

‘GARMENTS SO CHEQUERED’: THE BIBLE OF CÎTEAUX, THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY AND THE VAIR PATTERN

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The Bayeux Tapestry depicts three curious chequered garments. These garments are usually identified as gambesons, or some form of scaled armour. Several scholars have observed similar garments in the early twelfth-century Bible of Cîteaux. The Cîteaux garments are depicted in a pattern later used to represent fur (called ‘vair’) in heraldic art. This identification is confirmed by the pattern’s usage in cloak linings, but its simultaneous appearance as tunic material is unfamiliar in later art. The Cîteaux tunics suggest the possibility that the Bayeux garments may also have been intended to represent fur tunics. Reasons for that identification, as well as problems with the identification, are considered.

Among the iconographic mysteries of the Bayeux Tapestry are three chequered garments worn by Count Guy, Duke William and Bishop Odo. Scholars have proposed a variety of tentative explanations, but no explanation has ever gained a confident following. This paper argues that the depictions represent fur tunics, and that they are early examples of a variegated pattern that would come to be known as ‘vair’. The connection between the Tapestry garments and later medieval illustrations of vair is not immediately obvious, but a pair of twelfth-century French manuscripts from the scriptorium of Cîteaux represent an intermediate stage which, while exhibiting a recognizable vair pattern, also reflects the structure of the Bayeux patterns.

Vair is the name of a set of patterns used in medieval art. It is a stylized chequered pattern, usually of blue and white, representing the pelts of squirrels sewn together. The light fronts and dark backs of the squirrel pelts were alternated in a variety of patterns. Vair appeared in art around the beginning of the twelfth century, and went through several conventional forms before settling into its modern heraldic form. Although vair saw service in all sorts of medieval art, it survived beyond the Middle Ages in heraldic art, and in that context it remains in current use today.

In this paper, I will review the role of the heraldic furs, ermine and vair. I will then identify and describe what appear to be the earliest clear examples of a vair pattern in two Cistercian manuscripts from Cîteaux, and another from Tours. Finally, I will argue that the Bayeux Tapestry may contain even earlier prototype representations of vair.

THE FURS

Since the origin of armorial bearings in the middle of the twelfth century, the furs ermine and vair have been featured in heraldry. Heraldically, the furs are patterns of two or

(occasionally) more colours, but are treated more or less like solid colours. Because they are treated like regular colours, they are classed among the heraldic tinctures. The furs are originally based on the real-life patterns of medieval fur clothing.

Ermine is the popular name of a weasel species (*mustela erminea*). The wintertime pelt of the ermine is white right down to the tip of the tail, which is black. Historical ermine fur clothing would generally be white, with the black tails scattered around the surface. The complexity of ermine lay in the tails, because the shapes of ermine tails are by no means standardized in artistic representation. There are many variations on ermine spots recorded in art, some resembling the thin black point of a tail, others more fanciful and stylized. Ermine clothing is common in medieval and Renaissance art, especially in the lining of cloaks, hoods and other garments. It remains in active use today, most notably in the official robes of UK peers whose scarlet robes include an ermine mantle denoting rank.

Ermine as it appears in heraldic art is very similar to ermine in medieval art. Many of the same variations on the ermine spot were used in the past, but heraldic art has gradually settled on one basic stylized design, with only minor variations. Because all the variations are at least loosely based on the use of ermine in clothing, the design has remained recognizable in all its iterations.

The colours of heraldic ermine have not remained so traditional. There are three named variations to ermine: *Ermines* features white spots on a black field; *Erminois* has black spots on a gold field, and *Pean* consists of gold spots on a black field. The design strayed from its origins in fur clothing by introducing unnatural colours, but retained its essential patterning.

The other heraldic fur, *vair*, is not necessarily associated with a specific species, but is considered to be formed from the pelts of the Eurasian red squirrel, *Sciurus vulgaris*, whose winter coat turns blue-grey on the back and white on the belly in the colder parts of northern and central Europe. Because a squirrel pelt is tapered at the head and wider at the feet, the most efficient organization for squirrel pelts is side by side and head to foot. By alternating the back and belly pelts, the furrier makes a wavy or chequered pattern of blue and white.

In medieval art, and presumably in usage, *vair* was usually employed in the linings of mantles and cloaks. By the Renaissance, however, *vair* had virtually disappeared from non-heraldic art, and, unlike ermine, *vair* does not enjoy the modern patronage of the UK peerage.

Like ermine, heraldic depictions of *vair* have variations of pattern and colour. When of any colours other than blue and white, *vair* is termed *vairé* of the appropriate colours. In extremely rare cases, *vair* is fancifully made up of three or even four colours. Different arrangements of the pelts are called *vair-en-point*, *vair in pale* and *counter-vair*. When the pelts are stripped of their natural shape, and become essentially T-shaped, the patterns are called *potent* and *counter-potent*.

There is still more variation in *vair*, however, because of subtle changes in the depiction of pelts over time. In early depictions, the pelts were rounded, so creating a wavy appearance. Over the centuries a stylistic modification arose whereby the curves became angular and began to resemble shields with triangular ‘ears’. These two designs were used concurrently for centuries, until the older, curved version gradually fell out of use. Even today, both designs are recognized and considered correct depictions of *vair*. They are sometimes called *vair ancient* and *vair modern* by armorists.

The importance of fur in medieval art is not limited to its identification and recognition. The furs bear a powerful and readily apparent symbolism. Sumptuary laws



Fig 1. Knight with a falcon and vair-lined cloak. *Photograph:* © Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon, MS 173, fol 174; coll E Juvin

restricted the use of fur, which therefore became an indicator of aristocratic rank. Because the finest furs were imported at great expense from Scandinavia and Russia, furs were also a symbol of wealth, and because of their distinctive patterns, furs were an effective means of signalling a subject's wealth and power in a work of art. In iconographic terms, this is probably the essential symbolism of fur in medieval art.

PROTO-VAIR IN FRENCH MANUSCRIPTS

The artistic use of vair seems to have arisen in France around the beginning of the twelfth century, in manuscript art. The earliest depictions of vair differ from later medieval conventions. Rather than the two symmetrical lines of blue and white waves of *vair ancien*, the pattern consists of a blue field with regularly arranged white figures: regular horizontal lines and deeply scalloped curves that begin at the horizontal line above and reach their nadir at a point of tangency with the horizontal line below. Between the descending panels are visible triangles of material with shallowly scalloped upper angles. The larger descending panels are white, and the smaller, triangular underpanels are in blue. To distinguish this early vair pattern from the roughly standardized *vair ancien* and *vair modern*, I have termed this pattern 'proto-vair'.



Fig 2. Knight with a vair-lined cloak slaying a dragon. Photograph: © Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon, MS 173, fol 20; coll E Juvin

A pair of early illustrations of fur-lined mantles or cloaks may be found in a French copy of Gregory I's *Moralia in Iob* dating from the 1120s.¹ One historiated initial, coming at the beginning of Book xxv, shows a long-haired rider astride a horse, with a falcon perched on his gloved right hand and his left hand holding up his long cloak to display a lining of vair (fig 1).² The other initial, placed at the top of Book xix, shows a knight slaying a dragon (fig 2). The cloak is clearly displayed and lined in the same pattern.³ Vair was usually depicted as a cloak lining in medieval art, so the *Moralia in Iob* illustrations represent vair in its usual context.

The earliest clearly identifiable use of a vair pattern in medieval art is perhaps a dozen years older, and came from the same scriptorium. The Bible of Cîteaux (also known as the Bible of Stephen Harding, or the Bible d'Étienne Harding) dates from about 1109–11.⁴ Its illustrations have some stylistic similarities to the Bayeux Tapestry, especially in its representations of armoured soldiers and grotesque figures. The manuscript was made at the abbey of Cîteaux in Burgundy, the founding abbey of the Cistercian Order. Both the Bible of Cîteaux and the *Moralia in Iob* manuscript mentioned above were made under the direction

1. Dijon MS 173, fols 20, 174; Załuska 1989, 203.
2. Załuska 1989, pl 2, fig 3.
3. Ibid, pl 55, fig 101.
4. Dijon MS 14; Załuska 1991, pl 16.



Fig 3. David enthroned, wearing a vair-lined cloak. *Photograph:* © Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon, MS 14, fol 13v; coll E Juvin

of Stephen Harding, the monastery's third abbot. Both manuscripts are believed to have been illustrated by the same workshop, and both manuscripts show proto-vair illustrated in the same way.⁵ Proto-vair appears five times in the Bible of Cîteaux, in two different contexts. In the first two instances, it is subtly, but unmistakably, used in the linings of mantles. In the other three, an entire tunic is formed from proto-vair.

5. Cahn 1982, 138.



Fig 4. Nebuchadnezzar wearing a vair-lined cloak. *Photograph:* © Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon, MS 14, fol 64; coll E Juvin



Fig 5. Antiochus IV in a vair tunic. *Photograph:* © Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon, MS 14, fol 191; coll E Juvin

The first example is a full-page illustration featuring King David with his harp, seated on a throne (fig 3).⁶ There is a framework around King David in the form of an embattled wall, manned by a garrison of knights very reminiscent of the Norman knights in the Bayeux Tapestry. The soldiers wear the helmets of Norman knights, and wield lances, axes, gonafons, shields and bows all identical to those seen in the Bayeux Tapestry. Within the framework, King David wears a long woollen tunic. On his shoulders he wears a mantle draped over his left arm. A close look at his mantle where it hangs behind his right arm, and again where it is turned up over his left knee, reveals that his mantle is lined with small fur pelts.

The second illustration is at the beginning of the Book of Daniel (fig 4).⁷ Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego stand in the furnace protected by an angel. A servant feeds the fire, and three more servants lie engulfed in flames at the base of the furnace. Nebuchadnezzar and two associates look on. Nebuchadnezzar is wearing an open crown and the usual loose tunic, with a mantle over the left shoulder, pinned on the right shoulder.

6. Dijon MS 14, fol 13v; Załuska 1991, pl 16.

7. Dijon MS 14, fol 64; Załuska 1989, pl 33, fig 59.



Fig 6. Solomon being anointed, in a vair tunic. Photograph: © Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon, MS 14, fol 44v; coll E Juvin



Fig 7. David in a vair tunic, enthroned at Hebron. Photograph: © Bibliothèque municipale de Dijon, MS 14, fol 13r; coll E Juvin

The outside of the mantle is decorated with what appears to be a floral pattern, and is lined inside with proto-vair like the mantle of King David. In her catalogue of Dijon manuscripts, *Manuscrits Enluminés de Dijon*, Yolanta Załuska describes Nebuchadnezzar as 'debout, couronné, portant chlamyde en étoffe brodée, doublée d'hermine'.⁸ Rather than ermine (*hermine*), however, the pattern is vair.

The third Cîteaux illustration is a decorated initial showing King Antiochus IV Epiphanes of Syria, who incited the Maccabean Revolt, seated on his throne overseeing a massacre of the Jews (fig 5).⁹ Antiochus, who is seated facing forward, wears a long-sleeved, ankle-length tunic, curled and pointed shoes and a cap. There is a slit centred in the front of the tunic, from the knees down, and another V-slit at the front of the neck. The neckline and cuffs are coloured bright red. The outer surface of the tunic is made of contrasting-coloured pelts, in a pattern identical to the mantle linings of King David and Nebuchadnezzar.

The design of Antiochus' tunic is closely echoed in a historiated initial showing Solomon at his anointing as King of Israel (fig 6).¹⁰ Solomon is seated, and is being

8. Załuska 1989, 194.

9. Dijon MS 14, fol 191; Załuska 1989, pl 39, fig 71.

10. Dijon MS 14, fol 44v; Załuska 1989, pl 31, fig 56.

anointed from a ram's horn by Zadok and Nathan. Solomon wears a long, loose tunic of proto-*vair*. With the exception of the location of the slit at the bottom of the tunic, and white cuffs rather than red, it is identical in pattern to that of Antiochus.

The final example of proto-*vair* in the Bible of Cîteaux is on a page illustrating the life of King David in extended cartoon form (fig 7).¹¹ At the top of the page Goliath is dressed as a Norman soldier, with a chain-mail hauberk, a conical helmet, a spear and a pointed Norman shield. He is so large that he extends above and below the margins of the narrative. Near the bottom of the same page, David is anointed King of Israel at Hebron. He is seated, sporting a crown on his head and a sword in his right hand. He wears a mantle of light green, draped over his left arm. The lining of the mantle cannot be seen, but under it he wears a long tunic of the same pattern as those of Antiochus IV and Solomon, in white and blue proto-*vair*. The cuffs of the tunic are again trimmed in red, and like most of the figures on fol 13r, David wears red hose under his tunic. Załuska describes David at Hebron, in the scene from fol 13r, as 'vêtu d'une tunique d'hermine et d'une chlamyde [mantle]'.¹² Załuska was right to recognize the pattern as a fur, but again mistakenly identifies *vair* as ermine.

The presence of the proto-*vair* pattern – depicted as both a traditional cloak lining and as a tunic material in the same manuscript – leaves no doubt that the Bible of Cîteaux represents tunics whose outer surface is composed entirely of fur. However, the absence of this fashion in later medieval art raises the question of whether fur tunics in this style ever existed in common use, or whether they were merely an invention of the Cîteaux scriptorium.

A manuscript in Tours suggests the former. An illustration in an early twelfth-century copy of the *Tractatus in Evangelium Johannis* shows a clerical scribe at work on a manuscript with knife and pen.¹³ Behind him stands another tonsured cleric, observing the scribe's work. The standing cleric wears a tunic composed of *vair*, but the tunic differs dramatically from the Cîteaux illustrations. It is looser, and the *vair* pattern follows an artistic convention more familiar from later manuscript art. The almost shield-shaped white pelts are spaced further apart than in the Cîteaux manuscripts, and there is blue visible all around them. If the *vair* tunic had been a scribe's invention, then the idea must have been transmitted a great distance, without an attendant transmission of the stylized *vair* pattern. More likely, *vair* tunics were a real, if understandably rare, article of clothing in early twelfth-century France.

THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY: NASCENT VAIR

Three times in the Bayeux Tapestry, Norman notables are depicted wearing an odd garment of contrasting light and dark colours in a roughly chequered pattern. This garment has been a mystery of the Tapestry ever since it was subjected to scholarly study, and has been described as possibly a gambeson, or scaled leather armour, or as some unknown form of noble dress.¹⁴

11. Dijon MS 14, fol 13r; Załuska 1989, pl 27, fig 49; Załuska 1991, pl A.

12. Załuska 1991, 52.

13. Tours MS 291, fol 132.

14. Planché 1846, 59; Gibbs-Smith 1973, pl 39; Legge 1987, 84–5; Grape 1994, 27; Neveux 2000, 15.



Fig 8. Guy, Count of Ponthieu, receives messengers from Duke William: detail from the Bayeux Tapestry. *Photograph:* courtesy of the City of Bayeux



Fig 9. Duke William (or Odo) rides by Mont-Saint-Michel: detail from the Bayeux Tapestry. *Photograph:* courtesy of the City of Bayeux

The unexplained Norman garment is seen on three occasions in the Bayeux Tapestry. In the first, Guy, Count of Ponthieu (*c.* 1048–1101), is receiving messengers from William, Duke of Normandy. In the second, William, Duke of Normandy (1027–87), is wearing a very similar garment as he rides past the abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel on a military expedition. In the third example, in the midst of the Battle of Hastings, William's half-brother Odo, Bishop of Bayeux (*c.* 1032–97), wears a garment that is again similar to the previous two. None of the three garments are depicted identically, but they are clearly all of a type.

In 1064, Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex, was taken captive by Guy, Count of Ponthieu, in Beaurain. The Duke of Normandy took a particular interest in Harold's situation and sent messengers to secure his release. This meeting between Guy and the messengers of William is depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry (fig 8). Guy stands with his right hand on his hip, his left hand holding a single-bladed battle axe just slightly shorter than himself. He wears a past-knee-length garment that seems to be made of scales in alternating horizontal rows of terracotta and pale green, edged in green thread. The scales are rounded at the bottom, and each row obscures the top of the row directly beneath. The bottom hem of the garment is a band of terracotta. On his legs are horizontal bands



Fig 10. Odo at Hastings: detail from the Bayeux Tapestry. *Photograph:* courtesy of the City of Bayeux

of colour, probably garters. On his shoulders he wears an unlined woollen mantle, draped over his left arm. Rather than continuing the chequered pattern, his right arm is embroidered in the same green that outlines the scales of his garment.

After the Duke of Normandy secured his release, Harold Godwinson joined him in a campaign against Conan, Duke of Brittany. In the Tapestry, Harold and William are depicted passing the abbey of Mont-Saint-Michel and approaching the treacherous shores of the River Couesnon (fig 9). Just to the right of the abbey we can identify William astride a horse and flanked by retainers, some in chain mail and some unarmoured.¹⁵ William carries what appears to be a baton of office or mace, and wears a garment similar to that previously worn by Count Guy. It is green at the collar, has long sleeves and comes to his knee. It is different from Guy's in that the colours are arranged in an irregular checkerboard pattern of terracotta and dull yellow, rather than in horizontally arranged scales. William does not wear a mantle, nor do any of his soldiers.

15. It is conventional wisdom – based on his unconventional clothing and his prominent placement – that the man in the chequered garment is William, but a closer consideration of the scene leaves me unconvinced. The figure is dressed and equipped much the same as Odo at Hastings, and is far from William's name in the caption. A cap covers the figure's head, and may conceivably conceal Odo's tonsure. Owens-Crocker (2002, 267 n39) comes to the same conclusion; for the sake of clarity, however, I will continue to refer to the figure as William.

Near the Tapestry's end are two great panoramic views of the Battle of Hastings. Norman cavalry charge at the English shield wall and this time Harold and William command the opposing armies. In the second battle panorama, on the right side of the shield wall, is one of the most celebrated scenes in the Tapestry (fig 10). The mounted Norman knights have been repulsed by the English shield wall and the Norman commanders struggle to rally their troops. William raises his helmet to show his demoralized soldiers that he still lives, and Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, waves what may be a baton of office or a mace and encourages the fleeing men.¹⁶ Odo wears a Norman helmet tipped with a small golden ball and a scaled garment, with no mantle. The scales are worked in black or very dark blue and a terracotta colour that matches nearby horses. The scales are nearly triangular in this garment, though some are slightly curved, and alternate in a chequered pattern like William's scales at Mont-Saint-Michel, only smaller and more regularly arranged. The tunic descends just below the knee and the sleeves come to mid-forearm where they end in pale yellow cuffs. Any collar is concealed behind Odo's upraised arm. The warrior-bishop is clearly wearing chain mail under his chequered garment. The arms of a mail shirt are visible at his wrists, and a mail coif covers his head and extends below the collar of the tunic. Citing an example from the biography of William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke, Legge claims that Odo is not wearing a full-length hauberk and that the chequered garment marks him out as a non-combatant.¹⁷ It is possible that the chequered garment is a sign of a non-combatant, but it would be impossible for Legge to know the length of Odo's hauberk under a garment that clearly covers mail at the neck and wrists and which goes all the way to his boots.

Of all the scholars who have written on the Bayeux Tapestry, few have attempted to explain the chequered Norman garments. Most recently, Michael Lewis classed the chequered tunics as styles of armour, and notes especially that the odd garments differentiate the important characters from those surrounding them.¹⁸ Lewis also recognizes the structural difference between Guy's scaled tunic and William and Odo's more triangular patterns. Accepting that they represent armour, Lewis conjectures that the scaled/plated armour was more expensive to create, and is therefore a marker of wealth and status in the Tapestry.¹⁹

Planché and Legge both conclude that the 'garments so chequered' are gambesons.²⁰ A gambeson was a quilted, padded garment worn under the hauberk, with the dual purpose of softening blows and making the mail more comfortable to wear. But while a diagonally quilted gambeson would not be out of the question, the multiple colours of the Bayeux garments would be needlessly complex. A gambeson was composed of two layers of tough fabric, with softer layers in between as padding, all sewn together (quilted) to prevent the layers from shifting. To make a multi-coloured gambeson, one would have to sew on extra patches to add colour, a needless affectation and expense for an item of clothing normally hidden under armour, where it would inevitably attract sweat and blood stains. Furthermore, if a gambeson is meant to be worn under the hauberk, why

16. Brown 1980, 197–8; Legge 1987, 84.

17. Legge 1987, 85 (citing Meyer 1891, 317, 319, lines 8803–6, 8841). This argument conflicts with the depiction of Guy, who carries a long-hafted axe while wearing the supposed clothing of a non-combatant.

18. Lewis 2007, 105.

19. *Ibid.*, 113.

20. Planché 1846, 59; Legge 1987, 84.

would Odo wear one outside his mail coat? William, Odo and Guy are the three most prominent Frenchmen identified in the Tapestry. Since they are the only ones depicted in the chequered garment, it seems likely, as Lewis has argued, that the garment is a marker of status. A gambeson, even a colourful one, could not be a marker of status. It was a basic part of the armour, and any professional soldier would have had one.

It has also been suggested that the chequered garments represent armour formed of leather scales, or even lamellar armour. Such armour might have offered greater comfort and economy than heavy chain mail, although at the cost of decreased protection. But if the chequered garments represent leather armour, why would they be worn *over* chain mail? It is conceivable that scaled leather armour would have offered increased protection over mail alone, but if it were an effective supplement then we should expect the practice to have been more widespread. Other knights would also have made the relatively minor investment in supplemental scaled-leather armour. Also, while leather could certainly have been obtained in brown and grey (although not pale green), there would have been no reason beyond the purely decorative to use scales of alternating colours. In fact, more complicated patterns would have been possible.

Recognizing fundamental similarities in pattern, Wolfgang Grape cited the proto-vair garments in the Bible of Cîteaux as evidence that the Bayeux garments were not an invention of the Tapestry's designer.²¹ However, Grape did not recognize the Cîteaux pattern for what it was: an early version of vair. Because of this, Grape does not venture an explanation of what the garments represent, but does suggest, based on their twin appearances in the Bayeux Tapestry and the Bible of Cîteaux, that they were a fashion among European nobles in the second half of the eleventh century, but were unknown in Britain. Grape describes the garment as 'horizontal and diagonal lines [creating] a triangular pattern in two colours'.²²

What Grape, Planché, Legge and Lewis all miss is that the diagonal lines on the Bayeux garments are not straight but rather are subtly curved. We can expect a hauberk to be quilted with straight stitches, while lamellar armour is formed of rectangular scales. The Bayeux Tapestry garments are scalloped, much like the pelts of the Cîteaux illustrations.

A COMPARISON OF THE BAYEUX AND CÎTEAUX PATTERNS

A close examination of Odo's garment at the Battle of Hastings shows that the shape of its scales closely matches the proto-vair of the Bible of Cîteaux. Duke William's chequered garment is more irregularly embroidered; the pelts are not precisely arranged, but the garment is noticeably similar to Odo's, and Lewis classifies them together.²³ Guy's garment is different from the other two. It shows only descending scales, with no scalloped ascending panels. The colours are arranged into horizontal rows instead of chequered. Horizontal rows are not unheard of in later heraldic depictions of fur, but a fur tunic without ascending panels would be a less efficient use of pelts. Certainly the three garments are more similar to each other than to anything else in the Tapestry, and each garment has a structure consistent with squirrel fur.

21. Also, Lewis 2005, 50 n309.

22. Grape 1994, 26–7.

23. Lewis 2005, 50.

It is possible that Guy's garment is intended to represent another form of dress entirely, but it is more likely that the difference may be ascribed to different embroiderers or embroidery workshops producing and adding their subtle graphic reinterpretations to the various scenes.²⁴ Chain mail in the Tapestry shows similar variety in design, sometimes formed of tiny circles and other times embroidered in a straight crosshatch pattern, so the differences between the three Bayeux garments may represent a similar phenomenon.²⁵ If the Tapestry is the product of an English workshop, and the fur tunics had been unknown in England prior to the Conquest, then it is also possible that the designer and embroiderers were working from a limited knowledge of fur tunics in practice.

Putting pattern aside, the cut of all three Bayeux garments corresponds to the long proto-vair tunics worn in the French manuscripts. The Cîteaux tunics come to the ankle, the *Tractatus* tunic is knee length and the Bayeux tunics come just below the knee. William's garment has a prominent dark-coloured collar. Guy's collar is obscured by his mantle and Odo's is obscured by his arm. King David's collar in Hebron is obscured by his mantle, but the collars of Antiochus and Solomon are visible and prominent. The only difference between the visible collars in the Tapestry and the Cîteaux Bible is that the visible Cîteaux garments, like most woollen garments in the Bible, have V-necks.

The most important difference between the Bayeux garments and the Cîteaux garments – and indeed all later depictions of vair – is the colour. The Bayeux Tapestry garments do not conform to the usual blue and white colouring for vair, but the colour difference should not be taken as a disproof. The Bayeux Tapestry may pre-date the earliest clear depictions of a vair pattern by years or decades. It is no surprise that the earliest depictions of vair do not conform to the later, settled conventions regarding its use. Even if the designer had been aiming for blue-and-white vair, the Bayeux Tapestry was embroidered with a limited colour palette, which could only approximate white by leaving the surface bare and unembroidered.²⁶ The Tapestry does use some variations on blue, but not in any shades that would conform to later artistic practice for depicting vair. The colours in the Bayeux Tapestry are often fanciful, with blue and sea-green horses.²⁷ It is therefore no surprise to find the fur garments in the Tapestry picked out in black or dark blue, terracotta, buff and pale sea-green. Since horses are shown in the same colours, the colours may be interpreted as representing natural hues, suitable for genuine squirrel pelts.

Given the fanciful use of colour in the Bayeux Tapestry, not to mention the stylized colours conventionally used in later medieval depictions of vair, the chequered pattern is more telling than the colours involved, because it is an inherent result of the efficient use of fur from small mammals. When lighter front pelts and darker back pelts are sewn together, the result is necessarily chequered. If the Bayeux garments had been gambesons, or scaled leather armour, the chequering would be purely decorative. If they represent fur, then the chequering is inherent to the material.

24. Owens-Crocker 1994, 1–9; Owens-Crocker 2002, 258–61.

25. Lewis identifies at least six 'designs used to evoke armour', two of which are the chequered garments: Lewis 2005, 220, fig 30.

26. Wilson 1985, 10–11.

27. Lewis 2005, 1. Lewis does argue (p 74) that clothing colours in the Tapestry are more accurate to life than other elements of the embroidery, but this is because the same sorts of vegetable dyes would have been used for embroidery thread and clothing. This observation would not apply to undyed furs.

DESIGNER INTENT

Two of the three vair tunics in the Bible of Cîteaux are worn by enthroned kings and the third is a coronation scene. Certainly this confirms Grape's argument that the tunics were an expensive status symbol among the French nobility. The later widespread use of vair in cloak linings suggests that the material was not strictly restricted to enthroned kings, and the illustration from the Tours *Tractatus in Evangelium Johannis* shows that at least one scriptorium thought vair tunics were appropriate for senior clerics.

None of the chequered tunics in the Bayeux Tapestry are worn during enthronement scenes, or by kings. Count Guy wears his in what appears to be an informal meeting with William's messengers, rather than a formal audience. In that scene, Guy is holding an axe but his attendant and William's messengers, while armed with lance and sword, are shown unarmoured. In the Mont-Saint-Michel scene, William wears his tunic with no visible mail or helmet during an expedition against Brittany. Most of his accompanying knights are unarmoured, but all are armed; most carry shields and two men directly behind him ride in mail. The strangest setting for a fur tunic is Odo's appearance at Hastings. The enthronement scenes of the Cîteaux manuscripts have little in common with the Tapestry's battle scenes. The mail at his cuffs reveals that, at the least, Odo was not unarmoured, but given the cost of such a fur tunic, why would Odo expose it to the danger of a battle?

Conceivably, a fur tunic could have served to identify Odo on the battlefield, or even announce his non-combatant status.²⁸ However, the Bayeux Tapestry is not a photographic representation, and there is no need to conclude that Guy, William or Odo wore any such garment at the moments depicted in the Tapestry, or indeed ever. The garments are used primarily to distinguish their wearers in the pictorial narrative and, if they truly represent vair tunics, to identify their wearers as men of great wealth and status. It was not necessary that such garments were worn – only that they were meaningful to the designer and the Tapestry's intended audience. Lewis argued that the Tapestry's designer was familiar with lay clothing fashions and that the depiction of clothing was largely drawn from real life rather than artistic convention.²⁹ It seems most likely that the designers of both the Cîteaux and Tours manuscripts and the Bayeux Tapestry were artistically rendering real tunics they had seen, rather than following previous conventions.

CONCLUSION

Fur tunics are featured five times in the Bible of Cîteaux, in a proto-vair pattern, as well as twice in a Cistercian *Moralia in Iob* and once in a *Tractatus in Evangelium Johannis* from Tours. These appear to be the earliest clear depictions of a pattern that would become standardized as vair. While vair is commonly depicted in the linings of cloaks and mantles, two early sources show long tunics entirely made of vair. The appearance of fur tunics in

28. In the *Roman de Rou*, Wace reports that Odo wore a white vestment under a hauberk on the field of Hastings, rode a white horse and carried a mace. Writing a hundred years after Hastings, Wace is probably unreliable on this point, though the Bayeux Tapestry also shows a mace and a hauberk, if not the white vestment. If the two sources agree in any broad point, it is that Odo was readily identifiable on the battlefield.

29. Lewis 2005, 87, 124.

two French manuscripts from distant scriptoria certainly suggests that fur tunics were in use around the first quarter of the twelfth century.

The Bayeux Tapestry garments have been tentatively identified as gambesons or scaled armour, but there are reasons to doubt these identifications. The existence of fur tunics in near-contemporary French manuscript art raises the possibility that the chequered Bayeux garments are early representations of similar tunics. They are close to the manuscript examples in every respect but colour and the inherent imprecision of the embroidered medium. The evidence is not sufficient to prove conclusively that the Bayeux garments are fur, but it is sufficient to challenge their usual identification as armour.

Whatever their material, the Bayeux Tapestry garments are intended to distinguish their wearers from surrounding figures in the pictorial narrative. If they were intended to represent fur tunics, this fashion was certainly also intended by the designer to establish the wearers as men of wealth and power.

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RÉSUMÉ

La tapisserie de Bayeux dépeint trois curieux vêtements à carreaux. Ces vêtements sont généralement identifiés avec des gambisons, ou une forme quelconque d'armure à plaques. Plusieurs chercheurs ont remarqué des vêtements similaires sur la bible de Cîteaux, qui date du début du douzième siècle. Les vêtements de Cîteaux sont dépeints avec un motif employé par la suite pour représenter la fourrure (appelée vair) dans l'art héraldique. Cette identification est confirmée par l'utilisation du motif dans les doublures des capes, mais son utilisation simultanée comme tissu de tunique est inconnue dans l'art ultérieur. Les tuniques de Cîteaux suggèrent la possibilité qu'on avait peut-être voulu représenter des tuniques en fourrure pour les vêtements de Bayeux. Les raisons à l'appui de cette identification, ainsi que les problèmes posés par l'identification, sont pris en considération.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Wandteppich von Bayeux stellt drei seltsame karierte Gewänder dar. Diese Gewänder werden üblicherweise als Gambesons identifiziert, oder als eine Art von schuppenförmiger Schutzkleidung. Verschiedene Gelehrte haben ähnliche Gewänder in der Bibel von Cîteaux aus dem frühen zwölften Jahrhundert vermerkt. Die Gewänder von Cîteaux werden in einem Muster dargestellt, daß später in der Wappenkunst Fell darstellen sollte (auch vair genannt). Diese Identifikation wird durch den Gebrauch dieses Musters in Mantelfutterstoffen bestätigt, aber das gleichzeitige Aufkommen als Tunikamaterial ist in späterer Kunst unbekannt. Die Cîteaux Tuniken deuten darauf hin, daß die Bayeux Gewänder eventuell auch Fell Tuniken darstellen sollten. Argumente und Probleme für diese Identifikation werden erwogen.