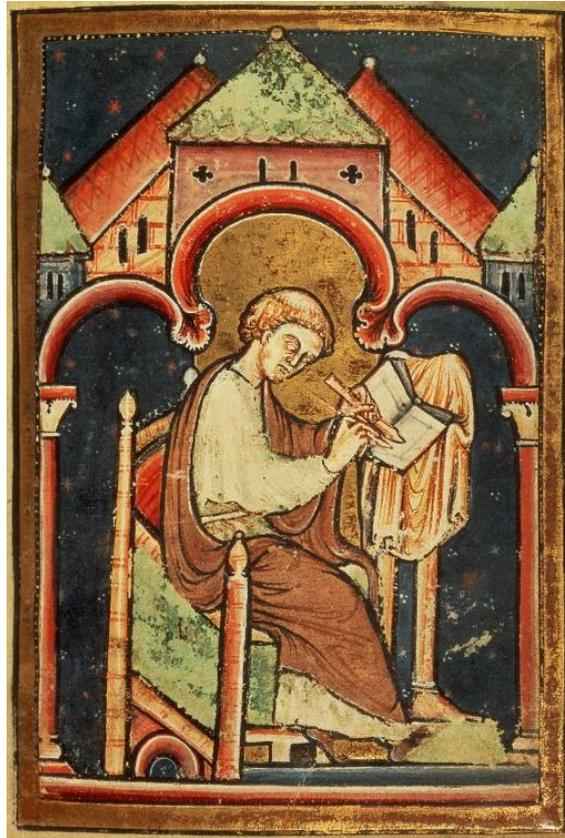


BELLARIA XXXIV



Beda Venerabilis

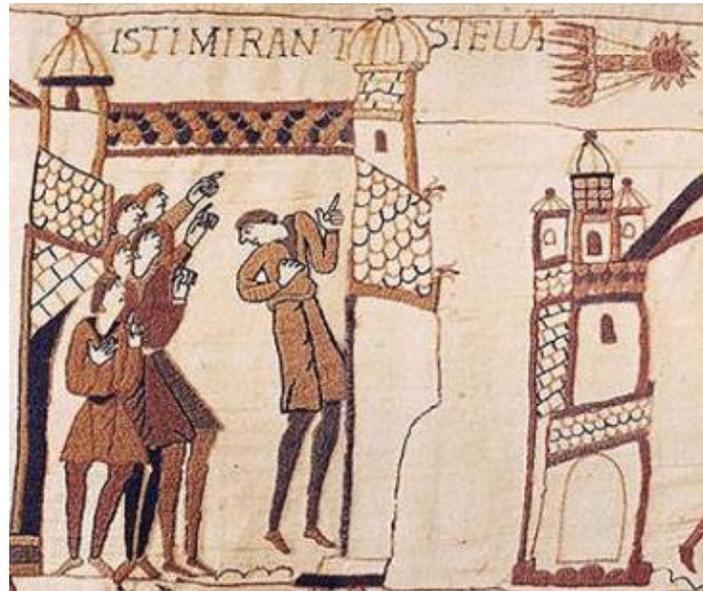
MEDIEVAL LATIN (2)

This sequence of texts will be drawn from Keith Sidwell's *Reading Medieval Latin* (Cambridge, 1995). It is a teaching text, with 86 passages, prose and verse, from St Benedict (b. 480) to Nigel Whiteacre (b. 1130), a monk active at the time of Henry II and Richard Lionheart.

The texts are supported by full historical and cultural introductions and running vocabulary and grammatical help. It ends with a brief grammar (summarising the main differences from classical Latin), a note on orthography, and total vocabulary for the texts.

Professor Sidwell has kindly translated, as literally as possible, the passages selected for this series of *Bellaria*. You can find the Sidwell's *Reading Medieval Latin* online [here](#).

INTRODUCTION: 1066 AND ALL THAT (Scenes from the Bayeux 'tapestry')



Isti mirant stellam 'They wonder at the star' Halley's comet (April 1066)

In 1064 Harold, the Earl of Wessex, shipwrecked off the coast of northern France, was rescued by William Duke of Normandy. He then apparently swore to agree that William should succeed Edward the Confessor (Harold's brother in law) as king of England, probably confirming an agreement already made between Edward and William in 1051.

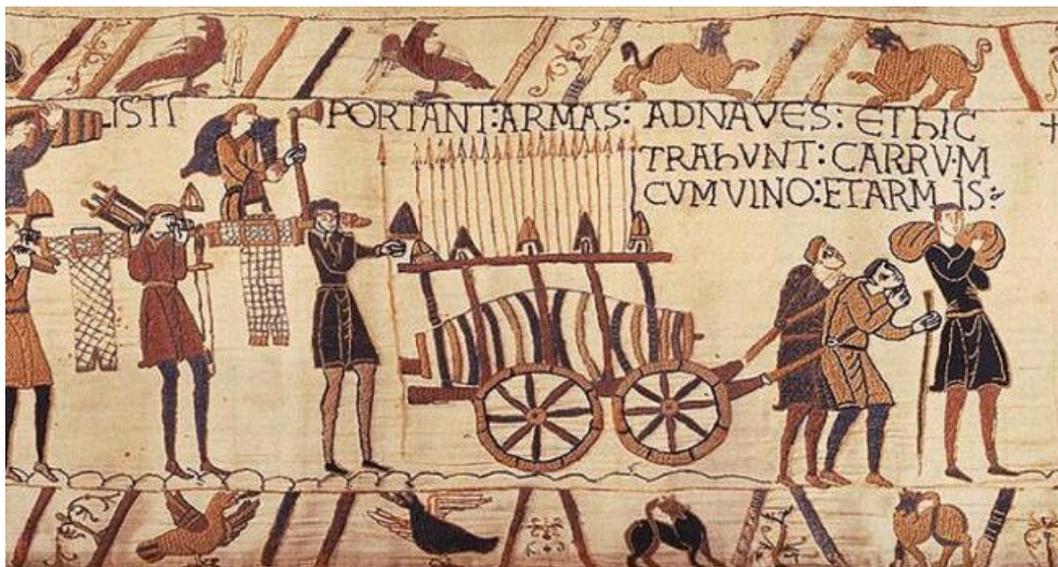


'[Bayeux], where Harold made an oath to Duke William'

On January 5 1066 Edward died, and the Witan (his advisers) recommended that Harold succeed. On January 6 1066 he was crowned king of England.

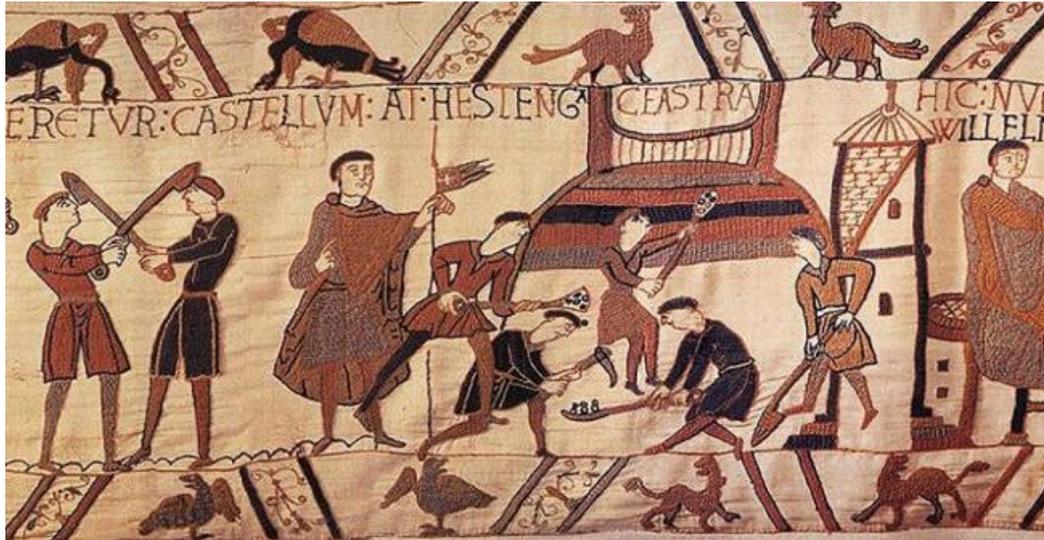


'Here sits Harold, king of the English. Archbishop Stigand'



The Normans 'carry weapons to the ships and here they pull a cart with wine and weapons'

William immediately started to prepare an invasion force, which landed at Pevensey on September 28, marched to Hastings and started constructing a fort. Harold, who three days earlier had defeated another claimant to the throne at the battle of Stamford Bridge near York (Harold Hardrada, king of Norway [*Noricus*], supported by Harold's alienated brother Tostig, both killed), had marched straight back to face William. He arrived at Senlac ('Sandstream', now Battle) on October 13, and battle was joined the next day.



[iste jussit ut fodjretur castellum at hestengacestra
 'This (man) has ordered that fortifications should be dug at Hastings'

Here William of Poitiers (c. 1020-1090), chaplain to William, picks up the story in his *Gesta Willelmi ducis Normannorum et regis Anglorum*, composed in the 1070s.

THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS

The troops on both sides of the conflict, and the defensive positions of Harold's men and their allies, are described

Under the following most comfortable arrangement (sc. of his forces) William advanced, with the standard which the Pope had sent over leading the way. He placed infantry at the front, armed with arrows and slingshots, and likewise the stronger infantry dressed in chain-mail in the second rank, and in the last the squadrons of cavalry, in the middle of whom was he himself with the strongest force, so that from there he might give advice to every section both by hand (sc. signals) and by word of mouth. One of the ancients in describing that army of Harold's might have recalled that, during his passage, rivers had been drunk dry and forests reduced to open plains. For very large forces of the English had come together from all regions everywhere. Some were displaying their support for Harold, but everyone their support for their native-land, which they wished to defend, albeit unjustly, against outsiders. The land of the Danes, their close relation, had also sent auxiliary troops in great numbers. But not daring to engage with William on level ground, fearing him more than the King of the Norwegians, they took up position beforehand on a higher place, a hill near to the forest through which they had come there (Battle Hill). Discarding at once the aid of their horses, all of them took their stand as foot-soldiers, huddled very densely together.

hac autem commodissima ordinatione progreditur, vexillo praevio, quod apostolicus transmiserat. pedites in fronte locavit, sagittis armatos et balistas, item pedites in ordine secundo firmiores et loricatos, ultimo turmas equitum, quorum ipse fuit in medio cum firmissimo robore, unde in omnem partem consuleret manu et voce. scribens Heraldi agmen illud veterum aliquis in eius transitu flumina epotata, silvas in planum reductas fuisse memoraret. maximae enim ex omnibus undique regionibus copiae Anglorum convenerant. studium pars Heraldo, cuncti patriae praestabant, quam contra extraneos, tametsi non iuste, defensare volebant. copiosa quoque auxilia miserat eis cognata terra Danorum. non tamen audentes cum Guillelmo ex aequo confligere, plus eum quam regem Noricorum extimentes, locum editiorem praeoccupavere, montem silvae per quam advenere vicinum. protinus equorum ope relicta, cuncti pedites constitere densius conglobati.



The Normans confidently attack, but the English reply in kind

The Duke with his men, fearful not even of the roughness of the ground, gradually climbed the slopes of the incline. The terrible clamour of war-trumpets rang out the signal for battle on both sides. It was the Normans' eager boldness that produced the battle's beginning. Just as when advocates in a lawcourt are prosecuting an action about robbery, it is he who makes the charge who strikes first with his speech. Thus the Norman infantry marching up close provoked the English, with their missiles directing at them wounds and death. They in return resisted each with whatever strength of mind he possessed (lit: 'each with what intellect he had strength in'). They threw javelins and weapons of various types, (sc. using also) all the most savage battleaxes and maces (lit: 'rocks mounted on sticks'). You would have thought that by these our men would be overwhelmed as though by a siege-engine (lit: 'a death-bearing mass'). The cavalry came to their aid and those who were last became first. † They were ashamed to fight from a distance: they dared to wage war with their swords.

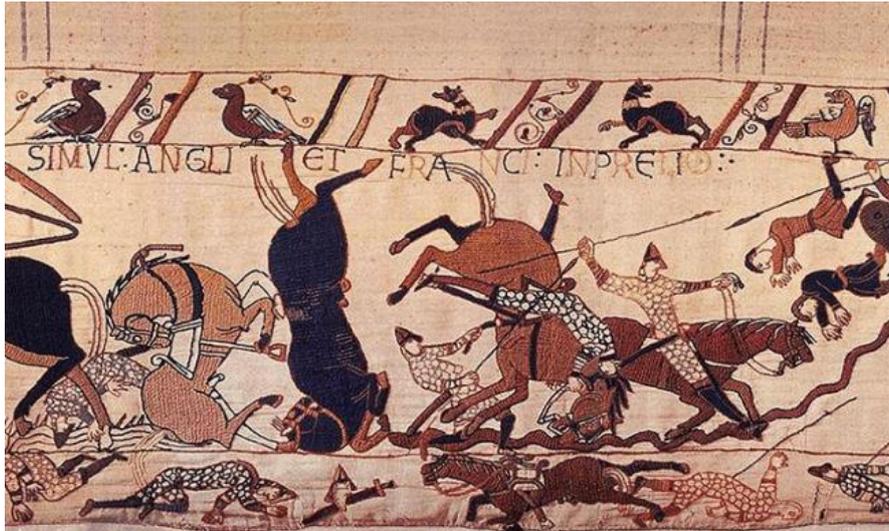
†cf. Luke, 13.30.

dux cum suis neque loci territus asperitate ardua clivi sensim ascendit. terribilis clangor lituorum pugnae signa cecinit utrinque. Normannorum alacris audacia pugnae principium dedit. taliter cum oratores in iudicio litem agunt de rapina, prior ferit dictione qui crimen intendit. pedites itaque Normanni propius accedentes provocant Anglos, missilibus in eos vulnera dirigunt atque necem. illi contra fortiter quo quisque valet ingenio resistunt. iactant cuspides ac diversorum generum tela, saevissimas quasque secures et lignis imposita saxa. iis veluti mole letifera statim nostros obrui putares. subveniunt equites et qui posteriores fuere fiunt primi. pudet minus pugnare, gladiis rem gerere audent.

English numbers and their favourable location give them the advantage

The very loud shouting of the Normans on one side and of the barbarians (sc. the English!) on the other was drowned out by the sound of arms and the groans of the dying. Thus for some time the fighting went on with the utmost violence from both sides. The English were helped a great deal by the advantages of their higher position, which they were holding without advancing, and by being packed tightly together, but also by their huge numbers and their immensely strong physiques, and moreover by their tools of battle, which easily found their way through shields or other types of armour (lit: 'coverings'). Most bravely therefore did they hold up or drive off those who had dared to make an attack upon them with drawn swords (lit: 'an attack drawn with swords'). They were wounding even those who were casting spears at them from a distance.

altissimus clamor hinc Normannicus, illinc barbaricus armorum sonitu et gemitu morientium superatur. sic aliquandiu summa vi certatur ab utrisque. Angli nimium adiuvantur superioris loci opportunitate, quem sine procursu tenent et maxime conferti, ingenti quoque numerositate sua atque validissima corpulentia, praeterea pugnae instrumentis, quae facile per scuta vel alia tegmina viam inveniunt. fortissime itaque sustinent vel propellunt ausos in se districtum ensibus impetum facere. vulnerant et eos qui minus in se iacula coniciunt.



General slaughter of the cavalry

The French (Bretons), so used to winning, turn to to run because they believe William has been killed. This shameful retreat in fact turns out to have its uses

Lo and behold, then, terrified by this savagery, the infantry and the cavalry of the Bretons alike were turned back† and all the auxiliaries who were on the left wing; almost every line of the Duke's gave way—and let this be said without objections from (lit: 'with the peace of') the most invincible nation of the Normans. The army of Rome's majesty, holding in check the forces of kings and accustomed to victory on land and sea, on occasion fled when it knew or believed that its leader had been killed. The Normans believed that their Leader (i.e. their Duke) and Lord had fallen. It was not therefore in a very shameful flight that they gave way, and not at all to be lamented, since it was so very helpful. ‡

†The Bretons were on the left, Normans in the centre and Franks and Flemish on the right

‡ In the later stages of the battle, they feign a flight

ecce igitur hac saevitia perterriti avertuntur pedites pariter atque equites Britanni et quotquot auxiliares erant in sinistro cornu; cedit fere cuncta ducis acies, quod cum pace dictum sit Normannorum invictissimae nationis. Romanae maiestatis exercitus copias regum continens vincere solitus terra marique fugit aliquando, cum ducem suum sciret aut crederet occisum. credidere Normanni ducem ac dominum suum cecidisse. non ergo nimis pudenda fuga cessere, minime vero dolenda, cum plurimum iuverit.



'Here is D[uke] William' (on the right, removing his helmet)

William, removing his helmet, shames his troops into standing their ground

Their leader, having seen that a great part of the opposing force had leapt forward and started chasing the backs of his men, ran to intercept those fleeing and blocked their path, striking them or threatening them with his spear. In addition, baring his head and pulling off his helmet he exclaimed: 'Look at me' he said, 'I am alive and I shall be the victor, with God's help. What madness is it that urges you to flee? What path lies open for escaping? Those whom you could slaughter like sheep are driving back and killing you. You are deserting victory and everlasting honour; you are running towards destruction and everlasting shame. None of you will escape death by leaving.' Upon these words, they recovered their spirits. He ran forward first, flashing with his sword, and laid low the enemy people who by rebelling against him—their king—deserved death.

princeps namque prospiciens multam partem adversae stationis prosiluisse et insequi terga suorum fugientibus occurrit et obstitit, verberans aut minans hasta. nudato insuper capite detractaque galea exclamans. 'me,' inquit, 'circumspicite. vivo et vincam, opitulante Deo. quae vobis dementia fugam suadet? quae via patebit ad effugiendum? quos ut pecora mactare potestis. depellunt vos et occidunt. victoriam deseritis ac perpetuum honorem; in exitium curritis ac perpetuum opprobrium. abeundo, mortem nullus vestrum evadet.' his dictis receperunt animos. primus ipse procurrit. fulminans ense, stravit adversam gentem quae sibi—regi suo—rebellans commeruit mortem.

The Normans resume the attack on the gigantic English army, trying to break through its close formation

The Normans caught the flame and, having surrounded several thousand who had been pursuing them, in a moment destroyed them, so that not a single one survived. Thus strengthened, they attacked the huge army (lit: 'the immensity of the army') more vehemently, which though it endured the greatest losses did not appear any smaller. The English confidently fought with all their strength, striving most of all to ensure this, that they should not open up any entrance for those wishing to break in. Because of their great density, those killed were scarcely able to fall down. Nonetheless, ways lay open, cut into them through various sections by the swords of the bravest soldiers. Those who harassed them were the men of Le Mans, the Franks, the Bretons and the men from Aquitaine, but with particular courage the Normans.

exardentes Normanni et circumvenientes aliquot millia insecuta se, momento deleverunt ea, ut ne quidem unus superesset. ita confirmati, vehementius immanitatem exercitus invaserunt, qui maximum detrimentum passus non videbatur minor. Angli confidenter totis viribus oppugnabant, id maxime laborantes, ne quem aditum irrupere volentibus aperirent. ob nimiam densitatem eorum labi vix potuerunt interempti. patuerunt tamen in eos viae incisae per diversas partes fortissimorum militum ferro. institerunt eis Cenomanici, Francigenae, Britanni, Aquitani, sed cum praecipua virtute Normanni.



The Norman cavalry '[against the Engl]ish army'

The Normans feign flight, drawn the English out of formation after them, then turn and slaughter them.

The Normans and their allied troops, realising that so great an army resisting at the same time could not be overcome without great inconvenience to themselves, turned their backs, deliberately pretending to flee. They remembered the opportunity which flight had a little earlier given them to obtain the result they desired. Immense joy arose among the barbarians along with the hope of victory. Encouraging one another with exultant cries they began to jibe at our troops with curses, and to threaten that they would all rush over there. Several thousand, as earlier, dared to harry as though at a flying run those whom they thought were fleeing. The Normans all of a sudden turned their horses round and slaughtered on all sides those they intercepted and shut in, leaving none (sc. alive). After using that trick twice with the same result, they attacked the rest with greater alacrity, a line of battle still inspiring fear and very difficult to encircle.

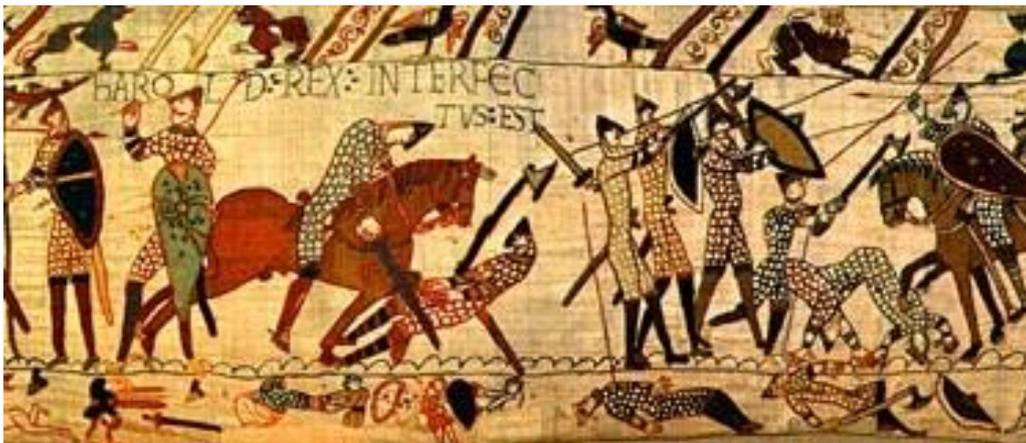
animadvertentes Normanni sociaque turba non absque nimio sui incommodo hostem tantum simul resistentem superari posse terga dederunt, fugam ex industria simulantes. meminerunt quam optatae rei paulo ante fuga dederit occasionem. barbaris cum spe victoriae ingens laetitia exorta est. sese cohortantes exultante clamore nostros maledictis increpabant et minabantur cunctos illico ruituros esse. ausa sunt ut superius aliquot millia quasi volante cursu quos fugere putabant urgere. Normanni repente regiratis equis interceptos et inclusos undique mactaverunt, nullum relinquentes. bis eo dolo simili eventu usi, reliquos maiori cum alacritate aggressi sunt, aciem adhuc horrendam et quam difficillimum erat circumvenire.



The tactic succeeds twice and the English begin to yield

Next there occurred a battle of unusual type, which was engaged by one side with sallies and different movements, while the other endured it as though fixed to the earth. The English lost heart and, as though they confessed their crimes a result of their own faults, bore the vengeance. The Normans fired arrows, struck blows, pierced (sc. flesh) and the dead appeared to move while they were falling more than the living. The density of the allies did not allow the lightly wounded to escape, but by its compress killed them. Thus happiness ran riot (lit: 'ran') to hasten the triumph for William.

fit deinde insoliti generis pugna; quam altera pars incursibus et diversis motibus agit; altera, velut humo affixa tolerat. languent Angli, et quasi reatum ipso defectu confitentes, vindictam patiuntur. sagittant, feriunt, perfodiunt Normanni, mortui plus, dum cadunt, quam vivi moveri videntur. leviter sauciatos non permittit evadere, sed comprimendo necat sociorum densitas. ita felicitas pro Guillelmo triumpho maturando cucurrit.



'Harold the king is killed'

The exhausted English take to flight in the face of the Norman attack

When the day had already turned (i.e. 'in the afternoon'), without doubt the army of the English realised that they could no longer stand against the Normans. They knew that they had been diminished by the death of many regiments (lit: 'legions'), the king himself and his brothers and some nobles of the realm had died, all those who remained were almost exhausted of strength, and there was no help left for them to await. They saw that the Normans had not greatly decreased (sc. 'in numbers') by the fate (or 'fall') of those killed, and that they were threatening more fiercely than at the start, as though they drew increases of strength from fighting, and that their leader possessed such savagery as would spare none who stood

against him, and such courage as would not be calmed except as victor. And so turning to flight very quickly they retreated, some grabbing their horses, a few on foot, parts of them by the roadways, but most of them through the trackless wastes.

jam inclinato die, haud dubie intellexit exercitus Anglorum se stare contra Normannos diutius non valere. noverunt se diminutos interitu multarum legionum, regem ipsum et fratres ejus regnique primates nonnullos occubuisse, quotquot reliqui sunt prope viribus exhaustos, subsidium quod exspectent nullum relictum. viderunt Normannos non multum decrevisse peremptorum casu, et quasi virium incrementa pugnando sumerent, acrius quam in principio imminere; ducis eam saevitiam quae nulli contra stanti parceret, eam fortitudinem quae nisi victrix non quiesceret. in fugam itaque conversi quantotius abierunt, alii raptis equis, nonnulli pedites, pars per vias, plerique per avia.

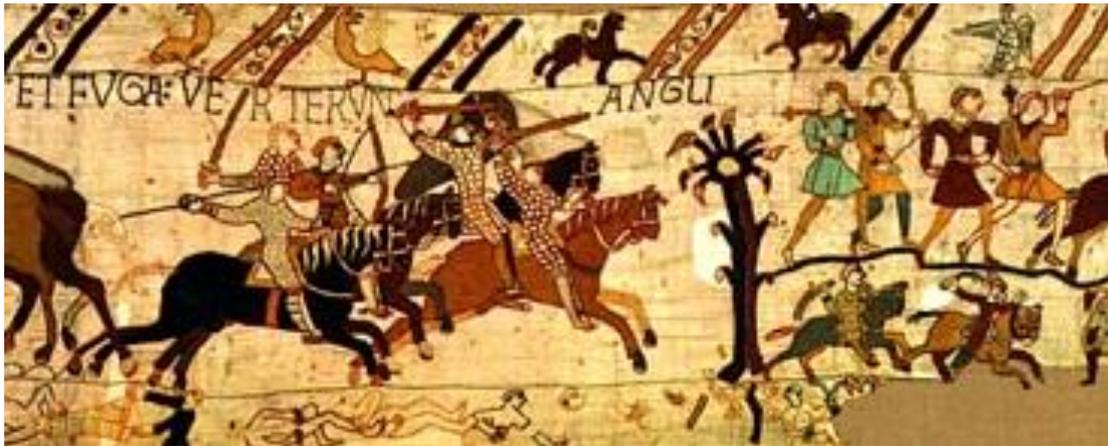


'Here fell Leofwine and Gyrrh, Harold's brothers'

The Normans pursue, leaving bodies scattered far and wide

Those who were trying to arise or actually arose, but did not have the strength to flee, lay (sc. dead) in their own blood. A spirit strongly desirous of safety made some strong. Many corpses remained in hidden thickets, many collapsing on the tracks hindered those following. The Normans, though they did not know the region, pursued avidly, hacking at the guilty backs, putting the final touch to a successful business. From the dead even the hooves of the horses exacted punishment, as the rout took place over those lying prone.

jacuerunt in sanguine qui niterentur aut surgerent non valentes profugere. valentes fecit aliquos salutem valde cupiens animus. multa silvestribus in abditis remanserunt cadavera, plures obfuerunt sequentibus per itinera collapsi. Normanni licet ignari regionis, avidè insequerentur, caedentes rea terga, imponentes manum ultimam secundo negotio. a mortuis etiam equorum ungulae supplicia sumpserunt, dum cursus fieret super jacentes.



'And the English turn in flight'

The English, being of combative Saxon origin, fight a rearguard action in the rugged landscape: after all they had already easily conquered Harold of Norway

But confidence returned to those in flight when they obtained from a steep rampart and numerous ditches a very great opportunity to renew the battle. Indeed, that people has always been ready by nature for the sword, descending from the ancient stock of the Saxons, most ferocious men. They would not have been routed, had not the strongest force pressed upon them. How easily they recently defeated the King of the Norwegians, who had relied upon an army both great and warlike.

redii tamen fugientibus confidentia, nactis ad renovandum certamen maximam opportunitatem praerupti vallis et frequentium fossarum. gens equidem illa natura semper in ferrum prompta fuit, descendens ab antiqua Saxonum origine, ferocissimorum hominum. propulsi non fuissent, nisi fortissima vi urgente. regem Noricorum, magno exercitu fretum et bellicoso, quam facile nuper vicerunt.



The flight continues

William returns to the main battlefield. The flower of English youth, with Harold and his two brothers lie dead. William rejects the offer of gold from Harold's mother for the return of his body: he is buried on the shore

When victory had been completed thus, William returned to the field of war and found a slaughter which he viewed not without pity, although it had been done against impious men, and although to kill a tyrant is a fine thing, glorious in repute and pleasing in its benefits. The ground was covered far and wide with the flower of the English nobility and youth, filthy in (sc. their own) gore. Nearby the king and his two brothers were found. The king himself, lacking any mark of distinction, was recognised by certain signs—but not by his facial features at all—and was brought to the Duke's camp, who entrusted his burial to William surnamed Mallett, not to his mother, who offered equal (sc. weight of) gold for the body of her beloved offspring. For William knew that it was not appropriate for gold to be received in such a transaction. He reckoned it would be unworthy for him to be buried at the wishes of his mother, since innumerable men remained unburied because of his (i.e. Harold's) great cupidity.

sic victoria consummata ad aream belli regressus reperit stragem quam non absque miseratione conspexit, tametsi factam in impios, tametsi tyrannum occidere sit pulchrum, fama gloriosum, beneficio gratum. late solum operuit sordidatus in cruore flos Anglica nobilitatis atque juventutis. propius regem fratres ejus duo reperti sunt. ipse carens omni decore quibusdam signis, nequaquam facie, recognitus est et in castra ducis delatus, qui tumultum eum Guillelmo agnomine Maletto concessit, non matri pro corpore dilectae prolis auri par pondus offerenti. scivit enim non decere tali commercio aurum accipi. aestimavit indignum fore ad matris libitum sepeliri, cujus ob nimiam cupiditatem insepulti remanerent innumerabiles.



English coin with William's head

We do not rejoice over Harold's death, but he brought it upon himself by making himself master of a land to which he had no right.

It was said, in jest, that Harold should be placed as a guardian of the shore and the sea which he had earlier madly patrolled with his army. Harold, we are not insulting you, but with the pious and tearful victor we pity your ruin and we lament for you. You conquered, in an outcome worthy of you, in accordance with your deserts, and you lay down in your own gore and you lie in a tomb upon the shore, and you will be cursed by future generations both of the English and the Normans. They are wont to fall who consider the highest power in the world to be the highest happiness, and, in order to be as blessed as possible, take it by force, and once so taken, attempt to retain it by force of war. And yet you were bathed in your brother's blood, lest your brother's greatness should render you less powerful. † Then you rushed madly into a second conflict, so that aided by your fatherland's murder you might not lose the honour of kingship. It is a disaster wrought by yourself that has dragged you down. Lo and behold, you do not glisten forth in the crown which you treacherously attacked, you do not sit upon the throne which you proudly ascended. Your end is proof of how justly ‡ you were raised up by the gift of Edward upon his demise. That terror of kings, the comet, * glinting after the beginning of your elevation, prophesied your destruction.

† i.e. his brother Tostig (see Introduction)

‡ i.e. not at all 'justly' (irony)

* Halley's comet had appeared in April 1066, a portent of things to come (see Introduction)

dictum est illudendo, oportere situm esse custodem littoris et pelagi, quae cum armis ante vesanus insedit. nos tibi, Heralde, non insultamus, sed cum pio victore tuam ruinam lacrymato miseramur et plangimus te. vicisti digno te proventu ad meritum tuum et in cruore jacuisti et in littoreo tumulto jaces, et posthumae generationi tam Anglorum quam Normannorum abominabilis eris. corruere solent qui summam in mundo potestatem summam beatitudinem putant, et, ut maxime beati sint, rapiunt eam, raptam vi bellica retinere nituntur. atqui tu fraterno sanguine maduisti, ne fratris magnitudo te faceret minus potentem. ruisti dein furiosus in alterum conflictum, ut adjutus patriae parricidio regale decus non amitteres. traxit igitur te clades contracta per te. ecce non fulges in corona quam perfide invasisti, non resides in solio, quod superbe ascendisti. arguunt extrema tua quam recte sublimatus fueris Edwardi dono in ipsius fine. regum terror cometa, post initium altitudinis tuae coruscans, exitium tibi vaticinatus fuit.



This seal of William Duke of Normandy as king of England is inscribed
hoc Anglis regem signo fatearis eundem
'By this seal may you acknowledge this same king for the English'

Important statistical note for pub quiz enthusiasts

The 'tapestry' features 626 humans, 190 horses, 35 dogs, 37 trees, 32 ships and 33 buildings. To add to this impressive list, world-beating Oxford research now reveals that 93 male organs are also on display, 88 belonging to horses. Duke William's horse, obviously, sports the most imposing:



The four attached to living humans (all featured in the tiny scenes above and below the main 'strip') are tumescent. Weighty conclusions have been drawn from this momentous observation.