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Shirley Ann Brown, *The Bayeux Tapestry, Bayeux, Médiathèque municipale: Ms. 1: A Sourcebook*. Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013. cvi + 316 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. 85.00€ (pb). ISBN 978-2-503-54917-0.

Review by Karen Rose Mathews, University of Miami

Like moths to a flame, medievalists simply cannot stay away from the Bayeux Tapestry. The textile has been the object of scholarly fascination since the early eighteenth century, but the tapestry presents a medieval paradox to modern viewers. It is an extraordinary artwork, monumental in size, masterful in execution, and iconic in style. We have little or no information, however, on the conditions of its manufacture: where, when, how, by and for whom it was made, and where it was meant to be displayed. Thus, basic information essential for any type of scholarly inquiry is completely absent in the case of this work. In spite of, or perhaps because of this ambiguity, scholarship has proliferated on this enigmatic artwork as seen in the over 1000 entries compiled in Shirley Ann Brown's *The Bayeux Tapestry, Bayeux, Médiathèque municipale: Ms. 1: A Sourcebook*. Brown, a world-renowned scholar on the tapestry, combines in this volume an annotated bibliography (up to the year 2013) with an extended introduction that addresses significant themes in the Tapestry's study, tracing the life history of the textile and its scholarship over almost three hundred years. Together these parts provide a comprehensive, detailed, and thoughtful assessment of the Bayeux Tapestry and the scholarly literature associated with it.

In her introduction, Brown begins appropriately with the object itself, providing a physical description of the Tapestry and its constituent parts. The textile has had a long and eventful history and it is truly remarkable that an embroidery on linen made in the eleventh century has been preserved virtually intact to the present day. Then the author addresses some of the most basic but fraught questions associated with the Bayeux Tapestry's manufacture concerning which there is great debate but no set of definitive answers. No conclusive information exists concerning the conditions of the Tapestry's creation, so Brown summarizes the arguments that address the textile's provenance, artists, and patron. She also treats the ample scholarship on the narrative depicted on the textile, the strategies employed to tell the story, the relationship between word and image as well as the interaction between the main zone and the borders. Scholars have long debated whether the Tapestry presents Norman or English perspectives on the Norman Conquest, and an understanding of the textile's narrative would have differed markedly depending upon the viewer's nationality, gender, and class affiliation. There has also been considerable attention paid to particular details of the Tapestry--weapons, horses, ships, historical figures, buildings, etc.--in order to understand whether the portrayal of eleventh-century life in England or France is accurate. Brown's last section of the introduction outlines what she calls new viewpoints, summarizing recent, innovative methodological approaches to this complex monument, and she mentions semiotics, gender studies, and the appropriation of the Bayeux Tapestry by various political entities to serve propagandistic purposes.

Brown's introduction is thorough as she does address the most significant questions that have been asked of the Tapestry over the past few centuries, and she presents bibliographic references related to these themes in the footnotes that are keyed to the citations in the second part of the text. Throughout

the introduction as well the author maintains a neutral tone, not commenting on or engaging in the numerous arguments associated with the Tapestry, some of which are still quite hotly contested. Some parts of the introductory material were superfluous in my opinion, such as the section on the curators of the Tapestry. This discussion seemed to be a curious non sequitur in the context of a discussion of the scholarship on the object itself. I would also have liked to have seen a longer discussion of new viewpoints and trends to complement the (in some cases) timeworn discussions about the Tapestry for which we may never have definitive answers. It seems just as important to look beyond traditional concerns of patronage, production, and iconographic sources to where the scholarship on this object might be heading. A work this complex and visually compelling begs for new perspectives and approaches, and it might have been of interest in the introduction to address future challenges and possibilities in the study of this exceptional artwork, to ponder how scholarship on the Bayeux Tapestry might be transformed in the future.

The second section of the book is the bibliography proper, where Brown has compiled an extraordinary number of references to the Tapestry. Though she indicates that there was no claim to comprehensiveness in this compilation, the list of citations is extensive, incorporating material from multiple centuries in numerous European languages, from the perspective of various scholarly disciplines. This bibliography is a supplement to earlier bibliographic works published by the author, and Shirley Ann Brown demonstrates her continued commitment to providing essential resources for the study of the Tapestry. The chronological arrangement is quite useful in this volume in that it provides a historical context but also allows the reader to work from the most recent publications backwards in time. The keyword/subject index was also very helpful as it organized citations according to significant themes and concepts associated with the Bayeux Tapestry. This index provided a treasure trove of information; indexes in general are time-consuming to produce, and this one must have been even more so as it required detailed knowledge of all of the works cited to provide such a thematic organization of this vast bibliography.

In all, this was an impressive compilation of bibliographic material related to the Bayeux Tapestry. The problem with any bibliography, however, is that by the time it is published it is already obsolete. Brown did include forthcoming works in her citations, but the incredible number of publications on the Tapestry each year requires constant updating to keep the bibliography current. The problem of obsolescence could be solved with the creation of a digital or even web-based version of the bibliographic material that could be updated regularly to keep pace with the scholarship on this topic. A digital bibliography could complement the digital presentation of the Tapestry itself as seen in Martin Foys's CD-ROM publication of the entire textile in 2002.^[1] That may be the wave of the future for this compilation of bibliographic citations, but for now Brown's volume, which manifests her decades-long dedication to the dissemination of information on the Tapestry and its study, is the definitive publication on this enigmatic and fascinating medieval monument.

NOTES

[1] Martin K. Foys, *The Bayeux Tapestry: Digital Edition* (CD-ROM, Birmingham: Scholarly Digital Editions, 2002).

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