



# "Et le combat prend fin": The Exhibition of the Bayeux Tapestry at the Louvre in 1944

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The announcement Emmanuel Macron, president of the French Republic, made on 17 January 2018, about the agreement to loan the Bayeux Tapestry to the United Kingdom was historic in many ways.<sup>1</sup> This monumental medieval artwork, which recounts the Norman conquest of England in 1066 along 68.3 meters of embroidered cloth, may not have been abroad in almost a millennium, since it is believed to have come to continental Europe after its hypothetical creation in the British Isles in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Hartwig Fischer, director of the British Museum, characterized this loan as “probably the most significant ever from France to the UK.”<sup>3</sup> Considering that all previous requests to loan the embroidery made by institutions in the United Kingdom and the United States were rejected by France, Macron’s agreement constitutes an unprecedented milestone.<sup>4</sup>

An eventual temporary exhibition of the Tapestry in London would be equally remarkable because it has only been publicly displayed twice outside of Bayeux in modern history: The embroidery was first shown at the Musée Napoléon in the Louvre Palace in

- 1 Nicola Slawson and Mark Brown, “Emmanuel Macron agrees to loan Bayeux Tapestry to Britain,” in *Guardian*, 17 January 2018, URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/17/emmanuel-macron-bayeux-tapestry-loan-britain> [accessed: 31.10.2021]. Despite its usual denomination, the Bayeux Tapestry is not a tapestry but an embroidery. Thus, the artwork is referred to as an ‘embroidery’ in lowercase and as the ‘Tapestry’ in uppercase throughout the article. On the Bayeux Tapestry’s naming problematic, see Nicole de Reyniès, “Broderie ou Tapisserie de Bayeux,” in Pierre Bouet, Brian Levy, and François Neveux (eds.), *La Tapisserie de Bayeux: L’art de broder l’Histoire*, Caen, 2004, pp. 69–76.
- 2 The question of the Bayeux Tapestry’s dating, patronage, and workshop location has been the source of scholarly debate since the 18th century. For an overview of opinions up to 2013, see Shirley Ann Brown, *The Bayeux Tapestry. Bayeux, Médiathèque Municipale: MS. 1. A Sourcebook*, Publications of the Journal of Medieval Latin 9, Turnhout, 2013, pp. LXX–LXXXI.
- 3 Slawson and Brown, 2018 (note 1).
- 4 Shirley Ann Brown’s 2013 publication (note 2) provides the most detailed overview of the Bayeux Tapestry’s history from the Middle Ages until 2007 (pp. XXI–LII). Her historic overview mentions three international loan requests: 1931, for the Exhibition of French Art, Burlington House in London (p. XLI); 1946, for the 75th Anniversary of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (p. XLVIII); and 1953, for Elizabeth II’s coronation, Victoria and Albert Museum in London (V&A) (p. XLIX).

Paris between December 1803 and February 1804. One-hundred-and-fourty years later, the Louvre hosted a second exhibition of the Tapestry, taking advantage of the fact that it was stored in the museum's basement after the liberation of Paris in August 1944. This article aims to present new findings on the latter exhibition, situating this singular moment of display in the Bayeux Tapestry's millennial history and valuing its lasting impact in the artwork's museum presentation in the second half of the 20th century.

### The Bayeux Tapestry: From the Middle Ages to the 1930s

The first archival document that can be unequivocally related to the Tapestry is the Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Bayeux's 1476 inventory, which mentions how it was displayed in the nave during the liturgical acts for the Feast of the Relics but kept away for the rest of the year.<sup>5</sup>

The artwork was introduced to the academic community by the work of Antoine Lancelot (1675–1740) and Bernard de Montfaucon (1655–1741) in the early 18th century. “Queen Matilda’s Tapestry,” as it was referred to by early scholars, was subject to a nationalistic appropriation by the French and British academics that studied it during the second half of the 18th century while the artwork was still being briefly displayed in the context of liturgical acts at the Cathédrale de Bayeux and under lock and key the rest of the year.<sup>6</sup>

The French Revolution interrupted this centuries-long display tradition. The embroidery was seized on 18 August 1794 by the Bayeux Commission des Arts, the administration responsible for the inventory and protection of the city's cultural assets. Meant to be transported to the newly created Musée des Beaux-Arts in the neighboring Caen, the Tapestry was first sent to Paris at the request of Dominique-Vivant Denon (1747–1825), director of the recently renamed Musée Napoléon in the Louvre Palace.<sup>7</sup> There, the monumental embroidery was displayed as part of a whole series of propaganda actions related to the growing diplomatic tensions between France and the United Kingdom.<sup>8</sup>

5 Brown, 2013 (note 2), pp. XXII–XXIII.

6 Shirley Ann Brown, “A Facsimile for Everybody: From Foucault to Foys and Beyond,” in Anna C. Henderson and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (eds.), *Making Sense of the Bayeux Tapestry: Readings and Re-workings*, Manchester, 2016, pp. 133–153, here p. 133. Several articles have extensively studied the modern rediscovery of the Bayeux Tapestry: Aase Luplau Janssen, “La redécouverte de la Tapisserie de Bayeux,” in *Annales de Normandie* 3, Caen 1961, pp. 179–195; Gildas Bernard, “Les pérégrinations de la tapisserie de Bayeux,” in *Annales de Normandie* 24, Caen 1992, pp. 535–547; and Elizabeth Carson Pastan, “Montfaucon as Reader of the Bayeux Tapestry,” in Janet T. Marquardt and Alyce A. Jordan (eds.), *Medieval Art and Architecture after the Middle Ages*, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2009, pp. 89–110.

7 Bernard, 1992 (note 6), pp. 540–544.

8 The main scholarly articles on the 1803 exhibition of the Bayeux Tapestry in Paris are: Bernard 1992 (note 6), pp. 540–544; Carola Hicks, *The Bayeux Tapestry: The Life Story of a Masterpiece*, London, 2006,



1 Interior of the Bayeux Tapestry's exhibition room, so-called Galerie Mathilde, no date

The exhibition, held at the Louvre's Galerie d'Apollon between 6 December 1803 and mid-February 1804, was revolutionary in two ways: First, it can be considered as the first time the Tapestry was displayed in a museum setting, probably hung along the gallery's west wall facing the windows, its end slightly curved around today's entry door.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, this brief relocation to Paris changed the embroidery's fate to become part of Caen's museum collection. When the artwork was returned to Normandy after the exhibition, Bayeux was its final destination, where it arrived, on 18 February 1804, with a letter from

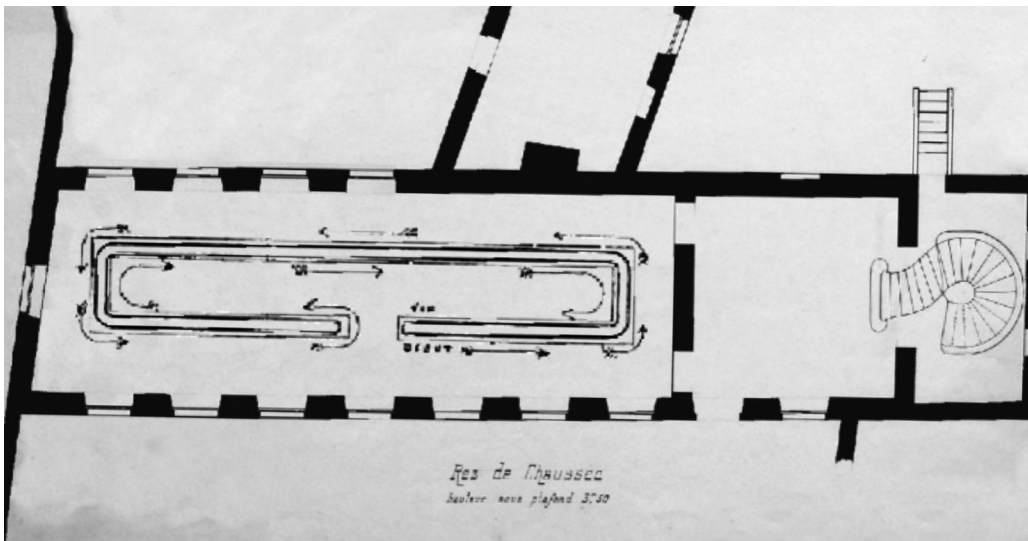
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pp. 95–114; and Brown, 2013 (note 2), pp. XXXIV–XXXV. The “Feuilles de travail de Dominique-Vivant Denon,” which are the main primary source concerning this exhibition, are held at the Archives nationales (AN), 20150157/7, microfilm 20150282/180. The booklet published to accompany the exhibition is available online: *Notice historique sur la tapisserie brodée de la reine Mathilde, épouse de Guillaume le Conquérant*, Paris, 1803, URL: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10543562k> [accessed: 31.10.2021].

9 The description of how the Tapestry was hung in 1803–1804 is based on a comparison between the room's length (61.39 meters) and the artwork's length (68.3 meters) and the fact that the current entry to the Galerie d'Apollon from the Rotonde d'Apollon was blocked at the time of the exhibition. Visitors entered the room at the time through a side door, coming from the adjacent Salon Carré. See Françoise Mardrus, “La Galerie d'Apollon, de la Révolution à Duban: Lieu d'expositions, espace en projet,” in Geneviève Bresc-Bautier (ed.), *La Galerie d'Apollon au palais du Louvre*, Paris, 2004, pp. 154–160, here p. 154.

Denon.<sup>10</sup> This document, which expressed Napoléon’s appreciation of the town’s centuries-long efforts to keep the embroidery safe, assured that it would remain in Bayeux for years to come.

Following this eventful trip to the French capital, the ancient display tradition at the cathedral briefly resumed between 1804 and 1816.<sup>11</sup> The next display arrangement for the Tapestry was finally inaugurated at the so-called Galerie Mathilde in the newly established Bibliothèque Municipale of Bayeux in 1842.<sup>12</sup> The reduced dimensions of this room forced the architects to conceive a presentation system that could accommodate the monumental embroidery. A local carpenter, M. Renouf, built the display cabinet (fig. 1–2) around which the artwork was unrolled behind protective glass.<sup>13</sup> Visitors would begin their path by looking at the first scene of the Tapestry outside of the cabinet, working their



2 Reconstruction of the Galerie Mathilde’s floor plan, no date

10 Brown, 2013 (note 2), p. XXXV. The eventual relocation of the embroidery to Caen was still mentioned in Denon’s documents on 16 January 1804 (Feuilles de travail de Dominique-Vivant Denon, travail du lundi 25 nivose an XII, AN 20150157/7, microfilm 20150282/180). The decision to send the Tapestry back to Bayeux was thus made between 16 January and 18 February 1804.

11 Brown, 2013 (note 2), p. LXXII.

12 The new municipal library was installed in the building previously used as the town hall. The architect Lair de Beauvais was in charge of the remodelling. “Lair de Beauvais, Architecte (1790–1851),” in *Société des Sciences, Arts & Belles-Lettres de Bayeux* 7, Bayeux, 1902, pp. 42–44, here p. 43, URL: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k433577z/f47.item> [accessed: 31.10.2021].

13 Brown, 2013 (note 2).

way along its exterior border, before finally entering the narrow space in the middle. In 1913, the artwork and its display cabinet were moved to a room of similar dimensions on the first floor of the Hôtel du Doyen, former residence of the town's bishop, a few steps away from the cathedral.<sup>14</sup> The ever-increasing flow of visitors that came to admire the embroidery had outgrown the capacity of the Galerie Mathilde, which could not be easily expanded because of the monumental staircase directly next to the exhibition cabinet.<sup>15</sup>

### The Tapestry During the Military Occupation of France

The Second World War triggered unprecedented measures to protect Europe's cultural heritage from damage, involving the displacement of countless works of art to safe locations.<sup>16</sup> In France, a detailed evacuation plan had been in preparation since 1936, under the supervision of Henri Verne (1880–1949), director of the Musées Nationaux (national museums), as well as Jacques Jaujard (1895–1967), who replaced Verne as director in 1939. Instead of being evacuated to one of the national museums' repositories, in which most of the Louvre's artworks were secured, the Bayeux Tapestry was placed in an armored shelter at the Hôtel du Doyen on 1 September 1939.<sup>17</sup> There, the artwork was inspected monthly for possible insect infestations and monitored by the mayor of Bayeux, Élie Dodeman (1873–1960); the curator of the Tapestry, Jeanne Abraham (1870–1948); and the curator of antiquities and artworks of the Calvados department, René-Norbert Sauvage (1882–1955).<sup>18</sup> The embroidery remained in Bayeux through the German invasion of France and its subsequent occupation after the armistice of 22 June 1940.<sup>19</sup>

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14 Ibid., p. XLI.

15 On the worsening conditions for visitors during the first half of the 20th century and the architectural difficulties posed by the Hôtel du Doyen, see Simone Bertrand, "The History of the Tapestry," in Frank Stenton (ed.), *The Bayeux Tapestry: A Comprehensive Study*, London, 1957, pp. 76–86, here p. 83.

16 For a general overview of cultural heritage in Europe during the Second World War, see Lynn H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War*, New York, 1994.

17 René Dubosq, *La Tapiserie de Bayeux: Dix années tragiques de sa longue histoire, 1939–1948*, Caen, 1951, p. 26. This publication offers a detailed overview of the Tapestry's journey during the war and the post-war years, sometimes using a dramatic tone and nationalistic, anti-German language. For an overview of the evacuation of French museums during the war and cultural policy during the occupation, see Michel Rayssac, *L'exode des musées: Histoire des œuvres d'art sous l'Occupation*, Paris, 2007; and Elizabeth Campbell Karlsgodt, *Defending National Treasures, French Art and Heritage under Vichy*, Stanford, 2011.

18 Brown, 2013 (note 2), p. XLII.

19 A relocation to the nearby Abbaye de Mondaye was suggested in June 1940 but ultimately rejected by Sauvage on 15 June 1940. Letter from René-Norbert Sauvage to Elie Dodeman, 15 June 1940, Archives municipales de Bayeux (AMB), 3209.

The new political panorama in France brought new faces to the cultural administration, which would oversee the Tapestry's whereabouts at different levels. The head of this administration was the Ministère de l'Éducation nationale (Ministry of National Education), directed by Jérôme Carcopino (1881–1970) until April 1942, then by Abel Bonnard (1883–1968) through 20 August 1944. The Secrétariat Général des Beaux-Arts (Fine Arts administration) was run by Louis Hauteœur (1884–1973) until March 1944 and then by George Hilaire (1900–1976) until the liberation. Finally, two offices under the Secrétariat Général des Beaux-Arts were of utmost importance during this time: the Direction des Services de l'Architecture (Department of Architectural Services), which managed national monuments under the supervision of René Perchet (1898–1980), and the Direction des Musées Nationaux, under Jacques Jaujard (1895–1967).

The occupation equally meant the establishment of different German cultural institutions in Paris. The Kunstschutz, the Wehrmacht's artworks protection office, reflected Germany's adhesion to the Hague Convention of 1907 and the influence of German art historian Paul Clemen's work as a monuments officer in Belgium during the Great War.<sup>20</sup> This organization logistically supported the movement of artworks between repositories and played a vital role in the different operations to transport the Tapestry.<sup>21</sup> This organization was directed by Count Franz von Wolff-Metternich between 1940 and 1942 and then by his assistant Bernhard von Tieschowitz (1902–1968) until the war was over. The cultural affairs section of the German Embassy in Paris, managed by Werner Gerlach under ambassador Otto Abetz's supervision, was another critical agent in occupied France.

Peace did not last long for the Bayeux Tapestry after the armistice. From late September onwards, several German officer groups requested to see it regularly, on a bi-monthly basis.<sup>22</sup> The artwork inspired great interest among the Nazis: First, in the context of anthropological and historical studies undertaken to determine the origins of the German state, the Tapestry was considered an early example of Germanic heritage worth studying.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the embroidered scenes picturing the Norman conquest of England were interesting to the Nazis as a source of inspiration, considering that their next military goal was to invade the United Kingdom.<sup>24</sup> These constant visits to the Hôtel du Doyen forced

20 Jonathan Petropoulos, *The Faustian Bargain: The Art World in Nazi Germany*, New York and Oxford, 2000, p. 210.

21 For more information on the Kunstschutz's role in French national collections, see *Le Louvre pendant la guerre: Regards photographiques 1938-1947*, Guillaume Fonkenell (ed.), exh. cat., Paris, Musée du Louvre, Paris, 2009, cat. 11–17, here cat. 15–16; and Campbell Karlsgodt, 2011 (note 17), pp. 39–41.

22 Rayssac, 2007 (note 17), p. 289.

23 Sylvette Lemagnen, "L'histoire de la Tapisserie à l'heure allemande," in Pierre Bouet, Brian Levy, and François Neveux (eds.), *La Tapisserie de Bayeux: L'art de broder l'Histoire*, Caen, 2004, pp. 49–64, here p. 53; and Shirley Ann Brown, "Decoding Operation Mathilda: The Bayeux Tapestry, the Nazis and German Pan-Nationalism," in Michael J. Lewis, Gale R. Owen-Crocker, and Dan Terkla (eds.), *The Bayeux Tapestry: New Approaches*, Oakville and Oxford, 2011, pp. 17–26, here p. 17.

24 Rose Valland, *Le Front de l'art: Défense des collections françaises (1939-1945)* [1961], 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Paris 2014, p. 164.

the Bayeux authorities to take the Tapestry out of its shelter and unroll it, which was a big concern for the Secrétariat Général des Beaux-Arts, the Kunstschutz and Jean Verrier (1887–1963), inspecteur général des Monuments historiques (general inspector of historical monuments) under the Direction de Services de l'Architecture. To avoid these frequent visits, Wolff-Metternich suggested Verrier relocate it to a Musées Nationaux repository in May 1941.<sup>25</sup>

Two German study campaigns took place before this relocation operation: First, in October 1940, a photographic campaign was undertaken by the art history department at Philipps-Universität Marburg, directed by Hans-Adalbert von Stockhausen, which was part of a bigger project to photograph monuments in occupied France.<sup>26</sup> Secondly, a team from the archeological research association of the SS Deutsches Ahnenerbe (German ancestral heritage), led by Herbert Jankuhn (1905–1990) and Hermann Bunjes (1911–1945), took on a research project to analyze the Tapestry's value as a source for understanding Germanic heritage and the Norman invasion of England, and as proof of Germanic presence in North-Western Europe. For this more extensive study, the Tapestry was briefly held at the Abbaye Saint-Martin-de-Mondaye, close to Bayeux, from 23 June until 1 August 1941, where it was photographed, reproduced in watercolor, and thoroughly described scene by scene.<sup>27</sup>

The day after the embroidery was brought back to Bayeux, Mayor Dodeman and Jacques Dupont (1908–1988), an inspector of historical monuments who worked closely with Verrier, organized its shipment to the Château de Sourches, located close to Le Mans. The embroidery was transported in a gazogene truck and arrived on 19 August 1941.<sup>28</sup> The Sourches repository, overseen by the Louvre's paintings curator Germain Bazin (1901–1990), would host the Tapestry for the coming three years in its *salon d'honneur*.<sup>29</sup> In Bazin's words, the Bayeux Tapestry became the most valuable artwork onsite upon its arrival.<sup>30</sup>

The Allied landing in Normandy on 6 June 1944 marked the beginning of the Nazi retreat in occupied France. This military intervention also occasioned the Tapestry's movement from Sourches, where it had been safely kept since August 1941, to

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25 Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, Archives nationales (AN), 20144792/275, letter from Jean Verrier to Louis Hauteceur, 24 May 1941.

26 Brown, 2013 (note 2), p. 43. The pictures taken during the campaign are available online in the Bildarchiv Foto Marburg's Bildindex der Kunst und Architektur, URL: <https://www.bildindex.de/document/obj20051333> [accessed: 31.10.2021].

27 The articles by Lemagnen (2004, note 23) and Brown (2011, note 23) describe this research campaign in great detail.

28 Letter from Élie Dodeman to Jacques Dupont, 20 August 1941, AMB, 3209.

29 A plan of the repository, on which the "Dépôt des œuvres les plus précieuses" and the Tapestry's special storage location within it (9a) can be seen, is published in Hicks, 2006 (note 8), p. 225. The original plan is held at AN, 20144792/227.

30 Letter from Germain Bazin to the Feldkommandatur in Le Mans, 12 September 1941, AN, 20150044/242.



Paris, an operation initiated by the Germans. Heinrich Himmler's great interest in the Tapestry, which culminated in a secret operation to loot the artwork known as *Sonderauftrag Bretagne*, has been extensively documented by previous researchers.<sup>31</sup> The *Ghent altarpiece*, looted from the Pau repository on 29 July 1942, or the *Bruges Madonna*, smuggled out of the Onze-Lieve-Vrouwenkerk in September 1944, represent similar Nazi efforts to remove extraordinary artworks from occupied territories.<sup>32</sup> The Bayeux Tapestry's fate after the Allied landing reveals a more complicated process that involved its transportation to the French capital, where the Germans probably intended to display it.

On June 16 1944, Himmler contacted the German Embassy in Paris and instigated the relocation of the Bayeux Tapestry to a safer place away from the war front.<sup>33</sup> This request seems to be directly linked to the recent Allied threat because, apparently, no other attempt had been made to move the Tapestry while it was at Souches. The displacement operation proposed by Himmler went directly against the advice given by the French curators' committee on 14 May 1944, which considered any transportation measures more dangerous than keeping artworks in their original repositories.<sup>34</sup>

Himmler's request was discussed on 17 June in a meeting between Gerlach, consul general and head of the Kulturpolitische Abteilung at the German Embassy, and Georges Hilaire, the person in charge of the Secrétariat Général des Beaux-Arts. Hilaire agreed to allow the embroidery to be transported to the Louvre, pending Bonnard's approval as the head of the Ministère de l'Éducation nationale.<sup>35</sup> The Tapestry would only be temporarily safeguarded in Paris until the French authorities could decide on a permanent protected site. On 18 June, the French cultural administration quickly suggested the repository at the Château de Chambord as a safer location, where the embroidery could be taken directly from Souches.<sup>36</sup> However, this proposal was dismissed by the German authorities, because "the transportation operation to Chambord did not seem to greatly reduce the danger."<sup>37</sup> Gerlach reverted to the original plan to bring the Bayeux Tapestry to Paris, which Bonnard approved.<sup>38</sup>

31 Petropoulos, 2000 (note 20), pp. 212–213; and Hicks, 2006 (note 8), pp. 232–247. See also Jean-Charles Stasi, *Le vol de la tapisserie de Bayeux: L'incroyable projet des Nazis*, Paris, 2018.

32 Nicholas, 1994 (note 16) p. 143; and Report on the National Monuments of Belgium during the war, National Archives of the United Kingdom, T 209/12, p. 2.

33 Letter from René Perchet to Georges Hilaire, 19 June 1944, Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine, Documentation des Objets Mobiliers (MAP-DOM), 14/364-1/4.

34 Rayssac, 2007 (note 17), p. 634.

35 Kunstschutz report on the transportation of the Bayeux Tapestry to Paris, signed by Tieschowitz, 27 June 1944, AN, AJ/40/573.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

The official transfer order was given on 23 June 1944, specifying that the Kunstschutz would provide the transportation means.<sup>39</sup> The Tapestry would be escorted by Dupont. This order declared a “very short” period of safekeeping at the Louvre, from where the embroidery would then be transported to another storage facility. The French authorities’ role in this transport action seemed to be a resignation towards the occupation authority, taking into consideration the expressions of prudence and even disapproval of Verrier and Perchet regarding the Tapestry’s transport away from Souches.<sup>40</sup>

The relocation of the artwork from Souches to Paris, an approximately 500-kilometer journey, took place on the morning of 27 June 1944, when it was picked up by a truck accompanied by a German military escort and Dupont. Germain Bazin wrote about that night’s events in two different reports to Jacques Jaujard and in his war memoir.<sup>41</sup> He mentioned his resistance to letting the embroidery go without Jaujard’s signed approval, as well as the dangerous transport conditions, as the Tapestry was placed next to a 200-liter oil barrel.

The Tapestry arrived that same day in Paris, where it was stored at the Louvre “in a very protected and clean basement” and examined by Jaujard and Verrier.<sup>42</sup> Even though French authorities still spoke of the provisory character of the artwork’s storage in Paris and its impending relocation to Chambord, this second transportation operation never took place.<sup>43</sup> On 15 August, a few days before the liberation, Tieschowitz and Dietrich von Choltitz, military governor of Greater Paris, visited Jaujard to ensure that the artwork was still at the Louvre, revealing the Bayeux Tapestry’s importance to the German authorities.<sup>44</sup> Choltitz mentions in his memoirs an attempt by two officers to seize the embroidery “following Himmler’s orders” on August 21.<sup>45</sup>

The German insistence on bringing the Bayeux Tapestry to Paris seems to point to an alternative purpose not directly related to the ultimate goal of bringing the artwork to Germany. In her war memoir, *Le Front de l’Art*, Rose Valland briefly mentions the Nazi’s wish to display the Tapestry in the context of an exhibition “meant for the edification of German soldiers.”<sup>46</sup> This exhibition project—also mentioned by Georges Hilaire and Jean Verrier in the days immediately before the embroidery’s transfer to the capital—

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39 Letter from Georges Hilaire to Jacques Jaujard, 23 June 1944, AN, 20144792/275.

40 Letter from Jean Verrier to René Perchet, 24 June 1944, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4.

41 Letters from Germain Bazin to Jacques Jaujard, 27 and 29 June 1944, AN, 20144792/275; and Germain Bazin, *Souvenirs de l’exode du Louvre (1940-1945)*, Paris, 1992, p. 107.

42 Letter from Jean Verrier to Georges Hilaire, 11 July 1944, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4. See photograph of Jaujard and Verrier inspecting the Tapestry in Robert Fohr and Guillaume de La Broise, *Pillages et restitution: Le destin des œuvres d’art sorties de France pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale*, Paris, 1997, p. 139.

43 Letter from René Perchet to Georges Hilaire, 13 July 1944, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4.

44 Valland, 2014 (note 24), p. 165.

45 Dietrich von Choltitz, *Un soldat parmi des soldats: Comment Paris fut sauvé* [1951], 1st French edition, Paris, 1964, p. 271.

46 Valland, 2014 (note 24), p. 165.

was never accomplished.<sup>47</sup> At the time of the liberation of Paris, on 25 August 1944, the Bayeux Tapestry was still securely stored in the Louvre's basement.<sup>48</sup>

### The Exhibition of the Bayeux Tapestry at the Louvre

The mayor of Bayeux, who had not been updated about the Tapestry's whereabouts since November 1943, was informed after the liberation that it was at the Louvre.<sup>49</sup> He subsequently requested the prompt return of the town's "most precious jewel" on 28 August 1944.<sup>50</sup> A first attempt to ship the embroidery back to Normandy, scheduled for 15 September, was abruptly cancelled three days before its departure due to the uncertain security conditions in France.<sup>51</sup>

Simultaneously, the idea to display the Bayeux Tapestry in Paris started to develop as early as 7 September, when Verrier officially suggested it to the new directeur général des Beaux-Arts, Joseph Billiet. This exhibition project, devised by Jaujard and Verrier, was described as an opportunity to illustrate the actions undertaken in France to protect its cultural heritage.<sup>52</sup> Other than the artwork's artistic value, the symbolic importance of the city of Bayeux during the liberation process could have been another factor taken into account by the organizers. On 14 June 1944, Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970) visited the Norman city, where he gave his first speech on French soil after the Allied landing. This proclamation, known as de Gaulle's "First Bayeux speech", confirmed the legitimacy of the Provisional Government of the French Republic in opposition to the idea of establishing an Allied occupation government:<sup>53</sup>

"I promise you that we will continue the war until the sovereignty of every inch of French territory is restored. ... We will fight alongside the Allies, with

47 "Suivant un accord à intervenir avec l'Autorité Allemande, elle pourra être exposée, sinon en public, du moins devant des journalistes convoqués à cet effet": Letter from Georges Hilaire to René Perchet, 22 June 1944, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4; "Lorsque l'œuvre sera arrivée à Paris et déposée au Musée du Louvre, on devra...étudier les conditions dans lesquelles elle pourra être exposée à Paris, si une suite est donnée à ce projet....(J'estime qu'en raison des bombardements fréquents de la région parisienne, [la] durée [de cette exposition] devrait être réduite si possible à une seule journée.": Letter from Jean Verrier to René Perchet, 24 June 1944, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4. For an overview of the exhibitions organized in Paris during the occupation as well as on propaganda during the Vichy regime, see Laurence Bertrand Dorléac, *Art of the Defeat: France 1940-1944*, Los Angeles, 2008, pp. 122-125.

48 Letter from Élie Dodeman to captain Lafarge, 18 August 1944, AMB, 3209.

49 Ibid.

50 Letter from Élie Dodeman to Georges Hilaire, 28 August 1944, AMB, 3209.

51 Letter from René-Norbert Sauvage to Élie Dodeman, 4 September 1944, AMB, 3209.

52 Letter from Jean Verrier to Joseph Billiet, 7 September 1944, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4.

53 Jean Quellien, "Été 1944: Bayeux, capitale de la France libérée," in *Annales de Normandie* 35, 2009, pp. 247-267, here pp. 250-257.

the Allies, as an ally. And the victory that we shall win will be the victory of liberty and the victory of France.”<sup>54</sup>

The organizers may have recognized the exhibition’s potential to convey a political statement, connecting the medieval embroidery to the fight still taking place in other parts of France and presenting the Bayeux Tapestry as an ambassador of the liberating message pronounced by de Gaulle in its ‘hometown’.

The organization of the exhibition depended on the approval by the mayor of Bayeux, which was officially requested on 19 September 1944.<sup>55</sup> The request assured its safety at the Louvre during the Tapestry’s display and its subsequent return to Normandy. Billiet explained that the exhibition would be relatively short, taking place while the transportation of the embroidery to Bayeux was organized. The mayor gave his approval on 27 September.<sup>56</sup>

The preparation of the exhibition was administered by different institutions: the Service des Monuments Historiques took on the role of the main organizer and the Direction des Services de l’Architecture was in charge of the inauguration ceremony and the project’s budget; the expenses would be assumed by the Ministère de l’Éducation nationale. James J. Rorimer (1905–1966), curator of medieval art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, who was present in Paris at the time as a ‘Monuments Man’, was also involved in the preparation and witnessed the complexity of the situation: “Because of the personalities involved and a question of domain... they were continually at loggerheads on jurisdictional questions.”<sup>57</sup>

The location of the exhibition at the Salle des Sept-Mètres was already settled on 26 September.<sup>58</sup> Located between the Pavillon Daru and the beginning of the Grande Galerie, close to the Salon Carré, this space was one of the rooms assigned to the museum’s paintings department on the first floor of the Denon wing. The Salle des Sept-Mètres had featured Italian paintings on its walls since its inauguration in August 1857. Its display focus was progressively restricted towards Italian masters of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, explaining the room’s alternative denomination of “Salle des primitifs italiens.”<sup>59</sup> The state in which the room was found after the war was probably fairly similar to its condition in 1939 (fig. 3), only five years after its extensive renovation by architect Albert

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54 Translation quoted from the website D-Day Overlord: *Encyclopédie du débarquement et de la bataille de Normandie*, URL: <https://www.dday-overlord.com/en/battle-of-normandy/cities/bayeux> [accessed: 31.10.2021].

55 Letter from Joseph Billiet to Élie Dodeman, 19 September 1944, AMB, 3209.

56 Letter from Élie Dodeman to Joseph Billiet, 27 September 1944, AMB, 3209. The French State owns the Bayeux Tapestry, but the legal question of the embroidery’s ownership was not raised until 1953. See: Brown, 2013 (note 2), p. XLIX-L.

57 James J. Rorimer and Gilbert Rabin, *Survival: The Salvage and Protection of Art in War*, New York, 1950, p. 65.

58 Letter from Jacques Dupont to Élie Dodeman, 26 September 1944, AMB, 3209.

59 On the history of the *Salle des Sept-Mètres*, see Christiane Aulanier, *Le Nouveau Louvre de Napoléon III*, Histoire du Palais et du Musée du Louvre 4, Paris, 1953, pp. 42–43.

Ferran (1886-1952) under the direction of René Huyghe (1906-1997) and Paul Jamot (1863-1939).<sup>60</sup> During the 1934 refurbishment campaign, a more spacious hanging was implemented, and all four frescoes held by the Louvre's paintings department were moved to the room.<sup>61</sup> Sandro Botticelli's two frescoes, originating from the Villa Lemmi in Florence, as well as Fra Angelico's *Calvario* were highlighted by a light protuberance on the wall.



3 Marc Vaux, *Salle des Sept Mètres* at the Louvre, 1939

The remaining fresco, attributed to Raphael's workshop, was placed in the apse above the entrance leading to the Grande Galerie.

Why did the organizers of the Bayeux Tapestry exhibition specifically choose this room in late September 1944, in a museum where most artworks had been evacuated and most spaces were empty at the time? The rooms on the ground floor were reopened to the public shortly after in the first week of October 1944.<sup>62</sup> The organizers thus had to look for a space on the first and second floors of the Louvre, which were still closed to the public. The direct connection between the museum's entrance, placed next to the Daru staircase at the time, and the Salle des Sept-Mètres would provide direct access for visitors. Furthermore, the curators in charge surely appreciated the unique opportunity to design a display setting adapted to the embroidery's monumental dimensions. Consequently, another criterium for choosing an appropriate exhibition space could have been its relation to the artwork's size.

<sup>60</sup> Enguerrand Lascols, "Le Louvre, musée populaire? Le musée idéal de René Huyghe dans les années 1930", in *Histoire de l'art* 84/85, 2020, pp. 95-108, here p. 100.

<sup>61</sup> Aulanier, 1953 (note 59), p. 42.

<sup>62</sup> "La réouverture du musée du Louvre," cover, *France-soir*, 5 October 1944.

Jean-Jacques Haffner (1885–1961), chief architect of the Palais du Louvre after January 1944, delivered a first draft of the Bayeux Tapestry’s exhibition in the Salle des Sept-Mètres on 12 October 1944, in which he conceived displaying the embroidery on the room’s walls in a continuous U-shaped form, “like in the nave of a church” (fig. 4).<sup>63</sup> The first part of the Tapestry was hung along the left wall of the room. A device made out of five panels ensured a seamless curve of the embroidery, which then extended along the right wall of the Salle des Sept-Mètres. This display setting blocked the neighboring Grande Galerie’s entrance, creating a perfectly symmetrical hanging into which visitors entered through a single door at the end of the Daru staircase.

The device used to mount the Bayeux Tapestry comprised a horizontal glass frame fixed to a two-meter high wooden plate, which in turn was fixed to the wall and the ground. This wooden plate was covered from the ground up to a height of 1.3 meters by a dark beige curtain, after which the glass frame holding the Tapestry emerged, safely fixed to the wooden plate hidden behind it. Above the embroidery, a curtain in a light beige tone extended another three meters to the ceiling, allowing the three Italian frescoes on the wall to be hidden in a discreet, uniform way. The horizontal frame contained a plywood plaque covered by a layer of isolating paper and a coat of distemper, which were meant to protect the Tapestry from possible reactions to its support. A continuous pane of glass covered the artwork to shield it from dust.<sup>64</sup>

Considering how it had been exhibited from 1842 until 1939, this display system was revolutionary in the Bayeux Tapestry’s history. This was indeed the first time in the embroidery’s modern display history that the architecture was adapted for the artwork and not the opposite. The organizers of the exhibition at the Louvre took into consideration the Tapestry’s monumentality and found a room that perfectly fit its size. This reconstruction of the exhibition is possible thanks to a description by Dupont, which was transcribed by Abraham, the curator of the Tapestry, in a letter to René-Norbert Sauvage (antiquities and artworks curator of the Calvados department) on 15 November 1944.<sup>65</sup> Dupont’s words, which passionately characterize the presentation at the Louvre as “astonishing and striking,” give us a glimpse into the importance given to the visitors’ aesthetic experience.<sup>66</sup> In comparison to the 19th-century display cabinet, whose glass plaques were separated by thick wooden frames, the Louvre’s display featured “perfectly contiguous” glass that allowed a seamless view of the Tapestry.<sup>67</sup> In his description, Dupont also

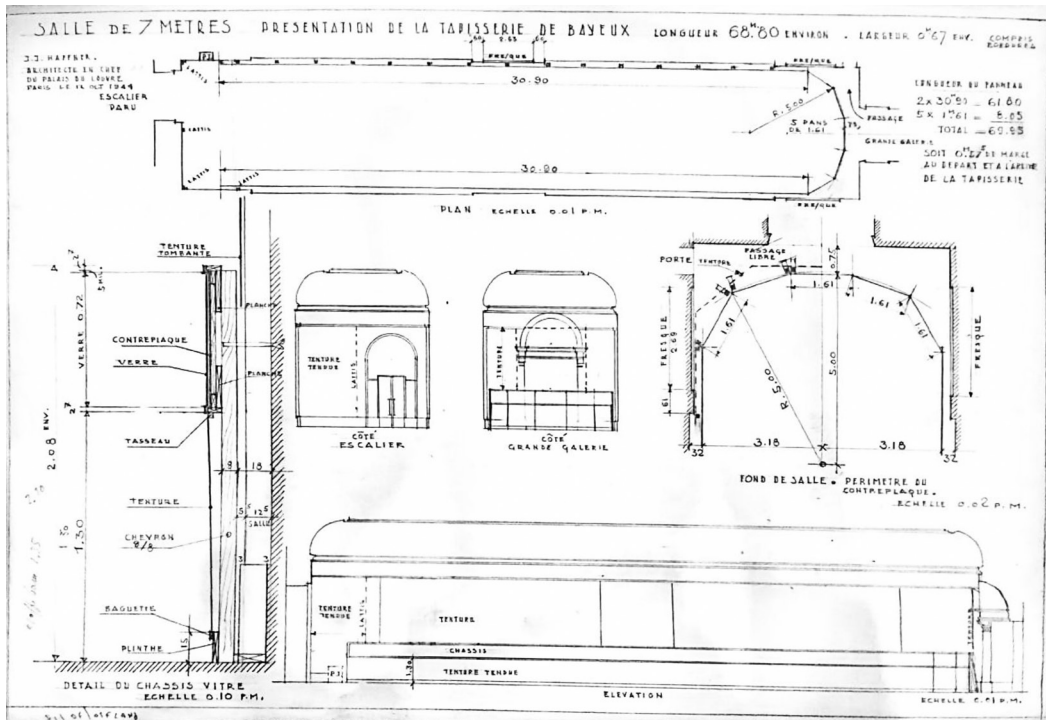
63 Letter from Jacques Dupont to Élie Dodeman, 11 November 1944, AMB, 3209.

64 Letter from Jeanne Abraham to René-Norbert Sauvage, 15 November 1944, Archives du Calvados, 3T/15, URL: <https://archives.calvados.fr/ark:/52329/ltvbx7d4fj3b> [accessed: 31.10.2021]. I would like to thank Julie Desolndes and Jean-Yves Laillier (Archives du Calvados) and Florian Meunier for bringing this document to my attention.

65 Ibid.

66 “Je ne puis vous dire combien l’effet de la tapisserie ainsi vue dans son ensemble est étonnant et de nature à frapper les esprits”: Ibid.

67 Ibid.



4 Jean-Jacques Haffner, Architectural design of the Bayeux Tapestry exhibition at the Louvre, 1944

expressed concerns about the work's preservation and a desire to implement conservation measures in the exhibition. A credit of 89 100 French francs (FF) was allocated by the ministry for the temporary redesign of the Salle des Sept-Mètres, an amount that—with the addition of a few supplementary expenses—grew to 102 520 FF by the end of the exhibition in December 1944.<sup>68</sup>

The exhibition was initially scheduled to take place from 10 November through 15 December 1944. The Tapestry was insured for 3 million FF during this time.<sup>69</sup> An admission fee of 10 FF was established for every day of the week except Friday, when it was doubled.<sup>70</sup> The organizers of the exhibition planned special programs to grant students access to the exhibition, taking into account its relatively high price. Members of the military were granted free entry.<sup>71</sup> The flow of visitors in the room was also controlled to ensure the proper visibility of the Tapestry at all times.<sup>72</sup>

68 AN, F/21/7191 and 64AJ/846 contain all bills concerning the temporary redesign of the *Salle des Sept-Mètres*.

69 Letter from Élie Dodeman to Jean [sic] Dupont, no date, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4.

70 Letter from René Perchet to Jean Verrier, 27 October 1944, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4.

71 Robert M. Edsel and Bret Witter, *Monuments Men. Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History*, New York, 2009, p. 159.

72 Letter from René Perchet to Jean Verrier, no date, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4.

Posters of the exhibition (fig. 5) that prominently displayed the Tapestry's first scene, the conversation between Edward the Confessor and Harold, were hung in busy places, such as metro and train stations, to advertise the exhibition.<sup>73</sup> The choice to display this peaceful image on the poster is remarkable, taking into account the large number of war scenes depicted in the Tapestry, which could have called to mind Germany's recent defeat in France or the ongoing combat further east. Furthermore, the poster text abandons the usual "Queen Matilda's Tapestry" denomination used in contemporary correspondence and academic texts, in favor of the currently more popular name, the "Bayeux Tapestry". Could this name change on the poster be interpreted as a reference to de Gaulle's speech at the Norman city in June 1944?

The inauguration of the exhibition took place on 10 November 1944, a day before the parade organized at the Champs-Élysées to celebrate the 1918 armistice after four years of occupation. The guest list included the principal names of France's cultural administration, including Jaujard, Perchet, many representatives of the Service des Monuments Historiques, and various agents involved in the exhibition's conception and organization.<sup>74</sup> Even if *Ministre de l'Éducation nationale* René Capitant's name did not appear on the list, two different witnesses mentioned his presence at the event.<sup>75</sup> The mayor of Bayeux was also invited but did not attend because of the difficult travelling conditions between the Norman city and the capital at the time.<sup>76</sup>

Although Capitant initially conceived this inauguration as a private ceremony, BG Pleas B. Rogers of the United States Army, Commanding General of the Seine section, wished to give it a more official character, and the Allied Generals in Paris were invited.<sup>77</sup> The ceremony was set to begin at 2:30 p.m. to allow military personnel to attend other events surely linked to Winston Churchill's visit to the French capital.<sup>78</sup>

A booklet accompanying the exhibition was published by the Caisse Nationale des Monuments Historiques and sold for 10 FF (fig. 6). The introductory text, signed by Dupont, specifies the role of the Service des Monuments Historiques as the organizer of the event and recognizes Bayeux's gratitude for the protection of the Tapestry during the conflict. The iconographic, technical and historical overview of the artwork allowed readers not only to understand the embroidered history presented before their eyes but also to appreciate the Tapestry as a work of art.

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73 Letter to the director of the Compagnie du Chemin de Fer Métropolitain, 25 October 1944, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4; Letter to M. Barjot, SNCF, 25 October 1944, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4. My thanks go to Michael Carter, associate museum librarian at The Cloisters Library and Archives, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, for bringing this poster to my attention.

74 Guest list for the inauguration of the Bayeux Tapestry's exhibition, no date, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4.

75 Rayssac, 2007 (note 17), p. 732.

76 Letter from Élie Dodeman to Jacques Dupont, 15 November 1944, AMB, 3209.

77 List of invited Allied Generals, no date, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4.

78 Letter from René Perchet to James J. Rorimer, 13 November 1944, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4.



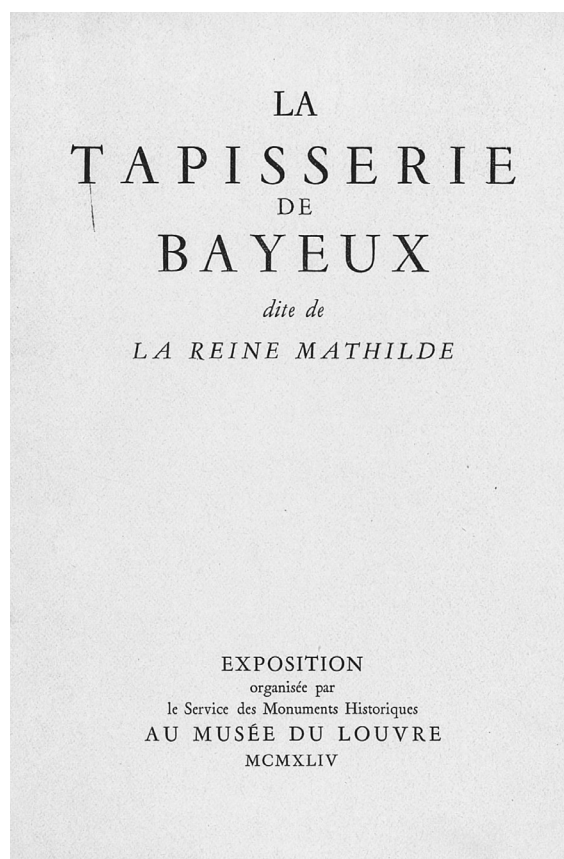


5 Poster of the Bayeux Tapestry exhibition at the Louvre, 1944

Even if the Bayeux Tapestry is indeed full of war scenes, not a single line in the booklet referred to the ongoing conflict. An anecdote mentioned by James J. Rorimer in his war memoir *Survival*, nevertheless, showed the politically charged nature of this display. The booklet's introductory text was followed by a list of the Latin inscriptions on the Bayeux Tapestry and their French translation, helping visitors decipher each scene of the artwork. The last inscription on the Tapestry, "Et fuga verterunt Angli" (And the English turned in flight), was frowned upon by some Allied generals, who considered it inappropriate in the contemporary context of the aid the British had provided to the French and

taking into account that the war was not yet over.<sup>79</sup> As stated by Rorimer, this scene of the embroidery was quickly covered. Although the archival sources consulted in the preparation of this article do not mention exactly how this covering was accomplished—by folding the Tapestry or using a temporary wall<sup>80</sup>—this anecdote is confirmed by the existence of two editions of the exhibition booklet. The two versions are identical except for one key point: the Tapestry’s problematic inscription alluding to the defeat of the English was omitted from the list of Latin inscriptions in the second edition and replaced by a brief bibliography (fig. 7). The translation of the penultimate inscription, “Hic Harold rex interfectus est” (Here the king Harold is killed) was completed in the second version of the booklet with a final sentence that does not appear on the Tapestry: “[et le combat prend fin]” (and the battle ends). Since the success with which the last part of the Tapestry was hidden cannot be ascertained, we can merely assume that only the visitors in possession of the first edition booklet or those that had already seen the Tapestry in its entirety would have been able to identify this measure, which, according to Rorimer, was taken “in the interest of inter-Allied solidarity.”<sup>81</sup>

The exhibition of the Bayeux Tapestry was opened to the general public on 11 November 1944, the day of commemoration of the 1918 victory. School visits were prioritized by the exhibition’s organizers, who allowed these groups to access it for free before the museum opened, from 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., or at a reduced price between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. The exhibition dossiers held at the archives document many visit requests from schools, attesting to the exhibition’s success and the large



6 Cover of the exhibition booklet, *La Tapisserie de Bayeux dite de la Reine Mathilde, Exposition organisée par le Service des Monuments Historiques au Musée du Louvre, 1944*

79 Rorimer and Rabin, 1950 (note 57), p. 65.

80 Nicholas, 1994 (note 16), pp. 306–307; and Edsel and Witter, 2009 (note 73), p. 163.

81 Rorimer and Rabin, 1950 (note 57), p. 65.

56 HIC : FRANCI PVGNANT ET CECIDERVNT  
QVI ERANT : CVM HAROLDO :

Ici les Français combattent et tuèrent ceux qui étaient  
avec Harold.

57 HIC HAROLD : REX : INTERFECTVS : EST.

Ici le roi Harold est tué [et le combat prend fin].

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des Monuments historiques.

7 Page 15, exhibition booklet, *La Tapisserie de Bayeux dite de la Reine Mathilde, Exposition organisée par le Service des Monuments Historiques au Musée du Louvre*, 1944

number of young visitors that saw the Bayeux Tapestry at the Louvre.<sup>82</sup> Leigh Ashton, at the time Keeper of Collections and Assistant to the Director at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, visited the exhibition at the Louvre and mentioned his positive impression of the embroidery's conservation in the correspondence related to the British loan request of 1953.<sup>83</sup>

The closure of the exhibition, originally planned for 15 December, was rescheduled for 31 December 1944. This brief extension was justified by the absence of military visitors who still had not been allowed to visit Paris.<sup>84</sup> The exhibition was interrupted on 26 December, when Paris suffered its last bombing by the Germans.<sup>85</sup> According to Rorimer, the Louvre had almost been hit a few days before, when a bomb fell on the neighboring Tuileries.<sup>86</sup> The exhibition of the Bayeux Tapestry, presumably the first temporary exhibition to take place at the Louvre after the liberation of Paris, was officially closed in the first days of 1945.<sup>87</sup>

82 MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4. This archive folder contains documentation on the Tapestry's history from the 19th century through the 1980s. I would like to thank Gaëlle Pichon-Meunier, responsible for the Documentation d'Immeubles et Objets at the Médiathèque de l'Architecture et du Patrimoine for her help during my research.

83 Letter from Leigh Ashton to Georges Salles, 25 January 1953, AN, 20150042/242.

84 Letter from René Capitant's office to André Warnod, December 1944, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4.

85 Aulanier, 1953 (note 59), p. 45.

86 Rorimer and Rabin, 1950 (note 57), p. 64.

87 Letter from Élie Dodeman to Jeanne Abraham, 5 January 1945, AMB, 3209.

### The Display of the Tapestry in Bayeux, 1948–1983

The beginning of 1945, year of the Allied victory, also meant a victory for Bayeux with the return of the Tapestry to its guardian city. During the months the artwork was held at the Louvre, the municipal authorities in charge of the embroidery, Dodeman and Abraham, constantly worried about the dangers that a Parisian exhibition would entail, as the war was not over.<sup>88</sup> They also dreaded the idea of a travelling exhibition after the Parisian display instead of the Tapestry's return to Bayeux they had been promised: "As long as, after Paris, they don't take it to London in the spring, and then, why not, on a world tour."<sup>89</sup>

Dodeman officially requested the return of the Tapestry to Bayeux on 5 January 1945.<sup>90</sup> He also asked for the Louvre's support in assuring a proper transportation of the embroidery—not having forgotten the two relocation operations of 19 August 1941 and 27 June 1944. The artwork's journey from Paris to Bayeux took place on 2 March. Verrier and Dupont escorted the Tapestry to its final destination in the name of the Service des Monuments Historiques, the entity which assumed the insurance costs.<sup>91</sup>

Triumphantly received in Bayeux, the Tapestry could not be displayed right away because the Galerie Mathilde at the Hôtel du Doyen, its exhibition room before the war, was being used as a school.<sup>92</sup> The Tapestry returned to its wartime armored shelter until 4 October 1945, when it was reinstalled in its 19th-century display showcase.<sup>93</sup> Though it was back in the outdated cabinet in which it had been housed since 1842, the revolutionary display accomplished at the Louvre had brought to light the embroidery's potential in a modern museum setting.<sup>94</sup>

The organizers of the exhibition at the Louvre were aware that the Tapestry's permanent display in Bayeux needed to be updated. Even if Bayeux's mayor suggested donating the exhibition's admission earnings to the war victims of the Calvados department,<sup>95</sup> the Fine Arts administration decided to invest this money in improving the artwork's display in Bayeux even before the inauguration of the show in Paris.<sup>96</sup> At the time of its closure, the exhibition had made a total of 317 334 FF, an amount supplemented by a subsidy from the ministry bringing the total to 350 000 FF.<sup>97</sup>

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88 Letter from Élie Dodeman to the Sous-préfet of Bayeux, 9 October 1944, AMB, 3209.

89 Letter from Jeanne Abraham to René-Norbert Sauvage, 15 November 1944, Archives du Calvados, 3T/15 (note 64).

90 Letter from Élie Dodeman to René Perchet, 5 January 1945, AMB, 3209.

91 Letter from René Perchet to Élie Dodeman, 27 February 1945, AMB, 3209; and Rayssac, 2007 (note 17), p. 757.

92 Brown, 2013 (note 2), p. XLVII.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

95 Letter from Élie Dodeman to René Perchet, 8 November 1944, AMB, 3209.

96 Letter from René Perchet to the *Sous-préfet* of Bayeux, 6 November 1944, AMB, 3209.

97 Letter from the director of the *Bureau de la Documentation Générale des Fouilles et Antiquités* to the director of the Bureau des Travaux et Classements, 28 September 1948, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4.

Between March 1945 and June 1948, the Service des Monuments Historiques refurbished the old Galerie Mathilde at the Hôtel du Doyen in Bayeux. Dupont, who had been heavily involved in the Tapestry's protection, transportation and final exhibition at the Louvre, was in charge of this project. Paul Colas (1908–1997), head architect of historical monuments, was chosen to design the new exhibition space.<sup>98</sup> On 4 December 1945, Colas delivered the first draft of his design, which would “use the entirety of the main building's first floor to allow a sufficient expansion of the artwork and achieve a display setting similar to the Louvre's in 1944.”<sup>99</sup>

This expansion, inspired by the Louvre's exhibition, was a challenge because the small Galerie Mathilde was blocked by a monumental staircase that had been registered as a historical monument under French heritage law since 1929. Nevertheless, the decision was made to move this staircase and rebuild it on the opposite side of the Hôtel du Doyen, which allowed for the construction of a thirty-five-meter long exhibition room and an adjacent waiting space with a view of the cathedral<sup>100</sup>. Dupont successfully argued in favor of an artificial illumination system, which was unprecedented in the Tapestry's history and controversial at the time.<sup>101</sup>

The total budget of 5 million FF allocated to this renovation project in 1945 was vastly surpassed.<sup>102</sup> Considering the great economic distress that France experienced in the immediate postwar years, such an expense shows the importance the local and national authorities attached to the permanent display of the Bayeux Tapestry. As early as March 1945, Dupont predicted the coming development of the Normandy landings sites as tourist destinations and declared the renovation of the Hôtel du Doyen “indispensable.”<sup>103</sup>

The Bayeux Tapestry's new permanent exhibition room (fig. 8) was inaugurated on 6 June 1948, in the presence of Henry Jeanne, mayor of Bayeux since 1945, and Vincent Auriol, president of the French Republic.<sup>104</sup> This new display setting, where the Tapestry was hung until 1983, was a direct counterpart to the Louvre's exhibition in 1944. The curtains employed at the Salle des Sept-Mètres were substituted by a decorative pattern inspired by the wall ornaments in the Cathédrale de Bayeux. A similar hanging device consisting of a plywood frame situated at eye level allowed visitors to see and admire the embroidery in its entirety. Although the room's decor and technological equipment were changed and upgraded over the following thirty-five years, the original U-shaped setting was kept intact until the renovation campaign of 1983. The current display

98 Letter from Paul Colas to René Capitant, 4 December 1945, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4.

99 Ibid.

100 Ibid.

101 Jacques Dupont, Report about the new display for the Bayeux Tapestry, 27 December 1945, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4.

102 Minutes of the *Comité consultatif des Monuments historiques*, 22 November 1948, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4.

103 Letter from Jacques Dupont to René Perchet, 9 March 1945, MAP-DOM, 14/364-1/4.

104 Brown, 2013 (note 2), p. XLIX.

setting, located at the Grand Seminary of Bayeux, upgraded the climatic and lighting conditions of the space in which the Tapestry is held, sacrificing, however, the monumental panoramic display originally conceived at the Louvre.

The next chapter of the Bayeux Tapestry's modern history is currently being written. The potential exhibition in London, as well as a new permanent display setting in Bayeux scheduled to be inaugurated in 2026, will be new opportunities to reconsider the way this unique medieval masterpiece is presented to the public.<sup>105</sup> In this context, the two exhi-



8 Interior of the Bayeux Tapestry exhibition room, circa 1965

bitions of the embroidery at the Louvre can be considered as major milestones in its millennial history. In 1803, its presentation in Paris saw the Tapestry's birth as a museum object and secured its link to Bayeux in post-revolutionary France. The second exhibition,

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<sup>105</sup> "Une restauration de la Tapisserie de Bayeux à partir de 2024", Bayeux Museum website, 3 February 2021, URL: <https://www.bayeuxmuseum.com/actus/une-restauration-de-la-tapisserie-de-bayeux-a-partir-de-2024/> [accessed: 31.10.2021].

in 1944, was a consequence of the wartime efforts to keep the embroidery safe and the great interest it held for the Nazis. The Tapestry's unprecedented display setting at the Louvre following the liberation of Paris drew upon its monumentality and symbolic value, shaping the artwork's museum presentation in Bayeux for several decades to come.

This article is based on the master's thesis *L'exposition de la Tapisserie de Bayeux au musée du Louvre. Deux moments capitaux (1803-1944) pour la naissance muséographique d'un chef-d'œuvre médiéval*, supervised by Françoise Mardrus (Centre Dominique-Vivant Denon, Musée du Louvre) and defended at the École du Louvre on 26 June 2018. The committee was composed by Florian Meunier (conservateur en chef, Département des Objets d'art, Musée du Louvre), Antoine Verney (curator of the Bayeux Tapestry), Pascal Riviale and Genevieve Profit (Archives nationales). Catalogue Sudoc URL: <http://www.sudoc.fr/236414674> [accessed 31.10.2021].

Illustration on the following page: Bayeux Tapestry, Scene 57, The death of King Harold at the Battle of Hastings (detail)  
Frontispiece page 96: Interior of the Bayeux Tapestry exhibition room, circa 1965 (detail, see page 117, fig. 8)



REX: INTERFEC  
TVS: EST

