

Mark Hagger, *Norman Rule in Normandy, 911-1144*. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2017. 824pp. £60.00 (Hbk) ISBN 978-1-783-272-14-3. £25.00 (Pbk) ISBN 978-1-783-275-38-0

This monumental book presents a detailed, multi-thematic account of the development and practice of Norman ducal power and governance within the duchy. Providing a wealth of detail and with an authoritative command of the charter evidence, Mark Hagger's work will be a crucial reference for future research into medieval Normandy.

After an introduction providing a useful overview of the principal historical sources and the surviving *acta*, the book is split into two parts. Part I constructs an 'analytical narrative' (xvi), with three consecutive chapters on the political expansion of the Norman dukes' authority, followed by another two on the dukes' relations with the church and with French kings. This section argues for the *slow* formation of Normandy and of Norman rule throughout the period c.945-c.1120, but emphasises the dukes' consistent—and successful—aim of establishing an autonomous duchy within the kingdom of France. Part I, however, is not an introductory account of Norman history, despite Hagger's observation that narrative histories of Normandy are lacking: this is a work written for an audience conversant with at least the general outlines of events and relevant historical debates. Major events (not least the conquest of England in 1066) are not directly narrated, but rather contextualised and explained with reference to political relationships within Normandy. Part II consists of six chapters addressing different themes relating to Norman governance: ducal authority, and the dukes' relationships with, respectively, the court, justice, localities and the centre, finance, and the military and castles. The evidence presented reveals the Norman dukes' strategies in convincing and coercing local lords to recognize and remain faithful to their authority, at the same time as keeping external powers—French kings and popes—at a

safe distance. Hagger suggests that these chapters may be read as stand-alone essays, although they all contribute to his central arguments for gradual expansion and for the dukes holding their power by consensus. Readers interested in a particular theme may be well advised to begin with the relevant section, rather than attempting to read the book cover-to-cover: two useful indices (of People and Places and of Subjects), as well as regular cross-references in the footnotes, make navigation straightforward.

The major contributions of this book are made through the detailed and expert analysis of the ducal *acta* (diplomas, charters, and writs), a surviving sample of 512 documents for the period 911-1144 (29). As Hagger explains, such comprehensive coverage is made possible not only by Marie Fauroux's 1961 edition of ducal *acta* before 1066 and David Bates' 1998 edition of William the Conqueror's *acta*, but also by recent digitisation efforts within France and the Telma database of original charter texts from France (pre-1121). Using charters to write a political history across two centuries is no easy task, and Hagger regularly calls on narrative histories from the period, but his analysis of the *acta* provides new and useful insights on the political relations behind events and also behind the medieval narratives themselves. This analysis foregrounds the relationships between people demonstrated by the charters: as Hagger puts it, 'lordship was lordship over men (and women), not land' (96). The book also contains in-depth discussion of particular aspects of the charters as sources, including the ducal titles in superscriptions and subscriptions, *arengae*, petitions, and lists of signatories, as well as the methodological issues that accompany them. These sections stand out as erudite and nuanced contributions to our understanding of Norman authority and of these documents. Despite the often technical nature of the discussion, and the narrative's assembly from disjointed documentary evidence, Hagger writes in an accessible and fluent style and the book is enjoyable to read.

Hagger presents an argument for consensus between Norman dukes and their subjects: the dukes had to show, consistently, that it was better for the inhabitants of Normandy to support them than to challenge their authority. They did so through commanding military might and exercising justice on offenders, but also by the display of wealth, the promise of protection, by keeping the peace, and through patronage. Hagger shows how Norman lords acted in their own self-interests, rather than through loyalty to Normandy as such, and how the dukes managed this behaviour. It is an interpretation based on the investigation of practicalities, rather than ideological concerns. Hagger describes his book as an account that is both ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom up’ and, although it is regularly major landholders and ecclesiastical institutions that we hear most about, he makes a convincing argument that Norman rule offered benefits to those lower in society, too. This argument for consensus rests on an attitude to the charter evidence and, to an extent, the medieval historical texts, that sees them as expressions not of ducal perspectives but of their immediate authors’ perceptions. Hagger, dismissing any suggestion of a writing office or occasional in-house production before 1066, takes the position that the *acta* were drafted by beneficiaries, and thus that the dukes had little input into these texts written in their own voices. The influence of ducal self-perceptions is even downplayed with respect to the historiographical productions of Dudo of St-Quentin, William of Jumièges and William of Poitiers. The question here must be how involved Norman dukes were in identifying the written word as another strategy in the promotion of their authority.

Thus, despite its vast size, *Norman Rule in Normandy* is not a synthesis of earlier work, but the presentation of a particular interpretation, based on detailed analysis of the *acta* and political readings of narrative texts. Hagger states that he will present a ‘fresh look at the primary sources’ (41), and the reader should be aware that in doing so he

does not always give the fullest picture of earlier debate and disagreement over those texts. For instance, his compelling interpretation of Dudo's *De moribus*—which links its early sections to the presence of the West Saxon æthelings in Normandy and the promotion of royal saints in England by Æthelred and Cnut —rests upon the belief that it was composed c. 1015 and can be related precisely to that single political moment (although these arguments, especially those related to Cnut, seem to require a still later date of composition). Yet we may choose to see Dudo's work as originating much earlier than this, not least because he himself claimed to have been commissioned by Richard I, and because of the text's relationship to the Fécamp Chronicle which Mathieu Arnoux dated pre-1001. For Hagger's attribution of the *De moribus* to 1015, the reader is directed to discussions published elsewhere. Other, more incidental, references, are less engaged with possible divergent readings. For instance, the use of Fulbert's *Life of St Romanus* (192-3) relies wholly on Felice Lifshitz's account in her *The Norman Conquest of Pious Neustria* (1995). While I agree with the dating of this hagiography to the 940s, there exists considerable disagreement about its origins, since others have situated it in the mid-eleventh century. Here, the reader sees no mention of this dispute, which makes Hagger's use of the *Life* as the 'best evidence' for tenth-century attitudes to Christianity difficult to judge. Moreover, the account of viking conquest in Fulbert's *Life of St Romanus* is notable for the lack of reference to the Norman ducal family, and so it is not correct to say that the text refers to 'the pagan Vikings led by Rollo' (193).

These details relate above all to the problem of dealing with tenth-century Norman history. Hagger excuses himself from having to deal with the issue of Norman origins and viking settlement (xvi-xvii), but it is a conspicuous absence. More discussion of viking activity would have made clearer the extent of the challenges Rollo and his family faced in order to establish their hold on the duchy; the possibility of a variety of viking

groups and leaders active in the first half of the tenth century (as discussed, for instance, by Lesley Abrams) would perhaps allow the main arguments of the book to extend further back in time. Similarly, the vexed question of Norman identity is mostly side-stepped, and the 'Normans' of the title are the ducal family and later the wider population. These are, however, familiar problems for Norman historians, and demonstrate the need for a different approach to Normandy's early history, since the earliest Norman charter dates from 968. It is surprising, therefore, that place-name studies are largely dismissed out of hand.

For the history of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Hagger's analysis of *acta* and historical narratives demonstrates in full their potential to offer new insights. The thorough investigation of Norman rulers' titles and their relationships with the kings of France puts this discussion on a more solid footing, while the importance of Rouen is elucidated carefully in several sections of the book. Moreover, more novel approaches are employed to considerable effect. A particularly interesting chapter concerns the ducal court: Hagger combines detailed discussion of diplomatic evidence with perspectives on buildings and court ceremonial utilising spatial analysis and history of the emotions. Hagger is also generous in presenting his empirical findings in a series of useful tables, including a list of papal interventions in Normandy, several tabulations of the use of styles for Norman rulers in the *acta*, and a list of references to ducal messengers in the period. There are six maps, a timeline, and a genealogical tree, all of which will be highly useful for students and researchers. The book also contains eight further images, although those of stone sculpture are unfortunately not well reproduced. Throughout, quotations from primary sources are generally only given in English translation, which is frustrating, but presumably due to the already considerable size of the volume.

Norman Rule in Normandy presents a nuanced and practical interpretation that, while surely not the last word, advances understanding of medieval governance and will stimulate productive debate. For those researching any aspect of Norman history in the period covered, it will become essential to consult what Hagger says on the topic. Moreover, the book provides an example of the analysis of political power and relationships that can be used as a model for others, and provide a comparative study for other principalities. With the recent issue of a paperback edition, this major work of scholarship is now available at a reasonable price, so that it may take its place on the bookshelf of every historian interested in rulership in the central Middle Ages.

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