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***Corpora* and Cultural Transmission? The Political Uses of the Body in Norman Texts,  
1050–1150<sup>1</sup>**

Patricia Skinner

In a volume on 'People, texts and artefacts', the place of the body as a site of cultural transmission might seem all too obvious. The movement of Norman *people* (mainly, but not exclusively, men) from one part of Europe to another, and the relationship between these migrants and the existing populations of the regions they colonised, has of course generated considerable scholarship on the marital and other relationships that commingled Norman bodies with native ones and produced new blended communities that were more or less 'Norman', with military, legal, marital and cultural identities to match.<sup>2</sup> This chapter, however, considers the body as a *text*, to be read and interpreted by onlookers as a result of its appearance, actions or movement; and as an *artefact*, something acted upon and/or visibly changed by others. It will explore the shared culture of bodily motifs in Norman texts, and examine how such categories are useful for questioning accepted views of the Normans introducing 'new' bodily practices to the regions they conquered.

Surprisingly, given the impact within Norman studies of feminist and gendered approaches,<sup>3</sup> there has been relatively little discussion of Norman responses to and uses of the body.<sup>4</sup> This despite the fact that historiography on the medieval body and its meanings has grown exponentially from the 1980s onwards, driven in large part by feminist scholarship interested in exploring mainly women's relationships, physical and spiritual, to their own bodies and that of Christ.<sup>5</sup> This in turn led to some work on the body and masculinity in medieval culture.<sup>6</sup> Whether Norman studies were rather less receptive to such research

themes, focusing more on the political and structural changes brought about by Norman conquest, or whether later medieval texts simply offer more material to study this topic, the Norman body is still a neglected subject for investigation.<sup>7</sup> Norman masculinity, however, has featured as a subject for study, and attention has notably been paid to the motif of effeminacy directed towards prominent figures such as Robert Curthose and William Rufus, which I do not propose to revisit here.<sup>8</sup> Instead, this chapter will explore the political messages encoded in Norman texts' references to bodies, physical and metaphorical, of the male elite classes, including Norman leaders in northern and southern Europe. It will feature references to bodily appearance, physical actions, and stories of corporal punishment and destruction in Norman texts.

The phrase 'Norman texts' requires precise definition. It is taken to mean any narrative account of Norman history written by a Norman, or by a non-Norman under Norman rule. Thus, famous descriptions of Norman bodies such as the Byzantine author Anna Komnena's lingering account of Robert Guiscard, which showed off her classical training rather than any powers of observation, do not feature here.<sup>9</sup> A sample of Norman narrative sources does reveal significant variations in the ways the authors presented bodily attributes, gestures and symbolism. I shall outline some of these and explore reasons for the differences.<sup>10</sup> The main works cited, in rough order of composition, are Dudo of Saint-Quentin's *History of the Normans*, written between 996 and 1020; the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* compiled by various authors between the 1050s and 1130s; the *Gesta Guillelmi* of William of Poitiers, dating to the 1070s; Amatus of Montecassino's *History*, of around 1080; William of Apulia's *Deeds of Robert Guiscard*, composed between 1096 and 1099; Geoffrey Malaterra's *Deeds of Count Roger*, Orderic Vitalis's *Ecclesiastical History*, written 1114–1141; William of

Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, completed in 1125; and the History of Roger II of Alexander of Teleso (1130s).<sup>11</sup>

Studies of the medieval body have tended to focus almost entirely on the body as sign, defined and determined (and dissolved) by language, rather than as a living, fleshly entity.<sup>12</sup> The medieval dichotomy between body and soul, and the emphasis on the care of the latter, has further determined how many medievalists have approached the body in history, focusing on writers' accounts of spiritual growth, particularly that of women.<sup>13</sup> Norman male aristocratic bodies, by contrast, were active, martial, the very epitome of physicality. Norman public rituals, too, were based on bodily contact: the very act of feudal commendation involved the ritual enclosing and submission of one body (or at least, its hands) within and to another. And Norman accounts of reconciliation also feature visible, public bodily rituals such as kneeling or prostration and kissing to signal that peace was restored.<sup>14</sup> As Timothy Reuter pointed out some years ago, the latter rituals were highly visible pieces of political theatre.<sup>15</sup> Bodily gestures and poses are frequently included in moments of lord–lord or lord–subordinate interactions.<sup>16</sup> Dudo of Saint-Quentin's *History of the Normans*, our earliest text, is full of such gestures: face-to-face kisses, kissing of feet, enfolding of hands.<sup>17</sup> Those unfamiliar with such rituals might accidentally or deliberately get them 'wrong', as in William of Malmesbury's tale of the Norman Rollo's submission to Charles the Simple - instead of prostrating himself to kiss the king's foot, Rollo simply grabbed it and brought it up to his mouth.<sup>18</sup> Dudo, from whom William may have got the bare bones of his tale, tells the story rather differently, saying that Rollo ordered one of his own men to perform the act, and that the lifting of the king's foot to the man's mouth 'laid the king flat on his back'.<sup>19</sup> The physicality of the Normans, and the weak position of the

French king, could hardly be more plainly expressed! Physical bodies matter then, and their appearance, actions and how they are reported and interpreted all go to make up elements of Norman political life that reward closer attention.

There are several historiographical traditions that need to be taken into account when thinking about Norman political bodies. Firstly, it has long been argued that royal bodies, Norman or otherwise, carried with them a specific, special quality that set them apart from those they ruled over, whether it was a quality of light and eminence, the ability to heal through touch, or the corporeal representation of rulership approved by God. The aura might persist even after death. A damaged or mutilated royal body, by contrast, lost those qualities.<sup>20</sup> How far do Norman texts utilise these images of kingship to describe Norman dukes and kings? Secondly, it has been suggested that the twelfth-century turn toward affective piety, in particular the rise of the cult of Christ's body and blood, led to a heightened consciousness of bodily symbolism, played out in extended commentaries on specifics of bodily appearance, the association of bodily signs with specific character defects and the rise of bodily mortification as an empathetic act.<sup>21</sup> The idea of society as a body gave rise to considerable use of medical metaphors expressing the 'healing' of the individual and body politic through execution (representing excision) and/or punishment (representing treatment).<sup>22</sup> Did Norman texts exhibit any of these uses of actual or metaphorical bodies in their account of Norman politics? Finally, and linked with this, it has been argued that Norman rulers such as William the Conqueror in England oversaw a change in judicial practice, substituting bodily mutilations for the death penalty.<sup>23</sup> William of Poitiers praises William's 'restraint [*continentia*]' and 'humanity [*humanitatem*]' in this respect, but some older historiography struggled with the idea that this change represented a 'merciful'

version of royal justice.<sup>24</sup> But does this association of Normans with mutilation (and by association its diffusion through Europe and the Holy Land) hold up under scrutiny, and how does it fit into a wider frame of Norman attitudes toward the whole and incomplete body?

### *Royal and rulers' bodies*

In his study of Norman mutilation, Klaus Van Eickels suggests that the Normans' Scandinavian origins gave them a very specific concept of male honour and masculinity, linked to 'bodily integrity, sexual dominance and political power'.<sup>25</sup> This emphasis, he continues, rendered the Norman aristocratic male uniquely vulnerable - mutilation of any kind took away his social, as well as physical, manhood. How did such ideas play out in texts about Norman leaders? And should we make a distinction here between Norman dukes and Norman kings?

In fact, Norman writers are somewhat ambivalent about attributing special qualities to their leaders. Whilst employing panegyric passages, some of which we shall explore in the next section, our authors tend to limit themselves to assertions that the success of the Normans as a group was due to God's will, rather than setting up their leaders with any theocratic or special status. The exceptions were Duke William I of Normandy (d. 942), whose death at the hands of assassins elevated him to quasi-martyrdom in the eyes of chroniclers,<sup>26</sup> and the two leaders who subsequently became kings, William I of England (1035–87) and Roger II of Sicily (count 1112–30; king 1130–54). In both the latter cases, bodily metaphors are employed to suggest they were destined for much greater things. William of Malmesbury recounts a story of the Conqueror's mother dreaming that her inward parts (*intestina*) were spread over England and Normandy, signifying his rule, whilst Alexander of Telese in his

prologue says that the future King Roger was 'extracted by God from the vagina of Sicily' (*Deus...Rogerium de vagina provincie Sicilie extraxit*).<sup>27</sup> These were not the only examples of maternal imagery in Norman histories.<sup>28</sup>

Yet the only 'special' king we find is in fact an Anglo-Saxon one: William of Malmesbury writes at length on Edward the Confessor. Having outlined the lives of saintly predecessors of the king, William then recounts how cures were effected by water that Edward had washed his hands in, and by Edward's own touch. William is careful to point out, however, that the cures came from Edward's saintliness, not his royal status: 'which shows that some people in our own day are wasting their time, when they wrongly assert that the cure of this complaint proceeded not from personal sanctity but from hereditary value in royal blood'.<sup>29</sup> The editors suggest that William was making a point at the expense of the French kings, whether contemporaries such as Philip I and Louis VI, or past kings such as Robert the Pious, whose healing activities would have been well-known.<sup>30</sup> But the need to distance Norman kingship from French was also of course driven by the fact that the Conqueror could not claim a distinguished and lengthy bloodline in the mould of the Capetians or the Saxon kings - Norman kingship, therefore, had to be distinctive.

Was this also true of Sicily? Here, there was no pre-existing kingly status to step into, and Roger's early difficulties in asserting his authority after 1130 perhaps point to this lack of precedent. Alexander of Telesse's lengthy encomium of the king makes no mention of his physical prowess or bodily appearance, preferring to record Roger's qualities as a ruler and lord. This may reflect Alexander's writing style: in fact the only physical description, in highly-generic terms, is that of Roger's son-in-law Adam, 'a man in the flower of youthful

beauty, affable and the bravest of soldiers'.<sup>31</sup> The well-studied series of mosaic ruler-portraits in royal foundations in Sicily, however, hints at an understanding of the physical qualities of rule. They have been commented upon at length by art historians.<sup>32</sup> But did such portraits, like their Byzantine prototypes, embody something more than simply a depiction of the donor of these rich buildings? Representations of the ruler in Byzantine culture, it has been argued, occupied a liminal place between holy icons and straightforward portraits - when a ruler was deposed, her/his face might be removed, but the bodily 'frame' of the representation was retained and reused, signifying the continuity of the imperial office.<sup>33</sup> Did the Sicilian mosaics fulfill a similar function? It is after all striking that we have no ruler portraits of William I 'the Bad' of Sicily, despite his rule of twelve years between two major patrons of such works.

Despite their apparent indifference to contemporary ideals and ideas of royal bodies in neighbouring lands, Norman authors do seem to have had some sense that a leader's body should remain inviolate. William of Malmesbury is at pains to emphasise that 'not a drop of William [the Conqueror]'s blood' was spilt at Hastings, despite coming under a hail of missiles (*ut nichil sanguinis ex eius corpore hostis hauriret, quamquam illum tot iaculis impeteret*). When a knight hacked at the prostrate King Harold, however, William censured him for a dastardly and shameful act (*rem ignavam et pudendam*).<sup>34</sup> This seems to reflect the earlier account of Harold's death in William of Poitiers - the king's body, he says, 'was recognised by certain marks, not by his face (*quibusdam signis, nequaquam facie, recognitus est*)', suggesting either that the famous arrow had done more damage than simply land in Harold's eye, or possibly that he had indeed been mutilated in death. The mutilation of Harold's face (and by implication a misrecognition of his corpse) offered the opportunity for



Gerald of Wales to speculate that the king actually survived Hastings and died in refuge on the Welsh border, 'wounded in many places, losing his left eye through an arrow which penetrated it but, although beaten, he escaped to these parts'.<sup>35</sup>

Mutilation or injury of any kind (except death) was clearly a sensitive topic. Whilst Orderic Vitalis reports the death of William Rufus, and is happy to report political blindings in the Byzantine empire (erroneously, as it turns out), his account of Norman kings in battle emphasises near-misses: a knight standing beside William Rufus is reported killed by a stone at the siege of Mayet, and Henry I was protected from another stone by his brazen helmet, and from a sword thrust by his armour.<sup>36</sup>

Yet not all Norman leaders were invulnerable supermen. Amatus of Montecassino reports a stone hitting Robert Guiscard when he besieged the citadel of Salerno, so hard that 'it seemed he would die from it... [but] through the grace of God the duke soon recovered'.<sup>37</sup>

William of Apulia, too, reports this injury, and although he downplays the severity of the wound, he also attributes its healing to God's help.<sup>38</sup> The key to understanding this injury report, and another about Robert's son Roger, seems to be that they occur prior to victories, emphasising the toughness of the Norman commanders. Robert's injury happens before the fall of Salerno; a later wound to Roger's arm precedes a victory at sea against the Byzantines and Venetians.<sup>39</sup> Norman leaders, then, can be injured but only if they survive and overcome their opponents. By contrast, William recounts that the Byzantine Emperor Romanos was captured by the 'Persians' after he was wounded by an arrow in an unprotected (and unspecified) limb, and that the rebel Abelard was incapacitated by a lance wound to the chest.<sup>40</sup> To summarise then, Norman texts do not appear to attribute special

'ruling' qualities to the bodies of Norman leaders - even if masculinity resided in bodily strength and integrity. The right to lead was won through actions, not blood.

### **Bodies as Texts/Signs**

Good looks, however, do feature as a means of indicating good character. Dudo and his successors, and Amatus of Montecassino, use this device extensively, whilst others like Alexander are less fulsome. Dudo's history is full of good-looking Norman leaders: Rollo is 'very fair of body', and Richard I, whom Dudo claimed as a patron of his work and whose son, Richard II, he served as Chancellor, is repeatedly described in glowing terms.<sup>41</sup> The *GND* follows the same model, describing Rollo's son William as 'a tall man with a handsome face and sparkling eyes (*statura procerus, vultu decorus, micantibus oculis*)'.<sup>42</sup> In Amatus the same panegyric style is evident: William son of Tancred of Hauteville, chosen by the Normans as their leader in the early 1040s, was 'handsome, young and of noble stock', whilst Asclettin, successor to his uncle Rainulf as count of Aversa, was 'an elegant youth...very worthy on account of his prowess and beauty' as well as his intelligence and good manners. Asclettin's son Richard, too, is described as 'a fine figure of a man and a lord of good stature. He was a young man with an open countenance and strikingly handsome'.<sup>43</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that Amatus describes Robert Guiscard only in terms of his character, whilst it is Sichelgaita, his second wife, who is described as 'beautiful in body'. Amatus continues, 'Therefore it was quite proper for a single body to be made of these two, who were equal in virtue'.<sup>44</sup> This is getting quite close to the imagery of the uniting of two nations by this marriage, where physical bodies signified much wider connections.

Dudo and Amatus use positive descriptions to enhance their heroes, and Burgwinkle has commented that many passages were 'conventionalized flattery' driven by the fact that the authors were 'directly implicated in courtly politics',<sup>45</sup> but not all ruler-portraits were so idealised, nor was superior physique everything. William of Apulia uses bodies in amusing and surprising ways. The Germans in Pope Leo IX's army, he says, were 'notable for their long hair, good looks and height (*quia caesaries et forma decoros fecerat egregie proceri corporis illos*)', and thus they mocked the rather shorter Normans. This allows him, some lines later, to portray Robert Guiscard cutting off their heads, 'proving that bravery is not the prerogative of the tall, but the prize can go to the smaller man (*virtutisque docet palmam non affore tantum corporibus magnis, qua saepe minora redundant*)'.<sup>46</sup>

Norman authors could present leaders' bodies in distinctly negative ways as well. The *GND* admits that Rollo/Robert's body at the end of his life was 'physically broken by hardship and battle on which he spent all the strength of his youth (*fractus iam viribus, laboribus et preliis in quibus omne iuventutis robur consumpserat*)'.<sup>47</sup> William of Apulia's account of Sichelgaita's attempts to retrieve Robert Guiscard's body after his death on campaign - the corpse falling into the sea whilst being transferred back from Corfu and starting to smell, thus requiring evisceration and embalming before being buried in two separate locations - seems deliberately designed to distinguish this ducal body from those of saints, and we might contrast this account with Dudo's of Richard I in his tomb, whose body was found to be uncorrupted and giving off a sweet odour 'sweeter than the fragrance of turpentine and balsam'.<sup>48</sup> In both these cases, of course, the bodies were dead, but how do we explain William of Malmesbury's unflattering comment that William the Conqueror's corpulence 'gave him an unshapely and unkingly figure (*quamquam obesitas ventris nimis protensa*

*corpus regium deformaret*'), a comment that was rivalled only by his description of his son, William Rufus, as 'inclined to be pot-bellied (*ventre paulo proiectore*)?'<sup>49</sup> This later portrayal contrasts with William of Poitiers' earlier emphasis on the duke's physical strength, carrying on his own shoulders one of his supporters and two hauberks!<sup>50</sup> Clearly William was a big man, but maybe temporal distance from his subject allowed Malmesbury to elaborate on how big in his descriptions - perhaps even reflect a reality that the earlier author did not dare mention?

### **Broken bodies**

This brings me on to the question of imperfect and mutilated bodies. It is not difficult to find mutilated or otherwise humiliated bodies in Norman texts. Transgressors and rebels against Norman law and rule were executed or punished physically.<sup>51</sup> Blinding occurs for open rebellion (as in the case of Bretons resisting William of Normandy or killing deer in the king's forest.<sup>52</sup> There has been an extensive historiography on transitions to Norman justice.<sup>53</sup>

Klaus van Eickels' recent consideration of castration and blinding in Normandy and Anglo-Norman England accepts unproblematically the report of William the Conqueror replacing execution in some cases with mutilations such as these.<sup>54</sup> Edward Wheatley has drawn a contrast between blinding as a common punishment in France and Normandy, and its relative rarity in England. He notes the increase of blinding as a punishment in England after 1066, and attributes its introduction into southern Italy and Ireland to the Norman arrival there.<sup>55</sup> A closer look, however, suggests that the connection between the arrival of the Normans and the introduction or increase of mutilation is misleading. Norman authors such as William of Malmesbury in fact preserve accounts of such mutilations prior to the

Conquest in both Normandy and England, and mutilation and blinding are also recorded in pre-Norman southern Italy.<sup>56</sup> But the threat to mutilate was part of what Gerd Althoff has termed a 'renaissance of royal anger' in the twelfth century, and certainly the anger of the ruler could be deployed as an effective rhetorical tool. According to Stephen White, this reinvention was mirrored by an upsurge of clerical texts advocating restraint.<sup>57</sup>

Yet the mutilation of another person in many Norman texts is presented as a sign of *transgression* rather than as a just punishment. Dudo's one report of a threat of blinding is by an enraged King Louis against a knight rescuing Richard I of Normandy from the king's custody,<sup>58</sup> and Louis further threatens to 'roast the knees' of Osmund's young protégé.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the most extreme mutilations in Orderic Vitalis are again perpetrated unjustly. In one account, William Talvas blinds and castrates William of Bellême for no good reason, in another a clerk who had been punished for an appalling crime in Norway by being blinded and having his hands and feet cut off, murders King David I of Scotland's baby son using his false metal fingers.<sup>60</sup> Whilst Orderic reports judicial mutilation relatively neutrally, its unauthorised use functions in his text as a measure of cruelty, as in his account of Robert of Bellême's ferocious behaviour.<sup>61</sup> William of Malmesbury repeats and develops the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's account Cnut's mutilation of hostages in 1014, also seen as an unwarranted act of cruelty.<sup>62</sup> Finally, William of Poitiers presents the blinding and resulting death of the ætheling Alfred by Harold as a result of 'wicked treachery'.<sup>63</sup> The overwhelming message in these northern sources seems to be that mutilation is an extreme to which others resort.

Wheatley's assertion regarding southern Italy is also incorrect. Blinding as a political tool was already known in the South, as evidenced by its use in Naples and Salerno in the ninth century and Amalfi in the eleventh,<sup>64</sup> and seems to have owed its presence here to Byzantine, not Norman influence. Amatus includes a report of the blinding of Romanos IV in 1072 (as does William of Apulia, writing some fifteen years after Amatus), but otherwise, like Orderic, seems to attribute the practice of blinding and mutilation to the enemies of his hero, Robert Guiscard, or to tyrannical rule.<sup>65</sup> Thus the assassins who kill Prince Guaimarius of Salerno 'cried out "Death to him who seeks only to blind!" (*soit occis cil qui ce veut cecare!*)'. Indeed, almost all of the threatened or actual episodes of mutilation in Amatus are at the hands of Prince Gisulf II of Salerno, against an assortment of opponents including his uncle Guido, threatened with blinding, Abbot Guaiferius of Montecassino, threatened with the loss of his tongue, or the numerous acts of corporal mutilation described in Book VIII, carried out on prisoners held to ransom and designed to heighten the climax of the book, Gisulf's confrontation with Robert. When Amatus reports Robert threatening to extract the prince's teeth if he did not hand over a genuine tooth relic of St. Matthew, he justifies this by the numerous deceptions Gisulf has already perpetrated, and of course the threat is not carried out.<sup>66</sup>

This brings us on to William of Apulia, whose poetic Deeds of Robert Guiscard offers a rather different view of the Normans in southern Italy, and may partly explain their association with mutilation. For in his account it is indeed members of Robert's family who do the mutilating. Before considering these episodes, however, we need to bear in mind that William's poem represents an early example of the epic genre.<sup>67</sup> Rather like the Song of Roland, written down some decades later but long circulated orally, William's text contains

graphic and stylised violence - bodies split down the middle vertically, or sliced with their horses - and extended similes, comparing the intensity of fighting to that of two wild boars.<sup>68</sup> And, rather like Roland, the justification for mutilating and killing comes from the need to avenge disloyalty, as in Count Humphrey's punishment of his brother Drogo's murderers, or the blinding and castration of the rebel Gradilon. Roger Borsa's punishment of the rebellious citizens of Troia, including mutilation of limbs and faces, is however compared to the unusual fury of a trapped tigress (*insolitum furorem*):<sup>69</sup> whilst Roger's actions are explicable, William is clearly uncomfortable with their ferocity.

There is something of a contrast between William's depictions of Norman violence and those in the account of his contemporary Geoffrey Malaterra. Although Geoffrey relates many of the same incidents (for example, Humphrey's revenge for Drogo's murder; the punishment of Troia), he does not go into the same levels of rhetorical detail, and he mentions Gisulf's brutality to his prisoners only in passing. Rebellious and treacherous bodies are, nevertheless, still mutilated: the shocking story of the impaling of a traitor's wife in Gerace, however, is put down to 'the extraordinary fury of the ignorant mob (*cum tanta impietate a suis civibus...cum tanto furore*)', whilst Duke Robert and Count Roger's blinding of Walter, castellan of Guillimaco, is explained as a measure to prevent him causing their brother any further trouble on his release from prison (*ne si, oculos habens in posterum, a captione quando liberaretur, fratri iterum molestus fieret*). And whilst Count Roger forgives his rebellious son Jordan, the latter's twelve accomplices are rounded up and blinded as a warning as to his future behaviour.<sup>70</sup>

Alexander of Telese emphasises King Roger's just and restrained rule and, like Orderic, reserves stories of mutilation as a means of measuring the ill-will and pride of the king's enemies. For example, Richard, brother of Roger's estranged brother-in-law Count Rainulf, is reported to have greeted news of Roger's successes by removing the nose and eyes of the messenger. Alexander attributes this behaviour to Richard's 'fury' (*furore*) and loss of reason (*demens*). That is not to say that Roger rejected such punishments: adulteresses in the laws of Ariano were threatened with nose-slitting, 'which [punishment] has been most sternly and cruelly introduced'.<sup>71</sup>

The potential for injustice in a moment of irrational anger, therefore, underpins many of our Norman mutilation texts, and offered the opportunity for writers of hagiography to develop the theme further. William of Malmesbury himself explored the problem in his *Vita Wulfstani* in his lengthy account of the cure of Thomas of Elderfield, wrongly blinded and castrated.<sup>72</sup> Key to William's account is injustice - Thomas loses a judicial duel engineered by one George, and is blinded and castrated by the victor and his associates. Whilst judicial duels might well pit accuser and defendant up against each other (as in the case of Geoffrey Baynard against Count William of Eu),<sup>73</sup> the extremity of outcome in Thomas's case may explain why it made a good subject for a miracle story. The problem with this type of evidence is obvious. I would argue that it was the infrequency of use of mutilation in Norman society that led Norman authors to report episodes in detail when they did occur.

## **Conclusions**

Bodies were highly visible in Norman society, used to signal status and scrutinised and reported upon. One of the most detailed examples comes in William of Poitiers' record of



the end of William of Arques' revolt against Duke William. He expounds at length on the bodily cost of the lengthy siege that ended in Arques' surrender: <sup>74</sup>

What a sad spectacle! What a wretched end! French knights... come out with the Normans as fast as their failing strength permits, hanging their heads as much from shame as from starvation; some clinging to starved mounts...most of them carrying their horse's saddle on their bowed and weary backs, some staggering and barely keeping upright. It was equally pitiable to see in all its forms the sordid ruin of the lightly-armed troops as they came out.

William's account, however, is packed with body politics: the losers in this battle were starved, their bodies incapable of fighting and, crucially, some of them were literally 'saddled', a reference perhaps to their submissive, 'ridden' position as losers in the rebellion.<sup>75</sup> William of Malmesbury elaborates further on the humiliation of saddle-bearing in his account of the reconciliation of Fulk of Anjou with his rebellious son Geoffrey. The latter was forced to carry a saddle on his back for several miles, then prostrated himself under the burden at his father's feet to be kicked before being raised up.<sup>76</sup>

In this chapter I have ranged across a number of ways of looking at Norman male bodies, from those of leaders, through the use of bodily metaphor to express Norman domination, and on to their association with cruelty and mutilation of enemies' bodies. Despite the variations visible between authors, regions and time period (in part due to differences in genre of writing), the sheer activity and physicality of Norman bodies are clearly expressed. Meetings and reconciliations included specific bodily gestures; panegyrics might or might not include physical prowess - in fact there is a tendency to play down qualities of the flesh (which we might expect from clerical authors); and mutilations by Norman lords, where

they are reported, were presented within a very tight set of acceptable parameters - and more frequently they happen outside those boundaries, creating shock among contemporary reporters.

What, if anything, about this picture is particularly 'Norman'? It could be argued that all of our authors, male and clerical, are drawing not upon a Norman register of bodily standards but a broader palette of motifs deriving ultimately from Biblical *exempla*, particularly where excessive anger (*furor*) was concerned. Yet the Norman expansion across Europe arguably precipitated the wealth of narrative sources that sought to record, explain and in some cases justify the conquests. Military prowess could be expressed in physical terms, newly-subject people might be threatened with bodily violence as a means of control, and the sheer mobility of many Normans between different parts of Europe may have contributed to the appearance of introducing new corporal punishments when in fact such practices had already existed in the regions taken over. Attention to Norman bodily practices, then, would reward further research.

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<sup>1</sup> I should like to thank David Bates and Elisabeth van Houts for their invitation to contribute to the 'People, texts and artefacts' conference at Ariano.

<sup>2</sup> R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonisation and Cultural Change, c.950–1350* (1993); G. A. Loud, 'How "Norman" was the Norman conquest of southern Italy?', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, xxv (1981), 3–34; E. Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power, 840–1066* (Berkeley, 1988); J. Drell, *Kinship and Conquest: Family Strategies in the Principality of Salerno during the Norman Period, 1077–1194* (Ithaca, 2002); E. van Houts, 'Intermarriage in eleventh-century England', *Normandy and its Neighbours. Essays for David Bates*, ed. D. Crouch and K. Thompson (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 237–70. See also S. M. Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy and Power in the Twelfth-Century Anglo-Norman Realm* (Manchester, 2003); Pauline Stafford's collected essays in *Gender, Family and the Legitimation of Power* (Aldershot, 2006).

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<sup>3</sup> Not least those Elisabeth van Houts: *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe 900–1200* (1999); ead., 'Conversations amongst monks and nuns, 1000–1200,' *Understanding Monastic Practices of Oral Communication (Western Europe, tenth-thirteenth centuries)*, ed. S. Vanderputten (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 267–92; L. V. Hicks, *Religious Life in Normandy 1050–1300: Space, Gender and Social Pressure* (Woodbridge, 2007); K. A. Fenton, *Gender, Nation and Conquest in the Works of William of Malmesbury* (Woodbridge, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> An exception is Pauline Stafford, 'The meanings of hair in the Anglo-Norman world', in *Saints, Scholars and Politicians: Gender as a Tool in Medieval Studies (Festschrift in Honour of Anneke Mulder-Bakke on the Occasion of her 65th Birthday)*, ed. M. van Dijk and R. Nip (Turnhout, 2005), pp. 153–71.

<sup>5</sup> *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. S. Kay and M. Rubin (Manchester, 1996). The work of Caroline Walker Bynum has been most influential in this field, particularly her *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982) and *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. D. M. Hadley (London, 1999); R. M. Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Later Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, 2002); *Religious Men and Masculine Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Woodbridge, 2013); *Une histoire sans les hommes est-elle possible? Genre et masculinités*, ed. A.-M. Sohn (Lyon, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> In contrast there has been some work on Anglo-Saxon bodies: *Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. B. C. Withers and J. Wilcox (Morgantown, WV, 2003); and bodily symbolism looms large in 13th century politics: M. Fisher, 'Dismembered bodies and treasonous bodies in Anglo-Norman literature', *Violence and the Writing of History in the Medieval Francophone World*, ed. N. D. Guynn and Z. Stahuljak (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 833–97.

<sup>8</sup> W. M. Aird, 'Frustrated masculinity: the relationship between William the Conqueror and his eldest son', in *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. Hadley, pp. 39–55; J. Thibodeaux, 'Odo Rigaldus, the Norman elite and the conflict over masculine prerogatives in the diocese of Rouen', *Essays in Medieval Studies*, xxiii (2006), 41–55; K. Fenton, 'Writing masculinity and religious identity in Henry of Huntingdon', *Religious Men and Masculinity*, ed. Cullum and Lewis, pp. 64–76. W. M. Aird, *Robert Curthose Duke of Normandy, c.1050–1134* (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 48–51, discusses the formation of the duke's masculine, aristocratic identity, and p. 85 explores the influential labelling of the duke by Orderic Vitalis as a 'wanton cow'. W. Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity and*

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*the Law in Medieval Literature: France and England 1050–1230* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 48–52, discusses William Rufus.

<sup>9</sup> Anna Comnène, *Alexiade*, ed. and trans. B. Leib, 3 vols (Paris, 1967), Book I.11.

<sup>10</sup> Marie-Agnès Lucas-Avenel's chapter in this volume compares two authors in more detail.

<sup>11</sup> Dudo; *GND*; *WP*; Amatus; *WA*; Malaterra; *OV*; *WM GRA*; *AT*. All references are to book and chapter or paragraph, and not to edition and page number.

<sup>12</sup> See Caroline Bynum's response to this issue in 'Why all the fuss about the body? A medievalist's perspective', *Critical Inquiry*, xxii (1995), 1–33. Bynum, p. 5, comments that interest in the body across disciplines is 'often mutually incomprehensible'.

<sup>13</sup> Bynum, 'Why all the fuss?', 12–14, challenges the simplistic nature of this dichotomy.

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Amatus VI.6: William of Montreuil and Atenulf of Aquino meet under safe conduct and 'William happily welcomed him, throwing his arms about his neck and kissing him on the mouth...Thereupon they made a covenant of their friendship...'; reconciliation of Robert Guiscard and Richard of Capua: Amatus VII.16: 'they embraced, kissed each other on the mouth and remained talking until Vespers'; *AT*, II.63, an extended account of the peacemaking between King Roger of Sicily and Count Rainolf, his brother-in-law. The submission of Sergius, ruler of Naples, to the same king also features kneeling and the giving of hands: *AT*, II.67.

<sup>15</sup> In the case of bishops: T. Reuter, 'Pastorale pedum ante pedes apostolici posuit: dis- and re-investiture in the era of the investiture contest', *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies presented to Henry Mayr-Harting*, ed. R. Gameson and H. Leyser (Oxford, 2001), pp. 197–210.

<sup>16</sup> The act of homage is more extensively discussed by Alice Taylor's chapter in this volume.

<sup>17</sup> *Dudo* III.54; Book IV.117 (faces); I.2 (feet); II.28, 38 (hands).

<sup>18</sup> *WM, GRA*, II, 127.

<sup>19</sup> *Dudo*, II.29–30; reused by Robert of Torigni in *GND* II.11(17).

<sup>20</sup> E. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: a study in medieval political theology* (Princeton, 1957); M. Bloch, *The Royal Touch: sacred monarchy and scrofula in England and France* (London, 1973: originally *Les rois thaumaturges*, (Paris, 1961)); S. Bertelli, *The King's Body: the sacred rituals of power in medieval and early modern Europe* (University Park, 2001, Italian original *Il corpo del re: sacralità del potere nell'Europa medievale e moderna* (Florence, 1990)); N. Marafioti, *The King's Body: Burial and Succession in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto, 2014).

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<sup>21</sup> B. Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood* (Cardiff, 2006); S. McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, 2010); Patrizia Carmassi, 'Il sangue di Cristo: Eucaristia tra celebrazione, riflessione e rappresentazione nell'alto medioevo', in *Text, Bild und Ritual in der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft (8.-11.Jh)/ Testo, immagine e rituale nella società altomedievale (VIII-XI sec.)*, ed. S. Gehrke, P. Carmassi and C. Winterer (Florence, 2014), pp. 263–86.

<sup>22</sup> G. R. Evans, *Law and Theology in the Middle Ages* (London and New York, 2002), p. 174, comments on this medical theme to justice. On the body politic see Andreas Musolff, 'Metaphor in the history of ideas and in the history of discourse: how can we interpret a medieval version of the *Body-state* analogy?', *Metaphor and Discourse*, ed. A. Musolff and J. Zinken (Basingstoke, 2009), pp. 233–250. On medical practices and the physical body, see Elma Brenner's chapter in this volume.

<sup>23</sup> A judicial pronouncement attributed to William the Conqueror and published in F. Liebermann, *Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols (Halle, 1903), I, 488: 'Interdico etiam ne quis occidatur aut suspendatur pro aliqua culpa, sed eruantur oculi et testiculi abscidantur.' Mutilation instead of death could certainly be presented as an act of clemency: S. McGlynn, *By Sword and Fire: Cruelty and Atrocity in Medieval Warfare* (2005), p. 13. For discussion see below, p. 00.

<sup>24</sup> WP, I.25 and II.38. C. W. Hollister, 'Royal acts of mutilation: the case against Henry I', *Albion*, x (1978), 330–40, examines that king's reputation.

<sup>25</sup> K. van Eickels, 'Gendered violence: castration and blinding as punishment for treason in Normandy and Anglo-Norman England', *Gender and History*, xvi (2003), 588–602, at p. 591.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. *GND* III.8, recording his desire to become a monk and acquiring the appropriate cowl and shirt, and III.12, recording his death.

<sup>27</sup> WM, *GRA* III.229; AT, Prologue. It is possible that Alexander meant that Roger was a sword, 'unsheathed from Sicily by God' instead, since the word *vagina* had multiple meanings. Van Houts comments that this is a pun drawn from Jordanes which also appears in the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum: GND*, vol. I, p. 15 n. 4.

<sup>28</sup> We can add Dudo's image of a pregnant Francia giving birth to a peaceful nation of Normans ('Dacians') and French (*Dudo*, Book II, 4); William of Malmesbury's likening of England and Normandy to conjoined twins (WM, *GRA*, II, 207).

<sup>29</sup> WM, *GRA*, II.220–224, quote at 222: *Unde nostro tempore quidam falsam insumunt operam, qui assuerat istius morbi curationem non ex sanctitate sed ex regalis prosapiae hereditate fluxisse.*

<sup>30</sup> WM, *GRA*, vol II, p. 207: 'his "reply" amounts to a denial of sacral kingship'. For the argument that Edward's thraumaturgy dates from his time as exile in Normandy, see E. van Houts, 'Edward and Normandy', in *Edward the Confessor: the man and the legend*, ed. R. Mortimer (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 63–76, at pp. 71–5.

<sup>31</sup> Ruler and lord: AT, IV.3–4; III. 28: *Adam, virum scilicet iuvenilis aetatis decore fulgentem, affabilem, militemque strenuissimum.*

<sup>32</sup> E. Borsook, *Messages in Mosaic: the royal programmes of Norman Sicily, 1130–1187* (Oxford, 1991); E. Kitzinger, *The Mosaics of St Mary's of the Admiral in Palermo* (Cambridge, MA, [Harvard University Press](#), 1990) and *I mosaici del periodo normanno in Sicilia, I: La Cappella palatina di Palermo; III: Il duomo di Monreale* (Palermo, 1992 and 1994) as well as *La cattedrale di Cefalu, la cattedrale di Palermo e il museo diocesano: mosaici profani* (Palermo, 2000); further essays can also be found in his *Studies in Late Antique, Byzantine and Medieval Western Art*, 2 vols. (2003).

<sup>33</sup> A. Eastmond, 'Between icon and idol: the uncertainty of imperial images', in *Icon and Word: the Power of Images in Byzantium*, ed. A. Eastwood and L. James (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 73–85.

<sup>34</sup> WM, *GRA* III.244 and 243 respectively.

<sup>35</sup> WP, II.25; Gerald of Wales, *The Journey Through Wales*, I.1, trans. L. Thorpe (1978), p. 188.

<sup>36</sup> OV, I.24 (Rufus); VIII.5 (blindings); X.10 (Mayet); XII.8 and XII.18 (Henry).

<sup>37</sup> Amatus VIII.24: 'et une part de la pierre donna à lo costé de lo Duc; et parut qu'il en deüst morir. Mès, par la vertu de Dieu, en poi de temps en fut garut'.

<sup>38</sup> WA, III, lines 451–5. William also reports an arrow injury to Robert's wife Sichelgaita in a way that implicitly criticises her presence in a theatre of war: IV, lines 425–6.

<sup>39</sup> WA, V, l. 172.

<sup>40</sup> WA, III, l.54 and III, l.587.

<sup>41</sup> Dudo, II.25 (Rollo); IV.67: 'beautifully-built'; 90: 'handsome'; 100: 'his appearance dazzled...he was fair of face and had become fairer to all by his every action; 126: Most lovely to look upon, bristling with brilliant white hair, brilliant in eyebrows and in the pupil of the eye, resplendent of nostril and cheek, honoured for a thick, long beard, lofty of stature...' (Richard). The latter passage is repeated almost verbatim by *GND*, IV.19: *Erat autem statura procerus, vultu decorus, integer corpore, barba prolixa, cano decoratus capite...*

<sup>42</sup> *GND*, III.1.

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<sup>43</sup> Amatus, II.29 (William); II.32 (Asclettin); II.44 (Richard). Even Pope Leo IX was 'very handsome with red hair and a lordly stature' (*Amatus*, III.15), whilst Abbot Desiderius was 'a saintly, handsome, good and noble youth', presaging his later rise to prominence (*Amatus*, III.52).

<sup>44</sup> Amatus, IV.18. I have commented elsewhere on Amatus's apparent closeness to the duchess: 'Halt! Be men!' Sikelgaita of Salerno, gender and the Norman conquest of southern Italy', *Gender and History*, xii (2000), 622–41.

<sup>45</sup> Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity and Law*, p. 20.

<sup>46</sup> WA, II, lines 93-5 and II, line 240.

<sup>47</sup> *GND* II.15 (22).

<sup>48</sup> WA, V, lines 296–402; *Dudo*, IV, 129. 'Corpses' feature in both Dudo and William of Apulia at the centre of tricks to gain entry, and may ultimately derive from classical sources: Dudo, I.6–7 (reused in *GND* I.9(10)), WAp, II, lines 340–4. See E. Albu Hanawalt, 'Dudo of St Quentin: the heroic past re-imagined', *H SJ*, vi (1994), 111–18.

<sup>49</sup> WM, *GRA*, III.279 and IV.321.

<sup>50</sup> WP, II.9.

<sup>51</sup> *GND* II.14 (20) records Duke Robert of Normandy issuing a law sentencing thieves to hang, since 'with these and similar fears [he] curbed his people (*his et huiusmodi terroribus populam frenens*)'.

<sup>52</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a revised translation*, ed. D. Whitelock (1961), versions D/E s.a. 1075 (Bretons) and E s.a. 1087 (deer). Other rebels are seen being blinded in OV, IV.ii.180 and XII.39.

<sup>53</sup> E.g. David Bates's seminal article, 'The earliest Norman writs', *EHR*, c (1985), 266–84; J. Hudson, 'Court cases and legal arguments in England, c.1066–1166', *TRHS*, 6th series x (2000), 91–115; R. Fixot, 'Pouvoirs et justice en Italie méridionale lombarde et normande (XIe-XIIe siècles: les transformations du système judiciaire et des pratiques', in *Le pouvoir au moyen age: idéologies, pratiques, représentations*, ed. C. Carozzi and H. Taviani-Carozzi (Aix-en-Provence, 2005), pp. 193-210; J. A. Green, 'Forest laws in England and Normandy in the twelfth century', *HR*, lxxxvi (2013), 416–31.

<sup>54</sup> van Eickels, 'Gendered violence'. Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, I (Oxford, 1999), p. 404, points out that the 'ten articles' attributed to William, from which this statement comes, are not a code at all, and have overlaps with Cnut's laws, calling into question just when this change occurred.

<sup>55</sup> E. Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor, 2010), pp. 60, 33 (with numerous examples) and pp. 34–5 respectively. The problem is further discussed with reference to bodily mutilation by J. P. Gates, 'The *fulmannod* society: social valuing of the (male) legal subject' and C. M. Eska, "'Imbrued in their owne blood": castration in early Welsh and Irish sources', both in *Castration and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. L. Tracy (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 131–48 and 149–73 respectively.

<sup>56</sup> WM, *GRA* II.137 (attempt to blind King Athelstan); II,145 (blinding of Riulf son of Anscytel by Rollo); II.165 (Æthelred's blinding of Ælfric's son); II.188 (blinding of Alfred son of Æthelred).

<sup>57</sup> G. Althoff, '*Ira regis*: prolegomena to a history of royal anger', and S. D. White, 'The politics of anger', both in *Anger's Past: the Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, ed. B. Rosenwein (Ithaca and London, 1998), pp. 59–74 and 127–52 respectively. On differing portrayals of just and unjust mutilation, D. Bates, 'Anger, emotion and a biography of William the Conqueror', *Gender and Historiography: Studies in the Earlier Middle Ages presented to Pauline Stafford*, ed. J. L. Nelson, S. Reynolds and S. M. Johns (London, 2012), pp. 21–33.

<sup>58</sup> Dudo, Book IV.73, and p. 112 n.341. This threat does not reappear in *GND* III.3, which reworks the story somewhat.

<sup>59</sup> *GND* III.3: '*adustis poplitibus*', '*cauteriatis genibus*'.

<sup>60</sup> OV, III.ii.15; IV.274–6.

<sup>61</sup> OV, VIII.5.iii.301 and VIII.24.iii.423. Sometimes, as in the exchange of young hostages between Henry I and Eustace of Breteuil, an unjust mutilation was repaid with one presented as legitimate and with the king's permission: OV, XII.10. On this episode see Nicolas Civel, 'La colère d'Henri: un cas de mutilation d'otages dans *L'Historia Ecclesiastica d'Orderic Vital*', *Mémoires (Paris et Ile de France)*, lvii (2006), 47–66 and Patricia Skinner, *Living with Disfigurement in Early Medieval Europe* (New York: Palgrave, 2017), chapter 4.

<sup>62</sup> WM, *GRA* II, 179.

<sup>63</sup> WP, I.3.

<sup>64</sup> Naples: *Erchemperti Historia Langobardorum Beneventanorum*, c.39 (s.a. 877), ed. G. Waitz, in *MGH SSRLI*, p. 249: Sergius, the *magister militum* of Naples, is blinded and sent to Rome, where he ended his life miserably (*ibique miserabiliter vitam finivit*). Salerno: *Chronica Sancti Benedicti Casinensis*, ed. G. Waitz (*MGH SSRLI*, Hanover, 1878), c. 13 (p. 475); Amalfi: P. Skinner, *Medieval Amalfi and its Diaspora, 800–1250* (Oxford, 2013), p. 124.



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<sup>65</sup> Amatus I.13; WA, III, I.90. William also reports other political blindings in the Byzantine Empire: I, lines 462 and 467; IV, line 117. William's account of tyrannical Byzantine rule in the South (e.g. the cruelty of Maniaces, I, lines 445 and 488-90) allows him to position the Normans as liberators.

<sup>66</sup> Amatus III.28 (assassins); IV.42 (Guido); IV.42 (Guaiferius); VIII.2-3, 8, 11, 20; VIII.29 (teeth).

<sup>67</sup> Genre considerations are extensively articulated by the contributors to *Violence and the Writing of History*, eds Guynn and Stahuljak, in particular D. Rollo, 'Political violence and sexual violation in the work of Benoît de Saint-Maure', at pp. 117–32.

<sup>68</sup> WA, II, lines 214–5 and II, lines 508–15.

<sup>69</sup> WA, II, lines 287–90; WA, III, lines 613–4; WA, IV, lines 514–7 and 521, respectively.

<sup>70</sup> Malaterra I,13 (Humphrey); II,30 (Troia); III.2 (Gisulf); II, 24 (Gerace); II, 24 (Walter); III, 36 (Jordan).

<sup>71</sup> AT, I.21 (restraint); II.13 (messenger); Graham Loud's translation:

[http://www.medievalsicily.com/Docs/04\\_Kingdom\\_of\\_Sicily/Roger%20II%20Assizes.pdf](http://www.medievalsicily.com/Docs/04_Kingdom_of_Sicily/Roger%20II%20Assizes.pdf). On nose-slitting see now P. Skinner, 'The gendered nose and its lack: a medieval punishment and its 'modern' manifestations', *Journal of Women's History*, xxvi (2014), 45–67.

<sup>72</sup> The episode is extensively discussed by Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks*, pp. 175–79 and van Eickels, 'Gendered violence', 595.

<sup>73</sup> The count was accused of treachery, fought and lost, leading to his blinding and castration: *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* E (Peterborough) version s.a. 1095; OV, VIII.iii.23.411; WM, GRA IV.319. See also Jane Martindale, 'Between law and politics: the judicial duel under the Angevin kings (mid 12th century to 1204', in *Law, Laity and Solidarities: Essays in Honour of Susan Reynolds*, ed. Pauline Stafford, Janet L. Nelson and Jane Martindale (Manchester, 2001), pp. 116–49.

<sup>74</sup> WP, I, 27: *En spectaculum triste, letum miserabile. Properant ultra quam vires invalide sufficient, ... equites cum Normannis evadere Franci, non minus dedecore quam inedia cervicibus contusis, pars in iumentis famelicis... et eorum plerique sellam equestrem incuruo languidoque dorso, nonnulli solum se nutabundi vix eportantes. Erat item cernere clamitatem levis armaturae egredientis foedam ac variam.*

<sup>75</sup> As far as I am aware, little work has been done on this issue apart from Jessica Hemming's work on Welsh literature: 'Sellam gestare: saddle-bearing punishments and the case of Rhiannon', *Viator*, xxviii (1997), 45–64.

<sup>76</sup> WM, GRA III.235