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THE ‘GENS NORMANNORUM’ – MYTH OR REALITY?

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‘The Normans are an untamed race, and unless they are held in check by a firm ruler they are all too ready to do wrong. In all communities, wherever they may be, they strive to rule and often become enemies to truth and loyalty through the ardour of their ambition. This the French and Bretons and Flemings and their other neighbours have frequently experienced; this the Italians, Lombards, Saxons and Angles have suffered to the point of destruction.’

The words of Orderic Vitalis encapsulate, albeit with his characteristic moralising overtone, both the theme of this conference and, in a rather different way, that of my paper. They embody a topos of other contemporary writers. William of Malmesbury called the Normans ‘a people accustomed to knighthood and scarcely knowing how to live without warfare’, who, when they failed to gain what they wanted by prowess, resorted to cunning to achieve their ends. Geoffrey Malaterra, the author of the official, and highly propagandist, history of the conquest of Sicily, described the Normans as ‘a most astute people, impatient of injuries, seeking to grow rich by other means than tending their hereditary fields’.

And yet, if we are to follow the recent and suggestive analysis of R. H. C. Davis, the concept of Normanitas enunciated by Orderic and his fellow historians and their exaltation of the conquests of the indomita gens Normannorum were the expressions of a myth which reached its apogee at a time when Norman blood and Norman customs were already being subsumed into the lands which the Normans themselves had conquered. Davis suggests that in the eleventh century, the era of conquest, the Normans were more concerned to vindicate their position as Frenchmen and as part of the European Christian community than to emphasise their role as a separate and distinct people.

Such an approach obviously calls into question the whole notion of the ‘Norman Achievement’, and raises numerous questions about the development and themes of ‘Norman’ historiography. Not only does it suggest that previous scholars have wildly overestimated the coherence and consistency of those contemporary writers who described the rise of Normandy and the conquests made by its people, but it also poses a more fundamental problem still, and one with much wider implications. Was there any real concept of race or people in the Central Middle Ages?

Probably the most perceptive study of Norman historiography in the last few years has been that of Ovidio Capitani, who has pointed out something which might seem to be obvious, but in much of recent scholarship has clearly not been so: that the Norman chroniclers, our chief source for the Normans’ own view of themselves, were part of a wider intellectual firmament, and reflected not merely their own ideas but those of the culture of medieval Christendom as a whole. Any re-exam-
ination of Norman historical writing must analyse it against the background of the ideas which Norman writers themselves imbibed, and against the mirror of the chroniclers of other areas.

Most scholars have seen Orderic as the key figure in the evolution of Norman historiography. The historian of St Evroul, they argue, had the clearest and most developed conception of the achievements of the Norman race, derived from the careers of scions of the families from the Pays d'Ouche. To him the benefactors of St Evroul encapsulated the Norman ethic. And Orderic, writing between about 1114 and 1141, was a product rather than a contemporary of the era of conquest — indeed, literally so, as the child of a Norman father and an English mother.

According to Davis his stress on the unity of the Norman conquests and the role of the Normans as the race of conquerors par excellence represented a virtually new departure, anticipated only very slightly by Dudo of St Quentin's exaggerated claims of Norman victories over their immediate neighbours a century before. This theme was in turn expressed by Henry of Huntingdon in the rhetorical speeches attributed to Duke William in his account of the Battle of Hastings and to Bishop Ralph of Orkney at the Battle of the Standard. A slightly different version of the latter speech was repeated by Ailred of Rievaulx in his account of the battle, written c.1155-7, and assigned by him to the founder of his own abbey, Walter Espec. To these texts one might add an anonymous poem of c.1150 equating Rouen and Rome (an analogy perhaps derived from the now-lost Gesta Romanorum also used by Orderic). This argued that just as Rome had once ruled an empire so now Rouen was the centre of one stretching from France to Scotland, while a son of Rouen (that is Roger II of Sicily) ruled Italy, Sicily, Africa and Greece.

This view, however, requires several qualifications. To begin with, the theme of the intrinsic unity of the Norman conquests was hardly a creation of Orderic Vitalis. We may if we like dismiss the statement by William of Poitiers that the Normans had conquered Apulia and Sicily, were defending Constantinople and making Babylon tremble as an isolated reference at the end of the work which the author made no effort to develop. Similarly, given the present uncertainty as to the date of the Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, the one enigmatic line referring to the ‘Apulian, Calabrian and Sicilian’ in the ducal army can hardly be taken very seriously. But the earliest historian of the Norman conquest of Italy, Amatus of Montecassino, writing about 1080, presented an unequivocal and very eloquent statement of the unity of the Norman Achievement. In the first fifteen chapters of his history he discussed in turn Duke William’s conquest of England, the involvement of Norman knights at the siege of Barbastro in Spain in 1064, and the activities of the Norman mercenaries of Byzantium, in particular the notorious Roussel of Bailleul. Only then did he turn to deal with the arrival of the Normans in Italy. Amatus was very clearly not using the term ‘Norman’ as it very well might have been used in Italy, to mean simply someone from north of the Alps, particularly since in his account of the attack on Barbastro he was careful to differentiate the Normans from the Burgundians and the French (i.e. men from the Ile-de-France). And this recognition of the Normans and their history is the more notable since Amatus himself was an outsider, a Lombard from the Principality of Salerno.

Furthermore, at the time when the conquest theme was at its height, in the 1140s and 1150s, another commonplace remained in full and vigorous life. In Henry of Huntingdon’s account of William’s speech at Hastings the duke addressed the Normans as gentium fortissimi, and in his epilogue to the reign of the Conqueror
Henry expatiated on the singular savagery of the Norman race, which had led God to choose them to wreak his vengeance on the English, and had enabled them to make their far-flung conquests. Another work from the same period, the anonymous *De Expugnatione Lyxbonensi* of 1148, provides a particularly interesting example of this practice, precisely because, by contrast to the archdeacon of Huntingdon, the author made no mention of Norman conquests. But he did discuss the innate characteristics of the *gens Normannorum*: their refusal to be deterred by difficulties however great or to be corrupted by prosperity and the delights of idleness. Above all this typology of the race is developed at considerable length by Orderic himself. He stressed the warlike nature of the Normans, their arrogance, restlessness and desire to see new lands, their acquisitiveness and ambition, and reluctance to surrender power once they had gained it, and above all the *furor Normannorum* — their propensity for internal strife, devouring each other with their own teeth like the Beast of the Apocalypse. Orderic's concern to show, and frequently to deprecate, the peculiar character of the Norman race was far more marked than his concern with the exaltation or unity of Norman conquests. Hence his first mention of Robert Guiscard's campaign against Byzantium in 1081·5 was made, not in connection with *Normanitas* at all, but in discussing the connection of the English with the emperor's Varangian Guard. Above all the Norman element in his account of the First Crusade was curiously muted, not least because he did so little to rework his immediate source, the history of Baudri of Bourgueil. Thus in his account of the battle outside Antioch against the army of Kerbogha of Mosul he described Bohemond, Guiscard's son, as leading 'thirty thousand Lombards and Italians'. In his description of the 1101 Crusade, which is not derived from Baudri (whose work ceased with the capture of Jerusalem), he said that Alexius Comnenus had often experienced the courage of the *Cisalpini* under Robert Guiscard and Bohemond. If he exaggerated Robert of Normandy's role at Lattakieh, he hardly matched William of Malmesbury, who said that the Duke of Normandy had himself killed Kerbogha at Antioch, and had later been offered and declined the kingdom of Jerusalem, or Henry of Huntingdon, who also recorded the offer of the crown and had earlier portrayed Robert as personally saving the Christians from defeat at Doryleum in 1097.

The desire to record the conquests of the Normans was anyway only one among a variety of motives which moved Orderic to write. He naturally retained a strong monastic and liturgical element even after his decision to expand his history from its original concentration on his own abbey. His most important model was Bede, whose own propagandist purpose was Christian and didactic, and certainly not racial, and among the other important influences on his changes of design while writing his history were Eusebius and the recent world chronicles of Marianus Scotus and Sigebert of Gembloux, none of which was geared to any particular race. It ought also to be pointed out that, for all his desire to record the connection of St Evroul with the important south Italian monasteries of St Euphemia and Venosa and the deeds of the relatives of William Giroie in Italy, Orderic's information about Norman Italy was often thoroughly inaccurate. Even his chronology of the career of the great *condottiere* William of Montreuil, a member of the Giroie family so well-known to him, was decidedly confused. His brief account of events in Sicily after the death of Count Roger I and Roger II's relations with the anti-pope Anacletus is quite unreliable.

In addition, one must ask not merely what authors wrote, but who actually read
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what they wrote, if indeed they were read at all. Here once again one finds the importance of Orderic Vitalis in the evolution of Norman historiography and in the promulgation of the alleged Norman ‘myth’ diminishing. Whatever the local audience for the Ecclesiastical History, whose main interest in readings from the work in the cloister would surely have been in those passages of overtly ecclesiastical content, one cannot escape the fact that only two twelfth-century manuscripts of the work survive, one of which is the author’s autograph (the other being from St Stephen’s, Caen). Nor is there any evidence for other, now-lost, manuscripts. Despite Orderic’s contacts at Worcester and Croyland the Ecclesiastical History was never known in England. By contrast the work of Dudo of St Quentin was known at Fécamp, Jumièges and St Evroul in Normandy, at Bury St Edmunds in England, and exists in several other English manuscripts of unknown provenance. That of William of Jumièges, in its various redactions, was, as Dr Van Houts has shown, more widespread still, circulating in some forty surviving manuscripts from before 1200, including ones from all the main Norman monasteries, from all over England, and in addition at St Denis. It was used by numerous later historians. Though no manuscript of the Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers now survives, the fact that Orderic, Robert of Torigny and Wace all read it suggests at least a limited distribution in Normandy. And while the History of Amatus and the Gesta Tancredi of Radulf of Caen both survive only in a single manuscript, two other works from Norman Italy were distributed widely enough to have been known in the duchy; the Gesta Roberti Wiscardi of William of Apulia at Bec and Mont-St-Michel, and Malaterra’s history at St Evroul (though modern historians are not agreed as to whether Orderic had actually read it). Furthermore the now lost Chanson de Geste about the pilgrimage of Duke Robert to the Holy Land, composed in southern Italy, was known in both Normandy and England, being used by the ‘B’ redactor of William of Jumièges, William of Malmesbury and Wace. And at the end of the eleventh century echoes of Robert Guiscard’s conquest of Apulia found their way into the Chanson de Roland, a work certainly known in Norman circles, notably to Radulf of Caen.

Therefore any examination of the themes and preoccupations of Norman historiography must surely concentrate on those works which appealed most to the Normans themselves, not on those such as Orderic which, however great their value as historical sources, were not copied and rarely read. Dr Van Houts has stressed the continuous accretion, revision and recapitulation within a single conceptual framework of the Gesta Normannorum Ducum, from Dudo through to Robert of Torigny (with for example both the compiler of the E redaction of William of Jumièges and Robert going back to Dudo’s original for extra material). This enhances the importance which the wide manuscript distribution already suggests should be given to the text. The Gesta Normannorum Ducum was part of a living historical tradition, the Ecclesiastical History a largely unknown monument to one man’s learning and devotion, unread except by Wace. The other important elements of the tradition are surely those works known both in the north and south: that is William of Apulia and Malaterra’s encomia of Robert Guiscard and Roger the Great Count; and those well-known within a more limited area. Of the latter the most notable was the Gesta Regum of William of Malmesbury, which according to Stubbs ‘seems to have sprung at once into the position of a standard and popular history’. And whereas many of these works were intended for oral recitation, more significance ought to be attached to those intended for a secular, noble and
courtly audience, as those of Dudo and Malaterra, rather than to a primarily ecclesiastical one, as Orderic.\(^40\)

How did the eleventh-century authors view the Normans? Davis has suggested that Dudo at least was concerned to stress the Francisation of the Normans rather than their own individuality, and that the emphasis of the time was placed on the land of Normandy, not on the people, whom contemporaries recognised as being polyglot.\(^41\) Certainly Dudo stressed the peculiar richness and fertility of the land of Normandy, but the intrinsic desirability of the lands conquered by the Normans was such a topos of their historiography — Amatus for example wrote of them going to the land of milk and honey in Italy — that it is difficult to interpret it other than as a purely literary effect.\(^42\) And while Dudo did occasionally write of the *regnwm Northmanniae*, this represented a political claim vaunting Norman independence of the French king (and like much of Dudo’s political vision was anachronistic special pleading).\(^43\) The key word in this phrase was *regnwm*, not *Northmanniae*, and the word *regnwm* anyway had territorial connotations implicit within it.\(^44\) However, Dudo talked far less of Normandy than of the Norman *gens*. He wrote of the *dux Northmannorum*, not the *dux Northmanniae*. (The use of the ducal title for the early and mid tenth century was of course another anachronistic political touch).\(^45\) Similarly Dudo considered the inhabitants of other areas of Francia as *gentes* in their own right: for example the ‘Flandrenses caeterasque gentes’, ‘Flandrensis gentis comitum Arnulfum’.\(^46\) When exalting the power of William Longsword he wrote of the various *gentes* who obeyed him.\(^47\)

William of Jumièges too saw the land of Normandy primarily as the *patria* *Normannorum*. Similarly William of Poitiers wrote that, despite the wealth of his new-found kingdom, William the Conqueror still loved his *patria* because its *gens* was faithful to its rulers and profoundly attached to the Christian faith. Seventy years later the *De Expugnatione Lycbonensi* extolled ‘generis nostri mater Normanniae’.\(^48\) William of Jumièges, like Dudo, saw the Normans as only one among many *gentes*, and the whole concept played a central role in his thinking. Thus after Ethelred of England’s massacre of the Danes in his kingdom in 1002 King Sweyn of Denmark was angry because of the injury to his *gens*.\(^49\)

The distinction between Dane and Norman was an important one. Admittedly, even at the time when William of Jumièges was writing the older usage of *normannus* to mean any sort of Scandinavian or Viking was not quite dead. Adam of Bremen commented: ‘Nam Dani et ceteri, qui trans Daniam sunt, populii ab istoricis Francorum omnes Nordmanni vocantur’.\(^*\) But though Adam was writing in the 1070s the Frankish historians whom he used and to whom he was referring were those of the Carolingian age.\(^50\) Dudo did write of the *Normanni* attacking Francia, but for the most part he called them *Dani*, and, interestingly enough, he never used the word *normannus* in connection with the exploits of his first hero, Hastig, in the Mediterranean. And he was careful to differentiate the Danes from the other Scandinavian peoples, and to ascribe to them a distinct and separate (albeit legendary) ancestry.\(^51\) By the 1070s William of Jumièges was quite explicit. Before

\(^*\) Adam’s problem was that there was at this period no word coined for the Scandinavian *natio* as a whole except *normanni*, but by the late eleventh century the primary use for that word in a Scandinavian context was clearly as ‘Norwegian’. See Adam IV.44 (*M.G.H. in usus scol.* ed. p.280), and Kahl, in *Aspekte der Nationenbildung im Mittelalter*, ed. Beumann & Schröder, 77.
The treaty of St-Clair-sur-Epte the newcomers to Neustria were Danes. Rollo himself remarks ‘Dani sumus’. Afterwards they became Normanni. In his account of the early years of Duke Richard I William contrasted the Normanni of Normandy and the Danes under King Harald who aided them against the French king. William made the difference more explicit than did Dudo in describing the same events. The latter called Harald the consanguinis of Richard; William by contrast said only that he was the duke’s amicus. For William of Jumièges there was a vital difference between the Normanni and the Danes and Swedes (whom he also distinguished from one another). The former were not merely resident in Normandy, but were also Christian, whereas the latter were still pagani. Dudo, though obviously writing from a Christian standpoint, was much more ambivalent about the original paganism of the Normans and of their Danish allies, perhaps in part because he was incorporating non-Christian legendary material into his work, but also because he was probably more conscious than his successors how slow and imperfect the Christian conversion of the Scandinavian invaders had been. Perhaps because of this, Dudo, though obviously conscious of the distinction, was less rigorously consistent than was William in the contrast between the Danes before the conversion and the Normanni afterwards.

If, by the time of William of Jumièges the Normans were very clearly distinguished from their Danish ancestors and contemporary Danes, what exactly did the key phrase of the gens Normannorum (or as sometimes rendered gens normannica) imply? The word gens could have at least three distinct meanings in Latin. Just as in English the word ‘people’ can refer either to ‘a people’ or to a group of persons casually thrown together, so it could in Latin. Thus Dudo wrote of the aftermath of a Viking raid, ‘omnisque gens desolata ad naves ducta est captiva’; and the Gesta Francorum could charge (quite unfairly), ‘Infelix imperator jussit suis exercitibus invade re ducem cum Christi gente’. Here there is no question of relationship or peculiar distinctiveness from anyone else. In the second example ‘Christi gens’ simply means the whole Crusading expedition, even though the author knew well that it comprised members of many different peoples. Secondly, the Romans used the term to mean the extended kin-group of which an individual family might be a part. Hence Sallust: ‘Sulla gentis patriciae (i.e. the Corneliae) nobilis fuit, familia prope jam extincta majorum ignavia’; or Suetonius on the descent of the Emperor Nero ‘ex gente Domitia duae familiae clamurent, Calvinorum et Aenobarbum’. But the third and most usual usage for the word gens was to mean ‘a people’, and in this context it had in the Middle Ages a precise technical meaning. The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville defined a gens as ‘a multitude sprung from one principal ... a gens is named from the word generation’, and they explicitly differentiated a gens from a regnum. Regna were the properties of nationes, but the latter were not simply peoples. The concepts of nation and regnum implied both geographical and legal, as well as, sometimes instead of, blood relationships. A nation would be made up of several gentes, usually related to each other, but none the less separate and distinct. Thus Adam of Bremen saw the Scandinavian natio as composed of the various gentes of the Danes, Norwegians and Swedes. Widukind of Korvey and Helmold of Bosau saw the natio of the Slavs as divided into its component gentes such as the Rugians, Aproditi, Wilzi and Hevelli. This distinction between natio and gens was already well-established in the Roman world. Tacitus, for example, stated that the Germans were divided into various individual gentes. Caesar wrote that ‘the gens of the Suebi is the largest and most warlike of all the Germans’.
Above all their own supra-national empire must have made apparent to Roman authors the difference between the political and geographical natio and the tribal, inter-related, gens. The distinction between gens and regnum was also made abundantly clear by the Bible. William of Malmesbury’s account of the deathbed vision of Edward the Confessor quoted that most ominous of New Testament prophecies, Mark xiii. 8: ‘gentem contra gentem surrectam, et regnum adversus regnum’. One of the great rallying texts of papal theocratic claims was Jeremiah i. 10: ‘constitui te hodie super gentes et regna’.

Contemporaries saw the great monarchies of Western Christendom in precisely this sense in the Early Middle Ages. They were regna over various gentes, not merely over one — and hence the staggering ambition of Dudo’s claim that Normandy was a regnum, necessary though it was if the Normans were to assert their independence from the French king. Dr Nelson has shown the importance of such an ‘imperial’ concept of kingship in tenth-century England, and the significance in this respect of Edgar’s 973 coronation. From this period Anglo-Saxon royal charters began to use the formula ‘rex anglorum ceterarumque gentium in circuitu persistentium gubernator et rector’. Interestingly enough three Glastonbury charters with this introitatio were copied by William of Malmesbury in the Gesta Regum. A precedent for rule over the English and the peoples bordering them was not without its application in the days of the Norman ‘empire’ of Henry I. But, the regna of East and West Francia were seen in a similar manner. East Francia in particular only had existence as a thin post-Carolingian superstructure of kingship over the reality of the separate and diverse gentes of the stem-duchies. Not only did these peoples see themselves as distinct, they usually behaved like it, particularly when in the territory of another of the kingdom’s gentes. Indeed the very idea of Germany except as the totality of rule over and above the gentes was extremely slow to emerge. The persistence of the importance of the gens even after this emergence is shown by the Carmen de Bello Saxonico, a contemporary metrical poem describing Henry IV’s attempts to reassert his authority in the 1070s, not over Saxony or the Saxon duchy, but over the Saxon gens. The concept of the natio as an agglomeration of gentes was no less powerful in West Francia, even if political reality there was based on the Carolingian marches and counties rather than on any tribal idea.

The medieval concept of the gens itself had two distinct components. One was the idea of common descent — to which we shall return later. The other, once again expressed most pithily and authoritatively by Isidore, was that each individual gens not only had its own distinct physical characteristics but also its own innate Geisteshaltung. Thus the Romans were distinguished for their gravity, the Greeks for their levity, and the Africans for their fickleness. The Goths were quick by nature and active in character. But Isidore was saying nothing very new here. The Romans knew well that particular gentes could be distinguished both by appearance and customs and by mentality. The fickleness of the Numidians was a topos in Sallust. The idea of climate dictating racial character, of which Isidore made mention, was of course Aristotelian (though this was only to achieve wide currency in the Middle Ages with the revival of Aristotelian studies in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries). However the concept of the innate character of each gens was alive and well in the early Middle Ages. One of the most elaborate examples comes in two tracts, one perhaps an enlargement of the other, originating in Spain in the late ninth century and entitled ‘De Proprietatibus Gentium’. The longer of these, which occurs in four manuscripts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, two
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from England, was divided into ‘De vitis gentium’ and ‘De bonis naturis gentium’, and enumerated among the former ‘invidia Iudeorum, perfidia Persorum, astutia Aegyptorum crudelitas Unorum, libidia Suevorum, (and) rapacitas Normannorum’. Similar ideas were expressed by writers in the Carolingian and post-Carolingian realms, even if they inevitably reflected political viewpoints as well as quasi-scientific concepts – for example the innate treachery of the Bretons or the ferocity and cruelty of the Hungarians. One of the best later examples comes at the beginning of Helmold’s Chronicle of the Slavs, where the author notes that the Hungarians are ‘a most powerful gens and strenuous in arms’, the Bavarians are marked by their honesty, piety and respect for the priesthood, and the Poles and Bohemians by their cruelty in foreign wars and their failure to respect churches and holy places. Certainly a degree of deduction from observation is included here – as indeed was the case with the classical authors who served as models for analyses of other races – but the idea still remains that each gens has its specific character.

This concept was equally powerful in twelfth-century France. The History of Count Geoffrey of Anjou boasted that, ‘Andegavorum gentem magnanimis et bellicosissimis valuisse et terrori extisse circumfusis nationibus celebre percognitum est’. In Spain similar examples can be taken from the Planeta of Diego Garcia, a devotional and polemical tract written in 1218, though in this, perhaps under Aristotelian influence, the character of a people was becoming equated with the character of the country they inhabited.

Hence the stress in the Norman sources on the innate character of their race was merely one expression of a standard intellectual concept of the Early Middle Ages. But it was none the less important, because it was one of the crucial marks of a distinct race to have its own national character, and the concentration by Norman writers on the peculiar and special qualities of the gens Normannorum is in itself proof that the Normans considered themselves to be a race in their own right. This characterisation of the race, not the emphasis on the unity or scope of their conquests, was the dominant theme of Norman historiography.

Dudo assigned two chief qualities to the Normans, their warlike nature, ‘gens belligera et effera’, describing them at one point as charging down on their enemies like wolves falling on a sheepfold, and secondly their shrewdness in argument and propensity for cunning and deceit (fit indeed for treasons, stratagems and spoils!). William of Jumièges saw them as the gens feroceissima, in which not only the men but the women were doughty fighters, and whose enemies invariably turned and fled on the battlefield. William of Poitiers praised the virtus normannica, and wrote how, with the victories under Duke William, Normandy’s neighbours realised the folly of trying to attack the duchy. His description of the feigned flight at Hastings provided perhaps the classic example of how Norman cunning overcame resistance which temporarily frustrated warlike skill. William worked on the same assumption of the Norman character as his fellows, although he tended to transfer the Norman virtus to his hero, Duke William, as indeed one might expect given the biographical framework of his work. However the typology of the Norman race was most fully expressed by three later writers, Malaterra, Orderic and William of Malmesbury. Orderic’s characterisation of the Normans has already been examined. Malaterra, writing c.1100, produced very much the same picture as had Dudo. He portrayed the gens astutissima, avid for conquest and domination, ready in tongue, and above all, as Capitani has so skilfully shown, dominated by the quality of strenuitas, the energy and determination which made the Normans so formidable in
arms and conquest (a theme repeated by Radulf of Caen). Roger I encapsulated the qualities of his race, "lingua facundissimus, consilio callidus, in ordinatione agendarum rerum providens ... militia ferox". William of Malmesbury noted not merely the warlike nature of the Normans but their cunning and unscrupulousness — "they weigh treachery by its chance of success". The deviousness of the Normans and the rewards it brought was emphasised again and again. Dudo and William of Jumièges told how Richard I escaped from the captivity of the French king by feigning mortal illness. Amatus and Malaterra recorded the faked conference which Guiscard employed to capture the lord of Bisignano in Calabria, William of Apulia the Normans' cunning in preventing any decisive victory in the internecine wars of the Lombards in southern Italy, so that no power was strong enough to resist them. Malaterra described how Roger the Great Count broke the siege of Troina, waiting till the Arab besiegers were fuddled with wine on a dark winter's night. The E redactor of the Gesta Normannorum Ducum told how two Norman boys were smuggled into Mayenne, avoiding suspicion by the garrison, and then set light to the town. The Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, in this if in nothing else part of the mainstream of the Norman tradition, exulted in Norman cunning triumphing over English deceit during the negotiations for the control of London after Hastings.

Not only did the Norman historians assign an intrinsic character to their own race, they did so, usually much less flatteringly, to others as well. Dudo inserted a speech into the mouth of William Longsword in which he characterised the Poitevins as avaricious and cowardly. William of Poitiers was more charitable about the Tourangeaux, an ingenious and opulent race. But with the historians of the Normans in Italy the reverse side of the coin comes with a vengeance. All harped on the ingrained effeminacy and cowardice of the Greeks, to use Malaterra's words 'a people given by custom rather to softness and self-indulgence than to the study of war'. To Malaterra too the Lombards were a people driven by envy and perfidy. Amatus, Lombard that he was, saw his people as one inevitably inclined to internal dissension, and hence to downfall in the face of the invaders. Here he was developing a theme already set out by Erchempert a century and a half previously, as the latter described and denounced the internal quarrels which had made the Lombard principalities disintegrate in the face of Arab attacks. William of Malmesbury offers one of the most interesting studies. The Venetians he described, naturally enough, as 'gens mari assueta'. The Bretons were 'a race of people poor at home, and seeking abroad to support a toilsome life by foreign service ... they decline not civil war if they are paid for it'. In his dedication of the Gesta Regum to Robert of Gloucester he wrote, 'from the Normans you derive your military skill, from the Flemings your personal elegance, from the French your surpassing magnificence'. And in one interesting passage William explicitly connected the characterisation of a people with the preservation of its racial homogeneity. King Edgar's fame, he said, had attracted many foreigners to England, whose bad qualities corrupted the English, for from the Saxons they learned an untameable ferocity of mind, from the Flemings a feeble delicacy of body, and from the Danes drunkenness.

This theme too was one which had a much wider impact than simply in the Norman world. Adam of Bremen plagiarised a passage from Tacitus about the reluctance of the Germans to pollute their blood by marriage with other and inferior races. In 1233 the Emperor Frederick II forbade his subjects to marry...
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foreigners on the grounds that 'diversarum mixtura gentium' led to the corruption of native customs and the impairment of the purity of the population. And in the fourteenth century the Brut blamed the civil wars of Edward II's reign on the pollution of the 'kind blood of the English' by men of other nations.

Of course in practice no gens was racially homogeneous. Modern scholarship would reckon the Scandinavian element in Normandy to be small. Similarly the Germanic peoples who invaded the Roman empire were social and political associations rather than racial entities. Norman writers were quite capable of recognising this, at least with regard to individual cases of intermarriage and immigration. But though they must have been at least partially conscious of the artificiality of the literary concept, nonetheless the idea of common descent as a key element in the identity of the gens was so well-established as to be fundamental in the Normans' own conception of themselves. The legend of Norman descent, via the Danes and Dacians, from the Trojans, promulgated by Dudo, copied by William of Jumièges, and accepted to a greater or lesser extent by their successors, was no isolated creation of the early eleventh century. An origo legend was as essential a concomitant to the Normans' standing as a race as the creation of a typology for the gens. Other gentes had explanations for their origins, therefore the Normans needed one as well.

An Origo Gentis Romanae, based on the Aeniad, was written in the fourth century (and revised in southern Italy in the 1020s). Isidore's Gothic History traced that people's descent from Magog the son of Japhet. The Trojan legend first received currency with regard to a people other than the Romans with Fredegar in the seventh century and the Liber Historiae Francorum in the eighth. Less ambitious, but still quite elaborate, origin legends played their part in Lombard historiography and in Widukind's Rerum Gestarum Saxonicorum. As Southern has so justly pointed out, it was precisely those peoples who were in the ascendand, who were groping for 'a place in the sun', who needed intellectual respectability by securing an ancestry, however spurious or risible it might seem to the modern mind. It was no accident that the Frankish Trojan legend was revived in the eighth century as the Carolingian drive for the dominance of Christendom began, or that Saxony at the height of Ottonian power should see a variant. When interest in the Trojan origins of the Franks revived in the twelfth century where else was it likely to centre than at St Denis, the powerhouse of French royal propaganda?

Similarly the origo legends of Italian cities emerged when individual cities were on the ascendant both economically and politically, and becoming conscious of their need for antiquity and respectability to match their growing power, and here again Trojan exiles helped to provide a satisfactory solution to the problem.

Norman writers had ample opportunity to know that other peoples had explanations for their origins, and that this was a vital part of the whole concept of being a people. Jordanes, from whom Dudo drew his geography, explained peoples precisely in terms of their descent. Dudo also knew the Liber Historiae Francorum. Prentout's supposition that he had read Widukind seems improbable, but not wholly impossible. And Paul the Deacon's History of the Lombards was known not only to Dudo but also to Orderic and William of Malmesbury, and at Mont-St-Michel. William of Jumièges made reference to Isidore's Gothic History, and that good classical scholar William of Poitiers was familiar with, and much influenced by, the Aeniad. William of Malmesbury knew the significance of Woden-descended kingship to the Anglo-Saxons. Henry of Huntingdon recorded how a courtier (surely rather imprudently given the character of the king concerned?) recounted
Thus belief in common descent as a prerequisite of the *gens* was something with which Norman historians were very familiar. Both classical writers, for example Jordanes, and their medieval successors, believed that physical form was transmitted by heredity. John of Salisbury said that the inhabitants of Siena owed their characteristic physionomy to their descent from the Gallic invaders of Italy under Brennus. Similarly the innate character of a people was handed down by descent. William of Poitiers said that the English *gens* was by nature always active in war, being descended from the old Saxons, the most ferocious of men. At least by implication, in Dudo and William of Jumièges it was the Norman descent *ex ferocitate saevae gentilitatis Dacigenae* which made them so formidable in war.

The widespread influence of the works of Isidore of Seville, and particularly the Etymologies, which became the standard medieval reference book, played an important part in creating and sustaining contemporary ideas about the composition and character of races. Isidore's assessments became **topoi**—for example his description of the agility of the Saxons. The direct influence of the Etymologies on the writers of the Norman world should not be underestimated. In Normandy they were used by Lanfranc at Bec and by Orderic at St Evroul. William of Malmesbury referred to them when trying to find out more about the porcupine in Henry I's menagerie at Woodstock, and it would be surprising if this was the only time when he studied the tome. Amatus of Montecassino was a member of a monastery in which the Etymologies had an important intellectual influence, and from which several contemporary manuscripts preserving the work in whole or in part survive.

For other authors direct classical influence may be posited. To the familiarity of William of Poitiers with Sallust we may add that of Malaterra. Capitani has pointed out the latter's exaltation, in a thoroughly classical manner, of the character of the Normans. The theme of their *fortuna*, also much emphasised by Malaterra, is again very definitely a classical concept. Both William of Poitiers and William of Malmesbury had read Caesar, and in his work in particular they could find the idea of individual races being distinguished both by their own peculiar customs and by their innate character. Indeed William of Poitiers created his characterisation of the Bretons by plagiarising passages from both Caesar and Sallust. At times the line between custom or habit and character could become blurred, as with the Breton propensity for internecine warfare remarked by the archdeacon of Lisieux and by William of Malmesbury, or with the drunkenness of the Danes which the latter regarded with such distaste. The Normans' own insatiable appetite for wealth and power comes into the same category.

Hence both Isidore and the classical heritage could provide sources for a literary concept of racial distinctiveness, and hence encourage the creation of a model for the *gens Normannorum*. That in reality the Normans were not a people with a unified descent, but a hybrid of French thinly overlaid with Scandinavian, was unimportant compared with the conception of a separate people enunciated by Norman intellectuals (and echoed by those in southern Italy, whether Norman or not, who wrote about the Normans). Indeed an anthropologist might well think that it was the dubious and confused origins of the real Normans which made the creation of a 'charter myth' so vital for them. The classic anthropological definition of the function of myth is that of Levi-Strauss, 'to mediatize contradictions'.
The myth of the descent of the gens Normannorum, and the characterisation of the race by their historians, did precisely that. But to see this in isolation is to misunderstand the exercise. The Norman writers were drawing on the common stock of early medieval ideas on the constitution of a people. They did not create a pattern; they conformed to one. And the dominant element in Norman historiography, the creation of a characterisation or typology of the gens Normannorum, was not a product of the twelfth century when, it is alleged, real Normanitas was in decline, but of the eleventh, the age of conquest. Indeed this typology was a key element in the very idea of Normanitas.

Two further and final points ought to be made. Given the geographical spread of their origins the historians of the Norman expansion displayed a noticeable uniformity of themes — token to the appeal of the Normans' own view of themselves as a people. But the historical writing represented only the tip of the iceberg. It has long been recognised that a body of oral, legendary, material underlay this, and played an important part in forming the ethos of the Norman knightly class. The First Crusade added chansons de geste which mayor may not have been specifically Norman in content.\textsuperscript{119} What perhaps should be stressed more is the extent to which, despite the emphasis which modern scholars have placed on the relatively short duration of Scandinavian influence in Normandy, there was a strong Scandinavian element in Norman legend, and not just in the time of Dudo either. The Chanson de Duc Robert, as recorded in the B redaction of the Gesta Normannorum Ducum, included a tale about the duke ordering his suite to buy nuts, irrespective of expense, to use as fuel at Constantinople, after the Byzantine emperor had forbidden his subjects to sell firewood to the Normans. This story was repeated in the sagas in connection with the kings Harold Hardrada and Sigurd the Pilgrim.\textsuperscript{120} In the E redaction of the Gesta Normannorum Ducum there is an account of the death of the Norman Turstan Citellus in Apulia; killed by the poisonous breath of a dragon into whose lair he had been lured by some treacherous Lombards. There are obvious affinities here with the fire-breathing dragon which killed Beowulf, and with several Icelandic sagas.\textsuperscript{121} And both Amatus of Montecassino and Abbot Alexander of Telese, the biographer of Roger II of Sicily, writing c.1136, included in their histories visions in which their heroes (Robert Guiscard in the case of Amatus) drank the sea as an omen of conquest; a feat attributed to Thor in Norse saga.\textsuperscript{122} The survival of a Scandinavian element in the legends of the Norman expansion can only have reinforced consciousness of the distinctiveness of the Norman people.

Finally there is the vexed question of when this Normanitas began to fade. Although in the 1170s the author of the Dialogue of the Exchequer said that it had become almost impossible to distinguish those of English and Norman birth, this famous passage, which is anyway in the narrow legal context of the muntrum fine, is hardly by itself conclusive proof.\textsuperscript{123} Not all contemporaries or near-contemporaries had the same difficulty. A generation earlier (but still after Orderic had finished writing) the De Expugnatione Lyxbonensi explicitly differentiated English and Norman. So too did one of the early writs of Henry II.\textsuperscript{124} The Battle Chronicle reports a speech of the justiciar Richard de Luci during the famous exemption dispute of 1157, in which he appealed to the feelings of the royal courtiers as Normans in an attempt to enlist their support for the abbey of the Conqueror.\textsuperscript{125} Jocelyn of Brakelond had no problem in seeing a division between English and Norman at the end of the century (albeit on grounds of language rather than birth). Indeed the biographer of William the Marshal distinguished those of Norman birth
as late as 1217. Hence the assumption that the historians of the mid twelfth century were fostering a myth of Norman distinctiveness and cohesion at a time when any real sense of being Norman was lost seems, at best, questionable.

There was a Norman myth. It was the myth of the Normans being a distinct people with their own character. But it was not a product of the twelfth century, and certainly not of Orderic Vitalis. It was apparent in the widely-distributed works of the eleventh-century historians of the Norman achievement. Because the individuality of each *gens*, and the hereditary concept of the *gens*, was so much part of the medieval thought-world already it was easy to accept. And because it was accepted, it became reality.
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57 C. Gross, American Historical Review v, 1899-1900, 742-4; [F. W. Maitland], The Athenaeum, 21 October 1899, 547-8 (repr. in Selected Historical Essays of F. W. Maitland, ed. Helen Cam, Cambridge 1957, 259-65).
59 PRO 1/158, 24 November 1898; Cal. Docs. France, no. 615.
60 Maitland Letters, no. 115.
62 American Historical Review vi, 1900-1, 351-3. Yale Univ. Library, G. B. Adams papers, 6/30 and 16/239 contain 37 letters of Round to Adams between 1900 and 1918 and the draft of some of Adams's replies. ULL, IHR MS. 613 contains only 7 of Adams's letters to Round.
67 The letters in Yale Univ. Library, G. B. Adams papers, 6/28, might well be classified as 'Studies on J. H. Round's Calendar'; e.g. in December 1906 a lengthy discussion of Cal. Docs. France, no. 714.
68 The Athenaeum, 13 July 1895, 61-2.
70 Yale Univ. Library, G. B. Adams papers, 6/30, Round to Adams, 21 October 1902.
71 ULL, IHR MS. 664, 26 October 1904; PRO 1/158, 14 January 1909, 2 January 1913, 4 April 1916, 29 December 1919; Bodleian Library, Eng. hist. b. 158, fos. 261-3.
73 Delisle Letters, fasc. 5, 215.

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Notes
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Notes to pp. 104-6

1 Orderic, v, 24. I have made one minor change to the translation.
2 De gestis regum ii, 306.
7 For the chronology of the Ecclesiastical History, Orderic i, 31-4, 45-8.
9 Davis, 66-7. Huntingdon, 261-2. Ailred, Relatio de Standardo, in Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I, ed. R. Howlett, RS 1884-9, iii, 184-9. A possibility not suggested by Davis is that Ailred, writing about ten years later than Henry, may have seen a copy of the Historia Anglorum, perhaps at Durham, where the work was certainly known during Ailred’s lifetime, and where the Abbot of Rievaulx had close connections, Huntingdon, xlix-x, The Life of Ailred of Rievaulx by Walter Daniel, ed. F. M. Powicke, London 1950, xcix, 33.
11 Gesta Guillelmi, 228. Davis, 65.
15 Huntingdon, 200, 208.
16 De Exquagnatione Lyxbonensi, ed. C. W. David, Columbia 1936, 106.
17 Orderic, ii, 2, vi, 130, 454.
18 Orderic, ii, 268, iii, 106, iv, 110, 226, 278.
19 Orderic, iv, 440.
20 Orderic, ii, 178, iv, 14, vi, 168.
21 Orderic, iii, 198, iv, 82, v, 24, 300, vi, 450-8.
22 Orderic, ii, 202.
23 Orderic, v, 110. Baudri (Recueil des Historiens du Croisade, Occidentaux iv, 75) merely says that Bohemond commanded the sixth division of the army, without specifying of whom it was comprised, but, 78-9, he talks of the Lombards under Bohemond’s command being indignant when the banner of Raymond of Toulouse, and not that of their commander, was raised over the citadel at Antioch.
24 Orderic, v, 326.
27 Orderic, i, 45-6, 57-8, cf. ii, 186-8. A. Gransden, Historical Writing in England c. 550 - c. 1307, London 1974, 153-5, though Dr Chibnall has noted not much
direct use is made of Sigebert, Orderic, ii, xxii.

28 Orderic, ii, 58, 98, 160-1, vi, 428-34, 510. E. R. Labande, 'La Sicile dans les sources narratives de la France de l'ouest aux Xie et XIIe siècles', Atti del convegno internazionale di studi sulla Sicilia normanna, Palermo 4-8 dicembre 1972, Palermo 1973, 151-5. Orderic's claim that Roger II married a sister of Anacletus was probably based on a garbled and exaggerated account of the homage done by various members of the Pierleone family to the king, in return for an annual pension, in 1134, see P. F. Kehr, 'Diploma purpureo de Re Ruggiero II per la casa Pierleone', Archivio della reale società romana di storia patria xxiv, 1901, 253-9.

29 Orderic, i, 84, 112-14, 118-21, ii, xxv, xxxix-xl.


32 Orderic, i, 58, Gransden, 159, 170, 219.

33 Amatus in a fourteenth-century French translation, Paris B.N. MS. Francais 688, and Radulf in a MS. from Gembloux. Radulf's work may also have been known at Montecassino, where c.1130 passages from it were incorporated in the Historia Belli Sacri, a late and inferior account of the First Crusade, S. Runciman, A History of the Crusades i, Cambridge 1952, 330.


35 R. Louis, 'Les Ducs de Normandie dans les Chansons de Geste', Byzantion xxviii, 1958, 391-402. In addition to the episodes cited there the story of Duke Robert and the smith of Beauvais, Jumièges pp.106-8, may well be part of the Chanson. The extraordinary generosity shown by the duke certainly fits in with the main theme of the Chanson.


37 Van Houts, 'History without an end', 107-14, 'Quelques remarques', 220-1.

38 Orderic, i, 114.

39 De gestis regum i, xci.

40 Capitani, 19.

41 Davis, 52-8, 69.


43 Dudo, cc.94, 101, pp.254, 263. H. Prentout, Étude Critique sur Dudon de Saint-Quentin, Caen 1915, 23; 'L'histoire de Dudon n'est, en outre, qu'un écrit politique'.

44 Note the phrase 'regna terrarum' used by Isidore, Etymologiae, ed. W. M. Lindsey, Oxford 1911, IX.iii.2, and the reference by Dudo c.106 p.268 to
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‘Franciam Burgundiamque et caetera regna’.


47  Dudo, c. 47 p. 192.


49  Jumièges, 79.


51  Dudo, cc. 1-7 pp. 129-135.

52  Jumièges, 22, 53. Dudo, c. 84 pp. 239-40.

53  Jumièges, 85-6.

54  Nitschke, 279-83. Prentout, 258-9, 350-8.

55  E.g. Dudo, cc. 8, 82, pp. 136, 237. Boehm, 655 is in error here.


57  Sallust, De Bello Jugurthino c. 95.3. Suetonius, Nero c. 1.

58  Etymologiae IX.ii.1.


60  Tacitus, Germania cc. 29, 30, 38. Caesar, De Bello Gallico IV.i.iii. Tacitus 38.1 corrected Caesar by pointing out that the Suebi were not in fact a single gens as the Chatti or the Tencteri. Cf. Isidore, Etymologiae IX.ii.97 on the German gentes.

61  De gestis regum, i. 275.


64  De gestis regum, i, 158, 170, 225. Probably none of them is quite genuine, see P. H. Sawyer, Anglo-Saxon Charters: an annotated List and Bibliography, London 1968, nos. 499, 783, 966, but the formula is authentic for this period.


67  Kahl, 81.


69  De Bello Jugurthino, 56.6, 66.2.


72  Annales Regni Francorum, ed. G. H. Pertz & F. Kurze, MGH in usum schol., Hannover 1895, ad annos 811, 824, pp. 135, 165. Regino of Prum, Chronicon


74 Dudo, c.112 p.275, and c.86 p.241, 'Alterius moris est gens haec quam Francigena, argumentosae callidatis nimis plena'. Nitschke, 269-71, 284-8.

75 Jumièges, 77, 93.

76 *Gesta Guillelmi*, 64, 82, 144, 194.


80 Dudo, c.75 p.231, Jumièges, 48-9.


83 Carmen, II. 681-740 pp.44-6.

84 Dudo, c.47 p.192. *Gesta Guillelmi* 34.


86 Malaterra, I.6, 13, pp.10, 14.


88 *De gestis regum*, ii, 321, 478.

89 *De gestis regum*, ii, 399.


95 Dudo, cc.1-2 pp.141-2, Jumièges, 6-8. Orderic, ii, 274, iv, 122, 136 (where Robert of Rhuddlan is described as being ‘of Danish stock’).


97 *MGH Auct. Antiqui* XI. 293-4.


100 J. Lair, ‘Mémoire sur deux chroniques latines composées au XIIe siècle à l’abbaye de Saint Denis’, *Bibliothèque de l’École de Chartes* xxxv, 543-80, 1874.

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102 Prentout, 28-9, 34, 46.
105 *De gestis regum* i, 9.
106 Huntingdon, 248.
110 The phrase is used by Dudo, II c.1 p.141.
113 *De gestis regum* ii, 485.
115 Capitani, 7-11, 30-3, 37-40. Classical examples of *fortuna*: Caesar, *De Bello Gallico* V. xliv.13; *De Bello Civile* III.lxxiii.3; Sallust, *Catilinae Coniuratio* 41.3.
117 *Gesta Guillelmi* 110. *De gestis regum* i, 165, ii, 399, 478.
124 *De Expugnatione* 132. V. H. Galbraith, ‘Royal charters to Winchester’, *EHR* xxv, 1920, 398-9 no. 43.
125 Battle Chronicle, 182.