



This article comes from the Bayeux Tapestry Museum website: <http://www.tapisserie-bayeux.com>

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## The story

### History



In 1604 the question of who would succeed to the throne of England was unanswered. The king, Edward the Confessor, was growing old, and had no children. There were three possible claimants to the throne: Harold Godwinson, brother of Edith, wife of King Edward, the young Edgar Atheling, Edward's great nephew (brought up in Hungary) and Duke William of Normandy, second cousin of the king.

After a long exile in Normandy, and having brought back to the English court the Norman language and habits, as well as Norman nobles, King Edward logically chose William as his successor. He sent Harold Godwinson to inform William. Harold no doubt thought it wise, from a political standpoint, to accept, and set off for Normandy. This is the starting point of the Bayeux Tapestry.

Later, Harold had himself crowned King of England, and flouted the oath made to the very Christian William in Bayeux Cathedral. William was then forced to take up arms against him, as the only punishment for felony was death!

Reading this vision of the facts is made easier by texts written by [historiographers](#). The following commentaries have reached us:

#### Two minor texts

\*the tale in verse by the Abbot Baudry de Bourgueil, probably written between 1085 and 1102. Baudry later became [Bishop](#) of Dol-de-Bretagne in 1107.

\*the prose story *Historia Novorum*, written before 1107 by the monk Eadmer in Canterbury Cathedral.

#### Great Norman historical texts

\*the *Gesta Normannorum ducum*, by the monk William in the [abbey](#) at Jumièges, written circa 1070.

\*the *Gesta Willelmi* by William of Poitiers, chaplain to Duke William and archdeacon of Lisieux, written between 1073 and 1077.

\*the *Historia Ecclesiastica* by Orderic Vital, a monk in the abbey of Saint-Evrout, dated 1140.

Finally, several **Anglo-Norman 12<sup>th</sup> century narratives** were also used:

\*the *Gesta regum Anglorum* by the monk William in the abbey of Malmesbury, dated 1125,

\*the *Historia Anglorum* by the Archdeacon Henry of Huntingdon, written circa 1130,

\*the *Roman de Rou*, a poem in French, written circa 1170 by Wace, [canon](#) of Bayeux Cathedral, at the request of King Henry II Plantagenet.