

William I Longsword

“Guillaume Longue-Épée” redirects here. For others of the same name, see [William Longsword](#).

William Longsword (French: *Guillaume Longue-Épée*, Latin: *Willermus Longa Spata*, Old Norse: *Vilhjálmr Langaspjót*), (c. 893 – 17 December 942) was the second ruler of Normandy, from 927 until his assassination in 942.^[1]

He is sometimes anachronistically dubbed "Duke of Normandy", even though the title duke (*dux*) did not come into common usage until the 11th century.^[2] Longsword was known at the time by the title Count (Latin *comes*) of Rouen.^{[3][4]} Flodoard—always detailed about titles—consistently referred to both Rollo and his son William as *principes* (chieftains) of the Norse.^[5]

1 Birth

William Longsword was born “overseas”^{[lower-alpha 1][6]} to the Viking Rollo (while he was still a pagan) and his Christian wife Poppa of Bayeux.^{[7][8]} Dudo of Saint-Quentin in his panegyric of the Norman dukes describes Poppa as the daughter of a Count Beranger, the dominant prince of that region.^[9] In the 11th century *Annales Rouennaises* (Annals of Rouen), she is called the daughter of Guy, Count of Senlis,^[10] otherwise unknown to history.^[lower-alpha 2] Despite the uncertainty of her parentage she was undoubtedly a member of the Frankish aristocracy.^[11] According to the Longsword’s planctus, he was baptized a Christian probably at the same time as his father,^[12] which Orderic Vitalis stated was in 912, by Franco, Archbishop of Rouen.^[13]

2 Life

Longsword succeeded Rollo (who would continue to live for about another 5 years) in 927^[14] and, early in his reign, faced a rebellion from Normans^[15] who felt he had become too Gallicised and too soft.^[16] According to Orderic Vitalis, the leader was Riouf of Evreux,^{[16][17][18]} who was besieging Longsword in Rouen. Sallying forth, Longsword won a decisive battle, proving his authority to be Duke.^{[19]:25-6} At the time of this 933 rebellion Longsword sent his pregnant wife by custom, Sprota, to Fécamp where their son Richard was born.^[20]

In 933 Longsword recognized Raoul as King of West-

ern Francia, who was struggling to assert his authority in Northern France. In turn Raoul gave him lordship over much of the lands of the Bretons including Avranches, the Cotentin Peninsula and the Channel Islands.^{[21][22][23]:iii} The Bretons did not agree to these changes and resistance to the Normans was led by Alan Wrybeard, Duke of Brittany and Count Berenger of Rennes but ended shortly with great slaughter and Breton castles being razed to the ground.^{[19]:24} Alan fleeing to England and Beranger seeking reconciliation.^[24]

In 935, Longsword married Luitgarde,^[11] daughter of Count Herbert II of Vermandois whose dowry gave him the lands of Longueville, Coudres and Illiers l’Eveque.^[18] Longsword also contracted a marriage between his sister Adela (*Gerloc* was her Norse name) and William, Count of Poitou with the approval of Hugh the Great.^[25] In addition to supporting King Raoul, he was now a loyal ally of his father-in-law, Herbert II, both of whom his father Rollo had opposed.^[26] In January 936 King Raoul died and the 16 year old Louis IV, who was living in exile in England, was persuaded by a promise of loyalty by Longsword, to return and became King. The Bretons returned to recover the lands taken by the Normans, resulting in fighting in the expanded Norman lands.^{[23]:iii}



The funerary monument of William Longsword in the cathedral of Rouen, France. The monument is from the 14th century.

The new King was not capable of controlling his Barons and after Longsword’s brother in law, Herluin II, Count of Montreuil, was attacked by Flanders, Longsword went to their assistance in 939,^{[19]:28-9} Arnulf I, Count of Flanders retaliated by attacking Normandy. Arnulf captured the castle of Montreuil-sur-Mer expelling Herluin. Herluin and Longsword cooperated to retake the castle.^{[27][28]} Longsword was excommunicated for his actions in attacking and destroying several estates belonging to Arnulf.^[29]

Longsword pledged his loyalty to **King Louis IV** when they met in 940 and, in return, he was confirmed in lands that had been given to his father, Rollo.^{[30] [23].ⁱⁱⁱⁱ} In 941 a peace treaty was signed between the Bretons and Normans, brokered in Rouen by King Louis IV which limited the Norman expansion into Breton lands.^{[23].ⁱⁱⁱⁱ} The following year, on 17 December 942 at Picquigny on an island on the Somme, Longsword was ambushed and killed by followers of Arnulf while at a peace conference to settle their differences.^{[18][28]} Longsword's son, **Richard** becoming the next Duke of Normandy.

3 Family

Longsword had no children with his wife Luitgarde.^[31] He fathered his son, **Richard the Fearless**, with **Sprota**^[lower-alpha 3] who was a Breton captive and his concubine.^[32] Richard, then aged 10, succeeded him as Duke of Normandy in December 942.^[31]

4 Notes

- [1] Neveux and other authorities believe this may have been in England, as Rollo left Neustria for several years, probably for England. See: Neveux, P. 62; *Complainte sur l'assassinat de Guillaume Longue-Épée, duc de Normandie, poème inédit du Xe siècle*, Gaston Paris; Jules Lair, Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes (1870), Volume 31, Issue 31, p. 397; *Complainte de la mort de Guillaume Longue Épée*; and Prentout, *Etude critique sur Dudon de Saint-Quentin*, 178-9 [ns].
- [2] See Commentary: The origin of Poppa at: **Stewart Baldwin**, *The Henry Project: "Poppa"* for more detailed discussion and opinions.
- [3] Sprota married Esperling, a rich miller in the Pont-de-l'Arche-Louviers region. By her, he had a son, Count **Rodulf of Ivry**, who was one of the most trusted advisers of his half-brother, Richard I of Normandy. See Searle, p. 108 and *The Normans in Europe*, p. 57

5 References

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- [2] David C. Douglas, 'The Earliest Norman Counts', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 61, No. 240 (May, 1946), p. 130
- [3] David Crouch, *The Normans: The History of a Dynasty*, (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), p. 14.
- [4] *The Normans in Europe*, ed. & trans. Elisabeth van Houts (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 31, 41, 182
- [5] Eleanor Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power, 840-1066* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 45
- [6] François Neveux, *A Brief History of the Normans*, trans. Howard Curtis (London: Constable & Robinson, Ltd, 2008), p. 62 & n. 111
- [7] David C. Douglas, 'Rollo of Normandy', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 57, No. 228 (Oct., 1942), p. 422
- [8] Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. Marjorie Chibnall, Vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), P. 7
- [9] Douglas, 'Rollo of Normandy', p. 417
- [10] K.S.B. Keats-Rohan, 'Poppa of Bayeux and Her Family', *The American Genealogist*, vol. 72, no. 4 (July–October 1997), p. 198
- [11] Neveux, pp. 60-1
- [12] Crouch, p. 9
- [13] Vitalis, p. 67 (Citing William of Jumièges, Book II, ch. 12[18])
- [14] Douglas, 'Rollo of Normandy', p. 435
- [15] *The Normans in Europe*, p. 41 (Citing the *Planctus* for William Longsword composed shortly after his murder in 942)
- [16] *A Companion to the Anglo-Norman World*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill; Elisabeth Van Houts (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2007), p. 25
- [17] Crouch, p. 11
- [18] Neveux, p. 72
- [19] Duncan, Jonathan (1839). *The Dukes of Normandy from the time of King Rollo to the expulsion of King John*. Joseph Rickerby and Harvey & Darton.
- [20] Searle, p. 95
- [21] Pierre Riché, *The Carolingians; A Family who Forged Europe*, trans. Michael Idomir Allen (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 252-3
- [22] *The Annals of Flodoard of Reims; 916-966*, eds. & trans. Steven Fanning and Bernard S. Bachrach (New York; Ontario Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2011), p. xvii & notes 15b, 85
- [23] Stapleton, Thomas (1840). *Magni rotuli scaccarii Normanniae sub regibus Angliae*.
- [24] *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, ed. & trans. Elizabeth M.C. Van Houts, Vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 79
- [25] *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, p. 81
- [26] *The Annals of Flodoard of Reims, 916-966*, p. xxi

- [27] Searle, p. 56
- [28] David Nicholas, *Medieval Flanders* (London: Longman Group UK Limited, 1992), p. 40
- [29] *The Annals of Flodoard of Reims; 916-966*, p. 31
- [30] *The Annals of Flodoard of Reims; 916-966*, p. 32
- [31] Neveux, p. 90
- [32] *The Normans in Europe*, p. 47

6 External links

- Planctus for William
- Stewart Baldwin on Guillaume “Longue Épée” of Normandy

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