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How to map the Angevin Empire?

Fanny Madeline

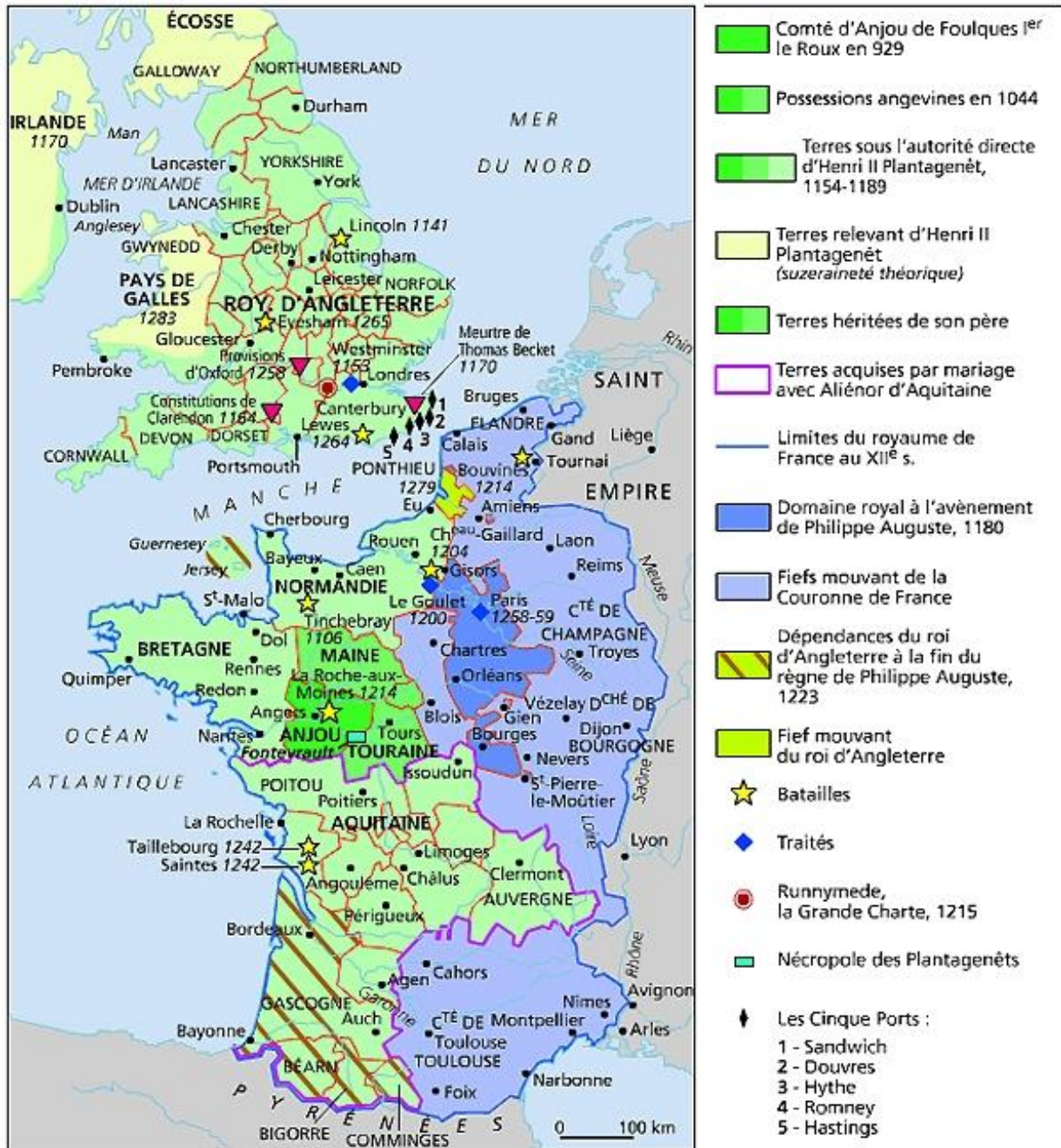
In today's world, mapping space is a common intellectual activity that uses levels of abstraction, scales, coordinate systems, perspective, and symbology to convey a sense of three-dimensional space through a two-dimensional medium.¹ It was not always an ordinary practice to turn the experienced world into a representational one, and we could even say that it is a « modern » way of thinking about space, because cartography and maps became a visual habit only by the 15th century. For five centuries, we have used (and historians still use) maps with insufficient reflection on how untrustworthy they are in showing us the reality of space and territory in the Middle Ages. During the 1960s and 1970s, the growing discipline of historical geography, given impetus by the work of H. C. Darby and his school of historical geographers, proposed new ways of mapping medieval England. Despite the fact that this school's methodology has been criticised on the grounds that it took insufficient account of human factors, its ideas still dominate the way that most people engage with maps representing space in the middle ages.² More recently, historians have begun to discuss the problem of representing space, especially when it comes to the vexed question of the border between two territories.

Georges Duby for example, in *La société au XIe et XIIIe siècles dans la région mâconnaise*, his first book (1953), tried to sketch the territorial Lordship of Brancion-Uxelles as a constellation of points with interrupted hashes, taking care of not to trace settled boundaries, which would have matched with no reality at that time. But in the *Atlas historique*, Duby supervised and published for the first time in 1978, such precautions were not followed. As such the “limits of the realm” in the 12th and 13th Century, were clearly drawn (map 1).

1 T. Presner and D. Shepard, “Mapping the Geospatial Turn”, in *A New Companion to Digital Humanities*, ed. S. Schreibman, R. Siemens and J. Unsworth, John Wiley & Son, 2016, p. 201.

2 A.R.H. Baker, « Évolution de la géographie historique en Grande-Bretagne et en Amérique du Nord », *Hérodote. Revue de géographie et de géopolitique*, n°74/75, 1994, p. 70-86

MAP 1

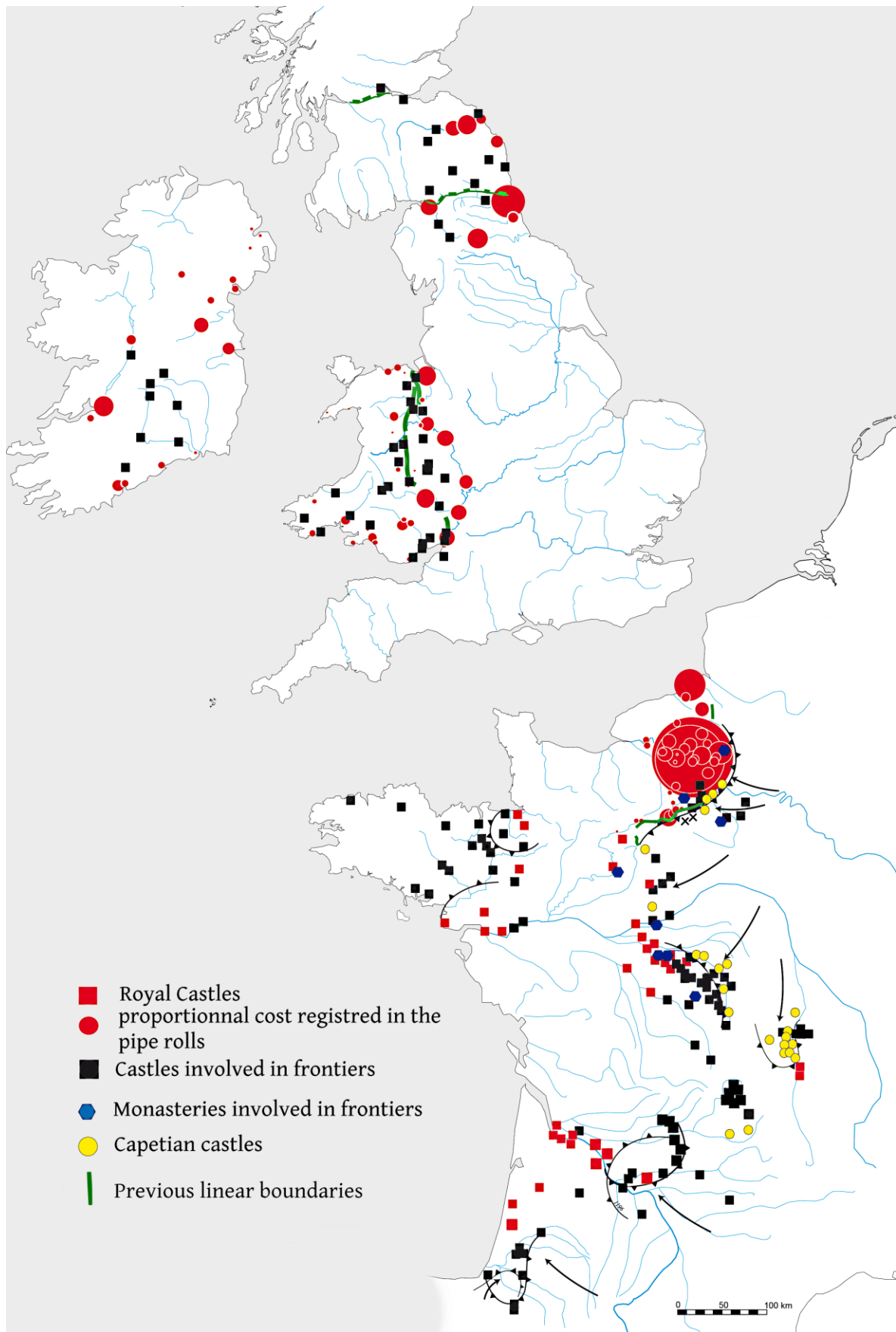


For creating a two-dimensional map of medieval territorial boundaries, map-makers most often use the borders of episcopal sees, but the boundaries of medieval diocese are often unknown, and so the map-makers must use their modern boundaries. It is precisely during the 12th and 13th centuries that the process of settling diocesan limits became a widespread phenomenon in western Europe. In his book on Norman Frontiers, Daniel Power explains this very clearly: it was exactly in the place of greatest conflict between the Angevins and Capetians - the Vexin - where precise delimitation of frontiers and boundaries took place.

Elsewhere, the process of making boundaries was an ongoing process.³

To John Gillingham (except, therefore, on the eastern edge of Normandy) mapping the limits the Angevin Empire is not thus very easy, mostly because we cannot “deal with a clearly drawn line but with a frontier zone where Henry's and neighbouring princes' rights intermingled and overlapped”. Indeed, to a certain extent, we could even say that the Angevin kings did not themselves know the precise boundaries of their empire. They presumably knew (or could find out) the feudal ties, yet in places these ties must have sometime been extremely fragile; they presumably knew (or could find out) the fortified places that belonged to them in the margins of Berry, Auvergne or Aquitaine. But places are not limits, instead, they form a frontier zone, more or less defined, depending on whether they are following natural limits such as rivers or ridges. That is why I tried to replace the traditional but misleading lines that delimited the Angevin Empire, either because they are modelled on an anachronistic ecclesiastical geography or because it is so vague that it does not help to understand anything about what boundaries were about, by different kinds of information on places which were involved in the moving frontiers of the second half of the 12th century. Thus instead of having a line showing a border, frontiers are drawn as points showing Angevin positions and castles facing their neighbours' positions and castles. It is this information that shows the limits of Angevin territorial power (map 2). This map also includes expenses in the fortification of Norman and English royal castles, information gathered from the Exchequer rolls, which in England run in almost continuous sequence from 1155 onwards and which in Normandy survive sporadically.

3 D.J. Power, *The Norman Frontier in the Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Century*, Cambridge, CUP, 2004.



MAP 2 : Angevine empire frontiers. (F. Madeline, les Plantagenet et leur empire. Construire un territoire politique, Rennes, 2014)

But “the map-maker's real problem”, according to Gillingham, “comes when he decides how to show the area *within* the borders. A map of the Angevin Empire which implied – perhaps by shading all the provinces in a uniform colour – that Henry's rule was equally effective everywhere would be seriously misleading”.⁴ For instance, England was more intensively governed thanks to its network of shires, whereas in continental dominions the ruler's authority was more “patchy”. Indeed, Angevin Kings did not exert the same power, with the same intensity, over their other territories, mainly because they did not have the same administrative framework and the same network of officers to rule as efficiently as in England.

Despite his thoughtful analysis of how we might map the Angevin Empire, Gillingham failed to produce such a map; the ones included in his book were not totally satisfactory (map 3). As such, they were almost never reused by historians in their own books when they attempted to map the Angevin Empire. Most prefer to use the more colourful maps.

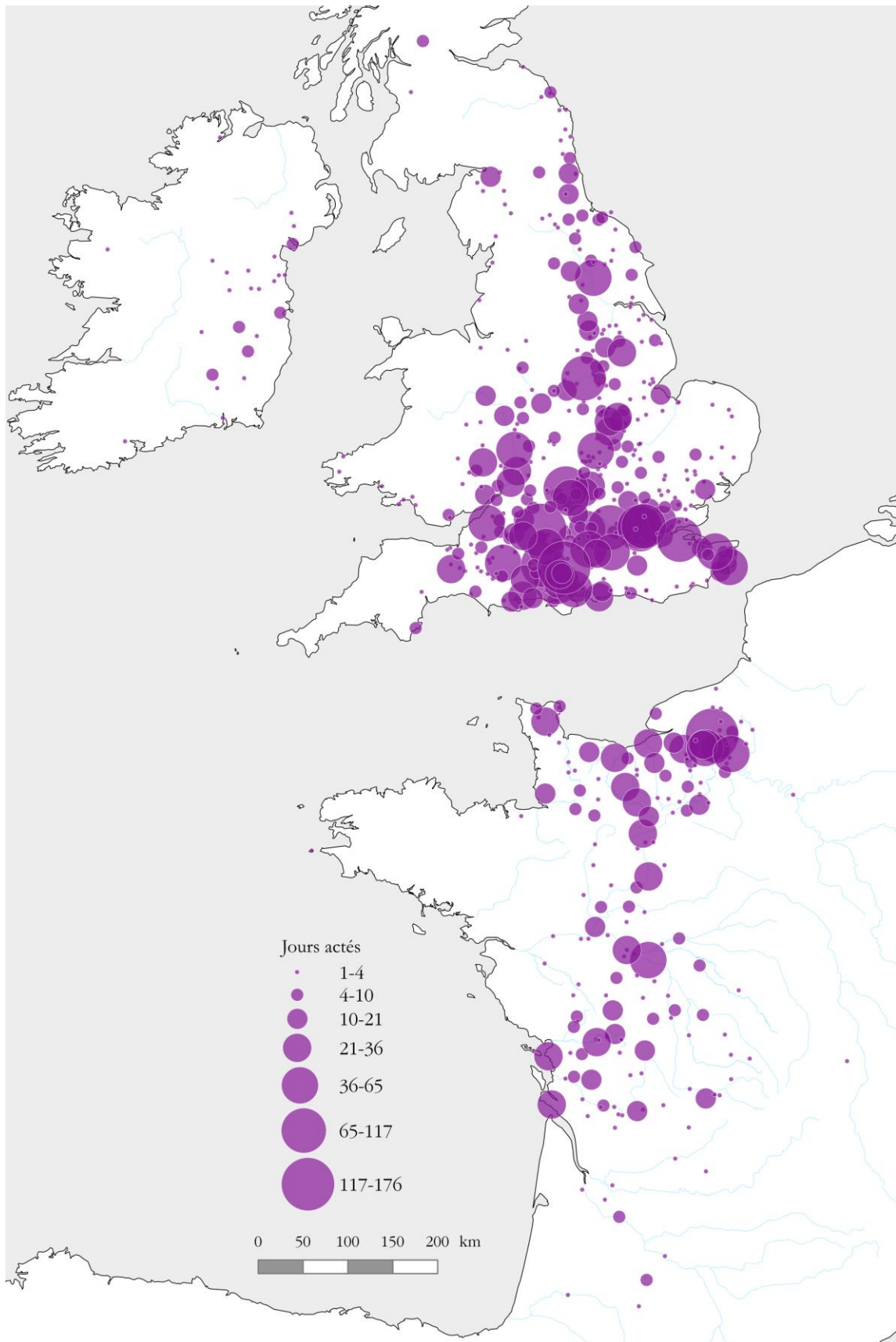


MAP 3:

! Angevin dominions on the Continent c. 1200

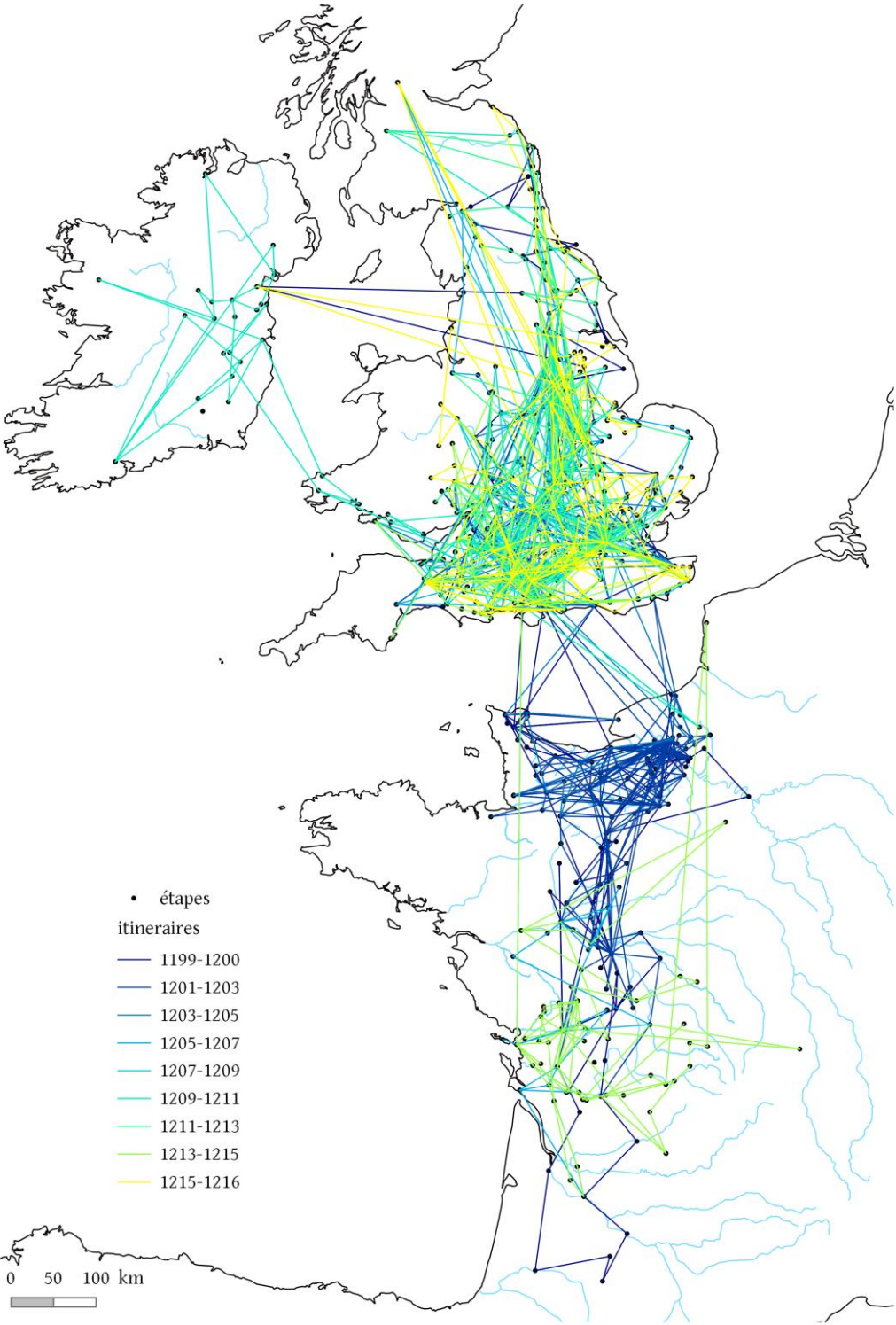
We thus reach the fundamental question of the use of maps in historical research: are they only useful for giving an illustrative and synthetic view of the past or do we need them for heuristic reasons? How could maps be tools to understand this heterogeneous political configuration as a whole? The answer we give depends on what exactly we wish to map. For instance, we generally use points to map “itineraries”. Thus we can show places that the Angevins stayed and show that some places were more regularly visited than others. We can also show that the court was ceaseless on the move. Yet, to figure mobility it would be better to use lines or vectors rather than points. In the meantime, web-mapping can also help us to figure out itineraries as successive location of places, in a diachronic perspective. The site created by Jon J. Crumb dedicated to King John's itinerary gives us an illustration of what web-mapping can do: recreating the rhythm of the king's mobility all over his empire by a dynamic timeline of John's movements on googlemap. He called his experience “neogeography” webmapping as a new tool to write history. (See url: <http://neogeography.com/timelines/JohnItinerary.html>). This is new methodology because mapping was most often a way of gathering spatial information to produce a synthetic view. Here the synthetic function of cartography has been replaced by a geo-temporal visualisation.

Mapping the places visited by King John is indeed much more complicated than mapping those for his predecessors because for John we have much more information making any map challengingly complicated; we also need to think about what we want to map. Do we just want to map the number of times John *came* to such-and-such a place, as can be done for his predecessors? But we can also map the number of days John *spent* in such-and-such a place or, more precisely, the number of days that he was administratively active in such-and-such a place (map 4)? .



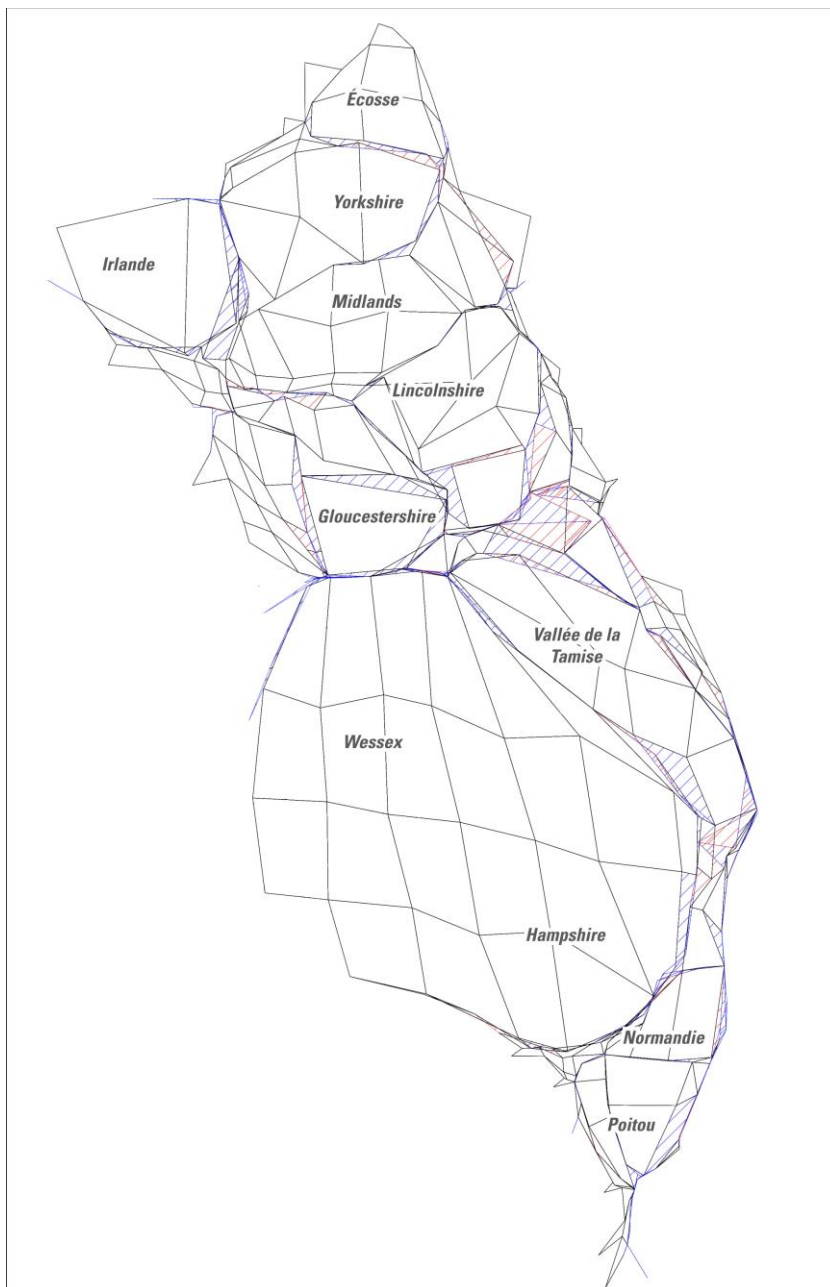
MAP 4: Days of enactment in John's reign. (F. Madeline, « Itinéraires royaux et lieux de gouvernement dans l'empire normand et Plantagenêt (1066-1204) » dans F. Chausson S. Destephen et J. Barbier (dir.), *Le gouvernement en déplacement. Pouvoir et mobilité de l'Antiquité à nos jours*, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2019, pp.311-322)

Another way of mapping itineraries would be to draw the flux to a point to another (map 5). But even in adding colours to introduce a diachronic dimension, synthetic maps have the inconvenient of being unreadable to a certain amount of information overlapping. But, this also illustrates the raster of the kingdom and certain parts of empire, by the king's movements



MAP 5 (Fanny Madeline, King's John itinerary)

To deal with the problem of illegibility, new cartographic tools allow us to produce other maps to figure how space was occupied and ridden over by the King and its court. For instance, I worked with anamorphic maps which distort geographic projections to underline the phenomenon we want to map. With this tool, we can adapt the form of the map and the geographical outlines to project data in a geometric space that represent something else than the surface area of territories. As such, we can think the itineraries of the king not only in terms of places or mobility, but also in terms of occupied spaces in an organisational global structure, that is in terms of world representation (map 6).



MAP 6 anamorphosis of the occupied space under King John's (F. Madeline, « Penser les mondes normands et Plantagenêt avec des cartes. Itinéraires et pensée politique de l'espace », in D. BATES and P. BAUDUIN (eds.), *911-2011. Penser les mondes normands médiévaux*, Caen, 2016, p. 443-474.)

This how mapping can be a heuristic tool: maps are not drawn with preconceptions of space as separated territorial units gathered by approximate boundaries, but as a space of projection for collected data, allowing us to produce maps we have not (or could not) imagined yet. GIS (geographic information system) mapping is thus a formidable tool in our attempt to organize data and to see new (or other) aspects we did not consider initially, thanks to its synthetic, multilayered and statistical functions. Today the development of digital and technological cartography brings a number of epistemological questions but also refreshing insight into the study of a space that historians still struggle to understand and which they can not even agree whether we should call the lands over which the Angevins ruled an “empire” or not.

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