

# THE NORMANS IN EUROPE



*Translated and edited by Elisabeth van Houts*

# THE NORMANS IN EUROPE



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# THE NORMANS IN EUROPE

*edited and translated by* Elisabeth van Houts

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# CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	page ix
List of abbreviations	xii
Introduction	1
<b>I: From vikings to Normans</b>	<b>13</b>
Introduction	13
1 Charter of King Charles the Simple, 17 December 905	23
2 Charter of King Charles the Simple, 22 February 906	24
3 Charter of King Charles the Simple, 14 March 918	25
4 Dudo of Saint-Quentin, History of the Dukes of the Normans	25
5 Norman annals, 842-915	33
6 William of Jumièges, Deeds of the Dukes of the Normans	34
7 The Discovery and Miracles of St Vulfran	36
8 The Miracles of Coutances	38
9 The <i>Plaintsong</i> of William Longsword	41
10 Flodoard of Reims, Annals	42
11 Adémar of Chabannes, Chronicle	51
12 Geoffrey Malaterra, Deeds of Count Roger and his brother Duke Robert	52
13 The Life of Gruffydd ap Cynan	54
14 Snorri Sturluson, <i>Heimskringla</i> , Saga of Harald Fairhair	54
<b>II: The Normans in Normandy</b>	<b>56</b>
Introduction	56
15 William of Jumièges, Deeds of the Dukes of the Normans	66
16 Gilbert Crispin, Life of Herluin of Bec	69
17 William of Poitiers, Deeds of Duke William	74
18 Charter from Jumièges on a substituted child	75
19 Charters from Rouen cathedral and Saint-Pierre at Préaux	76
20 Orderic Vitalis, Ecclesiastical History (on the character of the Normans)	77
21 The Discovery and Miracles of St Vulfran	78
22 The Miracles of Fécamp	79
23 Marsilia of Saint-Amand, Letter to Abbot Bovo II of Saint-Amand (Elnone)	80
24 Milo Crispin, On the origin of the Crispin family	84
25 Eadmer of Canterbury, History of Recent Events	89

26	Dudo of Saint-Quentin, History of the Dukes of the Normans (on Gunnor)	90
27	Warner of Rouen, <i>Moriuht</i> poem	92
28	Robert of Torigni, Deeds of the Dukes of the Normans (on Gunnor)	95
29	Robert of Torigni, Deeds of the Dukes of the Normans (on Empress Matilda)	97
30	Geoffrey Malaterra, Deeds of Count Roger and his brother Duke Robert	99
<b>III: The Normans and Britain: the Norman Conquest</b>		<b>102</b>
	Introduction	102
	Norman and other continental narratives	
31	The Discovery and Miracles of St Vulfran	112
32	William of Jumièges and Orderic Vitalis, Deeds of the Dukes of the Normans	113
33	William of Poitiers, Deeds of Duke William	118
34	Baudri of Bourgueil, Poem for Adela	125
35	Guy of Amiens, Song of the Battle of Hastings	129
36	Lanfranc of Canterbury, Letter to Bishop Geoffrey of Coutances	129
37	The Ship List of William the Conqueror	130
38	Bavarian annals, 1066	131
39	Fulcoius of Beauvais, <i>Jepthah</i> poem	132
	English narratives	
40	Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, version C	134
41	Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, version D	137
42	Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, version E	141
43	John of Worcester, Chronicle	142
44	Eadmer of Canterbury, History of Recent Events	146
45	Henry of Huntingdon, History of the English People	150
46	The Waltham Chronicle	156
47	William of Malmesbury, Life of Wulfstan	159
48	William of Malmesbury, Deeds of the Kings of the English	161
49	Herman of Bury St Edmunds, Miracles of St Edmund	171
50	Giso of Wells, 'Autobiography'	172
	Wales and Scotland	
51	The Life of Gruffydd ap Cynan	173
52	William of Malmesbury, Deeds of the Kings of the English'	180

<b>IV: The Normans and their neighbours</b>	<b>182</b>
Introduction	182
<b>France</b>	
53 William of Jumièges, Deeds of the Dukes of the Normans	188
54 Helgaud, Life of Robert the Pious	193
55 Fulbert of Chartres, Letters (concerning Normandy)	195
56 The Life of St Simon of Vexin	197
57 The Short Account of William the Most Noble Count	199
58 Suger of Saint-Denis, Life of Louis VI	200
59 Lambert of Wattrelos, Annals	206
<b>Maine, Anjou and Brittany</b>	
60 William of Poitiers, Deeds of Duke William	208
<b>Aquitaine</b>	
61 Charter of Jumièges, 1012	213
62 Adémar of Chabannes, Chronicle	213
63 The Miracles of Sainte-Foy	215
<b>Burgundy</b>	
64 Rodulfus Glaber, History	217
65 Rodulfus Glaber, Life of St William of Volpiano	218
<b>Flanders</b>	
66 The Treaty between Henry I of England and Robert II of Flanders, 1101	220
<b>V: The Normans in the Mediterranean</b>	<b>223</b>
Introduction	223
<b>Italy</b>	
67 Wipo, Deeds of Conrad II	231
68 Adémar of Chabannes, Chronicle	231
69 Rodulfus Glaber, History	232
70 William of Apulia, Poem on the Deeds of Robert Guiscard	235
71 Geoffrey Malaterra, Deeds of Count Roger and his brother Duke Robert	238
72 Amatus of Montecassino, History of the Normans	241
73 Robert Guiscard, Pledge to Pope Nicholas II, 1059	243
74 Orderic Vitalis, Deeds of the Dukes of the Normans	244
75 Orderic Vitalis, Ecclesiastical History	246
76 Robert of Torigni, Deeds of the Dukes of the Normans	249

<b>Byzantium</b>	
77	Anna Comnena, <i>Life of Alexius Comnenus</i> (on Robert Guiscard) 250
78	Anna Comnena, <i>Life of Alexius Comnenus</i> (on Roussel of Bailleul) 264
79	Michael Psellus, <i>Fourteen Byzantine Rulers</i> (on Robert Crispin) 265
80	Amatus of Montecassino, <i>History of the Normans</i> 267
<b>Spain</b>	
81	Dudo of Saint-Quentin, <i>History of the Dukes of the Normans</i> 268
82	Adémar of Chabannes, <i>Chronicle</i> (on Roger of Tosny) 269
83	Amatus of Montecassino, <i>History of the Normans</i> (on Robert Crispin) 270
84	Orderic Vitalis, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i> (on Robert Bordet) 271
85	Priest Raol, <i>The Conquest of Lisbon</i> 272
<b>The Holy Land</b>	
86	Orderic Vitalis, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i> 274
87	Eadmer of Canterbury, <i>History of Recent Events</i> 277
	<b>References</b> 279
	<b>Further reading</b> 287
	<b>Genealogical charts</b>
1	The counts of Rouen and dukes of Normandy 292
2	The counts of Rouen and dukes of Normandy 293
3	The dukes of Normandy 294
4	The dukes of Normandy and kings of England 295
5	The Anglo-Saxon kings 296
6	The Crispin family 297
7	The Hauteville family 298
8	The Norman princes of Capua 299
	<b>Maps</b>
1	Europe 300
2	Normandy 301
3	Britain 302
4	Southern Italy 303
	<b>Index</b> 304

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To anyone whose permission I have inadvertently failed to obtain, I offer my apologies; full acknowledgement will be made in any future edition if the omission is drawn to my attention.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AA.SS</i>	<i>Acta Sanctorum quotquot tot orbe coluntur</i> (Antwerp 1643–1940), 67 vols
<i>AN</i>	<i>Annales de Normandie</i>
<i>ANS</i>	<i>Anglo-Norman Studies: The Proceedings of the Battle Conference</i> (Ipswich-Woodbridge, 1978 onwards)
Bates	<i>Regesta regum Anglo-Normannorum: The Acta of William I (1066–1087)</i> , ed. D. Bates (Oxford, 1998)
Dudo	<i>De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae ducum auctore Dudone sancti Quintini decano</i> , ed. J. Lair (Caen, 1865)
<i>EHD</i>	<i>English Historical Documents</i> , ed. D. C. Douglas (London, 1953–77), 12 vols
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
Fauroux	<i>Recueil des actes des ducs de Normandie de 911 à 1066</i> , ed. M. Fauroux, Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie, 36 (Caen, 1961)
<i>Gallia Christiana</i>	<i>Gallia Christiana in provincias ecclesiasticas distributa</i> (Paris, 1715–1865), 16 vols
<i>GND</i>	<i>The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni</i> , ed. and trsl. E. M. C. van Houts, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1992–95), 2 vols
Ménager	<i>Recueil des actes des ducs normands d'Italie (1046–1127)</i> , vol 1: <i>Les Premiers Ducs (1046–1087)</i> , ed. L. R. Ménager, Società di storia patria per la Puglia: Documenti e monografie, 45 (Bari, 1980)
<i>MGH SS</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i> (Hanover, 1826 onwards)
Migne, <i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia latina</i> , ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1844–64), 221 vols
Orderic	<i>The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis</i> , ed. and trsl. M. Chibnall, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford, 1969–80), 6 vols
Porée	A. Porée, <i>Histoire de l'abbaye du Bec</i> (Evreux, 1901), 2 vols

## INTRODUCTION

The Normans were the people of Normandy, the north-western province of France that came into existence at the beginning of the tenth century. The frontiers of Normandy fluctuated, but the region in which Norman customs prevailed during the duchy's lifetime (from *c.* 911 to 1204) stretched from north to south and from east to west as follows (see [Map 2](#) on p. 301). From Eu near the mouth of the River Bresle in the north, to the Rivers Epte and Eure in the east, towards Dreux where the Rivers Avre and Sarthe formed the south-eastern borderline. From Saint-Céneri in the south-east corner, the frontier went westwards following the River Mayenne as far as a point half-way between Domfront and Ambrières, from where the line continued westwards to pick up the River Couesnon at Pontorson.<sup>1</sup> This region roughly corresponded to the ecclesiastical province of the archbishopric of Rouen, which itself was based on the Roman administrative unit centred on that city.

The inhabitants were for the most part Frankish but included a significant minority of Scandinavian settlers from Norway, Denmark and from Scandinavian settlements in Britain, who formed the ruling elite. The immigrants assimilated so rapidly with the Frankish people, however, that within three generations they ceased to use their own language and lost most of their customs. What they retained were personal names, some legal practices, stories which reminded them of their homeland in Norway and Denmark, and above all their collective name. That name derives from 'north men', which means 'men who came from the north', an etymology that was well understood by the Normans themselves [**12, 20, 70**]. From Normandy they set out later to conquer southern Italy and the greater part of Britain and some established themselves elsewhere in Europe. They were at the height of their power in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries.

<sup>1</sup> For the early Norman frontier see Lewis, [1992](#), 147–56 and for the twelfth century Power, [1994](#), 181–202 with map on p. 182. For the view that the customs of Normandy crystallised during the reign of William the Conqueror, see Tabuteau, [1988](#), 223–9. An interesting description of the Norman frontier can be found in no. **12**.

The purpose of this book, divided into five chapters, is to give readers a selection of the abundant (narrative) source material generated by the Normans and the peoples they conquered. **Chapter I**, 'From vikings to Normans', covers the process of assimilation and amalgamation between Scandinavians and Franks and the emergence of Normandy. Once firmly established in and around Rouen, the ruling dynasty of the Norse Rollo (d. *c.* 928), his son William Longsword (*c.* 928–43) and his grandson Richard I (943–96), enlarged the territory over which they held sway. They issued laws, kept order and through a network of kinship extended their influence to the furthest corners of the province. In particular, the dukes established pockets of political authority through their patronage of monasteries and churches. Their maintenance of law and order, their support for the Christian religion, and their exploitation of the remnants of Carolingian government structures enabled them to become one of the strongest of the territorial princes of France. **Chapter II**, 'The Normans in Normandy', illustrates the internal organisation of the principality with a variety of source material from chronicles, miracle stories and charters. It is in this chapter that evidence appears of the women and children who formed, as in every country, such an essential part of society.

The Normans had a turbulent relationship with the English kingdom. This country had been regularly attacked by vikings, who had settled in the east in an area known as the Danelaw. Afterwards in the early eleventh century the whole of England had been conquered by King Svein of Denmark (*c.* 988–1014) and his son Cnut (1016–35). But in 1002, fourteen years before the Danish occupation of England, King Aethelred II of England (978–1016) married Emma, the sister of the Norman duke Richard II (996–1026). The marriage negotiations formed part of the English king's strategy to prevent the vikings from seeking refuge in Norman harbours. This marriage established the family connection which set in motion the train of events that ultimately led to the Norman conquest of England in 1066. **Chapter III**, 'The Normans and Britain', presents material from the main chronicle sources for the history of the Norman invasion and settlement, supplemented with some poetry. It is roughly divided into Norman and English sections with a few texts about the Normans in Scotland and Wales.

Once Duke William had become king of England, the relationship with the kings of France, often strained anyway, became fraught with difficulties. As duke of Normandy William owed allegiance to the

king of France, and in that position he was obliged to do service to him, but as king of England he was the French king's equal and in that role had no such obligations. Rollo's descendants maintained a fair degree of independence from the kings of France by acknowledging their overlordship but meanwhile going very much their own way. After 1066 the elevation of the duke to the status of king, albeit of another country, changed that relationship. With regard to the other territorial princes in France, especially those of Maine, Brittany, Anjou, Poitou/Aquitaine, Blois-Chartres, Burgundy and Flanders, the dukes followed the normal medieval pattern of warfare alternating with peace negotiations sealed by marriage alliances. Such contacts are highlighted in [Chapter IV](#), 'The Normans and their neighbours'.

From the early eleventh century onwards we find Normans outnumbering the other west-European men who travelled around Europe looking for opportunities to earn a living, usually by fighting, and hoping to settle somewhere. Land awarded in return for military service and (or) as the result of marriage to a well-to-do heiress outside Normandy became the goal for these young émigrés. We find Normans among the first settlers in southern Italy and elsewhere in the Mediterranean. In [Chapter V](#), 'The Normans in the Mediterranean', we can follow their careers particularly well in Italy, and to a lesser extent in Byzantium, Spain and the Holy Land.

The sources presented in those five chapters consist mostly of histories and chronicles written by the Normans themselves, or written by those whom they conquered, or written by contemporaries elsewhere in Europe who observed their actions from afar. The sheer volume of narratives written by or about them is exceptional. Few other medieval peoples generated historical writing of such quantity and quality or matched the pride and self-awareness of the Normans, as expressed not only in their own historiography but also in the reports of others. Around the first millennium the Normans became the first people in western Europe to produce a serial biography of their secular rulers, a type of chronicle previously used only for bishops and abbots. It was written *c.* 995–1015 by Dudo of Saint-Quentin, a Frank who had become friendly with the new rulers of Normandy and offered his services as their historian. Fifty years later his chronicle was extended and updated by a Norman monk, William of Jumièges, who after 1066 (the year of the conquest of England) had an extra reason to celebrate the deeds of the Norman dukes.

Dudo and William of Jumièges shaped the narrative framework for the history of the Normans by sketching their metamorphosis from pagan viking conquerors to Christian conquerors. Both of them concentrated on dynastic history, however, that is on the deeds of Rollo and the Norman dukes who descended from him. But William of Jumièges revised and extended the framework established by Dudo to allow more scope for the expression of the historical truth that other vikings besides Rollo had had a hand in the colonisation of Normandy. For example, he introduced Björn Ironside (a legendary shadow of the viking Björn who is known to have been in France in the 850s), and he attributed all viking activity in western France to Danes in general until their arrival in Rouen, where Rollo was, as William tells it, selected as leader by lot.<sup>2</sup> Dudo and William say very little about the 'ordinary' Scandinavian settlers or indeed about the process of colonisation and settlement. Surprisingly, more information on this process surfaces in the work of William of Jumièges's successors Orderic Vitalis (d. c. 1142) and Robert of Torigni (d. 1189), who updated William's chronicle in the twelfth century but inserted information preserved orally which pertained to earlier events. For example, Orderic Vitalis, writing c. 1113, mentions an ancestor of the Tosny family named Malahulc, apparently an uncle of Rollo, but unknown from any other source.<sup>3</sup> And Robert of Torigni, writing about thirty years after Orderic, reveals much more than Dudo about William Longsword's mother Sprota, her second Frankish husband Esperleng of Pîtres and their children, even though Dudo was Sprota's younger contemporary; Robert also gives the names of Countess Gunnor's sisters and nieces as ancestors of many Norman families. Such information was no doubt passed from mouth to mouth within the family, until it was recorded in writing out of fear that it would otherwise disappear into oblivion. The reliability of these written sources remains, however, very difficult to establish.

Dudo of Saint-Quentin and William of Jumièges set out to fit the story of Rollo's dynasty into the literary and classical tradition of the so-called *origo* (origin) histories, chronicles about the origin of a people. Erroneously equating Danes with Dacians, Dudo began his account of the viking settlement of Normandy with remarks on the Balkans, the home territory of the Dacians as described by Roman authors like Jordanes; in this way he extended Rollo's historical

<sup>2</sup> Van Houts, 1983, 112–17; for the historical Björn, see Coupland, 1998, 103–4.

<sup>3</sup> GND, ii, 94–5; Musset, 1977, 48–9.

background by several centuries and matched it to the norm of classical historiography. In doing so he did not include the family traditions concerning individual immigrants which were still preserved in his day and those are the stories we would now prefer to know. Carolingian education, as represented in the person of Dudo,<sup>4</sup> with its emphasis on the authority of the written word in north-western France, is to blame; though Dudo's predilection for using Latin sources full of '*auctoritas*' (authority) was also a product of the Christian tradition. Fitting the vikings into a Romano-Christian tradition enabled Dudo and William of Jumièges to link the Roman period with the Norman period and to consider the pagan viking years as merely an interlude.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in spite of their limitations, the Norman chronicles are unique in the historiography of viking settlement. By way of contrast the Norwegian settlement of Iceland from the late ninth century onwards was not recorded until 150 years after the initial settlement when it was based on oral, and predominantly pagan, tradition.<sup>6</sup>

Dudo's and William of Jumièges's preoccupation with the ducal dynasty meant that they had virtually nothing to say about the exploits of the Normans in southern Italy, even though the Norman emigration to the south began in the early decades of the eleventh century, during Dudo's lifetime. For the Norman exodus to the Mediterranean we are dependent on brief contemporary references in non-Norman chronicles from France and Germany. Otherwise, there are the late eleventh-century chronicles written in Italy as part of a new dynastic history tradition that emerged there centred on the Norman families of de Hauteville and the counts of Capua and Aversa. Robert Guiscard, duke of Calabria and Apulia (d. 1085) and his brother Roger I, count of Sicily (d. 1101) were scions of the de Hauteville dynasty which sprang from humble origins in the Norman Cotentin. Their deeds were described by Geoffrey Malaterra, probably a monk of Norman origin, who wrote his history *c.* 1090, and William of Apulia, a cleric whose first name likewise suggests a non-Italian origin, who wrote an epic poem on the deeds of Robert Guiscard in the late 1090s. A decade earlier their older contemporary Amatus, monk of Montecassino, had already

4 Shopkow, 1989, 19–37 and Shopkow, 1997, 68–79.

5 Lifshitz, 1995 has focused on the tenth-century Latin hagiography written in late Carolingian Neustria or early Normandy; her book fills an important gap in our knowledge about late Carolingian education and writing in the area.

6 Sawyer and Sawyer, 1993, 16–26; Benediktsson, 1993, 332–3.

completed his record of the history of the arrival of the Normans. Like their historian colleagues in Normandy the Italian historians are less forthcoming about the Norman settlers of lower rank.<sup>7</sup> The work of the Italian historians can be complemented by that of Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni, using oral reports brought back by visitors from Italy, and the histories of Geoffrey Malaterra and William of Apulia.

With regard to the Norman conquest of England, the contemporary narrative texts are mostly of Norman origin. William of Jumièges, writing from the late 1050s until 1070, has already been mentioned. His contemporary William of Poitiers, at one time a ducal chaplain, wrote in the mid-1070s a biography of William the Conqueror, while in 1067 Guy of Amiens wrote a poem in praise of King William and his wife Matilda. The monumental embroidery known as ‘the Bayeux Tapestry’ was produced probably around 1080. All four sources defend the conquest of England by the Normans and the legitimacy of William the Conqueror’s succession to the Anglo-Saxon king Edward the Confessor. Of the few contemporary English sources the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in its different versions is the most important. For substantial narrative accounts of the Conquest in England we depend on works written by later English monks and clerics, some of whom were of mixed English and Norman parentage. The monk Orderic Vitalis, already mentioned, and Henry, archdeacon of Huntingdon (d. after 1154), had an English mother and a French father, while William, monk of Malmesbury (d. c. 1144), had one English and one Norman parent. Their writings were presumably influenced by their mixed nationality: they identified with the Norman cause because of their fathers, but they may have depended on their maternal family background for their pro-English sympathies. This applies most strongly to Orderic who was born in England but left the country at the age of ten to enter the Norman monastery of Saint-Evroult where he spent the rest of his life. Like Orderic, William was a monk and spent most of his life in a monastery, while Henry was an educated secular clerk. The other important historians of the period, like the monks Eadmer of Canterbury and John of Worcester, were, as far as we know, of English origin.<sup>8</sup> Their education and access to libraries

7 Wolf, 1995, 143–71, 123–42 and 87–122.

8 Simeon of Durham (d. c. 1130), whose work has not been incorporated in the present volume, was the most important chronicler for northern England. Although a monk at Durham from the 1090s onwards he came from north-western France (*Symeon of Durham, Historian of Durham and the North*, ed. D. Rollason (Stamford, 1998)).

enabled them to use a wide variety of written sources which combined with oral information provided them with the essential tools to write about the history of the English (and after 1066 the Normans). Their chronicles too are concerned with the military leaders and the aristocracy and contain only incidental references to the common soldiers and colonists.<sup>9</sup>

The narrative excerpts collected for this book, whether on Normandy, England or southern Italy, provide an incomplete picture of the material available to modern historians. Documentary sources such as charters, lawcodes and a variety of other administrative records (such as Domesday Book for England) provide supplementary information that is of crucial importance where questions to do with ethnicity, colonisation, settlement, language, legal custom, taxation and justice are under discussion. Consider, for example, what one can learn from the many records in which ‘vicomtes’ are referred to and named. The office of vicomte, which involved responsibility for such tasks as collecting taxes, acting as judge in court cases, and organising military operations on a regional scale, was of Carolingian origin.<sup>10</sup> It is possible that the position disappeared during the Scandinavian settlement of Normandy and that new arrangements emerged. No tenth-century records have survived to confirm or deny this. From Richard II’s charters we may infer that Scandinavians took over senior posts in the existing structure. The appearance of Scandinavian names such as Thurstan, vicomte of the Avranchin, and Ansketil, vicomte of the Bessin, the earliest known vicomtes, suggest that the main positions were taken over by the new elite.<sup>11</sup> We are much better informed about what happened in England after the Norman Conquest. The Anglo-Saxon office of sheriff, closely equivalent to that of ‘vicomte’, was not abolished; although usually rendered in Latin as *vicecomes*, it remained essentially unchanged after 1066, but the holders of it were then mostly Normans or other continental newcomers.<sup>12</sup> In Italy the situation was somewhat different because no equivalent posts existed under Lombard or Byzantine rule.<sup>13</sup> Byzantine

9 Van Houts, 1996a, 167–80; 1996b, 9–15.

10 Haskins, 1918, 45–7 and Bouvris, 1985, 148–51.

11 Bouvris, 1985, 151–74.

12 Haskins, 1918, 46; Green, 1982, 129–45 and 1986, 194–214.

13 Jahn, 1989, 165–70. His conclusions are based on the pioneering work by Von Valkenhausen, 1977, 337–8 (Norman *vicecomites* or *viceprincipes* in Capua) and 343–5 (*stratagetes* and *vicecomites* in Apulia and Calabria).

*stratages* were of much higher rank and their responsibilities were wider. In this case the documentary evidence suggests that the Normans imposed the office of vicomte while initially suppressing that of the *stratagete*, though the latter was resurrected after about 1100. It also shows that until 1100 all vicomtes were Normans, and that after that date some *stratages* were Norman too.<sup>14</sup>

Those conclusions are obviously significant, illustrating as they do the adaptability which the Norman rulers displayed, and many other examples could be given of equally significant conclusions derived from documentary sources. Unfortunately, such sources do not lend themselves to quotation; they tend to be meaningful only when studied alongside other similar documents. Seven charters [1–3, 18, 19, 61], one administrative record [37], one pledge [73] and one treaty [66] are included in this book. In terms of their importance, however, documentary sources are underrepresented.<sup>15</sup>

Over the years the abundance of source material has inspired several historiographical debates. Perhaps the most intriguing questions about the Normans concern their homogeneity and their success. Did they form one people, *gens*, regardless of where they lived in Europe, drawing their identity from their common origin? Did they display characteristics uniquely associated with the land of their birth? Did they derive from their viking ancestors a conqueror's gene? Can we isolate the reasons for their apparent success? These and other questions crop up in the debates about the Normans, four of which need consideration here.<sup>16</sup>

First there is the on-going debate about the precise extent to which Carolingian and Frankish characteristics on the one hand and viking characteristics on the other, survived in Normandy. The late Eleanor Searle saw the Normans as distinctly Scandinavian, whose invasion of France altered the structure of society there in an essentially discon-

14 Jahn, 1989, 170–2.

15 The most important among them, Domesday Book (*Domesday Book seu Liber Censualis Willelmi Primi Regis Angliae*, ed. A. Farley, 2 vols (London, 1783)) can be conveniently consulted in English translation in the Phillimore edition, ed. J. Morris, 40 vols (Chichester, 1974–86). For collections of Norman ducal charters, see Fauroux and Bates; for Norman ducal charters from Italy, see Ménager. The regesta of the royal charters from England under its Norman kings from 1087 can be consulted in *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum*, ed. H. W. C. Davis *et al.*, 4 vols (Oxford, 1913–69).

16 What follows is of necessity a rather sketchy and at times simplified account of a series of important but complicated historiography.

tinuous fashion. She believed that they imposed Scandinavian customs based on kinship upon an alien society and that these customs survived until, and can be said to have caused, the Norman conquest of England.<sup>17</sup> David Bates, following in the footsteps of Jean Yver and Lucien Musset, discerned a powerful short-term Scandinavian impact lasting into the early eleventh century, arguing in favour of long-term continuity of Frankish institutions and practices.<sup>18</sup> These views are on the whole also espoused by Emily Tabuteau, who in her exhaustive study of Norman customs regulating the transfers of land found no evidence for Scandinavian influence.<sup>19</sup> Studies of historiography, literature, art and architecture by Maylis Baylé and myself supplemented the main thesis. While, on the whole, accepting the continuity model, we point to the Normans' profound awareness of their Scandinavian heritage and their willingness to use Scandinavian motifs in literary texts and sculpture as late as the second half of the eleventh century.<sup>20</sup> As a contribution to the same debate we also discussed the possibility that instead of such motifs having survived in Normandy uninterruptedly, they may have been reintroduced into Normandy from other areas of Scandinavian occupation (e.g. the English Danelaw) at the time of the third or fourth generation of settlers. Such reintroduction of Scandinavian narrative detail and art-historical motifs would only have been acceptable in a climate that still appreciated such northern material as recognisably Scandinavian and as part of a living Scandinavian heritage and a sense of 'belonging to our northmen's past'. The reintroduction of Scandinavian customs is a point also suggested by Lucien Musset with regard to one extremely important aspect of Norman law, namely the Scandinavian right of exile, *ullac*, which will be discussed below in [Chapter II](#). Here it is important to underline Musset's suggestion that this custom may have been (re)introduced from Danelaw England into Normandy, suggesting a late tenth- or early eleventh-century date.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, there is the debate about the *Normannitas* ('Normanness') which centres on the Normans' perception of themselves in Normandy

17 Searle, 1988, 1–11, 61–78, 237–49.

18 Bates, 1982, 15–25; Yver, 1969, 299–366 and Musset, 1970, 96–129.

19 Tabuteau, 1988, 4–5.

20 Baylé, 1982, 1–20 and 1990, 35–48; Van Houts, 1983, 120–1.

21 Musset, 1985, 45–59 at 58–9. Note also Fellows-Jensen, 1990, 149–59 who on the basis of personal names' distribution suggests pre-1066 migration to and fro between Normandy and the English Danelaw.

and elsewhere. In her analysis of the European-wide historiography of the Normans (Norman, English and Italian), the German historian Laetitia Boehm distinguishes four characteristics: its apologetical character (defence of conquests), expressions of ethnic consciousness (pride in the Norman fatherland), evidence of imperialistic planning (pan-Norman expansion throughout Europe) and a peculiarly Norman idea of leadership based on horsemanship. All four characteristics of *Normannitas*, so her argument goes, can be distinguished not only in historical narratives but also in documentary sources (though Boehm herself does not cite the latter).<sup>22</sup> R. H. C. Davis, on the other hand, argued that in the tenth and eleventh centuries the Normans displayed no particular self-awareness; he suggests that a myth of what it meant to be a Norman was invented in the twelfth century by Orderic Vitalis among others and projected backwards by him to a time when the Normans were in reality still striving to be as Frankish as the Franks.<sup>23</sup> Graham Loud differs from Davis by discerning self-awareness among the Normans (as being different from Franks) in the eleventh century and he stresses the influence of classical antiquity on the way in which Norman chroniclers chose to express it. All nations derive their sense of identity from their past and Dudo of Saint-Quentin gave the Normans a respectable past by linking Danes with Dacians as noted above; he created a myth thereby, but a myth different in kind from that discerned by Davis.<sup>24</sup> More recently, Cassandra Potts has emphasised the stress placed by Dudo on Rollo, to whom Dudo attributes the laws and customs under which the different peoples who inhabited Normandy had (by implication) united, as under an umbrella. The evidence, she argues, comes from *The Discovery and Miracles of St Vulfran* written c. 1053–54, which eloquently uses the phrase ‘and he [Rollo] made one people out of many different ones’. Making one people out of many, so argues Potts, is not what Rollo did but what Dudo c. 1000 did when he created the Normans as a people.<sup>25</sup> It is important to note, however, that Dudo himself never used such a phrase nor expressed such an opinion and that therefore the St Vulfran text cannot be used as evidence for Dudo’s thoughts.

<sup>22</sup> Boehm, 1969, 623–704. A similar approach can be found in Neveux, 1994, 51–62 (on Norman imperialism) and in Bouet, 1994, 239–52 (on the Normans as ‘a chosen people’).

<sup>23</sup> Davis, 1976, 15–17.

<sup>24</sup> Loud, 1981b, 104–16.

<sup>25</sup> Potts 1995, 139–52 and 1997, 1–13.

The third point concerns the debate about to what extent the Norman expansion into the Mediterranean was part of an exclusively Norman experience. Most historians would agree that the movement of young aristocratic men across Europe, fighting as mercenaries, was a northern French phenomenon.<sup>26</sup> A consensus is also emerging that among identifiable fighters the Normans did indeed stand out, both in their numbers and in the quality of their military skills. Graham Loud and Jonathan Shepard stress that medieval Italian and Greek chronicles and charters distinguish between Normans and other Franks, and single out what seem to have been peculiarly Norman characteristics.<sup>27</sup> They mention the Normans' exceptional familiarity with horses for military purposes: the Normans were said to be good at selecting and breeding horses, at fighting on horseback themselves, and at teaching others to do so. They also point to the Normans' willingness to fight and teach fighting in small fighting units called '*conrois*', and to their willingness to hire themselves out to foreign lords in return for cash and moveable goods or land. The Italian sources indeed single out the Normans as men who took ruthless advantage of local warfare to grab land for themselves. In [Chapter V](#) we will look more closely at this material. For the moment it suffices to note that non-Norman observers were commenting on the usefulness of Normans as mercenaries from the middle of the eleventh century onwards. That was one way, perhaps the principal way, in which their fame spread, and how they came to be perceived by themselves as well as others, as distinct from the Franks.

In the fourth and last place there is a debate which logically follows from the previous one: to what extent comparisons between the activities of the Normans in different corners of Europe help to understand the Normans as an identifiable group of people with a distinct culture. As the present book shows, the Normans themselves in the eleventh and twelfth centuries drew attention to their actions all over Europe. In chronicles, poems, battle speeches and inscriptions on weapons, a Norman in Normandy, say, might compare himself to his compatriots in England, Italy (Apulia, Calabria and Sicily), Byzantium and, even, Africa.<sup>28</sup> Thus there is plenty of room for argument on the differences and similarities between groups of Normans and between them and their neighbours.

<sup>26</sup> Bartlett, [1993](#), 24–60 provides a good introduction.

<sup>27</sup> Loud, [1981a](#), 13–34 and Shepard, [1992](#), 275–305.

<sup>28</sup> Abulafia, [1984](#), 26–49.

The process by which viking and Norman newcomers adapted to and assimilated with other indigenous cultures can be traced in early Normandy, in England, in Italy and to a lesser extent elsewhere in southern Europe. Intermarriage and language as evidence for assimilation constitute tools for modern research which can illuminate how the Normans operated abroad. They married indigenous women so as to legitimise their claims to land won by conquest thus ensuring that their children and grandchildren would not be disinherited. Language illustrates how in a bilingual society the Normans would converse among themselves in French but talk to their wives in English, Italian, Spanish or Greek. The second generation would be bilingual but the third would probably be monolingual and have only memories of a mixed background transmitted to them.<sup>29</sup>

This book is meant to stimulate readers to reflect on the above observations and to reach conclusions of their own. Any selection of source material naturally imposes a limitation on the choices of texts on offer (and the vicomte example set out above illustrated the limitation of primarily narrative sources). Fairly tough restrictions on the word limit have forced me to leave out texts I might otherwise have included. I have deliberately devoted a good deal of my space to items concerning women and children, though I could easily have used twice as much. The result is a balancing act which I trust will enrich and, occasionally, amuse the reader. If the texts seem to repeat themselves in places this is evidence in itself that the Normans were proud of their Norman (viking?) ancestry, as the words of one eleventh-century Norman magnate, expressed in a charter of the early 1080s, illustrate:

I, Roger of Montgomery,  
Norman [born] from Normans  
(*ex northmannis, northmannus*).<sup>30</sup>

29 Searle, 1980, 159–70; Loud, 1996, 325–32; Short, 1995, 153–76.

30 R. N. Sauvage, *L'Abbaye de Saint-Martin de Troarn au diocèse de Bayeux des origines au seizième siècle* (Caen, 1911), no. 3, pp. 352–3 and Bates, no. 281 (dated to 1080 x1082).

# I: FROM VIKINGS TO NORMANS

## Introduction

The inhabitants of Neustria, the area of western France which stretched from the River Seine to the River Loire, were the Franks.<sup>1</sup> From the late tenth century, as we have seen, part of the region that was roughly equivalent to the archdiocese of Rouen became known as Normandy as a result of the settlement of Scandinavian people and the grant of authority by the Carolingian king to the viking leader Rollo. However, most of the inhabitants of this land – the peasants who worked on it, those engaged in trade or industry, or those who lived as monks in monasteries – were Franks. When and how the government of the Franks and Scandinavians shifted from a predominantly Frankish elite to a predominantly Scandinavian elite is extremely difficult to establish. Due to a lack of late ninth- and tenth-century documentary and narrative sources, it is extraordinarily difficult to identify the individuals who wielded power and how they did so. The few surviving Carolingian documents [1–2] are charters from King Charles the Simple (898–922, d. 929), which show that the basic structures of royal administration were still in place: there is talk of bishops, the mechanism by which a change of ownership of serfs is effected seems valid, and the *fisc* (a royal estate at which taxes were collected) of Pîtres is still in operation. There is no evidence in these documents for large-scale disruption as a result of the viking invasions, even though the production of two of them [2–3] was inspired by viking activity.<sup>2</sup> The first hint of a viking take-over comes from 918, when another charter of Charles the Simple [3] refers retrospectively to his treaty with Rollo and his companions which gave them control of an area on the Seine (Rouen) which they defended on his behalf, presumably against other vikings. In order to understand

1 For general introductions to the early history of Normandy, see Musset, 1970, 96–129; Bates, 1982, 2–44; Searle, 1985, 198–213 and 1988, 61–78; Potts, 1997, 1–12. For the rivalries between groups of Franks and Scandinavians, see Searle, 1985, 198–213 and 1988, 15–26.

2 Though Searle, 1985, 198–213 and 1988, 42–3, 69–71 interprets the documents as showing disruption.

Rollo's emergence in Rouen we have to go back in time and consider the Carolingian royal policy of negotiations with the vikings.<sup>3</sup>

After Charlemagne (d. 814) nearly every Carolingian king negotiated with viking leaders, paid them off with tribute or offered them land. In return the kings received from the vikings pledges to go away, or to stay to defend the land given to them. The treaties also usually involved an additional promise by the viking leader to accept the Christian faith. The area of the Carolingian realm that features most prominently among the treaties that concern gifts of land is Frisia, stretching from Rüstingen in the north to Antwerp in the south. There many grants were given, most of which comprised the harbour of Dorestad on the River Waal, a tributary of the Rhine: in 807–12 to Hemming, in 829 to Harald I, in 855–73 to Rorik and in 882 to Godfrid. In contrast to what happened later in Normandy, Frisia never experienced any large-scale viking settlement and thus never showed signs of indigenous assimilation with Scandinavian settlers. Nor do we find signs of survival of Scandinavian names, laws or language. In Frisia prosperous harbours on rivers offered the vikings trading depots, while the kings received political and military support in locations vulnerable to attacks from the sea. Other places in France where short-lived viking settlements can be traced are around Nantes on the River Loire, and (in what became Normandy) on the isle of Oïssel in the River Seine. Carolingian kings negotiated with the viking leaders there but none of the settlements on the River Seine lasted longer than a few winters before *c.* 911. In 852 and 856–8 we find in those areas vikings called Björn and Sidroc, and one called Hundi in 896. The arrival of Rollo in France probably followed the same pattern initially of a sizeable group of viking soldiers/sailors arriving by ship, raiding extensively inland and settling in the river valley as well as on the nearby coasts. The exact date of Rollo's arrival is unknown. The Norman eleventh-century historians are unanimous in offering the year 876 as the date, but modern historians are sceptical and prefer a date nearer to 900. In order for Rollo to have been offered the task of defending Rouen (which of course he may have held under his control anyway) one imagines him to have been around long enough to earn the confidence of the Frankish population, to receive a wife (Popa of Bayeux), to organise his army in such a way that it could effectively undertake a defensive task, and to be prepared to accept the Christian faith. King Charles the Simple's treaty with Rollo *c.* 911 was probably

<sup>3</sup> For what follows, see Lot, 1908, 5–62; Nelson, 1997, 19–47 and Coupland, 1998, 85–114.

meant to be a temporary arrangement like the treaties made by his predecessors with viking leaders further north in Frisia. Interestingly, Dudo may have reminded his readers of the Frisia precedent by claiming that Rollo rejected an offer of Flanders when accepting Rouen [4]. That the treaty with Rollo would prove in the long term to constitute the longest lasting alienation of Carolingian land to a viking cannot have been foreseen by either Charles or Rollo or by any of their contemporaries. Rollo's dynasty survived at Rouen, against all odds, due to a combination of ruthless military action by the vikings and disastrous infighting among the Frankish aristocracy, which left them severely weakened and unable to resist the Rouen vikings' growing determination to stay put.

Before we can look at the extent and nature of Rollo's power it is important to establish who he was. The Norman historians Dudo of Saint-Quentin and William of Jumièges say that the pagan viking Rollo came from Dacia (Denmark) and thus they imply a Danish origin. Dudo doesn't name his father but calls his brother Gurim. The Scandinavian version of Rollo's ancestry, consisting of early thirteenth-century sagas written down by Snorri Sturluson, on the other hand, records a Norse origin. Snorri identifies Rollo as Hrolf or Rolf, son of Ragnvald, earl of Møre, in western Norway [14], and Hild, daughter of Rolf Nevja. Snorri, importantly, quotes a skaldic poem by Rollo's mother Hild, who, presumably addressing the king (Harold (c. 872–930)), laments the fact that her son was outlawed after a quarrel with his lord, who cannot be anyone but the king himself.<sup>4</sup> The saga tradition as recorded by Snorri then explains that as an exile Hrolf/Rollo settled for a while in the Orkneys and from there travelled further south via Scotland, where he is said to have had a child. This daughter, Kathleen, is mentioned in Icelandic tradition, a fact which prompted David Douglas to speculate no doubt correctly that her mother was Celtic and thus presumably a Christian. That conclusion matches the evidence from the *Plaintsong* on William Longsword that William had a Christian mother of overseas origin (see below).<sup>5</sup>

4 Skaldic poetry is named after its authors who were (court) poets known as skalds. Whereas modern historians are justified in their scepticism about the reliability of sagas, they are more inclined to put faith in the reliability of the skaldic poetry quoted by the saga writers on the grounds that the skalds were contemporaries of the events they described.

5 Douglas, 1977, 124–5. Dudo of Saint-Quentin claims that William's mother was Popa of Bayeux, evidence that is difficult to reconcile with the *Plaintsong* information. Keats-Rohan accepts Popa as William's mother and suggests that she was a daughter of Berengar, marquis of Neustria; she does not discuss the *Plaintsong* evidence (Keats-Rohan, 1997a, 187–204).

Thus Rollo (d. *c.* 928) and his men settled in Rouen after having received a grant of land from the Carolingian king which probably consisted of the *pagi* (the old Roman provinces) of Talou, Caux, Roumois and parts of the Evrecin.<sup>6</sup> He and his son William Longsword (*c.* 928–43) gradually acquired more territory to the west: in 924 Bayeux and Maine, and in 933 ‘the land of the Bretons situated on the sea-coast’, an area that is usually identified as being the Cotentin and the Avranchin [10]. The 933 grant extended the province to more or less the boundaries that existed at the time of the Norman conquest of England.<sup>7</sup> The extent to which Rollo and William were given some form of authority over Brittany, or part of it, remains a subject of great debate among modern historians.<sup>8</sup> If the above identification of the land given in 933 is correct we have to remember that exactly that area had been given in 867 by King Charles the Bald to Salomon of Brittany. Rivalry between indigenous and viking rulers in these frontier areas gave rise to claim and counter claim. The lack of contemporary sources makes it very difficult to verify Dudo of Saint-Quentin’s story that the royal grant of land to Rollo included the land of the Bretons. William’s son Richard I (943–96) had to defend his hold over Normandy against frequent attempts by the Franks of central France to take back what Charles the Simple and his successors had granted. Piecing together the chronology of Rollonid expansion and exercise of authority is difficult because of the patchy nature of the source material.

The Frankish annals of Flodoard are the fullest record we have [10]. Flodoard (d. *c.* 966) was based in Reims, many miles away from the Atlantic coast, and relied for his information on those who fought against the vikings and were engaged in missionary activity. His entries are often short and were written for a contemporary public that already knew what he was talking about.<sup>9</sup> Although the geographical distance and the annalistic brevity of his notes make his work difficult to interpret, many precious details concerning viking activity along the west coast of France are known only from his work.<sup>10</sup> For example, under the year 943 Flodoard provides tantalising information on mysterious individuals called Turmod and Setric, both pagan viking leaders operating in the area of Rouen, nominally under the control of

6 Bates, 1982, 8–9.

7 Musset and Chanteux, 1973, 54–5.

8 For a useful summary, see Smith, 1992, 200–2 and *GND*, i, 64–5.

9 For Flodoard as historian, see Sot, 1993, 83–7.

10 Guillot, 1981, 101–16 and 181–219.

William Longsword. Flodoard's annals were continued by the historian Richer *c.* 998, who records the death in 996 of Richard I and describes him in scathing terms as 'Richard, leader of the pirates'.<sup>11</sup> Richer's contempt for one of Rollo's descendants, which presumably reflected the views of most of the clergy in Reims, could scarcely have been expressed more strongly. The only other strictly contemporary source is a literary 'plaint' song bewailing the murder of William Longsword in 943 at the hands of Count Arnulf I of Flanders (918–65) [9]. Its origin is unknown but is to be sought either in Normandy (where it may have been written at Jumièges, the monastery on the Seine to which William had planned to retire as a monk), or more likely in Aquitaine (where William's sister Gerloc, also known as Adela, was countess).<sup>12</sup> The song is so important because it clearly speaks of William and his son Richard I as counts of Rouen. Their position as 'dukes of Normandy' was attributed to them retrospectively by the Norman court apologist Dudo of Saint-Quentin [4] in the years *c.* 995–1015, followed by William of Jumièges in the mid-eleventh century [6].<sup>13</sup>

We know very little about the Scandinavian settlers. Most of our information comes from place-name evidence and personal names found in written sources like charters and chronicles. Any discussion of this type of evidence is compounded by the difficulty that Scandinavian names and Frankish names ultimately derive from common Germanic roots. Unless extra information is provided, for example specific identification of someone as a Dane or a Norwegian, one cannot automatically equate a Germanic name with a Scandinavian one. Having said this, the work of Adigard des Gautries and Fellows-Jensen has dramatically advanced our knowledge of the Scandinavian settlement of Normandy.<sup>14</sup> The toponyms of Scandinavian origin, like Brametot (Seine-Mar.), Herquetot (Manche) or Colletot (Eure) indicate that they were once occupied by men called Brami, Helgi and Koli. Other place names contain Scandinavian words in them, like Carbec (*bec* = stream) or Oudalle (*dalle* = valley), illustrating that Scandina-

11 Richer, *Histoire de France (888–995)*, ed. R. Latouche, 2 vols (Paris, 1930), ii, p. 328.

12 For the state of research, see *GND*, i, xxviii–xxix.

13 For the use of titles, see Werner, 1976, 691–709; for the early medieval history of Rouen, see Gauthiez, 1991, 61–76 and Le Maho, 1994, 1–51. A useful map of Rouen *c.* 1000 can be found in Dudo of St Quentin, *History of the Normans*, trsl. E. Christiansen (Woodbridge, 1998), p. 231.

14 Adigard des Gautries, 1954, 264–70 and Fellows-Jensen, 1990, 149–59; see also Bates, 1982, 16–19.

avian people once lived there and named the sites in their own language. Toponymic evidence further suggests large-scale early settlement by Danes in the Pays-de-Caux (the land north of the Seine) and the north of the Cotentin (the peninsula) with some Irish/Scandinavian settlement in the tip of the peninsula as a result of immigration by Irish/Anglo/Scandinavian people from Britain, especially from the northern isles of Scotland. It is of course interesting that, if we can believe the skaldic poetry and sagas, the ruling clan came from Norway (via the Orkneys and Scotland) while the names of the 'ordinary' Scandinavians indicate immigration from Denmark. Recently Fellows-Jensen has called attention to the evidence suggesting late tenth- and eleventh-century migration of people bearing Scandinavian names between Normandy and the English Danelaw. Of the eighty Scandinavian names identified by Adigard des Gautries in Norman sources, most are male and Danish, with only three names belonging to women. From this it appears to follow that the Scandinavian (Danish) men settled down with, or married, Frankish women. Their offspring would have been brought up by their mothers, who no doubt taught them French as their first language. With language come customs, and we can perhaps assume that the children of mixed marriages were brought up to accept the prevailing manners and customs of France, even though they would not forget their Scandinavian origin and pass on Scandinavian folklore to future generations. The rarity of archaeological finds of unambiguously Scandinavian artefacts or remains reinforces the theory that a relatively speedy assimilation of Scandinavians and Franks took place. The most interesting of the rare finds is without doubt that of the two *fibulae* (brooches) from a female grave at Pîtres. They probably date from the second half of the ninth century, when similar ones are known to have been produced in Norway. Otherwise, the viking provenance of some swords and other weapons found in rivers in Normandy is beyond dispute, but their date is very difficult to establish. No conclusions can be drawn about whether such arms were imported from Scandinavia or were produced, according to Scandinavian models, in Normandy after the viking settlement of the early tenth century.<sup>15</sup>

Foreign contacts can be established thanks to the finds of coin hoards both in Normandy, where the hoard of Fécamp (980–85) discovered in 1963 and comprising over 9000 coins is the best known, and in England, Scandinavia, Ireland and the European continent as far

<sup>15</sup> Perin, 1990, 161–88 at 161–3.

away as Russia.<sup>16</sup> The spread of coins minted in tenth-century Rouen suggests Norman contacts with the British Isles and Scandinavia (Denmark in particular) as well as Russia, Poland, Germany and Switzerland and therefore presents a Norman focus to the west, north and north-east of Europe. This is of course precisely the area where the viking traders and raiders were active. The eleventh-century coin evidence suggests that a marked shift from north to south, that is, to the rest of France and Italy, occurred *c.* 1030–40 onwards. The increase of coinage from finds in Rome and southern Italy is especially illustrative of the emigration of Normans to Apulia and Calabria. As far as the coinage itself is concerned, as opposed to the use and spread of coins, a paradox of continuity and discontinuity with the Carolingian past emerges. The main mints remained those of Carolingian Rouen: the count and the comital palace chapel, the cathedral and the abbey of Saint-Ouen all continued to mint coins as they had done before the vikings arrived. As Françoise Dumas has noted, there is no perceptible halt in production nor in the use of Rouen coinage at any time in the tenth century. Yet this picture of continuity of minting along the lines of Carolingian practice is deceptive, because the coins were different from those of pre-viking Rouen. William Longsword (no coins of Rollo survive) was the first territorial prince in Carolingian France to use his own name on his coins while at the same time omitting any reference to the Carolingian king. Richard I continued his father's practice after an hiatus *c.* 943, the year that William Longsword died, during which Rouen was briefly under the control of King Louis IV. The cunning use of coins by the counts of Rouen to display that they were independent of the very kings who had granted them Rouen provides a striking illustration of their power in Rouen and of the weakness of the kings of France. However, the survival in the hoard of Fécamp of a coin minted in the name of a Hugh the Dane, datable to the 980s, is evidence that other semi-independent viking leaders coexisted with the Rollonid family elsewhere in Normandy. A stray coin with the name William on it followed by the letters DV (for *dux* = duke or leader?), datable to the early tenth century and found near Mont-Saint-Michel, adds weight to Dudo's claim, mentioned above, that William Longsword controlled western Normandy and Brittany.<sup>17</sup>

16 What follows is based on Bates, 1982, 36 and Dumas, 1979, 84–140 at 87–96 and 101–2.

17 Dolley and Yvon, 1971, 7–11 and Searle, 1985, 209.

Thus archaeological evidence suggests a picture of continuity and to a lesser extent discontinuity with the Carolingian past. Similar evidence emerges from the study of legal practices, which remained predominantly Frankish. Nevertheless, in law some significant Scandinavian traditions were retained. Among them were several rights belonging to the dukes which derived from Scandinavian precedent.<sup>18</sup> Crimes of murder in secret (*murdrum*) or assault on someone inside a house (*hamfara*) were crimes subject to ducal jurisdiction, and penalties were paid to him. The right of exile (*ullac*) and the right of shipwreck (*varech*) also belonged exclusively to the duke originally. The tradition whereby the duke provided protection for agricultural implements left out in the fields, with thefts of agricultural tools punished by death rather than fines as in Carolingian times, probably went back to Rollo's time. It can be interpreted as the legacy of measures adopted by an army of occupation determined to apply its own (Scandinavian) rules rather than accept indigenous customs. Interestingly, the documents which record those Scandinavian practices all come from William the Conqueror's period and concern monasteries located on rivers or in coastal areas, precisely those areas where the vikings settled in the first place. *Ullac* and *hamfara* are uniquely mentioned in the Conqueror's 1050 charter for Saint-Pierre at Préaux as rights attached to the land at Vascoeul, which were sold to the abbot,<sup>19</sup> whereas the two examples of *varech* appear in charters for Coutances and Cherbourg.<sup>20</sup> The late date of the documents recording those Scandinavian customs prompted Lucien Musset to suggest that the customs were the result of reimportation from Danelaw England, rather than relics from Rollo's time.<sup>21</sup>

Contacts with Scandinavia persisted till the first quarter of the eleventh century, that is, more or less till the end of the time of Richard II (996–1026).<sup>22</sup> He was instrumental in negotiating the release of Emma, viscountess of Limoges, who had been captured by the vikings [62]. In c. 1003 or 1013 he concluded a treaty of alliance with King Svein when the latter was *en route* to England. He employed

18 Bates, 1982, 22; Musset, 1971, 263; Yver, 1969, 319–21.

19 Fauroux, no. 121.

20 Fauroux, no. 224, p. 431 and no. 214, p. 406.

21 Musset, 1985, 58–9; very little is known about the right of shipwreck in Anglo-Saxon times and its possible Scandinavian origins, see F. E. Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, 2nd edn (Stamford, 1989), p. 426.

22 Van Houts, 1983, 110–11.