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Benjamin Pohl, *Dudo of Saint-Quentin's Historia Normannorum: Tradition, Innovation and Memory*. Woodbridge and Rochester: York Medieval Press, 2015. xii and 313 pp. Maps, tables, figures, plates notes, bibliography and index. \$115.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978 1 903153 54 3.

Review by Charles C. Rozier, Durham University.

Dudo of Saint-Quentin's *Historia Normannorum* is one of the most important sources for the early history of the duchy of Normandy. Begun during the last years of Duke Richard I (942-96) and completed in c.1115, during the reign of Richard II (996-2026), Dudo's *Historia* provides a narrative of Norman migration from Scandinavia, settlement in northern Frankia, and conversion from pagan pirates to Christian princes. Although modern commentators have often criticised the accuracy of Dudo's florid style (Christiansen, author of the most recent English language edition of the work, for example, argued that "the history is all wrong") the text offers unrivalled insight into the ways in which Dudo and his contemporaries attempted to digest and articulate the foundation of the Norman duchy within the changing cultural and political landscapes of post-Carolingian Frankia.[1] And while medieval authors did not always accept the truth or style of Dudo's narrative, his status as the first known author of Norman history ensured that the *Historia Normannorum* provided the "master-narrative behind the work of every subsequent generation." [2]

The concept of Norman identity features prominently in this thought-provoking new book by Benjamin Pohl (Lecturer in the Department of History at the University of Bristol), which is the first publication in a new series from York Medieval Press and Boydell Press, entitled "Writing History in the Middle Ages." Pohl has developed an extensive programme of research into the creation and evolution of Norman self-imaging during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. His work is marked by a pronounced focus on medieval manuscript sources, and this provides a driving theme of the research presented in this new book.[3] At the beginning of the book, Pohl outlines the rationale behind his work by highlighting the paucity of research on the manuscript transmission of Dudo's *Historia Normannorum*. He shows that Lair's edition of 1865, which he regards as "outdated, and in many regards unsatisfactory", was based on fewer than half of the manuscripts now available (pp. 36-7). Moreover, Pohl argues that the most recent study of the manuscripts by Huisman (1984) was "tentative," "inaccurate," and even based on "erroneous observations" (pp. 39-40).[4] This indicates that this important monument to the early history of Normandy may be, in many ways, incomplete in the form in which readers currently encounter it, either through Lair's edition or the English translation of Christiansen, which was based on Lair. With this in mind, Pohl attempts to examine the manuscript transmission of Dudo's text, and to explore some of the ways in which this body of material might help us to know more about its impact on the development of Norman culture and identity from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries.

The material presented in Pohl's book develops from an extensive programme of research into the fifteen surviving manuscript witnesses. These are dated and described in some detail in an appendix to the introduction (pp. 18-33) supplementary tables in chapter one (pp. 43, 46 and 55) and in two further

appendices at the end of the book (pp. 262-3). Four analytical chapters explore various issues related to the transmission of the *Historia Normannorum* during the medieval period, and in doing so, provide new insights into Dudo's original vision for the text and its role in shaping Norman identity in the centuries which followed its completion. The first chapter, "Manuscripts" (pp. 34-108) comprises a statistical analysis of where and how much of the text of the *Historia Normannorum* appears to have been transmitted before c.1250. The second, "Tradition" (pp. 109-55) describes Dudo's original intention to sculpt a narrative of legitimacy within existing Carolingian and Roman models and in doing so, situates Pohl alongside previous discussions in this area by Shopkow and Albu.^[5] Chapter three, "Innovation" (pp. 156-223), explores the topic of Dudo's possible audience and, focusing primarily on the later eleventh-century manuscript witness from Jumièges, proposes a hypothesis that Dudo originally imagined his work as an illustrated history. The fourth chapter, "Memory" (pp. 224-51), examines the reception and use of Dudo's *Historia* in later Norman histories by William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni, and the reception of Dudo's account in twelfth-century England.

Pohl's approach combines an interesting mix of textual criticism and highly technical manuscript analysis, through which he contributes to a thriving recent discourse on concepts of identity and uses of the past in medieval Europe. Those new to the study of Norman history have much to gain from his commitment to providing extensive historical background to some of the major figures discussed, including the Dukes of Normandy and Dudo himself (see for example, pp. 109-24) while those new to manuscript studies are provided with valuable models of how to describe individual artefacts and their constituent features using all the relevant technical terms.

If Pohl's extensive engagement with the manuscript witnesses to Dudo's text is a defining characteristic of this book, it is also its most important contribution to current and future scholarship. Although Lifshitz has raised some queries on how Pohl has dated certain manuscripts,^[6] the level of detail offered in Pohl's descriptions in his corpus, tables, and discussions, which is in turn augmented by the extensive use of figures and plates throughout the book, ensures that he has succeeded in his ambition to supersede the work of Lair and Huisman. This book should be regarded as the essential starting-point for all future research into any or all of the manuscript copies of Dudo's *Historia*. Indeed, Pohl's work heightens the need for a new critical edition of the text that draws on his analysis. If the research presented here has been envisaged as a first step towards this goal, then Pohl has established himself as a prime candidate to undertake the work in preparing a new modern edition of the *Historia Normannorum*.

While Pohl's manuscript work provides new material for future scholarship, his discussions also attempt to engage with existing discourses on Dudo's work. His principal thesis on the nature and purpose of the *Historia Normannorum* is delivered across chapters two and three, during which he follows the traditional reception of the text, as seen most recently in the work of Shopkow and Albu. Following a detailed summary of existing knowledge on Dudo's life and works (which, for any beginners, arrives perhaps a little late in the book, at p. 109), Pohl characterises Dudo as a talented graduate from the Carolingian tradition of learning, who was able to remould the Norman past into a shape more palatable to the prevailing traditions of Frankish history and literary tastes. Across chapters two and three, he explores the functions of the eighty-nine poems that feature within the original version of the text. Pohl shows that, even if later scribes struggled to present them as such, these poems were in fact an original feature through which Dudo aimed to imbue the *Historia* with a "distinct aura of stylistic and intertextual authority" (p. 146). In this way, Pohl's work owes much to Shopkow, who discussed many of these themes within the development of Norman historical writing, although with nothing like the detail and insight offered here by Pohl's focus on the manuscript survivals.

In chapter three, Pohl posits a hypothesis that Dudo's poems were originally accompanied by a programme of illustrations such as those which were intended for, but never added to, an eleventh-century copy from Jumièges (now Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale MS 1173/Y11). This thesis may be

regarded as Pohl's most original contribution in the book, but requires careful reading. Following a comprehensive reconstruction of these incomplete illustrations, he argues convincingly that the Jumièges manuscript would have provided a valuable status symbol or diplomatic gift if intended for a lay audience that did not have the ability to read or understand the accompanying text (pp. 193-4). Less convincing is Pohl's suggestion that Dudo himself may have added a programme of illustrations to his *Historia* and that the text was "designed, from the outset, as an illustrated chronicle, making it one of a kind in medieval Normandy, and perhaps even one of the earliest examples of illustrated historiography to survive from anywhere in the Latin West" (p. 252, and see also p. 254). While Pohl posits an entirely plausible suggestion that the Jumièges manuscript was copied from an earlier exemplar, his hypothesis that Dudo produced an illustrated copy in c.1015 rests on the interplay between the poems and blank spaces in this manuscript alone, and as such cannot be shown to reflect Dudo's original intentions until further evidence comes to light. Further research in this area would be of great benefit to students of medieval history writing, should Pohl decide to pursue this avenue of thought in future.

Given that Pohl presents extensive evidence on the transmission of Dudo's *Historia*, his chapter four, "Memory," provides an opportunity to explore some of the ways in which the text was received by later authors of Norman history and also by later copyists whose work helped to disseminate and preserve the work. Covering just twenty-six pages, the discussion of the former is, however, a little short, given the wealth of material on Norman history-making and identity which is available in the narratives by William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni, and especially when compared to the length of the previous chapters. Pohl does discuss William's attitude to Dudo's text elsewhere (for example, pp. 130-6), but it would be interesting to see how far the impact of Dudo's Norman identity compares with those featured in the works of these other authors, or indeed, their various contemporaries active in producing narratives of Norman history in England and southern Italy.

In his introduction, Pohl states that his "foremost objective" is to highlight the "functions of Norman historiography as a medium of cultural memory" (p. 6). However, the insights offered by models of Cultural Memory Studies are perhaps not sufficiently pronounced within the analysis or conclusions for their impact to be fully understood by those for whom this field of research is new. In fact, it is possible to suggest that Pohl's book operates in a much more traditional field than he has argued. His research is firmly grounded in the manuscripts and, in focusing on Norman conceptualisations of identity, Pohl seeks to engage with one of the most important and long-standing topics for historiographical debate within the field of Anglo-Norman studies.^[7] He does so in a highly informed manner, and has brought new evidence into play within an important and long-standing debate. Perhaps more could have been said on exactly how the concept of cultural memory operated in the context of eleventh- and twelfth-century Normandy, within the main chapters of Pohl's discussion.

This is a richly produced book, comprising numerous figures apparently composed by the author himself, and a total of twenty-two high-quality images of original manuscript sources. As such, it lays down a marker for future high-quality monographs, and bodes well indeed for the future development of the York Medieval Press-Boydell partnership, and the "Writing History in the Middle Ages" series.

Pohl's book delivers an important new contribution to the study of Norman history and identity and the development of historical writing during the European Middle Ages. His manuscript research is exhaustive, and feeds into some new and important insights. Other aspiring young medievalists would do well to recognise the value of this methodology. Although a number of issues raised in the book remain unanswered, most notably the identity of Dudo's original patrons (discussed pp. 54-6, 113-24 and 156-7) and the character of his original audience (discussed at length in chapters two and three), Pohl's analysis does bring us closer to plausible conclusions on what are undoubtedly highly complex issues. This book will provide a valuable contribution to future academic discourses on numerous topics, from the in-depth analysis of Dudo's *Historia Normannorum*, discussions on the role of the past and historical writing in medieval cultures and, perhaps most importantly of all, to wider debates on the

development of Norman, and with this also Frankish, society and culture, in the crucible of the tenth to twelfth centuries.

NOTES

[1] Eric Christiansen (trans.) *Dudo of Saint-Quentin: History of the Normans* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1998), p. xv.

[2] David Crouch, *The Normans: the History of a Dynasty* (London, 2002) p. 313. See also, Elisabeth van Houts, "Historical Writing" in *A Companion to the Anglo-Norman World*, eds. Christopher Harper-Bill and Elisabeth van Houts (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002), pp. 103-121.

[3] See for example, B. Pohl, "Abbas qui et scriptor? The handwriting of Robert of Torigni and his scribal activity as Abbot of Mont-Saint-Michel (1154-1186)," *Traditio* 69 (2014): 45-86; B. Pohl, "When did Robert of Torigni first receive Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*, and why does it matter?," *Haskins Society Journal* 26 (2015): 143-67; B. Pohl, "The illustrated archetype of the *Historia Normannorum*: Did Dudo of St. Quentin write a 'chronicon pictum,'" *Anglo-Norman Studies* 37 (2015): 225-55.

[4] *De Moribus et actis pomorum Normannie ducum*, ed. J. Lair, Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie 23 (Caen, 1865), pp. 104-14; G. C. Huisman, "Notes on the Manuscript Tradition of Dudo of St Quentin's *Gesta Normannorum*," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 6 (1984): 122-35.

[5] Leah Shopkow, *History and Community: Norman Historical Writing in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997); Emily Albu, *The Normans in Their Histories: Propaganda, Myth and Subversion* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2001).

[6] Felice Lifshitz, "Pohl, Benjamin: *Dudo of Saint-Quentin's Historia Normannorum: Tradition, Innovation and Memory*," *The Medieval Review*, 2016.

[7] David C. Douglas, *The Norman Achievement, 1050-1100* (London: Eyre and Spottiswode, 1969); R H. C. Davis, *The Normans and their Myth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976); R. Allen Brown, *The Normans* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1984); Nick Webber, *The Evolution of Norman Identity, 911-1154* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005).

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