

ONE

INTRODUCTION

A mong the most compelling examples of medieval visual culture are several Norman works of art: the church of St.-Étienne in Caen (c. 1066–1100) (Fig. 1), the Bayeux Embroidery (c. 1075) (Plate I), Durham Cathedral (c. 1093) (Fig. 2), the Coronation Mantle of Roger II (1133) (Plate III), and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo (1134–1140) (Plate IV). Produced within a seventy-year period in Normandy, England, and Sicily, these objects represent the conundrum of Norman art, an art that is frequently described with a qualifier of Anglo-Norman or Siculo-Norman, suggesting a kind of hybrid status for these iconic works. Diversity, an idea for which these objects with their purportedly Islamic, Anglo-Saxon, and Byzantine elements are almost always celebrated, is a part of Norman identity from their earliest history. Dudo of St. Quentin, their first chronicler, writes in his *History of the Normans* (written c. 995–1015) of their mission to rule over diverse peoples as revealed by a dream of the first Norman ruler, Rollo:

And finally while he was staying on top of that mountain he saw about the base of it many thousands of birds of different kinds and various colours but with red left wings, extending in such numbers and so far and so wide that he could not catch sight of where they ended . . . And they went one after the other in harmonious incoming flights and sought the spring on the mountain, and washed themselves, swimming together as they do when rain is coming and when they had all been anointed by this miraculous dipping, they all ate together in a suitable place, without

being separated into genera or species, and without any disagreement or dispute . . . furthermore, they willingly yielded to his command, in the vision.¹

The text then goes on to provide an interpretation of the dream that identifies the washing of the birds as baptism and the different species of birds as representing men of different provinces who have done fealty to him, ending with, “The birds of different sorts will obey you, men of different kingdoms will kneel down to serve you.”² The interpretation also describes the rebuilding of devastated cities as part of the Norman vision. Thus, the Normans are identified as rulers of diverse peoples who would rebuild their cities and bring Christianity to their followers. Given the date of the text, 995–1015, which was well before the construction of their major monuments or conquests of England and southern Italy and Sicily, Dudo’s words seem remarkably prescient, as an overview of their visual culture makes apparent.

While St.-Étienne, built under the patronage of William the Conqueror, has been described as “proto-Gothic” in recognition of its almost skeletal nave elevation with large openings at arcade, gallery, and clerestory level, it also reveals connections with the region’s Carolingian past (Fig. 1).³ Also contributing to the deterministic assessment of the church’s historical contribution to the Gothic is the one-to-one correspondence between element and support seen, for example, in the relationship between the arcade moldings and the colonettes below. Yet, as discussed in Chapter 2, the building also has connections with the earlier buildings of the reform movement in Normandy. The grid-like division of the bays horizontally and vertically by string courses and colonettes also creates an impression of uniformity and regularity, which has been emphasized for its modernity rather than its historicity. The moldings throughout the nave are generally relatively plain, as are the Corinthianesque capitals. This impression of austerity may have been mitigated by painted decoration, which is no longer evident.

By contrast, the nave of Durham Cathedral, begun less than thirty years later, is rich with ornament (Fig. 2). Chevron and other patterns decorate the vaults, arch moldings, and massive columns. Although closely related to Jumièges Abbey church in its elevation and plan and begun under the patronage of a Norman bishop appointed by the Conqueror himself, Durham exudes a powerful sense of monumentality and richness not found in Normandy itself. This sense of difference at least partially reflects the particular identity of this church, which was associated with St. Cuthbert, and the political situation in post-Conquest northern England.

¹ Dudo, *History*, 29–30.

² Dudo, *History*, 31.

³ Bony, *French Gothic Architecture*, 71.



1. St-Étienne, Caen, nave, 1060–1080s.

Wikimedia Commons contributors, “File:Caen, Église Saint-Étienne 01.jpg,” *Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository*, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Caen,_%C3%89glise_Saint-%C3%89tienne_01.jpg&oldid=217668718 (accessed November 08, 2019).

A similar idea underlies the controversial design of the Bayeux Embroidery, one of the most famous of medieval objects, widely regarded as produced by Anglo-Saxon artists in the service of a Norman patron (Plate I). It demonstrates the intersection of politics and art even more clearly: this monumental textile depicts events that led to the coronation of Duke William of Normandy as king of England. Interpretations of its narrative and imagery vary greatly despite agreement on its general subject matter. With this Embroidery, a medium for which the Anglo-Saxons were renowned was employed for a lavish display of the Norman Conquest.

Among the most opulent of surviving Romanesque interior is the Cappella Palatina in Palermo, begun nearly seventy years after St.-Étienne. Built on a smaller scale as a palace chapel rather than an abbey church or monastic cathedral, the Cappella Palatina features walls and domes encrusted with gold ground mosaics, marble inlaid pavements and paneling, a muqarnas ceiling,



2. Durham Cathedral, nave, begun 1093.
(Photo: Author)

and columns and capitals of Roman *spolia* (Plate IV). Similarly, Roger's so-called Coronation Mantle fused Islamic technique and an Arabic inscription with a northern European design (Plate III). The integration of a mixture of cultural vocabularies found in both of these objects was more complex than the frequently applied label of *multicultural* suggests.

Executed to a very high standard under high levels of patronage, each of these objects conveyed a similar message about political power and legitimacy when considered within the context of Norman history. Each displayed the multiplicity of traditions invoked by the Normans as they sought to reinforce their political power through the use of visual culture. The roots of these objects – Anglo-Saxon, Islamic, Byzantine, Roman, Carolingian – are readily apparent in their forms, but the process by which these earlier traditions were appropriated and transformed by the Normans is less well understood.

This study interrogates Norman visual culture in terms of its process in order to understand how the Normans formed such distinctive visual cultures in each area of their reign and what those cultures might share. It is difficult to characterize the style of their art and architecture: for example, it is Romanesque and typically modified as Anglo-Norman or Siculo-Norman. Terms such as *hybrid*, *amalgam*, *aggregate*, and *multicultural* have been applied to their art at various times, but none is entirely satisfactory. In part, this is because such terms have been used to emphasize the visibility of distinct sources, typically labeled as Carolingian, Anglo-Saxon, or Islamic. The final product, such as Durham or the Cappella Palatina, is more than an accumulation of separate

sources; in fact, it is distinctly Norman. Through their patronage, the Normans managed to make their sources visible while creating something greater than the sum of its parts. Analysis of what sources they draw from visually, as well as in texts and rituals, suggests a desire to create a consistent message: one that emphasizes their status as legitimate Christian rulers. Deciding what term is applicable to describe this process is complicated, in part because what are now identified as culturally distinct vocabularies in Norman Sicily in particular may not have been regarded as such in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The notion of *cultural hybridity* as articulated by Homi Bhabha may be the most promising term for describing Norman cultural production, although as this study will argue, its application is more limited than its frequent use in relation to Norman visual culture may suggest.⁴ While the term *hybrid* is traditionally defined as “an offspring of two animals or plants of different races, breeds, varieties or genera” or “something heterogeneous in origin or composition,” in postcolonial discourse it has acquired a more fluid and dynamic meaning.⁵ Following Edward Said’s comment, “The history of all cultures is the history of cultural borrowing,” Bhabha puts forward a concept of cultural hybridity that is more a process than a state.⁶ This idea of process suggests a sense of agency in cultural production that is sometimes more clearly associated with terms such as *appropriation* and *accommodation*.⁷ Bhabha’s notion of cultural hybridity is useful in some ways due to its widely acknowledged ambiguity, which renders it applicable to circumstances outside the colonizer/colonized model at the heart of his discussion. His idea of culture as characterized by a “mixedness” to which the term *hybridity* can be applied is strongly evident in the Norman use of forms labeled as Carolingian, Anglo-Saxon, Antique, Scandinavian, etc. The relationships between the Normans and the producers of these cultural vocabularies are not those of colonizer and colonized, but the sense of interconnectedness and flux critical to Bhabha’s use of the term *cultural hybridity* is apparent. As he states, “[W]e should remember that it is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.”⁸ Thus it is not that each cultural strand imparts a separate and distinct meaning, but that the interrelationship of the two or more strands creates a new meaning and cultural significance. The Bayeux Embroidery, as discussed in Chapter 3, is a good example of how this works, since an Anglo-Saxon art form and artists were used to create what is, on the surface at least, a Norman political statement.

⁴ See Bhabha, *Location of Culture* and “Culture’s In-Between.” See also Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*, 45–55.

⁵ *Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*, 559.

⁶ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xxix; Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*, 46.

⁷ Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*, 55.

⁸ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 56.

In other instances, particularly in Sicily, the idea of hybridity has more limited application. As argued in Chapter 4, forms that are currently identified as “Islamic,” “Christian,” and “Byzantine,” for example (and used as instances of hybridity in much of the literature), may be better understood as part of a regional Mediterranean visual culture rather than attached to specific religious or political associations.

While the selected examples analyzed here are visually quite different, the underlying concept behind their design is in many ways similar. In each of these intercultural connections, historical references and a creation of a visual vocabulary that is simultaneously familiar and new are evident. It is this conceptual connection, the question of how and why these kinds of designs emerged in each area of Norman occupation, that is explored in this study, as well as the meaning conveyed by Bhabha’s “in-between space.”

The evidence for Viking visual culture in the pre-Norman period does not really suggest that anything on the scale and richness of the architecture found in Normandy, Norman England, or Norman Sicily was in the offing. While some surviving textiles may suggest a tradition that would contribute to the creation of the Bayeux Embroidery, there are no exact precedents. Equally, the way the Normans created their own history was apparently distinctive and revealed much about their sense of identity. The circumstances of their arrival in northwestern France in the ninth-century did not initially suggest that they and their heirs would rule the area that became the duchy of Normandy, and later the kingdoms of England and southern Italy and Sicily.

As the Carolingian Empire fragmented throughout the course of the ninth-century, Scandinavian marauders known as Vikings began to raid first the North Sea coasts and then (using rivers such as the Rhine and the Seine) the interior of Western Europe.⁹ In the popular imagination, these marauders were seen as brutally violent attackers, a reputation promoted as early as the late eighth-century by medieval chroniclers such as Alcuin, who described them as pagans terrorizing Britain following their infamous raid on Lindisfarne Abbey in 793.¹⁰ Raids in northwestern France began c. 820.¹¹ Monasteries there as well as in Britain were frequent targets of Viking attacks due to their easily portable riches. In England, Viking settlements and territories were established, particularly in the north, at sites such as Jorvik in the ninth-century. A similar pattern of raids followed by settlement also occurred in western France, where the region ultimately took on the French word for these Scandinavian raiders, *normanni* or northmen, as its new name: Normandy. Unlike other Viking colonies, Normandy survived to become a distinct

⁹ Rowley, *The Normans*, 21.

¹⁰ Rowley, *The Normans*, 17–18; Alcuin of York, *Letter to Higbald*, letter 26: 36–38.

¹¹ Rowley, *The Normans*, 21.

political unit, ultimately a powerful dukedom within the French kingdom.¹² The establishment of a territory in northwest France under Viking control was marked by the Treaty of Saint-Claire-sur-Epte in 911. With this treaty, Charles the Simple granted the Viking leader Rollo and his followers the land between the River Epte and the sea in exchange for Rollo's loyalty, military allegiance, and conversion to Christianity. By 933, their territory had expanded west from the central area of the Seine to include the region now known as lower Normandy. Rollo was granted this territory in *alodo et in fundo*, so despite paying homage to the French king, he and his successors were established as fairly independent rulers.¹³ Rollo and his son William Longsword used the title Count of Rouen; their son and grandson Richard I, marquis. In 1015, Richard's son, Richard II, was known as duke with the "right to control the church and appoint counts under him."¹⁴

Thus, from the first appearance of Viking ships off the coast in 820, less than one hundred years passed before Rollo became the first official Viking ruler of this Frankish territory. As the Normans transformed themselves from itinerant raiders to patrician leaders, they also undertook the process of creating an identity in text and an image of themselves as legitimate Christian rulers; at the same time, they expanded their territories to include England and southern Italy and Sicily. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, in 1066, the Duke of Normandy, William, successfully invaded England to pursue what Normans regarded as his legitimate claim to the English crown. Thus, he reigned as both duke of Normandy and king of England. The conquest of southern Italy and Sicily took place under quite different circumstances. There, Normans who were largely younger sons of local aristocrats and political exiles arrived in the region as mercenaries beginning in the early eleventh-century. Conquest there was gradual and piecemeal. Ultimately the Hautevilles emerged as the most powerful dynasty, and it was a member of this family who brought both southern Italy and Sicily under Norman control. Roger II was crowned first king of Sicily on December 25, 1130. Pope Innocent II, as discussed further in Chapter 4, confirmed Roger as ruler of Sicily and Italy south of the River Garigliano in 1139.¹⁵

The Norman rise to power in each of these regions – Normandy, England, and southern Italy and Sicily – was followed fairly quickly by an extraordinarily active period of artistic patronage by the new rulers. Together with contemporary texts, the objects and monuments they produced suggest a common interest across the Norman territories in the assertion of a Norman

¹² Rowley, *The Normans*, 22.

¹³ Rowley, *The Normans*, 23.

¹⁴ Rowley, *The Normans*, 25.

¹⁵ Rowley, *The Normans*, 154.

claim as legitimate Christian rulers. Their patronage led to the creation of some of the most famous and visually compelling examples of medieval art. Although they look quite different from one another, St.-Étienne, Caen; Durham Cathedral; and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo are all described as Norman, a label that reflects the identification of their patron. What is not immediately apparent from their appearance is what places them together, identifies them as sharing a quality of “Normanness.” This study investigates these examples of Norman visual culture and asks, initially, whether there is a shared Norman visual culture – or rather, identity – represented by objects such as these. It goes on to suggest that, while there are some visual similarities, particularly between Norman and Anglo-Norman visual culture, it is the process of production, rather than their formal or visual traits, that connects them. Through this process, the Normans from northwestern France, England, and Sicily invoked their own past, that of the territories they came to rule, the classical past, and the visual language of their fellow rulers to create an identity for themselves. Despite their former status as pagan Viking raiders, they wanted to be understood as legitimate Christian rulers who promoted the true faith to subjects diverse in their ethnicities as well as their religious practices. Writing the Normans into a narrative that evoked past writings of kings and heroes was intended to make them part of that tradition, just as does creating a visual culture that evoked associations with rulers of the past and present. This process of reinventing themselves initially was seen most clearly in Dudo St. Quentin’s *Historia Normannorum*, in which a narrative of Norman identity was created that remained a thread throughout their invention of visual culture across their different territories.¹⁶ Like Dudo’s innovative text, their architectural patronage led to buildings that both invoked previous traditions while being innovative, thereby creating a visual culture that at once recollected a particular past and signaled a new present – one that was profoundly Christian and had an impeccable dynastic history.

Richard I commissioned Dudo of St. Quentin to write one of the earliest medieval histories of secular rulers. Dudo established a narrative for the Normans that focused on three key themes: their role as Christian rulers; the legitimacy of their rule; and their role as rulers of diverse subjects. These themes are observable throughout many of the texts, rituals, and objects the Normans produced or employed in all three areas under their control during the period of their ascendancy. Cultural memory consists of texts, rituals, and objects that provide a basis for group identification and uniqueness. These materials were reused or perhaps invoked repeatedly over time. While providing some sense of stability, their meaning over time is also subject to change

¹⁶ Dudo, *History*.

while also providing an element of stability for a particular self-image.¹⁷ With the *Historia Normannorum*, Dudo fashioned a past for the current Norman leaders that identified their ancestor Rollo as a legitimate Christian leader of diverse peoples – an identity that this book argues they returned to regularly in the creation of a visual culture in each area of their rule. Dudo drew on classical models, with the *Aeneid* perhaps the most frequently cited of these. But as Benjamin Pohl argues, its sources are actually considerably more complex. Just as the Cappella Palatina brought together elements of Byzantine, Classical, northern European, and North African culture to create an image congruent with Norman claims and identity, Dudo's text brought diverse components together to create a single coherent narrative.

As Pohl points out, a critical feature of medieval historical writing, and indeed sources generally, is the use of the past to serve the ends of the present, needs that of course can change over time.¹⁸ Indeed, this book argues that through their creation of a distinctive visual culture in each area of their rule, the Normans brought multiple pasts as well as presents to bear in their creation of a visual image of their rulership. This process began in Normandy as the Normans began to formalize their position as rulers. In commissioning Dudo, Richard I selected an extremely well educated canon from the neighboring area of St. Quentin, probably from a privileged family, with a long career as a writer.¹⁹ A careful analysis of the influences on his writing, discussed in greater detail later in the book, suggests a close familiarity with Carolingian texts as well as a broader knowledge of classical texts than is typical for the period.²⁰ In their bid to establish themselves as equally legitimate as their contemporaries, Richard I and his son Richard II (r. 996–1026) selected a writer who understood how to create a narrative that fitted within contemporary conventions of dynastic histories.²¹ As Pohl describes it, the Normans' past as Vikings was not erased but recontextualized in order to support their current identity as legitimate Christian rulers. Richard I's striving for legitimacy on the terms of his aspirational peers was a goal seen again in the actions of his son as well as Norman rulers in England and Sicily. Dudo established a narrative for the Normans that could be reinvoked throughout their history of rule and across their diverse territories.

This study argues similarly that the Normans invoked a range of diverse cultural models in similar ways across their territories as a means of expressing the principles of *translatio et imitatio imperii* in a manner appropriate to their

¹⁷ See Pohl, *Dudo of St. Quentin's Historia Normannorum*, 11–13, and his discussion of Assman's ideas about cultural memory.

¹⁸ Pohl, *Dudo of St. Quentin's Historia Normannorum*, 16–17.

¹⁹ Shopkow, *History and Community*, 35–38.

²⁰ Pohl, *Dudo of St. Quentin's Historia Normannorum*, 112; Shopkow, "The Carolingian World of Dudo," 25.

²¹ Pohl, *Dudo of St. Quentin's Historia Normannorum*, 117.

particular circumstances and peer group. Examples of their visual culture such as the Bayeux Embroidery or the Cappella Palatina are frequently discussed in terms of their particular visual sources but not considered in terms of the larger picture of the Norman mission of reinventing themselves as legitimate Christian leaders on a par with peers such as the Byzantine or Holy Roman emperors.

Dudo drew on a variety of largely antique sources to create a distinctly Norman narrative, which reinvented these notorious pagan invaders as Christian rulers over diverse peoples under the leadership of Rollo. Dudo's narrative was intended to remind contemporaries of several heroic rulers of the past, Constantine among them. This particular process of creating a new narrative from their past resembles what Homi Bhabha identified as *retroaction*: "the ability to re-inscribe the past, reactivate it, relocate it, resignify it."²² While Bhabha raises the issue of retroaction in a different context, his discussion of narratives of historical reconstruction is relevant for the analysis of Dudo's *Historia Normannorum* as well as other Norman constructions of identity. The acknowledged past of the Normans, identified by contemporaries as a negative story of pagan violence, was relocated within a larger narrative, which culminated in their emergence as leaders within a Christian western European tradition. It was only by virtue of his pagan past that Rollo, like Constantine, could be redeemed as a Christian ruler who led his people as well as his diverse subjects in the true faith. The Norman future was thus reinterpreted as a divinely ordained one that positioned them as legitimately and divinely sanctioned rulers who would protect the Church and its institutions.

The idea of retroaction, in which action is taken retrospectively or the past is in fact acted upon, draws on multiple pasts; in this case it drew on past events to create or reshape Norman identity in order to support a claim for legitimacy that was legible to their contemporaries. These include those of the Normans themselves, as well as Constantine and Aeneas, to create something simultaneously familiar and new. The process of retroaction, of reinscribing, reactivating, relocating, and resignifying the past, is one that Normans continued to invoke across time and place. Their use of *spolia*, both actual and virtual, allowed the Normans to physically reactivate, relocate, and resignify the past in their artifacts to create new meanings while retaining their association with the past. It was not unique to them or to this one moment and place in their history. Their use of the past (or, really, multiple pasts) continued in their assumption to the English throne in 1066 and invention of the Sicilian monarchy in 1130. In both of these instances they continued to use the past, whether textual or visual, to create an image of themselves as powerful and legitimate Christian rulers. This image was intended to be legible to their subjects as well

²² Pohl, *Dudo of St. Quentin's Historia Normannorum*, 257, makes this connection. See Bhabha, "Culture's In-Between," 59.

as their peers, and varied in its form according to the particular circumstances of time and place. In other words, the visual culture of Normandy, Norman England, and Norman Sicily may not look similar, but the purpose and process behind their creation were shared.

In all three areas, Norman leaders were concerned to appear to be legitimate Christian rulers over a group of subjects that included very few actual Normans. This goal is also apparent in their own histories, Dudo's *Historia Normannorum* in particular, which invokes a range of earlier traditions and heralds the Norman mission as Christian rulers of diverse peoples. Similarly, their art and architecture brought together elements and ideas from a broad range of cultures. Sometimes this took the form of earlier native traditions as in the use of Anglo-Saxon vocabularies in Norman England. It could also involve the use of elements from contemporary cultures as seen in the variety of vocabularies from around the Mediterranean found in Siculo-Norman visual culture. The resulting buildings and objects were not simply an amalgam of these forms, but actually fused to form a new style distinct to the particular area under Norman rule and patronage.

In the traditional art historical search for sources and stylistic similarities, the concept of a shared process and purpose has been largely, though not totally, overlooked. Even as more recent general interest in multiculturalism has led to an explosion of literature on Norman Sicily, much of this has continued the traditional focus on sources, albeit widening the range of sources under examination. Traditionally, this search for sources has been used to identify the precedents and role models upon which other buildings and works of art are based. While understanding and identifying these sources is critical to the current study, it seeks to move beyond identification in its analysis of what can be seen as a shared process and intended meaning on the part of Norman patrons, beginning with their commissioning of Dudo to craft their history, their creation myth out of their own past and that of widely familiar heroic rulers such as Constantine and Aeneas. This retroactive reshaping and integration of these pasts made the present and future the Normans wished for themselves legible to their subjects and their contemporaries.

This study analyzes Norman visual culture across three areas under their control (Normandy, England, and Sicily) as a means of understanding the process of cultural accommodation that occurred as these former Vikings encountered Carolingian, Anglo-Saxon, Byzantine, and Islamic cultures through their conquests in Western Europe. In each area, the Normans reformulated local traditions and invoked those of rival political powers as they reinvented and presented themselves as legitimate political leaders. The circumstances that led to Norman domination of each area varied widely; nor did the same individuals or families control all three areas of Norman occupation. Yet the question of whether there was a particular Norman

identity common to all three regions has dominated much of the scholarly literature, particularly in the field of history. This issue is not central to the current study.²³ The question here is how people of similar backgrounds in similar situations might have used visual culture in similar ways, even though they were in different places with different cultural traditions. In each area, the Norman rise to power was not straightforward. In Normandy itself, the French king sought to appease the invaders through a land grant that they ultimately used to create a dukedom with a distinct political and cultural identity. In England, the Norman duke pursued his somewhat questionable claim to the throne through conquest. The Normans also achieved control of Sicily and southern Italy through conquest, although in this case it was a more gradual process. They then forged their territories into newly created kingdoms. In each of these areas the Normans chose to portray themselves as lawful rulers and used visual culture as one means of delivering a message about their right to rule. In their creation of a visual culture for each of their territories, the Normans invoked both past traditions and contemporary practices from both within and without their lands. Their use of the past to lend their rule a sense of legitimacy is not unique but rather common to many other people and places.²⁴ The circumstances of their coming to power and use of art provide an opportunity to examine this use of the past closely and with reference to specific places.

Norman architecture across Normandy, England, and Sicily does display some similarities, particularly between Normandy and England, with some suggestion of connections between Sicily and northern European examples. This analysis does not focus on identification of specific design sources and influences within the realm of Norman visual culture. Rather, the concern here is a more conceptual one related to political identity. In the broadest of terms, certain circumstances of the Normans' coming to rule are similar: in Normandy, England, and southern Italy and Sicily, the Normans displaced the previous ruling class and installed a new government. These broad similarities of the circumstances of new rulers striving to institutionalize power over an alien population provide the opportunity for a comparative study that questions the Norman construction of an identity through the manipulation of visual culture. In each of the three regions of their occupation, Normans were prolific patrons of art and architecture; they modified or transformed the preexisting culture, creating a new culture that still maintained connections to what had come before. The way they did this was similar in each of the three areas, although the cultural artifacts they produced were very different

²³ See, for example, Davis, *The Normans and Their Myth*, and Bates, *Normandy before 1066*, for a discussion of this issue, particularly in the introduction to each book.

²⁴ See, for example, Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," 1–14.

visually. This book examines how this transformation took place, analyzing the evidence to consider whether there were patterns to the changes that took place across the three regions under study. As explained above, the issue is not one of a common appearance in the visual culture of Normandy, England, and Sicily, but rather of a common approach to the problems posed by broadly similar political circumstances. In each of these areas, art historians have used the term *Norman* (albeit sometimes modified with a regional name as in Anglo- or Siculo-Norman) to describe their artistic production. This is not because the Cappella Palatina (Plate IV), for example, looks like Durham Cathedral (Fig. 2), but rather because the art and in particular the architecture produced under Norman rule in each area is distinct from that which precedes and succeeds their period of rule. As discussed below, Notre-Dame, Jumièges, is dramatically different in scale and elevation from the neighboring church of St. Pierre, Jumièges (Figs. 3, 4). Similarly, the Anglo-Saxon churches of the pre-Conquest period contrast sharply with their Norman replacements.

The newly empowered Norman rulers were apparently in accord with Sean Wilentz's "unchallenged first principles of a political order," which consist of "making any given hierarchy appear natural and just to the rulers and ruled."²⁵ This study argues that the Normans in England and Sicily employed a wide range of tools such as texts, rituals, administrative organization, and – the main focus of this study – visual culture to achieve the appearance of natural and just rule for monarchs who achieved their thrones through conquest rather than peaceful succession. The roots of this process of conquest and accommodation lay in the Viking raiders' transformation of themselves into Norman dukes and aristocrats. They invoked a mix of Scandinavian, Carolingian, and contemporary royal and imperial practices from across Europe to create Normandy and then in turn Norman kingdoms in England and Sicily with strong and apparent ties to their past along with clear signs of their transformation into something new.

Wilentz's remarks are part of his discussion of Clifford Geertz's essay, "Centers, Kings and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power."²⁶ Wilentz considers anthropology's contributions to the study of history; he observes that it allows historians to see "politics as a form of cultural interaction."²⁷ These cultural interactions are scrutinized here in the exploration of the question of how visual culture (as well as text and ritual, to a more limited extent) can be reshaped and reinvented to support what have been labeled "master fictions." These fictions help form the cultural frames "political authority still requires . . . to define itself and advance its claims."²⁸ This study analyzes

²⁵ Wilentz, "Introduction," in *Rites of Power*, 4.

²⁶ Geertz, "Centers, Kings and Charisma."

²⁷ Wilentz, *Rites of Power*, 3.

²⁸ Geertz, "Centers, Kings and Charisma," 30.



3. Notre-Dame, Jumièges, nave, *c.* 1040–1066.
(Photo: Author)

how the Normans created the cultural frames that supported their claims to a divine and legitimate right to rule. In doing so, they invented a visual culture, to build on Eric Hobsbawm, which drew both traditions on they inherited and those they brought in from outside to justify and support their claims.

It is not unusual that the continuities the Normans constructed with the Carolingian, Anglo-Saxon, or classical past were often largely fictional, given their recent arrival to the territories they come to control. As Hobsbawm explains, “the peculiarity of ‘invented’ traditions is that the continuity with it is largely factitious. In short, they were responsive to novel situations which took the form of reference to the old situation or established their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition.”²⁹ For the Normans, the novel situation was their

²⁹ Hobsbawm, “Inventing Traditions,” 2.



4. St-Pierre, Jumièges, nave, ninth-century.
(Photo: Author)

arriving first as Viking raiders, invaders, and finally as mercenaries to Normandy, England, and Sicily, and then ending up as dukes and kings. In all three areas they invoked local traditions as well as practices from contemporary rulers outside their territories to secure their image as rulers legitimated by divine right. In the case of Sicily, the Norman monarch actually invented a past for his kingdom, a domain that was of his own making. By combining local traditions and transnationally understood vocabularies, they invented a Norman tradition of rule supported by their texts, ceremonies, and visual culture. These supporting elements simultaneously conveyed a message of connection and continuity with the past as well as one of change in their references to conventions from outside the region; they signaled the arrival of a ruler who was divinely anointed and legitimate according to the traditions of medieval kingship while also new and a change from the past. As Hobsbawm points out, “all invented traditions . . . use history as a legitimator of action and

cement group cohesion.”³⁰ Building on their myth about themselves as rulers of diverse peoples, the Normans used the past to legitimize their conquests and connect themselves to their subjects.

PAST QUESTIONS

The study of invented traditions is by its nature interdisciplinary.³¹ This book draws on discussions by literary scholars, historians, musicologists, anthropologists, and religious historians, among others, in its investigation of Norman visual culture. The aim is to understand the larger context and patterns into which objects like the Bayeux Embroidery fit. Until fairly recently, art historians have tended to focus on Normandy and England as part of a larger narrative of Western medieval art. The questions asked here are often drawn from those posed by other disciplines such as literary studies and history. These questions differ significantly from those posed in the past about Norman art and architecture. While historians have explored issues relating to Normans as a group, art historians have not been as concerned with the connections across Norman patronage. Although discussions of architecture often integrate analysis of Norman French and English examples, Sicily is relegated to a separate category. In architectural studies, English and Norman buildings such as Durham and St.-Étienne, Caen, were traditionally used in evolutionary studies of Gothic architecture intended to explain the history of Gothic architecture of the Île de France (Figs. 2, 1). This approach was due to the early development of rib vaults, use of harmonic facades, and skeletal elevations, all key features to the twelfth- and thirteenth-century ecclesiastical architecture around Paris, in Norman and Anglo-Norman buildings.³² These studies were centered on questions of sources and influences rather than political motivations, the reception of the forms employed, or a consideration of how Norman visual culture emerged.³³

The Normans used art and architecture, similar to their use of rituals and literature, to demonstrate their links with their territories' pasts. This sense of deliberateness and awareness of the use of history and sense of self is part of what makes Normans such an interesting case study for an exploration of the transformation of past traditions into new Norman ones. Contemporary chroniclers such as Geoffrey of Monmouth, Geoffrey Gaimar, and Wace

³⁰ Hobsbawm, “Inventing Traditions,” 12.

³¹ Hobsbawm, “Inventing Traditions,” 14.

³² Bony, *French Gothic Architecture*, 7–12, 23–26.

³³ Among historians the range of issues has been broader, as summarized by Elisabeth van Houts in her excellent study of recent historiography, *The Normans in Europe*, 8–12. The aspect of her discussion with the most relevance for this study is that which has to do with Norman self-awareness and sense of self-identification, 9–10.

identify Norman rule as a time of continuity with earlier traditions rather than as simply disruptive. As described by literary scholar Elizabeth Salter, these chroniclers “confirmed the desire of the Normans to enter into their new inheritance, rather than to advertise their role as continental conquerors.”³⁴

This understanding of contemporary chronicles ties in with how both historians and literary scholars have frequently emphasized the post-Conquest period in Britain as strongly historicist: making powerful and self-conscious use of literature and historical writing to promote a sense of continuity between pre- and post-Conquest England, for example. Antonia Gransden discusses at length the Norman adoption of Anglo-Saxon history to justify and make acceptable their religious reforms, which were cast as a restoration of Anglo-Saxon monasticism to its former glory.³⁵ Durham Cathedral, as discussed in Chapter 3, provides a potent example of the architectural representation of this idea (Fig. 2). Several contributors to the *Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* identify a common theme in several areas of Norman culture: the Norman consciousness of the past and local tradition as a way of celebrating their history as well as integrating themselves into the history of their conquered subjects. Christopher Baswell, for example, identifies William the Conqueror’s use of some of Edward the Confessor’s regalia and a ritual reminiscent of that used for Edward’s coronation as a means of lending authority to his reign.³⁶ He suggests that William invoked Edward in order to establish him as the hinge between the Anglo-Saxon and Norman dynasties, thus demonstrating a continuing tradition of kingship in the pre- and post-Conquest periods.³⁷ In the same volume, Susan Crane relates how Anglo-Norman literature of the later twelfth-century aimed “to unite the conquerors’ history to England’s and to provide them with an illustrious past in England.”³⁸ This interest in the Normans as self-conscious rulers of diverse peoples who sought to integrate themselves historically with their subjects has been particularly absent from the study of the most visible remains of Norman culture: their art and architecture. It is worth considering how Norman buildings, for example, have been treated within the broader framework of eleventh- and twelfth-century architectural studies and offer some new modes of investigation that take account of the Normans’ own view of themselves as suggested by textual and visual evidence.

In certain ways, medieval architectural scholarship traditionally developed in response to questions and dictates of other disciplines – perhaps in an effort to provide quantification to a subject that is not essentially quantifiable. Early

³⁴ Salter, *English and International*, 6.

³⁵ Gransden, “Traditionalism and Continuity,” 159–207.

³⁶ Baswell, “Latinitas,” 122–151. See also Janet Nelson, “The Rites of the Conqueror,” 117–132, 210–221.

³⁷ Baswell, “Latinitas,” 128. This is discussed at length in Chapter 3.

³⁸ Crane, “Anglo-Norman Cultures in England,” 35–60, in particular 40.

scholarship revolved around questions of evolution and classification similar to taxonomic concerns for natural history.³⁹ This methodology succeeded in providing a framework for the study of medieval architecture largely based on chronology and style, a means of differentiating and organizing scholarly thinking about the wide range of medieval architecture – covering as it does a vast geographic and chronological spectrum.

This approach diminishes the sense of difference. In taxonomic classification, similarity rather than diversity is celebrated. Taxonomy is defined as the “classification of plants and animals according to their presumed natural relationships”⁴⁰: *presumed* is the key word here, indicating the subjective nature of such a system. The term *natural*, defined as “having a spontaneousness suggesting the natural rather than the man-made world,” is also problematic.⁴¹ It suggests a lack of active choice in the process, which is, of course, not the case in architectural design regardless of the evolutionary framework into which historians may fit buildings. This system of analysis views buildings largely in terms of how they respond to earlier architecture or influence later structures, rather than as responses to other sets of circumstances such as site history or institutional identity. The development of a seamless evolutionary continuum converging at a particular goal has contributed heavily to the monuments selected for study as well as the manner of their presentation. Such a construct is understandable, as taxonomic organization and the scientific bases of much nineteenth-century scholarship are biased toward hard physical evidence, which can be quantified through matching molding profiles or capital forms. Hence, given an interest in classification and evolution as the construct into which the evidence of medieval architecture was inserted, we see molding profiles, vaults, buttresses, and tracery patterns as the principal organizing features for much early scholarship. Paley’s nineteenth-century study of Gothic molding profiles is typical in its arrangement of clusters of moldings according to similarities, in a scheme not unlike that employed by nineteenth-century naturalists for equally disembodied features such as bird beaks, wings, and feet.⁴²

Traditionally the Gothic style was set up as an architectural climax, and although the exact peak varies depending on the scholar and his/her time and nationality, for much of the twentieth-century, thirteenth-century French buildings such as Amiens or Reims Cathedrals were regarded as the high point of medieval architectural achievement.⁴³ Much of our thinking about

³⁹ See, for example, Rickman, *An Attempt to Discriminate the Styles of Architecture*, 39.

⁴⁰ Webster’s *Dictionary*, 904.

⁴¹ Webster’s *Dictionary*, 563.

⁴² Paley, *A Manual of Gothic Mouldings*.

⁴³ For example, Whitney Stoddard describes Amiens in a manner typical of this approach: “The cathedral of Amiens . . . is . . . the climax of the High Gothic heritage from the Chartres design (1194) via Soissons (late 1190s) and Reims (1211).” *Monastery and Cathedral*, 211.

medieval architecture remains influenced by Viollet-le-Duc, whose *Dictionnaire* contributed heavily toward the classification of these buildings.⁴⁴ Viollet saw reason as the generating principle behind French medieval architecture.⁴⁵ He was also influenced by his times and a model of thinking that placed Paris at the center of French life and aimed to demonstrate this Parisian centrality as a circumstance rooted in a historical basis. Viollet invoked the Romantic history of France in support of his concept of medieval architecture.⁴⁶ In line with his political views, the nonstructural aspects of medieval architecture such as liturgy were suppressed in favor of less emotive and more “scientific” issues such as vaulting. Thus, the Île de France is seen as a goal toward which structural history was moving with such buildings seen as ultimately desirable. Of the flying buttress he says, for example:

Until their application in Gothic churches, all is trial and error, from the moment that the presence of the flying buttresses in the construction becomes marked, the structure of the churches develops in its true sense, it boldly follows the new path. To ask for a Gothic church without flying buttresses is to ask for a ship without keels, it is for the church as for the ship a question of being or not being.⁴⁷

Contemporary buildings were thus often classified (and valued) according to their similarities to such buildings as Amiens and previous buildings according to their role in this natural evolution toward Amiens or its equivalents. This organizing principle and imposition of the natural law of evolution on the man-made world of architecture is problematic in its sense of determinism and inevitability as well as the inference that the extinct varieties of architecture (the road not taken) imply some sort of genetic inferiority. Such an approach suggests that, like the dinosaurs, buildings like Albi Cathedral, for example, built of brick and without flying buttresses, were fit only for extinction rather than imitation. As a thirteenth-century building without flying buttresses, Albi would be an unwanted building according to Viollet’s view.

For much of the twentieth-century, an architectural history that was constructed according to style and date, and celebrated buildings’ similarities rather than differences, served very well. The age of high modernism and the International Style tended to emphasize the importance of newness and

⁴⁴ Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné d’architecture*.

⁴⁵ Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné d’architecture*, 1–3.

⁴⁶ Murphy, *Memory and Modernity*, 32–35.

⁴⁷ “Jusqu’à leur application dans les églises gothiques, tout est tâtonnement; du moment que les arcs-boutants sont nettement accusés dans la construction, la structure des églises se développe dans son véritable sens, elle suit hardiment la voie nouvelle. Demander une église gothique sans arcs-boutants, c’est demander un navire sans quille; c’est pour l’église comme pour le navire une question d’être ou de n’être pas.” Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné d’architecture*, I: 60.

structural evolution without an interest in a sense of place or the past. The language used to describe these two architectural movements, Gothic and high modernism, is often startlingly similar. Eminent architectural historian Robert Branner's description, "The High Gothic cathedral is a monument to clarity and reason...every part has its proper place, nothing has been omitted, nothing is superfluous"⁴⁸ is strongly reminiscent of Mies's motto "less is more." Branner's description of a Gothic church, "the anatomy of the church, like the human frame, is in reality a 3-dimensional skeleton. The wall is a mere skin stretched between uprights and arches,"⁴⁹ may bring to mind both the Seagram Building and Amiens Cathedral as well as Mies's description of office buildings: "This is skin and bone construction."⁵⁰ Indeed, the very point of this modern architecture was its lack of specificity for time and place, a concept that then carried over to the analysis of historical monuments such as Durham and Amiens.

This approach is not wrong or invalid: it is useful as a means of understanding certain features of medieval architecture. The structural evolution toward the High Gothic does explain the technical history of an influential group of buildings. For figures such as Viollet-le-Duc, the historical contexts in which these buildings were produced was very loaded, given their religious associations, as they had been for earlier English antiquaries for whom a celebration of medieval and hence overtly Catholic past was sometimes a dangerous act.⁵¹ Viollet's compilation of hard physical evidence has a greater appearance of seemingly incontrovertible scientific rigor than the more emotional appeal of Pugin, for example.⁵² Additionally, Viollet's promotion of the technical side of medieval architecture further established the relevance of Gothic architecture for the modern era.

The difficulty with the evolutionary Gotho-centric approach, however, is what it leaves out, an understanding of why buildings differ and how they relate to individual and specific sets of circumstances with which art historians are now more concerned. The structural evolution toward the High Gothic does explain the technical history of an influential group of buildings. Scholars of Norman architecture should perhaps be pleased that this mode of analysis places some of the subjects of their study in such a key position in this history as

⁴⁸ Branner, "High Gothic Architecture," 7.

⁴⁹ Branner, "High Gothic Architecture," 9.

⁵⁰ Mies van der Rohe, "Bürohaus," G1:3, June 1923, cited by Johnson, *Mies van der Rohe*, 183.

⁵¹ See, for example, Joan Evans, *A History of the Society of Antiquaries*, 14, 25.

⁵² For example: "The Church is the true mechanics' institute, the oldest and the best. *She was the great and never failing school in which all the great artists of the days of faith were formed* (italics original). Under her guidance they directed the most wonderful efforts of their skill to the glory of God; and let our fervent prayer ever be, that the Church may again, as in days of old, cultivate the talents of her children to the advancement of religion and the welfare of their own souls." Pugin, *The True Principles*, 30.

the birthplace of such critical elements as the rib vault, the harmonic façade, and logical articulation of parts. But this approach also limited the study of Norman architecture in two key ways: first, it addressed only certain aspects of Norman architecture in its role as the harbinger of the new; and second, it separated buildings that might more effectively be studied as a group. An analysis of the buildings of Normandy, England, and Sicily, despite their physical differences, reveals similar goals in their development of their visual culture.

There are two aspects to the historiography of Norman visual culture relevant for this discussion. One has to do with its position in the larger narrative of medieval art, in particular with regard to architectural history, given the emphasis of this book. The second is the nature of the specialized literature for each area under consideration: Normandy, Norman England, and Norman Sicily. An examination of traditional medieval architecture survey books provides a fairly clear idea of the framework into which the buildings under examination here have traditionally been inserted, at least by British and American scholars; it is a framework that has often directed the questions asked in the more specialized scholarly literature. The historiographic discussion here begins with an analysis of one of the most widely used survey books historically together with a well-received more recent text: Conant's *Carolingian and Romanesque Architecture* and Stalley's *Early Medieval Architecture*.⁵³

While Conant's study was first published over sixty years ago, it was reprinted consistently into the 1990s and shaped much of the discussion of Romanesque architecture during its long history of publication. Within the chapters dealing with Normandy, England, and Sicily, Conant establishes sources, influences, chronology, and stylistic development: the traditional questions of art history. This discussion then feeds into his larger consideration of relative importance and significance based on each monument's contribution to the Gothic. For the most part, Conant apparently regarded Sicily as an interesting anomaly, calling it "hardly a Romanesque civilization" and its architecture "exotic" and "overblown."⁵⁴ Until the recent emergence of scholarly interest in multiculturalism, transnationalism, and the Mediterranean,

⁵³ Conant, *Carolingian and Romanesque Architecture*, and Stalley, *Early Medieval Architecture*.

Conant's study was first published in 1959 with editions published regularly through 1990. Despite its age, Conant's work is largely unsurpassed for the depth and breadth of its study, as with so many of the Pelican series volumes. In addition, nothing has appeared to challenge its position as a detailed overview of the field. For as Conant observed in his foreword of 1954, "General works on Romanesque architecture are not numerous," a situation which has not changed substantially. Conant's work remains strongly influential, as it was widely used as the framework for understanding Romanesque architecture until recently. While the information about individual monuments has expanded in the intervening fifty years, his format for analyses has continued to dominate much of the more specialized literature.

⁵⁴ Conant, *Carolingian and Romanesque Architecture*, 352, 359.

among other new approaches in medieval art history, Conant's approach typified the field's marginalization of Norman Sicily and its overall organization of the study of Romanesque architecture.⁵⁵

More recent overviews, such as Roger Stalley's excellent volume *Early Medieval Architecture*, in the Oxford series, are more limited in scope and different in approach from the Pelican series. Stalley's text addresses many of the current concerns with the traditional classifications and emphasis on formal analysis of earlier studies. His title alone reflects the current reluctance to use without qualification the stylistic labels accepted and defined by previous generations of scholars. Most of the text focuses on the Romanesque, a term he uses freely although he addresses the concerns with it in his final chapter, "Diversity in the Romanesque Era."⁵⁶

Here he confronts the difficulties with using a stylistic label for a group of buildings renowned, as the chapter title suggests, for their diversity. He also eschews the regional approach favored by many scholars of the period, pointing out the rigidity with which this classification system has been applied. Instead he suggests a modification of the regional approach, one in which regions are replaced by local clusters where "some buildings (but not all) may share common characteristics."⁵⁷ While acknowledging that political and cultural distinctions, particularly in France, may be useful in understanding the regional differences in Romanesque architecture, Stalley points out that this approach does not work for all areas. For Normandy, however, the correlation between architecture and political power is particularly significant.

The book is largely organized according to themes and topics rather than the chronological/geographical approach that is more traditionally used and is evident in the work of Conant. Throughout, the architecture of Normandy receives significant treatment with a limited discussion of Anglo-Norman and

⁵⁵ In his foreword Conant explained this sequence:

But they (Holy Roman Empire) do not show the drive for the logical synthesis in structure that characterized the northwestern region. Therefore, at the end of our work we refer to Romanesque Norman England and the Île de France in contrast with the Empire; the result of their effort in architecture was the creation of a new structural unit. Conant, *Carolingian and Romanesque Architecture*, 11–12.

By contrast Norman Sicily is discussed separately and earlier in the text. Conant introduced this section with the following remarks:

They develop spectacularly in scale, richness and superb craftsmanship from local Early Romanesque styles; but lacked the inventive drive which eventually achieved the definitive solution (in France) of the essential vaulting problem . . . A certain unity will be given to our exposition by mention of the features which the respective styles contribute to the development of Gothic architecture. Conant, *Carolingian and Romanesque Architecture*, 343.

⁵⁶ Stalley, *Early Medieval Architecture*, 213–231.

⁵⁷ Stalley, *Early Medieval Architecture*, 218.

Sicilian monuments. Stalley is wide-ranging in his examples for the volume, including sites in Apulia, Germany, Spain, and Ireland as well as those in England and France. Stalley's approach leads to a broader appreciation of the range of building activity and issues associated with early medieval architecture as well as the current questioning of many traditional theories concerning architectural development. So although he does not provide a detailed analysis of the buildings under study here, his survey signals the expansion of the field to include the questioning of traditional classification schemes, the importance of political and social contexts, and a more diverse range of building types.

While studies like Conant's were crucial in the establishment of baseline information for ongoing investigations of medieval architecture, Stalley's is equally critical in highlighting how the field can and has used that information to move beyond the focus on taxonomy and evolutionary models of stylistic influences. The specialized literature reflects both approaches, although the separation of Norman Sicily from England and Normandy seen in Conant's study remains in place for current art historical scholarship.

NORMANDY

Given the critical role Norman buildings such as St.-Étienne, Caen, and Notre-Dame, Jumièges, play in traditional narratives of medieval architecture, it is somewhat surprising that they have not received more detailed study of late (Figs. 1 and 3). Still widely cited, however, is Victor Ruprich-Robert's landmark two-volume study *L'Architecture normande aux xième et xiième siècles en Normandie et en Angleterre*, originally published in 1889. Its comprehensiveness and emphasis on documentation reflect at least in part Ruprich-Robert's career with the service of the Monuments Historiques, which gave him unparalleled access to the monuments. His career included positions as the diocesan architect of Bayeux, Coutances, and Séez cathedrals as well as restoration architect at St.-Étienne. He also published monographs on St.-Étienne and La Trinité at Caen.⁵⁸

More recent studies have built in many ways on Ruprich-Robert's work and continue to emphasize an archaeological approach to the field as well as an interest in chronology, sources, and influences.⁵⁹ Recent works continue to

⁵⁸ Ruprich-Robert, *L'Église Ste-Trinité*, and *L'Architecture normande*.

⁵⁹ Eric Carlson's landmark dissertation, "The Abbey Church of St.-Étienne at Caen in the 11th and early 12th Centuries," successfully analyzes the building archaeology of the church, establishing the building history and its construction phases. Valerie Chaix's *Les Églises romanes de Normandie* provides a comprehensive examination of Norman architecture by topic such as function, exterior, and nave as well as an overview of each site. Maylis Baylé has further developed our understanding of the diverse sources and chronology of both the architecture and sculpture of Romanesque Normandy in studies such as *La Trinité de Caen*.

consider the pattern of building activity, the rich and diverse architectural sources across the duchy, and the chronology of individual monuments. While the link between Norman architectural patronage and the development of political power is frequently mentioned, it has not been fully explored, nor has it been considered in the context of Norman political activity in England and Sicily.

ANGLO-NORMAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

The literature on Norman architecture in England is considerably more extensive. This is in part because the Normans transformed the built environment of England so completely, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. In addition, many of England's major monumental medieval churches such as St. Alban's, Gloucester, and Durham preserve a significant amount of Norman fabric. Also of interest is the influence this architecture had on both the later medieval architecture of England and the Continent.

Within the historiography of Anglo-Norman architecture, four scholars have written overviews of British medieval architecture within the past seventy-five years that remain influential. A. W. Clapham published his study, *English Romanesque Architecture after the Conquest*, in 1934.⁶⁰ This was followed in the second half of the twentieth-century by two more expansive studies, Geoffrey Webb's British medieval architecture volume in the Pelican series and then the *History of English Architecture*, coauthored by Peter Murray and Paul Thompson together with Peter Kidson, who wrote the medieval section.⁶¹ Most recently, Eric Fernie wrote *The Architecture of Norman England*, published in 2000. Fernie identifies Clapham's volume as the last overall study of Anglo-Norman architecture and describes his own book as "an attempt to evaluate the vast amount of research of the intervening sixty-five years in order to provide a framework for its discussion and to make the subject more accessible once again to non-specialists."⁶²

James Morganstern's archaeological work at Jumièges, such as "Jumièges, Église Notre Dame," has clarified the chronology and original appearance of the buildings on the site.

Carol Heitz has analyzed the relationship between Norman buildings (west fronts, in particular) and Carolingian architecture in her "Influences Carolingiennes et Ottoniennes."

⁶⁰ Clapham, *English Romanesque Architecture after the Conquest*. Clapham wrote a series of three books on Romanesque architecture, beginning with *English Architecture before the Conquest* and concluding with *Romanesque Architecture in Western Europe*.

⁶¹ Webb, *Architecture in Britain*; and Kidson, Murray, and Thompson, *History of English Architecture*.

⁶² Fernie, *The Architecture of Norman England*, ix. This is also a goal of the Clapham study. There is substantial agreement about many aspects of Anglo-Norman architecture among the four as well as with Robert Willis, *Architectural History of Some English Cathedrals*, and John Bilson, "Durham Cathedral." Each differs slightly in his coverage and certain aspects of his identification of sources and influences for particular examples.

All three of these authors agree, although sometimes with different degrees of emphasis, that the Conquest had a significant impact on the architectural history of England. They discuss their subject matter within an evolutionary framework, using terms like *parents* and *ancestors* as well as *development* to discuss the relationships between buildings and change over time. The use of this framework, together with the emphasis on structural development, reflects the continuing powerful influence of Viollet-le-Duc's approach. This approach is partly responsible for Durham's central role in British medieval architecture, as in overall surveys of Romanesque architecture such as the Pelican volume by Conant discussed above. As also discussed above, Durham's early rib vaults make it an important contributor to the Gothic style (Fig. 2).⁶³ Both Kidson and Webb, however, see Durham's decorative system as equally important overall and indeed of greater consequence for English medieval architecture. Each also acknowledges that Durham's influential decorative vocabulary marks a resurgence of Anglo-Saxon forms, although neither addresses how or why this occurs.⁶⁴

Eric Fernie's recent book amplifies many of the discussions in the Webb, Kidson, and Clapham studies.⁶⁵ He organizes his study in a format similar to that of Clapham, chronologically and then typologically, followed by a study of individual elements concluding with a discussion of the design and building process. Throughout, Fernie brings his extensive understanding of Romanesque architecture in general and Anglo-Norman architecture in particular to bear on his close examination of a wide range of monuments, identifying potential sources and influences for each example.

Fernie does raise some questions concerning intention and meaning that do not surface in the studies by his predecessors.⁶⁶ He proposes that the selection of certain sources may have been made with the purpose of conveying a particular political or religious meaning. For example, in discussing in general terms why the Normans undertook such a massive rebuilding campaign he suggests it was "not only because the money and opportunity were available to

⁶³ Clapham, *English Architecture after the Conquest*, 26, 39. Clapham describes Durham as "the most important achievement of the Anglo-Norman school" and its rib vaults as its most significant feature.

⁶⁴ Kidson et al., *History of English Architecture*, 36–37, and Webb, *Architecture in Britain*, 35–39.

⁶⁵ But in contrast with the earlier texts, Fernie, *Norman England*, gives secular buildings considerable attention. Like Webb, he underscores the importance of understanding the larger context of European Romanesque architecture for his study of Norman England as well as Anglo-Saxon architecture, and begins the book with this topic before discussing "England before the Conquest."

⁶⁶ Kidson et al., *History of English Architecture*, 36–37. For example, Kidson highlights the reemergence of Anglo-Saxon forms in the second generation of Anglo-Norman buildings while stating, "Norman architecture in England was always Norman architecture with a difference." He does not, however, suggest a reason for this return to Anglo-Saxon vocabulary, 37.

them, but equally because they saw modernizing the country as a means of indicating who, both politically and culturally, was in charge.”⁶⁷ More specifically, Fernie makes suggestions in terms of specific case studies concerning how the selection of site and forms may have been a deliberate play by the Normans to legitimize or impart other meaning about their rule.⁶⁸ Further on, with regard to Normandy itself he states: “The Carolingian past was of great importance as a means of legitimizing Norman rule. . . . It would therefore not be surprising if buildings in Normandy used Carolingian motifs at the same time as developing more modern Romanesque forms.”⁶⁹ While he acknowledges that meaning and symbolism are components of Norman architectural design, he does not undertake a comprehensive analysis of these aspects of the buildings.

In addition to these book-length overviews, there is a rich body of scholarly articles that discuss both specific monuments and more general issues. In many instances these articles, similar to those discussed for Normandy itself, are critical for their establishment of building chronology, stylistic influences and sources, and patronage history.⁷⁰ These articles have been invaluable in providing a framework for this study, which proposes to further the investigation into the critical questions raised in many of these studies about what message the Normans may have been trying to convey in their transformation of the built environment in post-Conquest England. It is this type of question with which this book is concerned. As suggested by the discussion of Durham in Chapter 3, a deep analysis of a particular site, which investigates its formal characteristics while also considering its political, social, religious, and larger cultural context, provides clearer answers to these questions.⁷¹

SICILY

While English-language survey texts traditionally marginalized Norman Sicily or treated it as an example of exotica or a model for modern values of diversity,

⁶⁷ Fernie, *Norman England*, 245.

⁶⁸ Fernie, *Norman England*, 67. With regard to Colchester Castle, for instance, he reminds us that its position on the site of the Roman temple of Claudius and the town’s Romano-British and Early Christian associations all suggest it may have been an emblem of the legitimacy of Norman rule due to its connection with these earlier traditions.”

⁶⁹ Fernie, *Norman England*, 96. On 121 he is slightly more explicit about Winchester: he outlines its features, stating, “The cathedral at Winchester draws from imperial models, Speyer in particular, such as the raised east arm, crypt cushion capitals, etc.” Based on this formal connection, he goes on to say that “The cathedral at Winchester then becomes a clear statement of William’s wish to be considered in the same light as the German emperor and, at one remove, as Constantine.”

⁷⁰ See, for example, the British Archaeological Association conference transactions for Winchester and Durham: *Medieval Art & Architecture at Winchester*, and *Medieval Art & Architecture at Durham*.

⁷¹ Reilly, “Durham Cathedral: The Emergence of Anglo-Norman Architecture.”

more specialized literature is fairly rich and growing given the increasing interest in the Mediterranean and its complex interculturalism.⁷² As discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, many of these texts grapple with the complexity of a visual culture that on its surface appears to be an aggregation of Byzantine, Islamic, and Romanesque elements. Upon closer examination, Siculo-Norman monuments such as the Cappella Palatina are revealed to be not simply a cut-and-paste of Byzantine mosaics, Islamic ceilings, and Romanesque ground plans (Plates II, V, and Fig. 5). Each of these elements is not simply copied from its models, but rather transformed by its use in a Norman context. What seems to be a muqarnas ceiling decorated with princely scenes found in Fatimid Egypt is now understood to include images from western Romanesque sources, for example.⁷³ The work of Lev Kapitakin offers a detailed and nuanced analysis of the ceiling that suggests it is Islamicate rather than Islamic in nature while also including Romanesque and middle Byzantine references.⁷⁴ Similarly, the mosaics, although executed by Byzantine artists, do not strictly follow Byzantine iconographic or programmatic conventions. Despite being born and raised in southern Italy and Sicily, Roger, his heirs, and their court remained connected to northern European as well as Mediterranean artistic traditions.

Much of the scholarly literature is devoted to unraveling the complex chronology of the building and exploring the sources for its individual elements.⁷⁵ William Tronzo's landmark study, *The Cultures of His Kingdom*, provides a detailed analysis of the building fabric.⁷⁶ He posits three major phases to its decorative program: under Roger II (1095–1154), William I (1154–1166), and finally William II (1168–1189). Tronzo provides a more developed contextual analysis of the building than did previous scholars. He ultimately interprets the chapel as originally comprised of a royal audience hall with a ceiling decorated with secular imagery, which was transformed into an ecclesiastical space by a new mosaic program implemented under William I.⁷⁷

⁷² Intercultural exchange is understood to involve two or more cultures and can be described as “the mutual exchange of ideas and cultural norms”; it relies on a deep respect between all of the cultural groups involved. For example, see “What’s the Difference between Multi-cultural, Intercultural and Cross-cultural Communication?”

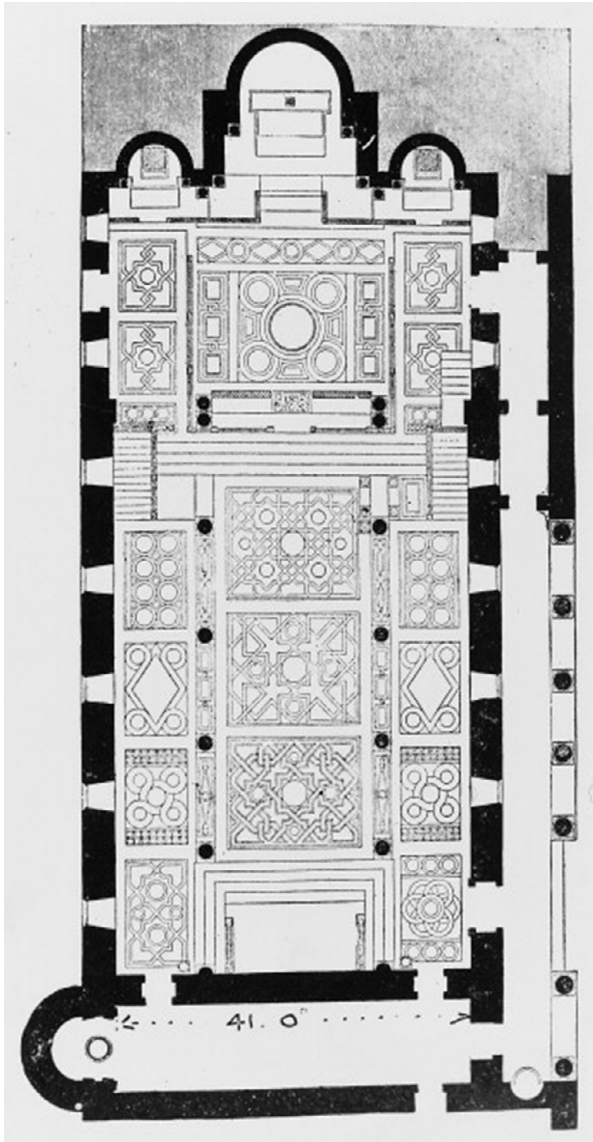
⁷³ Ugo Monneret de Villard, *Le Pitture musulmane al soffitto della Cappella Palatina in Palermo*, established a model for discussing the ceiling as derived from Islamic sources only – a view recently revised by the study of the ceiling written by Ernst Grube and Jeremy Johns, *The Painted Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina*.

⁷⁴ Kapitakin, “The 12th-Century Paintings of the Ceilings of the Cappella Palatina, Palermo.”

⁷⁵ See studies of the mosaics by Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*; Kitzinger, “The Mosaics of the Cappella Palatina”; and Borsook, *Messages in Mosaic*. See also Grube and Johns, *The Painted Ceilings*.

⁷⁶ Tronzo, *The Cultures of His Kingdom*.

⁷⁷ Not all previous scholars agree that the mosaic program was devised under William I: see Kitzinger, “Mosaics of the Cappella Palatina,” for example.



5. Cappella Palatina, Palermo, plan with pavement diagram, 1130–1154.

(Photo: after Domenico la Faso Pietrasanta Serradifalco, *Del Duomo di Monreale e di altre chiese siculo normanne ragionamenti tre*. Palermo: Roberti 1838 pl.SV)

Ernst Kitzinger, among others, sees the mosaic program as planned as a unified composition, although not executed at one time.⁷⁸ The complex program has lent itself to various interpretations. Eve Borsook emphasizes the theme of the special status of the Norman monarchy as common to the

⁷⁸ See Pasca, *Descrizione della imperial e regal Cappella Palatina*, and Kitzinger, “Mosaics of the Cappella Palatina.”

Cappella Palatina, Monreale and Cefalù.⁷⁹ Nora Nercessian stresses the Cappella Palatina program as an anti-papal celebration of the Norman king as the head of the Sicilian church.⁸⁰ While these varied approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive and contribute to our still emerging understanding of this complex visual language, none of them really considers the monuments of Sicily within the framework of Norman identity and visual language at large.

THE INVENTION OF NORMAN VISUAL CULTURE

The goal here is to examine, through a series of case studies from Normandy, England, and Sicily, how Normans used visual culture, and architecture in particular, to legitimize their rule in each area and promote themselves as rulers on a par with imperial rulers in the Latin West, Byzantium, and the leading powers of the Islamic world. The focus is on understanding how and why the Normans used artistic patronage to transform themselves from Viking raiders into dukes and monarchs with imperial pretensions. While the examples under study look very different in many cases, the approach to developing a visual language in each of their areas of rule is similar.

With few exceptions, these Norman and Anglo-Norman buildings have been analyzed in relation to one another, and generally their role as critical to the ultimate achievement of Île de France High Gothic is stressed.⁸¹ Siculo-Norman buildings have been left out of this discussion. Presumably their lack of physical proximity and clear visual similarity to the northern examples has promoted this approach. Their lack of importance for the vaulting evolution toward the desired goal of Gothic architecture also led to their marginalization. What this separation does is to omit conceptual links or patterns in building practice or attitudes toward the use of earlier traditions out of the discussion. There is a pattern to how Normans synthesized their traditions with indigenous ones; despite sharp differences in appearance, there are clear links with earlier cultural practices throughout the three regions under their political control. Through their lavish architectural patronage, there is the opportunity to analyze the relationship of Norman architecture to past building traditions and its principally historicist orientation.

Much could be gained by a regrouping of the traditional pattern. First, and most obviously, the Normans were not seers who knew that Chartres was just

⁷⁹ Borsook, *Messages in Mosaic*.

⁸⁰ Nercessian, "The Cappella Palatina of Roger II."

⁸¹ Kidson et al., *A History of English Architecture*. Kidson's treatment of Anglo-Norman Romanesque is virtually unique in its analysis of English buildings on their own terms rather than in terms of their contribution to an overall evolution of European architecture; however, this is perhaps to be expected in a book specifically on English architecture rather than on medieval architecture in general. See, for example, p. 52.

ahead and thus they could get their names into every survey book of the future by building with rib vaults. Rather, their architectural choices were based on other considerations, and in at least some cases it was the past rather than the future with which the Normans were concerned. Key features of major Anglo-Norman monuments such as Durham and Peterborough reflect a concern to emphasize the elements of continuity between the pre- and post-Conquest history of the site.⁸² Shifting the questions asked of these buildings to a consideration of Norman purpose or identity architecturally is distinct from their contribution to the Gothic of the Île de France, a consequence visible only in hindsight.

Secondly, a reformatting of the approach could also further our understanding of the Normans with regard to both their architecture and their culture at large; Norman visual culture could be considered as a group rather than separated into important contributors and interesting but unimportant buildings. One of the key debates in Norman history, for example, is whether Normans in Normandy were conquerors who imposed their ways and represented a rupture in the history of their territories, or whether they assimilated as they adopted local practice. At first glance, the architectural evidence might suggest neither or both. The transformation of the English architectural landscape following the Norman Conquest with the extensive construction of castles might suggest imposition as the answer to this question, while the indigenous features found at the Cappella Palatina and Durham suggest assimilation. At the same time these and other examples of Norman architecture are undeniably varied. Gloucester, for example, does not look very much like Monreale or Cefalù or St.-Étienne, Caen or Bernay; perhaps this is because of chronological differences, or perhaps because there was not a strong Norman identity that moved between Scandinavia, Normandy, Sicily, and England. What was common to these three areas of Norman conquest was an interest in making their presence known through architecture, architecture that is very big. Indeed, the very variety that is found may be the key to the commonality of Norman architecture. The manner in which native, often highly localized traditions were integrated with Norman ones may explain the rich diversity of their architecture. An acknowledgment of the diversity of Norman architectural forms as a conscious choice tied to political goals would reinforce Cassandra Potts's argument that the Normans were conscious of the mixed heritage of the people under their rule.⁸³ She cites the account of the dream of Rollo related by Dudo, which suggests the Normans were destined to bring together diverse peoples under one rule. The Norman identity seems to be

⁸² See Reilly, "Durham Cathedral," and *An Architectural History of Peterborough Cathedral*, chapter 7.

⁸³ Potts, "Atque unum ex diversis gentibus populum effecit."

based here in diversity, which may explain the variety found in their architecture. Joshua Birk describes the Norman monarchy of Sicily as forced to cross traditional boundaries in establishing both their identity and bureaucracy due to its particular circumstances: it was a kingdom with substantial Muslim, Byzantine, and Latin Christian populations. Roger II lacked clear precedents for the construction of his identity as ruler and thus drew on a mix of models.⁸⁴ While this is in many ways true, it is also the case that Roger's model may have been a specifically Norman one following the example of his fellow Normans in England and Normandy and in line with the creation myth narrated by Dudo.

The analyses of literary scholars and historians such as Elizabeth Salter, Christopher Baswell, Susan Crane, Cassandra Potts, and Antonia Gransden suggest a common theme in several areas of Norman culture: a Norman consciousness of the past and local traditions as a means of celebrating their history as well as integrating themselves into the history of their conquered subjects. It must be acknowledged, however, that the question of how much of the continuity between pre- and post-Conquest Britain can be seen as Norman enthusiasm for the past versus Anglo-Saxon retention of their tradition remains an open one. In *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, Seth Lerer asserts that Old English writing during the 150 years following the conquest was self-conscious in its use of language and literary forms that were no longer current. This possibly deliberate antiquarianism may be evidence of an instinct for self-preservation on the part of Anglo-Saxon writers rather than Norman integration into local traditions.⁸⁵ For the most part, however, these historians and literary scholars apparently regard the post-Conquest period as one that made strong and self-conscious use of literature and history writing to promote a sense of continuity in pre- and post-Conquest England. The application of these same questions about Norman identity, particularly across time and place, to visual culture studies would allow an examination of the Norman relationship to the past and non-Norman traditions, which should reveal much about what they most likely wanted their visual culture to express about themselves; an analysis based on the role of Norman buildings as harbingers of the future would not achieve this. Norman art historical studies can be recast, in part, following the model of historical and literary studies, which recognize Norman manipulation of the past as well as their concern for image and acceptance among the people whom they conquered. This approach acknowledges the Norman quest to represent their own identity as well as that of their subjects as part of their strategy for dominance through text and visual culture. While similar strategies may be employed at

⁸⁴ Birk, "From Borderlands to Borderlines," 1,3.

⁸⁵ Lerer, "Old English and Its Afterlife."

other sites, the Normans provide an opportunity for a comparative study given the range of their conquests and patronage.

While the new interest in Norman Sicily and southern Italy as part of a larger investigation of multiculturalism has led to a clearer understanding of the region's visual culture, this book proposes to take that investigation in a different direction. In this study, Norman Sicily is, as in many other recent studies, considered within the context of the Mediterranean region and its culture. It is also considered, to a greater extent than in many other studies, within the larger context of Norman visual culture and identity. By placing southern Italy and Sicily into both of these contexts, a more nuanced understanding of how visual culture was produced by Normans is possible. Their approach to using both past and contemporary examples of rulership, particularly with a religious focus, was part of what they brought to each of the regions they ruled. Their use of these examples was combined with a sense of their own identity as legitimate Christian rulers with ties to past traditions of rulership, both local and transnational. Although the products of this process in Sicily look quite different from those to the North, a comparison of, for example, St.-Étienne, Caen, or Durham with the Cappella Palatina indicates that their intended messages have strong parallels (Figs. 1, 2, and Plate IV). The shift here from considering Durham and St.-Étienne, Caen, as proto-Gothic to looking at them on their own terms – their function as opposed to their afterlife as zones of formal influence – is part of a larger scholarly movement away from evolutionary tracking of sources and influences. Similarly, the Bayeux Embroidery remains a highly contested artifact due to lack of agreement about its sources, style, and patronage; this leads to confusion about its intended meaning (Plate I).

The concern here is to acknowledge the complex process of Norman cultural production and to recognize it as an integrative one. The Norman design process differs from postcolonial discussions of cultural hybridity while also sharing that concept's notion of past histories and cultures intruding on the Norman present.⁸⁶ The debate about whether Norman rule represented a creation of empire or colonies is long-standing. A compelling overview is presented in David Bates's recent rethinking of the issue, *The Normans and Empire*.⁸⁷ Bates argues that the Normans in England created a "framework by which the new regime set out to establish its legitimacy and legality [which] can immediately be identified as a generic feature of empire."⁸⁸ I accept that

⁸⁶ This notion is widely associated with Homi Bhabha: see "Culture's In-Between." See also Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*.

⁸⁷ See in particular the first chapter, "The Normans and Empire," in Bates, *The Normans and Empire*, 1–27.

⁸⁸ Bates, *The Normans and Empire*, 20.

the Normans created this framework, but would suggest that its use is not restricted to the construction of empire. The Normans in Sicily, for example, were not colonial rulers in the sense of modern colonial powers such as Great Britain. They had no real political power in a home territory apart from southern Italy and Sicily from which they ruled. Although they identified as Norman, many of their leaders, including their king Roger II, had never been to Normandy. Their kingdom of southern Italy and Sicily was politically independent. Nonetheless, their relationship to their new subjects as outside conquerors suggests a connection with colonial/imperial models, as does Dudo's emphasis on their destiny as ruler of diverse peoples (discussed in greater detail later in the book). The Norman relationship to England in terms of a model of empire is also complex. Their situation did not easily fit within the conventional definition of empire as a single ruler or political unit with control over a number of territories or peoples. The Norman conquest of England was not simply a matter of one ruler expanding his territory or the crown claiming direct rule, as the British did over India in 1858. Through his conquest, the Duke of Normandy, William, actually became a king and thereby enjoyed a higher status than he did in France. He also followed through on what Normans represented as his legitimate claim to the throne. The relationship between England and Normandy is much more complicated than one of powerful center and colony. As in Sicily, despite the fact that power was acquired through military action, the emphasis in ritual, text, and visual culture was on creating an image of legitimate acquisition of power through right, not might – although in medieval terms the success of might implied a God-given right.

While the Normans' process of cultural production used past histories and cultures from their new territories, it also invoked other territories (for example, the classical past, the Holy Roman and Byzantine empires) and both past and present vocabularies. While their audience included their new subjects, it also seems to have featured those they considered as or wished to have as their peer: other rulers in the region. Following Clifford Geertz's discussion of man as suspended in webs of significance of his own creation, this study understands those webs to include visual culture, an interpretive analysis of which will lead to a greater understanding of its intended meaning.⁸⁹ The concern here is to understand the Norman process across all areas of cultural production as similar in its methods and goals. The process is seen early on in Dudo's *Historia Normannorum*, where Norman identity was first allied in writing with legitimacy and Christianity as well as in relation to rulership over a diverse group of subjects. These themes continued to be celebrated through

⁸⁹ Geertz, "Thick Description," 5, 9.

Norman cultural production, often through connections with the visual culture of past and present rulers as well as objects emblematic of their new subject's culture. Continuity and newness, or familiarity but difference, are strong themes in their culture across time and place, as are legitimacy, Christianity and diversity. Previous scholarship, particularly for England and Normandy, has established the framework of chronology, archaeology, sources, and influences that make this study possible. This study builds from this foundation in its use of selected examples to consider the question of whether *Normannitas* is relevant to cultural production and intended meaning, to view these examples through the lens of the Norman process of creating a legitimate identity for themselves across their newly acquired territories.

This approach can aid the understanding of how the creation of identity follows a similar path but leads to a visually diverse group of objects; those objects were intended to serve the common purpose of arguing for Norman political and cultural legitimacy. While earlier studies dissected these examples to identify sources and then stylistic phases of production, this one focuses on looking at the process of assembling sources in the creation of a familiar but distinctive message. Identifying purpose or intention behind medieval visual culture is always a tricky business; however, by looking across the circumstances of Norman rule in Normandy, England, and Sicily and the formation of the visual culture they patronized, patterns are apparent in the Normans' approach to creating a visual vocabulary of legitimacy and power. Those patterns suggest an intended meaning consistent with their own histories, in particular their first – Dudo's *Historia Normannorum*. Like their written history, these objects inscribed the Norman regimes into history as legitimate and powerful political entities with a tradition of Christian rule.

The following three chapters are divided by region: Chapter 2 considers Normandy itself and the roots of Norman identity; Chapter 3, England and the insertion of Norman rule into an ongoing history of kingship; and Chapter 4, Norman Sicily, where in fact a kingship was created – albeit one with claims of ancient lineage. As the Normans became monarchs in their newly conquered territories of England and Sicily, the process of identity creation established in Normandy became more complex in its sources and expression. As a result, the discussion of these regions is longer and more detailed than that of Normandy itself. This organization may seem to undermine the claim here to consider Norman visual culture as shared in its production and intended meanings, but in fact it is only by closely examining case studies from each region that their commonality, discussed in the final chapter, becomes apparent.