

Viola Skiba, Nikolas Jaspert, Wilfried Rosendahl, Bernd Schneidmüller (Hg.), Die Normannen. Eine Geschichte von Mobilität, Eroberung und Innovation, Regensburg (Schnell & Steiner) 2022, 528 S., zahlr. Abb., ISBN 978-3-7954-3671-1, EUR 45,00.

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The cultural, linguistic, economic, administrative and above all military and political actions of the Scandinavian »Northmen«, their descendants in the emerging polity of Normandy, and the subsequent Norman diaspora have evoked enormous scholarly and popular interest since long before the emergence of professional historical research in the 19th century. This beautifully produced companion volume to the exhibition »Die Normannen«, held first at the Reiss-Engelhorn Museum in Mannheim (September 2022–February 2023) and subsequently in Rouen and Caen (summer of 2023), offers a panoramic overview of the Normans, from their Scandinavian origins in the 8th century up through their expansion across Europe and the Mediterranean in the later 12th century. The volume is a collaborative effort between the staff of the Reiss-Engelhorn Museum, led by Professor Dr. Wilfried Rosendahl and Dr. Viola Skiba, and a team of specialist scholars led by Professor Dr. Nikolas Jaspert, Professor Dr. Bernd Schneidmüller, and Professor Dr. Valentino Pace.

The original scholarly conference (2020) and subsequent publication »Norman Connections – Normannische Verflechtungen zwischen Skandinavien und dem Mittelmeer« (2022), which inspired the museum exhibit, provides much of the intellectual foundation for the work under consideration here. However, despite some overlap in topics and contributors, »Die Normannen« stands on its own as an independent volume. Following a brief description of the exhibition at Mannheim, the volume is divided into seven parts, each of which comprises several chapters, as well as excurses. Overall, the chapters are quite short, usually no more than two or three double-columned folio pages, and are intended for a popular rather than a scholarly audience.

Part one, »The Northmen« from the Vikings to the Normans«, includes two chapters that focus on the cultural transformation of Scandinavians into proto-Normans and the development of the term Norman. Part two, »The Northmen« in Eastern Europe«, comprises seven chapters that deal with a range of questions relating to the settlement of Scandinavians in the East, and particularly in modern Ukraine. Of particular interest is the examination by Franziska Kothe of the role of archaeology in the scholarly investigation of the early medieval history of Eastern Europe. Part three, »Normandy: From Northmen to Normans«, also includes seven chapters, which trace the familiar history of the



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emergence and development of the Norman polity over the course of the 10th and 11th century. The interdisciplinary examination of Norman military equipment in the 11th and 12th century by Giovanni Coppola is a high point of this section.

Part four, »The Conquest of England and the Creation of an Anglo-Norman Kingdom«, comprising fourteen chapters, features numerous brief biographies including Emma of Normandy († 1052), Matilda of Flanders († 1083), William the Conqueror († 1087), Bishop Odo of Bayeux († 1097), Empress Matilda († 1167), and curiously out of place at the end of the section Tancred de Hauteville († circa 1041). Of particular value for non-specialists in this chapter is Stephen Baxter's synopsis of his own enormous contribution regarding the value of »Domesday Book« as a source and representation of Norman rule. Part five, »Paths to the Mediterranean: The Normans in the Iberian Peninsula«, provides what is likely to be the least well-known aspect of the Norman diaspora for most non-specialist readers. The brief account by Viola Skiba of the military activities and career of Roger Tosny († circa 1040) introduces the reader to the Norman participation in the so-called Reconquista in the first half of the 11th century. Similarly, Skiba's treatment of Robert Burdet († circa 1155) illuminates the establishment during the 1120s of the only Norman polity in Iberia, which was based on the city of Taragona.

Part six, »Paths to the Mediterranean: Southern Italy and Sicily«, is the longest of the volume encompassing nineteen chapters. These include numerous biographical sketches of such prominent figures as Robert Guiscard († 1085), his wife Sichelgaita († 1090), Count Roger of Sicily and Calabria († 1101), King Roger II of Sicily († 1154), and Constance de Hauteville († 1198), the mother of the future Emperor Frederick II († 1250). Other important topics in this section include Norman patronage of the arts and architecture, the fusion of Greek, Latin, Muslim, and Jewish cultures in Sicily, and the development of a new Norman style of administration that drew on numerous earlier traditions. The final section, »The Normans in the eastern and southern Mediterranean«, examines Norman relations with the Byzantine Empire, their participation in the crusades, and the establishment and development of the principality of Antioch. In a brief epilog, Viola Skiba addresses the »secret« of the Norman success. The volume is rounded out with a general bibliography and a catalog of the hundreds of images that appear throughout the volume.

The primary value of a text such as this is to bring history to life for a popular audience, and to encourage readers to pursue a deeper understanding of topics about which they had some vague prior knowledge or no knowledge at all. This volume succeeds exceptionally well in that goal. Almost every one of its pages includes a well-executed image of an artifact, text, map, or genealogy. The vast arrays of topics that are addressed by the contributors provide a point of entry with regard to most aspects of the Norman experience, broadly conceived. As the editors of the volume observe in the introduction, the Normans

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Seite | page 2



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are almost uniquely suited to serve as a prism through which to examine early and high medieval Europe and the Mediterranean because they tied together this world through their travels, created new connections, and forged syntheses from disparate cultural, economic, political, and military strands. Throughout this beautiful work, the contributors succeed in proving the editors' point.

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Seite | page 3



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