Preserving History?

A Textual Analysis of the Norman Invasion of England

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Introduction

In southern England on the morning of October 14, 1066 two of the most cunning and militarily capable leaders in medieval Europe stood, with their armies, only several hundred feet away from one another. Duke William of Normandy was determined to capture London and the title of king, and the only obstacle to him achieving this goal was King Harold Godwinson of England, whose objectives that day were to defeat William and retain his crown. By the time the battle of Hastings had concluded at around six in the evening, William and his Norman army had won a narrow, yet decisive victory over Harold and his force of Anglo-Saxon huscarls and fyrd, most of whom were killed or severely injured.\(^1\) Never again would the Anglo-Saxons\(^2\) be able to offer up a unified resistance to the invader, nor would they be able to select another legitimate candidate for king. England was changed forever.

To the chroniclers who wrote about the invasion, what William and his army had accomplished was not a localized military action, nor was it the work of ordinary men. Those involved were sanctioned by God through the Papacy, which had given them a banner of Saint Peter that they carried through England as a symbol of the righteousness of their cause. The invasion was not only important within Normandy, but it also resonated throughout the rest of Europe, with implications as far as the Byzantine

\(^1\) So narrow that unlike most battles of the Middle Ages, which lasted a couple of hours, the English army at Hastings only fled after 8 hours or more of grueling Norman charges, the death of their king and most of their leadership, and the loss of sunlight. See Stephen Morillo, *The Battle of Hastings*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1996), p. 215.

\(^2\) Throughout most of this paper I will use the term English to refer to those who resided on the island of Britain before the Norman Conquest. In order to avoid confusion with the modern English, however, I have in certain instances referred to them as Anglo-Saxons.
Empire.¹ Within a year, although William had not yet subdued the whole of England, the French bishop Guy of Amiens began to write his *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, or the *Song of the Battle of Hastings*. Within the next twenty years, two more books were written to praise William. The Norman monk William of Jumieges added additional information by completing his *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, or *Deeds of the Dukes of the Normans*. Although this work was originally completed in 1060 and therefore not about the conquest, William believed that it was a important enough event to justify its inclusion within the expanded version of his book, completed around 1070.² During the 1070s, William of Poitiers, archdeacon of Lisieux compiled, but did not finish, the *Gesta Guillelmi*, or the *Deeds of William*. Finally, an unknown patron paid for English needle workers to stitch the Bayeux Tapestry. This is an illustrated depiction of the invasion, as well as of the events preceding and following it. It dates from around 1080, and thus is an invaluable source created for a patron who had probably accompanied Duke William to England, or who had been a close associate in Normandy in 1066.³

What is especially rare is that while many chronicles were completed within thirty years of the invasion, accounts continued to be written into the late 12th century by men such as Orderic Vitalis and Wace. Only the ever-popular tales of ancient Greece and

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¹ Many of the defeated Anglo-Saxons fled their homeland to the Byzantine Empire in the twenty years following the battle of Hastings. They served as members of the elite Varangian Guard for several emperors, notably Alexius I (r.1081-1118). For more information on this subject, see John Godfrey, "The Defeated Anglo-Saxons Take Their Service With the Eastern Emperor", *Anglo-Norman Studies* 1 (1978), pp. 63-74.


³ It was likely commissioned by Bishop Odo, Duke William’s half-brother and influential advisor. For an overview of the tapestry, see David Wilson, *The Bayeux Tapestry* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985).
Rome, the chronicles of the crusades, and the epic myths of adventure and bravery related to the Matters of Troy and Britain had more written about them within this time period. Yet while the stories of Troy and Arthur are about a history that was so distant it was imbued with mythical qualities, the works by the chroniclers focus almost exclusively on the decades slightly before and after the invasion. Thus, while the matters of Troy and Britain are derived from orally transmitted stories that likely changed over time, the authors of the chronicles received their information from individuals who had lived through and perhaps even participated in the invasion. In addition, much of the Matter of Britain originated from one man, Geoffrey of Monmouth. His Historia Regum Britannie was the foundation upon which all other subsequent stories were based, including those of King Lear and King Arthur, and it was he who first documented their histories. All of the authors of Arthurian literature after him were therefore forced to follow this similar framework of an invented past.¹ The chroniclers did not have this issue of having to borrow information from one source and follow in its tradition, though some did.² Guy of Amiens and William of Poitiers had living sources at their disposal if they chose to use them, but they also likely had access to written material that is no longer extant. In the cases of Orderic Vitalis and Wace this is certainly the case. Yet even these later writers had access to veterans of the invasion. Though the chroniclers distorted history in many instances, because Guy and WP had lived during the invasion and Orderic and Wace had ready access to those who had, it meant that they did not need to invent history.

¹ This is not meant to imply, however, that subsequent authors of tales relating to the Matter of Britain did not expand upon this framework. The French writer Chretien de Troyes, for example, was the first to extensively write about Lancelot and Percival. ² Orderic Vitalis’ use of the Gesta Guillelmi in particular.
Yet although the chroniclers did not want to tell stories from antiquity in detail, this does not mean that ancient history was not important to them. Romans were still especially revered, and they were particularly useful when making an effort to emphasize the bravery and martial valor of the Norman army. William of Poitiers went to great lengths to portray the Norman invasion as being more efficient and decisive than those of Julius Caesar in 55 and 54 B.C.E.¹ While Caesar did not venture far from the coast and had to fight multiple battles, William’s army fought in only one major engagement. After criticizing the flaws of both Caesar and his campaigns, William offers up a short section of praise, if out of guilt for criticizing such a popular historical figure:

“We omit further mention of Julius Caesar, as it may perhaps be considered disparaging. He was indeed a distinguished general, who had learnt the military science of the Greeks from books and practiced Roman warfare from youth with acclaim, his valour leading him to consulship. He brought many wars against warlike people to a swift and successful close, and finally, by force of arms, he made Rome, the mistress of Africa, Europe, and Asia, his kingdom.”²

The personal lives as well as the later dates at which Orderic Vitalis and Wace composed their books allowed them greater freedom to add additional details beyond what Guy of Amiens and William of Poitiers had written. Orderic, author of the *Ecclesiastical History*, was half English and Norman by birth. Despite living many years after the invasion had occurred, he had heard personal accounts from survivors who knew that William’s army did not act as peacefully or piously as the early chroniclers had maintained. Others, including William of Malmesbury, Robert of Torigni, and Benoit de Sainte-Maure, continued to write detailed accounts until the close of the 12th century. In addition, they added details that had never appeared in earlier books, such as the story of

¹ While it is true that the campaigns of Julius Caesar did not succeed in establishing a lasting Roman presence, it is unknown if that was his ultimate goal.
Harold being hit in the eye with an arrow at the battle of Hastings and how the archers aimed their arrows differently towards the end of the battle, causing significant damage among the English ranks. Though these details by themselves are seemingly insignificant within the wider narrative, when put together they all play an important part in how the Norman invasion was presented. Wace, a native of the island of Jersey, included further information that, while questioned by later scholars for its accuracy, added to the mysticism and intrigue of an event that had occurred nearly one hundred years before he began writing his *Roman de Rou*, or the *Romance of Rollo*.

In this thesis, I will be analyzing the five main sources for the Norman invasion in order to determine how closely they align or deviate from one another, as well as how closely their accounts either swing towards or veer from a broader group of historical texts. In addition, I will be analyzing the chronicler’s lives in order to prove that their different upbringings, ethnicities, and occupations caused them to write unique, and often distorted, accounts of events leading up to the invasion as well as the invasion itself. These events include the reasons for Duke William’s decision to invade England, including the murder of Alfred Ætheling, Archbishop Robert’s visit to Normandy, Harold Godwinson’s breaking of his oath, the behavior of the Norman army while it was in England, and how the army secured the victory at Hastings. In an age when copying entire sections of another author’s texts was considered acceptable, it must be asked why some chroniclers did so while others did not. Finally, I will prove that while the later chroniclers of the 12th century took the broad outline of the invasion that had been established by the earlier writers, especially William of Poitiers, their childhoods in England and Jersey, as well as Orderic’s mixed English and Norman heritage, helped to
create a less biased view of the behavior of the Norman army. To understand the events that they detailed, however, one must first understand the complicated political and military situation in England during the first half of the 11th century, especially the ascendance of the Godwine family and King Edward.

**II Earl Godwin and King Edward:** The Norman invasion cannot be understood simply as a quick military action, nor can it be understood solely from the vantage point of English-Norman conflict. The Normans were but the last of many invaders of England in the turbulent 11th century, from King Sweyn and Cnut of Denmark to King Harald Hardrada of Norway. Between 1013 and 1066 England was invaded no fewer than five times, but it was the invasion of Cnut and the Danes in particular that was critical to the story the chroniclers told. Without it, the father of King Harold Godwinson, Earl Godwin, never would have become so influential, and thus his family would not have become the most powerful of the English nobility. To understand the Norman invasion and why the chroniclers believed Duke William had such a strong claim to the English throne that allowed him to justify the invasion, one must understand the complex political situation leading up to it.

Little is known about the origins of the Godwin family. The earliest known member was a certain Wulfnoth from Sussex in southern England. He was accused by an earl of some type of misdeed, although the nature of the accusation and whether it was true has not, and most likely never will be, determined. “Then at this same time, or a little before, it happened that Beorhtric, the brother of the ealdorman Eadric, accused Prince
Wulfnoth the South Saxon, to the king.”¹ Due to the political pressure on him, King Ethelred expelled Wulfnoth from the kingdom. In response, he and his fleet of ships cleverly sat out a storm that devastated a royal fleet sent against him. When the storm ended, his group of ships attacked the remaining royal boats, doing considerable damage to them. He continued raiding along the coast but unfortunately, what happened to Wulfnoth after this is unknown, as his name vanishes from English records. His son Godwin, however, continued the family line, if in a more loyal and less rebellious way.

Godwin was already a lower member of the nobility at the time of the epic battles between the English king Edmund Ironside and Cnut, who was in the process of building a formidable North Sea empire.² At the critical battle of Ashingdon in 1016, many Englishmen, including one of the most prominent, Ealdorman Eadric, defected, ensuring a Danish victory. While Cnut was a cunning politician and general who certainly appreciated the help, he did not value traitors, especially after his need for them had ended. Thus Eadric was executed soon after the battle, probably for his treachery of Edmund at Ashindon, but also because he may have had Edmund murdered.³

Despite the intrigue and brutality often associated with the Middle Ages and especially Scandinavian politics, loyalty did exist, and it was often rewarded. This was the case for Godwine, who quickly developed a close working relationship with Cnut:

“When God’s rod of justice had swept away by the oppression of the Danes what had displeased Him among the people, and the kingdom, as a result of the vicissitudes of war,

² At the time of his invasion of England, Cnut was not yet the king of Denmark but rather a prince.
³ It is not certain whether Edmund was murdered or died of natural causes. Certainly it was convenient for him to perish so shortly after Cnut became king. Different tales of his murder became prevalent in chronicles in the years after his death. See Emma Mason, *The House of Godwin* (New York: Hambledon and London, 2004), pp. 29-30.
had passed to Cnut, among the new nobles of the conquered kingdom summoned to the
king’s side that Godwin, whom we have just mentioned, was judged by the king himself
the most cautious in counsel and the most active in war.” 1

It was also mentioned by the anonymous author of the Life of King Edward that the
English appreciated Godwin because of his calm personality. If this were true, it was a
wise political decision by Cnut to employ him, for by using Englishmen in his
administration, pacifying a restless population would have been made easier. Although
the exact date when Godwine became Cnut’s closest advisor is unknown, it was likely
during a military expedition to Denmark in 1019 and 1020. Because of his service,
Godwin was given permission to marry Cnut’s sister. Upon returning to England, he was
given extensive estates and became the leading councilor of the realm. 2 Thus began a
remarkable, nearly uninterrupted run of success for the Godwinson family that would
culminate some forty-five years later with the crowning of Godwine’s son Harold as king
of England.

When Cnut and the Danes came to England, an infant member of the royal family,
Edward, was taken for his safety to Normandy, where he was raised in the court of dukes
Robert and William II. 3 This was a critical period for young Edward. Although few
details of his time in Normandy are recorded, his exposure to Norman and French nobles
gave him a favorable opinion of them. His one activity of note was the journey he made
with his brother Alfred Ætheling to England in 1036, shortly after Cnut had died. The
two brothers’ small armies operated separately of one another, and while Edward’s was
intercepted and forced to flee, Alfred’s was detained after Godwine allegedly deceived

2 Ibid., p. 11.
3 Edward was the son of King Æthelred “the Unready” (r. 978-1013 and 1014-1016).
him. According to William of Poitiers, he was subsequently murdered in captivity.¹ The earl was called a traitor, which was contrary to the anonymous writer’s description of him as peaceful and calm. While important at the time, it was not a monumental event.

Political intrigue was commonplace in the 11th century, although the case of Alfred was particularly brutal. In the years following the Norman invasion, however, chroniclers would use it as a critical piece of propaganda to justify the use of force by Duke William against the English.

The political situation following this attempted invasion was chaotic. By 1042 all of the legitimate Danish claimants to the throne, including Cnut’s son, were dead of natural causes. Thus the favorable and only acceptable option to the English population was to have Edward as their ruler. He rose to the fore because of his descent from the royal family, and his cause benefitted from the lack of opposition either foreign or domestic. He was crowned king in 1042 after once again sailing from Normandy.

Although his reign started peacefully, within several years of his crowning he began to shower favors on his continental advisors and officials, a policy that would lead to his ultimate confrontation with the Godwin family.

When Edward became king, Godwin was the most powerful earl in England. According to the Domesday Survey of 1086, he had manors worth £723 primarily in Sussex and Kent, although he also held lands in Hampshire, Surrey, and Worcestershire.² These were some of the most productive manors in southern England, including Stoughton and Orleswick.³ There were other earls such as Leofric, the earl of Mercia,

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¹ William of Poitiers, p. 5
² Mason, p. 33.
who also held large tracts of land, but they did not wield the same degree of political influence. Godwin’s sons Harold, Tostig, Leofwine, and Gyrth were also given earldoms in the south of England upon Edward’s accession, which according to the *Domesday Book* were collectively valued at £5,000, far surpassing the next nearest earl.\(^1\) However, when Edward began to expel the Danes who had been prominent in Cnut’s government and replace them with imported French and Norman advisors, it troubled Godwine. He had worked with many of the Danish officials for years, and must have felt comfortable with the policies that they promoted. Getting rid of them represented a loss of his family’s influence and familiarity within the palace. These continental men had come with Edward when he had returned to England from Normandy. “And these, since he was the master of the whole kingdom, he kept with him, enriched them with many honours, and made them his privy counsellors and administrators of the royal palace.”\(^2\) Although Normans such as Ralph were given earldoms and military responsibilities, it was Edward’s handling of church politics that caused the greatest rift between Godwin and the king. It was ultimately a Norman abbot who would give Duke William the idea that he had a claim to the English throne.

The abbey of Jumieges in Normandy was among the most powerful of the ecclesiastical institutions in Western Europe, one that had a close connection to Duke William II. It had been rebuilt following a Viking invasion in the 10\(^{th}\) century by Duke William Longespee, and continued to be patronized by the dukes of Normandy after his reign. Its abbot, Robert, had been in charge there since 1037, and was responsible for the great rebuilding of the abbey in the Norman Romanesque style upon which so many new

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\(^1\) Mason, p. 53.

ecclesiastic structures on the mainland were to be based.¹ When the bishop of London
died, Robert succeeded to the position in 1044, with the consent of King Edward.
According to the anonymous author of The Life of King Edward, he abused his position
and used it to promote his own causes within the royal government.² In addition, he tried
to gain influence in the affairs of the church and in doing so alienated the other nobles
and church officials of the kingdom, especially those who were English.

When the archbishop of Kent died in 1050, the English monk Ethelric became a
candidate for the job, one who had support from the ecclesiastical community in the
surrounding area. To bolster their cause, they asked Godwin to go to Edward and plead
their case. Yet despite the earl’s efforts, the king appointed Robert to the position instead
of Ethelric. Although the anonymous author attributed this failure to Robert’s influence,
there is the possibility that Godwin was simply not very good at articulating Ethelric’s
cause. Whatever the case may have been, King Edward was not a fool, and did what was
best for him politically. He was squeezed between those with power whom he had known
his entire life, the continental advisors, and those with power whom he had less
experience with and less trust in: Earl Godwin and his sons. In such a precarious
situation, and having to make a choice, he must have believed that the earl was gaining
too much power, to the point of rivaling his own. Based on the amount of land that
Godwine and his sons owned, this becomes understandable. Not only did he ignore the
earl, but he also continued to appoint continental men to jobs within the church, such as
appointing Ulf to Dorchester. This was a city in Wessex, the heart of the earl’s territory,

¹ The Romanesque style of architecture also became popular in England during Edward’s
reign. Shortly before his death the Westminster Abbey was completed. For more
information about the original Romanesque abbey, see R.D.H. Gem, “The Romanesque
and must have been an affront to his dignity.\textsuperscript{1} Despite all of this, the dispute could have ended there, yet Robert seems to have taken Godwin’s efforts to support Ethelric as a personal insult. For the next year he did everything in his ability to oppose the earl.

The story of Alfred, so brutal but seemingly insignificant, suddenly became a significant factor in the struggle at court between Robert and Godwin. Robert convinced Edward that the earl was plotting against him, just as he had plotted against Alfred. This theme of not only Godwin, but his entire family being scheming, treacherous, and cowardly would be a common theme amongst the chroniclers of the invasion. Although there is no way of knowing whether or not the king believed in Godwin’s guilt, the case Robert made was strong enough for him to convene a council in 1051 at which Godwin was charged with murdering Alfred. The negotiations between Edward and the earl were not conducted face to face, but instead from a distance. The king, possibly at the urging of his foreign advisors, made an unrealistic offer that if Alfred and his men were produced alive, Godwin would be freed from guilt. Knowing the obvious impossibility of the offer, the earl fled to Bosham, where his manor was located. So thoroughly did Edward cleanse his administration of any members of the Godwin family that according to the \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle Manuscript E} his wife, the queen Edith, was expelled from the palace and sent to the nunnery of Wherwell\textsuperscript{2}. The earl and his sons were declared outlaws, yet their exile did not last long.

Godwin and his sons were expelled from the kingdom and deprived of their vast estates. Harold and his brother Leofwine went to Ireland, where they were welcomed,

\textsuperscript{1} Mason, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{2} Anonymous, \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle}, p. 176.
while Godwin escaped to Flanders. The count of Flanders, Baldwin, was an avid supporter of the earl due to Godwin’s son Tostig being married to his sister. He welcomed the earl and gave him lodging. That the family had these areas of respite proved to be tremendously advantageous to their hopes of someday returning to England. Although Godwin lacked support at court amongst members of government, nothing had diminished his support amongst those who lived in the lands comprising his former earldom. Thus he was able, in the summer of 1052, to assemble a group of men and a fleet, which sailed to the southern shores of England. According to the anonymous writer of *The Life of King Edward*, a mass of people welcomed his arrival both there and outside of London. Although this author, having composed his book for Queen Edith and praised Godwine and his sons, is inevitably biased, there is no reason to doubt the account in this instance. For within a short time of his arrival, King Edward reconciled himself with the earl. Either this was the result of Godwin having large numbers of supporters with him or, more likely, a combination of both large numbers and Edward being convinced of Godwin’s innocence. After all, a man who risked his life to return to king not to conquer his realm, but rather to plead his innocence, must have been convincing. Edward was also not a man who carried grudges or was harsh against those who were close to him. Thus he accepted Godwin into the kingdom, and restored all of his and his son’s lands to them. The Godwin family was resurgent, but a critical piece was missing.

Upon the return of the Godwin family, knowing that all of their influence was gone Archbishop Robert as well as the Norman bishops Ulf and William fled to

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1 The King of Leinster, Diarmait, was known for harboring refugees. He also harbored two of Harold’s sons after he was killed at the battle of Hastings.

Normandy. While their fleeing represented the breaking of continental power in England, it was whom Robert allegedly brought with him that was so critical. Although it is not known for certain, most scholars now theorize that the archbishop, upon realizing that his opportunity for political gain in England was over, took the hostages that Godwin had provided during his initial negotiations with King Edward in 1051. Where these hostages were being kept, who was guarding them, and how he managed to take them is unknown. What is known is that shortly after his arrival in Normandy, the hostages also appeared. There are varying opinions about why Robert would have done this, but the most logical is that by giving Duke William the hostages he would be able to influence political events when Edward died. Godwin would be able to wield power over whoever the successor would be, but not if members of his family were in danger. Although Robert would not live long after he arrived in the duchy of Normandy, his actions were critical to subsequent events.

It is this event, when Robert had taken the hostages and fled to Normandy, which was the second incident that the pro-William chroniclers chose to hone in on. For it was upon his return to Normandy that Robert planted the seed of what would become a powerful idea; that Edward had promised Duke William the throne of England. Before we begin analyzing the chronicles, however, a basic biography of the writers who will be analyzed within this paper needs to first be established. By understanding their lives, it becomes easier to understand why each wrote in different styles with unique biases.

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1 Mason, p. 75.
III The Chronicles: Although many books that addressed the Norman Conquest were written in the years immediately after 1066, the two most important are the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* by Bishop Guy of Amiens and the *Gesta Guillelmi* of William of Poitiers. I do not mean to imply by this statement that the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* of William of Jumieges is not important. The section of his book about the later part of Duke William’s, and later King William’s reign was finished by 1070 and contains valuable information that cannot be ignored by scholars. It lacks specific or unique detail relating to the invasion, however, and other writers amended much of the book years after William had finished the original. Thus the authenticity of his account of the events must be called into question. For these reasons I have decided not to use the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* as a source for this paper.

Likewise, although the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* can be useful, its statements about the invasion are so brief that it can add little to this study, with the exception of a few select events. This is especially unfortunate because the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is the only English source written immediately after the conquest, and is one of only three sources written by English authors.¹ The only valuable and unique piece of information to be gained from the chronicle is a possible geographic location marker for the battle of Hastings.² That alone cannot be justification for its use within this paper. In addition, an English monk of Canterbury named Eadmer wrote the *Historia Novorum in Anglia* in the 12th century. Like the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, his description of the invasion is short,

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¹ The other two being Eadmer’s *Historia Novorum in Anglia* and the *Vita Haroldi*, attributed to a monk of Wiltam Abbey. Although the latter has been widely criticized as a fantastical version of Harold’s life, more attention has been paid to it of late. For a translation, see *Three Lives of The Last Englishmen*, trans. Michael Swanton (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1984), pp. 3-40.

² “Then this became known to King Harold and he gathered a great raiding-army, and came upon him at the grey apple-tree.” See Anonymous, *Anglo Saxon Chronicle*, p. 199.
with very few details worth including within this paper. It must be noted, however, that
the briefness of these accounts is in itself indicative of the effects the Norman Conquest
had on the English psyche. Especially by the time Eadmer wrote the *Historia Novorum* in
the 1120s, Englishmen could have written relatively freely about what had occurred, but
chose not to do so. The conquest was still too traumatizing. The statements by continental
writers that the English supported William certainly do not seem to be very accurate
when one considers the lack of detail in these early English sources. Yet it is these
continental chroniclers who provide most of the lengthy accounts, and thus they are the
primary written sources that can be used in research by scholars.

Guy of Amiens was from the duchy of Ponthieu, an area of what is now
northeastern France.¹ He was the son of the leader of the duchy, who was a close ally of
the French king. At an early age as was typical of a son who was not the eldest, he was
sent to a monastery, Saint-Requier. There he received a typical religiously focused
education, including the learning of Latin, and he subsequently used these skills to get a
secular job within the church. He became a canon and then around 1045 was promoted to
be an archdeacon for the church of Amiens.² This allowed him to develop a political
network that strengthened his ties to the French kingdom. Not only did he have a political
relationship with the king of France, Guy was also a blood relative of the royal family.
He was the great-grandson of Hugh Capet (r. 987-996), the first of the Capetian kings of
France, and a cousin once removed of King Philip I (r. 1060-1108), whose reign
corresponded to the period in which he wrote his poem.³ This tie to the kingdom of
France is important, for throughout his poem Guy favors the French, particularly their

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¹ The area of Ponthieu is now part of the Picardy region.
² Barlow, *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, p. xlvii.
³ Ibid., p. xlix.
skill in warfare. While he was from the duchy of Ponthieu and men from that area served in the invasion force, to him they, and all men from the area of northern France excluding Normandy and Brittany, were French despite political boundaries. The political network he developed at Amiens also allowed him to strengthen his ties with certain English political figures. There is the possibility, although it has not been proven, that he met Harold Godwinson and his retinue in Flanders. Guy did not have a great opinion of Harold’s behavior within the political sphere, and this could have been the result of their encounter. Additionally, King Edward was a close ally of the kingdom of France, and Godwin’s attempts at ridding the king’s administration of French and continental advisors and church officials must not have sat well with Guy.

The Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, or Song of the Battle of Hastings is different from the other works I cite as sources in this paper in that it was written in poetic verse. Although it is comprised of 835 lines of hexameters and pentameters in Latin, it originally may have been significantly longer.\(^1\) At some point the ending of the longer extant manuscript was lost, engendering debate about its original contents and length. Although the original version is lost, two 12\(^{th}\) century manuscripts made at the abbey of St. Eucharius-Matthias, Trier, were found in 1826 by German scholar G.H. Pertz in the Royal Library at Brussels.\(^2\) The first manuscript was found in a collection of unrelated booklets, many dealing with poetry. The second manuscript was derived from the first, but only the first 66 lines of the poem have survived. From the time of its discovery in 1826 until the last decade or so, the authenticity of the claim that Guy of Amiens was the

\(^1\) For a discussion of possible conclusions, see Barlow, Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, pp. xx and xc.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. xiii.
author had been in question. Yet recent analysis of a troubling passage, done primarily by Frank Barlow, has shown that Guy is the most likely author. The only evidence we have as to the name of the original writer is the opening line of the prologue: “Quem probitas celebrat, sapientia munit et ornat, Erigit et decorat, L W salutat.” Modern scholarship agrees that ‘L.W. salutat’ means something akin to ‘Guy greets Lanfranc’, and upon extensive research and using Ockham’s razor Barlow came to the conclusion that there are no other logical individuals who would have those same initials.

“Also, as it is praiseworthy to write of the deeds of mighty men, I have intrusted to the tablets of posterity the deeds which that royal offspring, William, performed on the world’s western rim. For manfully he recovered a kingdom of which he had been deprived, and by his victory extended the boundaries of his ancestral lands across the sea—a deed worthy to be remembered for ever.”

Ostensibly the purpose of the Carmen, as is stated above, was to glorify the achievements of William in England. Yet one must be careful not to read into this quote too much, because William was only a part of the overall story. Unlike William of Poitiers who was Norman and whose main objective was to promote Duke William and the Normans, Guy considered himself French. He believed this because of his blood relations to the Capetian rulers of France, despite his homeland not being the French demesne but rather the duchy of Ponthieu. Consequently he gave Frenchmen the pivotal role in the invasion. Because he was primarily interested in the invasion and its results, Guy began his chronicle with the army sailing across the English Channel, omitting

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1 For an analysis concerning the authorship of the poem, see Barlow, Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, pp. xxiv-xl.
3 According to Barlow, this line translates to: “To L., renowned for his virtue, and protected, armed, embellished and exalted by wisdom, W. sends greetings.”
4 Barlow, Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, p. xxv.
5 Guy of Amiens, p. 3.
earlier events that feature prominently in the works of the other writers.\(^1\) In addition, he was not interested in covering the early part of William’s reign because for most of it the primary foe of the duke was Henry I, the French king. Despite Guy’s praise of William, his family ultimately owed loyalty to the French king, and writing of Henry’s defeat in battle at the hands of William in 1054 and 1057 would have been inappropriate. The calm political and military situation between the French and Normans had developed only after the death of Henry in 1060. Guy wrote his book at some point in between 1067 and 1070, too early in French-Norman diplomatic relations to mention the humiliating defeat of Henry. For the purposes of this paper then, Guy’s work can only be used to discuss the invasion, particularly the behavior of William’s army.

William of Poitiers was a Norman church official who wrote his chronicle roughly between 1071 and 1077, shortly after the invasion. It was written in excellent Latin and although he wrote in his own style, he was at least partially influenced by Caesar, Virgil, Sallust, Cicero, and St. Augustine.\(^2\) These writers provided him with models for covering various topics. Cicero and St. Augustine were referenced for moral issues while Cicero and Sallust provided models for speeches. Unlike the other sources used in this study, the *Gesta Guillelmi* does not survive in manuscript form. The last known copy was probably lost in the 1731 fire at the Cottonian Library.\(^3\) The versions we have today are from a 1619 copy of the manuscript made by Andre Duchesne. When he made this, however, the manuscript was already damaged. It was missing its first and last sections, and thus valuable biographical information and additional details of the Norman

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1 The *Gesta Guillelmi* begins with the death of Cnut, the *Ecclesiastical History* begins with the ancient history of the church, and the *Roman de Rou* begins with the story of the founder of the duchy of Normandy, Rollo.


3 This is the same fire that badly damaged the Beowulf manuscript.
invasion were lost. Orderic Vitalis included many details from these lost sections in his book, the *Ecclesiastical History*, and much of what is now known about William is because of Orderic.¹ ²

What is so unique about William of Poitiers is that he had received training to be a knight and had experienced battle during his younger years: “He had been a brave soldier before entering the church, and had fought with warlike weapons for his earthly prince, so that he was all the better able to describe the battles he had seen through having himself some experience of the dire perils of war.”³ This lends greater legitimacy to his descriptions of military events than those of the other chroniclers. Unlike other writers, who would have either exaggerated or made up details about military tactics, he would have been genuinely able to provide accurate details, despite his pro-Norman bias. It is for this reason that his account has been the most widely used by military historians. In addition, although he was critical of Harold and the English, his understanding of strategy allowed him to appreciate their bravery and effort at the battle of Hastings. Harold is described as treacherous and lacking honor, but never as cowardly. Similarly, the English were fickle, but brave. In describing them this way he undermines, perhaps unknowingly, one of his main points; that Harold did not have much support among the population. If he did not have support, why then did his warriors defend him so strongly? This is a point I will explain in greater detail in another section of this paper.


² Information of particular interest can be found on pages 259 and 261 of the *Ecclesiastical History*. Orderic provides information about William's hometown, sister, his jobs as a soldier and a religious official, and what he did in his later years.

While WP\textsuperscript{1} and Guy of Amiens were the most important early writers, Orderic Vitalis was the first of a group of men who wrote in the 12\textsuperscript{th} century. Unlike the earlier writers, he was of mixed heritage. His father Odelerious of Orleans was a French priest for an aristocratic family, while his mother was English. This cultural diversity allowed him leeway with his writing. He was not confined within the limits of having to praise the Normans or the French, nor was he only exposed to the political and religious affairs of mainland Europe. He had grown up in England and began his ecclesiastical studies at Shrewsbury in 1080 at age 5.\textsuperscript{2} Although his father sent him to the monastery of St. Evroul on the mainland at age 10, from where he would never return to England, he had an exceptional mind and during his short time there he was able to listen to and memorize stories about the Norman invasion. Knowing this, and not having to serve a secular figure as Guy of Amiens and WP did, he gave a less glowing account of the invasion. The violence and pillaging of the countryside is not hidden, but instead openly criticized. Nevertheless, he maintained a primarily pro-Norman bias. He criticized some of the actions taken during the invasion, but not the righteousness of Duke William’s cause. As a member of a monastic community, he also lent the invasion a degree of spiritual legitimacy. William and his men, he believed, had been authorized by God, represented by the papacy, to invade England. He and other writers had good reason to believe this because the Pope had given William’s army the banner of Saint Peter, which they carried with them on the expedition in England. Because Orderic never obtained office within a monastery or church as Guy and WP had, he had more time to write, and thus more of his works exist than any of the other writers I have included within this paper. He began his

\textsuperscript{1} In order to avoid confusion with Duke William, for the remainder of the paper William of Poitiers will be referred to as WP.

\textsuperscript{2} Chibnall, p. XIII.
amendments to the *Gesta Normannorum Docum* of William of Jumièges in the first
decade of the 12th century, and from it he may have developed not only further interest in
the Norman invasion, but he also would have gained additional details he may not have
heard when he was listening to stories in England.\(^1\) It is from these stories and other
chronicles that he gained the necessary material to write the only work that is attributable
to him, the *Ecclesiastical History*.

The *Ecclesiastical History* was composed of thirteen books written in Latin
between 1114 and 1141. Like Guy of Amiens and William of Poitiers, he had access to
his own monastery’s library, as well as those of neighboring religious houses from whom
he borrowed texts.\(^2\) Among the works he was able to access were Eadmer’s *Life of St.
Anselm* and, most importantly, William of Poitier’s *Gesta Guillelmi*. From sources such
as these he was able to derive much of his information. It must be noted that Orderic’s
history is a large work, and the Norman invasion is only one small part of the whole. Out
of the thirteen books that make up the larger text, it is discussed primarily only at the end
of the third one. The *Ecclesiastical History*, as the name suggests, is primarily concerned
with the affairs of the church and when discussing politics, Orderic often links political
events to church affairs. Nevertheless, it is a critical source to understanding the invasion,
because Orderic often incorporated large amounts of what previous chroniclers wrote,
especially WP: “I have abridged the history of William and his followers for some
matters, but I have not tried to include all that he says, or even to imitate his artistry.”\(^3\)

Although he is correct in stating that he did not include all of what WP wrote, on many
occasions he copied, line by line, passages from the *Gesta Guillelmi*. This can be a

\(^{1}\) Ibid, p. xiv.
\(^{2}\) Ibid., p. xvii.
\(^{3}\) Orderic Vitalis, p. 261.
benefit, however, in that it can help to corroborate particular points which otherwise
could not have been corroborated by comparing them to other sources.

The information that is unique to him and not derived from William of Poitiers,
however, is often not complimentary to the Norman lords and their men. It includes less
than flattering opinions of the damage that they had done to the English people and their
lands. “When their men-at-arms were guilty of plunder and rape they protected them by
force, and wreaked their wrath all the more violently upon those who complained of the
cruel wrongs they suffered.”¹ Even Duke William himself was not spared Orderic’s harsh
words: “Moreover, I declare that assuredly such brutal slaughter cannot remain
unpunished. For the almighty Judge watches over high and low alike; he will weigh the
deeds of all men in a fair balance, and as a just avenger will punish wrongdoing, as the
eternal law makes clear to all men.”² Finally, it should be noted that without Orderic
Vitalis, the identity of the author of the Carmen de Hastingae Proelio may not be known.
Nowhere in the Carmen does the writer identify himself, with the exception of initials,
which alone are not obvious enough to identify an author. Orderic, however, provides a
description of both the author and his work. “Guy bishop of Amiens also wrote a poem
describing the battle of Senlac in imitation of the epics of Virgil and Statius, abusing and
condemning Harold but praising and exalting William.”³ This passage increases the
likelihood that Guy of Amiens wrote the Carmen, and in doing so makes it probable that
his poem is the earliest existing work detailing the invasion.

The last of the main chroniclers I will include in this paper is Wace, who was a
much different type of writer than the others I have mentioned thus far, both in his

¹ Ibid., p. 203.
² Ibid., p. 233.
³ Ibid., pp. 185, 187.
writing style as well as in his upbringing. He was neither from England nor the mainland, but rather he was born on the Norman controlled island of Jersey sometime between 1090 and 1110.\textsuperscript{1, 2} At an unknown date he was sent, similar to Orderic Vitalis, to the mainland. He received a religious education at Caen, one of the most important cities in the duchy of Normandy. For much of his life he remained in the city, becoming close with King Henry II, who awarded him a prebend in Bayeux. While there, he also became qualified to teach. His time spent in Normandy meant he had the same Norman bias that characterized the other chroniclers, and his teaching qualification also indicate that he knew a great deal about ecclesiastical issues. With regard to his Norman bias, it should be noted that like Orderic, the passage of time allowed him to see the Norman invasion differently than Guy and WP. His descriptions of events were not exaggerated, nor did he describe Duke William as a perfectly pious man. Rather, he seems to have made every effort to make the details in his book accurate, even if he wrote them in a nontraditional literary style, which certain scholars have taken issue with. One such critic was Edwin Tetlow, who was critical of Wace’s description of the English position at Hastings. “But he was writing 90 years after the battle and his Roman de Rou is notable more for its appeal as a smoothly-written but fancy tale than for its reliability as evidence.”\textsuperscript{3} Opinions have changed among scholars regarding Wace, but unfortunately he still is tainted by his portrayal as a literary writer rather than a historian. As I will point out in this paper, however, he is often the most well-researched, accurate, and unbiased writer among the four.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{2} Duke William Longsword added the island of Jersey to the duchy of Normandy in 933.
\end{flushleft}
King Henry II of Britain commissioned the *Roman de Rou, or the History of the Norman People*, during the later part of 12th century. Yet unlike the other chroniclers, whose other works are not well known or have not survived, five of his writings exist in multiple manuscript versions. Besides the *Roman de Rou*, three of these are religious poems that confirm his interest and knowledge of theological matters. The fourth is the *Roman de Brut*, a book modeled on Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*. While modeled on Geoffrey’s work, however, Wace’s emphasis on research sets it apart. Not only did he not carry over the pseudo-historical material that was prevalent in Geoffrey’s book, but also while writing the *Roman de Brut*, he is believed to have travelled to southwestern England in order to investigate events that had occurred at various locations in the *Historia regum Britanniae*. This practice was unique among 12th century historians, who usually relied upon materials available in monastic libraries. They should not be faulted for this, however, because their occupations as monks and other church officials often prevented widespread travel.

Unlike the early chronicles that focus on the Norman invasion, and unlike Orderic Vitalis’ history, which is primarily concerned with ecclesiastical affairs, the *Roman de Rou* is an account entirely of Norman history, starting with the emergence of the duchy in the 10th century and ending at the battle of Tinchebray in 1106. Its purpose was to provide Henry II with a method of justifying the legitimacy of his family, who were still not accepted by some people in England. Although the king was a member of the House of Anjou, a family of French origin, his mother Matilda was the daughter of the last Norman king of England, Henry I. Thus he was related, on his mother’s side, to Duke William. It is important to note that Wace never finished his work. The reasons are not

1 Burgess, p. xv.
entirely clear, for while his writing style was certainly embellished, he seems to have genuinely tried to be as accurate as possible with his description of events. This was probably not to Henry’s liking because Wace, while often praising him, also often drew a less than favorable picture of the king. “The king in the past was very good to me. He gave me a great deal and promised me more, and if he had given me everything he had promised me things would have gone better for me. I could not have it, but it is not my fault.”\(^1\) When one reads Wace this quote must be kept in mind, because there is the possibility that he added elements that were critical of Henry’s family after his initial work had been rejected. This will likely never be proven, but because of the animosity he conveys towards Henry, it is something to consider.

What makes the Norman invasion of England one of the most exceptional events of the Middle Ages is that, in addition to being described in multiple written works, it is also displayed in a pictorial representation, the Bayeux Tapestry. In a society composed overwhelmingly of illiterate peasants and laborers, this masterpiece provided a means by which they could understand contemporary events in the world around them. These events would otherwise only be detailed in books written in Latin, a language used exclusively by the learned class and thus out of most of society’s reach. As Howard Bloch states: “As a visual record of the Conquest, the Tapestry was a powerful vehicle of cultural memory at a time when even the most powerful lords were illiterate.”\(^2\) While illuminated manuscripts and other forms of art depict political, military, and religious occurrences, they capture only one moment in time. The Tapestry, however, is a 230-foot long and 20 inch high embroidered chronological history, beginning with King Edward

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seated on his throne and continuing through Harold’s visit to Normandy and abruptly
ending with English soldiers fleeing after the battle of Hastings. Unfortunately, as with so
many of the written sources, the ending has been lost, although it is speculated that a
fitting concluding scene would have been William seated on the throne. Thus the
transmission of kingship from Edward to William would have been legitimized and on
display for all to see. In addition to the main story there are sub-plots, many whose
meanings remain unknown or controversial. These include the dwarf Turold in Scene 11,
the cleric and Ælfgyva in Scene 18, and the death of Harold in Scene 71.\footnote{The Bayeux Tapestry is not numbered according to the various events depicted on it. The Scene numbers used in this paper correspond to those shown in David Wilson, \textit{The Bayeux Tapestry} (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985).}

Ten colors were used in the production of the Tapestry: rosy red, darker brick red,
mustard yellow, beige or fawn yellow, black blue, dark blue, medium or indigo blue, dark
green, medium green, and light green.\footnote{Bloch, p. 82.} These colors were derived from natural sources
including seaweed, yellow broom or lotus root, and blue woad.\footnote{Ibid.} As Wilson points out,
these colors were not used naturalistically, with horses being made up of blue and gold
colors, for example.\footnote{Wilson, p. 11.} Though unnatural, this adds vibrancy to what would otherwise be a
dull display dominated by dark colors. In addition to the main story and sub-plots in the
center, there are also stories shown along the top and bottom of the work. Among the
items displayed in these sections are animals, many likely from Aesop’s fables, scenes of
farming and hunting, and even the looting of the battlefield at Hastings by the Normans.\footnote{Aesop’s fables, as well as fables from other sources, were tremendously popular during the Middle Ages. For a 13th century compilation, see Odo of Cheriton, \textit{The Fables of Odo of Cheriton}, trans. John C. Jacobs (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press), 1985.}

Although most of these scenes are not critical to this study, the depictions of fables were
likely meant to show to viewers why Harold had failed as king. The images on the margins also are valuable for shedding light on how people lived during the 11th century, particularly those who were not members of the ruling elite or ecclesiastical community.

Although the event it depicts is known, there is an aura of mystery surrounding the Tapestry. Who made it? Why? When? For much of its history the work was unknown to anyone save a small group of individuals and, aside from a brief reference to it in an inventory listing for the cathedral of Bayeux, it was never mentioned in any other text. This changed in 1724, when it was discovered within a storage room at the cathedral in Bayeux. For unknown reasons, it was assumed to have been made for Duke William’s wife Matilda. This theory was not challenged until the 20th century, when it was attributed to Odo, Duke William’s half-brother and Bishop of Bayeux. He is believed to have been the likely patron due to his connection with the cathedral in which it was found. He had been bishop of the cathedral that, along with an episcopal palace, had been completed in the 1070s. It is believed that the tapestry was displayed in one of these two buildings upon their completion in order to display Odo’s wealth and accomplishments. Following this, it was kept inside Bayeux cathedral where it sat for hundreds of years in relative obscurity until being brought to light in the 1700s.

If this is the case, and it is assumed by most to be, then how could it have been made in England, and how can this be proven? First, elements of the script are in Anglo-Saxon form, such as the abbreviation 7 for et (and is) and a crossed D in the name Gyrth, which is an English form. Second, although there are French elements within the captions, there are more English ones. This is the case in such names as Ceastra,

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Eadwardus, and Baglas, which are Old English forms.¹ Because Odo was made earl of Kent upon the success of the invasion, it is assumed that English seamstresses in Canterbury created the tapestry. These seamstresses had long been regarded as among the best in Europe, but because Odo was a large landowner there are several other possible locations for its manufacture. Among these are the nunnery at Minster-in-Sheppey and the Nunnaminster (St. Mary’s) in Winchester.² Wherever the Bayeux Tapestry was made in England it, along with the sources listed above, provide valuable insights into their maker’s beliefs regarding the Norman invasion. As I have proven above, however, it is not alone in containing valuable details and thus each source must be analyzed to piece together an accurate picture of the Norman invasion.

¹ Ibid., p. 204.
² Ibid., p. 212.
Chapter 1

The Death of Albert and Archbishop Robert’s Visit to Normandy

Any discussion of Norman propaganda efforts regarding the invasion of England must start with the killing of Alfred Ætheling in 1036 and the flight of Robert of Jumieges from England to Normandy in 1052. While I have described these events in the preceding pages, it is important to understand how both WP and Orderic Vitalis used them to frame Godwine as the murderer of a member of the royal House of Wessex and to portray his son Harold as a usurper. Although descriptions of these two events were brief in each chronicle, they both were used as powerful propaganda tools.

It should first be noted that while Guy of Amiens did not mention either event, and Wace only wrote about the murder of Alfred and not Robert’s journey to Normandy, the reasons for this are not as mysterious as it seems. Guy’s main focus was on the invasion and the soldiers who took part in it, specifically the French contingent. Unlike the other chronicles that begin with background information regarding political, religious, and military affairs in Normandy and England, Guy’s begins with William’s fleet being waylaid at the port of Vimeu while en route across the English Channel. There is an immediate emphasis on military, rather than political activity and thus it is the action itself, rather than the reasons for it that is important. It is not until nearly a third of the way through the poem that Harold’s perjuring himself is mentioned. Also noticeably absent are attempts to explain what led to William’s decision to attack England, the one exception being the oath that Harold broke. Throughout Guy’s poem, this emphasis on

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1 This is not meant to imply that there is no mention of religion in the opening pages of the Carmen. Guy credits God with calming the seas and stopping the rain, allowing for the departure of the fleet. See Guy of Amiens, p. 7.
action rather than justification is prominent. There are no explanation as to how the news of William’s right to the throne was conveyed, how Harold seized the throne and who took part in the coronation ceremony, or whether or not the invasion had papal support. All that mattered was the fact that the invasion had occurred, men served bravely, and it was a success. Thus we must turn to WP and Orderic to understand why the murder of Alfred and Archbishop Robert’s visit to Normandy were so important to legitimizing the invasion.

Accounts written before the invasion describe Earl Godwin as loyal and of a good temperament. Although these descriptions survive in writings attributed to either English or pro-English continental Europeans such as the anonymous writer of the *Life of King Edward*, the behavior of the earl during the tumultuous period of the Danish invasions seems to verify the depictions these writers gave of him. He was loyal to each king, regardless of whether they were English or not, and continued to be so until their deaths. During the Danish invasion he remained loyal to King Edmund, despite the fact that Cnut was among the strongest military commanders in Western Europe. After the disastrous defeat at Ashingdon in 1016, Godwine did not switch allegiance to Cnut as so many others had, but rather waited until the death of Edmund. Once Cnut was the unopposed king, Godwine supported and served him faithfully, as he would the next three kings, even when they endured periods of weakness and vulnerability.² This treatment extended to the children of rulers, and it is unlikely that he would have mistreated a son of Edmund Ironside, the king whom Godwine had so staunchly supported. Thus the blaming of the

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¹ The author of the *Life of King Edward* is unknown, but is thought to have been a monk at Saint Bertin Abbey in Saint Omer. For an explanation about the theories of authorship, see Barlow, *The Life of King Edward*, pp. xlv-lix.
² The next three kings being Harold Harefoot (r. 1035-1040), Harthacnut (r. 1040-1042), and Edward (r. 1042-1066).
earl and his son Harold for the events of 1036 must be regarded with suspicion, for they do not fit the pattern of being a level headed and generous man. Harold’s kind treatment of the survivors from a Norwegian army he defeated in 1066 at the battle of Stamford Bridge is likewise a testament to his compromising nature.

As WP points out, the goal of Alfred’s journey from Normandy, where he had been raised, to England, was to become king. Yet the throne was not unoccupied at this point, as Cnut’s son Harold Harefoot had already been enthroned. Knowing that Godwine was loyal to those in charge, it is not surprising that he decided to support the king and seize the young man. In addition to accusing Godwine of seizing Alfred, WP also charges the earl with breaking an oath he had earlier made to protect the boy.

“As he went into the interior, Earl Godwine received him with nefarious guile and betrayed him through wicked treachery. For he went to meet him openly, as if to honour him, and willingly promised his help, giving him a kiss and his right hand as a pledge of faith. In addition he admitted him, familiarly, to his table and to his counsels.”

This accusation of taking an oath and then breaking it became the most commonly used tool of the chroniclers against his son Harold. It helped further WP’s agenda, however, to extend the treachery beyond just Harold to his father. In a world where lineage meant everything, especially in the chaotic years after the battle of Hastings and the cementation of the Normans in power, proving that Harold’s family was treacherous gave the chroniclers a method to try and convince a wary English population that the Normans were legitimate rulers who had come to power by defeating an untrustworthy family. It was not only treachery that WP hones in on, but it was the extraordinary amount of violence that was inflicted upon Alfred and his troops by Godwine and Harold’s men. Some of the men were taken to London while others were disemboweled. Alfred was

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1 William of Poitiers, p. 5.
ordered by Harold to be taken to the Isle of Ely, where he was tortured and, in the process, accidently killed.\(^1\) WP mentions that this was done to frighten Alfred’s brother Edward, the future king, yet this is a strange explanation. Edward, who slightly earlier had also landed in England, was defeated by a large group of English soldiers who, according to WP, “swiftly overcame them with huge slaughter.”\(^2\) Yet being completely defeated and having a large portion of his army destroyed would have alone been enough to keep him away for a long period of time, if not permanently. In addition, capable military leaders such as Godwine and Harold would not have had reason to fear a boy who had no experience leading men. They had, after all, easily defeated the armies the two boys had brought with them. Thus, such extreme violence as was meted out to Alfred would not have been necessary to make a point.

Although there is no doubt that the murder occurred, there is a lack of evidence to point to Godwine and Harold being responsible. Even if Harold ordered the boy to be sent to the Isle of Ely, he may have intended only on keeping him as a prisoner. A more likely culprit for the torture and killing of Alfred after he had arrived at Ely was King Harold Harefoot. He would have had reason to fear the boy, as well as the earl and his son. He was newly enthroned and had no experience working with either Godwine or Harold and in the complicated political situation of the 11\(^{th}\) century, it is possible that he feared an alliance between the three. Because Harold and Godwine had strong support in the south and the ability to lead men in battle, the king took the easiest route by eliminating Alfred, thus securing his throne and instilling fear into Godwine, Harold, and others. WP admits, shortly after his criticism of Godwine, that Harold Harefoot was a

\(^1\) Ibid.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 3.
brutal ruler: “Harold died not long afterwards, and was succeeded by Harthacnut, his brother. This man was more like his mother’s family, and did not rule by cruelty as his father and brother had done; nor did he desire the death of Edward, but only his advancement.”¹ By indicating that Harthacnut did not desire the death of Edward, WP is unknowingly implying that another ruler did. It could not have been Cnut, because during his reign Edward was in Normandy seemingly disinterested in returning to England. Thus the only other possibility is Harold Harefoot. Because of this, WP’s passages about the treachery and cruelty of Godwine and Harold must be treated with suspicion and were likely made up to further his agenda of making the earl and his sons into villains and the Normans into heroes.

WP’s agenda becomes obvious when he begins to mention Normandy. There, Edward had a comfortable safe-haven that he did not have to leave: “He knew that this was a safe home for him, both generous and benevolent.”² Alfred had likewise been sheltered in Normandy and although he was a member of the English royal family, Norman soldiers protected him on his expedition to England. By killing the troops who were not guilty of any crime, WP believed that Godwine had committed an act unbecoming of a Christian that required avenging. Because the earl had died several years before 1066, it was Harold who needed to pay for the crimes of his father. In WP’s language:

“However, William, the most glorious duke (whose deeds we will, with the help of God, teach to the age to come), will smite with his avenging sword the throat of Harold, your offspring and your equal in cruelty and perfidy. By your treachery you shed the innocent blood of Normans, and in your turn the blood of your men will be shed by the sword of the Normans.”³

¹ Ibid., p. 7.
² Ibid., p. 5.
³ Ibid.
Although WP may have believed what he wrote, parts of his chronicle involving Godwine, Harold, and Alfred do not match up with historical facts or other sections of his writings. He was likely trying to develop a case as to why the invasion of England was justifiable.

Orderic, writing at a later date than WP, also mentions the incident involving Alfred, albeit in a shorter passage. His description does not appear at the beginning of the section about the Norman invasion, as WP’s does, but towards the end in a description of the battle of Hastings. “For the Norman fury became uncontrollable, and on that Saturday they massacred many thousands of English who long before had unjustly murdered the innocent Alfred with his servants, and only a week earlier had slaughtered without mercy King Harold, Earl Tostig, and many others.”¹ This passage does not implicate Godwine and Harold by name for the death of Alfred, but rather anonymous armed Englishmen. Orderic’s belief that some of the English killed at the battle of Hastings received their due punishment is an argument many readers would have sympathized with, given that certain members of Harold’s army may have been responsible for killing the boy’s soldiers when they landed in England in 1036. These English soldiers would have had no other choice but to carry out King Harold Harefoot’s orders to do harm to Alfred. Yet for Orderic, who supported the Norman campaign in 1066, this narrative provided the justification he needed when writing his chronicle. By excluding the names of Godwine and Harold, however, he may have implicitly declared their innocence in this particular matter, while simultaneously justifying the invasion of England as a way to avenge the fallen Normans.

¹ Orderic Vitalis, pp. 177, 179.
Wace is more forceful than Orderic in blaming Godwine for what happened to Alfred but unlike WP, he does not place blame on Harold. In his words:

“The very low-born Count Godwin came to oppose him; his wife had been born in Denmark and she was of good Danish family. She had Harold, Gyrth, and Tostig as sons, and because of the children I am telling you about, who were born of the Danes and loved by the Danes, Godwin loved the Danes much more than he did the English. Hear what devilry, great treason and great felony he committed! He was a traitor and committed treason, following in the footsteps of Judas. The traitor deceived and betrayed the son of his natural lord and heir to the domain, as Judas had betrayed Jesus. He had greeted him and kissed him, eaten from his bowl and assured him that he would bear him faith and loyalty.”

Despite the vicious nature of this commentary, especially the comparison of Godwine to Judas who was among the most despised figures in the Middle Ages, Wace does not bring the issue up again apart from this passage. This is unusual, because it could be a powerful tool to legitimize the invasion as an act of righteous revenge for the crimes committed by Godwine, his son, and the English. Like Orderic, however, Wace does not necessarily connect Harold to the crime, as does WP. Because he was writing the book for his patron King Henry II in the 12th century to legitimize the rule of the king’s family and continental baronial families over England, excluding Harold is strange. There are two explanations for this. Either he had originally included Harold but omitted his name after his fallout with King Henry or, more likely, Wace believed that Godwine directed the whole effort against Alfred, and his anger for the murder was directed towards the earl only. Because Godwine had died before the Norman invasion, Wace did not believe the issue helped legitimize the rule of the Normans over England and thus it was not mentioned any further.

While the murder of Alfred was a strong propaganda tool for the chroniclers to use in order to legitimize the right of the Normans to use force against Harold, it did

1 Wace, p. 143.
nothing to justify their outright seizure of the kingdom after their victory at Hastings. Nor did it give legitimacy to William having himself crowned king of the English at the end of 1066. To accomplish this, the chroniclers provided readers with the story of Robert, the abbot of Jumieges and one time Archbishop of Canterbury. To modern scholars, Robert is a controversial figure because his actions and motivations are so shrouded in mystery that to make any concrete conclusions would be an exercise in futility. Yet what is historical fact or fiction is not as critical to this study as the fact that the chroniclers wrote that Robert was the means of transmission of the throne from Edward to William.

As I described in the introduction, Robert had been on excellent terms with King Edward during the 1040s and 1050s and he rose even higher than Godwine’s family in influence at the royal court. This influence ultimately culminated in the exile of the earl from England in 1051. By the following year, however, Godwine had regained the initiative, to the point where he was able to either convince or intimidate Edward into expelling Robert, who subsequently fled to Normandy. The expulsion of Robert was the culmination of nearly ten years of struggle between himself and Earl Godwine. By the time he reached Normandy, it is likely that he wanted to exact some type of vengeance on the earl and his family. Thus 1052 would seem to be the logical point at which he conveyed the message of succession to William. Yet one of the problems with the sources is that they do not provide firm dates or give further description of what occurred in Normandy beyond a few basic points. Despite this, there is also the possibility that Robert spoke with William in 1051 when he went to Rome to receive his pallium from
the Pope.¹ There are clues within the chronicles, however, that reveal which date is accurate.

According to WP, the reasons for Edward favoring William as the next king were simple. Not only had he had been treated exceptionally well while growing up in Normandy by both William and his father, but the duke was responsible for his being able to return from exile in 1042. It was only right for Edward to return the favor and help the duke become a king:

“But Edward, when he reckoned with a real gratitude what sumptuous liberality, what singular honour, what intimate affection he had been shown in Normandy by prince William, to whom he was bound as much by these benefits as by a long line of consanguinity, and in addition what vigorous hope he had received in his return from exile to his kingdom, wished to recognize him in a way benefitting his power and gratitude, as do all good men. So he determined, by a lawful donation, to make him heir to the crown which he had gained through his help. And so, with the consent of his magnates, he sent to William (by Robert, archbishop of Canterbury, acting as mediator of this delegation) hostages of noble birth, a son and a grandson of Earl Godwine.”²

Again, however, the date WP is referring to is not known and this presents a problem with the last sentence of the passage. The hostages he mentions could have been sent with Robert to the mainland in 1051 while he was on his way to Rome to receive the pallium, and sending the hostages willingly at that time would have been wise strategy by Edward to counter the growing influence of Godwine. Logical as this seems for the king, it is an unlikely scenario. The earl did not have anything to gain from the negotiations, and he almost certainly would not have willingly given over members of his family as hostages. While it is possible that they were taken by force in 1051 after the expulsion of the Godwines, there is no mention of this in any source. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states in an entry for 1051 that: “Here in this year Archbishop Robert came across the sea here

¹ The pallium is a woolen ecclesiastical garment worn by the pope and given by him to Archbishops and occasionally bishops.
² William of Poitiers, p. 21.
with his pallium; and in this same year Earl Godwine and all his sons were put to flight from England, and he turned to Bruges, and his wife and three sons: Swein and Tostig and Gyrth.”¹ The word *all* is key here, because it indicates that each of his sons were present when fleeing to Ireland and Bruges. In addition, the fact that the earl returned to England the next year without worrying about possible consequences, which would not have been the case if any sons were held in Normandy by an ally of King Edward, confirms that his family members had not yet been taken hostage.

To conclusively rule out the 1051 date as a possibility, however, one need only consider the idea that Edward would have had to send hostages with Robert at all. WP wrote that Edward praised William and already knew that the king wanted the duke to be his successor. If this were accurate, why would there have been a need for hostages? Again, the need to weaken the influence of the Godwine family would have been pressing for Edward in 1051, but there would not have been any reason for the earl to willingly give up family members to the king. More plausible is a scenario in which Robert forcibly took Godwine’s son and grandson in 1052 while he was fleeing England. WP may have included the passage about hostages in an attempt to be historically accurate, but in doing so he also inadvertently exposed the possibility that Edward had not made up his mind as to who his successor was going to be, but instead was grappling with pro-Norman and pro-Godwine forces who were each vying for power and, more significantly, the right to influence the king’s successor.

Leaving aside the issue of the hostages for a moment, whether Robert’s trip occurred in 1051 or 1052 is also significant when analyzing the section of WP’s passage regarding Edward having the consent of his magnates to send hostages to William. In

1051 a majority of Edward’s advisors were Normans and other continental Europeans with connections to Normandy. Thus, they would have favored William over any possible English candidates and had a substantial amount to gain from the duke becoming the next king. In contrast to this, by 1052 most of the continental advisors had been expelled, and the native Englishmen who replaced them had less to gain if William were to become king. Taking into account the information in the preceding paragraphs that proves Robert coming to Normandy with hostages must have occurred in 1052, there is no possibility that Edward’s magnates agreed to willingly send hostages. WP likely invented the passage to make it appear as if Robert’s message to William concerning succession had English support, when in fact the officials likely had no idea that Robert had ever spoken to William.

All of the information thus far has proven that Archbishop Robert fled to Normandy in 1052 with members of Godwine’s family who he had forcibly taken with him. Because of his animosity towards the earl’s family, it is likely that soon after his arrival he did try and convince William that Edward had made him his successor. This being the case, however, Edward never supported or approved of this message. No evidence, aside from one entry in a pro-Norman manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, points to William ever visiting England after Robert came to Normandy. It would be unusual for a leader who, according to WP, had effectively been handed over the keys to the kingdom not to visit his inheritance at least once while Edward was still alive. As anyone living in England in the 1080s would discover, William was meticulous in discovering every last detail of a kingdom in order to efficiently rule and extract money from it. The Domesday Book detailed every piece of land, the owner of the land,
how many tenants and slaves were on it, and other items down to the smallest detail. If Edward had made William his successor in 1052, it is likely he or one of his officials would have at least investigated the manors and ecclesiastical properties, as well as meet with leading earls and officials. While this does not rule out WP’s account, it makes it unlikely. Thus we must now turn to the account of Orderic Vitalis.

While Orderic’s account is similar to that of WP, there is one difference:

“The truth was that Edward had declared his intention of transmitting the whole kingdom of England to his kinsman William duke of Normandy, first through Robert archbishop of Canterbury and afterwards through the same Harold, and had with the consent of the English made him heir of all his rights.”

Orderic, while keeping the message similar, removed the section about Robert taking hostages with him. This can be explained by the purposes of his book as compared to the purpose of the Gesta Guillelmi. WP’s primary concern was to glorify the accomplishments of William. While he included the story of Robert and the hostages, he made sure to explain that the captives were sent with the archbishop by Edward, thus not against their will. Orderic, however, although he also justified the Norman invasion, wrote his book primarily to inform his writers about ecclesiastical affairs and in most cases portrayed church officials in a positive light. He must have known that Robert’s taking of hostages was not fitting of someone in his position, regardless of motivation, and so removed the section. Orderic is well-known for taking much of what WP wrote and using it in his own material, so his exclusion of this section is an indication of his feelings towards Robert’s actions. Regardless of this, the rest of his passage is false for the same reasons that the passage from the Gesta Guillelmi is false. Edward never told

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1 Orderic Vitalis, p. 135.
Robert to convey a message of succession to William nor did the English people support William as the next king.

What is most striking about the description Wace gives of the transmission of the message of succession is that it lacks mention of Archbishop Robert. Yet his account of how William learned that he was Edward’s successor is similar to that of William of Poitiers:

“He thought about who would inherit his kingdom when he died; he thought hard and often said he would like to give his inheritance to Duke William, his relative, the finest of his lineage. Robert, his father, had raised him and William had served him a great deal. All the advantages he had enjoyed had been through this lineage; whatever impression he had given, he did not love anyone as much. For the honour of the good family with whom he had been raised, and because of William’s valour, he wanted to make him heir to his kingdom.”

Lineage and the kind treatment Edward had received while in Normandy were as important to Wace as they were to WP, and based on the similarities within the passage, he may have transcribed much of this section from the *Gesta Guillelmi*. Just like Orderic had done, he removed the section detailing the taking of hostages because it had been done by force and was thus not becoming of a church official. While not a monk or a cleric, he was a teacher who was well versed in theology and dealt with the church on many occasions, especially after twice receiving a prebend from Henry II that required him to live at a church and perform special duties. Thus the forceful taking of earl Godwine’s sons would not have been appropriate to include in his book.

But Wace took his chronicle a step further and removed any mention of Robert. This hints both at his level of disgust with the archbishop and at his attempts to include only those events which he perceived as legitimizing William’s claim to the throne. Wace

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1 Wace, p. 153.
2 Burgess, p. xv.
acknowledged that there were hostages in Normandy, but he did not mention how they got there, thereby acknowledging that the crime of taking them had occurred but ceding the fact that it was too disgraceful to put down on paper the names of those involved. It is also a tacit acknowledgement that though Robert had gone to Normandy and probably informed William that he was next in line to the English throne, he had done so on his own without approval from Edward and without approval from the leading magnates in England. Luckily for Wace, and even for the chroniclers who had included the story about Robert, they had the story of Harold Godwinson’s oath while in Normandy to use as their main source for the legitimization for military action against the English.

More than any other events leading up to the invasion, it is difficult to ascertain the truth of what occurred in the cases of Alfred and Robert. As I have proven, none of the chronicles provide a satisfactory explanation when tested against the historical facts that we have available. Therefore, in these matters they must all be viewed with suspicion. Each chronicler blamed Godwine for Alfred’s murder despite failing to provide a legitimate motive for why the earl would have needed to do so. In addition, their explanation that Edward supported William as the next king has never been shown to be accurate based on the political situation in 1052. This being the case, however, these passages about the murder of Alfred and Robert’s journey to Normandy are not without value. The chroniclers attempted to show that by killing Alfred, Harold had acted treacherously towards a member of the royal family. In addition, they tried to prove that sending Robert to Normandy was Edward’s acknowledgement that he supported William as his successor. They made the case that Harold had once again acted treacherously towards a member of the royal family, as well as William, by ignoring Edward’s wishes
and having himself crowned. For these reasons he was an illegitimate king. These points were the foundation upon which all other attempts to vilify Harold and promote William were based. They are critical to understand when analyzing the chronicler’s accounts of Harold’s visit to Normandy in 1064.
Chapter 2
Harold Godwinson in Normandy

Even if Archbishop Robert had, upon his expulsion from England, crossed the channel to Normandy and told Duke William that Edward had promised him the crown, the chroniclers must have known that this alone was not a sufficient justification for the bloodshed caused by the invasion. Edward was old and his mind may have been slipping. In the Bayeux Tapestry Scene 27, he is seen just before his death consulting with certain officials. It has been theorized that he was discussing who was to succeed him, and such a view is consistent with what we know about Anglo-Saxon succession law. They had a unique testamentary custom known as verba novissima, “the latest words.” This was a last act before death that allowed a ruler to void an earlier donation he had made and could be done in the case of succession regardless of whether the king had previously promised the throne to anyone else. Most of the chroniclers could not have been ignorant of this fact. Many had connections with England, and amongst those who were monks, their monasteries often owned extensive estates in England that were close to the royal family. One such monastery was Fecamp, which had lands in the south: “The abbot of Fecamp holds Rye of the king and held it of king Edward, and then it was assessed at 20 hides, now at 17½ hides. There is land for 35 ploughs.” In addition to existing in 1065, it was a practice that continued to be practiced after the Normans had conquered England. Thus this unique custom would not have been a mystery even to later writers such as

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1 For more information about this unique law, see John S. Beckerman’s “Succession in Normandy, 1087, and in England, 1066: The Role of Testamentary Custom”, Speculum 47:2 (April 1972), pp. 258-260.
Orderic and Wace. WP, however, was the only pro-Norman writer to mention it. He points it out while describing the message from an English envoy: “He knows, however, that the kingdom is his by right, by gift of the same king his lord, made to him on his deathbed. For ever since the time when St Augustine came to these parts, the common custom of this people has been that the gift that anyone made at the point of death shall be held as valid.”

1 Although WP provided a quote by William offering reasons why the deathbed oath was not valid in order to discount it, the incident must have bothered him.

For all of the chroniclers, the troubling aspect about this custom was that it jeopardized the legitimacy of the succession from Edward to William, regardless of whether one accepts the view that Edward had previously sent Robert to Normandy to announce the plan. If, however, it was discovered that Edward had later designated Harold, not William, his successor, scandal could ensue and even worse, civil disobedience. It would have made any story regarding Robert meaningless. Thus while Robert’s visit is given a degree of emphasis in the chronicles, it was Harold’s action in 1064 and 1066 that became the centerpiece of their efforts to frame him as a usurper not worthy of the English crown. They wanted readers to know that it was his oath and subsequent perjury that legitimized the Normans being the rulers of England.

The duchy of Ponthieu was located to the northeast of the duchy of Normandy, along the English Channel in what is today northeastern France. In the confused political situation of the 11th century, it was one of many small political units to the north of the French demesne and like many jurisdictions in the area, it’s political loyalty shifted frequently between the French king and the duke of Normandy. Guy, the count of Ponthieu, had been an enemy of Duke William during the early 1050s. After his forces

1 William of Poitiers, p. 119.
and those of his allies were defeated by a Norman army at the battle of Mortemor in 1054, however, Guy became a vassal of William, and this was to prove critical to subsequent events.

Scholars agree that Harold Godwinson arrived in Ponthieu in 1064, most likely after his ship had been driven off-course in a storm. What is not known however, is the reason for his visit. According to WP, he was sent by Edward in order to confirm Duke William as his successor:

“To confirm the pledge, he sent Harold, the most distinguished of his subjects in wealth, honour and power, whose brother and nephew had been received as hostages. And this was very prudently done, so that Harold’s wealth and authority could check this resistance of the whole English people, if, with their accustomed fickleness and perfidy, they were tempted to revolt.”

While this passage was intended to prove that the English were rebellious, he made an inadvertent error by including it in his chronicle. Harold may have been the most distinguished of all of Edward’s earls, but he was still a subject of the king. If Edward had already sent Archbishop Robert to Duke William in the 1050s to confirm him as his successor, why did he then need to send Harold to do the same thing ten years later? The English people would have had no reason to be rebellious if their own king, in the 1050s, had confirmed the duke as the next ruler. Edward was known throughout all of England while Harold, although a wealthy landowner, was known only in certain areas of the kingdom, particularly the southern coast where many of his manors were located. This quote indicates that even if Robert and Harold had visited the duke, Edward probably had not sanctioned their visits, for if he had William would have been able to gain the support of the English population.

1 Ibid., p. 69.
Orderic, writing many decades after WP, but often taking much of the information for his *Ecclesiastical History* from him, also mentions very briefly that Harold was sent by Edward to confirm William as his successor to be king: “The truth was that Edward had declared his intention of transmitting the whole kingdom of England to his kinsman William duke of Normandy, first through Robert Archbishop of Canterbury and afterwards through the same Harold, and had with the consent of the English made him heir to all his rights.”¹ Although he added onto WP’s account by mentioning that Archbishop Robert had been sent to Normandy first before Harold, what is most important is that Orderic reworded the reaction of the English to Edward’s belief that William was his rightful successor. Rather than being rebellious, as WP stated, they unanimously agreed with Edward’s decision. Likely Orderic realized that leaving WP’s original language intact undermined Duke William’s legitimacy because if, after Robert had given Edward’s message of succession to the duke and the English people had become rebellious, it would indicate that he did not have widespread support in England. If he did have support, they would have had no reason to rebel. The line as WP wrote it would not do for Orderic, who was still trying to legitimize the invasion by emphasizing the support of the English population for William. Even at the time he was writing his *Ecclesiastical History*, there were many among the English who did not accept the Normans as the rulers of England. By removing the section about the English being rebellious, Orderic made it appear as if Edward was being courteous, by indicating that after ten years he was still standing by the duke and reemphasizing William’s legitimacy as the next king to succeed him.

¹ Orderic Vitalis, p. 135.
Why Harold went to Normandy is not known, and probably never will be. WP provides the only lengthy early description, while Orderic often took his information directly from him, sometimes line by line. Thus scholars have only one other chronicler, Wace, through whom they can try to gain another motive for Harold to visit Normandy. While most of the chroniclers wrote with confidence that their version of the events was the correct one, Wace expressed his inability to confirm which of two possible motives for Harold’s visit was the correct one. He detailed two books he had reviewed, one that stated one motive and another that offered something completely different. Before analyzing this issue further, it is important to understand the two contrasting opinions amongst researchers of Wace. He is criticized by certain scholars such as Edwin Tetlow and David Rollo for making extravagant literary stories out of historical events and even for lying in an attempt to define in what light these events are to be considered. This type of writing, according to these scholars, has the potential to muddy the picture of what may have really occurred both during the Norman invasion but also during the events of the 12th century that he wrote about. In a critique of Wace and another chronicler not important to this study, David Rollo makes his case: “Through analyses of the Roman de Brut, the Roman de Rou… Wace and Benoit emerge as self-conscious artisans of apocrypha, creating visions of a past they know to be false and employing their fabrications as a prism through which to dramatize, to interrogate and, in some cases, to subvert the pretensions of the Angevin present.”\(^1\) As more recent scholars such as F.H.M. Le Saux point out, however, Wace and his writings should not be ignored. He is “an altogether more weighty character than the somewhat frivolous writer of romances he has

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sometimes been held to be, and well deserving of the revival of interest he is currently enjoying.”¹ As I also assert, at least in this case, his emphasis on research indicates that he is a writer who, while taking into account his literary flourishes, needs to be taken seriously, particularly when analyzing the Norman invasion.

In the first unnamed book that Wace cites, Harold’s motivation for traveling to Normandy was his desire to free the English hostages that Duke William held. This is more plausible than WP and Orderic’s version of events. Harold was a keen politician who must have known that William, whether or not he had his eye on the crown of England, would be able to wield strong influence over English politics if he was able to keep the hostages with him. This would have been unacceptable. When Harold asked permission from Edward to try and free the hostages, he was strongly rebuked, not out of the king’s concern about offending the duke, but rather out of worry for Harold’s wellbeing. The duke was described as being crafty and deceptive, with the capability to trick the earl. “He took leave of King Edward; Edward openly refused him permission, forbade him and entreated him not to cross over to Normandy or speak to Duke William; he could easily be tricked there for the duke was very astute. If he wished to have his hostages back, he should send other messengers.”² While it may seem unusual that a pro-Norman chronicler such as Wace criticized William, the practice had become more common among later writers. However, in this particular case it is strange that Wace included such a passage because it was a harsh criticism not necessarily originating out of his own beliefs, but rather one that may have come directly from Edward’s mouth. On the same page, he had taken pains to emphasize how much love the king had for William and

² Wace, p. 153.
all Normans for the hospitality they had given him while he was in exile during the reign of King Cnut: “Robert, his father, had raised him and William had served him a great deal. All the advantages he had enjoyed had been through this lineage; whatever impression he had given, he did not love anyone as much.”¹ Although the inclusion of this account was Wace’s attempt at fairness, by offering even the remote possibility that William was a deceptive figure, he risked undermining the narratives of WP and Orderic Vitalis. In doing so, he made the duke into a figure who shared many of the qualities other chroniclers believed had only existed in Harold. He was crafty and dishonest, a far cry from the religiously pious and honest ruler he was often portrayed as.

The other book that Wace cited offered a pro-Norman reason for Harold’s journey. It explained how Edward had sent Harold to confirm Duke William as his successor but it is strange how, much like those of WP and Orderic, this explanation is short and lacks detail. “Another book has informed me that the king, to ensure that the kingdom passed to Duke William, his cousin, after his death, asked Harold to go to him.”² It is as if Wace had more trust in the explanation the first book gave, but being generally pro-Norman and wanting to hang on to his belief that Edward would never criticize the duke, decided to insert the reference to the second book just to ease his own mind. He had access to the chronicles of WP, Orderic, and others, some of the best historians of the 11th and 12th centuries, yet decided to include this reference from a book written by an author he does not name. While there were many texts that described the invasion which are no longer extant, chroniclers would almost always include the name of an author when referencing their sources. This is the case with WP, Guy, and Orderic,

¹ Ibid.
² Ibid.
who referenced one another as well as less well-known authors. Although Wace seems to doubt the story of Edward sending Harold to Normandy, he ends his description of the two referenced books with a line that is both refreshing for its honesty and frustrating in its conclusion. “I do not know which is the correct explanation, but we can find both in writing.”

The final source that offers a reason for Harold’s journey, the Bayeux Tapestry, appears to confirm the version Wace offered; that Edward had warned Harold not to go to Normandy because William was deceitful. In the first scene, Edward is shown seated talking with advisors, one of whom is Harold.

Yet this does not appear to be a casual conversation. Rather, the king seems to be lecturing the earl and the man next to him, as if a disagreement was occurring. His right

1 Ibid.
arm is either nearly touching or making direct contact with Harold’s chest, something that would not have occurred in casual conversation. This argumentative or confrontational aspect to the opening scene is further illustrated by the positioning of the two men’s hands up in the air, as if having to explain something with emphasis. Either they disagreed with something Edward had told them, or the king had reacted to something they had mentioned and they were forced to defend themselves. Likely Harold wanted to go to Normandy to negotiate the release of the hostages William was holding, because in the next Scene he and his men are shown riding away on horses from the palace towards Bosham Abbey, the seat of his family’s power. In the following Scene, Harold and his men are shown sailing for Normandy.

Scene 2: Harold and his retinue riding towards Bosham
Scene 4: Harold and his men boarding boats for their journey to Normandy

The patron of the tapestry was an individual, most likely Norman but definitely continental, who was involved with the invasion, and had Edward promised the throne through Harold to Duke William, this illustrated version of events should confirm that. However, what is depicted after Harold arrived in England upon his release from William’s custody seems instead to confirm Wace’s version of events that Edward had warned Harold about the dangers of going to Normandy, but was ignored. In Scene 25, Edward is seated on his throne pointing, as in the first Scene, at Harold. There are also two men who seem to be either advisors or guards on both sides of Edward who point at the earl. This time however, Harold is not standing close to the king pointing his finger at him as if making a case that he is correct in the dispute and Edward is wrong. Rather, he has his entire hand outstretched with his palm facing upwards, as if asking for forgiveness. This would make sense if we believe the explanation that Harold had, against Edward’s advice, gone to Normandy to try and free the hostages. As someone who had previously had much influence on the king, failure to listen to his advice and his subsequent humiliation while in William’s custody must have been embarrassing. Not only was it embarrassing, if Edward previously had the idea in his mind that Harold was a possible choice as his successor, his behavior in Normandy would have risked the chance of this occurring. Thus he had no other choice but to repent to Edward and ask for forgiveness. By all measures, the Bayeux Tapestry confirms the version of events Wace offered.

What is certain is that upon landing in Ponthieu, Harold and his men were taken captive by Count Guy, an event mentioned in all of the chronicles and shown in the
tapestry. Duke William learned of this and, because Guy was his vassal, was able to get Harold released into his own care. The duke knew that with Harold in his custody, he had much to gain. If he had both Harold and his relatives as hostages, he could get them to agree to conditions that they otherwise would not. Yet despite the obvious political motives behind it, this event was also important to the chroniclers because it allowed them to portray William as a charitable, generous ruler who was willing to help those in need. He was shown to be a religious ruler, unlike Count Guy who imprisoned people for ransom. According to WP, he used a mixture of prayer and political force to have Harold released and even though he despised the tactics Guy used, for his willingness to give over his captive the count was rewarded with lands. Thus Duke William was forcible, but also religious and merciful. Similarly, Wace stated that William gave Guy, despite his depiction in his account as being cruel, an estate near the River Eaulne.\(^1\) If his enemies repented, forgiveness was always possible. This was a theme that was to be repeated by the early chroniclers when he and his army invaded England. It should be noted, however, that this is one of the instances where Orderic omits details given by WP. By not including the account of William generously giving Count Guy lands, he continued his theme that although William’s invasion was righteous, the man himself was not worthy of being praised. This is the result of Orderic’s unique upbringing. Having grown up in England learning about the conquest, and not having to write for a political patron, he was free to describe William differently. In this case he did not criticize him, but nevertheless did not praise him. This was to become a common tactic of Orderic, although in passages describing events after the invasion had taken place he freely pointed out the faults of the Normans. Duke William was not above average humans.

\(^1\) Wace, p. 154.
Rather, Orderic believed that while he was an exceptional military leader, he also could be a brutal ruler.

The oath that Harold took while in Normandy, swearing to agree that William was to be the next English king, was the most important event that the chroniclers used to legitimize the Norman invasion. Most of these writers were men who worked within the church, and the idea that Harold swore an oath according to Christian custom and then decided to break it was particularly reprehensible. In medieval penance books written as early as the 6th century, perjury was listed among the worst possible sins. In the 12th century *Penitential of Bartholomew Iscanus*, perjury is listed second only to homicide in severity:

“He who knowingly commits perjury also either disbelieves or neglects the sanctity of the whole Christian profession, since an oath constitutes the end of every controversy in ecclesiastical affairs, and in secular matters many controversies are terminated by an oath. Indeed the judgments which are publicly called laws are never completed without an oath. Diverse heavy penances are therefore laid down by the Holy Fathers against perjurers for a variety of perjuries.”

These penance books do not stipulate different punishments according to the status in society of those who perjure themselves. Secular rulers who violate oaths are not to be punished with violence. The chroniclers, however, wrote otherwise. By breaking an oath, a secular ruler could not only be physically punished, he could bring military action against his kingdom. The writers had to make this claim, because without it there was no justifiable reason for William to invade England. They were writing after the invasion in an effort to legitimize William as king, and men knowledgeable in theology writing that the use of violence was justifiable would have helped solidify William’s position on the throne. What WP and all of the pro-Norman chroniclers failed to mention, however, was

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that Harold had taken the oath while he was under duress. Had he refused to take it, he probably would have been held hostage along with the two men he had come to Normandy to try and free. Taking the oath was his only way out of the dire situation that he found himself in, a fact conveniently left out of the chronicles.

WP points out that not only did Harold swear on Edward’s orders to be William’s vassal, but he also promised that he would get Dover Castle ready, presumably so that the duke could use it as a landing place and a safe area for his knights to live.\(^1\) Other castles were to be fortified as well so that they could be garrisoned by William’s troops. This reinforces the point WP inadvertently made about the English being rebellious. He had tried to depict Harold as not having support in England, but if this were the case, why would William need so many castles to be garrisoned and fortified? It indicates that the duke knew he had less support than Harold within the kingdom, and a display of military strength would have been helpful to intimidate the population into supporting him. Harold, who owned many estates, would have been more familiar to the population in the southern half of England facing the English Channel than William. The duke had most likely never been to England, whereas Harold had spent all of his life there, with the exception of his brief exile in Ireland.

WP did not contain his contempt for Harold for making the oath and then breaking it. Not only was he not worthy to be a friend of William, he was also not a good Christian:

“With what intent dared you after this take William’s inheritance from him and make war on him, when you had with both voice and hand subjected yourself and your people to him by sacrosanct oath? What you should have suppressed you perniciously stirred up. How unfortunate were the following winds which filled your black sails on the way

\(^1\) William of Poitiers, p. 71.
home! How impious the smooth sea which suffered you, most abominable of men, to be
carried on your journey to the shore! How perverse was the calm harbor which received
you, who were bringing the disastrous shipwreck of your native land!”

This passage is a key piece of Norman propaganda. WP believed that although William
acted as the aggressor by launching the invasion of England, Harold had started the war
by perjuring himself. Thus the duke’s actions were righteous. He was defending what had
been given to him rightfully by King Edward and doling out just punishment upon a
perjurer. This theory was used as an excuse for other activities as well. WP, in a later
section of his chronicle, puts the blame for the devastation that would be wrought upon
England squarely with Harold. Although WP never mentioned any poor behavior by the
Norman army while it was marching through England in 1066, it is likely that this theory
was a good way to excuse such actions if they did take place. It would also be a good way
to shift the blame to Harold, because any devastation that occurred was the result of his
actions alone. This was an opinion that was shared by Guy of Amiens when describing
the lead-up to the battle of Hastings.

Orderic was also disgusted at Harold breaking his oath, and similarly blamed him
for bringing devastation upon England, his native land: “In a short time the kingdom
which he had nefariously seized was polluted with crimes too horrible to relate.” This
account is expected from a writer who came from England but who also supported
William’s right to the crown. Like WP, he agreed with the idea that Harold was the cause
of the invasion because of his poor behavior. But whereas WP focused solely on Harold’s
seizing of the crown, Orderic also emphasized the harsh conditions that the English

1 Ibid., pp. 78-79.
2 William of Poitiers, pp. 141, 143.
3 Orderic Vitalis, p. 139.
population was subjected to during his reign. This comes as a surprise, because there is no evidence that Harold mistreated the population during his short reign as king. What he did do that offended Orderic, however, was seize from churches lands that had been granted to them by Cnut and Edward, including properties in Sussex that had belonged to the Norman monastery at Fecamp.\(^1\) The resentment that resulted from this is proven by the assistance Williams’s army received from the remaining monks upon landing in England.\(^2\) Harold’s harsh behavior towards the monastery must have upset Orderic, who complimented William for building, not taking away, churches. This account suited Orderic’s purpose of proving that Harold was against the English, the church, and God and thus deserved to have been deposed.

Wace’s description of Harold’s perjury and its consequences is a combination of passages from both WP and Orderic, yet it features a significant difference. Like WP, Wace wrote that Harold brought destruction upon the kingdom by breaking his oath, and like Orderic, he wrote that he had harmed the local population. What is unique about his account, however, is its emphasis on the mistreatment of Normans within England by Harold:

“The Normans, who lived in that country and had wives and children there who had been taken there by Edward and given great castles and fiefs, were thrown out of the country by Harold; he did not want to leave a single one there. He expelled fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, sisters and brothers.”\(^3\)

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1 See Peter Clark, *The English Nobility Under Edward the Confessor* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 120.
2 The presence of a monk from Fecamp in William’s army is described in the *Gesta Guillelmi*, p. 120.
3 Wace, p. 157.
While Normans were expelled from the kingdom, it was not during Harold’s short reign as king that this had primarily happened. Rather, it was his father Godwine who, after having returned from Flanders and regained his prominent status, had convinced Edward to expel all continental advisors and churchmen from his realm. This passage has two explanations. Either it was a case of mistaken chronology by Wace, or it was included purposefully, despite its inaccurate date, in order to build up support for William’s invasion by presenting him as the defender of an oppressed people. Whatever the case, it is interesting that like Orderic, he did not believe the breaking of the oath to be the sole cause of the invasion. What this indicates is that by the 12th century when these two men were writing, legitimizing an invasion and conquest of a kingdom by citing an instance of perjury was not adequate. Whether or not this was the belief specifically in England and Normandy is unknown, for there are no extant sources to document this. But the fact that in the 1070s WP believed including Harold’s perjury within his chronicle was enough to make his case, while decades later for Orderic and Wace it was not, indicates what the prevailing opinion of the 12th century was.

While Wace was mistaken in writing that Harold had mistreated the local English population and expelled Normans from England, the section of his chronicle describing why Harold travelled to Normandy is to be trusted more than the accounts of WP and Orderic. While the latter writers wrote that Edward had sent Harold to Normandy of his own free will to confirm William as his successor, Wace gives readers a choice based on two written sources he had utilized to conduct research. While he provided an explanation from a pro-Norman account, he also included a much longer and more detailed account that portrayed Edward warning Harold against leaving to help his
relatives. The duke was crafty and the king knew it. Because Wace generally supported
the invasion, there was no other reason for him to include this story other than to attempt
to be historically accurate, and because it does not appear in any other pro-Norman
source, there is a better chance that it is accurate. Why then, if Wace portrayed William
as crafty, did he still express outrage when Harold broke his oath? As I have proven,
perjury was a serious crime in the Middle Ages, and once an oath was taken it was not to
be broken. Regardless of whether Wace knew that William had tricked Harold, the oath
he took still had to be upheld. Because it ultimately was not, Wace expressed the same
outrage as the other chroniclers. Unlike WP and Orderic, however, who expressed disgust
at Harold breaking his oath for no other reason than to arouse outrage from their readers,
Wace believe that he had a legitimate reason to do so: oaths had to be kept. Regardless of
Harold being forced to take the oath under duress, the chroniclers connected all of his
subsequent actions to it, including when he was enthroned as king.
Chapter 3
Harold’s “Seizing” of the Throne

“A true report came unexpectedly, that the English land had lost its king and that Harold was wearing its crown. And this mad Englishman could not endure to wait the decision of a public election, but on the tragic day when that best of all men was buried, while all the people were mourning, he violated his oath and seized the royal throne without acclamation, with the connivance of a few wicked men.”

In this quote, WP raises two other central themes of the Norman propaganda effort against Harold. By implying that Harold did not wait for an election to take place, but instead seized the throne on the day that Edward died, WP creates an image of a hasty, impatient man. The chroniclers would expand upon this further when describing Harold marching his army towards the south of England to launch a surprise attack on the invading Norman troops later in the year. Second, WP implies that Harold was surrounded by impious ecclesiastical officials who influenced him to behave irrationally. Prominent among these was Stigand, Archbishop of Canterbury and Bishop of Winchester. He had been actively involved in politics as early as the 1020s, having been an advisor to Cnut. Under King Edward, he benefited from the flight of Archbishop Robert from England as he was able, with Edward’s approval, to take Robert’s job at Canterbury.

Robert, feeling he had been slighted, went to Rome to make the case to Pope Leo IX that he had been unfairly removed from office and that Edward had usurped the authority of the papacy by appointing an important church official without consultation. He likely also made the case that Stigand could not hold two ecclesiastical offices at

once, which he was doing by being the Archbishop of Canterbury and Bishop of Winchester. Yet while the reform-minded popes of the 11th century would have preferred to have power over secular leaders to appoint these officials, they were not strong or influential enough to do so in the 1050s and 1060s.\(^1\) It would take decades for the papacy to establish authority over far-flung bishops and secular leaders, and even then its power was not absolute. Despite this weakness, Leo attempted to enforce his authority by calling Stigand to Rome to answer for his actions. Not only did the archbishop refuse to attend the meeting, but he also refused to give up one of his ecclesiastical positions.\(^2\) The practice of pluralism, or holding more than one ecclesiastical office at once, was one of the main targets of the new reform movement. Again, however, although Leo IX and his successors Victor II, Stephen IX, and Nicholas II had shown that they were not afraid of cracking down on those who they believed were guilty of inappropriate behavior, their failure to convince Stigand to step down from one of his two positions was a sign that they were still too weak to influence church officials in distant locations. They did, however, have one option remaining, which in 1059 Nicholas II used by excommunicating Stigand.

This had little effect on the archbishop due to the favorable opinion King Edward had for him. He was permitted to retain his dual positions and continued to be close to the court and the king. In the battle between the papacy and secular leaders, kings still held the upper hand. Although it is not known how loyal the chroniclers were to the reform papacy, in this case it makes little difference. What is important is that they were able to


use this issue as a tool to make a villain out of Stigand in order to create another justification for the invasion. A church official like WP could portray Stigand as an illegitimate archbishop, and by doing so made all actions he took after 1059 illegitimate as well. One of these actions was Harold’s coronation: “He received an impious consecration from Stigand, who had been deprived of his priestly office by the just zeal and anathema of the pope.”1 In addition to emphasizing the illegitimacy of Stigand, this passage about the excommunication of the archbishop also gave WP a chance to compare Harold’s impious theological counselors to those of William.

WP wrote that although the duke would frequently engage in conversations and debates about religious doctrine with churchmen and monks, he was never afraid to expel any who he believed were not religiously pure. His officials also were not afraid to crack down on their companions around them if they acted foolishly. One of these was Hugh, the bishop of Lisieux. He was willing to criticize a member of his family, and also clamped down on inappropriate behavior:

“Indeed it was he who, when Archbishop Mauger was deposed, was the resounding voice of justice, standing steadily on the side of God and condemning his uncle’s son on God’s behalf… He is a merciful prosecutor, the holy enemy, not of any man, but of every vice. He watches most faithfully over those subjects to him, comparable in his discretion to those loving fathers who consider the interests rather than the desires of their young sons.”2

In this passage and others like it, WP accomplishes two goals. First, he shows that Stigand, unlike William’s ecclesiastic officials, satisfied the desire of Harold to be king by crowning him rather than considering what was in his best interest. If he had an official like Hugh at his side, the coronation likely would have never occurred. Second,

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2 Ibid., p. 93.
he tries to prove that despite being a long distance away from Rome, William surrounded himself with pious officials and was thus an ally of the faith.

Despite this rosy picture that WP tries to paint of William being aligned with religious officials, the duke did not always have such fond opinions of the papacy. During the 1050s, he married Matilda of Flanders despite papal objection that the couple was violating rules against degrees of kindred. It was only in 1059 that William’s closest spiritual advisor, Lanfranc, was able to have the interdict against Normandy, which had been placed by Leo IX, removed. One of the conditions was that William build a new church in his capital, Caen. As a display of gratitude for what he had accomplished, William appointed Lanfranc to be the abbot of this new ducal church of Saint-Etienne-de-Caen.¹ In Lanfranc, William had a loyal supporter who also happened to be among the most prominent of 11th century theologians, who had successfully argued the church’s position during the Eucharistic crisis with Berengar of Tours.² It is no surprise that WP honed in on William’s respect for him:

“He admitted to his closest circles a certain Lanfranc, of whom it was disputed whether he deserved respect and glory more for his remarkable knowledge of secular and divine learning or for his outstanding observance of the monastic rule… To him he committed the guidance of his soul, to him he entrusted the care of presiding, as though from a watch-tower, over all of the ecclesiastical orders throughout Normandy.”³

This positive review given by WP served a greater purpose than displaying Lanfranc’s theological knowledge. It also helped to legitimize the campaign he was

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¹ William of Poitiers, p. 84.
² Berengar of Tours was a teacher in the Loire Valley who promote the controversial belief that the Eucharist was not the body and blood of Christ. The controversy began in the late 1040s, and although Berengar was an excellent orator, he was outmatched by Lanfranc. The issue was settled at the synod of Poitiers in 1075 when the bread and wine were declared to be Christ’s body and blood. For an overview of the doctrinal issues Lanfranc used in his debates with Berengar, see Margaret Gibson, Lanfranc of Bec (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 71-81.
³ William of Poitiers, p. 85.
undertaking in England after 1066 to systematically replace nearly all Anglo-Saxon bishops and other church officials with those from the mainland.¹ Lanfranc was a staunch proponent of the reforms that had begun to sweep the papacy beginning in the early 1050s, and these reforms were often instituted by men who believed that the church should operate under the rules establish at Cluny in the 10th century. By portraying him as a learned theologian who was aligned with the monastic rule, WP was able to mark a contrast between Lanfranc and the English bishops who were unaligned with the proper monastic rule. It also served to strengthen the bond between William and Lanfranc. Even Eadmer, an English chronicler, mentions this relationship in his Historia Novorum: “He always took great pains both to make the king a faithful servant of God and to renew religion and right living among all classes throughout the whole kingdom.”² As Helen Clover and Margaret Gibson put it: “Lancfranc’s fundamental virtue in public life was an unquestioned loyalty to William the Conqueror and a readiness to commend such loyalty to wavering magnates.”³

While it is tempting to believe that Lanfranc was not as devoted to the church as WP described, his own writings confirm that he was a staunch supporter of the reform popes. Particularly important to this study is the close relationship he had with Alexander II (r. 1061-1073), who was in power during the Norman invasion. Unfortunately, none of the letters to Alexander before 1071 survive, but later extant copies nevertheless express Lanfranc’s belief in papal primacy. In a letter dated to that year, he delays naming a

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¹ For a look at the ethnicities of the new bishops, see Frank Barlow, The English Church 1066-1154 (London and New York: Longman Group, 1979), p. 57.
successor to two offices until he receives orders from Alexander. Of the first office: “It was for this reason that I decided to consult your highness in the apostolic see, so that with your guidance we can be quite sure what to allow or what action to take in a matter of such urgency and importance.” The second man, the bishop of Lichfield, had been accused of having a wife and fathering children. After he gave up his office, neither William nor Lanfranc appointed a successor. Rather, they opted for Alexander’s advice: “I have not presumed either to consecrate a bishop in his place, or to give other bishops licence to consecrate, until instructions come from you, directing us how to proceed in a matter of such consequences.” The relationship between these two men would influence the papacy’s attitude towards William as well. Lanfranc had defended the church against Berengar of Tours during the Eucharistic controversy, and this could have led to papal support for the Norman invasion. His belief that the bishop of Rome was the custodian and guarantor of Christian truth, as H.E.J. Cowdrey puts it, made him stand in stark contrast to Stigand and the English ecclesiastical officials.

Despite Edward’s prominent role in retaining Stigand after the pope demanded his removal, WP never criticized the king. It is unlikely that he agreed with Edward’s actions, because regardless of his theological opinion on the matter, he did not respect Stigand due to his role in crowning Harold. But WP could not criticize Edward, because it would have ruined his narrative that Godwine, Harold and certain English officials were the only reasons for the downfall of the kingdom. Edward had tried to run his kingdom correctly by using continental advisors and churchmen, but Earl Godwine and

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1 Ibid., p. 37.
2 Ibid., p. 39.
Harold had forced him into replacing them with corrupt English officials. By doing so, Harold had violated both the king’s wishes as well as those of the papacy.

Orderic, as a church official, also includes the outrageous behavior of Stigand and Harold’s coronation in his chronicle. Yet he also includes further information about their conduct during the funeral of King Edward that made the two men not just poor Christians, but also disgraceful political figures:

“There on the day of the funeral, whilst the crowds watched the last rites of their beloved king with streaming eyes, Harold had himself consecrated by Archbishop Stigand alone, whom the pope had suspended from divine service for various misdeeds, without the common consent of the other bishops, earls, and nobles, and so by stealth stole the glory of the crown and royal purple.”

Not only did Orderic believe that an illegitimate church official had crowned Harold, but he had conducted the ceremony at the same time as Edward’s funeral. Just after this passage, however, Orderic makes the same mistake as WP. He wrote that Harold’s poorly timed coronation caused the English to become irate, and while some chose to resist him by military means, others believed that they were too weak to do anything about it and submitted to him. There is no evidence, however, that any widespread revolts occurred against Harold, with the exception of his brother Tostig. This revolt occurred for reasons unrelated to the coronation, and no other leading English officials joined him or separately took up arms against the king. Ten months after Harold’s enthronement, the English and nearly all of the kingdom’s earls supported their king at the battle of Hastings, and by doing so repudiated Orderic’s claim.

1 Orderic Vitalis, pp. 137-139.
2 Ibid., p. 139.
Orderic also frequently mentions Lanfranc, and it is no coincidence that he is mentioned shortly after the section detailing Stigand’s deposition for murder and perjury. Orderic does not shy away from praising Lanfranc’s intellectual abilities, even compared to intellectual giants throughout history:

“By intellect and learning Lanfranc would have won the applause of Herodian in grammar, Aristotle in dialectic, Cicero in rhetoric, Augustine, Jerome, and the other commentators on the Old and New Testaments in scriptural studies. The Athenians themselves, when they were at their most flourishing, and excelled in teaching, would have given place to Lanfranc in every branch of eloquence or learning, and after hearing his apt proofs would have been eager to learn from him.”

Like WP’s lines of praise, the purpose of this passage from Orderic is not only to venerate Lanfranc in order to impress readers. Rather, it is also meant to offer a comparison to the corrupt Stigand: “He had defiled himself with perjury and homicide; and he had not honestly entered into the archbishopic by the right door, but had climbed in from the two bishoprics of Norfolk and Winchester, up the shameful ladder of ambition and intrusion.”

Lanfranc knew the rules of the church and abided by them, as Orderic tried to prove by mentioning that even Augustine and Jerome, two of the most well respected theologians, would have thought well of him. The same could not have been said for Stigand who, according to Orderic, was not interested in either following the orders of the papacy or becoming more learned: “Stigand, archbishop of Canterbury, on the other hand, was immersed in worldly affairs and interests, and had been suspended by Pope Alexander for his misdeeds.”

Along with a fluency in theology, Lanfranc also knew the proper rules and protocols of the church and had taught them to students while he was a teacher at Avranches. This made him the perfect candidate to teach the English,

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1 Orderic Vitalis, p. 251.
2 Ibid., pp. 237, 239.
3 Ibid., p. 183.
who had long been taught by men Orderic believed to be sinful: “And so in the year of Our Lord 1070, Lanfranc, the first abbot of Caen, was by God’s will sent to instruct the English, and after his praiseworthy election and fitting consecration was enthroned as archbishop of Canterbury on 29 August.”¹ To Orderic, Lanfranc had been sent to correct the damage done by Stigand, and by marking the contrast between the two men, offered another reason why the Norman invasion was a legitimate action.

Wace did not include Stigand within his chronicle, yet this should not be particularly surprising. Despite his religious upbringing, with few exceptions ecclesiastical issues were of less importance to him than they were to WP and Orderic. He was more intent on criticizing the oath that Harold had taken to William than anything else. It did not matter whether or not Stigand had taken part in the coronation because the damage wrought by Harold breaking the oath had already been done, and so any role the archbishop had in making the Normans invade England was small and insignificant compared to the misdeeds done by Harold. There is also the possibility that he could find no evidence to support the claim that Stigand was involved and even now his exact role, if any, in Harold’s enthronement is less than obvious. This lack of interest in church matters is also shown by the exclusion of Lanfranc from his book until a later section unrelated to the invasion.²

¹ Ibid., p. 255.
² Lanfranc’s name appears only twice in the Roman de Rou. In the passage, he is described as having a letter read out loud proclaiming William Rufus as the next king. See Wace, pp. 196-197.
Scene 31: Harold’s enthronement presided over by Stigand

Scene 32: Halley’s Comet flies by after Harold’s coronation
When analyzing the coronation Scene in the Bayeux Tapestry, it is obvious that its patron believed Stigand played a central role in Harold’s enthronement. In Scene 31 the bishop is standing to Harold’s left presiding over the ceremony. Although two other men are shown, including one handing a ceremonial sword to Harold, neither is important enough to be named. These may have been palace servants rather than notable individuals, and based on their clothing they were not ecclesiastical officials. What is unusual about this scene is the description of “Archbishop” over Stigand’s head. While it is true that following his dispute with the papacy, Edward allowed him to retain his job, considering that the Tapestry’s patron was a continental European, allowing him to maintain his title seems strange. There is, however, an explanation for this. The patron likely intended the piece to be viewed by secular audiences who would have known the story of Stigand being excommunicated. These individuals would have been outraged by his actions and by labeling him Archbishop, the patron was reminding them of his inappropriate behavior.

Although there is nothing directly critical of Stigand during the coronation, his wrongdoing can be inferred in the next Scene by the appearance of Halley’s comet. This was considered a bad omen, and despite the fact that it did not appear immediately after Harold’s coronation as it appears to on the Tapestry, modern science as well as descriptions in most chronicles, including English ones, has confirmed its existence. The English writers, however, did not believed that it portended their downfall: “Then throughout all England, a sign such as men never saw before was seen in the heavens. Some men declared that it was the star comet, which some men called the ‘haired’ star;
and it appeared first on the eve of the *Greater Litany, 24 April*, and shone thus all week.”¹ Continental chroniclers, however, believed the comet portended the coming of righteous judgment, in the form of their army, to punish Harold and Stigand: “The comet, terror of kings, which burned soon after your elevation, foretold your doom.”² It should be noted that all of the continental chroniclers except Guy of Amiens wrote their accounts after the Normans had achieved control over most of England, not immediately after the victory at Hastings. Thus, their control over the kingdom was all but assured, and the comet proved to be a convenient way to prove that their cause was righteous, and that victory was inevitable.

Because neither the *Carmen* nor the *Roman de Rou* include details about Stigand or Harold’s coronation, we must rely on the *Gesta Guillelmi* and the *Ecclesiastical History*. The strategy employed by WP and Orderic of associating Stigand with Harold and comparing the archbishop to Lanfranc was brilliant. By emphasizing the contrast between the two ecclesiastical officials, they persuaded readers of their texts that Harold was not a legitimate king because Stigand, who defied the church, had proceeded over the enthronement ceremony. Not only did Harold illegally occupy the throne, but he also became an enemy of the church by associating with the archbishop. Lanfranc, on the other hand, had defended the church against those who tried to do it harm. His main champion was Duke William, and thus WP and Orderic made the personal battle between Harold and William into a religious debate. While there is no doubt that Lanfranc was an incredibly gifted theologian, attempting to imply that Duke William was equally as pious was inaccurate. He had defied the church when he was young, but had been saved by

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² William of Poitiers, p. 143.
Lanfranc’s interjection between he and the pope. Nevertheless, it was this argument that turned what had been essentially a personal debate between William and Harold into a religious one. While I have shown that there is little evidence to prove that Stigand was the official who crowned Harold and thus the accounts cannot be trusted, the idea of William as a defender of the faith was a strong one. His invasion the following year would, according to certain chroniclers, prove so.
Chapter 4

Invasion

Following Harold’s seizure of the crown, William decided that the only appropriate response was to invade England. His army assembled at the ducal port of Saint-Valery-sur-Somme, and it was there that a massive fleet was assembled. Some ships were given to him by his vassals, while others were built by craftsmen, as is shown in Scene 36 and 37 of the Tapestry. The size of this army and fleet was impressive for its day. The earliest writer, Guy of Amiens, puts the number of men at an exaggerated 150,000: “The earth; the heavens quake; the ocean is amazed. Beasts flee, and likewise birds and fish, for one hundred and fifty thousand different voices make the welkin ring.”\(^1\) WP also provides an exaggerated number of 50,000 troops\(^2\) while Wace places the number of ships at 696.\(^3\) Despite the best estimates of modern scholars, we do not know the precise number of troops in William’s army. It consisted not only of Normans, but also had large contingents of Breton and French soldiers. Guy of Amiens mentioned troops from Maine as well as Apulians, Calabrians, and Sicilians who also volunteered.\(^4\)

The involvement of these last three can be attributed to the large number of Norman mercenaries in southern Italy who had been taking part in wars against Muslims since earlier in the century: “Foreign knights flocked to help him in great numbers, attracted partly by the well-known liberality of the duke, but all fully confident of the justice of his

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\(^1\) Guy of Amiens, p. 9.  
\(^2\) William of Poitiers, p. 103.  
\(^3\) Wace, p. 163.  
\(^4\) Guy of Amiens, p. 17.
cause.”¹ That they left a campaign against the unholy Muslims in order to offer military aid against a fellow Christian kingdom is an indication that Harold’s crime of perjury was a heinous one deserving of a military response, at least to WP. For the time being, the Norman cause was more righteous than holy war.

According to WP and Orderic, while William’s fleet was being assembled on the coast of Normandy in preparation for the military campaign, he was also busy on the political and spiritual fronts. If WP and Orderic still had doubts as to whether their audiences would believe that William had justification for his invasion, even after describing Harold’s breaking of the oath and Stigand’s illegitimate coronation ceremony, the granting of the banner of Saint Peter by Pope Alexander II to William’s army was an event that bolstered the idea that God was on the side of the Normans. After a lengthy passage praising Alexander II, who not coincidentally was also a strong ally of the Normans in southern Italy, WP describes the importance of the banner: “Seeking the approval of the pope, whom he had informed of the business in hand, the duke received a banner with his blessing, to signify the approval of St Peter, by following which he might attack the enemy with greater confidence and safety.”² Orderic also mentions the banner, and adds other details: “The pope listened to his account of all that had taken place, gave his opinion in favour of the duke’s claim, advised him to take up arms boldly against the perjurer, and sent the standard of St. Peter the Apostle, by whose merits he might be defended from every danger.”³ This would have sent a powerful message to readers. By the time WP and Orderic wrote their chronicles, the invasion had succeeded and William as well as many of his men had survived, despite the odds against them. To those reading

¹ William of Poitiers, p. 103.
² Ibid., p. 105.
³ Orderic Vitalis, p. 143.
their accounts, St. Peter had taken the side of the Normans, protected them, exposed Harold as a perjurer and doled out just punishment. This is similar to the chroniclers’ accounts of Halley’s Comet, which must also have helped to convince readers of Harold’s guilt. Despite this description of papal assistance, there is no evidence that the meeting between an envoy and the pope occurred, or that the banner ever existed. As Ian Walker points out, such banners were given only to endorse war against Muslims or rebels against papal authority, not to promote war against Christians.¹ Even if certain members of the English ecclesiastical community did not respond well to the reforms the papacy was pushing, endorsing an invasion in order to punish them would have been an inappropriate response. In addition, it is strange that in 1070, Alexander II ordered the duke to build a large abbey upon the battlefield to do penance for causing such harm to the English kingdom.² If the Pope had supported the invasion from the beginning, he would have known that one of the consequences would be the death of a number of soldiers and civilians. To make William construct an abbey would have tarnished the pope’s reputation by linking him indirectly to the deaths of thousands of Christians. In addition, the decision by Wace not to mention the banner casts doubt on the claim that papal support was given.

After sailing from Normandy across the English Channel, the duke’s army landed near Pevensey in Southern England on either the 28th or 29th of September. The Anglo-Saxon kingdom did have naval resources and troops at its disposal to defend the coast, and Orderic claims that Harold and a large group of soldiers had been defending the

¹ For more information on the papal banner, see Walker, pp. 148-149.
² Battle Abbey in Battle, East Sussex. Although none of the structures built in the 11th century survived the ravages of time, the outline of the abbey’s church, including its high altar, are still visible. For more information about the structures on the property, see J.N. Hare, “The buildings of Battle Abbey”, Anglo-Norman Studies III (1980), pp. 65-77.
southern shores all year. Yet by late September a substantial amount of the resources available had been diverted from the coast and were instead being used in the north of the kingdom, where the king and his army had, on the 25th of September, defeated an invading Norwegian army at the battle of Stamford Bridge. From Stamford Bridge, Harold and his presumably exhausted army marched south to London. While they were on the march, the Normans set about pillaging the countryside.

“With peace, indeed, but little ground acquired, your men go out and devastate and burn the land—behaviour which, since the stupid people reject you as king, is not to be wondered at. It is entirely just that they should perish and come to naught.” Because he was primarily interested in the military role of the French during the invasion, Guy was less concerned than the other authors about trying to legitimize it by portraying the English people as supporters of William. By not having interest in doing so, he was freer to write about events as they actually occurred upon William’s landing. By admitting that the Normans burnt down the houses of Englishmen, he also tacitly acknowledged that the duke could be cruel to those who did not side with him. The portrayal Guy gives of the first moments of the invasion is also similar to the picture portrayed in Scene 50 of the Bayeux Tapestry.

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1 Orderic Vitalis, p. 169.
2 Guy of Amiens, p. 11.
Scene 50: Norman soldiers burn an Anglo-Saxon home as a mother and her child flee

Just as the Tapestry offers an honest assessment of the actual reason for Harold’s visit to Normandy, here too it appears to offer a realistic portrayal of the invasion. While it is not directly critical of William, these soldiers were likely ordered by him to pillage the area. As would be proven after the battle of Hastings, anyone who was opposed to William and would not give in to him would often suffer unpleasant consequences. Wars in the Middle Ages almost always involved raiding the countryside for provisions, as well as for its psychological effect, but because the Norman invasion was often portrayed as an action that would help free the English people from Harold’s oppression, both the Carmen and the Bayeux Tapestry help to prove that this was not the case. Far from benefiting from the invasion, the English people suffered from the start.

Orderic would share this view, with the exception that he did not criticize the actions of the Norman army until after they had won at Hastings. Wace offers nearly the
same information as Guy, yet strangely omits the information regarding the burning of property. In the case of Guy’s information, an Englishman was hiding next to a rock shortly after the Normans came on shore, and reported the information to Harold:

“When one of the English, hiding under a rock by the sea, saw the countless ranks of men spreading out, the fields glittering with the mass of shining weapons, Vulcan driving with his flames people from their homes, a perfidious race falling by the raging swords, and what tears the children shed at the slaughter of their parents, he ran to mount his horse and hastened to inform the king.”¹

In Wace’s chronicle, an English knight also witnessed the Normans coming on shore and reported the information to Harold. But instead of seeing them burning homes, he only saw their weapons and tools:

“He saw the archers emerging from the ships and afterwards the knights disembarking. He saw the carpenters, their axes, the large number of men, the knights, the building material thrown down from the ships, the construction and fortification of the castle and the ditch built all round it, the shields and the weapons brought forth. Everything he saw caused him great anguish. He girded on his sword and took his lance, saying he would go to King Harold and give him this news.”²

It is likely that Wace used the Carmen as his source for this matter, because the two passages are similar in theme and also because there is no such claim made by WP. The difference between them can be attributed to the varying motivations Guy and Wace had for writing their chronicles. Guy’s main interest was praising the actions and ultimate victory of the French contingent of the Norman army, regardless of whether they acted humanely or not. Thus he had freer reign to depict acts of violence. In addition, Guy believed these acts were carried out on a people who supported a perjurer, and so they were collateral damage in the campaign.

Wace, on the other hand, had to be more careful not to overly criticize the Normans. His patron, King Henry, was related on his mother Matilda’s side to William’s

¹ Guy of Amiens, p. 11.
² Wace, p. 165.
family, and the book was an attempt to convince the population of England that he was the legitimate ruler of the kingdom. Earlier in his chronicle, Wace had been able to criticize William indirectly by describing a book he had used as a source that portrayed the duke as sneaky and scheming. But he was only able to do this because it was an indirect use of criticism, rather than one he had written directly assailing William. Wace also mentioned that he had another book with different information that he was using as a source to counter the criticism in the first text. While he was willing to indirectly criticize William and his behavior on occasion, including stories of the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians would have been damaging to the reputation of King Henry’s family. It would have done nothing to boast their legitimacy or that of the French and Normans who controlled most of the government, and likely would have been an embarrassment to them. The worst scenario would have been a revolt by those English who still did not accept a foreign dynasty ruling the kingdom.

From London, Harold and his army marched south to meet the Norman invaders. Most military historians surmise that between having fought two battles only three weeks earlier and having to perform a forced march down to the coast, the Anglo-Saxon army could not have been in peak physical condition.¹ In addition, Harold may not have had his full complement of soldiers, as many had been killed at Fulford and Stamford Bridge. The battle at Fulford reduced the number of men available from the north while the engagement at Stamford Bridge would have further eliminated a large number of quality troops from this area as well as the midlands. Although casualty numbers for the latter battle are not known, a passage by Orderic Vitalis gives an idea of the slaughter that had

¹ DeVries, p. 298, for example. Walker, pp. 169-171 emphasizes the reduced number of troops available rather than the long march.
occurred: “Travellers cannot fail to recognize the field, for a great mountain of dead
men’s bones still lies there and bears witness to the terrible slaughter on both sides.”¹
While many who perished would have been fyrd men, those who were raised in a levy
and thus less experienced, others would have been the huscarls, the paid household
troops of various lords.² The loss or severe injury of these men would have been
particularly damaging, for not only were they the most experienced troops in England,
they were also the most loyal. The fyrd men, however, were by no means inexperienced
or poor warriors. They were moderately well equipped troops who had been nominated
by their communities to serve in battle.³ The loss of a substantial percentage of both
groups from the north and the midlands meant there were few men available in those
regions to join Harold on the campaign south.

Historians have blamed Harold for leaving London too soon after learning that the
Normans had landed on the coast. This, they believe, cost him the time he needed to
refresh and build up his army by waiting for fresh troops to arrive. If Harold had arrived
in London from the north at the beginning of October, he would have only been in the
city for a few days before continuing the march south, and so the number of men
collected could not have been substantial. The only caveats, however, are that fresh
troops may have joined his army as he was on the move or they could have already been
assembled in London while he was making his way to the city from the north. According
to Orderic, Harold was able to create a vast army: “Then for six days he sent far and wide
to summon the populace to war, gathered a huge multitude of Englishmen around him,

¹ Orderic Vitalis, p. 169.
² For a study concerning fyrd service in England, see Richard Abels, ’Bookland and Pyrd
³ Walker, p. 159.
and hastened to battle against the enemy.”¹ Likewise, Wace describes a large army assembling for Harold: “Harold has summoned his men, those from the castles and those from the cities, ports, towns and burgs, his counts, barons and vavassors. The peasants came in great throngs, bringing such weapons as they could find; they carried cudgels and great pikes, iron forks and clubs.”² Orderic’s account features the exaggerated language typical in medieval descriptions of troop strength, and there is little likelihood that the English army could have had all available soldiers upon leaving London. Wace’s account is also likely exaggerated, and there are no indications that Harold’s army was composed of a large group of peasants, whom Wace believed formed the bulk of Harold’s army. Whatever the case may have been regarding troop strength and composition there would have been many fresh troops, but also many others who were still fatigued from having to fight one or two battles in the north. In addition, there also would have been men who were coming from such long distances that they would not have been able to arrive in time to join the army as it was leaving London.

While Harold could be blamed for leaving the city too rapidly, he may have been trying to execute a rapid strike on the Normans, just as he had done so successfully against the Norwegians at Stamford Bridge and earlier in his career defending the western borders against the Welsh. Both Guy and Orderic believed that surprise was an element Harold wished to take advantage of. The differences in their descriptions of the preparation for the surprise assault reveal differences about how they viewed war. Guy’s description was not given in order to promote Harold’s skill at war, but rather to depict him as sneaky and unwilling to line up his troops for a traditional battle: “Meanwhile the

¹ Orderic Vitalis, p. 173.
² Wace, p. 173.
king, the abode and inheritor of blackest deceit, skilled in the robber’s craft, under cover of darkness secretly ordered his troops to arm and, if they could, attack the duke’s army.”¹ While this could only be a criticism of Harold’s military tactics, Guy had greater reasons for using such harsh language. Harold had not acted fittingly in Normandy by sneakily seizing what was rightfully William’s, and his behavior on the battlefield was similar. Because of the superiority of Norman and French troops, Harold knew he could not win by force of arms alone, but would instead need to use other means. Once again, he needed to use deception to get what he wanted.

The tone of Orderic’s description is different from Guy’s, as is its underlying meaning: “His plan was to catch them unawares and overwhelm them by an unexpected or night attack; and to prevent them escaping in flight he kept seventy heavily armed ships at sea.”² By excluding Guy’s harsh language but retaining the description of the surprise attack, Orderic legitimized Harold’s plan. It was not cowardly or treacherous, but rather a sensible tactical maneuver, regardless of his support for the Norman cause. It should be noted that the probability of Harold having 70-armed ships patrolling the southern shore is unlikely, yet it is possible. One possibility scholars have yet to analyze is a scenario in which the English had seized a portion of the Viking fleet after the battle at Stamford Bridge. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the defeated Viking army only needed a 24 of their original 300 ships to return to Norway.³ Assuming that 300 ships is an exaggeration, as medieval statistics typically are, there is still a possibility that Harold’s men were able to commandeer some of the unused crafts. He would have been

1 Guy of Amiens, p. 19.
2 Orderic Vitalis, p. 173.
3 Anonymous, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* p. 199. The number of ships required by the defeated Vikings is only mentioned in the D version of the chronicle, also known as the Worcester Manuscript.
aware of the possibility of a Norman invasion, and so the ships may have been sent south and been in the area on October 13. Thus incorporating them into a surprise attack is plausible. There is one problem with this theory, however. The main English fleet had disbanded shortly before the battle at Stamford Bridge due to a lack of supplies, and it is hard to believe enough food would have been gathered within three weeks to support hundreds, if not thousands, of men on a new fleet. Rations would have already been in short supply, as they would have been needed to support Harold’s army as it moved south towards Hastings. Nevertheless, this is a theory that needs to be looked into, because it would help to corroborate the idea that Harold was trying to copy the strategy he had utilized at Stamford Bridge. Whether true or not, by providing a specific number of ships to be used in the surprise attack, Orderic emphasized the large number of men at Harold’s disposal. By doing so, he did what all of the chroniclers tried to do, which was emphasize the overwhelming odds William had to overcome in his quest to become the king of England.

Wace’s account describes a different sequence of events, and one that would make sense in the tense situation on October 13th, the day before the battle:

“That night the Norman were on their guard and they stayed awake all night, fully armed. All night they were fearful, for they had been told that the English would come to them that night and attack them that night. The English themselves feared the Normans would attack them that night; in this way they spent the whole night awake, each side watching out for the other.”

Before battles there are often rumors that circulate among anxious men, particularly regarding the strength and planned movements of the enemy, and this case is no different. Although the concept of chivalry with its emphasis on fighting fellow Christians on an equal playing field was just in its infancy in this time, surprise attacks in battles were still

1 Wace, p. 169.
not unheard of. This was particularly the case in England, where raids between the Welsh and the English had become commonplace during the 1050s and early 1060s. During the night of October 13th rumor may have spread that Harold intended to launch a surprise attack, possibly based on what the duke’s soldiers had heard had happened at Stamford Bridge, when in fact the English had planned no such efforts and were instead focused on how to win a set-piece battle. Yet in this case, based on Harold’s previous tactics against the Welsh and Vikings, Orderic’s description has to be given the greatest chance for accuracy. Somehow, however, Harold must have discovered that his plan had been discovered and opted instead for a traditional battle. He marched his troops onto Senlac Hill early on the morning on October 14th, and thus dawn broke on one of the most important days in English history.

Although the chroniclers disagree about many aspects of the battle of Hastings, the one they unanimously agree upon is the order of battle used by the two opposing forces. The Norman army was composed of a front line of infantry armed with crossbows, a second line of more heavily armed infantry, and most importantly a third line composed of heavy cavalry. The use of cavalry by European armies was not new, having been used by the Carolingian armies of Pippin II and Charlemagne during the 8th and 9th centuries. During the Carolingian period, however, they were not the most important unit of European armies. Their charges could be disorganized and, as Bernard Bachrach has shown, they were ineffective without support from other types of troops. Their primary goal was to pursue fleeing enemies and collect the spoils of war, not only because of their ineffectiveness when used alone but also because Charlemagne’s troops

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1 For further information about conflicts with the Welsh as well as Harold’s final raid into Wales from 1062-1063, see Devries, The Norwegian Invasion of England, pp. 130-143.
engaged in sieges more often than open battles.\(^1\) By 1066 this had changed. While sieges were still the primary means of gaining territory, set-piece battles had become more common. The capabilities of cavalry had also been honed over the preceding 200 years, and the Normans were considered the finest cavalrmen on the continent. In contrast English armies, although they used horses to move troops to battlefields, only fought on foot in a formation known as the shield wall: “The English foot soldiers carried axes and pikes, which were very sharp; they had made shields for themselves out of shutters and other pieces of wood. They had them raised before them like hurdles, joined closely together; from them they made a barrier in front of themselves.”\(^2\) Scandinavian and English armies had used this system of interlocking shields for hundreds of years and when formed properly it was a formidable military unit. Yet the English received criticism from certain early chroniclers for using this type of military formation.

The concept of a knight, with its implications for warfare and the economy, had not yet fully formed in 1066, yet certain attributes had emerged. In much of mainland Western Europe, the principle of engaging in combat on equal conditions, primarily with cavalry, had been established at such battles as Val-es-Dunes in 1047 and Civitate in 1053.\(^3\) No longer were battles solely reliant upon sheer strength and close-quarters infantry combat. Rather then riding their horses to the battlefield and dismounting to

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\(^2\) Wace, p. 178.
\(^3\) At Val-es-Dunes, a combined army of French and Norman troops led by Duke William and King Henry defeated a coalition of rebellious Norman barons. This was the first serious action for William, and it was a major accomplishment in his quest to make his barons obedient to him. At Civitate, a Papal coalition was defeated by Norman troops. Pope Leo IX, who had been watching the battle from the walls of the nearby castle, was subsequently captured.
fight, these men rode to the field and remained mounted.¹ While swords were still used, the lance became an increasingly popular tool for mounted warriors.² This weapon would become synonymous with mounted warfare in the following three centuries. Guy believed that the Anglo-Saxon tactic of forming into the shield wall on top of a steep hillside represented ignorance of military strategy: “The English, as was their custom, advanced in mass formation and seized this position on which to fight. For that people, unskilled in the art of war, spurn the assistance of horses: trusting in their own strength they stand fast on foot.”³ Sheer strength and the use of infantry were important components of warfare, but they were useless if cavalry was not incorporated.

The chroniclers descriptions of the beginning of the battle are similar to one another. Trumpets indicated that it was time for the battle to commence, and with this call to arms the infantrymen in William’s army first fired their arrows and then proceeded to attack the shield-wall. The fighting was fierce, with neither side able to gain an advantage. The English used any weapon they could get their hands on in order to harm the incoming troops: “They threw javelins and missiles of various kinds, murderous axes and stones tied to sticks.”⁴ This description of arrows being fired by the Norman infantry and then missiles of various kinds being hurled by the English against the Norman troops can be corroborated in Scenes 61 and 62 of the Bayeux Tapestry. In them, the English soldiers hold shields that appear to be penetrated with arrows and lances. In the upper left

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¹ Norman cavalrymen were held in especially high regard. For more information about how Normandy became a center of horse raising, as well as why horses were more important to the Normans than the English, see R.C.H. Davis, ‘The Warhorses of The Normans’, Anglo-Norman Studies X (1987), pp. 67-82.
² At the time of the battle of Hastings, lances were primarily thrown, rather than held under the arm during a charge. Yet this was a time of transition, and both methods of using the weapon are shown on the Bayeux Tapestry.
³ Guy of Amiens, p. 23.
⁴ William of Poitiers, p. 129.
hand side a mace or club-like object is hurtling through the air towards the approaching Normans, and this may be one of the sticks with stones tied to it that WP described. In addition, the men on the left side of the shield-wall hold their weapons with their right hands over their heads, as if to throw them. Finally, there are multiple depictions of axes not only in this Scene, but throughout the entire section of the Tapestry depicting the battle. Although battles axes had been used in Scandinavia as early as the 8th century, the axes shown in the Tapestry are of the broad type, which began to be used around 1000. Also known as “Danish Axes”, they were adopted by Anglo-Saxon warriors during the Danish occupation in the early decades of the 11th century and became one of their weapons of choice. These were fierce weapons, and could very easily cut men in two. Thus WP was right in his description of them as murderous weapons of war.

Scenes 61 and 62: The English defend themselves in a shield-wall formation. Note the mace in the upper left-hand corner, the posture of the English soldiers on the left, and the arrows in their shields

While the depictions of the first part of the battle are one of the few areas of the Norman invasion that scholars generally agree upon, it is the marked shift in descriptions

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of the English that is of the most interest for this study. While earlier accounts of the English in the chronicles focused on their rebellious nature, their lack of culture, or their lack of battlefield prowess, this changed once fighting began. When mentioning the English soldiers before the battle, Guy of Amiens refers to a speech given by William describing them as being effeminate in appearance and conduct: “Harold’s troops, with their combed and anointed hair, are nancy-boys, reluctant warriors. And, many though they be, they are like as many sheep, as fearful as foxes at the sound of thunder.”¹ Yet once the battle started, there emerged a sharp contrast between the description that had just been given to them and their actual martial abilities. Not only were they able to fight effectively, they were winning against what was supposed to be a superior army: “Just as a wild boar, wearied by the hounds and at bay, protects itself with its tusks and with foaming jaws refuses to submit to the weapons, fearing neither the enemy nor the spears that threaten death, so the English phalanx fights on unafraid.”²

Although the length of the battle leaves no doubt as to whether the English fought courageously, Guy was forced to make this description to accomplish two of his goals. First, in the following section of his poem he would show how the French were able to, temporarily at least, overcome the odds and eliminate a section of the hitherto impenetrable shield-wall. This proved that the French were skilled in the art of war unlike their opponents who were only able to survive this attack, despite their tenacity, by strength of numbers. Second, by describing the tenacity of the English, Guy believed that he proved that William went up against tremendous odds and overcame them, with the help of the French. If this is the case, it is far from clear why Guy included William’s

¹ Guy of Amiens, p. 21.
² Ibid., p. 25.
speech referring to the English as nancy-boys who can’t fight. This would indicate that he underestimated his opponent and could undermine the perception of the duke as a skilled general. The most likely answer, assuming that Guy believed the speech really happened, was that William knew the English would fight for their king but was trying to calm his troops and assure them that the day would ultimately be theirs. Regardless, Guy’s ultimate victors were the French.

Throughout his description of the battle, WP similarly compliments the bravery of the English. By being situated on the high ground and using whatever weapons they could utilize, they managed to resist the initial charge of the infantry. Being a man with military experience, he understood that seizing the high ground was a basic military principle, not a sign of cowardice as Guy believed. Orderic, in describing the opening of the battle, used much of what WP had described, the only difference being that his is a much shorter description. Both of these passages, while having some similarity with Guy’s and thus sharing his intention of depicting William as overcoming the odds, also had different motives. They were not interested in praising the French contingent of the duke’s army, but rather promoted the Norman unit. They accomplished this by mentioning in other sections of their chronicles that it was the Normans who were able to gradually chip away at the shield wall, not the French. Orderic, being half English, may have also been genuinely proud of the effort that they had displayed in defending themselves, even if he did not support Harold’s cause. His description of the battle is much shorter than any of the other chronicles, and this is in line with extant English sources, which devote only small sections to the events of that day.
Although Wace has been criticized for his literary style and for including details that do not appear in any other sources, this method of writing does not necessarily mean that he is wrong. As I have shown throughout this paper, he often offers a realistic view of events as they were occurring on the ground, and this case is no different: “When they saw the Normans coming, you would have seen many English shaking. Men were roused, and the whole army was in a state of agitation, with some men going red and others pale. Weapons were seized and shields lifted and the bold dashed forward while the cowards trembled.”¹ This is a more realistic view of what occurs in battle. Many of the English would have been frightened, while others, perhaps more experienced, would have rushed forward to engage the Norman army. His depictions are not limited only to the English, however: “Some men lost their strength, others gained in strength, the bold struck and the cowards took flight, as men do when in combat. The Normans were intent on attack and the English defended themselves well.”² He does not criticize cowardice, but rather informs readers that it is a part of battle. Although like WP and Orderic he had a pro-Norman bias and ultimately gave credit to them for securing the victory, his description of the emotions felt during the battle as they must have really been is refreshing and a break from the ways other chroniclers wrote about conflict.

Once it became obvious that the infantry charge had failed, William ordered his cavalry to advance. Just as they had been able to maintain their formation against his infantry, the English again held together against this new attack. At some point, the cavalry and the rest of the Norman army began to turn and retreat. What is not known, however, is whether this was done purposefully as part of a ‘feigned flight’, or whether it

¹ Wace, p. 181.
² Ibid., p. 182.
was a genuine rout. What is also not known is when the retreat occurred. Some writers placed it before an actual rout occurred, while others placed it after. It is at this point the chroniclers begin to differ in their descriptions of the remainder of the battle and who was ultimately responsible for victory. Despite these differences, the outcome would be the same in each book.

Guy wrote that it was the French who developed and carried out the retreat, which was feigned. This was due to their superiority in arms: “The French, versed in stratagems, skilled in the arts of war, cunningly pretend to flee as though they had been defeated. The rustic folk rejoice, thinking that they have conquered, and pursue them with naked swords.”¹ Like his earlier passage criticizing the English as unable to devise a better formation than the shield wall and thus being uneducated in war, here Guy offers up a comparison between the civilized French and the barbaric English, as evidenced by the English breaking their ranks and pursuing the supposedly fleeing French. The strengths of the shield-wall were its interlocking shields and the ability of one man to replace another when he fell, and so when large groups of English soldiers left it they became disorganized and vulnerable, and were slaughtered piecemeal. Whether or not it was the French who developed the strategy, it initially succeeded, but because many of the English had retained their positions within the shield-wall it could not lead to a total victory. Thus, following their temporary victory, when the French troops and the rest of the Norman army attacked the wall again, the English drove them away into what Guy claimed was an actual retreat. Again, however, he wrote that it was the tenacity and superior numbers of the English that allowed them to do this, not their knowledge of warfare.

¹ Guy of Amiens, p. 27.
WP’s chronology is different from Guy’s, as is the party responsible for the retreat. According to his account, after hours of hand-to-hand fighting the Breton left wing broke and fled, followed by the rest of the ducal army:

“The loud shouting, here Norman, there foreign, was drowned by the clash of weapons and the groan of the dying… So, terrified by this ferocity, both the footsoldiers and the Breton knights and other auxiliaries on the left wing turned tail; almost the whole of the duke’s battle line gave way, if such a thing may be said of the unconquered people of the Normans.”

Just as Guy had written, it was the ferocious nature of the English defense that had caused the ducal army to break. But unlike the planned retreat of the French that Guy wrote about, this was a panicked retreat, one that was only prevented by William lifting up his helmet to prove that he was still alive. At this point, the army took heart and attacked again. It is likely that this is the correct sequence of events. First, it is corroborated in Scenes 68 and 69 of the Bayeux Tapestry. In Scene 68 William has his visor lifted up to prove that he had not died, while in Scene 69, his troops are shown renewing the attack upon the English.

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1 William of Poitiers, p. 129.
Scene 68: Duke William shows his face to his troops

Scene 69: The ducal army renews the assault on the English

In addition, one interesting theory that gives credence to the idea that the Normans were responsible for the feigned retreat was their military service in southern Italy and Sicily. There are accounts of feigned retreats being carried out at Arques in France in 1053 and at Messina in 1060. The commander at Arques, Walter Giffard, and several knights had served in Sicily, and these men were also at Hastings.¹ Thus even if they were not the individuals who presented the idea to William when his army was in desperate straits, the idea for the maneuver must have earlier been disseminated to prominent Normans by mercenaries who had returned from southern Italy and Sicily. Finally, WP’s reaction to the retreat is indicative of embarrassment. Rather than admitting what happened and moving on to the feigned retreat, he first needed to defend the actions of the army. He did this by comparing them to the army of Rome:

“The army of the Roman Empire, containing royal contingents and accustomed to victory on land and sea, fled occasionally, when it knew or believed its leader to have been killed. The Normans believed that their duke and lord had fallen, so it was not too shameful to give way to flight; least of all was it to be deplored, since it helped them greatly.”²

¹ Morillo, p. 192.
² William of Poitiers, p. 129.
There was no need for WP to include the information about the general retreat other than to be historically accurate. He admits at the end of the passage that it ultimately helped the army, yet he could just as easily have written that the Normans were struggling to break the shield-wall and devised a feigned retreat to weaken it. Because of this and the other two reasons provided, WP’s account is likely accurate. Orderic helps to confirm this, however.

The account of Orderic is similar to that of WP. The English put up fierce resistance, and at a certain point the rumor spread that the duke had been killed. A general retreat began, which was only prevented from becoming a total rout by William lifting his visor to prove he was alive. At this the ducal army turned around and attacked those English soldiers who had broken their formation:

“Twice more the Normans feigned flight in a similar way, and then suddenly wheeling round their horses cut off the pursuing English, and slaughtered them. So they deceived the English by this hazardous stratagem, and then when their ranks were broken destroyed them piecemeal, slaying thousands and attacking the survivors yet more fiercely.”

Yet missing from this description is WP’s long justification for why the Normans retreated. Based on Orderic’s English upbringing but also his support for the Norman cause, this makes sense. There are other indicators in the Ecclesiastical History that suggest Orderic’s tacit pride in the English resistance, but this is the most marked. There would be no other reason to remove the passage other than he did not agree with its contents or felt they were unnecessary. The English had defeated the Normans in the first part of the battle, and that was all there was to it. Yet because he ultimately supported the invasion, he soon turned to documenting the victory. He also discredited Guy’s account by stating that men from Maine, France, Brittany, and Aquitaine all helped the Normans

1 Orderic Vitalis, p. 175.
press the attack, a point he acquired from WP. Thus it was not only the French who were responsible, but rather every portion of the Norman led army. He had less invested in making only the Normans look good at every point in the battle because he knew that they had ultimately won, regardless of the ebbs and flows.

Wace confirms the accounts of WP and Orderic, although it is not initially obvious: “The English pursued them and the Normans kept on moving away little by little with the English following them, so much so that the more the Normans moved away the closer the English drew to them.”\(^1\) At this point in the passage, it is seemingly implied that the Normans devised the feigned retreat and were also the ones carrying it out. Yet, he goes on to write: “Because the French were moving away, the English thought and said that those from France were taking flight and would never return…. But they dispersed like fools and pursued the Normans like fools… The Normans took their stand against the English and made ready to strike forcibly.”\(^2\) This inclusion of the French in the passage is strange, because within the larger description of the feigned retreat, they are mentioned once while the Normans are mentioned eleven times. Yet Wace did not intend their inclusion to depict them helping the Normans, but rather to criticize them for being responsible for nearly causing the collapse of the entire army. As we have seen in the accounts of WP and Orderic, the entire ducal army did not initially begin to flee, but rather only certain sections. While they wrote that it was the Breton left wing that was responsible for causing the collapse, Wace must have believed that it was instead the right wing. The English, he believed, noticed the French actually retreating, but pursued instead the Normans, who were the ones primarily responsible for the

\(^1\) Wace, p. 183.
\(^2\) Ibid., pp. 183-184.
feigned retreat. This was a major mistake by the English, who could have easily defeated the panicked French soldiers. At some point in this process, the French and others who had fled regained their composure and returned to the battlefield, where they ultimately contributed to the final victory.

The last issue regarding the battle of Hastings that needs analysis is the closing moments of the conflict, when the Norman army pressed its assault against the English, resulting in the death of Harold. This remains perhaps the most controversial aspect of the battle because each author, even WP and Orderic, provides conflicting details. Almost all schoolchildren in England are today taught that King Harold was hit in the eye by an arrow and subsequently perished, yet this is only one side of the story. It is not found in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, the *Gesta Guillelmi*, or the *Ecclesiastical History*. The first mention of an arrow being fired was in the *L’Ystoire de li Normant*, or the *History of the Normans*, by Amatus of Montecassino, a Benedictine monk: “William first went against Harold, and fought against him; and gouged out a eye with an arrow, and slew a great many Englishmen.”¹ It should be noted that the original manuscript has been lost, and the only surviving copy is a 14th century document in French. Yet because it does not attribute the arrow being fired to any one group, there is no reason to suspect that the passage was added later.

For much of his poem devoted to the battle, Guy focused on troop movements as well as the overall ebb and flow of the battle, but towards the end of his account he transitioned to the activities of certain figures within the ducal army. They are William, Eustace, Hugh of Ponthieu and Giffard. With the exception of the duke, each was French,

and to them belonged the greatest amount of glory for forcing the English to give up the fight. Guy wrote that Harold was on top of the hill bravely cutting down anyone attacking him, when the four men launched their attack on him:

“The first of the four, piercing the king’s shield and chest with his lance, drenched the ground with a gushing stream of blood. The second with his sword cut off his head below the protection of his helm. The third liquefied his entrails with his spear. And the fourth cut off his thigh and carried it some distance away. The Earth held the body they had in these ways destroyed.”

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There is no doubt that Harold would have been fighting along with the rest of his army, if not at the beginning of the battle than certainly towards the end when circumstance would have made it necessary.

WP did not hesitate, like Guy, to mention important individuals within the ducal army who were responsible for brave deeds. Yet it was not any one man who caused the death of Harold and the defeat of the English. Nor was it the cavalry who had played such an important role in the feigned retreat that he had focused on so intently. Rather, it was the contingent of archers who had been ineffective during the opening of the battle: “The Normans shot arrows, smote and pierced; the dead by falling seemed to move more than the living. It was not possible for the lightly wounded to escape, for they were crushed to death by the serried ranks of their companions.”

2 Much has been made of this passage, both because it is not known whether Harold died at this point, but also because it seems illogical that the archers who had not been able to hit their targets in the beginning of the battle suddenly found their mark.

1 Guy of Amiens. P. 33.
2 William of Poitiers, p. 133.
Not one to typically diverge from the account of WP with regards to the Norman invasion, Orderic does so in this case. Yet he provides little new information in what is the shortest account of any that are available from pro-Norman sources:

“So the battle raged from the third hour, and Harold the king was slain in the first assault. Earl Leofwine his brother and many thousand others later suffered the same fate. At last as the sun was setting the English realized that their king had perished with the chief nobles of the kingdom and many of their troops, whilst the Normans grimly held their ground and dealt out destruction to all who attacked them; their ranks broke and they fled with all speed, to suffer diverse fates.”

He is the only author among the four in this study to write that Harold died during the start of the battle, perhaps one of the few casualties caused by the first attack of the Norman archers. Yet this statement does not seem to correlate with his writing that the English only realized he was dead long after the battle had started. His chronology is unlikely, given that in nearly all battles of the Middle Ages in which a king or leader died, the troops fled. In the few cases where this mass fleeing did not happen, such as after the deaths of Brian Boru at Clontarf in 1014 or Prince Lazar at Kosovo in 1389, these leaders were killed away from the main action or after the outcome of the battle had already been decided. One need only consider what happened to the Norman army at Hastings after rumors of William’s death began circulating amongst them. The army panicked and fled almost immediately.

As is typical for Wace, he confirmed one account but added further information to it. Sometimes this is helpful, but it can make determining which account is accurate more difficult as well. In this case, he wrote that an arrow hit Harold: “Arrows flew more densely than raindrops in the wind; they flew very thickly and the English called them

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1 Orderic Vitalis, p. 177.
2 He likely derived the information about Harold's death from the Norman monk William of Jumieges. For the specific passage in the Gesta Normana Normannorum Ducum describing Harold's death, see William of Jumieges vol. ii, pp. 169.
mosquitos. It happened in this way that an arrow which had fallen from the sky struck Harold right in the eye, removing one of his eyes. \(^1\) Harold did not die from the impact of the arrow, however. Rather, he continued to fight for the remainder of the battle. This apparently occurred before the feigned retreat, but it should be noted that Wace’s chronology, like that of Guy of Amiens, seems confused. The battle begins, is interrupted, and then picks up again, in striking similarity to the *Carmen*. He also places the malfosse incident, which was a last desperate attempt by the English to defend themselves, as occurring during the main battle. Orderic Vitalis, who first mentioned the malfosse, wrote that it occurred after the battle. \(^2\) This is also reported in the *Chronicle of Battle Abbey*, a record kept by the monks of the abbey subsequently built upon the battlefield. \(^3\) Finished in 1070, these monks would have been able to locate the spot and learn when the action at the malfosse took place by speaking with nearby residents. Years later, there may have also still been bodies left from the conflict, as there had been at Stamford Bridge. Because of this, and because he borrows certain information for this section from Guy, Wace’s credibility regarding chronology must be viewed with skepticism. This is an important point with regard to the Bayeux Tapestry, which depicts what may be Harold possibly being hit by an arrow and another figure being cut down.

Wace’s description is different from those of Guy, WP, and Orderic because it is an amalgamation of each. Harold was hit with an eye, just as WP wrote, but was ultimately killed by being cut down, as Guy described. Rather than assign credit for

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\(^1\) Wace, p. 183.
\(^2\) Orderic Vitalis, p. 177.
\(^3\) This is an invaluable text for those interested in the conflict between the bishop of Chichester and the monks at Battle Abbey. During the conflict the monks presented various charters allegedly granting certain privileges. For more information on this issue, see Anonymous, *The Chronicle of Battle Abbey*, trans. Eleanor Searle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 155, 185, 195, 197-203.
victory to any one group, he does not provide any names, similar to Orderic Vitalis: “The Normans knocked the standard to the ground, killed King Harold and the finest of his allies and captured the golden pennon; there was such a throng when Harold was killed that I cannot say who killed him.”¹ He probably got this information from Orderic, because he later says that the English did not notice Harold’s death until later in the day, when they could not see his standard. This is too similar to Orderic’s account to be coincidence. Wace must have known, however, that Orderic’s description of Harold’s death at the beginning of the day was unlikely. In such a situation, at some point from around 10 a.m. until the late afternoon someone would have noticed the king’s missing standard.

This is an appropriate moment to introduce the final segments of the Bayeux Tapestry, for they align closely with the chronicles of WP and Wace. In Scenes 68, 69, and 70, below the images of charging cavalry who are renewing their attack against the English, is a long line of archers.

*Scene 69: Archers begin discharging their arrows*

There is no mention on the Tapestry narrative of who these men are, but their number indicates their importance. There are 31 of them, far outnumbering the cavalry shown in

¹ Wace, p. 190.
the three Scenes. If their important is not mentioned in writing, however, Scene 71 gives visualization to their devastating impact and their role in ending the battle.

Summary: This Scene is the most widely debated section of the tapestry. Although the caption “Hic Harold rex interfec est”, or “Here King Harold is killed” proves that the king is portrayed in the Scene, it is not clear whether he is the fifth man from the left with his right hand in the air, the seventh man from the left who is being hit with a sword and falling, or both. Confusing the matter is whether the figure fifth from the left is holding an arrow that has pierced his eye, or whether he is grasping a lance held in the air. Despite years of research, conclusive answers to these questions have never been established. Because each source has a different description of Harold’s death, if he can be identified as one or both of the figures, it would help to corroborate which chronicler is more likely to be accurate.
The origin of the story that Harold was hit in the eye with an arrow is something of a mystery. The first reference to the king’s death by an arrow is in the *History of the Normans*, written by the Benedictine monk Amatus of Montecassino in 1080. It is a brief passage which lacks details about where and who he had received the information from. Although he could have spoken with veterans of the campaign, it is strange that Amatus is also the only writer who believed that the king was killed by an arrow alone. All of the following writers who included the arrow story in their works believed that it had only wounded Harold, and that it was a subsequent attack that delivered the fatal blow. The story next appears in the *History of the English People*, written by Henry of Huntingdon in the early to mid 12th century: “Meanwhile the whole shower sent by the archers fell around King Harold, and he himself sank to the ground, struck in the eye. A host of knights broke through and killed the wounded king, and earl Gyrth and Leofwine, his brothers, with him.”¹ Despite Wace’s mixed up chronology regarding the battle of Hastings, his description of the arrow hitting Harold, written shortly after Henry of Huntingdon’s book, also supports the theory of an arrow hitting Harold and the king being subsequently killed by several knights: “It happened in this way that an arrow which had fallen from the sky struck Harold right in the eye, removing one of his eyes…Because of the pain in his head, he leant on his shield.”² In the *Gesta Guillelmi*, the assailant or assailants responsible for killing Harold are unidentified. Likewise, in the *Roman de Rou* no specific person or group is given credit for killing the king: “The Normans knocked the standard to the ground, killed King Harold and the finest of his

² Wace, p. 183.
allys and captured the golden pennon; there was such a throng when Harold was killed that I cannot say who killed him.\footnote{Ibid., p. 190.}

WP’s account, while not specifying whether or not Harold had been struck in the eye by an arrow, is similar to those of Amatus and Henry mentioned above. He may not have mentioned the king’s death out of caution, not knowing the truth of the matter and thus not wanting to guess about what happened. Harold’s body after the battle is said to have been nearly unrecognizable, and thus any speculation on whether he had been hit by an arrow would have been just that. In addition, he may not have wanted to give too much credit to archers, a group formed from social classes lower than those that made up the mounted cavalry. Because he was formerly trained as a knight, he may have believed that the majority of the credit belonged to the men who were of increased status. Thus he left open the possibility that despite the importance of the archers in changing the course of the battle, it was ultimately mounted knights who won the day by killing the king. This emphasis on cavalry may also help explain why Guy completely excluded archers in the Carmen and instead attributed the victory over Harold to four knights. As he wrote towards the beginning of his poem, knowing how to use cavalry made one learned in the art of war, and killing King Harold in such a way would have been a fitting end to the conflict. It was the ultimate victory of the new type of warfare versus the old, or the learned versus the ignorant as Guy believed it. WP simply attempted to be more accurate about recording the tactics of the battle and thus included the archers and the possibility that the cavalry was ultimately responsible for victory. Despite the exclusion of a definitive cause of death in the Gesta Guillelmi, the similarities between it and the Roman de Rou cannot be ignored.
Despite Wace’s mixed up chronology regarding most of the battle of Hastings, his description of Harold’s death, written shortly after Henry of Huntingdon, also supports the theory of an arrow being fired and the king subsequently being attacked and killed by several knights: “It happened in this way that an arrow which had fallen from the sky struck Harold right in the eye, removing one of his eyes…Because of the pain in his head, he leant on his shield.”\(^1\) In the *Gesta Guillelmi*, the assailant or assailants responsible for killing Harold are unidentified. Likewise, in the *Roman de Rou* no specific person or group is given credit for killing the king: “The Normans knocked the standard to the ground, killed King Harold and the finest of his allies and captured the golden pennon; there was such a throng when Harold was killed that I cannot say who killed him.”\(^2\) Based on this analysis, there is no denying that a substantial volley of arrows was fired towards the end of the battle, one of which probably hit Harold and either killed or gravely injured him. But can Scene 71 of the Bayeux Tapestry corroborate this?

The main problem with Scene 71 is that it was subject to a “restoration” in 1842. Of the entire section, only the head and shoulder of the figure on the left is original. Every other figure was thus tampered with. This means that the argument that the two figures are separate based on their differing clothing must be rejected. Of the first figure, there have been suggestions that he is holding a lance in his right hand, rather than an arrow. This seems unlikely, given that in no other Scene in the Tapestry do troops hold lances that high up the shaft. For those who support the theory that his hand is portrayed as if pulling out rather than throwing an object, this too is the result of restoration work. In 1982 David Bernstein introduced one of the more interesting theories supporting the

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\(^1\) Ibid., p. 183.
\(^2\) Ibid., p. 190.
idea that Harold is both figures. He discovered small stitch marks protruding out of the eye of the figure on the right. This led him to believe that there had once been an arrow there and thus came to the conclusion that both figures must have been Harold. While this is an interesting theory, it has since been discovered that the stitch marks were the result of an overzealous worker during the restoration. Despite the problems with interpreting this scene caused by restoration, there is one way to understand what the segment looked like before it was tampered with.

In 1729 Antoine Benoit made a series of sketches of the Tapestry for the historian Bernard de Montfaucan that were engraved and published the following year.

*The original sketch by Antoine Benoit of Scene 71 (1729)*
Starting with the figure on the left, he is holding an object that, while longer than the arrows shown in his shield, is also significantly shorter than the lances depicted throughout the battle segment of the Tapestry, particularly Scene 54. In addition, in that Scene the English soldiers hold their lances midway up the shaft, rather than towards the front as the figure in Scene 57 is doing. This is also the case in Scene 57 itself, where the man to the left holds a lance towards its midsection. Although is true that in Benoit’s sketch the item I believe to be an arrow does not appear to have the feathers that are shown at the ends of the arrows embedded in the shields of the English soldiers in Scene 71, this may have been the result of either damage to the Tapestry or an indication that the arrow had been split by Harold in an attempt to pull it out, as Wace wrote. What is also telling is the height at which the figure holds his right hand above his head. In Scene 62, the English troops who grip lances are shown holding them high above their heads,
not at chin level. If the figure in Scene 71 were to throw the object it would travel neither far nor at an appropriate angle. All of this leads me to believe that it is an arrow and not a lance that the figure is holding. Because the caption above the Scene declares that Harold has died, and the figure on the left is not dead, then it can be assumed that the one on the right is definitely the king. However, based on the evidence I have just provided, it is also likely that the figure on the left is Harold as well.

This interpretation of the Tapestry corroborates Wace’s version of the story: that Harold had been struck by an arrow and was then cut down. It also confirms the importance of archers that WP attested to, though he did not state whether or not one had struck the king. Despite the accuracy of Wace for this particular aspect of the battle, William of Poitiers is the only source to be trusted for descriptions of troop movements and the overall chronology of the battle. Because he had formerly been a knight, WP had more knowledge of tactics than any of the other writers. In addition, his honesty in admitting that that ducal army was forced to retreat, as well as his attempt to compare the retreat to those of the Romans, makes him the most credible chronicler of military affairs, up until the death of Harold. At this point, Wace is to be the most trusted.
Conclusion

One of the striking aspects of the Norman victory at the battle of Hastings, as Stephen Morillo points out, was that it eliminated any future unified resistance from the Anglo-Saxons.\(^1\) This is not to say that there were no surviving individuals capable of leading troops, but rather that there were none who commanded the same degree of loyalty that Harold had.\(^2\) The two strongest earls, Edwin and Morcar, were based in Northumbria, a region that had been ravaged by the Norwegian invasion. Their ability to raise further armies would thus have been limited. In addition, Harold had earlier defeated most of the external threats to England and in doing so ironically helped secure William’s position. The Welsh, who had raided the western border for years, had been defeated in the early 1060s. Vikings, who had ravaged England for hundreds of years, were also no longer a threat after Harold’s victory at Stamford Bridge.\(^3\) Knowing that they would face little resistance if they moved inland, the Norman army left the battlefield and proceeded, by a circuitous route, towards London.

Along the way, they captured a string of strategic towns including Romney, Dover, Canterbury, and Winchester. Dover was particularly well fortified, and its willingness to surrender without resistance is indicative of the hopelessness the local population felt: “He had not got half way when its terrified inhabitants came to meet him,

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\(^1\) See Morillo, p. 221.
\(^2\) Harold had many sons who lived long after his death. For more information about their lives and roles in England after Hastings, see Walker, pp. 187-198.
\(^3\) The threat from that quarter was not completely quelled, however. In 1069 the Danes took York, although their invasion ultimately failed. For the roles of surviving earls in this event, see Walker, p. 191.
ready to surrender.”\footnote{Guy of Amiens, p. 37.} WP echoes this sense of desperation: “Then he went to Dover, where he heard that a great multitude had gathered because the place seemed impregnable. But the English, terror-stricken at his approach, lost all confidence in the natural defenses and fortifications of the place, and in the multitude of men.”\footnote{William of Poitiers, p. 145.} At Wallingford, William received the submission of Archbishop Stigand. Although he had been a prominent figure in Harold’s ecclesiastical administration, the duke did not immediately remove him from his positions within the church. Despite the insistence of the chroniclers that William was devoutly religious and Stigand was not, there was good reason to keep the archbishop around, namely to keep the English from rebelling by leaving in place some part of the native ecclesiastical class.

Having taken most of the important cities in the south, and having received the submission of Stigand, William arrived at Berkhamstead in a position of strength. Although the English had elected a member of the House of Wessex, Edgar Ætheling, to be king following the death of Harold, he was too young to be an effective military commander.\footnote{In 1066 Edgar was only fourteen.} Regardless of his military effectiveness, he did not have the means to recruit another army. Most of the English officials, including Edgar, knowing their options were limited, surrendered to William. The duke and his army proceeded to march to the outside of London where they were, by most accounts, allowed in without issue. Guy’s poem includes a long description of the Normans laying siege to the city, which was only ended after negotiations between the two sides. Although this is possible, it does not appear in any other source and must be viewed with skepticism. In addition, the other sources place Edgar and several nobles surrendering at Berkhamstead, not...
London. Whatever the case, Guy made sure to note that the decision to surrender was made by all of the English, not only a select few. By doing so, he tries to persuade readers that William had support not only from religious officials, but from the population as a whole. This somewhat contradicts his earlier statement in which he wrote: “With peace, indeed, but little ground acquired, your men go out and devastate and burn the land-behaviour which, since the stupid people reject you as king, is not to be wondered at.”¹ This is a particularly damaging point with regard to the Carmen, because it is the only source that does not initially try and state that William had the support of the population before and during the invasion. If Guy started his poem in 1066, there would have been little reason to have to legitimize William’s rule over England by emphasizing popular support. There was little internal rebellion and the throne was apparently secure. Yet by 1067 or 1068 when the poem was finished, there were many revolts occurring outside of the limited area of Norman control.² Thus the need to legitimize and emphasize the support of the people would have been more pressing. His use of the word “people” in his description of the surrender of London could be a reference only to the inhabitants of that town, but even if this is so, it represents an attempt by Guy to show that at least among a large group of the population, William had support. In the Carmen, as in all of the other writings, once the leading political figures had surrendered the Norman army was allowed into London.

The chronicler’s descriptions of the coronation ceremony are varied, and unfortunately Wace, who previously provided minute details about the invasion, chose not to do so in this case. This is likely not because of any inherit lack of interest in the

¹ Guy of Amiens, p. 11.
² These revolts occurred in many different areas, although Exeter was the center of one of the stronger uprisings.
subject, but rather because he was writing for King Henry II and wanted to emphasize events of the time period in which he was living.\footnote{Very little detail is given of William’s reign as king. Most of the remainder of the Roman de Rou primarily describes the reign of King Henry I, particularly his dispute with his brother Robert Curthose, Duke of Normandy in the early 12th century.} Thus we must rely only on the accounts of Guy, WP, and Orderic. Sadly, however, the main manuscript of the Carmen is missing its ending. From the available fragment, however, it is clear that Guy put great emphasis on the number of bishops and English officials who were in the church with William: “At the time appointed for the king’s coronation, the magnates of the realm, the people, the dignitaries of the church, and the venerable witan assemble from all sides for the royal ceremony.”\footnote{Guy of Amiens, p. 47.} Ealdred, the Archbishop of York, was the main ecclesiastical official at the coronation. This was critical both for William and the chroniclers. Stigand had been excommunicated when he had crowned Harold, thus making that coronation illegitimate. William, however, had himself crowned by Ealdred who was not stained by conflict or controversy: “From these, to consecrate and at the same time to crown the king, by ennobling the king’s head with a coronet, was chosen the most celebrated of the bishops, a man of distinction, renowned for his goodness.”\footnote{Ibid.} This being the case, Stigand is also believed to have been present at the duke’s coronation. There is some debate about this because he is not named in any source, but it would be logical for William to include him in the ceremony. By doing so, he could gain additional support from the English in order to bring some stability to the kingdom. This was part of an early strategy of reconciliation with members of the English establishment that William used for the first year or so that he was in England. Men such as earls Edwin, Morcar, and Waltheof gave up peacefully and thus their lands and titles were confirmed. As Richard Huscroft points out, even

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1 Very little detail is given of William’s reign as king. Most of the remainder of the Roman de Rou primarily describes the reign of King Henry I, particularly his dispute with his brother Robert Curthose, Duke of Normandy in the early 12th century.
2 Guy of Amiens, p. 47.
3 Ibid.
Edgar Ætheling, who had briefly been king, was given lands for his submission.¹ Guy wrote that during the ceremony the English within the church pledged their allegiance to William, and that Ealdred told them to pray. The idea of the English having to voice their support is important, and it was one that WP and Orderic wrote about as well. There is, sadly, little more that can be gleaned from the Carmen after this, however. Shortly after the passage about Ealdred, the poem ends.

WP made sure not only to name Ealdred and Stigand as Guy had, but also to mark a contrast between them: “On the day fixed for coronation, the archbishop of York, a great lover of justice and of mature years, wise, good, and eloquent, addressed the English, and asked them in the appropriate words whether they would consent to him being crowned as their lord.”² The description of Stigand was markedly different: “He had indeed refused to be consecrated by Stigand, the archbishop of Canterbury, having learnt that he had been pronounced excommunicate through the just zeal of the pope.”³ Unlike Guy, WP does not assign a role to Stigand in the ceremony. Either he was not there and Guy’s information was incorrect or, more likely, there was no longer a reason to include him in his chronicle. Guy wrote the Carmen soon after the invasion, when William was not yet secure on the throne. Including Stigand would have proven to readers that William had attempted to include Englishmen at the ceremony and was willing to work with them, regardless of their previous misdeeds. WP wrote the Gesta Guillelmi in the 1070s, after the kingdom was secure. There was no reason to risk William’s reputation by including Stigand in the description of the coronation, especially

² William of Poitiers, p. 151.
³ Ibid.
when WP was trying to legitimize William’s sons continuing the dynasty’s rule: “And his children and grandchildren will rule by lawful succession over the English land, which he possesses both by hereditary designation confirmed by the oath of the English, and by the right of conquest.”¹ There was no need to risk making the same mistake Harold had made by using Stigand at his coronation ceremony.

That WP wrote that the English responded with jubilation to Ealdred’s question about their support for William is not surprising, given his Norman bias and desire to show English support for the duke. This sequence of events regarding the English being questioned is, however, generally consistent with the description given by Guy. While it may be true that the English within Westminster Abbey vocally supported William as their king during the coronation, they likely did so out of necessity. Norman soldiers, after all, did surround them. Interestingly, WP wrote that the soldiers heard the noise from the English jubilation coming from inside the church and, believing it to be the result of an attack, set fire to houses in the city. This proves that there was a level of mistrust between the two sides that had started after the battle of Hastings but before the coronation, probably the result of either mistreatment or suspicion.

Orderic Vitalis description of the coronation is similar to that of WP and begins by describing Ealdred and Stigand. There is, however, no mention of Stigand partaking in the ceremony: “He was a man of sober years and a lover of justice: wise, good, eloquent, and full of virtue, following the way of the fathers towards the presence of the King of kings. Stigand, archbishop of Canterbury, on the other hand, was immersed in worldly affairs and interests, and had been suspended by Pope Alexander for his misdeeds.”²

¹ Ibid.
² Orderic Vitalis, p. 183.
Again, the purpose of this was to prove that a legitimate official had crowned William, unlike Harold. What is also interesting about this section, however, is the description of Norman soldiers setting a fire. While WP made mention of the incident, his description is brief, as if it had either not been a particularly important event or it was one he did not want to emphasize. Orderic, however, believed it ruined any goodwill that the Normans had previously established:

“The fire spread rapidly from house to house; the crowd who had been rejoicing in the church took fright and throngs of men and women of every rank and condition rushed out of the church in frantic haste…. The English, after hearing of the perpetuation of such misdeeds, never again trusted the Normans who seemed to have betrayed them, but nursed their anger and bided their time to take revenge.”

Although this may be an exaggeration by Orderic as to why the English began rebelling against the Normans, it is likely that it contributed to their sense of unease. They would ultimately act on these feelings, and in the next several years, England was anything but pacified.

In this study, I have analyzed the five main sources for the Norman invasion in order to determine how closely they align or deviate from one another, as well as how closely their accounts either swing towards or veer from a broader group of historical texts. In addition, the author’s upbringings, biases, and occupations led to their unique, and often deliberately distorted, accounts of the invasion. Therefore by looking closely at not only their writings but also their lives, one gains a greater understanding of why they wrote what they did. By performing this analysis, I have determined that while they help to establish a basic timeline, no one account offers a completely accurate picture of what occurred at critical moments between the death of Alfred Ætheling and William’s

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1 Ibid., p. 185.
enthronement. Nor, on the other hand, is any one of them completely inaccurate or exaggerated, as certain scholars still unfortunately believe about the Carmen and the Roman de Rou. Each account includes small details that are often free from bias. These details, when extracted and welded together, allow us a better understanding of what happened before, during, and after the Norman invasion.

This being the case, one must always exercise extreme caution when attempting to analyze an issue using sources that are, despite certain instances to the contrary, clearly biased towards one group. History is written by the victors, and without having a corpus of texts available from the English, it will always be difficult to gain an understanding of their side of the story. These four accounts were written by men with a vested interest in making sure that their readers understood their versions of why King Harold had failed and his kingdom had been conquered, not in telling an accurate story of what had happened. This being the case, I have made an effort to identify issues of particular interest for each chronicler, besides for the obviously distorted story of Harold that they focused on. These specific interests typically took precedence over their tendency to inject bias into their accounts and are the only occasions when this is the case. In certain instances, they even offer a glimpse into conditions for the English during the invasion, something which otherwise would not be possible. Thus, by identifying these instances where the authors momentarily let go of their biases, it is possible to knit together as reliable an account of the events from 1035 to 1066 as can be done without having access to English sources.

Guy of Amiens, whose poem the Carmen de Hastingae Proelio is often rejected as fantastical and a product of a poetic mind, actually has many details that deserve closer
analysis. Because he was related to the Capetian Dynasty of France, he was biased towards the French contingent of the ducal army and thus much of his information regarding their role at the battle of Hastings is exaggerated. In addition, his chronology of the events at Hastings is confused, particularly the opening movements of both armies. The only passage in the Carmen relating to the battle that can be trusted is one admitting that the ducal army took heavy losses and retreated. This detail is confirmed by similar passages in the accounts of WP, Orderic, and Wace. Because of the many problems that appear within his text, most of Guy’s description of the battle cannot be used to determine what happened on that particular day. This does not mean, however, that he was incapable of providing accurate descriptions about other aspects of the invasion.

The other three authors, seeking to justify William’s rule over England by emphasizing his support among the English, omitted from their accounts any suggestion that the native population was hostile to the duke. Guy did not have this problem. His poem, unlike the works of the other authors, is almost entirely devoted to events after William and his army had landed in England. It thus emphasizes military rather than political and religious affairs. In addition, because Guy was French and not Norman, he had less interest in legitimizing William’s right to the throne. He was only interested in William’s martial valor and promoting the efforts of the French in helping him become the king of England. For these reasons, Guy was able to write that English civilians did not support William and therefore they could be killed or have their property burnt, an admission seemingly confirmed by the Bayeux Tapestry in Scene 50. Although many aspects of Guy’s Carmen de Hastingae Proelio must be treated with suspicion, there are
significant portions that are likely to be accurate and thus it is a source that needs to be taken more seriously.

William of Poitiers, the author of the *Gesta Guillelmi*, was one of Duke William’s chaplains before he became the archdeacon of Lisieux. Because of this, and because he was born within the duchy, his writings are the most biased towards Duke William’s cause. It was WP more than any other pro-Norman writer who was responsible for developing the case upon which the invasion would be legitimized by other chroniclers. Although many of these points can now be proven false, at the time they must have made a convincing case. He was the first writer to connect the murder of Alfred Ætheling to Harold, rather than only to his father. As I have proven, however, the evidence for this murder being carried out by either man is flimsy; it is more likely that King Harold Harefoot had the boy killed in an attempt to secure his crown by frightening Edward, Godwine, and Harold. Nor can WP’s account of King Edward and his magnates favoring Duke William as the successor on the throne be relied upon. Although Edward had been treated well during his youth in Normandy, the situation in 1052 was significantly different than it had been in 1051. The majority of Edward’s magnates were English rather than continental and thus not likely to support a Norman as king. In addition, Edward had recently been reconciled with Godwine who would not have had any reason to want the duke to be his successor. In reconciling himself with the king, Godwine had scored a political victory that made him the most powerful earl in England and thus his influence over the court would have been extensive. Lastly, it is unusual that if William had actually been promised the throne he never visited the land he was eventually going to attain. This is especially odd for a man who would later commission the *Domesday*
Book, the most extensive compilation of property in the Middle Ages. For these reasons, WP’s accounts of King Edward’s wishes regarding the succession to the throne are not likely to be accurate.

Because of where he was born and who he served WP was also biased towards the accomplishments of the Norman contingent of the ducal army during the invasion. In this aspect of his chronicle, however, he is to be more trusted than in his descriptions of political affairs. Of particular importance to his passages about battles is the experience in battle that he had acquired as a young man before turning towards the church. This experience is unique among the chroniclers and makes him a particularly reliable source regarding tactical maneuvers. This has not been lost among military historians, who rely upon his descriptions more than any other source when writing about the battle of Hastings. His account of the Normans firing arrows followed by the English using whatever weapons they could get their hands on to defend themselves with, including lances, axes, javelins and stones tied to sticks is supported by several scenes depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry. Because he referenced previous occasions from antiquity when the Romans retreated in order to defend the Normans temporarily fleeing from the battlefield, WP’s admission that the troops fled in an actual rout, rather than an initial feigned retreat as Guy had written, must be taken seriously. He would have had no other reason to include such a comparison other than to avoid embarrassment over an actual event. Although the feigned retreat did happen, it only occurred later in the battle after the troops had been rallied and regained their courage. Finally, WP is the first author to mention arrows being a decisive factor in ending the battle. Although he did not describe them as causing the death of Harold, this could perhaps be because WP was unsure as to
the cause of the king’s demise and did not want to speculate. The *Gesta Guillelmi* is an invaluable book because it established many of the points later chroniclers would use to vilify Harold and legitimize William. Yet the points WP made about political events are often false, or at least exaggerations of the truth. Therefore, his book is best used when trying to determine what happened regarding military events, particularly the battle of Hastings.

Orderic Vitalis was born and raised in England until the age of ten when his father sent him to Normandy. He became a monk and lived in the duchy for the rest of his life, yet he never forgot about his childhood in England. While he often took chunks of information from the *Gesta Guillelmi* and used them in his own book, he is also the only author in this study who was raised in England and brought to Normandy. This offered him a unique vantage point from which to view the invasion, and one that allowed him to portray the Normans in a more realistic light than the earlier authors had. Despite his overt sympathy for the plight of the English, he did not consider Harold to be their righteous king and therefore used many of the points that WP had provided to vilify him. He blamed Harold for not only taking and breaking the oath swearing allegiance to William but also for mistreating the English population. Historical evidence would seem to dismiss this point, however. The fact that there was only one rebellion in his reign, by his brother Tostig, is evidence that even if Harold did mistreat the population he was still a popular ruler. He also made the inaccurate claim the Harold had been enthroned by Stigand at the same time that King Edward’s funeral was occurring in an effort to connect Harold to an impious religious official. Although information about the battle of Hastings was borrowed from WP, his account of Harold dying in the beginning of the conflict
rather than towards the end is not found in the other three texts and is almost certainly inaccurate. For these issues, Orderic cannot be trusted, yet for others his book is extremely valuable.

The *Ecclesiastical History* is unique based on the vantage point of the man who wrote it. Because of his mixed heritage and the fact that he had no patron, he was the first chronicler not afraid to criticize William. He often did so in an overt way, by omitting the praises that WP and others heaped upon the duke. For example, according to WP and Wace, William had allegedly granted Guy of Ponthieu an estate after he had handed over Harold. Yet Orderic omitted this because did not want to portray William as a kind, benevolent ruler. Similarly, it was what he did not write about the battle of Hastings that reveals his opinion on the matter. Rather than the long descriptions of Norman bravery given by the other authors, his passage is short. This is similar to the accounts given by English authors like Eadmer and the monks who wrote the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. It was too traumatic for them to write about, and although Orderic supported the concept of the invasion, he did not agree with how it was carried out, particularly after the battle had ended.

Wace’s *Roman de Rou*, like Guy’s *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, has often been criticized as fantastical and exaggerated. Yet although I have proven that there are parts of his book that do need to be viewed with caution, Wace’s unique emphasis on research warrants taking his chronicle more seriously than it previously has been. This is particularly important with regard to the most important piece of the Norman propaganda campaign against Harold: his journey to Normandy and subsequent oath pledging allegiance to William. Unlike any of the other three chroniclers, Wace offered two
possible versions of the event from different written sources he had access to, the more reliable of which harshly criticized Duke William. In the first source, Edward warns Harold not to go to Normandy because William is crafty and deceptive. This version of events is seemingly confirmed by the Bayeux Tapestry, which shows Harold standing embarrassed in front of Edward upon his return from the continent. While he counters this with a pro-Norman source, its shortness and lack of detail tacitly infers that the first source is the more accurate of the two. Moreover, Wace was generally pro-Norman, and would have had no reason to include the first source other than for accuracy’s sake. In addition, the Bayeux Tapestry supports his version of Harold’s death and that in this case as well he derived his information from two or more sources, thus again emphasizing the important he placed on research. In his account, Harold was hit by an arrow, as WP alluded to, but he was ultimately killed by being cut down, as Guy wrote. Because Guy was pro-French, he attributed Harold’s death to three French soldiers as well as William. Wace likely knew that this was not true, and so he omitted the names and stated that there were so many soldiers who were around Harold that he could not state who had killed him. Because of the frenzy and confusion associated with battle, this explanation makes sense. Due to his emphasis on utilizing multiple sources for his research and because his account is supported by the Bayeux Tapestry, for these two particular incidents there is no doubt that Wace is the most reliable chronicler.

There are, however, deep flaws in the *Roman de Rou*. While his emphasis on using multiple texts was beneficial for his research about Harold’s visit to Normandy as well as his death, the lack of such research could lead to disjointed and confusing descriptions, particularly for events taking place over long periods of time. Such is the
case with his account of troop movements at the battle of Hastings. This confusing account was likely derived from a similarly disjoined description in the Carmen. In these cases, Wace may have conducted the necessary research, but not included information from other texts he had referenced. Or perhaps he felt so overwhelmingly in favor of one account over another that he felt no need to check its accuracy against another source. Regardless, while Wace cannot be trusted to be totally accurate in all instances, he is also not the writer of fictional history or flowery literature that he has often been criticized for being.

The Bayeux Tapestry is a source unlike any other. While it is helpful and illuminating, it is also frustrating. It can be used to corroborate details in the chronicles, but uncertainty about the patron who commissioned it raises the question of how accurate a depiction it actually is and what purpose it was intended to serve. This being the case, most scholars believe that the patron was likely Odo, the Bishop of Bayeux, who had the Tapestry made to decorate either his new cathedral or palace. Because of this attribution, it can be assumed that the Tapestry generally favors the Normans. It is therefore particularly useful for corroborating the accounts of the chronicles detailing Harold’s journey to Normandy and the battle of Hastings. In the case of Harold’s journey, King Edward is seen talking with Harold, after which the earl leaves and proceeds to his base at Bosham. He then sets out on his journey. Upon his return from the mainland, he is seen being reprimanded by Edward for a reason that is not given. This would seem to confirm the account given by Wace that the king had warned Harold against going to Normandy because he would be deceived but that the earl had nevertheless left. This is curious, because Wace’s version is critical of Duke William. This is not so strange, however, if
the Tapestry was indeed created in the 1070s. In 1076, Odo was put on trial by William, after which their relationship was never the same. Perhaps the conflict between Odo and William was already beginning when the Tapestry was made and, rather than depicting the fanciful version of the story told by WP, Odo decided to have the truth displayed for all to see. In addition, it portrays Norman soldiers burning the homes of English civilians upon their landing in England. This corroborates the account given by Guy that the English were targets of the Normans because they did not support William. Finally, the scenes that depict the battle of Hastings are among the most helpful to modern historians. Most of what they show confirms what WP wrote, including the various weapons used by the English and the retreat of the ducal army. This accuracy is unquestionable up until the scene depicting the death of Harold, at which point there is still a question as to which of the two figures, or perhaps both, are the king. As I have shown above, however, the height at which the figure on the left holds his lance, where he holds it, and its length all indicate that both figures are Harold.

Despite its usefulness in corroborating parts of the chronicler’s accounts, one must remember that the Tapestry was probably made by the victors to depict their triumph. It is inevitably biased, and therefore while it is helpful in corroborating accounts that appear in the chronicles, it cannot be considered a completely reliable source with regard to events that do not appear in the four sources. For example, the maker of the Tapestry marked down Bayeux as the place where Harold made his oath to William. This differs from the chroniclers, each of whom listed a different city where it had happened. Odo was the Bishop of Bayeux and the Tapestry likely hung in the cathedral there. There is thus a strong chance that he wanted to display to the church audience what would
happen when one perjures him or herself. It also would have legitimized his own role in helping expand Norman power into England. There would have been no better place to make this point than the city of Bayeux, the center of his power. Finally, there are many segments of the Tapestry that unfortunately will likely never be deciphered, including the stories of Ælfgyva and Turold. Though these may be important figures who played major roles in events leading up to and during the invasion, how they fit into the overall puzzle remains unknown. It must be wondered why the creator of the Tapestry included them within his narrative while the chroniclers chose not to. This is a question that needs to be answered.

The Norman invasion of England was a complex and important event in European history. Although there are multiple sources that detail the lead up to the invasion, the invasion itself, and the aftermath, no one of these can be relied upon solely to present a complete picture of these events. Only by analyzing the sources, taking into account the biases within them, and knitting together the rare reliable portions of each account can one truly understand what happened before, during, and after the fateful year of 1066.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


**Secondary Sources**


