Pax Normanna research Programme (2022-2026)

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Conquest and creativity: the dynamics of innovation
in the context of conquest in medieval Norman worlds (10th-13th centuries)

Concluding conference of the Programme.
Rome, École française de Rome, 27-29 October 2026

This conference will conclude the *Pax normanna* programme (led by Pierre Bauduin, University of Caen-Normandy/CRAHAM, and Annick Peters-Custot, University of Nantes/CRHIA), one of the École française de Rome's structuring research programmes for 2022-2026. It follows the programme's previous scientific meetings: the Cerisy conference (October 2022) on 'Pacification', the meeting devoted to "The first generations of the conquest" held in Oxford (October 2023) on "Departing" and in Ariano Irpino (October 2024) on "To settle", and finally the symposium in Cosenza-San Marco Argentino (October 2025) on "During and after the conquest: governing plurality".

Having considered the multiple and intertwined modalities and reasons for the movements of departure and the conditions of settlement of the conquerors within the 'Medieval Norman Worlds', as well as the modes of governance of the 'augmented plurality' created by these settlements over the long term, the conference hosted at the École française de Rome aims now to consider what is a variable but constant reality of the movements of conquest and political construction in the medieval Norman worlds: innovation across all sphères of social, political, economic, religious, cultural, and linguistic activity, both during and after conquest.

Creativity is not the exclusive preserve of situations of conquest, nor even of displacement or migration. Migratory phenomena in themselves do not necessarily foster a fertile ground for the development of innovative ideas or behaviour, even if they do create favourable conditions by bringing diverse societies into contact with one another: the encounter and confrontation between diverse experiences and societies do not imply the circulation of knowledge, which depends to a large extent on an ability to receive novelty, particularly in

medieval societies where progress and innovation are not considered positive values or intellectual or socio-political stimuli. However, dynamics involving collective mobility, conquest, long-term settlement and political construction (or attempts at political construction) implement, to varying degrees but on a recurring basis, logics of adaptation. These dynamics stem from a confrontation between what the conquerors know and what they discover in terms of socio-political order, economic organisation, religious life, customs, norms, etc. In particular, the contributions presented at the previous meeting on the government of plurality (2025) showed the capacity of both local populations and new rulers to create new modes of government had to contend with a multiplicity of traditions, customs, and challenges in war or fragile contexts.

Thus, conquests that give rise to political constructions are situations that not only stimulate innovation but make it practically necessary. Situations arising from processes of conquest, even slow ones, are unstable; the "conquerors" are in a minority and often tear each other apart as they advance in the dynamics of war and integration; revolts and protests are not uncommon, and there is often an urgent need to identify ways of creating a minimal consensus among the local elites; finally, government involves quickly establishing the means of mobilising the resources and individuals likely to contribute to the stabilisation and perpetuation of the emerging new political construction(s).

Historiographical approaches have perceived these realities in two ways: one viewed innovation as an expression of a "Norman myth", and the other, more recent and still ongoing, considers it as a combination of legacies The first approach is part of a traditional historiography that has long associated Norman conquests with the political, administrative, social and cultural innovations experienced by the countries. These changes, whether imposed or accepted, fuelled a 'Norman myth' with multiple connotations – both positive and negative ('Norman Yoke') – and had a lasting influence on historical analyses in each of these areas since the 17th century. In the case of the Normans of Sicily, interpretations vary from the view of Risorgimento Italy, which perpetuated the myth the myth of the Hauteville's "failure" understood as inevitable and preordained, to a resolutely modern view of the Sicilian state.

On the other hand, even in the most recent historiography, the emergence of modes of government and the integration of the conquerors into the socio-political, economic, religious and cultural landscape they occupied has most often been considered from the perspective of adaptation and, above all, the combination of legacies: Frankish and Scandinavian legacies in the case of Normandy from the end of the 9th century onwards; Anglo-Saxon and Norman legacies in the case of England and the Duchy of Normandy after 1066; Byzantine, Islamic and Lombard heritage in the case of the Hauteville Kingdom of Sicily (and its antecedents) from the 1040s onwards; 'Frankish' and Eastern heritage in the case of the Principality of Antioch. While it is acknowledged that the "Men of the North" displayed, during their movements in the early Middle Ages, a particular propensity and a clearly unusual ability to integrate into the various local substrates into which they inserted themselves, the analysis of their successes in this field (but also their failures) cannot be conducted solely in terms of the legacies to be mobilised. This view has several drawbacks:

> ➢ It essentialises the constituent elements and identity of the areas of integration (Islamic Sicily, Byzantine Calabria, Saxon England, etc.);
> ➢ It directs attention and research towards frozen affiliations or rigid identification of the nature of political construction emerging from conquest (the Kingdom of Sicily: a 'feudal', "Byzantine" or 'Eastern' kingdom?);

➢ It understands political construction resulting from a combination of conquerors and "subjugated" people only in terms of domination (which should be questioned) by the former over the latter, and in terms of appropriationof political archetypes (the Anglo-Saxon monarchy, the Islamic empire, the Byzantine model, the feudal monarchy, etc.).;

➢ It over-politicises all the issues relating to the integration of newcomers into their new environment; finally, it delegitimises the idea that societies resulting from the combination of the "conquerors ' (always in the minority and who, or this very reason, had quickly to cease being identified as "conquerors") and local populations were able to create something new *together* (and with others, in particular external protagonists) in response to contingent events, the geopolitical framework and regional conditions.

It is therefore while keeping in mind these constraints, the questions they raise and the findings of recent research that allow us to move beyond them, that we must now revisit this inventiveness – the term itself is open to debate – that arose from a situation of conquest.

The *Pax Normanna* programme could not be completed without considering innovation and creativity as key elements in analysing and understanding the logic of conquest and political construction. These concepts, which today have positive connotations and are used here in a medieval context, will themselves be discussed: they are to be understood not as carrying a value judgement but as denoting the newcomers' ability to develop a genuine governmental engineering combining, in varying proportions, ancient traditions with new practices - the boundary between these two elements sometimes being difficult to determine. The programme's concluding conference will therefore ask contributors to study the logic of individual but above all collective integration resulting from a dynamic of mobility and conquest, from the perspective of experimentation (unsuccessful or successful), i.e. the choice, from among multiple possibilities, of solutions that do not depend on the pure replication of "legacies". This implies to consider the ability to pragmatically combine traditions and to innovatively associate ideas or practices that have been tried and tested in the past with creations made possible by the situation of conquest.

This investigation into the medieval Norman worlds through the lens of their creativity – that of all the protagonists and not only that of the conquerors themselves – will cover all fields of activity. It will therefore inevitably address :

- Normative, legal and customary innovations;
- Governmental creativity, whether in terms of institutions, administrative and fiscal organisations, information gathering, or modes of representation, rituals and ceremonies, and the symbols of power displayed by rulers;
- Military innovations, whether in the recruitment of men (such as mercenaries), the definition of their service, logistical needs, fortifications or poliorcetics;
- New developments in socio-political organisation, delegation of public authority, organisation of elites, relations with political mediators (monasteries, clergy, churches);
- Innovations in socio-political discourse: the use of writing, diplomatic forms of documents, languages and, possibly, alphabets;
- Economic innovations in infrastructure (ports, coinage, taxation, fairs and markets), in patronage of certain groups of merchants (as the Amalfitans in the Kingdom of Sicily), in the broader involvement of public authority, etc.

This brief overview does not exhaust the fields of investigation or the issues addressed by the theme structuring this latest *Pax Normanna* symposium.

Presentations (lasting a maximum of 30 minutes) will be given in French, Italian or English. Proposals, accompanied by a summary, should be submitted by **30 April 2026** at the latest to one of the organizers:

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