**The Bayeux Tapestry**

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Newberry Library

Syllabus

Susanne Dumbleton, PhD

 <http://www.susannedumbleton.com>

*“The Bayeux Tapestry is one of the supreme achievements of the Norman Romanesque…. Its survival almost intact over nine centuries is little short of miraculous… Its exceptional length, the harmony and freshness of its colours, its exquisite workmanship, and the genius of the guiding spirit combine to make it endlessly fascinating.”*

Sylvette Lemagnen, conservator of the tapestry, in 2005.

The beautiful designed, meticulously crafted artifact known as the Bayeux Tapestry is as personally touching as it is historically and culturally valuable. Its 64.38 centimeters of linen panels, on which women whose identity will never be known meticulously stitched images and words, render in stunning detail an event that changed the history of western Europe—the Battle of Hastings, October 14, 1066. That event inextricably wove the futures of the Norman French and the Anglo Saxons into a new relationship. Though often in conflict, they would together weave a new language (English), a new way of organizing (shared governance), and an expanded sense of the continent of Europe—with the British Isles no longer apart.

In this two-session virtual seminar, we will review events leading up to the Battle, meet the principals involved, view the encounters, note the observations and assess the outcomes. Armed with that background, we will trace events in the panels, simultaneously enjoying the artistry of the designer and sewers.

Using handsomely digitized images of the scenes and persons, we will engage in some of the debate about the origins of the panels and the various uses they have played over the more than nine and a half centuries since their creation.

The goal is to gain an understanding of the events depicted, an appreciation of the tapestry’s artistic and narrative merit, and an awareness of its significance to the historical record.

**FIRST MEETING: HISTORY AND ARTISTRY**

1. **History IN the Tapestry**
* Overall Context: The “Dark Ages” or Early Medieval Period
* Immediate Lead-up to the Battle--1064-1066
	+ Monarchy and Succession
	+ Religion and Succession
	+ Relationships among royal families
		- King Edward (the Confessor) without “issue”
		- Duke Harold (brother-in-law)
		- Duke William (first cousin once removed)
* Warfare in the Middle Ages
* Impact of the Norman Conquest
1. **History OF the Tapestry**
* Probable Date of Completion (July 14, 1077)
* Probable Dates of Display (St. John’s Day-July 14)
* Crises over the centuries and ingenius / heroic actions
1. **Artistry**
* Overall Design
	+ Concept, motion, color
	+ Process specificity vs autonomy (stitchers)
* As Viewed
	+ As hung in cathedral–maybe ambulatory or side aisle or ?
	+ As now displayed in museum (opened in 1983)
	+ As available as Scrollable Tapestry
* In Detail
	+ Dimensions; Divisions; Composition; Content; Differentiations
* Aesthetic

Romanesque *“…the tapestry rigidly avoids anything which might distract it from its purpose, eschewing anecdote and embellishment, the merely pious and the merely poetic alike. In common with the great Romanesque masterpieces built soon after the Conquest, it achieves its effects by the most direct of methods,”* Musset, 33.

* + - blend of simplicity and sophistication
		- variety (density and lightness)
		- proportion (compression of complex narrative)
		- colors
		- scope
		- overall aesthetic impact
1. **Importance of the Tapestry as History**

**SECOND SESSION: “WALK AROUND”**

1. **The Tapestry as Narrative**
* “Narrative Elements” (Plot, Characters, Setting, Language, Tone, Theme)
* Narrative techniques: Clustering; Leaping and Lingering; Major Moments
* Specific language: The Captions

*“The writing explains the images and subjects so that anyone who can read can understand them… in fact, one reads these cloths.”* Boudry de Bourguile (Musset, 39).

1. **Overall Importance of the Tapestry**

**VI. Further Reading and viewing**

* Bouet, Piere and Francois Neveux. *The Bayeux Tapestry.* Editions Ouest-France, 2015.
* Musset, Lucien. *The Bayeux Tapestry*, Tr. R. Rex. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005.
* Wilson, David MacKenzie. *The Bayeux Tapestry*. London. Thames and Hudson, 2005.
* Comprehensive bibliography with excellent links:

 <http://users.clas.ufl.edu/burt/middleagesonfilm/bayeux1.html>

* Image of tapestry as hung in cathedral:

<http://holythequest.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/img_0398.jpg>

* Scrollable tapestry: <http://www.bayeux-tapestry.org.uk>
* Animation (4 min): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtGoBZ4D4_E>
* Graphic rendering of battle (11 Min) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FW4RKp23Z4M>