

**ODO OF BAYEUX AT WAR:  
LINKING THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY  
AND *THE SONG OF ROLAND***

by

Carl Jameson

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in History with Distinction.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	vi
Chapter	
<b>1 THE TAPESTRY AND THE SONG: AN INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
The Bayeux Tapestry .....	2
The Song of Roland .....	4
Connecting the Song and the Tapestry .....	5
<b>2 ODO OF BAYEUX</b> .....	9
Odo at Hastings: The Chroniclers vs. The Tapestry .....	12
Odo In The Tapestry .....	15
Odo After The Conquest .....	18
Odo As The Bayeux Tapestry’s Patron .....	22
The Case For Eustace Of Boulogne: An Alternative Examined And Rejected ...	24
<b>3 THE SONG OF ROLAND AND ODO AS TURPIN</b> .....	27
Odo’s Patronage of the Song .....	28
Odo and Turpin .....	30
Turpin in Battle .....	31
Odo and Turpin as Worldly Clerics .....	32
Odo and Turpin as Leaders .....	33
Odo as Turpin .....	37
<b>4 INFLUENCES ON THE FIRST CRUSADE</b> .....	39
The First Crusade – An Overview .....	39
A Final Discussion on the Dating of the Song .....	42
Holy Wars in the Eleventh Century .....	44
The Song and the First Crusade .....	46
Odo on Crusade .....	48

<b>5</b>	<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	51
	<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	52
	Primary Sources .....	52
	Secondary Works .....	54

## ABSTRACT

In 1066 England was conquered by Duke William of Normandy, and during the next ten years a magnificent work of art was created to glorify the conquest: the Bayeux Tapestry. Curiously, although William's brother Bishop Odo of Bayeux is scarcely mentioned by the chroniclers who recorded the events of the Norman Conquest, the Tapestry features him in a leading role. This can be explained by the fact that Odo was almost certainly the Tapestry's sponsor, but a more intriguing possibility arises when examining the contemporary great work *The Song of Roland*. In its epic verses the tale of Charlemagne's Spanish campaign in 778 is magnified into a world-spanning struggle between the forces of Christianity and Islam, and in the midst of it all is a character who bears remarkable resemblance to Odo in the Tapestry: Archbishop Turpin of Rheims. Given Turpin's legendary status, Odo could have masterminded his image in the Tapestry to liken himself to the archbishop, enhancing his prestige far more extensively while legitimizing his warlike tendencies in the eyes of his contemporaries by endowing himself with the image of a holy warrior.

This thesis examines the links between Bishop Odo, the Tapestry, and *The Song of Roland*, using the evidence of the two primary sources themselves, other contemporary written sources, and a wealth of modern material. Once such a connection are established, it proves valuable to examine the impact of the three subjects in the context

of the growing crusading movement at the end of the eleventh century. Odo himself set out on the First Crusade, and as it shall be seen, the events of his later life give further evidence to the idea that he modeled himself after Archbishop Turpin.

## Chapter 1

### THE TAPESTRY AND THE SONG: AN INTRODUCTION

“Archbishop Turpin goes throughout the field. No tonsured priest who ever sang a mass, performed such feats of prowess with his body. ‘God send you every ill,’ he tells the pagan ... And making his good destrier plunge forward, belabored him upon his Toledo shield, then throws the dead man down upon green grass”.<sup>1</sup> Even in our modern times, when wars of religion are disturbingly frequent, it seems strange to think of a priest with a weapon in his hand. However, in the early Middle Ages this was not such an uncommon sight, as the higher and more visible echelons of the Church’s hierarchy – bishops, abbots, and so forth - were drawn from the aristocratic warrior class. Noble families would extend their power base by planting a younger son in the local bishopric or monastery, so that a count and a bishop in the same area were often brothers or other close relatives. Even royal families were eager to have members in positions of power within the Church. As a result, many church officials were really just ecclesiastical barons with all the warrior education and values of their secular peers. Archbishop Turpin, Roland’s stalwart companion in *The Song of*

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<sup>1</sup>*The Song of Roland*, translated by Robert Harrison, New York: Penguin Putnam Inc. (2002), v. 1605-8, 1610-12.

*Roland* is one of the most legendary examples. Analysis of the sources regarding the Norman Conquest of England in 1066 and the years following reveals that Bishop Odo of Bayeux was another, especially if one consults the Bayeux Tapestry.

### The Bayeux Tapestry

The late eleventh century saw the rise of the crusading movement, and so it is perhaps not surprising that the two greatest works of that period – the Bayeux Tapestry and *The Song of Roland* – feature these prominent churchmen in battle. The Bayeux Tapestry presents in vivid and dramatic images the events that culminated in the Norman Conquest of England in 1066. On January 5th of that year King Edward the Confessor of England died childless, leading to a colossal struggle for the future of the kingdom. The very next day the crown was taken up by Harold Godwinson, the most powerful man in England and Edward's brother-in-law. This came as rather a surprise to William, Duke of Normandy. He had been promised the succession by Edward as early as 1051, as they were closely related by blood.<sup>2</sup> Harold himself had been sent to Normandy in 1064, where many sources say he confirmed this promise and pledged to support William's

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<sup>2</sup> David C. Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, Berkeley, California: University of California Press (1964), 160. Edward's mother Emma was the sister of Duke Richard II, William's grandfather. Moreover, Edward grew up at the Norman court; in fact, almost his entire life before becoming king was spent in Normandy.

candidacy.<sup>3</sup> Naturally, William was not pleased to have been betrayed, and he was prepared to enforce his claim. During the next seven months, he gathered and built a fleet of as many as a thousand ships and called all his vassals to war along with thousands of enterprising men from all over Western Europe.<sup>4</sup> He even obtained Pope Alexander II's public approval for his invasion of England, symbolized in the Tapestry by the papal banner carried at Hastings.<sup>5</sup> On September 27-28 William crossed the channel and landed unopposed near the town of Hastings with an army of seven thousand men. By extreme good fortune, King Harold was in the north with all his army at the time, and he force-marched the length of the kingdom to meet William. Harold's exhausted army approached Hastings late on the 13<sup>th</sup> of October. Early the next morning William led his forces against Harold's position. The ensuing battle was unusually long and grueling, for the English held fast along a ridge and had to be whittled down by repeated assaults, but by late afternoon Harold was killed and his army was dead or routed. In one of the most decisive battles in history, William had succeeded in forcing his claim to the English crown.

The Bayeux Tapestry's name is not entirely accurate – it is actually an embroidery, 230 feet long and 20 inches wide, meant to hang around the edge of a

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<sup>3</sup>Bayeux Tapestry, in Sir Frank Stenton, Simone Bertrand, George Wingfield Digby, Charles H. Gibbs-Smith, Sir James Mann, John L. Nevinson, Francis Wormald, *The Bayeux Tapestry: A Comprehensive Study*, ed. Sir Frank Stenton, London: Phaidon Press (1957), plates 1, 29; William of Malmesbury, *The History of the English Kings*, Volume I, trans. and ed. R.A.B. Mynors, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1998), 419.

<sup>4</sup>“The Ship List of William the Conqueror”, *The Normans in Europe*, trans. and ed. Elisabeth van Houts, Manchester: Manchester University Press (2000), 130.

<sup>5</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, plate 69; Douglas 187-88.

great hall or church – but to avoid confusion it will be referred to as a tapestry henceforth. It was created sometime between 1068 and 1082 (most scholars favor a date in the early to middle 1070s), and is a masterful piece of propaganda.<sup>6</sup> In an era where very few could read, this was a work of art that could impart its patron’s message to anyone who saw it. It is also a work without peer or precedent in its medium. J. Bard McNulty wrote an excellent “analysis of the Tapestry on its own terms” in 1989.<sup>7</sup> He notes that, due to the Tapestry’s singular nature in its own field, comparisons to great works in other media have routinely been made: “to chronicles, *chansons de geste*, plays divided into ‘acts’, comic strips, movies, and Roman triumphal monuments”.<sup>8</sup> While such comparisons are not perfect, those of a *contemporaneous* nature can be extremely useful in explaining some the Tapestry’s curiosities in a larger context.

### The Song of Roland

*The Song of Roland*, meanwhile, is among the first and certainly the greatest of the *chansons de geste*, “the songs of deeds”, a French form of literature that can be likened to the epic poetry of Homer and Virgil infused with feudal and Christian valor. Its author is unknown, as are the years of its writing: both these uncertainties will be addressed below.

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Bridgeford, *1066: The Hidden History in the Bayeux Tapestry*, New York: Walker Publishing Company (2005), 239-40.

<sup>7</sup> J. Bard McNulty, *The Narrative Art of the Bayeux Tapestry Master*, New York: AMS Press (1989), 15.

<sup>8</sup> McNulty 15.

This epic tale presents a version of Charlemagne's clashes in Spain in 778. It is based loosely on truth, but more on legends centering on the character of Roland, the great Charles' nephew and most puissant knight, in much the same way as the Arthurian tales usually focus on Lancelot or another of the Knights of the Round Table. Leaving Spain after a seven year campaign, Charlemagne's massive army is spread through the Pyrenees. Charles is betrayed by one of his own lords, Ganelon, and an even larger Muslim force ambushes the rear portions of the army. The rearguard, led by Roland and his two companions Olivier and Archbishop Turpin, heroically fight to the death to protect their honor and the rest of the army, slaying all the attacking Muslims in the process. This incites Charlemagne to return with the rest of the army and wipe out the opposing pagan kingdom.

#### Connecting The Song And The Tapestry

The *Song* and the Tapestry cover different topics, but have many of the same themes. Both feature a key character who, while strong and brave, becomes a traitor. Furthermore, this treachery plays a central role in the climax of the story. Harold's oath-breaking leads to William's invasion of England, the victory of the Normans over the English, and Harold's demise. Ganelon's betrayal of Charlemagne's army to the Saracens, meanwhile, results in the triumphant deaths of Roland and his companions, and ultimately the defeat of Muslim Spain. Both also have a clear holy war theme. In the *Song*, the historical Basque attackers are altered to vast Muslim armies which the Christian Franks must face. The deaths

of the Franks, particularly Roland's, are portrayed as something close to martyrdom. The two sides are extremely polarized, with Charlemagne and Baligant as the heads of the united forces of good and evil, respectively.

Admittedly, there are no Muslims in the Bayeux Tapestry. However, while England is a Christian kingdom, there remains a pagan element, and the land received little direct supervision from Rome due to the great distance. The Tapestry also highlights Harold's coronation by Archbishop Stigand of Canterbury, the kingdom's highest religious authority.<sup>9</sup> Stigand, however, had been excommunicated by not one but five Popes running for the crime of plurality: he refused to give up his seat as Bishop of Winchester when he became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1052, and illegally held both of those offices until 1070.<sup>10</sup> He was thus regarded with great unease even by many of the English clergy. (perhaps even worse than the Saracen 'pagans' in the *Song*). This provides additional motivation for the Pope's blessing, which is symbolized by the holy banner carried at Hastings.

The most obvious parallel of all is the role played by two men of the cloth: Odo of Bayeux and Archbishop Turpin. Both appear prominently in battle, despite their high clerical offices, and also prove influential, even vital, to counsels of war in the Tapestry and the *Song*. Without abandoning their religious

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<sup>9</sup> It is uncertain whether, because of Stigand's excommunicate status, Harold was actually crowned by Aldred, Archbishop of York. Florence of Worcester claims so, but William of Poitiers, Orderic Vitalis, and the Tapestry all indicate Stigand. William the Conqueror chose Aldred to perform his own coronation, however, so the Norman-biased sources might be simply contrasting to disadvantage Harold's reputation. See Douglas 182, 206.

<sup>10</sup>Douglas 170.

duties they show themselves to be formidable military men. These two characters stand out both for their actions within the stories and for excelling in these dual spheres.

Overall, then, the similarities between these two works are striking, and because the Tapestry was created at around the same time that the epic was written down the intriguing possibility of a direct connection between them arises. If so, there would be no better candidate for the connecting personality than Odo of Bayeux himself, the half-brother of William the Conqueror. Although both Anglo-Saxon and Norman chroniclers offer evidence that Odo was indeed a warlike bishop, the Bayeux Tapestry places him in such a central role that one must suspect an ulterior motive. Connecting Odo to the sponsorship of both works explains this, by showing that the bishop of Bayeux consciously modeled himself – and his depiction in the Tapestry - on Archbishop Turpin of Rheims from *The Song of Roland*.

The real Turpin of Rheims is just a name, one of a number of possible bishops or archbishops in the Carolingian realm of the eighth century; however, for the men and women of Odo's time the facts of Turpin as a historical character were almost certainly both unknown and irrelevant. He would have been known popularly as Roland's close friend and advisor in the seminal French feudal epic. By connecting himself to this heroic character, Odo would be both enhancing his prestige and legitimizing his warlike attributes. Like Turpin, he could be seen as a proto-crusader, putting his physical and mental gifts in the service of God, to be used in righteous battle. There is other compelling evidence in the Tapestry to

indicate Odo's involvement, the most important of which is the presence of named characters for which no explanation is given – Wadard, Vital, and (most importantly) Turol. All three names correspond with followers of the Bishop of Bayeux, but one of them can potentially be tied to *The Song of Roland* as well.

In the century leading up to the beginning of the crusades, the Church put forward several less martial ideas as a means for controlling warfare and internal violence, including the Peace of God and the Truce of God movements. Although they were respected at certain times, these declarations were generally unsuccessful, in part because the bishops and abbots were themselves drawn from the families of the warrior elite, and shared in their power struggles. When furnished with lands and titles, these men were not only spiritual leaders but also temporal lords in their own right. Until the ecclesiastical reforms begun by Pope Leo IX (1049-1054) there was little real difference between the two groups, so it is not surprising that many clergy remained true to their roots; as previously mentioned, they were often skilled in the arts of war due to their upbringing. Interestingly, the documents detailing the 'Peace of God' provide evidence for churchmen on the battlefield. This declaration set down by the Synod of Charoux in 989, an early promulgation of the Peace, declares "anathema against those who injure clergymen ... who [are] not bearing arms (shield, sword, coat of mail, or helmet)".<sup>11</sup> It seems that warrior clerics were common enough to get a special disclaimer. One such worldly prelate was Bishop Odo of Bayeux.

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<sup>11</sup> "Peace of God: Synod of Charoux, 989", Internet Medieval Source Book, <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/pc-of-god.html>>, 1998, accessed 1 Nov 2007.

## Chapter 2

### ODO OF BAYEUX

Odo was the half-brother of William the Conqueror, born of the duke's mother Herleve. Odo, unlike his elder half-brother, was a legitimate child – the product of marriage between Herleve and Herluin, the viscount of Conteville.<sup>12</sup> However, the lack of records makes his exact date of birth even less certain than William's; it was probably in 1030 or soon thereafter but could have been as late as 1035.<sup>13</sup> He served his older brother ably throughout the uncertain years before 1060 as a friend, assistant and councilor. The two grew up in the same household, and Odo received all the training expected for a youth of the aristocracy. Eleanor Searle writes in her influential work *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power* that this “warrior-bishop” was as well educated in “the tactics of warfare and the strategy of castlebuilding” as the Conqueror himself.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Douglas 15.

<sup>13</sup> David R. Bates, “The Character and Career of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux (1049/50-1097)”, *Speculum*, Vol. 50, No. 1. (Jan., 1975), pp. 1-20, [JSTOR](http://www.jstor.org:80/stable/2856509?seq=2&Search=yes&term=Career&term=Bayeux&term=Bishop&term=Odo%2C&term=Character&list=hide&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3DThe%2BCharacter%2Band%2BCareer%2Bof%2BOdo%252C%2BBishop%2Bof%2BBayeux%26wc%3Don&item=1&ttr=53&returnArticleService=showArticle&resultsServiceName=doBasicResultsFromArticle), <<http://www.jstor.org:80/stable/2856509?seq=2&Search=yes&term=Career&term=Bayeux&term=Bishop&term=Odo%2C&term=Character&list=hide&searchUri=%2Faction%2FdoBasicSearch%3FQuery%3DThe%2BCharacter%2Band%2BCareer%2Bof%2BOdo%252C%2BBishop%2Bof%2BBayeux%26wc%3Don&item=1&ttr=53&returnArticleService=showArticle&resultsServiceName=doBasicResultsFromArticle>>, 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power, 840-1066*, Eleanor Searle, Berkeley, California: University of California Press (1988), 194-97.

William granted Odo the bishopric of Bayeux in 1049 or 1050, by which time he was probably eighteen or nineteen: a grown man, raised in the traditions of the warrior aristocracy. This assumes, as seems most likely, Odo's birth occurring in 1030, or 1031 at most. It is a fairly safe assertion that William would not appoint a mere youth to such an influential and lucrative post, even one of his closest relations.<sup>15</sup> Further, Odo's appointment occurred at a critical time in William's career. In 1047, with the help of King Henry of France, the duke narrowly overcame a determined uprising of nobles at the Battle of Val-es-Dunes. This rebellion was centered in northwestern Normandy, where Bayeux is located; indeed, Ranulf the viscount of Bayeux was himself one of the principal rebels.<sup>16</sup> After Val-es-Dunes, William chose the nearby town of Caen as a new center of power and ordered the proclamation of the Truce of God there in October 1047.<sup>17</sup> A strong local ecclesiastical leader would be required to simultaneously uphold the Truce and assert control over the rebellious Norman lords, keeping them in check while William erected his massive fortress at Caen. A cynic might still claim that Odo was chosen for the job based solely on nepotism, but given William's astute governance of Normandy it might be more productive to take the appointment as a mark of Odo's abilities.

In any case, there is no evidence that Odo was a poor or negligent custodian of Bayeux. Despite his youthful entry into such a lofty position (the official earliest age of eligibility for the office of bishop was thirty), there was no hint of a

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<sup>15</sup> Bates 2.

<sup>16</sup> William of Malmesbury 429.

<sup>17</sup> Douglas 51.

scandal from contemporaries, a further sign that “he was not thought unsuitable”.<sup>18</sup> On the contrary, under his hand the see of Bayeux prospered. He continued work on a magnificent new cathedral, which had been begun under his predecessor. He also took personal charge of the cathedral school at Bayeux, and sent the most promising students abroad for further study. Several of his proteges later had illustrious careers of their own – among them two brothers, Thomas and Samson, who both served as treasurers of Bayeux and went on to become, respectively, Archbishop of York (1070-1100) and Bishop of Worcester (1096-1115).<sup>19</sup> He expanded the church’s lands, reclaiming those lost during the strife of William’s minority and the more recent rebellion of 1047. However, little more of substance is known about his career before the fateful Norman Conquest.

In 1066, Odo provided a hundred manned ships for the invasion of England, more than any other single contributor except for his own brother Robert of Mortain, who provided one hundred and twenty.<sup>20</sup> William certainly consulted with both of his brothers throughout the planning phase, but due to Robert’s youth (he was almost certainly born after 1040) and lack of personal initiative it is safe to say that Odo contributed more to these councils.<sup>21</sup> Given Odo’s aristocratic knightly training, his support for Duke William and his own considerable stake in the invasion, it is not so surprising to see the bishop emblazoned on the Bayeux

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<sup>18</sup> Bates 5.

<sup>19</sup> Douglas 129-30.

<sup>20</sup> “Ship List” 130.

<sup>21</sup> Bates 2.

Tapestry, riding into battle in full armor and wielding a rod, staff or mace of some form.<sup>22</sup>

### Odo at Hastings: The Chroniclers vs. The Tapestry

However, other sources cast some doubt as to Odo's actual role in the battle. William of Poitiers' description is often interpreted as asserting that Odo was not an active participant: according to R.H.C. Davis's notes on his translation, "[William of Poitiers] insists both on the piety of Duke William and the canonically correct noncombat role of the two bishops, Odo of Bayeux and Geoffrey of Coutances, both of whom were capable of leading troops in battle."<sup>23</sup> While it is telling that Davis admits to Odo and Geoffrey having such military abilities, and also that he seems to be accusing William of Poitiers of toeing the "canonically correct" line, the text does not in fact claim that Odo and Geoffrey did not fight on this occasion. William of Poitiers says only that "two bishops who had accompanied him from Normandy, Odo of Bayeux and Geoffrey of Coutances, were in his company", and that they "prepared for the combat with prayers", as indeed all Christians would have done before battle.<sup>24</sup> William of Poitiers also credits Odo with a sound military mind. Odo was "feared by enemies because he 'gave aid in battle through his most excellent advice'".<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panel 68.

<sup>23</sup> *Gesta Guillelmi*, William of Poitiers, translated by R.H.C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall, Oxford: Oxford University Press (1998), 124 n.

<sup>24</sup> Poitiers 125.

<sup>25</sup> David J. Bernstein, *The Mystery of the Bayeux Tapestry*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson (1986), 142.

Two generations later, Orderic Vitalis does explicitly relegate Odo and his fellows to an advisory role at Hastings, saying that their duty “was to aid the war with their prayers and counsels”.<sup>26</sup> However, this was after three generations of reforms, begun under Pope Leo IX, which sought to focus on the spiritual elements of church positions and separate the secular and sacred realms. Orderic demonstrates this evolution in the medieval world view by continually decrying Odo’s involvement in “worldly affairs”, when at the time it was generally accepted that ecclesiastical barons would play a vital role in local and regional politics.<sup>27</sup> Odo’s ambition often led him to meddle excessively, it is true, but his nearer contemporaries only criticized these excesses and not the general principle. William of Poitiers actually applauds Odo’s ability to effectively take on dual roles.<sup>28</sup> Coupled with this strike against his objectivity, the late date of Orderic’s writing may serve to discredit him in this particular instance. Even so, none of the other accounts of the battle of Hastings mention Odo at all. While it appears that some historians have interpreted the contemporary chroniclers too conservatively, there remains a considerable discrepancy between their writings and Odo’s depiction in the Tapestry.

Many historians, David C. Douglas among them, sidestep the issue altogether by arguing that Odo’s role in the Tapestry was also that of a mere noncombatant.<sup>29</sup> This is difficult to disprove, as we cannot know the artist’s

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<sup>26</sup> “The Battle of Hastings according to Orderic Vitalis”,  
<[http://www.shsu.edu/~his\\_ncp/Orderic.html](http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/Orderic.html)>, accessed 2 Dec 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Orderic Vitalis, quoted in Bates 3.

<sup>28</sup> Poitiers 165-67.

<sup>29</sup> Douglas 200.

intentions, but from the evidence this argument appears somewhat unconvincing. He appears in the midst of the action, charging forward to help William rally the flagging Norman cavalry. He is clad in full armor and helmet like those around him; his colorful and eye-catching surcoat (beneath which he is clearly wearing chainmail identical to his peers') can be seen as a device to allow him to stand out among the crowds of horsemen on this panel; it certainly does not appear to represent a bishop's robe.<sup>30</sup> While instead of a sword he carries a rod, often regarded as a mere instrument of his office or the like, this may simply draw attention to his priestly nature. It is clearly thicker and shorter than a bishop's crozier, and as there is a Biblical prohibition on the spilling of blood, many warrior clerics wielded a bludgeoning weapon.<sup>31</sup> For some reason it was considered acceptable by God for a clergyman to bash an enemy's head in as long as he didn't draw blood. The mace was by no means a lesser weapon, as Edward Freeman clearly acknowledges: "The Duke and the Bishop alone carried maces instead of swords. The mace was a most terrible and crushing weapon; Odo, it was said, carried it rather than a sword or lance, because the canons of the church forbade a priest to shed blood".<sup>32</sup> This proscription is of uncertain origin, although widely evidenced in the form of euphemistic 'holy water-sprinklers' wielded by clerics throughout the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance, but it

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<sup>30</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panel 68.

<sup>31</sup> Bates 6.

<sup>32</sup> Edward A. Freeman, *A Short History of the Norman Conquest of England*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1908).

likely stems from the Bible: “Put your sword back in its place, for all those who take the sword will die by the sword”.<sup>33</sup>

It should, however, be noted that in this scene William is shown armed with the exact same weapon as Odo.<sup>34</sup> Since it would be absurd to suggest that William carried no sword in the greatest battle of his entire career even if he were not seen wielding one later, another more plausible explanation is that the rod, a symbol of command, is meant to signify the men wielding greatest authority in the battle. This is bolstered by the Tapestry’s caption “HIC ODO EPISCOPUS BACULUM TENENS CONFORTAT PUEROS” (“Here Odo the bishop, grasping a rod, rallies the young men”).<sup>35</sup> As it is apparent that Odo is holding a staff, mace, or rod of some variety, the text seems to place emphasis on the weapon as a tool of power and leadership.

### Odo In The Tapestry

The resulting implication for Odo’s involvement – that he was William’s second-in-command – fits perfectly into the bishop’s portrayal throughout the Bayeux Tapestry. The crucial event leading up to the Battle of Hastings is the Oath of Harold, during which Norman sources agree that the Englishman swore to uphold William’s claim to the throne of England and to act as his representative there until such time as Edward the Confessor died. Naturally this oath would have been strengthened by the invocation of holy relics, the supposed force of

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<sup>33</sup> Matthew 26:52.

<sup>34</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panel 68.

<sup>35</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panel 68; McNulty 65.

which cannot be overestimated in modern understandings of the early Middle Ages. In the Tapestry this pivotal scene is set at Odo's seat of Bayeux, "yet William of Poitiers places it at Bonneville, whilst Orderic Vitalis amends this to Rouen".<sup>36</sup> As David Bernstein points out, the Tapestry is alone among all the sources in placing the oath at Bayeux.<sup>37</sup> As we will see, this was no mere error on the part of the designer.

In fact, the tapestry master's decision to set for the Oath of Harold in Bayeux, and to emphasize that fact regardless of whether or not it truly occurred there (or at all) is extremely important. It serves to "enhance the importance of the relics of Bayeux (and thus of Odo, Bishop of Bayeux) and to foreshadow Harold's perjury".<sup>38</sup> In focusing so closely on the oath and the subsequent oathbreaking, the Tapestry ignores any other justification for the Norman invasion of England. William had other, arguably stronger, justifications to legitimize his conquest – his close blood relationship with Edward the Confessor and said king's prior blessing of William as his successor. Admittedly, these would be slightly more difficult to weave into the plot of the Tapestry, but nevertheless it is clear that William's viewpoint is being neglected.<sup>39</sup> Odo, on the other hand, had nothing to do with either of the latter two arguments. He himself was not at all related to King Edward, and the alleged bequest of the throne to William had

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<sup>36</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panel 29; "The authority and interpretation of the Bayeux Tapestry", N.P. Brooks and the late H.E. Walker, *Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1978*, edited by R. Allen Brown, Ipswich: Boydell Press (1979), 8.

<sup>37</sup> Bernstein 143.

<sup>38</sup> McNulty 73.

<sup>39</sup> McNulty 73.

taken place long before Odo's prominence in Norman affairs; this probably occurred in late 1051 or early 1052 during the Godwinson family's exile from England, since they would surely have forcibly vetoed such an arrangement had they been in power. Such arguments would not serve Bishop Odo, and so the Tapestry ignores them and highlights the oath, placing at Odo's cathedral in Bayeux.<sup>40</sup>

Where Harold swore the oath would have been insignificant, if he had kept it. He did not, and the Tapestry records with great detail the consequences of that failure, culminating in Harold's death on the battlefield and the victory of William (and Odo). This is the fulcrum of the entire work. Essentially, the Tapestry is saying that Harold's blasphemous treason invoked the power of Bayeux's precious relics, and Odo would of course have an interest in demonstrating said power. As McNulty states, "The Tapestry shows that to break one's oath on the relics of Bayeux is serious business, serious enough to topple a kingdom".<sup>41</sup> By emphasizing the spiritual reasons for Harold's downfall, Odo manages to impress a broad audience with the holy power entrusted to his care (because God would only place such relics in the hands of a very holy person).

Once the invasion force – Harold's divine punishment – lands on the shores of England, Odo presides over the celebration feast, where he "blesses the food and drink", and sits at William's right hand in the council of war.<sup>42</sup> These

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<sup>40</sup> This cathedral, the replacement for a crumbling and outdated building, had recently been completed at great expense by Bishop Odo and consecrated (See below) – another reason to highlight it in the Tapestry.

<sup>41</sup> McNulty 65.

<sup>42</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panels 49-50.

two scenes are placed side-by-side, displaying Odo's dual role. In the first, he is a bishop, and in the second, a warrior. He even appears next to William when the news of Harold's betrayal arrives, where he gravely points his half-brother toward the rest of the Tapestry's events. William immediately responds by ordering ships to be built – perhaps implying that Odo proposed the invasion himself.<sup>43</sup> All in all, “Odo's presence in this version of the Conquest is so prominent that commentators have imagined the Conqueror's own discomfort if he ever saw the Tapestry.”<sup>44</sup>

### Odo After The Conquest

While Odo may have been overrepresented in the Bayeux Tapestry, once England fell to the Normans he proved on several occasions that he was in truth a fearsome man at war. After the Conquest, William granted him vast lands in the south and east. William of Poitiers records, “As for the castle of Dover, he [William] entrusted it to his brother Odo, together with the adjacent south coast, which goes by the old name of Kent.”<sup>45</sup> Odo was charged with fortifying the kingdom while William was abroad, building castles “here and far and wide throughout this country”<sup>46</sup> and ravaging the remaining English rebels; according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle this made him rather unpopular. William of

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<sup>43</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panel 37. See below.

<sup>44</sup> *The Normans in their Histories: Propaganda, Myth, and Subversion*, Emily Albu, Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press (2001),100.

<sup>45</sup> Poitiers 165.

<sup>46</sup> “Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Version D”, *The Normans in Europe*, translated and edited by Elisabeth van Houts, Manchester: Manchester University Press (2000), 139.

Poitiers denies any impropriety on Odo's part, however, since he was acting under William's mandate.<sup>47</sup> He also led Norman forces against rebellions in 1074-75, and against the Scots in 1080 alongside his half-nephew Robert. William of Poitiers is quite a fan of the Bishop of Bayeux: "As for Odo, from his earliest years the unanimous commendation of the best men rated him among the best. His renown has been carried into the most distant regions; but the zeal and goodness of this most generous and humble man deserve much more."<sup>48</sup> He seems intent on making him out to be a saint, which was by no means the case; this may explain why he leaves out possible roles in battle, just as he glosses over the man's well-known desires for wealth, power and luxury. Another equally likely explanation is that he was writing in Normandy, far removed from Odo's campaigns in England and Scotland, and from his exploitations of English lands to which the English sources – like William of Malmesbury and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle – were more privy.

It is clear that Odo recognized himself as both a warrior and a prelate. On his double-sided seal he is shown on one face as a properly-attired bishop complete with crozier, and on the other as a mounted knight in full armor, carrying both shield and sword.<sup>49</sup> It is imperative to note that is no evidence of Odo actually slaying men upon the battlefield, and that he almost certainly restricted himself to leadership roles, but the fact that his own seal depicts him armed with a sword is very intriguing. This lends some weight to the possibility

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<sup>47</sup> Poitiers 181-3.

<sup>48</sup> Poitiers 93.

<sup>49</sup> Bernstein 142.

that Odo's depiction in the Tapestry's Hastings actually softened the truth by arming him with a club, for if he had entered the thick of the battle a weapon of wood would have been little protection. More likely, it signifies that Odo simply desired to be a great warrior – hence his adoption of the Turpin image.

Unfortunately for Odo, he and his half-brother came into opposition in 1082, and he fell abruptly from power. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle has this to say: “And at length he [William] spared not his own half-brother Odo. This Odo was a very powerful bishop in Normandy. His see was that of Bayeux, and he was foremost to serve the king. He had an earldom in England, and when William was in Normandy he was the first man in this country, and him did William cast into prison”.<sup>50</sup> The Chronicle does not give details as to why this occurred, and William of Poitiers wrote too early, but Orderic Vitalis records that Odo was caught gathering a number of William's vassals for a military expedition to Italy, where he had bought a mansion and purchased the loyalty of many influential Romans with the apparent intention of making himself pope!<sup>51</sup> William of Malmesbury elaborates on this:

In the accumulation of wealth he was a great double-dealer and showed great cunning, and had almost succeeded in buying the see of Rome from the citizens in his [presumably the Pope's] own absence, by stuffing the wallets of pilgrims with letters and coin. When rival throngs of knights from the whole kingdom hastened to join him on hearing of the journey he was planning, the king was furious and put him in chains, having

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<sup>50</sup> “The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Assessment of William I”, Internet Medieval Source Book, <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1186ASChron-William1.html>>, 1998, accessed 8 Nov 2007.

<sup>51</sup> Orderic Vitalis, cited in *William the Conqueror*, David C. Douglas, Berkeley, California: University of California Press (1964), 243.

explained that his fetters were not for the bishop of Bayeux but for the earl of Kent.<sup>52</sup>

His brother William, both as a Christian king and as a feudal overlord, must have looked upon this act with extreme severity.<sup>53</sup>

William only released him when on his deathbed, after his young half-brother Robert of Mortain fervently pled Odo's case, and he quickly regained his prominence in English affairs. In 1088 he led a widespread uprising against William II Rufus on behalf of the elder son Robert (whom he had fought alongside in Scotland), and again we see Odo as a full-fledged warrior and leader despite his advancing years. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, "Bishop Odo, with whom all these affairs originated, went to Kent...and injured it severely, and [he] utterly laid waste the king's land and the archbishop's, and he carried all the goods into his castle at Rochester".<sup>54</sup> After William II stifled the rebellion by besieging and defeating Odo at Rochester, Odo was exiled to Normandy, where he continued to faithfully serve and advise his nephew Robert. After serving as one of the Norman representatives to the Council of Clermont, he joined Duke Robert's crusading forces in 1096, although he was almost sixty-six years old.<sup>55</sup> It can be assumed that he sought the same spiritual benefits that his fellow magnates and warriors did. However, there will be further discussion of Odo's involvement with the First Crusade below.

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<sup>52</sup> Malmesbury 507.

<sup>53</sup> Douglas 243.

<sup>54</sup> Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, quoted in "1088 – William II and the Rebels", Richard Sharpe, *Anglo-Norman Studies XXVI*, ed. John Gillingham, Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press (2004), 141-2.

<sup>55</sup> Bates 2.

### Odo As The Bayeux Tapestry's Patron

Based on the evidence, it would seem that the Bayeux Tapestry edits history in hindsight in order to give Odo the military prowess and glory which he only fully obtained many years later. The Conquest of England arguably serves as a backdrop with sufficient importance, heroism and epic qualities to adequately showcase these same qualities in Odo.<sup>56</sup> The obvious explanation is that the Tapestry was commissioned by the bishop himself, an explanation which is generally accepted by most scholars, among them David C. Douglas, J. Bard McNulty and David J. Bernstein, but for which a summary of the evidence will prove valuable. Odo's own role in the Tapestry has already been discussed at great length, and the prominence of Bayeux and its relics, as mentioned above, also argues strongly in favor of the point. The most compelling proof of Odo's direct involvement, however, is the presence of the three mysterious characters Tuold, Wadard and Vital. Tuold is seen attempting to handle two restless horses at the same time.<sup>57</sup> He is extremely small, but before assuming that Tuold was a dwarf one must recall the great variety of sizes for men in the Tapestry - it is possible that his stature was simply reduced to make his apparent struggle more humorous. Wadard is simply one of many knights pillaging Hastings before the battle, while Vital appears as one of the Norman scouts.<sup>58</sup> Had he been the only

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<sup>56</sup> McNulty 65.

<sup>57</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panel 12.

<sup>58</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panels 47, 56.

outrider who tells William of Harold's approach, his mention by name would have been understandable, yet several other heralds go unnamed.<sup>59</sup> As Brooks and Walker write, "They [Tuold, Wadard and Vital] occur in no other account of the Norman conquest, and there is nothing in their actions depicted in the Tapestry to indicate why they should be named".<sup>60</sup> The only reason that these three would be given such distinctive places in the work is that the sponsor or the artists were connected to them in some way. In fact, the Domesday Book reveals that Tuold, Wadard and Vital were all minor nobles who held lands in Kent and were thus followers of Bishop Odo.<sup>61</sup> They may also have fought in his contingents during the invasion.<sup>62</sup> Odo must almost certainly then have been responsible (financially, at the very least) for the production of the Bayeux Tapestry, and thus, as expected, the source of his own aggrandizement.

#### The Case For Eustace Of Boulogne: An Alternative Examined And Rejected

Not all scholars are convinced that Odo was the Bayeux Tapestry's patron. However, because he is so blatantly favored, most alternatives involve the Tapestry being designed and given as a gift to Odo by the real patron. A recent case has been made for Count Eustace II of Boulogne by Andrew Bridgeford, who includes it in his impressively researched 2006 book *1066: The Hidden*

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<sup>59</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panels 56-57.

<sup>60</sup> Brooks 8.

<sup>61</sup> Brooks 8.

<sup>62</sup> Bates 11.

*Meaning of the Bayeux Tapestry*. The book contains a great deal of valuable and original material. In the argument for Eustace, however, Bridgeford seems to have gotten carried away. While lengthy, it essentially revolves around the single appearance in the Tapestry of a character who might be Eustace, but whose caption was nearly destroyed during the Tapestry's first examination and had to be reconstructed with no small amount of guesswork. Through a series of rather convoluted assertions and interpretations, Eustace becomes the hidden centerpiece of the entire Bayeux Tapestry.<sup>63</sup> Bridgeford combines his curious but not unprecedented theory with the more common one of the 'secretly pro-English' Tapestry, whereby the clever English craftsmen fooled their Norman paymasters and inserted all manner of covert messages into the imagery. His implication is that Eustace desired the English crown for himself, and that certain Englishmen supported him in this.<sup>64</sup> This seems to be supported by the fact that Eustace led an attack on Dover Castle in 1067, an attack which failed miserably and for which there was no clear explanation. William of Poitiers writes of the event, "the inhabitants of Kent persuaded him to attack Dover castle with their help," and describes Eustace's humiliation, but remains silent on his motives.<sup>65</sup> This is consistent with Bridgeford's theory, as William of Poitiers would certainly not have broadcast Eustace as a potential alternative to his patron the King. Furthermore, Dover Castle was held by Odo in his role as Earl of Kent, and so after Eustace was banished for his rebellion it would make sense that he might

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<sup>63</sup> Bridgeford 198.

<sup>64</sup> Bridgeford 200-201.

<sup>65</sup> William of Poitiers 183.

wish to patch things up with Odo as part his return to good graces, while at the same time maintaining good relations with his English friends.

Unfortunately, as Carola Hicks succinctly puts it, “the main flaw in the case for Eustace”, apart from the fact that it requires the acceptance of an implausible number of twists in the Tapestry itself, “is that he could not have commissioned the Tapestry (presumably with the support of his former Kentish followers and with access to the Canterbury workshops) until after his reinstatement”. This renders paradoxical a claim that Eustace commissioned the Tapestry as a bribe or reconciliation gift for Odo of Bayeux.<sup>66</sup> In other words, Eustace was not in the right place nor did he have the resources at hand to sponsor such a project until after its intended goal had already been achieved. The count became reconciled to King William only in the late 1070s. William of Poitiers speaks of his restoration as a very recent event in the last pages of his chronicle, which he finished in 1077.<sup>67</sup> At this point it was too late for Eustace to begin a work of the Tapestry’s scope even if he still wished to. The Conquest was no longer current events; it is partly for this reason that most historians place the Tapestry’s creation within ten years of the Conquest. Moreover, Bishop Odo completed Bayeux Cathedral in 1077 and the Tapestry is believed to have been first hung at its consecration.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Carola Hicks, *The Bayeux Tapestry: The Life Story of a Masterpiece*, London: Chatto & Windus (2006), 27.

<sup>67</sup> William of Poitiers 185.

<sup>68</sup> Sir Frank Stenton, Simone Bertrand, George Wingfield Digby, Charles H. Gibbs-Smith, Sir James Mann, John L. Nevinson, Francis Wormald, *The Bayeux Tapestry: A Comprehensive Study*, ed. Sir Frank Stenton, London: Phaidon Press (1957), 11.

### Chapter 3

#### THE SONG OF ROLAND AND ODO AS TURPIN

To what ultimate end was the enhancement of Odo in the Bayeux Tapestry carried out? The version of Odo in the Tapestry bears very significant resemblance to the famous clerical companion of Roland, Archbishop Turpin of Rheims, in *The Song of Roland* - enough so that it may answer this question. "To some degree the Tapestry might seem a Song of Roland without its hero ... There is in fact no Roland but there is a Turpin. Archbishop Turpin, we may remember, was - with Oliver - Roland's companion at Roncesvalles, and it is in at least a comparable role that bishop Odo is depicted", writes C.R. Dodwell.<sup>69</sup> While this cannot be denied, more than mere similarities are required to assert that a direct reference to Turpin was intended by the Tapestry creator and its patron. It is first necessary to show that Odo himself could and would have made it: that he had not only knowledge of the *Song* but a special connection to it that would give him the ability and reason to make such a bold allusion.

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<sup>69</sup> "The Bayeux Tapestry and the French Secular Epic", C. R. Dodwell, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 108, No. 764 (Nov 1966), 557, [JSTOR](http://www.jstor.org/view/00076287/ap020225/02a00020/5?Frame=noframe&userID=80af449e@udel.edu/01c0a8487500502db28&dpi=3&config=jstor), <<http://www.jstor.org/view/00076287/ap020225/02a00020/5?Frame=noframe&userID=80af449e@udel.edu/01c0a8487500502db28&dpi=3&config=jstor>>, 2000, accessed 20 Nov 2007.

### Odo's Patronage of the Song

The first item in favor of this argument is William of Malmesbury's assertion that some version of the epic was performed at the Battle of Hastings. "Then starting the Song of Roland, in order that the warlike example of that hero might stimulate the soldiers, and calling on God for assistance, the battle commenced on both sides, and was fought with great ardor".<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, we know that the final version was most likely completed during the late eleventh century. The events of 1066 may even have helped to inspire it.<sup>71</sup> As a great patron of culture and literature, Odo makes a great candidate for influencing the epic's evolution; David C. Douglas himself suggests this possibility, but without a great deal of assurance.<sup>72</sup>

More compelling evidence for Odo's involvement is provided when one considers the final line of *The Song of Roland*: "The story that Turolodus tells ends here".<sup>73</sup> Robert Harrison, the foremost modern translator of the epic, writes that the Latinized name Turolodus, "a variant of the Scandinavian *Thorvaldr*", or Turolod, makes it most likely that he was a Norman.<sup>74</sup> Naturally, historians have been eager to identify this figure, but his identity remains uncertain. According to Harrison, "the most likely candidate in the Turolodus sweepstakes nowadays is a monk from Fecamp who fought at Hastings, served at Malmesbury and at

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<sup>70</sup> "William of Malmesbury: The Battle of Hastings 1066", Internet Medieval Source Book, <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/1066malmesbury.html>>, 1998, Accessed 30 Nov 2007.

<sup>71</sup> Douglas 261.

<sup>72</sup> Douglas 129.

<sup>73</sup> *Roland* v. 4002.

<sup>74</sup> *Roland* 13.

Peterborough, and died in 1098.”<sup>75</sup> As aforementioned, a man of that name appears in the Bayeux Tapestry – one of the three who provide such a significant connection between the Tapestry and Odo. Moreover, the Tapestry presents a Tuold in the garb of a jongleur or bard, and a high-class one at that: just the sort of person to be writing down the tales of Roland and Turpin.<sup>76</sup> Andrew Bridgeford attempts to fit Tuold into his hypothesis by claiming that he was in the service of Count Guy of Ponthieu, a cousin of Eustace II who captures Harold on his arrival from England. “The tapestry shows Tuold only once; his feet are set firmly on the soil of Picardy; and he is depicted in the same scene as the Count of Pontieu.”<sup>77</sup> The central statement can be easily refuted by a mere glance at the Tuold scene. His feet are in fact well above the ground, implying that either he is not from that locale and has either come with the messengers (he faces away from the characters in his scene and looks to the messengers arrival in the next scene [a flashback]) or he is a simple cameo, cunningly worked into the Tapestry to reference his importance elsewhere.<sup>78</sup> He is the only Tuold or Tuoldus mentioned in any of the chronicles of the Battle of Hastings, so this would seem to link Tuold from the Tapestry with the development of the finalized *Song of Roland*.

Further evidence for the *Song*’s Norman authorship can be found in other lines. If it had indeed been written by a Norman, one might expect to see some reference to pro-Norman events, however subtle. One would be right. Among

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<sup>75</sup> *Roland* 13.

<sup>76</sup> Bridgeford 229-30.

<sup>77</sup> Bridgeford 230.

<sup>78</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panel 12.

the list of Charlemagne's vast conquests the author includes this passage: "A wondrous man is Charles, who conquered Puglia, all Calabria, and crossed the salt sea on his way to England, where he exacted tribute for Saint Peter".<sup>79</sup> Charlemagne did not do any of these things. William of Malmesbury, however, writes that in the late 1050s a Norman of great ambition and limited resources named Robert Guiscard sailed to southern Italy with "fifteen knights, hoping to redress his shortage of necessities by taking the pay of that unenterprising people"; in other words, he became a mercenary, and a quite successful one at that.<sup>80</sup> Guiscard fought energetically until he made himself lord of both Apulia (Puglia) and Calabria. The *Song* therefore makes explicit reference to Norman conquests in Italy and to William's own invasion of England. Furthermore, the words "he exacted tribute for Saint Peter", if you substitute the factual William for the fictionalized Charles, emphasize that the Norman Conquest restored England to papal authority, a point which was also emphasized in the Bayeux Tapestry.<sup>81</sup> Combined with Odo's associations with literature, Hastings, and Turold himself, we now have an uncommonly close correlation between Odo, the Tapestry, and *The Song of Roland*.

#### Odo and Turpin

Having established that Odo was closely tied to both the Tapestry and *The Song of Roland*, it now seems only logical to compare him to Turpin, as indeed he

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<sup>79</sup> *Roland* v. 370-73.

<sup>80</sup> William of Malmesbury 483.

<sup>81</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panel 69.

himself appears to have intended. There are a number of qualities which the two epic characters share. The first of these is a distinctly warlike nature for men of their position. Bishops going to war was not terribly rare in Odo's time, but given his career as a whole he was certainly an uncommon figure, as the chroniclers seem to indicate. Odo's portrayal as a warrior in the Tapestry has already been described at length; the depiction of Turpin is far more exaggerated, taking on a legendary stature which Odo can hardly be blamed for wanting to emulate.<sup>82</sup>

### Turpin in Battle

The archbishop needs no euphemistic 'water-sprinkler': he has no qualms about spilling infidel blood. His attitude towards the enemies of Christendom is simple: " 'This Saracen's a heretic, I think. It's best by far I go and kill him' ".<sup>83</sup> On horse he spitted many of the most vile and unholy Muslim foes in scenes such as this, when he strikes the first blow against a king named Corsablis. Corsablis utters his contempt for the Franks and their cause. "Archbishop Turpin overheard this well: he hates no man beneath the sky so much. He rakes his horse with spurs of finest gold, and rides to the attack with all his might. He breaks his shield, demolishes his hauberk, and drives his great lance deep into his body, impales him well, and throws the corpse a spear's length down the road".<sup>84</sup> He is referred to as "an experienced campaigner" and Roland praises him to Olivier: "You'll have to grant him this, my lord companion – the archbishop is a very worthy

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<sup>82</sup> If only to a point, given the artist's careful depiction of Odo playing a critical role in the battle without actually killing anyone; see Bridgeford 237-38.

<sup>83</sup> *Roland* v. 1484-85.

<sup>84</sup> *Roland* v. 1243-50.

knight. None better is on earth or under heaven; he fights extremely well with lance and spear.”<sup>85</sup> When finally his horse is killed out from under him, he wreaks an impossible slaughter with his sword Almace, heaping a pile of four hundred men around him despite the four spears which protrude from his torso.<sup>86</sup> After the last Muslim attacker at Roncesvalles had fallen, Turpin was the only Frank besides Roland himself to remain alive (if mortally wounded). This depiction of events is obviously exaggerated out of all proportion, but it is very interesting that an archbishop is given such a heroically violent role in the retelling.

#### Odo and Turpin as Worldly Clerics

Another characteristic of both characters is the balance between the secular and the spiritual which the two embody. Although there is heavy emphasis on the worldly undertakings of Turpin and Odo, elements of their clerical roles remain to set them apart from their fellow warriors. Turpin blesses the Franks before battle, giving a heartfelt sermon in which he offers martyrdom and instant salvation to those who fall while fighting to “help sustain the Christian faith”, and his fellows say of him, “ ‘Here’s a valiant man! Salvation lies in our archbishop’s crook’ ”.<sup>87</sup> It would seem that there was no greater man for a battle or a sermon in Charlemagne’s Christendom. Likewise Odo “was well known to be the kind of man best able to undertake both ecclesiastical and secular

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<sup>85</sup> *Roland* v. 2068; *Roland* v. 1671-75.

<sup>86</sup> *Roland* v. 2083-95.

<sup>87</sup> *Roland* v. 1129; *Roland* v. 1507-09.

business”.<sup>88</sup> His tonsured head is evident throughout the Tapestry, until it is covered by a helmet in the battle scenes.<sup>89</sup> This serves several purposes. It reminds the viewers, even those who cannot read, that he is a cleric. It also acts as a clear mark of identification for Odo in his scenes, especially on the one occasion when he is not named in the caption. Finally, it can be seen as another direct reference to Archbishop Turpin, of whom it was written, “No tonsured priest who ever sang a mass, performed such feats of prowess with his body”.<sup>90</sup>

Odo leads the Normans in prayer at their feast in celebration of the safe passage across the Channel, and if the end of the Tapestry were not missing – it cuts off at the moment of Norman victory - we would undoubtedly see him consecrating his fallen comrades as Turpin does.<sup>91</sup> His version of events in the Tapestry also makes much of the Oath of Harold and its attendant relics from Bayeux, as well as signs from the Almighty, such as the comet which foretells the doom of Harold and the wicked Stigand as a result of the breaking of the oath.<sup>92</sup> As with the Archbishop, though, the emphasis remains on his warrior traits and worldly exploits.

#### Odo and Turpin as Leaders

As befitting men of high rank in the Church, Turpin and Odo are both shown as men of experience and charisma who provide leadership and counsel

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<sup>88</sup> Poitiers 165-67.

<sup>89</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panels 37, 50, 68.

<sup>90</sup> *Roland* v. 1606-7.

<sup>91</sup> *Roland* v. 2190-2205.

<sup>92</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panels 29, 34-35.

when their friends require it. It is Turpin who stokes the Franks for righteous battle against the approaching Saracen hordes.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, each time he smites an opponent in single combat, he pauses to counter their blasphemies with ringing words of defiance to his foes and hope for his noble comrades. After overthrowing the sorcerer-king Corsablis in the epic manner described above, he shouts, “ ‘You turntail pagan, you have told a lie! King Charles, my lord, will always be our champion; we Frenchmen have no wish to run away. We’ll give all your companions their quietus; I’ve news for you – you’re just about to die. Now lay on Franks! Remember who you are!’”<sup>94</sup> At the climax of the battle, Turpin acts as the voice of reason to settle a dispute between Roland and Olivier, counseling Roland to blow his horn, the “Oliphant”, and summon back their lord Charlemagne, that he might avenge their deaths: “ ‘I beg of you, for God’s sake do not quarrel! A horn blast cannot save us anymore, but nonetheless it would be well to sound it’”.<sup>95</sup>

In selfsame fashion Odo is represented as a leader and councilor to the Normans, and particularly to his half-brother William. He is in close conversation with the duke before both major sequences in the latter half of the Tapestry. In the first scene, William and Odo confer about Harold’s betrayal and what ought to be done as a result; obviously their exact dialogue cannot be known, but the preceding events in the Tapestry makes the topic of discussion quite plain. A

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<sup>93</sup> *Roland* v. 1124-38.

<sup>94</sup> *Roland* v. 1253-58.

<sup>95</sup> *Roland* v. 1702, 1741-43.

messenger from England has just arrived, bringing the dire news.<sup>96</sup> The caption reads “HIC WILLELM DUX IUSSIT NAVES EDIFICARE” (“Here Duke William ordered ships to be built”).<sup>97</sup> The image, however, tells a very different story. William looks worried, his left hand gesturing not ahead but backwards in the direction of Harold’s recent coronation.<sup>98</sup> It is Odo, not his brother, who seems to be suggesting action. He solemnly points ahead, indicating the invasion and William’s ultimate victory. Meanwhile, at his side is “the chief shipwright, a man holding an adze,” who is listening to every word Odo says.<sup>99</sup> The shipwright points in turn, and a woodcutter begins chopping trees. The Bishop, not the Duke, appears at the head of this chain of command; it his guiding hand that leads William to command the assembly of the invasion fleet.<sup>100</sup>

Then, after landing safely at the shore near Hastings and celebrating God’s benevolence toward the Norman cause, William, Odo and Robert of Mortain are shown discussing plans for the conquest itself.<sup>101</sup> Robert’s sword is pointed ahead, indicating that he is impatient and wishes to advance on London, while Odo’s gestures and expression suggest caution and cleverness. Note that William is looking in Odo’s direction as he smiles and points to his own sword. The next scenes show the erection of a motte-and-bailey fort in Hastings and the ruthless

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<sup>96</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panel 36.

<sup>97</sup> McNulty 112.

<sup>98</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panel 37.

<sup>99</sup> Hicks 13.

<sup>100</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panel 37.

<sup>101</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panel 50. The image of the Brothers Conqueror cannot help but recall the trio of Roland, Turpin, and Olivier. Closer comparison yields mixed results however; William is a best a mix of Roland and Charlemagne, while Robert in the Tapestry is too headstrong to be a match for Olivier’s cautious nature.

sack of the surrounding lands by the invaders, in the hope of drawing Harold down with speed rather than overextend themselves in hostile territory.<sup>102</sup> For the Norman army, time was the greatest enemy. With limited supplies available from home they would have to come to grips with the English in a decisive (and victorious) battle as soon as possible or risk being stranded on the coast, food running low, with a hard choice between retreat home across the Channel or an uncertain march further inland. William's best hope was to make the presence of the army a threat too great to ignore, and in the Tapestry it is Odo who points this out by suggesting the pillage of Harold's own heartland. As this tactic was ultimately a complete success, Odo uses this occasion in the Tapestry to demonstrate, in hindsight, his strategic skills and wisdom. More subtly, this scene reminds the audience of Odo's crucial role in the success of the Conquest. If his military prowess does not match the exploits of Archbishop Turpin in *The Song of Roland*, he makes up for it with an arguably greater dose of wise counsel.

Finally, in Odo's famous rallying of the Norman knights he exhibits the same charisma that Turpin does with the Franks. There is, in fact, a direct parallel between the images of Odo's climactic battle scene and the words of *The Song of Roland*. At the height of the Battle of Roncesvalles, when many of the Franks lie slain and the Muslims "have swarmed upon the field", the remaining knights of the rearguard grow anxious.<sup>103</sup> Archbishop Turpin simultaneously encourages the men and shames them to bravery. "My lords and barons, don't think shameful thoughts! I beg of you, for God's sake do not run, nor let proud men sing

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<sup>102</sup> Bayeux Tapestry, panels 51-52.

<sup>103</sup> *Roland* v. 1511.

mockingly of you; it's best by far that we should die in combat".<sup>104</sup> In both cases the mere sight of even so warlike a man of God leading the charge served to embolden those whose morale was failing.

### Odo as Turpin

From all this is drawn the irresistible conclusion that Odo took up the role of a warrior-priest as a model of the renowned epic character Turpin of Rheims (and caused himself to be so portrayed in the Tapestry he commissioned). Although he may not have been a war hero at Hastings, he sought to retroactively alter events via the Bayeux Tapestry, in light of his later exploits and in an attempt to fit better in his role as the Tapestry's version of Archbishop Turpin. This would explain why contemporary chronicles are in general disagreement with the Hastings representation. Given that Odo may have been responsible for fostering the spread of *The Song of Roland* in Northern France, and that an early version of it was recited at the Battle of Hastings, he would have been well equipped to take on the mantle of the legendary Archbishop. While likening himself to a famous character would certainly have enhanced his image, it also served to legitimize Odo's unusually war-like nature and make him, like Turpin, a Christian warrior with values that, given the mindset in Western Europe at that time, made him a hero and a role model.

This was particularly well done on Odo's part, for these great works did not exist in a vacuum. They were reflections of the era in which they were made,

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<sup>104</sup> *Roland* v. 1515-18.

a time when new ideas about holy war combined with increasing papal authority to initiate the Crusades. As popular and influential works of art, the Bayeux Tapestry and *The Song of Roland* certainly had an impact on these ideas, and thus played a role in the crusading movement. The final chapter will examine this relationship, and also explore Bishop Odo's own involvement in the First Crusade, which has been gravely overlooked by historians until this point.

## Chapter 4

### INFLUENCES ON THE FIRST CRUSADE

The First Crusade began in 1095, less than thirty years after the Norman Conquest and even fewer since the creation of the Bayeux Tapestry and, if I am correct, *The Song of Roland*. Pope Urban's stirring call to arms on November 27, 1095 moved tens of thousands of Europeans from all backgrounds to undertake a remarkable and perilous adventure – among them Odo of Bayeux, now approaching sixty-five years of age. I suspect that it was ideas such as those propagated by the Bayeux Tapestry and *The Song of Roland* that helped lay the groundwork for this unprecedented response.

#### The First Crusade: An Overview

On November 27, 1095, Urban gave an address at the Council of Clermont in which he described his vision for the reclamation of Jerusalem and incited those present to take up the cross<sup>105</sup>. Urban's words were not transcribed at the time, and the Pope never wrote an account of his address, so exactly what he said remains a mystery. Many, however, recorded the results of his extraordinary call. The "First Crusade", as it would later be known, was arguably the greatest military expedition in European history. Fervent armies of Christian knights and

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<sup>105</sup> Thomas F. Madden, The New Concise History of the Crusades, Updated Student Edition (Lanham, MD, 2006), p. 7.

warriors from all walks of life marched over two thousand miles to rescue their Holy City of Jerusalem from the Muslims who occupied it, and they succeeded against overwhelming odds. 100,000- 150,000 Europeans are believed to have ‘taken the cross’.<sup>106</sup> Certainly most of this vast assemblage was made up of the poor, the elderly, and others (such as women) who were unable to contribute militarily. Still, the total fighting force of the First Crusade is estimated at 25,000-40,000 men, a vast sum, far larger than any army seen in Western Europe since at least the days of Charlemagne: more likely, larger than any since Roman times.<sup>107</sup> The crusading army passed through Constantinople, answering the prayers of the Byzantine Emperor for Western aid, and then proceeded to sweep through Anatolia and Syria towards Jerusalem. The First Crusade witnessed many stunning victories along its path to the Holy City. The two greatest of these were the Battle of Dorylaeum in 1097, where the vanguard engaged an army of Turks estimated by the chronicler Robert the Monk at 300,000 men, holding them off until the main army could surround the lightly-armored Turks and crush them with their heavy cavalry; and the fall of Antioch on June 3, 1098 and the subsequent rout of the vast relief forces of Kerbogha, atabeg of Mosul.<sup>108</sup> While the numbers given by medieval chroniclers are always to be used with caution, it is safe to say that the crusaders were outnumbered in both battles and won through superior discipline and tactical skill. At last they reached Jerusalem on

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<sup>106</sup> Madden 12.

<sup>107</sup> Madden 12.

<sup>108</sup> *Robert the Monk's History of the First Crusade: Historia Iherosolimitana*, trans. Carol Sweetenham, Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing (2005), 107-108; Madden 28-29.

June 7, 1099, taking it after a six-week siege on July 15.<sup>109</sup> Out of an estimated 43,000 men and women who reached Antioch, perhaps only 15,000 survived to see the Holy City.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, the First Crusade was an awesome achievement, and it is easy to see why its chroniclers dubbed its successes miraculous.

How did such an expedition manage to harness the combined forces of Christendom in so short a time? Part of the Crusade's success was derived from the fervent desire of its participants to rescue the Holy City of Jerusalem. Certainly there were also great material rewards for the taking, but perhaps the single most compelling motive was the spiritual incentive offered by Pope Urban. Modern men and women can at least have some idea of the significance of Jerusalem to medieval Christians, given the endless wars fought over it even today, but in today's secular society, most Christians take salvation for granted. Believe in Christ and you are saved, we are told. For this reason, we cannot begin to imagine the all-importance of religion, sin, and salvation in medieval minds. Although sins could be forgiven and even expunged, it required lengthy and often arduous acts of penance, such as fasting, pilgrimage, or abstinence, and even then one was not guaranteed relief from Purgatory (a 'middle ground' between Heaven and Hell, where one who was not eternally damned would be cleansed of sin over time by various unpleasant means until he had truly fulfilled his penance and could enter Heaven). The enormous wealth accumulated by monasteries and

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<sup>109</sup> Madden 34.

<sup>110</sup> Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading*, London: The Althone Press (1986), 63.

cathedrals demonstrates the efforts of the nobility to gain the prayers and support of God's men on earth, that they might avoid this fate (no small portion of Odo's vast resources were drawn from such earnest piety). Thus, Pope Urban's promise that those who took up the cross to free the Holy Land would receive "remission from all their sins" – guaranteeing not only salvation, but instant heavenly glory for those who died on 'crusade' - was an extraordinary motivation for the population of Christendom.<sup>111</sup>

### A Final Discussion of the Dating of the *Song*

While many scholars have maintained that the *Song of Roland* must date from at least the end of the First Crusade, among them the formidable Jonathan Riley-Smith, that position is weakening.<sup>112</sup> Their argument involves the equation of *The Song of Roland*'s brand of holy war with the Crusades themselves; the 'chicken and egg' dilemma that results is addressed by Carl Erdmann in his seminal book *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*. He writes that scholars debate "only the question of whether it should be set shortly before or shortly after the First Crusade; some say that 'the *Chanson de Roland* would be impossible without the First Crusade,' while others maintain that 'the crusade would be incomprehensible without the *Chanson de Roland*'".<sup>113</sup> Erdmann (writing in

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<sup>111</sup> Urban's Letter to the Faithful in Flanders, in *The First Crusade. The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials*, ed. Edward M. Peters, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (1998), 42.

<sup>112</sup> Riley-Smith 116.

<sup>113</sup> Carl Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*, trans. by Marshall W. Baldwin and Walter Goffart, Princeton: Princeton University Press (1979), 284-85.

1935) fell into the “shortly after” camp, but more recent research has tipped the scales against him. It must be pointed out that there are no explicit references, nor even vague allusions in the *Song* to the expedition to Jerusalem, as one would expect to see if it were meant to glorify the recent recapture of the Holy City. It has already been shown that the author makes reference with great skill to contemporary events in the verses of the *Song*. Shall we believe then that such a talented writer alluded to numerous events of great importance that occurred up through the early 1070’s, and then refused to do so for the most recent twenty-five years?

Even stranger, there does appear a reference to the Holy Land of a different sort. In the final battle between the Franks of Charlemagne and the multinational pagan forces of King Baligant, Baligant is helped onto his horse by a Marcule of Outremer (a Latin name for Palestine).<sup>114</sup> Having just been connected to a Muslim from Palestine, a reminder not of a Christian victory but of the continued Muslim presence there, the Saracen lord is then treated to perhaps the highest praise accorded to any enemy in the *Song*. Eight rich and flattering verses are written of him, ending with, “His valor has been proven many times. God, what a lord, if he were but a Christian!”<sup>115</sup> These would be surprising words indeed if the First Crusade had just taken place. The section may instead be a subtle reference to the Byzantine Empire’s repeated pleas for assistance from Western Christendom following their crushing defeat at Manzikert in 1071, for

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<sup>114</sup> *Roland* v. 3156.

<sup>115</sup> *Roland* v. 3163-64.

many of Baligant's troops come from regions in Asia Minor that the empire hoped to reclaim from the Muslims.

In fact, the audience might even have understood the exceptionally high praise of Baligant, coming just after a reference to the Levant, as a clear message of Jerusalem's plight. The author would thereby be implying, "God, what a *city*, if *it* were but *in Christian hands!*" This sort of veiled talk about the Holy City is not unprecedented: Guibert of Nogent waxes poetic about Jerusalem with a number of equally elaborate metaphors. For example, "If all that there is of Christian preaching has flowed out from the fountain of Jerusalem, its streams, whithersoever spread out over the whole world, encircle the hearts of the Catholic multitude, that they may consider wisely what they owe such a well-watered fountain".<sup>116</sup> If Marcule's introduction is in fact meant to remind the audience of the fact that the Holy Land continued to be held by 'pagans', it seems to prove that *The Song Of Roland* predates the First Crusade, and may in fact have been an influence upon it.

#### Holy Wars in the Late Eleventh Century

There is thus clear evidence for the early dating of the *Song*, and that the post-First Crusade line of thought may be obsolete. A more tenable argument, then, is that *The Song of Roland* glorifies the sort of event that shaped Western Europeans along the path towards the Crusading movement. The latter half of the eleventh century featured a number of wars that spread Orthodox Christianity, in

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<sup>116</sup> Guibert of Nogent, in Peters 35.

Spain, Sicily, and England. The Normans were unsurprisingly key players in most of these conflicts. They become renowned in the Mediterranean for their valor and strength as early as 1016, when “forty Norman pilgrims” broke the Muslim siege of Salerno.<sup>117</sup> As previously mentioned, Robert Guiscard established a Norman power base in Southern Italy in the 1050 and 1060s, and he and his brothers prosecuted wars against the Muslims in Sicily. Admittedly this was mostly for material gain, but the words Robert uses in his pledge of fealty to Pope Nicholas II in 1059 makes plain his hope to use the propaganda of holy war to help him take Sicily, a task which was underway by 1062.<sup>118</sup> Nor were these events unconnected to the Norman homeland. Many Normans who took part in the conquest of Sicily returned home with plunder and tales, and more joined in the conquest of England, bringing much-needed ships. William of Malmesbury asserts that Duke William was personally affected by the victories in Italy and Sicily. “The spirit and energy of his activities were increased by the example of Robert Guiscard, for he used to declare that it would be disgraceful if he yielded in enterprise to a man he surpassed in birth”.<sup>119</sup> Just as the Conqueror was motivated by earlier victories, so many others would have been encouraged by his example.

These wars were not themselves crusades but helped foster the idea, put forth by Gregory VII, that war could be a penitential act. Why then is there no reference to a pope in the *Song*? Perhaps this is because it predated the First

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<sup>117</sup> “Amatus of Montecassino, History of the Normans”, *Normans in Europe* 241.

<sup>118</sup> “Robert Guiscard, Pledge to Pope Nicholas II, 1059”, *Normans in Europe* 245.

<sup>119</sup> William of Malmesbury 483.

Crusade and the pope's great influence on war in France, the heart of the crusading movement. At the time of its writing, the papacy remained a significant but distant force. Banners might be sent from Rome, as seen in both the Tapestry and the *Song*, but for the action a clerical stand-in of greater presence was required in the form of Archbishop Turpin.

### The *Song* and the First Crusade

The implication by the *Song of Roland* and other *chansons de geste* of a unified Muslim world (led in the *Song* by King Baligant) may have contributed to the miraculous victory of the First Crusade. The crusaders overestimated their foes, who had little cohesion or will to work together against the sudden and unanticipated threat from the West. The Emperor in Constantinople had been pleading for Western aid for decades; the threat of Frankish reinforcements had probably lost any power it originally had over the squabbling Turkish and Egyptian factions. When at last the knights and soldiers of the West responded, they were thus able to retake the great cities of the Holy Land one by one. Unfortunately, later crusades found the situation reversed when Islam was united by such great leaders as Saladin.

Several crusading chroniclers also make reference to the *Song* in their accounts of the First Crusade. Robert of Rheims wrote one of the few surviving accounts of Urban's speech at Clermont, and attributes these words to the Pope:

“Let the deeds of your ancestors move you and incite your minds to manly achievements; the glory and greatness of king Charles the great ... and of your other kings, who have destroyed the kingdoms of the pagans, and have extended in these lands the territory of the holy church”.<sup>120</sup> Whether or not Urban spoke them is debatable but immaterial. Robert was calling upon his readers to remember well the glorious deeds of their past kings, Charlemagne being ranked first among them. At the time, the *Song of Roland* was helping them to do exactly that.<sup>121</sup>

Ralph of Caen makes a more explicit allusion to the *Song*. As he recounts the Battle of Dorylaeum, he writes these words in praise of the counts Robert of Flanders and Hugh of Vermandois: “You would say that Roland and Oliver had been reborn if you saw the raging of the counts, this one with a spear, that one with a sword”.<sup>122</sup> This is fine praise indeed, and demonstrates that by 1118, approximately when Ralph’s work was finished, the *Song of Roland* had a sufficiently wide audience to render such a comparison worthwhile.<sup>123</sup>

Interestingly, Ralph was mentored by Arnulf of Chocques, who accompanied the First Crusade in the party of Duke Robert of Normandy, alongside Odo of Bayeux.

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<sup>120</sup> Robert of Rheims, in Peters 27.

<sup>121</sup> Meanwhile, among those “other kings” who advanced the goals of the church, one could easily place William the Conqueror.

<sup>122</sup> *The Gesta Tancredi of Ralph of Caen : a history of the Normans on the First Crusade*, trans. Bernard S. Bachrach and David S. Bachrach, Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing (2005), 53.

<sup>123</sup> *Ralph* 1.

## Odo On Crusade

Odo of Bayeux, now in his mid-sixties, joined the First Crusade in 1096 alongside his nephew Duke Robert of Normandy. Robert was not the best of rulers; Odo, as we have seen, was not particularly successful in his attempts to “encourage the indolent duke Robert into stemming the disintegration of his duchy”.<sup>124</sup> Orderic Vitalis records a remarkable incident among the countless property transfers that preceded the departure of the crusading armies: “In September Robert, duke of the Normans committed Normandy to King William and after receiving ten thousand marks in silver from him, set out on crusade at the head of a formidable army of knights and foot-soldiers”.<sup>125</sup> It seems highly unlikely that, after eight years of war with his brother William, Robert would mortgage his entire inheritance to him of his own accord. Odo was old and tired of rebellion, and surely recognized that if Normandy remained in Robert’s weak hands for much longer it would suffer irreparable damage. It is quite reasonable to suspect that Odo masterminded this deal, and therefore that he was instrumental in instigating such a serious Norman commitment to the Crusade.

This assertion is amply supported by the sources. Odo led a contingent of Norman clergy to the Council of Clermont, and so was present for the overture of the First Crusade. Afterward, he “travelled around Normandy, presumably to preach the Crusade, with the papal legate, Abbot Gerento of St.-Benigne of Dijon”.<sup>126</sup> Orderic, presumably in recognition of the bishop’s work, lists Odo as

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<sup>124</sup> Bates 19.

<sup>125</sup> *Normans in Europe* 275.

<sup>126</sup> Bates 18.

the first among Robert's impressive retinue.<sup>127</sup> He was the chief Norman religious to take the cross, leading a number of others, including the aforementioned Arnulf of Chocques. Arnulf was not a bishop at the time of departure but was elevated during the Crusade, perhaps to help replace the loss of the papal legate Adhemar of Le Puy in 1098.<sup>128</sup>

Odo himself, sadly, did not see Jerusalem. In September 1096 he departed with the Norman army, and he met again with Pope Urban at Lucca, outside of Rome.<sup>129</sup> Odo appears to have died of natural causes at some point during the arduous trek east - "at some point", because there is a remarkable degree of discrepancy regarding Odo's death and how far he traveled as a crusader beforehand. By most accounts, Odo died while the First Crusade was still preparing to depart from Italy, with little detail being given. For such a well-known and influential figure, this is baffling. Orderic Vitalis records his death as having occurred in February of 1097, while in Bayeux it was marked on January 6.<sup>130</sup> Bates writes that Odo paid a visit to fellow Norman Roger the Great of Sicily, and that he fell victim to an illness in Palermo. He was buried there, although whether that can be corroborated by modern evidence is unclear.

How, then, can the account of William of Malmesbury be explained? He was certainly a more contemporary source for Odo's life than Orderic was, and his writings tell a very different story. William is quite clear: "when he [Odo] set off with that same nephew on the journey to Jerusalem, he met his end at Antioch

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<sup>127</sup> *Normans in Europe* 275.

<sup>128</sup> *Ralph* 1.

<sup>129</sup> Bates 20.

<sup>130</sup> Bates 20. January 6 of what year? See below.

while the Christians were besieged there”.<sup>131</sup> That would put Odo’s death between June 1098 and January 1099, up to two years later and a thousand miles removed from Sicily.<sup>132</sup> There is more evidence to support Odo’s surviving long enough to participate in the successful conquest of Antioch. Orderic states that Robert and Odo joined their forces with those of Hugh the Great of Vermandois (brother to the King of France). Hugh, meanwhile, was the first crusading leader to meet with Emperor Alexius in Constantinople – in early December of 1096, before Odo’s alleged death, which occurred while the combined army “wintered in Apulia and Calabria”.<sup>133</sup> Hugh clearly did not so winter, and if Robert accompanied him with his forces, Odo surely came along and would therefore have left Sicily after only a brief visit, rather than the months required to succumb there in January or February 1097. All but the last stragglers had departed by that time, and the extraordinary commitment Robert and Odo made by mortgaging their realm to a relative who would almost certainly take the reins in their absence suggests that they were rather to be found among the vanguard of the crusade.

Orderic’s dating is thus suspect at best; Bayeux cathedral celebrated Odo’s obituary on January 6, but judging from the evidence it could have been January of 1099, not 1097, when the Bishop of Bayeux expired. Thousands fell to illness and hunger during the siege of Antioch by Kerbogha. That Odo, going on 70, would have become ill and died before the departure of the crusade for Jerusalem a week later is poignant but not surprising in the least. It is therefore more than

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<sup>131</sup> William of Malmesbury 507.

<sup>132</sup> The First Crusade was at Antioch October 21, 1097 to January 13, 1099. It was besieged from June to

<sup>133</sup> *Normans in Europe* 275.

possible that Odo experienced much of the First Crusade and died contentedly in the knowledge that he had, to the last, lived up to his self-created image as Archbishop Turpin, the warrior-priest.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

### **ODO THE GREAT**

There can be no doubt that Bishop Odo of Bayeux was a truly warlike bishop, to whom Archbishop Turpin can be rightly compared. In fact, Odo comes off favorably in the comparison, for despite Turpin's impossible feats of martial prowess he never engineered a work of art (or two) so clever and so evocative that it continues to stir the imaginations of both scholars and audiences today. Despite all of his good advice and stirring sermons, he could not rally the Franks to victory. Turpin is a mere character in a story; Odo was a creator of stories. He took his own story in his hands and shaped it to make himself look great, and by trying to live up to his own image he did what so many others failed to do: he became Great. Few other non-papal religious in medieval history had such influence, and few non-royal lords had such power. Odo was an egotist, certainly, but despite his faults he helped to shape wondrous and lasting ideas and events. The Bayeux Tapestry. *The Song of Roland*. The First Crusade.

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<sup>134</sup> Much of my original research was done using the TAPESTRY program, obtained from the History Media Center, University of Delaware. However, I renumbered my citations to match the scene numbers in *The Bayeux Tapestry: A Comprehensive Study*.

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