

FIVE

CONCLUSION

The Norman invention of visual culture throughout their territories supported their construction of themselves as rulers, charged with leading diverse people in avowedly Latin Christian realms. The earliest concrete expression of their self-awareness of their identity and mission seems to have been Dudo of St. Quentin's *History of the Normans*, written in the early eleventh-century. The very nature of this text, the earliest medieval history of secular rulers, resembles that of the visual culture examined here in its "potent combination of Roman and Christian, Frankish and Scandinavian elements."¹ While the list of ingredients used in Norman visual culture may vary depending on the time or place of its creation, the concept of using diverse vocabularies that reflect varying aspects of Norman identity underlies both Dudo's early construction of a narrative of Norman history and the ensuing development of distinctive visual languages in Normandy, England, and Sicily.

This diversity, made so apparent by Dudo's account of Rollo's vision in particular, but also in later Norman histories, is integral to their identity. In their creation of distinctive visual cultures, each responding to the unique circumstances surrounding their creation of Norman realms in Normandy, England, and Sicily, the Normans reinforced the myth established by Dudo.

¹ Albu, *The Normans*, 11.

Their invocation of Scandinavian, Classical, Anglo-Saxon, Byzantine, and Islamic models, among others, highlighted their understanding and promotion of themselves as legitimate Christian rulers of diverse peoples. As Albu points out, the Normans tended to invoke the most prestigious identity available into the formation of their own.² Beginning with their adoption of Carolingian governmental structures, texts, and visual culture upon assuming power in Normandy, the Normans invoked the language of past and contemporary political power in the formation of their own identity in each region of their rule.

A closer look at two of the objects under analysis in Chapters 3 and 4 highlights this pattern in the invention of Norman visual culture. Both the Bayeux Embroidery (Plate I) and Roger's Coronation Mantle (Plate II) can be understood as fundamental expressions of the Norman promotion of the legitimacy of their rule. Both were associated with conquest. The Bayeux Embroidery is a narrative depiction of the Norman conquest of England, and the mantle is a symbolic reference to the Norman conquest of Sicily. As we have seen, both William and Roger sought to legitimize their actions in seizing or creating their crowns and forming a unified kingdom out of ethnically disparate populations. Each was the first of his line to rule as king. Both also invoked papal approval. William of Poitiers recorded that William had the approval of Pope Alexander II for his conquest of England. He is said to have fought under a papal banner wearing consecrated relics at Hastings and is sometimes cast as a crusader bringing papal reforms to the English church. Roger actually secured the title of king by papal grant through his support for Anacletus I. In both England and Sicily, the physical conquest and coronation of a new monarch was accompanied by transformation of their respective visual cultures under the extraordinarily active patronage of the newly enriched and recently established Norman ruling class. In both kingdoms, the Normans remained a minority, but in both they not only secured the monarchy but also displaced the previous ruling class almost in its entirety.

The Embroidery and the Coronation Mantle can each be understood as fundamental expressions of the creation of a legitimate right to rule. The process of creating a symbol of legitimate rule that was comprehensible to multiple audiences was complex and multilayered. On one level, it was fundamentally inherent to the process of creating the Embroidery and the Mantle themselves. Each represented the act of conquest not only figuratively in its narrative or symbolic imagery; the actual commissioning of the objects represented the conquest materially. In the case of each, the art form and the artists were those of the conquered people. It is widely agreed, albeit with

² Albu, *The Normans*, 26.

some dissenting voices, that the Embroidery was produced in England by Anglo-Saxon embroiderers. As Richard Gameson rightly emphasizes, however, the identification of the Embroidery as by English hands in a medium for which they were internationally renowned should not prevent us from understanding it as a bicultural work.³ All the same, the production of work whose narrative clearly affirms the legitimacy of the Norman Conquest of England and William's right to rule, created in an art form for which England was famous, can be understood as further legitimizing the narrative as a kind of tacit endorsement of its subject matter.

Equally, Roger's Coronation Mantle was the product of a tiraz, a royal Islamic silk workshop for which Palermo had been famous long before the Norman conquest of Sicily. The workshop that produced this cloak was located within the palace grounds and staffed by Muslim silk workers. Once again, as with the Bayeux Embroidery, an object was made using a medium for which the new subjects of the Norman monarchy were internationally renowned. In addition, the Kufic lettering of the inscription and the image, generally interpreted as symbolizing the Norman conquest of Sicily, are both associated with the visual culture of the Islamic world, although this type of garment is typical of northern Europe.

As R. Howard Bloch has argued in his fascinating study, *A Needle in the Right Hand of God*, the Embroidery may represent quite literally the weaving together of diverse cultures to create something new, just as William hoped to forge a new kingdom. Bloch evocatively describes the Embroidery as "a suture for the wound of 1066."⁴ The same approach can be used with reference to the mantle, given the emphatically multicultural nature of Roger's kingdom.

But in fact, the stories of these objects, like the kingdoms they represent, are a little more complex than a multicultural synthesis intended to represent a newly unified kingdom. In addition to forging one kingdom out of diverse populations, William and Roger both sought to compare themselves to contemporary rulers, such as the Byzantine and Holy Roman emperors and North African caliphs. Furthermore, legitimization of their rule was also critical to the artistic patronage of these kings and their courts. This concern is evident in both the Embroidery and the Cloak.

As has been discussed in the more detailed analyses of these objects in Chapters 3 and 4, while Anglo-Saxon culture may have been the dominant source for the Embroidery and Islamic culture for the cloak, in the end, no one source or group of sources entirely explains either object. It is difficult to find a satisfactory term to explain the heterogeneous nature of their sources, artists, and patrons. The distinctness and clarity of the culture contributing to each

³ Gameson, "The Origin, Art and Message of the Bayeux Tapestry," 173–174.

⁴ Bloch, *A Needle*, 202.

work in some ways parallels the inclusion of *spolia* in other works of art and architecture. While the Embroidery and the Mantle contain no actual *spolia*, their use of Scandinavian forms, Roman and Carolingian images, and Kufic script may be read as virtual *spolia*, which function to display the rich heritage and claims of each kingdom as well as of the Normans themselves. In stressing the diversity of each kingdom's heritage, they also place each kingship within the framework of its history, as part of a sequence with parallels to Rome and the Holy Roman Empire as well as other contemporary rulers. These are parallels that at least in part are reinforced by Dudo's use of the *Aeneid* as a model for his history.

This study relies on the rich scholarly tradition of studying Norman art and architecture as separate entities according to geography, with an emphasis on understanding the patterns of sources and influences that underlie Norman visual culture; however, it also moves beyond that tradition. What is central to this discussion is the conceptual significance of these objects and how, despite their visual differences, they are similar in their expression of a Norman attitude or approach toward the role of the arts in their creation of their realms. Further study of other evidence of Norman culture, such as literary traditions and music, in each of their areas of rule may further our understanding of this process. In the case of Sicily, in particular, analyzing examples like the Cappella Palatina or Roger's mantle within the context of Mediterranean culture (rather than one circumscribed and separated by terms such as Byzantine, Islamic, and Romanesque) clarifies our understanding of how vocabularies were exchanged and invoked for audiences described as culturally varied. Perhaps further analysis of Mediterranean culture will suggest that the region may have been religiously but not necessarily culturally diverse, given its common classical foundation and shared vocabularies.

Similar to the nation founded by Rollo *ex diversibus gentibus*, the Normans created a visual culture that relies on an aggregation of *spolia* both actual and notional for its powerful message of rulership. The diverse sources for Norman art and architecture actually serve to expand their meaning – as objects that represent the cultural diversity of each kingdom, the rich heritage of the monarchy; perhaps most significantly, they represent the triumph of Norman rule not just as a military victory but as a legitimate succession to the throne and the return of true Christian rule.