

## England Becomes French

William the Conqueror wins a kingdom and changes England forever



English spearmen defend their position on a rocky outcrop against Norman cavalry in a scene from the Bayeux Tapestry.

In the most decisive battle ever fought on English soil, the knights of William, Duke of Normandy famously defeated the army of King Harold II. William claimed to have been promised the throne of England by King Edward the Confessor, but Harold had been crowned instead on Edward's death in January 1066. So William sailed to England at the head of an invasion force, having obtained the Pope's backing for his enterprise.

The Bayeux Tapestry, an embroidered wall-hanging made c. 1070, shows in a long series of dramatic scenes the events leading up to William's invasion and the battle itself. At first the Norman army of cavalry and archers made little impression against Harold's foot soldiers, massed behind a wall

of interlocking shields. In the midst of the battle we see the figure of William turning and raising his helmet to encourage his cavalry to a charge. He orders his archers to shoot over the wall of shields, and Harold is killed, apparently by an arrow in his eye. His army is routed, and William is crowned king of England on Christmas Day.

Within two years King William the Conqueror had taken control of the entire country, suppressing rebellions with brutal force. He rewarded his followers with grants of land, replacing the English nobility with Normans, Bretons, and Flemings. Norman law and feudalism were introduced, and Norman French became the language of the court. England would never be the same again. **SK**

## War in the Name of God

Pope Urban II's speech begins the first holy war between East and West



A fifteenth-century image of Christians looting Jerusalem after capturing the city from the Muslims at the end of the First Crusade.

Seated upon a dais erected on a hillside outside Clermont in central France, Pope Urban II, addressing a throng of bishops, nobles, and people, called upon the knights of Western Christendom to stop fighting each other and free Jerusalem from the Muslims. His words had an electrifying effect and his speech was interrupted with cries of *Deus vult!* ("God wills it!").

Urban was responding to an appeal from the Byzantine Emperor Alexius II for military aid from the West. Such an appeal had been made before—after the Seljuk Turks had destroyed a Byzantine army at Manzikert in 1071 and overrun Anatolia, the heartland of the Byzantine Empire, Pope Gregory VII had called for Christian soldiers to aid their fellow Christians in the East, but without notable success. Since then

reports of Muslim attacks on Christian pilgrims to the holy places of Jerusalem had aroused a new mood of religious fervor in the West, and Urban's stirring call fell on willing ears. By early 1096, thousands of people, mostly from France, the Low Countries and Germany, had taken a solemn oath to make the long and dangerous journey to the Middle East.

Urban's speech signaled the start of the Crusades, the series of wars that would pit Christian against Muslim in the Middle East, Spain, and the Balkans for centuries to come. If some of those who signed up for the First Crusade did so out of worldly ambition and the hope of personal gain, the great majority were moved to join out of spiritual piety and the promise of heavenly reward. **SK**