

# Bayeux tapestry's authenticity and value to historians



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The Bayeux Tapestry What is it? A band of white linen 70m long and 49.5cm wide, embroidered with yarn, that depicts the events that led to William of Normandy's conquest of England and his victory at the Battle of Hastings.

What was the Battle of Hastings? A battle fought in south Sussex in October 1066 that determined the successful outcome of the invasion. Harold, then-new King of England, had legitimately succeeded King Edward the Confessor, but William felt the crown was rightfully his because of promises made to him by both Edward and Harold.

## **Authenticity**

This has never been questioned:

- Style is consistent with other 11th-century Anglo-Saxon needlework
- First referred to in 1476 – displayed once a year at Bayeux cathedral
- Halley's comet appears; astronomers have confirmed this.

This detail would not have been known by someone who was not closely connected to the event. Origin (Commission and Creation) Bishop Odo, by general consensus, for the following reasons:

- His inclusion in scenes in which he may be considered dispensable
- The tapestry's close association with Bayeux cathedral, his ecclesiastical seat.
- Three minor Norman knights, recorded in the Domesday book as holding Kentish land from him, are named

General consensus is that it was manufactured in England.

Evidence for this includes:

- Stylistic similarity with other Anglo-Saxon art
- International reputation of English needlework at the time
- Influence of English language – written in Latin with English syntax; English folk names appear, eg. ? Ifgyva

## Age

Potentially 946 years old. Was made between 1067 and 1082 if Bishop Odo was the commissioner – he fell out of favour with William in 1083. Bias It is generally agreed that there is a strong Norman bias.

The evidence for this includes:

- The small amount of attention paid to Edward's legitimising of Harold and death
- That a common alternative title, William the Bastard, is never used or referred to

The attempted justification of the campaign – William is portrayed as reclaiming what was rightfully his and Harold as an untrustworthy oath-breaker, in spite of the strong English case for his kingship, the arguments for which include:

- That King Edward wished him to be successor and legitimately passed it on
- That Harold was a wise, experienced governor
- That William had no claim by descent to the throne

It is difficult to determine exactly what has been changed or omitted as empirically-written information is non-existent and the single existing closely-dated English account, The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, is brief. The only <https://assignbuster.com/bayeux-tapestrys-authenticity-and-value-to-historians/>

other source that mentions the main contentious point, Harold's oath, is Norman (Deeds of Duke William, William Poitier).

## Value to Historians

The tapestry provides tremendously important and interesting information to historians about significant Norman characters, their motives and a colourful narrative of an extremely important battle.

It is, however, demonstrative of the problem of history-fixing by the victorious side in a controversy. William would have had any unfavourable accounts destroyed had the minority of literate English had the courage to create them. Hence, historians are forced to accept that their only major sources are biased to an unknown degree and compare them with the few facts from other primary sources, eg. dates from gravestones, to develop a somewhat empirical account.

## References

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