The Influence of a Mixed Provenance on the Portrayal of Harold and William in the Bayeux Tapestry

MA-Thesis Literary Studies, English Literature and Culture

Student name: Suzanne van der Raad

Student number: 0809136

Date: 01-07-2014

First reader: M.H. Porck, MPhil

Second reader: Dr. M.P.J. Cole

Leiden University, Department of Film and Literary Studies

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Bayeux Tapestry is a unique piece of pictorial evidence of one of the most important turning-points in early medieval history and western civilization: the Norman Conquest. It depicts the "dynastic power-game" [1] played out in the opening decades of the second millennium: the events leading up to the conquest and the Battle of Hastings. The Tapestry, almost 950 years in existence, is kept in Bayeux, Normandy, in the Musée de la Tapisserie de Bayeux and attracts thousands of visitors each year.

The Tapestry was first recorded in 1476 at Bayeux, although it had possibly been there since shortly after its production some years after 1066.[2] However, historians of medieval art have concluded that the Tapestry is of English origin.[3] There is sufficient evidence that the Tapestry was made in England and that the designer worked within an English tradition. The Anglo-Saxon spelling and word forms appear in the inscriptions and the master designer seems to have been familiar with Canterbury manuscripts and artwork,[4] the principal design was most likely drawn across the linen for the embroiderers by someone accustomed to manuscript illumination.[5] Moreover, Norman culture had neither a tradition of artistic embroidery nor of pictorial narration comparable with those of England.[6]

For many years scholars have agreed on some probabilities with regard to the patron, designer, and the makers of the Tapestry. It is almost certain there was one chief male designer of the whole Tapestry, while the embroidery work was almost certainly done by clerical women in England. The manufacture of the Tapestry was a learning process where artist met artisan, and the graphic artist was both dictating the work of the female embroiderers and seam-stitchers and adapting to the practical problems that occurred during the work.[7] It would have been much easier to create individual hangings of several important scenes, but there is no doubt a deliberate decision was made to make one single continuous series of scenes.

There had to be a patron, a person who commissioned and paid for the Tapestry, since in the (early) Middle Ages a work of art this size and of such historical importance was not

[1] G.R. Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry:Collected Papers* (2012), p. 1.
[2] A. Bridgeford, 'Whose Tapestry is it anyway?', *History Today 54* (2004), 5-7 (p. 6).
[3] Ibidem.
[4] Ibidem.
[5] J.L. Laynesmith, 'A Canterbury Tale', *History Today* (2012), 42-48 (p. 43).
[6] D.J. Bernstein, *The Mystery of the Bayeux Tapestry* (London, 1986), p. 50.
[7] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 2.

spontaneously created in the artist's mind.[8] A patron was usually involved in the process of the work throughout the various stages of manufacture. Various candidates have been considered for the patronage of the Tapestry. However, it is generally believed that the Norman Odo of Conteville, Bishop of Bayeux, was the patron of the Tapestry.

Because the Bayeux Tapestry was most likely commissioned by a Norman, one might expect the work depicts William the Conqueror as faultless hero and Harold as a downright villain. Andrew Bridgeford provided a new reading of the Bayeux Tapestry in which he attempts to change the general thought that the Tapestry was a celebration of the Conquest from a Norman point of view:

> I would argue that the Tapestry is designed to please a Norman audience at superficial level, while at the deeper level, it tells the same story as that put in writing by Eadmer of Canterbury: there are subtle pictorial clues throughout the work that consistently undermine the Norman version of events.[9]

I agree with Bridgeford that the Tapestry should not be seen as a Norman celebration of the Conquest and that there are subtle clues throughout the scenes in the Tapestry that reveal an English point of view. I do not think the Tapestry is either fully pro-Norman or fully pro-English. Where Bridgeford only compares the Tapestry with an English written source, I have chosen to compare certain Tapestry scenes with Anglo-Norman and Norman written sources as well. I am further interested in the relationship between the Norman Odo of Bayeux and the English embroiderers, and how this is manifested in the Tapestry scenes of Harold and William.

A Norman patron and an English provenance for the Tapestry have become accepted ideas over the years, albeit occasionally contested by alternatives. For this thesis I have accepted the premises, and they are the foundation for the argumentative chapters of this thesis. These chapters will attempt to answer the following thesis question: The Bayeux Tapestry has a background that combines a Norman patron and English embroiderers, what influence does this mixed background have on the portrayal of Harold and William in the Bayeux Tapestry?

The first chapter of this thesis is an introductory chapter which describes the complete Tapestry in detail. Chapter two provides evidence for Odo of Bayeux as the patron of the Tapestry and gives evidence for an English place of manufacture. It further discusses the

[8] C. Hicks, *The Bayeux Tapestry :The Life Story of a Masterpiece* (London, 2007), p. 22.
[9] Bridgeford, 'Whose Tapestry is it anyway?' p. 6.

relationship between the English embroiderers and a Norman patron. Chapter three will place the Tapestry in historical context through comparisons of selected scenes of Harold and William and Norman and English written accounts.[10] The last chapter deals with the relationship between the main narrative and the commentary in the borders of the Tapestry. The borders are thematically relevant in that they present a commentary from a Norman point of view. However, they may also provide a subversive subtext reflecting an English view of the Conquest.

[10] For these written accounts I have consulted *The Norman Conquest* by R. Allen Brown, a collection of Norman, Anglo-Norman and English written sources for the Norman Conquest.

CHAPTER 1 – THE STORY TOLD BY THE TAPESTRY

Although it has always been known as a famous tapestry, the Bayeux Tapestry is technically an embroidery. A true tapestry has the designs woven in by the mechanical action of shuttle and loom, but the depictions on the Bayeux Tapestry are handmade with woollen threads and needled onto a strip of linen.[11] The depictions are embroidered in red, yellow, grey, bright green and a darker green, and three shades of blue. Although the Tapestry has been exposed to light and dirt for over nine centuries, the eight colours of woollen thread are still vivid and bright. The embroiderers used two different techniques: outline stitch, for single lines, and laid and couched work, for giving colour and texture to larger spaces in an economical manner.[12] Unsurprisingly, in all the years of its existence some threads on the Tapestry have faded or completely disappeared. This is especially the case at the end of the Tapestry, where after the death of Harold and the flight of the English the story is cut off.

The Bayeux Tapestry differs in technique and shape with later medieval textiles like the Angers tapestries and the Unicorn tapestries, which were designed to cover large walls.[13] Another significant difference is the size: the Tapestry is approximately 70 meters long and only 50 centimeters high, which makes the embroidery more like a frieze[14] than a 'normal' medieval wall-hanging. The 70 meters of linen are covered with approximately 75 scenes portraying an astonishing number of images and figures; 623 persons, 202 horses and mules, 55 dogs and 505 other animals, 37 buildings, 41 ships and boats and 49 trees[15].

Instead of being separated into different scenes with clear lines, the Tapestry presents a continuous narrative, leading the viewer from one scene to the next with gesturing figures and buildings and trees serving as subtle punctuation marks. Some figures turn inward from the physical barriers to close a scene and graphic details move the eye forward.[16] Three elements can be distinguished in the Tapestry: the large middle part portrays the main narrative, the inscriptions or captions in Latin in the main narrative provide descriptive commentary, and there are all sorts of animals, imagery and other figures in the upper and lower borders which comment on - and interact with - the main narrative.

---

[11] Hicks, *The Life Story*, p. 3.
[12] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 15.
[13] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 14.
[14] A long stretch of decoration which may depict a sequence of scenes.
[15] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 16.
[16] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 1.

The following part of this chapter will provide descriptions of all the scenes in the Tapestry, some descriptions are accompanied by background information and suggestions of other observers on certain events, places, persons and objects. This method allows a full experience of the story told by the enormous Tapestry and gives access to the history behind the Battle of Hastings and the accession of both Harold and William. The knowledge of all the historical events will serve as the foundation for the analysis of chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

1. Harold's journey

The Tapestry starts in 1064, in the opening scene (Plate 1)[17] King Edward the Confessor sits on his throne in his palace, crowned and sceptered. He is addressing two men: one of them is Harold Godwinson, earl of Wessex. Whether it was Edward's instruction or Harold's own initiative is uncertain, but in the next scene (Plate 2) the inscription informs us that Harold heads towards Bosham with his hawk on his arm, together with his retainers: "sui milites"[his soldiers].[18] Harold and his men are all wearing tunics and cloaks and have moustaches and their horses' manes are braided. The hunting dogs in front of them are chasing two hares and have leash-rings or bells pendant from their collars. The tree marks the end of the scene, and on the right the church at Bosham is depicted, the crosses on top distinguish it from a secular building (Plate 3).

Harold visits the local church and has dinner with his followers, in what Bernstein identifies as the upstairs chamber of Harold's seaside house.[19] Then one of Harold's men or a messenger tells him that his ship is ready and it is time to depart. With bare legs and their tunics tucked up, Harold and his men wade towards the ships while carrying their dogs, Harold holds his dog and hawk (Plate 4). According to the inscription the wind was full in their sails when Harold and his men sailed across the Channel (Plate 5 and 6), and they eventually arrive at the French shores of Ponthieu.

The following scenes depict Harold's imprisonment by Guy of Ponthieu and his release by the Norman duke William. Once Harold arrives at the French coast, he is immediately captured by Guy of Ponthieu, the local count (Plate 7). Mounted and armed with a sword, Guy directs Harold's arrest. Together with his soldiers Guy strips Harold of his

[17] All the plate numbers are from D. Wilson, *The Bayeux Tapestry* (London, 1985).
[18] All quoted inscriptions used in this thesis are taken from the plates and simplified. Where contractions are used in the Tapestry I have consulted Wilson's *The Bayeux Tapestry*, pp. 172-3. Underlined letters represent contractions in the original. Translations are my own.
[19] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 18.

sword, symbolizing his helpless position as captive.[20] Harold is brought to Guy's castle at Beaurain, and held there for ransom (Plate 8 and 9). In the convoy, Harold and Guy both hold their hawks and are followed by soldiers and dogs.

Gale Owen-Crocker points out that from plate 9 onwards the Tapestry artist distinguishes the 'otherness' of the Normans by their clothing and their hairstyles: the Normans "wear culottes [knee-breeches] and sometimes have parallel gartering over hose or bare legs" and their hair is "shaved from the back of the neck almost up to the crown, leaving their ears exposed".[21] The English on the other hand wear traditional tunics, have full heads of hair and moustaches.

In the following scene (Plate 10) Harold enters the residence of Guy and the inscription informs us that Harold and Guy are having a talk: "Ubi Harold et Wido parabolant"[Where Harold and Guy speak]. It is not clear form the inscription whether their conversation is a heated discussion, but Bernstein suggests that "clearly this is no conversation between equals, since it is the Norman brigand who dictates terms to an apprehensive Harold".[22] In my view, the position of Guy in relation to that of Harold confirms the statement of Bernstein. Guy holds his sword high and sits enthroned, which places him higher than Harold. Harold seems a bit uneasy; his head hangs low and he shrugs his shoulders, his unbelted and sheathed sword nearly touches the ground. The gesture of Guy - his arm stretched towards Harold with a pointing finger – is stronger in relation to the pointing gesture of Harold towards Guy, which also confirms the two are not represented as equals. Meanwhile, a man that secretly listens to the discussion between Harold and guy sneaks off to William to inform him about Harold's arrival and imprisonment.

What follows is a sequence of three scenes that depict Harold's release by William and his men. According to Bernstein and Wilson, the scenes appear to be in reverse order.[23] The first scene shows how the men of William demand Harold's release from Guy (Plates 10-11), while a dwarf[24] holds their horses. In the next scene two messengers are rushing towards Beaurain to issue William's demand (Plate 12). The following scene depicts how William

[20] Hicks, *The Life Story,* p. 5.
[21] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry,* p. 4.
[22] Bernstein, *The Mystery* ,p. 19.
[23] Bernstein, *The Mystery,* p. 19. Wilson, *Bayeux Tapestry,* p. 176.
[24] Wilson points out that the gesticulating messenger in plate 10 is often identified as the Turold, while the inscription "Turold" is placed immediately above the dwarf. Therefore it is not impossible that the dwarf is Turold and not the messenger. I agree with Wilson that the inscription is too far away from the gesturing messenger to confirm that he is Turold, because further down in the Tapestry other figures are identified with inscriptions placed directly above their heads: Stigand (Plate 31), Wadard (Plate 46), William, Odo and Robert (Plate 48) and William (Plate 56).

receives the news that Harold is captured and then sends two of his men to free Harold (Plate 13). As noted, these three scenes should be 'read' to the left: first William receives the news of the imprisonment of Harold, after which he sends two men who shortly after demand Harold's release from Guy.

William's power in Normandy is demonstrated when Guy immediately releases Harold and rides with him to William's palace (Plates 13-14). William meets Harold and Guy halfway, and directs Harold to his palace at Rouen (Plates 14-15). William's palace is an impressive building and William sits on a cushioned chair. Harold is standing next to him and the two are having a discussion on an unknown subject: the inscription reveals nothing. Wilson is silent about the discussion between William and Harold, while Bernstein suggests that it is a heated discussion.[25] The posture and gestures of Harold indeed suggest it is not a calm discussion, but unfortunately the Tapestry does not provide further information.

2. Ælfgyva and the clerk

During the discussion of the previous scene, Harold faces William but his left hand points towards a scene involving a woman and a cleric (Plate 17). This scene is one of the most mysterious depictions in the Tapestry. The gesture of Harold suggests that the two scenes are related. The inscription of the scene with the woman seems deliberately cut off and lacks a verb: "Ubi unus clericus et Ælfgyva"[Where a cleric and Ælfgyva]. The tonsured cleric touches the face of Ælfgyva, who is framed by a striking rectangular construction of pillars with on top of them mythical beasts.[26] The scene may represent rape or adultery: the cleric is either making a pass or slapping the woman for having impure thoughts or for being a witch.[27] J. Bard McNulty indicates: "[t]he face-fondling gesture was for centuries charged with sexual meaning"[28], so whether the scene depicts rape or any other sexual vice, the sexual content is undeniably present. The explicit content is further confirmed by a naked figure in the lower border of the scene that mimics the gestures of the cleric and has exposed and exaggerated genitals. The 'obscenity' figure is used by the Tapestry designer to make the viewer aware of the sexual impropriety indicated in the scene.

The purpose of the scene and the identities of Ælfgyva and the cleric remain a mystery to us, although to the contemporary audience the meaning of the scene must have

[25] Bernstein, *The Mystery,* p. 19.
[26] Laynesmith, 'A Canterbury Tale', p. 43.
[27] Wilson, *Bayeux Tapestry,* p. 178.
[28] J.B. McNulty 'The Lady Aelfgyva in the Bayeux Tapestry', *Speculum* 55 (1980), 659-668 (p. 665).

been clear. Ælfgyva was a common name and the woman in the scene has therefore been identified as several different women. Wilson points out that there have been a series of investigations, and one of the suggestions is that the woman in the scene is Queen Ælfgyfu, the wife of Æthelred II.[29] McNulty believes that Ælfgyva of Northampton is depicted, who was first the mistress and then the wife of Cnut, the ruler of England, Denmark, and Norway.[30]

Not only the identity of Ælfgyva is questioned, the whole purpose of the scene seems to have interested scholars over the years. McNulty indicates that Freeman and other commentators insist on the physical presence of Ælfgyva at the palace at the time of Harold's visit, but they fail to recognize the iconography of the scene.[31] The scene may be symbolic and perhaps it alludes to a scandalous event that happened in the past and not in the palace at the time of Harold's visit to William. The gesture of Harold towards Ælfgyva during his discussion with William leaves no doubt that the scenes are connected: this connection will be further discussed in chapter 3.

3. Harold joins William in a military campaign

In that next scene (Plate 18) Harold accompanies William in a military campaign against a rebellious vassal: Duke Conan II of Brittany. They pass Mont-Saint-Michel and then they ride towards Dol passing the river Couesnon, where some soldiers get stuck in the quicksand. In the next scene Harold's strength is depicted: he saves two men by pulling one man out the water while another holds on to his neck (Plates 19-20). It seems that the patron, although he was a Norman, made the effort to focus on this event and the bravery of Harold by dedicating a whole scene to it including an inscription.

The campaign against the rebel vassal begins when William and Harold arrive in Dol: William's men attack the castle (Plates 20-21). At first Conan manages to escape with the help of a long rope hanging from the castle, after which he is chased past the castle at Rennes (Plate 22). Conan is then forced to surrender at Dinan: the wooden palisades are set on fire and there is no way to escape (Plate 23). Conan places the keys on the end of a lance and hands them over to William.

[29] Wilson, *Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 178.
[30] McNulty, 'The Lady Aelfgyva', p. 666.
[31] McNulty, 'The Lady Aelfgyva', p. 665.

In the next scene Harold receives arms from William for his participation in the campaign (Plate 24). Bernstein states that "such a ceremonial giving of arms signified that Harold, already beholden to William for his release from the clutches of Count Guy, was now formally William's vassal".[32] Wilson indicates that although the idea of vassalage had not yet been established in England, it would still be clear to Harold what the gift of arms by William meant.[33]

4. The oath of Harold and his return to England

The story continues with Harold and William's arrival at Bayeux (Plate 25) and it is here that Harold swore an oath to William (Plates 25-26) according to the Tapestry. This is confirmed by the inscriptions: plate 25 says: "Hic Willelm venit Bagias"[Here William came to Bayeux] and plates 25-26 indicate "Ubi Harold sacramentum fecit Willelmo duci"[Where Harold made an oath to Duke William]. William sits enthroned in majesty and he holds his sheathed sword as a sword of state.[34] The scene depicts Harold swearing his oath on two shrines, Harold and these reliquaries are standing on the same ground as the horses in the previous scene are presented on; therefore the oath most probably took place outdoors according to the Tapestry. The soldiers behind William in the scene point towards Harold and the inscription, particularly the word 'sacramentum': this is a note for the viewer to pay attention here.

In the next scenes (Plates 26-27) Harold returns to England by ship. Plate 27 shows an English lookout on a balcony and several faces in small windows looking at the arriving ship. The place where Harold arrived in England is not known, the inscription on the Tapestry only states: "Hic Harold dux reversus est ad Anglicam terram"[Here Duke Harold returned to England]. The following scene (Plate 28) depicts Harold visiting King Edward, who sits crowned on a seat and whose old age is emphasized with a walking stick. Harold approaches Edward with a slightly bowed head, stretching out his hands and behind him follows a man holding an axe.

[32] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 20.
[33] Wilson, *Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 180.
[34] Ibidem.

5. The death of King Edward and the accession of Harold

The following three scenes (Plates 29-31) are arranged in reverse order, similar to the scenes where Harold is released by William (Plates 10-13). Plates 29 to 31 first depict the burial and then the death of Edward, after which the accession of Harold is pictured. The scenes have quite some time in between them, even more so than in the scenes with the release of Harold. Plates 29 to 31 also bear more significance which is highlighted by the reversal. Wilson indicates: "[t]he reversal of the death and burial scenes is interpreted by many as emphasizing the hurried nature of the accession".[35]

In the burial scene of Edward (Plates 29-30) the Westminster Abbey is almost ready for consecration in late 1065: this is symbolized by the man adding the final touch by adjusting the weathercock on top of the building. The consecration itself is shown by a hand that appears from the sky and points towards the Westminster Abbey: this symbolizes the Hand of God. On the right a group of men carry the shrouded corpse of Edward towards the church of St Peter the Apostle, as the inscription informs. A group of tonsured men accompany the men and below there are young men holding bells.

The next scene (Plate 30) depicts King Edward on his death-bed in one of the upper rooms of his castle at Westminster. The inscription, that is placed in the upper border instead of the main frame, informs: "Hic Eadwardus rex in lecto alloquitur fideles"[Here King Edward speaks with his faithful ones in bed]. His faithful ones are his wife Edith, Harold, a cleric and a servant. Edith, the sister of Harold, is seated at the foot of the bed as a grieving widow wiping her tears with her veil.[36] Harold sits on Edward's side and their fingers touch, according to Wilson this is symbolic of his bequest to the kingdom.[37] Below the body of Edward is wrapped in his shroud and the inscription confirms that he has passed away. Edward is eventually buried in the Abbey.

In the next scene (Plate 31) Harold is offered the crown by a man who points towards the death-scene of Edward. On the right of this scene sits an enthroned King Harold with the crown, a scepter and an orb, captioned with: "Hic residet Harold rex Anglorum"[Here sits Harold king of the English]. On the left of Harold two men are depicted of which one holds an unsheathed sword, on the right of Harold a tonsured clerical figure is captioned with: "Stigant archiepiscopus"[Stigand Archbishop]. Outside the building where Harold is enthroned a

[35] Wilson, *Bayeux Tapestry,* p. 183.
[36] Hicks, *The Life Story,* p. 30.
[37] Wilson, *Bayeux Tapestry,* p. 182.

crowd of people with raised hands are looking at the new king of England (Plate 32). Bernstein identifies the men with the sword, Stigand, and the group of people as symbolic for the three orders of society: the nobility, the clerical estate and the masses.[38] The enthronement scene therefore indicates that all orders of society acclaimed Harold as king of the English.

Further on in the scene there is another group of men, they are gazing and pointing at a comet in the sky: "isti mirant stellam"[these men admire the star]. Wilson indicates that this comet (called Halley's Comet) would have been clearly visible in England on 24-30 April 1066.[39] Next, a messenger informs Harold about a mysterious subject: the inscription merely states Harold's name. It might concern the comet that is depicted on the upper left of Harold and the messenger, or, as Wilson suggests: "the presence of the outlined ships in the lower border may indicate that the message concerns William's order to build an invasion fleet".[40] If this is the case, then there is another occurrence of inverted scenes, as the next scene in the Tapestry portrays an English ship arriving in Normandy (Plate 33). The man who wades ashore presumably brings Duke William the news of the enthronement of Harold (Plate 34). The English ship has animal heads on the front and the back but lacks wooden shields on the side, unlike other ships in the previous scenes of the Tapestry.

6. William prepares an invasion fleet

The Tapestry is now set in Normandy, and William hears from across the Channel that Harold has become king of England (Plate 34). Together with his tonsured advisor, most likely his half-brother Odo of Bayeux, William commands an invasion fleet to be build. Odo gestures to a shipwright carrying a T-shaped axe. The preparations for the fleet-building are depicted in detail: carpenters cut down trees; ships are built with the planks; provisions, helmets, swords and wine carried in skins are loaded upon the ships (Plates 35-38). The ship-building scenes provide insights into the use of tools in the early medieval period. The ships were built on land and pulled into the water with ropes (Plate 37), which were attached to a pole in the sea.

After all the provisions are carried onto the ships, William and his men ride to the shore where the many vessels lay ready to set sail (Plate 39). The next scenes (Plates 40-43) only depict a fragment of what was the largest single military operation that had taken place up

[38] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 21.
[39] Wilson, *Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 182.
[40] Ibidem.

until that time in northern Europe: there must have been over 600 ships and 7000 men.[41] The ships are filled with many men and horses: the invasion led by William was the first that required sea transport of many horses, fighting on horseback was essential for the Norman mode of warfare.[42] The ship with the cruciform frame at the mast-head is most likely William's ship (Plate 42), at the back of the ship a man with a horn is depicted. The next scene depicts the disembarkation of the horses, which is inscribed: "Hic exeunt caballi de navibus"[Here the horses leave the ships]. Wilson suggests that in the designer's mind there was something unusual about this idea of horses disembarking ships, because the inscription specifically mentions it.[43] The disembarkation scene marks the landing of the Normans at Pevensey, 28 September 1066.

7. The Normans arrive in England

The following scenes portray in detail the Norman activities between their arrival at Pevensey and the Battle of Hastings. The inscription in plates 44-45 reveals that after disembarking the Normans ride towards Hastings: "et hic milites festinaverunt Hestinga ut cibum raperentur"[and here the soldiers went to Hastings to gather food]. A sheep is slaughtered (Plate 45) and a mounted knight is identified as Wadard by the caption (Plate 46). Plate 46 features a unique pack-animal and a pig is carried towards the food preparations for the feast. The open-air feast is depicted in the next scene where the prepared pieces of meat are placed on sticks and the Normans are sitting on a bench and drinking from a horn (Plate 47).

Next is the scene where William and his brothers Odo and Robert are seated at a round table during the feast (Plate 48). The feast and food is blessed by William's half-brother Odo of Bayeux and after the festive activities the three brothers sit in council, William in the middle with his sword pointed upwards. In the council it is decided that a fort is to be constructed in Hastings, the next scenes depict workmen building the fortifications (Plate 49-50). Further on William is informed by a messenger that Harold is approaching: "Hic nuntiatum est Willelmo de Harold"[Here news about Harold is brought to William]. On the right a house is burned down by Normans while a woman takes her child by the hand when they are forced to flee their home.

[41] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 22.
[42] Ibidem.
[43] Wilson, *Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 187.

8. The Battle of Hastings

It is now 14 October 1066 and William is standing outside the gates of Hastings and a servant brings him his horse (Plate 51). William holds a lance and he is fully dressed in his military gear, complete with the traditional conical helmet with a strip of metal in front of the nose. He can be identified as William by the ribbons at his neck.[44] The Norman soldiers prepare to meet Harold in battle and mounted on their horses they ride out in gallop (Plates 52-53).

William meets with Vital, a tenant of Odo of Bayeux, on the battlefield (Plates 54-55) and asks him whether he knows anything about Harold's army and their position. William holds a club and behind him is one of his two brothers. Vital holds a lance and comes from the opposite direction riding towards William, presumably bringing news from the lookouts. In the next scene Harold's own scout, who was on foot unlike the Norman scouts, informs Harold about William's army (Plate 56).

Now William prepares his troops to set out for battle, he holds a club and speaks to his men to encourage them (Plate 57). In the next scenes the soldiers take off and gallop in full speed with their spears above their heads towards their enemy (Plates 58-60). In plate 60 in front of the galloping group there are Norman archers on foot. The upper border above William giving his speech depicts two winged horses. The upper and lower borders of the scenes with the Norman soldiers present several fable figures.

From this moment on the Battle of Hastings has begun, and the Norman troops storm towards the English soldiers on foot who form a shield wall with their kite-shaped shields (Plates 61-62). The lower borders now depict fallen soldiers and scattered weapons instead of animals, and one border depicts a round shield that is presumably of the English. Both sides use spears, bows, arrows and swords, and some Englishmen also carry axes. Most Norman mounted soldiers use spears to attack the English. Further on in the battle Gyrth and Leofwine, the brothers of Harold, are killed when they are surrounded by three Norman knights (Plate 64). After the death of Harold's brothers the battle becomes more bloody and fierce: an axe is broken by a sword, a horse is killed by an axe and several other horses have fallen because of a defensive mechanism of sharp stakes on the ground. English and Normans are killed and the lower borders are filled with body parts, a dead horse and broken weapons (Plates 65-66).

[44] Wilson, *Bayeux Tapestry,* p. 188.

At the turning point in the Battle of Hastings the young men of the Norman army are encouraged by a man who is wielding his field marshal's baton,[45] who is identified by the inscription as Odo of Bayeux (Plate 67). In the same group of mounted soldiers William lifts up his helmet to show his face (Plate 68), to reveal that he is still alive and to confirm that the rumours of his death are not true. Eustace of Boulogne points to William to reinforce this act.[46] The inscription for Eustace only reveals a first letter 'E' and 'tius', which presumably spelled Eustatius, another form of Eustace. From Plate 68 onwards the lower borders are decorated with archers, aside from one fallen soldier, and the archers are not dressed in armour. The shields of several men are covered in arrows and one rider has moved out of the saddle of his horse and sits on the neck of the animal (Plate 70).

9. The death of Harold

The next scene is the famous depiction of the death of Harold, one of the most difficult scenes for interpretation (Plate 71). The caption leaves no doubt: "Hic Harold rex interfectus est"[Here King Harold has been killed]. There are however many different speculations about which figure in this scene depicts Harold. Some scholars believe that the man with the arrow in his eye is Harold and that he is shown again lying on the ground being cut in his leg by a sword.[47] Others have suggested that Harold is either only the man struck by an arrow or only the latter figure. Andrew Bridgeford adds another speculation to the scene and suggests that the Norman knight that strikes Harold in the leg with his sword after the arrow-scene is a coded portrait of Eustace of Boulogne.[48] Because the Tapestry is the earliest source for the arrow story and the man with the arrow has Harold's name inscribed directly above him it seems very likely that Harold was killed by an arrow in his eye.

The last existing piece of the Tapestry; which is certainly not the last scene from the original, depicts the fall of the English in much detail. The lower borders depict fallen soldiers being stripped of their armour, and the image of dismembered corpses does not make this battle a distant heroic battle but a violent and painful happening.[49] All the way to the end in the lower border there is a curious figure that holds branches and covers his genitals with his hands. The Normans hunt down the fleeing Englishmen: one tries to pull an arrow from his

[45] T.A. Heslop, 'Regarding the Spectators of the Bayeux Tapestry: Bishop Odo and his Circle', *Art History* 32 (2009), 223-249 (p. 225).
[46] Heslop, 'Regarding the Spectators', p. 225.
[47] Wilson, *Bayeux Tapestry,* p. 194.
[48] Bridgeford, 'Whose Tapestry is it anyway', p. 7.
[49] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry,* p. 16.

eye and another looks at the pursuing Norman riders behind them. The Tapestry ends in chaos and slaughter, the image of the defeat of the English marks the end of the Tapestry as it exists now.

Unsurprisingly, the fleeing Englishmen were not the original ending of the Bayeux Tapestry. The conclusion of the story and therefore the Tapestry seems to have been missing by the early eighteenth century and possibly more has been lost during the many adventures of the work.[50] It is very likely that in the original ending William was depicted as the new ruler of England, enthroned and dressed in a long gown and wearing a crown. As the Tapestry displays his invasion and victory, an image of William's Christmas Day Coronation is almost a certainty.[51] This image would be similar to the opening scene of the Tapestry where King Edward sits on a throne, which would give the Tapestry a framing structure with the old king and new king of England on both ends.

Now that the story of the Conquest as told by the Tapestry is fully discussed, the following chapter will discuss the background of the Tapestry and answer the following question: how and where were the depictions of the Bayeux Tapestry designed and stitched onto the enormous piece of linen cloth, and more importantly, by who? The focus of chapter 2 will be on the connection between the patron and the Tapestry; the relationship between the patron, designer and embroiderers; and the place and project of manufacture.

[50] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 17.
[51] Laynesmith, 'A Canterbury Tale', p. 43.

CHAPTER 2 – THE MIXED PROVENANCE OF THE TAPESTRY

In order to analyse the Tapestry's depiction of Harold and William, it is important to know the provenance of the work. The introduction has indicated that the Tapestry was most likely embroidered by Anglo-Saxon women and that the patron was the Norman Odo of Bayeux. Odo did not receive much interest of scholars, this contradicts with his important role during the Norman invasion and the Battle of Hastings and his association with the Bayeux Tapestry as the commissioner. Orderic Vitalis, a writer from the 11th century, has presented Odo as an extraordinary personality, the Conqueror's closest associate, a man of insatiable ambition and uncontrolled lust who was the very epitome of Norman restlessness and the foremost oppressor of conquered England.[52] Orderic also stresses that Odo had a deep concern for the external and material aspects of the religious life and gives him full credit for his role in the ecclesiastical development of England and Normandy.[53] His outspoken character, diverse career and above all his connection to the Bayeux Tapestry are reasons why a large part of this chapter deals with Odo of Bayeux and his depiction in the Tapestry. It is useful to understand how a Norman patron may have worked together with Anglo-Saxon embroiderers and designers. This chapter therefore further discusses the English provenance of the Tapestry and the project of manufacture.

1. The connection of Odo with the Tapestry

Before Odo of Bayeux was widely recognized as the commissioner of the Tapestry, it was generally believed that the wife of William, Matilda, designed and embroidered the Tapestry. After its earliest recording in 1476, the Tapestry was brought to wide public attention in 1729 by Dom Bernard de Montfaucon, a great historian.[54] By that time the wife of William was associated with the design and manufacture of the Tapestry. Over the years it became a certainty that Matilda had made the Tapestry, although there was no actual evidence for this belief. It was probably assumed that Matilda and her ladies-in-waiting must have embroidered this work in order to celebrate her husband William's deeds and achievement in conquering

[52] D.R. Bates, 'The Character and Career of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux (1049/50-1097)', *Speculum A Journal of Medieval Studies* 50 (1975), 1-20 (p. 1).
[53] Bates, 'The Character and Career of Odo', p. 1.
[54] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 28.

the English.[55] Some English and French scholars debated about two possible Matilda's as the patron of the Tapestry; Queen Matilda or a granddaughter of the Conqueror named Matilda. Others discarded the whole Matilda theory; the Tapestry was regarded as a work that included indecencies[56] and the wife or granddaughter of the Conqueror should not have been associated with improper depictions.

The scholar Delauney suggested: "since the work had been displayed, despite its indelicacies, in the cathedral of Bayeux, it might have been given to that cathedral by a cleric whose morals were not immaculate".[57] Since Odo of Bayeux was a bishop that had a mistress and a son, he was a likely candidate for the role of commissioner of the Tapestry, according to Delauney. Moreover, Odo's power in England gave him excellent knowledge of the events and his motive might have been his concern for embellishing the cathedral at Bayeux.[58] The Tapestry connects the oath of Harold with the city of Bayeux, the cathedral city of Odo, while other written sources connect the oath with different places. William of Poitiers has located the oath of Harold at Bonneville, and Orderic Vitalis at Rouen.[59]

Odo is the only identified Norman cleric in the Tapestry, and he is depicted in the scenes of two important moments of the invasion: where William commands the building of the ships (Plate 34) and the point in battle where the soldiers have to be rallied (Plate 67). That Odo had been given a greater role in the Tapestry than in any written sources from that period is further evidence that he may have been the patron.

The identification of several tenants of Odo in the Tapestry has also confirmed that Odo was indeed the patron. The Tapestry depicts two minor characters with the unusual names Wadard and Vital. Bolton Corney has demonstrated with the Domesday Book that Odo had two tenants with the names Wadard and Vital. They both held lands from Odo in the county of Kent, where Odo was earl.[60] Because Odo was the half-brother of the ruler of England, he had access to great wealth in England. Bernstein indicates that Odo liberally rewarded his followers out of his enormous holdings, among these followers were Hugh de Port, Roger Bigot, Wadard and Vital.[61] The last two were not recorded in other contemporary writings, yet two figures are identified and captioned with the names Wadard and Vital on the Tapestry.

---

[55] Bridgeford, 'Whose Tapestry is it anyway?', p. 6.
[56] The Ælfgyva scene and several 'obscenity figures' in the borders.
[57] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 29.
[58] Ibidem.
[59] Hicks, 'The Life Story', p. 23.
[60] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 30.
[61] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 33.

Wadard is depicted immediately after the landing of the Normans in England, where he is riding on horseback while other Normans on foot are foraging for food (Plate 46). Heslop suggests that Wadard is given a supervisory role in the logistical aspect of the scene.[62] Vital appears in the Tapestry as a lookout and personal messenger of William, the Duke asks Vital whether he has seen the army of Harold (Plates 54-55). It cannot be a coincidence that Odo had two tenants named Wadard and Vital who are immortalized on the Tapestry. The identification of these men in the Tapestry, the prominent appearance of Odo and the connection between Bayeux and the oath of Harold found in the Tapestry undeniably connect Odo with the commissioning and the design of the Tapestry.

2. The life of Odo of Bayeux

Odo was born either soon after the year 1030 or after 1035. His mother, Herleva of Falaise, had formerly been the mistress of Duke Robert I of Normandy.[63] From that illicit relationship William was born, which makes Odo and William half-brothers. Odo and another brother Robert were legitimately born from the marriage between Herleva and Herluin, Viscount of Conteville.[64] From an early age on William was destined for the life of fighting and ruling, and Odo for a career in the church.[65] It was not until the year 1066 that Odo started a political career aside from his extensive ecclesiastical career.

The invasion of England by his half-brother William was clearly a turning-point in Odo's life. Odo took part in the councils that planned the invasion, and he may have helped finance and man the fleet and army and probably accompanied the invasion force.[66] Heslop indicates that there is documentary evidence of Odo's contribution to the invasion fleet in the form of a ship list, which identifies the role of Bishop Odo in the enterprise.[67] After the battle at Hastings, William rewarded Odo greatly with the earldom of Kent and the castle at Dover. Odo was given lands that were previously in the hands of Harold, and the lands which he received made him by far the wealthiest of the Norman tenants-in-chief.[68] Odo had the responsibility to defend the south-eastern coast and to pacify the possible rebellious area

[62] Heslop, 'Regarding the Spectators', p. 229.
[63] Bates, 'Character and Career of Odo', p. 2.
[64] Hicks, 'The Life Story', p. 24.
[65] Bernstein, *The Mystery,* p. 31.
[66] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry,* p. 110.
[67] Heslop, 'Regarding the Spectators', p. 228.
[68] Bates, 'Character and Career of Odo', p. 2.

around Canterbury.[69] When William returned to Normandy he made Odo vice-regent over England. Odo would rule over England in William's absence, which made him the second most powerful man in the Anglo-Norman kingdom.[70]

The flourishing ecclesiastical and political career and the wealth of Odo were all lost in one blow when in 1082 he was arrested and thereby lost all his authority and English lands. On William's command Odo was imprisoned, but the motives of the Conqueror are uncertain. William may have charged Odo for inducing knights from all parts of England to join him in a military expedition over the Alps.[71] Others have suggested that Odo was arrested for conspiring to purchase the papacy.[72] In any case, the severity of the offence caused William to imprison his half-brother up to the end of his life. Even on his death-bed, when William ordered all prisoners to be released, he specifically excluded his brother.[73] Their brother, Robert of Mortain, eventually could persuade William to release Odo.

Back in England Odo participated in the revolt against the new king, William Rufus, in 1088.[74] The rebellion failed and Odo returned to Normandy. In late 1096 Odo joined Robert Curthose, duke of Normandy, on the First Crusade. The party wintered in southern Italy with their Norman kinsmen and early 1097 Odo passed away at Palermo.[75] Odo was commemorated by a great tomb: a small reminder of once being the wealthiest man of England after his half-brother and ruler of England, William.

Orderic Vitalis is the only near-contemporary chronicler to have written extensively about the life, character and career of Bishop Odo. In his work he stressed both the good and bad qualities of the churchman who broadened his career with relations in politics aside from ecclesiastical affairs. Orderic describes Odo's character as a combination of unique qualities and unrivalled authority. Orderic has stated that in Odo's character "vices were mingled with virtues", and that he was "more given to worldly affairs than to spiritual contemplation".[76]

3. The depiction of Odo of Bayeux in the Tapestry

As commissioner of the Tapestry Odo must have had influence on the depiction of Harold and of William, but also of himself. In the Tapestry scenes where Odo is depicted he is given an

[69] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 32.
[70] Hicks, 'The Life Story', p. 24.
[71] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 34.
[72] Bates, 'Character and Career of Odo', p. 2.
[73] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 34.
[74] Bates, 'Character and Career of Odo', p. 2.
[75] Bates, 'Character and Career of Odo', p. 2.
[76] Hicks, 'The Life Story', p. 23.

important role in the events, this may be Odo's own influence or the designer's choice to flatter him. An analysis of Odo's depiction in the Tapestry not only reveals his relationship towards his half-brother William, but also provides some insight in the goals he wanted to achieve with the Tapestry.

David R. Bates states: "the mentality exposed in the famous Tapestry is extremely assertive: Odo, his church and his men appear at a number of crucial moments in the story".[77] The first two scenes in the Tapestry where Odo is identified by the inscriptions depict him next to his two brothers: William and Robert (Plate 48). The inscription clearly states: "et hic episcopus cibum et potum benedicit"[and here the bishop blesses the food and drink] and "Odo episcopus Willelm Rotbert"[Bishop Odo William Robert]. The depiction of the three brothers indicates a council where William is advised by Odo, the Duke and his brother both face Odo while the latter raises his hands as if to explain something.

Although these are the first scenes where Odo is clearly identified, they may not be the first occurrences of Odo's presence. A few scenes back in the Tapestry (Plate 35) is the moment when William orders ships to be built: "Hic Willelm dux iussit naves edificare"[Here Duke William ordered ships to be built], and many commentators have no doubt that the tonsured figure who advises William to do so is Odo.[78] The council scene where the three brothers are identified has similarities with the ship-building scene, and although the inscription above the scene states that Duke William ordered the ships to be built, it is not hard to tell that the high-ranking ecclesiastic is taking the initiative.[79] No other than Odo can possibly be the tonsured cleric and therefore Odo appears to have ordered the building of the ships in the following scenes.

Earlier on in the Tapestry in Plates 18-19 there is a man depicted in distinctive clothing. Many suggest the figure is probably William, while Owen-Crocker sees the multicoloured clothing as evidence that the figure is Odo: "his suit of coloured triangles (and rhomboids) and the club he carries surely anticipate Odo's appearance at Hastings".[80] The same distinctive clothing is seen in the spectacular scene where Odo encourages young soldiers in battle (Plate 67). Here Odo is captioned: "Hic Odo episcopus baculum tenens confortat pueros"[Here Bishop Odo encourages the young men holding a wand]. Another argument in favour of identifying the man wearing the distinctive clothing as Odo is the fact that the man holds the *baculus*, the wand. Owen-Crocker states: "Odo's body stands out

[77] Bates, 'Character and Career of Odo', p. 12.
[78] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 112.
[79] Heslop, 'Regarding the Spectators', p. 226.
[80] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 113.

clearly against the plain background, with his *baculus* penetrating the identifying caption ODO EPS. His costume is distinctive. Fully coloured, alternating triangles distinguish him from other men in their open rings of mail".[81] Although Odo is not mentioned in the caption of Plates 18-19, he could have been a witness of Harold's brave act and the figure might forebode his presence at Hastings in later scenes.

The fully coloured clothing with triangles is also found on the man who joins William during the crossing of the river Couesnon (Plates 18-19), the same scene where Harold saves two men from the quicksand. Wilson has suggested that this figure is William, but Owen-Crocker says: "William could be either the man on the aroused stallion (…) or the lavishly armed figure in the centre of the scene (…) but the figure closely witnessing Harold's triumph is surely Odo".[82] Although Odo is not tonsured in this particular scene, the lack of it is not sufficient evidence that Odo is not the figure in plate 19. The Tapestry has several other occasions where the embroiderers forgot tonsures: it is therefore possible that Odo is presented much earlier on in the Tapestry only without the inscription of his name.

The scene where Odo encourages the young men in battle (Plate 67) stands out from other scenes. The figure of Odo is according to Owen-Crocker "the widest single figure in the Tapestry, measuring, from the edge of the back hoof to the muzzle of the horse, about 53.27cm".[83] Ships, buildings and groups of figures in the Tapestry are of course wider than this single horse, but the horse of Odo is individualized while other horses are not. The depiction of Odo's horse underlines the importance of the presence of the bishop. The horse is larger than any other in the battle scenes of the Tapestry, and the horse and Odo are entirely foregrounded and the other horses and knights do not overlap the figure. The overlapping is rare because any other horse in the Tapestry is overlapped by other horses and riders, and Owen-Crocker indicates: "although one rider may be in advance of the others in terms of linear progression, he is not necessarily the most prominent in his group".[84] Despite the fact that the first horse and rider of a group are not overlapped, they are multiplied and therefore lose any individuality. Most riders behind the first figure of such a group are depicted in the same position with their weapons and the horses' heads are placed in a similar way, which gives the impression of massed riders. This is not the case with Odo's horse.

The scene includes two horses galloping in the opposite direction of Odo's horse to further highlight the individuality of the horse and the importance of Odo. The distinctive

[81] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 110.
[82] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 113.
[83] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 109.
[84] Ibidem.

clothing and the *baculus*, a wooden club, make Odo stand out even more. Because he was a man of the church, Odo would not have carried a blood-shedding spear or sword.[85] The *baculus* was a bishop's staff of pastoral office, and the inscriptions suggest that he might have blessed the warriors with this episcopal staff.[86] Odo's portrayal as an active participant in full armour led to the assumption that he was a combatant, but the inscription above his figure where he encourages the troops suggests support and command.[87]

As such, Odo is depicted in three, and possibly five, important scenes in the Tapestry. The way Odo and his horse are depicted in the battle scene (Plate 67) highlight his importance during the Conquest, and the inscriptions in both the battle scene and the scene which presents him with his brothers William and Robert (Plate 48) underline his presence and authority at the events. It is likely that Odo advised William to build ships although the caption of that scene does not mention this (Plate 35). The distinctive clothing in the battle scene (Plate 67) is also found in the scene where the troops of William cross the river Couesnon (Plates 18-19), which suggests that Odo was also present in William's campaign before the battle of Hastings, in which Harold also participated. It therefore seems that Odo witnessed Harold's brave act of saving soldiers from the quicksand near Mont St. Michel (Plate 20).

4. The origin of the Tapestry

A significant clue for the English origin of the Tapestry is that at the time when Anglo-Saxon women were well known for embroidery skills, there was no comparable art form of embroidery in Normandy around the Conquest.[88] English women were famed for their skill in embroidery,[89] and as Odo of Bayeux had the English Canterbury under his rule after the Conquest, the excellent Anglo-Saxon embroiderers were in his reach. They were of course the perfect resource for the creation of a magnificent memorial to the success of his half-brother William the Conqueror.

Inside the work itself there are many clues for English embroiderers. The inscriptions reveal Anglo-Saxon lettering and spelling forms and leave no doubt that English design was used and English embroiderers worked on the Tapestry.[90] The choice of Latin for the

[85] Hicks, 'The Life Story', p. 17.
[86] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry,* p. 111.
[87] Bates, 'Character and Career of Odo', p. 6.
[88] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 38.
[89] Heslop, 'Regarding the Spectators', p. 230.
[90] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 39.

inscriptions is consistent with the Norman patron: a Norman would not have chosen English text for a celebration of the Conquest.[91] Despite the fact that the text in the Tapestry was dictated by the Norman patron, there are English characteristics in the style of the lettering. The name of Gyrth is spelled with an Anglo-Saxon 'Ð' (thorn) and Edward the Confessor is indicated as 'Eadwardus', a spelling only found in Anglo-Saxon writings. William the Conqueror is identified by several different spellings, fifteen times the Anglo-Saxon spelling is used which is found in Anglo-Saxon texts: 'Willelm', compared to only three times the Norman form 'Wilgelm'.[92]

Certain figures in the main narrative and borders of the Tapestry also reveal an English background. Odo had, aside from excellent seamstresses, also access to a master designer who had affinity with manuscript art, as Canterbury was the center of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. The graphic design of the Tapestry extracts and recycles images from manuscripts known to have been in the possession of Christ Church and St Augustine's in Canterbury.[93] Due to the significant number of illustrated manuscripts that has survived from the Anglo-Saxon period, the late paleographer and historian of illuminated manuscripts Francis Wormald was able to note significant parallels between figures in the Tapestry and images in pre-Conquest English manuscripts.[94]

At one point in the Tapestry the Normans forage for food at Hastings and a Norman holds a coil of rope above his head. This figure has striking similarities with a figure that is a personification of Labour in the 11th-century version of *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, an allegorical poem. The tale is a much-copied late classical book, but only a Canterbury manuscript that holds this poem has the same type of coil of rope for the figure that represents Labour as the coil of rope belonging to the Norman forager in the Tapestry.[95] The second example is found in Plate 11, where the lower border depicts a bird slinger. The bird slinger of the Tapestry has gestures and sling, including the tassel on the end, that are almost identical to those in a depiction of Abraham in the Ælfric Hexateuch, an illustrated Old English rework of the first books of the Bible.[96] The manuscript was kept at St. Augustine's Canterbury and provides many pictorial similarities with the Tapestry,[97] of which the bird slinger is one.

[91] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 37.
[92] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 39.
[93] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 112.
[94] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 39.
[95] Ibidem.
[96] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 40.
[97] Heslop, 'Regarding the Spectators', p. 242.

Additional evidence for an English origin of the Tapestry has been found by more scholars after Wormald's first findings. The scene in the Tapestry where Conan escapes from Dol using a rope down the castle (Plate 21) is similar to an escape scene from the Book of Joshua found in the Ælfric Hexateuch. The Israelite from the Joshua story is being let down by a rope from the top of a building. He wears a short skirt like Conan does and their legs and feet are placed in a similar position, also they are both midway down the rope in their depictions.[98] Another example is found in the scene from the Tapestry where William dines with his brothers and other men at a round table during the feast (Plate 48), the servant in this scene carries a bowl in one hand while a long thin napkin is draped over the other. In the Ælfric manuscripts there is a servant figure very similar to the Tapestry servant: he also carries a bowl in one hand and holds a similar napkin in the other that even terminates in two points in the same manner as the Tapestry napkin.[99]

The Ælfric Hexateuch was not the only manuscript located at Canterbury around the time the Tapestry was made. The Utrecht Psalter, a masterpiece of Carolingian revival of Roman culture, also resided in Canterbury and was a much admired and copied work filled with classical motifs, personifications and building types.[100] The first page of the Utrecht psalter shows a building with a structure very much similar to the small building William and his men gallop past on their way to release Harold (Plates 11-12): both structures are built on models of classical buildings. Another example of a classical shaped building in the Tapestry is in the scene where William, Odo and Robert hold a council (Plate 48): the three men are placed inside an unusual type of building for medieval times. In the Utrecht Psalter's rendering of Psalm 57 a group of officials are seated in front of a similar building with a pedimented structure.[101] No doubt the designer of the Tapestry turned to these images from the Utrecht Psalter for the inspiration of building structures in the scenes with Norman settings.

Not only certain building structures in the Tapestry are inspired on images in the Utrecht Psalter, but also Harold's death scene seems influenced by the manuscript. The iconography of the Psalter is used by the Tapestry designer while creating the image of Harold being hit by an arrow. In the Psalter illustration there is a warrior being struck by an arrow, while he braces himself against a rocky outcrop. While he rests on his shield, he clutches his broken lance in one hand while with the other he attempts to pull an arrow out of

[98] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 40.
[99] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 42.
[100] Ibidem.
[101] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 43.

his head.[102] This figure seems to be used by the Tapestry designer as an example for the depiction of Harold in his death scene, where he tries to pull an arrow out of his eye.

A final similarity between the Tapestry and a Canterbury manuscript is found in a comparison between the dining scene during the feast in the Tapestry (Plate 48) and the Last Supper illustration in St Augustine's Gospels, a 6th-century Italian manuscript.[103] This manuscript was given to St Augustine by Pope Gregory the Great in 597 at the start of his conversion of the Anglo-Saxons.[104] Odo and Christ are placed in the same central position at a circular table on which the men that accompany them rest on with one arm while they look at the centered figure that blesses the food and drink.

To conclude, certain illustrations found in the Canterbury manuscripts Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, Ælfric Hexateuch, Utrecht Psalter and St Augustine's Gospels seem to have been used as models for figures in the Bayeux Tapestry by its designer. These similarities, the well-known embroidery skills of Anglo-Saxon women, Odo's connection with Canterbury, and the Anglo-Saxon spelling provide sufficient evidence to confirm Canterbury as the place of origin of the Tapestry and the designer[105] worked within an English tradition of manuscript illustrations and iconography.

5. The workshops and manufacture

Unfortunately there are no precise recordings of how the making of the Tapestry would have been organized. However, writings of medieval craftsmen have shed some light on practices of medieval workshops. Although 'Theophilus' did not mention embroidery in his otherwise comprehensive manual *On the Various Arts (De Diversis Artibus)* (c.1100), his descriptions of the organization of workshops and the division of labour provide insights into the creation and manufacturing of an enormous work of art.[106]

The designer was assigned to the first stage, to draw the scheme of the patron on a small scale.[107] The designer was most likely the head of the workshops. In the Tapestry's case there is sufficient evidence that there were multiple workshops: each workshop might have had an individual head in charge of the embroiderers. Once the drawings of the designer were

[102] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 43.
[103] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 44.
[104] Ibidem.
[105] The designer may have been Scolland, abbot of St. Augustine's, Canterbury. For this see H.B. Clarke, 'The Identity of the Designer of the Bayeux Tapestry', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 35 (2013), 119–40.
[106] Hicks, 'The Life Story', p. 44.
[107] Hicks, 'The Life Story', p. 44.

discussed with the heads of the workshops and approved by the patron, they might have been scaled up into full-sized ones on separate pieces of parchment.[108] These drawings and large pieces of linen were distributed among the different workshops, where groups of Anglo-Saxon women worked on the depictions sitting opposite from each other.

Owen-Crocker provides evidence for the suggestion of different workshops during the production: "[t]he links are betrayed by subtle differences in the graphic style of the needlework which suggest that the commission was so large that lengths of linen were given out simultaneously to be embroidered in different workshops".[109] There are differences between the several sections of the Tapestry which indicate that the master design was reinterpreted, perhaps by the draftsmen or by the embroiderers.[110] For example the Normans are distinguished in their introduction scenes: they have traditional clothing and hairstyles. The English are depicted in tunics and have different hairstyles than the Normans and moustaches. After the first seam that indicates a separate cloth of linen, the distinguished features between the Normans and the English become less apparent.

The second workshop's figures are stylistically similar to earlier depictions but there are some individual choices of details, the earliest part of the second piece of linen suddenly has more cross-garters.[111] The cross-garters disappear soon in the following scenes, perhaps because the designer changed his mind, or the embroiderers, or it consumed too much time. The following separate pieces of the Tapestry depict clusters of figures in different clothing, indicating perhaps different occupations or different styles and choices of the embroiderers, these different costumes fade when the battle scenes commence and the armour of the soldiers dominate the Tapestry. Hicks suggests that the embroiderers probably had considerable autonomy over the colours of the figures,[112] this perhaps explains the individual choices in the clothing as well.

It must have been a difficult task for an English designer and embroiderers to stitch the defeat of their late King Harold onto an enormous piece of linen, under the instruction and authority of a Norman patron. However, the abbeys of St. Augustine's, Canterbury, and St. Albans acknowledged Odo of Bayeux as a benefactor.[113] Odo may not have lacked the sensitivity and tolerance that Orderic Vitalis ascribed as absent in many Norman clerics.[114]

[108] Hicks, 'The Life Story', p. 46.
[109] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry,* p. 4.
[110] Ibidem.
[111] Ibidem.
[112] Hicks, 'The Life Story', p. 47.
[113] Bates, 'Character and Career of Odo', p. 9.
[114] Bates, 'Character and Career of Odo', p. 10.

The many English features in the Tapestry perhaps not only suggest the English origin and Odo's appreciation of English art, but also the freedom the English designer and embroiderers were given in depicting their hero Harold. This is further confirmed by the individual choices the embroiderers have made in clothing between different scenes. It seems that the diverse character of Odo of Bayeux also included a certain sympathetic attitude towards the English, albeit closely linked to his appreciation for English manuscript art. The relationship between Odo of Bayeux and the English embroiderers may not have been as hostile as one would expect; it is interesting to see how the relationship has influenced the depictions of Harold and William in the Tapestry.

To conclude, the background of the Tapestry combines a Norman patron with an English designer and embroiderers, whose personal choices are traceable in the unique depiction of the Norman Conquest. Having discussed the patron in detail, the next chapter will return to Tapestry scenes and will mainly focus on the depiction of Harold and William. Their depictions in certain events will be compared with several written sources of the Conquest to establish whether the Tapestry's depictions reveal a Norman or English point of view, and how this relates to the mixed background of the Tapestry.

CHAPTER 3 – THE PORTRAYAL OF HAROLD AND WILLIAM

The Tapestry was commissioned by a Norman, and the danger of this is that we naturally expect a Norman point of view in the depiction of events. But as chapter 2 has demonstrated, the Norman patron Odo of Bayeux might have had a sympathetic attitude towards the English designer and embroiderers and perhaps gave them some freedom in depicting the events of the Norman Conquest. In order to confirm whether this is true or false, this chapter will take a closer look at important scenes with the main characters of the Tapestry: Harold and William. Additionally, scenes with Odo of Bayeux, Edward the Confessor and Guy of Ponthieu will also be considered in relation to Harold and William. Several aspects within the depictions of the Tapestry itself will be taken into account, but more importantly, the story told by the Tapestry is compared with written sources of Norman, Anglo-Norman and English origin in order to determine whether the narrative on the Tapestry leans towards a Norman or an English point of view.

1. Written sources

The Anglo-Norman William of Malmesbury explained in his *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (*The Deeds of the Kings of the English)* (c.1125):[115]

> Many both Norman and English have written about king William for different reasons: the former have praised him to excess, lauding both his good and bad deeds to the skies; the latter, out of national hatred, have heaped upon their ruler undeserved reproach.

Malmesbury came from a mixed Norman and English parentage, he claimed to steer a middle course in his writings. Malmesbury stands high in estimation of modern historians because he wrote carefully planned histories based on wide research and he wanted to reach the unbiased truth.[116] His writings are in contrast with written sources of Norman and English origin, yet he shares the Norman view that Harold unlawfully seized the crown. Another Anglo-Norman author, Henry of Huntingdon, wrote his account in the twelfth century; the *Historia Anglorum*

[115] R.A. Brown, *The Norman Conquest*, (New York, 1986), p. 116.
[116] Brown, *Norman Conquest*, p. 114.

(1135-40). Both Malmesbury and Huntingdon portray Harold negatively: they increasingly question Harold's legitimacy and see him as usurper of the throne.[117]

Bernstein has indicated that the Tapestry's imagery does not fit neatly beside the Norman versions known to us in the two prose narratives that were composed within eight years of the Conquest.[118] William of Jumièges wrote a brief account of the Conquest; *Gesta Normannorum Ducum (The Deeds of the Dukes of the Normans),* which was first written in 1060 and extended in 1070. William of Poitiers wrote a detailed biography of William the Conqueror; *Gesta Guillelmi ducis Normannorum et regis Anglorum (History of William the Conqueror)* (c.1070). Jumièges and Poitiers were officially recognised historians whose view on the events was most likely from the Norman point of view: they idolized William. Despite the potential bias in the sources, the two Norman accounts are regarded as principal sources for the history of the Conquest. It is worth noting that even for the hostile Norman sources of Poitiers and Jumièges Harold was Edward's most eminent subject in wealth, honour and power.[119]

The earliest English sources for the events around the Norman Conquest are three of the seven extant versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.* The 'E' version of the *Chronicle,* compiled at St. Augustine's, Canterbury, is the chief source written from an English perspective.[120] The document stresses the good as well as the bad qualities of William and portrays Harold as a legitimate successor of King Edward. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* applauds Harold's services: he was noble earl who had loyally followed his lord's commands at all times, with words and deeds, neglecting nothing that met the need of the people's king.[121]

Another English source comes from Eadmer, Englishman by birth, who was brought up in the monastic community at Christ Church, Canterbury. Eadmer was young in 1066, and as an adult he cherished his memories of the old days and resented the Norman invaders.[122] He wrote the *History of Recent Events in England,* and his initial purpose was to write a biography of Archbishop Anselm. Eadmer had to create an historical background and he did so by going back to the political history of England from the end of the 10th century towards

[117] P. Bouet, F. Neveux, 'Edward the Confessor's Succession According to the Bayeux Tapestry' in *The Bayeux Tapestry, New Approaches,* ed. M.J. Lewis, G.R. Owen-Crocker (2011), p. 62.
[118] Bernstein, *The Mystery,* p. 114.
[119] H.E.J. Cowdrey, 'King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry: a Critical Introduction' in *King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry* ed. G.R. Owen-Crocker, (2011), p. 2.
[120] Bernstein, *The Mystery,* p. 114.
[121] Cowdrey, 'Critical Introduction', p. 3.
[122] Bernstein, *The Mystery,* p. 115.

the Conquest. Despite the fact that his account is later than the Norman accounts, his history is valuable because it reveals what a Canterbury monk of native stock thought of the same events depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry and described by William of Jumièges and William of Poitiers.[123]

2. Portrayal of Harold

2.1 Narrative scenes

The opening scene of the Tapestry depicts Harold and Edward the Confessor, in the very next scene Harold rides towards Bosham in order to prepare his journey towards Normandy (**Fig. 1**). Written sources of Norman and English origin give conflicting reasons for Harold's journey; suggesting either that it was to inform William that he was Edward's designated heir; or to negotiate the release of his own brother and nephew who had been hostages of William's since 1051.[124] According to the Norman accounts, Edward had sent Harold to Normandy in order to confirm a designation of William as heir to the throne. Subsequently, looking at the opening scene of the Tapestry, Bernstein states it is easy to read the narrative as portraying Edward sending Harold on a mission.[125] However, though we can clearly see that Edward and Harold are in a discussion, the inscription does not reveal who initiated the journey of Harold.

The earliest English source, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* has no records of the journey, but Eadmer in his *History of Recent Events in England* provides a detailed version of Harold's journey. He contradicts the Norman accounts, because according to Eadmer "the initiative for the journey lay not with Edward but with Harold when he came to court to request permission to travel to Normandy in a bold attempt to recover members of his family being held hostage by William for over a decade".[126] Eadmer included a short speech by King Edward which provides interesting information about the journey to Normandy and William's character, although it is certainly an invention of Eadmer himself:

> I will have no part in this: but, not to give the impression of wishing to hinder you, I give you leave to go where you will and see what you can do. But I have a presentiment that you will succeed in bringing misfortune upon the whole kingdom and discredit upon yourself. For I know that the duke is not so simple as to be at all

[123] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 115.
[124] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 152.
[125] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 116.
[126] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 115.

> inclined to give them up to you unless he foresees that in doing so he will secure some great advantage to himself.[127]

The English source depicts William as devious while at the same time suggests that Harold did not listen to Edward and still left for Normandy while he knew he could bring misfortune upon himself and the kingdom.

So according to the Norman accounts Harold was sent to Normandy by Edward to confirm that William was his successor. The English Eadmer contradicts the Norman accounts and writes that Harold himself initiated his journey; an attempt to free some of his family members. The Tapestry confirms the journey, but does not agree nor disagree with both the Norman and English accounts; the inscription in the opening scene does not reveal who initiated Harold's journey. The neutral stance of the Tapestry is in correspondence with the mixed background of the Tapestry: a Norman patron and English embroiderers.

Fig. 1: Opening scene with King Edward and Harold, Harold rides towards Bosham (Plates 1-2)

When Harold arrives in Beaurain (Plate 9), he is deprived of his belt and sword by Guy (**Fig. 2**). This specific event during the encounter of Guy and Harold could easily have been left out by the Norman patron or the English designer. But taking away the belt has a significant meaning as Julia Barrow indicates:

> Belts were symbolic objects after all: canon law demanded the renunciation of belts, and thus of military activity, by laymen performing acts of penance for grave offences. Theft of a belt would therefore not merely mean the acquisition of a valuable object, but a calculated insult against its owner, who would surely therefore be provoked into retaliating.[128]

[127] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 115.
[128] J. Barrow, 'Demonstrative Behaviour and Political Communication in Later Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007), 127-150 (pp. 139-40).

The scene where Guy of Ponthieu takes away the belt and sword of Harold indicates an insult towards Harold, and is possibly a hint towards the 'rebellion' of Harold later on. Perhaps the Norman patron wanted to highlight the vulnerability of Harold in Normandy, but another possibility is that this scene was deliberately included by the English designer. By depicting the provocative behaviour of Guy, the designer might legitimize the later behaviour of Harold. Both from the Norman and the English point of view, there was a good reason for including this scene in the Tapestry.

Fig. 2: Beaurain, Guy takes away the belt of Harold (Plate 9)

At one point Harold and William are involved in a discussion (Plates 16-17). Harold is depicted centre-stage and he addresses William while gesturing with both hands; he appears to be agitated while William calmly listens (**Fig. 4**). Harold points towards the scene with a cleric and a woman named Ælfgyva (a purely English name) (**Fig. 3**); the couple might be the subject of Harold and William's discussion. The scene alludes to a scandalous event, as Chapter 1 has explained. Although the scene with Ælfgyva is certainly significant, it is nothing that causes an outward rift between Harold and William, because the two dukes are shown together on a campaign in the next scene (Plate 18). Then what was the reason for the insertion of such a mysterious scene of Ælfgyva?

McNulty suggests that the woman in the scene is Ælfgyva of Northampton, who was first the mistress and then the wife of Cnut, king of England, Denmark, and Norway.[129] Ælfgyva had deceived Cnut by pretending to have given him two sons. The eldest son Swein was actually the son of a priest and his concubine, while Harold Harefoot was the son of a cobbler, a workman.[130] The lower border confirms these stories; a naked man mimics the gestures of the cleric (**Fig. 5**), alluding to a scandalous event; and another naked figure is a workman (**Fig. 4**), recalling the second deception by Ælfgyva.

All this happened some thirty years before William and Harold had a discussion in Normandy. The events remained relevant because it bore directly on Norway's claims to the throne of England. Near the end of Edward's reign there were three claimants to the succession of the English throne: Harold, William and the Norwegian Harold Hardrada, who was the successor of King Magnus, who in turn was the successor of Swein.[131] Harold Hardrada claimed that he had the right to the throne of England under the treaty between Magnus and Hardacanute, a later king of England. The treaty between Magnus and Hardacanute specified that they would be each other's heir if either king died childless.[132] Hardacanute died first, but Magnus did not pursue the throne of England afterwards.

Ælfgyva and her son Swein had established a questionable connection with the English succession because Cnut was not Swein's real father. In the Tapestry, Harold and William might be discussing the Norwegian king Harold Hardrada's potential claim to the English throne and concluded that the Norwegians forfeited any claim because they had cast away Ælfgyva and Swein.[133] It is difficult to detect a Norman or English point of view in the insertion of the Ælfgyva scene, since it underscores a legitimate claim of the throne of England for both Harold and William. Moreover, the two dukes are presented amicably in the campaign of the next scene, so their discussion could not have concerned their own desires of the English throne. The Ælfgyva scene seems to highlight an ambiguous stance by the Tapestry; it does not criticize Harold or William, but instead it comments on the illegitimate Norwegian claim of the English throne.

[129] McNulty, 'The Lady Aelfgyva', p. 666.
[130] Laynesmith, 'A Canterbury Tale', p. 44.
[131] McNulty, 'The Lady Aelfgyva', p. 667.
[132] McNulty, 'The Lady Aelfgyva', p. 667.
[133] Laynesmith, 'A Canterbury Tale', p. 45.

Fig. 3: Harold and William in discussion, Harold points to a cleric and woman (Plates 16-17)

Fig. 4: Harold and William in discussion (Plates 16-17)

Fig. 5: Aelfgyva and the cleric (Plate 17)

As became clear in chapter 2, Odo of Bayeux was present during the campaign of William against the rebel Conan of Brittany, where he witnessed Harold's strength and bravery when the latter pulled two men out of the quicksand (Plate 20) (**Fig. 6**). Because Odo is the patron of the Tapestry it seems straightforward, therefore, that he ordered the designer to include this act of Harold in the work. However, if the Tapestry was supposed to celebrate the Norman invasion and depict William the Conqueror as a hero, why would the Norman half-brother of William depict Harold as a hero? It would have been much easier and convenient to exclude the whole event altogether.

I suggest the depiction of the brave act of Harold is the influence of the designer together with the embroiderers, a subtle but clear celebration of their English hero. Surely Odo informed them about this brave act of Harold, as he most likely witnessed it. Also, Odo had to approve all the drawings of the designer; he must have given the designer and embroiderers some freedom in including this scene of Harold. If Odo informed the English about the brave act of Harold and also approved the scene in the Tapestry, it suggests a sympathetic attitude of the patron towards the designer and embroiderers. The scene of Harold's brave act is not only a clear example of English influence in the Tapestry's depiction of Harold; it also reveals how the Norman patron may have interacted with the English designer.

Fig. 6: Harold saves two men from the quicksand (Plates 19-20)

Harold swears an oath to William before his return to England (Plates 25-26) (**Fig. 7**), and there are quite some different ideas about this oath in Norman and English accounts. Two interpretations emerge about Harold's oath; one where Harold willingly swears an oath to William and another where Harold swears an oath under pressure in order to escape. Both Norman authors William of Jumièges and William of Poitiers state that Harold took an oath to

William in order to confirm the Norman duke's succession to the throne. Jumièges wrote: "he [Edward] afterward sent to the duke Harold, the greatest of all earls of his dominions in riches, honour and power, that he should swear fealty (*fidelitatem faceret*) to him concerning Edward's crown and confirm it with Christian oaths".[134] William of Poitiers is even stronger in his formulation: "he [Harold] would strive with all his influence and power to bring about the succession of the English kingdom to William after Edward's death".[135] Harold's oath takes place immediately after his arrival in William's court.

Eadmer, in the *History of Recent Events in England,* is in agreement with the Norman authors in his statement that Harold acknowledged William's succession to the throne. However, Eadmer says that William first mentions the oath, recalling that when the two men were young, Edward had promised to make William his heir. In Eadmer's account, "Harold reluctantly accepts only because 'he could not see any way of escape without agreeing to all that William wished'".[136] Eadmer suggests that William forced Harold into swearing an oath, and Harold could not do anything other than follow William's orders, else he would not have returned to England safely.

In contradiction with William of Poitiers, the oath in the Tapestry is placed after Harold has been in Brittany for a while with William. While the Norman account emphasizes that Harold was sent to Normandy to confirm William's right to the throne, the Tapestry presents a different order of events which confirms a connection between the oath and Harold's safe departure. Instead of appearing as two separate events, "the two episodes are actually joined by the disposition of figures and the position of the inscription".[137] While the soldier on the right watches Harold swear his oath, the other seems to move towards the ship while looking back towards the ceremony with one foot at the water and one foot on dry land (Plate 26) (**Fig. 7**). The first words of the inscription: "Hic Harold Dux reversus est ad Anglicam terram"[Here Duke Harold returns to England] are placed above Harold's hand instead of over the ship, therefore it is clear that the oath ceremony and the departure scene are overlapping (**Fig. 7**). The oath-scene seems therefore hastily; the men of Harold are already moving towards the ship while Harold is still swearing the oath to William.

One way of interpreting the Tapestry's depiction of Harold's journey and oath-taking is that the Tapestry has "a visual parallel with the Norman insistence on how Harold was sent by Edward to confirm the duke as his successor and the way he dutifully, though with

[134] Brown, *Norman Conquest*, p. 13.
[135] Brown, *Norman Conquest*, p. 23.
[136] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 116.
[137] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 117.

understandable reluctance, carried out his mission".[138] However, the ambiguity of the inscriptions and images of the whole event in the Tapestry are convincing; the version comes closest to Eadmer's account which places doubt on whether Harold voluntarily took the oath and whether Edward even sent Harold to Normandy.

Fig. 7: Harold swears an oath to William (Plates 25-26)

The political question whether Harold seized the throne unlawfully or whether he actually was the legitimate successor has brought up many speculations. Norman, Anglo-Norman and English sources contain different versions concerning the legitimate successor and the last words of Edward on his death-bed (**Fig. 9**). Nonetheless, some accounts have an overlap in certain details and the Tapestry shares details with both Norman and English accounts (**Fig. 10**).

The Norman and Anglo-Norman accounts have one thing in common: Harold 'seized' the kingdom. The Norman accounts are those of William of Jumièges and William of Poitiers. Jumièges wrote that "Harold immediately usurped his kingdom, perjured in the fealty which he had sworn to the duke" and Poitiers stresses that Harold seized the throne and that the consecration by Stigand was unholy.[139] Without a ceremony of coronation and anointment a man is not a king, and Poitiers points out that Stigand (**Fig. 10**)was an excommunicated archbishop of Canterbury. The Normans therefore questioned the validity of the ceremony, and the depiction of Stigand in the Tapestry suggests a Norman point of view towards the coronation.

[138] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 117.
[139] Brown, *Norman Conquest*, pp. 14, 26.

The Anglo-Norman authors William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon share the Norman view that Harold was a perjurer. According to Bouet and Neveux, Malmesbury and Huntingdon both "increasingly question Harold's legitimacy and see him as a usurper".[140] Huntingdon wrote in his *Historia Anglorum* that Harold swore to William he would preserve England for William's benefit, and that Harold later usurped the crown of the kingdom. Although Malmesbury confirms in his *Gesta regum Anglorum* that Edward designated Harold king on his death-bed, he shrugs it off as a rumour and he is convinced that Harold's claim is illegitimate.

Cowdrey indicates: "Harold receives it [the crown] from two English followers (**Fig. 10**), and the one offering the crown points downwards towards the dead Edward, not upwards to the deathbed scene. Harold's crowning follows from Edward as dead, not from Edward as alive and making his final testament."[141] Cowdrey states that Harold owes the crown to no circumstances that have gone before but to a seizure of power facilitated solely by his own English followers.[142] Cowdrey suggests that the Tapestry depicts Harold's illegitimate accession; the English leading men chose Harold as new king after the death of Edward, and not Edward himself.

I do not agree with this view. The final words of Edward (**Fig. 9**), his death (**Fig. 8**) and the crowning of Harold (**Fig. 10**) are interconnected, and to me it seem natural that only after the death of the king, a new king can be crowned. Therefore the English follower that points towards the death of Edward during the accession of Harold is not a clue that Harold seized the crown, but the traditional order of events. If Harold truly seized the crown, this would have been depicted as such, with perhaps violent acts and demonstrative gestures of Harold and others.

Fig. 8: The death of Edward the Confessor (Plates 29-30)

[140] Bouet & Neveux, 'Edward's Succession', p. 62.
[141] Cowdrey, 'Critical Introduction', p. 8.
[142] Ibidem.

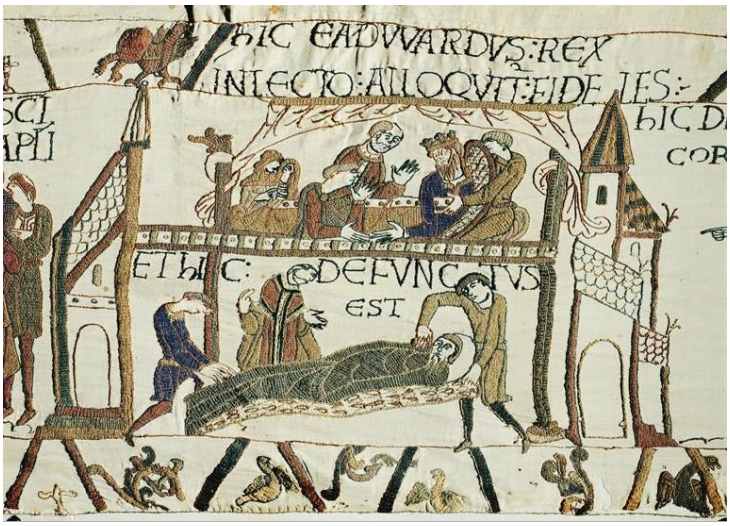

Fig. 9: Edward's death-bed (Plate 30)

Fig. 10: Harold's accession (Plates 31-32)

The Tapestry depicts Harold as being killed by an arrow in his eye or brow, and there are many speculations whether Harold is also depicted on the ground, being hacked in his leg (Plate 71). Bernstein suggests the latter: "the way the artist designed the inscription so that crucial words are situated above both Harold A [figure with the arrow] and Harold B [figure on the ground] permits the viewer to read both figures as the king, first alive, then dead".[143] While the Tapestry portrays the death of Harold in much detail, written sources of English and Norman origin are silent about it. William of Jumièges contradicts with the Tapestry in

[143] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 147.

recording Harold's death: "Harold himself fell in the first shock of battle, pierced with lethal wounds".[144] The Tapestry places the death of Harold at the end of the battle, causing the English to flee.

Because the detail of the arrow in Harold's eye is not found in contemporary texts, it could be an invention by the designer or patron to transmit a message to the viewer with a symbolic depiction. Loss of sight was a moral attribute in medieval times; it placed one on the wrong side of the moral universe.[145] The association between loss of sight and avarice was manifest in the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius.[146] As chapter 2 has demonstrated, the Tapestry's images were greatly influenced by the *Psychomachia* illuminations. The arrow in the eye of Harold in his death-scene might be an invented symbol of avarice by the designer or patron. It was probably chosen because the iconography had associations for both the English and the Normans that could be related by them to Harold's betrayal of William. Harold swore an oath and afterwards seized the kingdom for himself; these acts are brought back in a single image at the end of the Tapestry where Harold is blinded; it reveals the deceitful nature of Harold. By accepting this iconography in the death-scene of Harold, one has to conclude that Harold's death is depicted with a Norman view in mind.

Fig. 11: Death of Harold (Plate 71)

[144] Brown, *Norman Conquest*, p. 14.
[145] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 153.
[146] Ibidem.

2.2 Gestures and posture

Narrative sources, both Norman and Old English, have limitations when it comes to descriptions of gestures: verbal communication is preferred over gestural. The Tapestry is by contrast much richer and is one of the few post-Conquest historical sources looking back into the Anglo-Saxon past revealing gestural communication. The Tapestry designer understood the human need to employ the hands and used a range of 'props' to satisfy it: weapons, horse reins, scepters, drinking vessels, walking sticks; all of which have a function in their context and dramatize the main narrative.[147] Where figures have one hand, or two hands, free the designer has employed gestures to occupy the hands but also to guide and inform the reader. Double gestures are usually depicted in important figures in significant events; the gestures reveal more than only the posture and the position of the body and are therefore worth looking at.

In the opening scene of the Tapestry the right index fingers of Harold and King Edward seem to be touching (**Fig. 12**). Owen-Crocker indicates: "the general iconography of the image is adapted from the Old English illustrated Hexateuch, but the Bayeux artist has changed the hand gestures and created a point of focus where Harold and the king point at one another while touching".[148] Owen-Crocker further suggests that the gesture of an open hand indicates speech. This would mean that in the controversial opening scene of the Tapestry it is Harold who is talking rather than Edward and that Harold was anxious to bring back his family from forced residence in Normandy.[149] This corresponds with the English source of Eadmer, who wrote that it was not Edward who sent Harold on a journey to Normandy, but that it was Harold's own initiative.

[147] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 145.
[148] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 152.
[149] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, pp. 154-5.

Fig. 12: Harold and Edward (Plate 1)

In the scene where Harold and William are having a discussion (Plate 17) (**Fig. 4**), the pointing finger of Harold probably reveals the subject of their talk. However, other gestures in this scene might indicate more. Owen-Crocker points out that Harold's hand is touched by the man next to him, and that these man's fingers and thumb are curled. The touching seems deliberately depicted, not an accident of contiguity". [150] The touching of hands suggests that the man is close to Harold, perhaps he is one of his relatives held hostage in William's court. The discussion between Harold and William could concern negotiations by Harold towards William in order to release his family member.

In the oath-scene of Harold (Plates 25-26) (**Fig. 7**), three attendants point to the fact that 'here Harold made an oath to William' and they stress his rank and identity by pointing upwards towards 'Dux'. The gestures seem to reveal a more Norman point of view. The oath was an important pact between William and Harold, and afterwards Harold is crowned the king of England, in Norman sources described as 'seizing the crown'. The oath and the accession of Harold display a contrast and the pointing attendants of William highlight the Norman view towards the importance of the oath.

Cowdrey suggests that the hunchbacked Harold who returns from Normandy to Edward (Plate 28) (**Fig. 13**) is an icon of his own flawed character.[151] Harold appears in a similar position when he is addressed by Count Guy of Ponthieu (Plate 9). In the scene with

[150] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry,* p. 152.
[151] Cowdrey, 'Critical Introduction', p. 5.

Edward, Harold and his companion are bowed down by some kind of dishonor.[152] In the scene with Guy the clue is that Harold is vividly presented as having to surrender the sword of which he has divested himself (**Fig. 2**). With the sword he also surrenders the *cingulum militare*- the belt was symbolic for the pride of knighthood.[153] Harold bows down in chivalric dishonour before Guy because his belt is taken away. In the scene where Edward receives him, Harold cannot be bowing down in the same manner as he was before Guy. I suggest that Harold bows down before Edward in humility, as a loyal subject of the king and because he has experienced captivity in Normandy.

Fig. 13: Harold returns in England and meets with Edward (Plate 28)

Owen-Crocker points out that in the opening scene where King Edward and Harold come together they point to each other (**Fig. 12**), which implies a degree of equality in their discussion even though by position and costume Harold is shown as being of inferior status to the king. King Edward is significantly larger than Harold: it underscores his authority and Harold's inferiority. When Harold has returned from Normandy (Plate 28) (**Fig. 13**), Edward is again much larger and the scene depicts supporting figures on each side, bearing axes, also point inward, which gives a satisfying symmetry to the encounter.[154] Owen-Crocker questions whether the supporting actors' gestures are indicative of the main protagonists or if each is saying: this is my man and he is right in this discussion.[155] The depiction of Edward is clearly

[152] Cowdrey, 'Critical Introduction', p. 5.
[153] Ibidem.
[154] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 151.
[155] Ibidem.

the influence of the English embroiderers; they wished to honour Edward. The contrast between Edward and Harold is meant to idolize Edward, not to criticize Harold.

Orderic Vitalis describes in his writings the hostile and angry attitude of the English people towards Harold's coronation. It seems this is represented in the Tapestry's depiction of Harold's accession (Plate 32) (**Fig. 10**). The angry crowd certainly indicates a Norman view towards the coronation. It is also possible that the crowd, that represents the lower classes, were angry because they were not allowed to attend the coronation. Their confinement in a sort of building might confirm this. Another suggestion: if the image is read with a Norman view in mind, the crowd indeed seems angry. But with an unbiased view, their faces could also show amazement and wonder. Whether the crowd is angry or amazed, they are in any case not celebrating Harold's coronation, so a strictly English point of view is excluded.

Although Norman sources claim that Harold is a usurper of the kingdom and the agitated crowd of Anglo-Saxons suggests the same, the Tapestry does not depict the same view in the coronation scene (Plate 31) (**Fig. 10**). Harold's stance demonstrates that he is not seizing the crown but is listening to an argument; he is being persuaded.[156] The hand-on-the-hip gesture is also seen in the depiction of Guy of Ponthieu where he listens to the messengers of William (Plate 10), and is therefore an indication of a passive attitude. This graphic depiction of Harold with his hand on his hip while he is given the crown reveals the view of English embroiders or designer: Harold was no usurper but he was chosen as king by the leading men of England.

Julia Barrow indicates that "the men in the chamber were the king's closest followers, the people who had constant access to him and were in his favour, while those in the hall were loyal freeborn subjects though not necessarily people with direct access to the king".[157] Harold is depicted as a faithful and trusted person of the king sitting by his death-bed (Plate 30) (**Fig. 9**). In the private chamber of Edward, with his close followers, Harold is touching Edward's hand, just as they did in the opening scene (**Fig. 12**). Owen-Crocker points out: "[i]nterpreting this gesture could be an important clue to understanding the later touching of hands between Harold and Edward, and hence the nature of Edward's last wishes.[158] When Harold and Edward are parting, at Edward's death-bed, their touching hands are open in this gesture, and the open gesture indicates speech, as Owen-Crocker earlier stated. This suggests that they are engaged in dialogue, Edward nor Harold is dictating to the other, and Harold's

[156] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, pp. 157-160.
[157] Barrow, 'Demonstrative Behaviour and Political Communication', p. 142.
[158] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 152.

left hand may convey his reception of, or response to, King Edward's bequest.[159] The Tapestry therefore not only indicates that Harold was chosen as king by the leading men of England, but also that these men followed the orders of their late king; on his death-bed, Edward designated Harold as is heir.

2.3 Commentary by the horses

Sarah Larratt Keefer has suggested that the Tapestry's horses comment mutely on the ambitions of Normans and English alike.[160] The subtext of the body language of the horses is conveyed for those who can read the code and pay attention to graphic detail, and it runs parallel with the main narrative of the Tapestry, while it offers a counterpoint commentary.[161] Keefer distinguishes several groups of graphic horses: gender-shifting horses, falling horses and priapic horses; each group indicating different hidden messages from the English designer and embroiderers. For the scenes in this chapter the groups of gender-shifting horses and priapic horses are of importance; they are formulaic for shifts in political status and depiction of power and ambition in the scenes of Guy of Ponthieu, Harold and William.

Sarah Larratt Keefer has noted that both Norman and English important figures start out riding one gender of horse, but then have a gender shift occur beneath them, in some cases in the first following scene.[162] This can partially be explained by the fact that the Tapestry was made in multiple workshops, where many embroiderers worked on the depictions at the same time. The embroiderers made their own individual choices in stitching and colours, so the occurrence of many different horses does not seem strange. However, there is quite a remarkable change in the horse of Guy of Ponthieu in the scenes together with Harold.

Guy rides on a light-coloured stallion in the scene where he captures Harold (Plate 7), but further on in the Tapestry where Guy has to hand over Harold to William (Plate 14) he is depicted on a black mare, the head of the animal resembles that of a mule: its ears are very long and distinguished (**Fig. 14**). This shift indicates ranked status within the Norman hierarchy, with Guy's horse inferior to William's great stallion.[163] Even in captivity to Guy of Ponthieu, Harold's dignity is retained,[164] Harold rides a horse that is most likely male and

[159] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry,* p. 155.
[160] S.L. Keefer, 'Body Language: a Graphic Commentary by the Horses of the Bayeux Tapestry' in *King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry* ed. G.R. Owen-Crocker, (2011), p. 95.
[161] Keefer, 'Graphic Commentary by the Horses', p. 95.
[162] Keefer, 'Graphic Commentary by the Horses', p. 95.
[163] Keefer, 'Graphic Commentary by the Horses', p. 95.
[164] Cowdrey, 'Critical Introduction', p. 2.

holds his hawk, a sign of his nobility and authority (**Fig. 14**). So not only is Guy's status inferior to William's, Harold is also placed above Guy when they ride towards William, the mule of Guy is inferior to the male horse of Harold. The change of the horse's appearance might be a result of the different workshops, or it secretly reveals the negative attitude of the Norman patron and English designer towards Guy of Ponthieu; who was a rival of both William and Harold.

Fig. 14: Left: Guy captures Harold (Plate 7) Right: Guy brings Harold to William (Plate 14)

3. Portrayal of William

3.1 Narrative scenes

The narrative scenes which involve William are not elaborately discussed in secondary literature, nor do the Norman and English sources describe William's actions in such detail as they describe Harold's actions. Most sources from both sides confirm the informative inscriptions in the Tapestry about William. The gestures, posture and placement of William in relation to other main figures in the Tapestry reveal much more about the intentions of the Norman patron and the English designer than written sources in comparison with narrative scenes of William. Therefore, in the analysis of William's portrayal, there is more attention for the gestures, posture and placement of William than the narrative scenes.

3.2 Gestures and posture

In the Tapestry's depiction of the oath-taking it appears at first sight that William does not pressure Harold in any way (**Fig. 7**). Harold is saved from imprisonment by William and the two went to Normandy under friendly circumstances. Bernstein states: "regarding the crucial

matter of the oath, on which turns the whole Norman interpretation of the political significance of these events, certain details suggest that the artist is not willing to accept the straightforward Norman version".[165] Yet in the oath-scene William is placed higher than Harold, even though William is sitting and Harold is standing (**Fig. 7**). The patron might have requested a higher and larger position of William, to enforce the latter's authoritative role and indicate a contrast with Harold. Another possibility is that the English designer chose to present William higher and larger, to stress that he was an oppressor and forced Harold to swear an oath. The oath-scene could be read from a Norman as well as an English point of view because the different goals of the patron and designer are both achieved by the depiction of William.

A messenger, who has arrived from England, informs William that Harold has become king of England. The Tapestry depicts gestures that contradict the inscription of the scene: 'Here William ordered ships to be built' (Plates 34-35). Heslop 'reads' William's reaction to the news as "indecisive, if not comic: there is no commanding gesture, no assertive pose".[166] William, in need for advice, turns to his left to a tonsured cleric who is positioned behind him, who is surely his half-brother (**Fig. 15**). William is represented as an indecisive Duke, next to an authoritative Odo. No doubt this was the influence of Odo himself, and perhaps the deliberate choice of the English designer and embroiderers to represent William as less authoritative, which reveals their disliking of the Conqueror.

Fig. 15: William orders ships to be built (Plates 34-35)

During the Battle of Hastings scenes, the Tapestry reveals a large contrast between William and Odo in terms of authority. Heslop states: "[t]he way the men respond to Odo is in marked

[165] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 116.
[166] Heslop, 'Regarding the Spectators', p. 226.

contrast to their earlier reaction to the Duke".[167] Before the battle begins, William speaks to his troops, as a good commander should, so that his men prepare themselves manfully (Plate 57) (**Fig. 16**). William of Poitiers recorded the elaborate speech: William spoke authoritative and led his men to the battle. However, this is clearly not represented in the Tapestry: the men take almost no notice of William. All the men are riding away as he speaks, only the rearmost horseman turns in his saddle but, as the pose of his horse indicates, he will hear at best a few words as he is propelled into the charge.[168] The contrast between William and his half-brother Odo, in terms of authority, is demonstrated in the scene where William lifts up his helmet.

Fig. 16: William gives a speech in battle (Plate 57)

At one point in battle, Odo of Bayeux encourages the young Norman soldiers; he is given a prominent role in this scene which highlights his authority (Plate 67) (**Fig. 18**). Ahead of Odo, William raises his helmet to reveal that he is still alive and participating in the battle (Plate 68) (**Fig. 17**). One might interpret the backward direction of William's gaze towards Odo as an indication that he is responding directly to his brother's command.[169] Until now William was one among the many soldiers in battle, and in this scene he seems prompted by the words of his brother Odo, whose speech is given an important role in the Tapestry, which is in contrast with the speech of William.

[167] Heslop, 'Regarding the Spectators', p. 225.
[168] Heslop, 'Regarding the Spectators', p. 226.
[169] Heslop, 'Regarding the Spectators', p. 225.

Fig. 17: Left: Odo encourages the men, William lifts up his helmet (Plates 67-68)

Fig. 18: Odo encourages the troops (Plate 67)

The scenes of William's speech and Odo's encouragement of the troops portray how the patron and the English embroiderers both achieved a personal goal with the Tapestry. The authoritative depiction of Odo weakens the authority of William and diminishes the power of the latter's speech. This is in favour of both Odo and the English embroiderers. Weakening William's authority is convenient for Odo because it improves his own image in the Tapestry. Moreover, the English embroiderers would rather see Odo as more authoritative than William the Conqueror.

3.3 William's horse

The most extreme priapic horse in the Tapestry belongs to William (**Fig. 19**). His horse is facing left rather than right under the heading 'here the soldiers go out from Hastings' with the last two words placed directly over him (Plates 51-52). The large genitals of the animal clearly stand out from any other horse with visible gender; a sign of virility. Perhaps this is a reference to the power and success William ultimately has in the Battle of Hastings. The extreme priapic horse of William has a strong resemblance with an image from an English manuscript. Keefer points out a parallel between the Tapestry horse of William and a horse depiction found in the *Hexateuch* manuscript; they look similar and are standing in the same position (**Fig. 20**).[170] The horse in the *Hexateuch* belongs to Esau,[171] from the famous biblical story of the brothers Esau and Jacob.

If the Tapestry designer borrowed Esau's horse from the *Hexateuch* as the model for William's stallion, William may serve as an Esau. This would mean that Harold can be seen as a Jacob. The association of William's horse with the biblical story of Esau and Jacob indicates a hidden message: Harold stole William's inheritance and ascended the throne on Edward's death, just as Jacob stole Esau's inheritance.[172] The priapic horse of William thus seems to reveal a Norman reference to the betrayal of Harold and his illegitimate succession, according to Keefer.

Fig. 19: William's horse at Hastings (Plates 51-52)

[170] Keefer, 'Graphic Commentary', p. 103.
[171] Ibidem.
[172] Keefer, 'Graphic Commentary', p. 104.

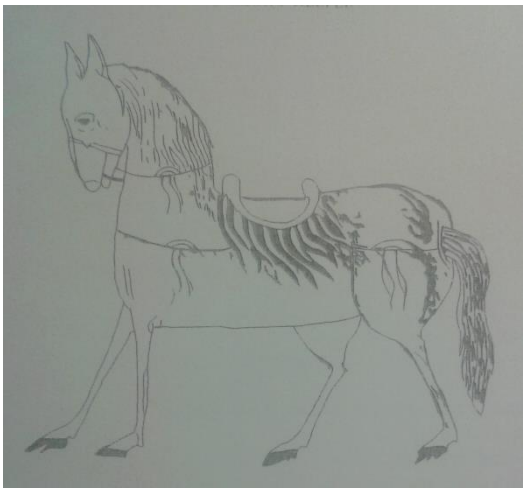

Fig. 20: Esau's horse, from Hexateuch, London, BL, MS Cotton Claudius B iv, fol, 51r

4. Conclusion

Written sources of Norman and English origin give conflicting reasons for Harold's journey. The Tapestry confirms the journey, but the inscription does not reveal who initiated the journey. The Tapestry therefore does not contradict Norman or English sources. The Aelfgyva scene also seems to stress an ambiguous view of the Tapestry; it does not criticize Harold or William. The gestures and posture in the oath-scene in the Tapestry place doubt on whether Harold took the oath voluntarily, this would suggest an English point of view. The oath-scene was perhaps influenced by the English designer and embroiderers in a subtle way.

The insertion of the scene where Harold saves two Normans is a clear example of English influence in the Tapestry's depiction of Harold. It also suggests that the Norman patron had a sympathetic attitude towards the English, because he approved the scene of Harold's brave act. The horse of Harold upholds a noble status, even when in captivity of Guy. Guy's horse loses status in comparison with Harold's horse, which causes Guy himself to lose power. This might be an influence of the patron together with the embroiderers and designer; Guy of Ponthieu was a rival of both.

Harold is depicted as a loyal subject in the death-bed scene of Edward; they are also clearly speaking with each other. English sources suggest Edward chose Harold as his successor. While Norman sources claim that Harold seized the crown, the Tapestry does not depict this, and seems to agree with the English written sources. Harold has a passive attitude and the crown is given to him by the leading men of England. The death-scene of Harold

suggests a Norman point of view; the arrow in the eye is iconographic for avarice and a deceitful nature.

The patron might have requested a higher position of William in the oath-scene, to enforce his authoritative role over Harold. The English designer may have chosen to depict William higher to stress that he was an oppressor. The priapic horse of William alludes to a biblical story about betrayal; William represents Esau and Harold the deceitful Jacob. The horse therefore reveals a Norman influence in the Tapestry towards the betrayal of Harold and his illegitimate succession. William is represented as an indecisive and less powerful duke, but only in scenes with an authoritative Odo. This was the influence of Odo himself, and possibly the deliberate choice of the English designer and embroiderers to depict William as less powerful. To represent William as an indecisive duke is convenient for Odo as well as the English embroiderers.

CHAPTER 4 – COMMENTARY BY THE TAPESTRY BORDERS

The Tapestry borders consist of the following elements: plants, animals, diagonal bars and scenes with multiple figures depicting fables, genre scenes[173] or couples. From Plate 61 onwards the lower borders are filled with fallen soldiers, scattered weapons, archers, fallen horses, dismembered bodies and bodies being stripped of their armour. Because of the large number of border decorations, it is simply not possible to go through each image and discuss its purpose in the Tapestry. Therefore, after an introduction of the several categories of figures in the borders,[174] I will discuss significant border depictions in detail which are closely related to the main narrative. I have selected images that to my knowledge present a variety of commentaries indicated in the upper and lower borders. Most creatures and birds in the borders echo or mimic the events that happen in the main narrative. The depictions I have selected are some of the commentaries that criticize the Normans as well as the English, and Harold and William individually. The chosen images reflect the mixed background of the Tapestry; a Norman patron and English embroiderers.

1. Categories of border depictions

The upper and lower borders of the Tapestry are largely taken up by pairs of creatures: animals, birds and winged mythical beasts. The Tapestry is most likely inspired by the traditional motif of birds and beasts found in Mesopotamian art of woven silks, where the animals were mechanically manufactured and therefore exact mirror images of each other.[175] The Tapestry's creatures are embroidered and therefore show diversity, not one creature has an exact copy. Even mirrored birds have different positions of their wings or feet.

The majority of the Tapestry birds have an individuality and apparent naturalism, they have facial expressions and their wings are gesturing towards each other or the main frame. Owen-Crocker points out that with the combination of their asymmetry, peering heads and prying beaks, the birds have an amusing and ironic anthropomorphism.[176] The many birds in the borders can be categorized in different groups: single birds, pairs, birds in natural and rural situations and birds in fables (often anthropomorphic).

[173] Genre scenes depict everyday life, for example occupations and hunting.
[174] I will not discuss the plants and the diagonal bars in the borders; for the purpose of this thesis they have no importance. Both the plants and diagonal bars serve as decoration, unlike the other elements in the Tapestry borders.
[175] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 237.
[176] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 239.

The Tapestry borders depict several fables of Aesop and his Latin successors, Babrius and Phaedrus; these stories were extremely popular in the Middle Ages and Aesop's fables appear in numerous works of literature, art, and political writings.[177] In the Tapestry, a sequence of nine scenes from Aesop appeared side by side in the lower border, as if the artist was copying them from a book that was to hand. These included the Fox who persuaded the Crow to sing and drop its piece of cheese (moral: never trust flatterers) and the Crane who pulled the bone from the Wolf's throat (do not expect gratitude for a good deed).[178]

While it might be argued that the fables in the borders are solely decorative, it seems as if the fables point to certain morals that are connected with the events in the main frame. Aesop was supposedly a slave from Samos, and he used his animal fables for political purposes.[179] As a slave, Aesop could not speak his mind without being severely punished; therefore he projected what he wished to say into animal tales, which seemed made-up but contained satire and political commentaries. These fables, and fables of Aesop's followers, have been recognized in the Tapestry's borders in important scenes and it is therefore very likely that they have a moralistic message for the audience. The morals of these fables are a prudential note for the viewer: look out! Hidden dangers beset the unwary from the ways of the crafty and deceitful.[180] As we shall see, the 'crafty and deceitful' are both of the Norman and of the English side.

The borders also depict several nude figures, some of which may be called 'obscenities'; their genitals are exposed and exaggerated. Among the nude couples there is one that depicts an Aesop's fable, others demonstrate professions and some indicate sexual improprieties. The nude border figures have been identified as a reminder of the English soldiers' rush to battle and their last embrace with their wives, as William's promise to his men that women would welcome them back after battle, and as a device to gender the battle; William as masculine and Harold as feminine.[181] The last suggestion does not have any further convincing evidence in the Tapestry, Harold is not overly associated with the feminine and William not with the masculine.

Although modern commentators have interpreted these characters as snide comments on Anglo-Saxon morals, or alternatively as the symbolic rape of England by the Normans, the juxtaposition or moral and profane fitted easily into early medieval art and thought: such

[177] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 128.
[178] Hicks, *The Life Story*, p. 60.
[179] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 135.
[180] Cowdrey, 'A Critical Introduction', p. 4.
[181] C.E. Karkov, 'Gendering the Battle? Male and Female in the Bayeux Tapestry' in *King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry* ed. G.R. Owen-Crocker (2011), p. 143.

imagery, inspired perhaps by the frustrations of celibate patrons and designers, had the highly moral purpose of warning against the sin of lust.[182] Most likely the nude figures function as indexical signs, they point our way towards a meaning rather than literally embodying one.[183] The naked figures, and especially the 'obscenities', certainly catch the attention and point towards underlying values and stories that are not often told in relation to battle and politics.

2. Commentary on William and the Normans

The lower border of the scene where Guy of Ponthieu captures Harold and leads him to his palace (Plates 7-8) depicts a hunting scene (**Fig. 21**)[184], which is similar to the fable where a deer is chased and captured by a goat, a lamb, an ox and a lion.[185] The predatory metaphor fits Harold's imprisonment perfectly, but the reappearance of the hunting image a couple of scenes further is somewhat puzzling. This second occurrence is depicted in the lower border of the scene where William orders his men to free Harold (Plates 12-13) (**Fig. 22**). The hunters in this image can easily be identified as Normans by their hair-styles. The lower border depicts a smaller version of Guy on his black horse,[186] riding in the opposite direction (Plate 13).

Of course, the hunting scenes could simply indicate the purpose of Harold's journey: hunting. But the placement of the two hunting scenes in association with Harold's transferal from Guy to William suggests something else. The deer could represent Harold, being trapped between dogs and hunters closing in from both sides: representing William and Guy. If this is the case, the Tapestry designer wanted to indicate how Harold fell from Guy's captivity into William's captivity, and that he was not liberated by William at all. The hunting scenes might therefore be a subtle clue to the treachery of William and the Normans, included by the designer and embroiderers.

[182] Hicks, *The Life Story*, p. 60.
[183] Karkov, 'Gendering the Battle?', p. 144.
[184] I have numbered the figures in this thesis per chapter, rather than consecutively.
[185] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 125.
[186] The smaller horse in the lower border is clearly a well-endowed male horse, while the horse in the main frame is not. In the light of Sarah Larratt Keefer's theory about the graphic commentary of the horses in the Tapestry, this might indicate a change in political status or femininity vs. masculinity.

Fig. 221: Guy captures Harold, lower border depicts hunting scene, upper border depicts griffin

Fig. 22: William sends his men to free Harold, lower border depicts hunting scene and a repeat of Guy on his black horse

Out of the many sorts of animals in the borders of the Tapestry the winged lion and a mythical creature known as a griffin are unmistakably connected with William and the Normans. A griffin combines the body of a lion with the head and wings of an eagle, so it distinguishes itself from a winged lion by the talons and beak. Lions and eagles have had connotations with royalty, bravery and power for ages, and are seen as "symbols of ferocious power".[187] In the Tapestry's borders they are not interchangeable, the winged lion appears twice as often as the griffin, and is depicted in places and postures that are unique to it.[188] Both creatures appear when Harold has arrived in Normandy and they are both usually associated with Norman triumph: they are depicted where Guy of Ponthieu captures Harold (Plate 7), where William gains victory over Guy and Conan (**Fig. 24**) (Plates 11 and 23), and where William receives Harold's oath (Plates 25-26).[189] But whereas the winged lion seems reserved for the scenes where William triumphs; the griffin is only shown where Guy captures Harold (**Fig. 21**). What characterizes the winged lions is that they appear to be preening[190] themselves: above the messengers of William commanding Harold's release (Plate 11) and above William

[187] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 128.
[188] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 127.
[189] Ibidem.
[190] To smooth of clean the feathers with the beak. Also: to take pride or satisfaction in oneself.

himself when he orders Harold to swear an oath (Plate 25).[191] These preening winged lions (**Fig. 23**) are a symbol of composure and self-satisfaction,[192] unlike the other animals in the borders that seem to react very strongly to the events in the main frame and are affected by violence or display violent behaviour themselves.

The preening winged lion might depict the following saying: "put one's foot in one's mouth and put one's foot in it; stick one's foot in one's mouth". Its meaning: to say something that you regret; to say something stupid, insulting, or hurtful. The preening winged lion above the oath-ceremony possibly indicates that the oath was forced by William and that Harold was unwilling to swear an oath (hence: to say something you regret). However, from a Norman point of view, the winged lion could reveal the deceitful nature of Harold; the oath was not truthful.

Fig. 23: Preening winged lion in the oath-scene (Plates 25-26)

Fig. 24: William's victory over Conan, lower border depicts winged lions

[191] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 127.
[192] Ibidem.

So far, it seems very likely that the winged lions and griffins are associated with William and the Norman victories in the Tapestry, and that they underline their strength and royal features. However, the winged lion is also found in the scenes that are set in January 1066, around Westminster and the death of Edward and accession of Harold. Above the scene where the body of Edward is carried towards Westminster (Plate 29), two agitated winged lions are depicted (**Fig. 25**). Their wings point to each other in human-like manner and it looks as if they are involved in a heated discussion. My suggestion is that they are alarmed by the death of Edward and depict the emotions of the English people. Another possibility is that the winged lions portray a Norman view towards the succession. The lions seem to argue with each other; King Edward has passed away, who should become the new ruler?

In the upper border above the death-bed scene of Edward is another winged lion (Plate 30), this one is placed next to the inscription that informs Edward is speaking to his faithful ones (**Fig. 26**). Perhaps the winged lion is here associated with the royalty of Edward the Confessor, the lion being the king of the animals and the eagle the most royal of all birds. It is also possible that the Tapestry designer included here a bit of irony by associating the English king and his followers with a symbol of Norman victory, pointing towards the moment Edward gave the crown to Harold and not William.

Despite some strange occurrences of the winged lion, these creatures and closely related griffins reveal a more Norman point of view, as they are depicted in the scenes where the Normans, and especially William, triumph.

Fig. 25: Edward's body is brought to Westminster, upper border depicts agitated winged lions

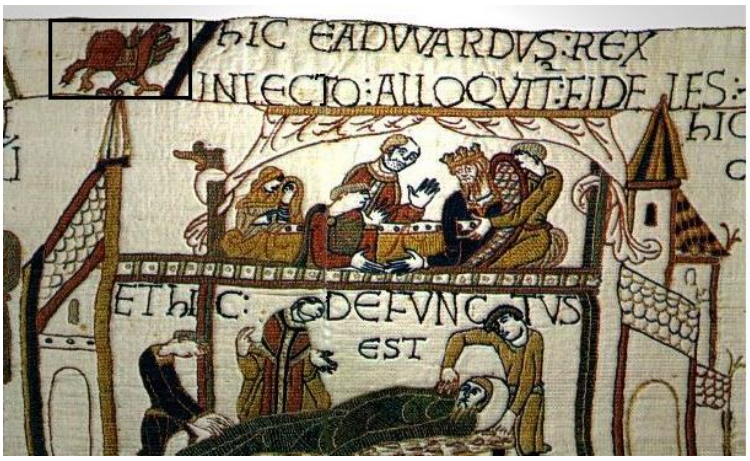

Fig. 26: Edward's death-bed, winged lion placed next to inscription

3. Commentary on Harold and the English

The lower border of Plate 4 depicts the fable of the pregnant bitch (**Fig. 27**).[193] This fable from Phaedrus is symbolic for the moral: the fair-seeming words of evil persons conceal a trap.[194] The fable occurs a second time in the Tapestry, in the lower border of the scene where William exhorts his men at the start of the battle (Plate 57) (**Fig. 28**). The first depiction of the pregnant bitch is among other fables, placed underneath Harold sailing towards Normandy (Plate 4). The story might serve as a metaphor for the ingratitude of Harold towards William by claiming the throne which the Normans thought was rightfully William's. The fable in the lower border of Plate 4 would thus be a foreboding clue of Harold's treachery. The repeated image of the fable in Plate 57 at the start of the battle would remind the audience of the reason why William attacks Harold. It would appear that the fable of the pregnant bitch is a subtle anti-Harold message hidden in the borders.

[193] Wilson, *Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 175.
[194] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 130. The fable of the pregnant bitch: a bitch about to have puppies asks another bitch to let her deposit her litter in the other's kennel. Permission is granted, but later on when the owner asks for her home back, the 'tenant' requests a little more time until the puppies are strong enough to go with her. When more time has passed the owner begins to insist more forcefully on the return of her home. 'If', says the tenant, 'you can prove yourself a match for me and my brood I'll move out'.

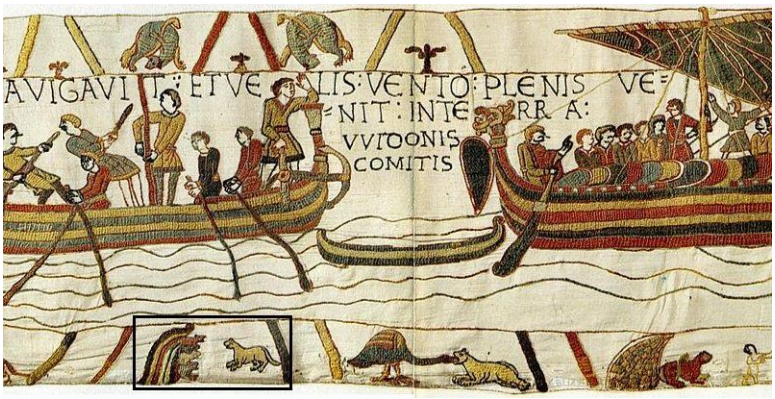

Fig. 27: Harold sails towards Normandy, lower border depicts fable of the pregnant bitch

Fig. 28: William exhorts his troops, lower border depicts fable of the pregnant bitch

The scene where Harold's brace act of saving men from the quicksand (Plates 19-20) is depicted has a unique border scene underneath it (**Fig. 29**). The border below the Couesnon river has fishes and eels, and what appears to be a man catching the eels with a knife or he is drowning.[195] Jill Frederick has suggested that the border scene has a two-fold purpose: it comments on the significance of Harold's act in the quicksand but also prepares for the moment he swears an oath to William.[196] The border is one of a kind in the Tapestry which signifies the importance of Harold's bravery. But the eels might also warn the viewer that Harold will not be trustworthy in the oath-ceremony. The purpose of this border scene is to highlight the different sides of Harold's character, and his supposed bravery in the quicksand scene. Afterwards Harold swears an oath on two reliquaries, indicating the ambivalence of his nature and that he is driven by ambition as well as allegiance. The border image reminds the audience that Harold is "slippery as an eel".[197]

[195] Wilson, *Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 179.
[196] J. Frederick, 'Slippery as an Eel: Harold's Ambiguous Heroics in the Bayeux Tapestry', in *The Bayeux Tapestry: New Approaches* ed. M.J. Lewis, G.R. Owen-Crocker (2011), p. 125.
[197] Frederick, 'Slippery as an Eel', p. 125.

Fig. 29: Harold saves two men from quicksand, lower border depicts eels and a man with a knife

4. Commentary on Norman and English aristocracy and warfare

The material culture of the aristocracy is criticized by the Tapestry's designer, and the judgements hidden in the borders are aimed at both the Normans and the English. In the lower border of Harold's extravagant feast scene at Bosham (Plate 3), Harold feasts nobly, while two crafty dogs or wolves lick their paws so they can hunt in the deceitful manner of their kind (**Fig. 30**).[198] In this depiction it is the fact that the dogs eat with their paws that highlights the wit of the designer, they imitate human actions.[199] The well-equipped soldiers riding out to battle (Plates 52-53) are satirized by preening birds in the upper and lower borders; the preening symbolizes the pride of the aristocracy.

[198] Cowdrey, 'A Critical Introduction', p. 4.
[199] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 247.

Fig. 30: Harold feasts at Bosham, lower border depicts dogs licking their paws

Not only the material wealth of both sides is criticized, warfare (or the Battle of Hastings) is also frowned upon by the designer. Two doves holding olive branches (**Fig. 31**) are depicted in the upper border of the most violent battle scene in the Tapestry (Plates 65-66). The birds are identified by the olive branches, which are also carried by the dove in the biblical account of Noah (Genesis VIII.11).[200] The olive branches are a reference to peace, and their occurrence above the most bloody scene during the Battle of Hastings must be an ironic message by the Tapestry designer or embroiderers. Perhaps this was their way to show criticism towards warfare in general or the blood-shedding by the Normans and the English.

[200] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 247.

Fig. 31: In the most violent scene in battle, doves with olive branches are depicted in the upper border

The upper borders of Plates 52 and 53 depict some remarkable figures: there are two naked couples above the Norman soldiers (**Fig. 32**). In plate 52 the right figure of the naked couple holds an axe and some sort of bucket and can be identified as male, of the other figure the sex is undetermined. Further right in the upper border (Plate 53) a naked man most likely makes sexual advances to a naked woman, whose breasts and genitals are exposed. The man also has exposed genitals and he has a moustache which suggests he is of English origin. Owen-Crocker sees the naked figures of these scenes as reflecting the stark pathos of the battle's separation: "the man and woman come together for what may be the last time", which suggests the Tapestry points out the grim aspect of warfare.[201]

Fig. 32: Naked couples above Norman soldiers in battle

[201] Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 16.

5. Ambiguous commentary

The lower border of Plate 5 depicts the fable of the crane removing a bone from the wolf's throat (**Fig. 33**).[202] This fable is repeated in the upper border of Plate 27 (**Fig. 34**). As with the fable of the pregnant bitch, the fact that this fable occurs twice in the Tapestry means that the designer had an interest in connecting the main frame with the moral of this tale.[203] Phaedrus' moral symbolized by this fable is: he who wants to serve rascals and be duly paid for it makes two mistakes: first he helps the undeserving, and secondly, he enters into a deal from which he is lucky to emerge without injury to himself.[204]

The first depiction of this fable is associated with Harold sailing towards Normandy (Plate 5), and the second pair of the crane and wolf is placed above the return of Harold in England (Plate 27). The repetition and position of the fable therefore frames the journey of Harold. When the focus is placed on the theme of betrayal and ingratitude incorporated in the story of the crane and the wolf, it seems that this fable indicates a Norman point of view. Harold appears to be the wolf: after William saved him from Guy's captivity, Harold is not thankful towards his saviour and even breaks his oath.

Yet if the thematic explanation is put aside and the position of the wolf and the crane is compared with Harold and William in the main frame, it points towards a different interpretation. The first image of the fable (Plate 5) depicts the crane on the left and the wolf on the right (**Fig. 33**), Bernstein points out: "a relationship parallel to that of Harold and William at the beginning of the Norman journey".[205] In Plate 27 the crane and wolf have switched positions (**Fig. 34**), and so have Harold and William. To further connect Harold with the crane, it is clear that they both stick their neck out for someone who turns out to be a cunning predator. Harold saves two Norman men from the quicksand near Mont St Michel, and the crane sticks his head in the dangerous mouth of a wolf. In this view, William is identified as the cunning wolf, and the fable now suggests an anti-Norman message instead of anti-Harold.

---

[202] Wilson, *Bayeux Tapestry*, p. 175.

[203] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 131: The wolf and the crane: A wolf having a meal got a bone stuck in his throat. When he promised a reward to any creature who would remove it, a crane accepted the offer on the strength of a solemn oath. Into the wolf's mouth the crane plunged her neck full length. When she got the bone out and asked for her reward, the wolf said: 'Reward! You ungrateful thing. Your head was in my mouth and you got it out intact, and now you say I should pay you a bonus.'

[204] Ibidem.

[205] Bernstein, *The Mystery*, p. 132.

Fig. 33: Harold sails to Normandy, lower border depicts fable of crane and wolf

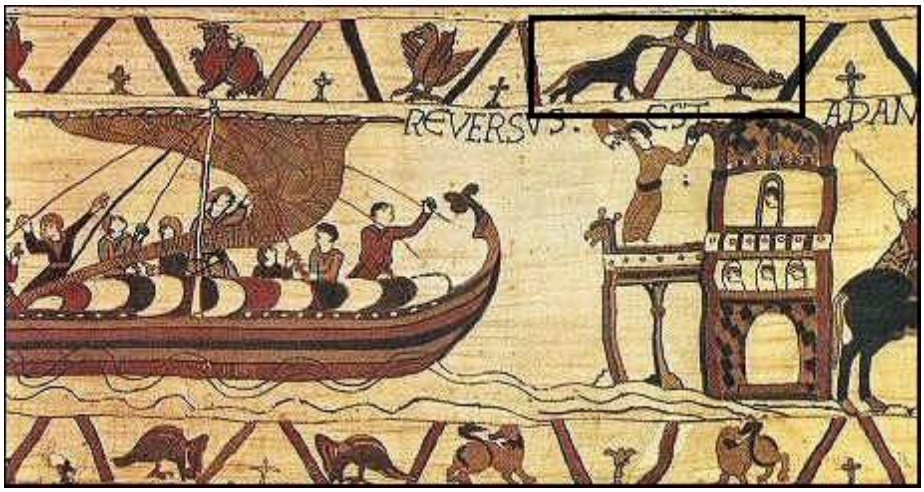

Fig. 34: Harold returns to England, upper border depicts fable of crane and wolf

The Tapestry borders comment on the Normans, the English, the aristocracy and warfare. Because the English designer and embroiderers worked for a Norman patron, they clearly had to include several border images that lean towards a Norman point of view. Yet the judgements of the defeated English on the actions of the Normans are also incorporated in the border decorations. The monastic background of the designer and embroiderers must have caused the negative attitude towards warfare and overly material culture of the aristocracy. The clever placements of certain fables and decorative animals that mimic and speak about the events and persons in the main narrative are hidden messages for the Norman and English audience. The messages are mostly ironic and occasionally even provide comic relief. The borders are open to all sorts of interpretations and that enforces the ambiguous character of the Tapestry. The fables depicted in the Tapestry particular associate success with the disreputable characters of the fox or the wolf. So whether Harold or William triumphs, they

are unmistakably associated with violence, greed and treachery. The Tapestry borders expose the other side of the coin of success, by commenting on the Norman and English triumphs and downfalls.

CONCLUSION

For many centuries, the Bayeux Tapestry was considered a celebration of the Norman Conquest that narrated the events leading up to the Battle of Hastings from a Norman point of view. Only since the last couple of decades, scholars have noticed the ambiguity of the enormous embroidery. This thesis has demonstrated that the Tapestry is an unbiased account of the Conquest because of its mixed background. This thesis has further provided new insights about the mixed background of the Bayeux Tapestry by researching the influence of a Norman patron and English embroiderers on the portrayal of the protagonists Harold and William.

Chapter 2 has provided sufficient evidence for a mixed background of the Tapestry. The Norman Bishop Odo of Bayeux most likely commissioned the work to celebrate the victory of his half-brother William the Conqueror. Odo is given a great role in the Tapestry, his personal choices and those of the embroiderers are traceable in the many depictions of the Tapestry. Chapter 3 indicated that Norman written sources about the Conquest naturally have a Norman point of view and condemn Harold, and that English written sources stress the legitimacy of Harold's enthronement. By comparison between important narrative scenes in the Tapestry with the written accounts, this thesis has concluded that the Tapestry provides a middle road; it neither idolizes William like the Norman writers, nor fully sympathizes with Harold. The Tapestry is closely connected with Harold's personal fortunes and defeat throughout the narrative. Odo is depicted in important scenes where he appears to have more authoritative power than William. This is most likely influenced by Odo himself and accentuated by the English embroiderers. As a consequence, William is presented less prominent in the narrative of the Tapestry.

Chapter 4 discussed the upper and lower borders that frame the main narrative. The borders indicate diverse critical commentary on both the Normans and the English, but also towards the aristocracy and martial practices of both sides. The mixed messages reveal the voice of a Norman patron and English designer or embroiderers. There is clear criticism on Harold, but also on William and the Normans. Because the embroiderers worked for a Norman patron, they had to include border depictions that revealed a Norman point of view. Yet the actions of the Normans are visibly judged by the English in cleverly hidden messages. The monastic background of the English must have caused the criticism on warfare and the material wealth of both the Normans and the English.

The research question stated in the introduction was: what influence does the mixed background have on the portrayal of Harold and William in the Bayeux Tapestry? The conclusion of this thesis is the following:

> The individual influences and choices of Odo and the manufacturers in the depictions of the Tapestry caused a less prominent portrayal of William, who should officially be the main protagonist of the narrative. The English embroiderers had no problem with giving Odo an authoritative role in the story because it diminished the success and power of William. Odo gave the English designer freedom in the drawings and approved many scenes where Harold is depicted a hero and throne-worthy. This would of course take away the focus on William and ultimately give Odo more power and authority in the Tapestry.

It is clear that the Norman patron had other intentions with the Tapestry aside from celebrating the victory of his half-brother William the Conqueror. Odo of Bayeux primarily wanted a prominent role in the Tapestry, while the English embroiderers wished to honour their late King Harold. The Bayeux Tapestry is the ultimate result of a Norman patron working together with an English designer and embroiderers. Both sides have fulfilled their wishes in the embroidered depictions of the Tapestry. The work of art should officially celebrate the Norman Conquest and William the Conqueror, but it actually serves as a stage for Odo of Bayeux and as a memorial created by the defeated English for their hero Harold.

WORKS CITED LIST

Barrow, J., 'Demonstrative Behaviour and Political Communication in Later Anglo-Saxon England', in *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007), pp. 127-150.

Bates, D.R., 'The Character and Career of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux (1049/50-1097)', in *Speculum A Journal of Medieval Studies* 50 (1975), pp. 1-20.

Bernstein, D.J., *The Mystery of the Bayeux Tapestry* (London, 1986)

Bouet, P. and Neveux, F., 'Edward the Confessor's Succession According to the Bayeux Tapestry', in *The Bayeux Tapestry, New Approaches,* ed. M.J. Lewis, G.R. Owen-Crocker (2011)

Bridgeford, A., 'Whose Tapestry is it anyway?', in *History Today 54* (2004), pp. 5-7.

Brown, R.A., *The Norman Conquest* (New York, 1968)

Cowdrey, H.E.J., 'King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry: a Critical Introduction', in *King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry,* ed. G.R. Owen-Crocker, (2011), pp. 1-15.

Frederick,J., 'Slippery as an Eel: Harold's Ambiguous Heroics in the Bayeux Tapestry', in *The Bayeux Tapestry: New Approaches,* ed. M.J. Lewis, G.R. Owen-Crocker (2011), pp. 121-126.

Heslop, T.A., 'Regarding the Spectators of the Bayeux Tapestry: Bishop Odo and his Circle', in *Art History* 32 (2009), pp. 223-249.

Hicks, C., *The Bayeux Tapestry: The Life Story of a Masterpiece* (London, 2007)

Karkov, C.E., 'Gendering the Battle? Male and Female in the Bayeux Tapestry', in *King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry,* ed. G.R. Owen-Crocker, (2011), pp. 140-147.

Keefer, S.L., 'Body Language: a Graphic Commentary by the Horses of the Bayeux Tapestry', in *King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry,* ed. G.R. Owen-Crocker, (2011), pp. 93-108.

Laynesmith, J.L., 'A Canterbury Tale', in *History Today* (2012), pp. 42-48.

McNulty, J.B., 'The Lady Aelfgyva in the Bayeux Tapestry', in *Speculum* 55 (1980), pp. 659-668.

Owen-Crocker, G.R., *The Bayeux Tapestry: Collected Papers* (2012)

Wilson, D., *The Bayeux Tapestry* (London, 1985)