SOCIAL HISTORY AND FALSE FRIENDS: FROM ANGLO-SAXON WILLS TO THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY VIA MATERIAL CULTURE[1]

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Born in 1901, Dorothy Whitelock had a long and fruitful career. Her first book, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, was published in 1930.[2] She retired in 1969 but continued to produce a steady stream of publications. Like a balloon scheme, her CV swells in her final years, with two volumes in 1980 and 1981 republishing most of her papers from four decades, and the co-edited *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes* appearing in 1982,[3] the year of her death. I never met her, but I feel as if she has stood at my shoulder throughout my career, from undergraduate to teacher and author. In re-reading some of her work in preparation for this lecture, I recognise how much she influenced my own teaching and openness to interdisciplinary research.

In her book *The Audience of Beowulf*, which is a collection of three lectures given in 1950, she explains that she does not 'wish to use the poem merely as a quarry for social history' but to 'use the poem of *Beowulf* to elucidate the poem of *Beowulf*.'[4] Nevertheless she had a talent for *seeing* social history and making it available to others, by editing and providing translations of texts including The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Anglo-Saxon wills and the many documents included in the monumental *English Historical Documents* and that beautifully clear distillation of knowledge which is the classic *The Beginnings of English Society*.[5] Published in 1952, this modestly-sized and -priced paperback is essentially an accessible, unintimidating read. Here, up-to-date archaeological material was smoothly integrated with information from literary and non-literary texts in an interdisciplinary approach that must have been innovative for its time.

With encouragement like this, and Rosemary Cramp's seminal article 'Beowulf and Archaeology' published in the first volume of *Medieval Archaeology*, in 1957, it became common to include a lecture on 'Beowulf and Archaeology' in undergraduate Old English courses in this country; and indeed I have often shared it with foreign audiences unfamiliar with that material and that approach, using not just the well-known Sutton Hoo Ship Burial but also other English and Scandinavian archaeological material. Key points included the fact and materials of ship

[1] The original lecture was illustrated by 31 slides. For practical reasons, illustrations here are confined to the Bayeux Tapestry. I have referenced images for other artefacts mentioned, but some British Library manuscripts cited are not available in digitized form at the time of writing, following a cyber-attack in 2023. All digitized citations were accessed on 25 February 2025.

[2] By Cambridge University Press.

[3] Edited by D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick and D. N. Dumville, published by Cambridge University Press.

[4] Published by Oxford, Clarendon Press, in 1951, quotation from p. 3.

[5] Respectively *English Historical Documents* c. *500–1042*, English Historical Documents vol. I (London, 1955); and *The Beginnings of English Society*, History of England vol. II (Harmondsworth, 1952).

burial;[6] examples of weapons and armour corresponding to details in the poem;[7] evidence of the realities of the 'joys of the hall', such as drinking vessels and musical instruments;[8] and above all, gold,[9] and with it the recognition that the gold which is celebrated by poets did exist in abundance, at least among the elite in the late sixth and seventh centuries.

Correspondences like this can lead to the illusions that Old English texts other than *Beowulf* can equally be illuminated by evidence of material culture (they cannot) and that the archaeological richness of the sixth to seventh centuries continues through the rest of the Anglo-Saxon period. It does not, for the simple reason that the majority of our archaeological finds come from furnished burials dating to a period when the dead were provided with grave-goods. That practice largely died out in England in the seventh century, with just a few isolated later cases. Mid- and late Saxon physical remains of artefacts, whether they be from occupation sites, metal detector discoveries or other stray finds, just do not have the context or quantity of the pre- and early Christian cemetery evidence. Nor can we take it for granted that the material culture of the tenth and eleventh centuries, the dates from which much of our written evidence and our illustrated (as opposed to purely illuminated) manuscripts derive, was exactly like that of the sixth and seventh. In other words, we must not make glib equations between text and material culture.

However, material culture can be a rich source of information on social history, and, in recent times, the Bayeux Tapestry has been seen as a convenient and supposedly reliable source of information about eleventh-century English and Norman life. Certainly, it contains material that informs social history, and in some cases reaffirms material from the wills, but it does much more with that material than simply reflect everyday life.

This enormous embroidery was almost certainly designed and drawn in Canterbury and probably stitched in southern England. As a narrative artwork dealing with historical people, and events that are attested in several documentary sources, the Tapestry is inevitably assumed to portray its material in an authentic way. This fails to acknowledge the dependence on models which was characteristic of early medieval writing and art. I freely acknowledge that in talking about models for the Bayeux Tapestry I am standing on the shoulders of giants: especially Francis Wormald and Cyril Roy Hart regarding manuscript art; and Otto Werkmeister for the Roman Columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. In recent years David Bernstein, Michael Lewis and I have found more examples of dependence on models.[10] There

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[6] See for example the Sutton Hoo Mound 1 ship, The British Museum images at: https://www.bmimages.com/results.asp?txtkeys1=sutton%20hoo, image 00175891001; and the Oseberg, Norway, ship which is, in the word of the *Beowulf*-poet (line 32) *hringedstefna*, 'ring-prowed' https://www.vikingeskibsmuseet.dk/en/professions/boatyard/building-projects/the-oseberg-ship.

[7] Helmets from Vendel and Valsgärde, Sweden: http://early-med.archeurope.com/iron-age-scandinavia/the-late-iron-age-in-scandinavia/helmets-from-the-vendel-period/; the Sutton Hoo helmet: The British Museum images 01040908001; the Benty Grange, Derbyshire helmet: https://www.sheffieldmuseums.org.uk/whats-on/benty-grange-helmet/.

[8] The vessels from Sutton Hoo are thought to have constituted a 'feasting set'. See also, for example, a drinking horn from Taplow, Buckinghamshire: The British Museum images 00080423001; the remains of a round lyre from Sutton Hoo, The British Museum images 01403423001, and the depiction of one in an illustration of King David as Psalmist in the eighth-century Vespasian Psalter, British Library MS Cotton Vespasian A. i, fol. 30^{v}.

[9] See for example, from Taplow, the buckle: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1883-1214-1 and clasps: https://www.bmimages.com/preview.asp?image=00214695001; the great gold belt buckle from Sutton Hoo: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1939-1010-1; and a selection of damaged and detached items from the seventh-century Staffordshire hoard: https://www.stokemuseums.org.uk/pmag/collections/archaeology/the-staffordshire-hoard/

[10] The extensive use by the Bayeux Tapestry of images from Canterbury manuscripts was first demonstrated by F. Wormald, 'Style and Design', in *The Bayeux Tapestry*, ed. F. Stenton (London, 1st ed. 1957, 2nd ed. 1965), pp. 28–32. His ideas have been both developed and modified in D. J. Bernstein, *The Mystery of the Bayeux Tapestry*, (London, 1986), Chapter 2; C. Hart, 'The Canterbury Contribution to the Bayeux Tapestry', in *Art and Symbolism in Medieval Europe: Papers of the "Medieval Europe Brugge 1997" Conference 5*, ed. G. De Boe and F. Verhaege (Zellik,

are many of them. However, if these discoveries mean that the images in the Bayeux Tapestry sometimes turn out to be false friends in terms of English social history of the more predictable kind, they can also illuminate an entirely different aspect of social history. To paraphrase Dorothy Whitelock, we can use these images based on identifiable models to elucidate the Tapestry itself. They illuminate the Bayeux designers' profound scholarship, ingenious blending of sources, and in some cases the daring and defiant portrayal by English artists of an English hero's outwitting and defeat at the hands of the Norman duke who was now their king.

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I will now pick out two themes from wills, particularly women's wills, ponder a little on the evidence of these things in terms of material remains, then consider what the designer of the Bayeux Tapestry makes of them. My first topic is rural life and the second domestic interiors.

In *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, Dorothy Whitelock edited and translated 39 tenth- and early eleventh-century documents enumerating bequests. The testators are variously seculars and ecclesiastics, royalty, an archbishop and bishops, ealdormen, some people of lesser status, though all wealthy, men and women. She also included some wills, in translation, in *English Historical Documents*, and in 1968 she published *The Will of Æthelgifu* with Lord Rennell and Neil Ker, for the Roxburghe Club. The wills are mostly concerned with land and money, apart from mention of the testator's heriot, paid to the king, which could include horses, both with and without tack, swords, and other military equipment such as helmets and spears, and some other item of metalwork, such as a cup and an object identified as a *beag*, which Whitelock translates as armlet, but I prefer to use the more indeterminate 'ring' (keeping open the possibilities of finger rings, neck rings, rings adorning objects and rings that were simply storable bullion). Swords are specified by their gold or silver hilt; rings and cups are described in terms of their metal value in mancuses. In this context, these things are seen as portable wealth, not bequeathed for their sentimental or aesthetic value. Wynflæd's will helpfully explains how it works:[11] she leaves to Eadwold, who is probably her grandson, 'her gold-adorned wooden cup' so that he can enlarge his ring with the gold, or she offers him 16 mancuses of gold instead of the cup. Her son and daughter are each bequeathed a cup with a lid, and instructed that they *findon* between them *twa smicere scencingcuppan* which Whitelock translates as 'two fair drinking cups' for the refectory of the nunnery with which she is associated. Whether they use the metal from the lidded cups to make or decorate the refectory cups, or whether they exchange them

1977), pp. 13–14; C. R. Hart, 'The Bayeux Tapestry and Schools of Illumination at Canterbury', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 22 (2000), 117–67; C. Hart, 'The *Cicero-Aratea* and the Bayeux Tapestry', in *King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry*, ed. G. R. Owen-Crocker, Publications of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies 3 (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 161–78; M. J. Lewis, 'The Bayeux Tapestry and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11', in *The Bayeux Tapestry: New Approaches*, ed. M. J. Lewis, G. R. Owen-Crocker and D. Terkla (Oxford, 2011), pp. 105–11; G. R. Owen-Crocker, 'Reading the Bayeux Tapestry through Canterbury Eyes', in *Anglo-Saxons: Studies Presented to Cyril Roy Hart*, ed. S. Keynes and A. P. Smyth (Dublin, 2006), pp. 243–65; reprinted in G. R. Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry: Collected Papers*, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Farnham, 2012), as Chapter IV; *eadem*, 'Reading the Mind of the Bayeux Tapestry master', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 15 (2021), 37–66; and in *eadem*, *The Design of the Bayeux Tapestry*, forthcoming.

Trajan's Column, and to a much lesser extent, the Column of Marcus Aurelius, were first identified as models in O. K. Werkmeister, 'The political ideology of the Bayeux Tapestry', *Studi Medievali*, 3rd ser 17 (1976), 536–95. Additions and modifications, including the possibility of indirect transmission through a 'sketchbook from Rome' in the Canterbury library, are suggested in G. R. Owen-Crocker, 'Stylistic variation and Roman influence in the Bayeux Tapestry' in Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry: Collected Papers*, Chapter V, there repaginated 1–35, reprinted from *The Bayeux Tapestry revisited*, ed. M. Crafton *Peregrinations* 2.4 (2009), 51–96, https://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol2/iss4/4/; and additional models are suggested in *eadem*, *The Design of the Bayeux Tapestry*.

[11] Text III in Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*.

for drinking cups which they already own is not specified, and was perhaps left up to the recipients.

Some of the longest wills are those of women, especially Æthelgifu's, and Wynflæd's, which was the subject of my own first publication, an article in *Anglo-Saxon England* 8 called 'Wynflæd's wardrobe'. Significantly it is mostly women's wills which highlight material conditions of both rural and domestic life and provide a window on social history. Women's wills populate the estates they bequeath with animals, and the swineherds, shepherds and huntsmen attendant on them; and they open windows into domestic interiors with soft furnishings, chattels and personal clothing. The voices of these wills are very different from what we find in Domesday Book, with its impersonal, business-like enumeration of measures of land, and the stock and inhabitants sustained by that land. These women know their servants and slaves by name, and they care about what will happen to them. When Æthelgifu frees the swineherd Eadstan she specifies that his son is to take charge of the herd of swine, which she bequeaths, with the younger swineherd, to her son. Small quantities of oxen are given to freed slaves, obviously to help set them up in their new independent state, just as the woman Siflæd, planning to travel overseas with the possibility that she may not return, leaves each of her tenants the homesteads they live on.[12]

A few of the wills reflect the fact that hunting was an important part of rural life for the prosperous landed Englishman and woman in the late Anglo-Saxon period. A man named Brihtric bequeaths 2 hawks and all his staghounds to the king[13] and Æthelgifu similarly leaves her staghounds to the king. She also mentions her huntsman Wulfric in her will. Though of relatively humble status, he is important to her and she knows the family well. He is apparently already a freeman, for she frees his wife and children and bequeaths the couple two oxen, two cows and two men.

Hunting with raptors is one of the occupations described in Ælfric's tenth-century *Colloquy*, but English people were perhaps already using tamed birds of prey to hunt for food from as early as the fifth to sixth centuries since the birds' bones begin to turn up at occupation sites from this time.[14] It is also evident that from the fifth century English people observed and were in some awe of, birds of prey, since their talons, or parts of them, occur occasionally as women's grave-goods, sometimes pierced to be worn as pendants, probably amuletic.

Falconry and hawking as sport seem to have been introduced to England in the sixth century, after which there is an increase in archaeological finds of raptor bones, and also discoveries of tiny bells which had probably been attached to birds to help locate them. The birds of prey which are characteristic of seventh-century Style II art very probably relate to a fascination with this sport which became an obsession of the upper classes that would persist throughout the Middle Ages. The skill needed to train a bird to hunt for humans is well appreciated in the Old English poem *Fortunes of Men*, and there are several instances of artworks which specifically celebrate falconry or hawking. A gold finger ring, dating to *c*. 580–650, a metal-detector find from north-west Essex, is decorated on the bezel with a human figure holding both a cross and a raptor; another bird hovers overhead. There are two more representation of birds on the hoop.[15] The object, which may have been a signet ring, is remarkable for associating falconry with Christianity in some way we do not understand. Certainly, later evidence suggests some ecclesiastics did not consider falconry incompatible with Church life, though King Edgar, Ælfric and Wulfstan disapproved.

[12] Text XXXVIII in Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*.

[13] Text XI in Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, the will of husband and wife Brihtric and Ælfswith.

[14] I am indebted to R. J. Wallis, '"The Hawk in Hand": Human-Raptor Sociality and Falconry in Early Medieval England', in *Animalia: Animal and Human Interaction in the Early Medieval English World*, ed. M. C. Hyer and G. R. Owen-Crocker, Daily Living in the Anglo-Saxon World vol. V (Liverpool, forthcoming 2025), pp. 47–68.

[15] Wallis, '"The Hawk in Hand", pp. 58–60, Figs 3.4, 3.5; *idem*, 'The "Northwest Essex Anglo-Saxon Ring", Falconry and Pagan-Christian Discursive Space', *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 30 (2020), 413–32, Fig. 1.

More famous is the early seventh-century purse-lid from Sutton Hoo with two central gold plaques depicting a bird of prey seizing a duck, crafted in cloisonné garnet and millefiori glass.[16] These tiny items—each plaque is only about 3cm wide and 3.3 cm tall—are remarkable for the way in which they suggest the characteristics of each bird: the cruel beak and talons of the raptor, the blunt beak and comfortable rounded shape of the hapless duck, as well as the convincing effect of feathers in the tiny chevrons of cloisons. Further examples include a tenth-century, silver, openwork disc from Cuxton, Kent, which has a central motif of a bird clutching prey in its claws, surrounded by the inscription +ÆLFGIVV ME AH (Ælfgivu owns me).[17] Images of falconry are also to be found on the Bewcastle Cross,[18] which again couples the sport with the Christian faith, and on some silver coins dating to the second half of the seventh century.[19]

At the opening of the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon*, the young kinsman of Offa memorably releases his beloved hawk for ever, and it flies to the woods, synecdoche for the man's renunciation of his life in loyalty to his lord and also a marker of the proximity of the woods and safety which only cowards will take advantage of.[20] King Edward the Confessor had his raptors and hounds brought to him for inspection every day,[21] so it is no poetic exaggeration when the *Beowulf*-poet speaks of a hawk swinging through the hall (lines 2263–64). Hawks and falconry were very much a part of English aristocratic existence. It is quite plausible, then, that images in Bayeux Tapestry correspond to the wills and archaeological finds in highlighting hawking and its social importance.

[16] https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1939-1010-2-a-l.
[17] https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1833-0101-1.
[18] *The Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture Volume 2: Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire-North-of-the-Sands*, ed. R. N. Bailey and R. Cramp, Bewcastle 1Avi, Plate 96; https://chacklepie.com/ascorpus/corpus_images_vol2.php?set=26&pageNum=4.
[19] Wallis '"The Hawk in Hand"', p. 60 citing Anna Gannon, *The Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage: Sixth to Eighth Centuries* (Oxford, 2003), Fig. 2.40, p. 51 and Fig. 3.20b, p. 96.
[20] This episode, which occupies lines 5–10 of the printed text of the poem, is discussed, in the context of Anglo-Saxon falconry in G. R. Owen-Crocker, 'Hawks and horse-trappings: the insignia of rank', in *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, ed. D. Scragg (Oxford, 1991), pp. 220–37, at pp. 220–26, reprinted in Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry: Collected Papers*, as Chapter XV. The escape of cowards, including the flight of the sons of Odda to the wood, occurs at lines 185–97.
[21] F. Barlow, ed. and trans., *The Life of King Edward who rests at Westminster: Attributed to a Monk of Saint-Bertin* (Oxford, 2nd ed., 1992), pp. 62–63.

Figure 1: Harold Godwinson rides to Bosham, Bayeux Tapestry. Unless otherwise stated, all images of the Bayeux Tapestry are credited: Détails de la représentation numérique officielle de la Tapisserie de Bayeux – XIe siècle. Crédits : Ville de Bayeux, DRAC Normandie, Université de Caen Normandie, CNRS, Ensicaen, Clichés: 2017 – La Fabrique de patrimoines en Normandie.

Harold Godwinson, one of the two major protagonists in the story, is first introduced by name as he travels to his estate on horseback with a bird of prey and hounds (Fig. 1). However, in the Tapestry, falconry is much more than simply an authentic detail of eleventh-century elite life. As a motif in art, the image of rider, bird of prey and hound goes back to Sassanian Persia and Byzantium. The hunting scene became a traditional motif on woven silk textiles.[22] The so-called 'Rider Silk', a very rare, silk, gold-printed textile, probably Spanish, was in circulation in England at a time contemporary with the manufacture of the Bayeux Tapestry. A surviving fragment of it shows a rider, with a raptor on his left hand and a hound beneath the horse.[23] It is tenth- or eleventh-century, and was at some point presented to St Cuthbert's shrine in Durham, probably not until the twelfth century, where it was discovered in the nineteenth.

The aristocratic rider with his hawk and hounds, then, is not just a plausible way of depicting Earl Harold, but a traditional image on high status textiles, adopted here on the Bayeux Tapestry which is made of more mundane materials, linen and wool, but was probably intended for a high-status patron. The Tapestry designer then manipulates this familiar image of the self-confident, aristocratic hunter/rider to underline the fluctuating fortunes of Harold as the story progresses. The bird of prey motif, along with details of horses and spurs, is used as an indicator of assertive masculinity and power.[24] Notice that in this first appearance, when he

[22] See for example two Byzantine silk roundels depicting a lion hunt, dated 700–900; https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O225389/woven-silk-unknown/.

[23] Illustrated as Fig. 50 in Owen-Crocker, *The Design of the Bayeux Tapestry*. The illustration shows a watercolour of the textile, made in 1888, which is held in the V&A. The fragment itself is held by Durham Cathedral but no photograph is available.

[24] S. L. Keefer, 'Body language: a graphic commentary by the horses in the Bayeux Tapestry', in *King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry*, ed. Owen-Crocker, pp. 93–108.

is effectively governor of England, Harold is riding a stallion, with prominent genitalia, and he has spurs.

Figure 2: Harold rides with Guy, count of Ponthieu, his captor.

Figure 3: Guy conducts Harold to William, duke of Normandy.

Figure 4: William conducts Harold to his palace.

From this position of authority, Harold goes first to captivity at the hands of Guy, Count of Ponthieu, where (Fig. 2) both Harold and Guy have birds of prey but only Guy, to the left, has the virile stallion and spurs. Harold, to the right, does not. As Guy confronts the more powerful William of Normandy (Fig. 3, Guy to the right here, Harold to the left), though both Harold and Guy carry raptors, and Harold has regained his spurs, and therefore some status, the designer has reduced Guy's mount to a mare with ass's ears![25] Harold retains some dignity, but at a price, as the guest of William who has bullied and probably bribed Guy into releasing him (Fig. 4). Harold, to the right here, with the English pudding-bowl haircut, wears spurs, but it is William behind him who rides the very virile stallion and has possession of the bird of prey.

The Bayeux Tapestry has other references to falconry in the borders, the significance of which is easily overlooked. A predatory bird closes in on a fleeing hare in the bottom border below the Norman army massing to advance against Harold's army (Fig. 5, beneath the darker brown horse). In this context the border image is suggestive of the imminent fate of the English.

Figure 5: Predatory bird chases a hare in the bottom border beneath the Norman army.

The apogee of hunting with raptors was probably the bringing down of big birds, especially cranes. When King Æthelberht of Kent asked Boniface, the missionary to Germany, to send him two birds of prey in the mid-eighth century, he specified that they were to be trained to bring down cranes.[26] We have archaeological evidence of crane-hunting, indeed an

[25] Harold is a valuable hostage so is depicted as such here. The Bayeux designer persistently undermines Guy of Ponthieu in the depictions of him; see G. R. Owen-Crocker, 'Fools in the Bayeux Tapestry', *Text* 42 (2014–15), 4–11, at 7–8, further developed in *eadem*, *The Design of the Bayeux Tapestry*.

[26] *S. Bonifatii et Lulli Epistolae*, ed. E. Dümmler, Monumenta Germaniae Historica Epistolae 3 (Berlin, 1892), p. 392, no. 105. Cranes (*grues*) are specified at line 31.

eighth- to ninth-century pit at the Flixborough ecclesiastical settlement site contained remains of at least eight cranes, evidence perhaps of an exceptional day of hunting and the resultant feast.[27] It seems to be no coincidence then, that the Bayeux Tapestry includes an unusually long-necked pair of large birds, cranes or herons, right above the scene where King Harold's two brothers Leofwine and Gyrth are killed in battle (Fig. 6, centrally in this image above the words *et Gyrð fratres*). In getting so close to the king, the Normans have brought down a big prize.

Figure 6: Large, long-necked birds in the upper border above the killing of Harold's brothers.

The use of stag hounds is rather less attested than falconry, although we know that King Edmund was stag hunting when he miraculously missed falling down a precipice,[28] and the *Beowulf*-poet, reversing the Bible's metaphorical hart that pants for water,[29] uses the audience's familiarity with the behaviour of a stag to convey the extreme terror the monsters and their habitat awoke in the human inhabitants of Denmark:

> Đeah þe hæðstapa hundum geswenced,
> heorot hornum trum holtwudu sece,
> feorran geflymed, ær he feorh seleð,
> aldor on ofre, ær he in wille,
> hafelan beorgan; nis þæt heoru stow![30]

> [Although the heath stepper, the strong-horned hart, harassed by hounds, seeks the forest, pursued from afar, he would rather give up his life, his being, on the shore [to save] his head. That is not a pleasant place!] (lines 1368–72, my translation)

Although in creating this striking image the poet may have been influenced by the extended similes found in classical poetry, it in fact presents a real animal in terror of its life that will face its usual predator, man, rather than plunge into the monsters' supernatural mere.

The majesty of the standing stag with its magnificent antlers seems to have been an emblem of kingship for the early seventh-century monarch of Sutton Hoo: a free-standing copper alloy model of a stag, 8.80 centimetres high, 5 centimetres long, once attached to an

[27] I take this information from Wallis, '"The Hawk in Hand"', p. 55, and his source, N. Sykes, 'Woods and the Wild', in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. H. Hamerow, D. A. Hinton and S. Crawford (Oxford, 2011), pp. 327–45, at pp. 333–34.
[28] 'B', *Vita S. Dvnstani*, 14.1–2 in *The Early Lives of St Dunstan*, ed. M. Winterbottom and M. Lapidge (Oxford, 2012), p. 48.
[29] Psalm 42:1.
[30] Text cited, with some modifications, from *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, fourth edition, ed. R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (Toronto, 2008).

iron ring, was probably mounted on the great ceremonial whetstone which is believed to have been the king's sceptre.[31]

Elsewhere it is the agility of the deer that is evoked in art, as manifested in one of the eighth- to ninth-century English gold and silk embroideries now in Maaseik, Belgium. The animals occur in one of two strips of arcading under the central arch, where they occupy but project from their framing roundels.[32]

Of course, the meat and the hide of deer were valuable commodities, but we have nothing left of them. What we do have is worked horn and antler, such as a decorated comb and comb case found in York, dating to around the year 1000.[33] However, the manufacture of antler objects was not dependent on hunting. There was probably a lively business collecting and selling on to carvers the antlers which were shed annually.[34]

Figure 7: Stag hunt from both directions in the bottom border.

The Bayeux Tapestry includes a stag hunt in the lower border (Fig. 7). Again, the Tapestry designer is not simply depicting a customary event in the English countryside for its own sake, although here we have some authentic details, the huntsman with his horn and leash for the dogs, the hounds themselves and rider moving in for the kill. Significantly, here, the deer is hemmed in from both sides. This stag hunt is a metaphor for what is happening to Harold. He has been captured by Guy, the count of Ponthieu, after inadvertently landing in his territory because of adverse weather. Above left here, Duke William is told of Harold's captivity by an English messenger and dispatches his tough-looking envoys to get the prisoner released to him. Above right, Harold is conducted by Guy to the hand-over meeting with William, caught, like the stag, between two enemies. Harold is just as vulnerable and embarrassed as the naked woman in the border directly beneath him.

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Farm animals, specifically pigs, sheep, oxen and the ploughs they pull, important elements in the rural social history of early medieval England, and mentioned in Æthelgifu's will, all feature in the Bayeux Tapestry.

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[31] https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1939-1010-205-a.

[32] https://zoom-image.kikirpa.be/x085893. The deer are in the middle row of roundels. They cannot escape their roundels because in each case their legs straddle the frame, the left-hand beasts forelegs crossed in what stone sculpture specialists identify as 'the Anglian lock'.

[33] Discussed and illustrated in D. B. Joyner, 'The Burden of Beasts in Anglo-Saxon Arts', in *Animalia*, ed. Hyer and Owen-Crocker, pp. 250–78, at 261–64, Fig. 13.6. The object is also illustrated at: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1866-0510-1_1?selectedImageId=33023001.

[34] Antlers that had been shed were probably preferable to those from animals that had been hunted, since they were both at maximum size and fully hardened; I. Riddler and N. Trzaska-Nartowski, 'Chanting upon a Dunghill: working skeletal materials', in *The Material Culture of Daily Living in the Anglo-Saxon World*, ed. M. C. Hyer and G.R. Owen-Crocker (Exeter, 2011; Liverpool, 2013), pp. 116–41, esp. p. 121.

Figure 8: Agricultural sequence in the bottom border.

Firstly there is a series of rural images in the border below the scene where William's messengers intimidate Guy of Ponthieu into giving up his prisoner, Harold: a sequence consisting of ploughing, sowing seed, harrowing and scaring of birds from the growing crop (Fig. 8). Ostensibly this border has nothing to do with the main register, and some commentators have assumed it is just a gratuitous depiction of English country life. I have wondered if it is a way of showing that time was passing, that all the serial agricultural tasks of spring were taking place while Harold was trapped as a prisoner in Ponthieu. Anyway, this being the Bayeux Tapestry it merits further investigation.

Figure 9: Detail of ploughing.

Figure 10: Back of previous image (reversed). credited: Détail du revers de la Tapisserie de Bayeux - XIe siècle. Clichés © Région Normandie – Inventaire général – P. Corbierre; Détails du panorama du revers reconstué : Ville de Bayeux, DRAC Normandie, Université de Caen Normandie, CNRS, Ensicaen.

This sequence is apparently novel in showing the earliest known depiction of a horse collar, the invention of which allowed horses to be harnessed as draft animals, so there may be a genuine bit of social history there. It is odd though, that the horse pulls a harrow, while it appears that a donkey pulls the heavier plough (Fig. 9). Since ploughs were normally pulled by teams of eight oxen, so Dorothy Whitelock assures us, though we only ever see one pair in Anglo-Saxon art, this must be a very light plough if it is pulled by a donkey. However, we need to be suspicious of this donkey. I must acknowledge that it was my colleague Sarah Anderson who thought this animal was an ox, when she was writing a chapter involving oxen for our edited book *Animalia*, and that because her draft was too long and I was convinced the animal was a donkey, I persuaded her not to include it. But returning to this beast, I became more convinced that it was perhaps originally an ox, and I have Dr Anderson's permission to include her idea. A photograph of the back of the Tapestry at this point shows that what now appear to be donkey ears are, like almost all of the image, repaired—the bright red wool is modern (Fig. 10); and the ploughboy is holding what looks like a goad, the traditional tool for stimulating oxen. A donkey pulling a plough, then, is almost certainly not an accurate picture. It is still odd that a plough is pulled by only one animal, but this border area is very small, and perhaps we are to read this one beast as shorthand for a team.

I have not found any source for the plough and harrow images. The rest of the sequence though, is demonstrably derived from considerably older models in manuscript art. The man sowing seed is likely to have been modelled directly on either the Utrecht Psalter or its Canterbury copy, the Harley 603 Psalter.[35] (The Bayeux designer borrows from both manuscripts.) The Utrecht Psalter is a ninth-century manuscript which incorporates some much older images, some sixth- to seventh-century, some Late Antique, fourth- to fifth-century.

It would be unrealistic to suppose that the Bayeux designer, utilising as models manuscripts in the libraries of Canterbury, would not be aware of the text they accompanied. The very purpose of illustrations, especially in Psalters, was to act as *aide-mémoires*, so that, by thinking of the images, the learning monk would recall the text which he had to commit to memory. The source context of the sower of seed is metaphorical: it concerns the just man, who shows mercy, who will accordingly be rewarded by the Lord, 'and his seed shall be in blessing' (Psalm 36 (37):26); so the seed in this case means the man's descendants. The Tapestry designer has not borrowed from the rest of this image, which shows reaping, sharpening a

[35] Respectively, Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek Utrecht Hs. 32, fol. 21r; https://www.uu.nl/en/utrecht-university-library-special-collections/the-treasury/manuscripts-from-the-treasury/the-utrecht-psalter; and British Library MS Harley 603, also fol. 21r.

scythe, ploughing with oxen and gathering grain into a pot, but has focused on the detail concerning seed, the theme of dynasty.

It is interesting then to find that the image of scaring birds off the newly planted seed is also derived from a model concerning dynasty. The bird-scaring episode (to the right in Fig. 8) unmistakably references Abraham on folio 26^{v} of the Old English illustrated Hexateuch, a probably early eleventh-century manuscript illustrating the first part of the Old Testament, which is the Bayeux Tapestry designer's favourite manuscript source.[36] Abraham, with a similar stance, hand position and catapult to our border figure, also scares birds into flight. Abraham, however, is not chasing the birds from a seedbed, but from the carcasses of animals he has presented to God as the sacrifice demanded of him, part of the covenant in which the hitherto childless Abraham is promised land and countless descendants (Genesis 15:2–11). This source image, then, is not about agriculture but about territory and, again, dynasty; so too is the power struggle in the Tapestry. An understanding of the border images' sources suggests the designer saw the long-term significance of Guy of Ponthieu being forced into giving up his prisoner to William of Normandy. The planting and protection of seed may be seen as a metaphor for cultivating the succession of one's family line. William would claim the English throne through kinship with King Edward the Confessor, notwithstanding the fact that the relationship was through Edward's Norman mother, not through the ancestral line of English kings. Harold, Edward's brother-in-law, was the son of Earl Godwin, and any royal blood he had was Scandinavian, through his mother, Gytha.[37] With a family of younger brothers already earls and a growing band of sons, Harold was in a good position to establish a new Godwin dynasty. William would put paid to that.

Figure 11: Pillaging of farm animals, and cooking by Normans.

The farm animals that we meet in the Old English wills occur together in one curious scene in the Bayeux Tapestry (Fig. 11). This follows the landing of the Norman ships in England and depicts the enemy pillaging the English countryside for food. Clumsily drawn and without the subtle geometric composition and placing which characterise most of the Tapestry's design, this part was perhaps a space-filler, one of several I have detected. Yet this, less technically competent, artist uses some of the most sophisticated blends of source materials and some of the most daring implicit criticism of the Norman conquerors in the entire Tapestry.

The general *mis-en-scène* of the foraging, which precedes the Norman feast, is probably copied from the Hexateuch, folio 29^{v}, which shows animals being killed and cooked for three angels who have visited Abraham (Genesis 18:7-8). In the Hexateuch, the dead animal on the ground is probably a calf or ox and the one about to be killed may be another calf, or, judging from its long horns, perhaps a goat. Both Hexateuch and Tapestry show two human figures, one taller than the other, slaughtering a smallish animal, one holding it by the horns, the other raising an axe, though the roles have been reversed, with the smaller figure wielding the axe in

[36] British Library MS Cotton Claudius B. iv.
[37] I. Howard, 'Harold II: A Throne-worthy king', in *King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry*, ed. Owen-Crocker, pp. 35–52.

the Hexateuch, the taller in the Tapestry. The small animal in the Tapestry is a sheep. Both images show the cooking taking place in a round-bottomed cauldron over a fire. The sequence of animals on the Bayeux Tapestry, though, probably derives from a scene on Trajan's column, a marble sculpture in Rome dating to the second century AD. Bayeux represents the animals as: a sheep; an ox, already dead on the ground; a pig, on the man's shoulders; and a pony with panniers to the right, plausibly there to carry some of the meat. There is a similar sequence of animals in a depiction of animals being taken to sacrifice on Trajan's Column, Scene IX, the ox and sheep to the left, a pig facing the other way as it is pushed round the corner into the building, and a pony with pannier to the right.[38] Trajan's Column is another recurrent source of the Bayeux Tapestry images, a particular favourite of this secondary artist. (Incidentally the idea of putting houses in the background with its attempt at perspective is probably inspired by Trajan's Column too, certainly not an authentic picture of cottages in an English village as I have seen suggested.) The designer's choice of blended models transforms the willing preparation of a meal for Abraham's angelic guests, who bring good news, into the unwilling sacrifice by English farmers of their animals to feed an invading army.

Figure 12: Figure bearing rings, copying a misunderstanding of a rock.

The sub-text implicit in this ironic transformation is strengthened by the recognition that the figure strangely carrying a series of rings, which frame his face, pierce his shoulder and run into his chin (Fig. 12), is a copy of a figure from one specific manuscript of Prudentius's allegorical poem *Psychomachia*, London, British Library MS Cotton Cleopatra C. viii, at folio 30^{r}. This person similarly clasps a series of rings, a misunderstanding, unique to this manuscript, of a man carrying a boulder on his shoulders, an image that is clear in other manuscripts of the poem.[39] Since the figure is identified from the caption to the Cleopatra image, as well as the text, as *Labor*, on the face of it this could simply be the Bayeux designer's representation of someone who is working hard. However, in the context of the *Psychomachia* poem, *Labor* is an associate of the Vice *Avaritia*, 'Greed', and is to be interpreted as 'Suffering', one of the terrible

[38] https://www.nationalgeographic.com/trajan-column/; see G. R. Owen-Crocker, 'Stylistic variation and Roman influence in the Bayeux Tapestry', in *eadem*, *The Bayeux Tapestry: Collected Papers,* Chapter V, pp. 18–20 and Figure 9.

[39] See for example, the equivalent figure in British Library MS Additional 24199, fol. 29^{r}, who carries a rough rock on his shoulders: https://iiif.bl.uk/uv/#?manifest=https://bl.digirati.io/iiif/ark:/81055/vdc_100060426205.0x000001.

consequences of greed.[40] If the textual context of the model is taken into consideration, therefore, the Bayeux designer was including suffering as a consequence of the Norman's greed in pillaging southern England for themselves. This artist's bitterness is reflected in the models he copies to depict the event.

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Finally I return to the wills to note that it is particularly women's bequests that mention furniture and textile soft furnishings: beds, bedding and bed curtains, table covers, seat covers and, especially, hangings. Textile making was women's work at this time—it is no coincidence that women were and are called 'spinsters' and that King Alfred referred to female relatives as 'the spindle side'.[41] Women were the owners and keepers of domestic goods, including textiles, and that fact is symbolised throughout the early medieval period by keys: from their deposition as grave-goods in pre-Christian female burials to the eleventh-century law specifying that the housewife kept the keys to her store-room, chest and coffer.[42] Nevertheless women sometimes bequeathed these valued possessions to men, and men used and appreciated comfortable furnishings. The Flemish monk Goscelin, who came to England in 1058, wrote of his horror at the squalid quarters assigned to him on his arrival and of his delight when they were cleaned, strewn with foliage, hung with curtains and wall hangings and the chairs supplied with seat covers.[43]

We do have material traces of a number of beds because they were used in burials towards the end of the pagan period, but we do not have any textile from them. The acid soil and wet condition of the Sutton Hoo Ship Burial were, however, conducive to the survival of organic remains and it is clear that the burial chamber was furnished with textiles, making it like an actual room, including bedding, a floor covering and a wall hanging.[44] Mineralised remains of the hanging indicate that it was originally a linen cloth with a repeated pattern in wool, worked in dense soumak (wrapped) weave.[45] Another patterned textile, thought to be a bed cover, had Xs and lozenges on it. It was of at least two colours, yellow, and, possibly, red.[46]

[40] H. J. Thomson, trans., *Prudentius* (London: Heinemann, 1949), pp. 322–23; https://archive.org/details/prudentiuswithen01pruduoft/page/322/mode/2up.
[41] *þa spinl healfe*; the Will of King Alfred, https://esawyer.lib.cam.ac.uk/charter/1507.html.
[42] Whitelock, *EHD*, p. 430. Laws of Cnut 76.1*a*.
[43] E. Coatsworth, 'Cushioning medieval life: domestic textiles in Anglo-Saxon England', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 3 (2007), 1–12 at pp. 5–6. The source is C. H. Talbot, ed., 'The Liber Confortatorius of Goscelin of St Bertin', *Analecta Monastica*, 3rd series Studia Anselmia fasc. 37 (Rome, 1955), 1–117 at p. 102.
[44] E. Crowfoot, 'Chapter IV; The Textiles', in *The Sutton Hoo Ship burial vol. 3*, ed. R. Bruce-Mitford and A. C. Evans (London, 1983), pp. 409–79.
[45] SH 7B; Crowfoot, 'The Textiles', pp. 433, 436 Fig. 311a, 456, 458; https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1939-1010-182-a.
[46] S 14; Crowfoot, 'The Textiles', pp. 428, 456, 460.

Figure 12: Deathbed of Edward the Confessor.

The Bayeux Tapestry regularly depicts furnishings, especially cushioned seats and curtains, hinting at the kind of domestic luxury that the wills and the earlier Sutton Hoo finds demonstrate. In particular, there is a grand bed, in which King Edward breathes his last (Fig. 13). C. R. Dodwell recognised the similarity between this and the bed in the Hexateuch folio 55^{r}, and certainly the large animal-headed bed-post and the curtain draped around it are similar.[47] However, rather than use the Tapestry as evidence that the Hexateuch's bed was authentic English furniture, I would see that the Bayeux designer is copying the Hexateuch in order to make a point, yet again, about dynasty. The context is that the biblical couple Judah and Shuah had three sons (Genesis 38: 2–5); they are pictured with their children near the massive marital bed, since conception and the birth of heirs are the subject of their story. In the Tapestry, the bedpost and curtain are reversed, appearing at the left instead of the right of the picture, just as the situation is reversed, from birth to death. King Edward died childless; he had no direct heirs, and as he had lived to old age, many of the men who might have hoped to succeed had predeceased him. His death provoked a succession crisis, when his brother-in-law, Harold Godwinson, took the throne, only to be deposed by William of Normandy, through victory at the Battle of Hastings and the Norman Conquest celebrated in the Tapestry.

[47] C. R. Dodwell and P. Clemoes, ed., *The Old English Illustrated Hexateuch: British Museum Cotton Claudius B. IV*, Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile 18 (Copenhagen, 1974), p. 72.

Figure 14: The Norman feast.

The Tapestry also, rather famously, uses a round table to depict the Norman feast on the eve of the Battle of Hastings (Fig. 14), famously because it was noticed long ago that the image is copied from the Last Supper in the Gospels of St Augustine, a Late Antique manuscript and the most sacred book of St Augustine's Abbey.[48] It has always worried me that the orderly disciples of the gospel book are replaced by lounging, pointing figures and the central image of Christ is copied as Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, the brother of William the Conqueror. Is this really a respectful borrowing of the treasured manuscript, or is it a sacrilegious appropriation?

Both the Hexateuch and the Cleopatra manuscript of the *Psychomachia* use round tables for dissolute feasts.[49] The Israelites in the Hexateuch are worshipping the golden calf and playing ball games alongside their feast, and the diners in the Prudentius manuscript are the Vice *Luxuria* ('Indulgence') and her companions. It may be, then, that the choice of a round table by the Tapestry designer may be more significant than just a nod to the sacred model. Add to this the fact that the servant with the napkin serving at the Bayeux feast is modelled on Joseph in the Hexateuch, waiting on Potiphar's wife, who will have him unjustifiably imprisoned, and one finds more negative than positive models for the Norman feast.[50] I suggest

[48] That the Bayeux detail is derived from Last Supper iconography was noted by L. H. Loomis, 'The Table of the Last Supper in Religious and Secular Iconography', *Art Studies* 5 (1927), 71–90, and the association with Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 286, folio 125^{r} was made in N. P. Brooks and H. E. Walker, 'The authority and interpretation of the Bayeux Tapestry', *Proceedings of the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies* 1 (1979), 1–34, 191–199, reprinted in R. Gameson, *The Study of the Bayeux Tapestry* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 63–92, at p. 75; see https://parker.stanford.edu/parker/catalog/mk707wk3350. The image is the central one on the top row.

[49] Respectively, British Library MS Cotton Claudius B iv fol. 102^{r}; and British Library MS Cotton Cleopatra C. viii fol. 18^{r}.

[50] British Library MS Cotton Claudius B iv fol. 57^{v}.

that the English clerics who knew the manuscripts in the Canterbury libraries would have picked up the designer's messages that he saw the Norman invaders as dissolute and unjust.

As my last point I will come to the wall hangings, which women's wills enumerate but do not describe except in terms of their size. They never mention whether the hangings are figural or patterned. In fact the only large-scale figural English textiles we know of apart from the Bayeux Tapestry itself are the *cortina*, 'curtain', depicting her husband's exploits which the widow of Byrhtnoth, hero of the Battle of Maldon, gave to Ely Abbey[51] and the sail of a ship which Earl Godwin gave to King Edward, which depicted 'the succession of forebears to give instruction, alongside the wars of noble kings on the troubled seas'.[52]

Curtains are pictured in the Hexateuch and the mid-eleventh-century Tiberius Psalter and an eleventh-century carving, where they are variously square or rectangular.[53] They function as room dividers and curtain off private spaces, though in pictures they do not reach right to the ground or, when they span an arch, right to the top. They must have divided off quite substantial spaces, because in 1016 curtaining hid enough assassins to kill Earl Uhtred of Northumbria and forty of his men. Presumably in this case the curtains were long enough to hide their feet![54]

In pictures, curtains hang from rings, either on poles or directly attached to the structure of a room and they are never depicted pulled back; rather, when not in use they are looped round a pillar or knotted up. They hang as a backdrop to a dining table in the Tiberius Psalter, where they would function as draught-excluders as well as being ornamental. They are generally not decorated, only the Tiberius Psalter curtain having a border of ring-pattern (which is this artist's default ornament on textiles and vessels alike).

One of the most distinctive things about Bayeux Tapestry is its shape. It is 68 metres long and only 50 centimetres wide. None of the hangings or curtains pictured in late Anglo-Saxon art are this shape. Wynflæd's will mentions a long hanging for the hall, but it does not specify how long.

Long, narrow hangings are, however, prominent in Scandinavian tradition. They include patterned and figural examples evidenced from the fragments found in the Oseberg, Norway, Ship Burial (*c.* 850) and five pieces representing four hangings from Överhogdal, now Sweden, but formerly Norway, dating variously from AD 800 to the thirteenth century.[55] None of these are anywhere near the size of the Bayeux Tapestry, but they are of similar proportions. Hangings such as these were used as domestic furnishings until at least the nineteenth century, according to watercolours of domestic interiors painted in response to the Norwegian Romantic

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[51] Discussed by M. Budney, 'The Byrthnoth Tapestry or Embroidery', in *The Battle of Maldon AD 991*, ed. Scragg, pp. 263–78. The donation is attested in a twelfth-century entry in the *Liber Eliensis*.

[52] H. Summerson, 'Tudor antiquaries and the *Vita Ædwardi Regis*', *Anglo-Saxon England* 38 (2010), 157–84, at 172, a version edited in conjunction with a transcription of a manuscript now lost.

[53] Respectively, British Library MS Cotton Claudius B iv, fols 27^{v}, 32^{v}; British Library MS Cotton Tiberius C. vi, fol. 5^{v}; an early eleventh-century ivory in the V&A; all depicted in C. R. Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Art: a new perspective* (Manchester, 1982), Plates 33–36.

[54] Whitelock, *Beginnings*, p. 890. The information is from 'The Seige of Durham', in *De obsessione Dunelmi et de probitate Uhtredi comitis, et de comitibus qui ei successerunt*. The text is translated in C. J. Morris, *Marriage and Murder in Eleventh-Century Northumbria: A Study of 'De Obsessione Dunelmi'*, *University of York Borthwick Paper* No. 82 (1992), pp. 1–5, at p. 3.

[55] Respectively S. Krafft, *Pictorial Weavings from the Viking Age: Drawings and Patterns of Textiles from the Oseberg Finds = Tapisseries du temps des Vikings: dessins et motifs executes lors des fouilles d'Osberg*, trans. M. Lesoil and R. Christophersen (Oslo, 1956); M. Vedeler, *The Oseberg Tapestries* (2019): https://www.academia.edu/39402405/The_Oseberg_Tapestries; S. Lemagnen, 'La Tapisserie de Bayeux et sa parenté avec les tentures histories scandinaves du Moyen Âge', in *La Tapisserie de Bayeux: Une Chronique des Temps Vikings?*, ed. S. Lemagnen, Actes du Colloque International de Bayeux 29 et 30 mars 2007 (Bonsecours, 2009), pp. 117–29, at pp. 119–20; and U. Oscarsson and A.-M. Rydquist, *La Tapisserie d'Överhogdal court présentatation par la Musée régional de Jämtland, Östersund*, translated [into French] by O. Ekwall (Östersund, 1981); R. Horneij, *Bonaderna från Överhogdal* (Jämtland: Jämtlands läns museum, 1991), English summary pp. 188-203, translated by D. Bell; Lemagnen, 'La Tapisserie de Bayeux et sa parenté', pp. 120–22.

nationalism movement, which promoted rural traditions. These paintings show geometric textile friezes displayed along the walls of living quarters, at and above head height of the seated occupants.[56]

Figure 15: King Edward seated in front of a long, narrow frieze.

I think it is very likely that the Bayeux Tapestry was displayed in this way, though the only English visual representation I know of a long narrow hanging like this is in fact in the Bayeux Tapestry itself (Fig. 15). Here King Edward sits in front of a long, narrow geometric frieze. It may be that long, narrow hangings like the Bayeux Tapestry were not, in fact popular in England until the Anglo-Scandinavian period and the reigns of Cnut and his sons, thus postdating our wills. It is possible though, that some of the patterns on them may have been traditional English ones. I note that the geometric pattern of King Edward's hanging consists of a lattice of yellow crosses forming lozenges containing red florets, rather similar to the supposed bedcovering at Sutton Hoo four hundred years earlier. I must point out though, that the same pattern is used for the cushion the king sits on, and something very similar decorates the border of the altar cover and the veil on top of the reliquary on which Harold swears his oath to William two scenes earlier. I think it is likely that these patterns were within the repertoire of an embroiderer working on this section of the Tapestry and that these micro details might have been stitched spontaneously without need for a cartoon to be drawn on the linen as it certainly was for the macro design. I think we may be on the level of the workshop

[56] See Nils Hertzberg's watercolour A Wedding in Kingservigs Rectory, from *c.*1820 in the Universitetsmuseet, Bergen; https://kringom.no/en/norwegian-language-movement-and-two-high-cultures.

supervisor saying, 'Stitch a bit of pattern in there Wulfgyth', rather than a conscientious attempt to recreate the furnishings of an eleventh-century English palace or Norman Cathedral.

The wills, uniquely, tell us how important domestic textiles were. They could be of sufficient quality to be bequeathed to religious establishments and immediate family, or unpretentious enough to be left in common to the testatrix's serving women. The Bayeux Tapestry itself, and this depiction of a textile frieze within it, are a testament to the shape and dimensions of certain wall hangings—one didactic, the other purely ornamental—from a century or half century later than the wills, when the royal court was an Anglo-Scandinavian-Norman *mélange*; but, as always with the Bayeux Tapestry, as a source of social history it must be treated with caution.

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Dorothy Whitelock, in gathering and publishing wills, laws and other documents, unlocked an opening through which we can peep at social history, often those unexplored but fundamental areas of social history: rural and domestic life. Material culture and the Bayeux Tapestry can, and sometimes do, illuminate the same areas, but all sources have to be considered individually, not necessarily as corroboration but also as difference, showing us ways in which early medieval people used and thought about living things and organic materials which, by their very nature, have now largely disappeared.