

The bayeux tapestry  
and the "gesta  
guillelmi" by william of  
poitiers essay  
sample...



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## **The Bayeux Tapestry and the “Gesta Guillelmi” by William of Poitiers Essay Sample**

The Bayeux Tapestry is an artistic depiction of the events that led to the invasion of the England by Normans. It is a story that concerns William, the Duke of Normandy and Harold, the King of England. It also portrays the ultimate battle of Hastings which saw the death of King Harold. This becomes the climax of the story as the Duke of Normandy, William, becomes the conqueror and the ruler of England. The story portrayed in the images begins with Harold going to Normandy in an attempt to rescue his people who had been held hostages. While there, William learns of his presence. He is captured and detained.

William later allows him to leave and gives him a lot of presents. However, he gives him a condition. The condition is that Harold should support him in inheriting the throne as the king of England upon the death of King Edward. Harold agrees to this condition and swears an oath with William. However, later on, Harold betrays William. When King Edward dies, Harold assumes the throne and becomes the King of England. William learns of this betrayal and plans to wage war against him. He plans the war the war against the King Harold. This becomes the Historic war by the name the Battle of Hastings. King Harold is killed and William takes over the throne.

The Bayeux Tapestry has correspondence with the historic text, the “William of Poitiers”. Its many constructs seem to correspond to what is written in the text. It appears as if the Tapestry borrowed from the text or the other way round. It is also possible that the two came from the same background of

knowledge. However, it is not clearly known how the two came to have correspondence. The other historic texts have small similarities. For instance, the “ Anglo-Saxon Chronicles” does not make the events appear as vivid as depicted in the Tapestry. Moreover, the “ Harold’s Saga” gives an account of the events but not as nicely as presented in the “ William of Poitiers”.

In the book “ Gesta Guillelmi” of William of Poitiers, there are key aspects of the Normandy invasion of the England that have been given emphasis. The same events are clearly portrayed in the Bayeux Tapestry. These are the Harold’s journey to Normandy as an emissary of King Edward, the Harold’s oath-taking event, the Harold’s coronation with Stigand as a celebrant, the sending of the English spies to Normandy after the crowning, the messenger sent to William at Hastings and William personally delivering a speech to his battle men prior to the battle. To understand the relationship between the Bayeux Tapestry, it is important to look at the correspondences more deeply.

The first image in the tapestry alludes to the journey of the Harold, the duke of English, to Boshom. It is only in the text by William of Poitier that the mention of the journey to Boshom is mentioned. Although the clear reasons for this journey are not depicted in the tapestry, the text in the William of Poitiers states that the journey of Harold was to deliver a message to William, the duke of Normandy. King Edward had sent him to tell William that he would inherit his thrown upon his death. However, the account given in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles is that Harold travelled to Normandy to rescue hostages held by William. The fact that the text of William of Poitiers mentions the journey to Boshom suggests that the tapestry follows its story.

In the tapestry, there is an image that depicts Harold helping the Norman soldiers out of the sand. This happened while the soldiers were crossing Couesnon near Mount-Saint-Michael. This event is greatly mentioned in the William of Poitiers text. It is a demonstration that shows that in a way, Harold and William and sealed a deal to be together. This happened when William was on his journey to undertake a campaign in Brittany to have Riwallon relieved from siege by Conan. The tapestry shows the soldiers of William fighting with the men of Dinan and Conan escapes. According to William of Poitiers, Conan was not in the town when the Normans invaded. He had fled into the countryside and William had to pursue him. The embroidery shows soldiers of Normandy riding past Rennes and finally catching up with Bretons at Dinan. It is at the Dinan that the war is waged. The Knights fight the Bretons and then after defeat, Conan surrenders and hands in the town's keys. At some point, the text of William of Poitiers varies with the account of the tapestry. The text states that Conan fled from William and William never caught up with him.

The Bayeux Tapestry gives William more glory than given in the literary accounts. The tapestry states that William finally overpowered Canon and took the city keys contrary to the account given in the text. Perhaps the tapestry gives William the glory as a mighty conqueror as a prelude of what was to happen against Harold.

William of Poitiers only mentions Dol, where Riwallon was captured. The Tapestry gives the account of the route more clearly. It adds Mount-Saint-Michael, Rennes and Dinan as the other places where this event took place.

Mount-Saint-Michael was a very popular site in history as a pilgrimage spot in <https://assignbuster.com/the-bayeux-tapestry-and-the-gesta-guillelmi-by-william-of-poitiers-essay-sample/>

Normandy. It was under the rule of the duke. According to William of Poitiers, Mount-Saint-Michael was a monastery from which many monks came to settle in the Abbey of Saint Vigor. Saint Vigor was founded by Bishop Odo of Bayeux. The mention of these places in the Tapestry may be in order to add emphasis on the popularity of the places in the perspective of history.

The taking of the oath of Harold in Norman is very vivid in the Tapestry. The event is also clearly described in the William of Poitiers. According to the Tapestry, the taking of the oath becomes the culminating event that happens in Normandy before the sudden turn of events. It is the last thing that happens between William and Harold in a peaceful manner. This is because the subsequent events are concerned with the war being arranged by William against Harold. After the oath, the tapestry depicts return of Harold to England. Therefore, the Tapestry provides the first real climax of events as the turning point in the story. The text of William of Poitiers also describes the oath vividly. Though other historical texts such as the Harold's Saga allude to the oath, only the William of Poitiers that gives the exact details of the oath. Other texts state that the oath was a private affair between William and Harold. However, William of Poitiers gives specific details of the oath. He first states that the oath took place at Bonneville-sur-Touques.

This contradicts what the Tapestry depicts. It shows that the oath took place in Bayeux. Perhaps the depiction of the Bayeux was to give tribute to the Bishop Odo who was probably the patron of the Tapestry. As to which of the two accounts gives the true venue where the oath-taking ceremony took place remains a matter of debate. According to the Tapestry, the oath-taking <https://assignbuster.com/the-bayeux-tapestry-and-the-gesta-guillielmi-by-william-of-poitiers-essay-sample/>

ceremony is depicted as a very solemn ceremony. It is depicted as a formal ceremony rather than a private ceremony. This confirms the text of the William of Poitiers who does not hold the ceremony has a private affair, unlike other historical texts. In the Tapestry, William presides over the ceremony. He is seen seated while holding his sword of office erect. Harold is seen swearing his oath upon two objects which are not clearly defined. They may be portable alters or reliquaries. The fact that the oath was very formal gives the importance of the inevitable consequences that fall after the oath is broken.

William of Poitiers states that Harold took the throne immediately after the death of King Edward. He was crowned immediately on the day of the funeral. The tapestry follows closely on the description given by William of Poitiers. In the Tapestry, two men are seen giving the crown to Harold. The two men are seen pointing at the deathbed of Edward as they give the crown to Harold. This is used to illustrate that the coronation was done in haste and on the day of the funeral. The deliberate presence of Archbishop Stigand at the coronation agrees so well with the account of William of Poitiers.

According to the text, the two men bestowing the crown on Harold are interpreted to represent the Witan. They are English partisans who perhaps supported the Harold's claim to the throne. All the events that take place seem to correspond with the Norman ideology as described by William of Poitiers.

Immediately after the coronation, a man is shown speaking to Harold. It is assumed that the conversation was with the connection to the preceding comet scene. It was an indication of a bad omen. The Tapestry also depicts <https://assignbuster.com/the-bayeux-tapestry-and-the-gesta-guillelmi-by-william-of-poitiers-essay-sample/>

the future invasion of England by the ghostly ships in the border beneath. The comets and the appearance of the ships foretell the future attacks that England was to face when Normans made the historical invasion. However, another interpretation of the man speaking with Harold may be that he was a messenger from William. This is supported by the account that the William of Poitiers gives.

However, the exact position is not known. It is also possible that the man talking with Harold was an English spy who was taking instructions from Harold. This is supported by the adjacent scene in the Tapestry that shows a ship landing in Normandy. The ship is thought to be the one that delivered the spy to Normandy. This is because there are no greetings seen after the landing as it would be expected if the ship had brought the Normandy messenger back. In this sense, there seems to be no proper connection between the Tapestry and the account of William of Poitiers. However, compared to many other historical accounts, it is the one that seems to bring a clearer picture of the Tapestry.

Finally, the Tapestry shows Duke William exhorting his soldiers just before the war. This war was to take place between the Normandy soldiers and the English forces. Duke William gives them a speech to prepare them manfully for the battle. This event corresponds with the account that William of Poitiers gives regarding this event. According to William of Poitiers, the Duke addressed the soldiers himself.

From the above observations, it is clear that many instances of correspondence between the narrative in the Bayeux Tapestry and the

account of William of Poitiers in the “ Gesta Guillelmi” are present. However, few discrepancies can be observed. The most outstanding one is the one that occurs during the Breton campaign. Others are with regard to the sequence of events that lead to the Harold’s oath-taking and even the location of the oath-taking ceremony.

William of Poitiers and the Tapestry appears to take on the Norman’s propaganda approach. However, because the story in the Tapestry is not a direct link of any one literary work in an exclusive sense, it cannot be said to depict the absolute truth in terms of the happenings in the eleventh century, and in particular during the year 1066. There are many historical literary works that borders the story in the Tapestry. However, it is a vivid story that the Tapestry portrays and it is self-explanatory. The Tapestry also comes out as an entertainment piece of work. It depicts the wide knowledge of the artist, who is probably a cleric. The artist must have had a wide knowledge of the literature in Normandy and England.

## References

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