# Historians debate the number of male genitalia depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry



In a scholarly debate that has revived interest in one of the medieval world's most famous artefacts, two historians have clashed over the number of male genitalia depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry, the embroidered cloth that tells the story of the Norman conquest of England in 1066.

The controversy centres on the tally and interpretation of what appear to be penises embroidered into the tapestry. Oxford professor George Garnett sparked global attention six years ago when he revealed he had counted 93 penises within the tapestry's intricate scenes. According to his analysis, 88 of these are attached to horses, with the remaining five belonging to human figures.

Now, Dr Christopher Monk, a historian and expert known as the Medieval Monk, claims he has identified a previously unrecognised example — a 94th penis. The subject of this discovery is a figure depicted running within the border of the tapestry. A black shape beneath the figure’s tunic, described by Garnett as a sword or dagger scabbard, is, according to Monk, unmistakably male genitalia. “I am in no doubt that the appendage is a depiction of male genitalia – the missed penis, shall we say. The detail is surprisingly anatomically fulsome,” Monk told The Guardian.

The Bayeux Museum in Normandy, where the 70-metre-long cloth is housed, describes the tapestry as “an epic poem and a moralistic work,” underscoring its historical and artistic significance.

The disagreement between the two historians was aired on the HistoryExtra Podcast. Despite the seemingly humorous subject matter, both experts affirm their investigations are serious scholarly efforts aimed at understanding medieval symbolism and mentality. Garnett said, “The whole point of studying history is to understand how people thought in the past. And medieval people were not crude, unsophisticated, dim-witted individuals. Quite the opposite.”

He further suggested that the tapestry’s unknown creator was a highly educated individual, embedding “literary allusions to subvert the standard story of the Norman conquest.” He argued that the size of certain figures was symbolic: “In the Bayeux tapestry, size did matter. The battle’s two leaders – Harold Godwinson, who died at Hastings with an arrow in his eye, and the victorious Duke William of Normandy, AKA William the Conqueror – are shown on steeds with noticeably larger endowments. William’s horse is by far the biggest. And that’s not a coincidence.”

Monk remained insistent that the running man’s genitalia were the “missing penis” of the tapestry, adding a new layer to the ongoing discourse surrounding the artefact.

Dr David Musgrove, the host of the HistoryExtra podcast and an authority on the Bayeux tapestry, praised the fresh interpretation, calling it “fascinating.” He emphasised the tapestry’s complexity, describing it as “a multi-layered artefact that rewards careful study and remains a wondrous enigma almost a millennium after it was stitched.”

The debate highlights the enduring intrigue and layered meanings concealed within the Bayeux Tapestry, which continues to captivate historians and the public alike nearly 1,000 years after it was created.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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