

Portfolio I: Dudo of St Quentin, *Gesta Normannorum*

Chapter 10: Rollo sees the town of Rouen and determines to settle there in fulfilment of his
dream-vision

Leticia Magalhães da Silva Pontes

Professor: Katie Hawks

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The text chosen for this commentary, introduces the story of Rollo and inserts the narrative of predestination of his settlement in what later became the region of Normandy in France. He was a crucial figure during the Middle Ages. The *Gesta Normannorum*, was written by Dudo of ST. Quentin around the years of 1015 to 1026, who then compiled the story of the Normans¹. Dudo had as his patron, Richard I, but it was only the prosperous reign of Richard II that the text was finally written². It is important to highlight that this period in Norman history was of deeper expansion and consolidation of the Norman Identity³. However the text does not mention the period that Dudo lived in, but only the first three leaders of the Normans⁴. And the passage chosen for this commentary only addresses the first one of them, Rollo.

Since this text had the purpose of telling the story of the Normans from the beginning, it is important to interpret Dudo's interactions of the events with caution especially because his patron was Richard I. Dudo's writing presented some interesting aspects such as connection to hagiographical texts, references to Classical literature in motifs and structure, and a descriptive image of the place Rollo visited. The text presented Rollo as having a divine right and predestination over the region of Normandy.

¹ Douglas, D. C. "Rollo of Normandy." *The English Historical Review* 57, no. 228 (1942): 417

² Natario Thiago, *The Construction of an Identity in Early Normandy: Ethnogenesis of the Gens Normannorum* (*A construção de uma Identidade na Primeira Normandia: A Etnogênese da Gens Normannorum*) Scandia: Journal of Medieval Norse Studies. p.404

³ Natario Thiago, *The Construction of an Identity in Early Normandy: Ethnogenesis of the Gens Normannorum* (*A construção de uma Identidade na Primeira Normandia: A Etnogênese da Gens Normannorum*) Scandia: Journal of Medieval Norse Studies. p.404

⁴ Natario Thiago, *The Construction of an Identity in Early Normandy: Ethnogenesis of the Gens Normannorum* (*A construção de uma Identidade na Primeira Normandia: A Etnogênese da Gens Normannorum*) Scandia: Journal of Medieval Norse Studies. p.404

Oh Rollo, mighty duke and most superior leader,

Through Christ's gift this town will flourish under your leadership,⁵

Behold the mount of the church where you kept seeing yourself rejoice⁶

These passages could indicate that Dudo would like Rollo to be perceived as a strong leader, and perhaps as almost a savior, who with his leadership towns could finally prosper. The author also made it clear that Christ was beside Rollo, consolidating Rollo's influence even more. The association with Christianity also indicates that the Normans, although coming from the North, did adopt some of the Frankish culture.

Moreover, coming down off the ship and surveying the town at a swift pace, he saw its monuments laid in ruins, and large stones torn away from sanctuaries, churches shaken from their foundations and walls smashed on every side, and a small and defenceless band, and he began to be perplexed in spirit.⁷

By presenting the state of destruction of the land and the people, Dudo presents the idea of Rollo as a savior once more. Strengthening his destiny as a ruler of that territory and of its people. But it not only influenced how Rollo was perceived but how Richard I and Richard II

⁵ *Dudo of St. Quentin's Gesta Normannorum: An English Translation*, ed. Felice Lifshitz

⁶ *Dudo of St. Quentin's Gesta Normannorum: An English Translation*, ed. Felice Lifshitz

⁷ *Dudo of St. Quentin's Gesta Normannorum: An English Translation*, ed. Felice Lifshitz

were as well, since by getting the “Norman throne” they were responsible for that population perpetuating the role of protector and savior that Dudo created for Rollo.

Dudo’s writing had Classical references that he implemented on the text. He used of classical literary motifs and influence to give the Normans, more specifically Rollo⁸, an epic tale. He proved the Normans with a similar origin story of the Trojans⁹, such as in the Epic written by *Virgill*, the *Aeneid*. By adapting Rollo’s story into that format, he brought a different type of consolidation to the Normmians, where instead of creating a new narrative for them, he added them to a pre- existing one.¹⁰

The text written by Dudo also presented a very vivid imagery of the places that Rollo visited. This ties with the idea of a classic lala epic where the hero visits different places during his journey to then finally settle into his predestined place.

launched his sails before the ship-bearing winds and came by ship to Jumièges,
having traversed the deep where the cerulean whirlpool of the Seine, flowing with its
crystal-clear courses and lapping the fragrant grasses of its elevated banks and, going
to the open main of the inundating sea, discharges itself, and is often repelled,
according to the intervals of the moon, by a more swollen billow of the sea itself.¹¹

⁸ Natario Thiago, *The Construction of an Identity in Early Normandy: Ethnogenesis of the Gens Normannorum* (*A construção de uma Identidade na Primeira Normandia: A Etnogênese da Gens Normannorum*) Scandia: Journal of Medieval Norse Studies. p.5

⁹ Natario Thiago, *The Construction of an Identity in Early Normandy: Ethnogenesis of the Gens Normannorum* (*A construção de uma Identidade na Primeira Normandia: A Etnogênese da Gens Normannorum*) Scandia: Journal of Medieval Norse Studies. p.5

¹⁰ Natario Thiago, *The Construction of an Identity in Early Normandy: Ethnogenesis of the Gens Normannorum* (*A construção de uma Identidade na Primeira Normandia: A Etnogênese da Gens Normannorum*) Scandia: Journal of Medieval Norse Studies. p.5

¹¹ *Dudo of St. Quentin's Gesta Normannorum: An English Translation*, ed. Felice Lifshitz

And seeing the monastery of Saint Peter and reckoning the place to be holy and embellished with abodes of monkish habitation, he hesitated to linger there, but steered his ships to the other side of the river, to the chapel of Saint Vedast, and he placed upon the altar of the body of a certain virgin, Hameltrude by name, which he had carried there with him, and a name from the virgin's name has forever stuck to this chapel.¹²

This passage not only connects with the geographical imagery and the hero like motifs, but also with christianism. Here Rollo recognized the holiness of churches and monasteries, and was influential enough that the church he visited last, Saint Vedast, had its name changed in homage to the virgin that he brought into the church, Hameltrude. This presents to the reader the idea that not only Rollo was closer to Criitaniy that one could have imagined due to his background, but that he was also accepted by it, and could influence up to a certain level. This brings us back to the fact of Dudo's Patronage who was trying to establish a Norman identity, which clearly included devotion to christianity. However, it was only during Richards reign that the dynasty that Rollo indicated actually stated to impose authority over the territories that Dudo claimed it was conceded to Rollo when he first got to the region¹³. It was only after the reign of Richard I and his son Richard II that the Duchy of Normandy reached its more traditional borders¹⁴. This is a great example to prove that Dudo's writing

¹² *Dudo of St. Quentin's Gesta Normannorum: An English Translation*, ed. Felice Lifshitz

¹³ Natario Thiago, *The Construction of an Identity in Early Normandy: Ethnogenesis of the Gens Normannorum (A construção de uma Identidade na Primeira Normandia: A Etnogênese da Gens Normannorum)* Scandia: Journal of Medieval Norse Studies. p.406

¹⁴ Natario Thiago, *The Construction of an Identity in Early Normandy: Ethnogenesis of the Gens Normannorum (A construção de uma Identidade na Primeira Normandia: A Etnogênese da Gens Normannorum)* Scandia: Journal of Medieval Norse Studies. p.406

cannot be taken into full consideration as a historical document of the beginning of the Normans. It can be studied as a great product of its time, when analysing its influences and historical background and in that sense can give the reader a better understanding of how Dudo's time period looked than Rollo's. By trying to build the Norman identity, it could be argued that Dudo's work might be a better representation of what the Norman leaders thought of themselves than what they might have actually been.

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