**Spartacus Educational Classroom Activity**

**The Battle of Hastings (Questions & Answers)**

<http://spartacus-educational.com/EXnormans1.htm>

This commentary is based on the classroom activity: [The Battle of Hastings](http://spartacus-educational.com/EXnormans1.htm)

Q1: Study source 3. Select examples from the passage where the author expresses (i) facts, and (ii) opinions.

A1: A fact is something that has actually happened. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle includes several statements of fact. These include "Then came William duke of Normandy into Pevensey" and "King Harold was killed". (ii) An opinion is a view or judgement formed about a particular matter. An example of an opinion being expressed is "William came against him unawares".

Q2: There is some doubt about how Harold was killed. Describe how sources 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8 help to answer this question. How reliable is this evidence? Before you answer this question it will help you read about the authors of these sources and the [Bayeux Tapestry](http://spartacus-educational.com/MEDbayeux.htm).

A2: William of Malmesbury claims that Harold's brain was "pierced by an arrow". William of Poitiers was unable to say how Harold died. In fact, he points out that they had difficulty recognising his body. Under the word "Harold" on the Bayeux Tapestry is a soldier with an arrow in his head which seems to support the view expressed by William of Malmesbury. However, some historians have argued that Harold could be the figure underneath the word killed (interfec). Another possibility is that both men are Harold as William of Malmesbury said that after he was hit by an arrow he was cut in the thigh with a sword. Both William of Poitiers and William of Malmesbury did not witness the death of Harold. However, William of Poitiers was friendly with several people who had taken part in the battle. His book was written only five years after the event and was probably based on eyewitness accounts. William of Malmesbury did not write his version until about 70 years after the battle took place. It is possible that his account was based on documents that have not survived. The Bayeux Tapestry was produced fairly soon after the Battle of Hastings. Bishop Odo, who organised the making of the tapestry, also took part in the battle. However, the problem with this source is it is not clear which one of the figures is Harold.

Q3: Compare the value of sources 1, 3 and 8 to the historian writing a book about the Battle of Hastings.

A3: The value of source 1 would depend on the research carried out by the people who took part in the re-enactment. It is likely that the individuals involved studied pictures and written documents about warfare during this period. It would be more important for the historian to study these sources rather than rely on other peoples' interpretation of them.

The problem with source 3 is that it provides few details of the Battle of Hastings. As it was written by a monk in Worcester or York it is highly unlikely that the author was at the battle. The lack of detail suggests that the monk did not even talk to people who were at the battle.

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William of Poitiers (source 8) was in Lisicux, Normandy when the Battle of Hastings took place. However, before writing his book lie interviewed several Normans who took part in the battle. William of Poitiers' book is the most detailed and reliable account that we have of the Battle of Hastings.

Q4: Study sources 2, 3, 4 and 6. Make a list of the reasons why these writers believed that the English lost the Battle of Hastings. Then explain whether you think these reasons are (a) very important, (b) fairly important, or (c) not very important in explaining Harold's defeat.

A4: Source 2 and 6 both suggest that William of Normandy's army outnumbered Harold's soldiers. William of Poitiers claimed that William of Normandy had sixty thousand men in his army and William of Malmesbury points out that the English "were few in number". If this was true, it would be a very important reason why Harold was defeated. However, other sources suggest that the two armies were similar in size. Source 3 argues that William attacked Harold before his men were ready. This claim is not supported by other sources. Even if it was true it would not be very important in explaining Harold's defeat. As the text points out, the English were able to hold their ground during the early stages of the battle. William of Malmesbury claims that Harold and his army were tired when the battle started. He suggests that the reason for this was that the English spent the night drinking and singing. A more important reason for their tiredness is that they had been forced to take part in a fast, long march before the battle started. The English army must have been very tired during the Battle of Hastings and this was an important factor in explaining why they lost to the Normans.