



The historiography of the Norman worlds (17th-21st centuries):

construction, influence, evolution

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This colloquium aims to examine the "historiographical models" used to study the Norman worlds of the Middle Ages. This is understood to mean the interpretative frameworks of the past that have had a lasting impact on our reading and understanding of the history of each of the countries or regions affected by Norman expansion.

With regards to the Viking period and the settlement of Scandinavians in various parts of Europe, the questions that have been posed are different and the responses given have strongly influenced each of the historiographies¹. Scandinavian historiography has for a long time highlighted above all else the cultural homogeneity of Scandinavia during the Viking period, and its history has often been seen as that of the Danes, the Norwegians and the Swedes, as well as of their respective countries². As for France, the questions have for a long time concerned the impact of Viking raids on the internal evolution of the Frankish world. The history of the beginnings of the Norman principality has been built on two historiographical paradigms: the opposition/discontinuity in relation to Carolingian Neustria and the centre/periphery model in the construction of the state and of Norman society. In England, there has been intense debate regarding the size of the Viking armies, the density of Viking settlement and the nature of the social structures imported or consolidated. With regards to Ireland, scholarly attention had for a long time focused on the profound transformations experienced as a result of Viking invasions. In Scotland, questions have focused repeatedly on the means, peaceful or otherwise, by which the Vikings took over the Scottish islands and on the fate of the Pictish population. Russia has known intense debates since the 18th century concerning two systems (later qualified as "Normannism" and "anti-Normannism"), with one group attributing the social and political development of Russia to Scandinavian factors, and the other stressing the indigenous origins (above all Slav) of the Rus.

The "Norman adventure" of the 11th and 12th centuries (F. Neveux) aroused admiration and pride in France and Italy, where historians praised the fighting spirit of the conquerors as

¹ P. Bauduin, « Migration, intégration, identités : les fondations scandinaves en question (Orient-Occident, VIIIe-XIe siècle) », in *Des sociétés en mouvement. Migrations et mobilité au Moyen Age*, XIe Congrès de la SHMESP (Nice, 4-7 juin 2009), Paris, 2010, p. 45-57.

² F. Svanberg, *Decolonizing the Viking age*, 1, Stockholm, 2003.

well as their sense of nation and then, amid criticism of colonialism, the cultural cohabitation of communities, for which Sicily had been unique³. Examination of the historiography of the Norman Conquest⁴ recalled the importance given by the past to the legal legacy of the Norman period and to its place in the political agenda of England, notably in the bias of the "Norman yoke" theory developed in the 17th century. The evolution of research issues in the second half of the 20th century, as well as the use of concepts such as "empire" – the expression *The Norman Empire* coined by Charles Homer Haskins was the title of John Le Patourel's famous work (1976) – and "colonisation", and the debates that these have inspired⁵, have profoundly shaped both British and American historiography and continue to witness new developments to this day⁶. The place and positioning of these historiographical traditions is one of the most important aspects for clearly defining the position of observers⁷, and for understanding the images created and the fascination they have produced⁸.

Of course, in many respects these models have been discarded and new questions brought to light, in particular with regards to themes that are not tied down by local or national concerns: take, for example, those that have been developed concerning questions of identity, diasporas (Viking and/or Norman), the "Europeanization of Europe", frontiers, centres and peripheries, cultural transfers, etc. Some of these questions reflect the influence of particular movements or contemporary historiographical schools (cultural history, postcolonial history...), as well as the preoccupations of our societies (globalisation, European construction...).

The gathering organised at Ariano Irpino will examine in particular the historiographical constructions developed since the 17th century by looking at the place of the "Normans" in the "national story" of each country. It will also evaluate their influence on our knowledge of the history of the Norman worlds. What axioms have influenced the historiographical debates? Beyond their identification and classification, it is also important to understand their genealogy, their implications, their pervasiveness, their rejection and their deconstruction. The colloquium will also look to explore the orientation of a history of the Norman worlds developed from questions that go beyond national boundaries, schools and academic traditions.

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³ A. Nef, *Conquérir et gouverner la Sicile islamique aux XIe et XIIIe siècles*, Rome, 2011, p. 4 et suiv.

⁴ M. Chibnall, *The Debate on the Norman Conquest*, Manchester, 1999.

⁵ F. West, « The colonial history of the Norman Conquest », *History*, 84, 1999, p. 219-236.

⁶ D. Bates, *The Normans and Empire*, Oxford, 2013.

⁷ D. Crouch, « Les historiographies médiévales franco-anglaises : le point de départ », *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, 48, 2005, p. 317-326

⁸ R. H. C. Davis, *The Normans and Their Myth*, Londres, 1976; R. R. Davies, *The First English Empire. Power and Identities in the British Isles 1093-1343*, Oxford, 2000.

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