

BRITTANY AND THE
ANGEVINS

Province and Empire
1158–1203

J. A. EVERARD



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DUCAL BRITTANY, 1066–1166

Brittany, as a political unit, was a creation of the Carolingian empire, but during the tenth and the first half of the eleventh centuries, the former Carolingian *regnum* experienced political fragmentation.¹ Although individuals vied for the title of ‘dux Britannie’, in fact none exercised authority over the whole of the Armorican peninsula and its hinterland. By the mid-eleventh century, the peninsula was divided into six main political units; the county of Rennes, the lordships of Penthièvre and Léon, the county of Cornouaille, the Broërec (or the Vannetais) and the county of Nantes (see map 1).

At this point, the process of political fragmentation was halted by a series of marriages which united the comital families of Rennes, Nantes and Cornouaille to form a single ducal dynasty.² Duke Hoël I (1066–84) and his descendants now had the potential to consolidate ducal authority, winning back the exercise of public authority from those who had usurped it. This chapter will present a brief survey of political conditions in Brittany for the 100 years from 1066 to the advent of Henry II from the perspective of ducal authority.

Around 1066, the position of the dukes of Brittany was analogous to that of the contemporary kings of France, the first among equals, having prestige and no internal rival for the ducal title, but no real authority outside their own domains.³ In terms of the exercise of ducal authority, three different categories of territory may be identified. First, in the north-west, the lordships of Penthièvre and Léon completely escaped ducal authority. The remainder of the duchy was notionally subject to

¹ J. M. H. Smith, *Province and empire: Carolingian Brittany*, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 144–5; H. Guillotel, ‘Le premier siècle du pouvoir ducal breton (936–1040)’, in *Actes du 103e congrès national des sociétés savantes*, Paris, 1979, pp. 63–84.

² A. Chédeville and N.-Y. Tonnerre, *La Bretagne féodale, XIe-XIIIe siècle*, Rennes, 1987, pp. 30–62, and see fig. 1.

³ B. A. Pocquet du Haut-Jussé, ‘Les Plantagenêts et la Bretagne’, *AB* 53 (1946), 1–27 at 3.

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ducal sovereignty. Here, though, there is a distinction between ducal domains, which were subject to direct ducal authority and administration, and the remaining territory, which was divided into numerous baronies. The duke did not exercise any direct authority within the baronies, but had some influence by virtue of the personal loyalty of individual barons and possibly also the physical proximity of ducal domains. Ducal domain and baronies coexisted in the counties of Rennes, Cornouaille and Nantes and the Broërec.⁴

PENTHIÈVRE AND LÉON

The absence of ducal authority in these regions is indicated by the fact that the dukes never went there, and their lords never attested ducal charters. Fortunately, it is not necessary to argue entirely from silence, because of the evidence of the 'Communes petitiones Britonum'. This is the record of an inquest, one in a series conducted in 1235 by order of King Louis IX to investigate complaints about the maladministration of the then duke, Peter de Dreux (1213–37). The inquest was held at Saint-Brieuc. The lay-witnesses (so far as they can be identified) were all vassals and tenants of the lords of Léon and Penthièvre; the ecclesiastical witnesses were all members of churches in the dioceses of Léon, Saint-Brieuc and Tréguier.

As recorded in the inquest proceedings, the 'petitiones' were that, before the time of Peter de Dreux:

- No duke of Brittany took custody of or relief from lands in Léon and Penthièvre;
- The barons of Léon and Penthièvre could construct fortifications without the permission of the duke;
- The barons of Léon and Penthièvre had the right of wreck on the shores of their lands;
- The barons of Léon and Penthièvre were accustomed to make wills ('testamenta') and to make arrangements freely regarding their debts and alms;
- The duke could not take homage from the barons' men;
- The barons of Léon and Penthièvre had jurisdiction in 'pleas of the sword' ('placitum spade').⁵

The 'petitiones' thus depict a situation in which ducal authority was non-existent. The basic elements of public authority (jurisdiction and

⁴ See A. de la Borderie, *Essai sur la géographie féodale de la Bretagne*, Rennes, 1889, for a survey of both ducal domain and baronies. For ducal domains, see Map 2.

⁵ This was not listed as one of the 'petitiones', but see 'Communes petitiones britonum', pp. 100–1.

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control of castle-building) and even feudal lordship (the right to custody of lands and infant heirs, the right to receive relief and homage) were exercised by barons rather than by the duke of Brittany.

What circumstances predisposed and enabled the lords of Léon and Penthièvre to resist ducal authority? In the case of Léon, the answer is probably simply remoteness from the centres of ducal power. There was also the history of the baronial dynasty, originally *vicecomites* of the *comites* of Cornouaille who had usurped the public authority delegated to them. By the late eleventh century they were therefore able to exercise public authority within their lands with a semblance of legitimacy.⁶

The lords of Penthièvre held an even stronger position, necessarily since their lands adjoined the county of Rennes. The barony was created in the early eleventh century by Eudo, the younger brother of Duke Alan III (1008–40). Instead of acknowledging that the barony was in any way subject to the senior, ducal line, Eudo and his descendants adopted a resolutely autonomous policy, evoking their ducal pedigree to rule Penthièvre under the title *comes* or even *comes Britannorum*.⁷ In addition to the evidence of the ‘Communes petitiones Britonum’, their exercise of public authority is exemplified by the fact that the lords of Penthièvre minted their own coins, the notorious *deniers* of Guingamp.⁸ No other ‘feudal coinage’ is known to have been minted in Brittany other than the ducal coinage itself.

THE BARONIES

In the absence of such explicit evidence as the ‘Communes petitiones Britonum’, the exercise of ducal authority within the baronies is less clear. It would seem that the rights and immunities enjoyed by the lords of Léon and Penthièvre were also enjoyed by the barons of the other regions of Brittany. There is no evidence that barons (as distinguished from tenants of ducal domain) regarded themselves as holding their lands ‘of the duke’. There is no evidence that they rendered homage to the duke for their lands, or that the duke in any way regulated succession to the baronies, and for this reason I have avoided calling them ‘tenants-in-chief’ or ‘vassals’ of the duke.

⁶ H. Guillotel, ‘Les vicomtes de Léon aux XIe et XIIe siècles’, *MSHAB* 51 (1971), 29–51; P. Kernévez, ‘Les châteaux du Léon au XIIIe siècle’, *MSHAB* 69 (1992), 95–127.

⁷ H. Guillotel, ‘Les origines de Guingamp: Sa place dans la géographie féodale bretonne’, *MSHAB* 56 (1979), 81–100; H. Guillotel (ed.), ‘Les actes des ducs de Bretagne (944–1148)’ (thèse pour le Doctorat en Droit, Université de Droit d’Economie et des sciences sociales de Paris (Paris II), 1973).

⁸ See above, p. 13.

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The duke could not summon barons to his court, and hence he could not exercise jurisdiction over them. Barons did however attend the ducal *curia*, as can be seen from the lists of witnesses to ducal *acta*.⁹ They seem to have attended voluntarily, when it suited them to associate with the duke. As might be expected, the more powerful the duke, the more barons attended his court. As an example of the converse, during the civil war of 1148–56, the *acta* of the rival claimants to the duchy, Eudo de Porhoët and Hoël, count of Nantes, are almost free of baronial attestations.¹⁰

There is also some evidence for the existence of two rights which would indicate the exercise of ducal authority: the right to summon the host and the right to levy a general impost (*tallia*). Some of the barons were, theoretically at least, liable to the military duty of *ost* or *exercitus*. Examples come from the baronies of Pontchâteau and Hennebont in the first quarter of the twelfth century.¹¹ Both baronies were relatively recent creations, however, and had perhaps escaped less completely from ducal authority than had older baronies.¹² Counts/dukes undertook military campaigns within Brittany in this period, but their armies could have comprised household knights, the tenants of domainal lands and any barons who voluntarily lent their support. Hence there is no evidence that the barons were ever actually obliged to join the ducal host; neither are the precise military obligations of any baron specified.

There is even less evidence of the dukes levying a general impost, as distinct from the customary dues payable by the inhabitants of ducal domains. The only instance I have found of ducal *tallia* levied on the inhabitants of a barony is at Pontchâteau. There, Jarnogon de Pontchâteau made a gift of immunity from *tallia* but not from ‘*tallia comitis*’,¹³ presumably because it was not within Jarnogon’s power to waive a ducal impost. There is still no evidence that the ‘*tallia comitis*’ was actually collected or even levied. This reference may represent no more than the recognition that ‘*tallia comitis*’ might be levied, and, as noted above, Pontchâteau was not a typical barony; its proximity to Nantes and recent creation made it vulnerable to ducal authority.

In general, the exercise of ducal authority depended upon the relative strength of the duke and of each individual baron from time to time.

⁹ E.g. *Cart. Redon*, no. CCXC; *Preuves*, cols. 465–6, and 470; *Actes inédits*, nos. xxxi and xl.

¹⁰ *Actes inédits*, nos. XLV–XLVII.

¹¹ M. de Brehier, ‘Chartes relatives au prieuré de Pontchâteau’, *BSAN* 3 (1863), 17–40 at 23, no. III; *Cart. Quimperlé*, no. LXVIII.

¹² N.-Y. Tonnerre, *Naissance de la Bretagne: Géographie historique et structures sociales de la Bretagne méridionale (Nantais et Vannetais) de la fin du VIIIe à la fin du XIIe siècle*, Angers, 1994, pp. 317 and 345–6.

¹³ de Brehier, ‘Pontchâteau’, p. 23 no. III.

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The relative strength of the dukes increased during the long and stable reigns of Alan IV and Conan III. The latter was able to take punitive action against some defiant barons; Conan imprisoned Oliver, the son of Jarnogon de Pontchâteau, disinherited Savary de Donges, and also pursued a vigorous campaign against Robert de Vitré.¹⁴

THE DUCAL DOMAINS

Ducal domain was not, of course, permanently fixed and stable. Domains, or portions of them, were alienated to the church and to laymen, who might escape ducal control and hold their lands autonomously, although this was unlikely to occur after the early twelfth century. New domains were added when the duke took baronial lands into his own hand. Lack of detailed evidence makes it impossible to determine the exact extent of ducal domains in this period; one can identify their locations but not their boundaries (see Map 2).

Only within the lands which constituted the ducal domains could the dukes exercise authority whether seignorial or ducal, such as levying a general impost (*tallia*) and summoning the host. A charter of Redon, albeit probably a twelfth-century forgery, records that the dukes levied 'quandam consuetudinem . . . quam vulgo tallia nuncupatur', in their domains of Piriac and Guérande.¹⁵ Conan III granted immunity to Savigny from 'hostico et tallia et corvea' in ducal forests. Conan IV granted twenty *solidi* of the *tallia* of Guingamp to the abbey of Beaulieu and also made a grant in respect of the *tallia* of Cap-Sizun.¹⁶ When Duke Hoel I gave 'Treu Ridiern' to Sainte-Croix de Quimperlé, he granted it free from 'ostagium', 'tali pacto ut quod homines in exercitu expenderent, ad opus ecclesie reddere non differant'. An inquest held in Nantes in 1206 describes elaborate customary procedures, dating at least from the early twelfth century, for the summoning of the ducal host in the city.¹⁷

There was nothing in principle to distinguish the administration of the ducal domains from baronial administration. The only difference was that even the greatest of the barons held lands limited to a particular region of the duchy, whereas, in consequence of the dynastic history of the ducal family, the ducal domain consisted of parcels of land scattered

¹⁴ *Cart. Redon*, no. CCCXLVIII; *Preuves*, col. 553; H. Guillotel, 'Les origines du bourg de Donges', *AB* 84 (1977), 541–52 at 544; M. Brand'honneur, 'La lignage, point de cristallisation d'une nouvelle cohésion sociale. Les Goranton-Hervé de Vitré aux XIe, XIIe et XIIIe siècles', *MSHAB* 70 (1993), 65–87 at 74–5.

¹⁵ *Cart. Redon*, no. CCCLXX, Guillotel, 'Actes', no. 115.

¹⁶ *Actes inédits*, no. XXXIX, Guillotel, 'Actes', no. 171, *Actes inédits*, no. LI, *Cart. Quimper*, pp. 45–6.

¹⁷ *Cart. Quimperlé*, no. LV; *Preuves*, cols. 802–4.

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throughout Brittany, excepting Léon and Penthièvre in the north-west. This was particularly advantageous in enabling the dukes to control the principal routes of transport and communication, both by land and by water.¹⁸

The counts had retained control of the principal urban centres in their counties. Thus the ducal domains featured profitable rights in and around the largest towns of Brittany, Nantes, Rennes, and Vannes. In Nantes, the duke held half of the town in domain, the other half being held by the bishop.¹⁹ The ducal domain was even more extensive in Rennes.²⁰

The county of Cornouaille represented an exception. Here, the principal town, Quimper, was dominated by the bishop, with the count/duke possessing only a suburb outside the town walls. Nevertheless, the majority of comital/ducal *acta* made in Cornouaille were made at Quimper, which suggests it was the principal seat of the counts/dukes in that county. Quimperlé, originally comital domain, grew into a substantial town during the eleventh century, but it was controlled by the abbey of Sainte-Croix, which the counts of Cornouaille had founded there early in the eleventh century.²¹ On the other hand, comital rule in Cornouaille had been effective during the eleventh century, and the count/dukes retained extensive and strategic domains in the county. For instance, these included the eastern forest of Carnoët, used to found the abbeys of Sainte-Croix de Quimperlé and Saint-Maurice de Carnoët, and the north-western castellany of Châteauulin, retained as a buffer against Léon to the north.²²

In contrast, in the county of Rennes, the dukes possessed little beyond the city of Rennes and its environs, with the forest which extended to the north-east of the city as far as the frontier baronies of Fougères, Châteaugiron and Vitré. By 1066, the counts of Rennes also possessed the Broërec, where extensive domains were retained. Consequently, the dukes controlled the town of Vannes, which like Nantes was an important focus for marine and river trade, and the castellanies of Auray and Ploërmel. Most of the extensive coastline of the Broërec was also comital/ducal domain, but apart from Ploërmel and some lesser baronies (Rochefort, Malestroit, Elven), the hinterland of the Broërec was occupied by the barony of Porhoët.²³

¹⁸ Tonnerre, *Naissance de Bretagne*, pp. 496, 515, and 538.

¹⁹ Chédeville and Tonnerre, *Bretagne féodale*, p. 77; Tonnerre, *Naissance de Bretagne*, p. 525.

²⁰ Chédeville and Tonnerre, *Bretagne féodale*, pp. 419–20.

²¹ *Charters*, no. C3; *Cart. Quimperlé*, no. lxxiv; *Actes inédits*, no. xxviii.

²² Chédeville and Tonnerre, *Bretagne féodale*, p. 60.

²³ Tonnerre, *Naissance de Bretagne*, pp. 349–50, 357, 515–20; H. Guillotel, 'De la vicomté de Rennes à la vicomté de Porhoët (fin du Xe-milieu du XIIe siècle)', *MSHAB* 73 (1995), 5–23.

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The ducal domain in the county of Nantes was more extensive. Apart from the city of Nantes, north of the Loire, the dukes possessed Guérande, with its profitable salt-works, the castellany of Blain and the forest of Le Gâvre.²⁴ South of the Loire, ducal domains included the castellany of Le Pallet,²⁵ estates on the south bank of the Loire and another in the extreme south-west of the county.²⁶ The ducal forest of Touffou was particularly valuable from a strategic point-of-view, as it monopolised access to Nantes from the south. At the northern end of the crossing, entrance to the city of Nantes was secured by the ducal castle.²⁷ Additionally, the alluvial islands which formed in the lower reaches of the Loire were a ducal prerogative.²⁸

While control of land was economically important for the proceeds of agriculture and forestry, towns were also increasingly important as centres of commercial activity. Tolls were levied on the routes leading to the towns, by land and by water, and on commercial activity therein, such as rental for market-stalls and levies on produce traded such as wine.²⁹

Also significant was the minting of coins. Coinage was a source of both revenue and prestige. The only ducal mint for which there is evidence in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was at Rennes, but coins minted there were current in Cornouaille. Although there was a mint at Nantes in the Carolingian period, there is no record of coins being minted there again until the late twelfth century.³⁰

The ducal administration was rudimentary and centred upon the itinerant household. Ducal government was largely personal. A tenant seeking ducal authorisation for a transaction, or ducal determination of a dispute, could have it on the duke's next visit to the area.³¹ In addition to the duke's extended family, the itinerant household comprised various officers and servants. These may be described in general terms as

²⁴ Tonnerre, *Naissance de Bretagne*, pp. 415, 488.

²⁵ *Actes inédits*, no. XLII, p. 86 note 3; see Guillotel, 'Actes', no. 161.

²⁶ Ducal domain near Nantes was used by Conan III to found the abbey of Buzay ('Actes de Buzay', nos. 1, and 2). Another, near the mouth of the Loire, included Corsept, where Conan III founded a priory of Tiron (L. Merlet (ed.), *Cartulaire de l'abbaye de la Sainte-Trinité de Tiron*, ed. L. Merlet, Chartres, 1883, nos. CLXVI and CCXVI); *Actes inédits*, no. XL; see Guillotel, 'Actes', no. 160.

²⁷ M. Lopez, 'Un domaine ducal en pays de Retz: La châtellenie de Touffou', *Bulletin de la Société d'Etudes et de Recherches Historiques du Pays de Retz* (1984), 47–52 at 47–9; Tonnerre, *Naissance de Bretagne*, pp. 412–5, 538; S. de la Nicollière, 'Une charte de Conan III et le prieuré de la Madeleine des ponts de Nantes', *BSAN* (1863), 196–209 at 196.

²⁸ H. Guillotel, 'Administration et finances duciales en Bretagne sous le règne de Conan III', *MSHAB* 68 (1991), 19–43 at 27–8.

²⁹ Guillotel, 'Conan III', pp. 21, 29, and 30.

³⁰ Guillotel, 'Conan III', pp. 24–5; Tonnerre, *Naissance de Bretagne*, p. 539.

³¹ *Cart. Quimperlé*, no. LXXXV; *Actes inédits*, no. XLI; Guillotel, 'Actes', no. 161.

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'serviens' or 'famulus',³² or specifically as steward or seneschal, chamberlain, pantler, butler, usher, chaplain.³³ There was no ducal chancellor until the reign of Conan IV, but the chaplains performed clerical functions as required.³⁴

At times the household, wherever situated, was the venue for a session of the ducal *curia*, attended by the household officers, tenants of the ducal domain, and any barons, bishops and abbots who felt it was in their interests to attend. The formality of such occasions varied. The duke could convene his court to determine a legal dispute whenever and wherever he chose, assisted by whichever household officers, domainal tenants and other magnates happened to be present. There also seem to have been more formal sessions of the ducal *curia* which were customarily held at particular places, such as Redon.³⁵ Such a court, attended by lay and ecclesiastical magnates, would have been an occasion both to discuss important business and to do justice.

While the ducal household itinerated between ducal domains, the administration of each domain was conducted by a variety of local officials. Sometimes their specific titles indicate their functions, such as 'forestarius' and 'venator',³⁶ but these local officials are typically styled *prepositus* and *vicarius*.

There is so little evidence for the offices of *prepositus* and *vicarius* that it is difficult to distinguish the two in terms of duties and functions, a question upon which much ink has been spilt.³⁷ Nevertheless, the two offices were distinguishable by contemporaries, since references to *prepositi* and *vicarii* may occur in the same text.³⁸ The matter has been satisfactorily resolved by Jacques Bousard, who argues that the *prepositus*

³² For example, 'Men serviens meus de Garranda' (*Preuves*, col. 560; Guillotel, 'Actes', no. 135), probably to be identified with Main de Guérande, who attested several *acta* of Conan III (*Actes inédits*, nos. xxxv, xxxvi, xl, xli; Guillotel, 'Actes', nos. 166, 168, 160, 161). See Guillotel, 'Conan III', p. 34; *Actes inédits*, no. xlii; Guillotel, 'Actes', no. 151.

³³ *Preuves*, cols. 528, and 635; *Cart. Quimperlé*, nos. xliii, lxxv, and lxxvii; *Actes inédits*, no. xxvii; Guillotel, 'Actes', no. 93; *Cart. Quimperlé*, nos. iv, ix, lxxv, and cxi; *Cart. Redon*, no. ccxc; Guillotel, 'Actes', no. 99, *Actes inédits*, nos. 1; *Preuves*, cols. 523 and 617. For seneschals, see pp. 26–7.

³⁴ *Actes inédits*, no. xv; Guillotel, 'Actes', no. 79. *Preuves*, cols. 566–7.

³⁵ *Cart. Redon*, nos. ccxc, and ccclxxvii.

³⁶ *Actes inédits*, no. xxiii; Guillotel, 'Actes', no. 96. *Cart. Quimperlé*, nos. iii, liv, and lxxxii.

³⁷ See, for instance: A. de la Borderie, *Histoire de Bretagne*, Rennes, 1899, iii, pp. 105–15; A. Oheix, *Essai sur les sénéchaux de Bretagne des origines au XIVe siècle*, Paris, 1913; R. Delaporte, 'Les Sergents, Prévôts et Voyers féodés en Bretagne des origines au début du XVe siècle' Université de Rennes, Faculté de Droit, doctoral thesis, 1938; J.-L. Montigny, *Essai sur les institutions du duché de Bretagne à l'époque de Pierre Mauclerc et sur la politique de ce prince (1213–1237)*, Paris, 1961.

³⁸ E.g., *Actes inédits*, no. xv; Guillotel, 'Actes', no. 79; *Preuves*, col. 455; '. . . nec prepositi nec vicarii aliquam habeant in ea potestatem . . .' (grant by Conan III to the Knights Templar, 1141; *Preuves*, cols. 583–4; Guillotel, 'Actes' no. 152).

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was the superior of the *vicarius* and had a range of important functions, principally judicial.³⁹ Although Boussard's evidence is from other regions of western France, there are examples of *prepositi* administering justice in Brittany. The ducal *prefectus* at Quimperlé sat in judgment there with the abbot of Sainte-Croix de Quimperlé.⁴⁰ The *prepositus* of the abbey of Saint-Georges de Rennes at Pleubihan was designated the 'defensor et protector' of this *plebs*, 'latronum etiam malefactor, justissimusque malefactorum persecutor, universorumque placitorum rectissimus iudicator'.⁴¹

The office of *vicarius* is more problematical because of the potential for confusion with the Carolingian administrative office.⁴² Most of the evidence for *vicarii* in Brittany in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, however, indicates that these officers were much more lowly than Carolingian *vicarii*. As Boussard has argued, the term *vicaria* had survived from the Carolingian administration, but with a changed meaning. It had come to describe certain rights once pertaining to the public administration, but since usurped by private individuals.⁴³ Specifically, by the eleventh century, *vicaria* had come to describe the right of the lord or his agent to enter land and there seize property or arrest persons accused of various offences (sometimes only the four serious offences of theft, murder, arson and rape) and to keep them in custody until they were tried or until a financial settlement was agreed. For instance, the 'villici' of both the abbey of Sainte-Croix de Quimperlé and of the count of Cornouaille at Quimperlé had responsibilities in the execution of distrains ('Ad preceptum abbatis et cellerarii, invasionem vulgari vocabulo saisiam dictam, propria manu facere, deinde villico comitis indilate tradendam').⁴⁴ The agent employed by the lord to exercise this right acquired the title *vicarius*. Thus the relative importance of a *vicarius* depended upon the extent of his lord's right of *vicaria*. The hereditary *vicarii* of the ducal domain of Guérande, for instance, seem to have been important and wealthy men, no doubt due to the commercial value of this domain. In contrast, in baronial charters, there often seems nothing to distinguish a witness styled *vicarius* from the other tenants attesting with him. Some of the duties of the 'villicus' of the abbey of Sainte-

³⁹ J. Boussard, *Le gouvernement d'Henri II Plantagenêt*, Paris, 1956, pp. 311–29.

⁴⁰ *Cart. Quimperlé*, no. LXX.

⁴¹ *Preuves*, col. 409, from the cartulary of Saint-Georges de Rennes.

⁴² J. Dunbabin, *France in the making, 843–1180*, Oxford, 1985, p. 41; Oheix, *Sénéchaux*, pp. 133, and 146.

⁴³ Boussard, *Gouvernement*, pp. 312–9; e.g., a grant of land to Marmoutier by some 'alodiarrii' (*sic*) with the consent of their two lords, exempt from 'omni consuetudine exactionis vel vicarie seu ceterorum vectigalium' (*Preuves*, cols. 452–3).

⁴⁴ *Cart. Quimperlé*, no. XXXIII, cf. note c., pp. 170–1.

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Croix indicate a rather humble status.⁴⁵ Lords with extensive lands, such as the dukes with their widespread domainal estates, no doubt employed numerous *vicarii*, each with responsibility for a particular estate.

As far as the exercise of jurisdiction was concerned, *vicarii* were the equivalent of modern police and bailiffs, while *prepositi* actually administered justice in the name of the duke or baron (or church). The functions of both *prepositi* and *vicarii* were not, however, limited to the exercise of jurisdiction.⁴⁶ In their other administrative functions, it is not possible to draw a distinction between the two offices. Boussard concluded, 'Dans l'ensemble, le prévôt, comme le voyer . . . est un agent d'administration domaniale chargé de percevoir les revenus et de veiller sur tous les droits qui appartiennent à son maître: paiement des redevances, droits de monneyage, droits sur les trésors trouvés, droits de passage, etc.'⁴⁷

I have left discussion of the office of seneschal until last, because this office appeared late in the history of domainal administration. Although the office appears in charters in Brittany in the early eleventh century, at that time, the seneschal was a household officer. The office was not restricted to comital households. In the first half of the twelfth century the lords of Porhoët were served by a seneschal (or perhaps a succession of seneschals) named Philip. Seneschals were employed in ecclesiastical establishments in the eleventh century. The hereditary seneschals of the archbishops of Dol are particularly well recorded, starting with Alan, who held the office between about 1075 and 1095. Seneschals of the bishops of Rennes and Nantes are attested around the same time.⁴⁸ The office of household seneschal of the count of Rennes was certainly established by the middle of the eleventh century.⁴⁹ The evidence is less clear for the other counties, although the office also appears in Nantes at this time.⁵⁰

During the reign of Duke Conan III (1112–48), a significant

⁴⁵ *Cart. Quimperlé*, no. xxxiii.

⁴⁶ E.g., the *villicus* of Sainte-Croix de Quimperlé was charged with rendering the 'communem pastum' owed to the abbey each January (*Cart. Quimperlé*, no. xxxiii).

⁴⁷ Boussard, *Gouvernement*, p. 321.

⁴⁸ *Cart. Morb.*, nos. cxiii, ccxiii, ccxxiv; *Enquête*, pp. 66–7; 'Cart. St-Georges', no. lviii; *Cart. Quimperlé*, no. lxxvi.

⁴⁹ See Appendix 2.

⁵⁰ In 1075, Geoffrey son of Aldroen 'dapifer' attested a charter of the dowager-duchess Bertha at Nantes (*Cart. Quimperlé*, no. lxxv). It is not clear whether he was the household seneschal of Bertha or of the count of Nantes (Bertha's son-in-law, Hoël I). Warin 'dapifer' attested a charter of Duke Alan IV, made at Nantes, between 1084 and 1103 (*Cart. Quimperlé*, no. xxxv). Listed among the 'Nannetenses', he may have been the seneschal of the count of Nantes, at this time Alan's younger brother Matthew. See Oheix, *Sénéchaux*, p. 32, note 10.

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development occurred in the office of ducal seneschal. The then seneschal, William, was detached from the household and became the duke's representative in the county of Rennes. There is no obvious reason for this development, but it may have occurred because Conan III spent more of his time in the county of Nantes than in other parts of the duchy. Two later acts of Conan III, dated 1136 and 1141, are attested by William, styled 'dapifer meus Redonensis', with the 1136 act describing William performing the administrative function of perambulating the bounds of the land the subject of the ducal grant.⁵¹ As the duke's representative in Rennes, the seneschal probably began to exercise ducal jurisdiction on a regular basis, but there is no documentary evidence for his functions in Rennes beyond the 1136 charter.

Since the dukes did not exercise authority beyond their own domains, the responsibilities of the seneschal of Rennes must have been limited to enforcing ducal authority in respect of the ducal domains in the county of Rennes. These, as discussed above, were already staffed with *prepositi*, *vicarii* and other officers such as foresters. The relationship between these officers and the seneschal is obscure, but it is most probable that Conan III simply superimposed a new level of administration onto the existing system.

This brief discussion of the ducal household and regional administration of the ducal domains demonstrates the similarity between ducal government in Brittany and that in neighbouring parts of Francia. The similarity is so close that the identical process of the comital/duc al seneschal leaving the household to become a superior administrative officer can be detected at about the same time in the counties of Anjou and Poitou.⁵²

THE COUNTY OF NANTES AND THE SUCCESSION CRISIS OF 1148–1156

At the beginning of this chapter, the political situation in Brittany was described in terms of unity under a single ducal dynasty from the mid-eleventh century. Nevertheless, the county of Nantes had a somewhat anomalous position in the Breton polity. Since this had important consequences in terms of the Angevin domination of Brittany, it is worth more detailed consideration at this point.

⁵¹ *Preuves*, col. 574; *AE*, VI, pp. 121–2; Guillotel, 'Actes', nos. 145, 146.

⁵² L. Halphen, *Le comté d'Anjou au XIe siècle*, Paris, 1906, p. 192; J. Boussard, *Le comté d'Anjou sous Henri II Plantagenêt et ses fils (1151–1204)*, Paris, 1938, pp. 113–27; J. Boussard, *Gouvernement*, p. 354. For Poitou – A. Richard, *Les comtes de Poitou*, 2 vols., Paris, 1903, I, pp. 414, and 420, II, pp. 48, 66, 71, 83, 87–88.

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Although Nantes was the capital of the duchy of Brittany in the later Middle Ages, this union was not inevitable or permanent. 'Brittany' is generally defined by the Armorican peninsula. The limits of Brittany only become defined by politics, rather than by geography, at the eastern border, where the peninsula meets the mainland. The county of Nantes is the only part of the historical duchy of Brittany which is not on the peninsula, and its eastern and southern borders, marching with Maine, Anjou and Poitou, lack any geographical definition and therefore have shifted over the centuries according to political circumstances.⁵³

The county of Nantes has always been involved in the politics of the regions to its south and east. Instead of being physically separated from neighbouring provinces by ocean, river or forest like other parts of Brittany, Nantes was connected to Anjou by the great thoroughfare of the Loire. The population was Frankish, with only the most north-westerly parts of the county experiencing Breton immigration and settlement.⁵⁴ It follows, then, that Nantes was culturally more akin to Anjou and Poitou than to Armorican Brittany. This is recognised in the modern administrative arrangement whereby the *département* of Loire-Atlantique, coterminous with the old county of Nantes, is not included in the region of Bretagne, but in the Pays de Loire.

Until the late twelfth century, Nantes was regarded as separate or severable from the rest of the duchy. Duke Hoël I (1066–84) inherited the county of Nantes from his mother, Judith. He had two sons; the elder was the future Duke Alan IV, and the younger, Matthew, was given the county of Nantes as his portion.⁵⁵ When Matthew died without issue, Alan IV succeeded him and the county of Nantes was reunited with the parts of Brittany under ducal authority. We do not know the terms on which Matthew held Nantes, or whether, if he had left issue, they would have inherited the county. It is significant, though, that the name Matthew came from the family of the counts of Nantes. The last count of that line was Matthew, who died in 1050, the comital title passing in default of male heirs to his aunt Judith, the mother of Hoël I.⁵⁶ Hoël therefore named his younger son after his first-cousin, who had been the hereditary count of Nantes.

N.-Y. Tonnerre has argued that Duke Alan IV himself gave Nantes

⁵³ See E. Chénon, 'Les marches séparantes d'Anjou, Bretagne et Poitou', *RHD* 16 (1892), 18–62, and 165–211, and 21 (1897), 62–80; J.-C. Meuret, *Peuplement, pouvoir et paysage sur la marche Anjou-Bretagne (des origines au Moyen-Age)*, Laval, 1993.

⁵⁴ Tonnerre, *Naissance de Bretagne*, pp. 62–8.

⁵⁵ *Preuves*, cols. 36, 102–3, 431, 433, 440, 466, 474, 487; *Actes inédits*, nos. xxv and xxix.

⁵⁶ *Preuves*, col. 127.

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to Matthew, his brother, to administer on his behalf with the aid of the bishop, Benedict, who was their paternal uncle, while he concentrated his own efforts on restoring ducal authority in Rennes. This is plausible, but there seems to me no basis for the assertion that Matthew did not receive any hereditary right in Nantes, and it ignores the significance of his name. The chronicles and diplomatic sources cited above demonstrate that Hoël I granted Nantes to his younger son, that Matthew was accorded the title ‘comes Nannetensis’ (or equivalents), and that he authorised dispositions of property by landholders of the county of Nantes, and himself made grants of land within the county, without requiring the consent of his elder brother.⁵⁷ Hoël must have intended Matthew to continue the dynasty of the counts of Nantes, which would continue to be ruled independently of the rest of the duchy. It was pure chance that Nantes reverted to the senior line upon Matthew’s death without issue, around 1103.⁵⁸

After nearly fifty years of union with the rest of the duchy, the county of Nantes once again became contentious in the succession crisis following the death of Duke Conan III in 1148. There ought to have been no difficulty about the succession. Conan left a son apparently fit to succeed him, but within a year or so after the duke’s death, his son Hoël was acknowledged only as count of Nantes. His sister Bertha and her husband, Eudo de Porhoët, based at Rennes, were acknowledged as duchess and duke *jure uxoris* throughout most of Brittany.⁵⁹

This extraordinary turn of events requires some explanation. Contemporary Breton annals record that, Conan III having disowned Hoël as his son (‘suum esse filium Conanus abnegaverat’), by popular will Hoël succeeded as count of Nantes.⁶⁰ This was elaborated by Pierre Le Baud, to the effect that Conan was persuaded on his deathbed that Hoël was not his son and disinherited him. The readiness with which this version has been accepted and repeated in the historiography is no doubt due to the fact that it impugns the character of Conan III’s wife, Matilda, an illegitimate daughter of King Henry I, and thus satisfies both the anti-English and misogynistic sentiments of Le Baud’s successors.⁶¹ The sheer sufficiency of this tradition has prevented historians from examining the succession to Conan III more closely.

⁵⁷ Chédeville and Tonnerre, *Bretagne féodale*, p. 65; *Preuves*, col. 36.

⁵⁸ Breton annals give the date of Matthew’s death variously as 1101, 1103 and 1104 (*Preuves*, cols. 36, 102–103 and 151, cf *Preuves*, col. 775).

⁵⁹ *Preuves*, cols. 622–4 (Rennes); RT, II, 6 (eastern Cornouaille).

⁶⁰ *Preuves*, col. 103.

⁶¹ Le Band, *Histoire de Bretagne*, p. 103. E.g., de la Borderie, *Histoire de Bretagne*, pp. 42, and 269–72. The strength of the tradition is indicated by its repetition in Chédeville and Tonnerre, *Bretagne féodale*, p. 72.

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In 1908, *le vicomte* Charles de la Lande de Calan reviewed the evidence and suggested that Hoël was Conan's illegitimate son.⁶² This theory has some appeal. It may be argued, for instance, that Conan intended to provide for his illegitimate son by giving him the county of Nantes. This is supported by the choice of the name Hoël, which is associated both with illegitimate sons of Breton dukes and also with the counts of Nantes. The name was used by the counts of Nantes from the tenth century, beginning with an illegitimate son of Alan 'Barbetorte'.⁶³ The name was given to Duke Hoël I (whose mother was the granddaughter of the first Hoël), instead of a name from the stock used by his paternal ancestors, the counts of Cornouaille, no doubt to reinforce his title to the county of Nantes. Additionally, there was a precedent for severing Nantes from the rest of the duchy for the sake of providing for a son (albeit a cadet, rather than an illegitimate or disinherited son) in the case of Conan III's uncle Matthew, the younger son of Hoël I. It is arguable that Conan III named his son Hoël both because he was illegitimate (recalling his ancestor, the illegitimate son of Alan 'Barbetorte') and to add weight to his plan to install him as count of Nantes.

La Lande de Calan's article was a welcome exercise in reviewing the evidence for the succession crisis, but a more satisfactory explanation is that advanced by Katharine Keats-Rohan, that Conan III disinherited his (legitimate) son in the interests of unifying the duchy through the marriage of his daughter, Bertha, to Alan, earl of Richmond.⁶⁴ On this interpretation, Hoël's legitimacy or otherwise is not in issue, and indeed the original annal-record does not comment on Hoël's parentage, merely that Conan disowned him, which was tantamount to disinheriting him.

The most cogent evidence for this theory is an obituary notice for Alan, earl of Richmond, which commemorates his attempt to reunite Brittany. Other evidence is an 1138 charter of Conan III, concerning property in Nantes, recording the consent of Alan 'gener meus', but making no mention of Hoël.⁶⁵ Contrary to the traditional death-bed disinheritance, this arrangement was certainly made some years before Conan's death, perhaps even before Hoël was born. Extraordinary as it may seem, in view of the strength of the custom of male succession, a similar arrangement occurred almost contemporaneously in the county

⁶² C. de la Lande de Calan, 'Mélanges historiques, XIX. Le duc Hoël II', *Revue de Bretagne* 40 (1908), 180–3.

⁶³ Chédeville and Tonnerre, *Bretagne féodale*, pp. 29–31.

⁶⁴ K. S. B. Keats-Rohan, 'Le rôle des Bretons dans la politique de colonisation normande de l'Angleterre (vers 1042–1135)', *MSHAB* 74 (1996), 181–215 at 205, note 98.

⁶⁵ *Preuves*, cols. 5, and 576–7.

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of Namur. In the 1130s, Godfrey, count of Namur, disinherited his son Henry the Blind, and gave Namur in marriage with his daughter to Baldwin IV, count of Hainault, thus uniting the two counties, while Henry was given a life-interest in Namur.⁶⁶

Such an ambitious policy required sacrifices. Hoël was obliged to sacrifice his claim to the ducal title in favour of his sister. He is not known to have married, and his only known child became a nun at Saint-Sulpice-la-Forêt.⁶⁷ In view of the significance of the name Hoël outlined above, and the Namur precedent, it may be that Conan intended to compensate his son with the county of Nantes for his life. Indeed, the subsequent conflict between Hoël and Bertha may have been limited to a dispute about the degree of Hoël's independence as count of Nantes.

Similarly, for Alan to succeed to the lordship of Penthièvre meant that one or both of Alan's brothers would have to designate him as their heir. In the 1120s, Stephen of Penthièvre had divided his lands between his three sons; the eldest, Geoffrey Boterel II, received the eastern portion (henceforth known as Penthièvre or Lamballe), the youngest, Henry, received the western portion (Tréguier or Guingamp), and Alan, the middle son, received the English lands, the honour of Richmond. On this basis, Alan had no hereditary right to any of the Penthièvre lands in Brittany. Geoffrey Boterel evidently was not compliant, as is indicated by his active support for the Empress Matilda in the English civil war, while Alan fought on the side of King Stephen. The youngest brother, Henry, on the other hand, seems to have been persuaded to sacrifice his independent and potentially hereditary possession of Tréguier in favour of Alan, and to remain unmarried.⁶⁸ In 1145, both Alan and Henry were at Conan III's court at Quimper, when Alan confirmed their father's grants to a priory in Guingamp, indicating Alan's lordship of Tréguier.⁶⁹

In fact, Alan predeceased his father-in-law by two years, bringing Conan's scheme of reunification to nought. Alan's death in 1146 meant that both Hoël's and Henry's sacrifices were unnecessary. Henry, at least, must have decided that the deal was off. Aged nearly fifty, he married for the first time and henceforth regarded Tréguier as his son's

⁶⁶ L. Vanderkindere (ed.), *La chronique de Gislebert de Mons*, Brussels, 1904, pp. 60–2; J. Falmagne, *Baudouin V, comte de Hainaut 1150–1195*, Montreal, 1966, pp. 75, 78; L. Vanderkindere, *La formation territoriale des principautés Belges au moyen âge*, 1, Brussels, 1902, p. 308. I am very grateful to Laura Napran for this information.

⁶⁷ *Cart. St-Sulpice*, no. LVIII.

⁶⁸ *Preuves*, col. 681.

⁶⁹ *Preuves*, col. 595.

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inheritance.⁷⁰ Hoël, in contrast, does not seem to have seriously attempted to claim the duchy. The situation was complicated by the fact that Alan and Bertha had an infant son, the future Duke Conan IV, who inherited his father's claims to the duchy of Brittany (including Tréguier) and the honour of Richmond. Bertha promptly remarried, to Eudo de Porhoët, apparently on the basis that he was well suited to fight for her son's cause.

By 1155 the balance of power was clearly in favour of Bertha and Eudo, and Hoël acknowledged that he held the county of Nantes of his sister.⁷¹ The peace did not last. For reasons which are not clear, but may have to do with his capitulation to Bertha, in 1156 Hoël was deposed as count of Nantes. He was immediately replaced as count by Geoffrey, the younger brother of Henry II. Several chronicles independently record that the citizens of Nantes chose Geoffrey to be their count.⁷² This should not be surprising. In view of the circumstances outlined above, Nantes was culturally more akin to Anjou than to Armorican Brittany. At the same time, the county of Nantes was extremely attractive to the counts of Anjou, for both strategic and financial reasons. From the point-of-view of the Angevin heartland, the fact that Nantes controlled the mouth of the Loire made it important that it should be under the political control of the count of Anjou,⁷³ whether directly or indirectly. It is not so remarkable, then, that in 1156 a cadet of the comital family of Anjou became count of Nantes and was accepted by the populace.

Eudo de Porhoët failed to respond to the events occurring in Nantes in 1156, no doubt because he was by then engaged in a struggle with his stepson, the young Conan. Conan had grown up in England, where, as early as 1153, Henry II recognised him as heir to the honour of Richmond.⁷⁴ Conan was anxious to enter into his maternal inheritance in Brittany, and must have demanded that Eudo deliver the duchy to him. Presumably Eudo refused, because in the summer of 1156 Conan

⁷⁰ See below, p. 54.

⁷¹ In 1155, Hoël made a grant of land in the county of Nantes to the abbey of Buzay, with Bertha's consent ('Actes de Buzay', no. 9). Similarly, Fontevraud obtained confirmations of a grant by Conan III of an island in the Loire from both Hoël (1153) and Bertha (undated) (*Prewes*, cols. 617, and 624; BN ms latin 5840, p. 120).

⁷² *Prewes*, col. 103; WN, p. 114; RT, I, p. 298. Hoël does not appear again in Breton sources, but attested an act of his nephew, Conan IV, in England, c.1164 (BN ms fr. 22362, f. 7; *EYC*, IV, pp. 67–8).

⁷³ J. Gillingham, *Richard the Lionheart*, 2nd edn, London, 1989, p. 28.

⁷⁴ M. Jones, 'The house of Brittany and the honour of Richmond in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries: Some new charter evidence', in K. Borhardt and E. Bünz (eds.), *Forschungen zur Reichs-, Papst- und Landesgeschichte*, Stuttgart, 1998, 161–73 at 170.

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landed in Brittany and proceeded to take the county of Rennes by force.

Conan was strongly supported by the baronage of north-eastern Brittany, including Ralph de Fougères and Rolland de Dinan. The only Breton magnate known to have opposed Conan's lordship (outside Eudo's personal *mouvance*) was John de Dol, lord of Combour. The outcome, at the end of 1156, was that Conan IV was generally acknowledged as duke of Brittany, but the county of Nantes remained completely independent of the duchy and was ruled by Geoffrey of Anjou.

Thus for nearly ten years in the mid-twelfth century Brittany was in state of civil war. The consequences were disastrous from the point-of-view of Breton independence. The advances in ducal authority achieved by Alan IV and Conan III were checked as barons took advantage of the near-anarchy to usurp ducal and ecclesiastical possessions. The ancient divisions of Brittany again came to the fore. In the succession crisis, the counties of Nantes and Cornouaille chose to support one ruler, Rennes, and the Broërec another, and the baronies of Penthievre and Léon remained aloof from ducal affairs as usual. These divisions had, of course, been alive all the time, especially in the case of the county of Nantes. The loss of the county of Nantes to the duchy would prove the most damaging long-term consequence, enabling Henry II to gain his first foothold in Brittany. The fact that Nantes was already under Angevin control explains why this county was the first part of Brittany to be acquired by Henry II in 1158. The tradition of severability of the county, furthermore, would enable Henry II to retain it in his own hand even after his son Geoffrey had become duke of Brittany in 1181.