THE NORMAN COMMANDERS

MASTERS OF WARFARE 911-1135

PAUL HILL

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Introduction

The Norman Commanders is intended to introduce readers to a number of the main characters in the history of Norman warfare and to show how these men approached the art of war. It is not a social or administrative history, nor is it an ecclesiastical one. The political history of the era, as recorded by churchmen and others, plays a huge part in framing the context of what we have to say about the military capability of the Normans, so that context is brought to the reader's attention throughout this book.

There are some key military themes to explore. The basic question of what warfare was really like in the period is examined. How often for example, were there pitched battles or strategic campaigns? Were our Norman commanders influenced by the classical manuals of warfare, such as Vegetius's great work *De Re Militari*, or any of the great Byzantine military manuals of the ninth and tenth century? The evidence is sometimes enigmatic, but as we shall see, there is an explanation for why it is a strange sort of question to ask in the first place.

How the commanders recruited their armies is examined. The training of troops, how they were supplied and kept cohesive on the campaign trail, is also explored. But it is with the strategies and tactical capabilities of the commanders that we are blessed with real hard evidence. The Normans achieved their military and political goals in a number of ways, from the strategic ravaging of an area of land, down to the more localised tactic of the 'feigned flight'; a much discussed topic in recent decades. The famous Norman knight and his much-vaunted cavalry charge is discussed. Here, as the mounted knight found himself facing enemies in England, southern Italy, Sicily and the Holy Land, was a tactical response which brought admiration from one easily impressed Byzantine observer. But was this a particularly 'Norman' trait? Were the Normans any different in their approach to war than the other contemporary Western cultures which they melted into, like the Anglo-Saxons, Franks (with whom they are closely identified in a number of Byzantine references) and the Lombards of Italy? Certainly there were differences between Norman warfare and that of the great imperial states such as the Byzantine Empire. The Normans never had the resources (not even when they were the kings of England) to run a professional standing army with infantry drilled, barracked, paraded and regimented in the way that their Byzantine counterparts were, but this would not make the Normans any less of a threat to the Byzantine world.

Throughout this book there are examples of Norman military prowess. There are also examples of how and why things could go wrong. Immediately apparent is the importance of personal leadership skills. By understanding the character of

the men who led armies to remarkable successes or conspicuous failures, we can get to the heart of these events.

The men under consideration here were complex human beings. Despite the propensity of military history to offer a dry picture of events and developments, it is hoped the reader will enjoy a very human story. So many of the Normans' achievements were driven by the personalities of their leaders. Before we look at the men, their characters and methods of approach, we need to heed a warning from the scriptorium. We base our observations on the historical evidence we have to hand. Frequently, we refer to certain medieval writers, whose works provide fascinating but sometimes frustrating detail about Norman warfare. The background, motivations and character of some of these writers is important.

A note on the sources

Documentary evidence exists in a variety of forms. There are charters, writs, pipe rolls and legal codes which give us hints about Norman military organisation and supply arrangements. We also rely on narrative accounts provided by contemporary and near-contemporary commentators. Some of the material we draw upon is biased, inaccurate or downright lies. Sometimes, the military terms used by the chroniclers and biographers of the medieval age are drawn from classical references and give us misleading ideas about technical equipment and army organisation. However, there is a wealth of material to draw on and some of it contains some remarkable revelations.

Our knowledge of the story of the Norman adventure south of the Alps is based around the work of three main writers. For the invasion and conquest of Sicily and southern Italy one of the sources is Geoffrey of Malaterra's *Deeds of Count Roger of Calabria and Sicily and of his brother Duke Robert Guiscard*. Malaterra had been brought to Sicily and was established as a monk by Count Roger after the last phases of its conquest in 1091. It was Roger who asked Malaterra to write this work and so it contains some remarkable accounts of Roger's achievements, many of which are written to cast Roger in a good light. Written at the turn of the century, Malaterra's work is a homage to its sponsor, with predictable tales of Christian supremacy and the power of God's work. This is especially true in the accounts he gives of the Battle of Cerami in 1063 (pages 157-160) and other aspects of the conquest of Sicily (1060–72).

Malaterra has far more strengths than weaknesses for those wanting to study the military aspects of the age. However, those weaknesses that do exist are frustrating. Rarely does he give us the combatant numbers in his accounts of battles and campaigns and, when he does, they are usually – but not always – so huge on the side of the Saracens as to immediately provoke scepticism in the modern reader. Nor are those Saracen armies ever described in terms of their troop types or capabilities. Battle accounts soon lose their authentic feel when Malaterra slips into the realms of the supernatural, citing the appearance of a

saint as a saviour in one of them. But Malaterra shines when he tells of Count Roger's motivations, and of his struggles with his stingy brother Duke Robert Guiscard. He is also able to draw from the oral history of Sicily and elsewhere, which he heard being told around him. He chose to use that material to glorify Count Roger and the Normans, whom he often refers to as 'our men', and he presents examples of the behaviour of commanders and their knights which are not given elsewhere and which help bring colour to the picture.

Amatus of Monte Cassino provides much detail about the slow conquest by the Normans of southern Italy, but is not as detailed as Malaterra on the subject of Sicily. He wrote in about 1080 and clearly had access to the archives of Italy's famous monastery, which had a relationship with the Norman lords of the Mezzogiorno that fluctuated from open hostility to adulation. The surviving version of his colossal work *The History of the Normans* was copied in a later century into medieval French with useful additional commentary added by the translator. However, the chronology of the work is infuriating, jumping around from event to event and place to place. There are some detailed accounts of sieges, particularly those of Bari, Salerno and the Norman Prince Richard I's assault on his own city of Capua. Amatus makes no secret of the pain and agony of warfare for those who were besieged. His harrowing accounts must be taken to be something near the truth. Despite the fact that it is believed Amatus had no military background, his battle descriptions reveal some interesting details about battle signals and tactics which can only come from the quill of a man who knew what could also be achieved with the sword.

William of Apulia was a layman in the court of Duke Roger Borsa (the son of Duke Robert Guiscard and his successor to the dukedom of Apulia). William's work *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* (*The Deeds of Robert Guiscard*) was written between 1096 and 1099 in hexameters. It covers the period from the arrival of the Norman adventurers in Italy in around 1016 to the death of Robert Guiscard in 1085. The work is silent on the early events of the invasion and conquest of Sicily in the 1060s. However, it is clear that William had a great deal of military knowledge, as he provides a detailed account of the Battle of Civitate in 1053 (pages 149–157) and the sieges of Bari and Dyrrhachium (pages 202–204 and 205). William, who would have spoken to veterans and may even have been one himself, revels in the detail of troop types and dispositions.

Of the northern writers William of Poitiers is the most important. He was William the Conqueror's military chaplain. However, he is very sycophantic. Once we accept that Poitiers could not portray William the Conqueror in anything other than a heroic light, we are still left with an invaluable work in his *Gesta Willelmi ducis Normannorum et regis Anglorum* (*The Deeds of William Duke of Normandy and King of England*). For the Battle of Hastings, Poitiers provides realistic accounts of the deployment of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman armies and he also tells of the troops' different capabilities.

Notoriously unreliable (though some believe this to be an unfair assessment) is the work of Dudo of Saint-Quentin. There is so little historical material for the early history of Normandy that sometimes Dudo is the only source. This dean of Saint-Quentin was asked by Duke Robert I of Normandy (1027–35) to write his *Historia Normannorum* which he composed from 996–1015. He seems to have used few written sources for his account, preferring to rely upon oral tradition handed down to him by knowledgeable men, including Raoul, count of Ivry. For this reason, the dates and people's names and actions are often called into question. He is the only source, for example, for the famous Treaty of Saint Clair-Sur-Epte of 911, which is taken by many to be the founding moment of the duchy of Normandy. Without Dudo we would survive only on scraps of information. William of Jumièges, William of Poitiers, Master Wace and others all used his work.

William of Malmesbury is another whose writings owed much to what he heard around him in an ancient West Saxon town where the memory of good kings was stronger than anywhere else in England. Half Norman and half English, his Anglo-centric comments provide a counter-balance to the expected pro-Norman views of his day.

Jumièges Abbey, Normandy, France. William of Jumièges wrote his famous Gesta Normannorum Ducum (Deeds of the Norman Dukes), basing part of it on an earlier work by Dudo of Saint-Quentin.

There are numerous other sources, of course. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* provides a contemporary – if occasionally brief – account of the tumultuous events of the years around 1066. The *Annals of Bari* assist with events in Byzantine-held Apulia, where other sources are weak. Then there is Hermann of Reichenau, who gives valuable German information around the build up to the Battle of Civitate (1053) in which the Pope found himself stricken. In fact, even the Pope – in this case Leo IX – provides written material to support his claims against the Normans in Italy in the form of a surviving letter (pages 154).

For the attack by Duke Robert Guiscard on the Byzantine Empire between 1081 and 1085, and for his son Bohemond's Illyrian campaigns in later years, we have Anna Comnena's *Alexiad*, written in the mid-twelfth century. This remarkable woman was the daughter of the emperor Alexius Comnenus (1081–1118). She wrote about events which occurred earlier in her lifetime and she even met some of the Normans about whom she writes. Her bias is obvious, but her words are invaluable when she talks of numbers, troop movements and battles.

One final word must go to a man whose personal background straddles the painful divide between the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman period in England. Orderic Vitalis was born in 1075, the son of a French priest and an Englishwoman. At the age of eleven he was sent to the abbey of Saint Evroul in Normandy. He would go on to write the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, a grand history with novel components including a remarkable commentary on the struggles between the sons of William the Conqueror (Duke Robert II Curthose of Normandy, and kings William II Rufus and Henry I of England). Orderic is important for his detailed histories of a number of Anglo-Norman families, his interesting contemporary interpretation of the role and value of the Norman castle, and his general revelations as to how Norman warfare was conducted.

All the events and campaigns of the Norman era mentioned by these writers happened long after the great Viking invasions of northern Europe. It was here amid the burning fires of the villages and monasteries of Northern France that a new age would be forged. Somehow there arose from these ashes leaders such as Robert Guiscard, William the Bastard (the future William the Conqueror) and Richard, the first Norman Prince of Capua. Such fantastic riches and power cannot have been imagined by many men in later ninth-century France. These were aspirations above the reach of most, even the nobility. But the predatory warriors who descended upon the shores of Carolingian Francia in the ninth century had a tireless desire to buy into the societies they invaded. They would take for themselves the things they wanted; raiding at first and then settling within enemy domains. Most of all, these Vikings – the ancestors of the Normans – would wish for legitimacy, for territory and power in their new lands. Their sons and grandsons would make few mistakes in finding it.

Part 1

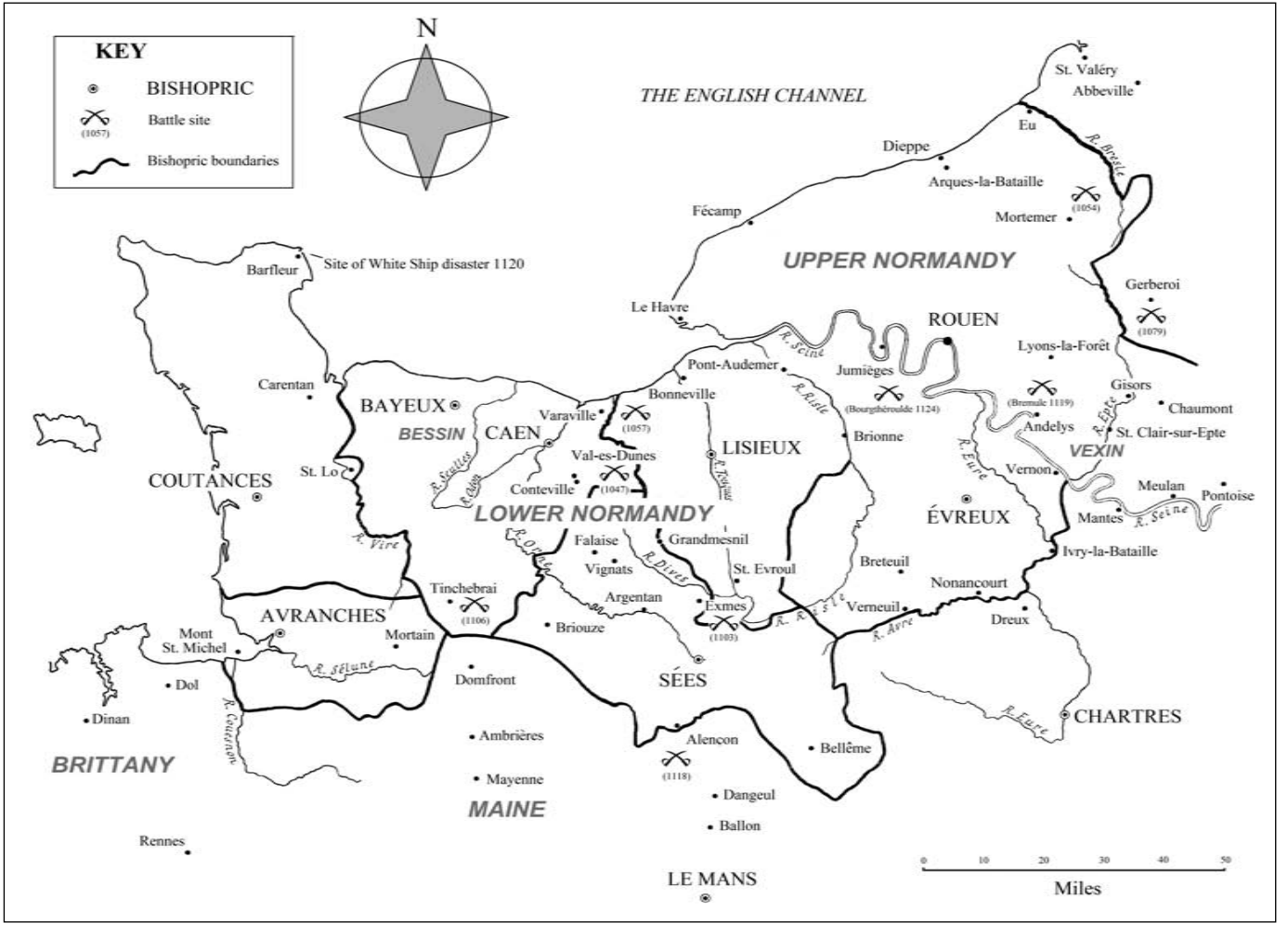
The Rise of the Normans

Chapter 1

Establishment and Expansion in Normandy

The monks of Noirmoutier were among the first to suffer the violence which the swollen Atlantic Ocean served upon the shores of their remote island at the mouth of the River Loire. These devoted followers of Saint Philibert fell prey to Viking adventurers hungry for portable wealth. The community built a church as a place of refuge from the pagan marauders between 814 and 819 on the mainland nearby, but by 836, after repeated raids, the followers of the saint gathered their relics together and transferred them to a mainland site at Déas. It was not enough. A raid on Déas in 847 heralded the beginning of a melancholy exile for the community, which saw the monks cart their revered casket across France from one monastery to another. This tale of upheaval and hardship was repeated along the western and northern seaboard of France, with similar tales of woe coming from communities in England and Ireland.

The great river networks of Russia, England and France were penetrated by the renowned shallow-draft Viking ships. In France, the Seine, the Loire, the Garonne and the Rhône were all violated. In 841 Rouen was sacked. In 843 the Vikings – ever knowledgeable about their victims' calendar – descended upon the summer feast of St John and attacked the festival crowd at Nantes, allegedly killing the bishop and taking away numerous human prizes as slaves. In 845 Paris was sacked by a fleet of 120 ships and the resulting payment of silver made by the king of the Franks Charles the Bald (840–877) to the Viking leader (possibly Ragnar Lothbrok) was of humiliating proportions. Soon, the exaction of tribute would not be enough for the Viking leaders. They began to over-winter in their victims' countries, hovering menacingly in the great river estuaries of Europe. Always looking for opportunities to exploit political discord, the Vikings began to settle in these new lands. They would even be prepared to adopt the Christian religion and customs of the cultures they came into contact with as they sought the prizes that the rulers of their ancestral Scandinavian homelands could not afford to give them. Successes in England led to the establishment of a whole region north of the line of the ancient Roman Road of Watling Street. Only the kingdom of Wessex under Alfred the Great (871–900) held out. Success in Ireland led to the



Map 1: Map of Normandy showing bishopric boundaries and battle sites (after Douglas)

establishment of a Scandinavian kingdom based at Dublin and the control by the Vikings of other major ports along the eastern and southern seaboard of the island.

Although these Viking successes would be temporarily reversed by some gifted English and Irish rulers, the long-term effects were inevitable: Scandinavian settlers had come to stay. They had brought their fighting styles, and their commercial and political acumen, with them. One place where the fusion of Scandinavian and indigenous political and military cultures bore the greatest fruit was in the ancient region of Neustria, in northern France, established many centuries before by Merovingian kings in the sixth century. A particular region within this huge stretch of land would come to bear the name of the men of the north who created it. These 'Normans' would be greater even than their Viking forebears, and they took some of their ancestors' tenacity, hunger, cruelty and guile with them on what was to become European medieval history's greatest adventure.

The area of northern France which was to become Normandy was more of a political idea than a geographical one. We owe the amusing story of the foundation of the duchy to Dudo of Saint-Quentin. At Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, in the autumn of 911, the Scandinavian adventurer Rollo placed his hands between those of the French king in a ceremony which marked him as the king's man. The Frankish bishops present demanded that a further token of humility be asked of the man who had recently brought so much destruction to the province of Neustria. Rollo was to kiss the king's foot. An indignant Rollo chose one of his own men to perform the task and, as this chosen warrior raised the king's foot to his lips without bending, Charles the Simple (893–922) was catapulted backwards in his chair and fell to the ground. Everyone held their breath until laughter on all sides broke the silence. The famous treaty of Saint-Clair-sur-Epte, ratified and extended at this great gathering, could well have ended in a bloodbath and the future duchy of Normandy might never have been created. As it was, Rollo was baptised, took the Frankish name of Robert and had the land in which he and his followers were already settled formally recognised and extended. The 'Northmen' of the Rouen area in the valley of the Seine would give rise to the 'Normans' of the next generation.

Rollo won some concessions from the French king in return for his protective military service. He extended an original agreement and chose to rule lands between the Epte and the sea. He also made the French king aware that the land he was to hold was already ravaged after years of warfare. He wanted a land to plunder as well as a land to rule. He was offered Flanders, but finally accepted Brittany. The story of the Norman counts who came after Rollo was one of a gradual westward expansion and inevitable conflict with the Bretons to the west. The Bessin was acquired in 924 and Avranchin in 933. With this expansion came the graduation in prestige of the leaders, whose title evolved from count to duke.

Rollo's son and successor William Longsword (c.933–942) was brought up as a Christian. His westward expansion was held up by other groups of Scandinavians who preferred not to recognise the authority of this new count of Rouen. But his military capability was up to the task. He defeated a rebellion led by a man named Riouf. Also, he expanded his influence northwards to Montreuil, bringing him into conflict with Arnulf, the count of Flanders, which led to William being ambushed at Picquingy on the Somme where he was killed on 17 December 942.

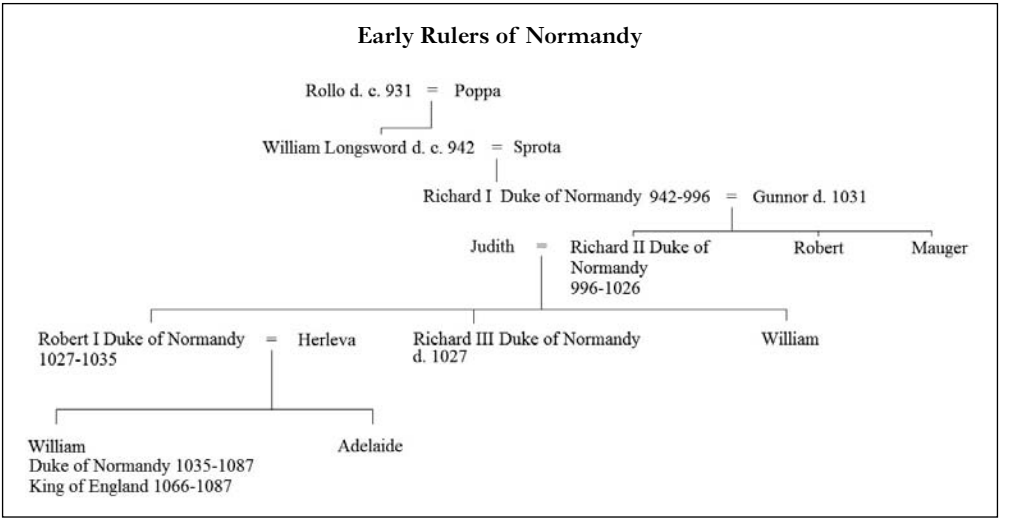


Fig. 1

After William Longsword's death, Normandy was ruled for almost fifty years by his son Richard I (942–996). An inevitable struggle for power took place at the beginning of the reign, but Richard held firm and later allied himself with the Capetian dynasty of French rulers. During this period the Norman church flourished against a relatively peaceful backdrop. However, this was the beginning of a new era of Scandinavian incursions into northern Europe and relations with the king of England, Ethelred II Unræd (979–1016), became strained when the English king accused the Norman duke of harbouring England's Danish enemies in Norman ports. The tension was so severe that the Pope had to intervene and negotiate a treaty in 991.

Duke Richard I had no children with his official wife, Emma, but had raised many with a Danish concubine named Gunnor. She bore him another Richard, who became Duke Richard II (996–1027). Richard II was very active militarily. He assisted the Capetian French king Robert the Pious (996–1031) in his conquests of Burgundy and reversed the earlier policy of hostility with the Bretons by allying himself through marriage to the Breton duke's daughter. But it was another alliance that had a seismic effect on the destiny of both Normandy and its larger neighbour, the kingdom of England. The difficulties with King Ethelred had not

gone away. In 1001– 02 the English king launched a military expedition against the Normans on the Cotentin, which had to be repulsed in what was probably an early English experience of fighting against the mounted Norman knight. The result of this conflict was a marriage between the duke's sister Emma and Ethelred himself, a union from which two half-Norman boys, Edward and Alfred, would issue. There then began a long and famous Norman interest in the destiny of the kingdom of England. William the Conqueror would use this alliance as a basis for his claim to the English throne. Emma would go on to marry Cnut, the Danish king of England (1016–36), but the seeds of Norman interest were already sown.

Richard II died in 1026. His son Richard III succeeded him. His reign was to be desperately short – just one year – but even in this short space of time he had shown himself militarily capable. He had been sent into Burgundy at the head of a large army by his father, to help Count Renaud who was held prisoner there. His reputation was therefore in the ascendancy when he came to power. But there was unrest from his younger brother Robert. Unhappy with his limited power in the county of Hiémois, Robert rebelled against Richard III. Robert's base was at Falaise (where he would meet Herleva, a beautiful tanner's daughter and future mother of William the Conqueror). The duke besieged Robert at Falaise and secured his surrender, subsequently treating him with relative compassion. However, within a year Richard III was dead. Rumours of poisoning were widespread, but nothing was proved. The Duke's younger brother Robert was the beneficiary, and he became Duke Robert I (1027–1035).

Falaise Castle, Normandy, France. Birthplace of William the Conqueror. From these walls Duke Robert I (1027-1035) is said to have spotted William's mother, Herleva.

Private wars and instability marked the beginning of this tempestuous youngster's rule. It was also a period of wanderlust as sons of the noble families of the duchy looked elsewhere to gain riches and power, such as Italy and Spain. As these men headed out on new adventures abroad, Duke Robert I began his rule by attacking two churchmen. Hugh of Ivry, who might have harboured thoughts of exercising some sort of regency over Robert, was besieged at Ivry and the late arrival of the French king's forces could not prevent him from surrendering and subsequently being sent into exile. Robert's uncle, Robert archbishop of Rouen and count of Évreux, was also besieged and exiled but fought back by excommunicating the duke and issuing an interdict preventing the saying of mass and distributions of the sacraments, all of which must have spread further discontent among the nobility. Duke Robert then continued his onslaught against the church by seizing some of the key properties of the abbey of Fécamp.

Roger I de Tosny

Roger de Tosny, or 'Roger of Spain' was the son of Raoul de Tosny, seigneur of Conches. He fought in the wars of the Iberian Peninsula. Called to assist Ermesinde of Carcassonne (972–1057), the Regent-Countess of Barcelona, Roger got involved in the wars of the Reconquista. He gained notoriety as a result of his cruelty. His style of warfare included a psychological approach, even if the tale seems far-fetched. Daily, he chopped a Saracen prisoner into two pieces in front of the other prisoners and boiled one part of the victim, then served him to the others. He would let others tell the tales of horror to their comrades, thus spreading the rumour of barbarity. Roger returned to Normandy in the 1020s. He founded Conches-en-Ouche castle in 1035 and became embroiled in the struggles during the early years of William the Conqueror's minority. He was killed in battle during campaigns against his neighbour, Humphrey of Vieilles, in 1040.

By about 1028 there was a reconciliation between the duke and the archbishop and Archbishop Robert was reinstated. Duke Robert's rule took on a more mature and constructive tone. Both men set about restoring church lands and by 1034 the duke had restored most of Fécamp's estates. However, it was outside Normandy that Duke Robert flexed his muscles most. He proved himself to be militarily successful. The French king Robert the Pious died in 1031 and his son Henry was forced to flee, since Queen Constance of Provence was supporting her second son Robert instead. Duke Robert I of Normandy, however, gave Henry refuge at Fécamp and lent him important military support against his brother at Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. The victorious Henry ascended the French throne as Henry I. He rewarded Duke Robert with sovereignty over the French Vexin, an area over which the dukes of Normandy and the kings of France would quarrel

for centuries to come. Further afield, Duke Robert intervened on behalf of the ageing count of Flanders, Baldwin IV, who faced a rebellion from his own son, capturing the castle at Chocques and restoring the count to his seat. Robert was no less energetic in putting down a Breton revolt led by his cousin, Alan III of Brittany. He built a border castle and ravaged the territory by land and sea, forcing Alan into submission.

It was the Norman fascination with the kingdom of England that provoked Duke Robert's most enigmatic military effort. In 1033 the duke is thought to have launched an invasion of England, which was still being ruled by the Danish king Cnut. This was designed to restore the son of Emma, Edward (soon to become Edward the Confessor) to his paternal kingdom. William of Jumièges says that Robert's requests for the restoration of Edward had been refused by Cnut, or at least Robert had received an unfavourable offer in return. An invasion fleet was assembled at Fécamp (with Edward on board), but when it set sail it was apparently blown off course and arrived not in England but at Mont-Saint-Michel via the island of Jersey. It is a curious diversion for an invasion fleet, but there may be some truth in it. Charters drawn up around this time, possibly dating to when the invasion fleet was at Fécamp, refer to Edward as 'king'. We can only guess at what would have happened if this fleet had arrived on the south coast of England.

At the height of his power Duke Robert left Normandy to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Whether he ever intended to revisit the English succession problem is open to question. However, he never returned. In 1035 he died on the return journey at Nicaea after falling ill. He left behind him a young son and heir, William, whose own relationship with the kingdom of England would become the stuff of legend. Duke Robert's rule lasted only eight years, but in this short time he embodied a characteristic that would become a hallmark of Norman prowess. There was a boundless energy in his military efforts. It was supplemented by an extraordinary knack of winning almost every conflict he got involved in. We cannot know what was said between father and son on the eve of Robert's departure for Jerusalem, but we can be certain that the boy inherited the tenacity of his father and possessed similar leadership skills. He would need them. As the young Duke William began his minority and more noblemen left the duchy for adventures in Italy, the hulks of his father's invasion fleet lay rotting at Rouen. Any dreams William might have held of the military conquest of an ancient and powerful kingdom must have seemed a long way off.

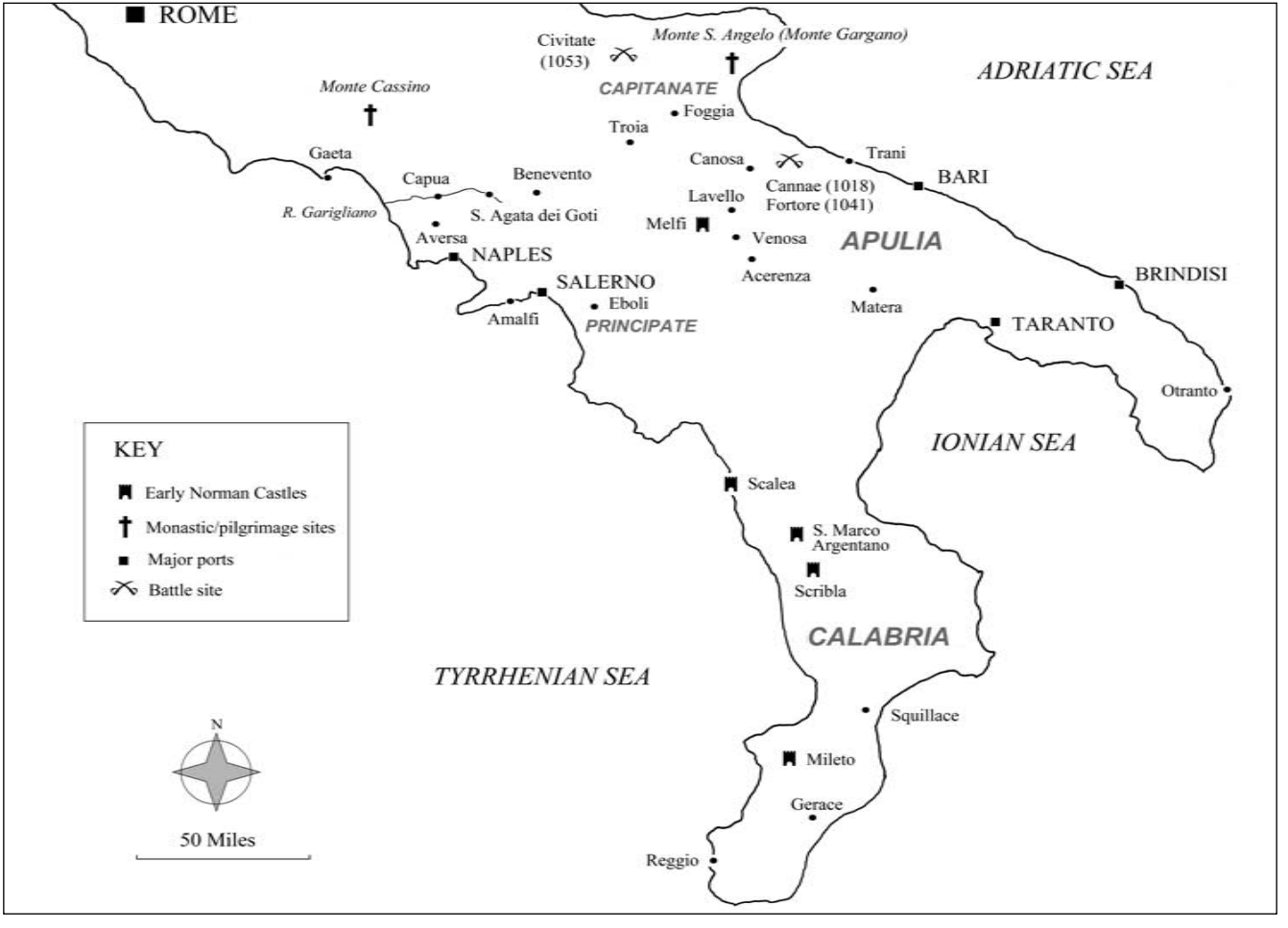
Chapter 2

Legitimacy in the South

Wearing a long robe and curious headwear in the Grecian style, a Lombard nobleman stepped out of the flickering shadows at the shrine of the Archangel Michael at Monte S. Angelo (Monte Gargano). As he approached some forty or so Norman pilgrims, he revealed himself to be Melus of Bari, a dispossessed yet driven man. The year, according to William of Apulia, was 1016 and Melus was at war with the Byzantine Empire. He told the Normans of his desire to regain former Lombard territory in southern Italy and he appealed for their help with promises of great rewards for their military service. But Melus had caught his visitors by surprise. They were not equipped for the military adventure they were offered, despite its obvious attractions. They promised to return to Italy the following year, bringing with them the men and equipment they would need.

William of Apulia's vivid tale of the beginning of the Italo-Norman story does not exist in isolation. Amatus of Monte Cassino has a tale in which forty or so Normans came to Salerno from the Holy Land on a ship from Amalfi. The Prince of Salerno, a man named Gaimar III (999–1027), received them with open arms and, whilst they were with him, the Normans flung themselves at a besieging Saracen force and defeated it, greatly impressing Gaimar. The year, however, was 'before 1000'. Gaimar asked the Normans to stay at his side, but they refused and said they must return to Normandy. They were packed off with riches and promised that they would speak to their kinsmen in Normandy and return. They went with tales of the Mezzogiorno being full of milk and honey.

There was a recorded raid on Salerno by Saracens in 1016, and there is a less reliable mention of the same for 999, the first year of Gaimar's rule. Amatus tells an enticing tale, but he squeezes together many events when he describes the advent of the Normans in Italy, including the exile by Duke Robert I of Normandy of a man named Gilbert Buatère, who came to Italy with his four brothers. However, he neatly forgets that Robert was not duke of Normandy until 1028. As if these stories were not different enough, Leo Marsicanus, when describing the revolt of Melus against the Byzantines, tells of forty Norman pilgrims coming not to Salerno or Monte Gargano, but to Capua. They had fled their homeland because of the anger of their lord, the 'count' of Normandy.



Map 2: Map of southern Italy showing principal ports and towns

Melus asked them to join him in his attack on Greek-held Apulia. In this version of his chronicle of Monte Cassino, Leo goes on to list these Normans. There was Gilbert 'Botericus', Rodulf of Tosny, Osmund, Rufinus and Stigand. The invasion date of Melus's force is later given as 1017.

Radulf Glaber is another contributor to the evidence. He was a Burgundian monk writing during the first generation of Norman incursions into Italy. He says there was a man who had angered the Norman count Richard II (996–1027). The man, one Rodulf, travelled with others to Rome. Here, Pope Benedict VIII (1012–1024) asked him to attack Apulia. Glaber recounts how the news of early successes attracted other Norman families to Italy and how – in a manner which became all too familiar – the Normans forced their way through the Saint Bernard Pass, refusing to pay tolls.

At this time the principal Lombard strongholds into which the Normans arrived as mercenaries were Salerno, Capua and Benevento. These places held the balance of power in the centre of the peninsula. To the east the remnants of the old Byzantine Langobardia still held out, although part of it was now remodelled into the 'Catapanata' (under a ruler called a catapan), which nominally stretched from modern-day Foggia in a line down to the tip of Calabria in the south west. Apulia, Calabria and the Otranto region in the heel of the peninsula were in Greek hands. Centuries of Byzantine influence had led to Greek culture being adopted in merchant cities such as Gaeta, Naples and Amalfi. These cities retained a degree of independence, but were closely tied politically and culturally to Constantinople. Moreover, the Holy Roman Emperor of the West also had his part to play. He looked to gain wide control south of the Alps, just as his predecessor, the western Emperor Charlemagne, had done centuries before him. The Pope, with territorial interests at Benevento, also had a keen eye on developments. It was upon this colourful stage of competing loyalties, jutting into the Mediterranean Sea, that the mail-clad Norman knight, with his spear, shield, horse and sword, made his entrance. His performance would change the course of the history of medieval Italy.

Amatus has five military successes for the Norman mercenaries in these early years. By 1018 they had helped the Lombards penetrate to Trani, just a day's march north of Bari. But there was to be a setback. The Byzantine catapan Basil Boioannes had called for help from his emperor Basil II (976–1025). The result was that Boioannes fielded an army of considerable size, reinforced by a unit of the Varangian Guard. They met the Normans at the Battle of Cannae in October 1018. We know that the Normans fought bravely at the battle, but we also know that Gilbert Buatère, the probable commander of a Norman contingent of a small force, was killed. Only ten of 250 Normans survived. Melus escaped and found refuge at Bamburg under the protection of the western Emperor Henry II (972–1024).

It was Rainulf, the brother of Gilbert, who led the Normans through the