

H. van Cuyck & V. Lambert, 'Count Eustace II of Boulogne (1047-1087) and the Bayeux Tapestry: a reappraisal of the evidence', in: *Annales de Normandie*, 64/2 (2014), pp. 137-167.

Summary

Elaborating on Andrew Bridgeford's hypothesis, this article indicates Eustace II, the count of Boulogne, as the patron of the famous Bayeux Tapestry. The political and economic circumstances of the late 11th century and the history of the Tapestry itself – maybe, contrary to common assumption, it was not originally intended for the cathedral of Bayeux – are examined in order to identify the patron, the recipient and the true purpose of the Tapestry.

At that time, the county of Boulogne was of great strategic and economic importance. The Boulonnais ships dominated the Channel. The port of Wissant handled the vast majority of cross-Channel traffic and became the main port through which English wool was imported for the Flemish cloth trade. Moreover, Eustace strengthened his power using a policy of strategic marital and political alliances. Being an enemy of Harold Godwinson, the most powerful English earl, the count of Boulogne allied himself to William of Normandy and played an important role in the 1066 Battle of Hastings – although accounts of this role differ widely.

In spite of the new king's generosity towards him, Eustace attacked Odo of Bayeux' castle in Dover in 1067. In the end, this attempt turned out to be a disaster: a family member was taken prisoner, the count himself was condemned and exiled and his lands in England were forfeited. The rebellion may reflect Eustace's hopes for the acquisition of lands, but he might even have had higher ambitions as far as claiming the English throne himself.

Eustace takes a prominent place on the Tapestry. The count of Boulogne may have commissioned the Tapestry as some kind of intelligent Boulonnais propaganda. The story, cleverly kept ambiguous, depicted on the Tapestry, can undoubtedly be read in different ways. It can either be understood as the official Norman version of the 1066 events, or as the English interpretation of the Conquest.