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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Maria Dajcar entitled "The Bayeux Tapestry: Norman and English Perspectives Intertwined". I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in History.

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THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY:
NORMAN AND ENGLISH PERSPECTIVES INTERTWINED

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the Bayeux Tapestry, commisioned by the victorious Normans after the Norman Conquest of 1066, in order to determine which, if any, of its scenes bore English influence. The primary sources analyzed were, among others, Ordericus Vitalis, William of Poitiers, William of Jumieges, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and the Bayeux Tapestry itself. The secondary sources included monographs by David J. Bernstein, Wolfgang Grape, Frank Stenton, and Ian Walker.

While the majority of the Tapestry scenes adhere to the interpretation of the Conquest that was popularized by Norman chroniclers, several elements, such as the Aelfgyva scene, Harold's coronation scene, and the presence of dragon figures in the borders, demonstrate that the English were both reluctant to accept Norman rule and willing to display that reluctance in artistic works such as the Tapestry. That these "anti-Norman" elements were not removed may be indicative of a Norman desire to foster better relations between the two peoples.

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1. Introduction to the Norman Conquest and the Bayeux Tapestry

The Bayeux Tapestry is a pictorial representation of one of the most momentous events in European history, the 1066 Norman Conquest of England. Planned originally as a monument to the Norman victory, the designer or designers of the Tapestry likely intended to show that William was politically justified in invading England. In order to further validate the Norman position, the Tapestry often depicts events surrounding the invasion as having been divinely sanctioned. However, this message is not communicated consistently throughout the work, for some scenes appear to offer an English perspective on matters.

The purpose of this paper is to show that there appear to be two separate viewpoints in the Tapestry: one that is demonstrably Norman and one that can be considered English. I will also argue that the English artisans who actually created the Tapestry may have shared the general populace's resentment of Norman intrusion, and thus chose to subvert the Tapestry's original message with their side of the story; however, the presence of the "English" sections of the Tapestry may have signaled a relaxing of tensions between the two peoples. Though much of this

paper is based on the arguments of other historians, I will be making the case for new interpretations of several key scenes in the Tapestry, and particularly the borders.

The Contenders

The Norman Conquest was a result of the controversy regarding the English succession. When the childless King Edward the Confessor died on January 5, 1066, there were several possible candidates for the throne. The two that will be discussed in this paper are Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex, and William, Duke of Normandy.

Harold Godwinson was the king's brother-in-law and right-hand man. John of Worchester, an English cleric writing in the twelfth century, refers to him as "the underking....whom the king had chosen before his demise as successor to the kingdom" and who was later "elected by the primates of all England [the witan] to the dignity of the kingship"[1]. The witan was a council of politically prominent men who had the power to select who would rule upon the death of a king; though it preferred the deceased's direct descendants or others of royal lineage, the witan could choose whomever it felt was most capable

[1] John of Worchester, The Chronicle of John of Worchester. Volume II. Edited by R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk. Translated by Jennifer Bray and P. McGurk. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 601.

of ruling, and this was often someone who had previously been selected by the king[2]. Whether Harold was actually designated the heir at the time of Edward's death -- or ever -- is unclear. Harold's father Godwine, who rivaled the king in landholdings and power, was known to be a source of considerable anxiety to Edward, and it is possible that the king's low opinion of the man would have prevented him from considering Harold as a candidate for the throne[3].

The other choice was Duke William of Normandy, the king's second cousin and therefore perhaps a slightly more viable candidate as far as family ties were concerned. William may have become the officially designated heir in 1051, at a time when the Godwinson family was briefly exiled from England; whether Edward still intended him to inherit the throne at the time of his death is uncertain[4]. William's justification for the Norman Conquest rested on

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[2] Rupert Furneaux, Invasion 1066, (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, 1966), 30; R. Allen Brown, Norman Conquest, (London, Edward Arnold, 1984), 20-26.

[3] Simon Schama, A History of Britain: At the Edge of the World? 3500 B.C - 1603 A.D. (New York: Hyperion, 2000), 74, 76.

[4] Richard Humble, among others, has suggested that Edward had become so disgusted with the ambitious Godwine family that he designated William as his successor in order to replace the existing network of nobles. Richard Humble, The Fall of Saxon England. (London: Arthur Baker

his claim that in 1064, Edward had sent Harold to Normandy to vow fealty to the duke, a promise that was later disregarded. However, the mid-11th century was a period of Norman expansion[5]. England, in contrast, was a wealthy and militarily underdeveloped country[6], and it is probable that these factors played a significant part in William's

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Limited, 1975), 196, 199.

[5] William's father died when his son was still a child, leaving him vulnerable to political enemies. The Norman expansionism was partly a result of William's attempts to retain his lands and power throughout the 1030s and 40s, when many of his rivals found it easier to relocate than compete with him; other nobles, often younger sons who could not expect to inherit vast amounts of land, also left in search of better opportunities. They went mainly to Southern Italy and Sicily, and since these areas were under Greek Orthodox and Muslim control respectively, the Church applauded the Normans' efforts to gain a foothold there, as it would later approve of the English invasion. Jonathan Phillips, "The French Overseas", Short Oxford History of France: France in the Central Middle Ages. Ed. Marcus Bull. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 167-196.

[6] The English did not fight on horseback, in contrast to Continental armies, including William's. Instead, they stood armed with axes and spears in a straight-line formation called a shield-wall. Norman F. Cantor, The Civilization of the Middle Ages. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 278; Shama, 101. Another disadvantage was the nature of the *fyrd*, the English militia, which could be called out at any time but could only stay mobilized for 40 days or, at the very most, until its provisions ran out. There is no evidence that additional troops could be called out or that *fyrd* members served on a rotation basis. This became a critical issue in the weeks leading up to the Battle of Hastings. Schama 93; Christopher Daniell, From Norman Conquest to Magna Carta: England 1066-1215. (London: Routledge, 2003), 6-7.

decision to invade.

Ultimately, the question of succession was militarily decided in the autumn of 1066. On October 14, Harold's troops were defeated at the battle of Hastings, and Harold and his brothers Gyrth and Leofwine were killed. Edgar Atheling, Edward's young great-nephew was chosen as king, but in vain: William took London with little resistance and was crowned in Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day[7].

One of the immediate effects of the Conquest was a greater centralization of royal authority, in contrast to the older Anglo-Saxon system in which power was held at the local level (a situation that allowed families such as the Godwinsons to rise to prominence)[8]. Technically, all land belonged to William as a result of his victory, and he was soon busy redistributing estates to approximately 180 of his followers, as well as a few English nobles who agreed to obey him. Feudalism, which had existed in the country prior to the Conquest, was strengthened by the introduction of new lords who did not have cultural or familial ties to their dependents. The document that most

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[7] Schama, 104.

[8] Daniell claims that "[a]round 5000 pre-Conquest estates were concentrated into the hands of less than 200 major lay tenants-in-chief, who between them controlled 54% of England in 1086." Daniell,

vividly symbolized this new relationship between the monarchy and the country was the *Domesday Book* of 1086, which for the first time minutely detailed the property holdings of virtually every household in the kingdom[9].

Although the Conquest was no doubt initially perceived as cataclysmic by some, in the long run it may have brought discernable benefits to the English. For example, the link with the Continent allowed for a better cultural and intellectual interchange during the 12th-century renaissance. If England had continued under the Anglo-Saxon monarchy, or been brought under Scandinavian dominion, the flowering of culture may not have developed to the extent that did under the Normans[10].

The Religious Background

England's succession crisis unfolded against a backdrop of religious debate and Church reform. In 1049, Pope Leo IX began what is known as the 11th-Century (or Gregorian) Reform. In the decades that followed, the program sought

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[9]Clifford R. Backman, The Worlds of Medieval Europe. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 193-194; John Gillingham, "Britain, Ireland, and the South", in Short Oxford History of the British Isles: From the Vikings to the Normans, edited by Wendy Davies. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 217-218.

[10] Edward James, Britain in the First Millennium. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 271.

to raise the spiritual and moral standards of the clergy through stricter prohibitions on clerical marriage, simony, and especially lay investiture, or the appointment of clerics to higher Church office by secular authorities[11]. Lay investiture was seen as an inducement to corruption as well as seriously undermining the power of the Church in relation to the state[12]. Though it started in Germany, the Reform soon spread throughout Europe.

Until the time of the Conquest, the relationship between England and the Church, and particularly the papacy, had generally been a close and positive one[13]. It was deteriorating by the mid-11th century, however, when some

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[11] Carl A. Volz, The Medieval Church: From the Dawn of the Middle Ages to the Eve of the Reformation. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 73; Backman, 215.

[12] Backman, 217.

[13] Veronica Ortenberg, "The Anglo-Saxon Church and the Papacy". The English Church and the Papacy in the Middle Ages, edited by C. H. Lawrence (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1999), 58. Ortenberg postulates that the closeness was partly based on the English affection for Pope Gregory I, "The Apostle of the English" who had been instrumental in their conversion, as well as Saint Peter, whose cult was by far stronger in England than anywhere else in Europe. The English Church was also among the first to identify (and to consistently continue to regard) Rome as the center of papal authority from which all Church doctrine flowed. Ortenberg asserts that, religious justifications to the contrary, in 1066 the English Church had a longer history of positive relations with the papacy than the Norman Church did (pp. 32-33, 47, 59, 60).

clergymen in England were resisting the reforms, feeling that part of the purpose of these changes was to tighten the Church's control over the island. In addition, Simon Schama has suggested that Rome may have perceived the English Church as incorrigibly corrupt due to the ambitions of the Godwinson clan, which was instrumental in uncanonically installing Stigand as archbishop of Canterbury[14]. Charles Duggan has also pointed out that the Norman Conquest occurred at a time when Stigand - who bore the unfortunate distinction of having been excommunicated by five popes[15] - was in support of the anti-pope Clement[16].

During this period, Normandy was enjoying a period of particularly satisfactory relations with the same institution, mainly because of Norman activities in non-Catholic regions. William was a close and valuable ally of the Church, regularly intervening in their Norman affairs and siding with the clergy in disputes[17]. As he was considering his options regarding the invasion, William

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[14] Schama, 92.

[15] Wolfgang Grape, The Bayeux Tapestry: Monument to a Norman Triumph (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1994), 56.

[16] Charles Duggan, "From the Conquest to the Death of John". The English Church and the Papacy in the Middle Ages, ed. C. H. Lawrence (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1999), 78.

[17] D. J. A. Matthew, The Norman Conquest (London: B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1966), 51.

may have sincerely believed that he had a valid reason to invade England, but he was probably also aware that he could exploit the strained political relationship between England and Rome to his advantage.

According to the Norman chronicler William of Poitiers, William presented his case to Pope Alexander II (1061-73) and his council shortly after learning of Harold's coronation. The council (which was swayed in William's favor by Hildebrand, the future Gregory VII) may have been considerably less galvanized by the thought of Harold's alleged broken vows than by the possibility of bringing England in line with the Church reforms through William, and may have sealed its decision by sending the duke a consecrated banner an a ring containing a hair of St. Peter as evidence of its approval[18].

After the Conquest, as evidence of his faith, William allocated about 20% of England's land for monasteries and other religious buildings, but if Hildebrand had expected that England would immediately become a papal vassal state

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[18] Denis Butler, 1066: The Story of a Year (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1966), 79-81; David J. Bernstein, The Mystery of the Bayeux Tapestry (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 17; Eamon Duffy, Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes. (New Haven: Yale University Press in association with S4C, 1997), 93.

under a Norman king, he was soon unpleasantly surprised[19]. Despite his enthusiasm for the Gregorian reform in theory, William tightly controlled ecclesiastical appointments and, after 1080, banned bishops from traveling to Rome under any pretext[20]. The new king also issued the Triple Concordat, which stated that royal permission was first necessary for all papal authority to be carried out in England[21]. Eventually, Gregory even claimed that not even pagan kings opposed him as William had. Though this was probably an overstatement, it did demonstrate that a papal alliance, while useful in justifying his military adventures, was not going to dictate William's governmental policies[22]. In the end, William demonstrated that the Norman Conquest had been primarily a political act, and not a religious crusade.

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[19] Backman, 194. The Penitential Ordinance of 1067 (issued by Erminfrid of Sion, a papal legate), included the founding of monasteries and convents, as well as the financial support of churches, so William's actions may have been a demonstration of penance. However, Daniell points out that the founding of religious buildings was also an effective method of establishing one's presence during times of conquest. Daniell, 11.

[20] Ortenberg, 59.

[21] Backman, 194.

[22] Duggan, 79-80.

Physical Characteristics and Manufacture of the Tapestry

The term "tapestry" is technically a misnomer: the artwork is a long strip of embroidery, approximately 20 inches high and 231 feet long in its incomplete state, and consisting of colored woolen thread on an unbleached linen background. It is made up of at least six separate panels sewn together[23], and includes 73 scenes[24], which are distinguished from one another by such visual effects as trees or buildings.

The story that the Tapestry relates is fairly straightforward. It begins by showing Harold leaving for France, ostensibly upon King Edward's request. Once there, he is captured by a local nobleman who later releases him upon Duke William's intervention. Harold goes on a military campaign with William, and afterwards makes a vow of fealty to the duke. Harold returns to England, where the old king lives just long enough to be told of the vow. After Edward's death, Harold is immediately crowned king, which triggers the invasion. The Tapestry ends with Harold's death and the victory of the Norman forces at

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[23] Francis Wormald, "Style and Design", in The Bayeux Tapestry: A Comprehensive Survey, edited by Frank Stenton et. al. (New York: Phaidon Publishers, 1957), 25.

[24] When referring to a particular scene, I will use the numbering

Hastings, and it is probable that the missing portion of the work showed William crowned as king[25].

The Bayeux Tapestry was made less than a generation after the Norman Conquest, and there is evidence that it may have been commissioned by Odo, the Bishop of Bayeux, who was a highly visible member of the Norman circle. As William's half-brother, he played a paramount role in the Conquest, and afterwards he often took over the king's duties in his absence. Odo's lands included Canterbury, where the Bayeux Tapestry was likely made, so the bishop would therefore have been familiar to the Tapestry artisans; indeed, shortly after the Conquest, he was created Earl of Kent, making him "[f]ar and away the wealthiest subject in the kingdom"[26]. It is easy to imagine him commissioning a work of such grand scale as the Bayeux Tapestry.

The majority of historians place the Tapestry in the early-to-mid 1070s, which means that those who designed it and worked on it likely remembered in some detail the

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system from Stenton.

[25] For this paper I will be referencing copies of the Tapestry published in Grape, pp. 91-167, and Bernstein, pp. 230-267. All photocopies of the Tapestry in this paper are also from these two sources.

[26] Bernstein, 33.

events of 1066. The Tapestry almost certainly would have been completed prior to 1082, when William had Odo arrested and imprisoned for political reasons. The general historical consensus is also that the Bayeux Tapestry was manufactured in England, and by female artisans. The identity of the designer or designers (as opposed to commissioner) is unknown. Bernstein notes that in the Middle Ages it may have been standard practice for a patron to commission a work, but to allow someone else, possibly one of the workers, to actually choose the details of what to depict and how[27]; such a policy may have given the artisans an opportunity to insert their version of the Conquest. The designer had apparently wanted to take advantage of English craftsmanship: Cyril Hart presents the case for the city of Canterbury, which was well-known as a center of quality embroidery, and draws parallels between the Tapestry scenes and works that had originated at Saint Augustine's Abbey[28] - indeed, if the tapestry had been produced in a cloister, it would at least partially explain how the artisans had acquired

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[27] Bernstein, 29-30.

[28] Cyril Hart, "The Bayeux Tapestry and Schools of Illumination at Canterbury", Anglo-Norman Studies XXII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1999 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999), pp. 117-167.

their knowledge of the secular and religious history that is occasionally hinted at in the Tapestry. There is also architectural and sculptural evidence for English provenance; for example, some animal and foliage motifs in Ely Cathedral (1090-1170) bear a marked resemblance to those in the Tapestry's borders[29].

There is some question as for whom and for where the Tapestry was intended: without knowing the building in which the Tapestry was to be displayed, there is no way to accurately determine its audience. The potential audience, though, may have been enormous. Certainly the fact that a tapestry is portable played a part in the intentions of the commissioner, for it (and its message) would have been able to reach a far greater number of people than a fixed piece of art such as a painted mural or sculpted frieze ever could. It is possible that the Tapestry was not displayed in any one place permanently; it may even have "toured" England or the Continent, though there is no evidence for this. Rather than being written in either Norman French or Anglo-Saxon, the inscriptions are in Latin, easily understandable by the literate segment of

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[29] Faith Johnson with Phillip Lindley: 'Ely Cathedral Sculpture', The Grove Dictionary of Art Online, (Oxford University Press, Accessed 17 March 2004), <http://www.groveart.com>

both countries. There is also the fact that the Tapestry depicts the political background of the Conquest in some detail, rather than just showing the victory at Hastings or William's coronation; this too suggests that it was meant as a teaching and propaganda tool rather than merely a decoration.

If the Tapestry was intended to be seen by the general population rather than merely a select few, then it was probably designed for a church rather than a private residence[30]. The likeliest place is Bayeux Cathedral, which was completed in 1077[31], but if so, it was probably not on

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[30] C. R. Dodwell contends that, since the Tapestry includes a few nude scenes, as well as depictions of at least one scandal-plagued priest, it may actually have been designed for a castle, feast-hall, or other secular building, rather than a place of worship; however, this argument does not take into consideration the similarly explicit sheela-na-gigs that also appear on English and French churches of this period. Sheela-na-gigs, or female exhibitionist figures, are found on Romanesque churches throughout France and England, as well as other parts of Europe. The earliest known examples can safely be dated to around 1080, or the period in which both the Tapestry and the Bayeux Cathedral were made. Etienne Rynne, "A Pagan Celtic Background for Sheela-na-gigs?", in Figures from the Past: Studies on Figurative Art in Christian Ireland, ed. Etienne Rynne. (Dun Laoghaire: Glendale Press, 1987), 189, 197; Karen Rose Mathews, "Nudity on the Margins: The Bayeux Tapestry and its Relationship to Marginal Architectural Sculpture", in Naked Before God: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England. (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2003), 148fn.

[31] Lewis Thorpe, The Bayeux Tapestry and the Norman Invasion (London: The Folio Society Limited, 1973), 57.

continuous display there, since a 1476 Cathedral inventory (the first known reference to the Tapestry[32]) records its use as a nave decoration on feast days only[33]; infrequent handling would explain the Tapestry's remarkable state of preservation. The prominent placement of Odo would also likely have affected the Tapestry's usefulness after the bishop's fall from grace, so it may not have been shown for very long after its completion. For the purpose of this paper, I will assume that the audience for the Tapestry comprised of a generous cross-section of the Norman and English populations. At the very least, it included two segments of Anglo-Norman society: the person or persons who commissioned it, Norman, upper-class, and pro-Conquest; and the individuals who actually embroidered the Tapestry and would therefore have been in a position to absorb its message.

How Subversive Imagery May Have Survived

If the English embroiderers really did insert their own interpretations of the Norman Conquest into the Bayeux Tapestry, what explanations can there be for these images' continued existence? One possible explanation is that the

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[32] Bernstein, 14.

[33] Bruce Heydt, "The Bayeux Tapestry", British Heritage, Volume 20, Issue 6 (Oct/Nov 99), 57-59.

subversive elements were not seen as such. The same image can have vastly different meanings for different individuals or groups of people, and the art of the British Isles in particular is noted for its deliberate duality of meaning[34]. For instance, in her study of sheela-na-gigs, Madeline Caviness has noted that while the statues had an obscene, misogynistic, or otherwise negative meaning for the men who commissioned them, women in childbirth may have derived positive comfort from them[35]. To this end, it is possible that the Tapestry artisans chose imagery that would have been misinterpreted by the Normans, though the subtleties of meaning are lost to us now.

As has been noted above, the Tapestry is surprisingly intact for an item so inherently prone to decay or fading, and a second possibility is that the Tapestry, though likely intended for display, was never actually shown to the public. If this was indeed the case, the subversive images may not have been the only problem with the work. Odo's prominent presence may have rendered the Tapestry unacceptable after his fall from power in 1082. A related

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[34] Rynne, 191, 201.

[35] Mathews, 150fn.

controversy involves the unknown figure who points to William as he lifts his helmet at the Battle of Hastings. It is generally thought to be Eustace of Boulogne, but Eustace was involved in a 1067 rebellion against William and was not in favor again until 1077, the decade during which the Tapestry was probably made. Grape points out that even after his restoration he probably would not have been honored in such an obvious way[36]. Whether the Norman commissioner requested Odo and Eustace's presence in the Tapestry, or whether the English deliberately chose to call attention to these traitorous men is not certain, but in either case, the two figures would have been politically problematic.

A third explanation, which I believe is the most likely, is that the subversive images were recognized as such but simply ignored. This may have been out of either a sort of benevolent tolerance or a genuine desire to foster Anglo-Norman understanding and unity. This seems reasonable, since William consciously styled himself as Edward's successor, not as a foreigner determined to destroy all vestiges of the Anglo-Saxon system. For instance, some of the nobles who survived the Battle of Hastings were permitted to keep their estates. It was only after repeated rebellions, some of which (like the 1069 Northumbrian uprising) coming uncomfortably close to reversing his

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[36] Grape, 23.

victory[37], that William decided to fill all positions of power - political as well as religious - with loyal Normans[38]. The Tapestry may have been made at a time when the ruling elite felt more secure and were prepared to tolerate dissenting voices - as long as the medium of expression was limited to cloth and thread rather than weaponry. Indeed, the inability of the English to display anything other than passive hostility may even have been interpreted as a sign that the Conquest was complete.

Alternatively, the Bayeux Tapestry could be seen as an artistic effort at an Anglo-Norman synthesis, with the Norman commissioner, if not actively encouraging differing viewpoints, at least allowing them to remain as an attempt at reconciliation between the two peoples. As will be

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[37] See Peter Rex, The English Resistance: The Underground War Against the Normans. (Stroud: Tempus, 2004, especially chapters 2 and 3. Rex notes that Florence of Worchester describes the English kingdom as "newly won" in a 1070 entry, which suggests that the victory was not certain until the Northumbrian rebels had been pacified. Rex, 107.

[38] The scale on which the depositions occurred is astounding. William needed to reward his own men (and also prevent *them* from rebelling), and did so through the mass allocation of English estates. Churchmen suffered a similar fate: by 1087 there remained only two pre-Conquest bishops, and no English were appointed to high Church office after 1066. Eadmer put it most succinctly in the *Historia Novorum*: "Their nationality was their downfall. If they were English, no virtue was enough for them to be considered worthy of promotion; if they were foreigners, the mere appearance of virtue, vouched for by friends, was sufficient for them to be judged worthy of the highest honor." Golding 36; Daniell 137; Ann Williams, The English and the Norman Conquest. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), 126.

demonstrated later, the Tapestry includes elements that are probably Norman propaganda, but there are also quite obvious examples of anti-Norman sentiment displayed. There are also several remarkable attempts at relating the events shown in an impartial way. The English are not uniformly vilified, nor are the Normans shown as consistently high-minded and deserving of their prize. Although it would probably be inaccurate to label the Bayeux Tapestry as a collaborative effort - it does commemorate a conquest, after all - it does not seem to be entirely the product of a ruthless propaganda campaign that left no room for the opinions of the conquered.

Reading the Tapestry

"To read a work", Elizabeth Sears wrote in 2002, "is to submit it to close visual analysis, informed by a knowledge of the specific historical context in which the work functioned, a familiarity with relevant pictorial conventions and their associations, and a grasp of visual genres."[39] In the Middle Ages, readers were taught to study texts literally, allegorically, tropologically, and anagogically in order to grasp their complete meaning[40]. In

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[39] Elizabeth Sears, "Reading Images", Reading Medieval Images: The Art Historian and the Object, ed. Elizabeth Sears and Thelma K. Thomas. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 1.

[40] Leah Shopkow, History and Community: Norman Historical Writing in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic

my study of the Bayeux Tapestry, I will attempt to integrate both approaches. I will be looking closely at the interpretation of historical events, such as the comet of 1066 and Harold's coronation, depicted within the Tapestry and how these compare to contemporary written accounts of the same events. I will also be looking at the symbolism of certain images, such as comets and dragons, in connection with how they would have been understood by 11th-century audiences. Yet considering the central role that Christianity played in medieval European art and life, I will be particularly focusing on the possibility of religious imagery and how it may have functioned as a code to unlocking the deeper meanings of the Tapestry.

Historiography

The primary sources that will be referenced in this paper come mainly from William of Jumieges, William of Poitiers, William of Malmesbury, Ordericus Vitalis, Eadmer, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. None of these sources is without a certain amount of bias.

William of Poitiers (c.1020-c.1090) came from a prominent Norman family, fought alongside William the Conqueror and was later his personal chaplain. In his

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University of America Press, 1997), 67.

Gesta Guillelmi Ducis Normannorum et Regis Anglorum, which was commissioned by the king himself, the writer sought to champion William's cause whenever possible, and often did so by comparing him to Julius Caesar and writing in a style consciously imitative of the classical writers[41]. He regarded the English as little more than savages, celebrated and attempted to legitimize the occupation of foreign territory, and instructed his audience (the Normans who remembered the events of 1066) to accept and enjoy their status as conquerors[42]. Since William of Poitiers is also the only author to mention the consecrated banner sent to William, this suggests that his intention was to validate the Conquest as a religiously necessary event. His accounts are the most unapologetically pro-Norman of all the chroniclers.

William of Jumieges (died c.1090) takes a slightly more neutral position. In his *Historia Normannorum*, he stresses the importance of Harold's vow and occasionally comments

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[41] "The Anglo-Norman Historians: Accessed 12 May 2004. Available at http://itsa.ucsf.edu/~snlrc/britannia/hastings/anglonorman.html; Shopkow, 90-93, 195; Brian Golding, Conquest and Colonisation: The Normans in Britain 1066-1100. Revised edition. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 3-4.

[42] Shopkow, 93, 192, 195.

that William's accession was the will of God. His narrative of the Conquest is based on his interpretations of other works, and he occasionally records rumors rather than facts. Like William of Poitiers, he defends the Conquest on both political and religious grounds, but explicitly states that he is making an effort to be truthful. He also does not appear to share William of Poitiers' propagandizing motives; he candidly admits that his cloistered state does not make him the best of chroniclers[43].

William of Malmesbury (c.1080-c.1143) is often considered the best English historian of the time. Though he had Norman forebears, he spent his entire life in England, writing his *Gesta regnum anglorum* while a monk at Malmesbury Abbey. Like William of Jumieges, he attempts to be objective - William says that his mixed ancestry should make him impartial - and he warns his readers not to be overly trustful of his sources (such as William of Poitiers' account of the Conquest)[44].

Eadmer (c.1060-c.1124) was an English monk of Canterbury who wrote about thirty years after the Conquest, an occurrence that his *Historia Novorum in*

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[43] Shopkow, 134-135; "The Anglo-Norman Historians: Accessed 12 May 2004. Available at http://itsa.ucsf.edu/~snlrc/britannia/hastings/anglonorman.html; Golding, 4.

[44] Shopkow, 136, 218.

Anglia deals with at length. Eadmer maintains that William tricked Harold into swearing an oath, but he hastens to point out that the oath was nevertheless binding, and therefore the Norman victory at Hastings was "without any doubt to be attributed to the....miraculous intervention of God"[45]. However, Eadmer (who must have been aware of the insurrections and general discontent that followed Hastings) makes obvious his disappointment at the increasingly insignificant position that the English found themselves in after the Conquest[46].

Florence of Worchester/John of Worchester (dates unknown, probably late 11th - early 12th centuries)[47] imbues the narrative of the Conquest with the slight sense that for many, it was an unwarranted, inexplicable event. He remarks that Harold had succeeded to the throne lawfully, abolished unjust laws, punished criminals, and generally behaved in a pious, fair, and appropriate manner

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[45] Eadmer, Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England. Translated by Geoffrey Bosanquet with a foreword by R. W. Southern. (Philadelphia: Dufour, 1965), 9.

[46] Ibid., xi.

[47] Florence of Worchester and John of Worchester wrote chronicles that are virtually identical to one another; who was responsible for what sections remains uncertain. In this paper they will be treated as the same chronicler. Darlington and McGurk, xviii.

throughout his short reign[48]; there is no mention of the oath or William's claim to the throne. The invasion and subsequent burning and pillaging are related laconically, without any mention of either the English or the Normans being in the right; if there is an awareness of the loss of Anglo-Saxon culture, there is little criticism of the Normans. Florence and John were likely English, though they were monks under Norman abbots, so their careful neutrality is perhaps understandable[49].

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was recorded at five different locations by usually anonymous scribes, and covers the period from the Roman conquest of the British Isles to the mid-12th century. The events concerning the Norman Conquest are written in a somewhat impersonal style, though the manuscripts uniformly suggest both Edward's nomination of Harold as king, and popular approval of him. There does not seem to be any indication that William's claim was known in England, and the chroniclers are candid on the social discord that followed the Conquest. There are, however, scattered references to

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[48] Ibid., 601.

[49] Christopher Harper-Bill and Elisabeth van Houts, A Companion to the Anglo-Saxon World. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 113.

"our sins" being the reason for the Conquest[50], which may indicate either a genuine commentary on the religious conditions of the time, or an attempt to find an explanation for the crisis.

Ordericus Vitalis (1075-c.1142) was born in England of an English mother and a French priest who had arrived with the Normans, and though he spent most of his life in a monastery in southern Normandy, he still used the name Ordericus Angligena. His *Historia Ecclesiastica* was partially derived from William of Jumieges and William of Poitiers, though Ordericus often omitted their more laudatory statements and inserted his own "impartial" judgments on the behavior of William and his Norman conquerors. As his nickname indicates, he seems to have been sympathetic to the English in many cases; presumably he was aware of the conditions prevailing in England after the Conquest. However, although Ordericus condemns violence and injustice, he nevertheless praises the effects of the Conquest for restoring religious faith in England, and in many ways this attempt at fair-mindedness makes him the best source for information on this period

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[50] The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, translated and edited by M. J. Swanton, (London, J. M. Dent, 1996), 200.

in history[51].

Many modern scholars have also written about the Bayeux Tapestry and its social and political significance. Most maintain that the Tapestry was not intended as merely an unbiased historical record of the Norman Conquest, but - to quote the subtitle of Wolfgang Grape's book - a "monument to a Norman triumph"[52]. Grape, like Daniel Terkla, Frank Stenton, and many others, believes that the Tapestry is a fully realized work of art whose uniform theme is the glorification and justification of the Norman endeavor; if any of its elements seem ambiguous, it is because we do not yet understand them, and not because they are the work of disgruntled English artisans who were seeking to detract from the Normans' success or to further a less praiseworthy view of the Conquest. Others, such as O.K. Werckmeister, David Hill, and Richard David Wissolik, believe that there was a significant English contribution to the Tapestry - though likely one unanticipated by the designer or commissioner - and that its panels contain subtle allusions to English views on the Conquest.

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[51] "The Anglo-Norman Historians: Accessed 12 May 2004. Available at http://itsa.ucsf.edu/~snlrc/britannia/hastings/anglonorman.html.

[52] Wolfgang Grape, The Bayeux Tapestry: Monument to a Norman Triumph (Munich: Prestel Verlag), 1994.

In this paper I will also maintain that the Bayeux Tapestry had originally been intended to celebrate the Norman Conquest. I will demonstrate that, while William may or may not have had a valid reason for carrying out the Conquest, the designers of the Tapestry attempted to justify the Norman position not only by asserting the validity of Harold's vow, but also by presenting the victorious forces as holy warriors who were intent on reestablishing true religion in England. Many of the Tapestry's more famous scenes, such as those showing the comet of 1066 or Odo's banquet in the Norman camp, are obvious attempts at linking William's conquest to the will of God. However, I intend to focus more on the sections that appear to have been deliberate interpolations by the English embroiderers, and which are generally not commented on by historians. These include Harold's feast at Bosham, certain elements of the Aelfgyva scene, Harold's return to England, and the dragons in the Tapestry borders. I will show how these appear to subvert the original Norman intention of depicting William's succession to the throne of England as legitimate and divinely ordained. I will also show that there were some notable uprisings in the first few years after 1066, which

suggests that a significant portion of the English population felt resentment toward their new Norman superiors and may have perceived the Conquest as an unjust act. I believe that this outlook also found its way into the Tapestry.

2. The Bayeux Tapestry as Political and Religious Justification of the Norman Cause

The Comet of 1066

The most transparent attempt to add a supernatural coloring to the Conquest is the misdating of the comet of 1066, which is now known to have been Halley's Comet[53]. It first appeared in the early spring of that year, reaching prominence in late April[54]. No medieval account or modern-day source mentions the comet being visible earlier than February, yet the Tapestry strongly implies that it appeared either during or shortly after Harold's January 6 coronation as a portent of doom.

In scene 35 of the Tapestry, Harold is shown wearing a crown while a group of men look on (Figure 1)[55]. Immediately to the right, what appears to be the same group of men are pointing at the sky, where a star with a jagged tail is visible; the caption reads *"Isti mirant stella[m]"*: "These men wonder at the star"[56] (Figure 2). Following this, a man speaks (apparently about the meaning

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[53] Donald K. Yeomans. Comets: A Chronological History of Observation, Science, Myth, and Folklore (New York: Wiley, 1991), 392.

[54] Ibid.

[55] All figures are in the Appendix beginning on page 80.

[56] Grape, 124. The Latin translations are not my own; all are from either Grape or Bernstein, as cited.

of the comet) to Harold, who inclines his head downward to listen. Below the two, the outlines of five canoe-like ships can be seen, darkly foreshadowing the invasion[57]. It is not surprising that these scenes should have been added into the Tapestry: comets, like virtually all unusual astronomical phenomena, were regarded during the Middle Ages as signs, usually of a negative nature, and fairly often as indications of an impending invasion. For example, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for 793 observes that "fiery dragons were seen flying in the air" over northern England, and, not coincidentally, that same year the Vikings came and laid waste to the monastery at Lindisfarne[58]. William of Malmesbury also relates that in 1066, Elmer, an aged monk of his monastery, understood the comet to mean disaster for England, exclaiming, "Thou art come! a matter of lamentation to many a mother art thou come; I have seen thee long since; but I now behold thee much more terrible, threatening to hurl destruction on this country."[59]

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[57] Grape, 123-124; Bernstein, 21, 246-247.

[58] James, 214. The "fiery dragons" can be interpreted as comets, the aurora borealis, or even as particularly striking cloud formations.

[59] William of Malmesbury, Chronicle of the Kings of England, from the Earliest Period to the Reign of King Stephen, translated by J. A. Giles. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1847), 251-252.

The problem with the comet scene is that there is little or no depiction of elapsed time, when, in fact, there had to have been at the very least a month, if not three, between Harold's coronation and a noteworthy appearance of the comet[60]. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* establishes the Easter date as April 16, and follows with a brief description of the comet:

> "Then throughout all England, a sight such as men never saw before was seen in the heavens. Some men declared that it was the star *comet*, which some men call the 'haired' star; and it appeared first on the eve of the *Greater Litany*, that is on *24 April*, and shone thus all the week."[61]

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's description of the comet

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[60] N. J. Higham believes the scene that shows Harold wearing a crown may not depict his coronation, but rather a ceremonial crown-wearing that possibly occurred at Easter. Since the comet became most visible around Easter, showing Harold's crown-wearing ceremony would serve basically the same purpose as would showing his coronation: to convince the Tapestry's viewers that Harold's reign was the object of divine disapproval. However, since the comet appears *before* William learns of the coronation, we can be fairly certain that the scene was set in January. Higham, The Death of Anglo-Saxon England (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1997), 175, 182.

[61] Swanton, p. 194 (italics original).

sighting can be regarded as emblematic of most other accounts. Indeed, the comet is mentioned in dozens of different chronicles from all over Europe, and they generally agree with one another's dating, descriptions and even interpretations. As the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry demonstrates, English versions acknowledge that the comet may have had something to do with the political situation between Normandy and England[62]; however, Norman chroniclers such as William of Poitiers and William of Jumieges are more explicit in their belief that the comet foreshadowed a change in a kingdom, and it is likely that this attitude found its way into the Bayeux Tapestry as well. William of Jumieges in particular makes a point of linking the comet with Harold's usurpation of the English throne:

> "At length king Edward, having completed the term of his fortunate life, departed this world in the year of Our Lord 1065 [sic]. Whereupon Harold immediately usurped the kingdom, perjured

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[62] For example, the 1066 entry from the Abingdon manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* consists wholly of: "Here passed away King Edward, and Earl Harold succeeded to the kingdom and held it 40 weeks and one day, and here came William and won England; and here in this year Christ Church burned, and here a comet appeared on 18 April" (italics original). Swanton, 194, 196.

> in the fealty which he had sworn to the duke. The duke at once sent envoys to him, exhorting him to withdraw from this madness and keep the faith which he had sworn. But he not only would not listen but caused the whole English people also to be faithless to the duke. Then there appeared in the heavens a comet which, with three long rays, lit up a great part of the southern hemisphere for 15 nights together, foretelling, as many said, a change in a kingdom."[63]

To make Harold's perjury all the more compelling, the Tapestry also sharply contrasts Harold's short reign with that of his religiously-minded predecessor. In an earlier scene, Edward's shrouded body is carried to the newly-consecrated Church of St. Peter the Apostle as a disembodied, obviously divine, right hand appears from the sky and blesses the scene. In contrast, the traitorous Harold's coronation is presided over only by the ominous comet.

Archbishop Stigand

Scene 35 shows Harold's coronation and also identifies Stigand by name (see Figure 1). His presence strongly

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[63] Peter Brown, Comets, Meteorites, and Men, (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1973), 14.

implies that he was the one who had crowned the new king, but this was almost certainly not the case. William of Malmesbury says that the ceremony was actually performed by Ealdred, the archbishop of York, but whoever it was, it is unlikely that it would have been the controversial Stigand. Mary Frances Smith argues that he was the wealthiest clergyman in England before and shortly after the Conquest, his holdings rivaling that of King Edward. Some of his wealth was legally obtained, and some was not[64]. The real problem, however, was his dubious standing with the Church.

It is not accidental that in the Tapestry, Stigand is holding what is probably a maniple (a narrow strip of silk worn over the left arm at mass[65]), since it may have reminded the Tapestry's audience of a pallium (a woolen band with pendants in the front and back, worn over the chasuble[66]). Smith has noted that Florence of Worchester's chronicle cites three reasons for Stigand's 1070 dismissal from the office of archbishop, and two of them involved

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[64] Mary Frances Smith, "Archbishop Stigand and the Eye of the Needle", Anglo-Norman Studies XVI: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1993, ed. Marjorie Chibnall (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1993), 204-206.

[65] Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 10th ed. (Springfield: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1993), 708.

[66] Ibid., 837.

wrongly-gained palliums. In 1052, he was uncanonically made Archbishop of Canterbury, which meant that he could not receive a pallium from the pope; in 1058 he did receive a pallium, but from the anti-pope Benedict X, who was deposed shortly afterward[67]. Harold surely would have realized how impolitic it was to be crowned by a man who was in such a position. The archbishop's presence in the Tapestry is likely a Norman attempt to undermine the legitimacy of Harold's coronation, as well as to demonstrate how corrupt the English Church had become[68].

Odo and the Religious Messages of the Bayeux Tapestry

Another example of the Norman desire to be associated with a divinely-sanctioned victory is the prominent placement given to Bishop Odo. The bishop is shown four times[69], and he is present at every important scene that deals with the Conquest, his tonsure reminding the Tapestry's viewers that government and religion were inseparable in this military operation. When he is shown it is always in the company of William, and in three out of the four instances, the duke appears to defer to the

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[67] Smith, 202-203, 204n.

[68] Bernstein, 122, 17.

[69] Scenes 37, 49, 50, 68-69.

clergyman by apparently requesting or accepting advice. In addition, the illustration of the Norman fleet is suitably grand; Odo, we are told, helped finance the invasion[70]. The scenes are examples of double propaganda: Odo, as commissioner of the Bayeux Tapestry, no doubt intended it to bring glory not only to his half-brother, but to himself as well. But far from only celebrating the individuals involved in a secular military triumph, the pictorial representations found in the Bayeux Tapestry do well to underscore the deliberately religious tones of the entire conflict, and to preserve for future generations the belief that the Norman Conquest occurred not because of William's ambition, but primarily because of his desire to avenge the breaking of a religious vow.

Upon learning of Harold's coronation, William gave "orders for ships to be built", or so the Tapestry states in scene 37 (Figure 3). In reality, however, it is Odo who seems to be the one giving orders. As a messenger brings the unwelcome news, William appears confused and agitated, incapable of action. As William turns to his half-brother as if for advice, Odo looks past him and toward the

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[70] Richard Gameson, in "The Origin, Art, and Message of the Bayeux Tapestry", in The Study of the Bayeux Tapestry, edited by Richard Gameson. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997), 159.

messenger as a man holding a handsaw hovers nearby. All three men are focusing their attention on the bishop, not William. Odo is also literally elevated over William. The two brothers are sitting on some type of double throne that, while possibly symbolizing that they are social and political allies and equals, also slightly raises the bishop, making him look both physically larger and more in command than the duke.

As preparations for the Battle of Hastings begin, Odo is once again shown with William, and here he sits at the duke's right hand, a traditional position of honor (Figure 4, at right). At this critical moment, William does not appear to be completely in charge. Again he looks to Odo, and points to his sword in a rather questioning manner. The Bishop confidently imitates the gesture as if he were agreeing with William - or giving him permission or advice.

Yet nowhere is Bishop Odo's prominence more noticeable (and politically significant) than in a scene showing a Last Supper-like banquet in the Norman camp shortly before the Battle of Hastings (Figure 4, at left). Here Odo, as the Christ-figure, sits flanked by William and his men

while he blesses the food and drink[71]; placed before them are fish and pieces of bread, clear symbols of Christianity. In this scene, it is the clergyman who holds the position of honor, not William, as would have been expected in a setting of this type[72]. Indeed, William is almost literally pushed out of the way by the bearded figure on his right. For the Tapestry's designer it was an unusual choice of subject matter, since, as Martha Rampton argues, there was no custom of feasting prior to a battle in eleventh-century northern Europe - the celebrations were usually reserved for afterwards[73]. Holding a feast *before* a battle, then, may indicate the Normans' certainty of both victory and divine help in achieving it.

Fables in the Bayeux Tapestry

David Bernstein has noted a more subtle, almost subliminal, attempt to portray Harold as a perjurer through the depiction of several fables by Aesop and Phaedrus. These are initially found in the lower border beneath the scenes of Harold and his men leaving Bosham and setting out to sea in their boats. The fables are that

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[71] Grape, 30-32, 54, 141.

[72] Martha Rampton, "The Significance of the Banquet Scene in the Bayeux Tapestry", Medievalia et Humanistica, New Series 21 (1994), 41.

[73] Ibid., 38.

of the Fox and the Crow, the Pregnant Bitch, and the Wolf and the Crane.[74]

The Fox and the Crow is a familiar tale. It relates how a hungry fox spots a crow about to eat a piece of cheese that it holds in its beak (Figure 5, lower border, center). Desiring the cheese for himself, the fox begins to compliment the crow on its appearance, lamenting only that it does not have a beautiful voice to go with its other attributes. Wanting to prove the fox wrong, the crow opens its beak to sing, thus releasing the cheese, which the fox immediately snatches up[75]. The moral is clear: seemingly innocent individuals (like Harold) may actually be scheming to get what is not theirs.

The Pregnant Bitch fable is more obscure, but appropriate nevertheless. The expectant mother, having no place in which to give birth, asks to borrow a home from another bitch. After the puppies are born, the owner asks for her home back. The tenant replies that she can get it back if she is willing to fight and defeat her and her

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[74] Daniel Terkla has identified nine separate fables in the borders of the Tapestry, all of which serve to condemn Harold's actions. His discoveries are plausible, but I will explain how some of them may appear favorable to Harold.

[75] Bernstein, 133.

brood (Figure 6, lower border, left). Again, it seems to pertain to Harold, who allegedly obtained a kingdom by means of deceit, and then forced William to go to war in order to reclaim it[76].

The third fable involves a wolf who, while dining, gets a bone stuck in his throat (Figure 6, lower border, center). He promises a reward to anyone who can remove the bone, and a crane volunteers. Upon completion of the task, the crane demands his reward. The wolf replies that the bird was lucky to get out of his mouth alive and should not ask for an additional benefit. As a segue into the fable, the border beneath the hall in which Harold dines shows two wolf-like animals who are licking their paws as if they had just finished a meal. When we remember that William had rescued Harold from Count Guy, the theme of cynical ingratitude is clear[77].

The fables are repeated at other crucial narrative points in the Tapestry. As Harold and his men arrive back in England in scene 30, the Wolf and the Crane and the Fox and the Crow appear in the above border, and the Pregnant Bitch fable appears beneath the Norman army in scene 59 as

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[76] Ibid., 130.

[77] Ibid., 131-132.

they prepare to go against the English at the battle of Hastings.

With these fables, however, the line between interpretations of Harold's behavior and that of William's begins to blur. Though Bernstein believes that the fables consistently serve to condemn Harold's treachery - and indeed, the themes of theft and betrayal seem far too obvious for the fables to have been covertly added in by the English embroiderers - they do nevertheless raise doubts about their application. For instance, if the unwitting victims of the fox, bitch, and wolf are supposed to represent William, it may also be a commentary on his gullibility and lack of forethought. If William, like the crane, only performed a good deed in order to put Harold in his debt, then what does that say about the legitimacy of his claim to the English throne? And it is Harold, not William, who ultimately loses a kingdom, much like the homeowning bitch and the crow lose their property through the deception of others. Each of the fables could as easily pertain to William as to Harold, and they are a perfect example of the Tapestry's ambiguous nature.

3: The Bayeux Tapestry as Attempt at English Subversion

The Tapestry, for all its depiction of William as a holy warrior, contains many more details that suggest the opposite. With these, the Tapestry's creators seem to have indicated what they may have perceived as the true character and motives of William and his men. Since the Tapestry was probably made by English workers, the possibility is high that they intentionally added in veiled references to what a large percentage of the kingdom's population must have, at least initially, regarded as the injustice of the Norman Conquest. The fact that the embroiderers were creating a work of art that celebrated their king's defeat must have seemed like (and was probably partly intended as) a deliberate reminder of their subordinate status, and they were in an ideal position to subvert the message of the Tapestry.

The English had well-grounded reasons to resent their new Norman overlords, and both English and Norman sources are candid about this fact. To begin with, it is possible that one of the reasons why Harold had accepted the crown was because he was aware that the English were hostile to the idea of a foreign king. The Norman sources corroborate this. In his *Gesta Guillelmi*, William of Poitiers comments

that "the dearest wish of the English was to have no ruler who was not a fellow countryman"[78]. He also relates that in sending Harold to make the oath to William, "King Edward behaved with the utmost wisdom, for, with his wealth and his authority, Harold was the man to contain any revolt of the English, if, with that perfidy and restlessness which they so often display, they were to rise in revolt". William "naturally hoped that Harold would mediate faithfully between himself and the English people" who, the chronicler damningly adds, "held him second only to their king"[79]. William of Jumieges notes in the *Historia Normannorum* that after William discovered that Harold had been crowned, he "[exhorted Harold] to withdraw from this madness and keep the faith which he had sworn. But he not only would not listen but caused the whole English people also to be faithless to the duke"[80]. The fact that the Normans would have needed Harold to intercede with the mutinous English on William's behalf in the first place seems to suggest that the idea of a Norman king could not have been widely accepted[81]. William of Poitiers even

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[78] Gillingham, 215.

[79] Thorpe, 33.

[80] Brown, 14

[81] Edward A. Freeman, The History of the Norman Conquest of England,

acknowledges that there may have been a certain level of nationalistic sentiment that motivated the English to fight; in the *Gesta*, the chronicler states that a few of the English may have fought out of "love for Harold", but all went to battle "out of love for their country which...they wished to defend against aliens"[82]. The English may also have genuinely thought that Harold had been Edward's chosen heir: The Peterborough 'E' manuscript of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* notes that "Earl Harold succeeded to the kingdom of England just as the king

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Its Causes and Its Results, Vol. III (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1873), 448-451.

[82] Quoted in Ian W. Walker, Harold, the Last Anglo-Saxon King (Thrupp: Sutton Publishing, 1997), 147. This does not necessarily imply a modern sense of nationalism or patriotism, but there must have been an awareness of the Normans as the "other", a people whose political system, culture, and language differed from that of the English, and whose arrival would be met with social upheaval and bloodshed. However, Golding (drawing upon research by G.A. Loud) has argued that both Normans and English had what seems to be almost a modern notion of racial superiority, albeit one defined by religion: both groups were, to a greater or lesser extent, convinced that the "sins" of the English were responsible for the Conquest. The Normans, however, also conceived of themselves as an "all-conquering, expansionist race who lorded it over other peoples by their military prowess and cunning. Against these positive virtues were ranged the negative vices of their opponents". Golding, 179. Since the Normans saw themselves as a separate, superior nation, it is possible that they would have attributed similarly "nationalistic" tendencies to the English as well.

granted it to him - and also men chose him for it."[83] All of this points to an English conviction that the Conquest was unwarranted and unwelcome[84].

The situation only worsened after William's coronation, which portended the beginning of a tumultuous period for the English. The Tapestry was apparently created in an atmosphere of violence, domination and general unrest as the Normans sought to consolidate their hold on the country in the years immediately after 1066. Ordericus Vitalis writes of this period:

> "...[T]he English were oppressed by the insolence of the Normans, and subjected to grievous outrages by the haughty governors...[t]he chiefs of inferior rank...treated the natives, both gentle and

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[83] Swanton, 197.

[84] The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Abingdon manuscript) implies that English nationalistic (and almost by extension, anti-Norman) sentiment was present in England long before the Conquest. In 1052, many of Edward's soldiers refused to take up arms against the forcibly returning Godwinson family, for "it was abhorrent to almost all of them that they should fight against men of their own race", and also, significantly, because "they did not want that this country should be the more greatly laid open to foreign nations, should they themselves destroy each other" (Swanton, 180). That same year, apparently at Godwine's behest, there occurred a general purge of "all the Frenchmen who earlier promoted illegality and passed unjust judgments and counseled bad counsel in this country" (Swanton, 182).

> simple, with the utmost scorn, and levied on them most unjust exactions...[T]he king's lieutenants, puffed up with pride, gave no heed to the reasonable complaints of his English subjects...They screened their men-at-arms who most outrageously robbed the people and ravished the women...The English deeply lamented the loss of their freedom".[85]

In 1069, William's notorious "harrying of the North" resulted in a tragedy of near-genocidal proportions. Here Orderic is even more severe in his condemnation of the brutal suppression of the Northumbrian revolt:

> "Never did William commit so much cruelty; to his lasting disgrace, he yielded to his worst impulse, and set no bounds to his fury, condemning the innocent and the guilty to a common fate. In the fullness of his wrath he ordered the corn and the cattle, with the implements of husbandry and every sort of provisions, to be collected in heaps and set on fire till the whole was consumed, and thus destroyed at once all that could serve for the support of life in the whole country lying beyond the Humber. There followed, consequently, so great a scarcity in England in the ensuing

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[85] Ordericus Vitalis, The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy. Volume II. Translated by Thomas Forester. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), 9.

> years, and severe famine involved the innocent and unarmed population in so much misery, that, in a Christian nation, more than a hundred thousand souls[86], of both sexes and all ages, perished of want".[87]

Florence of Worchester adds that "so severe a famine prevailed...that men were driven to feed on the flesh of horses, dogs, cats, and even of human beings."[88]

It would be misleading to attribute this discontent to the majority of the English populace, however. The insurgent forces were primarily made up of the aristocracy, the ones who had the most to lose under the new regime; no doubt much of the peasantry, if not

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[86] Based on figures from the *Domesday Book*, historians have hypothesized that the population of England in 1086 was anywhere between 1 and 2 million. H. R. Loyn, Anglo-Saxon England and the Norman Conquest (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962), 337. It seems reasonable to suggest that at the time of the Conquest, the population may have been about 1.5 million or less. The number 100,000 cannot be taken literally; it may simply mean a very large number. Rex, 105.

[87] Ordericus, 28.

[88] Florence of Worcester, The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester. Translated by Thomas Forester. (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), 174. Symeon of Durham relates that the Northumbrian countryside remained uncultivated for nine years as a result of the devastation, and the Domesday Book of 1086 describes many Yorkshire villages as "waste". However, Daniell points out that there could be other reasons for this designation, so the true extant of the harrying is uncertain. Daniell, 15.

completely indifferent, at least saw little purpose in taking up arms against the Normans. The rebels were also seldom unified, whether in Northumbria or elsewhere. They lacked a definite set of objectives, such as who to install as king, who to ally themselves with, or which aspects of the Norman government to reject - flaws that ultimately destroyed any hopes for their own victory[89]. However, as the literary evidence suggests, if the English were frustrated enough to attempt revolution, it is not inconceivable that they would also express their dislike of their new government within an artistic format such as the Bayeux Tapestry.

Harold's Voyage to France

The Tapestry opens with Harold conversing with Edward as the former is about to leave on a journey (Figure 7). H. E. J. Cowdrey has observed that this calm scene is counteracted by a certain implicit tension in the lower border, which shows dogs and birds in what appear to be face-to-face confrontations[90]. What has not been commented on is the animals' representation of *symmetry*, and by

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[89] Golding 48.

[90] H. E. J. Cowdrey, "Towards an Interpretation of the Bayeux Tapestry" from The Study of the Bayeux Tapestry, edited by Richard Gameson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997), 99.

extension, harmony. The pair of dogs beneath the castle that houses Harold and Edward do at first glance appear to be facing off in combat, but at closer inspection it can be discerned that they are the same size, color, and shape. They are mirror images of one another, and the same can be said of the animals in the upper border. Though Harold is shown properly smaller than Edward in the main frame, the border may indicate that the two men were more or less equal in their powers, opinions, and manner of ruling.

Although the Norman chroniclers would have us believe that this trip was made with the intention of vowing fealty to William, the meaning of this depiction is also ambiguous. As Harold rides out with his men, he carries a goshawk[91] and is accompanied by dogs. N. P. Brooks and H. E. Walker comment that these were "suitable gifts" for William[92]. Though that is a perfectly plausible explanation (indeed, Harold is depicted holding the hawk up until his meeting with William), the deliberate inclusion of these

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[91] W. Brunsdon Yapp bases this assertion on the shape of the wings and the size of the bird in relation to Harold's arm. W. Brunsdon Yapp, "Animals in Medieval Art: The Bayeux Tapestry as an Example". Journal of Medieval History, Volume 13 (1987) 30-31.

[92] N. P. Brooks and H. E. Walker, "The Authority and Interpretation of the Bayeux Tapestry" from The Study of the Bayeux Tapestry, edited by

animals in the scene suggests nothing so much as that Harold and his men were going on a hunting expedition, and not on a mission of state. William of Malmesbury claimed that Harold had been fishing when he was blown off course "by an unpropitious gale" and toward the French coast[93]. Though modern-day historians tend to downplay the possibility of an accidental arrival in France, the inscription above the Tapestry scene relates that Harold's sails were "full of wind", which could be a reference to their alleged encounter with rough weather[94]; lending credibility to this theory, Charles Gibbs-Smith has noted that eleventh-century ships would have been "navigationally helpless in a storm"[95], which would explain why Harold arrived at Ponthieu instead of at his supposed destination of Normandy. In the scene that shows an English ship bringing news of Harold's coronation, the inscription reads "*Hic navis anglica venit in terram*

Richard Gameson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997), 66.

[93] William of Malmesbury, 268.

[94] Gameson, 187.

[95] Charles H. Gibbs-Smith, "Notes on the Plates", The Bayeux Tapestry: A Comprehensive Survey, edited by Frank Stenton et. al. (New York: Phaidon Publishers, 1957), 163.

Willelmi ducis", "Here an English ship came to Duke William's country"[96], and this implies that Harold would have been able to sail directly to Normandy under favorable weather conditions. Furthermore, the fact that William and his troops had to wait several weeks before attempting a Channel crossing in the fall of 1066 suggests that weather would have played a crucial role in military matters[97]. Harold's arrival in France may well have been inadvertent. As David Douglas has pointed out, however, one would not go fishing in a "war galley complete with shields", which is what the Tapestry clearly shows[98]; yet Douglas also considers the Tapestry to be an unbiased historical document. Could it be that the general belief in England - whatever the truth may have actually been - was that Harold *had* merely gone off to indulge in some

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[96] Grape, 125.

[97] Christopher Daniell has outlined two arguments for William's delay. The first is that while William launched the fleet at Dives-sur-Mer, he advanced northward to St Valery in order to catch a south wind and hence avoid Harold's fleet at the Isle of Wight. A second argument states that strong winds forced William to St Valery's dangerous coastline, where some of his troops may have drowned. Both arguments highlight the importance of wind. Daniell, 6.

[98] David Douglas, "Edward the Confessor, Duke William of Normandy, and the English Succession". The English Historical Review, Volume 68, Issue 269 (October 1953), p. 541; Stenton, 164.

royal pastime, hunting or fishing or both, and that it had gone catastrophically wrong?

Harold's Return to England

Harold's return from Normandy is also filled with mysterious elements. As Harold comes before Edward in scene 31, he is bent into a caricature of humility, markedly unlike the stance he assumed when bidding farewell to the king before his journey (Figure 8). His posture and facial expression, however, seem to connote fear and uncertainty rather than exaggerated submissiveness. Harold is not depicted like this anywhere else in the Tapestry except in the scene where he formally meets with Count Guy, an instance where fear and uncertainty would likely have been factors (Figure 9)[99]. His bearing also resembles that of the escaped Englishman who reports Harold's capture to William, another occasion that may have involved a certain amount of apprehension (Figure 10). To come to Edward in the same manner suggests that something had happened on the trip that Harold was ashamed or afraid to tell the king about.

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[99] Apparently it was something of a tradition in Poitiers to torture noble captives and then sell them into slavery. William's release of Harold, then, was not merely a formality or the clearing up of a misunderstanding; Harold was in real danger. Gameson, 189.

There are some accounts that may support this view. Like William of Malmesbury, the chronicler Robert Wace maintains that Harold came to France as a result of his boat having been blown off course. Once there, he may have been tricked or coerced[100] into vowing fealty to William, possibly by placing his hand on holy relics while they were shielded from his view[101]. Historians have also noted that the inscription "*Hic Harold dux reversus est ad Anglicam terram*", "Here Duke Harold returned to English soil", begins above Harold's left hand as it placed over the reliquary, perhaps implying that his safe return hinged upon his making the vow[102]. Eadmer maintained that Edward knew of William's duplicitous nature and, far from sending Harold to Normandy, entreated him not to go. Harold, desiring to free his brother and nephew (who were being held as hostages, reportedly to ensure that Edward kept his earlier promise of the throne to the Norman duke), went anyway, and sure enough, was tricked into promising the throne to William. Edward, when learning of this, replied to Harold, "Did not I tell you that I knew

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[100] Dorothy Whitelock et. al., The Norman Conquest: Its Setting and Impact (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1966), 11.

[101] Freeman, 162-163, 461-462.

[102] Bernstein, 117; Schama 86.

William and that your going might bring untold calamity upon this kingdom?". In Eadmer's account, Edward had apparently made a promise of some kind to William, but did not intend for him to inherit the throne. This happened anyway through a combination of William's deceit and Harold's lack of caution.[103] Since Eadmer was English, the account may be indicative of what the people of England believed (or wanted to believe) about the circumstances surrounding the Conquest.

Harold's Coronation

Possibly the most prominent and favorable references to Harold in the Bayeux Tapestry concerns the death of Edward the Confessor in scene 33. This occurs shortly after the depiction of Harold's return from France, and it shows the dying king surrounded by Harold and two other men, while a woman, thought to be Queen Edith, sits at her husband's feet (Figure 11, left). Edward's hand is touching Harold's. Brooks and Walker have observed that this scene closely parallels the description of the king's death in the *Vita Eadwardi*, which states that Edward "addressed his last words to the queen who was sitting at his feet" and then "[stretched] forth his hand to his governor, her

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[103] Bosanquet, 6-8.

brother Harold" saying, "I commend this woman and all the kingdom to your protection". The *Vita Eadwardi* was written sometime before 1075, and it is not known whether it was completed before the Tapestry or afterwards, but there is an obvious connection between the two works[104]. Regardless of which work inspired the other, the Tapestry does seem to indicate that Harold was Edward's chosen heir.

To further strengthen the case, Harold is *not* shown seizing the crown immediately upon Edward's death; rather, the implements of his new office are *offered* to him by two men, one of whom points behind him to Edward's death scene as if to say that it was what the late king had intended (Figure 11, right)[105]. Bernstein notes that this scene shows Harold being accepted by "the three orders of society....those who fight, those who pray and those who work", and it also recalls the Peterborough manuscript's mention of Harold being chosen by the people.[106] The inscription reads *Hic dederunt Haroldo corona*[m] *regis*

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[104] Brooks and Walker, 73.

[105] Bernstein, 121.

[106] Ibid., 122.

("Here they gave Harold the King's crown")[107], again reinforcing that the kingship was thrust upon him.

In the next scene we see a crowned Harold holding a scepter and orb, again with (the same?) two men, who this time offer him a sword (see Figure 1, left). It is noteworthy that here Harold is not simply referred to as the king, but as "the King of the English" *(Harold Rex Anglorum)*. This closely parallels the inscription found over the scene in which Harold leaves Edward and sets out for Bosham; here he is called "*Dux Anglorum*", "the Duke of the English". The repetition of the phrase "of the English" may have signified that Harold was the people's choice, or simply that the English preferred a king who was of their own nationality[108]. The two men who are with Harold may also have been meant to represent the witan. Whatever the situation may have been, what is connoted in this scene is that Harold took the throne with the express approval of some of the kingdom's more influential members.

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[107] Bernstein, 122; Grape, 123.

[108] Stenton has noted that "Dux Anglorum" was not a formal designation in the 11th century in England, so it may indicate how Harold was seen by his subjects. Stenton, 11.

The Hunt Scenes

The scenes that relate Harold's first encounter with the Normans are rich with symbolism and foreshadowing, and what is particularly curious about these scenes is that they are not at all ambiguous, but surprisingly direct - even heavy-handed - in their meaning.

As Harold is seized by Guy's men in scene 8, the depiction of a violent hunt begins in the lower border (Figure 12). The longest of the Tapestry's border scenes, it culminates in a vivid struggle between a hunting dog and a stag. The border scene that follows shortly thereafter shows a mule and ox being used for planting and plowing, as well as a man who is using a slingshot to hunt birds. A smaller hunt-and-capture scene appears beneath William and an Anglo-Saxon messenger who had come to inform him of Harold's capture (see Figure 10). Toward the end of the Tapestry, two border scenes show hunting dogs with birds in their mouths beneath the Norman charge at Hastings. By far the most arresting hunting scene, however, occurs directly below the picture of William's mounted envoys in scene 13. In this scene, a bear-like animal is tied to a tree with a chain or rope that also binds its mouth shut, while a Norman soldier (identifiable

by his hairstyle and lack of moustache), who is armed with a sword and shield, is preparing to strike it.

These odd but significant images convincingly point to an English critique of the Norman Conquest. These scenes also uphold the belief that Harold had been caught off guard while hunting - though in the space of several scenes, the earl is unsubtly transformed from hunter to hunted. He seems to be likened to a beast that is pursued, captured, and either sent to labor for a master in the fields, or killed outright. The fettered bear - silenced and utterly defenseless - in particular conveys the message that William was an unsportsmanlike "hunter" who won the crown dishonorably during an unfair and unequally balanced conflict. This idea is reiterated in the border beneath William's England-bound ships, where a dog chasing a rabbit appears; and at the battle of Hastings, where two hunting dogs with prey in their mouths can be seen beneath the mounted Norman army. By depicting the protagonists of this political struggle as hunters and animals, the Tapestry emphasizes and elaborates on the violent manner in which it was carried out.

Harold's Vow

The most noticeable attempt to cast Harold in a negative light concerns the vow of fealty that he allegedly made to William while in Normandy, but even the scene that shows this is imbued with a slight air of ambiguity and unease (Figure 13).

In scene 29, Harold is depicted standing between two uncovered reliquaries with a hand placed on each one[109]. As if this scene were not plain enough, an onlooker points to the word *sacramentum* ("oath") to ensure that the Tapestry's viewers understood that Harold had indeed bound himself to William. This scene is depicted in carefully aboveboard fashion, and there is no indication here that Harold was deceived into making a vow that was of a more serious nature than he was aware. Yet William's unsheathed sword, the presence of the armed attendants, and the way that Harold is visually blocked in by the reliquaries and by William and an attendant, both of whom point to Harold from either side, convey the impression that the English earl was not making the vow entirely of his own accord. He appears, if nothing else, to have been "put on the spot". All of this lends credibility to the belief that Harold

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[109] Bernstein, 230-234, 242-243.

had made the vow knowingly, but under duress.

The Nude Figures

The inclusion of several nude figures in the Tapestry's borders, which have long been a source of consternation to scholars, may also give a compelling indication of anti-Norman sentiment in England.

In the scene that depicts Count Guy taking Harold under armed guard to meet William, nude figures of a man and a woman are seen in the border directly below Harold (Figure 14). H. E. J. Cowdrey believes that this scene hints at Harold's "notorious *luxuria*"[110], but this seems to be an unlikely point at which to make a digression about the earl's sex life; I believe it is more possible that it is a heavily symbolic reference to what was to happen after Harold met with William and made the fateful vow. In this scene, the nude man (who also appears to have a Norman hairstyle and no moustache) eagerly steps toward the woman with outstretched arms as if to embrace her; the reluctant woman bows her head in shame and covers her face and genitals.

The scene seems to convey a twofold message. First, the man and woman could represent William/Normandy and

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[110] Cowdrey, 99.

Harold/England, respectively, with William conquering or "raping" an unwilling England. This seems to confirm the Norman chroniclers' observations about William needing Harold to intercede with the English populace on his behalf. Secondly, the nude man's large and prominent genitalia suggests that it was William's military might, and not any divine favor, that ultimately subjugated the English[111]. Since many historians believe that the Bayeux Tapestry was not only produced in England but also by female artisans[112], it is not out of the question that the workers would have chosen to depict abuse of power from a distinctly feminine perspective.

A similar conclusion can be reached through a closer

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[111] Bernstein contends that phallic imagery is often used in the Tapestry to connote power. Bernstein, 160. For a detailed discussion of gender characteristics in the Tapestry, see Madeline H. Caviness, "Norman Knights, Anglo-Saxon Women, and the "Third Sex": The Masculinization of England After the Conquest". Reframing Medieval Art: Differences, Margins, Boundaries. (18 February 2004): not paginated. Online. Available: http://nils.lib.tufts.edu/Caviness/chapter2.html.

[112] Henrietta Leyser, Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England 450-1500, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 71. Since Canterbury, which was probably the place where the Tapestry was made, had once been part of Harold's landholdings, Leyser suggests that some of the women who worked on it may have had husbands or male relatives who had been killed during the Conquest. This may have been at least part of the motivation for inserting anti-Norman aspects into the Tapestry.

examination of the famously mysterious scene entitled *Ubi unus clericus et Aelfgyva*, "Where a [certain] clerk and Aelfgyva [are]" (Figure 15). The sentence seems to have been left intentionally incomplete. This could be because Aelfgyva was a well-known individual[113], but perhaps it was also meant to hint that the characters were involved in activities better left unmentioned. As the woman Aelfgyva stands in a doorway topped with two dragon heads, a tonsured clergyman reaches out and appears to touch her cheek. Directly beneath Aelfgyva, another nude man (again with prominent genitals) mimics the stance. The surface reason for adding in this scene was probably because it referred to a well-known scandal that needed no further explanation at the time of the Tapestry's manufacture, but it may also conceal a double meaning that was meant to convey the English people's disdain for their new ruler.

One of many scholars who have attempted to solve the puzzle, J. Bard McNulty has proffered a convincing explanation as to the woman's identity. He claims that she was Aelfgyva of Northampton, the English wife of Cnut, who was the king of England, Norway, and Denmark in the early eleventh century. Unable to conceive, she secretly adopted

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[113] Grape, 107.

the children of first a priest and then a cobbler, and then passed them off as her husband's sons and heirs (these men are represented by the nude figures of the cleric and the worker, respectively, beneath the Aelfgyva scene). In 1030, the priest's child, Swen, began to rule Norway with Aelfgyva as regent; in 1036 both were exiled from the country. The bearing that this scandal had on the question of English succession was that another contender, Harold Hardraada of Norway, could not argue that he also had a claim to the throne, since he was the successor of Magnus (who had been the successor of Swen), and the royal bloodline, of course, had been broken due to Aelfgyva's ruse[114].

If McNulty's interpretation is correct, then presumably the reference to Aelfgyva was used to remind and reassure the Tapestry's viewers that both Harolds had been legitimately disqualified from the English crown[115]. No

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[114] J. Bard McNulty, "Aelfgyva in the Bayeux Tapestry". Speculum, Volume 55, Issue 4 (October 1980), pp. 659-668.

[115] Although McNulty does not mention it, it seems reasonable to suggest that, given the characters involved, the Aelfgyva scene may also contain a further commentary on the clerical inappropriateness of Stigand's archbishopric. Smith notes that Stigand's first priestly appointment had been to Cnut's court in 1020, where he may have been Aelfgyva's advisor. He was "active in Cnut's court in the 1030s" and in 1043 he and Aelfgyva were implicated in a plot whose particulars

doubt the Tapestry's designer considered the depiction of a deceptive *English* woman as further underscoring Harold's dishonesty. However, I also believe that the Aelfgyva scene would have reminded the English of William (another ruler who may have usurped a royal lineage that was not completely his own), and that it possibly would have been understood as a veiled stab at William's own dubious parentage. The nude worker and priest may have quietly branded William, who was the illegitimate son of a duke and a tanner's daughter, as an interloper of low birth who had stolen the throne from Harold[116].

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are unknown (Stigand was later cleared). Smith, 200-201. This is not to suggest that Stigand and Aelfgyva were involved in a sexual relationship, or that Swen was Stigand's son from another relationship (though either is a possibility), but simply that he was connected with a historical Aelfgyva and that the two of them were known to have been involved in a scandal.

[116] William may have been sensitive about his illegitimacy, a fact that was apparently never far from the public mind. He was often referred to as "William the Bastard", and, when the townspeople of Alencon ridiculed him as "the tanner's son" during an early campaign, he responded by having many of them maimed and blinded. Brent A. Riley and Joe Bageant, "William from Bastard to Conqueror". Military History, Volume 19, Issue 1, (April 2002) pp. 51-58. In England, illegitimacy was more usual and less frowned upon than in Normandy: Harold himself was married *more Danico*, or "in the Danish manner" (the equivalent of a common-law union), which was often undertaken by nobles with the understanding that the relationship could be dissolved

The Dragons in the Borders

But what of the anonymous churchman in the Aelfgyva scene? Does he have any hidden significance? To determine this, we must first examine the veritable menagerie that creeps through the Bayeux Tapestry's borders. It may not be coincidental that in the Aelfgyva scene, fire-breathing dragons appear beneath the cleric, as well as above him on the columns. The dragon was uniformly a symbol of threat and evil in medieval literature and artwork[117]; indeed, England's patron, Saint George, is traditionally depicted as slaying a dragon[118]. There are two types of dragons in the Bayeux Tapestry: *serpentes* (also known as *wyvers* or *wyverns*), the winged, knot-tailed, two-legged kind, which may or may not breathe fire (see Figure 14, lower border,

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for political reasons without the need for divorce. Walker, 127-128.

[117] J. S. P. Tatlock, "The Dragons of Wessex and Wales", Speculum, Volume 8, Issue 2 (April 1933), 223-235. The Book of Revelation, a popular source of medieval artistic inspiration, refers to the Devil as "the great dragon". Janetta Rebold Benton, Medieval Menagerie: Animals in the Art of the Middle Ages (New York: Abbeville Press, 1992), 47. Two examples of Devil-as-dragon imagery that bear a striking stylistic resemblance to the dragons in the Tapestry are found in the church of S. Pietro al Monte, Civate (c. 1100; Figure 16), and in a codex (1138-47) from Zwiefalten (Figure 17). Both show creatures with two legs, wings, and a coiled tail; apparently this was a common way of representing dragons at the time.

[118] At the time of the Bayeux Tapestry's manufacture, the dragon motif had not yet entered into the St. George legend; dragon-slaying was

right; Figure 15, lower border, right); and the *amphisbaena*, which look like the *serpentes* but have heads at the ends of their (non-knotted) tails[119] (Figure 18, upper border, right).

These mythical creatures occur in the Tapestry singly or in bookend-like pairs, and there does seem to be a pattern to their occasional appearances. They appear beneath Guy of Ponthieu and William, as well as above the castle of Bayeux, just before Harold makes his disastrous vow. The title of this scene is *"[Hic] Willelm venit Bagias"* (here William came to Bayeux), and a dragon can be found directly above William's name. Significantly, the dragon motif is displayed on the shields of William's envoys. Two snarling dragons also appear beneath the disembarking horses at the Norman landing at Pevensey in scene 45, and here William's ships themselves sport dragon heads on bow and stern. A dragon can also be found beneath

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mostly associated with St. Michael. Yapp, 22.

[119] Yapp, 59. The additional head on the amphisbaena was "regarded as a further manifestation of evil" in the Middle Ages. Carola Hicks, Animals in Early Medieval Art. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 149; D. Newman Johnson points out that medieval allegories associated the amphisbaena with deceit or a divisive nature. D. Newman Johnson, "An Unusual Amphisbaena in Galway City" in Figures from the Past: Studies on Figurative Art in Christian Ireland, ed. Etienne Rynne. (Dun Laoghaire: Glendale Press, 1987), 234.

the tower that Conan, the disloyal duke of Brittany, escapes from. Toward the end of the Tapestry, Harold is killed within sight of two *dracos*, or windsock-like dragon banners, and this is the only instance in which the animal is shown in connection with an Englishman. The dragons therefore form a link among Count Guy, William, William's soldiers and fellow Normans (including, significantly, one who was punished for not obeying him), the anonymous cleric, the invasion, and Harold's death. The way that the dragon symbol is utilized in the Tapestry seems to connote William's destructive influence or power over others. What was the cleric's relationship with these people and events? The presence of a dragon suggests that this person too was a threat, and in some way connected with the subjugation of the English. I propose that this clergyman may have been meant to allegorically represent none other than Bishop Odo.

There is evidence that the bishop was severely disliked by the English, maybe even more than William himself was[120]. It is also ironic that the primary accusations brought against him - greed and political intrigue - echo those against the notorious Archbishop Stigand. Ordericus

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[120] David R. Bates, "The Character and Career of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux

Vitalis alleges that Odo "accumulated wealth by dubious methods"[121]; schemed to win the papacy[122]; and at times allowed his "flesh [to overcome his] spirit with evil consequences", the most obvious of the evil consequences being a son named John[123]. An additional cause for anger may have been Odo's leading of a 1080 campaign of terror against the inhabitants of northern England[124]. William, upon having the bishop arrested in 1082, is said to have commented that Odo was "frivolous and ambitious, devoted both to the delights of the flesh and to deeds of great cruelty, and he will never give up his vices and frivolities." Having him imprisoned, the king reasoned, would prevent thousands from being brought to destruction.[125]

This being the case, it seems more than coincidence that Aelfgyva, the woman the cleric is so possessively grasping for, bears a distinctly Anglo-Saxon name. Also, showing Odo in the presence of a woman would lend

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(1049/50-1097)". Speculum, Volume 50, Issue 1 (January 1975), 1-3.

[121] Ordericus Vitalis, The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy. Volume IV. Edited and translated by Marjorie Chibnall. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 119.

[122] Ibid., 39.

[123] Ibid., 117.

[124] Gameson, 177; Bernstein, 32.

[125] Ordericus Vitalis (Chibnall), 99, 101.

credibility to Ordericus's claim that the bishop was an uninhibited voluptuary who had fathered a child. David R. Bates has demonstrated that Ordericus Vitalis' assessment of Odo's shortcomings is probably unfairly negative and one-dimensional[126], but in this instance, the truth is almost irrelevant. What matters is how the English felt about Odo, and it is possible that they would have likened Odo and the rapacious Normans to dragons[127]. Ordericus' chronicle probably reflected the feelings of a large segment of the English population in voicing disgust for the influential clergyman[128].

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[126] Bates, 5, 9, 13.

[127] According to medieval bestiaries, the Devil in the guise of the dragon was said to deceive "fools with hopes of vainglory and human pleasures". Pamela Gravestock, "Did Imaginary Animals Exist?", in The Mark of the Beast: The Medieval Bestiary in Art, Life, and Literature, edited by Debra Hassig (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 126. Could this description have served as a metaphor for the ambitious William and his sensual brother?

[128] Though there is no evidence that the Tapestry designer or artisans were aware of it, the Aelfgyva scene bears a curious resemblance to another, earlier, episode in English history. David Humes' *History of England*, which draws on primary sources, tells of an Anglo-Saxon noblewoman named Elgiva who around the year 955 married King Edwy, even though they were too closely related for the marriage to be legal. The marriage was later dissolved at the behest of an Archbishop Odo, and Elgiva was branded on the face and exiled to Ireland. David Hume, The History of England: from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688 (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1983-1985), vol. I, 94-95.

Finally, it is important to note that the dragon was not a Norman military motif, but rather an *English* one. It was associated with Wessex, which was part of Harold's earldom. The dragon banners that Harold died under belonged not to the Normans, but to his own forces[129]. The dragons on the Norman shields probably never existed in reality. By peppering the Tapestry with the symbol of the last Anglo-Saxon king of England, not only did the English embroiderers connect William, Guy, and Odo with the Conquest in a seemingly random arrangement without drawing undue attention to the dragons' real meaning, but they also created a permanent tribute to their lost autonomy.

Three Ambiguous Scenes

The Tapestry's ambiguous standpoint on the Conquest is further emphasized in three scenes that show the direct opposite of what one would have expected them to show, had the Tapestry been executed, and not just designed, with the intent of portraying the Conquest in a positive light. Scene 4 depicts Harold and an attendant kneeling in front of a church at Bosham shortly before their voyage. Immediately afterwards, Harold and several of his men are

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[129] Tatlock, 224-225. Perhaps *no* dragon banner had been carried by the English at the time of Harold's death. Tatlock says there is no mention of it by any of the chroniclers.

seen dining on the top floor of a building (see Figure 5, main frame). The fare seems to consist of bread, and Harold drinks from a cup before passing it on to the man on his left. This scene is remarkably similar to the portrayal of the Last Supper-like banquet in the Norman camp, except here the religious implications are heightened due to the inclusion of the church and the praying figures. Furthermore, the imagery here is also more Biblically correct. St. Mark 14: 15 states that the Passover meal was to be eaten in an "upper room" - not unlike the place where Harold dines - and not in an outdoor, ground-floor setting, as the Norman meal is shown to be[130]. Rampton, in writing of the Norman banquet, says that "[t]he absence of feast scenes other than in religious contexts [before the twelfth century] is itself an important clue to the banquet in the tapestry."[131] Could not the same be said of Harold's prejourney feast?[132]

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[130] KJV.

[131] Rampton, 39.

[132] This may also be a prefiguration of Harold's downfall. Hugh Magennis asserts that among the Anglo-Saxons, cup/drinking imagery was often identified with the *poculum mortis*, or fatal drink, which was often indicative of martyrdom (such as Christ's), or more generally of impending death. Hugh Magennis, "The Cup as Symbol and Metaphor in Old English Literature", in Speculum, Vol. 60, No. 3 (July 1985), 520, 529.

In scene 22, Harold is shown rescuing Norman soldiers during a campaign against the mutinous Conan (Figure 19). As the Norman forces cross the river Couesnon, some of the men get stuck in the quicksand. They are pulled out by Harold, who seems to show no regard for his own safety as he grapples with two men at once. This scene is a non sequitur, an act of bravery that has absolutely nothing to do with the Tapestry's larger story and, even more importantly, an act of bravery that is nowhere topped or even equaled by William. In Harold's behavior we see no foreshadowing of his eventual refutation of his vows; instead, we see a courageous, resourceful man who shows by his actions that he is a worthy leader - unlike his host. In this scene, it is Harold, not William, who saves the day, and it is the Norman soldiers who appear small, defenseless, and even inept in front of their guest. It is therefore William who "owes" Harold a favor, not the other way around. The intent of this scene may have been to suggest that with this act, Harold had already paid back William's generosity in rescuing him from Guy, and did not need to further do so with the vow; additionally, it could convey the preposterousness of someone of Harold's caliber taking orders from a man who could not even come to the

aid of his own soldiers.

The third ambiguous incident occurs in scene 52, which shows Norman soldiers setting fire to a house as a woman and her young son flee from it (Figure 20). Again the embroiderers chose to portray a woman, and this time a child also, at the mercy of powerful males. There is no indication here that the Conquest was a harmonious or legitimate transition of power, or that it was limited to the combatants of either side. Rather, this scene portrays the same wanton, unthinking cruelty and unequal conflict that the border hunt scene had. The Normans are not shown as holy warriors, but as petty bullies reduced to terrorizing a defenseless family. Apparently such incidents had actually occurred, for Guy of Amiens, writing in 1067, notes that William devastated the countryside around Hastings because the "stupid populace" had refused to recognize him as king[133]. The scene also recalls an earlier depiction of William's troops setting fire to the stronghold of Conan, the Duke of Brittany, another incident that had been provoked by the victim's noncompliance with authority. If the embroiderers had inserted a scene that they had personally witnessed or

[133] Grape, 25.

experienced, then this shows that the English, far from being the riot-prone mob described by William of Poitiers, actually had more than ample reason to object to the invasion. Furthermore, the scene also seems to suggest that the English were not dispassionate observers of the Conquest, but that the men - and maybe even a few of the women and youths - had put up a spirited defense of their country, and consequently paid for it with their property and lives.

Too Little Religious Imagery?

Finally, what may be most curious about the Bayeux Tapestry is what is *not* shown. Some crucial scenes in the Tapestry, such as the misdated comet and the Last Supper-like banquet, seem to indicate that the Normans wanted to be associated with a divinely-sanctioned victory. Historically, the most important evidence of this desire is the account of William appealing to Pope Alexander II before deciding to launch the invasion, and reportedly receiving a consecrated banner and a holy relic as evidence of the Church's approval. Logically, a scene (or scenes) relating to this event could have become the powerful centerpiece of the Tapestry, and especially since it may have been displayed, at least occasionally, in a

church. Yet nothing that even remotely suggests papal support is shown - William receives news of Harold's coronation and immediately orders ships to be built. There is even confusion about the consecrated banner: is it represented by the cross pennant on top of William's ship, the semicircular banner that one of the Normans carries en route to the battle of Hastings, or any one of the many square, flutter-tailed banners used by the Normans? Is it shown at all?[134] None of these banners is given any particular prominence, either visually or by written indication. The transference of Conan's keys to William may have been a tightly coded allusion to a papal banner or the relic of St. Peter, but if so, why was this banner

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[134] After Harold is released by William, he is shown participating in a military expedition with the duke against Conan of Brittany, who had "refused to acknowledge William as his feudal overlord" (Grape, 57). In scene 26, the errant vassal is captured and forced to surrender the keys to the city of Dol (Bernstein 115; Figure 21). There is no explicit depiction of either William's papal banner or ring in the Tapestry, but as Conan lowers the keys of the castle and William rides forth (holding, for the first time, a shield emblazoned with a cross), he gathers up the keys on the tip of his standard, and a "papal banner" of sorts is formed. Since keys have been associated with St. Peter and the papacy since the earliest days of Christianity (St. Matthew 16:18-19 says in part, "Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build my Church and I will give to thee the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven"), the implication may be that a betrayal of the duke-vassal relationship would be the direct cause of William's receipt of the holy items.

- such a useful justification for the Conquest - depicted in such an unclear, oddly vague manner? To have drawn unmistakable attention to papal endorsement or consecrated items would have provided far more legitimacy to William's endeavor than the Tapestry in its present state ever could.

References to the Normans' religiosity also seem few and far between. Unlike Harold, William is never shown praying or performing any other religious activity, though such scenes would have worked to his advantage. On June 17, 1066, at the height of William's military preparations, the duke was present at the dedication of the abbey of La Trinite at Caen, but again, this memorable occasion is not documented in the Tapestry. Bishop Odo is shown four times, and in only one of those instances (the Last Supper-like banquet) is he shown performing a religious rite; the other times he is depicted advising William on political matters and rallying the Norman forces in battle. The only other members of the clergy that are prominently shown in the Tapestry are Stigand and the cleric in the Aelfgyva scene, and, associated with scandal as the two of them are, they do much to detract from the dignity of their respective offices. Furthermore,

just because Harold may not have God's support, it does not necessarily follow that William does: though the comet does appear to condemn Harold's reign, the only *clear* indication of divine judgment on a matter is the hand of God that bestows a blessing at Edward's funeral. Edward, though in fact only a minor figure, seems to be the only character in the Tapestry who is depicted in a religious and uniformly positive manner. This stands in stark contrast to the more neutral portrayal of the main protagonists, Harold and William, neither of whom seem to have the Tapestry designer's full endorsement.

Ian Walker has proposed an explanation that seems to account for all of these discrepancies: that there *was no* official papal support for the Norman Conquest[135]. He has pointed out that the papal banner is only mentioned by William of Poitiers, whose writings are probably the best example of pro-Norman propaganda. Also, at this time papal banners would not have been used in a campaign against fellow Christians, no matter how wayward; they would only have been used against Muslims or heretics. Furthermore, the Church would likely have hesitated to turn against England, which had had a strong relationship with the

[135] Walker, 149.

papacy for centuries and which financially supported it through a donation known as Peter's Pence. Finally, the fact that the Church imposed a penance on Norman soldiers in 1067 suggests that the Conquest may not have been carried out with the initial support of the religious establishment[136].

There is also the question of "implied fealty" to consider. Harold reportedly made his vow to William on holy relics, and this was the religious justification upon which the entire Norman Conquest hinged. For William to receive holy relics from Rome could have been interpreted as a similar sign of loyalty to the pope. As was demonstrated above, William's relationship with the papacy was governed more by political expediency than anything else, so it is unlikely that he would have voluntarily put himself into the same position that Harold had been in.

Divine or papal endorsement is hinted at in some scenes from the Bayeux Tapestry, but the story of the consecrated items had probably not yet become public knowledge at the time of its manufacture, which explains why they are not shown as explicitly as they might have been. There is also

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[136] Ibid., 148-149, 186; Daniell 11. Golding suggests that this act "at once expressed ecclesiastical disapproval for the slaughter while at the same time [legitimized] the new order." Golding, 41.

the possibility that the Tapestry's audience *was* aware that no papal support had been demonstrated, and that the designer and/or commissioner would not have wanted to cause unnecessary problems with the Church, by having an untruth so vividly illustrated.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have analyzed what are, in my opinion, the two distinct viewpoints in the Bayeux Tapestry. The obviously Norman perspective, which often has a religious coloring, is evident in such prominent, eye-catching scenes as the appearance of the comet of 1066, Harold's vow, or the feast in the Norman camp. The English perspective is subtler, but nonetheless discernable, in the Aelfgyva scene, in the depictions of dragons in the borders, or in the understated homage given to Harold. There are also places in the Tapestry, most notably in the border scenes that illustrate fables, where the two viewpoints become so intertwined that it becomes impossible to identify their correct meaning. Though the Tapestry had almost certainly been intended to glorify the Norman victory, neither the Norman nor the English position obviously predominates, and so the artwork does not present a consistent message of either pro-Conquest or

anti-Conquest sentiment to its viewer. This uncertainty in meaning, and the juxtaposition of the two viewpoints, may reflect the greater cohesion between the English and the Normans that began in the early 1070s, after the most threatening of the revolts had been quashed. The ambiguity is also historically appropriate, for neither medieval chroniclers nor modern scholars are in agreement as to whether Harold or William were intended to inherit the English throne. Rather, the Bayeux Tapestry is a blend of the two perspectives, which may serve as a metaphor for what Anglo-Norman society would become in the years after 1066.

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Appendix

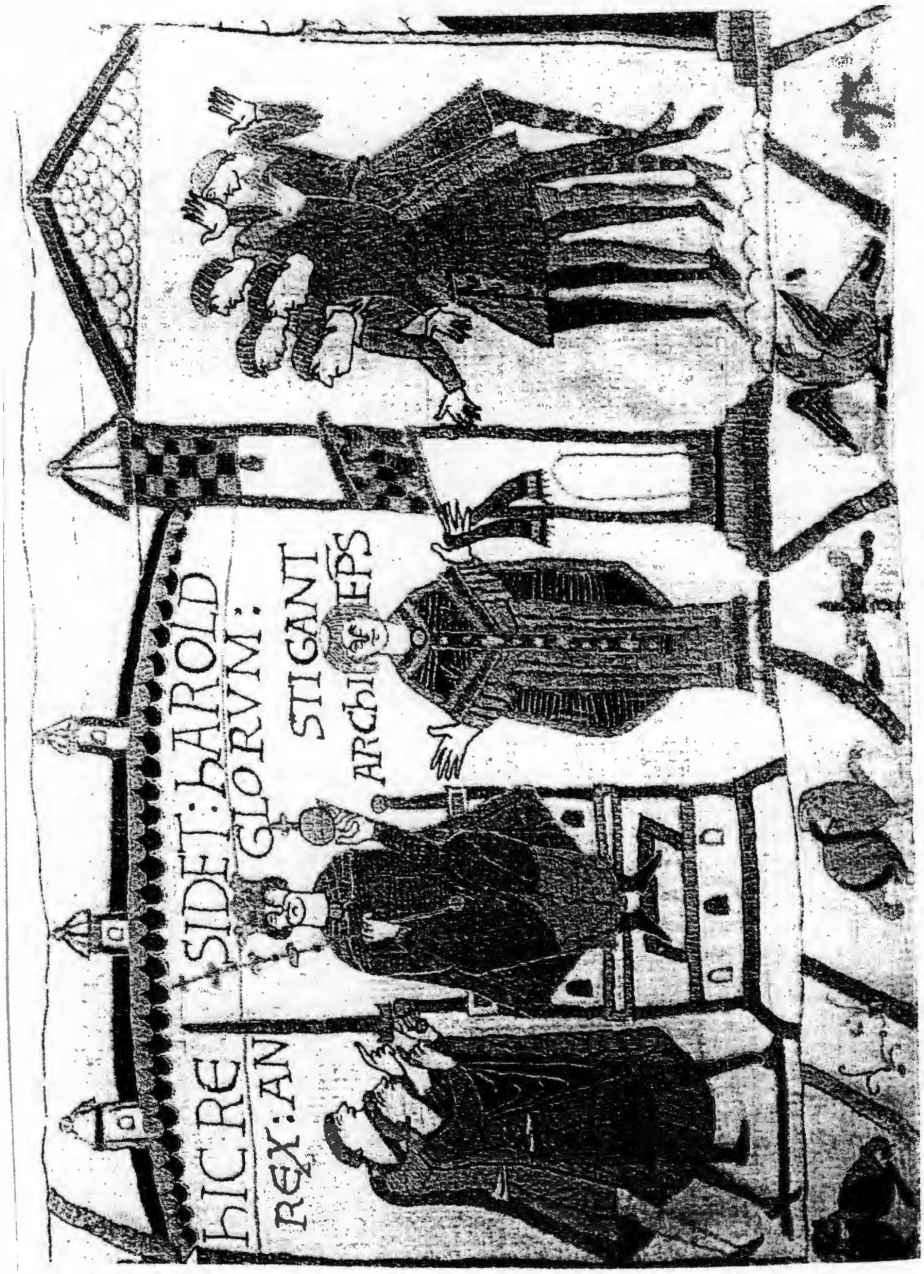


Figure 1: Harold's Coronation.

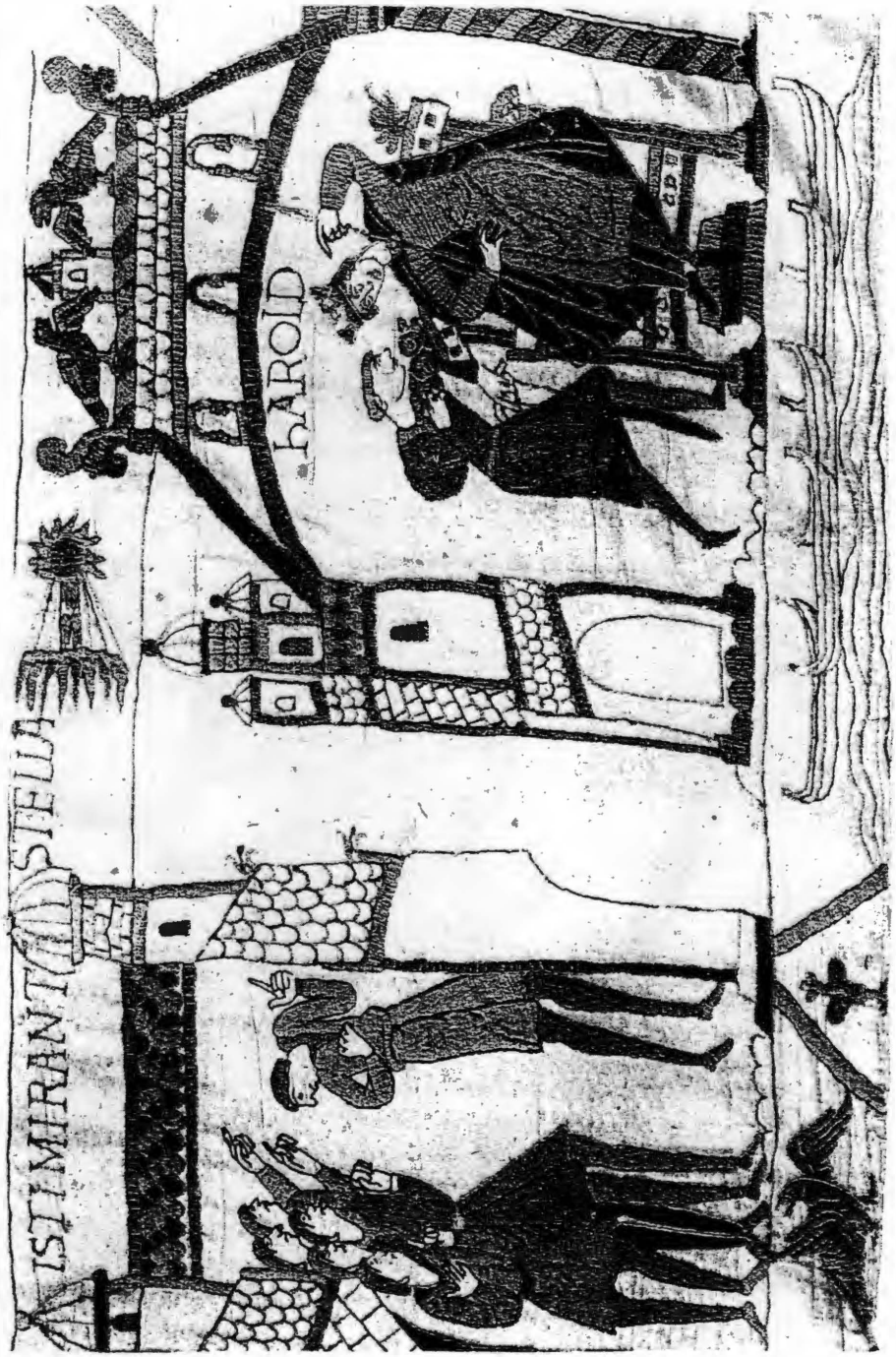


Figure 2: Halley's Comet of 1066.

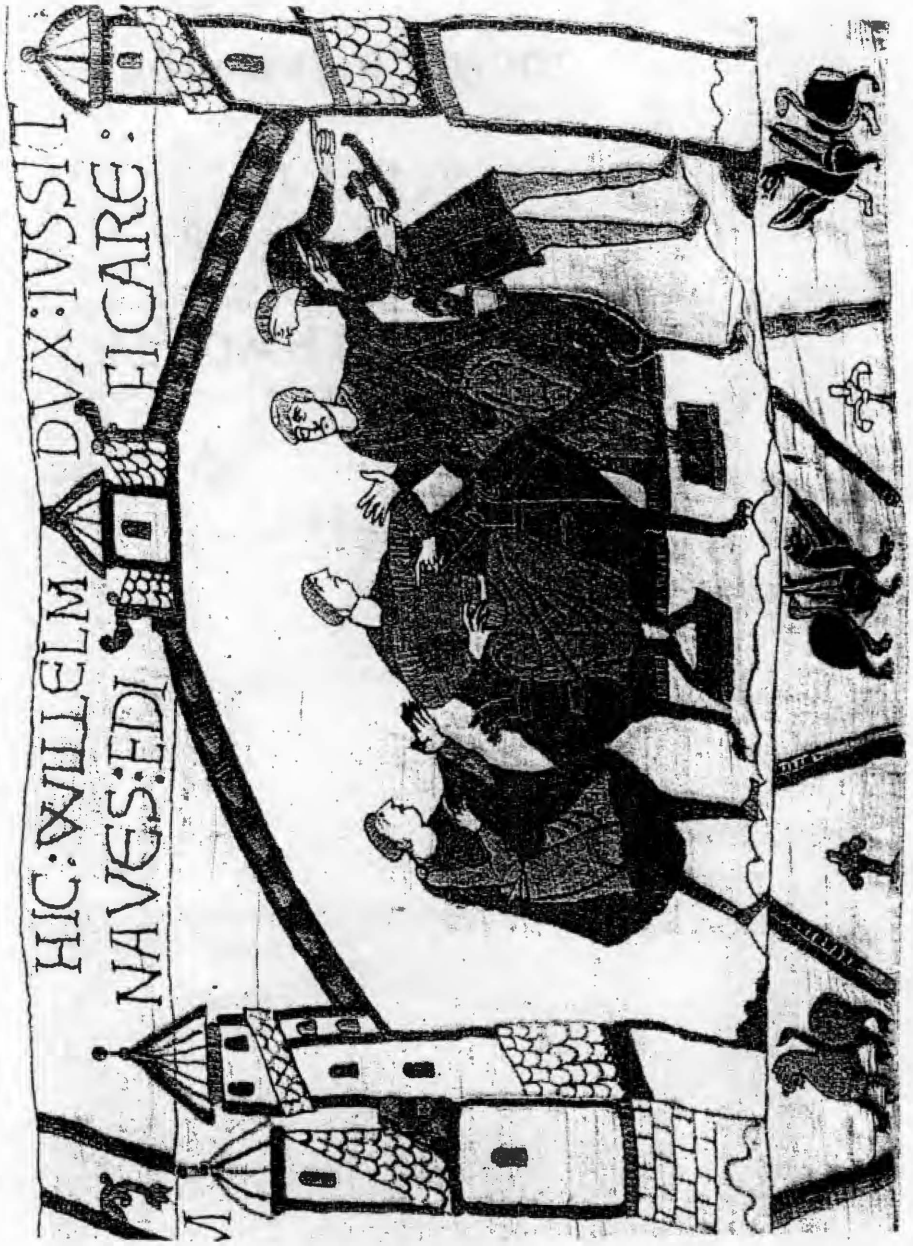


Figure 3: Odo and William Enthroned.

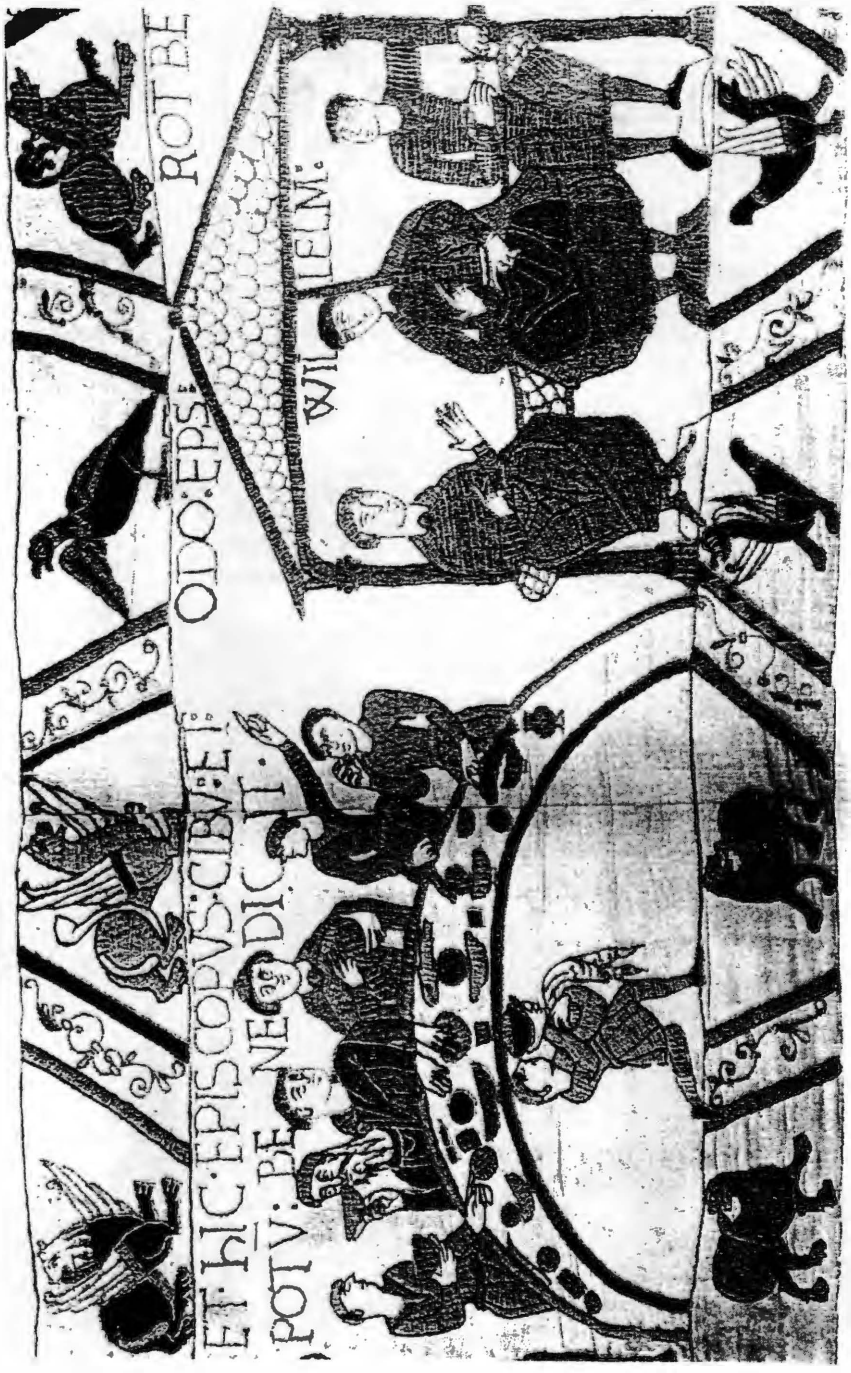


Figure 4: Odo Blessing the Feast in the Norman Camp. (William, Odo, and their brother Robert are seen to the right.)

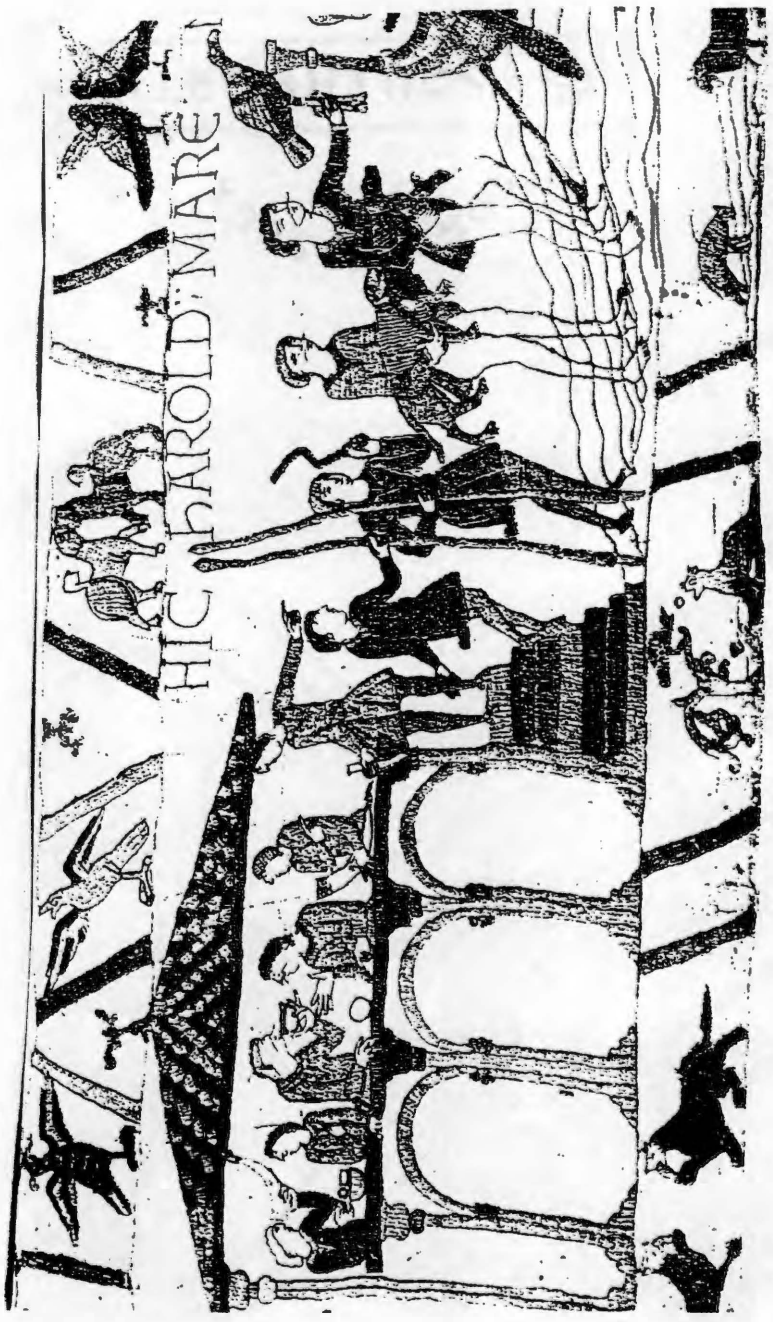


Figure 5: Harold's Prejourney Feast at Bosham. (The image of the Fox and Crow fable is seen in the center of the lower border.)



Figure 6: The Pregnant Bitch and the Wolf and Crane Fables.



Figure 7: Harold Meeting with Edward Before the Trip to France.

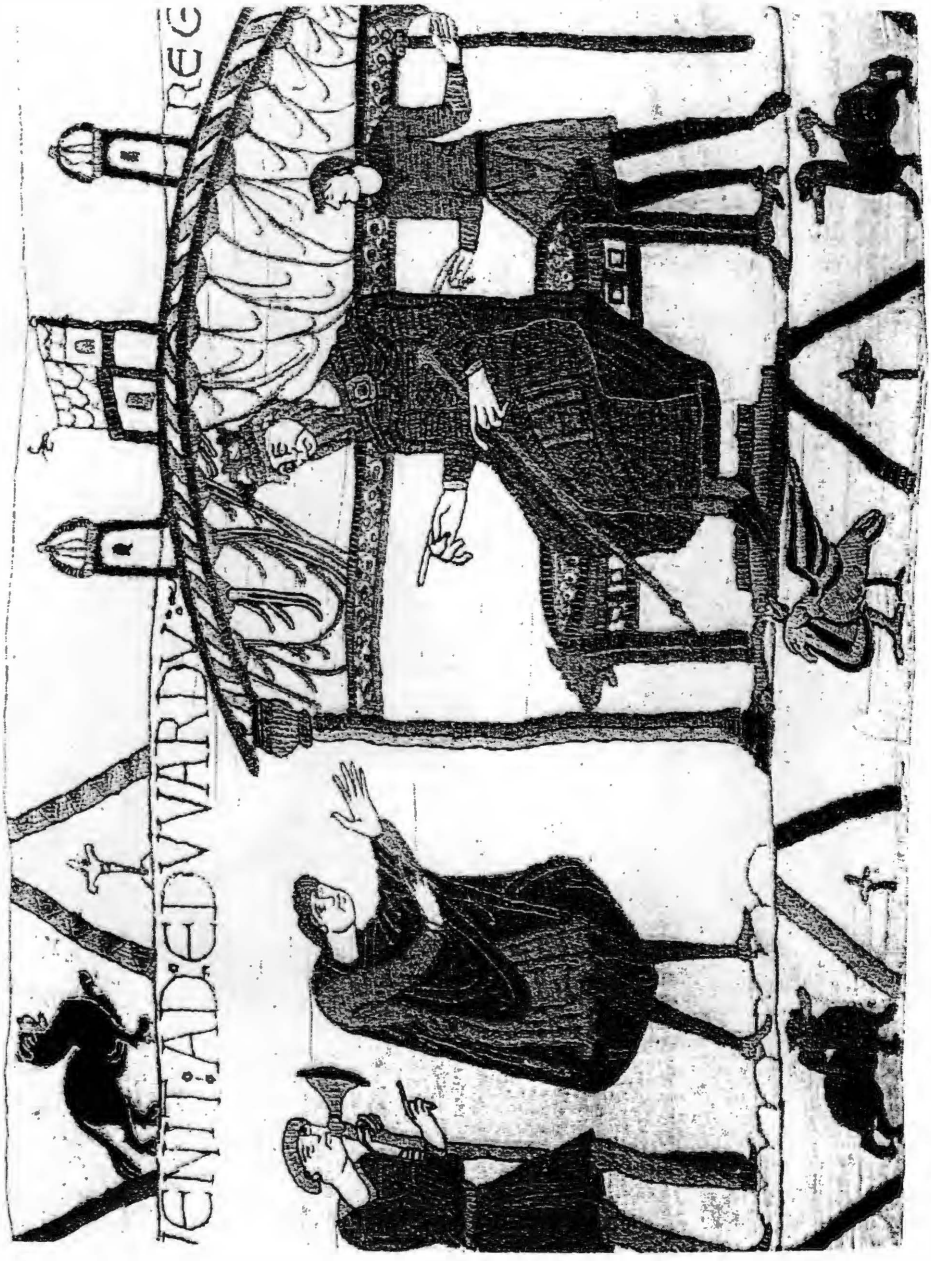


Figure 8: Harold Meeting with Edward Upon His Return.



Figure 9: Harold and Guy.

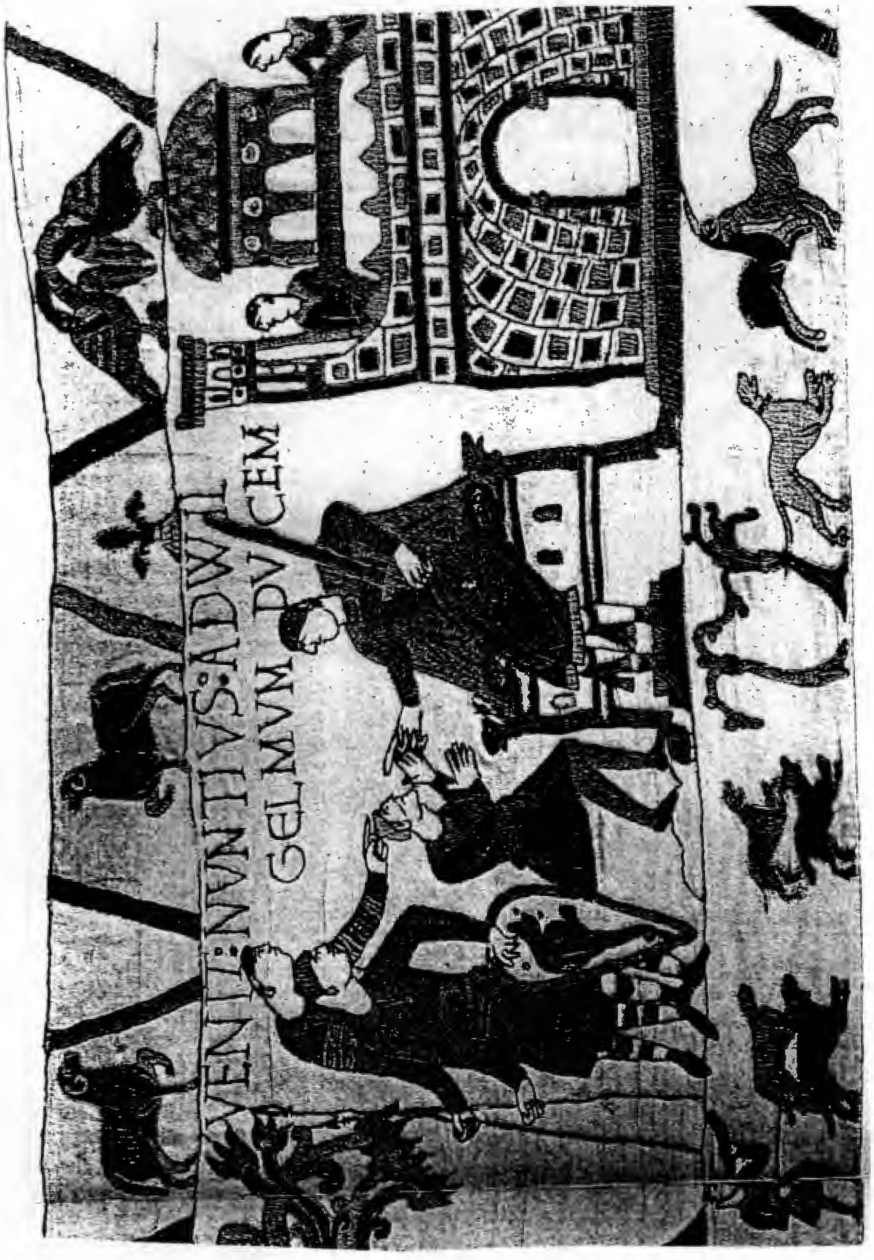


Figure 10: The Escaped Englishman. (Hunt Scene in Lower Border.)

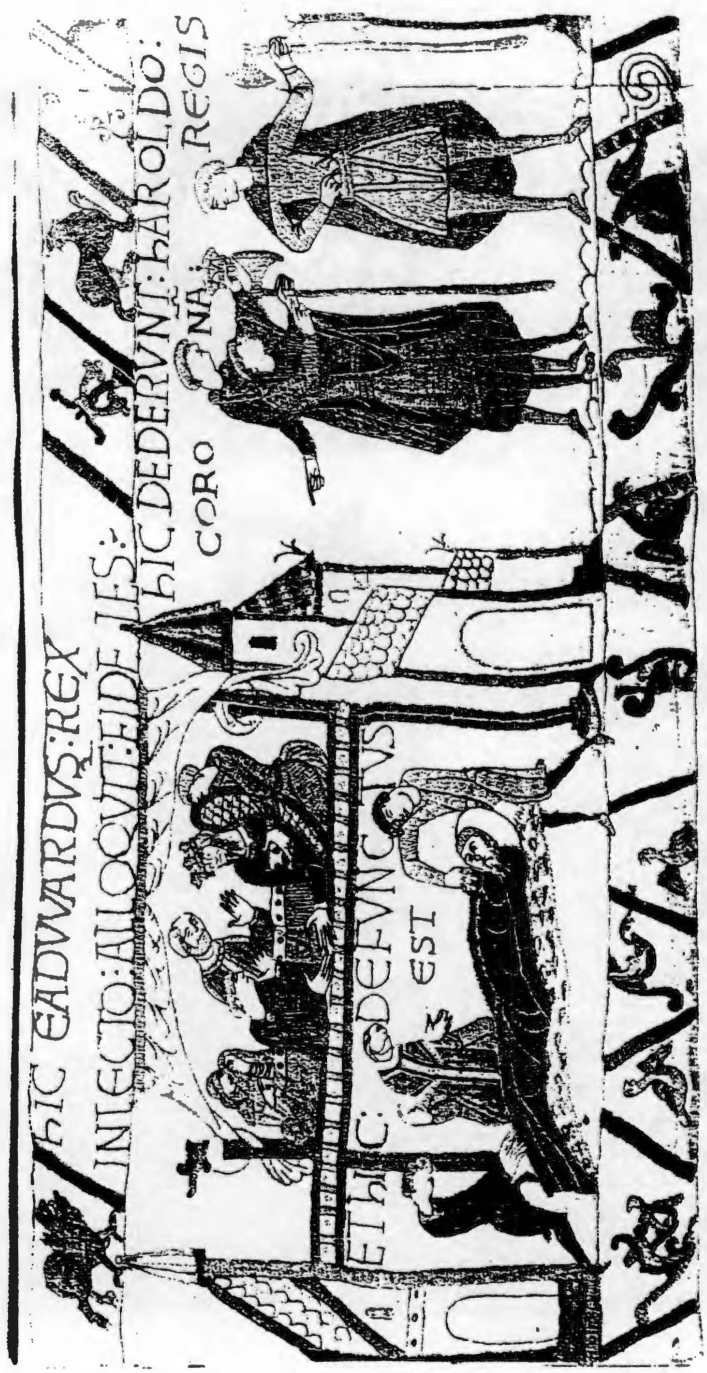


Figure 11: The Death of Edward. Harold is being Offered the Crown.

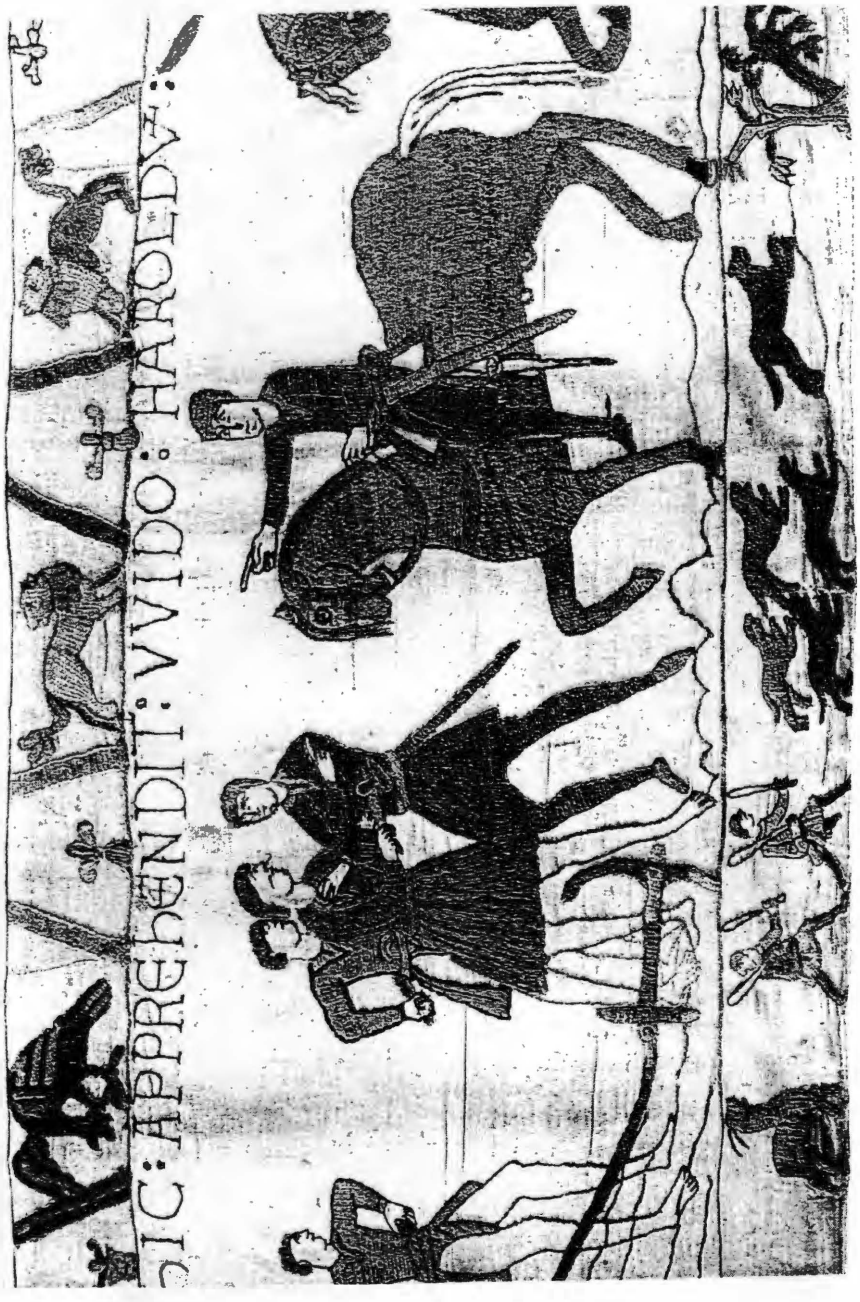


Figure 12: Harold Seized by Guy. (Hunt Scene in Lower Border).



Figure 13: Harold's Vow.



Figure 14: Harold with Nude Figures in Lower Border.

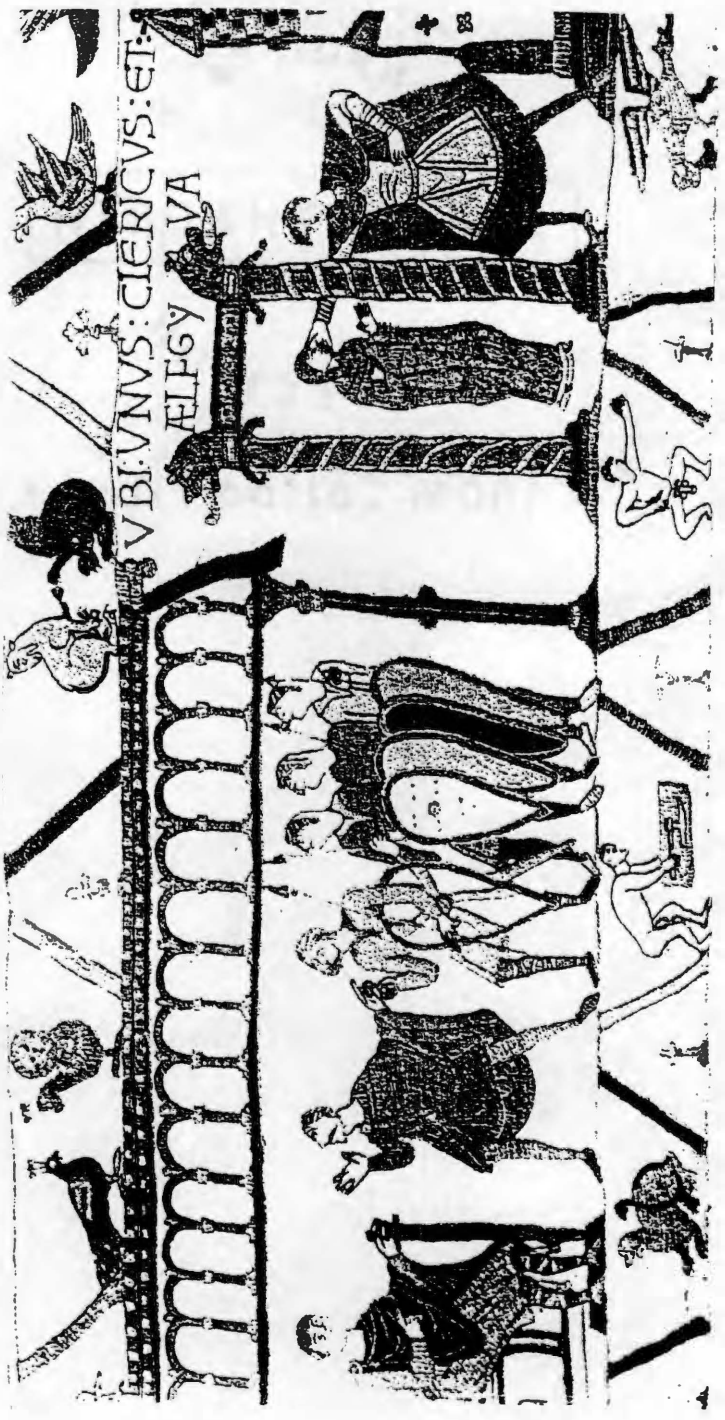


Figure 15: The Aelfgyva Scene.

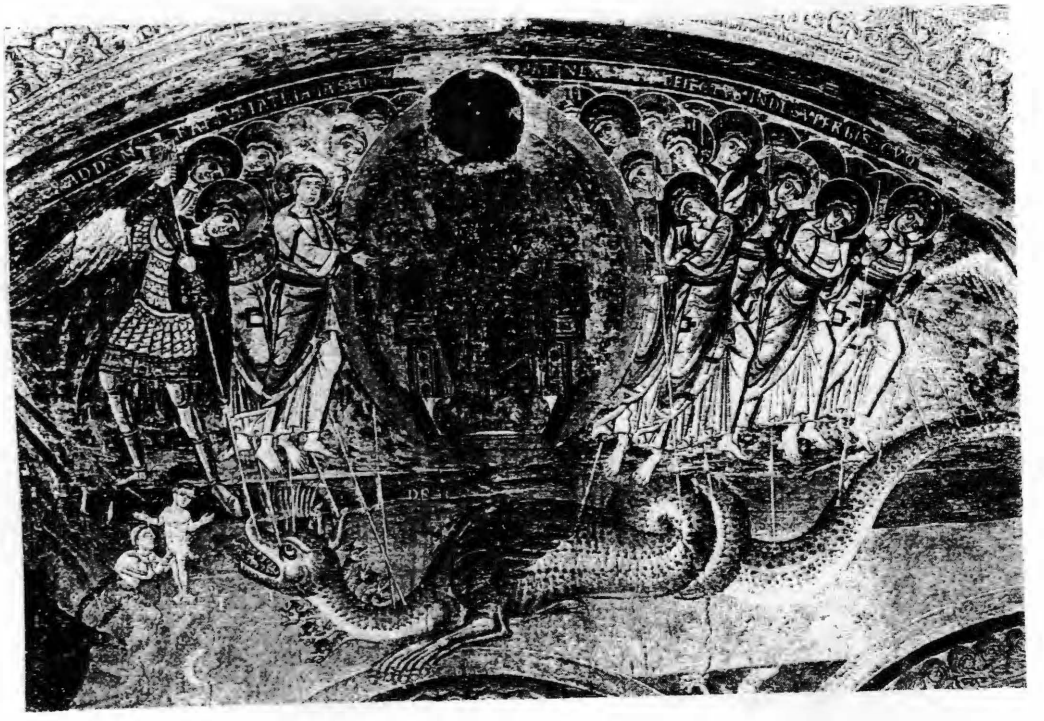


Figure 16: Seven-headed Dragon Beneath God and Angels. (Wall painting, east wall of the narthex of S. Pietro al Monte, Civate, Como, c. 1100).



Figure 17: Dragon Devouring Column Beneath St. Benedict. (Pen and ink drawing from codex from Zwiefalten, 1138-47.)

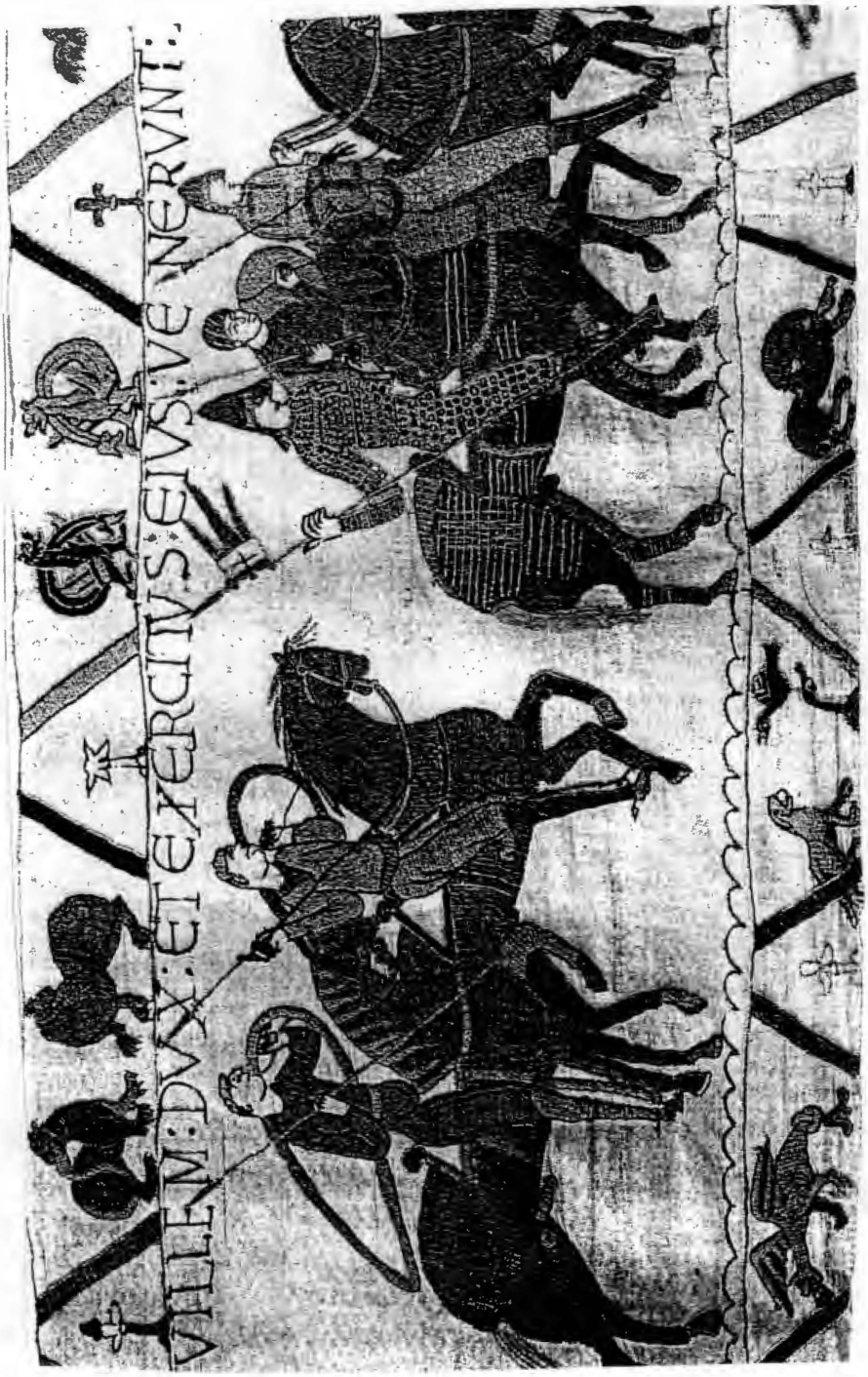


Figure 18: Amphisbaena in Upper Border, Right.

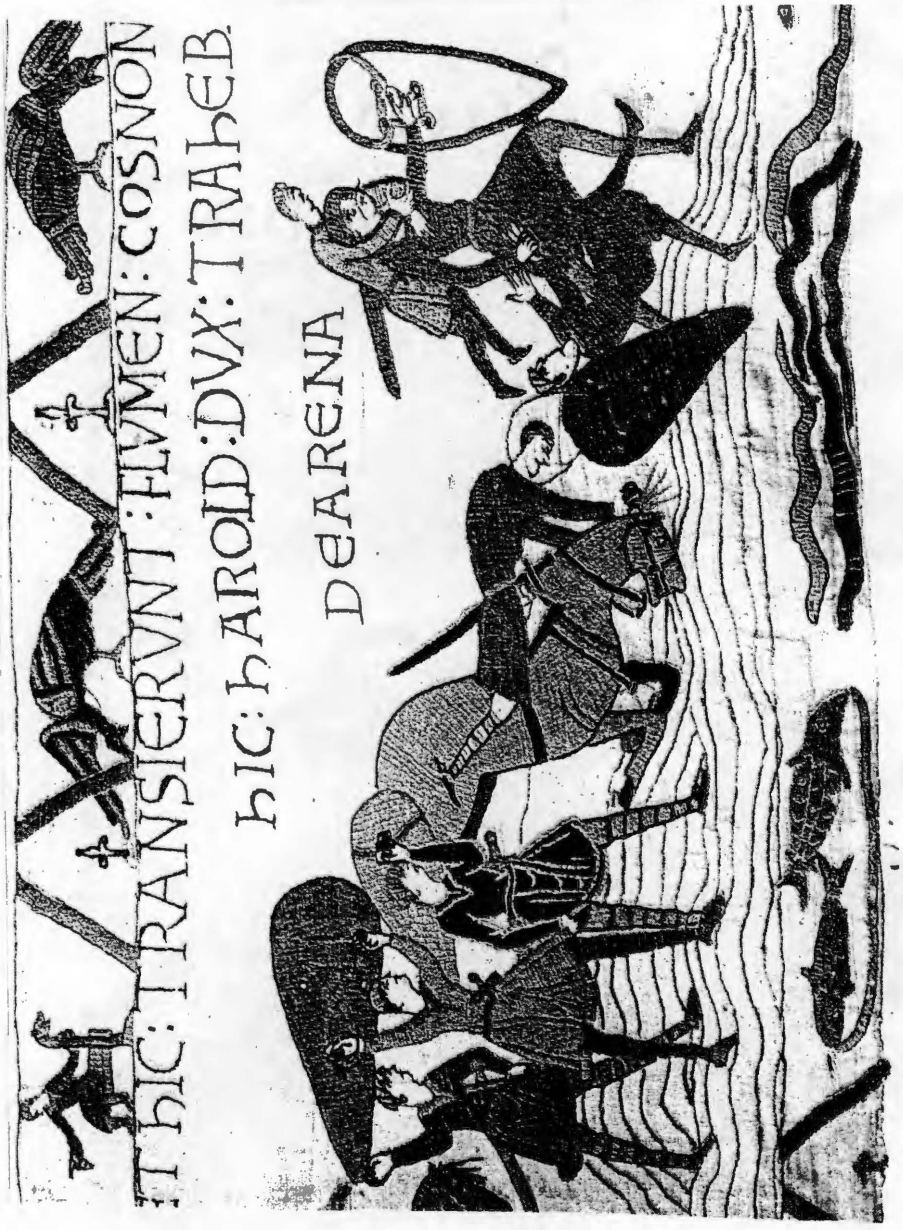


Figure 19: Harold Rescuing Norman Soldiers at Couesnon River.



Figure 20: Norman Soldiers Setting Fire to English Home.



Figure 21: Conan of Dol Hands Over Keys to William.

Vita

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