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Editor's Introduction

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PEREGRINATIONS
INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF PILGRIMAGE ART



Editor's Introduction

By John Michael Crafton, University of West Georgia

Although Charles Dickens referred to the Bayeux Tapestry as “The work of very feeble amateurs,”¹ if its worth can be gauged by the number of admirers visiting it and the number of scholars writing about it, the Tapestry’s stock value is doing quite well. Since its rediscovery in the early 18th century by Antoine Lancelot and Bernard de Montfaucon, the Tapestry has been, according to Sylvette Lemagnen, Conservator of the Bayeux Tapestry, the subject of “over 600 learned books and articles.” For good reasons, she goes on to suggest: “It is endlessly informative, not only relating the events of the years 1064-1066 which brought Duke William of Normandy to the English throne, but also affording us unparalleled insights into the everyday realities of life in that time.”² These words were written in 2002, and what was true then is even truer now. The rate of scholarly production has actually increased since that time. The Tapestry, furthermore, has in some ways made the city of Bayeux something of a pilgrimage site, as thousands of visitors, of all ages, every year make their way to the museum in Bayeux to see it. In the earliest days visitors may have seen it in the Cathedral, either on some rare occasion in the Treasury or more likely displayed in the nave during the Octave of the Feast of the Relics, but shortly after Napoleon commanded that the Tapestry be displayed for a brief period in Paris, it

¹ Carola Hicks, *The Bayeux Tapestry: The Life Story of a Masterpiece* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2006), iv.

² Sylvette Lemagnen, Preface. *Bayeux Tapestry*. By Lucien Musset. Trans. Richard Rex. New Edition. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), 9.

was recognized as a national treasure, and as a result, when it was relocated in 1804 back to its home of Bayeux, it was secured not in the Cathedral but in the Hôtel de Ville where it was stored on a spindle and displayed over a table. In 1842 it was moved to the public library, and there it was displayed behind glass, thus providing a bit more protection from wear and tear. In 1913 it was moved to the Bishop's Palace across from the Cathedral wherein a special display room had been created for it. To protect it from the ravages of war, the Tapestry was moved around a second time during World War II to locations in and around Bayeux, and during this time it was studied and photographed by several of Hitler's officers. After the war it was exhibited again in the Louvre as part of a celebration of the Liberation and of French culture. On March 2, 1945,



Figure 1: *A replica of the Tapestry hanging in Bayeux Cathedral. Published with special permission of the City of Bayeux.*

at the end of its five-week tour in the Louvre, it was taken back to the Bishop's Palace, where it remained until 1982 when it was moved to a special purpose building created for the primary purpose of displaying the Tapestry. This dedicated space is now known as the *Centre Guillaume*

le Conquérant. This facility displays the Tapestry under protective glass at waist high level under the proper light, temperature, and humidity, and provides a very comfortable space for examining the embroidery very closely.

Not only do thousands visit the Tapestry every year, but also they take away and disseminate images of the Tapestry in every kind of souvenir – ties, scarves, buttons, miniature paper versions of the Tapestry, coffee mugs, pillows, and embroidery kits with which one can learn the “Bayeux stitch.” For those who cannot make the trip to Normandy, even more



Figure 2: *A typical Tapestry tie.*

thousands of Tapestry images are distributed through the powers of merchandising. In addition to the ordinary channels of commerce, images from the Tapestry are becoming almost iconic for things medieval, so copies of Tapestry images find their way into movies and festooning the covers of books, magazines, newsletters, and anything else that might need an image that signifies, immediately, the Middle Ages. In the image copied below the library of the University of Auckland uses an image borrowed from the Tapestry to stand for the medieval world.

**A Guide to Medieval History Resources
In
The University of Auckland Library**



Figure 3: *Auckland's guide to medieval resources.*

The last few years have provided quite a rich supply of scholarly treatments of the Tapestry. The University of Caen brought out an excellent collection of recent studies of the Tapestry, from the historical to the scientific and lots of interesting places in between. Titled *Embroidering the Facts of History*, it was edited by Pierre Bouet, Brian Levy, and François Neveux. This is an excellent place for any scholar to begin to get a sense of the wide range of contemporary studies of the Tapestry. In this book, Shirley Ann Brown provides an update to her indispensable book-length bibliography, *The Bayeux Tapestry, History and Bibliography*, which was published in 1988. In the first few years of the twenty-first century, a half-dozen book length studies were published: Andrew Bridgeford's *1066: The Hidden History in the Bayeux Tapestry*; R. Howard Bloch's *A Needle in the Right Hand of God*; Lucien Musset and Richard Rex, *The Bayeux Tapestry*; Carola Hicks, *The Bayeux Tapestry: The Life Story of a Masterpiece*; and coming soon from Boydell Press a new set of essays by some of the best scholars today, edited by Dan Terkla, Martin Foys, and Karen Overby, *The Bayeux Tapestry: New Meanings*. We should also mention that in 2004 David Wilson's widely used photographic reproduction of the Tapestry was reprinted, and in 2003 Scholarly Digital Editions published

Martin Foys' digital edition of the Tapestry, an edition that may change the way most of us view and study the Tapestry from now on.

In this special edition of *Peregrinations*, I provide a sample of some of the representative approaches and the variety of scholarship on this subject. Shirley Ann Brown and Gale Owen-Crocker are two of the best known, most productive, and most influential scholars on the Tapestry writing today; to have an essay from each of them here is a great honor indeed and one that does not go unappreciated by the humble editor. Shirley Ann Brown's essay makes a new and forceful argument for the importance of considering Viking art and identity for a proper reading of the Tapestry and for understanding its origins. Gale Owen-Crocker's essay revisits the question of Roman influence and makes an extremely persuasive argument about three scenes in particular on the Tapestry as informed by imagery on Trajan's Column. Jennifer Brown, Richard Koch, and I are newer to Tapestry scholarship. Professor Brown's essay explores the relationship between the medieval lives of Edward the Confessor, who is featured prominently in the first third of the embroidery, and the Tapestry's design. She even suggests a possible explanation to a problem that has vexed Tapestry scholars for decades: what appears to be a reversed time sequence in the scene that depicts Edward's death and burial or, as it appears in the Tapestry, his burial and then death. Richard Koch's essay makes the case for a more religious reading of the Tapestry, particularly by arguing for the religious meaning of the animals represented throughout the embroidery. My own essay explores the effects of remediating the Tapestry in digital forms, using the term in the new sense as it has been adopted by communication theory. Hypertext and hypermedia are two very interesting new developments in digital media, and reading the Tapestry in light of these very recent creations offer us new ways

of reading the work as well as perhaps an insight into how or why it was created. We hope that the readers of *Peregrinations* will find these essays useful and find from one of them the end of a golden string that when wound into a ball might not, as William Blake, “lead you in at Heaven’s gate,” but rather might lead you to a gate nonetheless, a gate that opens to one of most transformative periods of European medieval history. The Tapestry is a gateway to the Anglo-Norman world, perhaps its first writing, perhaps its first cultural production.