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John Robert Maddicott. *The Origins of the English Parliament, 924-1327.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. xv + 526 pp. $55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-958550-2.

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The Peculiarities of the English Parliament

English medieval historians have had a long wait for a full modern scholarly account of the origins of the English parliament. H. G. Richardson and G. O. Sayles were planning to produce one from the late 1920s onwards and they did publish a succession of valuable scholarly articles about early parliaments which were intended to clear the way towards writing one. In the end, however, all that appeared in 1975 (and only after Richardson's death) was a brief book by Sayles on *The King's Parliament of England*, which fell some way short of that full scholarly account. The wait is now over. We have a modern monographic study that will become the standard account, combining a clear overall picture of the general outlines of the gradual emergence of the institution and its main characteristics with a clear and sharp sense of the historical contingencies which helped it to emerge and to shape those characteristics. It is the work of the Oxford medieval historian John Maddicott. Best known for his biographies of Thomas of Lancaster and Simon de Montfort, earl of Leicester, he is also the author of numerous learned articles. This book is an expanded version of the Ford Lectures which he gave in Oxford in 2004.

There were seven lectures and the book too is divided into seven chapters. The first six are chronological. In chapter 1 the pre-conquest roots of the English parliament are traced back to the first national (or almost national) consultative assemblies of which anything is known, those of the reign of King Aethelstan (924-39). Maddicott describes Aethelstan as the person who "might be thought to have a better claim than the popularly recognised Simon de Montfort to be the true if unwitting founder of the English parliament" (p. 4). In size the assemblies of his reign resembled thirteenth-century parliaments and like these they included lesser men as well as nobles and senior churchmen. They also resembled thirteenth-century parliaments in their association with great feasts of the church, in the probable use of formal summonses for attendance, in their function of creating and promoting consensus through entertainment and the exercise of patronage, and in their contribution to political decision making, legislation, and the doing of justice. Maddicott also argues in this chapter that later pre-conquest assemblies can be seen as playing an independent role in politics and government in imposing collective restraints on kingly power, and thus sees this period as also marking the "origins of the constitutional tradition in England" (p. 40).

Chapter 2 traces the development of national consultative assemblies in England from the Norman Conquest to the end of the reign of Henry II. Maddicott insists on the essential continuity of pre-conquest traditions, both in the business dealt with by such assemblies and in their ability (albeit one only sparingly exercised) to impose constitutional restraints on the king. But he also acknowledges the innovative influence of "feudal" ideas about the obligation of the king's tenants in chief to give him counsel on how their duty of attendance at such assemblies was conceived, and argues (against most prior scholars) that such attendance might indeed sometimes be required of lesser as well as greater tenants in chief. The period between the death of Henry II and the coming of age of his grandson, Henry III, in 1227 is the focus of chapter 3 and Maddicott describes it as one of the major turning points in the history of national consultative assemblies. During this period it became settled for the first time that direct taxation required conciliar con-

sent through the consultative assembly, even though the clauses of the 1215 Magna Carta which had required this and established the precise mechanism for securing that consent (clauses 12 and 14) were dropped from later reissues. The final years of this period also saw the reemergence of the claim by the magnates to represent the national community. A different kind of precedent established during Henry III's minority was for great councils dominated by magnates to be regularly consulted on major matters of public policy, including foreign affairs and appointments to major offices.

Two chapters are devoted to the period between Henry III's coming of age in 1227 and his death in 1272. Chapter 4 looks at the developments of the period down to 1258, which Maddicott characterizes as "the first age of parliamentary politics" (p. 157). This is the period when the word "parliament" first started being used for consultative assemblies. Maddicott suggests that this may have been to distinguish them from meetings of the smaller group of royal ministers and magnates who constituted the king's council, but who were also central to the operation of parliament. Meetings took place with increasing frequency in this period (up to four times a year, though less in most years) and it came normally to meet at Westminster. Parliament now began to emerge as a political force with its own collective will, often opposed to that of the king, and asserted its status as representing the king's subjects. Chronicles now also begin to include documents produced by the king's parliamentary opponents but not officially published. Parliament was, however, unable prior to 1258, to gain the control it wished to exert over appointments, foreign policy, and legislation, despite its power of consent to taxation and the king's need for money. The period also saw the beginnings of the more regular attendance of smaller landowners of the knightly class at parliament, even when taxation was not at stake, and the first known elections of knights of the shire to represent their counties (in 1254). There is also in this period the earliest evidence for the attendance of representatives drawn from towns and the lower clergy. Chapter 5 deals with the period of baronial reform and its long aftermath. Maddicott notes the importance of the Provisions of Oxford of 1258 as giving parliament for the first time a formal place in government. The provisions formed part of the program of institutional reform put in place by the baronial reformers and required for the first time the holding of three annual meetings of parliament at fixed times of the year with provision for attendance by representatives of the wider political community as well as the fifteen elected members of the king's council. The purpose was clearly to secure parliamentary consent not just for taxation and legislation but also for all major governmental decisions. These reforms were, however, relatively short-lived and by the summer of 1261 the king had resumed control of the summoning of parliament and of its composition. Maddicott places the summoning of representative knights and burgesses to the parliaments held by the Montfortian regime in 1264 and 1265 (and also perhaps to the parliament summoned by a resurgent Henry III at Marlborough in 1267) within the context of the wider struggle between the king's political opponents and the king for the support of a national community that was significantly wider than the magnates who had hitherto been the major political actors.

The development of parliament during the reigns of Edward I and his son Edward II is discussed in chapter 6. Maddicott describes that part of Edward I's reign that preceded the outbreak of war with France in 1294 as one which saw an expansion and deepening of the national political role of parliament. It began to be regularly associated with the granting of taxes, with consultation between the king and his leading subjects, and their giving consent to a variety of royal policies and to the enactment of legislation. Parliament also took on a new role as the institution that received grievances (and requests) of all sorts presented by the king's subjects through written petitions. The consensus which had marked this period broke down after 1294 with the financial strain imposed by the war with France and simultaneous military campaigns in Scotland and Wales. Parliament then became the "cockpit of conflict" (p. 304) where the king confronted prelates, magnates, and the representatives of counties and towns, who were much more often present in parliament than they had been earlier, since the king needed their consent to taxation. But the final five years of the reign brought a return to something closer to the pre-1294 consensual atmosphere of parliament. Although Maddicott sees the politics of most of the reign of Edward II as being "predominantly baronial and virulently factious" (p. 331) the development he considers as of much greater long-term significance is the transformation of the "Commons," with the knights and burgesses emerging as a separate force detached from the magnates, and increasingly possessing their own independent voice and expressing that voice through their collective common petitions. This he sees as a consequence in part of the increasingly frequent summoning of representatives and of the abnormal length of parliamentary sessions. The Commons came even more to the fore in the final years of the reign and in the process of Ed-

ward II's deposition in which they played an indispensable part.

In his final chapter, Maddicott uses the comparison between England and France (and at times other countries of western Europe) to highlight the "peculiarities of the English parliament" and make the case for "English exceptionalism" (p. 376). He argues that central assemblies played a much more significant role in the government of England than in that of France at all times between the early tenth century and 1300 and that initially at least this was mainly because the local power of the English nobility was so much more limited than that of its French counterpart. The English parliament also became much more significant than French assemblies because of its role in granting or denying the taxation on which the English king (unlike his French counterpart) became dependent and because of its role in the making of truly national legislation. Maddicott notes the failure of the French central assemblies to develop any system of local representation and that the English system differed from that of other western European states in giving pride of place to representatives of the counties (and of the countryside) rather than the towns. Maddicott also thinks the failure of the English nobility to secure exemption from taxation or gain other local privileges played a significant role in helping the king's subjects in parliament to develop a single viewpoint.

Maddicott's book is clear, well argued, and well organized and it is based on a thorough knowledge of the full range of relevant primary sources and of secondary literature. It is the very best kind of "constitutional history," which manages to tell the story of the development of a major political and constitutional institution over time by relating that development to contemporary political events while also bearing in mind the rather different trajectory of institutions of a similar kind elsewhere in western Europe and the need to explain why the English parliament developed differently. Scholars may, and will, differ from Maddicott on some of the details of his account and they may well be right to do so, but this will not detract from the overall achievement of his work. It will be the starting point for all future work on the origins of the English parliament. Indeed, historians will wonder how we ever did without it. This is a book which belongs on the shelves of anyone with an interest in the political or institutional or legal history of England or other western European states between the late Anglo-Saxon period and the early fourteenth century. It can also be commended to any interested layman or laywoman who lives in a democratic state built on the Westminster model and wishes to know something of the historical antecedents of their state.

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