La première Normandie (Xe–XIe siècles): sur les frontières de la haute Normandie: identité et construction d'une principauté

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In the 1990s medieval historians were very preoccupied with border studies. No sooner had the dust settled on the collapse of the Berlin Wall than medievalists were taking advantage of no frills air travel to jet off and discuss borders, frontiers and marches. English interest in the history of Normandy predates the era of mass travel, however, for the events of 1066 gave us an almost proprietorial interest in the emergence of the territorial principality on the other side of the English Channel that had provided the Norman kings and the Anglo-Norman aristocracy. The publication therefore of this important new work by Pierre Bauduin, Maître de Conferences at the Université de Caen, is to be warmly welcomed.

The early history of Normandy is a complex and well debated topic that has focussed on the survival of the Frankish institutions in the area of northern France settled by the Vikings or Northmen, and on the assimilation of those Normans into Frankish society. Dominating the debate have been the two great Norman historians of the second half of the twentieth century, Michel de Boüard and Lucien Musset. Boüard saw the arrival of the Normans as a profound 'discontinuity' and, using the evidence of political institutions, he stated his case in, among other places, the pages of the *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*. Boüard restated the traditional interpretation of Norman history, whereas the view that the old Frankish estates had survived the disruption of the Norman settlement was advanced from 1945 by Musset, based on his detailed archival research. It is this latter view of continuity that was taken up in 1982 in the first British study devoted exclusively to the early history of Normandy by David Bates.[(1)](#)

The study of the Norman border, where the emerging Norman polity came into contact with its neighbours,

clearly has much to contribute to this debate. At the very end of the Second World War, Jean-François Lemarignier published an investigation of feudal homage ceremonies that took place on borders, and Lucien Musset himself has since discussed the frontier. The stimulus for Pierre Bauduin was, however, a series of local studies which looked in detail at border zones. In the late 1980s Judith Green published a study of the Vexin, but it was the work of Gérard Louise that inspired Pierre Bauduin. Louise spent more than twenty years studying the lordship of Bellême, where Normandy borders the county of Maine, and concluded that it was a 'fenêtre ouverte' for the king of France. Bauduin's ideas were also stimulated by a late intervention in the continuity debate by Eleanor Searle, who stressed the Scandinavian links of the Norman ducal family. Furthermore, in France an anthropological perspective has been used to great effect by Régine Le Jan.[(2)]

Pierre Bauduin has also taken account of much recent work on the text as construct. In this debate the important text is *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae Ducum*, the work of Dudo, a canon of Saint-Quentin in Picardy, who was commissioned at the beginning of the eleventh century by Duke Richard II (996–1026) to write a history of Normandy. There is no better description for what has happened to Dudo's work than the neologism that it has been comprehensively 'rubbished'. The most damning critique was that of Henri Prentout in the early twentieth century, but, as scholars have come to understand the cultural and literary context in which he operated, Dudo has to some extent been recalled from the depths of historical disapproval.[(3)]

In brief, Dudo presents a picture of a separate Norman people, who settled in an area deserted after years, not to say generations, of Viking attack. After conversion to Christianity, it was the historic mission of the dynasty founded by Rollo, the Viking chief, to lead a new Christian people, the Normans. In their military successes over their hostile Frankish neighbours, the newly Christianised Normans were presented as agents of divine punishment. Here we have the origin of the 'Norman myth', discussed by R. H. C. Davis in the mid 1970s, for the work of Dudo informs all the other Norman writers, such as William of Jumièges and Orderic Vitalis, both of whom developed the theme of the military prowess of the uniquely Christian Normans. The image of Normandy that Dudo constructed has pervaded the historiography and still hangs over the early history of the principality.[(4)]

After setting the historiographical and geographical contexts, Pierre Bauduin looks at the origins of the frontiers of upper Normandy. In the ninth century the name of one of the original Merovingian kingdoms, Neustria, had survived and was still applied to the area west of Paris. Its administration had been revamped to counter the power of the Breton rulers and, as Viking raids increased during the ninth century, expedients such as the fortified bridge at Pîtres were devised to prevent Viking penetration of the inland areas. We are here in Marc Bloch's first feudal age, when the castle is about to develop and defence is becoming localised, with an additional perspective of the territorial strategies, pursued by individual families such as that led by Robert, marquis of Neustria.

Territory was ceded to the Viking leader Rollo by the Carolingian king, Charles the Simple (893–922), in the Treaty of Clair-sur-Epte, conventionally dated to 911, although the earliest contemporary reference to the cession dates from 918. Bauduin sees this act in its Frankish context, as the king strove to maintain his position against the increasing powers of the great lords. The king's chosen ally, whom Bauduin describes as the "king's Norman" (p. 134), was admitted to the circle of Frankish lords, and the marriages of Rollo and his two children, William Longsword and Gerloc, into the families of the most important lords demonstrate that acceptance. The foundation of Normandy was not a sign of Frankish weakness in the face of Viking attack, but a conscious act of policy, calculated to procure the services of a military leader of proven worth, and those services were as likely to be used in internal power struggles as in repelling external attack.

The precise limits of the cession are unclear. Dudo indicates that the whole of the area now known as Normandy, together with Brittany was ceded, but there is no contemporary support for this. The annalist Flodoard of Rheims in fact mentions three instances in which territory was ceded in 911, 924 and 933, and Pierre Bauduin's research supports this view. His examination of material on the Evrecin, the area around Evreux in southern Normandy, could locate no satisfactory references to Norman influence there until the 980s, but he does identify coastal Picardy as an area of opportunity for the rulers of Rouen. After the

deposition of Charles the Simple in 922, the area was susceptible to rivalries. The counts of Flanders pushed southward and the Norman rulers of Rouen moved east. The prize seems to have been, even at this early stage, the potentially lucrative connection with England. The counts of Flanders already had a family connection through the marriage of Baldwin II (879–918) to Aelfthryth, the daughter of King Alfred, and King Louis IV of France (936–954) was, of course, Louis d'Outremer, since he had been exiled among his mother Eadgifu's people when his father, Charles the Simple, was deposed. The movement into Picardy was not without setback for the Normans, since the second member of Rollo's dynasty, his son William Longsword (933–42), was killed at Picquigny by the agents of the count of Flanders, leaving a young son, Richard I, and a lengthy minority.

For a hundred years from 888, the kingship of the Franks alternated between two families: Charles the Simple's successors and the descendants of Robert, marquis of Neustria. Count Richard I of Rouen (942–996) developed an alliance with the latter family when he married Hugh the Great's daughter Emma, but after Hugh's death in 956 that family lost influence. Some of their extensive property in the former Neustria, particularly the area around Chartres and Châteaudun, slipped from their control into that of another family, whom historians describe as the Thibaudians after the family's lead name of Theobald. Just as the marquises of Neustria had challenged the powers of the king, so now their own power was fragmented. Rivalry between the newly-established Thibaudian family and the not-much-longer established counts of Rouen took off in the 960s as the Thibaudians sought the support of the Carolingian kings and the counts of Rouen remained allied with the family of Hugh the Great.

During the 980s and 990s the Evrecin was the site of their battles, and there was to be continued conflict there right up to the 1060s, with Norman influence moving southwards only slowly. Pierre Bauduin has measured this southward expansion of the counts of Rouen through claim and counter-claim to the town of Dreux and a meticulous examination of the history of local families and the strongholds they held. He assigns a particularly important role to Ralph, half-brother of Richard I, who held the castle of Ivry-la-Bataille on the River Avre. He suggests that Ralph was established here and at Pacy in the stand-off between the Normans and the Thibaudians at the end of the tenth century. He sees (p. 210) locally established warriors gravitating to Ralph's service at the castle, and bringing their customs with them.

Ralph of Ivry was among the first of the Norman lords to be given the title count. In contrast with the title inflation of the rest of northern France, where local lords started to call themselves counts, the Norman counts of Rouen kept the title for their own use until they adopted the style of dukes of Normandy. Thereafter the title of count was sparingly conferred upon close family members, such as Ralph, who were given specific military tasks. The title thus retained, in some measure, the characteristics of the Carolingian office of count: it was granted by the duke, it was revocable and it held the specific duties of defence and the administration of the duke's rights. Ralph of Ivry played an important role in the consolidation of ducal power, both on the southern frontier and further west in lower Normandy, and many of his interests and responsibilities descended to his son-in-law Osbern the Steward, and to his grandson, William fitz Osbern, the companion of the Conqueror. As pressure from the south again heightened in the 1050s, Duke William built a castle at Breteuil, which he entrusted to William fitz Osbern.

In considering the Norman/Picard border in the eleventh century, Pierre Bauduin notes a similar focus of ducal influence at Arques, where William the Conqueror's uncle William was established from the late 1030s with the title of count. Another ducal cousin was established at Eu and by the second half of the eleventh century a comital dynasty was in place. It was in this area that the Norman dukes made greatest use of the politics of matrimony. A sister of Duke Robert II (1027–35) was married to Baldwin IV of Flanders; a ducal cousin, Godgifu, sister of Edward the Confessor, was married to the count of Boulogne; William the Conqueror married Matilda of Flanders. William's sister Adelaide became the wife of the Count of Ponthieu, and there is detailed discussion of the emergence of the county of Aumale which she carried to her next two husbands.

As the eleventh century passed, however, the Vexin border became more problematic, and it was a raid across this border that was to cost William the Conqueror his life in September 1087. The River Epte had

delineated the border of Norman influence since the earliest cession to Rollo, but the authority of the archbishop of Rouen extended further south, and in the early eleventh century numerous Norman religious houses held lands on either side of this frontier. Here the Normans' neighbours were the counts of Amiens, Valois and Vexin, with whom, from the mid tenth century, relations were generally cordial, culminating in the joint pilgrimage of Count Walter I and Duke Robert I of Normandy to the Holy Land in 1035. From the 1050s, however, there was a rapprochement between the counts and the kings of France, and William the Conqueror began to fortify this border, just as the others had been fortified. William Crespin was given the castle of Neaufles and Hugh of Grandmesnil was established at Neufmarché. The extraordinary retirement to a monastery by Simon, Count of Amiens/Valois/Vexin in 1077 gave King Philip I (1060–1107) an opportunity to seize his lands, and brought the king of France into direct contact across the River Epte with the man who was now king of England, as well as duke of Normandy.

Pierre Bauduin makes observations from the borders of Normandy and from there he discerns that the picture of political and territorial stability within the duchy in the tenth and eleventh centuries is illusory. The congruence of the duchy of Normandy and the archdiocese of Rouen was a product of the second half of the tenth century as the energetic society that emerged there expanded beyond the limits of the original area ceded to Rollo. Bauduin notes that during the eleventh century the dukes had the ability to control the frontiers through castles and the right of exile, but did so in partnership with a newly emerged aristocracy that had territorialised their power, seized the profits of office and built castles. For Bauduin, William the Conqueror's great achievement was to work with this aristocracy, when there was every likelihood that these developments would weaken ducal power. Border security was achieved in a different way in each sector, but in the 1060s, as a result of the deaths of King Henry I of France and Geoffrey of Anjou, William was sufficiently confident to capitalise on the links with England that had been developing for two hundred years, and in September 1066 he set sail for England.

So, does this hold water? Bauduin's analysis of the relationships of family to location is detailed and powerful, and he shows the dynamic of the ducal/aristocratic partnership at work. One lineage might gain through ducal patronage at the expense of another; thus the Gournays benefitted from the fall of William of Arques in 1053, and the duke might offer a reliable man an opportunity in an area where he had no landed interests, just as he entrusted Hugh of Grandmesnil with Neufmarché. Bauduin is strong on this ducal direction of the border families, but not every family can have been implanted at ducal behest. As Norman influence expanded from Rouen some locally established families must have been won over and convinced of the advantages of working with the ruler of Rouen or his agent. Just as Roger of Montgommery had to find ways of working with local families when William the Conqueror encouraged him to takeover the lands to the south of Normandy inherited by his wife, Mabel of Bellême, so the Normans must have had to work with locals in earlier periods. Otherwise Musset's argument about continuing institutions is undermined.

Now clearly it is not easy to find direct evidence for this. Bauduin comments on the absence of material both for the very early period and for the twenty years or so in which Richard I laid the foundations for Norman polity that is described by Dudo. Much has been deduced from examining the patrimony of Norman religious houses: the policy of Robert, marquis of Neustria is revealed in looking at the property of the abbey of La Croix-Saint-Ouen (p. 135ff), while changing political fortunes in the north east are demonstrated by the history of the College at La Ferté-en-Bray (p. 293). Bauduin is adept at finding the less well known sources – indeed, in her preface Regine Le Jan compliments him on his excellent knowledge of the written sources, but there is, in the final analysis, not much material to be found. Thus might it not be the case that the partnership of the dukes with a territorialised aristocracy that Bauduin sees in the eleventh century could also be found in the tenth century, if we had the evidence? Might Dominique Barthelémy's observation about revelation rather than revolution be helpful here?

This is a splendidly produced book that is a credit to its publisher. It is notoriously difficult to get genealogies right, but this reader found only one typographical error here – in Table VII, the counts of Ponthieu. There is a valuable appendix on the history of the counts of Evreux, as well as a dossier of 20 texts, 16 of them hitherto unpublished. Above all its contents are meticulously researched and carefully and

clearly presented. It is a thought provoking and important contribution, taking advantage of new approaches, to update our understanding of the emergence of the duchy of Normandy.

Notes

1. Michel de Boüard, 'De la Neustrie carolingienne à la Normandie féodale, continuité ou discontinuité?', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, xxviii (1955), 1–14; Lucien Musset, 'Notes pour servir d'introduction à l'introduction à l'histoire foncière de la Normandie: les domaines de l'époque franque et les destinées du régime domanial du IXe au XIe siècle", *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie*, xlix (1942/5), 7–97; David Bates, *Normandy before 1066* (1982).Back to (1)
2. Jean-François Lemarignier, *Recherches sur l'hommage en marche et les frontières féodales* (Lille, 1945); Lucien Musset, 'Considérations sur la genèse et le tracé des frontières de la Normandie', *Media in Francia: recueil de mélanges offerts à K. F. Werner* (Paris, 1989), pp. 309–18; Judith Green, 'Lords of the Norman Vexin' in *War and Government in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of J. O. Prestwich* , ed. John Gillingham and James Holt (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 46–63; Gérard Louise, *La seigneurie de Bellême Xe–XIIe siècles: dévolution des pouvoirs territoriaux et construction d'une seigneurie de frontière aux confins de la Normandie et du Maine à la charnière de l'an mil* (2 vols., Flers, 1992/3, special issues of *Le Pays bas-normand*); Eleanor Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power, 840–1066* (Berkeley, Calif., 1988); Régine Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir dans le monde franc (VIIe - Xe siècles): essai d'anthropologie sociale* (Paris, 1995).Back to (2)
3. Dudo of Saint-Quentin, *De gestis Normanniae ducum seu de moribus et actis primorum Normanniae ducum*, ed. Jules Lair (Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie, xxii (1865), transl. Eric Christiansen, *History of the Normans* (Woodbridge, 1998)); Henri Prentout, *Étude critique sur Dudon de Saint-Quentin et son histoire des premiers ducs normands* (Paris, 1916).Back to (3)
4. R. H. C. Davis, *The Normans and their Myth* (1976); qualified by G. A. Loud, 'The Gens Normannorum – myth or reality?', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, iv (1981), 104–16.Back to (4)

The author is pleased to accept this review and does not wish to add any comment at present.

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