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Philippa Byrne and Caitlin Ellis (eds.)

Maritime Exchange and the Making of Norman Worlds

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THE MAKING of 'Norman Worlds' has been the subject of scholarly enquiry and debate for decades, if not centuries, with an extensive published repertoire concerning the activities of the Norman *gens* in Normandy, England, Ireland, Sicily, Southern Italy, North Africa and Rus, and indeed in other territories not discussed in this volume, such as Wales, Scotland and the Middle East. Yet, despite this sustained interest in the geographically and culturally diverse theatres of Norman activity between the tenth and thirteenth centuries, and the proximity of the sea to all those territories notwithstanding, the conceptual place of the sea and river networks as a medium of connection and interaction has largely been overlooked to date. The edited volume *Maritime Exchange and the Making of Norman Worlds*, published in Brepols' Transcultural Medieval Studies series, is therefore a welcome and timely contribution not only to Norman historiography, but also to understandings of past seaborne migration and transcultural contact, which are of perennial relevance.

The volume brings together seven essays covering many of the regions where Normans were active between ca.1000 and ca.1200, as well as an Introduction by the editors, Philippa Byrne of Trinity College, Dublin and Caitlin Ellis of the University of Oslo, and an Epilogue by esteemed medieval historian and biographer of William the Conqueror, David Bates. The contributors take different approaches in their explorations of Norman transcultural activity, drawing on architectural (Bowden and Bowie, and Blacker), documentary (Cargile, Talbot, Collins, and Abdusalam), and numismatic evidence (Vukovich). The outcome is a volume that takes the first necessary, exploratory steps away from the shore to consider transcultural interactions and influences and how these may have manifested in material culture and documentary evidence from this period.

In their chapter, Mark Bowden and Allan Brodie, a former archaeologist and a former historian at Historic England respectively, explore the archaeological

and documentary evidence for the earliest phases of Pevensey Castle, the role of the Roman fortifications at Pevensey in the Norman invasion of England in 1066, and the memorialisation of the Norman Conquest through the architectural symbolism employed to link the conquerors with the Roman classical past. The authors argue that ongoing coastal erosion of the southern section of the Roman walls may have influenced the location of the first Norman earth and timber fortifications to the north-east of the site, close to the harbour for the defence of the Norman fleet, and that the keep was constructed in the years immediately after 1066 to commemorate the Norman victory.

Continuing with the theme of fortifications, recent University of Birmingham PhD graduate Andrew Blacker's chapter suggests that Byzantine towers may have influenced the development of the great tower, or keep, in north-western Europe in the eleventh century. Blacker outlines the possible networks of transcultural transmission for Byzantine military technology from east to west, namely "visiting western foreigners" (p. 60), such as mercenaries, diplomats, and pilgrims who may have brought eastern influences in military tactics and architecture back to north-west Europe upon their return. The latter included Count Fulk Nerra of Anjou, who has been credited with the construction of the earliest great tower in western Europe at Langeais, and who undertook regular pilgrimages to Jerusalem via the Byzantine empire which, Blacker suggests, "may have camouflaged ulterior motives" (p. 65).

Carolyn Cargile, recent PhD graduate of Fordham University, situates her chapter in the North Sea world of Orderic Vitalis with an analysis of Orderic's account of Tostig Godwinson's trip to Norway in the early months of 1066. Cargile tracks Orderic's narrative across the North Sea within saga material to suggest that there were "direct literary ties between Normandy and Scandinavia after 1066, enabled by transcultural maritime connections" (p. 87). In addition, Cargile draws attention to the significance of Orderic's personal experience of sea crossings at key moments in his own life and in his work, highlighting the parallels Orderic draws between the turbulence and challenges of sea crossings and the writing of history.

In his study of the motivations behind the late eleventh-century foundation narrative of St. Mary's, York, by Stephen of Whitby, Daniel Talbot, recent PhD graduate of the University of East Anglia, illuminates the ways that transcultural connections can be obscured or promoted to provide the desired narrative. Here, Talbot places the community's foundation narrative within the wider context of an ongoing dispute with the Archbishop of York, where the two parties emphasized either pre- or post-Conquest rights whose legitimacy was derived from the Danish and Norman kings of England respectively. In

this analysis Talbot demonstrates that despite the direct impact of the Norman Conquest on York, and Yorkshire more widely, Stephen of Whitby and the monks of St. Mary's consciously constructed their community's identity by looking to the new Norman dynasty for legitimacy, rather than to the area's Anglo-Scandinavian past.

Moving now to the Irish Sea, independent researcher Claire Collins describes the career of John de Courcy in Ulster and the transcultural connections he cultivated in Ireland, England and the Isle of Man. Not least amongst these were his religious associations, which both contributed to his lasting legacy and also reflected the adoption of earlier strategies of conquest. For example, Collins directly compares de Courcy's donation of the site of a decisive battle to the church to William the Conqueror's establishment of Battle Abbey.

From the waters of Northern Europe, Mahir Shaab Abdusalam, a member of the History Department of Tobruk University in Libya, moves the discussion to the Mediterranean. Abdusalam's study focuses on the single surviving letter of correspondence between King Roger II of Sicily and Caliph Al-Hafiz of the Fatimid Caliphate. As well as placing the letter within its transcultural context of diplomacy, Abdusalam provides the first English translation of the letter as an appendix to this article. Here, Abdusalam argues for an economic incentive for cordial relations between the Norman kingdom of Sicily and the Fatimid Caliphate, particularly with regards to Norman aggression towards Zirid North Africa, and the significance of commercial transcultural relations influencing wider Siculo-Norman interactions in this region.

Finally, Alexandra Vukovich, Lecturer in Late Medieval History at Kings College London, builds on recent scholarship re-establishing the significance of the extensive trans-Eurasian trade networks operating within Rus and between Scandinavia, the Byzantine Empire, the Middle East and Central Asia. Vukovich further states that Rus should not be homogenized as a single political, social, and cultural entity. This study argues that numismatic evidence demonstrates the existence of groups separate to the ruling Rurikid dynasty that also maintained transcultural connections, not least in their imitation of Byzantine coinage. Significantly, Vukovich argues, these non-centralized groups reflect alternative "pathways across northern Eurasia that oppose the methodological statism that often articulates the story of early Rus as one centred around Kiev and the princely dynasty" (p. 194). Here transcultural connections, through a study of coinage, illuminate nodes in an extensive commercial network represented by a variety of groups, many of which included members of the Viking diaspora.

As Bates states in his Epilogue, this volume "must be seen as opening

up important vistas on a huge subject" (p. 220). Indeed, it is a much-needed demonstration of the kinds of questions that may be asked and explored when not bounded by terrestrial, and particularly national frameworks of analysis. The essays in this volume represent a beginning and, though there is still much more to do in this area, they nonetheless indicate the variety and richness of transcultural connections within and between Norman Worlds, and the insights that can be gained by reorienting scholarly perspectives towards waterways.

*Rebecca Tyson
University of Bristol*