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Lisa Reilly, *The Invention of Norman Visual Culture: Art, Politics, and Dynastic Ambition*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020. xiii + 214 pp. List of illustrations, acknowledgments, selected bibliography, and index. \$99.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781108488167.

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Lisa Reilly's new book is an account of Norman visual culture in three geographical areas under their rule, Normandy, England, and Sicily, and encompasses a seventy-year period. Divided into four chapters, the first outlines the general themes of her work, with the subsequent ones devoted to each of these regions. Reilly presents a refreshing perspective on the question of *Normannitas*, or the self-identity formation of a group of people who became known as the Normans. Visual culture played a key role in its crafting, and she points to similar concerns that went into the creation of buildings as different as Saint-Étienne in Caen, Durham Cathedral, and the Cappella Palatina in Palermo. She argues for a shared vision or set of messages in these monuments, which began in Normandy, repeated in England, and then in southern Italy and Sicily. Reilly highlights works that have a "kind of hybrid status" (pg. 1), both when they were made and as later interpreted by scholars. The hybridity and diversity of Norman art and architectural production came from either their Anglo-Saxon/Scandinavian or Islamic/Byzantine components, in addition to Rome. She sees hybridity as something that their Norman patrons were highly aware of, whose source was their own mixed Viking-Scandinavian identity, and which ultimately served to legitimize their rule over diverse populations.

In the introductory chapter (expanded in chapter two), Reilly points to Dudo of St. Quentin's *Historia Normannorum* of ca. 995–1015 as the foundational text that defined the Normans, an idea she sustains throughout her book. Commissioned by Richard I and his son Richard II, the ambitious *Historia* was the first secular work written in a chronicle format previously reserved for ecclesiastical patrons, which also borrowed from local traditions of hagiographical writing. In Dudo's work, the key episode Reilly highlights is the narrated dream of the Viking Rollo, the first leader to whom Charles the Simple granted the land of Normandy, and most likely the title of Count of Rouen, at Saint-Clair-sur-Epte in 911. In Rollo's colorful dream, he received the calling that the Normans would rule over diverse subjects as Christian rulers, which was how they would legitimize their control later in England and in Sicily. In each subsequent chapter, Reilly returns to these central themes and the ways they were expressed in Norman texts, rituals, and material culture. Together, the above shaped their cultural memory and hence their group identity. Dudo's *Historia* is just one example of their tendency to self-historicize, expressed visually in the Bayeux Embroidery (ca. 1075) and in works like William of Poitiers's *Gesta Guillelmi* (1071–1078). The latter glorified Duke William the Conqueror and his military

successes, comparing them to the taking of Troy and the triumphs of Roman antiquity, while Dudo used Virgil's *Aeneid* as a model.

What is particularly noteworthy in this chapter is the discussion of how early scholars and theorists approached medieval architecture through the lens of other disciplines. Their adaptation of a taxonomic method loosely derived from natural history supposedly proved a steady progression in medieval architecture, with High Gothic at the pinnacle of its evolutionary paradigm. These ideas and notions reverberated in survey books and achieved exceptional longevity (far longer than most of us teaching introductory classes care to acknowledge). Normandy and England were singled out as the place of origin of the rib vault, skeletal elevations, and balanced façade, all deemed critical components necessary for arriving at the seemingly teleological goal of the Gothic. Most studies did not consider Siculo-Norman buildings since the island's medieval art and architecture could not be incorporated within this framework and was included only intermittently as examples of the admixture of different architectural styles. Reilly uses as an example Kenneth J. Conant's *Carolingian and Romanesque Architecture, 800–1200*, which was first published in 1959 with many later editions into the 1990s, and his judgment of Sicilian works as “exotic” and “overblown.”

Chapter two explores the century-long transition of the Normans from Viking marauders into legitimate Christian rulers. Reilly emphasizes their awareness of the need for establishing continuity with Carolingian traditions, achieved by means of their patronage of monastic sites and the adoption of earlier administrative and governing practices. The two most significant were the major Benedictine monasteries of Jumièges and Fécamp, the latter designated as their dynastic burial place. Reilly credits the incoming ecclesiastical figures William of Volpiano and the later Lanfranc of Pavia, who were charged with the reforming of local monastic communities, as responsible for introducing architectural ideas as well. Consequently, the monumental west front of Notre-Dame de Jumièges (1040–1067) follows Carolingian and Ottonian examples. She points to a remarkable transition at the abbey of Saint-Étienne in Caen (begun in the 1060s), founded by William the Conqueror, whose tripartite elevation and clarity of form throughout was a major innovation signaling a new kind of building in Normandy. William's wife Matilda of Flanders commissioned the female monastery of abbey of Sainte-Trinité on the other side of Caen, and along with the ducal residence, these twin institutions dominated the town. A similar pattern of ecclesiastical and secular construction, albeit on an immense scale, occurred after William's conquest of England and would have been recognizable symbols of political control.

In the third chapter, Reilly picks up the discussion from the introduction on what she identifies as the principal attributes of Norman rulership. Following his victory at the Battle of Hastings, William felt the need to legitimize his reign. A key means of doing so was to minimize any sense of rupture, presenting a seeming continuity with his Anglo-Saxon predecessors. He adopted local rituals and liturgical practices, specifically English coronation rites. In the visual realm, he made use of Edward the Confessor's imagery for his royal seal. On the European stage, he looked to Rome for support from the papacy and turned to continental traditions of rule by invoking imperial models. His thrice-yearly coronations emphasized divine approval, which as Reilly demonstrates was communicated also in the Bayeux Embroidery that narrated the conquest. Created for a Norman patron, its actual materiality and craftsmanship inextricably bound it to the Anglo-Saxon sphere, making it a bicultural work. Yet, as she rightly points out, a far greater range of sources were drawn upon for its production, from Scandinavian to Roman, in addition to Carolingian and Ottonian imperial portraiture.

The monumentally sited Durham Cathedral above the Wear River built a few short decades after the Harrying of the North is central to this discussion. Begun in 1093, Durham is a later example of the Norman large-scale replacement of pre-conquest ecclesiastical buildings. Elected by William I as bishop, William of St. Calais chose Anglo-Saxon Benedictines to care for the immensely important cult of the seventh-century bishop of Lindisfarne, St. Cuthbert, who was earlier venerated at the site. Largely considered as the Anglo-Saxon “kingmaker,” the Venerable Bede, later buried in the same tomb, reinforced this role of the saint. The restoration of the original monastic community proved that the conquest was not a rupture and provided a sense of continuity. Durham was clearly a Norman commission in terms of its great size, ground plan, and elevation. Decorative elements within the church overwhelm the viewer, from the deeply engraved patterns on massive piers to the interlaced dado arcading in the nave that Reilly argues were derived from an Anglo-Saxon decorative vocabulary. In this section, however, she does note the limitations inherent to such an interpretation since not much is known about pre-Norman buildings. Thus, she calls them conceptual, as one can only assume references made at this site to an autochthonous visual culture. Indeed, the entire building is often described as an encasement for Cuthbert. Located under a ribbed canopy formed by the Romanesque choir, his shrine was framed by piers incised with spirals meant to recall the setting of the tomb of St. Peter in Rome. In addition to his body, the sumptuous banner linked to Cuthbert had a similar status as a relic unto itself. Reilly demonstrates how the Normans maintained Anglo-Saxon traditions when it served their objectives, which was of particular importance at northerly Durham, an area that had experienced great turmoil following the conquest.

In this part of the book, she introduces the idea of notional spolia, drawn from what Richard Brilliant earlier had labeled as *spolia in re*, which is the simulation of the outward characteristics as well as the essence of antique works.[1] She argues that these elements were made manifest at Durham and in the Bayeux Embroidery. This act of appropriating meaning or an association with the past can be distinguished from Norman Sicily, where Roman columns and porphyry are part of the physical fabric of the Cappella Palatina. The meaning or significance in the English commissions is the same since an analogous action takes place. When these components become integrated into an artwork, they generate new meanings even though their original state can still be identified for both actual and virtual spolia. This discussion is fascinating as it highlights the integration of the past at Durham in its usage of Anglo-Saxon elements or remnants in its decorative program and in the very materiality of the Bayeux Embroidery that was part of a local tradition of craftsmanship. However, this interpretation becomes somewhat overstretched when she considers the so-called Coronation Mantle of Roger II and its Kufic script, which is compared to the Embroidery at some length in the conclusion. To call it a work of notional spolia does not sufficiently account for the multiple processes that made its creation possible, operating in networks of meaning and transcultural exchanges in a wider Mediterranean context.

Chapter four turns to the art and architectural production of Norman Sicily and is certainly the longest, most dense, and substantial in the book, and perhaps the most successful as well. As she also discusses in the introduction, Reilly points to the past marginalization of Sicily as the same reason for which it has drawn so much recent scholarship, namely the myriad cultural traditions of the Norman court in Palermo. The key site and even the building exemplifying them is the Cappella Palatina, called by many a hybrid monument. Among them, the greatest attention is given to its supposed Byzantine and Islamic elements, with less accorded to those identifiably Roman. Scholars generally consider its disparate parts, interpreting each as if they were

addressing a different subset of the population, but which more frequently reflected the specialty of its interlocutor. She argues that we need to comprehend the palatine chapel instead as dependent on these separate components for its cumulative effect, necessitating a holistic understanding. To this end, she gestures toward interactions and exchanges that allowed for the creation of such works in the Norman court, and to a common visual culture shared with other elite communities in the Mediterranean that crossed over religious or cultural divides as perceived today. She suggests an interpretive model for this monument based on the craftsmen or creators working in the chapel who implemented Byzantine, Islamic, Latin Christian, or Romanesque vocabularies for the building and its ornamentation. Even though the nave and side aisle mosaics are products of later campaigns, she sees the chapel as conceived by Roger II and thus comprising a singular message or vision.

Like William I, Roger had concerns about establishing the legitimacy of his rule. His support of the anti-pope Anacletus II and the opprobrium he faced after his coronation from most of Europe and Byzantium made this need even greater. In terms of its representation in visual culture, she points to the Pantokrator in the apse of the Cathedral of Cefalù and in the Cappella Palatina, as alluding to their triumphal and perhaps even divinely sanctioned rule, while Peter and Paul appear due to the Norman kings' role as papal legates. She emphasizes the acquiring of porphyry tombs by Roger II and the creation of his mantle as making his sacral kingship manifest. Drawing from Hobsbawm, Reilly argues for his invention of a tradition of rule, while promoting Norman claim to it as a divine right. This is precisely where the importance of coronation and the rites accompanying it are so significant. In view of the above, she does not completely draw together these two figures of William I of England and Roger II. The character of their reigns offers many parallels illustrating the key themes of continuity, legitimacy, and rule over diverse persons that she uncovers in her book.

Reilly gestures only partly to the fundamental difference between Norman rule in the Italian south and in England and Normandy, which is that Count Roger I, his son Roger II, and his successors, governed over a multifaith population of Muslims, Latins, Greek Christians, and Jews. This question problematizes what she identifies as integral to their visual production, their legitimacy specifically as Christian kings, and here the importance and connection to papal Rome and Byzantium is clear. Though this message becomes much less so when thinking of the local populace of Sicily and when looking outward to the Mediterranean, which she rightly notes was inhabited by cultural elites whom Roger's court commissions were also addressing.

There is certainly great merit in considering together the three geographical locations in Reilly's book. However, the treatment is not entirely even in her discussion of the literature in the introductory chapter. She expounds on the late-nineteenth historiography on the Normans in Normandy and England. Yet for Sicily, only authors of studies in the past few decades appear, and none in Italian, which perhaps would have further highlighted pertinent questions and themes with regards to the production of material culture in the southern kingdom. Several times, particularly in conclusions to chapters, there is a tendency of painting with too broad a brush, of bending interpretations of artworks into categories that do not always fit, and some comparisons could have been further nuanced.

Reilly's book is an achievement overall: well-written and full of valuable observations, while also being relatively concise. Despite the few points raised above, she is mostly successful in taking on the formidable challenge of weaving the art and architectural production of these different

geographical areas into a cohesive narrative. Reilly is strongest in her rich and lucid descriptions of buildings and their interior decorative settings, not surprising as she has published extensively on architectural history, specifically a monograph on Peterborough Cathedral. As she notes early on in her work, it is “the very variety that is found may be the key to the commonalty of Norman architecture” (p. 30), and indeed for understanding the extraordinarily rich visual culture of the later descendants of the Northmen.

NOTES

[1] Richard Brilliant, “I piedistalli del giardino di Boboli: spolia in se, spolia in re,” *Prospettiva* 31 (1982): 2–17.

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