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AN ALLEGED MEDIEVAL EARL OF NORTHUMBERLAND

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IT has been stated in previous volumes of *Archaeologia Aeliana* as well as elsewhere that Simon de Senlis, earl of Northampton (d. 1153), was also an earl of Northumberland. The following discussion will examine the validity of this view, whose adherents have included most notably A. O. Anderson and C. H. Hunter Blair.¹

From a cursory glance at the evidence advanced by Dr. Anderson and others, it may appear that they were fully justified in regarding Senlis as an earl of Northumberland. In the first place, the fourteenth-century cartulary of Newminster Abbey has preserved, save for the witness-list, an apparently authentic charter of Simon, the original of which no longer survives. And this charter-copy tells us that at some date after the foundation of Newminster in January 1138 Simon, who is described as *comes Northu(m)br(ie)*, granted to the abbey a saltpan in the neighbourhood of Warkworth.² Secondly, the testimony of this late source seems to fit in with the fact that in theory Simon had a firm right to be in possession of the earldom of Northumberland. Born shortly before about 1113, he was the elder son, by her first marriage, of Maud (d. 1130), daughter and heiress of Earl Waltheof son of Siward, and this relationship gave him a powerful hereditary claim not only to the midland honour of Huntingdon, but also to the Northumberland earldom.³

But impressive as all this may seem, a closer look at the records available throws serious doubt on the opinion expressed by Anderson and other scholars. It can be said at once that in Simon's day the English crown was definitely not prepared to allow the earldom of Northumberland to descend according to any strict "law of inheritance"; indeed in England as a whole the hereditary system was as yet far from secure.⁴ Thus Henry I (1100-35) blatantly

¹ *Early Sources of Scottish History, 500-1286*, ed. A. O. Anderson (Edinburgh, 1922), ii, pp. 157-8 (notes); C. H. Hunter Blair, "The early castles of Northumberland", *AA*⁴, xxii (1944), p. 167. See also F. S. Scott, "Earl Waltheof of Northumbria", *AA*⁴, xxx (1952), p. 209; *NCH*, v (1899), pp. 20, 139; *NCH*, xv (1940), p. 155.

² MS. Cartulary of Newminster Abbey, *penes* Mr. George Howard of Castle Howard, fo. 117^r (modern pencil foliation); printed in *Chartularium Abbatiae de Novo Monasterio*, ed. J. T. Fowler (Surtees Soc., 1878), p. 212, where Fowler has *comes Northumbriae*. I have

been able to check the form of Simon's style as it appears in the original cartulary from a photographic copy obtained through the kindness of Mr. Howard.

³ Cf. *Complete Peerage*, vi (1926), pp. 638ff; ix (1936), pp. 662-4.

⁴ F. Pollock and F. W. Maitland, *History of English Law*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, 1898), ii, p. 266. See also R. W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism* (Oxford, 1970), p. 223; R. H. C. Davis, "What happened in Stephen's reign", *History*, xlix (1964), pp. 1-12.

ignored Simon's claims *jure hereditario* and retained the earldom in his own hands.⁵ Again, though Dr. Hunter Blair suggested that "Simon did possess the earldom ... about the year 1138",⁶ there is every reason to suppose that despite the evidence of the Newminster cartulary Simon did *not* obtain it during the reign of Stephen (1135-54). In contemporary, or near-contemporary, sources such as the chronicle of Richard of Hexham, which gives a detailed and knowledgeable account of northern English affairs in the first few years following his accession,⁷ we read that Stephen's object in the beginning was to keep the earldom under direct crown control and to defend it against encroachments by the Scots, who themselves claimed Northumberland (and the honour of Huntingdon) through King David I, the second husband of Waltheof's daughter Maud. Then, having successfully withstood Scottish pressures until 1139, we know that in April of this year Stephen generously agreed to give the earldom of Northumberland (and to re-grant the Huntingdon honour) to Simon's half-brother Henry, son of David I, in the hopes that this concession would help to purchase a lasting alliance with the Scots against his great enemy, Empress Matilda.⁸

The terms of this peace with Scotland were plainly a severe blow to the pretensions of Senlis, even though he was an ardent supporter of Stephen and as such earned the reputation of an ally "upon whom the king chiefly depended".⁹ As for the Scots, they went over to the camp of the empress in the summer of 1141 and thereafter remained loyal to her cause; yet Stephen was never able to recover the earldom of Northumberland, which they continued to hold until several years after Simon's death in 1153.¹⁰ Nor will it do to assume on the basis of the Warkworth charter that Stephen established Simon against Henry as a rival earl of Northumberland, if only in name. Recent research has shown that on occasion Stephen did cease to recognise an earl who defected to Empress Matilda and appointed a more acceptable candidate in his place;¹¹ but by 1152 Earl Henry had confirmed to the monks of Newminster the saltpan at Warkworth "which my brother Earl Simon gave to them",¹² and it is hardly likely that Henry would have issued this confirmation had Senlis made his grant as an earl of Northumberland set up in direct opposition to him. Quite clearly, it seems, all that Simon gained from the failure of Stephen's *entente* with Scotland was the honour of Huntingdon,

⁵ Cf. *Complete Peerage*, ix, p. 706.

⁶ *AA*⁴, xxii, p. 167; cf. *Early Sources*, ii, p. 158n.

⁷ Richard of Hexham, *De Gestis Regis Stephani*, ed. R. Howlett in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I* (Rolls Series, 1884-9), iii, pp. 139-78.

⁸ In February 1136 Stephen had evidently promised "that if he should wish to give anyone the earldom of Northumberland, he would first cause Henry's claim upon it to be fairly judged in his court". See Richard of Hexham, pp. 146, 177-8.

⁹ *Gesta Stephani*, ed. K. R. Potter (London, 1955), p. 158.

¹⁰ *Regesta Regum Scottorum*, i, ed. G. W. S. Barrow (Edinburgh, 1960), p. 109; cf. William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, ed. Howlett in *Chronicles*, i, p. 70.

¹¹ R. H. C. Davis, *King Stephen* (London, 1967), p. 138.

¹² *Regesta Reg. Scott.*, i, no. 26; *Chart. Abb. de Novo Mon.*, pp. 212-13.

which he entered after the Scots had been ousted from the midlands about September 1141.¹³

To sum up, this brief reconstruction of the history of the Northumberland earldom during Simon's lifetime would appear to discount any notion that he was ever appointed or recognised as its earl. How, then, do we explain the evidence of Simon's charter in the Newminster cartulary and the description of him as *comes Northu(m)br(ie)*? In attempting to answer this question, it must be emphasised that where a charter survives in the form of a copy, it obviously cannot be taken for granted that the copyist has written an entirely accurate version of the original document: careless copying apart, the fault might be to deliberately alter or "improve" in some way the general presentation of the text. Bearing this in mind, it should be appreciated that for the greater part of King Stephen's reign Simon described himself as "earl of Northampton",¹⁴ and as a rule "of Northampton" seems to have appeared in his original *acta* in the shortened form of *Norh'* (also a possible abbreviation for "of Northumberland"), *Norhamt'*, or *Norhant'*.¹⁵ In light of what has already been argued, it is thus virtually certain that the Newminster cartulary scribe, writing some two hundred years after Simon's death, has made the mistake of rendering one or other of these words as *Northūbr'*, either through inaccurate copying or an uninformed attempt to produce a "better" version of Simon's style.

If we accept this—and no other explanation makes sense of the evidence at our disposal—the main facts concerning Simon's saltpan at Warkworth fall readily into place. The conclusion is that he had the property (and perhaps other interests about which the surviving records are silent)¹⁶ not as an earl of Northumberland, but simply as a tenant of the northern earldom. And although we cannot rule out the possibility that this tenancy was created for him by Henry I or Stephen before 1139, it may seem more plausible that Simon was endowed there by Earl Henry, who certainly exploited the Warkworth salt-pans as a source of patronage during his tenure of the earldom.¹⁷ For it is not unreasonable to suppose that immediately after Stephen made his generous terms with the Scots in April 1139, Henry tried to strengthen his position in England by placating Senlis for all that he had suffered as a result of this

¹³ *Regesta Reg. Scott.*, i, p. 102.

¹⁴ The exact circumstances in which Simon used this style are uncertain; but his occurrence with it is amply documented in the records of the period.

¹⁵ The following original charters may be compared: British Museum, Cotton Chr. vii. 3 (printed in W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, new edn., London, 1817-30, v, pp. 522-23, with errors); Lincoln, Dean and Chapter Muniments, Dij/84/1/13; Dij/88/1/8 (= *Registrum Antiquissimum of the Cathedral Church of Lincoln*, ii, ed. C. W. Foster, Lincoln Rec. Soc., 1933, nos. 309-10); Northants. Record Office, Delapré Abbey, Northampton,

Stopford Sackville Muniments, no. 2392 (= *Records of Harrold Priory*, ed. G. Herbert Fowler, Beds. Hist. Rec. Soc., 1935, no. 7).

¹⁶ The suggestion that Simon gave his name to Simonburn and founded the "burgh or castle" in this place (*NCH*, xv, pp. 155, 191) is disproved by Hunter Blair in *AA*⁴, xxii, pp. 166-7.

¹⁷ Brinkburn Priory gained a Warkworth saltpan from Earl Henry; so too, it seems likely, did Eustace Fitz John; and Henry may have given Newminster a second *salina* there. Cf. *NCH*, v, p. 20; *Chart. Abb. de Novo Mon.*, p. 213.

peace. In fact this may have been a motive behind the several visits that Henry paid to Stephen's court in 1139-40;¹⁸ and, by way of a friendly gesture, he possibly gave Simon his Warkworth interest at some date during this period. Finally, it can be suggested that Simon made his grant to Newminster, and that Henry confirmed it, no later than 1141, when the two men found themselves on opposite sides in the confrontation between King Stephen and Empress Matilda.

¹⁸ Richard of Hexham, p. 178; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. T. Arnold (Rolls Series, 1879), p. 265; John of

Hexham, *Historia Regum*, ed. T. Arnold in *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia* (Rolls Series, 1882-5), ii, p. 306.