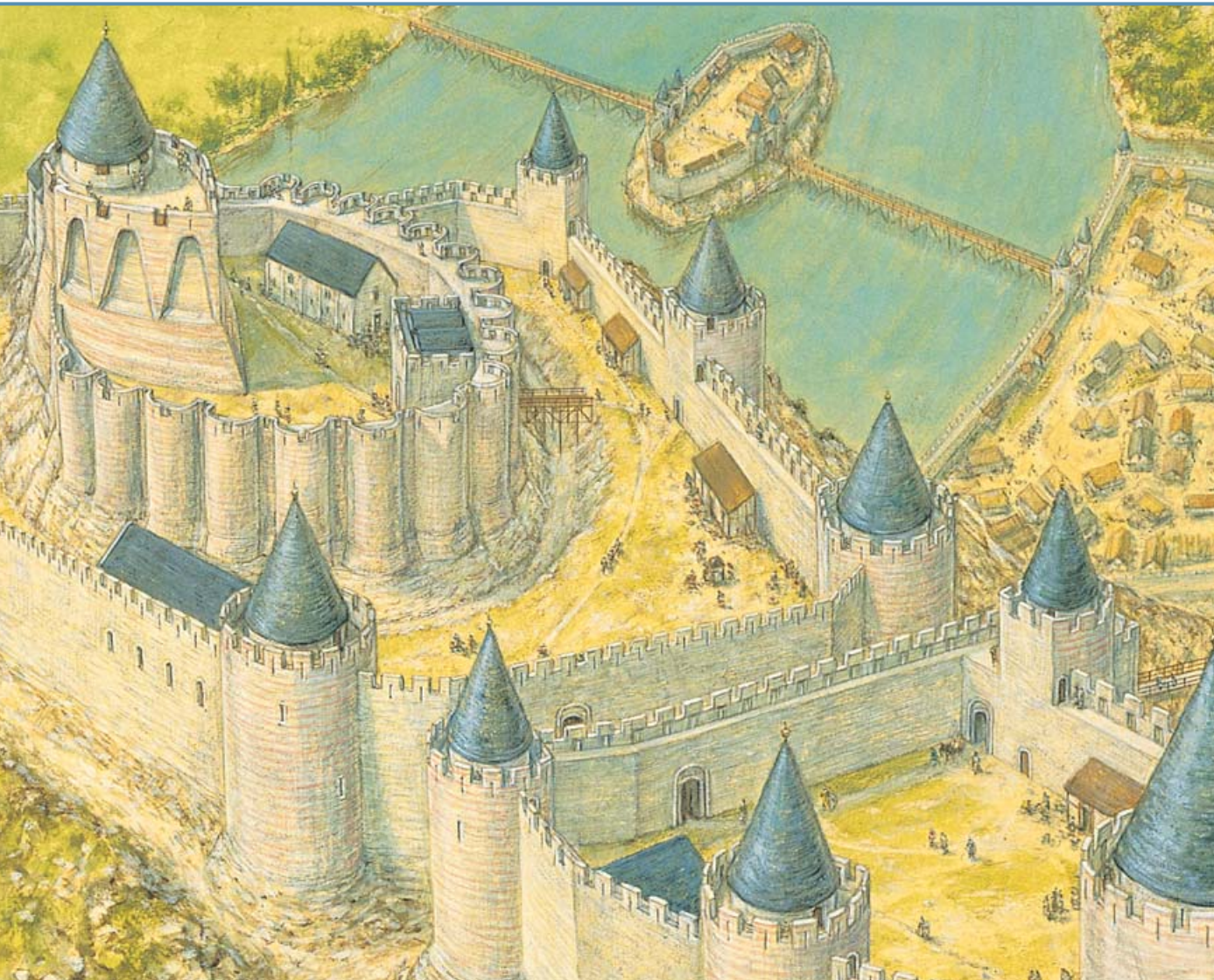


NORMAN STONE CASTLES (2)

Europe 950–1204



CHRISTOPHER GRAVETT

ILLUSTRATED BY ADAM HOOK

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Series editors Marcus Cowper and Nikolai Bogdanovic

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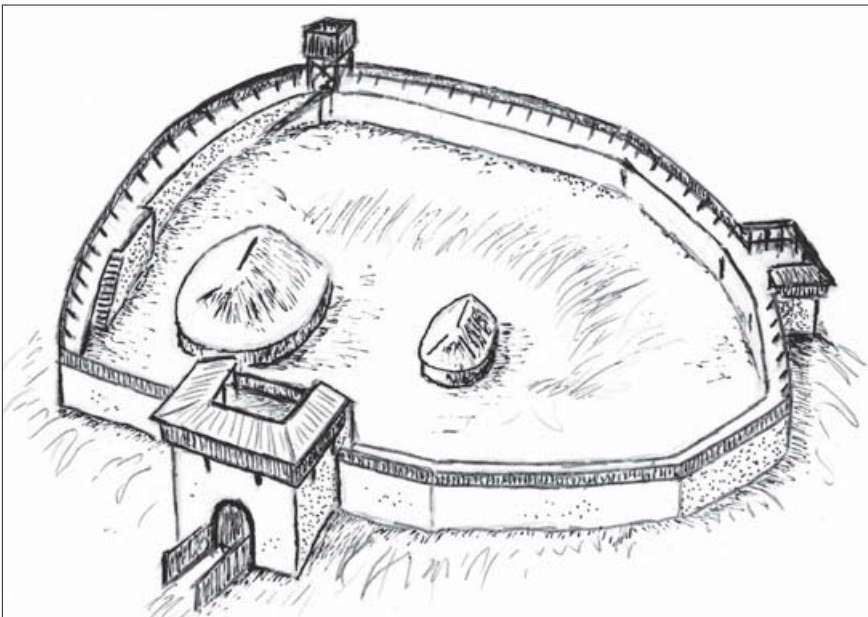
Introduction

The Duchy of Normandy was created in 911 by King Charles the Simple of France to accommodate the Scandinavian followers of the Viking leader, Rollo. The latter had struck a deal with the king of the Franks at the treaty of St Clair-sur-Epte, through which Charles hoped to neutralise the threat from one group while at the same time creating a buffer state against further attacks. The new territory, originally part of the Frankish province of Neustria, became known as 'Normandy', the land of the Northmen. As such, the incomers became part of the feudal way of life that was developing in France, in which a lord gave vassals land in return for military service, or kept them in his household. The Normans also assimilated the continental ideas of knighthood and the practice of fighting from horseback instead of primarily on foot, and soon built up a reputation as some of the best cavalry in Western Europe. In addition to feudalism and knighthood, they were introduced to the castle.

Castles were a relatively recent phenomenon. They seem to have arisen in response to the situation in north-western Frankia after the death of Charlemagne (Charles the Great), whose vast empire had also encompassed Germany and parts of northern Italy. As his sons and grandsons squabbled over territories, there was an inevitable breakdown of central government, probably already in evidence due to the problems of ruling such a vast area. Into this came the Vikings, rowing their shallow-draught vessels up the rivers to plunder where opportunity arose. With little central authority, people in threatened areas, notably in north and west France, were thrown back on their own defence. Nobles set themselves up to protect their lands, recruited knights and other soldiers to serve them, and protected their homes with fortifications. The castle, known in written texts as *castrum*, *castellum*, *munitio*, *municipium* or *oppidum*, was also a symbol of authority. The mounted men within could control an area at least 16km around, the distance a horseman could comfortably ride out and back in a day.

These castles were predominantly built of earth and timber, but a number included stone defences. Their expense meant that initially such examples were rare. The new stone towers were not known as 'keeps', since the word was not used in the medieval period (it first appeared in the English language in 1586 in Sidney's *Arcadia*). The more usual word in France was 'donjon', a term derived from the Latin word '*dominium*' (an allusion to lordship), which is still used in the French language today. The term was not only

A reconstructed view of Le Plessis-Grimoult in Normandy, an early form of castle.





used to signify these towers but might also denote a motte or the area of a castle that was the lord's preserve. They were also known as 'great towers'.

Written evidence, relating to the great tower at the ducal castle in Rouen built in the mid-10th century by Duke Richard I (942–96), indicates that stone castles soon appeared in Normandy. The same duke is said to have erected a fortified palace at Bayeux, and his successors carried on this trend. In Normandy, castle building other than by the duke always presented a potential threat to central authority, since feudalism was never as controlled in Normandy as it would initially be in England after the Conquest of 1066: the dukes tried to control construction where possible. Duke Richard I, for example, enfeoffed his brother, Raoul, with Ivry. In the first half of the 11th century castles were already being built not only by magnates but also by lesser vassals, though for the latter the cost involved would mean many were of earth and timber. During the century (mainly the first half) some 26 castles were founded between Caen and Falaise, in the area of Le Cinglais. Large numbers of castles were raised during the unsettled times following the death of Robert the Magnificent in 1035, while young Duke William was a minor. Le Plessis-Grimoult had stone defences, and was held not from the duke but from the Bishop of Bayeux until Grimoult de Plessis lost it in 1047 following the battle of Val-ès-Dunes, when William broke rebel power. His youngest son, Henry I, was responsible for much building in the duchy during his time as both duke and king. The vast Angevin empire that the latter's grandson, Henry II, acquired by inheritance and marriage gradually brought many French castles into his orbit whose walls had not been built by Normans: these have largely been passed over in this volume. The death in 1199 of Henry's son, Richard I the Lionheart, finally gave the wily Philip Augustus the opportunity to seize Normandy from King John, which he did in 1204.

At about the time the Normans were conquering England, other Norman adventurers were carving out homes for themselves in southern Italy and Sicily. At first Normans had arrived as mercenaries in about 1017, employed by the Pope as a counter to pressure from the German emperor in the north and the

The late-11th-century donjon at Valmont, with its flat pilaster buttresses, is seen on the right, with the smaller tower butted against its left side and the later château to its left. The machicolated parapet and enlarged windows were added in the 15th century.



The walls of Caen have been altered over the centuries but still retain the essential line of Duke William's castle of 1047. Some of the rectangular towers may be of late-12th-century date.

Byzantines to the east. The Normans gradually spread over southern Italy and founded the territories of Apulia and Calabria. In 1053 a Norman army from Apulia defeated papal forces at the battle of Civitate. Others crossed to Sicily in 1061 and by 1091 had conquered the whole island, which became a kingdom. As in Normandy, the newcomers were keen to assimilate ideas and culture they saw around them. Sicily, a rich mixture of Greek, Arabic and now Norman styles and customs, situated on the Mediterranean trade routes, was a cultivated and fertile kingdom.

Instability lay behind much of the castle building during the early period. The castles were often built on pre-existing Lombard examples and gradually the autonomous nature of the latter was altered as feudal ideas took hold. In the more mountainous regions of Molise in southern-central Italy, however, and in inland regions, the feudal administrative traditions that went with the castle came up against earlier, Roman, forms of organisation that were not to be overlaid. Such areas were new to the Normans. In Molise, the Norman strongholds were more administrative centres for managing the surrounding country. Sometimes villages or markets flourished near new castles, in areas where it was thought commerce would benefit. The rest of the land was poorly inhabited except for small urban enclaves. In more lowland areas such as Apulia and Calabria, feudal notions on similar lines to those in Normandy prevailed. In Apulia small warrior bands, often commanded by Greeks or Lombards, made the initial conquests, and central authority was slow to become established. In Sicily the island was conquered by a single effort, resulting in many small fiefs and a few large autonomous lordships that took a long time to be modified, including comital families who were a source of instability. The large monastic foundations also resisted feudal services, though the latter gradually came to prominence.

Other Normans would sustain the restless tradition these people made famous, a tradition that would carry them on the First Crusade under Bohemond of Taranto to set up the first crusader principality, with Bohemond proclaimed Prince of Antioch in 1100.

Chronology

Normandy

- 911** Treaty of St Clair-sur-Epte recognises the Duchy of Normandy.
- 942** Death of Duke William I, Longsword. Accession of Duke Richard I, the Fearless.
- 996** Death of Duke Richard I, the Fearless. Accession of Duke Richard II.
- 1026** Death of Richard II. Accession of Duke Richard III.
- 1027** Death of Duke Richard III. Accession of Duke Robert I, the Magnificent.
- 1035** Death of Duke Robert I. Accession of Duke William II, the Bastard.
- 1046** Revolt of western *vicomtes*.
- 1047** Battle of Val-ès-Dunes.
- 1049–50** Capture of Brionne.
- 1051–52** Siege of Domfront and capture of Alençon.
- 1052–53** Revolt of William, Count of Arques.
- 1053** Capture of Arques.
- 1053–54** Franco-Angevin invasion of Normandy.
- 1054** Battle of Mortemer drives out invaders.
- 1057** Second invasion of Normandy.
Battle of Varville drives out invaders.
- 1058** Capture of Thimert by William. Beginning of siege of Thimert by Henry I of France.
- 1066** Norman Conquest of England and accession of Duke William II as King William I.
- 1077** First attack on Normandy by Fulk le Rechin of Anjou and siege of La Flèche.
- 1078** First revolt of Robert, William's eldest son.
- 1081** Second attack on Normandy by Fulk le Rechin and second siege of La Flèche.
- 1083** Second revolt of Robert against King William I.
- 1087** King William I sacks Mantes.
Death of King William I. Accession of King William II. Accession of Duke Robert II.
- 1095** Preaching of First Crusade.
- 1100** Death of King William II.
Accession of King Henry I.
- 1106** Capture of Duke Robert by King Henry I, who becomes duke.
- 1134** Death of Duke Robert II.
- 1135** Death of King Henry I. Accession of King Stephen.
- 1144** Geoffrey of Anjou conquers Normandy during civil war.
- 1154** Death of King Stephen. Accession of King Henry II.
- 1173–74** Revolt of Henry's sons, and attacks of Louis VII of France.
- 1188–89** Second revolt of sons of King Henry II.
- 1189** Death of King Henry II. Accession of King Richard I.
- 1190** King Richard leads the Third Crusade to the Holy Land.

The so-called Exchequer Hall in Caen castle was damaged in 1944, but restored. It is one of the earliest and finest secular halls in Normandy.

