ONE

INTRODUCTION

Among 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

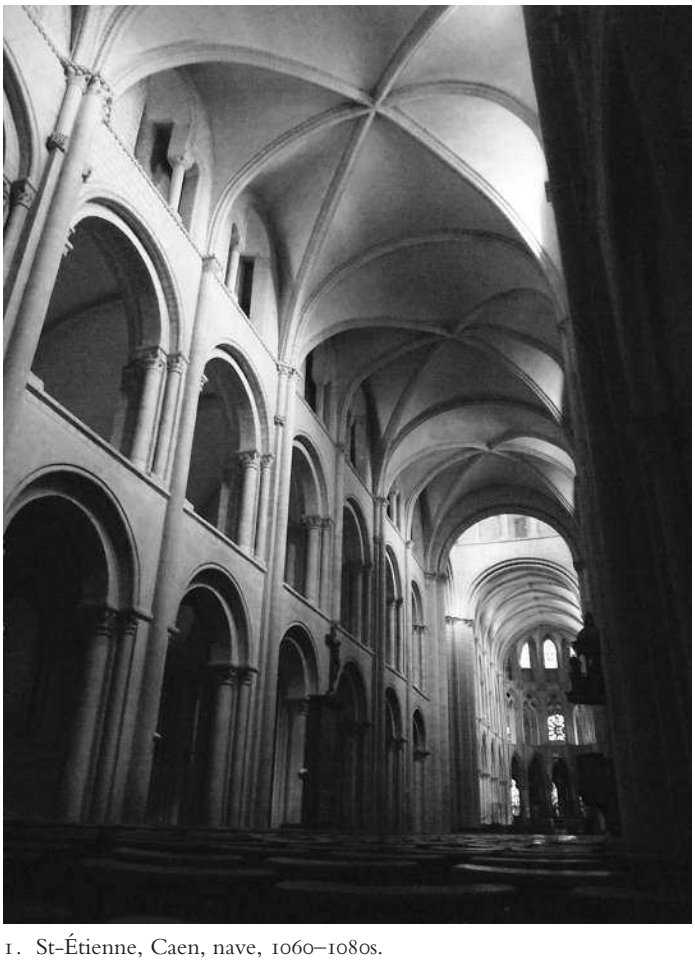
> being separated into genera or species, and without any disagreement or dispute . . . furthermore, they willingly yielded to his command, in the vision.[1]

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.

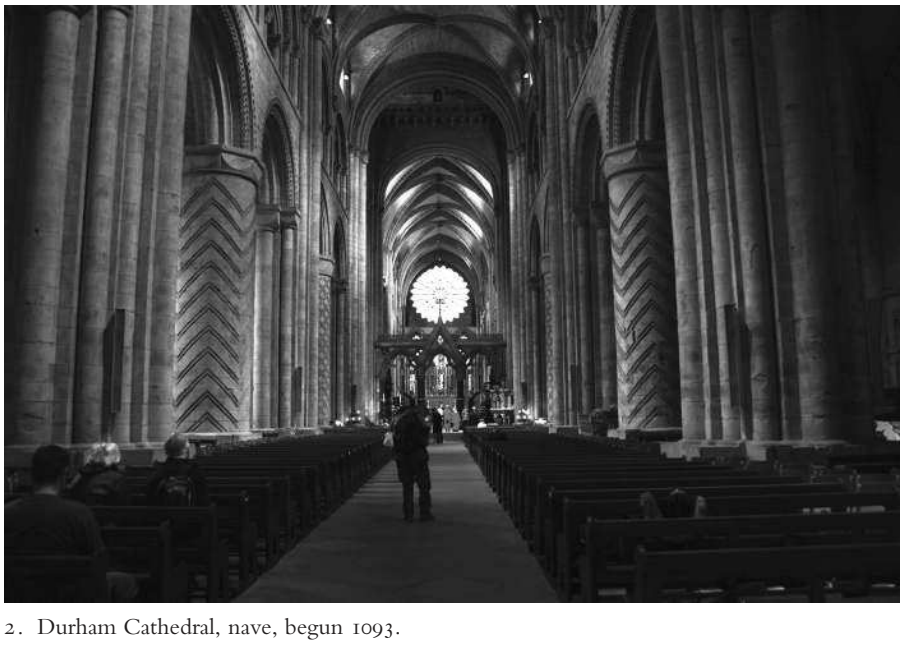
[1] Dudo, *History*, 29–30.
[2] Dudo, *History*, 31.
[3] Bony, *French Gothic Architecture*, 71.



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.