

The Bayeux Tapestry: History, Politics, and Propaganda in Art

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The Power of Images to express Ideas



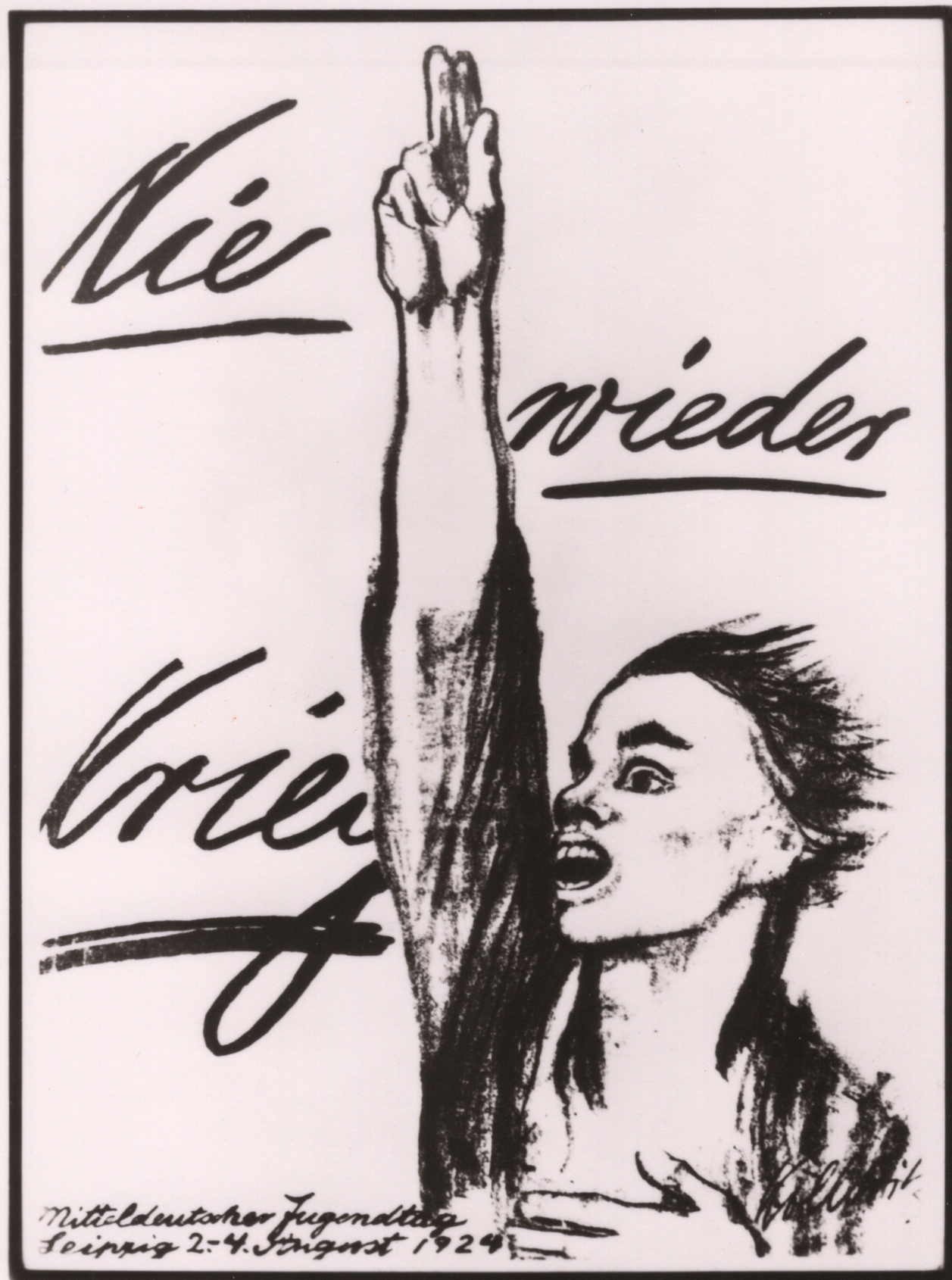
Coronation of
King Charles III
(6 May 2023)



Coronation of
King Charles II
(April 1661)



Attempted assassination of Presidential candidate Donald Trump on 13 July 13, 2024



Käthe Kollwitz, "Nie wieder Krieg" (1924)



Gold medalist Tommie Smith (center), silver medalist Australian Peter Norman (left) and bronze medalist John Carlos (right) on the podium after the 200 m race at the 1968 Summer Olympics, Mexico City



Not the First and not the Last

Linear Depictions of Military Victory and Conquest

- **Trajan's Column** in Rome (AD 113) depicting Emperor Trajan's victory over the Dacians (Romania and neighboring territory)
 - 30 metres high; 190 m carved frieze (depicting 155 scenes) wraps around marble "drums" 23 times
- **Bayeux Tapestry** (c.1070s) depicting the invasion and conquest of England by William Duke of Normandy
 - 50 cms high; 70 meters long; composed on 9 pieces of linen with colored embroidery in 58 panels
- Napoleon's **Vendôme Column** in Paris (1810) to celebrate the victory of the Battle of Austerlitz (1805) against the Russians and Austrians
 - a 280 metre-long frieze with 425 bronze plaques fixed to the stone with pins



Trajan's column in Rome (AD 113)



35 "events"

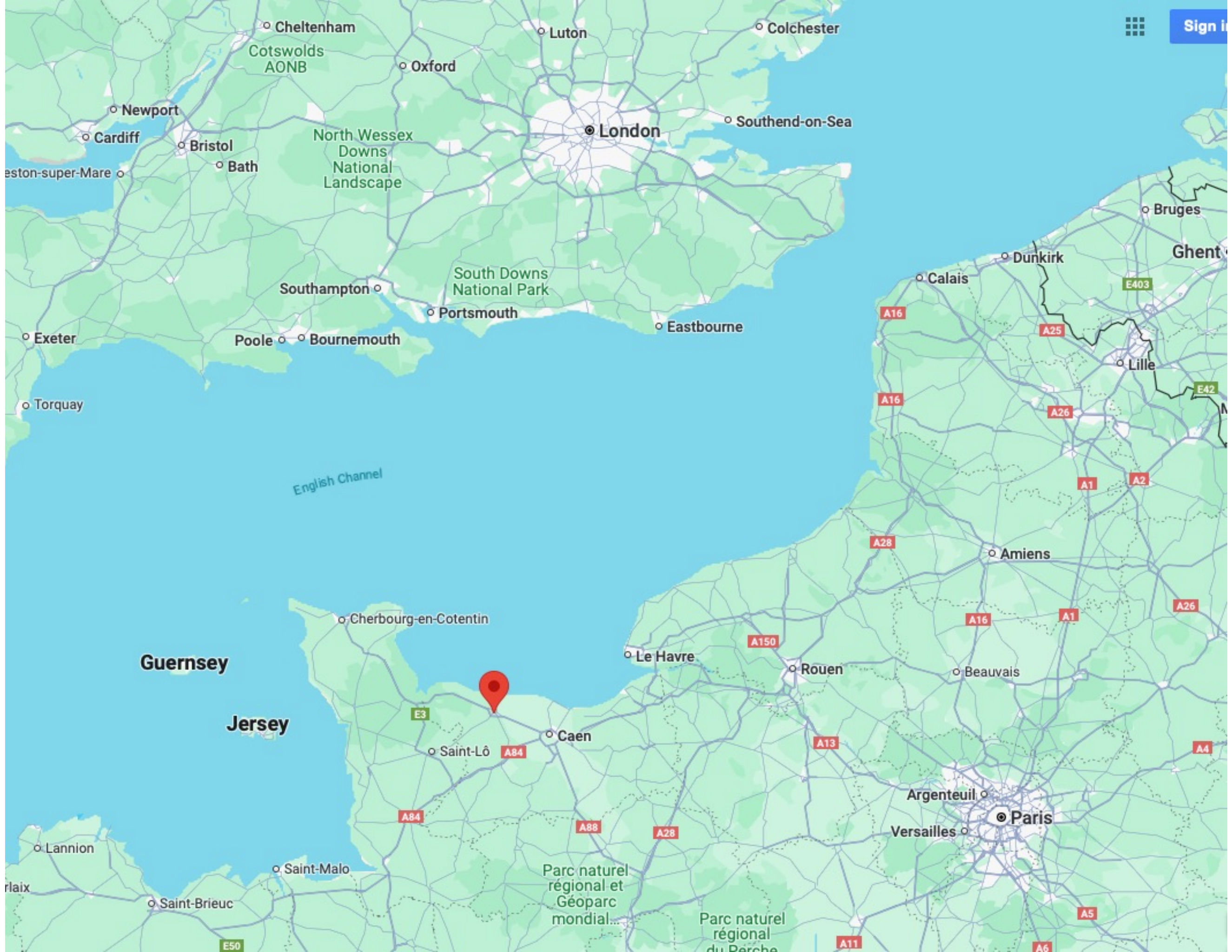


Bayeux Tapestry (c.1070s)



Napoleon's Vendôme Column in Paris (1810)

La Tapisserie de Bayeux





The Chronology of Events I

Leading up to the War

- King Edward sends his wife's brother Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex to France probably to assess the balance of power and interests of the major nobles of Normandy as his successor is in doubt since he is childless. [Panels 1-2 and Panels 3-4]
- Harold is captured by Guy, Count of Ponthieu. He is rescued by William, Duke of Normandy and is thus in his debt. William's daughter Aelfgifu is betrothed to Harold. [Panels 14 and 15]
- Harold joins William in a war against Conan of Brittany, who is defeated. William knights Harold who swears allegiance to William (and probably promises to support his claim to the throne of England once Edward dies). [Panels 22 and 23]
- King Edward dies in early 1066 and Harold is crowned King of England. [Panels 28 - 32]

The Chronology of Events 2

The War

- William feels betrayed and begins planning an invasion of England to claim the crown. He forges alliances with the other nobles of northern France who provide troops and war materiel. William builds and supplies a fleet for the invasion which departs in Sept. 1066 and lands at Pevensey. [Panels 35-38]
- William gets his army ready for battle. [Panels 46-48]
- William's army meets Harold's army at the town of Hastings and fight on 14 Oct. [Panels 51-52]
- William is victorious, Harold and his brothers are killed in battle, and he marches on London where he crowned the first Norman King of England on 25 Dec. 1066. [Panel 57]

“Bayeux Tapestry or Canterbury Embroidery?”

Commissioned by Odo Earl of Kent and Bishop of Bayeux,
King William's maternal half-brother

Created in Canterbury, England probably by monks (1070s)
to celebrate the invasion and conquest of England in
September/October 1066

It is 50 cms high and 70 metres long and consists of 58
"scènes" or "panels" depicting 35 separate "events" in the
form of a long "cartoon" strip or comic book



50 cms high and 70 metres long
58 “panels” and 35 “events”



35 “events”

Themes in the Images

Some of the Themes in the Images used in the Panels

Descriptive (military and economic history)

- the logistics and supply of the army
- the battle and its consequences

Interpretative (religious, political, popular thought)

- the legitimacy of power and alliances between the powerful
- allegorical commentary on the events

The Logistics and Supply of the Army

LANT: VBI: NVNTII: VVILLELMI: DVCIS: VENERVNT: ADVVIDO NE

Medieval Technology



Farming

Medieval Technology



Farming

What do you see in this image?



37.



Armour and Weapons

Medieval Technology



Boat building [Panel 36]

The Battle and its Consequences

What do you see in this image?



Injury and Death in Combat



Two Dead Soldiers, one decapitated

Injury and Death in Combat



Two Dead Soldiers

Injury and Death in Combat



Stripping Dead Soldiers of their Armor and Swords

Injury and Death in Combat



Stripping Dead Soldiers of their Armor and Swords

Injury and Death in Combat



Dead and Injured Horses



The death of King Harold on the battlefield at Hastings on 14 October, 1066 (Panel 57)



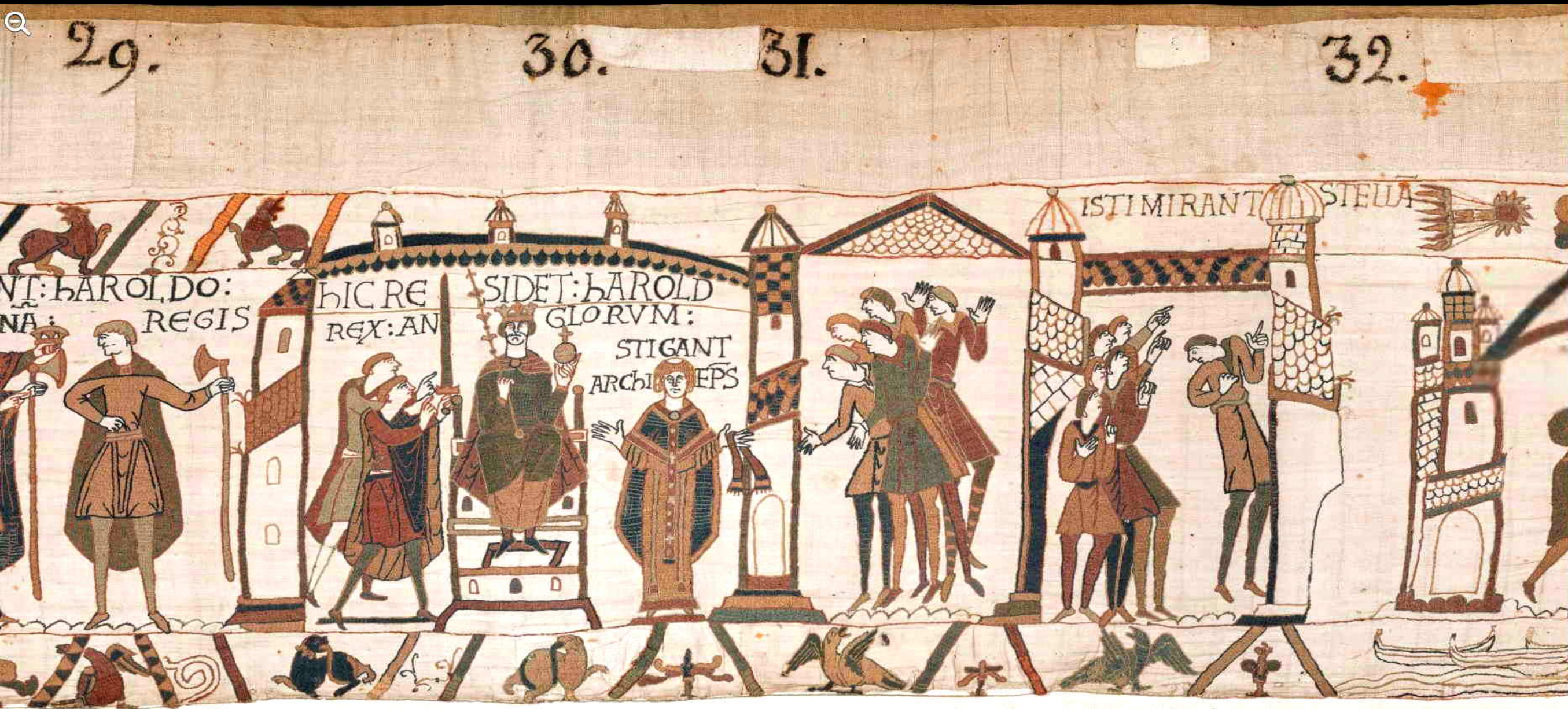


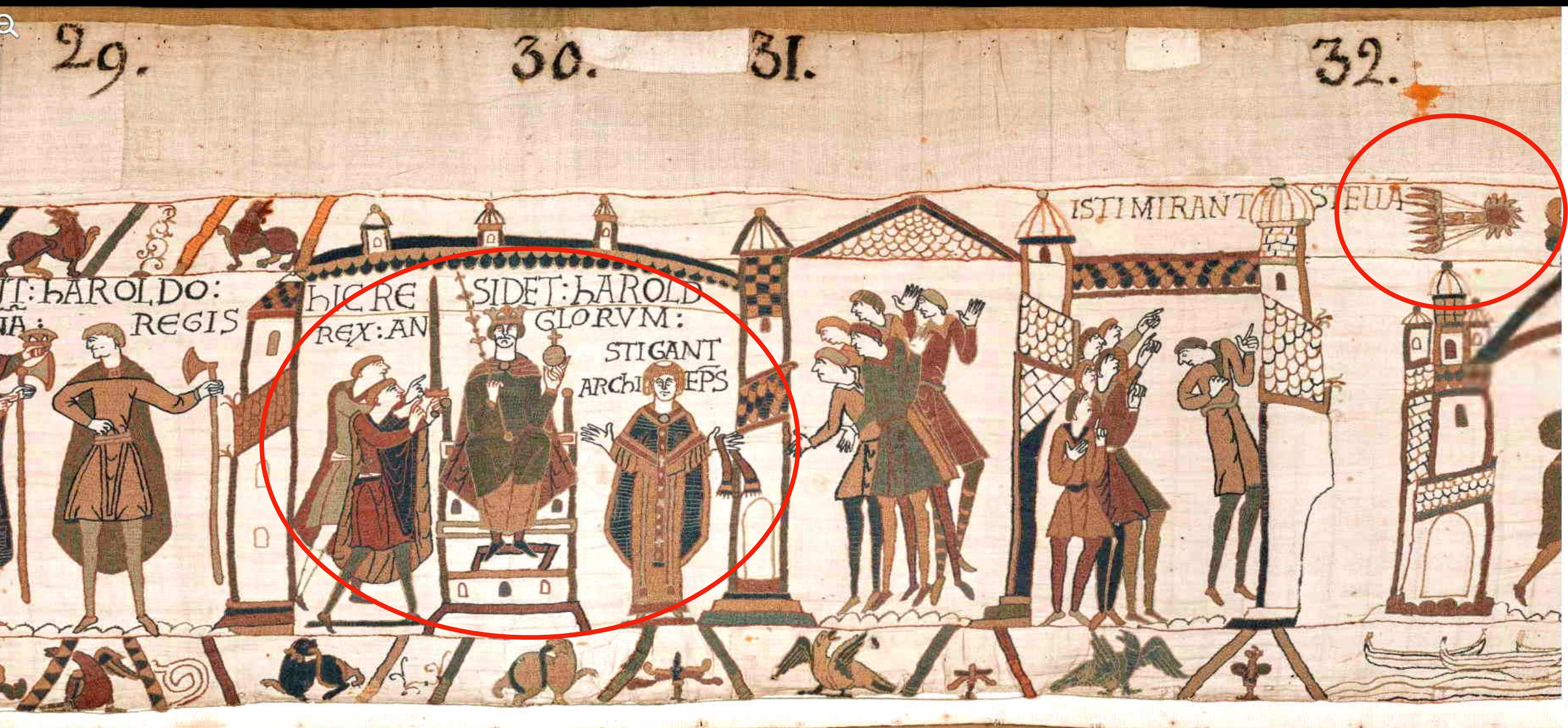
HAROLD REX INTERFEC
TVS: EST



The Legitimacy of Power and Alliances between the Powerful

What do you see in this image?





The Coronation of King Harold (6 January, 1066)
(Panel 31)







26.



The "Finger of God": the death of King Edward



What do you see in this image?



2.

23.



Harold swears allegiance to William on two altars



Allegorical Commentary on the Events

What do you see in this image?



Royal and Noble Beasts

Royal/Noble Beasts



Duke William is with Bishop Odo and his brother Robert on the eve of the battle; to their left are bishops and priests having a meal and blessing the battle to come; above them from left to right, are a Gryphon, a vulture, and two lions. Below are a pard sucking its tail, two vultures and another pard. [Panel 44]

Royal/Noble Beasts



Royal/Noble Beasts



What do you see in this image?



Mythical Beasts

Mythical Beasts



William takes Harold to his castle [Panel 14]:
above: lions, Gryphons (guardians of the souls of dead kings, body of a lion, wings and talons of an eagle), and peacocks; below: bowing vultures and pads (other large cats); crucifixes interspersed



Mythical Beasts



Two Centaurs beneath the feet of Harold as he sets off to Normandy: half man half beast with wild and uncontrollable tendencies.



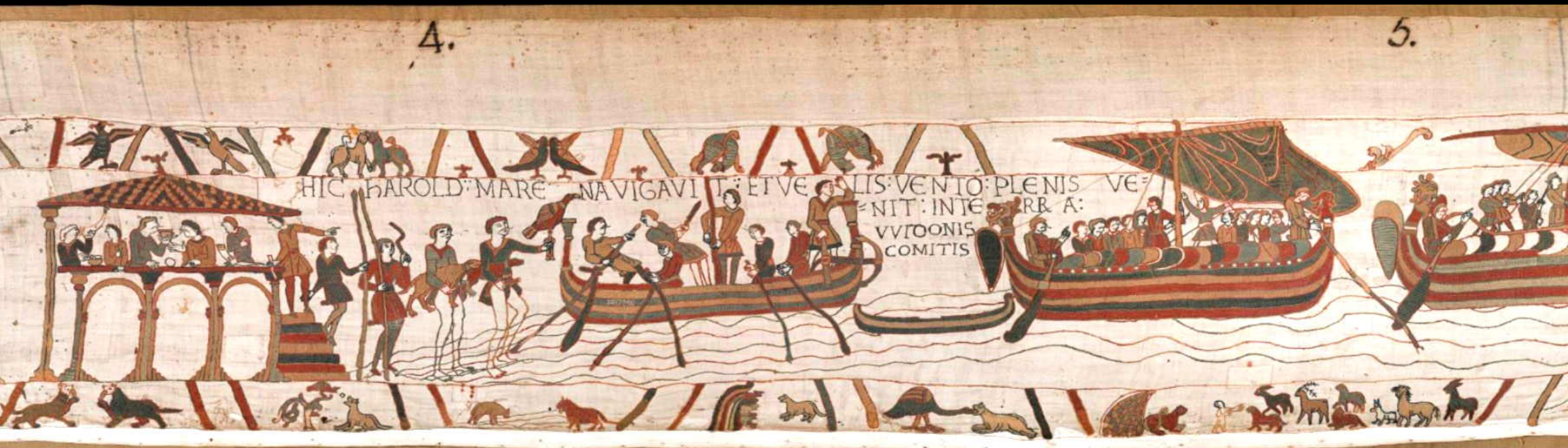
Mythical Beasts



Guy takes Harold to William: vultures (predators) and camels (endurance) above; "Adam and Eve" (sinners) and Wyverns (half lizard half bird which spit poison) below

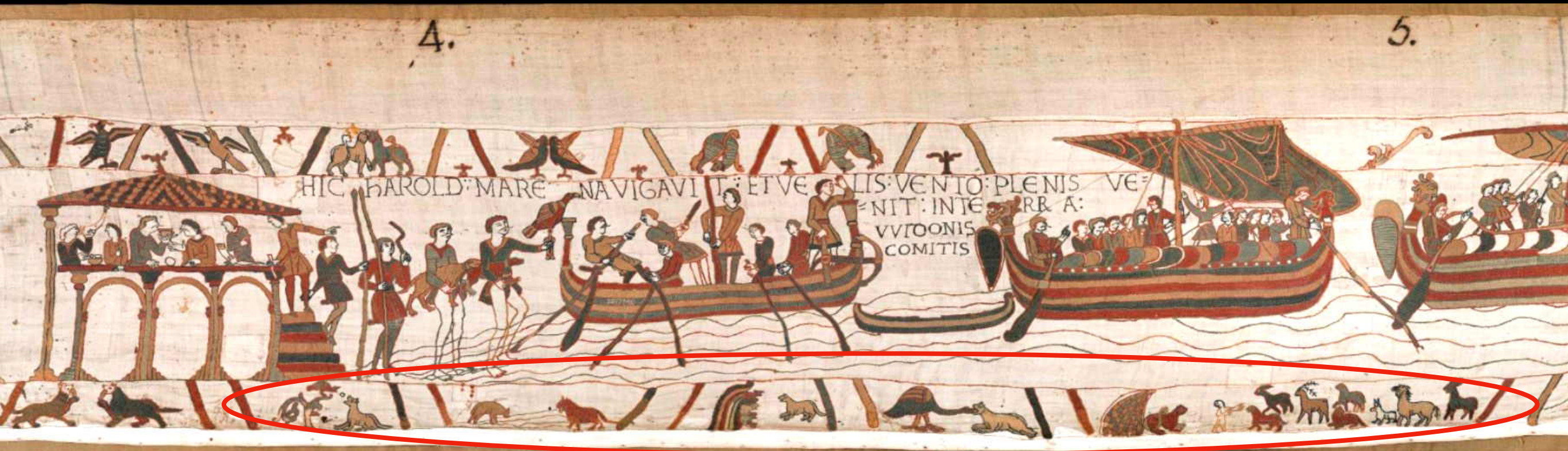


What do you see in this image?



The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phraedrus

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: undercutting the pro-monarchical narrative



5 classic fables in Panels 4-5

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: undercutting the pro-monarchical narrative



“The Fox and the Crow”

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: undercutting the pro-monarchical narrative



The Fox and the Crow: the fox tricks the vain crow
into opening his beak and dropping the cheese

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: undercutting the pro-monarchical narrative



“The Lamb and the Wolf”

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: undercutting the pro-monarchical narrative



The Lamb and the Wolf: the wolf falsely accuses the lamb of insulting him, but even after she defends herself successfully, he eats her anyway

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: undercutting the pro-monarchical narrative



“The Bitch and her Puppies”

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: undercutting the pro-monarchical narrative



The Bitch and her Puppies: a bitch lends her lair to a pregnant friend who takes advantage of her generosity and refuses to let her have it back

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: undercutting the pro-monarchical narrative



“The Wolf and the Crane”

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: undercutting the pro-monarchical narrative



The Wolf and the Crane: the wolf promises the crane a reward for removing a bone stuck in his throat, then reneges on his promise

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: undercutting the pro-monarchical narrative



“The Lion and the Animals”

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: undercutting the pro-monarchical narrative



The Lion and the Animals: the Lion King agrees not to eat meat but devours all the animals anyway

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: undercutting the pro-monarchical narrative



Other Canonical Fables: “The Lion’s Share”

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: undercutting the pro-monarchical narrative



Other Canonical Fables: “The Lion’s Share” -
The Lion refuses to share the hunt equally
with those who helped him, but eats it all
himself

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: animals who fight back



Other Canonical Fables: “The Wolf and the Goat”

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: animals who fight back



Other Canonical Fables: The Wolf and the Goat - a wolf catches a goat and allows her to pray before he kills her; she calls out for help, hunters hear her, and they and their dogs hunt down the wolf and kill him

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: animals who fight back



The armies of Williams and Harold are about to confront
“The Eagle, the Hare, and the Dung-Beetle” and
“The Old Man and the Donkey”

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: animals who fight back



The armies of Williams and Harold are about to confront
each other

The Eagle, the Hare, and the
Dung-Beetle

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: animals who fight back



Other Canonical Fables: The Eagle, the Hare, and the Dung-Beetle

The hare took refuge with the dung beetle, whose hospitality the eagle violated by devouring his guest. The dung beetle then took his revenge on the eagle by smashing its eggs in the nest

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: animals who fight back



The armies of Williams and Harold are about to confront
each other

The Old Man and the Donkey

The “Fabulous Animals” of Aesop and Phaedrus: animals who fight back



Other Canonical Fables: The Old Man and the Donkey

The donkey tells his owner, the old man, that he does not care who is his master, him or the soldiers of the invading army. They are all the same to him

Naked People

Naked People



Naked People



Naked man and woman (Adam and Eve?) [Panel 13]

Naked People



Naked People



Two pairs of naked man and woman (one with an axe) [Panel

Naked People



Naked People



Two naked men [Panel 15]

Naked People



Inspiration for Others



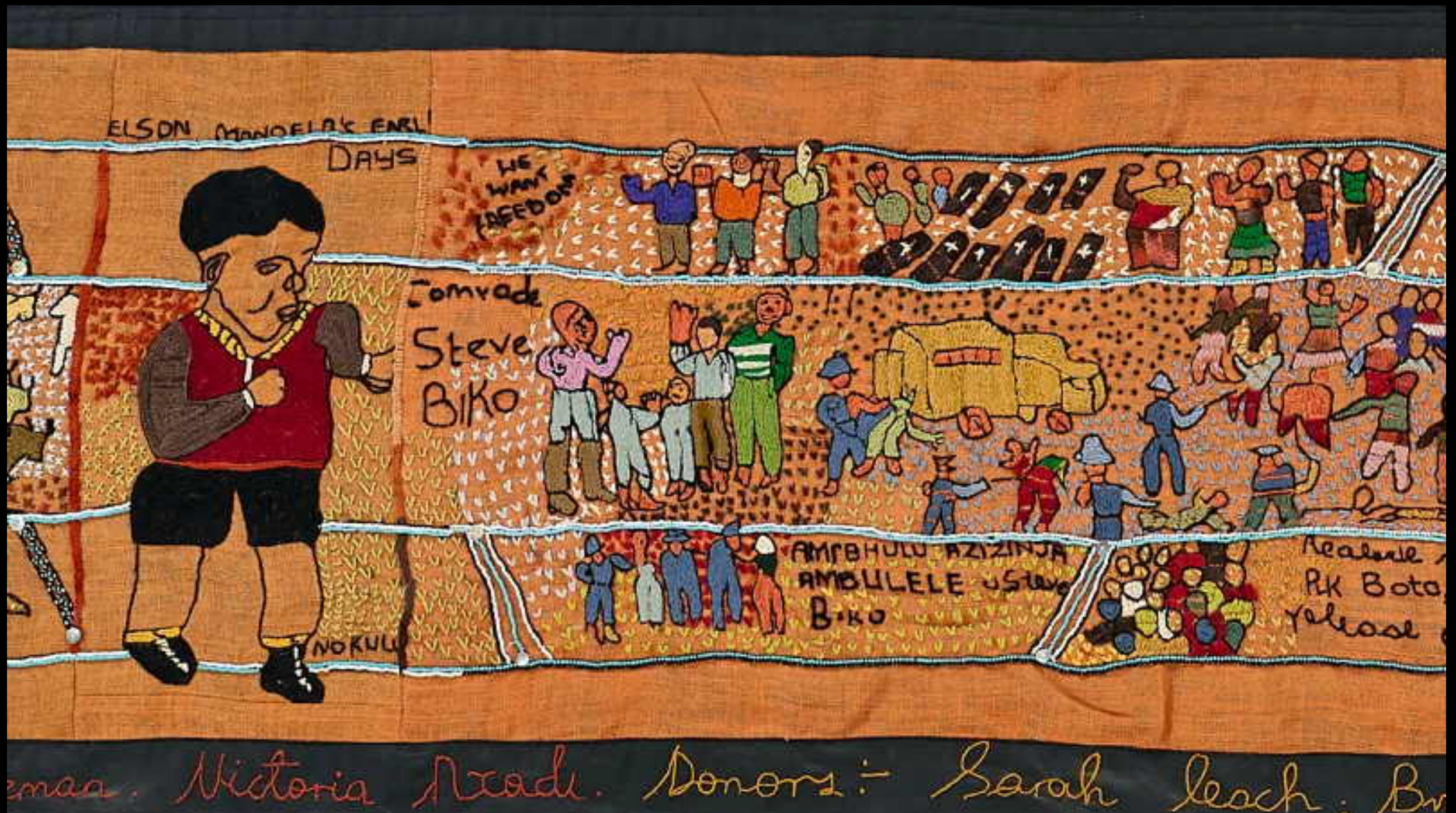
Michael L. Leunig, "Fragment of the Great Tapestry" (1997)



Mia Hansson "Lifesize Replica" (2024)



Annette Banks, "A Modern Version"



South African version: "The Keiskamma Tapestry"

My Own feeble Effort







Further Exploring and Reading

Images of the Tapestry online:

- The Bayeux Museum <<https://www.bayeuxmuseum.com/>>
- Foys, Martin K. *The Bayeux Tapestry. Digital Edition* (Scholarly Digital Editions, 2003). <<http://www.sd-editions.com/bayeux/online#/facsimile%3DBayeux%26panel%3D1>>

At my website:

- [Bayeux Museum Version]" <davidmhart.com/liberty/Art/WarArt/BayeuxTapestry/index.html>
- [Carolyn Schriber Version]" <davidmhart.com/liberty/Art/WarArt/BayeuxTapestry/BayeuxMuseum/index.html>
- Other "illustrated essays": "Images of Liberty and Power: the Art of War and Peace" <davidmhart.com/liberty/Art/war.html>

At my blog "Reflections on Liberty and Power":

- "From Bayeux to Guernica: The Depiction of Power, Destruction, and Suffering in War Art" (19 August, 2023) <<http://davidmhart.com/wordpress/archives/1678>>

Other works:

- Arthur Wright, *Decoding the Bayeux Tapestry: The Secrets of History's Most Famous Embroidery Hidden in Plain Sight* (London: Frontline Books, 2019).
- *The Bayeux Tapestry and Its Contexts A Reassessment. Edited by Elizabeth Carson Pastan and Stephen D. White with Kate Gilbert* (Boydell Press, 2014).