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Political Concensuses and Compromises in Relation to Anjou Expansion (Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries)

This study examines the role of political compromise and consensus in the expansion of Angevin dynastic power during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It focuses on three major cases of crown acquisition originating from the County of Anjou: the accession of Fulk V to the throne of Jerusalem, the rise of Henry II to the English crown, and the establishment of Charles of Anjou in Naples and Sicily. Rather than interpreting these successes solely as results of conquest, the article emphasizes the importance of negotiation, adaptation, and power-sharing with local elites. The reign of Fulk of Jerusalem illustrates how compromise functioned as a practical political strategy in managing conflicts with aristocratic factions and external powers such as Byzantium. In the case of Henry II, strong royal authority and administrative reform often reduced the immediate need for compromise, though the cultivation of loyalty among the nobility remained essential. Charles of Anjou similarly combined centralizing reforms with pragmatic respect for existing legal traditions, particularly in Provence and southern Italy. Across these examples, compromise appears both as a tool of conflict resolution and as a means of preventing conflict altogether. The study argues that Angevin political practice reflects a transitional stage between feudal consensus and the later development of more institutionalized political systems.

Keywords: Angevins, political compromise, consensus, Kingdom of Jerusalem, County of Anjou, Fulk V, Henry II of England, Charles of Anjou, medieval political culture



Among the dynastic and political constructions of the High Middle Ages, a particularly noteworthy phenomenon may be observed: the series of crown acquisitions originating from the County of Anjou in France. Within less than a century and a half, these ventures produced three distinct outcomes, each of which may be considered a durable success, even in the medium term. Count Fulk V of Anjou (1109–1129) secured the crown of Jerusalem; two generations later, his grandson Henry II (1154–1189) ascended the throne of England. A little more than a century afterwards, Charles of Anjou (1266–1285), of the Capetian line, established his rule over Naples and Sicily, thereby extending the sphere of influence of Angevine dynasties still further. These achievements, of

course, rested upon the convergence of multiple factors. Yet, it remains essential to ask by what strategic rationale the initial steps were undertaken, and whether any common features can be discerned among them. A sequence of successes unfolding in such divergent directions cannot be explained solely in terms of conquest; dynastic viability, in political terms, necessarily presupposed mechanisms of adaptation, the forging of power-sharing arrangements, and, more broadly, a capacity for compromise. For the historian, such political or other forms of consensus are often difficult to grasp directly; the present inquiry, therefore, seeks instead to identify the signs of compromise as one of the pathways through which such consensus may be approached.

To probe the issue more closely, it is first necessary to clarify what “compromise” might have meant in the circumstances under discussion. One of the enduring features of historical narrative is its tendency to focus on events and conflicts. Medieval accounts of conflict, in particular, were not only highly conventionalized but also suffused with emotion; thus, compromise was framed less as the outcome of rational calculation than as an affective resolution. More important still is the fact that compromise often remained implicit or concealed, with contemporary sources offering only limited detail. Theoretically, compromise is frequently an element of conflict settlement, though it cannot be equated either with retreat or with full consensus. In other respects, compromise could extend beyond conflict resolution itself, forming part of territorial acquisition, appropriation, or the assumption of new political roles; in such cases, it signified avoidance of conflict or the maintenance of a conflict-free state. Political compromise, then, could function both as the resolution of a conflict and as its effective suspension.

According to the uniquely valuable chronicle of William of Tyre, the reign of Fulk of Jerusalem (1131–1143) was marked by a series of cautious, compromise-oriented, and at times consensus-seeking actions.¹ If we take into account the potential points of conflict, at least five or six significant episodes emerge in which the chronicler consistently presents the king as a prudent ruler, prepared to make concessions. It is also important to note that the management of these points of tension forms one of the guiding threads of the archbishop’s narrative.

The first such instance concerns the circumstances of Fulk’s accession. The count of Anjou, who appeared to have arrived from outside with no prior local ties, nevertheless came to power in a carefully prepared setting, one that had been negotiated with and accepted by all the relevant local power holders. While this in itself speaks primarily to Baldwin’s (Balwin II, father-in-law of the count of Anjou) political arrangements, it is evident that Fulk, from the very outset, adhered firmly to the preconditions thus secured. Among the three

¹ William of Tyre, Vol. II, p. 629–711. The textual tradition of the *Chronicle of William of Tyre* and the English and French translations of its variants are highly complex and do not necessarily correspond to one another. Therefore, in the notes I indicate the page numbers of the modern critical Latin edition.

cases under consideration, this accession exhibits the strongest consensus.² Yet only a few years after Fulk's rise, that consensus appeared to dissolve, culminating in a pronounced conflict associated with the alleged relationship between Fulk's wife, Melisende, and Hugh of Jaffa. Behind this lay a palpable dissatisfaction, which William of Tyre does not attempt to conceal.³ The situation represented a breaking point of a kind observable elsewhere as a recurring topos. If one recalls Hungarian analogies (Andrew II, Charles I)⁴, it becomes clear how brutally such clashes between newly arrived foreign rulers and entrenched local dynasties could end when framed around marital ties or accusations of infidelity.

Following William's account, however, the precise interpretation of this turning point is not entirely unambiguous. On one hand, it may be read as the emergence, only a few years into Fulk's reign, of resistance formed in reaction to his earlier style of governance—namely, that he had “begun strongly,” seeking a firm and personal kingship, which the local elite, and particularly a sidelined queen, would not tolerate, thereby forcing Fulk into retreat. At this juncture, one can clearly perceive a strong imperative to compromise, to which Fulk, displaying sound political instinct, submitted. This reading is persuasive; yet the sources provide no further supporting detail. We do not see an overbearing or domineering Fulk, nor do William or other contemporary voices speak of prior clashes with the local nobility. Given that this was a count raised to the throne through a careful, almost overly cautious series of feudal maneuvers, such an image may indeed be unwarranted. Still, this does not preclude the possibility that Fulk's very presence ran counter to the expectations of the queen and certain segments of the local aristocracy, thus generating the conflict. What William of Tyre makes clear is that, at this point, the new king had no choice but to acknowledge that the influence of his “co-actors” could not be disregarded.

Fulk's reputation, however, was not uniformly positive. Ralph of Diceto, while favorable in his judgment, records that after the death of his wife, Fulk was summoned to Jerusalem “lest he be deprived of glory,” and there the

² “*Dominus rex Ierosolimorum, de successione sollicitus, videlicet apud quem primogenitam suam nuptui collocaret, post multam deliberationem de communi universorum principum consilio, sed et de populi favore, quosdam de principibus suis, dominum videlicet Willelmum de Buris, dominum Guidonem Brisebarre, ad predictum dirigit comitem, invitans eum ad filie nuptias et regni successionem.*” William of Tyre, Vol II, p. 633. see also the french chronicler John of Marmoutier: „*Cum igitur Fulco Andegavensem, Turonicum Cenomannicumque consulatum in prosperitate regeret, rex Jerusalem Balduinus secundus nuncios in Franciam misit qui, prudentium consilio, virum idoneum qui filiam suam cum Jerosolimitano regno duceret uxorem secum adducerent. Elegerunt itaque, consilio Ludovici regis et episcoporum et multorum peritorum, Fulconem Andegavensem, virum bellicosum, qui uxore carebat. Ipse vero, cum maximis copiis mare transiens, filie regis matrimonio copulatus, rex Jerusalem effectus est.*” John of Marmoutier, p. 181

³ William of Tyre, Vol II, p. 654–656.

⁴ Andrew II (1205–1235) and Charles I (1301–1342): In Hungarian history, in both instances political and personal jealousy led respectively to a brutal murder and to an attempted murder. ENGEL 2001. p. 90–91, 138.

princes unanimously elected him to sit upon the throne of David.⁵ Orderic Vitalis, by contrast, left no such complimentary portrait. The Norman chronicler openly laments that Fulk on several occasions acted recklessly and without due caution, failed to value sufficiently those lords who had long remained steadfast, and instead lavished excessive favor upon men who had accompanied him from Anjou.⁶

If the latter judgment may be read, at least in part, as a reflection of the Norman–Angevin conflict,⁷ William of Tyre presents a different picture, in which Fulk’s reign is consistently characterized by compromise and political prudence. This is exemplified, for instance, in the case of Damascus, when he undertook to support a Muslim leader and persuaded his own subjects of the necessity of such an alliance. Another striking example lies in his relationship with Byzantium, and more specifically, the role of Antioch within his political strategy. It seems clear that a key element of Fulk’s policy was to secure a suitable figure for the leadership of Antioch, which he accomplished in 1136 with the arrival of Raymond of Poitiers, a man drawn from his own circles. Yet even while ensuring such influence, Fulk never disputed Byzantium’s claims to Antioch. Once again, William offers us the image of a ruler willing to yield ground, one who acknowledged the emperor’s rights over the principality and showed no desire to enter into a serious conflict with Byzantium on this account.⁸

At one level, then, we observe in the Latin East a recurrence of the conflict dynamics of the feudal world. Yet it is equally important to recognize that local disputes in the East were not merely similar to the practices of conflict resolution familiar in the West, but that Western rulers actively sought to transplant their own feudal logics into the crusader states. On this basis, however threatening the belligerents may at times appear, it must be understood that their aims were not necessarily—or not exclusively—mutual destruction, but rather the stabilization of a status quo with limited adjustments. Among the challenges confronting Fulk, one of the most perilous was the redefinition of relations with a resurgent Byzantium. The offensive of John II Comnenus began with a campaign—launched to great fanfare—for the “recovery” of Antioch. This goal was achieved, but the outcome was in fact to place the Frankish–crusader powers in a position of renewed, though subordinate, alliance. Fulk demonstrated acute political judgment in recognizing the nature of the Byzantine threat, and by 1137 a Frankish–Byzantine agreement was concluded. This settlement, however, necessarily entailed his acceptance of Byzantium’s claim to Antioch.

⁵ “*ipsi Fulconi deesset ad gloriam, cum nominis sui fama latius per orbem claresceret, a regni Jerosolimitani principibus unanimiter evocatus, in solio David magni regis collocatus est, Millesendem Baldewini secundi filiam unicam et heredem uxorem accipiens*” Radulfus de Diceto, p. 269. (Bolded by L. G.)

⁶ Ordericus Vitalis, IV. p. 106–107.

⁷ MAYER 1989.

⁸ Nevertheless, Fulk skillfully deflected the idea of Emperor John’s pilgrimage to Jerusalem and his visit. William of Tyre, Vol II, p. 126.

In connection with Fulk's son Geoffrey V the Fair (1129–1151), it is worth making a brief digression: Geoffrey also known as Geoffrey Plantagenet, is not a case of acquiring a crown and therefore cannot be regarded as a truly successful generation in that respect. Yet in another sense he is still worth mentioning, if only because he and his wife, Matilda of England, can be considered the founders of Angevin rule in England. It is well known, however, that the crucial marriage arranged by Henry I (1100–1135) and Count Fulk of Anjou—prompted by Matilda's widowhood in 1125—did not initially appear advantageous from Matilda's perspective. It is no coincidence that the young widow, after returning (or being simply recalled by her father) to England, showed little inclination to marry Geoffrey, who was still underage and not yet knighted.⁹ This is why the account given a few years later by our Loire-region source, John of Marmoutier, is striking: he repeatedly emphasizes that the marriage enjoyed complete consensus.¹⁰ There is no doubt that this reflects the changing expectations set by the Church—namely, the necessity of mutual consent—yet it is also easy to imagine that John of Marmoutier may have been alluding to the disappearance of earlier personal objections as well. His report, in any case, depicts a romantic, almost fairy-tale wedding, containing a fair amount of idealizing exaggeration.¹¹ Nevertheless, it can be established that we are dealing with another marriage based on full consensus, similar to the union entered into by Geoffrey's father, Fulk, a year later (1129).¹² To put it differently, the dynasty's later fate was fundamentally grounded in two emphatically consensual marriages, concluded within scarcely a year of each other—first the son's, then the father's. It is also noteworthy, however, how fragile this initial consensus proved to be, as only a few years later both

⁹ William of Malmesbury, p. 481

¹⁰ "*Traditur itaque nuptui filia regis Andegavorum comitis filio, fit ab episcopis mutui consensus scrutinium. In consensu siquidem conjugii tota vis et efficacia consistit: consensus etenim conjugium facit; consentit uterque, alter alteri fidem se servaturum pollicetur.*" John of Marmoutier, p. 180. (Bolded by L.G.)

¹¹ "*Rex vero, genero suo et filie sue pacis relinquens oscula, ad alia agenda se convertit; consul vero Andegavensis cum filio suo et filii uxore Andegavis abiit. Quibus adhuc aliquantis per longe positis, tota civitas ruit, pulsantur signa, parietes ecclesiarum cortinis et palliis adornantur; universus vero clerus in albis et cappis, cum cereis et textis et crucibus, cum hymnis et laudibus obviam devotus procedit. Susceptus est itaque dominus novus et domina nova cum maximo cleri plebisque tripudio. Duxerunt deinceps in bonis dies suos et Britannie Majoris insulam et transmaritimas partes magnifici germinis successionem nobilitaverunt*" John of Marmoutier, p. 181.

¹² For comparison, see the passage from William of Tyre's text concerning count Fulk and his wedding, "*successit in regno dominus Fulco, gener eius, comes Turonensium, Cenomannensium et Andegavensium, cui predictus dominus rex filiam suam primogenitam Milissendam nomine dederat uxorem, ut premisimus. Erat autem idem Fulco vir rufus, sed instar David, quem invenit dominus iuxta cor suum, fidelis, mansuetus et contra leges illius coloris affabilis, benignus et misericors, in operibus pietatis et elemosinarum largitione liberalis admodum; secundum carnem princeps potens et apud suos felicissimus, priusquam etiam ad regni vocaretur gubernacula; rei militaris experientissimus et in bellicis sudoribus patiens et providus plurimum; statura mediocri, sed iam grandevus et plusquam sexagesimum aens annum.*" William of Tyre, II. p. 631.

marriages seemed on the verge of collapse,¹³ though afterward they remained steady—indeed, fruitful.

The case of Henry II differs somewhat from that of his two predecessors. His administrative practice and his relationship to the elites are well known and extensively studied in the scholarship. His accession owed much to the extinction of the House of Blois and the consensus thereby produced; yet in the first decades of his reign one can observe the implementation of a carefully designed administrative reform and, alongside it, the consolidation of a political model rooted in strong royal authority. The consensus that brought him to power remained, however, only partial. The example of Anjou—part of his paternal inheritance—reveals that Henry, when it served his interests, did not hesitate to overstep both his father's testament and his brother's rights. From this, it may fairly be concluded that Henry was not fundamentally reliant on political compromise. Indeed, in the early years of his reign he often pursued a strategy of outright domination. Yet it would be mistaken to exclude compromise entirely. Research into his relations with the local nobility has shown that he consistently sought—following his father's advice—not only to take account of local conditions, but also to involve both the regional aristocracy and the clergy in governance. This qualification complicates, and to some extent contradicts, the image of Henry as a merely punitive or destructive ruler. Alongside his efforts at control and enforcement, the scholarship now recognizes the concept of fidelization—the winning of loyalty—as an equally essential component of the early Plantagenet model. Such practices were aimed, in no small measure, at neutralizing potential conflicts. The Norman evidence shows that when faced with rebellious lords, Henry's repertoire extended beyond castle demolitions or exile; after a certain time, he might allow their return, restore part of their estates, or, in the case of castles, withhold only the central donjon for royal purposes.¹⁴

The crisis of 1173–1174 is instructive in many respects, though at first glance it appears to involve little compromise. Henry II was forced to confront a series of coordinated rebellions, which might suggest an inevitable pressure to negotiate. Yet, Henry succeeded in isolating each case and resolving the situation, as it were, “by force.” This was possible only because the rebellion, celebrated in historiography, was never entirely universal: many regions and lords remained peaceful and loyal to Henry. The principal danger to the Plantagenet king lay in the territorial dispersal of the revolts, the prestige of the powers supporting them, and their degree of coordination. By virtue of his larger mercenary forces, and not least the loyalty of his remaining allies, Henry was able to suppress the rebellions without major concessions or compromises. The devastation he inflicted in Brittany, moreover, resembled a campaign of vengeance more than the actions of a shrewd tactician.¹⁵

¹³ Henry of Huntingdon, p. 258–259.

¹⁴ BILLORÉ 2014. p. 191–192.

¹⁵ BOUSSARD 1956. p. 471–488.

Yet, the resolution of the crisis marked, in many ways, a turning point, and perhaps the first substantive compromise of Henry's reign. Until then, Plantagenet politics had appeared as a model of strong, personal, indeed autocratic governance, in which neither dynastic ambitions nor ecclesiastical resistance prevailed unless endorsed by the king himself. Beneath this, however, lay a political system sustained by constant mobility, rapid responses, a dense and carefully monitored network of castles, and a well-functioning administration—around which there was already emerging a coherent ideology of kingship.¹⁶ In this sense, it was the creation of a new political structure that temporarily displaced compromise from the feudal repertoire of political instruments.

Our third example is Charles of Anjou, who in the latter half of the thirteenth century built the so-called "Angevin empire." His policies were marked by a consistent avoidance of unnecessary conflicts in matters of legal practice. This is particularly evident in Provence, where he might have overturned deeply rooted traditions of Roman law and a practice of nearly a century and a half's standing had he insisted on applying models imported from northern France. Instead, he refrained from such disruption. At the same time, this restraint was never accompanied by passivity; on the contrary, in almost every respect Charles proved more active than his predecessors.

Charles may well have learned from the earlier Plantagenet experience. The Angevin dynasty of the twelfth century, torn apart by internecine rivalries, had lost a significant portion of its domains—most notably Anjou itself. In sharp contrast stood the Capetian heir who came to rule Anjou: in his person, the French royal family embodied a model of cohesion. The respect shown for paternal intentions, the deference to the decisions of his elder brother Louis IX, the provision of space for younger siblings, and their mutual support—these were positive examples that both contemporaries and modern historiography alike have identified as characteristic of the dynasty.

Charles began his rule with an inquest (*inquisitio*), a procedure familiar from the earlier Anglo-Norman and Plantagenet models.¹⁷ French historiography generally agrees that the highly deliberate centralization and professionalized administration that followed were largely responsible for the hostile reception of his rule, particularly in Sicily. It is equally important, however, to note that the early period of his reign saw the arrival of numerous French officials, which inevitably marginalized local—above all Italian—interests. A shift became visible only in the 1270s, though even then we do not perceive the kind of internal fracture or conflict observed in our previous two cases.¹⁸ Moreover, Charles's reforms were not without precedent: they sought primarily to perfect the administrative structures of the Hohenstaufen, and, as in the case of his predecessors, many of his men operated in foreign contexts. In fact, among his most effective collaborators were Italians integrated into the

¹⁶ CHAUOU 2001.

¹⁷ POLLASTRI 2004. A similar investigation was also conducted in Provence: *Enquêtes*.

¹⁸ BRESC 2004; GALASSO 2004; POLLASTRI 2020. 425–432.

reform program, such as Giovanni della Marra of Amalfi, Francesco Loffredo, and Matteo Ruffolo.¹⁹ The result was the construction of a widely recognized fiscal and administrative order, one that reflected the obligations of the French feudal world and provided regular revenues in southern Italy. Charles himself quickly reaped its benefits.

Thus, although Charles's first measures did not rest upon broad consensus, they nevertheless displayed prudent tact and a willingness to adopt sound precedents, both earlier and local. His royal curia (*magna regia curia*) drew above all on Hohenstaufen precedents, while the royal chapel (*capella regis utriusque Siciliae*)—though an old and widespread institution—took on in Sicily a range of complex functions modeled more closely on the papal chapel than on its French counterpart.²⁰

Conclusion

In each of the three cases considered, the Angevin dynasty attained power only after broad negotiation and with substantial support. Most clearly in the case of Fulk, one detects both consensus and numerous compromises in the acquisition of the throne and in the early years of rule. Yet all three rulers were eventually confronted with crisis periods that compelled them to adopt a more moderate and compromise-oriented stance. At the same time, it is equally clear that all three cases belong to the transitional phase between the narrower consensuses, characteristic of the feudal world and consensuses of the later structures of estates and representative institutions. Most notably in the reigns of Henry II and Charles of Anjou, the strengthening of royal ideology and the initiation of administrative reforms temporarily displaced the pursuit of broader political consensuses.

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¹⁹ JEHEL 2014. p. 49.

²⁰ JEHEL 2014. p. 49–51.

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