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□ Implications of Feeding Pigs in the Anglo-Norman Forest

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines documents dating 1066-1135 to gain insights into the practice of pannage and its implications. Feeding pigs in wooded areas of England and Normandy was common during the 11th and 12th centuries and was a driving force to manage the Anglo-Norman woodlands.

KEY WORDS: Pannage - medieval

"They claimed the right to send all their herds of pigs into the two forests, but the count did not wish to allow them more than a customary two herds. The two parties eventually compromised on four herds which could always be sent into the forests, but not into the count's fenced-off enclosure. However, if the count sent his own herds of pigs or other herds into the fortified enclosure, then the monks should also be allowed to do so." (Bates 1998, 262)

This agreement between the abbey of Saint-Wandrille and Count William of Evreux in 1074 provides a glimpse into the practice of sending pigs into forests to fatten up on acorns before slaughter. The practice was not without environmental implications. If too many pigs rooted in the forest, they could damage the forest ecosystem, thus the Count desired to limit the herd. In addition, he had created an enclosure for deer hunting where the vegetation provided adequate shelter and fodder for the deer. Swine could feed within the enclosure, but the Count wished to limit them to avoid habitat damage. Feeding pigs in the forest was not a simple matter.

Documents dating from William's conquest of England in 1066 to the end of his son Henry's reign in 1135 yield additional insights into this practice and bring us to two conclusions: feeding pigs in wooded areas of England and Normandy was a normal practice, and landholders actively managed woodland to accommodate it. This paper examines these propositions and draws some conclusions about medieval woodland conservation.

Scholars have disagreed about the importance of feeding pigs in wooded areas, known as pannage. R. Lennard (1959) argued that "Extensive pig-farming was a normal feature of districts in which there was much gladiferous woodland, and in some of these must have played a really important part in the economy". He based his conclusion on evidence in Domesday Book, William the Conqueror's financial census. In Domesday Book, the normal formula for woodland size is 'wood for x swine' (*silva ad x porcos*) although Shropshire entries are specific: 'wood for fattening (*incrassandis*) x swine'. H.C. Darby (1950) compiled the most extensive study of Domesday geography and drew the same conclusion as Lennard, "Wood formed an important item in the economy of the eleventh century because its acorns and beech-mast

provided food for swine." Based on Domesday references, these authors agree that pannage played a crucial role in the medieval landscape. But landscape historian O. Rackham has recently argued that Domesday records cannot be accurate because of acorn crop unpredictability. "Acorns and beechmast are notoriously variable crops, which often fail... By 1086 the wood-swine had become the swine of the imagination; real pigs were counted separately and fed in other ways" (Rackham 1990). Pannage was "only an occasional bonus to the pig-keeper and brought in an erratic and usually trivial rent to his lord" (Rackham 2000).

Which assessment is accurate? Oak silviculture studies demonstrate that acorn production does vary considerably, ranging from very poor, in which a small proportion of the trees have acorns, to very good, in which nearly all trees have a heavy crop (Johnston *et al.* 2002, McShea, Healy 2002). However, the data sets do not indicate bimodality, i.e. dearth and plenty years. Moderate crop sizes are just as common as extreme years (McShea, Healy 2002). Although years of excellent crop production are limited, typically acorns would have been available in the Anglo-Norman oak woods.

Charters point to the same conclusion. King Henry I gave to the abbey of St. Martin at Battle, England the "feeding in the woods of 'Bocfalde' and 'Betlesparrioc', one pig for every three that the King has there; and the fourth penny of pannage", and on the Continent, he granted to St. Martin's at Marmoutier "100 swine free of pannage in the forests of the Cotentin" (Johnson, Cronne 1956, p. 1238, 1948). Obviously, pannage had enough economic value to be worth specific enumeration with the king's signature.

Kings were not the only granters of pannage. Robert count of Mortain made two such surviving grants: to the abbey of Marmoutier, he permitted "wherever the count's pigs go into the forest, the monks' pigs shall do likewise without payment of pannage", and to the church of Saint-Evroult, "He granted that the pigs belonging to the canons, the priests of the prebends and their rent-paying farmers should be free and quit of pannage" (Bates 1998, p. 205, 215). The care with which these grants were recorded shows that pannage was more than just "an occasional bonus", but a regular part of the economy.

Contemporary calendars depict fall pannage. Two 11th century Anglo-Saxon manuscripts provide identical depictions of pigs feeding on acorns in September (BL Cott Julius A.vi and Cott Tiberius B.v). In the Anglo-Norman period, a calendar created c. 1140 at St. Alban's monastery depicts a swine-herder knocking down acorns for his pig on the October-November page followed by the pig slaughter in November-December (Bodl. MS. Auct. D.2.6). Anglo-Normans needed to take advantage of woods to fatten their swine. Dietary records are scarce for the time period, but pork, excluding bacon and entrails, made up 14% of the total weight of meat consumed by Westminster monks c. 1495-1525 (Harvey 1993). By allowing the pigs to gorge on acorns before slaughter, the meat quantity was increased. The swine in calendar pages may be "swine of the imagination", but they reveal that more than imaginary pigs were feeding in medieval woods.

Allowing pigs in woodlands could come at a price. Swine rooting behavior could cause vegetative damage, therefore, Anglo-Norman charters control the swine: King William I limited St. Martin's at Marmoutier to 100 swine; King Henry permitted St. Martin at Battle one pig for every three of his own; Robert of Mortain allowed pannage only in designated areas (see above). They made conscious efforts to limit pig foraging to managed areas, which were not dependant on natural regeneration because of coppicing practices in those areas.

The impact on deer was also limited. A donor to Lessay abbey made it clear that different conditions applied inside and outside of his deer parks. "Outside the park, the monks are to have pasture for all their animals and for all their pigs... if the pigs are sent to graze inside the

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park, the monks shall have the right freely to graze one hundred pigs from Martinmas until Lent." (Bates 1998, 175). Segregating forest uses increased the overall production of acorns, deer, and fattened pigs.

Pannage played an integral role in overall Anglo-Norman woodland management. Charter evidence shows that it was common in spite of crop variability. Pigs fattened before the slaughtering season were not an unexpected bonus, but a necessity for the slim winter months, hence their common inclusion in illustrations. Woodland management as a whole was affected. Landholders set aside pasture areas within the forest to allow for pannage with minimum impact. The practice of feeding pigs on acorns was a driving force to manage the Anglo-Norman woodlands.

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