

## **Xavier Barral i Altet**

### *Edward rex: Architectural Context in the First Scene of The Bayeux Tapestry*

The embroidery of the Bayeux, which is continued to be called “tapestry” even though it was not made in this technique, illustrates the story of the conquest of England by the Normans in 1066, providing valuable information about daily and military life of the time. The date of its manufacture is still uncertain, but the 1066 is the terminus post quem it was fabricate. The embroidery depicts, in seventy-two episodes, the rivalry for the succession of throne of King Edward of England between his cousin Harold and Duke William of Normandy. The narrative begins with the sending of Harold in France by Edward and ends with the Battle of Hastings which will allow William to ascend the throne of England with the title “Conqueror”. The first scene introduces Edward the Confessor, English king from 1042 to 1066. The inscription “Edward rex” surmounts the image depicting Edward in his palace with a large scepter in his hand, while giving instructions to two Anglo- Saxons, one of whom is Harold, to who the king is entrusted the mission. Edward appears “in majesty”, seated on a throne in almost frontal position, slightly turned and inclined toward the other characters. All the figures are situated below a sort of an arch, within architectural context, with the king placed in the central axis of the structure. The architecture in question is certainly to be identified as that of Edward’s palace of Westminster, represented both outside and inside, dominated by a robust entry, almost a two-storey Westwerk, flanked by circular towers, following the model of city gates. We can see a monumental entrance at the ground floor and a balcony at the upper floor with a “solarium” from which the ruler could dominate the open space in front of the palace and give speeches to assembly, according to the royal religious models such as the Palatine Chapel in Aachen, in front of which, above the entrance, the first storey, corresponding to the imperial tribune, opens with a porch to the atrium of the church. At the other end of the structure, the three-storey tower is used to accentuate the importance of the open gate, depicted with all its details and with its metal parts in plain view. The format of the gate, oversized in relation to the proportions of the tower, reflects the desire to refer to the departure of the delegation of Harold and his soldiers for Normandy, a way of representation already seen on the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius. At ground floor level, the polychrome decoration depicting a grid could be interpreted both as a wall decoration of the facade or as the graphic of the coffered ceiling that could cover the compartment behind the arch of the entrance, namely the vestibule behind the monumental gate of the palace. This gate, among other, is represented as a solemn entrance, without embrasures, as a simple monumental arch supported by columns with the corresponding capitals, but preceded by a series of steps. As for the structure above the figures, a roof or ceiling is represented in an unusual design not to be found in other scenes of the embroidery of Bayeux or, more generally, in medieval representations of architectural interiors or architecture framing different aulic episodes. In this case we are not dealing with a flat ceiling or even the external view of the tiles on a roof, but we seem to see a fabric folded and tied in its center, as is demonstrated by the zenith element, the strips that adorn the textile and even the progressive narrowing towards the top. To situate this scene in the courtyard of the palace and to recognize in this particular textile a monumental structure resembling a canopy, which emphasizes the

solemnity of the scene, correspond well to the protocol of the time. The author also analyzes the gestures of the characters, and proposes hypotheses about the significance of the different postures of the figures in the scenes with Edward.