

William the Conqueror...

Primary Sources

(1) Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Version E, entry for 1087.

King William and the chief men loved gold and silver and did not care how sinfully it was obtained provided it came to them. He (William) did not care at all how wrongfully his men got possession of land nor how many illegal acts they did.

(2) In his book *Ecclesiastical History*, Ordericus Vitalis described what happened after an English rebellion in the winter of 1069. (c. 1142)

In his anger William ordered that all crops and herds... and food of every kind should be brought together and burned to ashes, so that the whole region north of Humber might be stripped of all means of survival.

(3) William of Jumieges, *Deeds of the Dukes of the Normans* (c. 1070)

William, Duke of Normandy, never allowed himself to be deterred from any enterprise because of the labour it entailed. He was strong in body and tall in stature. He was moderate in drinking, for he deplored drunkenness in all men. In speech he was fluent and persuasive, being skilled at all times in making clear his will. He followed the Christian discipline in which he had been brought up from childhood, and whenever his health permitted he regularly attended Christian worship each morning and at the celebration of mass.

(4) William of Poitiers, *The Deeds of William, Duke of the Normans* (c. 1071)

Duke William excelled both in bravery and soldier-craft. He dominated battles, checking his own men in flight, strengthening their spirit, and sharing their dangers.

William was a noble general, inspiring courage, sharing danger, more often commanding men to follow than urging them on from the rear. The enemy (at the Battle of Hastings) lost heart at the mere sight of this marvellous and terrible knight. Three horses were killed under him. Three times he leapt to his feet. Shields, helmets, hauberks were cut by his furious and flashing blade, while yet other attackers were clouted by his own shield.

(5) Pope Gregory VII made the following comments about William the Conqueror in a letter to a friend. (1081)

The king of England, though in certain respects he is not as religious as we would wish, still shows himself to be more acceptable than other kings... he neither destroys nor sells the churches of God.. and he bound priests by oath to dismiss their wives.

(6) Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Version E, entry for 1083.

He (William) made large forests for the deer, and passed laws, so that whoever killed a hart or a hind should be blinded. The rich complained and the poor murmured, but the king was so strong that he took no notice of them.

(7) Ordericus Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History* (c. 1142)

William the Conqueror... realised that death was imminent... The wise king ordered all his treasures to be distributed among the churches and the poor.

(8) Confession made by William the Conqueror on his deathbed in 1087. Quoted by Ordericus Vitalis in *The Ecclesiastical History* (c. 1142)

I tremble my friends/ when I reflect on the grievous sins which burden my conscience, and now, about to be summoned before the awful tribunal of God, I know not what I ought to do. I was bred to arms from my childhood, and am stained from the rivers of blood I have shed... It is out of my power to count all the injuries which I have caused during the sixty-four years of my troubled life.