

Il Bayeux Tapestry e la conquista Normanna: una storia raccontata con un ricamo

Ask any Englishman the date of the Battle of Hastings and he will answer you 1066.

Why is this date so important? It marks the last time a foreign (straniero) army landed on the British coast. Let's start from the beginning! In the 11th century AD in England there were the Anglo-Saxons, Germanic tribes under Edward the Confessor. He loved Normandy a lot and chose as his successor on the British throne a Norman man, **William the Conqueror**.

Who was this man?

William was born in 1028, and was the son of a young woman, Herleve, a tanner's daughter and Robert, the Devil, Duke of Normandy. The couple was not married, but the duke wanted William to become his successor and heir. When his father died in 1035, little William became a duke at about seven years old. He was tall and well built with red hair and a firm regular jaw. The other noblemen did not accept him because his parents were not married and a civil war started. William became an experienced soldier, loyal, brilliant and brave but also cruel. Finally he won. Edward the Confessor went to stay in Normandy and named William his successor to the English crown. Little later William married Matilda of Flanders against the king of France's (Henry I) will. So Henry I moved an attack, but was defeated. William and his wife could finally enjoy a period of peace and founded 20 monasteries. It was in this period that the English earl Harold of Wessex landed on the coasts of Normandy because of a storm. William took him as a prisoner and promised him freedom under two conditions: first he had to help William to get the throne in England, second he had to marry William's daughter. Harold of course accepted these conditions, but once free, he ignored them. In 1066 Harold became king of England after Edward the Confessor's death. William was furious and claimed the English throne. So he prepared an army and made plans to invade the country. His men worked hard to prepare a fleet to carry not only soldiers in full armour, but horses and three prefabricated castles of wood.

NOTES

foreign: from another country (straniero)

landed: arrived on a land (sbarcò)

tanner: conciatore

heir: successor (erede)

jaw: mandibola

brave: courageous (coraggioso)

crown: corona

defeated: won (sconfitto)

enjoy: benefit from

storm: tempest

freedom: liberty (libertà)

throne: trono

free: libero

claimed: reclamò

fleet: group of sheep (flotta)

armour: protective covering (armatura)

throne

1066: the Battle of Hastings, il racconto di una conquista

While William was preparing his fleet, Harold was facing new enemies in his country. His brother Tosig and King Hardrada from Norway were fighting to get the English crown. So, while Harold was engaged in this battle, William landed on the south coast. Harold defeated Tosig and Hardrada near London. But his great enemy was William with his 777 ships, 4000 foot soldiers and knights. Harold's man covered two hundred miles in four days to meet the Normans at Hastings. William's army was made of 3 groups: the Bretons on the left, the French and the Belgian on the right and the Normans in the centre. The sound of horns and trumpets marked the beginning of the battle. Harold had an advantage because his men were on the hill and soon the Normans remained without arrows. The Norman infantry (soldiers on foot) went closer so the English had to put their shields together to push them back. At that moment the British heard a cry: "William is dead". The soldiers were frightened and began to retreat. It was impossible to win without their leader. The English troops thought that the victory was on their side and started running down the hill ignoring Harold's shout to stop. Harold was right. William was alive and ready to lead his troops against the English. The Normans killed violently Harold's soldiers under their king's eyes. William's archers launched a second attack to the English shield wall still intact. But they shot high in the air and a shower of arrows rained on the British heads. They were unprofessional soldiers who fell to the Norman swords. We do not know exactly about Harold's death: probably an arrow stroke his face, but the final blow was due to a soldier on horse, a knight. William's hatred towards Harold did not permit a burial proper to a king. His corpse was mutilated and then buried on the beach under stones. The English soldiers' end was not better: some died, other ran away pursued by the Normans till night. On Christmas day 1066 William the Conqueror became king of England in the great new Abbey of Westminster.

NOTES

engaged: occupied

knights = cavalieri

sound: noise (suono)

horns = corni

shields = scudi

push them back: make them go back (spingerli indietro)

frightened: scared (spaventati)

retreat: go back (ritirarsi)

troops = truppe

archers = arceri

shot = mirarono

fell to the Norman swords = were defeated (caddero sotto le spade Normanne)

due to: caused (a causa di)

hatred: hate (odio)

burial: funeral (sepoltura)

pursued: followed, chased (perseguitarono)

The Bayeux Tapestry

The Bayeux Tapestry is a long embroidered cloth (stoffa ricamata) which describes the events before and during the Norman conquest of England (1066). The two combatants were the Anglo-Saxon English, led by Harold Godwinson, and the Normans, led by William the Conqueror. The tapestry has

Latin notes and now it is shown in a special museum in Bayeux, Normandy called Musée de la Tapisserie de Bayeux. Among the various possible legends and stories about the creation, one says that it was made by Queen Matilda, William the Conqueror's wife, and her ladies - in - waiting /dama di compagnia). Recent studies have established that it was commissioned by William's half brother (fratellastro), Bishop Odo during the building of the cathedral (1070s – 1077). Probably Anglo-Saxon artists designed and created it in England because the Latin notes contain Anglo-Saxon words. The Bayeux Tapestry is embroidered in wool thread (filo di lana) on a linen ground (base di lino). The linen is assembled (unito) in panels and has been patched (rattoppato) in numerous places. The main colours are terracotta or russet, blue-green, dull (scuro) gold, olive green, and blue. When it was later repaired other colours like light yellow, orange, and light greens were added.