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'INCIPIENT ARMORY' IN THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY?

Michael J. Lewis

Various geometric and zoomorphic motifs appear upon the flags (sometimes called gonfanons, pennants or standards) and shields (both round and kite-shaped) in the Bayeux Tapestry.¹ Scholars such as Lucien Musset have suggested that 'some [of these motifs] look like heraldic designs', noting that 'there is a degree of resemblance in these emblems which means they could have served as identifying badges'.² It is however generally accepted that heraldry was unknown in England before the Norman Conquest,³ and there is no certainty over its use until the twelfth century.⁴ It therefore seems improbable that the various motifs employed on flags and shields in the Tapestry (generally believed to be contemporaneous with the events it depicts) are 'heraldic'. Certainly, this was the view of Fox-Davies who argued that there were 'several fatal objections to regarding these figures [in the Bayeux Tapestry] as incipient *armory*, namely that while the most prominent persons of the time are depicted, most of them repeatedly, none of these is ever represented twice bearing the same device, nor is there one instance of any resemblance in the rude designs described to the bearings actually used by the descendants of the persons in question'.⁵ In agreement, Francis J. Grant stated that the Tapestry's emblems were 'not hereditary in families', apparently being 'changed by their owners at pleasure, and therefore cannot be held to have been heraldic in our modern sense of the word'.⁶ More recently Stephen Slater has said, the 'scenes of the battle [of Hastings in the Bayeux Tapestry] show that emblems were displayed on the shields of the Norman knights [and also some of

¹ This paper is based on one given at the Leeds Medieval Conference 2010. I am indebted to the expertise offered by Steffen Harpsøe, Gale Owen-Crocker and the editors of this journal. The numbering convention for human figures and other elements in the Bayeux Tapestry follows that given in Michael J. Lewis, *The Archaeological Authority of the Bayeux Tapestry* (British Archaeological Report 404, Oxford 2005): F = (human) figure.

² Lucien Musset, *The Bayeux Tapestry* (Woodbridge 2005), p. 47.

³ Arthur Charles Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry* (London and Edinburgh 1909), p. 14.

⁴ Stephen Slater, *The Illustrated Book of Heraldry* (London 2006), p. 12; Fox-Davies, Heraldry, p. 16. Robert Jones, 'Identifying the warrior on the pre-heraldic battlefield', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 30 (2008), pp. 154–67, says that 'only after 1150 were the design's on a knight's shield used consistently...'.

⁵ Fox-Davies, op. cit., p. 15.

⁶ Francis J. Grant, *Manual of Heraldry* (Edinburgh 1937), p. 2.

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the English], but they are not considered to be heraldic devices, as the same knights bear different symbols in other episodes of the work'.⁷

There has not, however, been any systematic attempt to study the flag and shield designs on the Tapestry and provide factual support for these commonplace assessments of them. But a survey aimed at establishing whether they were used by the Tapestry's designer to identify specific people from different places might well help judge the extent to which they qualify as 'incipient armoury', or at least determine whether they are used by the designer in a purposeful way, as is the case with other 'attributes' of the Tapestry's design.⁸ as Robert Jones noted, 'just because the image on the shield does not adhere to the later tenets of heraldry does not mean that it could not be used to identify an individual'.⁹ The same applies with equal force to flag designs, and therefore it is useful to start the survey by looking at them.

A. Flags

There are 38 flags in the Bayeux Tapestry,¹⁰ of five broad types: gonfanons (the great majority, numbering 33), quadrate, triangular and semi-circular (one each), and those in the form of a wyvern (two). See **Figure 1** for the full range.

1. Gonfanons

A gonfanon is a pennant-type banner with tails. Of the 33 in the Tapestry, 29 have three tails, though two have four and two have five. Five of the gonfanons occur on the Tapestry's ships.

Although gonfanons are normally associated with the Normans (28 of the 33), four are identifiable with the English and one a Breton, so it seems they are not, as a category, identifiers of 'national' affiliation.

Only eight times are gonfanons associated with named or known individuals; these include Conan, Harold and William. However, it is intriguing that the rare four-tailed gonfanons are held only by Harold (F180) and William (F398). This might be more significant were it not for the fact that those with five tails have no such association with named or known persons.

The motifs on gonfanons vary. Depicted are crosses (six times), lines (sixteen), orles (eleven), roundels (eight), or combinations of these motifs (eleven or twelve); five are plain.

(i) Crosses

Crosses on gonfanons are generally of a simple form, though some are more complex; for example, that held by F392 has a design consisting of four roundels arranged in such a way so that the background (field) appears in the form of cross. It has been suggested that gonfanons with crosses represent the papal banner which, according

⁷ Slater, op. cit. p. 12.

⁸ Michael J. Lewis, 'Identity and status in the Bayeux Tapestry: the iconography and artefactual evidence', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 29 (2007), pp. 100-20.

⁹ Jones, 'Identifying the warrior', p. 164.

¹⁰ Derek Renn, 'Burhgeat and gonfanon: two sidelights from the Bayeux Tapestry', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 16 (1993), pp. 177-96 at 187, states there were 37, but missed the one on Ship 24.

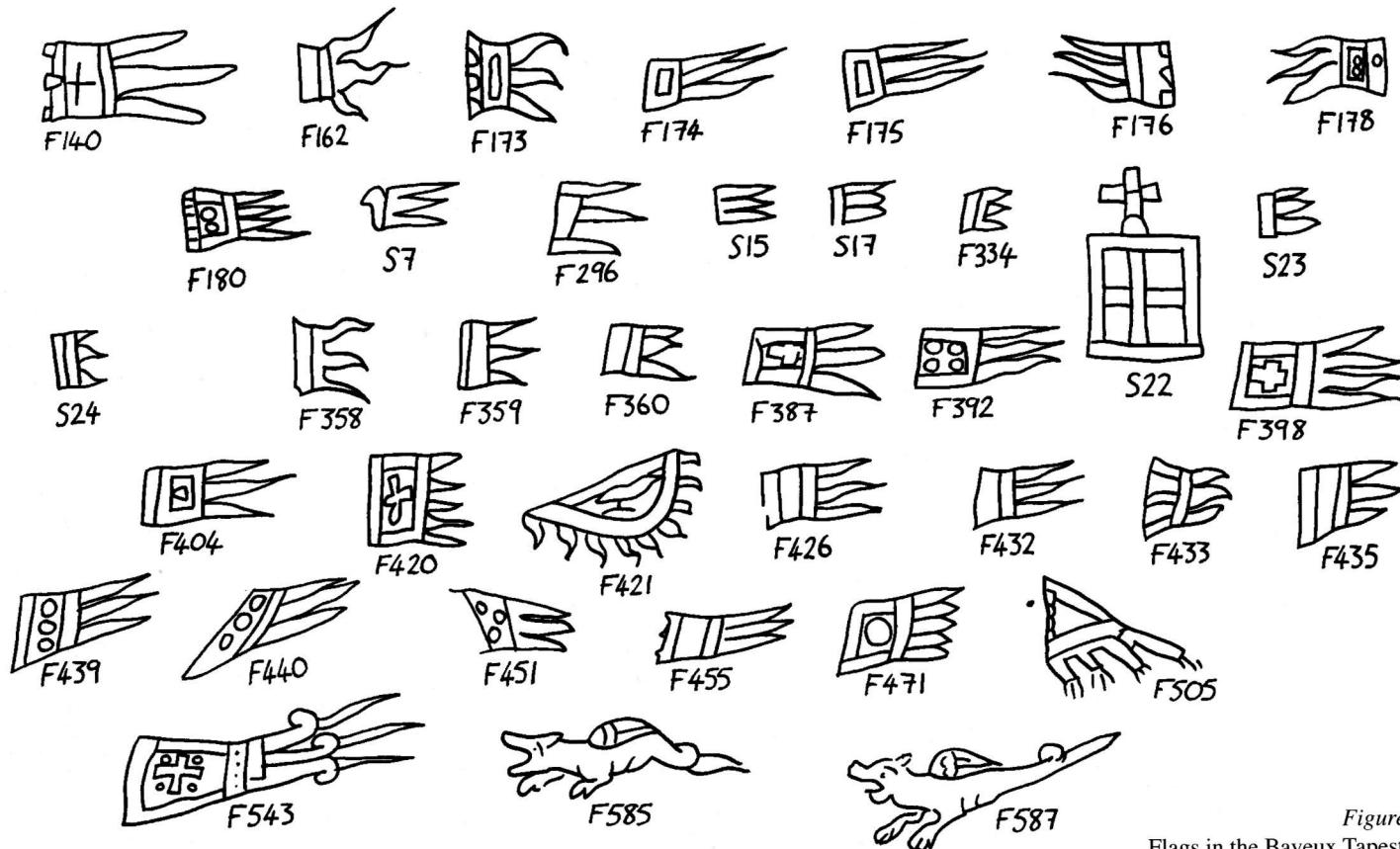


Figure 1
Flags in the Bayeux Tapestry

Numbered according to associated human figure (F) or ship (S).

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to the Norman chronicler William of Poitiers,¹¹ was bestowed upon Duke William by Pope Alexander II.¹² Advancing this view, Robert Jones postulated that the ‘seemingly repeated depiction’ of the gonfanon emblazoned with a cross strongly suggests it was Duke William’s ensign.¹³

However, the hypothesis that this gonfanon is the papal banner and/or William’s personal flag is in certain respects problematic. In the first place, Derek Renn noted that one such banner (held by F140) occurs during the Tapestry’s depiction of the Breton campaign, even before William successfully secured papal blessing for his invasion of England.¹⁴ This is anachronistic: at this time (*c.* 1064) Edward was still alive and Harold was (nominally, at least) supporting William’s claim. It was only once Harold took the crown that William had reason to solicit papal support.

However, Renn’s objection assumes, perhaps incorrectly, that the chronological placing of gonfanons with crosses mattered to the designer of the Tapestry; more plausible is the possibility that the Tapestry designer knew the papal banner was conferred upon William by the Pope and chose to associate it with him regardless of chronological accuracy.

Secondly, only three (F140, F392 and F398) of the six gonfanons with crosses are immediately or obviously connected with William. The only other example associated with a known or named individual is held by Figure 543, whose name, surviving in damaged form in the margin, is usually read as E[VSTAT]IVS or Eustace.¹⁵ In this case, and also in that of the two unnamed and unknown figures (F387 and F420), the designer probably understood the individuals to be part of William’s retinue. Certainly, the fact that all examples but one of this type of banner is associated with the Normans is unlikely to be coincidental.

It seems likely that if the Tapestry’s banners were incipient heraldry, the one borne by F543 would look different from those of William. Indeed it does, appearing as a cross formy cantoned by four roundels or disks (see **Plate 1a**).¹⁶ Catherine Morton argued that this is ‘the only banner depicted in the Tapestry for which there is

¹¹ William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, ii 3; R. H. C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall (ed. and trans.), *The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers* (Oxford 1998), pp. 104-5.

¹² David Crouch, *The Image of Aristocracy in Britain 1000-1300* (London 1992), p. 221.

¹³ Robert Jones, “‘What Banner Thine?’ The banner as a symbol of identification, status and authority on the battlefield”, *Haskins Society Journal* 15 (2004), pp. 101-9 at 102.

¹⁴ Renn, ‘Burhgeat and gonfanon’, p. 189.

¹⁵ The letters now seen in the margin are largely nineteenth-century reconstructions made on the basis of Charles Stothard’s examination of the stitch holes in 1821; see A. Bridgeman, ‘Was Count Eustace II of Boulogne the patron of the Bayeux Tapestry?’, *Journal of Medieval History* 25 (1999), pp. 155-85, for a discussion. David Spear, ‘Robert of Mortain and the Bayeux Tapestry’, in Michael Lewis, Gale Owen-Crocker and Dan Terkla (edd.), *New Research on the Bayeux Tapestry: proceedings of a conference at the British Museum* (Oxford 2010), pp. 75-80, argues that the figure is William’s brother Robert, not Eustace of Boulogne.

¹⁶ Renn, ‘Burhgeat and gonfanon’, p. 192, notes that the cross with roundels between each arm occurs on the coins of William, before (as Duke of Normandy) and after (as King of England) the Conquest; but this is a common coinage type. He also (p. 191) proposes that ‘this flag is another candidate for the *vexillum* given by pope Alexander II to William’.

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a probable identification'. Believing it to be that of Eustace II of Boulogne, Morton noted that this same design 'is found on the coins of his son, Eustace III, and almost certainly on his own coins as well'. She also thought the four roundels (= *boules*) were a rebus for Boulogne.¹⁷ David Spear, advancing the hypothesis that F543 is in fact Robert of Mortain, convincingly argued that the banner was 'unlikely' to have been that of Boulogne, as 'it is clear that the "cross formy cantoned by four disks" is found also on the coinage of several Norman dukes at least as early as William Longsword' as well as the PAXS coinage of William the Conqueror himself. In conclusion, Spear stated, 'there is no certainty that the banner in Scene 55 belongs to the House of Boulogne. Rather, it is equally likely to be associated with the Norman duke, with a different lordship altogether, or even to be merely a generalised version of a mid-eleventh-century standard'.¹⁸

Importantly, however, the gonfanon ascribed to F543 is distinct from others in several ways. Robert Jones noted that since it 'break[s] the border' and its tails 'twist and curl in a most natural way...' it is plausible that the Tapestry's designer was attempting to draw attention to it – and thereby to 'this crisis point in the battle'.¹⁹ Whilst it is right to be wary of making too many assumptions about the meaning or purpose of a unique or distinct motif, it does seem to be the case that the Tapestry's designer is using this particular gonfanon to highlight a specific episode in his narrative – the point at which William lifts his helmet to show that he is still alive (Scene 55). Whether or not the banner is that of F543 himself or of William is less clear.

(ii) Lines

Designs made up of lines, mostly vertical, are found on sixteen Norman gonfanons, but also appear on a banner held by a warrior (F455) within the Anglo-Saxon shield-wall. If it were not for this 'rogue' example – which is perhaps a random choice, an artistic error or (less probably) intended to represent a banner captured from the Normans – it might be convincingly argued that gonfanons with lines are signifiers of national affiliation.

In ten of the sixteen cases the design consists of one vertical line; in five, of two. There is a single example (held by F433, who is a Norman) with three horizontal lines. It is not obvious why this one differs from the others.

Only two of the sixteen gonfanons with lines are associated with named or known individuals, in both cases William himself (F140 and F176). Any suggestion, however, that these might represent the Conqueror's personal banner would exaggerate the strength of the association, especially given the relationship between gonfanons with crosses and the Duke's army. However, the fact that most such gonfanons are

¹⁷ C. Morton, 'Pope Alexander II and the Norman Conquest', *Latomus* 34 (1975), pp. 362–82 at 367. See also Michel Pastoureau, 'L'origine des armoiries: un problème en voie de solution?', in Sven Tito Achen (ed.), *Genealogica & Heraldica, Report on the 14th International Congress of Genealogical and Heraldic Sources in Copenhagen, 25-29 August 1980* (Copenhagen 1982), pp. 241–54.

¹⁸ Spear, 'Robert of Mortain', p. 76.

¹⁹ Jones, 'Identifying the warrior', p. 156; id., 'What Banner Thine?', p. 104.

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identified with Normans in general, might suggest they were used purposefully by the Tapestry designer.

(iii) *Orles*

Eleven gonfanons have the background field framed with a box, tressure or orle. This device is associated with the English in two cases, the Normans in eight and the Bretons in one, and therefore does not seem to have been used by the designer to denote national affiliation.

Five of the gonfanons in this category are associated with named or known individuals, namely Conan, F543, Harold and – twice – William; this is a high proportion. However in four of the five cases – the exception being the one held by Conan – such banners also have other motifs, specifically roundels (in four cases) and crosses (also in four); F543 holds a banner with both roundels and crosses. It is therefore possible that these motifs (not the orle) are the significant device. That said, the three gonfanons with such multiple attributes are not identified with named or known individuals, so their significance (or otherwise) is not immediately obvious.

(iv) *Roundels*

Eight gonfanons have roundels; they are associated with both the English (in two cases) and the Normans (in six) and hence are unlikely to be an identifier of national affiliation.

In four cases roundels are associated with named or known individuals, specifically F543, Harold and (on two occasions) William. Whilst four out of eight is a high proportion, it is clear that this device is not used to identify specific individuals. Of note is the fact that when a gonfanon in this category is associated with a named or known individual, the roundels always combined with another motif: in three cases an orle, in two a cross, and in one (the aforementioned F543) both an orle and a cross. The significance of this is unclear, though it is apparent that multiple attributes do help highlight specific individuals.

The numbers of roundels on gonfanons also vary: one (twice), two (once), three (three times) and four (twice). It may be worth remarking that the device of four roundels is associated with named or known individuals – namely William (F392) and F543 – whose banners also have a cross motif: as noted above, the roundels on William's flag (F392) make the field of the banner appear as a cross, whilst those on F543's are depicted in the angles of the cross. One can perhaps conjecture that the Tapestry designer intended the two depictions to represent the same banner in broad terms – though illustrated somewhat differently in detail. On this interpretation the banner would be William's personal standard, rather than that of the person shown as F543.

By contrast, however, the gonfanons of some known or named characters have fewer roundels than those of some unknown and unnamed characters; thus those of Harold (F180: see **Plate 3a**) and William (F404) have two and one respectively, while those of F439, F440 and F451, for example, have three. No convincing explanation for this can be given, thus suggesting the numbers of roundels on gonfanons is (for the most part at least) unmotivated.

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Derek Renn has suggested that Harold's gonfanon (F180), which has two roundels and four tails, is possibly the 'captured (Breton) arms made to look more important'. The basis for this suggestion is uncertain; the Bretons are never associated with gonfanons bearing either attribute.

(v) Plain

Five gonfanons are plain, with no motif. It may be unrealistic to treat a plain flag as a 'design', but in all but one instance (Ship 7) it is associated with the Normans, so it might be tentatively proposed that it did function to some extent as a marker of national affiliation; however the sample size is so small that this must remain very conjectural. There is certainly no reason to believe that plain gonfanons can identify more closely than this, since only one case is associated with a named or known individual: F296, believed to be William.

(vi) Combined motifs

More intriguing is the use of a combination of motifs on the Tapestry's gonfanons, of which there are eleven examples. As already indicated, these include: lines with a cross (one instance); an orle with roundels (three instances); an orle with a cross (three instances); lines with roundels (three instances); and an orle, cross and roundels (one instance). Not included in this category is the gonfanon of F392 which has a design consisting of four roundels, arranged so that the background takes the form of a cross.

Gonfanons with a combination of motifs are associated most frequently – nine times – with the Normans, but in two cases they are borne by the English; so as a class they do not seem to imply national affiliation. It is nonetheless intriguing that the English banners (F180 and F471) both combine roundels with an orle, though the numbers of roundels (two and one, respectively) vary. The third instance of this combination is the Norman gonfanon, held by F404; this however has only one roundel.

Five gonfanons with a combination of motifs are associated with named or known individuals, namely Harold (once), F543 (once) and William (three times), which is proportionally high given that only four other gonfanons are associated with named or known individuals – and two of these (F296 and F392) are questionable associations. The only figure with a combination of three motifs is, as we have already remarked, the enigmatic F543, variously identified as Eustace of Boulogne or Robert of Mortain; the significance of his heavily decorated flag is as uncertain as his identity.

2. *Quadrata*

A roughly square item, perhaps a flag, appears at the mast of Ship 22 (see **Plate 2**); it takes the form of a cross within a border with a smaller cross on top. It is has been suggested that this is either a 'lantern', seemingly described by William of Poitiers,²⁰ or the papal banner.²¹ Since the motif appears to distinguish the ship from the other

²⁰ William, *Gesta Guillelmi*, ii 7 (ed. Davis and Chibnall, pp. 110-1).

²¹ Musset (note 2 above), pp. 196-8.

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vessels in the Norman fleet it has been identified as William's flagship, the *Mora*.²² Though undoubtedly this motif has been used purposefully it is unlikely to be an instance of incipient heraldry.

3. *Semi-circular*

One flag in the Tapestry is semi-circular, and has nine small tails (F421: see **Plate 1b**). On it is depicted a bird (light green in colour), which Derek Renn thought might be the Viking raven, since a similar device is found on coins of Anlaf Curan, ruler of Northumbrian (reigned 941-4).²³ This would seem more likely if the figure holding it were Scandinavian, but he is a Norman – though of course the Normans were of Viking ancestry (through Rollo, the first Norman duke). Unfortunately this flag is not associated with a named individual, so it is not possible to identify it with a specific person from a particular place.

4. *Triangular*

One flag is triangular, and has four square tails (F505); it is plain. Derek Renn (following the Danish archaeologist and historian Worsaae) identified this flag as the *dannebrog* of the Vikings, for no obvious reason apart from the fact the Vikings might have had triangular flags.²⁴ The association of this flag with a particular individual is complicated by the fact it appears that it is being trampled by F505, who (though Norman) is not otherwise known or named.

5. *Wyvern-shaped flags*

Two flags (F585 and F587) – one beige, the other beige and red – are zoomorphic, appearing in the form of a wyvern (a winged, non-avian beast with two feet). A similar motif is found on some of the Tapestry's shields (discussed below). Both flags appear in Scene 57, where Harold (F591 and F593) is killed; they are depicted before and after the join between Sections 8/9. Several commentators have suggested that this banner is the symbol of Wessex,²⁵ though that was reputed to have been a dragon, rather than a wyvern (see appendix). However, the fact that this flag is only associated with the English adds credence to the view it is an Anglo-Saxon emblem.

Neither flag is directly associated with a known/named individual, but their proximity to Harold suggests they might be the king's banner, and are therefore probably being held by his housecarls or leading nobility.

Flags: colour

The colours of the flags in the Tapestry vary considerably and do not seem to have been used by its designer or embroiderers purposefully to indicate national affiliation

²² David M. Wilson, *The Bayeux Tapestry* (London 2004), p. 186.

²³ Renn, 'Burhgeat and gonfanon', p. 191.

²⁴ Renn, *ibid.*

²⁵ N. P. Brooks and H. E. Walker, 'The authority and interpretation of the Bayeux Tapestry', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 1 (1979), pp. 1-34 at 32; Renn, 'Burhgeat and gonfanon', p. 187. Robert Jones, 'What Banner Thine?', pp. 101-2, argues that this banner 'is not only a continuation of the draco standards carried by late Roman cavalry forces' but was to become an emblem of the kings of Britain.

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or particular individuals. Indeed, on some occasions the colours of flags are clearly influenced by design, rather than any other criteria. For example, the colours of the flags of F358 and F359 are reversed, so that that of F358 has a light-blue background with beige tail, whilst that of F359 has a beige background with light-blue tail.

There is a general preference for the backgrounds of flags to show the natural colour of the linen (so in nineteen cases), but red and beige are also used. More colours are exploited for the motifs on flags, where various shades of blue and green join the repertory. These colours (and others) are also found on the tails of flags, as indicated above.

Flags: summary

In general, the Tapestry's flags are not used to identify specific individuals or the places they are associated with. In the case of the types that are quadrate (one instance), semi-circular (one instance), triangular (one instance) and in the form of a wyvern (two instances), the small sample size makes definitive conclusions impossible. The wyvern type may well be associated with Harold, and the quadrate flag on the *Mora* might be there to help in identifying the vessel. Explanations for the semi-circular and triangular flags, however, have yet to be found.

In contrast, some of the gonfanons do seem to have been used in association with particular individuals: specifically, this can be proposed for three of the six gonfanons with crosses, four of the eight with roundels, five of the eleven with orles, and five of the eleven with multiple motifs. But the nature of the association between gonfanon and individual is in general terms and does not involve a particular, fixed design designating an individual. Thus, they cannot be claimed as examples of heraldry (or even incipient heraldry) in any true sense of the word.

So it seems that, with the exception of the quadrate 'flag' on the *Mora* and the two flags in the form of wyverns, which literary sources offer some support for associating with William and Harold respectively, most of the Tapestry's flags do not play anything resembling a heraldic role, and in many cases are purely decorative. However, it is possible that they had a function as part of the visual narrative, drawing attention to – literally 'flagging up' – particular individuals.

B. Shields

There are 241 shields in the Bayeux Tapestry, of which six are round and one is a round-cornered oblong; the remainder are all kite-shaped. Some sort of decoration is seen on 79 of them; this includes crosses, mythical beasts and various geometric motifs, of which circular marks or 'roundels' of various sizes are most common. Since most of the Tapestry's characters hold their shields in their left hand, leaving the sword hand free, it is often the case that the images on them can only be seen when the men carrying them are moving from right to left. There are however exceptions to this rule.

1. Roundels

Roundels (at smaller scales little more than dots) are the most common motif on the Tapestry's shields. They occur on 62 shields, and are the only form of decoration

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on 41 of them. Significantly, roundels appear on the reverse of two shields (held by F358 and F427), so it is reasonable to believe they are intended to be rivets, rather than decoration.

That said, the number of roundels varies from shield to shield, and it is particularly intriguing that the two shields with the most (fourteen and twelve, respectively) are borne by Harold (F591) and William (F176).²⁶

However, for the purpose of this study shields with roundels will not be considered further, thus leaving 38 shields with other forms of decoration.

2. Crosses

After roundels, crosses are the most popular motif on the Tapestry's shields, numbering 29 in total. There are four types: (i) a wavy cross, found on 21 shields; (ii) a single example of a cross nowy; (iii) a cross flory, again represented just once; and (iv) a cross with straight limbs, specific to the round style of shield, seen six times.

(i) Wavy cross

Crosses with curving or wavy limbs appear on the shields of the English (nine times), Normans (seven times) and Bretons (five times), and therefore are not identifiers of national affiliation.

Shields with wavy crosses are not generally associated with named or known individuals. One very uncertain instance is F130, who is sometimes believed to be Wulfnoth or Haakon,²⁷ but the figure is not named in the Tapestry. A clearer case of identity is that of Harold at the moment of his death (F591: see **Plate 5**), who holds a blue shield with a wavy cross and fourteen roundels or dots. As noted in the Appendix, heraldic crosses were associated with Harold later on, but they are a different sort of cross and more numerous, and unlikely to date back into the pre-heraldic period (though the motivation for them may well do). Tempting as it might be to see significance in the ascription of this design to Harold at this critical and dramatic moment of the narrative, the fact is that the frequency of the cross, and this particular form of it, throughout the Tapestry precludes it.

It is also very common for roundels or dots to appear on shields with wavy crosses (sixteen times). They are absent only on the shields of three Bretons (F170, F171, F172) and two Anglo-Saxons (F130 and F570); on Norman shields with wavy-crosses, they are ever-present.

Wavy crosses normally appear on kite-form shields, but one shield (held by F573) is in the form of a round-cornered oblong. Unlike the other wavy crosses this appears to have flory or floretty terminals. Unfortunately the individual bearing the shield is not identified in the inscription.

In eleven cases wavy crosses appear on 'natural' or white backgrounds;²⁸ other backgrounds used are beige (four times), blue, green and red (twice each). The colour

²⁶ In the other instance where Harold has a decorated shield (F430) it has only nine roundels.

²⁷ Michael J. Lewis, *The Real World of the Bayeux Tapestry* (Stroud 2008), p. 25.

²⁸ In all but one instance (F591) the shield has not been embroidered, but uses the white of the linen.

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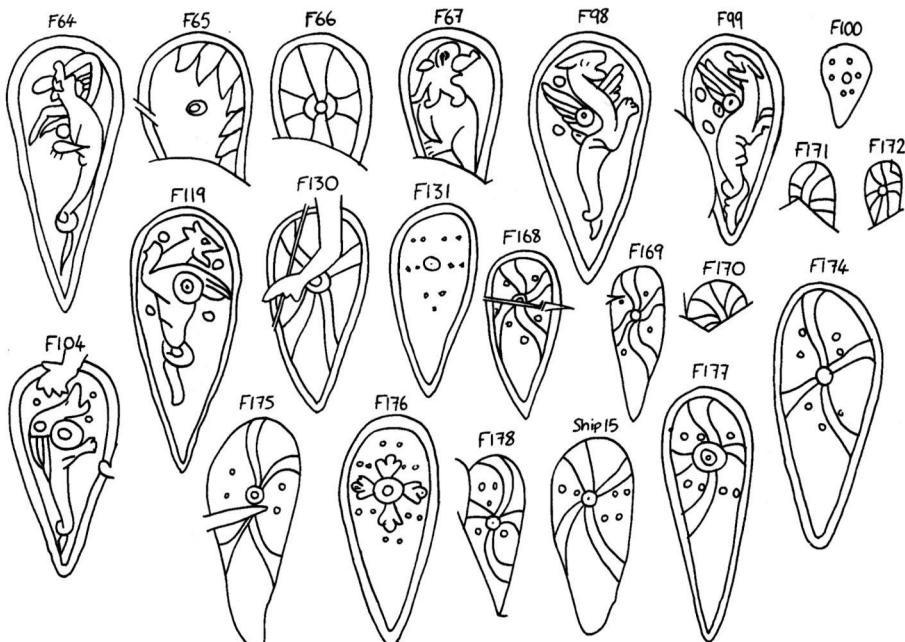


Figure 2
Shields in the Bayeux Tapestry (a)

of the crosses also varies, with sixteen being of mixed colours. The colours used seem to have no obvious significance and are likely to be decorative, as in some cases (see F170, F171, F172) the designer or embroiderer has clearly alternated the colours for aesthetic effect.

(ii) *Nowy cross*

A 'Celtic-style' cross or cross nowy (a cross with a central ring) appears on one of the Tapestry's shields (held by F66). It appears as a beige cross paty with a mid-blue roundel interlacing the limbs where they intersect and surrounding a shield-boss of the same colour. Otherwise the shield is the colour of the natural linen, with a light-green border.

This shield appears as part of a group of four distinct shields, held by F64, F65, F66 and F67, who accompany Guy of Ponthieu when he arrests Harold. Otherwise these individuals are not identified, and therefore there is no reason to regard this motif as associated with a specific person.

(iii) *Flory cross*

A beige flory cross, with a black roundel surrounding the beige shield boss, appears on a natural-coloured shield held by William (F176: see **Plate 4**); this shield also has twelve beige roundels (discussed above) and a dark green border. Significantly, this motif is unique in the Tapestry. It is also the only time that William bears a shield with a design on it. This could well be a case of imagery intended to stand for a specific individual, which might therefore count as incipient heraldry.

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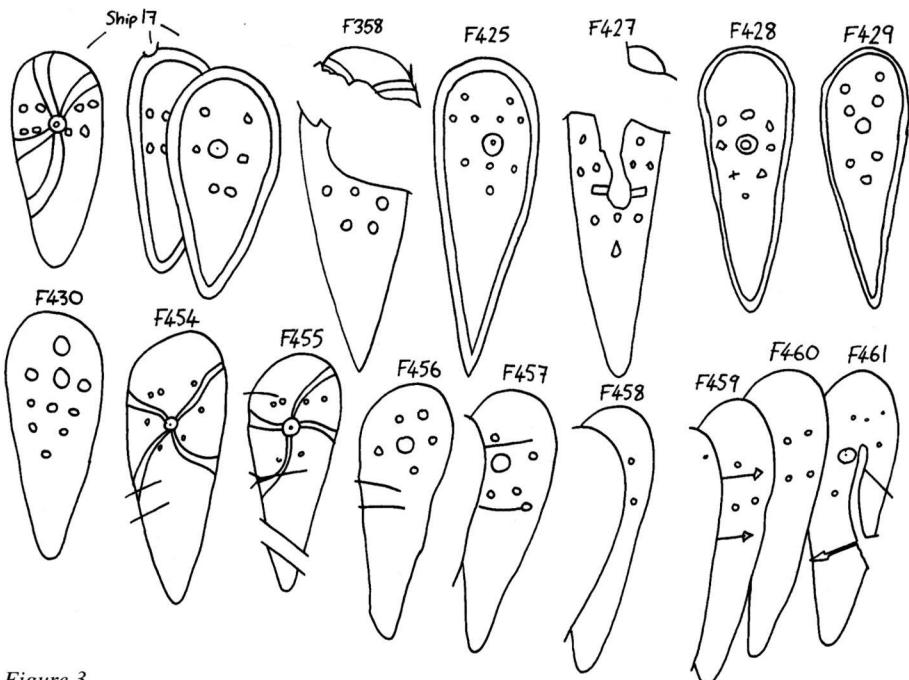


Figure 3
Shields in the Bayeux Tapestry (b)

(iv) *Straight-limbed crosses*

Straight-limbed crosses seem to appear on five or six round shields. Since the shields are shown in profile the full design is never shown; normally only three arms of the cross are visible. These expand from the boss in the middle of the shield to its border rim. In one instance (F587) the colour of the visible horizontal limb is different from the vertical ones, and the embroiderer seems to have misunderstood the vertical arms of the cross as part of its border, making the design as a whole rather difficult to read. Two round shields (F572 and F587) have roundels in addition to their crosses, with two and six visible small dots or studs respectively.

Since these crosses are particular to round shields, and round shields are associated only with Anglo-Saxons,²⁹ it could be suggested that here we have a motif that indicates national affiliation. More likely, it is simply a type of cross determined by the form of the round shield on which it appears: the one round-cornered oblong shield (F573), which is shown face-on, has a wavy cross.

These straight-limbed crosses always appear on natural backgrounds, apart from one instance where the background is dark blue (F587). In four instances the crosses are beige and (dark or light) blue; the other two are yellow and red. Again, the colours do not seem to have any particular significance.

²⁹ Lewis, 'Identity and status', p. 102.

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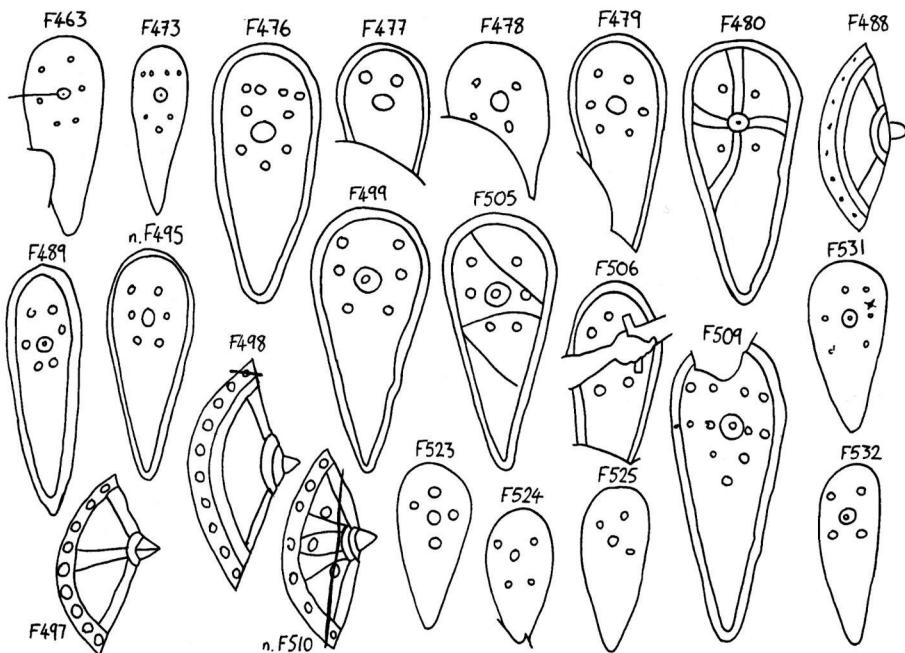


Figure 4
Shields in the Bayeux Tapestry (c)

3. Beasts

Beasts appear on seven kite-shaped shields. Six are often interpreted as dragons though in fact, since they have only hind legs, they are probably better described as wyverns. They all clearly shown with wings, hind legs and a tail that curls; in one instance (F64) the beast bites its wing. All are found on Norman shields, apart from the beast that bites itself, which is carried by one of Guy's men; this shield appears as part of a group associated with the men (F64, F65, F66 and F67: see **Plate 3b**) who accompany Guy of Ponthieu when he arrests Harold.

It is possible that the wyvern motif might have been used purposefully to identify 'Normans', although the shield held by F64 complicates that view, as does the fact that this motif is traditionally (though perhaps incorrectly) identified as the symbol of Wessex (see note 25 above).

All but one of the wyverns appears on shields with natural backgrounds; the exception (F574) is on a dark blue field. The colour of the beasts themselves varies considerably: two are blue, beige and red; one is beige and black; one beige and blue; one the natural colour of the linen and red; and one red. There is no suggestion that the colours have been used with a particular purpose.

There is one other beast depicted on the Tapestry's shields (F67). It is not a wyvern and has a mane, so it could be a lion, though the bottom part of the design is obscured by a horse (Animal 551). This shield is another in the group of four borne by the companions of Guy of Ponthieu (F64-F67). These individuals are not otherwise

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identified, however, and there is no reason to associate this motif with a specific individual. In terms of colour, this shield – a design in dark-green and beige on a natural linen background – uses the same palette as those of the other three shields held by Guy's men. But these colours are used elsewhere on the Tapestry's shields, so it is likely to have been used for aesthetic rather than for any incipient heraldic role.

4. *Triangles*

Besides roundels and crosses, the only geometric motifs to appear on the Tapestry's shields are triangles, and these occur in two radically different ways. First, they appear on a shield held by F65, one of Guy of Ponthieu's companions when he goes to arrest Harold. Seven small triangles of alternating colours (beige and mid-blue) are shown on the inside edge of the shield. Secondly, a single shield in the Tapestry has its (natural linen) background divided into triangular sectors through the use of three lines of beige embroidery (F505). Otherwise, the shield is undistinguishable from plain shields with roundels, for this shield also has six roundels.

Whilst both shield designs are unique in the Tapestry there is nothing to indicate who the persons holding them might be and no clues to help understand their significance.

Shields: summary

Most motifs on shields in the Tapestry are not firmly associated with particular people or even with particular groups, and are therefore unlikely to have any general incipient heraldic character. Certain motifs, such as roundels combined with wavy crosses, crosses with straight limbs and wyverns, do seem to be associated with either the Anglo-Saxons or Normans; the straight-limbed crosses may be dictated by the form of the shield, which is itself clearly a marker of national affiliation. But probably these associations serve narrative (rather than heraldic) purposes.³⁰

Some specific versions or variant forms of motifs, such as twelve or more of roundels on a single shield or the cross flory on William's shield (F176), are associated with named or known individuals, and may have been purposefully chosen for that reason. However, most unique motifs – the two types of triangle design (F65 and F505), the cross nowy (F66) and the maned beast (F67) – are associated with unnamed and unknown individuals; this makes them unlikely to be heraldic. It may be worth noting that three of these unique motifs appear on the shields of Guy of Ponthieu's retinue (F65, F66, F67); the remaining shield (that of F64) has a wyvern. These four shields are the first in the Tapestry to be decorated at all (the only preceding shields being the plain ones seen on Harold's ships as he crosses the Channel); possibly the designer had originally intended to show all the shields carried by figures decorated with elaborate motifs, but revised this plan, perhaps to save time or expense.³¹

Colour is an important feature of the Tapestry – and of heraldry also; but there is no clear indication that the colours on the Tapestry's shields are used purposefully.

³⁰ Lewis, 'Identity and status', pp. 102, 120.

³¹ Lewis, 'Identity and status', p. 119.

'INCIPIENT ARMORY' IN THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY?

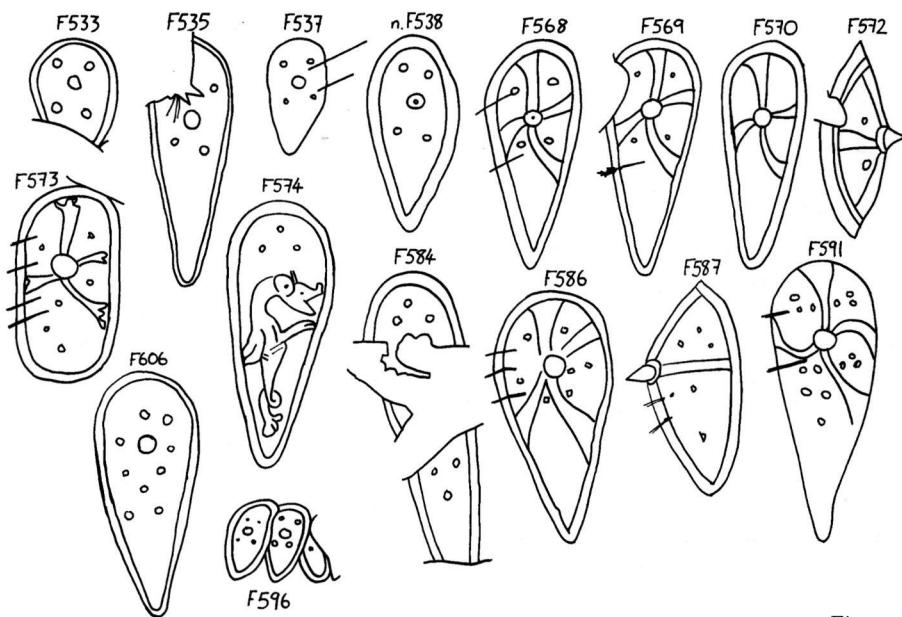


Figure 5
Shields in the Bayeux Tapestry (d)

So a similar conclusion must be drawn to the one reached above in regard to flags: whilst at times the Tapestry does seem to deploy motifs on shields to draw attention to or emphasize the role of individuals, probably for narrative rather than heraldic purposes, most shield motifs in the Tapestry are purely decorative.

* * *

On the remaining pages of this article, tabular summaries are given of the designs on flags and shields in the Bayeux Tapestry, followed by an appendix on the motifs associated with King Harold in the Tapestry, and on heraldry attributed to him in later sources.

Table 1: Summary of designs on flags in the Bayeux Tapestry

<i>Elem.</i>	<i>Nat.</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Design</i>	<i>Field</i>	<i>Motif colour</i>	<i>Tail colour</i>	<i>Identity</i>
F140	N	Gonf (3)	Lines (2) & cross	natural	red (blue)	red & mid-blue (beige)	?William
F162	N	Gonf (3)	Lines (1)	red	blue (dark blue)	red (dark blue)	
F173	B	Gonf (3)	Orle	beige	mid-blue (black & red)	beige & dark blue (red)	Conan
F174	N	Gonf (3)	Orle	natural	red (mid-blue)	mid-blue (red)	
F175	N	Gonf (3)	Orle	natural	dark-blue (red)	red (dark blue)	
F176	N	Gonf (3)	Lines (1)	beige	mid-blue (red)	beige & mid-blue (red)	William
F178	N	Gonf (3)	Orle	beige	light green (red)	red & beige (dark blue)	
F180	AS	Gonf (4)	Orle & 2 roundels	natural	beige & red (red)	beige (red)	Harold
S7	AS	Gonf (3)	None	dark green	-	dark green (beige)	
F296	N	Gonf (3)	None	red	-	mid-blue & beige (red)	?William
FS15	N	Gonf (3)	None	beige	-	beige (red)	
S17	N	Gonf (3)	None	beige	-	bkue (mid-blue)	
F334	N	Gonf (3)	Line (1)	natural	-	red (mid-blue)	
S22	N	Quadrata	Double-cross	natural	beige & mid-blue (red)	-	<i>Mora</i>
S23	N	Gonf (3)	None	red	-	red (beige)	
S24	N	Gonf (3)	?Line (1)	beige	dark blue (red)	beige (red)	
F358	N	Gonf (3)	Line (1)	light blue	-	beige (red)	
F359	N	Gonf (3)	Line (1)	beige	-	light blue (beige)	
F360	N	Gonf (3)	Line (1)	natural	beige (red)	beige & light green (red)	
F387	N	Gonf (3)	Orle & ?cross	natural	red & light green (beige & red)	dark green & blue (dark green & blue)	
F392	N	Gonf (3)	4 roundels (?cross)	natural	beige & light green (red)	beige (dark blue)	?William
F398	N	Gonf (4)	Orle & cross	natural	beige & light blue (red)	light blue (red)	William

<i>Elem.</i>	<i>Nat.</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Design</i>	<i>Field</i>	<i>Motif colour</i>	<i>Tail colour</i>	<i>Identity</i>
F404	N	Gonf (3)	Orle & 1 roundel	natural	beige & light blue (red)	1-bl (r)	William
F420	N	Gonf (5)	Orle & cross	natural	natural & blue (mid- & light green, & red)	natural (light green)	
F421	N	Semi-circle (9)	Bird	natural	light green & blue (red)	natural (red)	
F426	N	Gonf (3)	Lines (2)	beige	red (mid-blue)	beige (mid-blue)	
F432	N	Gonf (3)	Lines (1)	beige	red (black)	beige & light green (red)	
F433	N	Gonf (3)	Hor. lines (3 + 1)	red	mid-green & beige (red)	mid-green (red)	
F435	N	Gonf (3)	Lines (2)	natural	beige & light green (red & light green)	beige (light green)	
F439	N	Gonf (3)	Lines (2) & 3 roundels	natural	red, light green & blue (light green & red)	beige & light green (red)	
F440	N	Gonf (3)	Lines (1) & 3 roundels	mid-green	beige (red)	dark blue & red	
F451	N	Gonf (3)	Lines (1) & 3 roundels	natural	beige (dark blue & red)	red (dark blue)	
F455	AS	Gonf (3)	Lines (2)	beige	red (dark blue & red)	light green (red)	
F471	AS	Gonf (5)	Orle & 1 roundel	natural	red & beige (dark blue)	beige & light blue (red)	
F505	?N	Triangle (4)	None	natural	beige (dark blue)	natural & beige (dark blue)	
F543	N	Gonf (3)	Orle, cross & 4 roundels	natural	beige & dark blue (dark blue)	mid-green & beige (dark blue)	?Eustace/ Robert
F585	AS	Wyvern	None	blue (dark blue)	-	-	
F587	AS	Wyvern	None	red & beige (mid-green)	-	-	

KEY

Elem. = element in the Tapestry with which the flag is associated; *Nat.* = nationality or national affiliation (AS = Anglo-Saxon; B = Breton; N = Norman); *Type* = type of flag with number of tails in brackets (Gonf = gonfanon). Subsidiary colours are noted in brackets.

Table 2: Summary of designs on shields in the Bayeux Tapestry

<i>Elem.</i>	<i>Nat.</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Design</i>	<i>Field</i>	<i>Motif</i>	<i>Border</i>	<i>Other</i>
F64	P	Kite	Dragon/wyvern	natural	red (beige & light beige)	beige (red)	
F65	P	Kite	Triangles	natural	mid-beige & beige (red)	red (light green)	
F66	P	Kite	Cross	natural	mid-blue & beige (red)	light green (red)	
F67	P	Kite	Beast	natural	dark green & beige (red)	red (light green)	
F98	N	Kite	Dragon/wyvern	natural	dark blue, beige & red	beige (red)	
F99	N	Kite	Dragon/wyvern	natural	beige & black	dark blue (beige & red)	
F100	?	Kite	6 roundels	red	mid-blue & beige	mid-blue	lower border
F104	N	Kite	Dragon/wyvern	natural	mid-blue, beige & red	beige (red)	
F119	N	Kite	Dragon/wyvern	natural	dark blue & beige (red)	natural (dark blue & red)	
F130	AS	Kite	Wavy cross	natural	light green & dark blue (red)	red (dark blue & light green)	?Harold's nephew
F131	N	Kite	11 roundels	natural	red & beige	dark green (red & light green)	
F168	B	Kite	Wavy cross & 5 roundels	natural	red (dark green)	beige (red)	
F169	B	Kite	Wavy cross & 4 roundels	dark blue	beige & red	none (red)	
F170	B	Kite	Wavy cross	beige	dark green (red)	none (red)	
F171	B	Kite	Wavy cross	dark green	beige (black & red)	none (red)	
F172	B	Kite	Wavy cross	beige	dark green & beige (red)	none (red)	
F174	N	Kite	Wavy cross & 7 roundels	natural	red & beige (mid-blue)	black (red)	
F175	N	Kite	Wavy cross & 4 roundels	red	mid-blue, beige & red (beige)	none (mid-blue)	
F176	N	Kite	Cross (short) & 12 roundels	natural	beige & black (red)	dark green (red)	William
F177	N	Kite	Wavy cross & 7 roundels	natural	dark green & beige (red)	beige (red)	
F178	N	Kite	Wavy cross & 5 roundels	dark blue	beige & red (dark blue & red)	none (red)	
S15	N	Kite	Wavy cross & 6 roundels	natural	light blue, light green & beige (light blue & red)	none (red)	

<i>Elem.</i>	<i>Nat.</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Design</i>	<i>Field</i>	<i>Motif</i>	<i>Border</i>	<i>Other</i>
S17	N	Kite	Wavy cross & 8 roundels	natural	red & beige (mid-blue & red)	none (red)	
S17	N	Kite	4 roundels	natural	natural (beige)	black (beige)	
S17	N	Kite	6 roundels	natural	light blue & natural (red)	beige (black & red)	
F358	N	Kite	5 roundels	beige	natural (black & red)	none (red)	reverse of shield
F425	N	Kite	10 roundels	red	beige (mid-blue)	beige (red & light green)	
F427	N	Kite	10 roundels	beige	dark blue	none (mid-blue)	reverse of shield
F428	AS	Kite	8 roundels	beige	mid-blue (red)	natural (red)	
F429	AS	Kite	7 roundels	red	light green & natural (mid-blue)	natural (light green & red)	
F430	AS	Kite	9 roundels	red	beige & light green (dark blue & beige)	none (light green)	Harold
F454	AS	Kite	Wavy cross & 6 roundels	light green	natural & beige (red)	none (beige)	
F455	AS	Kite	Wavy cross & 6 roundels	beige	natural (red)	none (red)	
F456	AS	Kite	5 roundels	red	natural & beige (light green & dark blue)	none (dark blue)	
F457	AS	Kite	5 roundels	dark blue	natural & beige (red)	none (red)	
F458	AS	Kite	2 roundels	beige	natural (red)	none (red)	
F459	AS	Kite	3 roundels	dark blue	natural (red)	none (red)	
F460	AS	Kite	4 roundels	beige	natural (dark blue)	none (dark blue)	
F461	AS	Kite	4 roundels	dark green	natural & red (dark blue & red)	none (red)	
F463	AS	Kite	5 roundels	red	dark blue & beige (dark blue)	none (dark blue)	
F473	?	Kite	7 roundels	beige	natural & light green (red)	none (red)	dead (lower border)

Table 2 continues over.

KEY

Elem. = element in the Tapestry with which the shield is associated; *Nat.* = nationality or national affiliation (AS = Anglo-Saxon; B = Breton; N = Norman; P = associated with Guy of Ponthieu); Subsidiary colours are noted in brackets.

Table 2 continued

<i>Elem.</i>	<i>Nat.</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Design</i>	<i>Field</i>	<i>Motif</i>	<i>Border</i>	<i>Other</i>
F476	N	Kite	9 roundels	natural	dark green (red)	beige (dark blue & red)	
F477	N	Kite	2 roundels	dark green	beige (dark blue)	natural (dark blue & red)	
F478	N	Kite	4 roundels	beige	red (dark blue)	natural (dark blue)	
F479	N	Kite	6 roundels	red	beige & natural (dark blue & light green)	natural (beige & dark blue)	
F480	N	Kite	Wavy cross & 4 roundels	natural	red, beige & dark green (red & light green)	dark blue (red)	
F488	AS	Round	Cross	natural	beige & dark blue (dark blue)	beige (dark blue, red & light green)	dead (lower border)
F489	?	Kite	6 roundels	natural	red (dark blue)	red (dark blue & light green)	dead (lower border)
near F495	?	Kite	6 roundels	beige	natural (dark blue)	natural (dark blue & mid-blue)	dead (lower border)
F497	AS	Round	Cross	natural	beige & light blue (dark blue, red & light blue)	natural & beige (dark blue & light green)	
F498	AS	Round	Cross	natural	beige & light blue (dark blue & red)	natural & beige (dark blue & red)	?Gyrth
F499	N	Kite	6 roundels	natural	light blue & red (light blue, red & dark blue)	beige (dark blue & red)	
F505	N	Kite	6 roundels & triangular lines	natural	dark blue & beige (red)	red (dark blue)	
F506	N	Kite	4 roundels	red	beige (dark blue)	natural (dark blue & light green)	
near F510	AS	Round	Cross	natural	dark blue & beige (dark blue & red)	beige (dark blue & mid-blue)	dead (lower border)
F509	N	Kite	11 roundels	natural	dark blue, natural & beige (red, dark blue & beige)	red (dark blue)	
F523	AS	Kite	4 roundels	dark green	red (dark blue)	none (red)	
F524	AS	Kite	4 roundels	dark blue	beige (red & beige)	none (red)	

<i>Elem.</i>	<i>Nat.</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Design</i>	<i>Field</i>	<i>Motif</i>	<i>Border</i>	<i>Other</i>
F525	AS	Kite	3 roundels	red	natural (light blue)	none (light blue)	
F531	?	Kite	4 roundels	beige	dark blue & red (dark blue & red)	none (red)	dead (lower border)
F532	?	Kite	4 roundels	natural	white & beige (red)	none (orange)	dead (lower border)
F533	N	Kite	4 roundels	beige	dark blue & natural (red & dark blue)	red (dark blue)	
F535	N	Kite	3 roundels	red	yellow	dark blue	
F537	?	Kite	4 roundels	natural	dark blue (beige)	none (white)	lower border
near F538	?	Kite	4 roundels	natural	light red & natural (white & mid-blue)	red (mid-blue)	dead (lower border)
F568	AS	Kite	Wavy cross & 4 roundels	natural	beige, dark blue & natural (dark blue & red)	dark blue (red)	
F569	AS	Kite	Wavy cross & 4 roundels	natural	yellow & dark green (dark blue & light green)	yellow (light green)	
F570	AS	Kite	Wavy cross	red	natural & beige (dark blue)	beige (dark blue & red)	
F572	AS	Round	Cross & 2 roundels	natural	yellow & red (light green)	yellow (red & white)	dead (lower border)
F573	AS	Oblong	Wavy cross & 6 roundels	beige	natural, dark blue & dark green (red)	dark green (red)	diff. cross
F574	N	Kite	Dragon/wyvern & 3 roundels	dark blue	natural & red (dark blue & yellow)	beige (red)	
F584	N	Kite	3 roundels	mid-blue	yellow	beige (red)	
F586	AS	Kite	Wavy cross & 7 roundels	natural	yellow & dark blue (dark blue)	beige (dark blue)	
F587	AS	Round	Cross & 6 roundels	dark blue	yellow, beige & red (red, dark blue & beige)	red (beige & dark blue)	
F591	AS	Kite	Wavy cross & 14 roundels	white	yellow, red & dark blue (dark blue & light green)	none (red & yellow)	Harold
F596	?	Kite	4 roundels	natural	natural (beige)	natural (red)	lower border
F596	?	Kite	4 roundels	natural	natural & red (red)	natural (white)	lower border
F596	?	Kite	1 roundel	natural	natural & dark blue	natural (beige)	lower border
F606	N	Kite	9 roundels	red	beige, dark blue, white & red (dark blue)	natural (red & white)	

Appendix: The Arms of Harold Godwinson

The Bayeux Tapestry shows Harold Godwinson bearing a decorated shield on at least one occasion, and also associates him with various banners or flags. In the later heraldic tradition coats of arms are ascribed or attributed to him. This appendix collects the material.³²

A. Bayeux Tapestry

(i) Flags

The only time Harold himself holds a flag is in Scene 21 (see **Plate 3a**), captioned HIC WILLELM(VS) DEDIT HAROLDO ARMA and showing William (F179) giving arms to Harold (F180): many scholars, including Charles Gibbs-Smith, have suggested that the giving of arms implies that Harold became William's vassal.³³ The flag held by Harold is a gonfanon with four tails and a design consisting of two red roundels within a beige orle. As discussed above, this motif is not peculiar to Harold: the orle is a widespread element, though the number of roundels within varies.

Also probably associated with Harold are the two wyvern banners held by F585 and F587 – one beige, the other beige and red;³⁴ the men holding them may be his housecarls.³⁵ It is generally believed that this banner is the standard of Wessex. Describing the Battle of 'Beorhford' in 752 Henry of Huntingdon says that the emblem, banner or standard of the king of Wessex was a 'golden dragon' (*regis insigne draconem scilicet aureum*); significantly it was carried not by the king, but one of his thegns – Aethelhun, ealdorman of Wessex – as seems to be the case in the Bayeux Tapestry. Further, at Ashingdon (1016), the same author reports that King Edmund 'left his royal position, which was customarily between the dragon [*draconem*] and the sign which is called the 'Standard' [*insigne quod vocatur standard*]...'.³⁶ Although Diana Greenaway says that here Henry 'draws a distinction between the *draco*, the banner of Wessex, and the 'Standard', the king's personal ensign',³⁷ this is an assumption based on the fact that the dragon was the emblem of Wessex at 'Beorhford' – two and a half centuries earlier. Furthermore the banner in the Tapestry is not in fact a dragon, but the aforementioned wyvern.

It might even be the case that the dragon or wyvern was not Harold's personal standard. William of Poitiers states that his 'personal' banner showed 'the image of an

³² I am grateful for the assistance of Clive Cheesman in the preparation of this appendix, particularly sections B (iii) and (iv).

³³ Charles H. Gibbs-Smith, *The Bayeux Tapestry* (London, 1973), p. 11.

³⁴ Jones, 'Identifying the warrior', p. 156, stated that 'the draco standard' is 'the only banner [in the Bayeux Tapestry] that we can clearly identify as belonging to a particular individual'.

³⁵ Brooks and Walker, 'Authority and Interpretation', p. 32, believed that the Tapestry shows the same standard twice, whilst H. E. J. Cowdrey, 'Towards an interpretation of the Bayeux Tapestry', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 10 (1988), pp. 49-65 at 59-60, noting the dropped banner is shown before the raised one, implies the dropped banner has been picked up, rather than the other-way around: though the Tapestry does show events in both directions.

³⁶ Diana Greenaway (ed. and trans.), *Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, Historia Anglorum* (Oxford, 1996), iv 19 (pp. 242-3) and vi 13 (pp. 358-9).

³⁷ Greenaway, *Historia Anglorum*, pp. 358-9.

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armed warrior...woven in pure gold' (*memorabile quoque vexillum Heraldi, armati hominis imaginem intextam habens ex auro purissimo*).³⁸ Robert Jones makes the interesting point that since the writer describes this banner as 'famous' this implies it was regularly flown;³⁹ a regularly flown banner with an unchanging image is, at the very least, on the road to becoming heraldry. However, in no other source is Harold's banner described as having this design.

(ii) *Shields*

Only twice in the Bayeux Tapestry does Harold bear a shield with markings on it. Both are kite shaped. The first (F430) is embellished only with nine roundels, which are believed to represent rivets (see above), so will not be considered further here. The second (F591) has upon it a wavy cross with fourteen roundels. It has already been noted that wavy crosses are not in themselves identifiers of particular armies or individuals as they appear on 21 shields, of which nine are borne by Englishmen, seven by Normans and five by Bretons. Likewise it is common for shields with this motif to have roundels too – sixteen cases are seen in the Tapestry. So, although the shield with a wavy cross and fourteen roundels is unique to Harold, and in spite of the later association of heraldic crosses with him (see below), it does not seem likely that either of the shields associated with him in the Tapestry has a heraldic function.

B. *Later manuscript sources*

From the middle of the thirteenth century, arms are attributed to Harold in a variety of manuscript sources, both illuminated chronicles and (later) rolls of arms.

(i) *Matthew Paris*

The earliest known manuscript depictions of arms attributed to Harold appear in works by the chronicler Matthew Paris: the *Chronica Majora* (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Ms 26) and the *Historia Anglorum* (BL Ms Royal 14, C.vii).

The *Chronica Majora* were produced at St Albans in c.1240-53, and show Harold's arms twice:⁴⁰ at the foot of page 172 (fo. 86v) is depicted a shield (suspended from a nail) and to its right a closed crown; below the crown is the inscription *scutum et corona Regis Haroldi sibi Regnum usurpantis* ('the shield and crown of King Harold who usurped the kingdom'). The arms on the shield are *Azure a lion rampant or*. The tinctures, interestingly, are those widely used for other late Anglo-Saxon kings.

On page 174 (fo. 87v) Harold's arms are again shown (the inscription here reads *scutum Haroldi Regis*) but are slightly different: *Azure a cross moline sable and over all a lion rampant or*. Significantly, the arms are inverted, as is Harold's crown, and Suzanne Lewis reasonably believed the cross moline had been inserted behind the lion to 'symbolise the end of the Anglo-Saxon line'.⁴¹ Matthew Paris did not recognise the kingship (admittedly brief) of Edgar Ætheling (1066), who was chosen king

³⁸ *Gesta Guillelmi* ii 31 (tr. Davis and Chibnall, p. 153).

³⁹ Jones, 'Identifying the warrior', p. 157.

⁴⁰ T. D. Tremlett, in *Rolls of Arms. Henry III* (Aspilogia 1, London 1967), pp. 57-8, nos 1-2.

⁴¹ Suzanne Lewis, *The Art of Matthew Paris in the Chronica Majora* (Los Angeles and London 1987), p. 176. Cf. Tremlett, loc. cit: 'probably a sign of mourning'.

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upon Harold's death by the citizens of London. Lewis also noted that the lion on both shields is not found outside the works of Matthew Paris', and presumed also that these arms are therefore his invention.⁴² Adjacent to Harold's arms are those Matthew Paris ascribes to William – *Gules three lions passant guardant in pale or* – the later royal arms of England not recorded in use before 1195.

Similar arms – *Azure a lion rampant queue-fourchée or* – on an inverted shield above a reversed open crown are found on fo. 10 of the *Historia Anglorum*, which was produced in c. 1250-59.⁴³ Here, Suzanne Lewis notes that the chronicler 'experimented in positioning the painted shields... first, he apparently decided to insert a small representation of William the Conqueror's arms into the initial A, but then pasted it over with a new piece of vellum bearing a floriated initial and placed Harold's inverted shield between the text columns, while moving William's upright coat of arms to the outer margin'.⁴⁴ The fact that here a forked tail has replaced the cross moline of the *Chronica Majora* as a difference applied to the basic arms of a gold lion on a blue field supports Lewis' suggestion that the arms are Matthew's invention.

(ii) *The Life of Edward the Confessor*

Quite possibly by Matthew Paris, with whose works it bears close similarities, a thirteenth-century verse account of Edward the Confessor, based on a twelfth-century *Life* by Aelred of Rievaulx, survives in one copy only: the strikingly illuminated Cambridge University Library Ms Ee. 3.59, dating to c. 1250-60, though the text it contains must have been composed in the later 1230s or early 1240s.⁴⁵ Harold appears nine times, on eight of its 37 folios; his last appearance is at the moment of death, in a gloriously complex and intricate drawing of the culminating moments of the battle of Hastings (fo. 34v). Falling from his horse amid the *melée* and clutching at the arrow in his eye, he wears a mailed suit, with white surcoat, decorated with thin blue stripes. He is not helmeted, but wears a crown, and is armed with a sword and a shield depicting the arms *Gules a bird displayed sable*. Proposals have been made to interpret the bird as a raven, perhaps reflecting Harold's Danish ancestry.⁴⁶ The text beneath the battle scene contains the following lines:

The king struck in the eye with a dart
Falls and soon is in evil case,
Perished, slain and mangled,
And his standard is beaten down,
And the English host conquered.⁴⁷

There are, however, several standards or banners in the illustration and none of them seems to relate very closely to Harold, though one does bear the design *Azure a cross*

⁴² Matthew Paris, loc. cit.

⁴³ op. cit. p. 459.

⁴⁴ op. cit. p. 493, n. 66.

⁴⁵ The manuscript is reproduced online in full at cudl.lib.cam.ac.uk/view/MS-EE-00003-00059/1, with detailed discussion and bibliography.

⁴⁶ Tremlett, op. cit. p. 85 no 29 (p), interprets the bird as an eagle.

⁴⁷ Lines 4608-12 in the translation by H. R. Luard, *Lives of Edward the Confessor* (London 1858), p. 309.

'INCIPIENT ARMORY' IN THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY?

argent between four roundels gules, which has a distinct feel of the 'incipient armory' of the Bayeux Tapestry about it; but traces of the same design can be detected on a shield nearby, carried by someone who is not Harold.

(iii) *The Waltham Abbey Vita Haroldi*

BL Ms Harley 3776, the so-called *Codex ruber* or Waltham Abbey Miscellany, produced in the south-east of England (and probably at Waltham Abbey) between 1345 and c.1375, has on folios 1 to 24v a Latin *vita* of Harold;⁴⁸ at the foot of fo. 1r, a rather crude drawing in red ink shows a figure generally taken to be intended as an illustration of Harold.⁴⁹ It may be a slightly later addition, though the red ink makes it seem of a piece with the simple and slight marginal decoration, and it may in fact be contemporary. The king is shown in mail with a purple surcoat and a helm with tri-foliate crown. He has a sword belted around his waist. In one hand he holds a triangular shield and the other a banner: the arms on both shield and banner are untinctured and appear to show a fess between four crosslets; on the shield the crosses are distributed three in chief and one in base, while on the banner they are shown two and two. Markedly different from the earlier arms ascribed to Harold, this design looks forward to those found in later rolls of arms (below, (iv)), and needs to be seen in the context of the king's association with Waltham Abbey.

Later an Augustinian priory, at the time of the Norman Conquest Waltham was firmly in the patronage of Harold Godwinson who had refounded it as a college of secular canons before becoming king, and treated it, and its holy cross, which had reputedly cured him of paralysis in childhood, as his 'particular locus of benefaction'.⁵⁰ Waltham had various geographic attractions as a centre for a powerful earl with his eye on London and the throne, but there were serious devotional motives for the patronage, and the cult of the Holy Cross, with which the Abbey was particularly associated, was a popular one throughout Anglo-Scandinavian aristocratic circles. Harold is said to have been buried at Waltham after Hastings, and though this report derives from the Abbey's own chronicle (fos 43-62v in the same manuscript that contains the *Vita*), the only vaguely creditable alternative account has him entombed under a cairn at the coast by the victors, which seems much less likely; and it should be remembered that possession of the body of a king regarded by the Normans as a perjured usurper was not necessarily something to shout about. It certainly seems that a politically rather sensitive cult had grown up around Harold at Waltham by the reign of Henry II, and it has been suggested that this was one of the motives for the version of his fate given in the *Vita*, which has him surviving Hastings, adopting the name 'Christian', travelling abroad as a pilgrim and eventually dying as an obscure hermit near Chester; such a tale, it is argued, would draw unwelcome attention away from Waltham as his final resting place.

⁴⁸ Ed. and trans. by W. de G. Birch, *Vita Haroldi. The Romance of the Life of Harold, King of England* (London 1885).

⁴⁹ See www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IlliID=21865 for a full reproduction.

⁵⁰ R. Fleming, 'Harold II (1022/3?–1066)', *Oxford DNB* vol. 25, pp. 356-62 at 358-60.

THE COAT OF ARMS

However, the strength of the association between Harold, Waltham and the cult of the Cross did not diminish, with stories of the rood bowing down to him as he marched to Hastings, and the English using ‘Holy Cross’ as their rallying cry during the battle. It is tempting to imagine that this shared iconography dates back to Harold’s own life: among the gifts he showered on Waltham were relics and manuscripts, many lavishly illuminated. It would not be improbable for certain features from the imagery of this ritual relationship to solidify into a repertoire of devices or emblems for the donor and his beneficiary. However we have no contemporary record of this at all, and the hypothesis is strictly unnecessary to explain the fact that when a coat of arms is ascribed to Harold in the *Waltham Vita*, it should use the cross as its most prominent element, or that this should be picked up in later versions of the arms.

(iv) *Rolls of royal arms (c. 1380 onwards)*

As Suzanne Lewis has noted, rolls of arms from the later medieval period tend to give Harold some version of the basic design two bars between six lion’s faces.⁵¹ But in several cases the field includes crosses or crosslets, perhaps deriving directly or indirectly from the association between Harold and Waltham Abbey. The following selection of references is mostly from *DBA* 1; there will be many other late medieval and early modern sources where arms like these are attributed to Harold.

- *Gules two bars between six lion’s faces (3, 2 and 1) or.* William Jenyns’s Ordinary (CA Ms; c. 1380), no. 808: ‘King Haraulde’.
- *Gules two bars and six lion’s faces in orle or.* Heralds’ Roll, Fitzwilliam Version (Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Mus. Ms 297, 15th century), no. 19: ‘le Roy Harold’.
- *Gules two bars between six lion’s faces (2, 2 and 2) or.* Wriothesley’s Fesses & Bars (in CA Ms Vincent 152, *temp.* Henry VIII with additions c.1580), no. 313: ‘King Harold’.
- *Gules semy of cross crosslets two bars between six lion’s faces (3, 2 and 1) all or.* Segar’s Roll of the Kings of England (CA Ms L14, fo. 375r, early 17th century): ‘Harold 2dus the usurper’.
- *Gules semy of cross crosslets argent two bars between six lion’s faces or.* Randle Holme’s Book (BL, Harl. Ms 2169, c. 1460): ‘Kynge Haralde’.⁵²
- *Gules semy of cross crosslets or two bars azure fimbriated or between six lion’s faces (2, 2 and 2) or.* Letter H Roll (in Soc. Ant. Ms 476: c.1540), no 476: ‘K. Harold’. Also CA Ms B18, fo 7v (16th-century miscellany), fo. 7v: ‘Kynge Harald son to erle godwyn’; bars apparently originally *or* and cotised, altered to *azure fimbriated or*.
- *Gules semy of couped crosses or two bars azure fimbriated or between six lion’s faces (3, 2 and 1) or.* Kings of Britain Roll (*temp.* Henry VI; in CA Ms Vincent 170), no 223: ‘K. Harolde’.

⁵¹ Lewis, *Matthew Paris*, p. 493.

⁵² *The Ancestor* 9 (1904), p. 167.

PLATE 1



Images by courtesy of the City of Bayeux

Above (a), Bayeux Tapestry: Figure 543 (on right, variously identified as Eustace of Boulogne and Robert of Mortain), holding gonfanon, points at Duke William who raises helmet. *See pages 4-5.*

Below (b), Bayeux Tapestry: Figure 421, with semi-circular flag. *See page 8.*



PLATE 2

Image by courtesy of the City of Bayeux



Bayeux Tapestry: Ship 22 (possibly Duke William's flagship, the *Mora*).
See pages 7-8.

PLATE 3



Images by courtesy of the City of Bayeux

Above (a), Bayeux Tapestry: Duke William (Figure 179, on left) bestows arms on Harold (Figure 180, on right), holding gonfanon. *See pages 6-7, 22.*

Below (b), Bayeux Tapestry: four armed horsemen (Figures 64-67) accompany Guy of Ponthieu to arrest Harold. *See pages 13-14.*

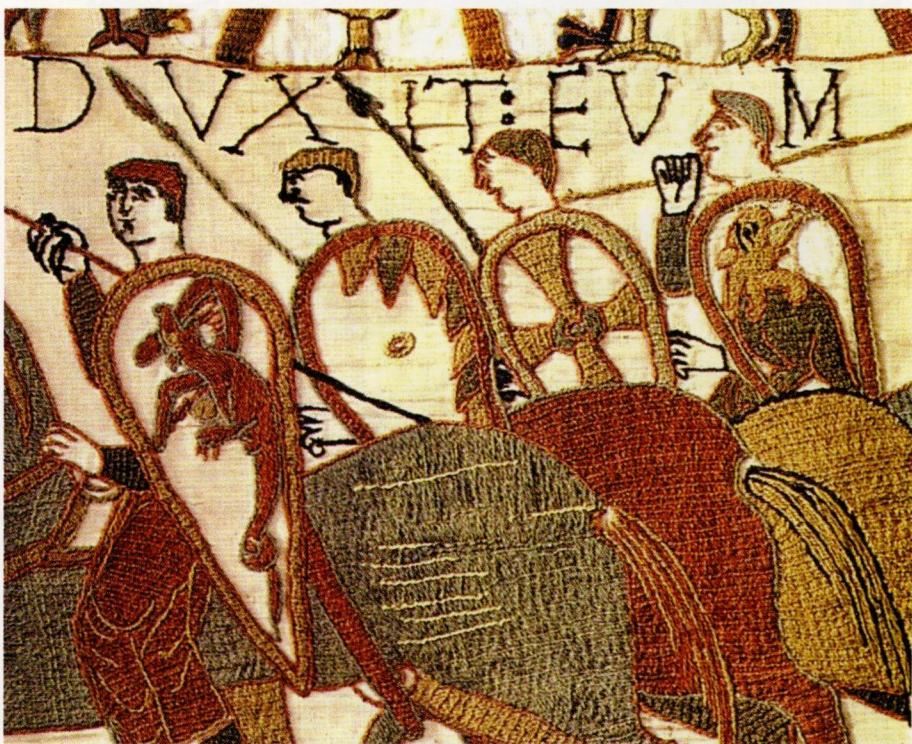


PLATE 4



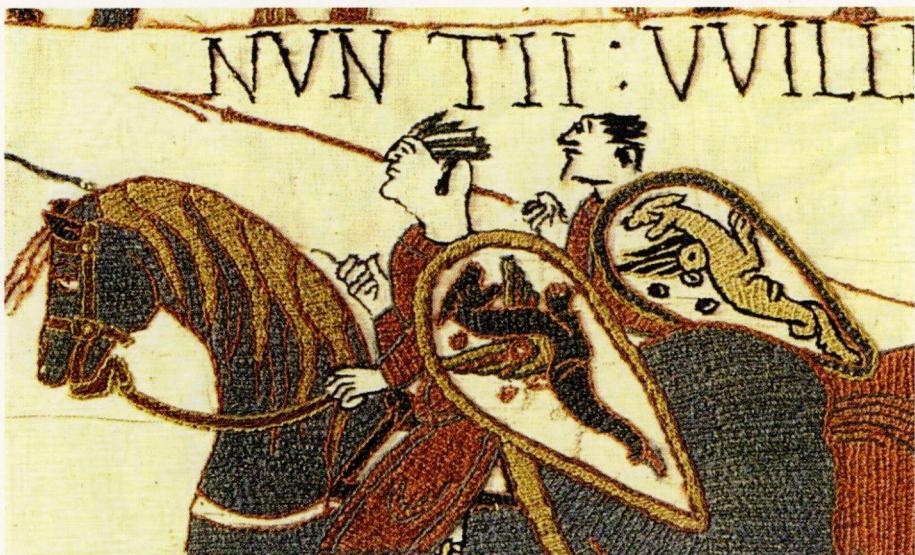
Bayeux Tapestry: at the end of the siege of Dinan, the surrendering Duke Conan (Figure 173) passes the keys of the town to Duke William (Figure 176), on the end of a lance. See pages 6, 11.

Image by courtesy of the City of Bayeux



Bayeux Tapestry: the death of Harold (Figure 591). See page 10.

PLATE 6



Images by courtesy of the City of Bayeux

Above (a), Bayeux Tapestry: two messengers sent by Duke William (Figures 98 and 99) to order the apprehension of Harold.

Below (b), Bayeux Tapestry: Figure 498 (possibly Harold's brother Gyrth) and Figure 499 engage at the Battle of Hastings.

