Chapter 9

FEASTING PRINCES?

Violence, Conflict and Child Kingship

Around mid-morning on the feast of All Saints in 1201, Markward of Anweiler and his men stormed the royal palace in Palermo where they seized King Frederick, then only a few weeks away from his seventh birthday, along with his *magister* William Franciscus. Within two days, news of the events had reached the archbishop-elect of Capua, Rainald, who immediately sent word to Pope Innocent III, now the boy king's guardian in name alone.[1] The archbishop's emotional report, graphic in its sorrow for the young ruler, is an apposite example with which to begin examining the association between child kingship and violent conflict. Since even recording Frederick's fate caused Rainald pain, he had no doubt that hearing of the king's treatment would inflame a spirit of compassion in any reader, unless they were of 'inhuman hardness'.[2] The six-year-old, although a little king (*regulus*) of mild spirit, was fully aware of his precarious situation. The child recognised that his defencelessness derived both from the vulnerability of his young age and from the treachery of those who had opened the doors to his enemies. Discerning that the custodians who had previously soothed him with childish lullabies were about to surrender him to a cruel imprisonment, Frederick began to weep. Yet the boy's tears were only a front. Beneath this performance, 'the authority of a good ruler was unwilling to deny [his] royal character'.[3] Frederick leapt at his captors as soon as they seized him, beating them with his hands before unbuckling his royal cloak to tear at his own clothes and scratch his flesh with his nails.[4]

[1] *Die Kampanische Briefsammlung (Paris Lat. 11867)*, ed. S. Tuczek, *MGH Briefe des späteren Mittelalters* 2 (Hanover, 2010), no. 127; K. Hampe, 'Aus der Kindheit Kaiser Friedrichs II.', *Mitteilungen des Instituts für österreichische Geschichtsforschung*, 22 (1901), 575–99 (592–5); van Cleve, *Markward*, 188–202.

[2] 'inhumane duricie', *Kampanische Briefsammlung*, no. 127 (215).

[3] 'boni … regnatoris vigorem nesciens regalis animi diffiteri', *Kampanische Briefsammlung*, no. 127 (216).

[4] Frederick's response through weeping, rending clothing and tearing at his body is evocative of contemporary depictions of grief. Such excessive emotional behaviour was often, though not

The theatrical scenes which Rainald's letter communicates share several features with Lampert of Hersfeld's account of Henry IV's kidnap from Kaiserswerth palace, the vignette which opened this book. Such vivid narratives draw attention to dramatic conflicts and turbulent political events into which child rulers were often drawn by virtue of their royal position. The striking nature of such stories has contributed to an overriding impression that periods of child kingship were intrinsically disruptive, that boy kings emboldened magnate rebellion and that such violence was detrimental to the stability of medieval rulership.[5] The same accounts have additionally prompted quasi-psychological analyses which, especially in Frederick's case, have often stressed the adverse effects of such violence upon the children involved.[6] Rainald's account of Frederick's capture provides a constructive foundation for this chapter's central argument: that scholars have overstated the causal relationship between conflict and a child's rule. After first discussing the rhetorical exaggeration of violence and lack of dynastic opposition to boy kings, I will consider some of the various forms conflict could take before finally commenting on the prominent use of kidnap as a form of political protest. Rather than interpreting magnate violence merely as an anarchic response to a child king, acts of conflict can instead provide further testimony of children's legitimacy as rulers between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries.

RHETORICAL EXAGGERATION AND DYNASTIC OPPOSITION

Evidence for the appearance and escalation of conflict while a boy was king has often been accepted without sufficient critical scrutiny, despite historians of medieval conflict long stressing the unreliability of most depictions of disorder. Such sources, as Reuter emphasised, '[are] not sociology but rhetoric: criticism of ruler or society'.[7] This is especially evident in the epistolary record of Frederick's seizure at Palermo,

exclusively, associated with women: L. A. Callahan, 'The widow's tears: the pedagogy of grief in medieval France and the image of the grieving widow', in C. L. Carlson and A. J. Weisl (eds.), *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 1999), 245–63 (251–4); Sparks, *Heresy*, 138–41. I am grateful to Elisabeth van Houts for suggesting this comparison.

[5] For a broader historiographical context countering over-dramatised narratives of violence see S. D. White, '"The peace in the feud" revisited: feuds in the peace in medieval European feuds', in K. Cooper and C. Leyser (eds.), *Making Early Medieval Societies: Conflict and Belonging in the Latin West, 300–1200* (Cambridge, 2016), 220–43.

[6] See Chapter 1; Abulafia, *Frederick*, 100.

[7] T. Reuter, 'The insecurity of travel in the Early and High Middle Ages: criminals, victims and their medieval and modern observers', in *Medieval Polities*, 38–71 (45). See also W. C. Brown, *Violence in Medieval Europe* (Harlow, 2010), 7–9.

which survives in a late thirteenth-century collection of letters, poetry and other assorted texts, including a French expansion of the Pseudo-Matthew infancy gospel.[8] Since Rainald's letter was incorporated within this collection precisely because of its rhetorical skill and style, it is a problematic record upon which to base any reconstruction of the boy king's behaviour, or from which to analyse political motives.[9] Even if we accept Rainald's authorship of the original narrative, as most previous scholarship has, his purposes in writing to the pope were multifarious.[10] The letter was not simply forwarding a messenger's report from Sicily. Rainald was also writing to defend the actions of his kinsman, Count Gentile of Manopello, and to appeal for papal help in freeing Frederick. Emphasising the treachery of those holding the royal fortress deflected blame from Gentile who, although he should have been responsible for Frederick's custody, had been absent in Messina when Markward besieged Palermo. Rainald's depiction of the child's impassioned defence of his royal dignity – the author even likens the attack on Frederick's person to the defilement of Christ – was intended to solicit papal sympathy and persuade the pope to rescue from 'wretched captivity' the *pupillus* he had sworn to protect.[11]

Surviving sources are usually partisan accounts of magnate conflict which perpetuate and embellish the negative interrelationship between conflict and a child's rule. Contextualising adverse narratives of royal minorities can reveal how authors manipulated representations of violence and rebellion. An informative example comes from later medieval Scotland, where Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon* has long contributed to a negative impression of political disorder during James II's minority. Michael Brown has shown Bower's depiction of the 'tyranny' of conciliar rule during this period to be a largely self-interested picture of the state of the realm under a boy king. Bitterness at the political defeat of the party with whom Bower felt the strongest alliance motivated the

[8] BNF, Lat. 11867, fos 136v–137r.

[9] *Kampanische Briefsammlung*, esp. 22–24, 33–42; F. Delle Donne, 'Le *dictamen* capouan: écoles rhétoriques et conventions historiographiques', in B. Grévin and A.-M. Turcan-Verkerk (eds.), *Le dictamen dans tous ses états: perspectives de recherche sur la théorie et la pratique de l'ars dictaminis (XIe–XVe siècles)* (Turnhout, 2015), 191–207.

[10] Scholars have viewed the letter as a genuine record based on first-hand testimony since Karl Hampe first published the transcription in 1901, although his arguments for its authenticity rely heavily on the letter's intimate and emotive nature. Recent work on letters relating to the First Crusade, some of which survive in epistolary collections similar to BNF Lat. 11867, suggests the wisdom of a more cautious assessment. See S. T. Parsons, 'The letters of Stephen of Blois reconsidered', *Crusades*, 17 (2018), 1–29.

[11] *Kampanische Briefsammlung*, no. 127 (216). Innocent likewise used Frederick's status as a 'pupil' to justify his defence and tutelage of the boy. See Wiedemann, 'Papal authority', 73.

author to contrast James's early reign with the 'golden age' of his father's government.[12] Similar rhetorical contrasts which framed child kingship within the context of violence, anarchy and the tyrannous behaviour of the boy king's custodians were not uncommon. Sometimes this device aimed to highlight the current ruler's failure to live up to an idealised model set by his predecessor, as in Bower's *Scotichronicon* but also in Lampert's depiction of Henry IV of Germany.[13] In other cases, authors employed the same trope of exaggerating conflict but for the opposite purpose: to reinforce their praise of the king's later, adult rule.[14] This approach is manifest throughout the late thirteenth-century hagiographical and biographical narratives which dwell on magnate discontent and violence during the initial decade of Louis IX's reign. Authors such as William of Nangis (d. 1300) and John of Joinville (d. 1317), writing several decades after the events, rendered Louis's early kingship as a politically turbulent period which the child endured with God's help, thus testifying to Louis's pious kingship from a young age.[15] Relying on these accounts as candid records of the late 1220s and 1230s overstates the violence and unrest of Louis's early rule. It is only very recently that this exaggerated impression of disorder has been subject to more nuanced reflection.[16]

Despite the rhetorical emphasis on violent magnate behaviour, acts of violence in this period rarely targeted boy kings directly. In Frederick's case, Markward wanted to capture the young ruler, not kill him. Rainald's letter reveals his disapproval of Markward's intentions and alliance with the papal cause, but the archbishop-elect did not allege that the king's life was threatened, contrary to later rumours which embellished Markward's perfidious intentions.[17] In the eyes of the letter's author, the threat posed to the boy was a moral-political one since he was now in the hands of 'wicked people' (*malefica*) who had compromised his royal dignity by seizing him forcibly.[18] The appeal for papal aid to free Frederick was not constructed around any fear for the child's life, or even concern for his education, but around the distress that enemies would violently ravage the kingdom of Sicily, bringing misery to its populace.

[12] M. H. Brown, '"Vile times": Walter Bower's last book and the minority of James II', *SHR*, 79 (2000), 165–88.

[13] Struve, 'Persönlichkeit', 34–8, 51–5; Robinson, *Annals*, 14, 36–40.

[14] See, for example, Reid, 'Alexander III', 187–9.

[15] John of Joinville, *Vie de Saint Louis*, ed. J. Monfrin (Paris, 1995), 186–8; William of Nangis, *Gesta Ludovici IX*, in *RHF*, XX, 309–465 (312–18).

[16] Grant, *Blanche*, 13, 80–1. [17] *Deeds of Pope Innocent*, 24–5; Chapter 6.

[18] *Kampanische Briefsammlung*, no. 127 (215).

Suggestions that rebellion against a child king had a regicidal or dynastic aspect must be approached with a healthy dose of scepticism, especially when this interpretation circulates only in much later sources. Later thirteenth-century writers claim that Philip Hurepel, count of Boulogne, 'aspired to the kingdom' of his half-nephew, Louis IX, but there is little contemporary evidence to support this version of events.[19] Philip's royal blood certainly provided a legitimate rallying point for princely discontent with Blanche's guardianship during the initial year of Louis's reign.[20] Joinville – still a later source but the only chronicler who might have heard an account of events from within the royal court or even from the king himself – names Philip as the leader (*chievetain*) of a group of rebellious barons.[21] But the count's aspirations did not extend any further than obtaining a greater stake in how the *regnum* was governed or ensuring further royal concessions, in addition to the castles of Mortain and Lillebonne which Blanche and Louis had already confirmed to him. As part of the Treaty of Vendôme in March 1227, Philip secured a substantial annual payment of 6,000 *livres tournois*, for life, in return for his promise not to claim anything else from his nephew in future.[22] Like Philip, most of the French princes were unwilling to push their conflict against the boy king into anything resembling open rebellion.[23]

There were other reasons for chroniclers to attribute regicidal motivations to conflict besides chronological distance from events. Even near-contemporary commentators could distort reports of violence against a child king. Various authors report disturbances across the Empire in the initial months after Henry IV's succession,[24] but Lampert of Hersfeld is the sole source to suggest a dynastic motivation underpinned the uprisings. Lampert claimed that an aspiration for the German kingdom spurred the rebellion of Otto, half-brother of William, margrave of the Saxon Nordmark, in 1057.[25] After Margrave William's death in 1056, when Otto had returned from exile to claim his inheritance, the Saxon aristocracy incited him to kill the king. The Saxon princes ostensibly believed that compensation for losses they had suffered under Emperor

[19] William of Puylaurens, *Chronique*, ch. 37 (142); Minstrel of Reims, *Récits*, ed. N. de Wailly (Paris, 1876), 176.

[20] Philip Hurepel was the son of Philip Augustus and his third wife, Agnès of Méran (d. 1201). Innocent III had legitimised Hurepel and his sister in November 1201. See Lewis, *Royal Succession*, 157–71. For royal kin as legitimising factors in noble resistance see Weiler, 'Kings and sons', 34.

[21] Joinville, *Vie*, 188. [22] *LTC*, II, no. 1920.

[23] As discussed in S. Painter, *The Scourge of the Clergy: Peter of Dreux, Duke of Brittany* (Baltimore, 1937; repr. New York, 1969), esp. 42–6, 56–77.

[24] *Annales Augustani*, 127; Berthold, *Chronicon*, 187; *Chronicon Wirziburgense*, 31.

[25] Lampert, *Annales*, 70–2; Robinson, *Henry*, 63–4.

Henry III should take the form of seizing the kingship from his son, 'while his age still provided an opportunity to inflict that injury'.[26] Lampert's assertion that the king's young age accelerated their urge to remove him from the throne is highly stylised. The author drew heavily on Livy, inspired by a passage in the *History of Rome* which articulates how, among hostages, pre-adolescent boys (*impubes*) were most exposed to injury.[27]

It is undeniable that children were, and still are, exceptionally vulnerable to adult violence. Nevertheless, the six-year-old king was not defenceless. He had the protection of his kinsmen and other members of the aristocracy who were more than willing to employ military force on Henry's behalf, especially when this aligned with their own interests. On 26 June, near Merseberg, Otto and his army clashed with a large group of men led by the king's cousins, Bruno, count of Brunswick, and Ekbert I, margrave of Meissen and also count of Brunswick, who were already embroiled in personal conflict with the Saxon margrave. Otto and Bruno were both killed in the fighting. Lampert's concession that Saxon hostility swiftly subsided after the elimination of 'the standard-bearer of rebellion' casts doubt on the chronicler's earlier insistence that the Saxons posed a sincere dynastic threat to Henry in 1057. Furthermore, Lampert composed this section of his *Annals* two decades later and used the account of Otto's rebellion to foreshadow Henry's deposition in 1076 and the events of the Saxon war.[28] Princely uprisings in Ottonian and Salian Germany seldom had a boy king's removal as the primary objective.[29] Lampert's account is implausible evidence for accepting regicide as a motive for this conflict. It serves as a cautionary tale when approaching similar examples.

On the rarer occasions when boy kings faced concerted opposition to their rule which sought to remove them from the throne, it was the child's association with a particular dynastic line which prompted the challenge. Those seeking to replace the boy were never making a manifest statement about the incompatibility of childhood and kingship; rather they were objecting to practices of royal succession or continuing their protest against an entire dynasty. Only two of the eight boy kings at the centre of this study faced a sustained attack on their kingship before they reached adulthood: Malcolm IV, king of Scots, and Henry III,

[26] 'dum adhuc aetas oportuna iniuriae esset', Lampert, *Annales*, 71 (trans. Robinson, 69). For the longer history of Saxon discontent see K. Leyser, *Rule and Conflict in an Early Medieval Society: Ottonian Saxony* (London, 1979) and 'The crisis of medieval Germany', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 69 (1983), 409–43.

[27] Livy, *Ad urbe condita*, 2.13.10 (trans. B. O. Foster, 14 vols [Cambridge, MA, 1919–59], I, 262–3).

[28] Struve, 'Persönlichkeit', 36–8, 56; Robinson, *Annals*, 32, 69 n. 171; *RI* III.2.3.1, no. 109.

[29] See also Chapter 2.

king of England. Taking the latter case first, Henry was thrust into a remarkably tumultuous political situation at his succession, crowned amid baronial warfare with a rival for the throne present in his kingdom. This all had very little to do with child kingship, however, since English barons had invited Louis to claim the throne in opposition to King John.[30] After John's death in 1216, Henry became the unwitting heir of the uprising against his father's rule and the protest against decades of oppressive Angevin kingship. The succession of a new king undermined the justifications for continued conflict, as Pope Honorius III reminded the dissident barons early in December. Unless they returned to their fidelity to John's sons, they would not be able to avoid accusations of treason (*proditio*), since they could no longer claim that the king had wronged them.[31] Henry's childhood ended up becoming a factor in the rhetorical reasoning for his right to rule. Rainald of Capua's letter of 1201 had claimed that the six-year-old Frederick weaponised his youth, deliberately employing his tears to protect himself against the full force of the fighting around him. Fifteen years later, it was the pope who used the idea of childhood to political advantage, citing the 'innocence' of a nine-year-old ruler and his younger brother as part of the rationale to delegitimise continued magnate conflict.[32]

A comparable dynastic threat had surfaced only a few months after Malcolm's inauguration. In November 1153, Somerled, ruler of Argyle, and his *nepotes* allied with other associates to rise up against the twelve-year-old king.[33] Examples from among the ruling elite suggest that inheritance by children was no longer the 'great infringement' of contemporary practices which some historians have implied.[34] Another Malcolm (d. *c.* 1197) had become earl of Atholl as a child during David I's reign and, after the death of Duncan I, *mormaer* of Fife, in 1154, his son, Duncan II (d. 1204), was still a minor.[35] Beyond Scotia, Harald Maddadsson had gained a half-share of the Orkney earldom in 1138

[30] S. McGlynn, *Blood Cries Afar: The Forgotten Invasion of England 1216* (Stroud, 2011).

[31] Honorius III, *Opera omnia*…, ed. C. A. Horoy, 5 vols (Paris, 1879–82), II, no. 74 (col. 101).

[32] Honorius III, *Opera omnia*, II, nos. 74 (col. 101), 157 (col. 200); *Memoriale*, II, 233, for the magnates' opposing view; Ward, 'Star lit by God', in press.

[33] *Chron. Holyrood*, 124–5; A. Woolf, 'The song of the death of Somerled and the destruction of Glasgow in 1153', *Journal of the Sydney Society for Scottish History*, 14 (2013), 1–11 (esp. 2–3, 4). For Somerled's representation in contemporary and later sources see also C. Ellis, 'Impressions of a twelfth-century maritime ruler – Somerled: Viking warrior, clan chieftain or traitor to the Scottish king?', *Northern Studies*, 51 (2020), 1–14.

[34] R. A. McDonald and S. A. McLean, 'Somerled of Argyll: a new look at old problems', *SHR*, 71 (1992), 3–22 (quote at 13).

[35] K. H. Jackson, *The Gaelic Notes in the Book of Deer* (Cambridge, 1972), 81–3; Taylor, *Shape of the State*, 44, 49.

when he was around the age of five.[36] Far more egregious than a twelve-year-old ruler, therefore, was the fact that his accession upheld David's aims to implement a primogenital principle for royal succession which disregarded other male collateral claimants. Somerled's *nepotes* were the sons of yet another Malcolm, natural-born son of King Alexander I. This Malcolm had been imprisoned at Roxburgh since 1134.[37] Contenders for the kingship from this collateral branch were far from unusual in twelfth-century Scotland. Prior to Malcolm's imprisonment, he had opposed David twice: the first time shortly after David's succession to the throne around the age of forty; the second, in 1130, several years into the king's reign.[38] Malcolm IV's succession was a rejection, once again, of this family's royal ambitions, but it is unlikely that the king's age alone provoked the uprising, even if his youth further emboldened magnate actions. A single manuscript of the *Scotichronicon* is the sole source to connect Somerled's rebellion in 1153 explicitly to the ruler's young age. Produced at Coupar Angus between 1450 and 1480, this copy of Bower's shortened version of the *Scotichronicon* altered earlier accounts of the events to add that 'he [Somerled?] despised [the king] because he was a boy'.[39] This fifteenth-century text is an unreliable witness from which to extrapolate that the ruler's childhood had been a principal factor spurring opposition to his rule three centuries earlier.

Political communities did not accept children as rulers simply because they were the last possible option, and a boy king's succession did not always go unchallenged. The Holyrood chronicler's claim that Somerled's rebellion caused widespread disturbance and unease was no exaggeration, as evidenced by the destruction of Glasgow in 1153.[40] Unrest was similarly widespread across England sixty years later. For most of the initial year of Henry's reign, it was unclear whether royalist forces would be able to maintain the child on the throne, or whether the supporters of Prince Louis would secure a further hold over the

[36] B. E. Crawford, *The Northern Earldoms: Orkney and Caithness from A.D. 870 to 1470* (Edinburgh, 2013), 183–4; P. Topping, 'Harald Maddadson, earl of Orkney and Caithness, 1139–1206', *SHR*, 62 (1983), 105–20 (106–7).

[37] For the confusion between Alexander I's son Malcolm and another Malcolm, known as MacHeth, see Ross, 'Prisoner of Roxburgh'.

[38] Duncan, *Kingship*, 66–7; McDonald, 'Soldiers'.

[39] 'quem tanquam puerum contempsit', Edinburgh, NLS, MS Adv. 35.1.7, fo. 161v; Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, IV, 253. It is less clear who is supposed to be the subject of the singular form of *contemnere*: either Somerled, or the Malcolm who was father to Somerled's nephews? A late twelfth-century chronicle notes that Malcolm was *puer* at the time of the rebellion but does not imply this was the reason for Somerled's actions. See BNF, NAL 692, fo. 60 (transcribed in Todd and Offler, 'A medieval chronicle', 158).

[40] Woolf, 'Song'.

kingdom and eventually see their leader crowned.[41] In England, military action proved decisive in fortifying the boy's dynastic legitimacy and neutralising the immediate threat to his rule, but fears of potential dynastic opposition continued to cause heightened anxiety. Rioters in London shouted their support for Louis in 1222 and, two years later, the French king's attack on Poitou and capture of La Rochelle contributed to serious concerns that he would invade England again.[42] The severity of opposition to both Malcolm and Henry should not be downplayed, but childhood was less of a contributory factor to such hostility than often assumed.

FORMS OF CONFLICT

Having already touched on some of the fundamental problems with accounts of magnate conflict, a further warning is necessary before considering other forms violence took when a boy was king. Quantification is a deeply problematic tool for assessing the incidence and severity of violent conflict across the medieval period, especially considering the qualitative nature of the available evidence.[43] This obstacle has not restrained historians from contrasting periods of child kingship with an elusive, semi-mythical 'norm' of peace and stability. Even though the foundations for such comparison are precarious, the propensity to equate the period a child was on the throne with greater prevalence of violence and heightened intensity of conflict endures. We saw above that the biblical warning of Ecclesiastes 10:16 – 'Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child…' – has been far more instrumental in shaping modern perceptions of periods of child kingship than in determining how boy kings were viewed between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries or in reflecting political realities.[44] The latter half of the verse – '…and when the princes feast in the morning' – appears to validate child kingship's association with opportunistic violence. Once again, however, there is a risk of generalisation in transposing this biblical passage directly onto the central medieval period.[45] Applying the arbitrary label of violent opportunism to all instances of conflict when a child was king oversimplifies

[41] For the precarity of Henry's situation see S. Painter, *The Reign of King John* (Baltimore, 1949, repr. 1966), 297; Carpenter, *Minority*, 13–49.

[42] *Chron. maiora*, III, 72; G. J. Turner, 'The minority of Henry III: part 2', *TRHS*, 1 (1907), 205–62 (216); B. Weiler, 'Henry III's plans for a German marriage (1225) and their context', *TCE*, 7 (1999), 173–88 (esp. 178).

[43] T. Reuter, 'Debating the "feudal revolution"', in *Medieval Polities*, 72–88 (73–5); Brown, *Violence*, 3–5.

[44] See Chapter 3. [45] Similarly, Kölzer, 'Königtum', 318.

the complex range of reasons for magnate disputes. Instead, conflict could be, among other things, a legitimate response to royal succession, a habitual aspect of the negotiation of disputed property and rights, or a product of recurring quarrels over hierarchy and prominence.

Violence and unrest in the kingdoms of north-western Europe rarely stemmed from a desire to depose a boy king, but child rulers were no exception to the broader norm in which magnate conflict frequently characterised the initial years of a new king's reign. This provides a wider context for ecclesiastical reports of general disorder following a child's succession, even if it is unlikely that the commonplace nature of such unrest made it any less perturbing for those living through it. Adam of Bremen claimed that Emperor Henry III's death and his young son's succession had brought confusion to the church and fears for the end of public order.[46] Early in Philip I's reign, Archbishop Gervais voiced his concern to Pope Nicholas that the behaviour of 'unrestrained and untamed countrymen' would lead to the kingdom's desolation.[47] Chroniclers and churchmen made similar comments regardless of whether their new ruler was a child or not.[48]

Nobles were often willing to exploit a king's succession. They attempted to use the arbitration processes which ensued to their benefit, especially in renegotiating disputed lands and rights, and often employed force to do so. A fuller picture of these confrontations frequently evades the historian since the surviving evidence is predominantly ecclesiastical in nature. Abbeys and churches intentionally cultivated the memory of property disputes and the associated magnate violence. Hariulf of Saint-Riquier, for example, argued that a knight named Walter had stolen land from the abbey when Philip and the French kingdom were under Count Baldwin's guardianship during the 1060s.[49] Although Hariulf was writing at least thirty years after Philip's succession, the Saint-Riquier community were still keen to press their right to this land. Emphasising the violence and deceitfulness of magnate behaviour helped further legitimise the abbey's prior claim. A slightly more balanced view of magnate behaviour can be found in a royal charter recording Philip's confirmation of a property exchange with the monastery of Saint-Germain-des-Prés in the initial year of his reign. Through words put into the boy king's mouth, the diploma narrates how many of the French nobles began

[46] Adam of Bremen, *Gesta*, 176.

[47] 'quantum infrenes et indomiti sunt nostrates', Gervais of Reims, *Epistola ad Nicolaum II Papam*, PL 143 (Paris, 1882), no. 39 (col. 1361).

[48] Wipo, *Gesta Chuonradi imperatoris*, ed. H. Bresslau, *MGH SS rer. Germ.* 61 (Hanover, 1915), 1–62 (8–9); Gervase of Canterbury, *Historical Works*, I, 161–2.

[49] Hariulf, *Chronique*, 234–5.

to press him with property demands after his succession. Since Philip's father had held everything peacefully and unchallenged, the new ruler was uncertain whether such noble claims were just or unjust. Unsurprisingly, the nobles were convinced all their demands were lawful.[50] This charter sounds a cautionary note against assuming the illegitimacy of magnate opportunism. The king, his mother and those counselling them were willing to concede the need for further investigation and negotiation of such claims before condemning them outright.

A more direct link between the escalation of conflict and a child's rule is occasionally apparent, as in ongoing disputes over the possession of royal castles in England during Henry III's minority. Magnates such as William, count of Aumale (d. 1241), attempted to retain the castles they had held since the period of baronial warfare at the end of John's reign. Some refused to return them even when issued direct orders in Henry's name.[51] The king's young age exacerbated the situation because the restoration of royal property became entwined with ideas about his attainment of full age.[52] Arguments that Henry's youth entitled magnates and castellans to retain castles formerly entrusted to them did not meet with universal approval, however. Pope Honorius rejected this excuse as a cover for greed in a letter to the legate Pandulph in May 1220.[53] Doubts have also been expressed regarding whether localised castle wars really posed a substantial threat to royal government, an interpretation further supported by the lack of severe punishment after castles had been surrendered.[54]

A similarly rapid intensification of conflict could also occur within the context of disputes concerning hierarchy. Although quarrels over prominence were hardly confined to moments of child kingship, a striking example from eleventh-century Germany indicates that the ruler's boyhood at least played a role in increasing magnate audacity and lessening the fear of royal repercussions. Towards the end of 1062, the bishop of Hildesheim challenged the abbot of Fulda's right to take precedence over him in the seating for a Christmas assembly. Several months later, the prelates' dispute deteriorated into bloodshed when the episcopal and abbatial entourages clashed violently in Goslar church in front of

[50] Prou, *Recueil*, no. 13.

[51] Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Stevenson, RS 66 (London, 1875), 188, 190; Turner, 'Minority: part 2', 221–55; Carpenter, *Minority*, 185, 189–91, 198–9, 227–34, 301–42.

[52] R. Eales, 'Castles and politics in England 1215–1224', in R. E. Liddiard (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Castles* (Woodbridge, 2003), 367–88 (esp. 375–84). See Chapter 10.

[53] *ROHL*, I, appendix 5, no. 9; Carpenter, *Minority*, 123.

[54] Eales, 'Castles', 376, 379, 385–6. For the exceptional nature of William de Bréauté's fortification of Bedford and the execution of these rebels see E. Amt, 'Besieging Bedford: military logistics in 1224', *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 1 (2002), 101–24.

the king. This was an exceptional conflict in many ways.[55] Lampert's lengthy account of events is partisan in emphasising monastic rights and criticising the bishop's actions, but other narratives corroborate both the violence of the incident and Henry IV's presence.[56] Considering the compromise of Henry's royal dignity was a prominent and repetitive theme throughout the *Annals*, Lampert's depiction of the twelve-year-old king's ineffective shouts in defence of his majesty (*regia maiestas*) should likely be taken with a large pinch of salt.[57] Nevertheless, it is far more plausible that, as the writer suggests, the king's young age had been one, among other, factors which encouraged the bishop to assert his precedence so forcefully.

The conjecture that a boy king led to greater violence and anarchy derives, in part, from the common but misguided assumption that a child ruler was an absent ruler. Papal and ecclesiastical complaints about the treatment of the Church can bolster such an impression, but even these sources are often more ambiguous than they initially appear. Pope Gregory VII, in the mid-1070s, recalled Philip I's early reign as a time when weak royal power and a lack of law had led to a state of *bellum* and encouraged magnate abuses. Although hardly a glowing report of child rulership, Gregory perceived these circumstances to be preferable to the *even worse* situation currently facing the French clergy and kingdom in 1074, at a time when Philip 'should not be called a king but a tyrant'.[58] Elsewhere in this book, I have shown how child kingship does not neatly align with a model of absenteeism, especially since boy kings were never equated with the 'absence' of royal rule.[59] Furthermore, since the 1990s, historians – in particular those working on Ottonian, Salian and Staufen Germany – have questioned the suggestion that royal presence inevitably upheld royal rule. Ottonian kings' absences did not necessarily cause the breakdown of royal rule at a regional level, and Frederick II's absences from Germany caused less of a political problem in the thirteenth century than once thought.[60]

[55] Reuter, 'Peace-breaking', 360; Robinson, *Henry*, 61–2; T. Vogtherr, 'Die Reichsklöster Corvey, Fulda und Hersfeld', in S. Weinfurter (eds.), *Die Salier und das Reich*, 3 vols (Sigmaringen, 1991), II, 429–64 (445–6).

[56] Lampert, *Annales*, 81–4; Berthold, *Chronicon*, 196.

[57] Lampert, *Annales*, 83. See earlier in this chapter, 234–5.

[58] 'qui non rex sed tyrannus dicendus est', Gregory VII, *Das Register*, ed. E. Caspar, *MGH Epistolae selectae* 2.1 (Berlin, 1920), no. 2.5 (130) (trans. H. E. J. Cowdrey, *The Register, 1073–1085: An English Translation* [Oxford, 2002], 97).

[59] See especially Chapter 7.

[60] A. Kränzle, 'Der abwesende König: Überlegungen zur ottonischen Königsherrschaft', *FrSt*, 31 (1997), 120–57; B. Arnold, 'Emperor Frederick II (1194–1250) and the political particularism of the German princes', *JMH*, 26 (2000), 239–52.

The underlying assumption of an anthropological constant which equates the relaxation of royal oversight with increasingly anarchic behaviour has also been contested.[61] Children may not have been able to exert their own will and presence in conflicts in the same way as adult men, but their kingship was still important. Aspects of royal will and emphasis on the king's participation were never entirely lacking.

Child rulers were not synonymous with deficient justice, and those seeking restitution for injustice still perceived boy kings as authoritative figureheads.[62] Henry IV's counsellors and guardians took the conflict at Goslar church in 1063 seriously, with a strict investigation taking place the following day.[63] Even after this enquiry judged against their abbot, the community of Fulda maintained enough faith in royal channels of restitution that, a short time later, some of the monks appealed to the king against the abbot's abuses.[64] Clergy also continued to address their entreaties directly to young rulers when magnate violence targeted churches and church liberties. Early in Philip II's reign, clerics complained to the king about the actions of noblemen such as the lords of Charenton and Beaujeu and the counts of Chalon-sur-Saône and Mâcon.[65] These were, partially, opportunistic responses to Louis VII's lengthy illness and his son's succession, but such violence was also part of a much longer history of conflict. The churches of Burgundy, for instance, had already been embroiled in disagreements with Humbert III, lord of Beaujeu, for several decades.[66] The fifteen-year-old king's valiant defence of ecclesiastical rights provides the centrepiece of the first year of his reign in Rigord's panegyric. It was the first time Philip had appeared at the head of a royal army, and the ruler's actions demonstrated his firm adherence to his coronation promises. Yet the Burgundy churches were not alone in continuing to seek support through royal channels when a child or adolescent was king. Before May 1253, Alexander III received a joint petition from the Scottish episcopate which complained about laymen depriving clerics of ecclesiastical possessions granted in alms without a judicial inquiry.[67] Rather than simply viewing this petition as a response to the political instability of a child ruler, the episcopal demands fit within a much wider context of disputes across the

[61] Reuter, 'Insecurity of travel', 49, 50 and 'Debating the "feudal revolution"', 74.
[62] See also Chapter 8. [63] Lampert, *Annales*, 83. [64] Lampert, *Annales*, 84–7.
[65] Rigord, *Histoire*, 134–7; *Philippe Auguste*, I, nos. 1, 17; Baldwin, *Government*, 26.
[66] *Études*, no. 628; C. B. Bouchard, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980–1198* (London, 1987), 130.
[67] Edinburgh, NLS, Adv. 15.1.18, no. 16 (transcribed and trans. *MoA*); M. Ash, 'The church in the reign of Alexander III', in Reid (ed.), *Scotland*, 31–52 (37).

thirteenth century about the relationship between secular and ecclesiastical justice.[68] The bishops' public objection to the boy king's counsellors introducing a 'certain new thing (*quiddam nouum*) previously unheard of' was also intended as a performative statement.[69] The letter distanced the twelve- or thirteen-year-old ruler from the irresponsible and novel actions of his counsellors, but it still held Alexander ultimately accountable, by virtue of his royal office, for ensuring the just treatment of clerics in future.

Even when magnates engaged in violent conflict or removed themselves from their fidelity to a child ruler, there was a level of respect for the institution of kingship which restrained direct action against the boy himself. The king's presence and participation could still exert a critical influence in dispersing conflict or resolving violent disputes, notwithstanding his young age. Joinville claimed that, when Louis IX attempted to engage some of the French barons in battle early in 1230, they were unwilling to fight against him and requested that the fifteen-year-old king remove himself from the battlefield. Louis refused, retorting that 'he would never send his men into battle without going with them in person'.[70] Joinville's account of events in the 1220s and 1230s cannot be accepted uncritically, as already noted, but royal charters provide more reliable contemporary evidence that the young king's presence in a locality could be an influential tool against magnate opportunism. Representatives from the English king had attended Louis's coronation in November 1226 and attempted to assert Henry III's 'hereditary right' to the Norman and Poitevin lands his father had lost to Louis's grandfather.[71] Ridicule had greeted the envoys' similar requests at Louis VIII's inauguration only a few years before, but the English embassy may have hoped to receive a more favourable hearing from the child ruler and Blanche, who was Henry's cousin.[72] Only a few weeks after Louis IX's coronation, the twelve-year-old king travelled with his mother and the royal court to Le Vaudreuil, a fortress outside Rouen which had been strategically important to Philip Augustus's campaigns against John.[73] In this symbolic location, Louis confirmed various liberties which his father and grandfather had formerly granted the commune and inhabitants of

[68] Taylor, *Shape of the State*, 337–43 (esp. 341–2). [69] NLS, Adv. 15.1.18, no. 16 (trans. *MoA*).
[70] Joinville, *Vie*, 196–8 (trans. C. Smith, *The Life of Saint Louis*, in *Chronicles of the Crusades* (London, 2008), 137–336, quote at 167).
[71] 'jure haereditario', Ralph of Coggeshall, *Chronicon*, 197. See also *Ex chronico Turonensi*, 318.
[72] *Dunstable Annals*, 81–2; Carpenter, *Minority*, 309–11. In later letters addressed to Blanche, Henry emphasised their close ties of kinship. See, for example, *PR, 1225–1232*, 244.
[73] Bradbury, *Philip*, 146–7; Baldwin, *Government*, 89, 193–4.

Rouen after the town's surrender in June 1204.[74] Louis's presence at Le Vaudreuil was a forthright response to Plantagenet impingement on Capetian rule in Normandy.

Other situations similarly reveal the value of the child king's presence in combatting magnate encroachments or preventing further escalation of violence, showing that children could still influence the nature of conflict and warfare even if they lacked military experience.[75] In response to unrest among the Saxon princes shortly after Henry IV's succession, arrangements were made for the boy king to travel to Saxony.[76] It is unlikely that the initiative for the visit to Merseburg in June 1057 originated with the six-year-old ruler, but the ability to call a royal assembly in the locality, to which the princes could be summoned to account for their actions, relied on his presence. Likewise, in England, when the Flemish serjeant Robert de Gaugi refused to surrender Newark castle to the bishop of Lincoln in July 1218, William Marshal took the ten-year-old king to the castle with a large army. After a siege lasting nearly eight days, Robert came to terms with the bishop and an agreement was settled between them 'with the king's assent' (*rege annuente*).[77] In this case, as elsewhere, the child ruler's presence was still deemed to be an effective tool in encouraging an end to defiance, facilitating the resolution of conflict.

KIDNAP AS POLITICAL PROTEST

When children embodied royal authority, it was not uncommon for their bodies to become disputed assets in magnate conflicts. The forcible removal of boy kings from their guardians and custodians – which I refer to collectively as cases of 'kidnap' even though this term is not always semantically appropriate – was a relatively common occurrence between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries. In addition to Henry IV's abduction from Kaiserswerth in 1062, some of the French princes attempted, unsuccessfully, to seize Louis IX on the road from Orléans to Paris in 1228 or 1229.[78] In Scotland, Alexander III was twice removed from the

[74] AN, JJ 26, fo. 83 col. 1; *Ordonnances des roys de France de la troisième race…*, ed. L. G. de Vilevault *et al.*, 21 vols (Paris, 1723–1849), II, 411–12; Moufflet, 'Autour de l'hôtel', Itinéraire no. 6.

[75] For the broader significance of the king's presence or absence see M. Strickland, 'Against the Lord's anointed: aspects of warfare and baronial rebellion in England and Normandy, 1075–1265', in Garnett and Hudson (eds.), *Law and Government*, 56–79.

[76] Lampert, *Annales*, 71.

[77] Roger of Wendover, *Flores historiarum*, II, 227; *PR, 1216–1225*, 164; Carpenter, *Minority*, 84–6.

[78] Joinville, *Vie*, 188; *Les grandes chroniques de France*, ed. J. Viard, 10 vols (Paris, 1920–53), VII, 38–40.

custody of different groups of guardians, first in 1255 and then again in 1257.[79] Frederick's capture at Palermo in 1201 shows such strategies were not confined to the kingdoms of north-western Europe, as does the Lara family's struggle to gain custody of Alfonso VIII (r. 1158–1214) in the year following the infant's succession to the Castilian throne.[80] Political intricacies, magnate motivations and the means of abduction inevitably varied from case to case, but these examples all reinforce the resolute acceptance of children within systems of medieval rulership. A firm conviction of the child's right to rule lay at the core of these abduction attempts.

Cases of kidnap provide an informative lens through which to consider the idea of aristocratic conflict as a legitimate part of medieval social order. Leyser's work on Ottonian Saxony has been especially formative in demonstrating how social anthropological insights can inform, albeit cautiously, an understanding of conflict as signs of 'continuity, equilibrium, and cohesion' when it expressed common values.[81] Magnate efforts to commandeer child rulers reveal such shared aspirations and values: namely, a common understanding that the power which resided with the king's guardians and custodians was provisional because its legitimacy relied on access to the child. The act of abduction was hardly the epitome of anarchic behaviour. Even when writers attributed emotive or vengeful motivations to a boy king's abductors, their anger or desire for revenge never turned against the king. Kidnap was rarely spontaneous since it relied on forward planning to succeed.[82] Seizing the young ruler was usually the culmination of a longer process of princely consultation via meetings or the exchange of letters among those who were dissatisfied with the status quo.[83] After the kidnap, writers predictably disagreed over whether such action was evidence of the utmost loyalty or of base treachery. Nowhere is this more explicit than in the divergent accounts of events at Edinburgh castle in 1255 which resulted in the seizure of the king and queen of Scots. According to Matthew Paris, it was to remedy the treacherous behaviour of Robert de Ros and other royal *custodes* that both Scottish and English magnates entered the castle to commandeer Alexander and Margaret.[84] The Melrose chronicler took the opposite view, accusing the magnates who had captured

[79] *Chron. Melrose*, fos 57r–58v; *Chron. maiora*, V, 504–6, 656. [80] del Álamo, 'Homage', 262.
[81] Leyser, *Rule and Conflict*, esp. 1, 28–9. See also: Reuter, 'Peace-breaking', 362; R. Lavelle, *Places of Contested Power: Conflict and Rebellion in England and France, 830–1150* (Woodbridge, 2020), esp. ch. 1.
[82] See Struve, 'Königsraub', esp. 251, for the pre-planning involved in kidnapping Henry IV.
[83] *Annales Altahenses*, 59; *Chron. maiora*, V, 501–2. [84] *Chron. maiora*, V, 502.

the king of an act of *perditio*.[85] Putting the contradictory nature of these accounts to one side, both positions of the rhetorical argument acknowledged the efficacy of abduction as a tool to renegotiate guardianship arrangements and influence royal governance. Removing the child likewise withdrew the authority to continue managing the kingdom's affairs. Other authoritative symbols of rulership, such as the royal insignia or the king's seal, were sometimes taken at or about the same time.[86] The boy king's young age deflected political resistance away from the ruler to target those responsible for his custody. In this respect, acts of kidnap confirm how firmly contemporaries associated children with the office of kingship and how willing political communities were to work with this system rather than stand against it.

One of the main vulnerabilities of child kingship was the forcible removal of the king's body from those responsible for his care, but even kidnap cannot be interpreted as a straightforward indication of increasingly anarchic behaviour. A boy king's abduction demonstrated how completely the aristocracy invested in children as the legitimate vessels of royal authority, through whom magnates could wield additional power. The timing of kidnap attempts suggests consideration of the male life cycle could be significant. Frederick was not yet seven years old when the soldiers at Palermo handed him over to Markward, but attempts to abduct boy kings typically occurred later in their childhood. Henry IV was eleven when he was taken from his mother's care, and Louis IX was around twelve when some of the French princes attempted to separate him from Blanche. Kidnap was a reaction to broader perceptions of 'undesirable' influence rather than a rejection of maternal influence alone. Scottish magnates likewise resorted to abduction as a political tool when Alexander III was between the ages of fourteen and sixteen. Bonizo of Sutri cited Henry IV's graduation to 'adult age' (*adultus … etas*) as one of the reasons for the Empress Agnes's removal from power.[87] This claim was part of the author's polemical stance against women rulers in the 1080s and is countered by papal insistence that the Church remained Henry's rightful tutor because of the boy's age.[88] Yet Bonizo's comment calls attention to the end of childhood as a crucial period of change for a young ruler. During adolescence and youth, boys began to assert greater

[85] *Chron. Melrose*, fo. 57v.

[86] When Henry IV was kidnapped, the lance and other insignia were also seized: Berthold, *Chronicon*, 194; Struve, 'Königsraub', 255. For the theft of Alexander III's seal in 1257 see *Chron. Fordun*, 297. This was probably Alexander's small seal, for which see Chapter 10.

[87] Bonizo of Sutri, *Liber ad amicum*, 596. See also *Annales Altahenses*, 59.

[88] For Bonizo's comments against women rulers see Hay, *Military Leadership*, 199, 211–12; *PREC*, 201. For the church as Henry's *tutor* see Peter Damian, *Briefe*, no. 89; Gledhill, 'Peter Damian', 209.

influence over their entourages and there were more opportunities for them to impose their will, as the political elite were fully aware. Magnate aspirations to gain a closer relationship with the king therefore intensified as the ruler neared the cusp of adolescence. Chapter 10 will focus on further important shifts associated with a king's progression towards young adulthood.

Children may have had less power to manipulate politics in their favour but at times the aristocracy relied on the forcible seizure of young boys to secure their hold on royal government. The act of kidnap thus only reinforced how much magnates and prelates invested in kingship. Conventional impressions of medieval politics as a constant power struggle pitting king against aristocracy have been subject to sustained challenge across much of medieval Europe.[89] These ideas are significant when considering kingship as embodied in a child. Historians often instinctively assume that, since adult men equated children with political weakness, it was inevitable the aristocracy would exploit this when a boy was king, whether by claiming royal prerogatives, alienating lands and privileges, attacking the ruler's dignity or destabilising royal authority. Attempts to remove children from their royal positions were rare, however, and conflict often upheld their legitimacy to rule rather than undermining it. Child rulers rarely attracted fresh adversaries. In the select cases where opposition encompassed a dynastic aspect, the conditions for such conflict pre-dated the boy's succession. Instances of magnate violence – the seizure of lands and property, the retention and fortification of castles, attacks on royal or ecclesiastical liberties, or even bloodshed in the king's presence – were seldom one-dimensional in their motivations even if the king's youth sometimes emboldened such actions. Magnates employed the same recognisable channels of protest when a child was king as they did on other occasions, and royal responses to conflict were not simply postponed until the boy came of age. Once again, there is evidence that the child king's presence and active participation conveyed a significant and authoritative weight, often helping to dissuade the continuation of conflict or to smooth processes of reconciliation and restitution.

The lack of concerted scholarly attention to child kingship, especially from a comparative perspective, has encouraged outdated perspectives on medieval conflict to linger unchallenged. Judging whether violent opportunism was any more or less present when a child was king is fundamentally asking a quantitative question of qualitative, highly rhetoricised evidence in which the retrospective exaggeration of violence often

[89] M. Innes, *State and Society in the Early Middle Ages: The Middle Rhine Valley, 400–1000* (Cambridge, 2000); Taylor, *Shape of the State*.

served the writer's current purposes. At best, scholars have been misled by, and placed too much weight upon, accounts written from the perspective of victims which exploit notions of childhood fragility and political instability to dramatise their narratives for political or economic effect. More ominously, expectations of a direct causal relationship between childhood and conflict suggest that nineteenth-century romanticised tropes of childhood still hold a tenacious historiographical influence. At worst, the assumption that political stability entirely depends on a strong, adult monarch exposes modern fears of the inevitability of adult exploitation of children unless rigorous state-backed mechanisms are in place to protect them.