAIN CONTROL:

Even after the victory William had to face several revolts and rebellions over quite a long time and his position in the English throne was not secure till 1072. After the Conquest the Normans had to face several obstacles to maintain control. In comparison to the English population, they were significantly less in number (number of Norman settlers estimated to be nearly eight thousand). The followers of William received titles and lands as a reward for their service in the invasion. However,

the ultimate claim over a land in England was of William himself. He possessed *de facto* control over the land and could dispose of it when he thought suitable.



Thus the Norman lords could hold lands in feudal tenure from the king in piecemeal fashion, but not in any particularly single geographical location. In order to assign lands to the Norman lords, William took the measure of confiscating the estates of English lords who had fought along with Harold. As a consequence there were rebellions which eventually led to further confiscations and this continued for five years even after the Battle of Hastings. For the sake of security of the Normans, castles and fortifications were constructed in huge numbers. Control over inheritance of property by daughters and widows and compulsive marriages to Normans were further exercised. One significant point worth mentioning in this context is that William was an absentee ruler from 1072 till the Capetian Conquest of Normandy in 1204. William set up royal administrative structures to rule England from a distance because he had to be personally present in Normandy to protect it from foreign attacks.

## King Harald Hardrada CONSEQUENCES AND AFTER-EFFECTS:

Norman Conquest was associated with several consequences and after-effects.

### i) EMIGRATION OF THE ENGLISH PEOPLE:

The Conquest was followed by immediate emigration of English lords and nobles who fled the country and escaped to Ireland, Scotland and Scandinavia. Family members of Harold's family sought refuge in Ireland. The largest emigration occurred in around 1070 when a fleet of 235 ships went to the Byzantine Empire carrying the Anglo-Saxons. Some of the English migrants who settled in Byzantine frontier regions on the Black Sea coast established towns with names as New York and New London.

### ii) REPLACEMENT OF THE ELITES:

The Conquest also meant complete wiping away of the existing English aristocracy. It also meant the loss of control of the English over the Catholic Church in England. The way in which English landowners were dispossessed is systematically documented in *Domesday Book* which records that by 1086 only 5 percent of land in England south of the Tees remained with English hands. Even this negligible number was gradually reduced in the decades to come. The English were also removed from important positions like ecclesiastical and governmental portfolios. In fact after 1075 the English people were seldom appointed as sheriffs while the honour of all earldoms was enjoyed by the Normans. The same scenario prevailed in the church from where all the senior English office-holders were either thrown away from their positions or replaced immediately by the Normans after their death. In the large monasteries the English abbots became rare after 1096.

### iii) CHANGES IN GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEMS:

There is no denial of the fact that the Anglo-Saxon governmental systems were much more sophisticated than that of the Normans prior to the arrival of the latter. The royal court was the centre of the government with the whole of England being divided into administrative units called shires. These shires were run by the reeves or the sheriffs. The English governments were mobile and used to hold courts when and where the weather and other required matters were in favourable condition. There was a permanent treasury at Winchester in England and the prime source of strength of the English monarchy was its wealth which was based on the system of tax. It should be mentioned here that it was a royal monopoly to mint coins and the English currency was considered to be superior in comparison to other currencies of north-western Europe. There was also the system of issuing writs by the kings to the officials along with the custom of issuing charters. Thus the form of government which the Normans received was sophisticated enough upon which they could make developments easily. The Normans were clever enough to retain the basic framework of the government but they changed the personnel, though initially there was an endeavour to keep some of the natives in official positions. With the end of the tenure of William as the king, most of the officials of the royal family as well as the government offices were Normans. Even the official language used in documents was changed from Old English to Latin. There was the introduction of the forest laws which resulted in the setting aside of large areas of England as royal forest.

### iv) IMMIGRATION AND THE RESULTANT INTERMARRIAGE:

After the Norman Conquest around eight thousand Normans and other people of the continent arrived in England and settle there. Some of these new settlers married native English women and by the early 1160s intermarriage was common in all strata of the society.

### v) SOCIAL CHANGES:

One of the significant changes in the English society as a result of the Conquest was the radical decrease of the slavery system in England. *Domesday Book* records the number of slaves to be twenty-eight thousand in 1086, a number much lesser than what it was enumerated in 1066. In places like Essex the fall in the number of slaves was twenty percent for twenty years. The chief reasons for the decrease in the practice of slavery were primarily two. One was the factor that the cost of supporting slaves had to be incurred completely by their owners. Another factor was the disapproval of the Church. The practice of slave-holding was not considered illegal and this can be proved by referring to its practice during the reign of King Henry I in the *Leges Henrici Primi*.

The status of the free peasants of the Anglo-Saxon society underwent a change with the Conquest and they seemed to have lost their status and became equal to the non-free serfs. It cannot be said for certain whether this occurred solely as a result of the Conquest or not but it is certain that the process picked its momentum due to the invasion and its resultant effects. The same is true about the increase in the number of nucleated settlements and the growth of towns in comparison to the scattered farms after the arrival of the Normans. Earlier historians claimed that women lost their freedom and position with the Conquest. However, recent scholarship has rejected this view. Unfortunately not much is known about the women except those belonging to the landholding class. Women belonging to the nobility had palpable influence upon political life primarily through their

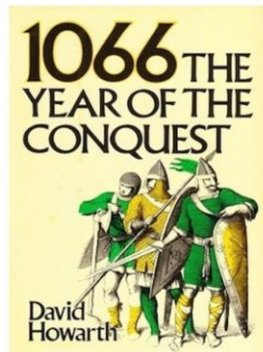
relationships of kinship. They could hold lands and even had the power to dispose off their property if they wished to do so.

vi) INFLUENCES ON THE LANGUAGE:

During the Anglo-Norman period a dialect of the langue d'oïl which was popular in England and in other parts of the British Isles was Anglo-Norman or Anglo-Norman French. When William invaded England in 1066, he along with his noble men and followers spoke a variety of Oil dialects which were Norman French dialects. Among these one was Norman. Others spoke in different versions of the Picard language or western French. The amalgamation of these various versions into a particular dialect is what we call now Anglo-Norman French. This was the chosen language for all administrative and literary purposes from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Since this dialect was used in its written form, it is difficult to make an idea about what was actually used during conversations. However, it is evident that Anglo-Norman was largely the spoken language used

by the people belonging to the aristocratic segment of the society. Since the impact of the Norman invasion and Conquest had



tremendous, extensive and prolonged influence on English language and society a somewhat detailed discussion and analysis of this is attempted here.

TRILINGUAL MEDIEVAL ENGLAND:

Whatever record we get of early usage of French is actually Anglo-Norman French. During that time there was no record being kept in vernacular in France since Latin was the language of the nobility. In every sphere like education, commerce and the Roman Catholic Church, all records were maintained in Latin. In fact, in England also Latin was used by the royal government, the Church and many local administrative bodies just as it was used before 1066 as a parallel language along with Anglo-Saxon. The adoption of Anglo-Norman as the language for literary and other forms of writing can be traced back to the history of bilingualism in writing. In the middle of the thirteenth century a trend developed in France to use Parisian French as a language of record although Latin was used in matters of permanent record. During this time certain variations started to emerge in Anglo-French which varied from the anglicized local to the level of language which was quite close to continental French. Thus, very obviously, the local records were different from continental French and documents pertaining to international trade and diplomatic affairs were in close proximity to the continental norm of language. However, English continued to enjoy the status of the vernacular of the common people during this entire period.



## LANGUAGE OF THE ROYALS:

Till the end of the fourteenth century French continued to be the language of the king and his court. It is noteworthy that even today the Royal coat of arms of the United Kingdom features the mottoes of the British Monarch- *Dieu et mon droit* ('God and my right') and the Order of the Garter- *Honi soit qui mal y pense* ('Shamed be he who thinks evil of it') in French. Marriages with people belonging to French royal families strengthened the French status. However, Anglo-Norman French was not always the chosen language of the court. Eleanor of Aquitaine and Edward the Black Prince spoke in Occitan language and Richard I considered himself as a troubadour poet. In fact for many years the langue d'oc remained to be more flourishing than the langue d'oïl. However, since the thirteenth century intermarriages with English people began to be popular and French gradually became the second language amongst the upper classes. Other important reasons for the decline of the French status were the increasing spirit of English nationalism and the Hundred Years' War.

## LANGUAGE OF THE LEGISLATION, CHARTERS, JUDICIAL SYSTEMS AND COURTS:

From 1066 till the end of the thirteenth century the language chosen for all official documents in writing was Latin and Norman French had the status of a spoken language only. There were only a few important documents which were translated into Norman such as the Magna Carta which was signed in 1215. It was in 1275 that the first official document was written in Anglo-Norman. It was a statute promoted by the king in 1275. Thus, since the thirteenth century Anglo-Norman started to be used in official documents as those which were marked by the private seal of the king. Nevertheless, till the Middle Ages, the documents that were sealed by the Lord Chancellor were written in Latin. Finally in the fifteenth century English became the language of the legislation and the Parliament, almost half a century after becoming the language of the royalty and the English aristocracy. Again, during the twelfth century there was the development of judicial and administrative institutions. Since for both the King and the lawyers Norman French was the chosen language, it automatically became the language of both these above-mentioned institutions. During the span of three centuries, precisely from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, three languages were used in the courts. Latin was the language used for writing while Norman French was the language used during the trial procedure orally. English was the language of somewhat less formal communication amongst the judge, the lawyer, the complainant or the witness. The sentences were delivered orally in Norman French. However, quite interestingly, it was recorded in the written form in Latin. In some cases, particularly in the lowest levels of the manorial courts, the trials were conducted purely in English. Though English became the most prominent spoken language during the fifteenth century, Latin and French continued to enjoy their status of being the official language in all legal documents till the beginning of the eighteenth century. However, since the end of the fifteenth century the Norman language that was used in England took a new form which was law French. This was a technical language which had a particular vocabulary. In law French grammatical rules and morphology pertaining to French were not maintained stringently. There were confusions of gender and the addition of 's' to form plurals. English words were also employed in this vocabulary to describe day-to-day experiences. In 1731 law French was finally banished from the courts of the common law.

#### CHOSEN LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE:

Although majority of the common people spoke in Middle English, French was popular as a second language primarily because of its aristocratic association and prestigious status. Hence it was the medium of instruction in schools through which Latin was taught. French was the language of business communication, particularly during the trades with the continent and hence was spoken by the merchants belonging to the middle class. Many of the churches selected French for communicating with the non-religious people. During the court proceedings the jury members, who were representatives of the population at large, had to understand French in order to comprehend the arguments and the appeals of the lawyers. From the thirteenth to the fifteenth century commercial and private correspondences were made in Anglo-Norman or Anglo-French although the forms of spellings were changed into continental spellings in many instances. People belonging to different classes other than the aristocracy were quite interested to learn French. Manuscripts dating back to the late fourteenth century contain materials for instructing non-native speakers. One interesting point which would not be impertinent to share here is that a small number of documents have survived that are associated with the Jews of medieval England. These documents feature Anglo-Norman written in Hebrew script and these are found in the typical form of glosses to the Hebrew Scriptures.

#### CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF ANGLO-NORMAN LANGUAGE:

Anglo-Norman (Anglo-Norman French), as a langue d'oïl, had a collateral development along with the central Gallo-Romance dialects which subsequently turned into Parisian French as far as vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar are concerned. It should be remembered in this context that French was not standardised as the official language for administrative purposes in France till the signature of the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterets in 1539 and even long after that. Both Anglo-Norman and Parisian-French had tremendous influence on Middle English. In fact Parisian-French is called the missing link because both Anglo-Norman and Parisian-French can be used as clues to our understanding of the transmission of words from French to English. This would also facilitate the process of filling up the gap created by the lack of substantial documents and records of English between 1066 and 1380.

It is quite clear from the study of various instances that the palatalization of velar consonants before the front vowel produced different outcomes in Norman in comparison to the central langue d'oïl dialects that developed into French. For example, the word 'fashion' in English has been derived from Norman 'fechoun' and not from the French 'facon'. In some cases words with velar plosive have been retained in English rather than the French which has a fricative. For instance, cabbage (English) caboche (Norman) chou (French); castle (English) caste(l) (Norman) chateau (French); plank (English) planque (Norman) planche (French); garden (English) gardin (Norman) jardin (French); fork (English) fourque (Norman) fourche (French).

Again it is clear from certain examples that Norman retained a /k/ sound which was not present in French. Instances are 'canvas' and 'captain'. In some cases Anglo-Norman acted as a kind of channel for French words which would get entry into England. As for example, the word 'challenge' shows a French origin rather than the Norman 'calenge'. In Modern English the word 'catch' (with 'k' sound) is derived from Norman French whereas the word 'chase' (with 'ch' sound) is derived from Parisian French.

In certain cases the Norman French 'ch' sound was modified into Parisian French 's' sound. The English words like 'change' and 'launch' have been derived from Norman French while the words such as 'champagne' have been taken from Parisian French.

Again, sometimes the Norman French 'w' got revised into Parisian French 'g'. Examples of such kind can be found in English words like 'warden' which came from Norman French while 'Guardian' which is of Parisian French origin.

Vowel differences are also interesting to observe. We can attempt a comparison between Anglo-Norman words like 'profound' and 'round' with Parisian French 'profond' and 'rond'. Originally the former words were pronounced as 'profoond' and 'roond'. However, these words later developed their modern pronunciation in English.

Several expressions which are commonly used in English presently have Anglo-Norman origin. The word 'mortgage' meant 'death-wage' in Anglo-Norman while 'curfew' meant 'cover-fire'. Again, the word 'glamour' has its origin in Anglo-Norman 'grammeire', it being the same word from which the word 'grammar' is also derived.

#### INFLUENCE OF FRENCH ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE:

It has to be remembered that French borrowings in English were not restricted to a particular sphere. Rather these borrowings were related to diverse spheres and aspects of English life and society. A concise list of these borrowings is enlisted below:

- i) Words related to administrative and governmental affairs: crown, reign, minister, parliament, nation
- ii) Words related to military affairs: peace, army, lieutenant, navy, war
- iii) Words related to feudalism: noble, glory, honour, peer, prince
- iv) Words related to legal matters: plaintiff, attorney, session, crime, jury
- v) Words related to ecclesiastical matters: saint, altar, clergy, trinity, religion
- vi) Words related to relationships: nephew, niece, cousin, uncle, aunt
- vii) Words related to food: pastry, soup, fry, boil, toast
- viii) Words related to morality: charity, virtue, vice, chaste, mercy
- ix) Words related to fashion: costume, apparel, garment, dress, fashion
- x) Words related to architecture: tower, arch, porch, castle, column
- xi) Words related to sports: dice, trump, ace, deuce, cards
- xii) Words of exclamation: adieu, alas

#### REASONS FOR EASY ASSIMILATION OF FRENCH WORDS INTO ENGLISH:

Certain reasons can be traced to get an idea about the easy and smooth way in which French words were assimilated into English.

- a) One important reason is presence of corresponding Old English words of common Germanic origin. For example, French 'choix' got assimilated in English because of a similarity between the old native verb 'choose' and French 'choix', ultimately resulting in the English 'choice'.

- b) Synonyms were very crucial in the process of assimilation. Sometimes the French words were used along with the English counterparts. For example, 'charity' (French) that is 'love' (English); 'old' (English) and 'ancient' (French) doctors. There are also instances of French and English set of words both of which have survived the test of time with distinct sense. For example, 'cordial' (French) is used in a formal sense in comparison to 'hearty' (English); 'commence' (French) is much literary in comparison to the colloquial 'begin' (English). The opposite is also true in certain cases like 'valley' (French) is a word used in everyday conversation in comparison to the poetic 'dale' (English).
- c) Another very crucial reason for the process of assimilation lies in certain similarities in the grammar of both the languages. In French certain nouns contained voiceless consonants and their respective verbs had voiced consonants. For example, 'us' (French noun) retained voiceless consonant 's' was pronounced as 's' and user (French verb) retained voiced consonant where 's' was pronounced as 'z'. A parallel can be drawn here with English where nouns were found with voiceless consonants and their corresponding verbs with voiced consonants. For example, 'house' (Old English noun 'hus') contained voiceless consonant where 's' was pronounced as 's' while 'house' (Old English verb 'husian') contained voiced consonant where 's' was pronounced as 'z'. Thus 'us' (French noun) was assimilated effortlessly in English resulting in 'use' (English noun) with 's' pronunciation while 'user' (French verb) was assimilated to give rise to 'use' (English verb) with 'z' pronunciation.

#### HYBRIDISM:

Hybridism is a phenomenon which would gain immense importance in connection to the development of English language and it began with the introduction of French words in English. A hybrid can be explained as a composite word created by an amalgamation of elements from diverse languages. A hybrid can be an addition of an English inflectional ending to a foreign word or a foreign ending to an English word. Here follows a few instances of hybrids formed by the combination of French and English words.

- a) French prefix + English word: dis+ believe= disbelieve; re+ birth= rebirth
- b) English prefix + French word: un+ pleasant= unpleasant; out+ cry= outcry
- c) English word+ French ending: drink+ able= drinkable; forbear+ ance= forbearance
- d) French word+ English ending: prince+ ly= princely; colour+ less= colourless

It should be mentioned in this context that English language has not only received several derivatives from French words. These derivatives have also been differentiated in many instances. For example, 'state' which means 'condition' is dissimilar to 'estate' which means 'property in land form'. Again, 'strange' which means 'unfamiliar' is differentiated from 'estrangle' which means 'alienated' or 'to feel less close'.

Thus the enormity of the influence of French on English language can be assessed from the above discussion. The French words sometimes ousted the Anglo-Saxon terms or sometimes co-existed with slightly varying meanings. For example, 'ox' was used while referring to the animal and 'beef'



while referring to the meat of the same animal. The influence of French language on English is a huge and extensive history which has been attempted to be covered in a precise but comprehensible manner in the above-mentioned discussion.

## CONCLUSION:

There are lots of arguments amongst historians regarding the impact of the Norman Conquest and its effects on the contemporary English society. There are arguments which state that the Anglo-Saxon society was much free and equal than the society that was created as a result of the invasion and the Conquest. However, in the present century the historians concentrate more on the effects created by the Conquest rather than on how much correct or incorrect it was to invade the country and conquer it. Historians like Richard Southern are of the opinion that the Conquest could be viewed as a critical and a turning point in history. Again, there are others like G.O. Sayles according to whom the changes that took place due to the Conquest were not that radical. The argument varies as per the standards chosen for measuring the changes precisely after 1066. Strong nationalistic feelings are palpable on both the sides and thus the Normans are sometimes thought to be the saviours of the country which was becoming decadent due to the Anglo-Saxon nobles while according to others the Normans are the cruel persecutors of the English before whose arrival the society was much more developed and liberal. Whatever the view be, the fact remains undeniable that the Norman Conquest had an all-pervasive influence on English life and society taking every sphere into consideration.

## QUESTIONS

### ESSAY TYPE:

1. Discuss the social changes and the changes in governmental systems that were brought in by the Conquest
2. Comment on the characteristic features of Anglo-Norman language and trace the influence of French on English language.
3. What are the probable reasons for the easy assimilation of French words into English? How far French was the language of the common people?

### SHORT QUESTIONS:

1. What prompted William to invade England?
2. What measures were adopted by William to ensure control over England?
3. Write a note on hybridism with special emphasis on French and English words.
4. Comment on trilingualism prevalent in medieval England.

OBJECTIVE QUESTIONS:

1. Mention the year of Norman invasion of England
2. In which year did the Capetian Conquest of Normandy take place?
3. Where did the largest emigration occur after the Norman Conquest?
4. Name the book which gives an estimate of the number of slaves in England
5. Name one historian according to whom Norman Conquest is a turning point in history.

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