THE LATIN *LIFE OF GRUFFUDD AP CYNAN*, BRITISH KINGDOMS AND THE SCANDINAVIAN PAST

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Abstract

The article examines the representation and purpose of dynastic struggle in the twelfth-century Latin *Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan*. Understudied despite the publication of Paul Russell's edition (2005), the *Vita Griffini Filii Conani* remains a missing piece of a larger puzzle: the flourishing of Latin historical writing in eleventh- and twelfth-century Britain and northern Europe. This article sets the *Vita* in its wider British and European context, and assesses the significance of Gruffudd's Scandinavian heritage against the realities of political experience. It argues that the *Vita*'s portrayal of dynasty and dynastic conflict, set on the great stage of the North Sea zone, seeks to establish the legitimacy of a ruler who was both an outsider and of Scandinavian descent. The reality of invasion and conquest in the British Isles demanded new Latin histories wherein Scandinavian dynasties could be a key source of legitimacy, and the *Vita* needs to be read as part of this larger discourse.

The twelfth-century Latin *Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan*, which was later translated into Welsh, presents us with a unique perspective on the past.[1] It tells the story of Gruffudd (d. 1137), who claimed kingship of Gwynedd in 1075 and established it again in 1081; his rule was soon afterwards interrupted when the Normans imprisoned him for over a decade. As Gruffudd sought to claim and to reclaim his right to rule in Gwynedd, he faced treachery within, opposition from the south, battles with rival Welsh lords, and Norman incursions. What is intriguing about the *Life* is that it looks back on the Norman invasions of both Wales and England, and hence offers insights into perceived differences between the kingdoms of Gwynedd and England—and into perceived similarities between the two as British kingdoms in a wider Scandinavian sphere of influence.

Gruffudd himself proved a conundrum to Latin writers of his life[2] because he was born not in Gwynedd, but in Ireland, to parents who traced their descent from royal lines in

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[1] The edition of the Latin life is *Vita Griffini Filii Conani: The Medieval Latin Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan*, ed. and trans. Paul Russell (Cardiff, 2006) (hereafter cited as *Vita Griffini*); the edition of the Welsh translation is *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan*, ed. D. Simon Evans (Cardiff, 1977). I wish to thank David Hook, Chris Lewis and Huw Pryce for their editorial advice and historical insights.

[2] E.g. the author of the *Vita Griffini*, and Orderic Vitalis, who was well informed about Gruffudd's activities in north Wales: *The* Ecclesiastical History *of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall, 6 vols (Oxford, 1969–80), VI, pp. 134–47. Orderic was also well versed in earlier Welsh history and the Norman presence in north Wales: e.g. on Shropshire and Shrewsbury: II, pp. 228–9; Wales and Anglo-Saxon England, II, pp. 138–9, 216–17; William I's aggression against the Welsh in the marches, II, pp. 234–5, 260–3; the Welsh as the historic Britons, II, pp. 276–7. See also Marjorie Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis*

Wales, Ireland and Denmark. Gruffudd's reputation as a Welsh king was vulnerable on two fronts. First, the king had to claim his own inheritance by conquest in Gwynedd, because his father, Cynan, was an exile in Ireland and had not been king of Gwynedd, or indeed of anywhere else. On Gruffudd's paternal side, the author of the *Vita Griffini* justified the conquest on the basis that Gruffudd's grandfather and earlier ancestors had been kings of Gwynedd. Second, Gruffudd's biographer had to defend the merits of these more remote royal lines against the continental and Norman descent of England's Anglo-Norman kings—a key argument of this article. A Welsh and Anglo-Norman audience is very likely because Gruffudd owed his advancement and preferment in part to the Normans, ultimately becoming a client of Henry I: first through conflict and then through alliance, there existed an ongoing relationship of competition.[3] Scandinavian ancestry and history offered precedents for Gruffudd's legitimacy—and they provided common ground on which to meet the Normans as equals. Through clever writing, the author defended Gruffudd's dynasty and legitimacy against the imposing record of Norman onslaught. The author sought to move Gruffudd's reputation to the forefront, to lodge it in Wales, and to set it on equal footing with that of the Normans.

Eleventh- and early twelfth-century Wales faced internal troubles because of crises of kingship. In the eleventh century, no dynasty was clearly dominant, and most kings had seized the throne from other kings, while from the last decades of the century Norman invasions threatened from the east: the Normans attacked Gwynedd from the 1070s,

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(Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 4–13; C. P. Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan and the Normans', in K. L. Maund (ed.), *Gruffudd ap Cynan: A Collaborative Biography* (Woodbridge, 1996), pp. 61–77 (pp. 64, 70–1).

[3] See below, Lewis, [**xref**].

conquered Dyfed, Ceredigion and Brycheiniog in 1093, and by 1100 had established themselves as potentially powerful allies—but, equally, as a serious threat.[4] The same threat of conquest was also true of eleventh- and early twelfth-century England: not only was England twice conquered in the eleventh century—by the Danes in 1016, and the Normans in 1066—but the loss of William Adelin, the heir to the throne, in a tragic shipwreck in 1120 led to a succession dispute which resulted in civil war. Twelfth-century historical writing in the British Isles reflects these crises of rule, as is evident in these writers' growing interest in alternative dynastic claims to Britain's thrones. I have argued elsewhere that these crises prompted alternate avenues of legitimation, especially after the House of Cerdic's monopoly on English kingship vanished in the eleventh century.[5] There are important links with the situation in Wales, because twelfth-century historical writing across borders in the British Isles appealed to new criteria for kingship in light of changing circumstances. In the decades following the Norman Conquest of England in 1066, further upheaval, rupture and change spread through the British Isles. After the Normans conquered England, they won several victories over the Welsh, Irish and Scottish. These dynastic shifts challenged existing ideas about—and expectations for—regional kingships and perceptions of dynasties in the British Isles.

The way in which our author chooses to render Gruffudd's ascent to power in writing underlines the changing dynastic claims in the British Isles, because the *Vita Griffini* appeals

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[4] See e.g. Wendy Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982), pp. 121–40; T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 254–5; Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan and the Normans', e.g. at pp. 61, 67.

[5] Emily A. Winkler, 'England's defending kings in twelfth-century historical writing', *Haskins Society Journal*, 25 (2013), 147–63.

to new models and rationales, reconciling them with existing expectations for kingship so as to assert the worthiness of Gruffudd's dynasty. In order to elucidate these narrative strategies, I will examine three kinds of narrative rendering: that of an idea, a story, and an event. First, the idea is that of time and space. The author represents time itself in a manner which favours Gruffudd's legitimacy as a uniquely distinguished king in Britain: he chooses to emphasize the import of the end points in time rather than the beginnings, and he highlights the duration of his ancestors' and relatives' rule, rather than its limitation. Second, the story is that of Gruffudd's initial bid for the kingship of Gwynedd. The author was aware of the dangers inherent in both Norman alliances and incursions, and sought to represent a Gwynedd, distinct from Norman England, with a distinguished king: he establishes Gruffudd's legitimacy by emphasizing the narrative of his genealogy on the Scandinavian side in order to imply comparable legitimacy with the Norman kings of England. Third, the event is the Norman Conquest of England. In discussing this event and the Norman incursions in Wales, the author shows respect for the shared Scandinavian royal heritage of the Norman kings and Gruffudd. But by rendering the Normans not as a dynasty of their own, but rather as a minor offshoot of the Danish royal line, the author alters the significance of this event against the backdrop of British history, minimizing its importance relative to events in Wales and comparing the Norman kings with Gruffudd on the basis not of disparity, but of what they share: Scandinavian ancestry.

My present purpose will be to compare how the *Vita Griffini* represents the Danish and Norman dynasties—and their conflicts with the peoples of Britain—in service of new historical projects. For this reason, I am primarily concerned with the *Vita Griffini*'s references to events which occurred before Gruffudd's arrival in Gwynedd. Our author's stories about Gruffudd's parents and ancestors function not purely as genealogies, but as the narrative foundation for Gruffudd's claim. In Gruffudd's matrilineal genealogies in Chapters

2, 4, 5 and 6, the author does two important things: first, he highlights that many of Gruffudd's maternal ancestors were kings (and that they were recognized as such during their lifetimes); second, he includes bits of narrative—miniature *res gestae* that illustrate the deeds and accomplishments of these regal ancestors. Of all Gruffudd's ancestors in the patrilineal genealogy in Chapter 3, on the other hand, only Cunedda is named 'King' ('Cunedae regis'), and no deeds are reported.[6] This latter style is not surprising for a Welsh genealogy, but what is important is that the author uses different styles of genealogical argument to stress why Gruffudd is uniquely qualified to be the legitimate king of Gwynedd—and leans heavily on the former. Ultimately, the author's narrative strategies in rendering ideas, stories and events permit Gruffudd to emerge as an important king in Britain in his own right—principally because of his northern heritage and his ancestors' kingworthy exploits.

The *Vita Griffini* is not only a biography of a king of Gwynedd, or even of a Welsh king. The contention of this article is that it is a biography of a reigning king of Danish extraction in the British Isles. The stage on which the *Vita Griffini*'s author sets the action of his narrative (and argues for Gruffudd's legitimacy) is a grander one than that of contemporary Welsh politics: it is the great stage of the North Sea, which extends back into the Scandinavian past. The particular Scandinavian past of interest to our author was one in which Scandinavian royal opportunism contributed to royal legitimacy and status in Britain. Although the non-Welsh aspects of Gruffudd's lineage have long been highlighted,[7] they deserve further scrutiny and are as important as the Welsh material *if not more so* to the author's case. The *Vita Griffini*'s author was not only historically informed, but was also self-

[6] *Vita Griffini*, cc. 2–6, pp. 52–9.

[7] E.g. most comprehensively by David E. Thornton, 'The genealogy of Gruffudd ap Cynan', in Maund (ed.), *Gruffudd ap Cynan*, pp. 79–108.

conscious about Britain's place in the wider world, including the continent and in particular the North Sea and Irish Sea zones.[8] The framework underlying this bid for Gruffudd's legitimacy is not Welsh dynastic politics alone, nor the political expediency of dealing with the Norman kings of England in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but rather the Scandinavian royal opportunism which underpinned and connected royal claims in the British Isles.

The *Vita Griffini*'s place of writing is unknown, and disputed. Russell suggests that the *Vita Griffini* was a product of St Davids, on the basis of the text's use of Cambrian terms—the author far prefers *Cambri* and *Cambria* to *Wallenses* and *Wallia* for 'Welsh' and 'Wales', respectively, which Russell finds consistent with Huw Pryce's argument that St Davids tended to employ Cambrian terminology—and on the basis of a comparison with terminology in the later Welsh version.[9] Nevertheless, the later version's overt Venedotian vantage point, and high level of detail, should not overshadow the more understated, but no less present, northern perspective of the original Latin.[10] Because it might have been dangerous to write a more overtly patriotic text in Gwynedd in the mid-twelfth century, given Gwynedd's close relationship with the Anglo-Norman leadership, a writer in Gwynedd in the

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[8] The author was very knowledgeable about Irish kings: see F. J. Byrne, 'Ireland and her neighbours, *c*. 1014–*c*. 1072', in Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (ed.), *A New History of Ireland. I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 862–98 (p. 863); Seán Duffy, 'Ostmen, Irish and Welsh in the eleventh century', *Peritia*, 9 (1995), 378–96, esp. 390–4.

[9] *Vita Griffini*, ed. Russell, pp. 43–5; see also Huw Pryce, 'British or Welsh? National identity in twelfth-century Wales', *English Historical Review*, 116 (2001), 775–801.

[10] Cf. David Stephenson, 'The "resurgence" of Powys in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 30 (2007), 182–95 (183–4).

second quarter of the twelfth century might well have moderated his discussion of the Normans on account of the uneasy peace between England and Gwynedd, and this relationship could have affected terminological choices, as Owain Jones suggests is the case for the 'Llanbadarn History', a continuous narrative of the Norman incursions into Wales during the years 1100–1127—the Norman occupation of Ceredigion—written after the fact, and included in *Brut y Tywysogion*.[11] The *Vita Griffini* is also less critical of the Danes than the later Welsh version, which could be evidence of the author's openness towards Scandinavian traditions and Gruffudd's own heritage.[12] The *Vita Griffini* draws on a range of traditions, but with clear loyalties to Gwynedd and Gruffudd's dynasty. I would thus tend to agree with Evans that the author was based in Gwynedd.[13]

The author's audience is also, as Lewis has remarked, a 'mystery';[14] but there is reason to believe that the author was ambitious as far as the text's reach. As I will show, the *Vita Griffini*'s political loyalties lie firmly in north Wales, and its argument is constructed directly to contest laws and practices in Wales which did not recognize Gruffudd's claim. Yet the *Vita Griffini*'s stylistic range and content also indicate a keen engagement with literary

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[11] On the *Brut*'s muted tone towards the Normans, see Owain Wyn Jones, '*Brut y Tywysogion*: the history of the princes and twelfth-century Cambro-Latin historical writing', *Haskins Society Journal*, 26 (2015), 209–27, esp. at 217 ff.; Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan and the Normans'; discussed also below, [**xref**]; cf. Pryce, 'British or Welsh?'.

[12] E.g. *Vita Griffini*, c. 15, pp. 66–7, and notes at pp. 144–5.

[13] Cf. *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan*, ed. Evans, p. ccxlix.

[14] C. P. Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan and the reality and representation of exile', in Laura Napran and Elisabeth M. C. van Houts (eds), *Exile in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2004), pp. 39–51 (p. 50).

traditions from Wales, the British Isles, Scandinavia and the continent. The author deliberately sought to join the wider conversation of Latin panegyric and Christian moralistic writing: he seeks to recount Gruffudd's great deeds ('res gestas operaque magnifica'), and to do so in the manner of the ancients ('antiquorum more') under Christ's guidance, comparing Gruffudd's victories and setbacks to those of Machabaeus, Caesar and Arthur.[15] And, as we will see, the author interacts with the political scene in England and with Scandinavian-inspired stories of kings and heritage. In addition to the pragmatic need to make a political and dynastic argument within Wales, the author perhaps had a literary motive as well: to share his hero's story with anyone in this northern European world who was willing to listen. As Brian Golding has shown recently, Gruffudd was a political and religious patron, with power and influence outside the borders of Gwynedd in Shrewsbury. The career of King David I of Scotland—from his alliances with the Anglo-Normans, to his bids for influence south of the Scottish border, to his renown outside of Scotland during and after his own lifetime—is a case in point showing that such wider connections were indeed forged, and could be maintained.[16]

[15] *Vita Griffini*, cc. 8, 14, pp. 58–9, 64–7; K. L. Maund, '"Gruffudd, grandson of Iago": *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan* and the construction of legitimacy', in Maund (ed.), *Gruffudd ap Cynan*, pp. 109–16, esp. pp. 114–15.

[16] See e.g. Judith Green, 'Anglo-Scottish relations, 1066–1174', in Michael Jones and Malcolm Vale (eds), *England and her Neighbours: Essays in Honour of Pierre Chaplais* (London, 1989), pp. 53–72; Joanna Huntingdon, 'David of Scotland: *virum tam necessarium mundo*', in Steve Boardman et al. (eds.), *Saints' Cults in the Celtic World* (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 130–45; Brian Golding, 'Piety, politics, and plunder across the Anglo-Welsh

To make a case for kingship to an educated audience in Wales, the author had to do three important things. First, he had to stress Gruffudd's royal status. Welsh kings were expected to be defenders and conquerors, powerful and efficient—but above all legitimate. By the ninth century, kings were expected to be sons of kings, members of royal families. To this end our author includes as much royal heritage for Gruffudd as possible, seeking to end each miniature genealogy with a male, reigning king.[17] Second, he had to show why Gwynedd was Gruffudd's alone, and why it could not belong to his competitors for the throne. As Smith has argued, the laws and practices of Wales in the central Middle Ages indicate that rulers at least valued a tradition of impartible succession (even if they did not always adhere to it), whereby there could only be a single heir to the throne and the kingdom could not be divided. In practice, this meant that disputes within a dynasty in Wales did not concern who would obtain which part of the kingdom, but rather who would secure the whole kingdom for himself and his direct descendants.[18] For the *Vita Griffini*'s Welsh audience,

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frontier', in Emilia Jamroziak and Karen Stöber (eds), *Monasteries on the Borders of Europe: Conflict and Cultural Interaction* (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 19–48 (pp. 32 ff.).

[17] Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 121–5; Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, pp. 220–4; Nia M. W. Powell, 'Genealogical narratives and kingship in medieval Wales', in R. L. Radulescu and E. D. Kennedy (eds), *Broken Lines: Genealogical Literature in Late-Medieval Britain and France* (Turnhout, 2008), pp. 175–204 (p. 176).

[18] There were nevertheless divided ideas about which contender would get which part: see J. Beverley Smith, 'The succession to Welsh princely inheritance: the evidence reconsidered', in R. R. Davies (ed.), *The British Isles, 1100–1500: Comparisons, Contrasts and Connections* (Edinburgh, 1988), pp. 64–81, esp. pp. 66–7; see also T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Dynastic succession in early medieval Wales', in R. A. Griffiths and P. R. Schofield (eds), *Wales and*

then, it was important to represent Gruffudd not just as an eligible heir, but as the sole heir to the throne.

The problem was compounded by the absence of both Gruffudd and his father from Gwynedd, for the third thing the author had to do, at least for a Welsh audience, was to highlight continuity in the reigns of Gruffudd's ancestors. By the early thirteenth century, Welsh lawyers held that the successor to a king should belong to the latter's close kinsmen, defined as the king's son, brother and/or nephew,[19] a point consistent with the tradition of impartible succession. Because Gruffudd's father Cynan had never ruled in Wales, Gruffudd would have been ineligible for rule in Welsh eyes. As Byrne has observed, Gruffudd would likely have been dismissed as an 'Irish impostor' had he not been successful, as other unsuccessful Irish invaders were;[20] even recently, Gruffudd ap Cynan has been deemed 'a pretender'.[21] Cynan was never king in Gwynedd, and Gruffudd was born in exile. Indeed, in its first reference to Gruffudd, *Brut y Tywysogion* calls Gruffudd 'grandson of Iago', because this was the only valid basis for his claim in Wales: his grandfather, not his father, had ruled in Gwynedd.[22]

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the Welsh in the Middle Ages (Cardiff, 2011), pp. 70–88; J. Beverley Smith, 'Dynastic succession in medieval Wales', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 33 (1986), 199–232.

[19] Smith, 'Dynastic succession', 201–2.

[20] Byrne, 'Ireland and her neighbours', p. 864.

[21] John Reuben Davies, 'Cathedrals and the cult of saints in eleventh- and twelfth-century Wales', in Paul Dalton et al. (eds), *Cathedrals, Communities and Conflict in the Anglo-Norman World* (Woodbridge, 2011), pp. 99–115 (p. 100).

[22] *Brut y Tywysogyon, or, The Chronicle of the Princes, Peniarth MS. 20 Version*, trans. Thomas Jones (Cardiff, 1952), p. 16; see also Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh*

Our author hides these facts by calling Cynan king, and by avoiding mention of the term 'exile'.[23] These claims might suffice for an audience that was only Welsh, in a Wales now unequivocally ruled by Gruffudd's descendants. But the author of the *Vita Griffini* had grander pretensions for Gruffudd: Gruffudd was not only the legitimate Welsh king, but also a royal equal to the Norman kings in Britain and an impressive king in the northern world. To make these wider appeals—and perhaps to a wider twelfth-century audience in the British Isles—the author of the *Vita Griffini* had to show why Gruffudd was worthy for kingship on different grounds than Welsh criteria alone. He does so primarily by recourse to Gruffudd's Scandinavian ancestors on his mother's side and their royal exploits.

It has been suggested that Gruffudd's father's genealogy was more important than Gruffudd's mother's genealogy in the author's legitimizing project.[24] The author uses Gruffudd's mother's heritage only to prove her descent from royal fathers:[25] noble female ancestors in the distant past, or a royal line originating with a woman, would not apparently have advanced the author's case. However, the author's choice to look forward—from the past, to Gruffudd's—helped to enhance Gruffudd's royal status. Even more significant, it is

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Kinship, p. 216; but cf. Gruffudd's obituary for 1137, below, n. 75; John Edward Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest* (2nd edn, London, 1912), II, p. 379.

[23] The absence of the theme of exile in the *Vita Griffini* is discussed in Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan and the reality and representation of exile', pp. 39–51.

[24] Thornton, 'The genealogy of Gruffudd ap Cynan', esp. pp. 79–81.

[25] Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, pp. 220–5.

because Gruffudd's mother preserves the oral tradition of Gruffudd's royal heritage that he pursues rule in Gwynedd at all.[26]

Gruffudd's maternal ancestry, although more concise than the paternal, was surely sufficient for the author's purpose: it permitted him to make the point that Gruffudd derived his impressive, royal origins not just from his Welsh heritage, but from the Scandinavian world.[27] Once he had gone far enough into the past to assert that his king's royal heritage originating in the northern world, there was little legitimizing capital to be gained by adding earlier generations to the start of the Scandinavian and Irish lines. The author sustains the importance of this Scandinavian genealogy by enhancing the list of ancestors with narratives of their actions.[28] The author uses these genealogical narratives to enhance his case for Gruffudd's legitimacy as a king in Britain.

Danish royal heritage was a persuasive way for the author to make the case for Gruffudd's rule for both symbolic and practical reasons. For a *Vita* written to impress in a European, Latin and Christian context, Gruffudd's possession of a Welsh line going back to Adam fulfilled the requisite preconditions for rule. The *Vita Griffini* recognized a classical and biblical past shared with the rest of Europe, and suggested the idea of translation of

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[26] *Vita Griffini* c. 9, pp. 58–9; see also below, [**xref**]; on women's roles in preserving family memory, see Elisabeth van Houts, below, n. 64.

[27] Cf. Maund, '"Gruffudd, grandson of Iago"', esp. at pp. 115–16.

[28] But cf. Thornton, 'The genealogy of Gruffudd ap Cynan', pp. 79–81, for a different interpretation of these narratives: Thornton argues that these narratives indicate special pleading for a lesser genealogy.

empire—*translatio imperii*—from Rome, to more remote regions.[29] However, this line was of minimal importance to the author in claiming Gruffudd's legitimacy for two important reasons. First, Gruffudd's rival Welsh claimants asserted possession of shared heritage: they all claimed descent from the ninth-century Welsh king Rhodri Mawr.[30] Second, to lean too heavily on Gruffudd's heritage in the distant past—and deep in the heart of Christendom—would highlight the distance and remoteness of his Scandinavian and Irish heritage, and the absence of these lines' ability to support his claim in the distant past. But like the authors of Hiberno-Norse saga and history, our author did not see Gruffudd—or indeed, his Scandinavian ancestors—as remote.[31] Hence, the author had to draw on more recent genealogical developments to show why Gruffudd was distinctive, and he had to build an argument on more than genealogy. The author needed to deploy a history of successful bids for rule in the recent past. For Gruffudd ap Cynan, that history was in Scandinavia.

To argue for Gruffudd's legitimacy in Gwynedd based on Danish royal influence reflected practical as well as ideological considerations. Scandinavian conflict and alliance

[29] On this theme generally, see J. G. A. Pocock, 'The historiography of the *translatio imperii*', in his *Barbarism and Religion. III: The First Decline and Fall* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 127–50; Susan Reynolds, 'Medieval *origines gentium* and the community of the realm', *History*, 68 (1983), 375–90.

[30] On the genealogical links to Rhodri Mawr, see Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 122–5; Thornton, 'The genealogy of Gruffudd ap Cynan'.

[31] Cf. Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan and the reality and representation of exile', on the absence of exile in the *Vita Griffini*.

had already proved influential in the fates of kingdoms in the British Isles in the recent past.[32] Scandinavian seafarers were powerful, and they posed a significant challenge to rulers in the British Isles. To secure an alliance with them was helpful—and, at times, necessary—for maintaining rule in the British Isles.

In England, this was certainly the case in the eleventh century. The Danish king Cnut conquered England in 1016, following his father Swein's successful invasion in 1014. In so doing, Cnut overturned the Anglo-Saxon dynasty of Wessex, which was a major dynastic shift: the House of Cerdic had produced a line of kings in what became England since the sixth century.[33] Cnut's Danish dynasty, which was in power in England until the death of his son Harthacnut in 1042, set a precedent for rulers in England who did not belong to the Wessex dynasty—something Harold Godwineson and William of Normandy had in common. Harold was an outsider to this English dynasty, and he could trace his own family heritage to the royal family of Denmark.[34] For these reasons, Ian Howard has suggested that we might do well to speak of Anglo-Danish England in the eleventh century, given the influence of the Danish royal house on English kingship, and the recognition of the legitimacy that such connections could provide. Harald harðráði's Norse invasion in 1066 and the invasion which

[32] See most comprehensively Colmán Etchingham, 'North Wales, Ireland and the Isles: the insular Viking zone', *Peritia*, 15 (2001), 145–87; Clare Downham, 'England and the Irish Sea zone in the eleventh century', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 26 (2003), 55–73.

[33] Alexander R. Rumble, 'Introduction: Cnut in context', in Alexander Rumble (ed.), *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway* (Leicester, 1994), pp. 1–9 (p. 7).

[34] Ian Howard, 'Harold II: a throne-worthy king', in G. R. Owen-Crocker (ed.), *King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 35–52.

Cnut IV of Denmark planned in 1086 both appear to have had royal pretensions,[35] and William of Normandy was himself descended from the Vikings who settled in Normandy. Scandinavian invasion was a very real threat, and the Danish Conquest in particular had shaped new expectations for what an English king could be in the eleventh century.

For Gruffudd in Wales, Scandinavian aid was critical. Gruffudd would not have gotten far against other claimants without the help and authority of royal men from Scandinavia, both during and before his own lifetime. Gruffudd traced his ancestry to the Danish royal house on his mother's side, but both sides of his family had depended historically on Scandinavian support.[36] Gruffudd's great-grandfather, Sitric Silkbeard of Dublin (his mother's father's father), had formed an alliance with King Cnut of Denmark and England; and Gruffudd's paternal grandfather, Iago, appears to have held Anglesey as a grant from Rhydderch ab Iestyn, who in turn held Wales of Cnut as is evident in letters from Cnut and guarantees from Æthelnoth, archbishop of Canterbury.[37] Thus, from our author's

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[35] Etchingham, 'North Wales, Ireland and the Isles', esp. at 152.

[36] See e.g. David Wyatt, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan and the Hiberno-Norse world', ante, 19, 4 (1999), 595–617 (595–6).

[37] *The Text of the Book of Llan Dâv*, ed. J. Gwenogvryn Evans with John Rhys (Oxford, 1893), p. 253; on Cnut establishing himself as ruler of Wales ('Britanniae'), see *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. Alistair Campbell (London, 1949), ii.19, pp. 34–5; see also T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350–1064* (Oxford, 2013), p. 560; Timothy Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great: Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Eleventh Century* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 127 ff.; Benjamin T. Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes: Dynasty, Religion, and Empire in the North Atlantic* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 120–1.

perspective, the Danish royal dynasty supported Gruffudd's claim on both sides of his family: his mother's line gave him royal genealogy and status, and his father's line owed its foothold in Wales in part to Danish influence.

The author's effort to represent the justified expansion of Scandinavian dominion into Wales and Ireland is not just geographical, but temporal—and it culminates in Gruffudd's reign. The *Vita Griffini* reveals the author's awareness of the power of words to render time and space in writing in ways which make both appear to exist under the authority of Gruffudd's Danish ancestor. Paul Russell has commented on the author's 'very competent Latinity', and has suggested that the author's simple, straightforward approach to Latin composition produced a 'strong, powerful narrative'. He calls particular attention to the author's preference for a paratactic structure rather than subordinate clauses, which suggests a sense of rapidity and action in Gruffudd's accession[38]—precisely the ideas the author wishes to render in prose. Indeed, as discussed below, when the author does use a subordinate clause, it is to downplay other rulers in comparison with Gruffudd, as part of his case for the parity of Welsh rule with Norman rule in Britain.

The author claims that Gruffudd's mother's father, Olaf, descended in a direct paternal line from Harald Haarfagr, son of the unnamed king of Denmark.[39] This Harald may be the Norwegian king Haraldr hárfagri (also known as Harald Finehair) who lived at the turn of the tenth century. However, as Jesch and Sawyer have noted, insular historians often could not distinguish between Haraldr hárfagri and the eleventh-century king Haraldr harðráði, who invaded England and died at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066. Jesch maintains that in the twelfth century, Norse historical writing and skaldic verse began to give both Haralds the

[38] *Vita Griffini*, pp. 35–41.

[39] *Vita Griffini* c. 4, pp. 55–6.

name ‘hárfagri’, as part of a project to link the two Norse royal lines.[40] This project was to a degree effective in the British Isles, for Anglo-Norman historians John of Worcester and Orderic were obviously interested in the Norse genealogy, and both conflated the Haralds. The author of the *Vita Griffini* appears to have taken the link one step further: he connects the Norse kings with the Danish royal house to create a single, impressive Scandinavian dynasty to which Gruffudd traces his ancestry. In this way, the *Vita Griffini* shares in the genealogical perceptions of his contemporaries British Isles, and perhaps even in a twelfth-century Hiberno-Norse genealogical project.

According to the author, the unnamed Danish king was the shared royal ancestor of both Gruffudd and the Normans ruling in England. The career of our author’s Harald was important because it was in Harald’s generation, the author maintains, that the Danish royal line split into the two major lines still in power in Britain. According to the *Vita Griffini*, Harald’s brother Rodolphus (better known as Rollo, who conquered Normandy in 911) was the ancestor of the Norman dukes. Rollo was certainly Scandinavian, but traditions differ as to whether he was Norse or Danish,[41] and the evidence is inconclusive. Our author may have

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[40] Judith Jesch, ‘Norse historical traditions and the *Historia Gruffud vab Kenan*: Magnús Berfœtter and Haraldr Hárfagri’, in Maund (ed.), *Gruffudd ap Cynan*, pp. 117–47 (pp. 119, 136–44); Peter H. Sawyer, ‘Harald Fairhair and the British Isles’, in Régis Boyer (ed.), *Les Vikings et leur civilisation* (Paris, 1976), pp. 105–9. For a discussion of the order and origins of the epithets for the Haralds, see Jesch, *passim*.

[41] For Rollo as a Danish prince—the son of one who ruled nearly ‘the whole kingdom of Dacia’—see *Dudo of St Quentin: History of the Normans*, ed. and trans. Eric Christiansen (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 25–6. The *Historia Norvegiae* claims that Rollo was a member of the Norse king Harald Finehair’s band that conquered the Orkney Islands, before Rollo

found it more convenient to represent Gruffudd and the Norman kings with common Scandinavian ancestors to assert a kind of agnatic equality with the Normans on British soil; at a minimum, his conclusions reflect the conflated Scandinavian genealogies which were developing in twelfth-century narratives of the North Sea and Irish Sea zones. Because our author claimed Harald as Gruffudd's direct ancestor, it was important to represent him as regal and powerful. Scandinavian royal heritage and success were the essential ingredients in asserting Gruffudd's superiority over both Welsh contenders for Gwynedd, and parity with the Norman kings of England.

The author of the *Vita Griffini* uses verbs in the imperfect tense to convey a sense of great but indefinite duration of Harald's reign, smoothing over the abrupt temporal edges of conquest:

> He [Harald Haarfagr] *was indeed building* the city of Dublin and other cities, and castles and forts where now he had settled confirmed in the possession of this kingdom … But Harald himself *was ruling* over the whole of Ireland and all the islands of Denmark …[42] [emphasis added]

captured Rouen and became count of Normandy: *Historia Norwegie*, ed. Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen, trans. Peter Fisher (Copenhagen, 2003), vi, pp. 66–9.

[42] 'Ipse vero civitatem Dublinensem aliasque civitates, castella atque presidia *edificabat*, ubi iam in huius regni possessione confirmatus acquieverat … At ipse Haraldus totam Hyberniam insulasque cunctas Daniae *regebat* …': *Vita Griffini* c. 5, pp. 56–7.

Harald was not 'beginning' to do these things:[43] rather, he was doing them. The author does not proffer starting and end points to Harald's reign, which would unequivocally denote in writing that his hegemony had a fixed term.[44] The absence of dates is not necessarily a factor of genre: other twelfth-century narratives in Britain include dates, and our author could have used the perfect tense to imply fixed start and end dates. The past may as well be the present, at least as far as Harald's importance for Gruffudd's claim.

Another linguistic strategy the author employs is the use of universals to highlight the spatial extent of Harald's power. Harald was ruling over 'the whole' of Ireland and 'all' Danish islands. Earlier, the author emphasizes that Harald 'had crossed the whole of Ireland' in his conquering raids,[45] a point noteworthy because Viking raids often tended to stay on the coasts. The author is keen to highlight the *royal* and *conquering* nature of these raids: these are not chaotic, violent Danes skimming the coasts of Ireland and escaping, but a royal project of conquest wherein a king's son sought, successfully, to expand his dominion.

The author is going into the past not merely to trace Gruffudd's origins, but to expand both the duration and dominion of Gruffudd's ancestors. Essentially, he blurs the boundaries of Scandinavian hegemony such that his narrative imposes no limits on rule. This is a similar strategy to the one which Geoffrey of Monmouth uses to create the appearance that the Britons (Welsh) held hegemony in Britain for two centuries after the Anglo-Saxon invasions, as R.W. Leckie has argued.[46] Although the invasions from the continent took place in the

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[43] Cf. Russell's translation, *Vita Griffini*, p. 57.

[44] Cf. the annalistic style of the *Brut y Tywysogion* and the *Annales Cambriae*.

[45] 'totamque Hiberniam pertransierat': *Vita Griffini* c. 5, pp. 54–5.

[46] R. W. Leckie, Jr., *The Passage of Dominion: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Periodization of Insular History in the Twelfth Century* (Toronto, 1981).

fifth century, Geoffrey stresses not dates, but rather the personal authority and royal character of the Britons, minimizing the appearance of Anglo-Saxon influence and thereby deferring the 'passage of dominion'. Indeed, it is likely that our author knew Geoffrey of Monmouth, and was perhaps inspired by his narrative strategies.[47] The author of the *Vita* emphasizes Scandinavian dominion in Ireland, without suggesting that at any specific point it passed to—or away from—Gruffudd's ancestors. Equally as useful here as the concept of 'the passage of dominion', then, is the narrative strategy of expanding dominion—to give a broader, almost limitless geographic and temporal foundation to Gruffudd's royal status.

It is commonly acknowledged that, in medieval Europe, peoples and kings competed for prestige by claiming impressive origins from biblical figures and the heroes of Troy.[48] These peoples' historians wrote origin myths into their dynastic histories to gain a competitive edge over other peoples and kingdoms. Yet the *Vita Griffini* dealt with dynastic conflict not only by constructing 'origin myths', but also by creating what it may be useful to call 'destination myths'. As important as the derivation of Gruffudd's legitimacy were his ancestors' doings: their intentions, their direction, their motivations. In this narrative, the word 'tandem' matters as much as 'origines'. The author constructed his case for a king's legitimacy based not just upon the fixed nouns of origins, but upon the adverbial manner in which a dynasty achieves power and distinction.

Gruffudd's origins are certainly important to the narrator of his life, but the impressive origins which mark his reign as special derive specifically from the northern world, not from the continental, Roman, biblical or even Welsh past. To claim royal status from the northern world would mean overcoming the Vikings' reputation for aimless raiding,

[47] Thornton, 'The genealogy of Gruffudd ap Cynan', pp. 79–82, 86–7, 93, 102.

[48] See e.g. Reynolds, 'Medieval *origines gentium*'.

their pagan origins, and the distance of both Scandinavia and Ireland from the continent. Our author defends his claims against all of these criticisms. The author spends the first part of the *Vita* identifying the deeds and lineage of kings of Ireland and Denmark,[49] presenting them as worthy ancestors for all by enhancing them with stories.[50] When describing Gruffudd's lofty heritage on both sides of his family at the outset of the *Vita*, the author frequently highlights Gruffudd's royal Irish heritage. Irish heritage is important to the narrative not only because it provides Gruffudd with royal status, but because in the end Irish kings prove essential allies in Gruffudd's real-time project of asserting kingship, and they provide a clear link to Scandinavian ancestry.[51] And, as discussed below, there is a distinct Hiberno-Scandinavian dimension to our author's narrative strategies and approaches, which indicate his and Gruffudd's ongoing links with that northern world.[52]

The author anticipates and answers any challenge about the worthiness of the Danes, Gruffudd's maternal ancestors, by lauding their victories in conquest and their impressive piety. In recounting the deeds of three sons of the Danish king—Harald (named Gruffudd's ancestor), Rodolphus and an unnamed third—our author ensures that the reader notices that they end up in Ireland: 'And this should not seem to be overlooked: that those three brothers travelled far and wide over the sea with their fleet, fitted out very well in the royal manner,

[49] *Vita Griffini*, c. 1–7, pp. 52–9.

[50] But cf. Thornton, 'The genealogy of Gruffudd ap Cynan', who suggests that the stories reflect the minor side of Gruffudd's heritage, as opposed to the Welsh side.

[51] E.g. *Vita Griffini*, c. 5, pp. 54–7.

[52] Below, [**xref**].

and *in the end* came to Ireland.'[53] Ireland is the end of the voyage, important because it will be Gruffudd's birthplace; and, as a focal point and the ultimate destination, it cannot be peripheral.

This short sentence reveals two key points about the author's priorities. First, rather than describing the Danish as aimless, or as given to surprise attacks and raids, the author renders the journey of the Danish fleet as a directed spread of royal dominion.[54] Although not kings themselves, the brothers herald the coming of a king through their clear direction and their achievements on behalf of their dynasty. Second, the author is less interested in the Danes' origins or place of origin than in what they do and where they end up: Ireland, the place of Gruffudd's birth. Even in this brief narrative, the writer's working of words and their sense of direction contribute directly to the image of dynasty and dynastic conflict which the *Vita* seeks to represent. For this writer, dynastic history becomes not a fount of impressive origins, but rather a progression to worthiness. The Danes' directed expansion across the sea augments the case for Gruffudd's impressiveness.

Because the *Vita* could not argue for Gruffudd's legitimacy solely based on existing frameworks for legitimate kingship in Wales, our author had to seek alternate means of justifying Gruffudd's rule. The *Vita* narrates the realization of ideas as actions. Our author emphasizes the direction of Gruffudd's life and the end results of his decisions—actions and

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[53] 'Neque hoc praetereundum videtur, tres istos fratres mari longe lateque perlustrasse cum classe regio more instructissima, ac *tandem* in Hyberniam pervenisse.' *Vita Griffini*, c. 5, pp. 54–5. Emphasis added.

[54] This is an interesting contrast with the reality that Danish kingship at the turn of the tenth century had weakened: see e.g. Birgit and Peter Sawyer, *Medieval Scandinavia: From Conversion to Reformation, c. 800–1500* (Minneapolis, 1993), pp. 53–7, esp. p. 54.

intentions—rather than on his entitlement to rule by origins alone. This is most evident in Chapter 9, which recounts Gruffudd's upbringing in Ireland:

> And so when Gruffudd was already cultivated in his habits, brought up most gently, he was spending the years of his youth in his mother's home and among his relatives, his mother would often recount to him what kind of a man his father had been, and how great he had been, how rich his realm, and how famous a kingdom was owed to him, and also how cruel a tyrant now held it. Upset by these words, he would often turn these things over sadly in his mind, and *in the end* he set out to the court of king Murchadh, and set his most serious complaints before him and the other kings of Ireland, showing that a foreign people were ruling over his paternal inheritance, and seeking humbly that they should help him in providing auxiliary forces by which he might regain it even by force of arms.[55]

[55] 'Cum itaque iam Gruffinus moribus esset excultus enutritus tenerrime, et adolescentiae annos attingeret materna in domo interque cognatos, saepe illi solebat mater referre qualis, quantus eius pater extiterat, quam ampla<>, quamque celebre regnum debebatur, atque etiam quam crudelis iam tyrannus possideret. Quibus ille vocibus anxius, multoties animo subtristi multa secum versabat, *tandem* vero in curiam Murchathi regis profectus, querelas apud eum et reliquos Hyberniae reges <> deposuit gravissimas, monstrando gentem extraneam in eius paternam hereditatem dominari, humiliterque petendo, ut ei auxiliares copias subministrarent, quibus eam vel armis recuperaret. Consensum est in eius subsidium polliceturque quisque opportuno tempore suppetias ferre.' *Vita Griffini* c. 9, pp. 58–9. Emphasis added. The Latin version emphasizes the words for tyrant and cruelty, as opposed to the later Welsh translation. Cf. discussion of William of Poitiers, below, p. **[xref]**.

The chapter concludes as the Irish kings agree to help; Gruffudd thanks both his allies and God. This is Gruffudd's first success in forging an alliance, a strategy which will ultimately help him win rule in Gwynedd.

Gruffudd is as yet far from Gwynedd, his patrilineal inheritance. Yet the 'destination myth' once again arrives in Ireland. Ireland has become a focus for Gruffudd's ancestors and for his own efforts to win his patrimony; here, the author shows that Gruffudd's genealogical and diplomatic links to Ireland are as crucial to the story of his claim in Wales as are Scandinavian links. His background and interactions with foreigners—not only those of Gwynedd—help to make Gruffudd legitimate: where Gruffudd goes, and with whom, is as important as where he is the rightful king.[56] The story of Gruffudd staking his dynastic claim begins, unapologetically, with reminders of Gruffudd's lack of dominion and distance from Gwynedd, and moves towards a decision which will ultimately lead him to victory.

The key turning point in the narrative is this story of how Gruffudd became motivated to seek his destiny. The influence of Gruffudd's mother is paramount: her words are a galvanizing force, the efficient cause which incites him to action.[57] Her role in the *Vita Griffini* is, therefore, more than just a conduit to royal Irish and Scandinavian heritage: her active influence as his mother, and through words spoken aloud, is the single most important motivating factor which inspires Gruffudd to take action, rather than to languish in obscurity. Without his mother to preserve the deeds of his dynasty in her memory, he would have been ignorant of his claim. Indeed, a 'wise' woman also speaks aloud the words of the prophecy

[56] Cf. Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan and the reality and representation of exile'.

[57] The significance of Gruffudd's mother in reminding Gruffudd of patrimony is discussed briefly by Powell, 'Genealogical narratives', p. 187.

which affirm Gruffudd's eventual success in claiming kingship,[58] which further emphasizes the connection our author makes between words spoken and the successful outcome of Gruffudd's bid for rule of Gwynedd.

In the earliest royal biographies of the British Isles we find evidence of the value placed on active maternal support in guiding future kings with words, whether by channelling God's divine will or by lending support to a royal claim with an oral history of the king's heritage. Another Welsh writer, Asser, in his late ninth-century *Life of King Alfred*, relates a similar story of the inspiring and determining influence which a mother's words have on the actions of her son, a future king of Wessex. Asser writes that Alfred's mother, Osburh, showed Alfred and his brothers a book of English poetry, and makes a promise: '"I shall give this book to whichever one of you can learn it the fastest."' Alfred is 'spurred on by these words, or rather by divine inspiration', and he 'immediately took the book from her hand, went to his teacher and learnt it. When it was learnt, he took it back to his mother and recited it.'[59] And indeed, Asser attributes the high quality of Alfred's kingship to his learning and wisdom: 'From the cradle onwards, in spite of all the demands of the present life, it has been the desire for wisdom, more than anything else, together with the nobility of his birth, which

[58] *Vita Griffini*, c. 11, pp. 60–1.

[59] '"Quisquis vestrum discere citius istum codicem possit, dabo illi illum." Qua voce, immo divina inspiratione, instinctus … statim tollens librum de manu sua, magistrum adiit et legit. Quo lecto, matri retulit et recitavit.' *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, ed. William Henry Stevenson (new impression, Oxford, 1959), c. 23, p. 20; translations from *Alfred the Great: Asser's* Life of King Alfred *and Other Contemporary Sources*, ed. and trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 75.

have characterized the nature of his noble mind'.[60] Alfred's mother acts as a conduit for divine inspiration. Her words provide him with a direct incentive to study, and Asser reveals that learning and wisdom made Alfred's reign both distinctive and successful.

Asser's *Life of King Alfred* was available in Wales before our author was writing the *Vita Griffini*,[61] so it is possible that the learned Latinist and author of *Vita Griffini* was familiar with it, as other twelfth-century writers like William of Malmesbury and John of Worcester were. The *Life of King Alfred* is our earliest surviving life of an Anglo-Saxon king, and the *Vita Griffini* the only life written of an eleventh-century (or indeed any medieval) Welsh king.[62] Eleventh- and twelfth-century narratives about kings in the British Isles often turned to insular precedents, and Asser's work is an obvious source thereof. The two works also share earlier Welsh ideas about kingship and the succession—namely, that Alfred and Gruffudd were *the* rightful heirs (as is evident in Asser's naming Alfred *secundarius*), not

[60] 'Cui ab incunabulis ante omnia et cum omnibus praesentis vitae studiis, sapientiae desiderium cum nobilitate generis, nobilis mentis ingenium supplevit': *Asser's Life of King Alfred*, c. 22, ed. Stevenson, pp. 19–20; *Alfred the Great*, trans. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 74–5.

[61] Patrick Sims-Williams, 'The uses of writing in early medieval Wales', in Huw Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 15–38 (p. 23); see also Michael Lapidge and Richard Sharpe, *A Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature, 400–1200* (Dublin, 1985), p. 14; and J. Beverley Smith, 'Historical writing in medieval Wales: the composition of *Brenhinedd y Saesson*', *Studia Celtica* 52 (2008), 55–86 (63–4), for the later *Brenhinedd y Saesson*'s connections to Asser.

[62] Wyatt, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan', 596.

merely eligible for the role; and, that the future king had to prove himself among his kin and companions in order to be successful as a king.[63]

It must be noted that there are no direct verbal parallels between the two texts. Asser's maternal story introduces the distinctive *quality* of Alfred's reign, whereas the *Vita Griffini*'s introduces the distinctive *means* by which Gruffudd became king. Nevertheless, both men had something to overcome—youth and illness for Alfred, distance and treachery for Gruffudd. Asser's story explains Alfred's early inclination towards kingship even though he was not necessarily the obvious or the only choice for the role in his youth. The two accounts share narrative strategies of preparing their subjects to be king, against the odds.

Furthermore, both mothers were responsible for inspiring the interest in learning and memory in their sons, which guided their ambitions and authority as kings. The personal influence of each future king's mother on his education—through storytelling, or encouraging him to read—is explicitly on his mind. It is an influence which may indeed reflect reality: it was the responsibility of early medieval women, especially aristocratic women, to retain dynastic memory themselves, and to inspire their sons to remember and to honour their ancestors, especially on their father's side.[64] There is evidence that women were thought of,

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[63] *Asser's Life of King Alfred,* c. 38, ed. Stevenson, pp. 28–9; see also Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* p. 330.

[64] E.g. Dhuoda, *Manuel pour mon fils,* ed. and trans. Pierre Riché (2nd edn, Paris, 1991), pp. 318–21; for these arguments, see Elisabeth van Houts, 'Introduction: medieval memories', in Elisabeth M. C. van Houts (ed.), *Medieval Memories: Men, Women and the Past, 700–1300* (Harlow, 2001), pp. 2–16, esp. pp. 2–8; Régine Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir dans le monde Franc (VIIe–Xe siècle). Essai d'anthropologie sociale* (Paris, 1995), esp. pp. 31–58; Matthew

and represented, as agents of memory in the northern world as well: in his prologue to *Heimskringla*, Snorri explains that Þuríðr, daughter of Snorri goði, was a woman of intelligence who remembered her father and his stories, and passed on her knowledge to Ari the priest.[65] In the *Life of King Alfred* and the *Vita Griffini*, the mother's words inspire the future king to prepare himself for rule, in the particular way that will characterize his success as a ruler, whether in study (for Alfred) or in seeking allies (for Gruffudd). Both narratives convey the power of words in shaping a king's destiny. In the view of these writers, spoken words move the plot forward, directly towards the ultimate realization of the king's rule.[66] Speaking a thing out loud both foreshadows and causes that event, and the maternal role is essential.

The author shows that Gruffudd proves himself worthy on his own merits, and in comparison with other fellow rulers of Scandinavian descent. In highlighting Gruffudd's and the Normans' common royal Danish ancestor, the author acknowledges the Normans' royal

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Innes, 'Keeping it in the family: women and aristocratic memory, 700–1200', in van Houts (ed.), *Medieval Memories*, pp. 17–35.

[65] E.g. Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. and trans. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London, 2011–), I, p. 5. On the wise woman in *Vita Griffini*, see also Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, 'More written about than writing? Welsh women and the written word', in Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, pp. 149–65, esp. pp. 160–1; on the political and diplomatic roles of aristocratic women in Ireland, see Donncha Ó Corráin, 'Women in early Irish society', in Margaret MacCurtain and Donncha Ó Corráin (eds), *Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension* (Dublin, 1978), pp. 1–13 (pp. 10–11).

[66] For the ongoing debate about the roles of orality and literacy in Wales and Ireland in this period, see Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*.

heritage, but also renders the Norman Conquest of England as little more than a Danish victory in Britain. This permits him to write of Gruffudd as a king in Britain of equal standing to the Norman kings of England, because they share a common ancestor; indeed, as Maund has pointed out, the distinguished exploits of Gruffudd's ancestor Harald in the north imply that the Norman kings belong to the less senior Danish line.[67]

The author accuses the rival Welsh claimants of being tyrants, oppressors, traitors and usurpers because he had to argue that Gruffudd's Welsh competitors had no right to accede to an impartible kingdom.[68] However, the author does not refer to Gruffudd's Norman enemies in the same manner:[69] he refers to the first arrival of the Normans in Wales as *clades* (disaster).[70] This term was used not only to denote divine scourges, but also to suggest punishments for a people from the outside, rather than as a charge against on offender held to

[67] This argument expands and builds on that offered by K. L. Maund about the deliberate dynastic linking between the Normans and Gruffudd: see Maund, '"Gruffudd, grandson of Iago"', pp. 112–14.

[68] *Vita Griffini* refers to Gruffudd's Welsh rivals in several ways: holding rule unjustly and undeservedly, c. 10, pp. 60–1; oppressors, c. 12, pp. 60–1, c. 17, pp. 68–9; Gruffudd's God-given offer to 'purge' the pretenders, c. 12, pp. 62–3; usurpers, c. 12, pp. 62–3; treachery in classical and biblical terms, c. 14, pp. 64–7; betrayers and oppressors, c. 15, pp. 66–7. See also Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, pp. 220–1, 294–7; Smith, 'The succession to Welsh princely inheritance'.

[69] This has also been observed of the Welsh version by Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship*, p. 295.

[70] *Vita Griffini*, c. 16, pp. 66–7.

be within the local king's jurisdiction.[71] The Normans as a collective may be a disaster in the abstract, but the author avoids charging specific Normans in Wales with illegitimacy. Two things probably preserve the Normans from the author's critique: the royal Viking heritage they share with Gruffudd, and still-live political relations between Gwynedd and Norman England at the time of composition.[72]

The *Vita Griffini* diminishes the relative importance of the Norman Conquest in Britain, casting it and Gruffudd's accession as equivalent enterprises in the long-term establishment of Scandinavian hegemony. The story of Gruffudd's ascent to power thereby becomes a tale of comparable Scandinavian royal success in Britain. The Norman kings and Gruffudd are contemporaries and distant kinsmen sharing dynastic origins. The author suggests on these grounds that Gruffudd has achieved parity of status in ruling a kingdom in Britain.

As discussed above, the author describes three Danish brothers—Harald, Rodolphus (Rollo), and a third—and their successes in conquest. Of Rodolphus he writes:

> From this Rodulphus the kings of Normandy, who acquired for themselves the kingdom of England, derived their origin, namely William and his two sons who

[71] Cf. Bede's description of the invading Britons as bringing external disaster: *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), i.12, pp. 44–5.

[72] Discussed below, [**xref**].

> succeeded him in the kingship. And that William, or Rufus, and Henry, and his nephew Stephen, were contemporaries of king Gruffudd.[73]

What is intriguing about this passage is the way in which the author renders the fact of the 'Norman' Conquest in prose—and I use the word 'Norman' in inverted commas, for reasons which will become clear presently. Here, the Norman Conquest is just a relative clause, in a subsidiary role both grammatically and to the narrative of events. The central idea of the sentence is that the kings of Normandy derived their origin from the Danish Rodulphus. The sentence's syntax produces significant telescoping: the author makes England seem fundamentally ruled by Danes, rather than by Normans; what 'happens' in the sentence is that the Normans derive ancestry from the Danish royal house, not that the Normans conquer England. The effect is a narrative feat: the 'Norman' Conquest of England diminishes in comparison to anything which happens in Wales. William the Conqueror's sons and England's future king Stephen are described as contemporaries of Gruffudd. In this regard they are important not primarily because they are kings themselves, but because they are evidence of Gruffudd's noble—and Danish—heritage.

In consigning Norman rule in Britain to a subordinate clause,[74] the author asserts the parity of the Welsh side of a Viking dynasty with the Norman side. For a deft Latinist such as he, this is no coincidence: the more powerful part of the sentence conveys the idea of the

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[73] 'Ab hoc Rodulpho genus deducunt reges Normanniae qui Anglie regnum armis sibi acquisiverunt, scilicet Willhelmus, et filii duo, qui ei in regno constant. At Wilhelmus ille, vel Rufus, Henricus, neposque Stephanus coaetanei regis Griffini fuerant.' *Vita Griffini* c. 5, pp. 56–7.

[74] Cf. the discussion of the author's Latinity, above, p. [**xref**].

more powerful line in prose. It is hardly surprising that this should be the chronicler's goal: he is, after all, writing about Gruffudd, seeking to legitimize him for the present and posterity, just as later writers sought to endorse his dynasty retrospectively.[75] The way in which he does so reveals that he acknowledged Danish kingship as a source of legitimacy. The passage suggests that the author was concerned about the Normans—indeed, they would subsequently invade Gwynedd, as the author goes on to relate. Although Gruffudd successfully turned back these incursions, he still had to rely on their aid at key moments in his career. For instance, Gruffudd made a truce with Henry I, and the two kings negotiated together about both protecting laymen and making ecclesiastical appointments in Wales, including David the Scot of Bangor (d. 1137x1139).[76] The author's anxiety about the future of Welsh relations with the Normans—especially if the *Vita Griffini* was initially written soon after Gruffudd's death in 1137[77]—created a need to narrate the story of the Norman

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[75] Cf. *Brut y Tywysogyon*, trans. Jones, p. 52 (s.a. 1136=1137); Gruffudd's place in royal genealogies was firmly established by the mid-thirteenth century: see e.g. 'Achau Brenhinoedd a Thywysogion Cymru', in P. C. Bartrum (ed.), *Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff, 1966), pp. 95–104; ~~see also ibid., pp. 77–8. {i.e. Welsh Life of Gruffudd, ed. D. S. Evans since Bartrum published – cut?~~ Cf. e.g. the 'Hanes Gruffudd ap Cynan', probably thirteenth-century, ibid., pp. 35–7.}

[76] Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan and the Normans', esp. at pp. 61–2, 72–7; cf. Jones, '*Brut y Tywysogion*', 225–6, for a discussion of *Brut y Tywysogion* taking an ambiguous attitude towards the Normans in the early twelfth century {'Llanbadarn History': cf. above} when? ~~on account~~ because of conflicting alliances and loyalties between the Welsh and the Normans between 1100 and 1127.

[77] See *Vita Griffini*, pp. 46–7.

Conquest of England differently, and to contend with the Norman dynasty in the arena of prose.

If the Welsh *Vita Griffini* saw the Normans as offshoots of the Danish royal line, then how did the Normans see themselves? The *Vita Griffini* is not alone in the primacy it places on Scandinavian kingship as a source of status. The Norman perspective of another royal biographer, William of Poitiers, reveals that even in continental narratives there is evidence of lasting, persisting dynastic competition in royal descendants of Scandinavian conquerors. Here too, the northern past helps a narrative argument aimed at eleventh- and twelfth-century audiences.

William of Poitiers's *Gesta Guillelmi*, written between 1070 and 1077, is similar to the *Vita Griffini* in that it is 'dynastic propagada':[78] it praises the deeds of a conquering king and casts that king as claiming what is rightfully his, albeit on slightly different grounds. William of Poitiers endorses William of Normandy's claim to throne of England by asserting that King Edward the Confessor promised the throne to William, and that Harold Godwineson was a usurper. Both narratives employ elements of panegyric style,[79] including comparisons of their respective heroes to Caesar and biblical kings.[80] The two works share another narrative strategy: both portray their heroes as morally sound and successful descendants of Scandinavian royal houses, in comparison with their contemporary fellow

[78] David Stephenson, 'The "resurgence" of Powys,' 183–4; Emily A. Winkler, 'The Norman Conquest of the classical past: William of Poitiers, language and history', *Journal of Medieval History*, 42 (2016), 456–78.

[79] Maund, 'Gruffudd, grandson of Iago', pp. 114–15; Wyatt, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan', 596.

[80] *Vita Griffini*, c. 14, pp. 64–5; see also Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan and the reality and representation of exile', pp. 45–6.

descendants. William of Poitiers compares William to his predecessor in the conquest of England, Cnut of Denmark. The Danes and the Normans shared Scandinavian ancestry, and their methods of attaining royal rule of England—invasion and conquest—were the same in 1016 and 1066. It was thus important for the chronicler to distinguish William from Cnut: if both were conquerors of Scandinavian descent, why was William a more legitimate ruler for England than Cnut?

William of Poitiers promotes the legitimacy of Norman interests by contrasting William directly with Cnut, and explaining why Cnut and his family are lacking:

> When Cnut lost his life he lost also the English kingdom, which he owed not to others but to his own and his father's conquest. [Cnut's] son Harold obtained his throne and crown, but was unworthy of him because of his love of tyranny . . . Others have written enough about the genealogy of his two brothers and how the Danes seized their inheritance by force.

William of Poitiers does not criticize Cnut and his family because they are Danish, but because of their cruelty in conquest and tyrannical behaviour. He notes that Cnut ruled England only through his and his father's forceful conquest—not through acclamation, lineage or the support of their countrymen—thereby undercutting their royal nature in implying that they were acting without leave or legitimacy. William of Poitiers also negates Cnut's claim to the throne by highlighting the impressive genealogy and legitimacy of the English heirs, calling attention to it through apparent dismissal in claiming that others have

written about it.[81] Scandinavian royalty has value and import for him; otherwise, there would be no need to explain the personal failings and isolated failures of Cnut's immediate family—criticizing them as Danes would have sufficed.

Like the *Vita Griffini*'s Gruffudd, Cnut and William shared a pretension to the throne of a kingdom in Britain and a Scandinavian inheritance. William of Poitiers subsequently compares his two kings' treatment of the English in successive sentences, which is noteworthy because the Danish Conquest of 1016 and the Norman Conquest of 1066 were fifty years apart:

> The noblest of your [i.e. England's] sons, young and old—Cnut the Dane, he slaughtered them with the utmost cruelty, so that he could subject you to his rule and that of his children. This man [William] did not desire the death of Harold. Rather, he wished to increase for him the power of his father Godwine, and give him in marriage to his own daughter, who was worthy to share an emperor's bed, as had been promised.[82]

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[81] '[…] cum uita regnum Anglicum amisit, quod paternae et suae uiolentiae, non aliis, debuit. Coronam eandem cum throno Heraldus obtinuit filius eius, partim ab eo tirannidis in amore degener. … Verum de genealogia horum germanorum, et quod haereditatem eorum Dani inuasione occupauerint, satis alii scripsere.' William of Poitiers, *The* Gesta Guillelmi *of William of Poitiers*, ed. and trans. R. H. C. Davis and M. Chibnall (Oxford, 1998), i.1, pp. 2–3.

[82] 'Nobillisimos tuorum filiorum, iuuenes ac sense, Chunutus Danus trucidauit nimia crudelitate, ut sibi ac leberis suis te subigeret. Hic ne Heraldum uellet occubuisse. Immo uoluit patris Goduini potentiam illi ampliare, et natam suam, imperatoris thalamo

Although Cnut was Danish and William was Norman, William of Poitiers was aware of the more important similarities. Their shared history and genealogical pattern was shared ground for a competition which, in William of Poitiers's view, transcended time. In this regard, his argument has some key similarities with that of the author of the *Vita Griffini*. His main intent here is to contrast the great outrage Cnut inflicted on the English with William's worthy actions on their behalf, thereby justifying his hero's accession. This strategy allows him to present William as the superior of the two descendants of Vikings who successfully sought the English throne in the eleventh century.

The similarities between the *Gesta Guillelmi* and the *Vita Griffini* reflect a shared interest in the Scandinavian past and its implications for present questions about rulers' legitimacy, conquest and status. The reason for these two authors' similar narrative strategies is the ongoing dynastic conflict and competitiveness between branches of the staunchly rooted and ever-growing Viking family tree. Just as the *Vita Griffini* reveals a narrative and dynastic interest in downplaying Gruffudd's ancestral kinsmen the Norman kings of England, so the *Gesta Guillelmi* reveals that same vested interest in downplaying William's kinsmen through Scandinavian descent, the Danish kings of England. William of Poitiers makes moral arguments about the character, choices and actions of Cnut and William to distinguish William as the better ruler of the two—who share both common ancestry and dynastic claims to rule of England.

We have examined three kinds of narration: how the author renders time and space, a genealogical story which emphasizes end results as much as origins, and an event with

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dignissimam, in matrimonium, uti fuerat pollicitus, tradere.' William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, ii.32, pp. 156–7.

important implications for narratives of twelfth-century Britain. Not just one invasion or moment of conquest, but rather the perpetual feeling of upheaval, shaped the way in which eleventh- and twelfth-century writers represented stories about dynasty and dynastic conflict. This conquest-conditioned historical writing permitted new visions of dynasty and dynastic conflict to emerge. The *Vita Griffini* rendered received ideas in new forms, times and places, thereby modifying the traditional vision of *translatio imperii*—the movement of the Roman empire outwards, and the progress of civilization from centre to periphery. The *Vita Griffini* advances a vision wherein two things could be the case. First, the merit of a ruling dynasty could derive from an inherited legacy of ancestors' impressive feats. These ancestors did not have to arise from the continent: Scandinavian and Irish roots were not only a source of impressiveness, but the winning cards in making a case against the Norman efforts to conquer Wales. Second, the case for a ruler's legitimacy acknowledged shared dynastic origins only so far as they would set Gruffudd on a level of equal status with other kings. Gruffudd's ancestors earned their legitimacy; and his mother, above anyone else, inspired him to claim his kingdom.

In responding to conquest and invasion, the *Vita Griffini* belonged to a wider tradition of historical writing in the British Isles.[83] The *Vita Griffini*'s views of kingship in particular—as something which had to be earned through successes—has more in common with Gildas, the sixth-century Brittonic writer who was well known in medieval Wales,[84] England and beyond, than with contemporary Welsh law and practice. Gildas viewed the Britons as the legitimate inheritors of Britain: the author of the *Vita Griffini*, keen to make

[83] Cf. e.g. Jones, '*Brut y Tywysogion*'; Stephenson, 'The "resurgence" of Powys'.

[84] E.g. a possible reference in *Brut y Tywysogyon*, trans. Jones, pp. 25, 162 (s.a. 1101=1103); see also Jones, '*Brut y Tywysogion*', 224–5.

use of available arguments (as Charles-Edwards has noted), also viewed Gruffudd as a native king and thus a rightful heir, even though he was born in Ireland and his father did not rule. Gildas criticized tyrants, as our author condemns Gruffudd's Welsh rivals; for Gildas, tyrannical behaviour was enough to make a person not a king, and this took precedent over any genealogical claims.[85] Twelfth-century narratives in England, including those by Geffrei Gaimar, John of Worcester, Henry of Huntingdon and William of Malmesbury, also developed legitimizing criteria in response to conquest and disruption in the eleventh century: a conquering king could be an English king if he proved himself worthy.[86] Like the author of the *Vita Griffini*, they reevaluate existing dynastic explanations in their respective kingdoms to accommodate the results of dynastic change and conflict in the eleventh century. This insular tradition of responses to invasion may represent more a twelfth-century British phenomenon than either an Anglo-Saxon or Welsh phenomenon.

There is further evidence that our author's stylistic models originated in the British Isles as well as the continent. The *Vita Griffini* shares two characteristics in common with insular romance: society does not necessarily emerge in a positive light, and the story lacks a

[85] Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom (London, 1978), esp. cc. 21, 28–65; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp. 318–37, esp. at pp. 326, 332–5; Davies, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 122; above, comparison with Asser, **[xref]**.

[86] Argued in detail in Emily A. Winkler, *Royal Responsibility in Anglo-Norman Historical Writing* (Oxford, 2017) [in press].

'happy ending'.[87] The Latin *Vita* does not try to obscure civil war, treachery and violence in Gwynedd and among the Welsh kingdoms. The later Welsh translator, on the other hand, frequently elides references to civil conflicts within Wales, which suggests that he had a more nationalistic desire to write a story of Wales as an independent unit against England.[88] Our author did not have a comparable interest in resolving dynastic disputes within Wales. There may have been a 'happy ending' for Gruffudd's descendants, who went on to rule in Wales until 1283, but the author does not invent one for Gruffudd himself. The author of the *Vita Griffini* devotes only about a fifth of the text to the last thirty-seven years of Gruffudd's life, choosing to focus on the years of struggle—and the distinction Gruffudd earned therein—rather than his relatively peaceable relations with Henry I from around 1100.[89] He often retreated to Ireland for strategic reasons, or sailed around Gwynedd seeking points of entry back into his dominion;[90] and, from 1081 to 1093, he was imprisoned in Chester.[91] But it was unimportant to the author that Gruffudd spent relatively little of his life in Gwynedd: his

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[87] See Laura Ashe, '"Exile-and-return" and English law: the Anglo-Saxon inheritance of insular romance', *Literature Compass*, 3 (2006), 300–17; Nerys Ann Jones, '*Historia Gruffud vab Kenan*: the first audience', in Maund (ed.), *Gruffudd ap Cynan*, pp. 149–64 (p. 154).

[88] *Vita Griffini*, pp. 1–50, 125–69.

[89] Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan and the Normans', pp. 72–7; see also R. R. Davies, 'Henry I and Wales', in Henry Mayr-Harting and R. I. Moore (eds), *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. H. C. Davis* (London, 1985), pp. 133–47.

[90] E.g. *Vita Griffini*, cc. 14–15, pp. 64–7.

[91] The *Vita Griffini*, inconsistently, mentions twelve and sixteen years: for twelve, *Vita Griffini*, c. 19; for sixteen, c. 22, pp. 72–3; for a convincing suggestion about reconciling these time frames, see also Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan and the Normans', p. 69.

adventures overcoming obstacles, seafaring exploits and military successes, like those of his Scandinavian ancestors, marked him out as worthy of ruling the kingdom. In these regards, *Vita Griffini* shares in an insular tradition of storytelling which derives from the history of the British Isles—repeated invasion and cross-cultural exchange.

Yet we must further widen the scope of the *Vita Griffini*'s tradition beyond the borders of Britain, into the North Sea and Irish Sea zones. The *Vita Griffini* does not share a third characteristic of insular romance—the exile-and-return narrative—because the author is keen to tell a skaldic story, like that of the *Orkneyinga Saga*, which begins *outside* his hero's homeland: the author is proud of Gruffudd's Scandinavian heritage and the impressive exploits of his northern forebears.[92] As Lewis has observed, the *Vita Griffini* does not refer to Gruffudd as an exile because to do so would hamper his claim to kingship of Gwynedd in Welsh eyes. The lack of this narrative loop—'exile-and-return'—is the more striking in view of the *Vita Griffini*'s emphasis on intention, success and direction in determining worthiness for rule. What is intriguing about the *Vita Griffini* is how the author makes remote places into foci of conquest and legitimacy: they are endpoints of journeys. The *Vita Griffini* is less concerned with Gruffudd's lofty origins, and more with how his ancestors made good use of their royal status, and with how Gruffudd was driven to claim what was his. For Gruffudd, what happens in the end is the significant moment of the story: he secures rule in Gwynedd. The introductory chapters of the *Vita Griffini* are told as though the source of Gruffudd's power is the words and actions of the men and women of the north.[93]

Gruffudd's grandfather's claim may not have been enough to make him king in Wales. But there are a number of intriguing correlations with a Hiberno-Norse tradition of

[92] Unlike the later Welsh translator: see discussion of *Vita Griffini* c. 15, above, [**xref**].

[93] See Lewis, 'Gruffudd ap Cynan and the reality and representation of exile', pp. 46–50.

legitimacy. If we look at *Vita Griffini* as sharing in this tradition, it is possible to explain several elements of structure and literary content of the Latin *Vita Griffini*. One such Hiberno-Norse parallel in the representation of dynasty is the emphasis on comparisons between the lives of the saga subject and his grandfather, rather than his father.[94] In addition, our author discussed the genealogies and activities of the Danish brothers, and compared Gruffudd with the Norman kings, his distant cousins. This indicates the author's strong awareness of and interest in an agnatic line, wherein the heir's brothers were senior to the sons, as was the case among the earls of Orkney. Gruffudd's direct patrilineal descent from his father, which mattered more in north Wales, was of decidedly less importance to our author.[95]

There are tantalizing parallels with with Old Norse saga literature as well. For instance, in the *Vita Griffini* as in skaldic literature, genealogy plays an essential role not just as a legitimating list, but as a plot device in developing the narrative. Other literary echoes, such as those of activity and movement on the sea, are possible. I have stressed the way in which our author emphasizes activity: the seafaring, voyages and movements of Gruffudd and his heirs. Similarly, in the *Orkneyinga Saga*, Sørensen has noted that only the active elements (fire, water and wind, as opposed to earth) appear frequently as literary references,

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[94] E.g. Theodoricus Monachus, *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensum*, ed. David and Ian McDougall (London, 1998), pp. 44–7; *Ágrip af Nóregskonuga sǫgum*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson (Reykyavík, 1985), pp. 44–5; discussed in Jesch, 'Norse historical traditions', pp. 134–9.

[95] See Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, 'The sea, the flame and the wind: the legendary ancestors of the earls of Orkney', in Colleen E. Batey et al. (eds), *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic* (Edinburgh, 1995), pp. 212–21 (pp. 215–17).

which is typical of the literature of a northern seafaring people.[96] The pride in the northern past in the *Vita Griffini* is unmistakeable. It offers further evidence for the connections between the British Isles and the Orkney Islands which Jesch has suggested, and shows too that a skaldic tone is not limited to vernacular writing.

Our foray into two royal biographies suggests that it is worth thinking further about what counted as legitimate dynastic claims for medieval writers—and, indeed, about how these dynasties saw themselves in competition with one another. In the *Vita Griffini*, dynastic identities which we might expect to be important—the Anglo-Saxon dynasty known as the House of Cerdic, or the Norman dynasty founded by Rodolphus (Rollo), even the Welsh dynasty of Rhodri Mawr—are often beside the point. First, they did not provide the most useful support for the author's bid for legitimacy in the face of Welsh and Norman claims to Gwynedd; indeed, critiques of these rivals are personal and character-based, not dynastic. Second, the experience of eleventh-century Britain and Ireland had proved the practical and pragmatic advantage of Scandinavian allies. This history of conflict and diplomatic interaction in the northern world had shown that Scandinavian allies were essential in securing rule, whether they were Olaf in Ireland, Cnut of Denmark and England, or opportunistic Norse and Danish ancestors who conquered, seeking opportunities for their offspring. In the *Vita*, the Danes were significant not only because of who they were—sons of kings—but because of who they became, through noble conquests of great extent and duration, across the sea and through their impressive descendants.

[96] Sørensen, 'The sea, the flame and the wind', pp. 213–15, 218–19. See also Bertie George Charles, *Old Norse Relations with Wales* (Cardif, 1934), pp. 52–88. I am grateful to Charles Insley for his insights on skaldic parallels in the *Vita Griffini*.

The *Vita Griffini* contributes to the growing body of evidence which indicates that pervasive awareness of Scandinavian influence existed in the British Isles in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[97] Even then, writers and their audiences in Britain—and those who, like William of Poitiers, wrote about Britain from Normandy—were thinking as much of 'Anglo-Danish Britain' as they were of Anglo-Saxon England or Welsh kingdoms. The *Vita Griffini* offers clear support for the persistent influence of the Vikings on mentalities in Britain and northern Europe, and in particular for the idea that they could be a source of authority, rather than a challenge to it. Trojan origins may have counted for much symbolically, but destination myths—based on constructed histories of success and directed royal ambition—may have been equally as persuasive to audiences familiar with the realities of conflict and cooperation in the central medieval northern world.

[97] E.g. Downham, 'England and the Irish Sea zone'; Etchingham, 'North Wales, Ireland and the Isles'; Maund, '"Gruffudd, grandson of Iago"'; Howard, 'Harold II'.