

Royal Responsibility  
in Post-Conquest Invasion Narratives

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## PREFACE

In order to meet the word limit it has been necessary to excise three sections of relevant work: first, an introductory chapter on classical and early medieval precedents for thought about kingship; second, the equivalent analysis on the vernacular narrative of Geffrei Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*; third, a part on all the authors' narrative of Edward the Confessor and how this completes their vision of the eleventh century. It is my hope to develop the implications of this excised material in future publications.

Citations of primary sources are, where relevant, cited by intrinsic book and chapter numbers, followed by the volume and corresponding page numbers of the edition. E.g: *GR* ii.177.4, i, 302–3. The goal is to enable efficient comparison with other material that may cite in either or both ways. Translations of primary sources are based on those in the standard editions.

Short references to ASC are used. The different versions are abbreviated according to the standard alphabetical style. E.g.: ASC (D); MS D. Where wording is not sufficiently different between versions to impact the argument, quotations follow a single MS. Dates in JW are bracketed as in the edition.

Biblical references are based on the *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*. References to classical and some medieval works are made accorded to intrinsic book and chapter numbers. Citations of Anglo-Saxon laws are made according to the standard format 'VII Æthelred 1–6' and can be found printed in *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. F. Liebermann (3 vols., Halle, 1903–1916).

Where possible, secondary sources—in particular articles republished in volumes of collected essays—are referenced from the most recent reprints. This is done primarily to highlight the most recent trends of scholarly debates and to consider any revisions (or, indeed, lack thereof) which scholars have made to their own work. Indeed, the story told by the most recent reprint or revision of an essay—and the story told through the paratactic relationship of several essays in a collected volume—are as important to current debates and visions of the past as is an individual essay's specific content.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has been a privilege to spend these years at Oxford and to share in the endeavours of William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon and John of Worcester: writing and thinking about history.

I wish to begin by thanking my supervisors, Chris Wickham and Laura Ashe. Chris has from the very beginning wanted to read more of what I had to say about twelfth-century historians in England, and he has read my writing regularly for nearly five years. I admire his originality and his uncanny ability to ask exactly the right question. Laura asked to co-supervise my doctoral thesis in my Masters year, and since then her exacting comments and critiques have challenged me to work at the highest level. Her intellectual rigour and knowledge continue to inspire me. I would like to express my gratitude to Patrick Healy, who supervised my Masters thesis and co-supervised the first year of my doctoral research, and gave advice which continues to impact my work.

Chris Lewis has read numerous chapter drafts in all stages of writing. His comments and discussion points are always considered and thought-provoking, and his continued encouragement of my work invaluable. Elma Brenner has read drafts of my work and discussed it with me regularly, and I wish to acknowledge her generosity and erudition. I wish to thank Pauline Stafford for her initial suggestion that John of Worcester might be worth investigating, and Adina Roskies for an illuminating discussion about causal and moral responsibility in philosophy. My professors from Dartmouth College continue to be role models in their enthusiasm for research and I would like to thank them for their continued interest in my work.

To my family and friends of Cold River Camp I extend thanks for their continued support, intellectual inspiration, and lively interest in history. Discussions over the campfire about biblical kingship, in the Lodge about rewriting histories of war, and on the trail about the nature of historical argument have all made their way into this thesis.

The fellow delegates of the conferences I have attended regularly over the past few years have invariably encouraged and debated with me. To them I owe thanks for valuable suggestions about books and articles to read, for insightful points to consider, and for their friendship. In particular I wish to thank the communities of the Charles Homer Haskins Society, the Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies, the International

Medieval Congress at Leeds, the Oxford and Cambridge International Chronicles Symposia and the Studentag zum Englischen Mittelalter.

Further thanks go to my students. Working with them has encouraged me to think about how to teach good writing and reminded me to listen to my own guidance. It is rewarding to explore in discussions the intriguing connections between their research and mine.

I would like to thank the friendly and helpful staff of the Bodleian Libraries, the Oxford Union Society Library, the Meyricke Library of Jesus College, the Old Warden's Lodgings Library of Merton College, the Corpus Christi College Library, the British Library, the New York Public Library and the Mount Pleasant Public Library.

There is a final word, in the spirit of a dedication, which I hope will express more than thanks. It was in the shared library of my parents, Mark and Lois Winkler, that the past entranced me from the beginning. History has no advocates more genuine or passionate.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ANS	<i>Anglo-Norman Studies</i>
ASC	<i>Anglo-Saxon Chronicle</i>
ASE	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
Asser, LKA	Asser, <i>Asser's Life of King Alfred: together with the Annals of Saint Neots erroneously ascribed to Asser</i> , ed. W.H. Stevenson, rev. D. Whitelock (Oxford, 1959).
BT	<i>The Bayeux Tapestry</i> , ed. D.M. Wilson (London, 1985).
Byrhtferth, <i>Vita S. Oswaldi</i>	Byrhtferth of Ramsey, <i>Vita S. Oswaldi</i> , ed. J. Raine, <i>Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops</i> (3 vols., London 1879–1894), i, 399–475.
<i>Councils</i>	<i>Councils and Synods, with Other Documents Relating to the English Church. I, A.D. 871–1204</i> , ed. Dorothy Whitelock et al. (Oxford, 1981).
Dyson	Augustine, <i>The City of God against the Pagans</i> , ed. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge, 1998).
Eadmer, <i>Lives</i>	Eadmer of Canterbury, <i>Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald</i> , ed. and trans. A.J. Turner and B.J. Muir (Oxford, 2006).
Eadmer, <i>HN</i>	Eadmer of Canterbury, <i>Historia Novorum in Anglia</i> , ed. M. Rule (London, 1884).
Eadmer, <i>VSD</i>	Eadmer of Canterbury, <i>Vita S. Dunstani</i> , ed. and trans. A.J. Turner and B.J. Muir, <i>Lives and Miracles of Saints Oda, Dunstan, and Oswald</i> (Oxford, 2006), 41–159.
EETS	Early English Text Society
<i>EHD</i>	<i>English Historical Documents, I: c. 500–1042</i> , ed. D. Whitelock, 2nd edn (London, 1996).
<i>EHR</i>	<i>The English Historical Review</i>
<i>Encomium Emmae</i>	<i>Encomium Emmae Reginae</i> , ed. A. Campbell (London, 1949).
Gaimar, <i>EE</i>	Geffrei Gaimar, <i>Estoire des Engleis</i> , ed. and trans. I. Short (Oxford, 2009).
Gildas, <i>De excidio</i>	Gildas, <i>The Ruin of Britain and other works</i> , ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom (London, 1978).
GG	<i>The Gesta Guillelmi of William of Poitiers</i> , ed. and trans. R.H.C. Davis and M. Chibnall (Oxford, 1998).

- GND* *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, ed. and trans. E.M.C. van Houts, (2 vols., Oxford, 1992–1995).
- GP* William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom and R.M. Thomson (2 vols., Oxford, 2007).
- GR* William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (2 vols., Oxford, 1998–1999).
- HA* Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People*, ed. and trans. D. Greenway (Oxford, 1996).
- HE* Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969).
- JS, Policraticus* John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, ed. K.S.B. Keats-Rohan (Turnhout, 1993).
- JW* John of Worcester, *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, ed. R.R. Darlington and P. McGurk, trans. Jennifer Bray and P. McGurk (3 vols. [ii, iii], Oxford, OMT, 1995–).
- Leges Henrici Primi* *Leges Henrici Primi*, ed. and trans. L.J. Downer (Oxford, 1972).
- Liebermann *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. F. Liebermann (3 vols., Halle, 1903–1916).
- LKE* *The Life of King Edward who Rests at Westminster Attributed to a Monk of Saint-Bertin*, ed. and trans. F. Barlow, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1992).
- MEL* P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century. I: Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999).
- MGH* Monumenta Germaniae Historica
- Fontes* *Fontes iuris germanici antiqui in usum scholarum separatim editi*.
- Poet. lat.* *Poetae latini aevi carolini*, ed. E. Dümmler et al. (4 vols., Hannover, 1881–1899).
- SRG* *Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi, Scriptores rerum Germanicarum, nova series*
- Milner *Vegetius: Epitome of Military Science*, trans. N.P. Milner, 2nd rev. edn (Liverpool, 2011), 114–15.

n.s.	new series
o.s.	original series
Osbern, <i>VSD</i>	Osbern of Canterbury, <i>Vita Sancti Dunstani</i> , ed. W. Stubbs, <i>Memorials of St Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury</i> (London, 1874), 69–128.
OV	<i>The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis</i> , ed. and trans. M. Chibnall (6 vols., Oxford, 1969–1980).
<i>Register Gregors VII</i>	<i>Das Register Gregors VII</i> , ed. E. Caspar (MGH, <i>Epistolae selectae ii</i> , 2 vols., Berlin 1920–1923, repr. 1967).
S	<i>Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography</i> , ed. P.H. Sawyer (London, 1968).
s.s.	supplementary series
Swanton	<i>The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles</i> , ed. and trans. Michael Swanton, revised edn (London, 2000).
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>
<i>Winchcombe</i>	<i>The Winchcombe and Coventry Chronicles: Hitherto Unnoticed Witnesses to the Work of John of Worcester</i> , ed. and trans. P.A. Hayward (2 vols., Tempe, 2010).
WJ	William of Jumièges
WM	William of Malmesbury
WM, <i>Commentary</i>	William of Malmesbury, <i>Willelmi Meldunensis monachi Liber super explanationem lamentationum Ieremiae prophetae</i> , ed. M. Winterbottom et al. (Turnhout, 2011).
WM, <i>HN</i>	William of Malmesbury, <i>Historia Novella</i> , ed. Edmund King, trans. K.R. Potter (Oxford, 1998).
WM, <i>VD</i>	William of Malmesbury, <i>Vita Dunstani</i> , ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom and R.M. Thomson, <i>Saints' Lives: Lives of SS. Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus and Indract</i> (Oxford, 2002), 157–303.
WM, <i>Saints' Lives</i>	William of Malmesbury, <i>Saints' Lives: Lives of SS. Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus and Indract</i> , ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom and R.M. Thomson (Oxford, 2002).
WM, <i>VW</i>	William of Malmesbury, <i>Vita Wulfstani</i> , ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom and R.M. Thomson, <i>Saints' Lives</i> (Oxford, 2002), 7–155.
WP	William of Poitiers

## LONG ABSTRACT

Much has been written about twelfth-century chroniclers in England, but satisfactory reasons for their approaches to historical explanation have not yet been advanced. This thesis investigates how and why historians in England retold accounts of England's eleventh-century invasions: the Danish Conquest of 1016 and the Norman Conquest of 1066. Repeated conquest could signal repeated failures and sin across the orders of society, yet these narratives not only extract insular kingship (and the English themselves) from a history of failure, but also establish English kingship as a worthy office on a European scale.

The object is to illuminate the consistent historical agendas of three historians: William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon and John of Worcester. In their narratives, these historians expanded theories of explanation to include individual responsibility and accountability within a framework of providential history. The patterns I identify suggest that these writers made substantial departures from their sources. I argue that the three twelfth-century historians share a view of royal responsibility independent both of their sources (primarily the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*) and of any political agenda that placed English and Norman allegiances in opposition. Although the accounts diverge widely in the interpretation of character, all three are concerned more with the effectiveness of England's kings than with their origins.

My methods are based on close readings and comparative studies across time and genre. I compare the chronicles to their sources to study how and why they redesigned the past. I examine each writer's attitude towards responsibility: the ability to influence the course of a battle or invasion through actions and behaviour (causal responsibility), and accountability for one's actions, whether in defence or conquest (moral responsibility). I argue that assessing how these writers distribute responsibility—among kings, the army, chance, fate and providence—is essential for understanding their expectations for kings and their agendas in rewriting the past. The authors exhibit similar strategies in their narratives of both invasions, the implications of which have not yet been addressed by modern historians. In the body of the thesis I identify several consistent patterns in how each medieval author manipulates his sources to narrate both the Danish and Norman invasions.

Part One outlines trends in early insular narratives and examines each of the three historians' background, prose style and view of English history to provide the necessary context for understanding how and why they rewrote narratives of kings and conquest. It explains how earlier insular invasion narratives rely on collective sin as an explanation for defeat. It suggests that the experience in twelfth-century England, the need to explain England's history of repeated invasion from a temporal distance, and the wide exposure to classical reading and thought all contributed to rendering this mode of explanation insufficient for twelfth-century historiographical purposes. The next section highlights the import of William of Malmesbury's reading and rhetorical style, Henry of Huntingdon's underrated interest in human achievements and moral development and his acute sense of

tragedy, and John of Worcester's remarkably coherent and innovative reworking of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which has hitherto gone unnoticed. Within each of these three projects, the king's personal responsibility had new resonance, which also indicates that ways of thinking about the past in England at this time transcended genre.

Part Two: *Defending Kings* analyzes narratives of defending kings Æthelred and Harold. I argue that the influence of eleventh-century sources—in particular, the account of the Æthelred chronicler 983–1016—on twelfth-century attitudes towards Æthelred have been overrated. I compare the chronicler's account to each of the three twelfth-century narratives, showing that nothing in the eleventh-century account dictated a positive or negative view of the king: later praise and condemnation of Æthelred are original. All three twelfth-century narratives share assumptions about the king's ability to influence the defence and moral responsibility for doing so. Within the framework of each twelfth-century narrative, Æthelred is an effective king: they accord him with the ability to save the defence. By redistributing a greater degree of responsibility for failure to the king, these writers exonerate the English defence from implication in the disaster of defeat.

The most significant point about the segment on Harold is that the patterns of explanation we find in twelfth-century accounts of defeat by the Danes hold true for their accounts of defeat by the Normans. Harold is either blamed for the defeat or credited with attempting to forestall it: in either case these writers accord him more moral responsibility and causal influence than do their sources. Each author has his own consistent approach to conquest and expectations for defending kings during invasions in the eleventh century. The parallels in narratives of Æthelred and Harold suggest that their shared aim of redeeming England's history of invasion is a more significant factor in their views of Harold than is any conflict between English and Norman loyalties.

Part Three conducts a parallel analysis of conquering kings Cnut and William. It considers the extent to which the twelfth-century writers considered Cnut and William responsible and accountable for the disastrous consequences of their respective conquests. Although source material for Cnut's reign was limited, all three reconstruct his conquest such that his character and behavior become noticeably worthy and distinguished the moment each considers him to have assumed the throne: it is as though English kingship itself has constitutive force, inspiring the conqueror to redeem himself and to earn this elevated office. William's legacy had more immediate relevance for these twelfth-century historians through temporal proximity, 1066 being nearer than 1016, and because of the sustained Norman presence in England. Yet even in their regret about the disasters wrought by this enduring Conquest, WM, Henry and John do not associate them with William's character or legitimacy. They universally extricate him from criticism: in William of Malmesbury's case, by narrating a consistently good character; in Henry's and John's, by permitting him to redeem himself as an English king. The shared effect is an argument for William's legitimacy not because he is a Norman or a conqueror, but because he is simply better at being an English king than any other possible candidate. Together, Parts Two and Three argue that all three writers add a significant and new degree of causal and moral responsibility to English kings in their invasion narratives.

Part Four discusses the implications and significance of the thesis's findings. It argues that the historians' invasion narratives follow consistent patterns in service of their projects of redeeming the English past. It contends that modern understanding of the eleventh-century conquests of England continues to be shaped by what historians wrote years later, in the twelfth. The idea of a 'late Anglo-Saxon state' in particular is brought under scrutiny: its existence, in relation to specific characteristics such as laws, institutions and coinage, is not at issue here; however, the way in which it is imagined is largely the product of twelfth-century historical craftsmanship.

In writing invasion narratives that question the contingency of kingship at its most fundamental level, the three historians' invasion narratives reflect a renaissance of ancient ideas about rule. They depart from Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon modes of explanation in that they either reject explanation by collective sin or modify in ways that enhance the force of royal responsibility. But in other ways, their narratives are quintessentially English, for they continue the Anglo-Saxon trend of inclusion. Anglo-Saxon kings claimed to rule the whole island of Britain; the peoples counted among the English expanded over time; William, Henry and John made English kingship an office of great effect, one which could only be held by worthy individuals. Ultimately, the conclusions identify a need to reexamine what it meant to be an historian in twelfth-century England.

**PART ONE**  
**INTRODUCTION**

Much has been written about twelfth-century chroniclers in England, but satisfactory reasons for their approaches to historical explanation have not yet been advanced. These chroniclers are not Norman conquerors erasing an English past, nor immediately post-Conquest historians still suffering from trauma. Their motivations are deeper than sentiments pro-English, pro-Norman, or—as recent scholarship has suggested—politically-calculated ambiguity and ambivalence.

This thesis investigates how Anglo-Norman writers of the twelfth century wrote about the eleventh. It asks how and why historians in England (William of Malmesbury,<sup>1</sup> Henry of Huntingdon<sup>2</sup> and John of Worcester,<sup>3</sup> c. 1120–c. 1150) retold accounts of England’s Danish and Norman invasions. I have chosen this theme in order to examine their projects of redeeming English history at those moments which posed the greatest challenge to the historian. Repeated conquest could signal failures and sin across the orders of society, yet these historians, each in different ways, not only extract insular kingship (and the English themselves) from a history of failure, but also establish English kingship as a worthy office on a European scale. The present project explains how this effect is accomplished.

Through close readings of these narratives, comparing them with their sources and with each other, I examine how and why they redesigned the past. I investigate each writer’s attitude towards responsibility: the ability to influence the course of a battle or invasion through actions and behaviour (causal responsibility), and accountability for

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter ‘WM’, to avoid confusion with William I, William of Jumièges (WJ) and William of Poitiers (WP).

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter ‘Henry’.

<sup>3</sup> Hereafter ‘John’.

one's actions, whether in defence or conquest (moral responsibility). I argue that assessing how these writers distribute responsibility—among kings, the army, the English, chance, fate and Providence—is essential for understanding their expectations for kings and their agendas in rewriting the past. Throughout I argue for the value of studying 'narrative time' (the order in and pacing with which events are described) as compared with 'historical time' (the order in which events happened) as tools of analysis for the portrayal of succession and changes in power. How these historians manipulate and represent events, and the relative order in which they present them, illuminates their motives and agendas.

Comparing narratives of the two eleventh-century conquests provides new insights into each writer's vision of the past. The authors exhibit similar strategies in their narratives of both invasions, which have not yet been addressed by modern historians; nor have the implications thereof been explored. There are several clear patterns to how each medieval author manipulates his sources to narrate both the Danish and Norman invasions. Each historian's view of history transcends, or can transcend, political, cultural and ethnic loyalties—an essential argument of this thesis.<sup>4</sup> For the twelfth-century historians, effectiveness and character were markedly more important than heritage or politics in defining good and legitimate English kings, and indeed had to be so if the conquerors were to be recognized as legitimate. In their narratives, these historians expanded theories of explanation to include individual responsibility and accountability within a framework of providential history, which varied from writer to writer. The patterns I identify suggest that these writers made substantial departures from their sources in tone and agenda. My aim is to challenge existing ideas about these historians and the extent to which they compiled historical data or created new histories, and my

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<sup>4</sup> Those writers with royal commissions had loyalties to William I's family, but it is worth noting that this family encompassed members of Anglo-Saxon families, including relatives of Edgar ætheling.

conclusions will identify the need to reexamine what it meant to be an historian in twelfth-century England.

It is my contention that modern understanding of the eleventh-century conquests of England continues to be shaped by what historians wrote years later, in the twelfth. My present object is to illuminate the consistent historical agendas of three twelfth-century writers: WM, Henry and John. I aim to show that they share a view of royal responsibility independent both of their sources and of any political agenda that placed English and Norman allegiances in opposition. Although their accounts diverge widely in their interpretation of character, all three are concerned more with the effectiveness of England's defending kings than with their origins.

These historians ascribe more moral and causal responsibility to English kings than do their sources, and they do so in service of the project of redeeming the English past. This also reveals that they had exposure to the variety of modes of explanation that would permit them to think of rule in this way. I will commence my analysis by briefly considering trends in early insular narratives, and then by examining each of the three writers' background, writing style and overall picture of English history. The aim is to provide the context for evaluating how these twelfth-century writers understand royal responsibility in their narratives of England's eleventh-century conquests. In Part Two: Defenders and Part Three: Conquerors, I will investigate three related questions. How do WM, Henry and John re-write ASC's narratives of the defeats of the English by the Danes in early eleventh century and by the Normans in 1066? Do they cast these defeats as shameful? Do the writers maintain that defeat reflects a failure of the king, the army, or the English? Throughout, I will consider these questions by means of several comparisons: defenders with conquerors, Danish Conquest with Norman; twelfth-century accounts with their sources; twelfth-century writers with one another. The conclusions

will consider some of the implications of my findings for the study of eleventh-century England, and of twelfth-century historiography and political thought.

Direct reproach—and direct praise—of the defending kings Æthelred and Harold did not originate in ASC, which takes a different line. Similarly, praise for the conquering kings Cnut and William cannot all be explained by a Norman bias. It remains to account for the presence of these tones of criticism and praise in the conquest narratives of WM, Henry and John: this is what I endeavour to do here. These historians evaluate the defenders and conquerors according to expectations for English kings which are the same across each historian's work. I argue for a larger, more original and more consistent pattern in the three writers' characterization of Anglo-Norman rule than has hitherto been acknowledged. This characterization, though it manifests itself at times in strikingly different personalities for the kings, is nevertheless consistent for each individual writer. Most significant, it betrays the twelfth-century writers' shared conviction about the capability and accountability of the kings who defended England.

In order to make extended close-reading comparisons of twelfth-century writers with their sources, my analysis is limited to three writers: WM, Henry and John. Their similarities in time, location and language permit a comparison of the realms in which they differ. This study does not, in particular, analyze the works of Eadmer, Orderic (writing in Normandy) or Gaimar (writing in the vernacular); although the study of each informs my analysis, comparisons of earlier works, different geographic milieux or languages could not be incorporated within the word limit of the present study. But within the chosen three Latin chronicles it is possible to evaluate the relevance of genre: WM's work is a history with a monastic context; Henry wrote history as a secular cleric; John's work is a monastic chronicle. The works I discuss are apparently in three different genres, but within a common language, geographical region, and reasonably similar time frame.

The scope of the study is thus limited in this way, yet the similarities serve as controls in the experiment that tests the variables of genre, originality and use of sources.

### **On the distribution of responsibility**

Responsibility has many definitions, but one set is particularly relevant here. Being responsible is: ‘being the cause or originator of something; deserving credit or blame for something’.<sup>5</sup> There are two distinct concepts here, but they are often related. To assess these writers’ picture of royal responsibility, I will consider both causal and moral responsibility.<sup>6</sup> That is, I shall examine the extent to which WM, Henry and John suggest that the kings caused certain outcomes, and the extent to which they suggest that the kings had a moral duty or obligation to perform certain duties or to generate the outcome of victory. This distinction between causal and moral responsibility, made by philosophers, provides a useful framework for asking how people thought about the past, especially when something as important as the defence of the kingdom was at stake.

The present analysis is concerned with both kinds of responsibility, and it is worth noting at the outset that these definitions can be related. If a party is deemed to be obliged to do something (moral responsibility), this may imply that he has the ability to influence outcomes (causal responsibility); his actions or inaction may determine how or whether the obligation is fulfilled. As I will show, how these writers view moral responsibility (including the obligations of royal office, regal duties and accountability to God) depends somewhat on how they understand causation. Through studying this relationship it is possible to gain insights into their perceptions of the past, the place of individual will, and

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<sup>5</sup> ‘responsible, *adj.*’, *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (Oxford, February 2013), 9 February 2013, <<http://www.oed.com/>>, definition 1.a.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. M. Klein, ‘Responsibility’, in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich, 2nd edn (Oxford, 2005), 815–16; for a survey of ideas about moral responsibility, see: J.M. Fischer, ‘Recent Work on Moral Responsibility’, *Ethics* 110 (1999), 93–139; for the relationship between causal and moral, see: A. Eshleman, ‘Moral Responsibility’, in E.N. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, 2009).

the patterns these historians use to render the past explicable, ordered and redeemed. This need on their part is an important difference from the modern sense of an historian's duty.

The tendency to conflate accountability with responsibility has recently been discussed in relation to history and political theory.<sup>7</sup> The present project is not about accountability as a philosophical or political concept of office and justice. Although my findings have implications for political thought, as I show in my conclusions, I do not argue that the three historians wrote with the intention of formulating political or legalistic theories about English kingship. Rather, the object is to consider the related elements of their modes of explanation—including causation, contingency and obligation—in order to make intelligible their patterns of narrating the invasions of England.

These twelfth-century writers were not theorists deliberately outlining the responsibilities of kings: rather, their narratives reveal their assumptions about the nature of kingship, and the powers and duties accordant to it. Royal responsibility provides a means of entry into their visions of the past. An analysis of how they distribute cause and blame in close comparison with their known source material offers insight into their thought about defending kings. WM, Henry and John narrate the Danish and Norman invasions at length; I concentrate on those parts of greatest moment: the conquests themselves. The historians' beliefs about the responsibilities of English kings emerge with particular clarity here. These are the times when kings faced the most severe challenges, and hence when beliefs about them come under the closest scrutiny.

The concept of 'distribution' is particularly important to my discussion of responsibility, because it permits analyses of how credit and blame are apportioned without generating artificially exclusive categories. Credit and blame do not operate in an

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<sup>7</sup> J. Sabapathy, 'A Medieval Officer and a Modern Mentality? *Podestà* and the Quality of Accountability', *The Mediæval Journal* 1 (2011), 43–79.

inverse relationship in these narratives: they are different manifestations of responsibility, and they appear in varying combinations and degrees. Assessing the distribution of responsibility also permits the responsibilities of kings to be evaluated in the context of reciprocal lordship obligations, as well as larger narrative comments about the causal and moral reasons for invasion and conquest. To attempt to understand twelfth-century historians' understanding of English kingship by examining kingship and theories of kingship alone has one important flaw: it prevents us from seeing that the real novelty is in the relative quantity of responsibility apportioned to kings, as compared to their subjects, and to external causes.

### **Invasion and explanation in early insular historiography**

Earlier insular literature tends to frame the causes and consequences of invasion within a providential view of collective sin and responsibility. For Gildas (d. c. 570), God designs the heathen invasions of Britain to punish and to cleanse the people of their sins.<sup>8</sup> He also considers laziness a major concern in times of war and invasion, and his primary concern with regard to his homeland's troubles and suffering ('patriae incommoditatibus miseriisque')<sup>9</sup> is for the indolence of soldiers. In his preface to *De excidio Britonum*, Gildas writes 'Quia non tam fortissimorum militum enuntiare trucis belli pericula mihi statutum est quam desidiosorum'.<sup>10</sup> This remark suggests he holds the opinion that the sloth of soldiers has caused many of the land's calamities. His censure includes the people and their leaders: he later explains that the Romans' attempts to aid the Britons in their defence against invasions were ineffective because the Britons were an irrational

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<sup>8</sup> Gildas, *De excidio* 22.1, referring to the sins he describes from 20.3–21.6.

<sup>9</sup> Gildas, *De excidio* 1.1.

<sup>10</sup> '[Because] I had decided to speak of the dangers run not by brave soldiers in the stress of war but by the lazy.' Gildas, *De excidio* 1.2.

mob with no leader.<sup>11</sup> Gildas does dedicate part of his work to grievances against tyrannical kings,<sup>12</sup> but he does not hold them wholly accountable for the invasions of Britain: only a proud tyrant could have been.

Bede's central theme in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* (compiled by c. 731) was the development and unification of the English Church—a prime instance of providential history—and his attitudes towards kings reflect this overarching framework.<sup>13</sup> Gildas cast the Britons as sinful, which Bede accepted, thereby permitting the Anglo-Saxons to be portrayed as God's chosen people in this new land.<sup>14</sup> Bede—like Gildas, his main source for earlier insular history—tended to attribute invasion to collective sin and divine punishment, as opposed to attributing it ultimately to the actions of individuals. In his *HE*, Bede acknowledges the recklessness of dictators as contributing to the drain of the Britons' army after the Roman occupation, during the time of the invasions of the Scots and the Picts.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless he describes the Britons as a whole as 'ignavi propugnatores' who '[r]elictis ciuitatibus ac muro fugiunt disperguntur.'<sup>16</sup> The people are culpable for the fall of their cities because they have abandoned their defence in cowardice. He goes on to say of the Britons: 'augentes externas domesticis motibus clades, donec omnis regio totius cibi sustentaculo'.<sup>17</sup> Bede suggests that the Britons' sufferings are a punishment for their behaviour as a group: he explains how the affluence and luxury brought about by a good harvest year led to sinful behaviour and consequent

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<sup>11</sup> Gildas, *De excidio* 15.3.

<sup>12</sup> Gildas, *De excidio* 27.1–36.6.

<sup>13</sup> On Bede's aims, see D.J. Tyler, 'Bede, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and Early West Saxon Kingship', *Southern History* 19 (1997), 1–23, at 2–3; Colgrave and Mynors, *HE*, xxx–xxi; W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History* (Princeton, 1988), 235–328; J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Bede and Plummer', in his *Early Medieval History* (Oxford, 1975), 76–95, esp. at 79–80.

<sup>14</sup> R.W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain: From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York, 1966), 70–1, and ff.; see also full chapter, 63–90.

<sup>15</sup> *HE* i.12, 40–1.

<sup>16</sup> 'cowardly defenders ... deserted their cities, fled from the wall, and were scattered.' *HE* i.12, 44–5.

<sup>17</sup> 'Thus they increased their external calamities by internal strife until the whole land was left without food and destitute', *HE* i.12, 44–5.

punishment.<sup>18</sup> He also describes the invasions of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes ‘iusto Iudice’ as punishment for collective sin: ‘Siquidem, ut breuiter dicam, accensus manibus paganorum ignis iustas de sceleribus populi Dei ultiones expetiit’.<sup>19</sup> According to Bede, the decision to call for aid is a collective one, and it reveals God’s plan to punish the people:

placiuittque omnibus cum suo rege Uurtigerno ut Saxonum gentem de transmarinis partibus in auxilium uocarent. Quod Domini nutu dispositum esse constat, ut ueniret contra inprobos malum, sicut euentius rerum exitus probauit.<sup>20</sup>

King Vortigern participates in this decision, but he is culpable as one among many, not as the primary cause of the people’s sufferings as a result of invasion.

Wulfstan’s *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* accounts for the invasions of the Vikings by explaining, following Carolingian traditions, that they are punishments for the sins of the English people as a whole.<sup>21</sup> Wulfstan observes that wrongs and crimes were done ‘ealles to wide gynd ealle þas þeode’, and that their sufferings were as a result deserved.<sup>22</sup> He describes the heathen Viking pirates’ plundering and ravaging, concluding ‘and la, hwæt is ænig oðer on eallum þam gelimpum butan Godes yrre ofer þas þeode swutol and gesæne?’<sup>23</sup> For Wulfstan, the cause of invasion is patently collective sin. He does not find the kings of the English during the invasions exclusively culpable. In describing the crime

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<sup>18</sup> *HE* i.14, 46–9.

<sup>19</sup> ‘To put it briefly, the fire kindled by the hands of the heathen executed the just vengeance of God on the nation for its crimes.’ *HE* i.15, 52–3. See also M. Godden, ‘Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, in M. Godden et al. (eds.), *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E. G. Stanley* (Oxford, 1994), 130–62, at 130.

<sup>20</sup> ‘all, including their king Vortigern, agreed that they should call the Saxons to their aid from across the seas. As events plainly showed, this was ordained by the will of God so that evil might fall upon these miscreants.’ *HE* i.14, 48–9.

<sup>21</sup> For a detailed discussion of the explanations for invasions offered in different versions of the *Sermo Lupi*, see Godden, ‘Apocalypse and Invasion’, 142–62; P. Wormald, ‘*Engla Lond*: the Making of an Allegiance’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7 (1994), 1–24, at 16–17. For the Carolingian tradition of explaining invasion and disaster as God’s punishment, and for the practices of *admonitio* and collective penance, see M. de Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840* (Cambridge, 2009), 39–40, 117, 150–2, 170–6.

<sup>22</sup> ‘far too widely throughout all this people’, Wulfstan of York, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, ed. D. Whitelock, 3rd edn (London, 1963), 48; *EHD*, 998.

<sup>23</sup> ‘and lo, what else is there in all these events except God’s anger clear and visible over this people?’ Wulfstan, *Sermo Lupi*, 60; *EHD*, 1000.

of treason, he writes that the greatest treachery is for a man to betray his lord's soul, adding:

and ful micel hlafordswice eac bið on worolde þæt man his hlaford of life forræde, oððon of lande lifiende drife; and ægþer is geworden on þysan earde: Eadweard man forrædde and syððan acwealde and æfter þam forbærnde [and Æþelred man dræfde ut of his earde].<sup>24</sup>

Wulfstan presents Edward and Æthelred as victims; the people's treason against them is what the invasions punish. Pre-Conquest narratives primarily ascribe the causes of invasion to divine retribution for the sins of a people, including leaders, soldiers and civilians. It is in twelfth-century historiography that the workings of fortune or the sins or failures of individual kings begin to occupy greater prominence as causes of, and as being morally responsible for, invasion.

### **Invasion and explanation in twelfth-century historiography**

In the twelfth century, intellectual inquiry began to pursue a greater range of interpretations of cause and consequence. These did not override God's hidden plan: the interest in nature and reason reflect an additional interest in causality and visible proof. Historians displayed an increased interest in causation by personal agency and by Fortune, which sometimes operated alongside the traditional Christian providential view of history.<sup>25</sup> Writers could also manipulate their interpretation of Fortune to convey a political agenda. For example, in the *Historia Novella*, WM describes Roger of Salisbury's feeling of foreboding before his imminent arrest by Stephen:

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<sup>24</sup> 'and a full great treachery it is also in the world that a man should betray his lord to death, or drive him in his lifetime from the land; and both have happened in this country: Edward was betrayed and then killed, and afterwards burnt, [and Æthelred was driven out of his country].' Wulfstan, *Sermo Lupi*, 56–7; *EHD*, 999. Whitelock notes that the line 'and Æþelred ... his earde' occurs only in the B manuscript, *Sermo Lupi*, 57.

<sup>25</sup> Hanning, *Vision of History*, 125–6, 130–1, 143; L. Ashe, *Fiction and History in England, 1066–1200* (Cambridge, 2007), 166–7.

Ita presagiebat animus mala futura. Tunc quasi fortuna famulari uideretur uoluntati regis, concitatus est tumultus inter homines episcoporum et Alani comitis Britanniae pro uendicandis hospitiiis<sup>26</sup>

By using the word ‘uideretur’, WM avoids asserting categorically that Fortune favours Stephen, whom he deems an illegitimate king. Other contemporary writers sought explanations for events in natural or observable factors. John of Salisbury devotes a book of his *Policraticus* to dissecting superstition with reason.<sup>27</sup> Abelard used logic to arrive at an understanding of sin based upon interior will and intent: the causes of choices, not just the choices and actions alone. He claims for example that God considers the mind and not the action when rewarding a man,<sup>28</sup> and exalts the use of ‘racion’ to avoid God’s condemnation.<sup>29</sup> His philosophy and examples suggest that people have a choice about whether to do God’s will, and are accountable for these choices before the divine judge. These kinds of intellectual approaches influenced the vision of history in the twelfth century. They led historians to identify natural and human causes of events in addition to the workings of Providence, and to use Fortune or chance as an explanation when natural explanations proved opaque.<sup>30</sup> These understandings of causation added to or in some cases crowded out explanation by Providence.

### **Storylines of English history in the twelfth century**

Prior historiography has stressed the influence of 1066 on historical writing in the twelfth century. Different interpretations have been offered as to how this influence motivated

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Thus did his mind forebode the evil to come. Then, as if fortune seemed to be favouring the king’s wishes, a brawl arose between the bishop’s men and those of Count Alan of Brittany about claims on lodgings’, WM, *HN* ii.22–3, 44–8; for more examples of WM’s use of Fortune: see A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England. I: c. 500–c. 1307* (Ithaca, 1974), 183.

<sup>27</sup> JS, *Policraticus* ii.

<sup>28</sup> Peter Abelard, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. D.E. Luscombe (Oxford, 1971), 12–13.

<sup>29</sup> Abelard, *Ethics*, 22–3.

<sup>30</sup> C.W. Hollister, ‘Anglo-Norman Political Culture and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance’, in C.W. Hollister (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Political Culture and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance: Proceedings of the Borchard Conference on Anglo-Norman History, 1995* (Woodbridge, 1997), 9. For a discussion of the wheel of fortune concept as applied to events: E. Mason, ‘Magnates, Curiales, and the Wheel of Fortune’, *ANS* 2 (1980), 118–40.

twelfth-century historians to write history. The Benedictine monks who wrote history did so, it has been argued, because they felt threatened by the prospect of dispossession and loss of their ways of life and prospects, both because of the precedent of Norman displacement of the English, and because of contemporary political instability and threats to the abbeys.<sup>31</sup> R.W. Southern suggested that those who remembered England before the Norman invasion experienced ‘outrage, resentment and nostalgia’, and argued that these sentiments persisted into the twelfth century, remaining poignant among those historians with English ancestors.<sup>32</sup> More recently, Elisabeth van Houts has suggested that twelfth-century historians introduced to the account of ASC explanations attributing the Conquest to national sin and divine punishment in order to compensate for the trauma of conquest, and, with Southern, ascribes to English monks a sense of regret, loss and shame. She attributes the absence of vivid accounts of the Conquest’s damage to the trauma of conquest which persisted into twelfth century.<sup>33</sup> Other scholars ascribe more positive, reconstructive motives to these historians: they sought to advance moral and didactic agendas, and wrote with patriotic fervour.<sup>34</sup> Whether interpreted in a positive, negative or neutral light, a sense of absence and temporal distance inspired enthusiasm for recalling and rewriting the past.

It is often remarked that historical writing at this time sought to teach morals by example, to noble patrons and princes in particular.<sup>35</sup> But the nature of those morals has a quality of particular interest. These writers visit a greater degree of moral and causal

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<sup>31</sup> R.W. Southern, ‘Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing 4. The Sense of the Past’, *TRHS*, 5th series, 23 (1973), 243–63, at 247; K.A. Fenton, *Gender, Nation and Conquest in the Works of William of Malmesbury* (Woodbridge, 2008), 17–18.

<sup>32</sup> Southern, ‘Sense of the Past’, 246–7.

<sup>33</sup> E. van Houts, ‘The Memory of 1066 in Written and Oral Traditions’, *ANS* 19 (1996), 167–80, at 170–1; idem, ‘The trauma of 1066’, *History Today* 46 (1996), 9–15, at 11–12, 14–15; idem, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe, 900–1200* (London, 1999), 129.

<sup>34</sup> Discussed with reference to each of the three historians below, 14 ff.

<sup>35</sup> See e.g. N.F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago, 1977), 19; S.O. Sønnesyn, *William of Malmesbury and the Ethics of History* (Woodbridge, 2012), 3, on kings in the context of WM’s moral objectives, 148–86; for an extended analysis of WM’s moral purpose in *GR*, c.5, c.6 (96 ff.).

responsibility on kings than did earlier works, their sources in particular. In their views, shaped by their classical reading, their thinking about causation in England's past and their expectations for kings, collective guilt was now a less credible explanation.

How do invasion narratives fit into these writers' stories of English history? One could make the case that the genre of *res gestae* or the tradition of English chronicles necessitated a lofty subject. But at a more practical level, invasions—and, retrospectively, their outcomes—contributed to a heightened awareness of particular responsibilities. Not only was England twice defeated in the eleventh century, but also the first conquest was, if twenty-five years in length, still relatively ephemeral: the Danes were unable to maintain their control of England. For England to be defeated by what was itself ultimately an unsuccessful conquest could reflect poorly both on the moral state of the people and the abilities of the defence. Defeat was shameful. But English history could not be shameful: this was not the story the three writers sought to tell. Thus English history had to be brought back not from oblivion, but from worse: scorn. In this regard they were certainly not trying to justify the Norman Conquest from the perspective of Norman conquerors. Ascribing their motives to ambivalence and ambiguity—however studied these devices were—does not go far enough.

What they do is to radically revise what it means to defend, to invade, and to conquer as part of their shared agenda—and as we will see, they do so on the basis of their shared beliefs and assumptions about responsibility. One way in which they accomplish this is by revising their main sources for the events of the invasions. The passage of time since the Danish and Norman Conquest merits mention. These historians were not within living memory of either conquest, so the emotional immediacy of the conflict between English and Norman would have been, if not entirely absent, at least

different.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, one of my primary arguments is that the old ethnic or political conflict between the two sides was irrelevant to their respective storylines of English history and views of royal responsibility and English kingship. For John, as we will see, the Danes are the enemy, but he does not apply their qualities to Cnut.

Does genre dictate, guide, or serve as the basis of departure for these historians? We have three different narratives, each representing on the surface a different genre: an ecclesiastical history of kings, a history of the English by a secular cleric, and an annalistic chronicle. I argue that, although each conforms in many respects to qualities often considered intrinsic to its nature, genre alone cannot explain or account for their pictures of English history. The conclusions they reach and their similar philosophies would be surprising if we imagined that genre might dictate significant differences in these regards. But in actuality, they all do things within their respective genres that have the same narrative effect. What this suggests is that this period saw a new way of thinking about the past, conditioned by the availability of multiple modes of explanation, and by the experience of the twelfth century in England. I shall return to this in the Conclusion.

### **WM: Invasion, explanation and responsibility**

WM was a Benedictine monk of Malmesbury. He was well-travelled, and extraordinarily well-read in patristic, biblical and classical texts. He completed his *GR* in 1125 and revised it after 1135.<sup>37</sup> It covers the history of the English kings from the Roman occupation to the reign of Henry I. It was commissioned by Queen Matilda, wife of Henry I and niece of Edgar the Ætheling.<sup>38</sup> WM's audience included his lay patrons, Henry's children the Empress Matilda and Robert of Gloucester;<sup>39</sup> indeed, it is evident in

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. van Houts, *Memory and Gender*, 123 ff.

<sup>37</sup> See most comprehensively: R.M. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, rev. edn (Woodbridge, 2003).

<sup>38</sup> *GR* 'Ep. I', i, 2–3.

<sup>39</sup> *GR* 'Ep. II'; 'Ep. III', i, 6–13.

his later writings that he sides with Matilda and not Stephen in the civil war. He lived in an environment of copying and scholarship typical of Benedictine abbeys, but he claimed to esteem the judgment of posterity more than that of his contemporaries.<sup>40</sup>

One of WM's explicitly stated goals was to fill in the gaps in the history of the kings of the English, finding it insufficiently well-treated in Latin since Bede. WM describes his design with the famous words: 'Vnde michi cum propter patriae caritatem ... uoluntati fuit interruptam temporum seriem sarcire et exarata barbarice Romano sale condire'.<sup>41</sup> The word 'sarcire' is often rendered as 'to mend' or 'to restore', which can imply a routine reconstructive task, not a creative one. But the word 'sarcire' also means 'to redeem', and this was indeed a central purpose of *GR*: to redeem the English past. The extant chain was not only missing links, but it branched in different directions: what to include was WM's own choice. His picture of English history serves this end of redemption, but not in terms that oppose English and Norman loyalties:<sup>42</sup> he forges a new chain that transcends ethnic or political divisions.

WM's title provides insights into his purpose and his view of English kingship. Thomson points out in his commentary that the translation of *De gestis regum Anglorum* is not only 'The Deeds of the English Kings', but also '“The Deeds of the Kings of the English People”'. He suggests that this means that the kings were not all of English origin, and that it means that William wrote with English sympathies.<sup>43</sup> These are certainly true; my subsequent arguments will take all of these implications one step

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<sup>40</sup> *GR* i.prologue, i, 16–17. In his *Polyhistor*, WM defended himself to his contemporaries for his interest in the classics: see R.M. Thomson, 'William of Malmesbury as Historian and Man of Letters', 14–39, at 28–9; idem, 'William's Reading', 40–75, at 52, both in his *William of Malmesbury*.

<sup>41</sup> 'It was therefore my design, in part moved by love of my country ... to redeem the broken chain of our history, and give a Roman polish to the rough annals of our native speech' *GR* i.prologue, i, 14–15. On prologues, see: A. Gransden, 'Prologues in the Historiography of Twelfth-Century England', in her *Legends, Traditions and History in Medieval England* (London, 1992), 125–51.

<sup>42</sup> But cf. e.g. J. Gillingham, 'The Beginnings of English Imperialism', 3–18, at 6–7; idem, 'Henry of Huntingdon and the Twelfth-Century Revival of the English Nation', 123–44, at 128–9, both in his *The English in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, 2000).

<sup>43</sup> Thomson, *GR*, ii, 4.

further by linking them: WM's conquering kings could be more English than his defending kings if they fulfilled the duties according to them.

Many different interpretations of *GR*'s structure have been advanced. Most recently, Sønnesyn has analyzed the sophisticated moral and didactic structure of *GR* in the context of WM's reading and other writings.<sup>44</sup> His study, building on the works of Thomson, Wright and Winterbottom, has further highlighted the extent of WM's intellect and has revealed moral patterns and agendas in WM's writing—and it suggests that there may be more patterns in WM's work yet to be explored. Fenton has recently advanced the idea that the Norman Conquest and its implications guided the entire structure of *GR*,<sup>45</sup> but as we will see, the structural similarities in his accounts of the Danish and Norman Conquests show the limitations of reading his work through the lens of one conquest alone. Weiler has commented upon how WM's narrative is structured such that it ultimately progresses towards the lauded reign of Henry I,<sup>46</sup> and Gillingham has traced WM's classicizing narrative of progress from barbarism to civilization in England.<sup>47</sup> Both views suggest that the unfolding of narrative time was an important thematic device for WM, and that England's progress and development was of central interest to him in *GR*. Thomson draws attention to the continental or temporal 'deviations' from the basic chronological structure of English history.<sup>48</sup> These deviations help to illuminate what themes were of such particular importance to WM that they demand inclusion or a different approach.

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<sup>44</sup> Sønnesyn, *William of Malmesbury*.

<sup>45</sup> Fenton, *Gender, Nation and Conquest*, 18. On the structural importance of the Norman Conquest, see also: M. Otter, '1066: The Moment of Transition in Two Narratives of the Norman Conquest', *Speculum* 74 (1999), 565–86.

<sup>46</sup> B. Weiler, 'William of Malmesbury, King Henry I, and the *Gesta Regum Anglorum*', *ANS* 31 (2008), 157–76.

<sup>47</sup> Gillingham, 'The Beginnings of English Imperialism', 5–7, 10, 17–18; idem, 'Civilizing the English? The English Histories of William of Malmesbury and David Hume', *Historical Research*, 74 (2001), 17–43.

<sup>48</sup> Thomson, *GR*, ii, 1; see also R.M. Thomson, 'William of Malmesbury as Historian of Crusade', in his *William of Malmesbury*, 178–88.

*GR* possesses none of the balance or objectivity which William claims for it. Recent work has identified the value of understanding William's occasions of invention, digression and rhetoric as essential to his meaning.<sup>49</sup> But as we will see, William's apparent humility and changes to the narrative are more than isolated scenes:<sup>50</sup> they constitute the substance of the narrative and guide the story throughout.

The extent and nature of William's historical reading and knowledge of the classics has been discussed at length elsewhere.<sup>51</sup> For present purposes, it is sufficient to note that versions of ASC provided his main source for the events of English history in the eleventh century. WM's English sources for the Norman Conquest included a version of ASC similar to (CE) and *LKE*; his Norman sources included WP *GG* and a version of *GND*.<sup>52</sup> WM was so well-read that it is difficult to know for certain what versions of ASC he had seen. He appears to have known a version of the northern recension: we know that he had a version similar to MS E to 1120, but he could have known the source of MS E because his account is sometimes closer to D. His material is sometimes similar to John's: they may have known the same materials or earlier versions of each other's work; they may even have met.<sup>53</sup> WM's originality in his interpretations—perhaps precisely because of his wide reading—will be a recurrent theme.

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<sup>49</sup> See e.g. R.L. Slitt, 'The Two Deaths of William Longsword: Wace, William of Malmesbury and the Norman Past', *ANS* 34 (2011), 193–208, esp. at 194; P.A. Hayward, 'The Importance of Being Ambiguous: Innuendo and Legerdemain in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum* and *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*', *ANS* 33 (2010), 75–102, esp. at 86, 101–2; M. Otter, 'Functions of fiction in historical writing', in N. Partner (ed.), *Writing Medieval History* (London, 2005), 109–30, esp. at 116–19, 122.

<sup>50</sup> But cf. Hayward, 'The Importance of Being Ambiguous', 86.

<sup>51</sup> Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*; R.M. Thomson, 'William of Malmesbury and the Latin Classics Revisited', in T. Reinhardt et al. (eds.), *Aspects of the Language of Latin Prose* (Oxford, 2005), 383–93; N. Wright, 'William of Malmesbury and Latin poetry: further evidence for a Benedictine's reading', *Revue Bénédictine* 101 (1993), 122–53; N. Wright, '“Industriae Testimonium”: William of Malmesbury and Latin poetry revisited', *Revue Bénédictine* 103 (1993), 482–531; N. Wright, 'Twelfth-Century Receptions of a Text: Anglo-Norman Historians and Hegesippus', *ANS* 31 (2009), 177–95, at 188–94.

<sup>52</sup> Thomson, 'William's Reading', 69; idem, *GR*, ii, 215–17; *EHD*, 124.

<sup>53</sup> Thomson, 'William of Malmesbury as Historian and Man of Letters', 37–8, 46, idem, 'William's Reading', 74–5; *EHD*, 124; M. Brett, 'The Use of Universal Chronicle at Worcester', in J. Genet (ed.), *L'Historiographie médiévale en Europe* (Paris, 1991), 277–85, at 113–17.

In the body of this thesis, I examine WM's assessment of royal responsibility and accountability during the eleventh-century invasions of England. I argue that WM holds the defending kings Æthelred II and Harold wholly responsible and accountable for the respective invasions they face. In his narrative of the Danish and Norman Conquests, he maintains that the conquerors Cnut and William establish themselves as legitimate kings of England through claims of conquest and most importantly through worthiness of behaviour. WM sees English kings as capable of influencing outcomes of invasion and morally bound to do so, and maintains that kingship must fundamentally be earned, through right behaviour.

WM's view of royal responsibility in particular must be contextualized by his wide reading and his experience of and thought about rule. I will first provide a background for understanding WM's classically-guided sense of causation and responsibility, and then point out ways in which WM's view of royal responsibility during invasions departs from prior approaches taken in insular historiography. In order to highlight some of WM's expectations for men holding the royal office, I will consider his attitude towards royal behaviour during the investiture controversy of the eleventh century.

WM's concern for the consequences of absentee kingship leads him to attribute a strong sense of personal responsibility and moral accountability to the office of kingship in his narratives of eleventh-century invasions in England. My thesis will go on to show how WM ascribes to two kings facing invasion, Æthelred and Harold, accountability for their own fate, for their men's fate and for the invasions themselves. WM's narrative holds the kings accountable for their actions to a greater extent than he holds others. He criticizes them for absence and incompetence in a way that suggests that only they can be blamed for their own failures. In contrast, he credits the conquerors, Cnut and William,

with true English kingship because of their successes and good behaviour. This approach permits WM to ascribe a greater degree of individual blame to kings in the context of invasion than would an approach guided exclusively by explanations of Providence or collective sin.<sup>54</sup> His criteria for kings and his harshness of judgment directly reflect his concerns about his own present time and England's future: uncertainty about the succession and the need for the king to be an active, undivided and present advocate of England, even in a conjoined realm.

WM's approach, which holds individual kings accountable for invasions, departs in some ways from earlier insular literature. WM's criticisms of eleventh-century kings resonate with twelfth-century preoccupations concerning kingship and the succession in England: namely, a king's physical presence and his legitimacy in cases of disputed rule. In *GR*, WM has two primary concerns about England's prospects in his own time: the death of the king's son<sup>55</sup> and the fear that Normandy is absorbing England's resources and freedom.<sup>56</sup> WM had experience with succession crises during the composition of *GR*. The White Ship disaster and death of the king's legitimate son in 1120 meant the loss of any clear heir to the throne.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the succession was complicated in 1125 with the emergence of the king's daughter, Matilda, as a viable heir when she was widowed.<sup>58</sup> This crisis coincided with the completion of the first version of *GR*. WM's engagement with contemporary politics and the succession is suggested by the fact that the dedicatees of *GR*—Matilda, David of Scotland and Robert of Gloucester in the revision—were in positions of political power, with the potential to elect or to be Henry I's successor.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> But cf. Wormald, 'Engla Lond', 17, and Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 151–85, for the contention that WM viewed the invasions as punishment for the collective sins of the English.

<sup>55</sup> *GR* v.419, 758–63.

<sup>56</sup> *GR* ii.207, 384–7.

<sup>57</sup> G. Garnett, *Conquered England* (Oxford, 2007), 208.

<sup>58</sup> C.W. Hollister, 'The Anglo-Norman Succession Debate of 1126: Prelude to Stephen's Anarchy', *Journal of Medieval History* 1 (1975), 19–41, at 19, 22–3; cf. Garnett, *Conquered England*, 231–8.

<sup>59</sup> B. Weiler, 'William of Malmesbury on Kingship', *History* 90 (2005), 3–22, at 12–13.

Furthermore, because England and Normandy were ‘conjoined’ realms under William I and Henry I, the king was often absent and, in the course of his ducal responsibilities on the continent, had to defend his lands from ‘uel principum auaritia uel circumpositarum gentium ferotia.’<sup>60</sup> WM maintained that a lack of royal authority detracted from England’s unity and autonomy, and as such was repugnant to him. WM was fundamentally an advocate of England,<sup>61</sup> and expected a good and rightful king to strengthen the *patria*.<sup>62</sup> WM’s narrative of his recent past reveals anxiety about the unpredictability of the succession since the Conquest, and the distraction that Normandy posed to the king in his primary duty to provide England with his attention, care and presence.

WM’s *GR* employs concepts of fortune, Providence and individual influence to explain events. Accidents, unlike the actions of an individual, tend to merit explanation by fate. WM describes the prince William’s early death in 1120 as fated by God’s will: ‘Deo alter uisum ... quod eum proxima dies urgebat fato satisfacere.’<sup>63</sup> These attributions seem to acknowledge the hidden inexplicability of the disaster, especially given that Providence could not be taking vengeance upon the sins of so good a prince. WM finds the king’s son’s fate to be tragic and undeserved, especially as the prince’s last act was one of pity, an effort to save a woman from drowning.<sup>64</sup> For WM, the greatest ship-borne disaster of his own time cannot be explained by reason or sin.

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<sup>60</sup> ‘the greed of princes or the ferocity of neighbouring nations.’ *GR* ii.207.2, 386–7.

<sup>61</sup> See H.M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity, 1066–1220* (Oxford, 2003), 253–5; Gillingham, ‘Henry of Huntingdon’, 127, 140; Fenton, *Gender, Nation and Conquest*, 8.

<sup>62</sup> J.G. Haahr, ‘The Concept of Kingship in William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta Regum* and *Historia Novella*’, *Mediaeval Studies* 38 (1976), 351–71, at 353; WM’s values in this respect are particularly evident in his favourable treatment of Henry I: see Weiler, ‘William of Malmesbury, King Henry I, and the *Gesta Regum*’, 157–76.

<sup>63</sup> ‘But God had other plans ... for the day was already at hand when he must fulfil his fate.’ *GR* v.419.2, 758–9; see also Hollister, ‘Anglo-Norman Political Culture’, 9–10.

<sup>64</sup> WM claims to know the story from the sole survivor, who managed to stay afloat overnight on a piece of wreckage, *GR* v.419.5–6, 760–1; see also: H.A. Kelly, *Ideas and forms of tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1993), 91–2.

WM's preference for explanations characterized by Fortune illustrates his intellectual debt to the classics.<sup>65</sup> Thomson characterizes WM's understanding of men and history as ironic and 'dominated by chance', remarking that Providence does not heavily pervade his works. WM's writings never invoke the typical Christian historical model of Creation and Last Judgment, and WM invokes the goddess 'Fortuna' almost as frequently as divine will, doing so on thirty-four occasions in *GR*. Despite WM's observations of divine judgment and miracles in human events, he preferred explanations for the events of history that emphasized 'mundane, even cynical human motivation and causation'.<sup>66</sup> This characterization of a historical attitude—ironic, cynical and deferring to chance—is reminiscent of Sallust.<sup>67</sup> Sallust, Suetonius and Cicero manifestly influenced WM's sentence structure; these and other classics guided his writing<sup>68</sup> and WM saw himself as following in their tradition as an historian.<sup>69</sup>

WM's interest in personal responsibility as an influence on the outcomes of events is evident in his efforts to seek explanations for invasion. He attributes the disasters of the eleventh-century invasions of England ultimately to the sins and the poor choices of kings, within the context of divine will. Evident in *GR* is an emphatic confirmation of the kings' capabilities to influence outcomes, and their responsibility and accountability for their actions. WM's classical inheritance for this kind of historical attitude was strong: Sallust describes 'fortuna' as unable to give or deprive a man of his values, and observes

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<sup>65</sup> On this debt, see Thomson, 'William of Malmesbury as Historian'; idem, 'William's Reading', 48–62; above, 17 n.51.

<sup>66</sup> R.M. Thomson, 'Satire, Irony, and Humour in William of Malmesbury', in C.J. Mews et al. (eds.), *Rhetoric and Renewal in the Latin West, 1100–1540: Essays in Honour of John O. Ward* (Turnhout, 2003), 115–27, at 124–5.

<sup>67</sup> For example, in his *Bellum Iugurthinum*, Sallust describes how chance, or the way things happen to fall out ('casu'), enables Jugurtha to have the early advantage: 'Quem ille casu ministrum oblatum promissis onerat impellitque', Sallust, *Bellum Iugurthinum*, xii.

<sup>68</sup> Thomson, 'William of Malmesbury as Historian', 29; on WM's knowledge of Sallust, idem, 'William's Reading', 59; idem, *William of Malmesbury*, 213; on WM's use of Suetonian structure, see M. Schütt, 'The Literary Form of William of Malmesbury's "Gesta Regum"', *EHR* 46 (1931), 255–60.

<sup>69</sup> R.M. Thomson, 'William of Malmesbury and the Letters of Alcuin', in his *William of Malmesbury*, 154–67, at 162.

that if men pursue the good rather than the bad and unprofitable, ‘they would control events instead of being controlled by them’.<sup>70</sup> Within a similar understanding history framed by Fortune and influenced by the political issues of recent memory, WM judges his kings according to a particularly high standard of accountability. The providential reasons for an accident may be obscure, but for WM there is nothing inexplicable about the consequences of a king’s behaviour.

### **Henry: Conquest and tragedy.**

Henry (d. c. 1156–1164) was a secular cleric who resided in Lincoln before becoming archdeacon of Huntingdon in 1110.<sup>71</sup> Henry wrote his *Historia Anglorum* during his tenure as archdeacon, beginning in the 1120s, and continuing and revising it until 1154. Alexander, bishop of Lincoln, commissioned Henry to write it as a history of the kingdom and of the people’s origins.<sup>72</sup> Henry intended that his work should reach a wide audience and a less educated readership, as he himself stated in his *De contemptu mundi*;<sup>73</sup> his success in reaching many (‘pluribus’) is evident in the popularity of his *Historia*.<sup>74</sup>

Henry identifies his own purpose in writing as the provision of moral guidance for his readers.<sup>75</sup> Previous scholarship has ascribed several different motives: that he sought to educate through moral exempla from the past; that he endeavoured to amuse and to entertain;<sup>76</sup> that, along with his contemporaries, he sought primarily to inform and wrote

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<sup>70</sup> ‘Quod si hominibus bonarum rerum tanta cura esset, quanto studio aliena ac nihil profutura multaue etiam periculosa ac pernicioso petunt, neque regerentur magis quam regerent casus et eo magnitudinis procederent, ubi pro mortalibus gloria aeterni fierent.’ Sallust, *Bellum Iugurthinum*, i.

<sup>71</sup> For background on Henry’s life and works, see: Greenway, *HA*, xxiii–lvii; Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 193–201; Partner, *Serious Entertainments*, 11–48.

<sup>72</sup> *HA* Prologue, 4–7; Greenway, *HA*, lvii–lviii; Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 193–4.

<sup>73</sup> *HA* viii, *De contemptu mundi* preface, 584–7; Greenway, *HA*, lviii–lix; Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 187.

<sup>74</sup> For the MS evidence for the *HA*’s witnesses and extracts, see: Greenway, *HA*, cvxii, 839–42; on the six extant authorial versions, cxliv.

<sup>75</sup> *HA* Prologue, 2–7; D. Greenway, ‘Authority, Convention and Observation in Henry of Huntingdon’s *Historia Anglorum*’, *ANS* 18 (1995), 105–15, at 114.

<sup>76</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 196–200.

with a ‘despairing’ moral objective.<sup>77</sup> James Campbell stresses the positive side, and suggests that his work was not a product of nostalgia, but reflective of a wider interest in the past outside the walls of monasteries.<sup>78</sup> More recent scholarship has strengthened the idea that Henry wrote on behalf of a united English nation.<sup>79</sup> As we will see, his aims include redemption of the English past through the imposition of a framework that rejects what is corrupt in the world, but embraces what persists.

Structure and theme are inseparable in Henry’s *Historia*. It is divided into ten books, extending in time from the Roman occupation to his present; the later books include letters and accounts of miracles.<sup>80</sup> Campbell claims that Henry re-orders his material intelligently;<sup>81</sup> it should perhaps be added that his re-ordering reflects his own consistent agenda in his reconstruction of the past. We should view Henry’s ‘intelligence’ not only in what we perceive to be accuracy, but also in thematic imposition. Henry devised the concept of the Heptarchy: the seven kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England, which culminated in unification under Wessex;<sup>82</sup> this model governs his account of the early Anglo-Saxon past. A recurring theme is that God’s judgment makes itself manifest in unexpected and dramatic changes in fortune and circumstance, which Henry makes most explicit in his *De contemptu mundi* book.<sup>83</sup> But the most essential theme which governs his structure of English history is the five plagues: the Roman, Pictish and Scottish, Saxon, Danish and Norman invasions of Britain.<sup>84</sup> As I discuss below, Nancy Partner disagrees about Henry’s primary theme, but a close reading of his invasion

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<sup>77</sup> J. Campbell, ‘Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past’, in his *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), 209–28, at 212–213.

<sup>78</sup> Campbell, ‘Some Twelfth-Century Views’, 211.

<sup>79</sup> See e.g. C.A.M. Clarke, ‘Writing Civil War in Henry of Huntingdon’s *Historia Anglorum*’, *ANS* 31 (2009), 31–48, at 47; L. Ashe, *Fiction and History in England, 1066–1200* (Cambridge, 2007), 58–9; Gillingham, ‘Henry of Huntingdon’, 123–44.

<sup>80</sup> For a structural summary, see Greenway, *HA*, lxxvii–lxxxv.

<sup>81</sup> Campbell, ‘Some Twelfth-Century Views’, 212–13.

<sup>82</sup> *HA* i.4, 16–17; see also Greenway, *HA*, lx–lxi; Campbell, ‘Some Twelfth-Century Views’, 213.

<sup>83</sup> Greenway, ‘Authority’, 110–12, 15; Partner, *Serious Entertainments*, 11–48.

<sup>84</sup> *HA* i.4, 14–15.

narratives and his distribution of responsibility shows the centrality of the five plagues to his work.

The *Historia* lies outside classification by genre because of its diverse audience and because its form so closely resembles that of his main sources, Bede and ASC.<sup>85</sup> His sources for the eleventh century included oral tradition, and Norman materials including William of Jumièges and a set of annals,<sup>86</sup> but he uses significantly more material from ASC. The *Historia* might be classed as both *origines gentium*<sup>87</sup> and *res gestae*, for Henry himself identifies his intent to tell both kinds of story.<sup>88</sup> Partner places it firmly in the genre of *contemptus mundi*.<sup>89</sup> Henry's intent to write for a wide readership, coupled with his ecclesiastical patron, suggests that his work cannot be neatly placed exclusively in a sacred or secular genre. Henry's *Historia* was rather constricted in form and style, in that he chose to shadow the structure of Bede and ASC. In many ways the *Historia* evokes the genres of both ecclesiastical history and annals; his eleventh-century content in particular appears, at least on the surface, to be a concise version of ASC. His decision to limit his material in this way renders it possible to make explicit comparisons about the significance of what he omitted and added.

Henry's narrative makes extensive use of rhetoric evocative of classical literature; he frequently employs battle orations.<sup>90</sup> Greenway identifies several ways in which his rhetoric is not just decorative, but also structurally important; she concludes that

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<sup>85</sup> On Henry's sources: Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 198; Greenway, 'Authority', 107–9; idem, *HA*, lxxxv–cvii.

<sup>86</sup> On Henry's sources and those shared with WM and John, Greenway, *HA*, xciii–xcviii; Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 198–9. For a consideration of oral tradition potentially known to Henry, see: C.E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1939), 178–212; Greenway, *HA*, cv–cvi.

<sup>87</sup> Greenway, *HA*, lvii; on the genre, see: S. Reynolds, 'Medieval *origines gentium* and the community of the realm', *History* 68 (1983), 375–90, at 375–80.

<sup>88</sup> *HA* Prologue, 4–7.

<sup>89</sup> Partner, *Serious Entertainments*, 11–48.

<sup>90</sup> Greenway, *HA*, xxxiv–xxxviii, lxvi.

historians must ‘filter the embellishing colours of rhetoric’<sup>91</sup> to understand the *Historia*. This conclusion needs to be taken further. As I will argue presently, the need is rather to rescue Henry’s rhetoric from filtration in order to achieve a better understanding of its role in the narrative. His rhetoric is not a superficial aspect of style, but intrinsic to the narrative.

My main point about Henry’s sources will be that he is not reliant on them for his picture of English history. Greenway describes Henry’s relationship to ASC<sup>92</sup> as providing a relatively accurate translation; Henry himself explains that this is his intent because style should match content.<sup>93</sup> It is indeed the case that he remains true to ASC in chronology and in tone (in the latter respect, more so than John); nonetheless, he makes subtle changes in translation that suggest an interpretation of events that is different in content and focus, which rhetorical convention alone cannot explain.<sup>94</sup>

Like John, Henry follows the narrative of ASC closely in detail, order and wording. But his vision of history is one in which the nature of the conquests and English kings is dramatically different from his sources.<sup>95</sup> The recent edition naturally draws attention to the similarities between Henry and ASC, not the differences. This is a useful and valuable start for comparisons of the narratives. Yet even in passages that appear to be near-literal translations, there are changes in tone and emphasis that produce a remarkably different narrative. The *Historia*’s editor asks, ‘How faithfully does Henry transmit the material taken from ASC?’ and evaluates his relationship with ASC by describing Henry as assuming, attempting, trying, embellishing, following rhetorical

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<sup>91</sup> Greenway, ‘Authority’, 110, 115.

<sup>92</sup> His version of ASC was most similar to ‘E’: see *EHD*, 122–3; Partner, *Serious Entertainments*, 21; Greenway, *HA*, xci-xcviii.

<sup>93</sup> *HA* v.18, 310–11; Greenway, ‘Authority’, 107–8.

<sup>94</sup> Greenway suggests that, like Bede, Henry’s object to persuade the reader towards moral purity, and that everything he was included governed by rhetorical convention, ‘Authority’, 114.

<sup>95</sup> But cf. J. Huntington, ‘The Taming of the Laity: Writing Waltheof and Rebellion in the Twelfth Century’, *ANS* 32 (2009), 79–95, at 88, for the claim that Henry generally followed ASC with some abbreviation.

practices, and frequently misreading and misunderstanding ASC.<sup>96</sup> There is no proposition that he might have had individual and original motivations for making narrative changes. The evidence suggests otherwise.

Greenway has traced in detail Henry's borrowings and major influences on his writing.<sup>97</sup> Yet to examine the *Historia* primarily in terms of sources can distract from his Henry's historiographical project and from the effect of his narrative. There is a danger that editions can detract from the originality and particular project of each writer if he is reduced in the footnotes to a conveyer—as opposed to a transformer—of information.

For all that Henry follows the wording of ASC, he transforms the narrative. He does not do so in the simplistic way of a Norman loyalist reading his political sympathies onto an English past; nor does he bring a conflicted ethnic understanding stemming from mixed parentage.<sup>98</sup> He shares with ASC a vision of providential history, but brings an original approach to his narrative of providential design—one attuned to the role of individual influence and responsibility, which accordingly makes changes to the original story. Gransden points out that Henry maintains the tradition of showing God punishing sin in history,<sup>99</sup> observing that on occasion he 'reconciled rational [i.e. secular] with divine causation.' But his method is more complicated, and in some ways surprisingly original, providing insights into his expectations for kings and his beliefs about kings' abilities to influence the events of history. He makes narrative space for applying to kings a greater degree of responsibility, causal and moral.

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<sup>96</sup> Greenway, *HA*, xcvi.

<sup>97</sup> Greenway, 'Authority', 105–15; D. Greenway, 'Henry of Huntingdon and Bede', in J.P. Genet (ed.), *L'historiographie médiévale en Europe* (Paris, 1991), 43–50.

<sup>98</sup> On the Anglo-Norman historians' mixed parentage, see E. van Houts, 'Historical Writing', in C. Harper-Bill and E. van Houts (eds.), *A Companion to the Anglo-Norman World* (Woodbridge, 2003), 103–21, at 113; R.H.C. Davis, *The Normans and their Myth* (London, 1976), 124, 129; Gillingham, 'Henry of Huntingdon', 141; Partner, *Serious Entertainments*, 11; Greenway, *HA*, xxix–xl.

<sup>99</sup> But cf. how Gransden casts Henry as an 'irrational historian' in this regard, *Historical Writing*, 196; for Henry on Fortune, 198–9.

An essential—and hitherto overlooked—theme of Henry’s *Historia*, which forms a part of his storyline of English history, belongs to the classical tradition: tragedy. Variations on this classical concept are not much remarked on in early medieval scholarship;<sup>100</sup> yet an awareness of tragedy pervades Henry’s work. Henry’s education included classical authors and that well-known work, Isidore’s *Etymologiae*,<sup>101</sup> which defines the nature and work of the tragic poets thus: ‘Sed comici privatorum hominum praedicant acta; tragici vero res publicas et regum historias. Item tragicorum argumenta ex rebus luctuosis sunt; comicorum ex rebus laetis.’<sup>102</sup> Isidore equates tragedy with sorrowful things, namely public affairs and the deeds of kings: subjects on a grand scale of history. And it is material of this nature and on this scale—the origins of the English and the deeds of the kingdom—that Henry identifies as the essential material of his *Historia*.<sup>103</sup>

Henry was not the only twelfth-century historian to sound a tragic note in writing the history of England. For WM the White Ship disaster encapsulated theatrical tragedy: an individual not punished for doing evil, but lost in spite of doing good; Orderic, by contrast, was sceptical of tragedy as a poet’s construct.<sup>104</sup> But tragedy means something different to Henry. It is what occupies the void between ideal and reality—or, more particularly, between what could have been and what was. His invasion narratives lament the failed possibilities of this realm, even as he expresses contempt for its volatility. As we will see, Isidore’s definition of tragedy pervades Henry’s invasion narratives. This is how Henry relates the responsibilities of kings: where they failed, he evinces the belief

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<sup>100</sup> Discussion typically limited to classical and late medieval or early modern era, but see broadly: Kelly, *Ideas and forms of tragedy*. For later views on the concept of tragedy, see: H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973).

<sup>101</sup> On HH’s knowledge of Isidore’s *Etymologies* at Lincoln, see Greenway, *HA*, xxxii, xxviii.

<sup>102</sup> ‘But the comic [poets] make known the deeds of ordinary men; the tragic indeed on public affairs and the deeds of kings. In addition, the subjects of the tragic [poets] are drawn from sorrowful things; those of the comic from joyful things.’ Isidore, *Etymologiae*, viii.vii.6.

<sup>103</sup> *HA* Prologue, 2–7.

<sup>104</sup> On the concept of tragedy in the works of WM and OV, see: Kelly, *Ideas and forms of tragedy*, 90–2.

that they could have succeeded, and are hence reprehensible for their failures. Yet there is a sorrowful tone to his narrative: even in cases when a defending king could not be in two places at once, Henry believes things might have been different had the king done his duty.

Henry's storyline of English history is guided by a preoccupation with worldly permanence. He identifies and follows threads whereby men produce (and leave behind them) creations that persist through time. The deeds of the kingdom and its kings—and the extent to which these deeds endure in, develop, or reconstruct the earthly realm in England—form the substance of this preoccupation.

This might seem a surprising conclusion, given Partner's claim (with a multiplicity of examples) that Henry is guided by contempt of the world.<sup>105</sup> But the dichotomy posed by *contemptus mundi* is between the permanence of the heavenly kingdom and the impermanence of worldly things like greed, ambition, riches, and individual human life. This dichotomy was, as a moral message, important to Henry, as he himself acknowledges. To focus exclusively on this dichotomy, however, obscures Henry's fascination with the persistence of certain qualities and institutions in the earthly realm.

As we will see, Henry advocates *contemptus mundi* and the humility and wisdom it encourages,<sup>106</sup> but he also laments worldly events which he cannot rationalize. There is a danger in reading Henry's earlier books exclusively through the lens of Book VIII, which was written earlier and added later,<sup>107</sup> and originally had a different audience. Only in later versions, in the 1130s and 1140s, did Henry incorporate and revise the letters he had written previously into his *Historia*<sup>108</sup>—ten to twenty years after receiving his

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<sup>105</sup> Partner, *Serious Entertainments*, 11–48, esp. at 20, 28; see also: Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 197.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Partner, *Serious Entertainments*, 47–8.

<sup>107</sup> Greenway, *HA*, lxviii–lxix.

<sup>108</sup> Greenway, *HA*, lxvi–lxxvii; Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 194.

commission from Bishop Alexander. Although his prologue ends with an exploration of how all in the world comes to naught,<sup>109</sup> the importance of *contemptus mundi* to him did not diminish his keen interest in the endeavours that endured, nor his intent to report the events of this world.

For indeed, earthly achievements of men that endure to be known by the living are the grounds for his highest praise of men. These things which persist in the earthly realm include legacies, kings and peoples. Henry admires the legacies left in the form of written histories, especially that of Bede, and the moral value of knowledge of the past.<sup>110</sup> He speaks highly of ancient structures still standing, including Stonehenge, and remarks of the four key roads of England ‘multum quidem spaciose, sed nec minus speciose, sanciti edictis regum scriptisque uerendis legum.’<sup>111</sup> Henry admires not only the roads themselves, but also the laws and kings who have endeavoured to preserve them. Indeed, Henry praises those kings of England who have done their duty, left an enduring legacy, and proved worthy of remembrance. Henry names Cnut as greater than his predecessors, and William greater than his.<sup>112</sup> The enduring memory of their authority is what makes them great. And yet it is partly because Henry characterizes them as great that their memory endures in this way.

Henry respects those *gentes* who endure—especially the English, but he includes Normans and their achievements as well. Despite his comments that in his own time it was a disgrace to be called English,<sup>113</sup> this functions like reported speech: the disgrace is in the perspective of the Normans, about whom Henry has little positive to say. The English were afflicted—but so were the Normans, as Henry observes, beginning in the

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<sup>109</sup> *HA* Prologue, 6–9.

<sup>110</sup> See e.g. *HA* Prologue, 4–7; iv.12–14, 230–5.

<sup>111</sup> ‘which are very broad as well as splendid, protected by the edicts of kings and by venerable law codes.’ *HA* i.7, 24–5.

<sup>112</sup> *HA* vi.42, 410–11; vi.17, 366–7.

<sup>113</sup> *HA* vi.38, 402–3.

years after William I's death.<sup>114</sup> Henry's comment functions more as a lamentation for a people who endure than a dismissal of a conquered people. Henry's keen awareness that the English have not been obliterated is evident in his description of the five plagues: he refers to them, and to the Normans, in the present tense:

Quinque autem plagas ab exordio usque ad presens immisit diuina ultio Britannie, que non solum uisitit fideles, sed etiam diuudicat infideles. Primam per Romanos, qui Britanniam expugnauerunt sed postea recesserunt. Secundam per Pictos et Scotos, qui grauissime eam bellis uexauerunt, nec tamen optinuerunt. *Terciam per Anglicos, qui eam debellauerunt et optinent.* Quartam per Dacos, qui eam bellis optinuerunt, sed postea deperierunt. *Quintam per Normannos, qui eam deuicerunt et Anglis inpresentiarum dominantur.*<sup>115</sup> [emphasis added]

Henry's English persist: they have been put down by the Normans as just punishment from God, but they are still a presence in the land. What Henry finds impressive within the earthly realm are those worthy legacies which persist over time, and which have accomplished something of moral moment.

Earthly things that do not aspire to some degree of moral improvement in this world—or indeed are not designed to endure in it at all—Henry rejects. The significance of Henry's description of the five plagues emerges with greater clarity by comparing how he treats the peoples he believes have disappeared. Henry's *contemptus mundi* applies here: he is wary of the lure of mutable things like ambition, riches and greed; their very mutability renders them contemptible to him.<sup>116</sup> But this is even true of the plagues themselves: the differences he perceives in the characters of the *gentes* cause him to view them differently. The invasions of the Picts and Scots are the only ones he acknowledges as particularly grave in this passage—and indeed, they are the only 'plagues' which he

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<sup>114</sup> HA vii.1, 412–13.

<sup>115</sup> 'From the very beginning down to the present time, the divine vengeance has sent five plagues into Britain, punishing the faithful as well as unbelievers. The first was through the Romans, who overcame Britain but later withdrew. The second was through the Picts and Scots, who grievously beleaguered the land with battles but did not conquer it. *The third was through the English, who overcame and occupy it.* The fourth was through the Danes, who conquered it by warfare, but afterwards they perished. *The fifth was through the Normans, who conquered it and have dominion over the English people at the present time.*' HA i.4, 14–15.

<sup>116</sup> E.g. HA viii, *De contemptu mundi* c.1, 584–7.

does not claim conquered the land. Henry uses the destruction of the Picts and their language as a reason to reject the earthly realm, because it is an instance of how even an ancient tongue and a people can come to nothing: ‘Cui autem non comparet amorem celestium et horrorem terrestrium, si cogitet’.<sup>117</sup> Henry rejects ephemeral histories and here reveals a deep-rooted fear of them, evident in the phrase ‘horrorem terrestrium’. Henry here names the opposition between celestial goods and worldly horrors, but Henry’s summaries and full narratives of the five plagues evince a contrast within the world: between the awe of things which last, and this fear of temporal oblivion.

Henry puts this contrast even more explicitly in his Book V Prologue. The three invasions which he deems had lasting, constructive impact for England merit favourable mention. Henry writes of the Roman invasion: ‘Romani namque sibi Britanniam breui subiugauerunt, et lege dominantium splendide rexerunt.’<sup>118</sup> In Henry’s view, right of conquest, and the legacy of the Romans in Britain, compensate for the brevity of their occupation. In a particularly crucial passage, Henry identifies justice and laws as virtues of both the Saxon and Norman invasions:

Saxones autem pro uiribus paulatim terram bello capescentes, captam optinebant, optentam edificabant, edificatam legibus regebant. Necnon et Normanni cito et breuiter terram sibi subdentes, uictis uitam ex libertatem legesque antiquas regni iure concesserunt, de quibus in antea dicendum est.<sup>119</sup>

These three invasions Henry deems have contributed to England’s future; they thus merit recognition for their success.

But the other two—Pictish and Scottish, and Danish—Henry derides, with the exception of King Cnut of the Danes. To invade and destroy, but to cease before

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<sup>117</sup> ‘Who will not espouse love of celestial things and dread of worldly things, if he considers’, *HA* i.8, 24–5.

<sup>118</sup> ‘The Romans subjugated Britain to themselves for a brief time, and ruled splendidly by right of conquest.’ *HA* v.prologue, 272–3.

<sup>119</sup> ‘The Saxons, on the other hand, strove with all their might to take the land by warfare little by little, gained possession of what they had taken, built on what they had gained, and what they had built they ruled by laws. Likewise the Normans, suddenly and quickly subduing the land to themselves, by right of kingship granted to the conquered their life, liberty, and ancient laws: an account of them will come later.’ *HA* v.prologue, 272–3.

conquest, means that no laws, rebuilding or preservation could take place at their hands: hence they are reprehensible. Henry writes of them: ‘Picti uero et Scoti crebras irruptiones ex boreali parte Britannie faciebant. Sed nec eam ex omni parte aggrediebantur, nec numquam pernitiouse repulsi, tempore non pauco ab inuasione cessabant.’<sup>120</sup> Henry’s reasons for criticizing the Pictish and Scottish invasions in his initial description of the five plagues become more apparent here. The Danish invasions were particularly cruel and reprehensible because permanence was not even the Danes’ goal. He writes: ‘Hec siquidem longe inmanior longe crudelior ceteris fuit.’<sup>121</sup> Shortly thereafter, in juxtaposing the deeds of the Danes with the laws, building projects and governmental persistence of the Saxons and the Normans, Henry writes: ‘Daci uero terram undique creberrime diutissime insilientes et assilientes, eam non optinere sed predari studebant, et omnia destruere non dominari cupiebant.’<sup>122</sup> Henry describes the Danes in a negative tone for destruction and for not intending to conquer. Henry respects successful conquest—something which endures in the earthly realm. An unsuccessful onslaught—or one which he believes seeks only to destroy instead of to rebuild—he considers chaotic and repugnant.

This exploration of the five plagues theme has two important implications. First, in the unfolding of Henry’s narrative through its prologues and central books, the theme of the five plagues is more subtle and varied, and more crucial to the narrative’s structure and meaning, than has previously been suggested.<sup>123</sup> The plagues are not all equal: those which attempted or achieved permanence—or involved individual kings who made this

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<sup>120</sup> ‘Next the Picts and Scots made frequent incursions from the northern part of Britain. They did not, however, attack it from every quarter, or very destructively, and when, after a short time, they were repulsed, they gave up their invasion.’ *HA* v.prologue, 272–3.

<sup>121</sup> ‘This plague was more widespread and more cruel than the others.’ *HA* v.prologue, 272–3.

<sup>122</sup> ‘But the Danes swooped and rushed upon the land from all directions very frequently over a long period, not aiming to possess it, but rather to plunder it, and desiring not to govern but rather to destroy everything.’ *HA* v.prologue, 272–3.

<sup>123</sup> But cf. Partner, who argues that the five plagues theme serves to organize his material into ‘a reasonably intelligible whole without, however, having much effect on the narrative.’ *Serious Entertainments*, 25.

their aim—do not earn the same gravity of scorn as those which failed, or which brought gratuitous violence without conquest.

Second, Henry's use of the five plagues theme suggests his regret for the tragedy of lost things within England's history. Henry's narrative was not, as has been argued previously, free of nostalgia for the English past,<sup>124</sup> but his nostalgia is not limited to the Anglo-Saxon past. His sense of regret does not oppose Anglo-Saxon achievements with Norman destruction or vice versa; rather, it opposes endurance with oblivion in the history of the whole island. The problem with earlier scholarly reasoning is that it has been based on the probable interests of Henry's patron, Bishop Alexander: as a Norman, it was thought, he would not have been interested in nostalgia for a conquered people. This assumption is not necessarily accurate; in any case, as we have seen, Henry intended his work for a wide audience. Furthermore, such a conclusion presupposes that Henry's interests and aims in writing history were determined foremost by political loyalties. As we will see in the ensuing discussion of royal responsibility, this was not the case.

Henry's five plagues theme structures the narrative, but it is more than an organizational tool and does not constitute emotional distance from the subject matter. Rather, the common frame permits him to articulate most clearly which invasions were morally worse than others, for whom, and why. His preoccupation with enduring things of this world does not mean that he is absorbed in them to the exclusion of the heavenly realm, nor that he cannot counsel scorn for ephemeral worldly evils or turns of fortune. But in his *Historia* he is not content to convey a moral message alone. Indeed, it is because he is so attuned to the ephemeral nature of the world—its temptations, its dangers, its mutability—that he recognizes so clearly what lasts in the world. Henry

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<sup>124</sup> But cf. Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views', 211, for the claim that Henry's narrative is a 'powerful corrective' to the view that yearning for a lost past was a central motivation of Henry's writing.

sounds the tragic note for the enduring good he deems possible, which nevertheless does not come to pass.

Henry professes contempt of the world, but *contemptus mundi* alone is not the key to Henry's views of peoples, deeds, invasions and kings. He admires *gentes* in it who persist through building, rebuilding and lawmaking; he admires kings who rule well and who make provisions for as much permanence as he deems is possible in the earthly realm. In this regard the political enmity between Saxons and Normans (or, indeed, a king's origins as an outsider) is beside the point: what they share for him is an interest in and dedication to perpetuating their legacy in the world this side of the grave. As the subsequent analysis will suggest, Henry's reconstructions of England's eleventh-century invasions and pictures of England's kings reflect these attitudes towards the past and royal responsibility.

### **John: crafting a new history**

Like Henry, John wrote an account of English history for which his primary source was ASC. John, formerly known as 'Florence' but reidentified as 'John' by Darlington and McGurk, was a monk at Worcester. He composed the *Chronicon ex Chronicis*, which is generally thought of as a Latin chronicle of English and some European history largely based on versions of ASC. He finished compiling the *Chronicon* between 1140 and 1143.<sup>125</sup> Wulfstan of Worcester (d. 1095) commissioned him to write the chronicle using Marianus's world chronicle (which went to 1082) as its basis, as well as ASC and other English source material.<sup>126</sup> Modern scholars have believed that the composition of the chronicle was a team effort at Worcester, which John supervised and directed, as a result

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<sup>125</sup> McGurk, JW, ii, lxxxii.

<sup>126</sup> Hayward, *Winchcombe*, i, 65–73; Brett, 'The Use of Universal Chronicle', 277–85. On the reception of Marianus in England, see also: V.I.J. Flint, 'The Date of the Chronicle of "Florence" of Worcester', *Revue Bénédictine* 86 (1976), 115–19; Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 232; G.O. Sayles, *The Medieval Foundations of England*, 2nd edn (London, 1950), 279–80.

of some observations made by Orderic Vitalis.<sup>127</sup> John's audience would have included the Worcester community above all. Indeed, his chronicle is steeped in the Worcester tradition; he includes much material specific to the region and praise for those people directly associated with the community.

A variety of purposes have been ascribed to John's *Chronicon*. It has been identified as a reference work,<sup>128</sup> and also as a straightforward account of English history. Hayward has recently argued that John's monastic milieu is the best context for understanding the purpose of the *Chronicon*, and that it was intended primarily as a teaching tool for young oblates and new monks.<sup>129</sup> Hayward argues that the influence of Marianus on the form and design of the *Chronicon* has been underrated, and that John's primary purpose was to endorse Marianus's distinctive chronology of the world.<sup>130</sup> He argues that the strongest patterns in the monastic annals are of religious, not political significance.<sup>131</sup> But I argue that this divide posited between the motives of John and other authors of annals—monastic and didactic on the one hand, and political or related to England on the other—is artificial.<sup>132</sup> Instruction is just as subject to the imposition of external agendas as is the conscious creation of a political narrative.

The monastic community may seem to be a natural framework for the production of histories. But there is a danger in overstating the isolation of these communities.<sup>133</sup> Many of the monks were well-travelled—both in the geographical sense and in the thought-world of their wide and deep reading (as indeed is true of WM)—and they had much to say about humanity and history. Furthermore, as I will argue subsequently, the

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<sup>127</sup> OV iii.ii.159–161, ii, 186–9; M. Chibnall, *The World of Orderic Vitalis* (Woodbridge, 1984), 36–7; Hayward, *Winchcombe*, i, 64–5.

<sup>128</sup> Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views', 213–14.

<sup>129</sup> Hayward, *Winchcombe*, i, 6–7 n.9, 36–7, 72–3.

<sup>130</sup> Hayward, *Winchcombe*, i, 64–76.

<sup>131</sup> Hayward, *Winchcombe*, i, 52–61.

<sup>132</sup> See e.g. Hayward, *Winchcombe*, i, 9.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. van Houts, *Memory and Gender*, 9; G. Duby, 'The Culture of the Knightly Class: Audience and Patronage', in R.L. Benson and G. Constable (eds.), *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1982), 248–62, at 250–4.

genre of annals and the monastic milieu are not the best or only ways of explaining the purpose and themes in the *Chronicon*, because there are several important similarities in how John, WM and Henry represent causation, responsibility, kingship and the English past—similarities which indicate in turn their similar thinking about these things.<sup>134</sup>

John's *Chronicon*—like its primary source for English history, ASC—is in annalistic form. I will argue, consistent with recent work on annals, that both of these sources are narratives with particular narrative agendas. Recent scholarship on annals has overturned the view that annals lack style, narrative cohesion, and order.<sup>135</sup> Historians in the past have argued that the temporal organization of annals does not supply a pattern or meaning to the material, nor do annals posit any causal relationship among the events documented.<sup>136</sup> But it has been argued that causation can still be implied by the paratactic sentence structure of annals, even without more the more sophisticated grammatical constructions of classical literature.<sup>137</sup> White has pointed out that modern historians have imposed both the distinctions made among annals, chronicles and histories, and the idea that it is profitable to evaluate them according to their success as narratives.<sup>138</sup> Medieval writers made their own distinctions and judgments, yet neither these nor modern historians' categories are necessarily inherent in the medieval texts themselves.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> But cf. Hayward, *Winchcombe*, i, 53.

<sup>135</sup> See esp. S. Foot, 'Annals and Chronicles in Western Europe', in S. Foot and C.F. Robinson (eds.), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing. II: 400–1400* (Oxford, 2012), 346–67, esp. at. 347, 352, 363–5; S. Foot, 'Finding the meaning of form: narrative in annals and chronicles', in N. Partner (ed.), *Writing Medieval History* (London, 2005), 88–108; on the implications of annals' temporal organization for content, see esp. 96; in ASC, 99–102. For a comment on the traditional views of annals, see e.g.: H. White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980), 5–27, at 9–10; for an analysis of annals as narrative, 11–20; compared to chronicles, 20–3; on the importance of omission to annals' content, 14.

<sup>136</sup> Discussed in R.F. Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse* (Cambridge, 1995), 117. See also J.O. Ward, 'Some Principles of Rhetorical Historiography', in E. Breisach (ed.), *Classical Rhetoric and Medieval Historiography* (Kalamazoo, 1985), 103–65. For the view that annals lack causation, and that this avoided problems of interpretation, cf. Hayward, *Winchcombe*, i, 20, 30.

<sup>137</sup> See E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. W.R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), esp. 73–4; Partner, *Serious Entertainments*, 197–9.

<sup>138</sup> White, 'The Value of Narrativity', 27.

<sup>139</sup> Consider e.g. the prologue of Gervase of Canterbury's *Chronicle*, wherein Gervase attempts to distinguish chroniclers from historians yet does not always follow these distinctions in his own writing:

One of Hayward's arguments for seeing annals as haphazard compilation without intentionality or order is the proliferation of what he identifies as 'political contradictions'. He gives the example of material favouring Frankish and English views, or West Saxon and Mercian, found in the same chronicles.<sup>140</sup>

The major problem here is the assumption that these 'political' perspectives are contradictory in the first place. If the starting assumptions are that political loyalties were of central importance to writers and that these loyalties were separate and discrete entities—e.g. 'English', 'Norman', 'Frankish', 'Mercian'—then anything which does not fit these categories will look like a contradiction or appear random. But I argue for considering the annals not as contradictions in, but rather the convergence of, perspectives. There was nothing preventing medieval chroniclers from having, recognizing or acknowledging multiple points of view in their histories. Nor is there any reason to assume that categories of political identity mattered as much to them as they do to us. Indeed, the fact that these annalists saw no need to reconcile political or ethnic views suggests that these concerns were immaterial to their overall agendas.

John's sources for the eleventh century are particularly relevant for present purposes. John had at hand many of the same sources as WM, and he apparently knew the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*. He probably had multiple versions of ASC. For England's eleventh-century history, he drew on a text similar to D, but sometimes more like C; he may have had a copy of the lost northern recension.<sup>141</sup> But as we will see, his narrative is

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*Gervasii Cantuariensis: Opera Historica*, ed. W. Stubbs (2 vols., London, 1879–1880), i, 87–8. Cf. Foot, 'Annals and Chronicles', 356, 363, 365); C. Given-Wilson, *Chronicles: The Writing of History in Medieval England* (London, 2004), 1, 21; but cf. Hayward, *Winchcombe*, i, 55–60, for the claim that Gervase is being 'disingenuous'.

<sup>140</sup> Hayward, *Winchcombe*, i, 52.

<sup>141</sup> McGurk, JW, ii, xix–xx, lxxix–lxxx; R.R. Darlington and P. McGurk, 'The *Chronicon ex Chronicis* of "Florence" of Worcester and its Use of Sources for English History before 1066', *ANS* 5 (1983), 185–96, at 192–3; Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 145, 147; see also: C. Hart, 'The early section of the *Worcester chronicle*', *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1983), 251–315, at 279–80, 298–305. Whitelock points out that John probably knew several versions; for the eleventh-century section of his *Chronicle*, he used a northern recension MS most similar to 'D' but with some material from 'C', *EHD*, 124; this builds on Plummer who

different in important ways from points where CDE is similar in its basic account of the Æthelred chronicler, writing c. 1016–1025, and from the CDE accounts of the Norman Conquest and its aftermath. I will not discuss John’s sources in great length because in structure and content, John draws mostly on material from versions of ASC. But we need to consider what has been written about John’s relationship to his sources in order to understand where my argument departs from earlier interpretations.

Our current picture of John is one of a compiler who follows the basic account of ASC, but historians have not been able to offer a reason for the way John restructures this material. Gransden calls the chronicle ‘mainly a compilation’ of other authorities;<sup>142</sup> Brett refers to John as a ‘very literal compiler’<sup>143</sup>; Given-Wilson claims that John’s *Chronicon* is ‘very largely an exercise in cutting and pasting rather than an original composition’;<sup>144</sup> similarly, Darlington and McGurk refer to John’s account of Æthelred’s reign as a ‘pastiche’ of material from ASC, Sallust, Bede and poetic sources. They claim that John’s reason for using this ‘pastiche’ for Æthelred’s reign (and not in other wars he describes) is unclear.<sup>145</sup> Gransden suggests that the compiler intended ‘to edify and amuse’ as well as to record.<sup>146</sup>

Prior work has identified and emphasized John’s similarities with and debt to ASC in tone and interpretation.<sup>147</sup> The *Chronicon* has been described as a translation of ASC appended to Marianus’s world history.<sup>148</sup> As noted above, he was familiar with the material that is now recognized as written by the Æthelred chronicler. But it has been

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pointed out that John used a ‘DE’ type, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, ed. C. Plummer and J. Earle (2 vols., Oxford, 1892–1899), ii, lxxxiii–lxxxiv.

<sup>142</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 143.

<sup>143</sup> M. Brett, ‘John of Worcester and his contemporaries,’ in R.H.C. Davis and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (eds.), *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Richard William Southern* (Oxford, 1981), 101–26, at 114.

<sup>144</sup> Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 159.

<sup>145</sup> Darlington and McGurk, ‘The *Chronicon ex Chronicis*’, 193.

<sup>146</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 147.

<sup>147</sup> See e.g. van Houts, ‘Historical Writing’, 112–13.

<sup>148</sup> C.M. Kauffmann, *Romanesque Manuscripts, 1066–1190* (London, 1975), 87.

suggested that John changed his sources as little as possible,<sup>149</sup> and that the annalistic format did not permit John to offer any perspective on larger historical questions like cause or purpose, or any new perspectives on English history.<sup>150</sup> Darlington and McGurk claim that John's account of Æthelred's reign in particular captures and amplifies the mood of ASC and does little else.<sup>151</sup> Gransden suggests it shares the Peterborough chronicle's pro-English bias, but to a lesser extent.<sup>152</sup> Others have identified John's sympathies for the English in his account of the Norman Conquest and 'silently corrected' Norman views in service of these sympathies.<sup>153</sup> These arguments suggest first, that John did not engage with different points of view in rendering the past; second, that he found English and Norman loyalties irreconcilable: I will dispute both points in my analysis of John's narrative. In their edition, Darlington and McGurk regularly suggest that many of John's additions to ASC are reasonable inference,<sup>154</sup> which implies that John's relationship with his source was passive, and underrates John's own historiographical project. It has been acknowledged that John omitted some of the lamentation from ASC,<sup>155</sup> but a satisfactory reason has not yet been provided.

John's *Chronicon* is, however, more than a compilation, and it makes a more striking interpretive departure from the accounts of the Æthelred chronicler and later versions of ASC than has been acknowledged previously. John's narrative transforms the narrative of the Danish invasions of Æthelred's reign from a lamentation of treachery and failure to an attestation of effective defence and royal action. He does the same for

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<sup>149</sup> Brett, 'John of Worcester', 114; for a similar interpretation, S. Keynes, 'The Declining Reputation of King Aethelred the Unready', in D. Hill (ed.), *Ethelred the Unready* (Oxford, 1978), 227–53, at 238.

<sup>150</sup> Brett, 'John of Worcester', 125; Given-Wilson, *Chronicles*, 159.

<sup>151</sup> Darlington and McGurk, 'The *Chronicon ex Chronicis*', 193, 196.

<sup>152</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 147.

<sup>153</sup> Hayward, *Winchcombe*, i, 72–3; see also: Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, 245–6; A. Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge, 1995), 168–70.

<sup>154</sup> McGurk, JW, ii, 442 n.1; 451 n.6–6; 452 n.2; 492 n.5; 507 n.4; 520 n.5; see also: Darlington and McGurk, 'The *Chronicon ex Chronicis*', 191.

<sup>155</sup> Hart, 'The early section of the *Worcester chronicle*', 298–9; Darlington and McGurk identify most of these omissions throughout JW.

Norman Conquest narrative. I will argue that John's omissions, 'inferences' and stylistic changes serve the further narrative function of redeeming the English defence. The subsequent argument thus suggests an addition to Gransden's list of John's purposes: to persuade.

A further comment about John's known and unknown sources is warranted. The many similarities between his account and that of the Æthelred chronicler, and later versions of ASC for the eleventh century, as well as John's proximity to the tradition of chronicling at Worcester, indicate that John knew the account of the Æthelred chronicler, northern recensions and Worcester annals, at a minimum. As the extant fragments of MS A suggest,<sup>156</sup> John could indeed have read and absorbed a different view of the Danish invasions from that of the Æthelred chronicler. But if John's views do indeed represent the views of a lost MS 'X'—a contention which may never be proved or even provable—then my findings and their significance do not change; they simply attach themselves to MS 'X' as well. The important point, in any case, is that John had the choice of what to include, whether it was to decide between variant accounts, or to modify the explanations of the Æthelred chronicler with original material. In his *Chronicon*, as we will see, he modifies ASC's overall picture of the English past to marked effect, in a way that redeems the English and visits responsibility and successes onto those who ruled England in the eleventh century.

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<sup>156</sup> S. Keynes, 'Re-Reading King Æthelred the Unready', in D. Bates et al. (eds.), *Writing Medieval Biography, 750–1250: Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow* (Woodbridge, 2006), 77–97, at 79; Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', 232–3.

## PART TWO: DEFENDING KINGS

### ÆTHELRED

England faced a series of Danish invasions in the latter part of the tenth century and was ultimately conquered in the early eleventh, first by Swein in 1013 and then by Cnut in 1016. The account of ASC's Æthelred chronicler reflects the worsening of the raids over time, and repeatedly reiterates the ineffectiveness of the defence. Twelfth-century historians who rewrote the Danish invasions over a century after the Danish Conquest faced a potential problem of historical interpretation: If they were to redeem England's past, they had to account for failure. I will discuss the ways in which they did so, and the import of their choices, in relation to their picture of the defending king Æthelred and their distribution of responsibility across the English. Who is given credit for exhibiting positive qualities, and who is blamed for their absence? More particularly, how is blame actually distributed, and what degree of praise or censure can we identify for a given party? Finally, what are the narrative effects and cultural significance of each author's distribution of responsibility? In evaluating these questions it is possible to distinguish the twelfth-century historians from their sources, in terms of their the historical visions and ideas about responsibility.

According to WM, Æthelred was responsible for not one, but two conquests of England. Æthelred, at least nominally an English king, not only harmed the kingdom through the consequences of his behaviour during the Danish invasions, but established the connection that would bring the Norman invasions of the future:

[Æthelred] ... qui, ut perniciosus in posteros esset, commentatus est qualiter successio sua omnem Angliam amitteret, Emmam filiam Ricardi comitis Normanniae coniugo asciscens; unde succedenti tempore factum ut Normanni

Angliam iure suo clamitantes ditioni subicerent, sicut hodie melius uidetur oculo quam exaratur stilo.<sup>1</sup>

WM gives the king considerable influence over the outcome of two invasions of England, and holds him accountable for the resulting defeats. In *GR*, WM suggests that his failures to do his duty make him less of a king: ‘Egelredus ... regnum adeptus obsedit potius quam rexit annis triginta septem.’<sup>2</sup> This is not a case of the winner writing history. But WM’s narrative changes the criteria which merit loyalty to the king; being a natural heir does not necessarily warrant loyalty. In WM’s view, criticism of Æthelred is not disloyalty to an English king: he is writing history based on a new set of parameters and assumptions about what English kingship is. WM’s caustic comments raise interesting questions about twelfth-century attitudes towards England’s defending kings in its history of invasion.

Faced with accounting for the crisis of invasion, at what point and on what basis did chroniclers question the royal authority of a defending king? Are their judgments and conclusions particular to the twelfth century? To determine the standards on which the defending king and the English defence were judged in the invasion narrative, this analysis identifies four themes (each with sub-themes). First, character and behaviour, which includes actions and motivations. Second, military leadership, which includes several elements and their opposites: courage, military preparation and presence opposed to cowardice, desertion and absence; decisive opposed to dilatory action; victory or well-fought defeat opposed to shameful or chaotic defeat; mutual obligation and loyalty opposed to treachery and tyranny. The third is the assessment of justice opposed to

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<sup>1</sup> ‘To prolong the harm he did so that it affected posterity, [Æthelred] contrived that his successors should lose all England, by marrying Emma, daughter of Richard duke of Normandy, the result being that in after years the Normans were able to claim England as of right and bring it under their control, something better seen today than put down in writing.’ WM, *VD* ii.34.3–4, 296–7; discussed in Winterbottom and Thomson, WM, *Saints’ Lives*, xxxiv.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Æthelred ... came to the throne, and occupied rather than ruled the kingdom, for thirty-seven years.’ *GR* ii.164.1, i, 268–9.

arbitrary violence; the fourth, pious opposed to irreverent behaviour. Naturally, they are interrelated, and it is not always possible to separate them; nor are all relevant to discussion of each author. The goal is to investigate how each writer assesses the king and the English defence, based on his particular characterizations and criteria.

WM, as the historian most critical of Æthelred (and the most demonstrably well-read), forms a natural pivot-point for this chapter. I will begin by investigating WM's main sources for the Danish invasions of Æthelred's reign in order to illustrate the significance of WM's own interpretation. Through WM's criticism of Æthelred, I will examine his distribution of responsibility and accountability between the defending English king and the defence itself. I will then turn to two of WM's contemporaries, Henry and John, and will argue that WM's attitudes towards the king and the defence are sustained in other twelfth-century versions of this invasion narrative. The analysis will demonstrate that the chroniclers each brought new ideas of kingship to their sources. They idealize English kingship by showing that failure is extremely unworthy of it, by assigning more responsibility to the king in both senses of the word 'responsibility': the ability to influence the course of battle through his actions and behaviour, and accountability for his actions and those of the defence.

### **The Æthelred chronicler: a post-conquest narrator**

The chronicler for Æthelred's reign (the Æthelred chronicler) composed the annals for 983 to 1016 retrospectively, after the king's death. This version of ASC (the northern recension) is preserved in MSS D and E of ASC. The chronicler wrote between 1016 and 1023, during the reign of Cnut, and on this basis it is reasonable to treat this series of

annals about Æthelred's reign as a continuous retrospective narrative instead of as a series of contemporary annal entries.<sup>3</sup>

Brooks identifies the possibility that the annals for MSS CDE were first composed at Cnut's court (on the basis that it is otherwise hard to reconcile and to account for the variations) and suggests that the original record kept by priests in the king's household was rewritten.<sup>4</sup> The only identifiably contemporary annal during this time period is the 'Parker Chronicle' (MS A)'s entry for 1001, and comparisons between this entry and CDE have indicated that the CDE entries show that the Viking raids were not only catastrophic (as indeed they were), but also more so than do the contemporary sources.<sup>5</sup> This is further evidence for the rewriting of entries at a later date.

One could argue that by WM's day, Æthelred was long dead, and thus an easy scapegoat for disaster. The Æthelred chronicler strikes a consistently negative tone about England's inability to resist. But Æthelred was also dead, and Cnut well-established by the time the Æthelred chronicler compiled his account: still, Æthelred does not appear as the sole culprit of English failure.

I will suggest that WM's primary source for the narrative, the Æthelred chronicler and his version of the annals for 983–1016, is not demonstrably the source of WM's negative opinion of Æthelred, as has hitherto been argued. The Æthelred chronicler does

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<sup>3</sup> S. Keynes, 'A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelred the Unready', *TRHS*, 5th series, 36 (1986), 195–217, at 201–5; idem, 'The Declining Reputation of King Aethelred the Unready', in D. Hill (ed.), *Ethelred the Unready* (Oxford, 1978), 227–53, at 229–31; A. Sheppard, *Families of the King: Writing Identity in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Toronto, 2004), 71, 71 n.1; C. Clark, 'The narrative mode of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* before the Conquest', in P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (eds.), *England Before the Conquest* (Cambridge, 1971), 215–35, at 224–30; F. Barlow, *Edward the Confessor*, new edn (New Haven, 1997), 4–5; S. Körner, *The Battle of Hastings, England, and Europe 1035–1066* (Lund, 1964), 7–10; S. Keynes, 'Re-Reading King Æthelred the Unready', in D. Bates et al. (eds.), *Writing Medieval Biography, 750–1250: Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow* (Woodbridge, 2006), 77–97, at 79. These arguments revise Stenton's assumption that the annals were composed annually: F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 2001), 394; for this view detailed, see: C. Hart, 'The early section of the *Worcester chronicle*', *Journal of Medieval History* 9 (1983), 251–315, at 298–308.

<sup>4</sup> Brooks, 'Why is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* about kings?', 43–70, at 52–4; for the case that main account came out of London, and that earlier material was revised c. 1016, see: Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', 232–3.

<sup>5</sup> Keynes, 'Re-Reading', 79; Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', 232–3.

not portray Æthelred as wholly or characteristically responsible for the Viking invasions. What criticism of the king is present is generally implied rather than stated, and it is based on how he handles individual situations and problems within his kingdom: in particular, his and his leading men's failure to deal with internal treachery. The chronicler distributes responsibility for the failed defence across the English: he implies that the king, the army and the ætheling Edmund are all at fault for the raids themselves and the various failures of defence. This is more consistent in tone with other sources from the period, which stress collective responsibility for the invasions, prime examples being Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi* and Æthelred's 1009 law code.<sup>6</sup>

This point needs to be made because our knowledge of the twelfth-century sources' attitudes continues to colour how ASC is read. The differences in tone and interpretation must be pointed out in order to reveal the twelfth-century chroniclers' originality in their interpretations. Work on ASC tends to characterize the Æthelred chronicler as steadily and uniformly hostile to Æthelred and some of his councillors, as despairing and defeatist, and as presenting the ultimate defeat of the English in 1016 as inevitable.<sup>7</sup> Alice Sheppard has argued that ASC portrays Æthelred in particular as incompetent, as part of the royal culpability required by a salvation history.<sup>8</sup> Following from these conclusions about the Æthelred chronicler, it has been asserted that WM's primary source for his characterization of Æthelred's life as 'cursus ... in principio, miser in medio, turpis in exitu'<sup>9</sup> was ASC.<sup>10</sup> Keynes also claims that the primary literary

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<sup>6</sup> Above, 9–10; the Prologue of VII Æthelred identifies the need for all to work for God's mercy in order to withstand their enemies. The code calls for the whole nation to make a general penance: confessing, making payments to God, singing and praying together, VII Æthelred 1–6.

<sup>7</sup> S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'The Unready', 975–1016* (Cambridge, 1980), 228–30; N. Brooks, 'Why is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* about kings?', *ASE* 39 (2010), 43–70, at 52; Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', 235; idem, 'Re-Reading King Æthelred the Unready', 78–9.

<sup>8</sup> Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 86, 73.

<sup>9</sup> 'cruel at the outset, pitiable in mid-course, and disgraceful in its ending', *GR* ii.164.1, i, 268–9.

<sup>10</sup> A. Williams, *Æthelred the Unready: The Ill-Counselled King* (London, 2003), ix–x. Williams claims that ASC was 'contemporary for Æthelred's reign', but although much of the material was probably contemporary, the annals were composed after Æthelred's reign.

sources for Æthelred's reign, the northern recension of ASC and Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, are responsible for defining the anti-Æthelred 'prejudices' of historians from the twelfth-century forward.<sup>11</sup>

These arguments rely on an interpretation of tone which is not in fact conclusively directed at Æthelred in particular; nor is it universally caustic towards his behaviour throughout the account. Although the Æthelred chronicler was writing with hindsight after Æthelred's reign had ended, he does not use the disastrous events of Æthelred's reign to justify direct or individual reproach of the king. The chronicler does not judge Æthelred as inevitably or characteristically responsible. Rather, over the course of the narrative, he implies reproach of the king in proportion to individual actions or choices. Given the chronicler's bitterness towards the English defence overall, this lack of accusation is particularly significant.

As we will see, the Æthelred chronicler's account of the Danish invasions darkens in tone as it progresses from the 990s to the 1010s, reflecting both the worsening of the raids over time and foreknowledge of their outcome. One might expect the cumulative effect of the raids would contribute to a catastrophic interpretation that focuses blame on the defeated—and by that point dead—defending king.

But this is not the case. Given the narrative's composition after Æthelred's final defeat, and under the reign of Cnut, it is striking that personal attacks against Æthelred are not more forthcoming. For something written retrospectively, it unfolds with a remarkable lack of attention to what are indeed foregone conclusions. Implied criticism of Æthelred never occurs when he acts with counsel, and only occurs explicitly in association with his failure to deal with internal treachery. Implied criticism is not directed at his character or the defence operation; the failed defence is not the king's fault

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<sup>11</sup> Keynes, *Diplomas*, xvi.

but a collective fault. The king may be unable to deal with treachery (implied criticism) but he is not blamed for causing it—and he is not alone in being ineffective at solving it. I will examine the themes of character and behaviour, the military defence, treachery, and justice versus arbitrary violence in the narrative to illustrate that ASC's assessment of Æthelred as a king is neither hostile nor based on a judgment of his character. It takes a critical tone only when Æthelred's choices—usually made with counsel—have an apparent ill effect on the civil cohesion of the kingdom.

ASC's account does not necessarily betray criticism of the king's actions, and can be read as describing a king taking necessary measures to defend his kingdom in a particular situation. ASC's account of St Brice's Day is not coloured by interpretive horror,<sup>12</sup> and as such cannot be the source of subsequent narratives that decry the king's actions, such as that of WM.<sup>13</sup> Clark observes that unlike earlier annals, those of Æthelred's reign display more interest in personality traits and judgments, and extrapolates from the 'detach[ed]' description of the 'massacre on St Brice's Day' that 'the king himself is left undefined'.<sup>14</sup> This indicates the limitations of looking at the whole Æthelred narrative as of a piece: although it was compiled during Cnut's reign, the chronicler still exhibits different tones at different points in the chronology. The order in which events occur and their descriptions show that the chronicler's censure of the king develops and changes as the narrative progresses, based upon the king's unfolding behaviour. The account of 1002 reads:

7 on þam geare se cyng het ofslean ealle þa deniscan men þe on Angelcynne wæron, on Britius mæssedæg, for ðam þam cyngre wæs gecyð þæt hi woldon hine besyrewan æt his life, 7 siþþan ealle his witan 7 <habban> siþþan ðis rice.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Keynes notes the simplicity of this annal's report, *Diplomas*, 203–4.

<sup>13</sup> *GR* ii.165.12, i.276–7. But cf. Keynes's argument to the contrary: that because ASC gives no context, it reads as 'spiteful violence', 'Declining Reputation', 236.

<sup>14</sup> Clark, 'The narrative mode', 225, 230.

<sup>15</sup> 'in that year, the king ordered all the Danish men who were among the English race to be killed on Brice's Day, because it was made known to the king that they wanted to ensnare his life—and afterwards all his councillors—and have his kingdom afterwards.' [D] ASC (CDE) 1002; Swanton, 133–5.

That the Danes killed belonged to ‘Angelcynn’ need not connote the targets’ automatic innocence and Æthelred’s culpability.<sup>16</sup> Danes living among the Angelcynn could be, and apparently were, perceived as the presence of heathens or invaders trying to undermine the Angelcynn from within.<sup>17</sup> The traitors Ælfric, Eadric<sup>18</sup> and Eadric’s brother Beorhtric<sup>19</sup> are all members of the Angelcynn, but this does not mean that any punitive action the king might take towards them would weaken the whole race; indeed, it might make the Angelcynn stronger. The chronicler is well capable of passing judgment (as we will see in the more adverbial entry for 1009); here he does not.

Twelfth-century commentators would not necessarily conclude from this narrative that the only reason for Æthelred’s order was a selfish desire to preserve his own life.<sup>20</sup> Such a measure might indeed be necessary to preserve the stability of the land. The information the king receives identifies three threats: in order, these are to the king’s life, to the lives of his councillors and to English rule of England. The chronological order in which the proposed threats would be carried out is a useful piece of information. The chronicler suggests that from the Danes’ perspective, killing the king would be a means to a larger end. Possession of the kingdom of England is not only the ultimate goal, but listed as the last of the objectives it appears narratively as the ultimate insult to England.

The deciding factor in Æthelred’s 1002 decision might have been the threat of Christian England falling to heathen rule, and not the threat to his own person. In a charter two years later, Æthelred defended his own actions:

For it is fully agreed that to all dwelling in this country it will be well known that, since a decree was sent out by me with the counsel of my leading men and

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<sup>16</sup> But cf. Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 86–7.

<sup>17</sup> See A. Williams, ‘“Cockles Amongst the Wheat”: Danes and the English in the Western Midlands in the First Half of the Eleventh Century’, *Midland History* 11 (1986), 1–22.

<sup>18</sup> ASC (CDE) 1015.

<sup>19</sup> ASC (CDE) 1002.

<sup>20</sup> But cf. Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 86–7, who argues that ASC portrays the king’s actions as motivated by self-preservation.

magnates, to the effect that all the Danes who had sprung up in this island, sprouting like cockles amongst the wheat, were to be destroyed by a most just extermination, and this decree was to be put into effect even as far as death.<sup>21</sup>

This passage is relevant not for its debatable truth-value,<sup>22</sup> but to demonstrate that the account of the Æthelred chronicler is compatible with the charter in terms of its sentiment. It does not express disgust or imply criticism on this occasion when the king takes decisive action to protect the kingdom.

The report of St Brice's Day, as well as the examples of Æthelred's attempting to defend the kingdom, demonstrate that the chronicler's Æthelred—and his violent actions—were not characteristically arbitrary and unjust. Because this version of ASC was the primary narrative source for twelfth-century writers, this is an important point to note. It means that later narratives which cast Æthelred as such are creating a new character, not drawing inevitable conclusions from their most obvious source.

Simon Keynes contends that in the absence of context, allusions to certain events 'seem only to represent acts of wilful and spiteful violence on the part of the king, and later commentators were to make much of them'.<sup>23</sup> But would later writers perceive them as arbitrary and unjust simply because no context is given? Not necessarily. One example Keynes provides of what might have appeared as arbitrary violence to later commentators is the blinding of Ælfgar in 993, and of Ufegeat and Wulfheah in 1006.<sup>24</sup> There is no reason to suppose, however, that someone reading this annal in the twelfth century would automatically interpret this action as arbitrary violence instead of a just punishment. The annal for 1006 lists the blindings as occurring immediately after Wulfgeat was deprived

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<sup>21</sup> S 909; *EHD*, 651; Swanton, 135 n.9.

<sup>22</sup> Whitelock suggests that Æthelred characteristically wishes to justify himself, *EHD*, 49; S. Keynes offers alternative reasons, 'Crime and Punishment in the Reign of King Æthelred', in I. Wood and N. Lund (eds.), *People and Places in Northern Europe, 500–1600: Essays in Honour of Peter Hayes Sawyer* (Woodbridge, 1991), 67–81, at 77; Williams observes that the Danes living in England at the time might indeed have posed a real threat, '“Cockles Amongst the Wheat”', 1.

<sup>23</sup> Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', 236.

<sup>24</sup> ASC (CDE) 993, 1006. Keynes acknowledges that these would probably not have appeared violent to the king's contemporaries, 'A Tale of Two Kings', 212–13, but makes no parallel argument to this effect about twelfth-century perspectives.

of all property. The deprivation of property is one clue that what we have here is a list of punishments, not arbitrary violence. Under Æthelred's laws (and those of his predecessors Ine and Alfred)—legal traditions known to WM—the forfeiture of life or property were among the standard punishments for offences including failure to report for military duty and treason;<sup>25</sup> other corporal punishments appear in the legislation,<sup>26</sup> and reports survive of their application—in some instances, as a merciful alternative to capital punishment.<sup>27</sup>

Blinding was a standard punishment for various offences that would have been familiar both to the chronicler in the eleventh century and to Anglo-Norman writers in the twelfth century. The laws of William I forbade the death penalty, but offered castration and blinding as alternative punishments.<sup>28</sup> WM exalts Henry I's laws—which, WM observes, followed his father's example—and specifically mentions Henry's provision regarding blinding, which is that offenders of serious crimes should lose their eyes and testicles.<sup>29</sup> Twelfth-century historians of invasion would have been as aware as anyone that desperate times sometimes required desperate measures: blinding a traitor would not even have appeared that desperate. Corporal punishments such as blinding were indeed far more common in England by the early twelfth century than in Æthelred's day.<sup>30</sup> These measures are presented in ASC without context, and we cannot infer that these actions would necessarily have been perceived as unjust.

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<sup>25</sup> II Cnut 77, V Æthelred 28; Ine 51, Alfred 4; see also: *MEL*, 344; Swanton, 147 n.13; for the suggestion that the posited 'secular counterpart' of VIII Æthelred might be similar in content: *MEL*, 344.

<sup>26</sup> II Cnut 30.3b–5.; which adapts I Æthelred 1:5–6.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. in Lantfred's 'Translation and Miracles' of St Swithun (c. 975), discussed in *MEL*, 125–7; see also: D. Whitelock, 'Wulfstan Cantor and Anglo-Saxon law', in A.H. Orrick (ed.), *Nordica et Anglica* (The Hague, 1968), 83–92, at 83–7. Corporal punishments, including blinding and cutting off hands, had Carolingian origins: cf. e.g. R. Stone, *Morality and Masculinity in the Carolingian Empire* (Cambridge, 2012), 109, 169, 182.

<sup>28</sup> Laws of William I, 10.

<sup>29</sup> 'deprehensis oculus cum testibus euelli precipiens.' *GR* v.399.1, i, 724–5.

<sup>30</sup> J. Campbell believes that the blinding of Ælfgar is the first English instance of this kind of penalty, see his 'England, c. 991', in his *The Anglo-Saxon State* (Hambledon, 2000), 157–78, at 174–6; see also: Keynes, *Diplomas*, 208–13.

ASC for 1003 criticizes the treachery of Ealdorman Ælfric, blaming him for the defeat of the army. The passage is important to keep in mind because of the way in which later commentators revisit it and its distribution of blame:

Pa gegaderede man swyðe micle fyrde on Wiltunscire 7 of Hamtunscire, 7 swyðe anrædlice wið þæs heres weard wæron. Pa sceolde se ealdorman Ælfric lædan þa fyrde, ac he teah forð þa his ealdan wrenceas, sona swa hi wæron swa gehende þæt ægþer her<e> on oðer hawede, þa gebræd he hine seocne, 7 ongan hine brecan to spiwenne, 7 cwæð þæt he gesycled wære, 7 swa þeah þæt folc becyrde þæt he lædan scolde, swa hit gecweden is: þonne se heretoga wacað, þonne bið eall se here swyðe gehyndred.<sup>31</sup>

In applying the proverb's moral lesson and suggesting that Ælfric's behaviour is characteristic, the chronicler reveals anxiety about treachery and implies specific blame of Ælfric.

The first time the chronicler takes a tone which could be described as directly critical of Æthelred occurs in the entry for 1009, when Æthelred does not deal with the confusion produced by treachery, and thus cannot carry out the defence he has planned. The chronicler applies simultaneously the same tone of blame to all the 'heahwitan' and the 'folc', and most of the blame goes to Eadric, the traitor. The chronicler's primary lament is not that the defence fails, but that because of treachery it never even has a chance to work. After recounting Beorhtric's treachery and theft of eighty ships and Wulfnoth's burning of ships, the 1009 annal states:

Ða þis cuð wæs to ðam oð<r>um scypum, þær se cyng wæs, hu ða oðre geferdon, wæs þa swilc hit eall rædleas wære, 7 ferde se cyning him ham, 7 þa ealdormenn, 7 þa heahwitan, 7 forlæton <þa> scypo þus leohtlice, 7 þæt folc þa þæt on þam scypum wæron fercodon þa scypo eft to Lundenne, 7 læton ealle þa scypas

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<sup>31</sup> 'Then a very great army was gathered from Wiltshire and from Hampshire, and were very resolutely going towards the raiding army; then Ealdorman Ælfric should have led the army, but pulled out his old tricks: as soon as they were so close at hand that each of them looked on the other, then he pretended to be ill, and began to retch so as to vomit, and said that he was taken ill, and thus deceived the people that he should have led. As the saying goes: "When the commander weakens then the whole raiding army is greatly hindered".' [D] ASC (CDE) 1003; Swanton, 135. For the proverb's precedents, see: T.D. Hill, ' "When the Leader is Brave ...": An Old English Proverb and Its Vernacular Context', *Anglia* 119 (2001), 232–6.

geswinc þus leohtlice forwurðan, 7 næs se sige<sup>32</sup> na betera þe eall Angelcynn to hopode.<sup>33</sup>

The forsaking of the ships is a collective action, carried out by the king, the ealdormen and the councillors together: all were ‘rædleas’, lacking in counsel. The king is not singled out as the cause of the confusion nor as solely responsible for forsaking the ships. The ‘folc’ on the ships in turn are said ‘leohtlice’ to waste all defensive efforts.

The labour in ship-building, it should be noted, was Æthelred’s own plan: ‘Her behead se cyng þæt man sceolde ofer eall Angelcynn scipu fæstlice wyrcan.’<sup>34</sup> Not only were the ships successfully built and gathered together, but the chronicler implies that the ships presented an impressive force that would have intimidated or even defeated the Danes. He accuses everyone of wasting that labour.

All parties of the English defence—the king, the nobles and the army—permit confusion to prey on them: they are complicit in the confusion for letting it rule them. If it was the king’s responsibility to take charge, the chronicler is silent on this point. Judging from ASC, the king’s orders on St Brice’s Day were not demonstrably motivated by self-preservation alone, since they were calculated as a response to enemy infiltration. Here in 1009 the situation is different: the English defence falls apart not in noble battle, but before the Danes even arrive. It is not a flight from battle, but a flight arising from the failure to deal with internal treachery, and the problems such treachery causes. In ASC, retreat from battle is sometimes explained, but not retreat from preserving the kingdom’s internal cohesion. Through their departure, the English forces acquiesce in the victory of a civil enemy: the treachery of Eadric’s brother Beorhtric. The idea that all parties in this

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<sup>32</sup> E has *ege* (‘awe’, ‘terror’) (posed to the Danes); CD have *sige* (victory over the Danes).

<sup>33</sup> ‘When this was known to the other ships were the king was, how the others had fared, then it was as if everything was in confusion, and the king took himself home—and the ealdormen and the chief councillors—and thus lightly abandoned the ships. And then the people who were on the ships conveyed the ships back to London, and thus lightly let the whole nation’s labour waste; and the victory in which the whole English race had confidence, was no better [than that].’ [D] ASC (CDE) 1009; Swanton, 139.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Here the king ordered that they should determinedly build ships all over England ...’ [D] ASC (CDE) 1008; Swanton, 138.

instance permitted civil chaos to impede the defence provokes the accusatory tone taken in the 1009 annal.

The chronicler attributes the continued failure of the defence in this year to Eadric and not to the king: he presents the king as a bold leader who cuts the enemy off from their ships, with a prepared and ready army.

Ða het se cyning abannan ut ealne þeodscipe, þæt mon ælce healfe wið hy healdan sceolde, ac þeahhwæðere hi ferdon loca hu hi woldon. Ða sume siðe hæfde se cyning hi fore gan mid ealre fyrde þa hi to scypon woldon, 7 eall folc gearu wæs him on to fonne, ac hit wæs þa þuruh Eadric ealdorman gelæt swa hit gyt æfre wæs.<sup>35</sup>

The chronicler comments on the defence's ineffectiveness, but remarks on the readiness of the king and the defence even within the criticism of Eadric. The chronicler names Eadric as the culprit without specifically identifying treason as a royal responsibility. Failure to deal with his treachery is an implied problem belonging to the whole defence, not just the king.

The chronicler's Æthelred does attempt to defend his people, and his decisions—whether strategic or conciliatory—are often portrayed as part of his effort to defend the kingdom. The entry for 1011 about the payment of tribute to the Danes must be considered in light of the chronicler's whole narrative of the tributes. Only the comment about the first payment of tribute in 991 ascribes specific individual responsibility to Sigeric.<sup>36</sup> The chronicler specifies that this is the first tax, which is a narrative clue that there is more to come; if there is any implication of blame, it is his for initiating the strategy of appeasement.

Payments of tribute are usually presented without lamentation. The annal for 1006, wherein the king began 'georne to smeagenne' with councillors during midwinter,

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<sup>35</sup> 'Then the king ordered the whole nation to be called out, in order to guard against them on all sides, but nevertheless they travelled just where they wanted. Then on one occasion the king got in front of them with all the army when they wanted [to get to] the ships, and everybody was ready to attack them; but it was Ealdorman Eadric who hindered it, as it always was.' [D] ASC (CDE) 1009; Swanton, 139.

<sup>36</sup> 'Þæne ræd gerædde ærest Syric arcebisceop.' [D] ASC (CDE) 991.

describes their determination to pay the invaders in the hope of recovering peace.<sup>37</sup> It is worth observing that the annal for 1011 offers the first explicit criticism of the decision to pay tribute to the Danes, even though these conciliatory taxes have been paid many times before without narrative moral comment. The ‘lack of decision’ is general, and not applied to the king specifically. The annal notes that the king and his councillors requested peace, shows (with a list of what has been overrun) that the move was futile and then comments that the misfortunes resulted from a lack of decision.<sup>38</sup> The suggestion that the taxes might have helped is striking, for ASC has related the other taxes without comment; if they temporarily bought off the Danes, they never helped for the long term, which someone writing during the reign of Cnut would certainly know. This annal follows the implied collective decision of the defence to abandon the ships in 1009. It is as though the chaos and worsening invasions in 1009 have driven the chronicler to suggest that civil chaos contributes to the consequences of Danish aggression.

In 1014, Æthelred’s councillors accept him back as king after his flight into exile. This passage is worth quoting in full because the specific modifications the twelfth-century historians make will prove an important consideration in later discussion:

Ʒa ræddon þa witan ealle, gehadode 7 læwede, þæt man æfter þam cyninge Æþelrede sende, 7 cwædon þæt him nan hlaford leofra nære þonne hyra gecynda hlaford, gif he hi rihtlicor healdan wolde þonne he ær dyde. Ʒa sende se cyning his sunu Eadweard hider mid his ærenddracan 7 het gretan ealne his leodscype, 7 cwæð þæt he him hold hlaford beon wolde, 7 ælc þæra þinga betan þe hi ealle ascunodon, 7 ælc þæra þinga forgyfon beon sceolde þe him gedon oððe cwæden wære, wið þam þe hi ealle anrædlice butan swicdome to him gecyrdon. 7 man þa fulne freondscipe gefæstnode mid worde 7 mid wedde on ægþre healfe, 7 æfre ælcne Dænisce cyning utlah of Ænglalande gecwædon. Ʒa com Æþelred cyning innan þam lænctentid ham to his agenre þeode, 7 he glædlice fram him eallum onfange<n> wæs.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> ‘to plan earnestly’, ASC (CDE) 1006; Swanton, 137. On Æthelred’s consistent reported involvement in the defence, see: Keynes, *Diplomas*, 227.

<sup>38</sup> ASC (CDE) 1011.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Then all the councillors, both ordained and lay, advised that King Æthelred should be sent for, and declared that no lord was dearer to them their natural lord—if he would govern more justly than he did before. Then the king sent his son Edward here with his messengers, and ordered [them] to greet all his nation, and said that he would be a gracious lord to them, and would improve each of the things which they

There are three salient points to note. First, the councillors' grievances are not based explicitly on the failed defence; they concern only the king's justice. Second, their preference for their 'natural lord' is clear and resolved. Third, the desire for more 'justice' is expressed, but the legitimacy of Æthelred's reign is not questioned.

The tone of the annal for 1016 is one of frustration, as has been acknowledged, and the picture is one of confusion. Criticism is implied of the ætheling Edmund, the army and the king, for their collective failure to resolve treachery and internal chaos:

Ða ongan seo Eadmund æþeling to gadrigenne fyrde, þa seo fyrd gesomned wæs, þa ne onhagode hy þærto buton þæt wære þæt se cyng þær mid wære, 7 hi hæfdon þære buruhware fultum on Lundene, geswicon þa ðære fyrdinge 7 ferde ælc man him ham. Ða æfter þære tide þa bead man æft fyrde *be fullum wite* þæt ælc man þe fere wære forð wende, 7 man sende to þæm cyninge to Lundene 7 bedon hine þæt he come ongean þa fyrde mid þam fultume þe he gegaderian mihte. Ða hi ealle tosomne comon, þa ne beheold nan þinc þe ma ðe hit ofter ær dyde. Ða cydde man þæm cyninge þæt hine man beswican wolde, þa ðe him on fultume beon sceoldon, forlet þa þa fyrde 7 cyrde him eft to Lundene.<sup>40</sup> [emphasis added]

The army has to insist on the king's presence, which suggests that the ætheling made a military decision without the king's knowledge; indeed, the king is informed that his men are planning treachery. That the army must be recalled 'be fullum wite' suggests that Edmund held them accountable for desertion. The key point here is that the chronicler acknowledges the presence of a penalty for desertion. The king then retreats upon receiving information about internal betrayal, thereby abandoning the army. The situation

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all hated, and each of those things that were done or declared against him should be forgiven, on condition that they all resolutely and without treachery turned to him. And full friendship was confirmed with word and pledge on either side, and [they] declared every Danish king outlawed from England for ever. Then during that spring King Æthelred came home to his own people, and he was gladly received by them all.' [D] ASC (CDE) 1014; Swanton, 145.

<sup>40</sup> 'Then the ætheling Edmund began to gather an army; then when the army was assembled, nothing would suit them but that the king were there and that they have the help of the garrison from London. Then they left off the campaign and each man took himself home. Then after the festival, the army was ordered again, *on full penalty*, that each man who was fit should go forth; then the king in London was sent to, and asked that he come to join the army with the help which he could gather. Then when they all came together, it did not achieve any more than it often did before. Then when it was made known to the king that one who should have been of help to him wanted to betray him, [he] left the army and turned back to London.' [D] ASC (CDE) 1016; Swanton, 147.

is more grievous in 1016 than in 1009 because all are at fault; the emphasis is on ineffective strategies.

## **Conclusions**

Criticisms of Æthelred and the English defence are present in ASC, but they are not explicit. The chronicler does not castigate Æthelred's character or challenge his right to be king. He and his councillors were responsible for the kingdom, and the chronicler often describes them as doing their duty, implying a negative tone only when they fail to act on behalf of the kingdom or fail to deal with treachery. Æthelred's behaviour in battle and his relations with his councillors did not produce victorious outcomes in battles against invaders, but for Anglo-Saxon writer such as the chronicler and Wulfstan, the king was not understood to be responsible for causing the Viking invasions; collective sin was the greater problem.<sup>41</sup> But as we will see, chroniclers after 1100 did not make recourse to this Carolingian sense of collective sin in their explanations of invasion and understanding of responsibility.

We will revisit ASC frequently, as do the twelfth-century chroniclers. For present purposes it is enough to note that the later chroniclers' raw material cannot in itself explain how they distribute responsibility within their invasion narratives. What they made of this material had more to do with their own preoccupations than with the nature of their sources. The Æthelred chronicler did not predetermine future accounts: his narrative allowed for different interpretations and different conclusions.

## **Post-Conquest sources for Æthelred**

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<sup>41</sup> Above, 9–10.

As explained in Part One, Henry's and John's accounts include more substantial content from ASC than does WM's. Because WM's portrayal of Æthelred explicitly employs a greater range of material, it is important to assess his post-Conquest sources for Æthelred's reign in order to ascertain how and why WM departs both from them and from ASC. Henry's *Historia* merits this to a lesser extent, and so the relevant points of his Norman sources will also be treated in the discussion of his narrative.

ASC is not demonstrably the source of WM's criticisms of the king. WM drew directly on other sources that criticized Æthelred, but his distribution of blame in his narrative of the Danish invasions is not derivative of any source. His later sources—primarily Osbern, Eadmer and WJ—all criticize Æthelred, but not as part of a project to redeem the English defence or to highlight the worthiness of English kingship. Instead, their descriptions of Æthelred illustrate and embody the sins and failures of the English.

Osbern's and Eadmer's respective *Lives* of St Dunstan were both known to WM. Eadmer's and WM's shared source for the interactions between Dunstan and Æthelred and the circumstances of Æthelred's accession was Osbern's *Vita S. Dunstani* (1070).<sup>42</sup> WM knew Eadmer personally and was familiar with his *Vita S. Dunstani* (completed before 1116<sup>43</sup>), although WM does not appear to have drawn on either of them directly in composing *GR*, perhaps because Eadmer and WM's Glastonbury patrons were engaged in a dispute over the location of Dunstan's body.<sup>44</sup>

These writers' attitudes towards Æthelred are also negative, and it is worth examining how they portray the relationship between Æthelred and the office of English kingship. Osbern and Eadmer cast Æthelred as responsible for causing the Danish invasions, and the moral decline in England as a result of his sinful behaviour. They

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<sup>42</sup> Osbern, *VSD* c.37–9.

<sup>43</sup> Turner and Muir, Eadmer, *Lives*, lxvii; R.W. Southern, *St Anselm and his Biographer* (Cambridge, 1963), 281 n. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Turner and Muir, Eadmer, *Lives*, lxxix–xci; Winterbottom and Thomson, WM, *Saints' Lives*, xxi–xxiii.

implicate him in the death of his brother, although they give his mother responsibility for the deed. However, they differ in their interpretation of Dunstan's grounds for accepting Æthelred's kingship. Osbern explains that despite Dunstan's reservations about Æthelred's lack of prudence and strength and his implication in the murder of his brother, Dunstan did not oppose Æthelred's accession 'propterea quod filius regis et proximus tunc haeres videretur esse.'<sup>45</sup> Eadmer writes similarly that Dunstan had reservations about Æthelred's ascent to royal power, but complied with *ius regium* because he knew that one could not break the laws of the land and offend its leaders by transferring the right to rule to another: 'Ideo tamen, quod proximus regni haeres existebat, compleuit ei *ius regium*, sciens se, inoffensis *legibus terrae* atque principis, id non posse transferre in quenquam alium.'<sup>46</sup> Eadmer emphasizes Dunstan's concern for doing right by law and justice, as opposed to conferring office based on the king's character.

For Eadmer, despite the king's evil deed, he is still king by law. Eadmer adds mention of mention of law and justice to Osbern's account, as though to emphasize that were it not for these principles which placed the decision beyond Dunstan's control, Dunstan would never have been persuaded to consecrate Æthelred king. In Eadmer's version there is a new hint of a desire for more ecclesiastical oversight over secular kingship and for limitations to be imposed on its conferral, which Dunstan nevertheless reins in by deferring to the laws of the land.<sup>47</sup> WM will go a step further: as we observed in the quotations at the beginning of this chapter, Æthelred's character and behaviour lead

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<sup>45</sup> 'because he was the son of the king and at that time seemed to be the nearest heir.' Osbern, *VSD* c.37, 114.

<sup>46</sup> 'In so far as he was the nearest heir to the throne, however, Dunstan fulfilled the laws of kingship in favour of Æthelred, knowing that he could not transfer the kingship to anyone else without breaking the laws of the land and offending its leaders.' Eadmer, *VSD* c.59, 144–7.

<sup>47</sup> This desire is not something we find in Wulfstan's thought in late Anglo-Saxon England: I am in agreement here with P. Stafford, 'The laws of Cnut and the history of Anglo-Saxon royal promises', *ASE* 10 (1982), 173–90, at 184; and with P. Wormald, 'Æthelred the Lawmaker', in D. Hill (ed.), *Ethelred the Unready* (Oxford, 1978), 47–80, at 75–7. The contrary position was argued by D.B. Loomis, 'Regnum and sacerdotium in the early eleventh century', in Clemoes and Hughes (eds.), *England Before the Conquest*, 129–145, esp. at 138–9, 144.

WM to suggest that he is not actually reigning, but occupying: the suggestion is one of illegitimate rule.

Once Æthelred is king, Dunstan attacks him for attaining the throne at the expense of his brother's life, predicts that Æthelred will live in blood, and makes a prophecy that after his time, fierce and cruel barbarians will hold power in the land for many centuries. Osbern writes of the disasters in England 'Quae omnia ita contigisse in annalibus legere, et nostris temporibus est videre.'<sup>48</sup> It has been remarked that Osbern views both conquests as evidence of Dunstan's prophecy fulfilled.<sup>49</sup> Eadmer borrows this sentiment from Osbern, commenting that proof of the prophecies can be read in chronicles and seen in his own day: 'euentura tamen omnimodo esse nimis ueraci, ut et in cronicis legimus, et hodie uidemus, prophetia asseruit.'<sup>50</sup> Because of this comment, it has been suggested that Eadmer sees both the Danish and Norman Conquests as fulfilling the prophecy.<sup>51</sup>

All seem to have the Norman Conquest in mind. Osbern and Eadmer both observe that the disasters can be observed and read about; Eadmer suggests in concluding his *Vita* that there is actually no need to write of the disasters because they are so evident, concluding that they are a just judgment from God for collective sin and failure to keep the commandments.<sup>52</sup> WM likewise emphasizes their severity by observing they are better seen than read about: 'sicut hodie melius uidetur oculo quam exaratur stilo'—and goes on to identify Æthelred specifically as the one deserving blame for them, without implicating the English to such an extent.<sup>53</sup> The point is that, in evaluating the king's

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<sup>48</sup> 'That all of this came to pass may be read in the annals and seen in our time.' *VSD* c.37, 117.

<sup>49</sup> A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England. I: c. 500–c. 1307* (Ithaca, 1974), 128; Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', 237.

<sup>50</sup> 'nevertheless, [Dunstan] asserted in a very accurate prophecy that these things were eventually come to pass in every detail, just as we read in chronicles and see today.' Eadmer, *VSD* c.59, 146–7; cf., similarly, Eadmer, *HN*, 3; see also: Southern, *St Anselm*, 311–12.

<sup>51</sup> Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 137; Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', 237.

<sup>52</sup> Eadmer, *VSD* c.68, 158–9; see also: Southern, *St Anselm*, 311–12.

<sup>53</sup> WM, *VSD* ii.34.3–4, 296–9.

legitimacy, Osbern and Eadmer are concerned with the circumstances of and leading up to Æthelred's accession, not his behaviour after becoming king.

WM's other main source for Æthelred's reign—in particular, the events of St Brice's Day and Swein's attacks—was WJ's version of *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*.<sup>54</sup> WJ condemns Æthelred harshly, but his negative portrayal of Æthelred explains neither why WM condemns the king nor the distribution of responsibility in his invasion narrative. In *GND*, Æthelred's barbaric behaviour—and that of the English—provides a foil for highlighting the civilized, regal behaviour of Norman Duke Richard II. In his project to recount the deeds of the Norman dukes, WJ has no incentive to make the quality of kingship in England particularly impressive,<sup>55</sup> nor to redeem the English in the eyes of his audience.

WJ's narrative was of the Norman dukes, but he included material from English history when appropriate to his narrative. Normandy harboured Æthelred for a time, and the king's failures provided a means for WJ to glorify the Norman dukes by contrast. WJ's negative attitude towards Æthelred is most evident in his report of the king's orders on St Brice's Day, which he describes as so offensive that even heathens decry the king's actions. His prime accusation is that the king did not charge the Danes with any crime before acting against them.<sup>56</sup> WJ also writes of Æthelred's readiness to run away when defeated by Swein at London. Unlike ASC's Æthelred, who remains with his troops before removing to the Isle of Wight and later to Normandy,<sup>57</sup> WJ's Æthelred flees immediately after the defeat—and, it should be added, directly to Normandy.

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<sup>54</sup> See Thomson, *GR*, ii, 149, 466.

<sup>55</sup> WJ regards Æthelred as king (e.g. *GND* v.4, ii, 10–13) and does not imply that his egregious behaviour makes him unworthy of the office of English kingship.

<sup>56</sup> 'nullis criminum existentibus culpis', *GND* v.6, ii, 14–17; WJ is the first writer to allege and describe the day's atrocities, see: ii, 16 n.1.

<sup>57</sup> ASC (CDE) 1013; *GND* v.7, ii, 18–19; see also: ii, 18 n.2.

WJ implicates the English in the atrocities ordered by the king and writes that Swein justly resolved to take revenge on the English.<sup>58</sup> He goes on to describe the Londoners as unable to resist Swein and likens them to beasts.<sup>59</sup> A final accusation he levels at the English is that they abandoned their king, Æthelred: ‘Adelredus ... ab Anglis se uidit funditus destitui’.<sup>60</sup> The great degree of disgrace the English incur is evident in the damning adverb ‘funditus’: the suggestion is that the desertion was complete, irredeemable. This is striking because as we will see, WM eliminates the implication of the English, and does not hold them accountable for desertion nor deem them complicit in the charges he levels at the king.

WJ discusses the Danish invasions of England in Æthelred’s reign peripherally and only insofar as they help display Richard’s generosity and welcome,<sup>61</sup> which the duke offers to both Æthelred<sup>62</sup> (despite WJ’s remarks that Æthelred previously sought out enmity with Richard<sup>63</sup>) and Æthelred’s enemy, Swein.<sup>64</sup> Æthelred’s cruelty, incompetence and desperation, as well as Swein’s need for an alliance, make Richard appear munificent and politically savvy, courting all potential allies.

WM read these sources, but the plain fact that they were also post-Conquest accounts does not mean that WM had an inevitable affinity with them. WM was hardly pro-Norman, and frequently wrote of them critically:<sup>65</sup> although the Norman accounts could have coloured his views, it is unlikely that WM would accept without question

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<sup>58</sup> *GND* v.7, ii, 16–17.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Cuius impetum Londonienses non ualentes ferre illius seruitutis iugo colla ferina inuiti subposuere.’ *GND* v.7, ii, 18–19.

<sup>60</sup> ‘Æthelred ... found himself utterly abandoned by the English.’ *GND* v.7, ii, 18–19.

<sup>61</sup> e.g. *GND* v.5, ii, 14–15; v.7, ii, 16–19.

<sup>62</sup> *GND* v.7, ii, 18–19.

<sup>63</sup> *GND* v.4, ii, 10–13.

<sup>64</sup> *GND* v.6–7, ii, 16–17. On WJ’s project to revise Dudo, recording the rise of Normandy through the deeds of its dukes, see: E. van Houts, ‘Historical Writing’, in C. Harper-Bill and E. van Houts (eds.), *A Companion to the Anglo-Norman World* (Woodbridge, 2003), 103–21, at 105–7.

<sup>65</sup> See e.g.: WM, *VD*, ii.34.3–4; WM, *Commentary* i.2194–2252, 84–6; see also Winterbottom et al., *Commentary*, xi; M. Winterbottom, ‘William of Malmesbury and the Normans’, *Journal of Medieval Latin* 20 (2010), 70–7.

WJ's account of Æthelred's behaviour, and that of his army, during the Danish invasions of England. Keynes and Gransden posit the opposite view: that WM's attitude towards Æthelred may have been part of a larger project to justify the Norman Conquest by revealing the inadequacies of the English.<sup>66</sup> I will argue that for WM, Æthelred was expendable; a candidate for blame: by allocating a great degree of blame onto the defending king, he permitted the English contrarily to distinguish themselves in their defence to a greater degree than in ASC.

### **WM on Æthelred: 'spectata audatia' and its absence**

I have shown that WM is not reliant on his sources. Thomson and Winterbottom suggest, following Keynes, that WM based his negative account of Æthelred on ASC because he needed an explanation for the failure of the English defence.<sup>67</sup> But we must look elsewhere to explain WM's account of Æthelred. I argue that his explanation of the defence is part of his mission to redeem the broken chain of England's history.<sup>68</sup> WM's account visits responsibility on Æthelred for causing defeat, and moral culpability for failing to be an adequate English king. His expectations for Æthelred derive from his assumptions and beliefs about the great abilities and responsibilities of kings. I will investigate how WM's account of Æthelred operates, establish why WM creates this negative image, and consider what effect he intended it to achieve.

WM's originality in the way he distributes responsibility during the Danish invasion narrative deserves further emphasis. Current scholarship suggests that WM's conclusions about Æthelred were inevitable and obvious, based on his sources. Keynes writes that WM was 'content to base his account firmly' on ASC despite its positive reports of Æthelred. In a similar line, Keynes goes on to argue: 'It only remained for

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<sup>66</sup> Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', 238; Gransden, *Historical Writing*, 173.

<sup>67</sup> Thomson, *GR*, ii, 149.

<sup>68</sup> Above, 15.

William of Malmesbury... to combine in his *Gesta Regum* the traditions of Dunstan's prophecies with the account of Æthelred's reign in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, the rest supplied by WM's own imagination. He suggests that WM casts the king as a man 'helpless to escape his destiny' and that the king's acts only increase the inevitability of his destiny.<sup>69</sup> As we will see, the magnitude of WM's censure derives, rather, from precisely the opposite conviction: that, despite Dunstan's prophecies, disaster was avoidable. WM presents us with an Æthelred who had the power and the responsibility to live up to the expectations of his office, but chose not to, and for this reason deserves more censure than any others involved in the defence of England.

The concept of the *rex inutilis* goes partway towards explaining WM's attitude towards Æthelred. Weiler argues that WM's explanation of the Danish victory is part of his attitude towards good and bad kingship, wherein a virtuous king's qualities are reflected in those of his subjects, and those qualities of the *rex inutilis* are also reflected in those of his subjects.<sup>70</sup> In the circumstance of invasion and English defeat at the hands of the Danes, however, WM does more than present the king as '*rex inutilis*'. Indeed, WM absolves the English of responsibility for their own faults by placing all of the blame on the king. In this regard he deviates from the sense of mutual responsibility and accountability which his predecessors,<sup>71</sup> and some of his contemporaries, identify and advocate in the lordship bond between king and subjects.

WM attributes the Danish invasions of 980–1016 to Æthelred's sinful character, and through the prophecy of Dunstan claims that the suffering the English will undergo as a result will be matched only by what the English suffered upon their arrival in England

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<sup>69</sup> Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', 236–8.

<sup>70</sup> B. Weiler, 'William of Malmesbury on Kingship', *History* 3–22, at 9–12. See also: S.O. Sønnesyn, *William of Malmesbury and the Ethics of History*, c.5, c.6.

<sup>71</sup> Above, 7–10.

centuries before.<sup>72</sup> WM's *GR* retells this story and offers an interpretation as to who is ultimately at fault for this suffering. WM highlights Æthelred's characteristic evasion of royal responsibility and designates him wholly responsible for the Viking invasions and their ill effects. WM's censure of Æthelred reflects the great degree of royal responsibility and accountability which he imparts only to the king and not to his subjects.

The line with which WM introduces Æthelred is particularly important because it illustrates WM's criteria for kingship.<sup>73</sup> The implication is that a king who refuses the duties of kingship cannot truly reign, and is thus not fully king: he is not made a satisfactory king merely by consecration or inheritance. It must be stressed that WM does not say explicitly that Æthelred is not a king; nor does he suggest that Æthelred should have been deposed. Yet to conceive of and to make the distinction between ruling and occupying, he had to subscribe to an intellectual tradition that acknowledged the contingency of royal rule. WM's comments bring Æthelred's legitimacy under scrutiny. It is hard to associate the scornful word 'obsedit' with legitimate rule; it is better applied to an illegitimate king or an invader. WM is an ecclesiastic, and his comments echo the precedent set in 1076 (and 1080) when Pope Gregory VII deemed the emperor Henry IV unworthy of rule because of his behaviour—an action much admired by WM.<sup>74</sup> WM maintains that Æthelred is neither reigning nor kinglike. This judgment of Æthelred presages—and perhaps influences—WM's later attitude towards King Stephen in his own time, who also held the office of king and had been crowned, but whom WM considered illegitimate.<sup>75</sup> For WM, a ruler who neglects the duties of his office cannot wholly be king, even if there is no other candidate for rule.

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<sup>72</sup> 'et uenient super gentem Anglorum mala qualia non passa est ex quo Angliam uenit usque ad tempus illud.' *GR* ii.164.3, i, 268–9.

<sup>73</sup> Above, 42.

<sup>74</sup> *GR*, iii.262.3–4, i, 484–5.

<sup>75</sup> WM, *HN* i.19, 36–7; on Stephen's coronation making him king regardless of perjury, see G. Garnett, *Conquered England* (Oxford, 2007), 241.

WM describes two different outcomes resulting from Æthelred's own actions: he observes that both Fortune and God are pitched against him, but the moral fault belongs to Æthelred alone. In the first instance, WM discusses how little went well for Æthelred in his reign, even though he apparently has evidence that the king was not excessively foolish or cowardly ('ut a maioribus accepimus').<sup>76</sup> He traces this element of apparent chance or bad luck ultimately to the king's pride, which made the nobles disloyal.<sup>77</sup> Through Dunstan's prophecies, WM also describes divine will as hostile to Æthelred because of his poor behaviour in his early years.<sup>78</sup> Neither chance nor divine will favours Æthelred, but this is because Æthelred is ultimately to blame for the misfortunes of his reign.

William's primary judgment against Æthelred is for the failure to uphold his own side in battle. Æthelred's tendency to abandon his cause is initially evident in the greed which precipitates Dunstan's prophecy:

Surrexerat inter regem et episcopum Rofensem similtas, incertum qua de causa, quocirca contra ciuitatem exercitum duxit. Mandatum ei ab archiepiscopo ut furori desisteret nec sanctum Andream, in cuius tutela episcopatus est, irritaret, sicut ad indulgendum facilem, ita ad ulciscendum terribilem. Verborum nuditate contempta, adornat preceptum pecunia, et mittit centum libras ut obsidionem solueret, pretio emptus abiret; quo ille accepto receptui cecinit, procinctum militum ferari permisit.<sup>79</sup>

WM goes on to explain: 'Miratus Dunstanus hominis cupiditatem haec per nuntios retulit', and Dunstan prophesies that, because of Æthelred's greed, '“uelociter uenient super te mala quae locutus est Dominus”'.<sup>80</sup> Dunstan invokes the certainty of divine

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<sup>76</sup> 'as we learn from our forebears', *GR* ii.165.11, i, 276–7.

<sup>77</sup> Below, 70.

<sup>78</sup> *GR* ii.164.1–3, i, 268–9.

<sup>79</sup> 'A dispute had arisen, the cause of which is not clear, between the king and the bishop of Rochester, as a result of which the king led an army against the city. The archbishop told him to abandon this crazy enterprise, and not to rouse St Andrew, the patron saint of the see, who was generous in granting favours but terrible in revenge. His bare words were met with scorn, so he gilded his instructions with money, and sent him a hundred pounds as the price of raising the siege, if he would take his money and go away. [Æthelred] took it and beat a retreat, allowing his armed force to go on leave.' *GR* ii.165.1, i, 270–1.

<sup>80</sup> 'Dunstan was astonished at the man's greed', '“there shall come rapidly upon you evils of which the Lord has spoken”', *GR*, ii.165.1, i, 270–1; WM discusses these realized evils in *GR* ii.165.1–13, i, 270–7.

punishment for Æthelred's behaviour. The narrative thus attributes the Danish invasions directly to Æthelred's greed: the king is deemed the agent and final cause of the Danish troubles. By way of comparison, it is worth noting that in the 986 entry of ASC, the Æthelred chronicler describes the king as fulfilling his threat of laying waste to Rochester: 'Her se cyning fordyde þet bisceoprice æt Hrofeceastre.'<sup>81</sup> He destroys the city, but the chronicler does not describe him submitting to bribery.

Yet later in the same chapter, WM describes the greed of the Danes without suggesting that divine punishment awaits them. Instead he writes that the archbishop Sigeric, finding it difficult to know how to fight off the Danes, determines to pay them off:

decretum a Siritio, archiepiscopo post Dunstanum secundo, ut repellerentur argento qui non poterant ferro. Ita decem milia librarum soluta cupiditatem Danorum expleuere: exemplum infame et uiris indignum, libertatem pecunia redimere, quam ab inuicto animo nulla uiolentia possit excutere.<sup>82</sup>

In the *Gesta Pontificum*, WM clarifies this point that Æthelred is the one at fault for acting on Sigeric's advice, thereby setting this 'exemplum infame':

Siritius ... cuius consilio in Gestis Regum dixi Egelredum regem animi libertatem Danis pretio uenditasse, ut eorum pacem argento redimeret quos ferro propellere posset nisi corde careret.<sup>83</sup>

The scale of Danish greed in terms of the destruction of property is high; in fiscal terms, it is, at ten thousand pounds, one hundred times greater than the greed of Æthelred, satisfied with one hundred pounds. Along these lines it is interesting to observe that the archbishop (Dunstan) is not censured either for buying the city of Rochester's safety from Æthelred with silver, whereas WM harshly criticizes Æthelred for following Sigeric's advice to buy

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<sup>81</sup> 'Here the king did for the bishopric at Rochester.' [D] ASC (CDE) 986; Swanton, 125.

<sup>82</sup> '[Sigeric] decided that they must be driven away with silver if steel could not do it. So Danish greed was satisfied with the payment of ten thousand pounds; it was a disgraceful precedent, unworthy of true men, to buy with money the freedom of which no violence can rob an invincible spirit.' *GR* ii.165.2, i, 270–1.

<sup>83</sup> 'It was on [Sigeric's] advice, as I said in the *History of the Kings*, that King Æthelred sold his freedom of action to the Danes: he gave silver to buy peace from people he could have driven out with steel, had he not lacked the courage.' *GP* i.20.2, i, 42–3.

off the Danes with silver. In both cases WM criticizes Æthelred: in the first case, for his own greed; in the second case, for enabling the greed of the enemy. In both cases Æthelred loses, deemed the agent and final cause of England's troubles with the Danes.

This passage reveals that WM does not impute the same criteria of accountability either to officers of religion or to the invaders. Fenton has observed that WM justifies anger, violence and self-control from sacred and secular men with apparent indiscriminate, as long as there is a moral reason for their actions.<sup>84</sup> WM makes a point of showing that Æthelred has no such reason. For WM, the evasion of action, or turning away from what one knows to be a just cause, is infinitely more worthy of blame in those entrusted with kingship of England than in other parties. Dunstan's reproaches<sup>85</sup> illuminate the differences in WM's condemnations of kings and of others, and the much higher standards he expected from the king.

More reprehensible than the king's greed is the fact that through it he abandons his purported cause and his royal duties. Not only does he initiate a raid against one of his own cities, but he accepts money in order to abandon the raid, and in so doing proves that the raid itself was not a worthy cause. This narrative is strikingly similar to WM's description of Henry IV's invasion of Rome, which he abandons not for greed but fear, thus proving both his inability to fight for a cause and the injustice of his attack on Hildebrand.<sup>86</sup> That Æthelred accepted money reveals that he was exploiting his power by leading the raid, not defending an honourable side in a dispute. Æthelred chooses to abandon the right course of action, guided by no greater cause. For WM, the censure is great because of the magnitude of the consequences: such a choice impacts not only on his own personal salvation, but also on that of his men and country.

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<sup>84</sup> K.A. Fenton, *Gender, Nation and Conquest in the Works of William of Malmesbury* (Woodbridge, 2008), 39–40. For a thorough analysis of WM's preoccupation with morality: Sønnesyn, *William of Malmesbury*.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Osborn and Eadmer, above, 57–60.

<sup>86</sup> See esp. *GR* iii.262.3–4.

WM places great value on the display of courage in battle, which resonates with classical expectations for military leadership. He locates responsibility for military conduct specifically in the king, and implies that the army is not accessory to Æthelred's failure. WM accomplishes this effect through rhetorical devices, such as irony and the juxtaposition of opposing ideas, to highlight the contrast between expectation and the reality he presents.

WM uses juxtaposition to emphasize the great distance between Æthelred's actions and the duties he avoids. The pattern of juxtaposition includes both proximity in the narrative itself, as well as its reference to simultaneous events. WM describes the hydra-like evils of the Danish invasion,<sup>87</sup> commenting 'ad summam' that the Danes had invaded sixteen of England's thirty-two counties.<sup>88</sup> Immediately following, WM writes with irony that the king was doing what he did best—sleeping: 'Rex interea, strenuus et pulchre ad dormiendum factus, tanta negotia postponens oscitabat'.<sup>89</sup> This is an example of the irony which WM frequently uses to reflect on the misdeeds of men in power.<sup>90</sup> The subsequent passage conveys WM's outrage at the immediate, direct consequences which the king's indolence had for the army:

Nam exercitus principe carens et disciplinae militaris ignarus aut ante congressionem dilabebatur aut in ipso conflictu facile cedebat. Valet multum in bellis ducis presentia, ualet *spectata* in talibus *audatia*, ualet usus et maxime disciplina; quibus, ut dixi, carens exercitus prouintialibus irrecuperabili dispendio, hostibus miserabili erat ludibrio. Est illud hominum genus, si non coherceatur ante bellum, in rapinas promptum; si non animetur in bello, ad fugam pronum.<sup>91</sup>  
[emphasis added]

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<sup>87</sup> GR ii.165.2–6, i, 270–3.

<sup>88</sup> GR ii.165.6, i, 272–3. This list follows ASC (E) 1011; C and D list seventeen provinces. See Thomson, GR, ii, 148.

<sup>89</sup> 'The king meanwhile, active and well-built for slumber, put off such important business and lay yawning', GR ii.165.7, i, 272–3.

<sup>90</sup> R.M. Thomson, 'Satire, Irony, and Humour in William of Malmesbury', in C.J. Mews et al. (eds.), *Rhetoric and Renewal in the Latin West, 1100–1540: Essays in Honour of John O. Ward* (Turnhout, 2003), 115–27, at 121; Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', 227–53.

<sup>91</sup> 'The army had no leader and no inkling of military discipline, and either melted away before facing the enemy or gave way easily when battle was joined. There is a great force in the presence of a general in battle, and in his *visible courage* in such circumstances; great force in experience, and above all in discipline. All these, as I have said, the army lacked, which was the source of irrevocable loss to their

The phrase ‘spectata ... audatia’ could be translated as ‘observed courage’: courage had to be not only displayed or visible, but seen. The king had to be a courageous presence in battle, and his absence encourages pillaging and cowardice. There are two points worth noting about this passage. First, WM’s closing comment (‘si non animetur in bello, ad fugam pronum’) resembles ASC’s proverb about how the army is hindered when the leader gives way.<sup>92</sup> The Æthelred chronicler applies the proverb to Eadric: WM’s comment is directed specifically at the king. Second, WM censures the army neither for desertion (‘aut ante congressionem dilabebatur’), nor for being ready to desert (‘ad fugam pronum’). For WM, responsibility for disciplining the men lies wholly with Æthelred. This attitude represents an intriguing contrast to a twelfth-century continental philosopher’s attitude towards responsibility.

WM does not treat the soldiers as individuals responsible for desertion, but as a whole unit under the responsibility of the king. This is significant in that desertion by any individual, not just by kings, was considered punishable not only in other European legal traditions, but also in legal traditions WM knew directly: Anglo-Saxon law, including that of Æthelred’s day, and the laws of WM’s own time.<sup>93</sup> In discussing the most grave crimes against a ruler, John of Salisbury observed a generation later that desertion of one’s

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fellow-subjects and of pity and contempt to the enemy. That sort of men, if not disciplined before the battle, quickly fall to pillaging, and if not inspired during the battle are quickly ready to run away.’ *GR* ii.165.7–8, i, 272–5.

<sup>92</sup> ASC (CDE) 1003; above, 51.

<sup>93</sup> Harsh penalties for deserters are found throughout different legal traditions: in the *Corpus Iuris Civilis (Digest)*, the law of Carolingian Francia, Norman and Anglo-Saxon law; for specific examples from these traditions, see: M. Hagger, ‘Secular Law and Custom in Ducal Normandy, c. 1000–1144’, *Speculum* 85 (2010), 827–67, at 834–5. In Anglo-Saxon law penalties for deserters included death if desertion were in the king’s presence and forfeiture of property or money depending upon one’s status and landholdings: V Æthelred 28, II Cnut 77. Loss of property was a penalty in Ine 51; in Alfred 4, death was the penalty for plotting treachery of the king. Similar provisions would likely have been found in the secular counterpart to VIII Æthelred posited by Wormald: *MEL*, 363, 344; P. Wormald, ‘Æthelred the Lawmaker’, in D. Hill (ed.), *Æthelred the Unready* (Oxford, 1978), 47–80. The laws of Ine, Alfred, Æthelred and Cnut were almost beyond a doubt known to WM: *MEL*, 137–8. The *Leges Henrici Primi* also outlined penalties for desertion: below, 76–7.

prince constitutes high treason.<sup>94</sup> Yet he also presents the ruler and the people as mutually responsible for one another's sins and morals.<sup>95</sup> WM's approach in this instance is less balanced: he holds Æthelred, the ruler, as solely accountable for his men's behaviour. This stance is consistent with Gregory VII's charge that rulers who abuse their authority encourage their charges to sin.<sup>96</sup> Yet it is worth noting that, in this case, WM does not even suggest that the men would be incurring the shame of sin by pillaging or deserting, thereby ascribing responsibility wholly to Æthelred.

WM places on the English no burden of responsibility, even when he acknowledges that their behaviour directly caused crisis or merited divine punishment, from nobles to soldiers. WM acknowledges that the divisiveness and treachery of the nobles caused many of the problems of Æthelred's reign,<sup>97</sup> but nevertheless concludes that Æthelred is the ultimate cause of the nobles' problems. WM claims to have done much thinking about why Æthelred faced so many crises in his reign, especially given some positive reports that have reached him, concluding: 'Cuius rei causam si quis me interroget, non facile respondeam, nisi ducum defectionem ex superbia regis prodeuntem.'<sup>98</sup> WM considers Æthelred's vice to be the cause of others' treason. For example, WM writes that Wulfnoth's treachery 'spem totius Angliae fefellerunt', but notes that it was the king who originally sent Wulfnoth into exile.<sup>99</sup> The implication of

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<sup>94</sup> JS, *Policraticus* vi.25. The observation that the gravity of treason approaches the greater crime of sacrilege resembles Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi*, above, 9–10; cf. this connection between sacred and secular in Wulfstan's Anglo-Saxon law: MEL, 203, 211–12, 350–5.

<sup>95</sup> JS, *Policraticus* vi.29.

<sup>96</sup> *Register Gregors VII*, ii, 182–5.

<sup>97</sup> GR ii.165.9, i, 274–5.

<sup>98</sup> 'If anyone were to ask me the reason for this, I should not find it easy to answer, unless it was the disloyalty of his chief nobles, arising from the pride of the king himself.' GR, ii.165.11–12, i, 276–7; see also Thomson, GR, ii, 148–9; Keynes, 'Declining Reputation', 236; D.P. Kirby, *The Making of Early England* (London, 1967), 115–16. Kirby overstates WM's concessions to Æthelred, claiming WM says the king was not foolish, cowardly or indolent. WM however cites no report clearing the king of indolence, and mentions foolishness and cowardliness only in their degree, not in their absence. No concessions WM makes are enough to redeem the king in his view.

<sup>99</sup> 'cheated the hope of all England' GR ii.165.8, i, 274–5.

these two passages is that the king is ultimately at fault, and accountable, for another man's treachery.

Nor are the soldiers who carry out Æthelred's atrocious orders held accountable. WM goes on to describe how Æthelred stole property from the English, and in the infamous St Brice's Day massacre, ordered all the Danes in England to be murdered, thereby forcing the English to betray their guest-friendships. WM's judgment departs from ASC, his main source for the event. As we have seen, that narrative gives no indication that the king's response is arbitrary or reprehensible,<sup>100</sup> and it suggests that WM's delegation of complete blame to the king is original. Even more significant, the statement that any blame is owed at all is new: ASC makes no moral comment on the action. As well as to the English and his wife, WM writes that the king behaved shamefully to the Danes:

quos leuibus suspicionibus omnes uno die in tota Anglia trucidari iusserat, ubi fuit uidere miseriam dum quisque carissimos hospites, quos etiam arctissima necessitudo dulciores effecerat, cogeretur prodere et amplexus gladio deturbare<sup>101</sup>

WM laments the king's action, claiming that the English were compelled to do this, which again criticizes Æthelred's leadership. The implication of compulsion suggests that the English had to follow an order, and as such were not morally responsible for the Danish massacre. It is significant that WM viewed the events of St Brice's day in this way: WJ had a pro-Norman reason to denigrate bad English kings, but WM did not.<sup>102</sup> This judgment is consistent with Augustine's observations about a soldier's moral duties and the inviolability of an order: 'Nam et miles cum oboediens potestati, sub qualibet legitime constitutus est, hominem occidit, nulla ciuitatis suae lege reus est homicidii,

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<sup>100</sup> Above, 47–9.

<sup>101</sup> 'all of whom in the whole of England he had ordered, on the strength of flimsy suspicions, to be murdered on the same day (and a pitiful sight it was when every man was compelled to betray his beloved guest-friends, whom he had made even more dear by close ties of relationship, and to disrupt those embraces with the sword)', *GR* ii.165.12, i, 276–7.

<sup>102</sup> See above, 60–2.

immo, nisi fecerit, reus est imperii deserti atque contempti'.<sup>103</sup> Gildas makes a similar point commenting on Saul disobeying God: 'ut bene quidam nostrum ait, non agitur de qualitate peccati, sed de transgressione mandati.'<sup>104</sup> WM holds Æthelred responsible for ordering the tragedy carried out by his men. Even William of Jumièges, as we have seen, implicates the English people in the atrocities.<sup>105</sup> WM exonerates them.

In his account of Swein's invasion of England, WM supplies a further ironic observation on Æthelred's failures as a military leader:

Turkillus interea regem patriae suae Suanum nuntiis accersit ut Angliam ueniat; preclaram esse patriam et opimam, sed regem stertere; illum ueneri uinoque studentem nichil minus quam bellum cogitare, quapropter odiosum suis, ridiculum alienis; duces infidos, prouintiales infirmos, primo stridore lituorum prelio cessuros.<sup>106</sup>

The word 'quapropter' reveals WM's reasoning: he attributes the disloyalty of generals and the army's weakness—and most important, their liability to retreat—directly to Æthelred's laziness and negligent attitude towards battle. The observation that the battle-trumpet was enough to make both army and generals flee merits comment. This might seem to reflect poorly on the courage of the army and generals, but for WM it reflects badly on the king—the ultimate general, who must be an observed presence in the defence against invasion. WM knew, studied and at times quoted Vegetius's treatise on

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<sup>103</sup> 'But when the soldier, obedient to the power under which he has been lawfully placed, slays a man, he is not guilty of murder according to any laws of his city. On the contrary, if he does not do so, he is guilty of desertion and contempt of authority.' Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, i.26; Dyson, 39; see also F.H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1975), 22.

<sup>104</sup> 'As one of us well says, it is not a question of the nature of the offence, but of the breaking of an order.' Gildas, *De excidio* 38.2.

<sup>105</sup> *GND* v.7, ii, 16–19.

<sup>106</sup> 'Thurkil meanwhile sent to invite Swein, the king in his native land, to come to England, saying that it was a splendid rich country, with a king who was asleep and snoring; given to women and wine, he thought of nothing so little as fighting, which made him unpopular with his own people and a laughingstock to others; his generals disloyal, his subjects weak, both liable to leave the field at the first blast of the trumpet.' *GR*, ii.176.1, i, 300–1.

military science,<sup>107</sup> and WM's position on the necessity of the king's presence and active courage in turning a rout or defeat into victory is strikingly consistent with Vegetius's position on the responsibilities of generals in the same circumstances. Vegetius writes:

Sciendum uero est, si pars exercitus uicerit et pars fugerit, sperandum, cum in eiusmodi necessitate ducis constantia totam sibi possit uindicare uictoriam ... prior clamore ac bucinis exultare uideatur. Hac fiducia ita perterrebit inimicos, ita suis fiduciam geminabit, quasi uictor ex omni parte discesserit.<sup>108</sup>

The leader's ability to turn the tide of battle, and his responsibility for doing so, are clear. Vegetius's emphasis is not on the army's accountability for doubt, defeat or rout, but on the leader's for reinspiring their courage.<sup>109</sup> It is to these standards of military leadership that WM holds Æthelred—and because the king fails to meet them, Æthelred becomes personally responsible for the defeat. For WM too the trumpet call was a potent symbol—and an ironic one. Æthelred should be present, first to sound the battle-call that will rouse his men to victory. Instead, he is absent: the battle-call makes his men desert.

A juxtaposition which highlights the contrast between Æthelred's absence and the great need for his presence occurs again in a similar formulation:

Nec adhuc flecterentur Londonienses, tota iam Anglia in clientelam illius inclinata, nisi Egelredus presentia eos destitueret sua ... Quocirca rebus extremis medentes compatriotarum exemplo se dedidere: laudandi prorsus uiri, et quos Mars ipse collata non sperneret hasta, si ducem habuissent; cuius dum uel sola umbra protegerentur, totius pugnae aleam, ipsam etiam obsidionem non paucis mensibus luserant.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> WM's copy of Vegetius is found in Oxford, Lincoln College MS lat. 100. It is part of a collection of classical texts compiled for or by WM: see R.M. Thomson, 'William of Malmesbury and the Latin Classics Revisited', in T. Reinhardt et al. (eds.), *Aspects of the Language of Latin Prose* (Oxford, 2005), 383–93, at 387–9.

<sup>108</sup> 'Note that if part of the army is victorious and part is routed, one should be hopeful, because in a crisis of this type the steadfastness of the general can reclaim the whole victory for himself ... Let him be seen to be the first to celebrate with shouts and bugles. By this show of confidence he will terrify the enemy and double the faith of his own men, as if he had come off victor in every part of the field.' Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militaris* iii.25; Milner, 114–15.

<sup>109</sup> Vegetius regularly emphasizes the leader's accountability for the state of his army. He ascribes the decay of the army to the neglect of those in power, ii.3; he comments that those who want victory must train the men 'diligenter', iii.preface; he claims that mutiny arises from the general's lack of imposed discipline, iii.4.

<sup>110</sup> 'The men of London still would not have yielded [to Swein], although by now the whole of England had gone over to [Swein's] allegiance, had not Æthelred deprived them of his presence ... whereupon, as the only remedy for their desperate state, they followed the example of their fellow-countrymen and surrendered, though they were admirable men to be sure "whom Mars himself in melée would not spurn",

WM suggests that the only reason for the army's surrender to Swein is Æthelred's absence ('Nec ... flecterentur Londonienses ... nisi Egelredus ... eos destitueret'). WM claims to know what would have happened had Æthelred been present, thereby highlighting the king's power to influence outcomes and making the consequent calamity wholly due to his refusal to perform his duty as a leader. Furthermore, WM not only avoids blaming the London army, but also actively absolves it of responsibility and defends its behaviour. This is apparent in his classicizing reference: he names them worthy adversaries of Mars,<sup>111</sup> which is hardly dishonourable. WM also portrays surrender as a last resort, which draws attention to the soldiers' will to continue fighting and denies that they wished to desert for selfish motives. They fought well even without the 'shadow' of a leader, which underlines their persistence, as well as Æthelred's absence: he must be far away indeed if even his shadow deserts the army.

As is the case in the previous example from ii.165, the proximity of a description of the army's suffering to a sarcastic account of Æthelred's behaviour magnifies WM's censure of Æthelred as a king. Immediately following the above passage from ii.177, WM relates that Æthelred flees in cowardice to the Isle of Wight: 'Ille interea, naturalis desidia conscientiam excitans, ab urbe profugit, cumque clandestinis itineribus Hamtunam uenisset, inde Wehtam enauigauit.'<sup>112</sup> The passage's ironic comment about the king's revival of his ill reputation emphasizes Æthelred's unconscionable absence during the army's distress.

WM's discussion of the king's argument in his own defence again presents the consequences of Æthelred's behaviour, this time with ingenious effect: Æthelred

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had they had a leader; for while they had even the shadow of one to protect them, they had played the whole hazardous game of battle, and even of actual siege, for many months.' *GR* ii.177.3–4, i, 302–3.

<sup>111</sup> Allusion is to Statius, *Thebaid*, ix.87–8, cited in Mynors et al., *GR*, i, 302 n.1.

<sup>112</sup> 'Æthelred meanwhile, reviving his reputation for innate cowardice, escaped from the city, and having made his way in secret to Southampton took ship for the Isle of Wight.' *GR* ii.177.4, i, 302–3.

essentially incriminates himself. This passage reportedly conveys the effect of Æthelred's own words, which in fact call attention to his own cowardice and inaction. WM writes that Æthelred addresses his still-loyal abbots and bishops 'in hanc conuenit sententiam',<sup>113</sup> yet given WM's foregoing conclusions about Æthelred, the words also convey irony and criticism of the king:

Viderent quam in angusto res essent suae et suorum. Se perfidia ducum auito extorrem solio et opis egentem alienae, in cuius manu aliorum solebat salus pendere, quondam monarcham et potentem, modo miserum et exulem; dolendam sibi hanc commutationem, quia facilius tolere opes non habuisse quam habitas amisisse<sup>114</sup>

Æthelred apparently refers to the nobles' desertion as 'perfidia', but we already know that WM deems Æthelred's bad kingship more reprehensible: WM himself does not use the same epithet to judge the nobles' desertion. WM's supposed report of the sense of Æthelred's words shifts subtly to his own commentary on Æthelred's behaviour with a gerundive of obligation: 'dolendam sibi hanc commutationem', which expresses the narrative commentary that Æthelred ought to grieve at his own downfall.<sup>115</sup> For WM, the weight of his condemnation for a king who avoids his duties is proportional to the gravity of a king's responsibility, especially at times of invasion.

That Æthelred shirks his responsibility as king of the English is more reprehensible than general desertion, and suggests WM's high expectations for an English king. This is especially salient given that general desertion itself was a worse offence at wartime than in peace, as we will see below in the examples of laws that stress the idea of supporting one's men or one's lord in times of 'greatest need'. WM finds Æthelred

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<sup>113</sup> 'to the following effect', *GR* ii.177.4, i, 302–3.

<sup>114</sup> 'The treachery of his nobles had driven him from his ancestral throne, and he on whose power other men's well-being used to depend now needed the help of others; once a ruler independent and powerful, he was now an object of pity and an exile, and had good reason to lament this change, for never to have had any resources is a lighter burden than to have had them and lost them.' *GR*, ii.177.4-5, i, 302–5.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. the different picture presented by Æthelred's charters of the 990s, which cast his reign as improving over time (especially S 876); see: P. Stafford, 'Political ideas in late tenth-century England: charters as evidence', in P. Stafford et al. (eds.), *Law, Laity and Solidarities: Essays in honour of Susan Reynolds* (Manchester, 2001), 68–82, at 81–2; see also: Keynes, *Diplomas*, 186–208.

unquestionably accountable and judges him more harshly than he does others for similar or other reprehensible behaviours. WM's narrative attributes the sufferings of the English under the Danish invasions to Æthelred's actions, which include his choices not to act.

The censure of absence and desertion—hiding in cowardice as opposed to displaying 'observed courage'—was not new, but the political situation in the twelfth century and the invasions of the eleventh heightened awareness of the potential problems were the king the deserter. In II Cnut 77, Wulfstan had articulated the punishment for desertion as revocation of the right to one's life and property:

And se man, þe æt fleo fram his hlaforde oððe fram his gefearam for his yhrðe, sy hit on landferde, þolige ealles þæs þe he age 7 his agenes feores; 7 fo se hlaforð to þam ehtan 7 to his lande, þe he him ær sealde.<sup>116</sup>

The gravity of the offence of desertion described here is evident in the expression of the perpetrator's 'cowardice'.<sup>117</sup> WM knew and admired Henry I's legislation;<sup>118</sup> and Henry I's laws (in particular his coronation charter) adopted many of the ideas and content of Cnut's laws.<sup>119</sup> The *Leges Henrici Primi* express similar criticisms of desertion and prescribes punishments which include forfeiture of rights and property by the perpetrator:

43.8: Si dominus terram suam uel feodum suum auferat homini suo, unde est homo suus, uel si eum in mortali necessitate deserat superuacue forisfacere potest dominium suum erga eum.

43.9: Sustinere tamen debet homo dominum suum, si faciat ei contumeliam uel iniuriam eiusmodi, in werra xxx dies, in pace unum annum et unum diem<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> 'And the man, who in his cowardice deserts his lord or his comrades, whether it is on an expedition by sea or on one on land, is to forfeit all that he owns and his own life; and the lord is to succeed to the possessions and to the land which he previously gave him.' II Cnut 77; *EHD*, 473. WM may have read a version that does not survive: see *MEL*, 138.

<sup>117</sup> R. Abels characterizes the Anglo-Saxon idea of cowardice as the failure to show the requisite love and loyalty a lordship bond requires: '“Cowardice” and Duty in Anglo-Saxon England', *Journal of Medieval Military History* 4 (2006), 29–49, at 31.

<sup>118</sup> *GR* v.399, v.407, v.411.

<sup>119</sup> Stafford, 'The laws of Cnut', 178–9.

<sup>120</sup> '[8] If a lord deprives his man of his land or his fee by virtue of which he is his man, or if he deserts him without cause in his hour of mortal need, he may forfeit his lordship over him. [9] A man must suffer his lord, if the lord affronts him or does him and injury of that kind, for a period of thirty days in war, or a year and a day in peace', *Leges Henrici Primi* 43.8–9.

It is worth noting of 43.9 that, during wartime, a man could gain his rights from a lord who oppresses or deserts sooner than during peacetime: a man need not put up with mistreatment for as long during wartime. This, and the stipulation of desertion at a time of ‘mortal need’ in 43.8, together suggest that desertion at a time of invasion earns a correspondingly higher degree of disgrace. These laws and the punishments they outline express the sentiment that desertion was a major offence in both eras, especially for soldiers under royal command. They throw into relief WM’s frequent comments directed at Æthelred: nothing can substitute for the lord’s presence in defence of the land.<sup>121</sup>

If a king through his own action absents himself from a fight or a cause, he relinquishes his moral tenure of kingship, his men, his land and his opportunity for victory. Indeed, as we have seen, WM explicitly claims that Æthelred held rather than reigned over the kingdom.<sup>122</sup> WM’s sense of Æthelred’s not being wholly king, even as the theoretical defender against invasions and despite his being the natural English heir, is evident in WM’s treatment of the English counsellors. After Swein’s death, WM preserves the remarks of ASC 1014 that Æthelred was preferred to Cnut,<sup>123</sup> but on what grounds? WM explains that the English would prefer their natural lord to Cnut (whom the Danes have chosen) if Æthelred will behave more like a king than he has previously: ‘Angli contra, naturalem dominum cariorem sibi pronuntiantes, si regalius se quam consueuerat ageret, e Normannia Egelredum accersiunt.’<sup>124</sup> There is a significant change in the conditional: WM effectively translates ‘govern more justly’ as ‘govern more like a king’. For WM, kingship itself must be moral.<sup>125</sup> The sense of contingency is strong:

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<sup>121</sup> Above, 68–9; 73–4.

<sup>122</sup> Above, 42.

<sup>123</sup> Above, 54–5.

<sup>124</sup> ‘The English on the other hand, declaring that they preferred their natural lord, if he were to behave in a more kingly manner than had been his custom, summoned Æthelred from Normandy.’ *GR* ii.179.2, i, 308–11.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. B. Weiler, ‘William of Malmesbury on Kingship’, *History* 90 (2005), 3–22; Sønnesyn, *William of Malmesbury*, 148–86.

Æthelred is the son of King Edgar, but his desirability as a king is contingent upon his actions. The presence of the conditional here reveals that neither nature nor law is enough to make a king in WM's estimation. The nature of the conditional phrase suggests that WM has high expectations for a defending English king.

WM states his ultimate harsh judgment of Æthelred explicitly in his later work, the *Gesta Pontificum*. Here, WM is primarily interested in the deeds of bishops, but his judgment of Æthelred as a king and lord remains harsh. In *GR*, the king fails in his duties as a military leader. In the context of WM's comments about the Danish wars in *GP*, the king fails in initiative and in protecting England's ecclesiastical interests:

uir qui coram uideret prouintias suas subuerti, se ipsum postremo exulem agi, nec ullum meditaretur remedium. Id quidam inaequalitati corporis, quidam segnitiei animi deputant. Verumtamen utcumque dicta mea ferant posteri, absolute pronuntio magnum insigne fuisse miseriae, quod primati patriae septem mensibus incarcerato nullam opem rex attulerit nec se ad uindictam excitauerit, seu presulis maiestate seu calamitatis indignitate permotus.<sup>126</sup>

WM notes that others attribute the king's failures to inherent bodily or mental qualities. But he explains here, appropriately for *GP*'s subject, that the best proof for the king's character is his failure to rescue or to avenge the archbishop. The king has the power and the responsibility to solve the situation, but chooses inaction. Absence of action for WM is a choice with consequences.

## Conclusions

WM attributes the Viking invasions to Æthelred's sinful character and deems him wholly responsible for the resultant suffering of the English. His attitude is one that acquits the

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<sup>126</sup> 'For [Æthelred] looked on at the overthrow of his provinces and at his own eventual exile without trying to retrieve the situation in any way. Some put that down to bodily infirmity, others to mental laziness. But, whatever posterity makes of my words, I categorically assert that nothing betrays the pathetic nature of his character more signally than the fact that though king he brought no help to the primate of his country when he was imprisoned for seven months, and the stirred himself not a whit to avenge him; he was swayed neither by the respect that should be felt for a bishop nor by the shameful circumstances.' *GP* i.21.1–2, i, 42–5.

army of any responsibility for their own actions, placing it entirely on the king's shoulders. To revisit the four themes established at the outset—character and behaviour, military leadership, victory and type of defeat, and loyalty—it is apparent that in these respects, WM's narrative of the Viking invasions is strikingly different from that of his source, ASC's Æthelred chronicler. Whereas the Æthelred chronicler offered reasons for Æthelred's behaviour—he was attempting a defence against the Danes—WM's Æthelred makes no effort and does not intend to do so. Æthelred is directly responsible for defeat, failure and desertion; WM's acerbic comments occlude any sense of collective responsibility. When WM's narrative reaches Æthelred's exile and return, WM rests the case that began with his earlier comment that Æthelred did not truly reign: WM's narrative has suggested that he is not worthy of being considered a king.

WM's assessment of Æthelred is not derived from any known source. WM could indeed have intended his own portrayal to provide a moral example of a bad king, designed to educate his royal readership.<sup>127</sup> But WM actually goes much further, by undercutting the idea that Æthelred is a king at all.<sup>128</sup> Provision of moral exempla may be a corollary of the aspiration to redeem English history, but was not in itself the root cause. To redeem English history, WM had to ascribe moral responsibility to some entity other than the English people at large. He finds the king is exclusively at fault, and this determination provides insight into both his philosophical ideas about kingship and his practical expectations for English kings. WM's conclusion would only be necessary if WM thought that kings actually did have the ability and power to influence outcomes (causal responsibility) and the accordant obligation and accountability for doing so (moral responsibility).

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<sup>127</sup> Above, 12.

<sup>128</sup> But cf. the covenant between God and the kings in Davidic kingship: 2 Kings 7:12–16. On the contingency of biblical kingship, from a theological perspective, see: W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, 1997), 601–4.

The Æthelred chronicler criticized English attempts at defence but did not devote much space to criticizing the king: the failure was that of the English nation as a whole. For WM, the Danish invasion is in the past—and he is seeking to mend the broken chain of English history, as he explains in his preface.<sup>129</sup> By locating fault almost exclusively in the king, WM can accuse him of not behaving as a proper English king should. WM removes the stain of failure from the kingdom by transferring the stain onto the king alone. He thus removes the bad king from the character of the nation by implying that he is not a rightful English king at all. Through the distribution and the degree of WM's reproaches, his narrative reveals uniquely high expectations for the moral and military qualities of a defending English king.

### **Henry on Æthelred**

Near the end of his fifth book, Henry introduces King Æthelred ominously: ‘Adelred ... ira Dei perturbatus erumpnose regnauit. De quo nobis multa restant dicenda.’<sup>130</sup> Already he has created suspense for his promised tale of woe. When Henry comes to reveal ‘that which must be said’ in Book VI, it becomes apparent that Æthelred has personally earned—and played a large part in provoking—the wrath of God through his actions.

Henry is a different case from his contemporaries, because his narrative does not defend the English; in fact he castigates them repeatedly for their sins, especially in his prologues.<sup>131</sup> He credits the English (not the king) with the murder of Æthelred's brother Edward in 978; they roused God's ire more than usual with this act.<sup>132</sup> On the other hand, Henry does not endorse the Viking invasions: he explains that they are the worst of the five plagues because (at least initially) they were conducted without any goal of conquest,

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<sup>129</sup> Above, 15.

<sup>130</sup> ‘Æthelred, harassed by the wrath of God, had a wretched reign. There remains more for us to say about him.’ *HA* v.32, 334–5.

<sup>131</sup> See e.g. *HA* v.prologue, 272–5; vi.prologue, 338–341.

<sup>132</sup> *HA* v.27, 324–5.

only destruction.<sup>133</sup> For Henry, there is thus a great amount of blame to distribute for causing and for failing to defend against the invasions.

Nancy Partner has observed that Henry judges both the defenders and invaders of England based on how much destruction they caused.<sup>134</sup> I offer a further refinement of this point: Henry makes the king particularly accountable, attributing to him personal responsibility for precipitating destruction, even amidst accusations of collective sin. Like Bede, Henry suggests that the sins of the people can ultimately be seen in their kings.<sup>135</sup> This goes partway towards explaining his criticism of the defending king Æthelred, but Henry also portrays Æthelred as uniquely culpable in certain respects. If collective sin is one of Henry's static causes of invasion, the king's behaviour is one of his dynamic ones: the efficient cause of bringing down God's wrath. In this respect similar to WM, Henry visits a greater degree of blame upon the king than does ASC. Henry holds the king directly responsible for precipitating the different waves of the Danish invasion. His criticism and implied censure are based less on grounds of the king's character, and more on the effects of his behaviour and implied failure to do his duty even when he is capable of doing so.

Like WM's, Henry's narrative highlights the need for the king's courage to be observed in battle, opposing it to the ineffectiveness and shame of retreat. In his general introduction to the Danish invasions at the beginning of Book V, Henry observes how even when kings and their nobles go to fight, messengers approach, telling them they are needed elsewhere. In reported speech, Henry has messengers address the king twice and

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<sup>133</sup> *HA* v.prologue, 272–5. But cf. the interpretation that Henry persists 'almost to the point of insult' in repeating his summaries to the reader (without the suggestion that he has a narrative reason for doing so): N.F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago, 1977), 22–4.

<sup>134</sup> Partner, *Serious Entertainments*, 25.

<sup>135</sup> Speaking specifically about kings of Northumbria, *HA* v.preface, 274–5; cf. Bede's prophecy of Oswine's death because the people did not deserve him, *HE*, iii.14. For an analysis of Henry's relationship with Bede, see: D. Greenway, 'Henry of Huntingdon and Bede', in J.P. Genet (ed.), *L'historiographie médiévale en Europe* (Paris, 1991), 43–50; at 43, Greenway remarks that twenty-five percent of the history Henry demonstrably borrowed is from Bede.

the nobles once. The desperation of the situation is apparent. The king's presence is invoked as essential to the defence. In the second purported plea to a king who is on the way to defend against one wave of invasion, Henry writes: 'Eadem die accurrebat alius dicens, "Rex, quo fugam capescis? Terribilis exercitus in occidentali parte Anglie appulit. Contra quos nisi festinus reuertaris, te fugisse existimantes, cede et flamma a tergo persequuntur."' <sup>136</sup> This lamentation suggests that strategic retreat is impossible, because the Danes are invading from all sides. A king can win a battle if he is present, but not the wars, since the battles are on all sides simultaneously. Henry's use of reported speech here serves to convey the situation's ironic futility: no matter where the king goes, he will be perceived as retreating from battle. Henry is entirely aware of the paradox that it is impossible for the king to be in two places at once, or to be eternally victorious. Yet the message is clear: the Danes will continue their attacks unless they perceive a strong defending king leading his army. Its impossibility does not prevent Henry from suggesting its necessity. Henry will make this kind of suggestion again in his invasion narrative.

Henry visits a high degree of prophetic blame onto the king for his behaviour. Henry refers to Dunstan's prophecies, but in comparison with Osbern, Eadmer and WM, <sup>137</sup> Henry shifts the emphasis away from Æthelred's sinful character, concentrating more on the king's specific actions. He takes the story of the infant Æthelred's peeing in the font during baptism as a sign that the end of the English is imminent. <sup>138</sup> This prophecy is more drastic than it appears elsewhere, for Henry describes the future as seeing 'exterminium Anglorum' instead of plagues and disasters visited upon them. It is worth

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<sup>136</sup> 'The same day another messenger would run up and say, "O king, whither are you retreating? A fearful army has landed in the west of England. Unless you turn back against them with speed, they will think you are running away and will pursue you from behind with killing and burning."' *HA* v.prologue, 272–3.

<sup>137</sup> Above, 57–67.

<sup>138</sup> *HA* v.28, 326–7.

commenting that Henry does not see the prophecy as proof of the king's character, as WM does, but rather as a signal of future troubles.

Henry moves on to explain that the king's behaviour directly precipitated God's decision to send in the Danes at that time. He gives the king no reason for his raid of Rochester, saying only that he cruelly destroyed the bishopric: 'Rex autem Adelred crudeliter destruxerat episcopatum Roueceastrie. Inde iterum Dominus ad iram promotus, quod facere parauerat non distulit.'<sup>139</sup> The people's sins anger God and he resolves to punish them—and, on seeing the king's destructive behaviour, in that moment he decides to act. The king's behaviour is what provokes divine retribution.

Henry enhances the sense of disorder in the Æthelred chronicler's account of Æthelred's reign, adding ironic comments and specific observations about causation and responsibility. Unlike for John, as we shall see, well-fought battles that end in defeat are not indications that the defeated army or king have preserved their honour. Rather, when describing the Danish invasions in general, Henry shows how defeat of any kind has a dampening effect on morale: 'Sic tot rumorum miserabili plaga percussi, rex et populus manibus et corde dissoluebantur et tabescebant.'<sup>140</sup> In content Henry's narrative closely follows ASC: Henry describes the army putting up a defence<sup>141</sup> but points out repeatedly that they do not prevail.<sup>142</sup> In one instance, he adapts the account of ASC into the ironic comment that what the English accomplished was the enriching of the enemy: 'Quid autem aliud profecit, nisi quod spoliis Dacos uictus ditauit?'<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> 'King Æthelred, however, had cruelly destroyed the bishopric of Rochester. Then the Lord, once more moved to anger, did not delay what He had planned to do.' *HA* v.28, 326–7.

<sup>140</sup> 'Struck down by the wretched plague of so many reports, king and people were broken in action and spirit, and dwindled away.' *HA* v.prologue, 274–5. Greenway, *HA*, 274 n.3 identifies the biblical reference to Ezekiel 21:7.

<sup>141</sup> At times 'uiriliter' and 'cum memoria fuge nulla': *HA* vi.6, 346–9. He includes the story of a renowned man who fought alone against the Danes, see: Greenway, *HA*, 348 n.31; C.E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1939), 239–40, 298.

<sup>142</sup> See e.g. *HA* vi.5, 346–7.

<sup>143</sup> 'But being defeated, what did it achieve other than enrich the Danish in spoils?' *HA* vi.3, 342–5; cf. ASC (CDE) 1006; above, 53–4.

But Henry is not bound exclusively to ASC's picture of general confusion. Henry, like WM, blames defeat and treachery on the poor judgment of the king: for him, the king is more culpable than the traitor. He describes how the king leaves a trap for the Danes, which is unsuccessful because the treacherous Ælfric forewarns them. He specifically identifies Ælfric as one whom the king had exiled but accepted back into his graces, adding a comment on the king's foolishness for doing so: 'Iure autem dicitur, "Quem semel grauiter leseris, non facile tibi fidelem credideris."' <sup>144</sup> Here, the defeat is the more shameful because all of the Danes escape the royal fleet: 'premuniti omnes euaserunt.' This totality of defeat differs from ASC, which reports one captured enemy ship. <sup>145</sup> The king is wholly at fault for permitting Ælfric's treachery to thrive and for the spectacular defeat that results.

Henry explains the Danish reaction to the St Brice's Day massacre as a justified response to Æthelred's treachery. If we take a closer look at Henry's comments about the events of St Brice's Day, we find the hint that he associates the worsening of Æthelred's character with the inception of Norman influence:

Quo prouentu rex Adelred in superbiam elatus et perfidiam prolatus, omnes Dacos qui cum pace erant in Anglia clandestina prodicione fecit mactari una eademque die, scilicet in festiuitate sancti Bricii. <sup>146</sup>

This appears to be an early warning of the French lordship that Dunstan ('uir Dei') has predicted will ultimately come to dominate the English forever. <sup>147</sup> As the narrative

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<sup>144</sup> 'Moreover it is justly said, "If you have once seriously injured a man, you should not readily believe that he will be faithful to you."' *HA* v.29, 238–9.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. ASC (CDE) 992; JW [992]; below, 95–6.

<sup>146</sup> 'With [Emma's] arrival, King Æthelred's pride increased and his faithlessness grew: in a treacherous plot, he ordered all the Danes who were living peacefully in England to be put to death on the same day, namely the feast of St Brice.' *HA* vi.2, 340–1.

<sup>147</sup> *HA* vi.1, 338–41.

unfolds, Henry shows that Æthelred's bad behaviour develops in parallel with increasing Norman influence, which he has brought to the kingdom.<sup>148</sup>

Henry's comment that the resident Danes were living peacefully ('cum pace') emphasizes these Danes' morality and the correspondingly great degree of injustice levelled at them. Henry goes on to observe: 'Millesimo tercio anno, ira Daci exarserunt digna, sicut ignis quem sagimine [sanguine *Ii*] uelit aliquis extinguere.'<sup>149</sup> The Danish invaders possess anger that is both intense and justified. They are God's avenging force against the English,<sup>150</sup> but in this instance their righteous anger is directed specifically at the king. Henry's metaphor itself underlines the incompetence and foolishness on the part of one ('quem') attempting to put out the fire—who is, as Henry has noted, King Æthelred.

We have seen how, in Book V, Henry suggests that the king is responsible for Ælfric's treachery. The king is by extension responsible for the incapacitation of the army when Ælfric abandons it, faced with this further onslaught of Danes. Henry includes ASC's account of Ælfric's feigned illness in 1003, with a harsher version of the accompanying proverb: Henry writes that when the leader fails, the army is not just hampered, but utterly useless: '“Quando dux deficit, exercitus uilescit”'.<sup>151</sup> This greater severity which Henry attaches to the consequence of treachery makes Ælfric's treachery, and in turn the king's failure to deal with it, appear the more egregious.

Given the high value Henry places on the king's presence and courage, Henry's editorial additions imply criticism of his absence when the king is not present. The message that the king's presence is essential to any victory recurs in Henry's descriptions

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<sup>148</sup> *HA* vi.1, 338–9. Henry also allies Emma's appointed sheriff, Hugh the Norman, with the Danes, vi.2, 342–3; see 342 n.10.

<sup>149</sup> 'In the year 1003, the Danes were inflamed with justifiable anger, like a fire which someone had tried to extinguish with fat.' *HA* vi.2, 340–1.

<sup>150</sup> *HA* v.prologue, 274–5.

<sup>151</sup> '“When the leader fails, the army becomes worthless”', *HA* vi.2, 342–3; cf. ASC (CDE) 1003, above, 51.

of the worsening raids. Henry's interpretive comments that Æthelred remained on his own manor 'cum mesticia et confusione ... sepe rumorum sauciatus aculeis'<sup>152</sup> highlight his ineffectiveness in leading the defence. ASC gives a practical reason for why the king was in Shropshire (to receive food rents) which Henry omits. Furthermore, it subsequently describes collective uncertainty about what to do;<sup>153</sup> Henry is original in concentrating this degree of confusion in the king himself. These changes create the implication that the king was succumbing to sorrows and hiding instead of fulfilling his duty to lead the defence and intimidate the enemy. Yet Henry does indeed suggest that the king is capable of ending the Danish ravaging, allotting him more influence than does ASC: 'Rex autem Adelred ... [f]inemque seucie eorum imposuisset'.<sup>154</sup> Both sources acknowledge the treachery of Eadric, but Henry is the only one to suggest that the king would have prevailed had it not been for the traitor.

Henry accords the king a greater degree of personal responsibility for the problems with paying tributes to the Danes than does ASC. Henry accuses the king specifically of being too late in offering tribute to and making peace with the Danes ('Tunc uero rex nimis sero pacem fecit cum Dacorum exercitu ...'), adding the comment that peace was never made in time to stop the ravaging.<sup>155</sup> Henry departs from ASC in that he assigns to the king responsibility for the tributes and the delay, for ASC describes them as a collective decision (and hence a collective failure) of the king and his council.

The importance of Henry's novel choices in modifying ASC is evident in what he chooses to leave unchanged. When the army is resisting siege in London, Henry preserves the account of ASC in explaining that their bravery is because of the king's presence:

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<sup>152</sup> 'in sorrow and confusion ... stung repeatedly by painful news.' *HA* vi.3, 344–5.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. ASC (CDE) 1006, 1011; above, 53–4

<sup>154</sup> 'King Æthelred ... would have put an end to the savagery', *HA* vi.5, 346–7.

<sup>155</sup> 'Then the king, too late, made peace with the Danish army', *HA* vi.8, 350–1; cf. ASC (CDE) 1012, and 1011, from which he borrows the comment about the ineffectiveness of tributes; this annal attributes them to bad counsel; see above, 54.

‘Ciues uero, quia rex Adelred inerat, fortiter ei restiterunt.’<sup>156</sup> In almost identical language, both narratives establish the value of the king’s presence. It is thus the more striking that Henry adds a new mode of explanation throughout his invasion narrative, holding Æthelred explicitly responsible and accountable for defeats, whereas ASC does not.

Like WM, Henry modifies the conditions of Æthelred’s return in 1014: in ASC and in John, the condition is to behave more justly; in WM, to behave more like a king; in Henry, to behave in a more civilized manner (‘humanius’).<sup>157</sup> Henry makes no reference to the English valuing him as their natural lord, nor to the mutual forgiveness, oaths and pledges, nor to the pronouncement that the kingdom’s leading men outlawed all Danish kings: ‘7 æfre ælcne Dæniscne cyning utlah of Ænglalande gecwædon.’<sup>158</sup> Henry is abbreviating ASC, but these details are nonetheless important omissions, because they reduce the importance of dynastic continuity in English kingship. Henry does not portray the people owing the king loyalty because he is the rightful heir: they promise loyalty to one who will behave the way an English king should.

And indeed, Æthelred does not behave the way an English king should. Henry hints that the king employs arbitrary violence at Lindsey. Henry explains that when Æthelred learns of the agreement between the men of Lindsey and Cnut, he kills nearly all the inhabitants.<sup>159</sup> This report is basically the same as ASC, but Henry introduces Cnut’s feeling of remorse, a sentiment which adds the unspoken suggestion that Æthelred’s violence was misdirected.<sup>160</sup> As we will see, Henry is setting up Æthelred as

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<sup>156</sup> ‘But the citizens resisted him bravely, since King Æthelred was within.’ *HA* vi.9, 352–3.

<sup>157</sup> *HA* vi.10, 352–3.

<sup>158</sup> ‘and [they] declared every Danish king outlawed from England for ever.’ [D] ASC (CDE) 1014; Swanton, 145.

<sup>159</sup> *HA* vi.10, 352–3.

<sup>160</sup> Below, 172–3.

the arbitrarily violent enemy in contrast with Cnut, whom he begins to cast as the one who behaves like an English king should.

It is in the final days of the English resistance that Henry's vision of royal responsibility moves from tacit to explicit. Henry gives England's defending kings personal influence over the outcomes of conquest, a pattern which he makes explicit in his description of King Edmund's final attempt to resist the invasion. Henry explains that were it not for Eadric, the king could have stopped the Danes: 'Quod si eos persequi persisteret, ultimus ille dies bello Dacisque fuisset.'<sup>161</sup> This observation is crucial because it reveals how Henry understands a king's influence in the context of his repeated observations that everything happened according to God's plan.<sup>162</sup> His comment that a better outcome was possible conveys both the tragedy of the English—and it accords sole causal responsibility to the king. Henry's words add the sense that a defending king was powerful enough to stop the invasion: and, like John, Henry conveys it using classical language. Classical language helps to colour Henry's expanded sense of causation, which he makes clearest when the most is at stake for English destiny.

## Conclusions

Henry shares with ASC an invasion narrative stressing collective sin and responsibility. But the king is to blame for shameful behaviour during the invasion that directly precipitates God's wrath. More so than his sources, Henry gives the defending kings Æthelred and Edmund more responsibility, in both senses of the word: the power to influence a battle, and accountability. By making a defending king explicitly capable of and responsible for saving the day, he makes him more accountable for causing

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<sup>161</sup> 'If he had continued to pursue them that would have been the last day of the war and of the Danes.' *HA* vi.13, 358–9. See also: Greenway, *HA*, 358 n.58, noting the quotation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, ix.759. An interesting parallel is that Turnus, like Æthelred, is also an ill-starred defender.

<sup>162</sup> E.g. *HA* v.preface; v.2; v.32; vi.1.

destruction than other members of the defence. Henry remains similar in tone to ASC, but we can identify some heightening of expectations for an English king by showing how Æthelred falls short of those expectations.

Henry's account is similar in tone to ASC, which makes it the more striking that his picture of the defending king is nevertheless different. It shows that Henry places more emphasis on the need for a king to behave well than for him to be a natural dynastic lord: he is thinking about an English king differently from Wulfstan, the Æthelred chronicler, or Ælfric. A final comment is warranted on Henry's motivation for assigning to the king the power and responsibility to influence the invasions' outcome. It cannot be to exonerate the English entirely, as with WM: instead, Henry highlights the tragic paradox of the English defeat by an unworthy opponent. Because Henry's defending king can turn the tide of battle with his leadership and observed courage—and perhaps even temporarily defer God's wrath—the impossibility of the situation, his inability to be in multiple places at once, and his failures of judgment when he could have made a difference, are the more poignant, and tragic.

Why hold the king particularly accountable in a tale of collective sin? Unlike John and WM, Henry sympathizes with the English, but does not exclude them from divine wrath to as great a degree. Yet there is more to Henry than the theme of the plagues to punish sin which he advances strenuously in his prologues. As we have seen, Nancy Partner argues that the theme of the five plagues provides a frame and narrative structure, but that it is not his primary theme: he does not develop it outside of his prologues or conclusions. She suggests instead that his primary theme is the persistence of worldly impermanence.<sup>163</sup> Despite this exaltation of the heavenly realm by contrast, Henry is aware of the sad ironies of the world of men and kings. Describing the king's power and

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<sup>163</sup> Above, 23–8.

responsibility to influence the outcome of a battle, if not the war, helps Henry to tell the story of the English tragedy—and shows that he is thinking of an English king.

Although Henry speaks repeatedly of the end of the English, their destruction and their sins, the English endure.<sup>164</sup> He describes God's plan for their destruction: God plans Eadric's treachery,<sup>165</sup> God deludes the fleet at Sandwich.<sup>166</sup> But even if defeated, the English remain a presence and an influence in his view of English history. He does not comment about the Anglo-Saxon invasion that their presence was ephemeral, as he does for the invasions of the Romans, Picts, Scots and Danes.<sup>167</sup> Only of the English and the Normans does Henry identify the construction of a long-term legacy in the form of English law. James Campbell suggests that Henry is noteworthy for his lack of nostalgia for the Anglo-Saxon past.<sup>168</sup> But Henry develops a sense of the peculiarly English tragedy: they and their laws endure, but subjected; they have the capability for defence in their king, but even he cannot fight the war on all fronts. The bitterness of his criticism of English sin is not enough to obscure his awareness of the tragic paradox of England's military loss.

Henry's blame of Æthelred is different from WM's in that Henry ascribes sin and culpability to all, whereas WM lessens the implication of the English in the king's sins. WM seeks to redeem the actions of the English in contrast to Æthelred. Henry, if he does not redeem the English through a contrast of characters as dramatic as WM's, still extracts them from blame: the framework of the five plagues renders collective human causation of minimal influence in comparison, and Henry conveys a sense of tragedy in the English defeat which outweighs his censure. WM and Henry are similar in important

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<sup>164</sup> Above, 22–34.

<sup>165</sup> *HA* vi.4, 344–5.

<sup>166</sup> *HA* vi.5, 346–7.

<sup>167</sup> *HA* v. prologue, 272–3.

<sup>168</sup> J. Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past', in his *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), 209–28, at 211.

ways. Within the historical framework of each narrative, their projects are sympathetic to the English past as each conceives of it. Both accord the king a greater degree of causal and moral responsibility in the invasions than do their sources.

### **John on Æthelred**

We have seen how the way in which WM and Henry cast the king as reprehensible for the English defeat has the effect of making the English defence appear more worthy and less shamed by defeat. To what extent is this borne out in John's *Chronicon*? Are the distribution of responsibility, the censure of Æthelred and the judgment of the English consistent among the three writers?

John's narrative accounts for and explains the English defeat in a way that does not portray the English defence as collectively responsible for failure. As such, John's *Chronicon* differs significantly from the accounts of Æthelred's reign preserved in the CDE MSS of ASC, which (as we have seen) portrays the English defence as repeatedly ineffective and implies that defeat was in part caused by internal treachery and failure of king and council. Through its omissions and added explanations, John's narrative attributes some of the causes of failure to external factors, including fortune, traitors and the influence of Danish blood. The king, his councillors and the English not only intend to do their duty, but are effective at those operations which were under their control—and many things were not under their control. In so doing the narrative absolves the English defence of blame for the defeat.<sup>169</sup> John's expectations for the king are similar to WM's and Henry's, but he creates an Æthelred who tends to fulfil them. John's narrative is similar in effect to his contemporaries in that all reduce the English army's relative

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<sup>169</sup> Cf. the similar narrative effect of JW's discussion of Harold, esp. the eulogy; below, 143.

responsibility for shame and defeat. But John achieves the effect by arrogating blame in a remarkably different way.

To determine the standards on which John judged the defending king and the English defence, I address primarily John's portrayal of military leadership in the defence. Herein is the most new, interesting and surprising material: he changes the story of the invasion to erase implications of blame across the defence, including blame of the king. Without a protracted discussion of piety, it is worth noting that unlike his contemporaries—and despite knowledge of material that might lead him to this conclusion—John does not offer any suggestion that the Danish or Norman Conquests were caused by the king's sins.<sup>170</sup>

To a greater degree than does ASC, John portrays Æthelred as a king who fulfils his responsibilities as a military leader who leads efficiently and commands his army personally. In many respects John's account is like that of ASC (particularly MS A) in that there are occasions on which the king is shown as fulfilling his responsibilities effectively. In battle, John makes the English defence and the king appear less reprehensible by emphasizing the strength of the effort, not the ineffectiveness of the result, which is an important change from ASC. As we will see, the changes do not entirely overwrite the account of the Æthelred chronicler. Like his source, John acknowledges the delay of the army's leaders in 999 as a major setback for the defence, and describes the forces as achieving nothing.<sup>171</sup> But there are other cases in which he makes the attempted defence look organized and laudable instead of dilatory and chaotic. Hart has commented that among John's stylistic changes are his observations that armies and individuals move about with rapidity, for which there is no precedent in his known

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<sup>170</sup> JW appears to rely in part on Byrhtferth's *Vita Oswaldi*: McGurk, JW, ii, 430 n.1. JW knew and used Osbern, *VD* c.39 (McGurk, JW, ii, 345 n.7, but apparently chose to ignore Dunstan's reservations about Æthelred and his prophecies about coming disasters in c.37: cf. discussion of Osbern, above, 57–60.

<sup>171</sup> JW [999], ii, 448–9; similarly, ASC (CDE) 999.

sources.<sup>172</sup> These stylistic changes have a comprehensive narrative effect: to make the English defence look more efficient.

John makes the defence less accountable for failures in many ways. At times he explicitly removes defeat from the control of the English defence, and attributes responsibility for defeat to external causes. Consistent with and following ASC, he blames evil counsel, negligence and the treachery of Norman allies for defeat,<sup>173</sup> but adds more explanations of his own. These include weather, insufficient numbers and fortune. ASC mentions these factors as well, but does not use them to excuse moral culpability as John does.

John sometimes blames Danish fortune for Danish victories, perhaps as an alternative to blaming their wins on the will of God or their military superiority. ASC gives no reason for the Danish victory at the Battle of Maldon, but John ascribes it to fortune: ‘Danica uero fortuna uicit.’<sup>174</sup> In its entry for 998, ASC gives as the reason for English retreats: ‘þonne wearð þær æfre þurh sum þing fleam astiht’.<sup>175</sup> But John observes that whenever the Danish forces engaged in battle, ‘Angli, *aut insidiis aut aliquo infortunio impediti*, terga uerterunt et hostibus uictoriam dederunt.’<sup>176</sup> [emphasis added] John turns ‘sum þing’ into specific explanations for the defeat that place blame directly on treachery and misfortune, not on the army or on chaotic leadership. It is important to note that John does use chance to explain English victory: the English army defeats the Danes and captures the treacherous ealdorman Ælfric ‘fortuito casu’.<sup>177</sup> John’s use of fortune as an explanation means that English defence gets less credit for winning, but fortune also takes some of the blame for defeat such that it is less shameful. By removing

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<sup>172</sup> Hart, ‘The early section of the *Worcester chronicle*’, 260.

<sup>173</sup> JW [1003], ii, 454–5; ASC (CDE) 1003; above, 51.

<sup>174</sup> ‘Danish fortune triumphed.’ JW [991], ii, 438–9.

<sup>175</sup> ‘something always started a retreat’ [D] ASC (CDE) 998; Swanton, 131.

<sup>176</sup> ‘the English, hampered by treachery or by some other misfortune, turned their backs, and yielded victory to the enemy.’ JW [998], ii, 448–9.

<sup>177</sup> JW [992], ii, 442–3.

the outcome of a battle from the defence's control, the defence cannot be deemed responsible for it.<sup>178</sup>

Although the English are ultimately defeated, John highlights the victorious elements of their losses. John provides numerous examples of the English army acquitting themselves well. The army from Hampshire and Wiltshire assembles and fights the enemy 'uiriliter et constanter', adverbs which ASC does not supply.<sup>179</sup> John adds to ASC's account the detail that Danes barely escape even in a battle in which they are the stronger army.<sup>180</sup> When the Danes besiege London in 1009, the citizens drive them back 'non sine paruo suorum detrimento'.<sup>181</sup> Although the raids were worse by this time, John's narrative stresses the defence's accomplishments, not their failures.

A significant way in which John repeatedly absolves the English of responsibility for failure is by erasing references in ASC to the futility of their defence, eliminating ASC's tone of reproach for the defence. John removes parts of annals that seem despairing, such that each year frequently ends on a less depressing note than ASC.<sup>182</sup> In 1006, John gives a shorter account of the year's battles than does ASC.<sup>183</sup> By telescoping the extent of warfare, John's chronicle reduces the sense that the English defensive position was worsening over time. Even in the later years when Danish forces were a strong and long-term presence (including 1011, the year in which John includes the list of sixteen counties overrun by the Danes), John eliminates ASC's laments and references to the ineffectiveness of the English, adding a reference to the Danes' trickery in 1011.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> For discussion on twelfth-century chroniclers' use of fortune to substitute for culpability, see also: L Ashe, *Fiction and History in England, 1066–1200* (Cambridge, 2007), 166–70; R.W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain: From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York, 1966), 125–6.

<sup>179</sup> JW [1003], ii, 454–5.

<sup>180</sup> 'Quibus ad naues repedantibus, non equa manu militum illis occurrit, durissimumque cum eis prelium commisit ... Dani uero uix euaserunt', JW [1004], ii, 456–7.

<sup>181</sup> 'with no small damage to their men', JW [1009], ii, 464–5; cf. ASC (CDE) 1009.

<sup>182</sup> For a partial list (994, 999, 1001, 1006), see: Hart, 'The early section of the *Worcester chronicle*', 298–9.

<sup>183</sup> JW [1006], ii, 456–9; ASC (CDE) 1006; see McGurk, JW, ii, 459 n.9.

<sup>184</sup> JW [1008], [1011], [1013], [1016], ii, 460–83; see also McGurk, JW, ii, 461 n.7, 462 n.1, 468 n.2, 475 n.10, 482 n.4.

The English cannot be culpable for an ineffectiveness of which this historian does not accuse them.

For John, did internal treachery dissolve the defence from within? As I have argued earlier in this chapter, ASC's overall tone implies that internal treachery, and failure to deal with it among king and council, are largely to blame for the defeat. John's picture of the invasion narrative differs markedly. He blames traitors and the Danishness of the English for treachery, and the king he shows as doing his duty to combat it. By identifying and criticizing specific culprits John avoids implicating the king or the English in general. The result is a narrative which does not subscribe to a concept of either collective or royal responsibility for the English defeat.

Royal commands responding to treachery appear swift and at least partially effective, unlike in WM's version of the Danish invasions. ASC writes of Ælfric's treachery and flight to the Danes in 992: '7 se here ða ætbærst, butan an scip þær man ofsloh.'<sup>185</sup> John's equivalent for this passage is: 'Quod ubi cognouit classis regia, fugientes insequitur. Nec mora ex illis una tantum nauis capitur, omnique in ea multitudine cesa spoliatur, ceteris per fugam lapsis'.<sup>186</sup> There is no suggestion that the king is reprehensible for slaying all of the deserters and the enemy. The terse syntax of the first sentence conveys the fleet's instantaneous action upon learning of treachery, thus implying the king's instantaneous decision; 'nec mora' underlines it. The emphasis in ASC is on the enemy's escape; John highlights what the English defence accomplished under the direction of royal authority, little though it was.

This annal provides the best example of John showing the king doing what is in his control to combat and punish internal treachery, thereby fulfilling his responsibility as

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<sup>185</sup> 'and the raiding-army then escaped, except for one ship which was stuck there.' [D] ASC (CDE) 992; Swanton, 127.

<sup>186</sup> 'When the royal fleet learned of this, it pursued those fleeing. Without delay one single ship was taken from amongst them, and was plundered when the whole host on board had been slain. The others escaped by flight.' JW [992], ii, 442–3.

king. This is noteworthy given ASC's implied criticism of the king (and his nobles) primarily for failure to deal with internal treachery. ASC reports that the fleet met the enemy but does not cast it as a direct response to Ælfric's treachery. Darlington and McGurk remark that the idea that Ælfric and his men fled to the Danish fleet and were pursued by the English was perhaps an inference of John's.<sup>187</sup> This may be the case, but it is also an effective plot device which recreates a tone about the English defence very differently from that of ASC in the same annal. John's specific discussion of treachery in narrative permits John to showcase the English defence and the king as doing their duty, and even, in some cases, as effective.

John finds a further intriguing culprit for the internal treachery that threatened the English in these years of the invasion: where possible, he blames Danish heritage for treachery carried out by the English. In 993, the local inhabitants of Lindsey and Northumbria respond promptly to Danish raids, 'contra quos prouinciales quamplures conglobati properanter ascenderunt'; there is no equivalent for 'properanter' in ASC.<sup>188</sup> The local inhabitants are not, however, to blame for their ultimate lack of success. John says specifically that two English generals betrayed their men and abandoned the fight because they had Danish blood: 'sed cum prelium essent commissuri, duces exercitus Frana uidelicet Frithogist et Goduuinus, *quia ex paterno genere Danici fuerunt, suis insidiantes, auctores fuge primitus extiterunt.*'<sup>189</sup> [italics indicate section not in ASC] By casting the generals as predominantly foreigners, he ascribes their treachery not to English treachery, but rather to foreign loyalty. Furthermore, John firmly places responsibility for the retreat on the traitors' Danish blood, identifying them as the original

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<sup>187</sup> McGurk, JW, ii, 442 n.1.

<sup>188</sup> 'A large number of the local inhabitants assembled and went against them in haste', JW [993], ii, 442-3; ASC (CDE) 993.

<sup>189</sup> 'but when they were on the point of joining battle, the army's leaders, Fræna, that is Frithugils, and Godwine, *because they were Danish on their father's side, betrayed their own people* and were the true initiators of the rout.' JW [993], ii, 442-3; McGurk, JW, ii, 443 n.4-4.

‘auctores’ of the retreat. He identifies a culprit for the retreat, thereby showing that this particular retreat was not honourable or at least excusable. This conclusion about responsibility is worth comparing with WM, for whom the king is both the efficient and the final cause of any shame incurred in failing to engage the enemy.

John preserves material from ASC when it serves to make the defence impressive and the king effective. In his account of Olaf and Swein’s attempt to invade and burn London with ninety-four ships, John preserves ASC’s reference to the intervention of Mary, but adds a new comment that the English inflicted damage on the Danes: ‘sed Dei sueque genitricis Marie iuuamine non sine paruo detrimento sui exercitus a ciuibus repelluntur.’<sup>190</sup> This understatement gives more credit to the English defence.

Furthermore, it preserves the comment that God aided the defence against the Danes: John does not retain material which casts God as using the Viking armies as punishment. Like ASC (particularly MS A), John shows the king’s resolution of conflict with enemy king Olaf as effective: he is doing his duty to protect his kingdom by making peace with an invader, and by extending the blessings of Christianity to him.<sup>191</sup>

With the advent of the millennial year 1000, the Æthelred chronicler mentions the king ravaging, and then only the actions of his ships: ‘his scypu wendon’.<sup>192</sup> But John’s king is, as he should be, commanding the fleet: ‘Hic sue classi mandauit’.<sup>193</sup> John’s comment conveys a sense of the king’s effective personal authority not present in his source; his explicit reference to the king behaving like a military leader is original. Similarly, John’s English army behaves as it should. Whereas ASC offers no explanation for the fleet’s failure to meet the king as ordered, John explains that bad winds prevented

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<sup>190</sup> ‘but with the help of God and his mother Mary they were driven back by the citizens, not without some small damage to their armies.’ JW [994], ii, 442–3.

<sup>191</sup> JW [994], ii, 444–5; cf. ASC (A) 993 [994]; (CDE) 994.

<sup>192</sup> ‘his ships turned’, [D] ASC (CDE) 1000; cf. (A) 1001, which does not mention the king ravaging.

<sup>193</sup> ‘He commanded his fleet’, JW [1000], ii, 450–1.

the meeting.<sup>194</sup> John preserves the comment that the English fled the Danes in 1001, but adds the explanation that the defence's lack of numbers rendered them unable to resist.<sup>195</sup> Only in MS A do we find an Æthelred who does not ravage, and the sentiment that he was wrongly betrayed by Pallig.

John does not imply criticism of Æthelred for arbitrary behaviour. John describes the king meting out punishment: when Leofsiges slays the king's high reeve, the king banishes him 'ira succensus'; John does not blame the king for angering unjustly.<sup>196</sup> It is not at all clear that John condones the events of St Brice's Day, but he does not criticize the king as do WJ and WM. John expands the targets to include all Danish settlers of either sex. He provides the same reasons as ASC: the Danes' intent to kill the king and his men and to take over the kingdom, and notes that the decision was taken in counsel, not by the king alone and arbitrarily.<sup>197</sup>

John's narrative is consistent: there are other instances later in the narrative in which John blames shameful behaviour on the Danish heritage of the traitors. When the East Anglians flee battle in 1010, John points out that the Danish thegn Thurketel is the first to do so.<sup>198</sup> To aid in his deceit, Eadric chooses forty ships from the English fleet—ships which are crewed by Danish sailors.<sup>199</sup> In 1016, he reports that a Danish noble murdered earl Uhtred, whereas ASC says Uhtred was murdered on Eadric's advice.<sup>200</sup>

The Danish are the enemy, and in these cases they become an internal enemy as well as an external one. This is particularly convenient for John's project of exonerating the English. ASC implies that the king and his nobles permitted treachery to defeat them

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<sup>194</sup> JW [1000], ii, 450–1; see McGurk, JW, ii, 450 n.3–3; cf. ASC (CDE) 1000.

<sup>195</sup> JW [1001], ii, 450–1; but cf. McGurk, JW, ii, 451 n.6–6 for the observation that this may be 'inference'.

<sup>196</sup> JW [1002], ii, 452–3. On the legitimacy of royal anger in Anglo-Norman and Angevin kingship, cf. J.E.A. Jolliffe, *Angevin Kingship* (London, 1955), 87–109.

<sup>197</sup> ASC (CDE) 1002; JW [1002], ii, 452–3.

<sup>198</sup> JW [1010], ii, 466–7.

<sup>199</sup> JW [1015], ii, 480–1; ASC (CDE) 1015 mentions no Danish crew; McGurk, JW, ii, 480 n.6–6.

<sup>200</sup> JW [1016], ii, 482–3; see McGurk, JW, ii, 483 n.9 for Durham sources identifying Thurbrand as the murderer. JW appears to select material that strengthens the associations between the Danes and treachery.

even before the Danes arrived; the English are their own internal enemy. For John, the English did not let treachery get the better of them; rather, they were infiltrated by the enemy. John's picture is consistent with Æthelred's charter of 1002:<sup>201</sup> if he knew the charter, the king's logic apparently made sense to him.

John blames traitors Ælfric and Eadric for treachery without implicating the English, and without blaming the king for failing to deal with them as WM does. John retells the story of the ealdorman Ælfric and the illness he feigns in 1003 in a way that implies that a defending leader should not only be present, but also fearless. As we have seen, ASC records the proverb as saying that a weak commander will hinder the army; John instead describes a specific weakness in a commander: observed cowardice. John rephrases the proverb: 'unde dictum est in antiquo prouerbio: tremiscente duce in prelio, ceteri omnes preliatores effiuntur pauidiores.'<sup>202</sup> This is a striking departure from the kind of cowardice we find in the Old English vernacular, which as Richard Abels has shown appears more as failure to uphold lordship bonds, instead of 'a personal and subjective response to the emotion of fear'.<sup>203</sup> John adds the army's reaction: 'Cuius inertiam et timiditatem ut uidit exercitus, a suis inimicis sine pugna diuertit mestissimus'.<sup>204</sup> John's addition that the army observed and bemoaned Ælfric's 'inertiam et timiditatem' suggests that they are not implicated in any shame for the retreat. For John, the real danger is fear in the army's leaders and its ranks, not weakness, and it is a danger potentially more serious. In ASC, the problem arises if the leader actually submits, but John shows us that even emotions the commander displays in battle can blunt the

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<sup>201</sup> Above, 48–9.

<sup>202</sup> 'As it is said in the old proverb: "A leader who trembles in battle makes all the other fighters more fearful."' JW [1003], ii, 454–5.

<sup>203</sup> Abels, ' "Cowardice" and Duty', 31.

<sup>204</sup> 'When the army saw his inactivity and cowardice, they turned away from their enemies in deepest grief, without battle.' JW [1003], ii, 454–5; cf. WM, above, 68–70.

army's effectiveness. The continued emphasis on the need for *spectata audatia* in the defence's leaders in the twelfth-century sources deserves to be highlighted.

John exonerates the English for their failure, largely by implicating traitors in even more wrongdoing than does ASC. He also provides reasons for the king's behaviour, showing him taking just actions against treachery. Despite his affection for Wulfgeat, the king strips him of dignity and property because of his arrogance and unjust deeds.<sup>205</sup> The Æthelred chronicler does not ascribe these negative character traits to Wulfgeat.<sup>206</sup> John shows the king fulfilling his responsibility, since he orders justice despite his personal feelings. Dubbing Eadric 'dolosus et perfidus', John describes him plotting to deceive ealdorman Ælfhelm in 1006.<sup>207</sup> In his entry for 1009, John establishes the right intent of the English, explaining: 'et ut totus erat exercitus mori uel uincere paratus',<sup>208</sup> an insight into the noble character of the English army which ASC does not provide. Even more striking, John holds Eadric entirely accountable for what appears in ASC to be a botched defence wherein the leaders should have dealt with treachery. John writes:

At perfidus dux Eadricus Streona ... et insidiis et perplexis orationibus ne prelium inirent, sed ea uice suos hostes abire permetterent, modis omnibus allaborauit, suasit et persuasit et a manibus Anglorum Danos, ut patrie proditor, eripuit et abire permisit. Illi uero ab eis diuertentes, magno cum gaudio ad suas regressi sunt naues.<sup>209</sup>

That Eadric put so much effort into his deception makes it seem almost excusable that the English listened. Significantly, the king, his leading men and the army do not abandon their ships 'leohtlice': they are not responsible for the shameful way in which treachery dissolves their defence; only Eadric is.

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<sup>205</sup> JW [1006], ii, 456–7.

<sup>206</sup> Cf. ASC (CDE) 1006; above, 49–50.

<sup>207</sup> JW [1006], ii, 456–9; see McGurk, JW, ii, 458 n.1.

<sup>208</sup> 'and this army [was] to a man prepared to conquer or die', JW [1009], ii, 462–3.

<sup>209</sup> 'But the treacherous ealdorman Eadric Streona ... laboured by all means, by wiles and baffling arguments, that they should not join battle, but permit their enemy, on that occasion, to depart, and so as a traitor to his country he urged and persuaded and snatched the Danes from the hands of the English and allowed them to get away. They, turning from the English, with great joy returned to their ships.' JW [1009], ii, 462–5. Cf. ASC (CDE) 1009, which notes only Eadric's characteristic treachery, above, 51–2; see also McGurk, JW, ii, 464 n.1

John explains that Æthelred leads an effective defence in a tone strikingly different from ASC. ASC reports of Swein’s invasion and attack on London in 1013: ‘Þa þe he to þære byrig com, þa nolde se buruhwaru bugan, ac heoldon mid fullon wige ongean, for þan þær wæs inne se cyning Æþelred 7 Þurcyl mid him. Þa wende Swegen cyng’.<sup>210</sup> There are two things to note about this description. First, ASC acknowledges the king’s presence, but no action on his part. Second, ASC reports that Swein left, as though of his own accord. John does something different. He explains that Æthelred conducts an effective defence in London:

Cunque Landoniam uenisset, multis modis illam uel dolo capere uel ui expugnare conatus est, sed rex Anglorum Ægelredus cum ciuibus et iuuamine Danici comitis Turkilli sepe memorati, qui secum tunc temporis intus erat, muros urbis uiriliter defendit et illum abegit.<sup>211</sup>

Both ASC and John identify the difference that the king’s presence can make in battle, but only John makes the king an active leader who caused Swein’s retreat. In this regard it is worth comparing the accounts of WM and John. Both writers share a belief in the defending king’s power and ability to influence outcomes—and in his duty to do so—even in their very different interpretations of Æthelred’s character.

John casts Æthelred as directly responsible for causing the Danish retreat. In recounting the events of 1014, ASC records the king’s leadership and surprise attack, but merely reports that Cnut and the Danish fleet put out to sea.<sup>212</sup> John’s king leads an army and catches the Danes unprepared: ‘Sed antequam essent parati, uenit illo rex Ægelredus cum exercitu ualido, *et Canuto cum classica manu expulso*’.<sup>213</sup> [italics indicate section not

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<sup>210</sup> ‘Then when [Swein] came to the town, the inhabitants of the town would not submit, but held out against them with full battle because King Æthelred was inside, and Thurkil with him. Then King Swein turned from there’, [D] ASC (CDE) 1013; Swanton, 143–4.

<sup>211</sup> ‘And when he came to London he tried by many methods either to take it by stratagem or to attack it with force but Æthelred, king of the English, with the citizens and with the aid of the Danish earl Thorkell often mentioned, who was at that time inside with him, resolutely defended the walls of the city, and drove him off.’ JW [1013], ii, 472–5.

<sup>212</sup> ASC (CDE) 1014.

<sup>213</sup> ‘But before they had been prepared, king Æthelred arrived there with a strong army, *and when he had expelled Cnut and his fleet*’, JW [1014], ii, 478–9; see also JW, McGurk, ii, 478 n.2–2.

in ASC] Æthelred commands, defends and routs the enemy. Whether John chose material from among several versions of ASC or invented his own explanations, his narrative makes the king demonstrably effective as a military leader in a way that his known sources did not. As we will see, because the king's actions are dutiful, John does not find that the resulting defeats reflect badly on him.

Æthelred's exile and return raises the same question as for the other twelfth-century writers: is kingship contingent upon the king's character and behaviour? When Æthelred returns to the kingdom in 1014, John has him make more explicit concessions than he does in ASC, thus conveying more and higher expectations for an English king. John stresses the people's love and loyalty for their natural lord, adding emphasis on its perpetual quality: '*dicentes se nullum plus amare uel amatuos esse quam suum naturalem dominum, si ipse uel rectius gubernare*'.<sup>214</sup> [emphasis added] Their loyalty is still contingent on his behaving well, but his description emphasizes the continuity rather than the contingency of their fidelity.<sup>215</sup> The king deserves more loyalty, but he must also promise more loyalty. Most significantly, John's Æthelred promises that he will be governed by their will and counsel in all matters: '*in omnibus eorum uoluntati consensurum, consiliis acquieturum*'.<sup>216</sup> For the king to describe his own responsibility in this manner makes a dramatic addition to ASC's account, in which he promises to be a faithful lord and to redress complaints made against him. The king is no longer merely defining the terms of the reconciliation, he is explicitly agreeing to a limitation of his power. The responsibilities John identifies for an English king make the man: the expectations for kingship and lordship are higher; for Æthelred to ascend successfully to meet and affirm them is the more impressive.

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<sup>214</sup> 'saying that there was no lord they loved, *or would love*, more than their natural lord, if he would either govern more justly', JW [1014], ii, 476–9; cf. ASC (CDE) 1014, above, 54–5.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. WM's translation, a still greater departure from ASC: above, 77–8.

<sup>216</sup> 'would be ruled by them in everything, would fall in with their advice', JW [1014], ii, 476–9.

Nor does John introduce any implication that Æthelred behaved reprehensibly in his final days as a defender. In addition to including ASC's report that Æthelred raided within England in 1016, John explains that the king led the raids 'quia aduersus Danorum exercitum ad pugnam exire noluerunt.'<sup>217</sup> John removes what could be ambiguity in the king's motives by making the king appear to be leading an avenging force against desertion.

John makes much of the leadership of Edmund Ironside in order to showcase the English defence, thereby projecting English dominion farther into the eleventh century and reducing the sense of repeated English failure found in ASC. John transforms Edmund into a military leader who inspires his men and personally leads them into battle.<sup>218</sup> John achieves this primarily by placing pre-battle orations from Sallust's works into Edmund's mouth on two occasions (in Dorset and at Ashington), wherein the king directly inspires the morale of the troops. John quotes from Sallust in order to show Edmund fighting hand-to-hand, acquitting himself well on the battlefield.<sup>219</sup> Darlington and McGurk claim that John uses Sallust here 'for effect'.<sup>220</sup> It is important to add that John does so for a specific effect: to convey to the reader the morale of the English army—and to show how it was produced through the observed courage of the king. John chooses to use the existing epithet 'Ferreum Latus ('Ironside') for Edmund, which further conveys the king's courage: it is a name that suggests he could only have earned it by fighting in the fray of battle.<sup>221</sup> It is also worth noting that John adds the detail that

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<sup>217</sup> 'because they would not go into battle against the Danish army.' JW [1016], ii, 482–3; cf. ASC (CDE) 1016; see also McGurk, JW, ii, 482 n.6.

<sup>218</sup> Cf. *Encomium Emmae* ii.8–9.

<sup>219</sup> JW [1016], ii, 486–7; Sallust, *Bellum Catilinae*, lix.1–lx.4; JW [1016], ii, 490–1; Sallust, *Bellum Iugurthinum*, xlix.2–l.3. See also: J.R.E. Bliese, 'Rhetoric and morale: a study of battle orations from the central middle ages', *Journal of Medieval History* 15 (1989), 201–226, at 211.

<sup>220</sup> R.R. Darlington and P. McGurk, 'The "Chronicon ex Chronicis" of "Florence" of Worcester and its Use of Sources for English History before 1066', *ANS* 5 (1983), 185–96, at 193.

<sup>221</sup> JW [1016], ii, 480–1. For JW's use of famous epithets for Anglo-Saxon personalities, see: Hart, 'The early section of the *Worcester chronicle*', 260.

Edmund ordered the battle-trumpets to sound ('deinde tubicines canere')<sup>222</sup>—an important duty of the king, and one for which WM derided Æthelred.<sup>223</sup>

John's narrative prevents an interpretation of events that might include desertion by the English army. On two occasions in his entry for 1016, he gives reasons to explain why the troops went home. When the Mercian army says to Edmund that it will not fight without the king and the London cohort, John explains that the troops were disbanded for this reason ('quapropter') and that each man goes home.<sup>224</sup> Subsequently, when Æthelred is warned that some of his auxiliaries intend to betray him, the army is disbanded as a result.<sup>225</sup> The impression created is that they were ordered to go home, not that they scattered in confusion. John's explanations resolve the ambiguity of ASC's 'each man took himself home',<sup>226</sup> providing reasons for the army's behaviour to an account that could look like chaos (and often did to WM). John lays to rest any question of desertion by demonstrating that the army is not accountable for failing to appear for, or leaving, a muster.

Despite the final defeat of the English, John still maintains their true potential for victory. At the battle of Sherston, John explains that King Edmund would have crushed the Danes had Eadric not pretended that he had killed the king;<sup>227</sup> ASC makes no comment about what would have happened, but suggests that it was unwise to take Eadric back, and that Eadric practiced his typical treachery and betrayed his natural lord and the English people.<sup>228</sup> John gives the king the power to influence outcomes, and blames the defeat specifically on treachery, but not on sin or incompetence.

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<sup>222</sup> JW [1016], ii, 486–7.

<sup>223</sup> Above, 72–3.

<sup>224</sup> JW [1016], ii, 480–3.

<sup>225</sup> 'Iccirco mox exercitu dimisso', JW [1016], ii, 482–3. McGurk observes that JW does not refer to the penalty for failing to report following an army summons, JW, ii, 482 n.2.

<sup>226</sup> '7 ferde ælc man him ham', [D] ASC (CDE) 1016; Swanton, 147.

<sup>227</sup> JW [1016], ii, 486–9.

<sup>228</sup> ASC (CDE) 1016.

## Conclusions

The divergent modes of explanation in the two eleventh- and twelfth-century chronicles reveal themselves pointedly in the Æthelred chronicler's vision of fortune and its role in the invasions. In the Æthelred chronicler's entry for 1009, a year of particularly intense raiding, he writes: 'ac we gyt *næfdon þa geselða. ne þone wurðscipe* þæt seo scipfyrd nytt wære ðisum earde. þe ma þe heo oftor ær wæs.' [italics added]<sup>229</sup> In accounting for the defence's pursuit of victory, the chronicler links good fortune with honour. John, however, distinguishes between the two. Both writers acknowledge that the defence was not fortunate. But with paratactic proximity, the Æthelred chronicler envisions a lack of fortune and honour that characterizes and explains the continued failure of the English defence throughout the Danish invasions. Only John renders fortune a means of moral redemption for failure.

John's narrative patterns repeat, as has been evident in progression through a chronological comparison of ASC and John's narrative. It is striking that John's modes of explanation persist, despite the worsening of the raids over time—a sense which emerges from ASC but which is entirely absent from John. John's consistency ironically means that there is a marked improvement in the picture of the English over the course of his narrative. Later on in the raids, there is more of a gap for his narrative to recover from ASC's lament if John is to maintain that the English are doing well and merit credit for their efforts.

John does not hold internal treachery and the failure to deal with it responsible for the collapse and the chaos of the English defence during the Viking invasions. Indeed the progression of his narrative denies that any such collapse and chaos ever happened.

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<sup>229</sup> 'But as yet we had neither the luck nor the honour that the ship-army were useful to this country, any more than it often was before.' ASC (E) 1009; Swanton, 138.

John's comments about the army's preparedness, promptness and commitment to victory makes the defence look laudable, not blameworthy. Using stylistic changes and omissions, John conveys the impression that the English resistance lasts farther into the invasion than does ASC. The effect of John's narrative time is to suggest that the state of affairs in England does not worsen inevitably and lamentably over the course of the invasions. He emphasizes victory where possible at the end of an annal, eliminates ASC's observations about an ineffective defence, and makes it seem that the defence was effective at those tasks under their control. Since the Danes are the enemy, he describes Danish blood as a culprit for English treachery, thus becoming a foil to restore honour to the English defence. By defining the limits of the king's influence and the army's, the narrative does not blame them for things he maintains they could not have changed. The ultimate English failure cannot be reprehensible or shameful for John, since neither the king nor the defence are responsible for causing it or for failing to address it.

John distributes blame so widely that there is little left for the king and the English defence. These explanations crowd out cowardice or laziness as possible interpretations of English defeat or retreat, which as we have seen WM applies aggressively to the defending king Æthelred. There is no sense that flight is reprehensible or shameful. What John provides is not necessarily a direct refutation of, or incompatible with, ASC's account. By resolving ambiguity and amending the effectiveness and efficiency of his characters, John offers an individual and original interpretation that makes it less possible to condemn the English. John separates moral and causal responsibility, which in itself is similar to modern historiography, but he does so in service of an overall project of redeeming the English past. He dissociates moral culpability from failure in three considered ways. First, he attributes all the moral failings to traitors and to the enemy, redeeming king and army by contrast. Second, he explains failures in terms of external

factors like fortune, omitting comments about futility that convey a tone of reproach. Third, and perhaps most significant, he only mentions God supporting the cause of the English, not wielding punishment. The effect these have is to redeem the English from the shame of defeat. Indeed, for John, defeat is not shameful as long as the defence distinguishes itself in the attempt—which he portrays it doing, in no uncertain terms. It is clear what John’s contribution would be to the debate about whether eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon England could be described as a well-functioning state.<sup>230</sup> The same cannot be said of the Æthelred chronicler. John wrote an undampened narrative of spirited confidence in England’s administration, military efforts and strong lordship bonds, the source of which was in the individual person and character of its defending kings. The Æthelred chronicler described a collective disaster across all orders of society, without imparting any explicit blame upon the king. Both narratives are annals—and there the similarity ends, for to add ‘of English history’ would imply their agreement on a basic story of the past, when in fact the respective stories they posit are as different in mood and substance as two stories can be.

As we saw at the outset, scholarship on John has persisted in representing him as a compiler whose *Chronicon* is a pastiche of sources about the English past.<sup>231</sup> This is not the case. John’s consistency in style and structure in his *Chronicon* convey his original historical vision and the deliberation with which he rewrote ASC. The cumulative effect of the numerous subtle changes he makes is a different vision of English history.

### **Conclusions: comparing the chronicles**

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<sup>230</sup> Cf. J. Campbell, ‘Agents and Agencies of the Late Anglo-Saxon State’, in his *The Anglo-Saxon State*, 202–25, at 202 n.7: Campbell is given to accept JW’s reliability based on the annals’ specific details about names and dates: the detail is small, but indicative of an approach.

<sup>231</sup> Above, 38.

We have now seen how three authors—WM, Henry and John—rework material primarily from ASC in such a way as to exonerate the English defence by redistributing blame and responsibility: but what of the two entirely different pictures of King Æthelred? One conclusion is that ASC cannot be considered the unequivocal source of a negative attitude towards Æthelred, since John uses essentially the same material to create a narrative with a positive impression of him as a responsible king. It is in the realm of distributing responsibility that these narrators' accounts are perhaps not as different as they appear. All three writers attribute to the king a significant and new degree of responsibility and accountability: in the case of WM and Henry, responsibility for causing the catastrophic failures of the English, and accountability for his army's failure, cowardice and desertion; in John's case, responsibility for being effective in command and for routing the Danes to the best of his ability, and accountability to his people in his return. Each writer differs in his reasoning about and portrayal of the defeat, but not in his new attention to whether or not, and on what grounds, a defending king fulfilled his responsibility to his kingdom.

In ASC, Æthelred was king of England and the preferred natural lord. He is given the benefit of no extenuating circumstances, yet there is no explicit criticism; the entire infrastructure of defence looks ineffective, and the leadership plagued by and unable to resolve treachery. ASC left much unsaid, and twelfth-century historians offered greatly varying—and original—interpretations. Two shifts of emphasis deserve comment: the move of collective responsibility towards the background, and the high expectations for the king. First, in the twelfth-century cases, the sense of collective responsibility is less than in WJ, ASC and the *Sermo Lupi*, even if only in the sense that its presence is partially obscured by the new emphasis on the king's responsibilities. The sins of the English are still acknowledged, but more of the blame goes to the defending king. The chroniclers distribute responsibility in ways that acquit the English of responsibility for

their defeat. The writers needed explanations that would overcome the providential histories of England's conquests. Second, in all twelfth-century cases, the writers establish explicitly high expectations for a defending English king's ability to influence the outcomes of invasion. These include the idea that his worthiness to be king was dependent upon his character, his behaviour, his efforts to defend his kingdom and his respect for justice. These are the beliefs about kingship that frame the perspective through which they viewed England's invasions. We find more themes of contingency of rule than in the earlier sources. In a world that post-dated the Investiture Controversy,<sup>232</sup> personal criticism of the king—any sense of deeming him implicitly or explicitly unfit for rule—highlighted by contrast the quality and unassailability of kingship itself by an unworthy individual. Unlike their sources, the Anglo-Norman writers explicitly established high standards for their defending kings—as well as the accompanying implications of high quality for English kingship.

Within the framework of each twelfth-century narrative, Æthelred is an extremely effective king—and in this case, by effective I mean 'has an effect'. All of the writers cast him as capable of influencing the outcome of battle, or even invasion, through his choices and actions—within the limitations each historian establishes for him. Those who defend Æthelred suggest that he is fulfilling the duties of the office, and had the power to achieve victory; external factors cause the defeat. Those who condemn him suggest that he is not fulfilling his royal duties; he causes the defeat. In all cases, historians relate what the defending king does or does not do to the state of the defence and the outcomes of the invasion. Æthelred is not capable of weakening English kingship itself.

One of the interesting elements of these chroniclers' invasion narratives is the way they navigate the realities of invasion, defeat and loss with their ideals for an English

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<sup>232</sup> E.g. *GR*, iii.262.3–4.

king. These trials were realities of conquest. The historians differ in how they assign responsibility for the defeats, and hence on whether the defeats are excusable. John explains losses which ASC leaves unexplained. By providing reasons for retreats and defeats, there is no chance of interpreting the narrative as one of a king failing to do his duty, succumbing to cowardice, or doing what was within his power to defend his kingdom. Yet to be a worthy English king, WM's (and sometimes Henry's) Æthelred would have to venture into combat situations which John describes as a no-win situation. WM expected Æthelred to fight and lead the army as general even if it would have meant losing his life because that is what an ideal worthy English king does; he does not address the implications of how the defence would fare if the king were to lose his life in battle. WM does not give Æthelred the opportunity to redeem himself: he is sacrificed for the cause of English redemption.

These historians were still trying to solve the eternal problem of why things went wrong. Part of that project involved assigning blame. To employ an echo of Orwell's ironic political commentary: everyone is equally responsible, but the king is more equally responsible than others. The chroniclers' ideals and expectations for a defending king do not necessarily mesh with what can be practically achieved. Justice and good leadership should prevail, but the political reality is otherwise. They all recognize it (most notably Henry); some try to resolve it (most notably Gaimar and John). WM puts the king in the paradox and leaves him there, sacrificing him to exonerate the English defence; he does not try to extract Æthelred with explanation by extenuating circumstance. The king could not necessarily win in practice, and may be forced to retreat to fight again: but for WM, Æthelred can only retreat by incurring shame. His courage must be observed on all fronts.

The striking thing is that even writers who blame the English more, and even the writers who blame Æthelred less, still show us a defending king who is more responsible

for influencing the outcome of battle, who is more accountable for his actions, and who must be more than a just and natural lord in order to be deemed a good English king, as compared to the picture of a defending king in their eleventh-century sources. The chroniclers are not Norman winners erasing an English past, nor post-Conquest historians still suffering from trauma. They are historians creating original accounts of the past, writing at times with echoes of classical irony and tragedy: one may despair the more about how events unfold if one attributes to an individual the power to stop them. In a new way for accounts of the Danish invasion, these chroniclers' defending kings of England had that power—and they consequently were responsible and accountable, both to their subjects and to the historians who re-wrote their story.

## PART TWO: DEFENDING KINGS

### HAROLD

In examining narratives of the defending king Æthelred, we have seen that WM, Henry and John rewrite the Danish Conquest in a way that ascribes a greater degree of responsibility—causal and moral, and in degree of blame and praise—to the defending king. To what extent is the narrative pattern of each borne out in his account of the Norman Conquest fifty years later and in his picture of the defending king Harold? As I argue, each historian's attitude towards invasion in the eleventh century and the quality and character of defending English kingship remains consistent. This is important because it suggests that all three historians not only shared beliefs about the nature of English kingship, but also wrote their accounts of England's invasions in service of a larger project of redeeming the English past. As I will show, their loyalties and expectations are not contingent upon the biases of their English and Norman sources.<sup>1</sup>

#### **WM on Harold**

WM emphasizes Harold's accountability for his actions and his influence over events within a context of Fortune and a divine plan. WM judges Harold guilty of perjury, which enables him to attribute the sufferings and the divine punishment of the English to Harold. Providence provides a framework for the succession to Norman rule, but Harold is consistently named as accountable in both WM's summary and his narrative of Hastings.

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<sup>1</sup> On their sources for the Norman Conquest, above, 17, 24, 36–8.

WM identifies Harold's accountability for the Norman Conquest in conclusive language that censures Harold and attributes the depletion of England's strength to Harold's perfidy:

Vnde cum suis quos ductabat post nouem menses et aliquot dies accepti regni, astutia Willelmi circumuentus, fusus est; leui uidelicet belli negotio sed occulto et stupendo Dei consilio, quod numquam postea Angli communi prelio in libertatem spirauerint, quasi cum Haroldo omne robur deciderit Angliae, *qui certe potuit et debuit* etiam per intertissimos *soluere penas perfidiae*.<sup>2</sup> [emphasis added]

WM first reminds the reader that Harold had charge of the English army ('quos ductabat'): it was his responsibility. The italicized phrases illustrate WM's perception that Harold is accountable for breaking his purportedly voluntary oath to William.<sup>3</sup> The lines 'qui certe potuit et debuit ... soluere penas perfidiae' could also be translated 'who was certainly able to and *had to* [and did] pay the penalty of his perfidy'. The words convey a strong sense of obligation: they connote the ideas that Harold was both destined to and responsible for paying the penalty, and that England's fall was a consequence of Harold's sin. As WM progresses through his narrative, the 'quasi cum' becomes a direct accusation that Harold failed to do his duty as king.

This judgment of Harold's ultimate accountability resides within an account of the Norman Conquest that echoes earlier insular explanations of invasion.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, when generalizing about the Conquest, WM distributes blame more evenly across the English people, emphasizing the causal roles of Providence and collective sin. He accords these causal factors more influence in the Norman Conquest than in the Danish because the Norman Conquest was a lasting conquest with, in his view, greater consequences for

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<sup>2</sup> 'Thus [Harold], together with his men, whose leader he was, nine months and a few days after his acceptance of the throne was outwitted by William's cunning and put to rout. The war itself was a mere trifle; it was God's hidden and stupendous purpose that never again should Englishmen feel together and fight together in defence of their liberties, as though all the strength of England had fallen away with Harold, *who could and should have paid the penalty for his perfidy* even through the agency of utter cowards.' *GR* ii.228.11, i, 422–3.

<sup>3</sup> 'Ibi Haroldus, et ingenio et manu probatus, Normannum in sui amorem conuertit atque, ut se magis commendaret, ultro illi tunc quidem castellum Doroberniae, quod ad ius suum pertineret, et post mortem Eduardi regnum Anglicum sacramento firmauit', *GR* ii.228.5, i, 418–19.

<sup>4</sup> Above, 7–10.

England. It is in his detailed account of the events leading up to and including the Battle of Hastings that WM elucidates the weight of his accusations against Harold: Harold's treachery and his military failures as a king and leader of men directly caused England's defeat.

WM begins by alluding to England's sufferings during 1066 indirectly, through prophecies of the divine plan. The prophecies of King Edward present a sweeping prediction of God's plan for England's future: they prefigure both the chaos of the year 1066 and the Conquest without offering any precise details about how the changes will occur. At an Easter feast at Westminster, Edward laughs and recounts the prophecy of the Seven Sleepers, and speaks of events to come that resemble the Lord's prophecy of the end of the world, including disease, signs and portents, warfare and kingdom changes.<sup>5</sup> On his deathbed, he declares that he has seen a vision wherein two monks of God announced to him:

Quoniam primores Angliae, duces episcopi et abbates, non sunt ministri Dei sed diaboli, tradidit Deus hoc regnum post obitum tuum anno uno et die uno in manu inimici, peruagabunturque demones totam hanc terram.<sup>6</sup>

Many narratives of 1066 employ prophecy to provide a sense of continuity across the Conquest, evading direct engagement with the Conquest as a major rupture in England's history.<sup>7</sup> Recounting general prophecies enabled historians to bridge past and future without narrating the events of 1066 in sequence. By referring to the Conquest obliquely, historians could avoid dwelling upon the themes of tragedy and disaster that might de-rail their narratives of English history. When describing the events of 1066 in his *Vita Wulfstani*, WM does not narrate the Battle of Hastings: he foretells it, then refers to it

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<sup>5</sup> GR ii.225.1–3 i, 410–13; the references are to *Vita Edwardi*: see *LKE*, 102–11, 116–19.

<sup>6</sup> “Since the leading men in England, earls, bishops, and abbots, are servants not of God but of the Devil, God has given this kingdom after your death for a year and a day into the hand of the enemy, and demons will roam at large over the whole of this land.” GR ii.226.1, i, 414–15.

<sup>7</sup> M. Otter, ‘1066: The Moment of Transition in Two Narratives of the Norman Conquest’, *Speculum* 74 (1999), 565–86.

indirectly as something that has already happened.<sup>8</sup> The anonymous *Vita Ædwardi* skips directly from describing King Edward's prophecies to their fulfilment '[s]ubsequenti tempore', and places the defeat of England's native king in the past.<sup>9</sup>

WM's prophecies in *GR*, presented before his narration of the events of 1066, are all-encompassing and vague, suggesting a supernatural state of disorder rather than an earthly one. The prophecies refer to 'manus inimici' without specifying which enemy, they mention unidentified 'demonēs', and they apply culpability to men in a range of offices. WM also avoids making 1066 into a narrative fulcrum in *GR*. He approaches and summarizes the Conquest at the end of Book II, but does not describe it; he then begins Book III with a life of William of Normandy.<sup>10</sup> By placing the Conquest in a biographical context, WM recasts it as a glorious chapter in William I's life, rather than exclusively as England's greatest disaster.

But WM's references to general disorder proceed to resolve themselves around a single executor of disaster: the defending king. When WM recounts the months leading up to and including Hastings,<sup>11</sup> WM places ultimate responsibility upon Harold, even for collective error. Within God's will and plan WM evinces a particularly strong moral judgment on Harold's accountability. WM's palpable tone of accusation conveys the impression that Harold's obligations matter for England's salvation, and he as an individual is wholly responsible for shirking them. This judgment is also apparent in his *Vita Wulfstani*: 'Denique Haroldo palam testificatus est quanto et detrimento, et sibi et Anglie foret; nisi nequitias morum correctum ire, cogitaret.'<sup>12</sup> WM directly makes the morals and character of the English people Harold's responsibility, and has Wulfstan

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<sup>8</sup> WM, *VW* ii.1.1, 60–1; discussed in Otter, '1066', 571–3.

<sup>9</sup> *LKE*, 106–11; see also Otter, '1066', 582–4.

<sup>10</sup> *GR* ii.228.12, 422–3; iii.Preface, 424–5.

<sup>11</sup> *GR* ii.228–iii.247.

<sup>12</sup> 'Indeed [Wulfstan] avowed openly to Harold how great a loss it would be both for him and for England, unless he planned to impel their immoral behaviour to improvement.' WM, *VW* i.16.3, 58–9.

promise punishment unless Harold takes the initiative to improve them. The charge of a ruler's responsibility for his subjects' sin itself is consistent with contemporary currents of thought on political philosophy. As noted above, Gregory VII argued that rulers who abuse their authority through evil deeds incur their own guilt and promote sin in others.<sup>13</sup> Later in the twelfth century, John of Salisbury claimed that the people's excesses often arise from their rulers' negligence and sin, and suggests (explicitly and uniquely) that the people have a duty to restrain their rulers' opportunities for wrongdoing.<sup>14</sup> Both writers acknowledge that the people still have an accessory role in the ruler's sin in a way that WM does not.

These writers present more of a balance between the obligations of king and subjects than does WM in his narrative of the Norman Conquest. As he does for the Danish Conquest, WM expresses the philosophy of royal responsibility for collective sin, and couples it with a harsher verdict on Harold's individual choices and on the gravity of their consequences. For WM, a king bears a great burden of responsibility, especially at times of crisis. Harold is apparently afforded several opportunities to redeem himself in defending England against invasions by the king of Norway and by William of Normandy. But could Harold have led the English to victory? WM conveys the illusion of choice, but his negative attitude towards Harold's legitimacy suggests that Harold could only have influenced outcomes before breaking the purported oath to William. Because of Harold's sins, collective morals are in jeopardy and, more radically, England is doomed to suffer defeat.

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<sup>13</sup> Above, 70.

<sup>14</sup> JS, *Policraticus* v.10; on the ruler's incapability of ruling well when beset by his own sin, v.7; on the ruler's sins as encouraging those of the people, vi.29.

That WM perceived Harold as perjured and illegitimate in this text meant that any actions he took as king were subject to censure.<sup>15</sup> WM explicitly states that Harold seized ('arripuit') the crown, and that the moral failing of illegitimacy prevented him from ruling well as king: 'Haroldus ... extorta a principibus fide arripuit diadema ... quanuis, ut non celetur ueritas, pro persona quam gerebat regnum prudentia et fortitudine gubernaret, si legitime susceptit'.<sup>16</sup> But is WM truly making a concession to Harold in claiming he might have ruled well? He uses similar concessionary language to describe King Stephen in his own day, whom he also viewed as nevertheless illegitimate.<sup>17</sup> WM has decided expectations for English kings, and goes on to describe a Harold who would have been inadequate as king even had he been legitimate.

WM's criticism of Harold as a king and lord begins with his denigration of Harold's military competence at times of foreign invasion, a tone which increases in intensity as his narrative approaches the Norman Conquest. WM explains that Harold's poor leadership caused desertions from the army, and suggests that Harold is responsible for the consequent depletion of the English army after the Battle of Stamford Bridge on its way to Hastings. WM observes that when Harold heard the news that the Norwegian king had invaded and defeated the earls Edwin and Morcar, Harold raced north with all of England's forces and emerged victorious, with heavy losses on the English side.<sup>18</sup> Then, echoing his treatment of Æthelred, WM attributes responsibility for the army's desertion

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<sup>15</sup> WM treats Harold with more indulgence in the *Gesta Pontificum*, although in a more epitaph-like comment, observing that he rests at Battle having been killed for the love of his *patria*, *GP* ii.97.1, i, 322–3; WM's limited attention to Harold's actions in this work is in the context of Harold's generosity to monasteries, v.264.1, i, 628–9.

<sup>16</sup> 'Harold, who had exacted an oath of loyalty from the chief nobles, seized the crown ... although, not to conceal the truth, he might well have ruled the kingdom, to judge by the figure he cut in public, with prudence and fortitude, had it come to him lawfully.' *GR* ii.228.7–8, i, 418–21.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. WM, *HN* i.19, 36–7: 'si legitime regnum ingressus fuisset ... parum ei profecto ad regiae personae decorem defuisset' ('if he had acquired the kingdom in a lawful way ... then undoubtedly he would have lacked little that adorns the royal character'). The parallel passages and judgments of Stephen and Harold as illegitimate kings are discussed in G. Garnett, *Conquered England* (Oxford, 2007), 241. Also in *HN* i.19, WM levies sarcastic criticism at Stephen, making the point that Stephen could not keep an oath, and criticizing him for listening to the wrong advisors.

<sup>18</sup> *GR* ii.228.9–11, i, 420–3.

not to the individuals in the army, but to the king: ‘Haroldus, triumphali euentu superbus, nullis partibus predae commilitones dignatus est; quapropter multi, quo quisque poterat dilapsi, regem ad bellum Hastingsense proficiscentem destituere’.<sup>19</sup> Harold is wholly responsible for the desertion of his own troops (‘commilitones’) in WM’s estimation: Harold caused the desertion because of his greed and abuse of power. This specific condemnation of Harold does not appear in WM’s likely sources.<sup>20</sup> ASC mentions English losses in northern England but does not explicitly connect them with the defeat at Hastings.<sup>21</sup> Given the different accounts that WM’s English sources offer, WM probably invented an explanation that accused Harold of causing the depletion of troops. Such an explanation would resonate with the medieval ideal of lordly generosity, and would be calculated to evoke indignation at its corruption. Everything is Harold’s fault for WM: this must be as well.

WM refers to the pact between Harold and William for Harold to marry William’s daughter as something which happened and which Harold acknowledges, even though he later repudiates it:

Et ille [Harold] quidem, diademate fastigatus, nichil de pactis inter se et Willelmum cogitabat, liberatum se sacramento asserens ... Fertur enim uir ille, non paucis uirtutibus preditus, parum aduersus perfidiam sibi consuluisse, dummodo posset quibuscumque prestigiis hominum ratiocinationes suspendere.<sup>22</sup>

WM claims to be passing on received wisdom about Harold’s imprudent attitude towards oaths, but it is evident from his collected observations about Harold that WM agrees with this conclusion. This passage makes a striking double condemnation. WM appears to

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Harold, inflated by this triumphant result, did not deign to share any part of the booty with his fellow-soldiers, with the result that many, slipping away as each best could, abandoned their king as he set off for the battle of Hastings’, *GR* ii.228.11, i, 420–3. Cf. WP, *GG* ii.7, 110–13; Virgil, *Aeneid* i.195–207; wherein leaders, by sharing food and goods with their men, prevent desertion.

<sup>20</sup> English or Norman: ASC, *GG*, *GND*; above, 17.

<sup>21</sup> ASC (CDE) 1066.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Harold, once crowned, did not spare a thought for the agreement between himself and William, declaring himself released from his oath ... Endowed as he was with many good qualities, he was too careless, it is said, in breaking faith, so long as he could hold men’s judgements in suspense by some piece of legerdemain.’ *GR* iii.238.2, i, 446–7. The comment about Harold being too free with oaths is from *LKE* i.7, 80–1.

concede that Harold had virtues, but WM's Harold decidedly could not 'prestigiis hominum ratiocinationes suspendere'. As we will see, WM uses the extended *ratiocinatio* of Harold's brother and adviser Gyrrh to show that the judgment of Harold's men is fully intact—and as such hold Harold morally accountable for breaking his oath to William. Indeed, Harold's inability to maintain order and consensus amongst his own men proves the king's contemptible lack of leadership.

By showing Harold as a poor leader and oathbreaker, WM discredits in advance what WM presents as Harold's own defence. Harold purportedly defends ignoring the oath by claiming that it is foolish given the end of his betrothal to William's daughter, the lack of King Edward's oversight, the lack of popular support for it and that it was given under compulsion.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, as we will see, for WM compulsion is not enough to invalidate an oath—a stance consistent with classical authority,<sup>24</sup> and with Matilda's case against Stephen in contemporary politics.<sup>25</sup>

WM later conveys the judgment that Harold characteristically underestimates the enemy. He remarks that Harold did not take William's warnings of invasion seriously, and that he was unprepared for the Norwegian king's attack at Stamford Bridge. He presents Harold's defence as a scramble that could have been avoided had Harold kept his army trained and conditioned:

Preterea, qui putaret minas Willelmi numquam ad factum erupturas quod ille conterminorum ducum bellis implicaretur, totum animum otio cum subiectis indulserat; nam profecto, nisi quod Noricorum regem aduentare didicit, nec militem conuocare nec atiem dirigere dignatus fuisset.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *GR* iii.238.4, i, 446–7.

<sup>24</sup> Cicero, *De officiis*: that an oath made under compulsion, even by a prisoner to his lawful enemy, must be kept, i.8.39–40; see also F.H. Russell, *The Just War in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1975), 6–7. Harold faces an analogous situation in *GR*: he was a prisoner of Guy of Ponthieu, but owed his freedom to William of Normandy. Although Harold was trapped by circumstance, he knowingly puts himself into William's protection. WM considers William more lawful and less barbarous than his original captor, Guy: *GR* ii.228.3–5; cf. Cicero, *De officiis*, iii.29.107–8: an oath must be kept to a legal enemy but not to a pirate or barbarous one.

<sup>25</sup> Garnett, *Conquered England*, 231–8.

<sup>26</sup> 'Besides which, as though he expected that William's threats would never be put into practice, involved as he was in fighting with neighboring magnates, he had abandoned himself and his subjects to complete

This accusation is at odds with the accounts in ASC 1066: D explains that Harold was already preparing the largest naval and land forces gathered in England's history for an imminent invasion by William of Normandy, even before learning of Tostig's arrival; C suggests that Harold assembled the forces after Tostig's invasion, but for the same reason; E presents Harold as initiating a naval skirmish with William. Despite the fact that Stamford Bridge was a victory for the English under Harold, which WM has already acknowledged, in this passage WM scorns Harold as a general unprepared for invasion. In the following chapter WM explicitly undercuts the sense of Stamford Bridge as a victory at all: 'Interea Haroldus de pugna Noricorum reuertebatur, sua estimatione felix quod uicerat (meo iudicio contra, quod parricidio uictoriam comparat)',<sup>27</sup> In these successive passages, we see again that as WM's narrative approaches the Norman Conquest, his censure of Harold becomes more absolute and more explicit.<sup>28</sup>

On the eve of the Battle of Hastings, Harold is given advice by his brother, Gyrth, through which WM subtly criticizes Harold for failed leadership and for perjury of his purported oath to William. WM observes: 'Rapuit ergo ex ore ipsius sermonem Gurtha frater, plus puero adultus et magnae ultra aetatem uirtutis et scientiae.'<sup>29</sup> WM's introduction of Gyrth—who seized the moment to speak ('rapuit'), and is more man than boy in his wisdom—gives an added moral weight to his ensuing speech:

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inactivity; in fact, had he not learned that the king of Norway was approaching, he would never have troubled to call out his knights or order a battle-line.' *GR* iii.238.2, i, 446–7.

<sup>27</sup> 'Meanwhile Harold was returning from his battle with the Norwegians, blessed in his own opinion with success, though I take the opposite view, since his victory was gained by parricide', *GR* iii.239.1, i, 450–1. The charge of parricide refers to the death of Harold's brother Tostig in battle. WM mentions Tostig's death earlier but does not attribute it directly to Harold, saying only: 'Rex Haruagra et Tostinus interempti', *GR* ii.228.11, i, 422–3. WM makes the accusation explicit only retrospectively, as his narrative approaches the Battle of Hastings.

<sup>28</sup> It begins to resemble the Norman sources more than it does his English sources. On the charge of parricide, cf. Orderic's comments: *GND* vii.(34), ii, 166–7; *OV* iii.ii.145, ii, 170–1; Thomson, *GR*, ii, 231.

<sup>29</sup> 'His brother Gyrth, who was now grown out of boyhood, and of courage and understanding beyond his years, took him up at once.' *GR* iii.239.3, i, 450–3; similarly, cf. Orderic, *GND* vii.(35) ii, 166–9; van Houts, *GND*, ii, 167 n.5; *OV* iii.ii.145–6, ii, 170–3.

‘Cum’ inquit ‘tantam fortudinem Normanni predices, indeliberatum existimo cum illo confligere, quo inferior robore et merito habearis. Nec enim ibis in infitias quin illi sacramentum uel inuitus uel uoluntarius feceris. Proinde consultius ages si, instanti necessitati te subtrahens, nostro periculo colludium pugnae temptaueris; nos, omni iuramento expediti, iuste ferrum pro patria stringemus. Timendum ne, si ipse decernas, uel fugam uel mortem oppetas; sed nobis solis preliantibus causa tua utrobique in portu nauigabit, quia et fugientes restituere et mortuos ulcisci poteris.’<sup>30</sup>

Not only does the wise Gyrth advocate prudence, but his words appear to endow Harold with the capability to restore the moral situation, if not to win the battle. Gyrth says to Harold: ‘you will be able’ to restore the situation, or to avenge the English. The implied conditional is that Harold will be able to do these things if he makes the right choice—and it is a choice of which Gyrth finds him unequivocally capable.

Yet the context suggests that Harold’s perjured oath (presented here as undisputed fact) has committed him and his army to an unhappy fate. The speech holds Harold responsible for breaking the oath, and implies that Harold cannot be victorious with an unjust cause.<sup>31</sup> Harold could conceivably justify breaking his own oath by avenging the deaths of his men, who are not restrained by any oath. It also means that the English are definitively not seen as culpable or included in Harold’s ‘perjury’. Harold is taken to have been speaking for himself alone.

But even if Harold could be a just avenger, he would still have failed in his foremost task: defence of the English kingdom, his primary task as a king and lord. Harold’s prior choices have condemned him to impotence as a leader: even if he is ‘able’ to do what Gyrth suggests, the rather dismal outcomes nevertheless include the dispersal

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<sup>30</sup> ‘“If the Norman duke is as strong as you maintain”, he said, “I think it most unwise to struggle against him, when you are thought to have both weaker forces and a weaker cause. For you will not deny that you have taken an oath to him, whether unwillingly or of your own free will. It will be more prudent to withdraw from the emergency that faces you now, and try a throw with him at *our* expense: we, who are not restrained by any oath, shall draw our swords to defend our country with justice. We are bound to fear that, if you enter the lists yourself, you may be put to flight or killed, whereas, if we alone fight, you will sail safely on both counts: you will be able to restore the situation if we flee, and avenge us if we fall.”’ *GR* iii.239.2–3, i, 452–3.

<sup>31</sup> K.A. Fenton, *Gender, Nation and Conquest in the Works of William of Malmesbury* (Woodbridge, 2008), 35.

or the death of his men. That Gyrth must resort to advocating Harold's absence—sacrificing the role and duties of the leader—conveys the extent of desperation in Harold's army, which WM ultimately traces back to Harold's oath-breaking. Harold is also presented as a poor leader for ignoring wise counsel, regardless of outcomes. Gyrth's words suggest that WM censures Harold both for breaking of the oath to William and for a rash and careless attitude towards the fate of his men. WM censures Harold for his continuous lack of wisdom from the oath to the Battle of Hastings. This condemnation is not a legal technicality based solely on oath-breaking.<sup>32</sup> According to Gyrth's 'wise' words, Harold's oath is binding, but were Harold to follow the advice, he would be evading the meaning of the oath:<sup>33</sup> loyalty to William. That Gyrth's advice is illogical, unworkable and dishonourable to the oath's meaning suggests that it was advice presented out of goodwill and self-sacrifice under the extreme duress of battle conditions, wherein many but unwelcome choices are available.

WM invents Gyrth's speech to dramatize Harold's failures, and to show that Harold has actually long since shirked his moral dilemma and failed to redeem himself. Gyrth, whom WM represents as wise, gives subversive (if impractical) advice that manages both force and justice with a strategic, military mind. He does not claim to leave the outcome of the dispute over the throne up to the judgment of God or fate. Harold, on the other hand, describes his decision as choosing to have God judge the legitimacy of his oath in battle between the English and Norman armies,<sup>34</sup> in effect as a traditional ordeal

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. WP, who stresses the voluntary nature of the oath: 'Paucis igitur te affabimur Heralde. Qua mente post haec Guillelmo haereditatem auferre, bellum inferre, ausus es, cui te gentemque tuam sacrosancto iureiurando subiecisti tua et lingua et manu?' WP, *GG* i.46, 76–7.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Cicero, *De officiis*, for the point that keeping faith in an oath depends more upon the intended meaning than upon the words alone: 'qui iuris iurandi fraude culpam invenerat ... iure iurando se solum putabat, et erat verbis, re non erat. Semper autem in fide quid senseris, non quid dixeris, cogitandum.' i.13.40.

<sup>34</sup> *GR* iii.240.1, i, 452–3.

or *judicium Dei*.<sup>35</sup> According to WM, Harold chose poorly in not following Gyrrh's advice: he characterizes Harold as displaying 'effrenata temeritas'.<sup>36</sup> Harold's words may imply that he places his trust in the hands of God, but WM judges that by his behaviour, Harold rather elects the path of imprudence.

This passage reflects the different ways in which WM imbues Harold with responsibility for his oath, and how his actions have produced a situation whereby even the choices still available to him will lead to failure. That Gyrrh details the last resort—fighting without one's leader—shows that the English are held at an impasse because of Harold's oath; that Harold refuses even to consider the unwelcome possibilities put before him underline his ambition at the expense of counsel. WM judges Harold as accountable both as military leader of the English and as vassal of William. For WM, Harold is doubly to blame: first for his perjury to William, and second for the consequences of that perjury suffered by his men. Harold fails to see that his own behaviour and disregard for justice have brought his men to a place where they must ask to fight without him in order to fight a just war.

After WM has recounted the events of the invasion and William's accession, WM explains the Norman Conquest by casting it as England's suffering for the consequences of its people's sins and generally poor character, and he summarizes the Battle of Hastings as fated: 'Illa fuit dies fatalis Angliae, funestum excidium dulcis patriae, pro nouorum dominorum commutatione.'<sup>37</sup> WM here accounts for the Conquest by showing how the English kings' powers permitted them indulgence in pleasures, how the English clergy was apathetic and uneducated, how the nobles were gluttons and lechers and how

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<sup>35</sup> R. Bartlett, *Trial By Fire and Water: The Medieval Judicial Ordeal* (Oxford, 1986), 103, 115–16; R.J. Hexter, *Equivocal Oaths and Ordeals in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, MA, 1975), 1–2.

<sup>36</sup> 'unbridled temerity' *GR* iii.240.1, i, 452–3.

<sup>37</sup> 'That was a day of destiny for England, a fatal disaster for our dear country as she exchanged her masters for new ones.' *GR* iii.245.1, i, 456–7; see also: iii.245.1–6, i, 456–61.

those with power over others abused it.<sup>38</sup> There were men in every order of English society who deserved divine punishment. The Conquest of 1016, by contrast, did not merit explanation by as vast an extent of English sins for WM since it was reversed in 1042.

WM concedes that not all deserved the harsh fate of the Norman Conquest, saying that his criticisms are not directed at the English as a whole. He explains this disparity by accounting for Providence's judgment in the disaster of the Norman Conquest in a traditional mode of Christian historiography: 'uerum sicut in tranquillitate malos cum bonis fouet plerumque Dei serentias, ita in captiuitate bonos cum malis nonnumquam eiusdem constringit seueritas.'<sup>39</sup> WM was not questioning Providence, but was nevertheless struggling to deal with the causes of outcomes that, like the White Ship disaster,<sup>40</sup> do not seem universally merited. As we will see, his determination is that in addition to some of the English, Harold is ultimately at fault for causing collective suffering. This is consistent with WM's view of causation during the Danish Conquest. Providence is not arbitrary: the severity and the comprehensiveness of the sufferings indicate to him that Harold's and others' actions were so despicable that God judged sternly and indiscriminately. This situation is thus quite unlike the White Ship disaster, which WM admits as God's plan but in which he involves no culprit. In the case of the Norman Conquest, someone is decidedly to blame, and to a greater degree than are the rest.

We have seen how, on either side of his narrative of 1066, WM explains the Conquest in general terms as fated and as a consequence of collective sin. In this respect

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<sup>38</sup> *GR* iii.245.2–5, i, 456–9.

<sup>39</sup> 'But as in tranquil times God's serene kindness often fosters bad and good men equally, so in the hour of captivity His stern judgement sometimes grips good as well as bad.' *GR* iii.245.6, i, 458–61.

<sup>40</sup> Above, 19–20.

his account resembles earlier insular literature and its explanations for invasion,<sup>41</sup> more so than does his treatment of the Danish invasion: the scale and finality of the Norman Conquest merit explanation by collective sin as well as by an individual king's failures. The balanced portrayal of the English and the Normans which he claims is his goal<sup>42</sup> produces a general, less acerbic account of blame and cause when WM writes broadly and indirectly about the Conquest.

### **Henry on Harold**

Henry is brief on both Edward's reign and the Norman Conquest. He continues to use material and structure based on ASC, and is even more concise than is ASC. He nevertheless punctuates his sparse narrative with the crimes of Harold. It is not brevity alone that generates the harsh picture of Harold, but rather what he chooses to omit and include. Henry relates a story of Harold based upon the most damning elements of both ASC and Norman sources.

I argue that Henry preserves a sense of tragedy about the English defeat, even though he follows the Norman accounts very closely at this point. Along with the Norman sources (especially William of Poitiers), Henry blames Harold for perjury, using slightly different wording. Yet similarly to WM, Henry renders Harold a scapegoat more culpable than the English as a whole—and he makes Harold characteristically so, not just worthy of blame in a single instance. In these respects, Henry's approach to this Conquest is similar to his approach in narrating the Danish Conquest, although the persistence of the Normans has different implications for him than the temporary Danish presence. That the

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<sup>41</sup> Above, 7–10.

<sup>42</sup> In describing William I, *GR* iii.preface, i, 424–5; writing favourably about the English and the Normans, ii.228.12, 422–3.

Normans inaugurate what Henry deems the recent past<sup>43</sup> suggests that there is more at stake—and more for which he will blame the defending king.

As the narrative draws nearer to 1066, Henry confers blame upon Harold, thereby revealing more about his expectations for how a future king of England—and his family—should behave. Henry preserves the Norman claim that Harold swore an oath on relics to uphold William’s claim to the English throne: ‘Haraldus autem iuravit Willelmo, super reliquias sanctorum multas et electissimas, se filiam eius ducturum, et Angliam post mortem Edwardi ad opus eius seruaturum.’<sup>44</sup> What is interesting is that Henry does not give a reason for Harold’s voyage,<sup>45</sup> nor does he attempt to defend Harold for being trapped into the oath he will make. The sparsity of the narrative itself deliberately leaves Harold open to criticism.

Henry juxtaposes Harold’s honour and the gifts Harold receives from William with Harold’s choice to commit perjury: ‘Summo igitur honore susceptus, et muneribus amplis ditatus, cum reuersus esset in Angliam, periurii crimen elegit’.<sup>46</sup> Other sources (most notably WP) accuse Harold of perjury,<sup>47</sup> and there are two significant and related ways in which Henry follows WP. First, Henry highlights Harold’s intent to perjure by making it a choice (‘eligo’); second, Henry places his censure of Harold’s action here, not upon Harold’s seizure of the throne.

Henry implies that Harold journeyed to Normandy in 1062<sup>48</sup> and names Harold’s ‘crimen periurii’ which one might suppose does not occur until 1066, when Edward dies and Harold seizes the throne. By commenting on the perjury at this early point in the

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<sup>43</sup> *HA* vi.42–vii.1, 410–13.

<sup>44</sup> ‘Harold swore to William, on many precious relics of the saints, that he would marry his daughter and after Edward’s death would preserve England for William’s benefit.’ *HA* vi.25, 380–1. Cf. WP, *GG* i.42, 70–1; cf. possible allusion in *LKE* i.7, 80–1; see also: Greenway, *HA*, 382 n.145.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. WP, *GG* i.41, 68–9.

<sup>46</sup> ‘On his return to England, he who had been received with great honour and many gifts, chose to commit the crime of perjury.’ *HA* vi.25, 380–3.

<sup>47</sup> WP, *GG* i.46, 76–9.

<sup>48</sup> See Greenway, *HA*, 382 n.145.

narrative—a charge which he will reiterate in recounting 1066<sup>49</sup>—Henry indicates clearly that Harold never had any intention of honouring the promise.<sup>50</sup> Henry makes Harold’s seizure of the crown a definitively premeditated act of treachery, not a sudden impulse to take advantage of the situation in 1066. Like WP, Henry considers the planning of treachery a crime, as well as the seizure of the crown.<sup>51</sup> Henry holds him accountable for both, and for behaviour unworthy of England’s own royals.

As the Conquest nears, Henry uses an episode in the king’s court to show that the Godwines have aroused God’s vengeance. Henry reports that in the king’s court Tostig grabs Harold’s hair, exhibiting jealousy (‘inuidie’), rage (‘odii’) and lack of restraint (‘impetu furoris propulsus’). This story is unique to Henry.<sup>52</sup> Henry then observes: ‘Rex autem pernitiem eorum iam appropinquare predixit, et iram Dei iam non differendam.’<sup>53</sup> WM and the *Vita Ædwardi* comment on Edward’s prophecies, but Edward applies the foretold disasters—the coming of the Normans—to England in general. Through both the story of Tostig and Edward’s subsequent comment, Henry focuses the anger of God, and his vengeance, on the Godwine family specifically.

What is interesting is that Henry uses the story to implicate Harold in these vices. In indicting Tostig, Henry accuses the Godwine brothers collectively of savagery: ‘Tante namque seuicie fratres illi erant, quod cum alicuius nitidam ullam conspicerent, dominatorem de nocte interfici iuberent totamque progeniem illius possessionemque defuncti optinerent.’<sup>54</sup> Not only does Henry use the story to focus Edward’s prophecy on holding the Godwine family particularly accountable for the wrongs in the land, but he

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<sup>49</sup> HA vi.27, 384–5. Henry uses the word ‘inuasit’ to describe Harold taking the crown, which interestingly connotes both seizure and invasion.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. WP GG i.46, 76–9.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. WM, above, 117.

<sup>52</sup> Greenway, HA, 383 n.148.

<sup>53</sup> The king, however, foretold that their destruction was already approaching, and that the wrath of God would be delayed no longer.’ HA vi.25, 382–3.

<sup>54</sup> ‘Such was the savagery of those brothers that when they saw anyone’s village in a flourishing state, they would order the lord and all his family to be murdered in the night, and would take possession of the dead man’s property.’ HA vi.25, 382–3.

makes Harold look party to the same behaviour even though he was the victim of Tostig's rage and jealousy. This is a prime example of Henry ascribing to Harold a greater portion of responsibility for wrong—in particular, the wrongs that bring on the Conquest. We will see precisely the same pattern occur again when Henry recounts what provokes William to invade.

Henry uses narrative time to shape his portrayal of Harold as a pretender who betrays his own people and the natural succession of his land. Henry accomplishes this by making Harold's seizure of the throne appear to be a usurpation of Edgar ætheling's right. ASC mentions English support for Edgar, but only after relating Harold's death: 'þa munecas ... senden him þa to Ædgar æðeling, forðan þet þe landfolc wendon þæt he sceolde cyng wurðen'.<sup>55</sup> Henry instead mentions this support earlier, near the beginning of his account of 1066: 'quidam Anglorum Edgar Adeling promouere uolebant in regem. Haraldus uero uiribus et genere fretus regni diadema inuasit'.<sup>56</sup> It is important to stress that the English choice of Edgar is not a story exclusive to the English sources. WP mentions the English sentiment as well. But he does so after the Conquest and William's victory: before the coronation but after the deciding events of Hastings. For WP, the prior choice of Edgar occurs in a decidedly pluperfect tense: 'statuerant': they had chosen him.<sup>57</sup> The episode is now far enough in the past, enhanced here by the pluperfect, that WP can safely mention it without there being any lingering possibility of competition for the throne. Furthermore, by mentioning Edgar as a possible alternative king, WP once again cuts out both Harold and the idea that there could have been another king. WJ accuses Harold in similar language ('Cuius regnum Heroldus continuo inuasit, ex

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<sup>55</sup> 'The monks ... sent him to the ætheling Edgar because the people of the land thought he ought to become king, and the ætheling happily agreed it for him.' ASC (E) 1066; Swanton, 199; see also: Greenway, *HA*, 385 n.152.

<sup>56</sup> 'some of the English wanted to advance Edgar the atheling as king. But Harold, relying on his forces and his birth, usurped the crown of the kingdom.' *HA* vi.27, 384–5.

<sup>57</sup> WP, *GG* ii.28, 146–7.

fidelitate peieratus quam iurauerat duci.’<sup>58</sup>), but relates the seizure only to a breach of faith with William—not a breach with Edgar or the English.

Henry adds to his sources another layer to the temporal placement of Edgar’s support: he makes it appear that Edgar’s failure to assume his birthright was directly Harold’s responsibility and fault. By introducing Edgar’s claim and the desire of the English at this point in time earlier than either ASC or WP, and by juxtaposing this situation with Harold’s succession, Henry makes Harold’s claim the more illegitimate and egregious. In this case, Harold does not wrong William, a Norman—he wrongs the English and their Ætheling. The conflict is internal. Henry judges Harold’s behaviour within English succession choices, not Norman ones, and deems him responsible and accountable for overturning them.

Perhaps the most significant implication of this passage is that Henry casts Harold’s ‘uis’ and ‘genus’ as the means for Harold’s unjust claim of the throne. Whereas strength and birth are often seen as good qualities in a king, Henry explicitly makes these qualities the means of Harold’s wrongdoing. And indeed, for Harold to claim the throne on the grounds of his birth looks particularly suspect given Henry’s explicit indictment of the Godwine family’s behaviour. Henry claims that Harold’s rule is unjust and, like WJ, uses the word ‘inuado’ to describe Harold’s seizure of the crown. Henry’s word choice speaks for itself: Harold is the aggressor, in the role of the invader.

Henry goes even further than the Norman sources in suggesting that Harold was partially responsible for the death of another Ætheling: Edward’s brother Alfred.<sup>59</sup> Henry makes William seem rational by listing his three grievances in an orderly fashion:

Willelmus uero dux Normannie tribus de causis mente stimulatus est et intrinsecus irritatus. Primo, quia Aluredem cognatum suum Godwinus et filii sui dehonestauerant et peremerant. Secundo, quia Robertum episcopum et Odonem

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<sup>58</sup> ‘Whereupon Harold immediately seized Edward’s kingdom, thus perjuring the fealty he had sworn to the duke.’ WJ, *GND* vii.13, ii, 160–1.

<sup>59</sup> See also: Greenway, *HA*, 386 n.154; WJ, *GND* vii.16, ii, 170–1; WP, *GG* i.4, 4–7.

consulem et omnes Francos Godwinus et filii sui arte sua ab Anglia exulauerant. Tercio, quod Haraldus in periurium prolapsus regnum quod iure cognationis suum esse debuerat, sine aliquo iure inuaserat.<sup>60</sup>

The Norman sources were offering defence of English succession as a reason for the Conquest, but from the perspective of the English and Norman alliance: both Alfred and Edward had spent much of their lives in Normandy. Whereas WP censures Godwine for murdering Alfred and names Harold equal in evil,<sup>61</sup> Henry suggests that Harold was actually involved in the crime itself. Henry focuses the blame, accusing Harold even more directly and holding him accountable for more evil—against his own countryman. Henry's Harold is consistently guilty of betraying his legitimate rulers or potential rulers, which is hardly how a future king should conduct his life.

Henry makes several positive comments about how Harold manages the defence of England, but without implying that these have anything to do with his character. On learning that William is sailing for England, Henry reports that 'rex Haraldus, uir bellis acerrimus'<sup>62</sup> set out to meet him. Hearing a report of William's castle at Hastings, Henry writes: 'Rex igitur non segnis aduolans, aciem suam construxit in planis Hastingses.'<sup>63</sup> Here Henry's language resembles that of John on Harold as a general. But Henry does not sustain it, and indeed the adverb 'splendide' he reserves here for William's preparations for battle. Harold is not the defender, but the enemy; William leads his army 'in hostem'.<sup>64</sup> Harold's military acuity is not enough to redeem him for Henry.

Henry uses his narrative of the Battle of Hastings to make the direct point that the king's presence in battle is essential to the success of the defence. Like ASC (E), Henry

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<sup>60</sup> 'Then William, duke of Normandy, was provoked in his mind and inwardly incensed, for three reasons. First, because Godwine and his sons had dishonoured and murdered his kinsman Alfred. Second, because Godwine and his sons had, by their cunning, exiled from England Bishop Robert and Earl Odda and all the Frenchmen. Third, because Harold, who had fallen into perjury, had wrongfully usurped the kingdom which by the law of kinship ought to have been William's.' *HA* vi.27, 384–7.

<sup>61</sup> WP, *GG* i.4, 4–7.

<sup>62</sup> 'king Harold, who was a fierce warrior', *HA* vi.27, 386–7.

<sup>63</sup> 'So the king, hastening without delay, drew up his lines on the flat land at Hastings.' *HA* vi.28, 388–9.

<sup>64</sup> 'towards the enemy', *HA* vi.28, 388–9

locates the death of Harold and his brothers immediately prior to declaring the English defeat: ‘7 Harold com norðan 7 him wið feaht ear þan þe his here come eall, 7 þær he feoll, 7 his twægen gebroðra Gyrð 7 Leofwine. And Willelm þis land geeode’.<sup>65</sup> But Henry uses more than proximity and parataxis to relate the events: he relates them causally.<sup>66</sup> He writes:

Quod Anglis magno fuit detrimento. Viginti autem equites strenuissimi fidem suam inuicem dederunt, quod Anglorum cateruam perrumpentes, signum regium quod uocatur “Standard” arriperent. Quod dum facerent, plures eorum occisi sunt. Pars autem eorum uia gladiis facta, Standard asportauit. Interea totus ymber sagittariorum cecidit circa regem Haraldum, et ipse in oculo ictus corruit. Irrumpens autem multitudo equitum, regem uulneratum interfecit, et Girdh consulem et Leuine consulem, fratres eius, cum eo. Sic igitur contritus est exercitus Anglorum.<sup>67</sup>

Although Henry mentions the struggles of the English early on in this passage, they are only ‘igitur contritus’ upon the death of the king. The word ‘igitur’ shows that the defeat of the English is, for Henry, a direct result of the deaths of their ruling family, and their king in particular. The loss of the Standard (both as a loss of pride and a tactical loss) suggests that the English were failing, but Harold’s death caused their ultimate defeat. This might seem a self-evident point; nevertheless, Henry re-words his source material subtly in order to make the defeat follow causally.

## Conclusions

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<sup>65</sup> ‘and Harold came from the north, and fought with him before all his raiding-army had come; and there he fell, and his two brothers, Gyrrh and Leofwine. And William conquered this land’, ASC (E) 1066; Swanton, 198.

<sup>66</sup> But cf. N.F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago, 1977), 197 ff., for comments on Henry’s stylistic use of parataxis without ‘causal connectives’; cf. also E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. W.R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), 73–4.

<sup>67</sup> ‘This caused great losses among the English. Twenty of the most valiant knights gave their word to one another that they would break through the English line and snatch away the royal banner, which is called the “Standard”. When they went to do this, several of them were killed. But some of them, making a way with their swords, carried off the Standard. Meanwhile the whole shower sent by the archers fell around king Harold, and he himself sank to the ground, struck in the eye. A host of knights broke through and killed the wounded king, and Earl Gyrrh and Earl Leofwine, his brothers, with him. And so the English army was shattered.’ HA vi.30, 394–5.

When Henry summarizes the kings of Book VI, the only king he directly criticizes is Harold: ‘Haraldus rex periurus i anno, et tamen non pleno quem propria perdidit iniusticia.’<sup>68</sup> As we have seen, Harold takes the greater part of blame (as compared to the rest of the English) for the failed defence in the narrative context of conquests. And here in this abbreviated summary narrative, Harold also takes the greater part of the blame as compared to all of the kings of the eleventh century. This suggests that the greater Henry deems the disaster for England, the greater the fault he finds in the defending king.

Henry’s narrative both gives Harold more autonomy and intent in his actions and holds him correspondingly more personally accountable than do Henry’s sources writing about the English. He reallocates blame and the impression of shame such that Harold is more responsible for the Conquest and the defeat than are the rest of the English. He combines material from both ASC and Norman accounts such that, retold, they help him to effect this more focused characterization of Harold.

Henry blames Harold earlier, across a greater duration of time, more particularly and for more reasons than do his sources. Henry follows, at times closely, the content and narrative timing of WP. But it is important to observe that Henry does not include this content from a pro-Norman perspective or for the same reasons. As we have seen, Henry is as concerned about Harold’s obligations to Edgar and Edward as he is about the purported oath to William.

WP blames Harold for breaking the oath to William only, not with breaking faith to heirs within the English kingdom. This is a strategy to permit him to make William’s claim appear legitimate. WP’s attack on Harold is focused and consistent: it has a single goal, to legitimize the Conquest based on Norman expectations and the specific situation in England. Henry’s reasoning is different. Henry blames Harold for failing to do his duty

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<sup>68</sup> ‘Harold, the perjured king, for one incomplete year, was destroyed through his own injustice.’ *HA* vi.42, 410–11.

by his oaths, by the English people and by any of the land's potential rightful successors—Edgar and William included. Henry's lack of concern for origin is striking. More important in his narrative are the plight of the English and the quality of the king.

It is worth pointing out at this stage the parallels between Henry's defending kings, Æthelred and Harold. As we have seen with Henry's treatment of Æthelred, God has a plan for England, and within this plan individual people and actions can provoke his anger directly. Henry introduces a new gap between the divine plan of and enacting it. Into that gap come individuals and both kinds of responsibility: accountability and the ability to influence. His defending kings are significant characters in both regards.

Henry observes that by the end of William's reign 'ita etiam ut Anglicum uocari esset obprobrior'.<sup>69</sup> He explains that this is God's justice and endorses it,<sup>70</sup> but is not blaming the English entirely. He is reporting—even lamenting—their state in a position of subjection to the Normans (who in turn began to find themselves faced with disasters). Furthermore, these are framing comments at the ends and beginnings of his books: as we have seen, as his narrative progresses through the events of the invasion itself, Harold is implicated in more wrongdoing than anyone else. The defeat has justly punished Harold. The English are punished too, but they were not responsible to the degree that Harold was. Herein is Henry's tragedy: that the English should be betrayed by the one most responsible for defending and advancing their interests and their laws. He betrayed what it was to be an English king.

As we have seen, to show that Harold's claim is unjust, Henry, like WJ, makes Harold the invader or aggressor. But what this also means is that to be an invader carried with it the implication of unjust force. Accounting for William's military invasion was not enough: Henry had to make William and Harold in effect switch roles. William was

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<sup>69</sup> 'and it was even disgraceful to be called English', *HA* vi.38, 402–3.

<sup>70</sup> *HA* vi.42–vii.1, 410–13.

the legitimate king, and Harold the invader. This shows how these historians perceived invasion as a problem; it was hard to justify and to explain. If Henry thought William's invasion was unequivocally a good thing, he would have no need to cast Harold as an invader in order to stress that Harold was behaving inappropriately or was an illegitimate king.

Another theme continues to emerge: character and correct behaviour overwhelm strength and origin in Henry's expectations for a king. Compare the *Vita Ædwardi*'s lamenting speech to the English: 'Naturalem regem tuum perdidisti'.<sup>71</sup> The *VE* refers to the loss of Harold; Henry does not describe him as a native king who was worth retaining in the first place. The circumstance of repeated invasion appears to have driven him to make this so explicit. Henry casts Harold's seizure of the throne as an internal betrayal. It is even worse than his sources. Harold's is a threefold betrayal of royalty: the wishes of Edward, the prospect of Edgar, the promise to William. He is implicated in a fourth: the murder of Alfred. What these constitute together is a betrayal of the best interests of the English. For this, in Henry's view, Harold is personally accountable and merits condemnation based entirely on his behaviour. The English loss may be tragic and the justice of God, but the people themselves are absolved to a great degree of implication in the shameful behaviour of the Godwine brothers and of Harold in particular. This is not necessarily lack of nostalgia on Henry's part,<sup>72</sup> but rather nostalgia of the most intense kind: one that seeks a reckoning within God's plan, in which the defending king is called to account for the shame that would otherwise belong to all.

As with Danish defeat, Henry provides still more tragic paradoxes of assigning blame in a defeat. Harold is at fault: as for WM, Harold's oath to William is binding;

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<sup>71</sup> 'You have lost your native king', *LKE* ii.7, 108–9.

<sup>72</sup> But cf. J. Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past', in his *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), 209–28, at 211.

extenuating circumstances, including Harold's intent, are irrelevant.<sup>73</sup> The English suffer for crimes of Harold and the Godwines. Henry acknowledges Harold's prompt responses to invasion as a general, but this earns him no credit. Henry has shown us kings—Æthelred and Harold—with no clear solutions to their military predicaments, but he condemns them nonetheless.

In his 1066 entry, John writes that a comet appeared in the sky which was seen around the world. ASC (CD) reported that it was visible throughout England. John, with the perspective of several more generations and sources, recognizes that this portent affected a larger scale than English history. With the passage of time and greater knowledge of sources even over his lifetime (apparent in the stages of the revisions of his chronicle),<sup>74</sup> there was more to explain. But John does not cast the comet as a portent of disaster. Despite John's awareness that the events of 1066 were remarkable for the English, for him they do not indicate a slow decline in English morals, a failure of English kings, or a defeated people. Because England was twice-conquered in the eleventh century—conquests between which Eadmer, WM and Henry made explicit connections<sup>75</sup>—there is a tradition from which John had to extract eleventh-century England if he wished to tell a history of a worthy people. As we have already seen in his portrayal of Æthelred, this is indeed his intent.

John tells a story of the Norman Conquest that preserves the ideas of continuity and strength among the English and their kings. He does not make English kings Edward and Harold accountable for the defeat by the Normans in the short- or long-term, but makes them look effective at dealing with internal threats. The Norman Conquest and rapid English defeat does not diminish the English or their kings for John.

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<sup>73</sup> Above, 119, 122.

<sup>74</sup> M. Brett, 'John of Worcester and his contemporaries', in R.H.C. Davis and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (eds.), *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Richard William Southern* (Oxford, 1981), 101–26, at 117 ff.

<sup>75</sup> Above, 31, 41–2, 57–60.

One question relevant to narratives of the Norman Conquest in particular is how John reconciled the rapidity and totality of the Norman Conquest with the continuously positive character he gives to the English. Was John an historian in a post-Conquest world looking for long-term evidence, or causes, for what had been a relatively rapid change? This does not appear to be the case: instead of attempting to rationalize defeat, he tells a story of continuity that shifts focus to English strengths, not defeats. He reduces the magnitude of the defeat in 1066 by strengthening the English in the past and introducing positive relations between the English and some Normans. He accomplishes these changes by narrating the changes in leadership and succession so as to make it look smooth, planned, and by the initiative of English kings, not by domineering English earls or Norman Conquest. He introduces William and the Normans in small, digestible morsels so their presence is not a surprise come 1066. John makes English independence and resistance last a long time on three levels. During Edward's reign, he narrates a strong pre-Conquest England, not dissolved by discord that would be conducive to failure in and after 1066.<sup>76</sup> In 1066 and on the day of Hastings, he stresses the quality of the resistance, not its failure. After Hastings, as we will see, he transfers blame from William to the Normans, recognizing William's authority as an English king after William is reconciled with the ætheling in 1074.

John's apparent purpose in changing the narrative in these ways is to retell 1066 as less disastrous, to promote a picture of continuity within English institutions and to promote a sense of the worthiness of the English people and English kingship. To achieve these ends, it would be important to cultivate the character of the English in the eleventh century, a time when it could appear (and did in ASC) to be a seat of repeated conquest, treachery and opportunistic nobles taking advantage of the king.

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. ASC (CD) 1052.

John knew sources common to WM, including saints' lives; at times he used WM's *GP*;<sup>77</sup> as we will see, he does so when it provides material to support English the English cause. It is worth reiterating that John apparently knew several versions of ASC,<sup>78</sup> which becomes more significant with his later eleventh-century narrative because the versions of ASC begin to differ more amongst themselves. In general, he includes more material than survives in any extant version of ASC. John knew a northern recension of ASC; his account is most often close to that of MS D, and as we will see his modifications of D are often the most significant in terms of how he retells English history. It is not necessarily evident what material is original to John, but his knowledge of multiple versions of Anglo-Saxon history shows that John as an historian had the luxury of choice. That is, not only could he choose to make his own interpretation of *one* version of events, but he could select material from *different* versions that best suited his purposes. His *Chronicon*, if not evidence of his originality in material, is evidence of his choices—which in themselves are evidence of his narrative originality.

John promotes a consistently heroic picture of Harold throughout his service of King Edward and his own rule, in which he is heir to an equally heroic king. John makes very little of Harold's familial connection with Godwine, and casts Harold as a worthy successor of Edward. By explaining and reiterating Harold's strengths both before he takes the throne and during his brief reign of 1066, John makes Harold and English kingship look worthy and the defence in 1066 look justified, well-conducted and in no way doomed to fail. John reveals no scepticism about the defence, nor any sense that the state of affairs in England made the Norman Conquest inevitable. A providential framework is conspicuously absent.

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<sup>77</sup> McGurk, JW, ii, lxxix–lxxx; above, 17, 36–8.

<sup>78</sup> *EHD*, 124; above, 36–8.

John's narrative of Harold before 1066 is important because this is where John establishes the strong bond of loyalty between Harold and Edward; their mutual worthiness reflects well on both. Indeed, it is only when Harold begins to act consistently in Edward's favour that John begins to praise his loyalty and leadership with epithets and adverbs.

When Harold is allied with his father Godwine, John says little about him in particular, thus avoiding any concentration on Harold's opposition to the king early in the 1050s. This is interesting for two reasons: first, because the extant versions of ASC refer to him specifically more often; second, because John begins praising Harold the moment when Edward gives Harold an order to prevent a Welsh invasion. It must be noted that John does not change ASC's story of events to make Harold look eternally loyal. He preserves ASC's report that Harold defeats local defensive forces in Somerset and Dorset, slaying thirty noble thegns and others and collecting booty.<sup>79</sup> John does not, that is to say, conduct a complete change of events.

John downplays Harold's individual opposition to the king by mentioning him with his brother Leofwine. D refers to the king ordering Ealdred to prevent (unsuccessfully) the escape of Harold and Leofwine,<sup>80</sup> a story which John omits. Thus John ignores a failure of Ealdred and the king—and most important, a reference to Harold acting against the king. In the entry for 1052, John records that Harold and Leofwine return from Ireland and later join their father; MSS CDE do not mention Leofwine in either case.<sup>81</sup> By adding information, John indicates that Harold is not acting alone.

These changes are not particularly significant, which is precisely the point. Before John can make Harold a hero by serving Edward, he does little to single out Harold; if

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<sup>79</sup> JW [1052], ii, 566–7. Cf. ASC (CD) 1052; only (E) 1052 and (F) 1051 also mention Harold collecting booty.

<sup>80</sup> ASC (D) 1052 [1051].

<sup>81</sup> McGurk, JW, ii, 567 n.6, 568 n.7, only mentioning CD.

anything, he diminishes Harold's individual personality by elimination and association with his brothers. John makes few changes to ASC's narrative and its style when the English and English kings would gain little were he to do so.

The first time Harold appears acting alone on the king's orders is in 1055. John shows Harold distinguishing himself in his honour to his lord, in his military strength, and in his expectations for his men. When King Edward musters an army from all England, 'cui Glauuorne congregato strenuum ducem Haroldum prefecit, qui deuote iussis obtemperans, Griffinum et Algarum impigre insequitur ac fines Walanorum audacter ingressus'.<sup>82</sup> John uses this opportunity to introduce the epithets and adverbs, not in ASC, which he continues to apply to Harold ('strenuus dux',<sup>83</sup> 'deuote', 'impigre', 'audacter'). That Edward puts Harold in charge and Harold obeys 'impigre' highlights their reciprocal loyalty. Harold emerges here as fiercely loyal and a good military leader.

John enhances Harold's military strength and leadership (which he has introduced with adverbs and epithets) by commenting on his reputation among the Welsh. He writes of Harold: 'ultra Straddele castra metatus est, sed illi, quia uirem fortem et bellicosum ipsum sciebant, cum eo committere bellum non audentes, in Suthuualium fugerunt'.<sup>84</sup> The actions of the enemy substantiate John's claims about Harold's military prowess. And as we have seen frequently, John writes with contempt about those fleeing because of fright. It is striking that Harold subsequently demands qualities of his men that resemble the qualities John has identified in Harold. Harold dismisses some of his army ordering them to resist 'uiriliter' if need be. John's Harold is not one who advocates shameful flight.

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<sup>82</sup> '[The army] assembled at Gloucester, and the king put the vigorous Earl Harold in charge of it. Zealously obeying his orders, Harold energetically pursued Gruffydd and Ælfgar, and boldly invaded the Welsh borders.' JW [1055], ii, 578–9.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. JW [1065].

<sup>84</sup> 'He encamped beyond Straddle, but they, because they knew him to be a strong and warlike man, not daring to embark on war with him, fled into South Wales.' JW [1055], ii, 578–9.

Rather, John makes consistent the shared character of the English fighting forces—King Edward, his general Harold, and the English army.

These passages for 1055 are important because they show the concord and effectiveness of the lordship bond between Edward and Harold. There are no precedents for these comments in ASC. This is part of why, for John, Edward is significant in providing a strong foundation for Harold's assumption of rule in 1066: staunch loyalty to—and trust from—a good king makes Harold an even stronger king.

John reiterates Harold's military prowess by showing his enemies struggling. ASC (D) reports only that Harold made Gruffydd flee;<sup>85</sup> John that Gruffydd learns in advance of Harold's approach 'et uix euasit.'<sup>86</sup> John's additional comment that Gruffydd barely escaped—and then only because he was forewarned—implies that Harold would have conquered him easily. John implies the English capacity for victory even when a resounding one has not been achieved in battle.

Even before Harold becomes a king, John groups him with kings by association with Edward. His annal for 1064 appears to be a subtle modification of the Welsh promises of loyalty after Gruffydd's death such that Harold—and Harold as a king—is a direct recipient of their homage. John explains, with MS D, that the Welsh king Gruffydd was killed by his own men, and that his head and ship's prow were sent to Harold who sent them to Edward. After Edward promises land to Gruffydd's brothers, there are some slight but nonetheless important differences in the accounts. MS D reports of Gruffydd's brothers:

7 hig aþas sworon 7 gislas saldan þæm cyng 7 þæm eorle þæt \h/eo him on allum þingum unswicende beon woldon, 7 eighwar him gearwe on wætere 7 on lande, 7 swylc of þam lande gelæstan swylc man dyde toforan ær oþrum kyng.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> ASC (D) 1063 [1062]; see also: McGurk, JW, ii, 593 n.7.

<sup>86</sup> 'and just managed to escape.' JW [1063], ii, 592–3.

<sup>87</sup> 'and they swore oaths and gave hostages to the king and to the earl that they would be undeceiving to him in all things, and everywhere ready [to serve] him on water and on land, and likewise to pay from that land, what was formerly done before to the other king.' ASC (D) 1063 [1062]; Swanton, 191.

John writes with apparently similar effect: ‘cui et Haroldo comiti fidelitatem illi iurauerunt, et ad imperium illorum mari terraque se fore paratos, ac omnia que prius de terra illa regibus anterioribus fuerant pensa, obedienter se pensuros sponderunt.’<sup>88</sup>

There is a striking change in John’s account. He uses the plural throughout the passage when describing the indirect objects of Welsh obedience: Edward and Harold. Even John’s use of the plural of ‘rex’, signifying former kings of England, evokes both Edward and Harold, paired as they are throughout this passage. John sets up Harold’s eventual ascension to the throne by affiliating him both with the English king Edward and with the honours which vassals pay English kings.

In the year before Edward’s death, John underlines Harold’s persistent strength and allegiance to Edward. In his entry for 1065, John reports: ‘Strenuus dux Westsaxonum Haroldus’ ordered a building erected and supplied in Wales so that ‘dominus suus rex Eaduardus’ could hunt.<sup>89</sup> ASC (CD) report only that Harold was preparing the place so that King Edward could hunt.<sup>90</sup> John’s impressive epithet for Harold leads off the sentence; John is alone in identifying the lordship bond between the two men. These elements remind us of the constancy John is establishing in Harold’s behaviour as a worthy man of King Edward.

Also significant is what John leaves out of 1065. The first and most striking omission John makes to deflect the Norman Conquest narrative away from defeat is ASC (CD)’s last line for the 1065 annal, which reads: ‘7 her wearð Harold eorl eac to cyngge gehalgod, 7 he lytle stilnesse þæron gebad þa hwile þe he rices weold.’<sup>91</sup> By omitting this

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<sup>88</sup> ‘and they swore fealty to him and to Earl Harold, and promised that they would obey their commands by land and sea, and that everything which had previously been paid to former kings by that country they would obediently pay.’ JW [1064], ii, 596–7.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Harold, the vigorous earl of the West Saxons ... his lord, King Edward’, JW [1065], ii, 596–7.

<sup>90</sup> ASC (CD) 1065.

<sup>91</sup> ‘And here also Harold became consecrated as king, and he experienced little quietness in it while he ruled the kingdom.’ [D] ASC (CD) [1065]; Swanton, 194–5.

comment, John forestalls the certainty of impending disaster in narrative time, and hence avoids the possibility that it could be Harold's fault.

John specifies that Edward chose Harold as his successor, thereby presenting a smooth and legitimate transition to Harold's reign:

*Quo tumultato, subregulus Haroldus, Goduini ducis filius, quem rex ante suam decessionem regni successorem elegerat, a totius Anglie primatibus ad regale culmen electus die eodem ab Aldredo Eboracensi archiepiscopo in regem est honorifice consecratus.*<sup>92</sup> [emphasis added]

Only ASC E mentions Edward's granting of the kingdom, and none of the MSS mention Ealdred, only that Harold was consecrated king.<sup>93</sup> By terming Harold 'subregulus', John further emphasizes that Harold was the proper heir and choice of Edward. By naming Ealdred personally, John makes the consecration appear more official—especially given Ealdred's tenure as bishop of John's own Worcester—and avoids the Norman criticism that the illegitimate Stigand crowned Harold. Furthermore, John's King Edward is committed to the succession and to the defence of the kingdom, which suggests that his will as an English king is worth following. The legitimacy John has created for Edward as a military leader in turn legitimizes Edward's choice: Harold.

Having conditioned Harold's rise by association with kings and exemplary loyalty and leadership, John makes Harold into a good English king and stalwart defender of the land. It is useful to revisit the themes set out in Part Two (character and the different elements of military leadership) in order to evaluate John's portrayal of Harold's leadership and the English defence in 1066 against the Normans and other enemies earlier in the year.

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<sup>92</sup> 'When he was entombed, *the underking*, Harold, son of Earl Godwine, *whom the king had chosen before his demise as successor to the kingdom*, was elected by the primates of all England to the dignity of kingship, and was consecrated with due ceremony by Ealdred, Archbishop of York, on the same day.' JW [1066], ii, 600–1.

<sup>93</sup> ASC (CD) 1065 [1066], (E) 1066. See also McGurk, JW, ii, 600 n.2.

Even before discussing the tribulations of 1066—indeed, even before mentioning the comet—John provides a short but admiring eulogy for Harold:

Qui mox ut regni gubernacula suscepit, leges iniquas destruere, equas cepit condere, ecclesiarum ac monasteriorum patronus fieri, episcopos, abbates, monachos, clericos colere simul ac uenerari, pium, humilem, affabilemque se bonis omnibus exhibere, malefactores exosos habere, nam ducibus, satrapis, uicecomitibus et suis in commune precepit ministris fures, raptos, regni disturbatores comprehendere, et pro patrie defensione ipsemet terra marique desudare.<sup>94</sup>

This eulogy resembles the Sallust passages John uses to show Edmund Ironside as a distinguished king and warrior. In both cases John employs rhetoric to create an aura of grandeur around these kings with shortened lives and reigns. The word ‘mox’ tells us that Harold lost no time in setting things right. Although his time as king in 1066 was limited, Harold makes the most of it.

Significantly, the defence itself has the last word of the eulogy. In describing Harold’s actions to defend of the kingdom, John finishes by explaining that Harold expected the same assiduous behaviour from his men. This comment is important, because it shows that John is perpetuating consistency in Harold’s career and expectations, extending forwards from the time when he was an earl fighting on behalf of Edward. He is as loyal now as he was then—and it shows that in the past, he was a king in the making.

John writes of Harold’s actions as a military leader to show him consistently prompt, efficient and prepared. When Tostig burns and murders on a course towards Lindsey, John reports that Edwin and Morcar chase after him. He then comments:

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<sup>94</sup> ‘He soon, when he had undertaken the government of the realm, destroyed iniquitous laws, and set about establishing just ones; becoming patron of churches and monasteries, cultivating and venerating at the same time bishops, abbots, monks, and clerks; showing himself pious, humble and affable to all good men; detesting malefactors, for he ordered the earls, ealdorman, sheriffs, and his own officers generally to seize thieves, robbers, and disturbers of the realm, and to exert themselves by land and sea for the defence of their country.’ JW [1066], ii, 600–1. See also: L. Ashe, ‘Harold Godwinson’, in N. Cartlidge (ed.), *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge, 2012), 59–80, at 63–4.

‘Interea rex Haroldus ad Sandicum portum uenit, ibique classem suam expectauit.’<sup>95</sup> That John uses the word ‘interea’ suggests that Harold’s defensive measure against Tostig happened at the same time as Edwin and Morcar’s chase, whereas MS C implies that it happened after, stating that Harold was obliged to wait indefinitely because it took a long time for the fleet to be assembled.<sup>96</sup> John omits any sense of delay or time ill-spent, resolving C’s narrative to make Harold look efficient by arriving in Sandwich early and implying that Harold would have been able to cut off Tostig successfully.

Indeed, John makes Harold’s preparations for William’s arrival seem less a desperate and futile distraction from the disturbances in the north, and more a part of Harold’s efficient planning as king. One important comment John omits is ASC’s early reminder that William’s intention to take over the land will be fulfilled. ASC reports that Harold gathers the largest force ever assembled in the land:

for þam þe him wæs gecyðd þæt Wyllelm Bastard wolde hider 7 ðis land  
gewinnen, eall swa hit syððan aeode.<sup>97</sup> (D)

forðam þe him wæs to soðan gesæd þæt Willelm eorll fram Normandige,  
Eadwardes cingces mæg, wolde hider cuman 7 þis land gegan, eall swa hit syððan  
aeode ... 7 þa his lið gegaderad wæs, þa for he into Wiht 7 þær læg ealne þone  
sumor 7 þone hærfest. 7 man hæfde landfyrde æghwar be sæ þeh hit æt þam ende  
naht ne forstode.<sup>98</sup> (C)

John includes some of the same information as C but recasts it entirely, eliminating both of the references to the lack of English success:

Que cum fuisset congregata Vectam insulam adiit, et quia Nortmannorum comes  
Willelmus, Eaduardi regis consobrinus, in Angliam cum exercitu uenire parabat,

<sup>95</sup> ‘Meanwhile, King Harold came to the port of Sandwich and there he awaited his [own] fleet.’ JW [1066], ii, 602–3.

<sup>96</sup> ASC (C) 1066, which includes the stories of Harold going to Sandwich and then to Wight.

<sup>97</sup> ‘because he was informed that William the Bastard wanted to come here and win this land, just as it afterwards came to pass.’ ASC (D) 1066; Swanton, 196.

<sup>98</sup> ‘because he was told for certain that Earl William from Normandy, relative of King Edward wanted to come here and win this land, just as it afterwards came to pass ... And then when his fleet was gathered, [Harold] went to Wight, and lay there all the summer and the autumn; and a land-army was kept everywhere by the sea, although in the end it was to no avail.’ ASC (C) 1066; Swanton, 195.

tota estate et autumnno aduentum illius obseruabat, ad hec etiam pedestrem exercitum locis opportunis circa ripas maris locabat.<sup>99</sup>

ASC (CD) stress the results: the English resistance will prove ineffective. John stresses the strength and distinction of the preparation, including his strategy: the use of ‘loci opportuna’. Also striking is that John chooses this moment to bring in the information about William’s planned invasion; C makes it appear that Harold is caught between conflicting needs for his presence. By introducing the information at this juncture in the narrative, John makes Harold look as strategic as possible given the circumstances.

John’s Harold returns rapidly to where he is needed.<sup>100</sup> John reports that Tostig joined Harold Fairhair, and records Harold’s response: ‘Quod ubi regi Haroldo innotuit, uersus Northymbriam expeditionem *propere* mouit.’<sup>101</sup> [emphasis added] With the word ‘propere’ John shows Harold reacting efficiently, in this respect similar to C (which records him assembling a force rapidly) and to D, which records Harold catching them by surprise.<sup>102</sup> John’s additions reiterate Harold’s efficiency as a military leader.

Despite the short time lapse between the battles of Fulford and Stamford Bridge (five days, which only John points out specifically), John highlights Harold’s impressive preparations and large forces. John writes of the fifth day after Fulford: ‘rex Anglorum Haroldus, *multis milibus pugnatorum armis bellicis instructorum*, Eboracum ueniens, et Norreganis in loco, qui Stanfordsbrycge dicitur’.<sup>103</sup> [emphasis added] Whereas only MS D refers to the size of Harold’s force and calls it a large one, John gives us thousands of well-trained men. Harold distinguishes himself by being prepared to fight with such a

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<sup>99</sup> ‘When [the fleet] had been drawn up, [Harold] went to the Isle of Wight and, because William, duke of the Normans, cousin of King Edward, was preparing to come to England with an army, he watched all summer and autumn for his arrival, against which he also placed his infantry at strategic places around the coast.’ JW [1066], ii, 602–3.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. *HA*, wherein Henry rather stresses the inability of the defending kings to be in the many places where they are needed at a given time: above, 81–2.

<sup>101</sup> ‘When King Harold learnt of this, he *speedily* undertook an expedition to Northumbria.’ JW [1066], ii, 602–3.

<sup>102</sup> ASC (CD) 1066.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Harold, king of the English, *with many thousands of well-armed fighting men*, marched to York and met the Norwegians at a place called Stamford Bridge.’ JW [1066], ii, 602–3.

force at such short notice, and the English fighting men themselves appear the more worthy as well.

John makes Harold personally responsible for the victory at Stamford Bridge: ‘occurrens, in ore gladii regem Haroldum comitemque Tostium cum maiori parte sui exercitus occidit, ac plenam uictoriam, licet acerrime repugnatum fuisset, habuit.’<sup>104</sup> Using the passive voice, ASC (CD) report only that Harold Fairhair and Tostig were killed.<sup>105</sup> Through his use of the third person singular and active voice, John claims directly that Harold personally killed Harold Fairhair and Tostig and had the victory. By giving Harold full responsibility for killing two enemies of England and for the English victory, John confirms his positive reputation of Harold as a king. Furthermore, Harold shows that he is behaving as a good lord should when he permits the Norwegian king’s son and others to return home freely after defeating them. John echoes ASC (D) here, adding the detail that Harold took hostages as well as the oaths mentioned by D.<sup>106</sup> Where ASC includes details that show Harold acting as a king, John preserves and refines them. Harold’s subsequent loss at Hastings cannot reflect badly on his character or his leadership.

Whereas ASC (CD) stress the results and ineffectiveness of the Battle of Hastings, John stresses the strength and distinction of the preparation. John attributes the lack of numbers at Hastings to several factors, none of which includes Harold’s poor leadership. He cites the loss of some of the bravest English soldiers at Fulford and Stamford Bridge; that half of Harold’s army did not arrive in time; that only one-third of it was ready for Hastings and that some of the English deserted from Harold’s ranks out of disloyalty to

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<sup>104</sup> ‘He put to the sword King Harold and Earl Tostig and the greater part of their army, and after a most bitter battle gained total victory.’ JW [1066], ii, 602–5.

<sup>105</sup> ASC (CD) 1066.

<sup>106</sup> JW [1066], ii, 604–5; ASC (D) 1066; see McGurk, JW, ii, 604 n.2–2.

him because of the imminent danger. Harold he describes as brave and valiant in the defence against William.

When Harold learns of William's landing at Pevensey, John describes William's fleet: 'cum innumera multitudine equitum, fundibalariorum, sagittariorum, peditumque aduenisse, utpote qui de tota Gallia sibi fortes auxilios conduxerat'.<sup>107</sup> These hyperbolic details are particular to John, and they help to suggest that any loss on the part of the English would be the fault neither of Harold nor the English. Of Harold, John writes: 'Vnde rex *statim* uersus Lundoniam suum mouit exercitum *magna cum festinatione*.'<sup>108</sup> [italics added for material not in ASC] John chooses to highlight Harold's effectiveness in gathering what troops he can.

John creates a heroic and experienced Harold. He is not a victim of surprise and circumstance, but a king who is aware of the dangers and difficulties he faces—and who meets them fearlessly. John provides an unprecedented comment on Harold's thoughts before Hastings:

et licet de tota Anglia fortiores quosque preliis in duobus bene sciret iam cecidisse, mediamque partem sui exercitus nondum conuenisse, *quam citius tamen potuit in Suthsaxonia suis hostibus occurrere non formidauit*<sup>109</sup> [emphasis added]

This Harold (unlike WM's) goes not blithely or recklessly into battle. He knows full well his army's weakness and the reason for it, yet does not fear to fight the enemy in order to defend his kingdom. John thereby succeeds in making Harold seem not weak or unprepared, but heroic. In mentioning Harold's intention to resist William, John—unlike ASC CD—concentrates only on the strength of the resistance without reminding the reader that it was futile.

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<sup>107</sup> 'with an innumerable multitude of knights, slingers, archers and foot-soldiers, for he had brought strong auxiliaries from the whole of Gaul with him.' JW [1066], ii, 604–5. See also: McGurk, JW, ii, 604 n. 4–4.

<sup>108</sup> 'Whereupon the king *at once* moved his army to London *in great haste*', JW [1066], ii, 604–5. See also: McGurk, JW, ii, 605 n.6.

<sup>109</sup> 'and *although he knew* that all the more powerful men from the whole of England had already fallen in two battles, and that half of his army had not yet assembled, *yet he did not fear to go to meet his enemies in Sussex with all possible speed*', JW [1066], ii, 604–5.

In another remarkable passage, John essentially excuses desertion in battle by accounting for it. He observes that before a third of Harold's army is drawn up, he must fight the Normans. John reiterates Harold's disadvantages, but stresses what he does in face of adversity (fight to defend his kingdom), not the fact that it will be ineffective. John then reports: 'Sed quia arto in loco constituti fuerant Angli, de acie se multi subtraxere et cum eo perpauci constantes corde remansere.'<sup>110</sup> The disadvantageous terrain explains the desertion, and the explanation carefully suggests that the worthy soldiers did remain with Harold. That they are few and heroic moves the defence closer to the level of epic.

Unlike ASC, John highlights the long duration of resistance on the day of the Battle of Hastings:

*Ab hora tamen diei tertia usque noctis crepusculum suis aduersariis restitit fortissime et se ipsum pugnando tam fortiter defendit et tam strenue ut uix ab hostili interimi posset agmine. At postquam ex his et illis quamplurimi corruere, heu, ipsemet cecidit crepusculi tempore.*<sup>111</sup> [italics added for phrase not in ASC]

MS D reports that Harold fought hard against William;<sup>112</sup> John develops the king's heroism by explaining that Harold's defended himself so well that he could barely be killed. John emphasizes the length and resilience of Harold's resistance, regretting his fall with the classic (and classical) interjection 'heu'. Harold's fall is heroic and tragic, carrying with it no proof of shame, sin or recklessness.

## Conclusions

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<sup>110</sup> 'But because the English were drawn up in a narrow place many slipped away from the battle-line, and very few of a constant heart remained with him.' JW [1066], ii, 604–5. See also: McGurk, JW, ii, 604 n.2–2.

<sup>111</sup> 'However, from the third hour of daylight until dusk he resisted his enemies most stoutly, and defended himself by fighting so strongly and vigorously that he could scarcely be slain by the enemy line. But afterwards, when very many had fallen on both sides, he himself fell, a last, at dusk.' JW [1066], 604–5; see also: 604 n. 2–2; Ashe, 'Harold Godwineson', 64.

<sup>112</sup> ASC (D) 1066.

Why would John want to redeem the English and their kings? The answer is not immediately obvious: his sources cast the English defeat as punishment for sin, but John made different narrative choices. The local tradition at Worcester may indeed be important. Brett points out that in John's own revisions to his later *Chronicula* version, he includes verse laments for the deaths of Edward, Harold and Wulfstan, and suggests that these indicate Worcester's long-lasting connection with the Anglo-Saxon past.<sup>113</sup> In his *Chronicon* John includes details about Ealdred and Wulfstan not present in ASC, including material which appears to reflect direct knowledge of the Worcester tradition. If John's *Chronicon* was indeed the latest stage in the ongoing project originally commissioned by Wulfstan of Worcester as Darlington and McGurk suggest,<sup>114</sup> the influence and inspiration of Ealdred and Wulfstan's trans-Conquest personalities could go some way towards explaining John's attention to redeeming the English and promoting continuity across the succession. Ealdred after all crowned both Harold and William,<sup>115</sup> and Wulfstan was the most notable English survivor in a high-ranking position after the Conquest.

But the Worcester tradition does not go quite far enough in explaining why John is markedly less caustic towards William than is ASC, and why he singles out good Normans for comment. Perhaps for him the legacy of the Worcester figures is more their memory as mediators than as English persisting in resistance against Norman dominion. In any case it is not demonstrable that John's thinking was limited by Worcester, or that he was not thinking about history on a wider scale. He not only included more Worcester material, but also more material from other parts of England and the known world. To

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<sup>113</sup> Brett, 'John of Worcester', 123; on the *Chronicula*, 109–110, 124.

<sup>114</sup> McGurk, JW, ii, lxxx–lxxxii.

<sup>115</sup> On the cross-Conquest continuities in bishops and ritual, see J.L. Nelson, 'The Rites of the Conqueror', in her *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London, 1986), 375–401.

localize his thinking overmuch creates the danger of underrating outside influences on his historical thought.

John emphasizes the continuity and nobility of English kings—through genealogy, behaviour and in his narrative of the succession—which in some ways develops the preoccupation of ASC with genealogy: in its earliest annals, ASC includes extensive royal and divine genealogies to legitimize English kings.<sup>116</sup> In recording royal genealogies, these annals sought to portray continuity an authority through the origins and paternities of English kings. John, however, does not attempt to legitimize his eleventh-century kings based on their heritage. Yet in the *Chronicon*, he too is interested in representing continuity in English kings—but in the realm of their character. John sought to make English history as a whole as impressive as possible, adding a greater degree of national pride to the assembled annals. John introduced theme and consistency in tone to varying versions and kinds of information. He was writing a narrative of an impressive English history untarnished by defeat.

He did not subscribe to the same views of providential history as his contemporaries.<sup>117</sup> The providential view could and did transcend style and time for these narratives; the D chronicler shared it in particular in the late eleventh century.<sup>118</sup> And yet it is impossible that he should be unaware of how pervasive a tradition it was. I suggest that the reason why John was so concerned to exonerate English kings and the English defence—and to eliminate the spectre of internal discord—was precisely because of his

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<sup>116</sup> E.g. ASC 449, 495, 547, 552, 560, 597.

<sup>117</sup> For a comparison of this theme in WM's and John's accounts of Harold, see: Ashe, 'Harold Godwineson', 62–5.

<sup>118</sup> In ASC 1066, only MSS D and E invoke God, and at different points. On the differences in the ASC MSS' modes of explanation in accounts of the eleventh century, see: C. Clark, 'The narrative mode of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* before the Conquest', in P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (eds.), *England Before the Conquest* (Cambridge, 1971), 215–35, esp. at 230–5; S. Baxter, 'MS C of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Politics of Mid-Eleventh-Century England', 1189–1227.

awareness of how providential historiography operated.<sup>119</sup> If he recorded events in the same way, and with a similar tone, to that of his sources (or some of his contemporaries), this mode of historical writing would demand that he ascribe the defeat to sin of some kind. John avoided this necessity, but he did not do so by changing the rules of providential history: that is, by claiming that disasters plagued the English although they were innocent of sin. He avoided the conclusion of sin by changing the narrative of the events themselves—in focus and, at times, in content. John did not excuse the English for defeat or make allowances for ruptures in the royal succession. Within the constraints of the events he was recording, he made it appear that the English were never entirely defeated and that the succession was planned and ultimately English, not occupied by ambitious pretenders or foreign conquerors. As the exception, John shows in relief how important invasion was as evidence of sin for the other writers. Yet like them, he did more than transmit stories of the past. John was far from a compiler: he was an historian and a narrator.

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. the isolated exception which proves his awareness: John mentions God's intervention on behalf of the English, JW [994], above, 97.

## PART TWO: DEFENDING KINGS

### CONCLUSIONS

Each author has his own consistent approach to conquest and expectations for defending kings during invasions in the eleventh century. A striking pattern emerges. For each writer, defending king are either to blame for the ultimate loss or deserving of credit for fighting well. The abilities and duties of a defending king take precedence over the individual king's unique and peculiar situation. The authors locate responsibility and causation in the defending king; his actions for better or worse admit of neither excuse nor dilution by external influences.

This pattern, which I have endeavoured to elucidate in these three chapters on defending kings, has three main implications for understanding how and why they wrote history. First, it shows that they conceived of greater personal responsibility for England's defending kings than did their sources, which was in itself a means for the redemption of England's history. The English defence failed in both conquests, yet WM, Henry and John give these defending kings the capability of influencing the defence. This is indeed a redemption of sorts. All three believed that Æthelred and Harold had the power of self-determination. WM and Henry conclude that they chose to waste it in laziness or ambition; John that they did everything within their power to win. All contend the kings' great responsibility, both causal and moral. This shared contention is part of their respective stories of England's history, and their efforts to make it as impressive as possible, untarnished by defeat. The English and their rightful kings, regardless of their origins, are specially capable of behaving with good character—and thus of being a model to the rest of Europe.

Second, the authors' consistent attitude towards England's defending kings should suggest to modern historians the need to be even more hesitant about accepting twelfth-century historians as compilers of facts and written traditions or as objective historical researchers of the eleventh century. This is important because there has been a tendency to underestimate design in medieval chronicle-writing. WM, Henry and John provide original perspectives on the behaviour of defending kings during the eleventh-century conquests—perspectives which reveal their assumptions about royal responsibility, and their efforts to redeem the English past. John's narrative takes the form of ordered annals, but it is not a passive recording of events or transmission of ASC.<sup>1</sup> What the twelfth-century writers chose to perpetuate or to invent about the eleventh century is often original, without grounding in their eleventh-century sources. The story of Æthelred illustrates this point best: WM's narrative is the original source of his great infamy—not ASC.

Third, WM's, Henry's and John's narrative patterns reveal that the purported divide between their sympathies for the English and the Normans is irrelevant to their views of kingship.<sup>2</sup> Their expectations for individual kings transcend their sympathies for any particular population, be it an army or a *gens*. Each historian's choice of material and sources depended on his individual project of explaining events and assigning blame, within a framework of belief that the king had the power to influence events.

We have now seen how three authors, WM, Henry and John, rework material primarily from ASC in such a way as to exonerate the English defence against Danes and Normans by redistributing blame and responsibility: but what of the two entirely different

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<sup>1</sup> For different views on John's objectives, cf. Hayward, *Winchcombe*, i, 63–73; H.M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity, 1066–1220* (Oxford, 2003), 245–6; A. Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge, 1995), 168–70.

<sup>2</sup> But cf. J. Gillingham, 'Henry of Huntingdon and the Twelfth-Century Revival of the English Nation', in his *The English in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, 2000), 123–144, at 129; R.H.C. Davis, *The Normans and their Myth* (London, 1976), 124, 129.

pictures of the English kings? It is important to stress that ASC is not the source of a negative attitude towards Æthelred or Harold: it did not dictate either a positive or a negative view of the defending kings which the twelfth-century historians were likely, or bound, to follow.<sup>3</sup>

It is in the realm of distributing responsibility that the twelfth-century accounts are not as different as they appear. All three writers add a significant and new degree of responsibility and accountability to their defending kings who confront conquest. WM attributes causal responsibility to Æthelred and Harold for causing the catastrophic failures of the English, and moral responsibility for the armies' failure, cowardice and desertion. Henry attributes causal responsibility to the kings for eliciting God's retribution on specific occasions through their actions, and moral responsibility for oath breaking, and for bringing God's wrath upon the English. John's defending kings have causal responsibility for being effective in command and for routing the enemy; they have moral responsibility both for their desire to defend their people, and for doing so. All three historians maintain consistency in theme and in tone, bringing these to varying versions and kinds of information. They differ in their reasoning about and portrayal of defeat, but not in their new attention to whether or not, and on what grounds, a defending king fulfilled his responsibility to his kingdom.

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<sup>3</sup> But cf. Keynes for a contrary view; above, 45–62.

## PART THREE: CONQUERING KINGS

### CNUT

The examination of conquerors asks different questions from that of the defenders. In the case of the defenders, their constancy is what mattered to the historians. For the conquerors it was their change—from enemy into the most important defender of all, the king. The conquerors must go through a transition which the defenders never had to. How then do the historians account for this difference? How do they narrate the conquerors over time? This is the key question which will inform the entire subsequent analysis.

After protracted years of Danish invasions of England, Cnut acceded to the English throne in 1016. Working with Wulfstan and other ecclesiastical officials, he produced legislation that echoed earlier eras of prosperity. In so doing he claimed his own right to rule, but also emphasized continuity and consistency with his predecessors in England.<sup>1</sup> He ruled until 1035, and after succession disputes and the reign of his son Harthacnut, Danish dominion in England ended in 1042.

Cnut's reign did not necessarily lend itself to obvious interpretations in the twelfth century: indeed, there was very little source material about him.<sup>2</sup> The few contemporary accounts of Cnut have meant that the Danish Conquest and its historiography tend to be studied less, and considered of less import, than the Norman Conquest by modern scholars.<sup>3</sup> ASC, the primary narrative source for WM, Henry and John, is notably brief

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g.: A.G. Kennedy, 'Cnut's Law Code of 1018', *ASE* 11 (1983), 57–81; *Canute's Proclamation of 1027* (Liebermann, i, 276–7); *MEL*, 345–66; R. Fleming, *Kings and Lords in Conquest England* (Cambridge, 1991), 21–2; S. Foot, 'The Making of *Anglucynn*: English Identity before the Norman Conquest', *TRHS*, 6th series, 6 (1996), 25–49, at 25 n.2, 47; P. Wormald, 'Engla Lond: the Making of an Allegiance', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7 (1994), 1–24, at 10.

<sup>2</sup> A. Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500–1066* (London, 1999), 123–4; for a detailed background on these sources, see M.K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (Harlow, 1993), 49–80.

<sup>3</sup> E. Trehearne, *Living Through Conquest: The Politics of Early English, 1020–1220* (Oxford, 2012), 11; but cf. R. Fleming, *Kings and Lords in Conquest England* (Cambridge, 1991), 21–52.

for the last ten years of Cnut's reign.<sup>4</sup> All were aware of the influential legacy of Cnut's laws;<sup>5</sup> WM and John may have known the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* or a source with shared material but do not quote it; some stories about Cnut appear to have roots in an Anglo-Scandinavian oral tradition.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, these twelfth-century historians, writing over a century later, had to reconcile several considerations in narrating Cnut's reign, probably on the basis of very little written narrative.

What did the Danish Conquest mean for England, especially since Danish rule there was relatively brief? Was Cnut's legal legacy and piety enough to transcend his history as a violent oppressor? As I argue, all three writers present Cnut as a true English king who earns the right to rule through fulfilling and excelling in his royal responsibilities. Each does so in a slightly different way; the significant commonalities are the attribution of a great degree of responsibility to the king and the almost constitutive force which the office of kingship appears to have on the development of Cnut's character.

### **WM on Cnut**

WM criticizes Æthelred without reservation for his failure to defend England from the Danes, deeming him personally responsible. The value which WM places on the personal responsibility of his English kings is not limited to those of English heritage. Cnut, though himself the conqueror and guilty of barbaric behaviour, is not doomed to unworthiness of English kingship, because WM permits him to earn this worthiness on the basis of proven character, military success, reciprocal loyalty to his men, and piety.

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<sup>4</sup> ASC (CDE) 1016–1035; see also: Treharne, *Living Through Conquest*, 11.

<sup>5</sup> See most comprehensively: P. Stafford, 'The laws of Cnut and the history of Anglo-Saxon royal promises', *ASE* 10 (1982), 173–90.

<sup>6</sup> C.E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1939), 175–226.

WM establishes Cnut's authority as a king by emphasizing his spatial and temporal proximity to the civilized world of Roman inheritance, thereby qualifying him as a civilized and worthy king of England despite his origins perceived as remote from Christendom. His kingship of England in turn makes him worthy of authority in the civilized world. For WM, England is a place where a European king can be made.

It should be noted that WM drew on many more sources than ASC, and does not follow its narrative as closely as do John and Henry. What is significant is what WM does with the material available to him, and how he suggests in his narrative that this evidence should be interpreted. I will begin by examining how WM's assessment of Cnut improves over the course of narrative time. I will then turn to the relationship between Cnut and the English, and how this illustrates WM's attitude towards the distribution of responsibility between them, before turning to the evidence WM presents that Cnut is actively taking responsibility and genuinely seeking to improve himself and to be worthy of this new role.

In WM's narrative, the character, behaviour and worthiness of Cnut improves over time. But unlike in the narratives of John and Henry, it is less a particular moment and more a transition over time that marks the important change in Cnut. Because WM is so very critical of Cnut before he becomes king, a wholesale change in a single moment might be almost unbelievable. The important point for WM is that Cnut can and does change to become a worthy and legitimate king of England: the office improves him, and he rises to its standards. Although WM directs an acerbic tone towards Cnut the invader, Cnut's foreign origins and reprehensible behaviour do not make it impossible for WM to deem him a worthy king of England.

Before Cnut becomes king of England, WM portrays him explicitly as a barbarian who flaunts wrongdoing, without the concession to his intent that we find in Henry. The

criticism accentuates points made in earlier insular sources: Cnut is an outsider and has no legitimate authority in England.<sup>7</sup> Yet this same harsh criticism makes WM's eventual acceptance and praise of Cnut as king the more striking. William writes of Cnut's landing at Sandwich in 1014:

Ibi, humano et diuino iure contempto, obsides quos habebat, magnae nobilitatis et elegantiae pueros, naribus et auribus truncos, quosdam etiam euirauit; sic in insontes grassatus, et magnum quid egisse gloriatus, patriam petiit.<sup>8</sup>

The crimes are displayed not as part of the course of war, but as those that transcend war in their horror. William castigates Cnut's arrogance by describing him boasting of his treatment of innocent victims. That Cnut 'patriam petiit' reminds the reader that Cnut is foreign: he is not yet of England. It might seem that based on these harsh criticisms, WM could never consider Cnut legitimate.

Yet unlike ASC for 1014, William does not mention that the nobles banned Danish kings from England for all time.<sup>9</sup> Were WM to preserve this injunction, Cnut's subsequent reign would be illegitimate and unsupported. William's omission means that despite his censure of Cnut the invader, Cnut's reign as king of England is not damned before it has begun. WM was making room for Cnut to become a king of England who possessed authority and legitimate power despite his Danish origins and conquest.

The final dispute over the crown between Edmund and Cnut, and its resolution, provides the keenest insight into WM's gradual redemption of Cnut. Like Henry and Geffrei Gaimar, WM includes a reference to single combat between Edmund and Cnut,

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. ASC (CDE) 1014, wherein the English outlaw all Danish kings: above, 54–5.

<sup>8</sup> 'There, in defiance of law human and divine, he took the hostages whom he had with him, boys of high birth and elegant upbringing, cut off their ears and noses, and even castrated some of them. After this outrageous attack on the innocent, boasting as though he had done some great exploit, he returned to his native land.' *GR* ii.179.3, i, 310–11. ASC (CDE) 1014 was the source for the details of cutting off the hostages' hands and noses; the rest is WM's addition. Cf. J. Gillingham, 'Civilizing the English? The English Histories of William of Malmesbury and David Hume', *Historical Research*, 74 (2001), 17–43, at 37.

<sup>9</sup> Above, 54–5; cf. JW [1014], below, 187.

which Cnut refuses.<sup>10</sup> But he tells the story differently and with different implications.

Edmund proposes the duel initially on the grounds that his and Cnut's worldly ambitions would make them responsible—and reprehensible—for the deaths of their subjects in pursuit of these ambitions. He writes:

Edmundus singularem pugnam petiit, ne duo homunculi propter ambitionem regnandi tot subiectorum sanguine culparentur, cum possent sine dispendio fidelium suorum fortunam experiri; magnam utrilibet laudem futuram, qui suo potissimum periculo tantum regnum nancisceretur.<sup>11</sup>

WM thereby reiterates a theme familiar from his criticisms of Æthelred and Harold: the king is wholly and personally responsible for his men and accountable for their loss and defeat. Yet even this proposal by Edmund is not the most profound statement on the gravity of royal responsibility: WM's description of the proposed duel between Edmund and Cnut is more illuminating still.

WM's interpretation of single combat is especially intriguing because he casts Cnut's refusal as a gesture on behalf of peace, and as such as an even better solution than engaging in the duel. In WM's version, Edmund proposes single combat as a way to avoid their mutual guilt for the deaths of their subjects; Cnut refuses. The ensuing passage shows remarkably the development of enthusiasm in response to Cnut's suggestion. WM writes (as though paraphrasing a remark of Cnut's) that Cnut did not consider himself physically a match for Edmund, and:

uerum quia ambo non indebite regnum efflagitent quod patres amborum tenuerint, conuenire prudentiae ut depositis animositatibus Angliam partiantur. Susceptum est hoc dictum ab utroque exercitu magnoque assensu firmatum, quod et aequitati conuadraret, et mortalium paci tot miseriis defatigatorum placide consuleret.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The story is first recorded in the *HA*; it is not in *ASC* or *JW* and may originate from oral tradition; see Wright, *Cultivation of Saga*, 191–7; cf. *HA*, below, 175–6.; Gaimar, *EE* II.4255–78, 232–9.

<sup>11</sup> 'Edmund then asked for single combat, rather than have two mortal men moved by ambition to be king carry the guilt for the blood of so many of their subjects, when it was possible to put fortune to the test without the loss of any of their faithful dependants; great credit would be due to whichever of them should acquire so great a kingdom at his own private risk and no one else's.' *GR* ii.180.8, i, 316–19.

<sup>12</sup> 'Surely, since both not without reason were demanding a kingdom which had been held by the parents of both, it would be sensible to lay aside their enmity and divide England's between them. This remark was taken up by both armies and ratified with massive agreement, as both consonant with justice and a benign

Cnut's remark establishes him as capable of (and affirms him as) acting with reason and with acknowledgement to the claims of heritage of both Edmund and himself. Both English and Danes enthusiastically recognize Cnut's 'prudencia' as just, and as progress towards the peace desired by all. Edmund's agreement in the next sentence emphasizes the soundness of and collective support for Cnut's idea: 'Ita Edmundus unanimi clamore omnium superatus concordiae indulsit, fedusque cum Cnutone percussit, sibi Westsaxonum, illi concedens Mertiam.'<sup>13</sup> In this episode, WM makes it appear that single combat would only have been continued fighting, rather than the best means to peace. By contrast, Cnut's proposition of peace appears to be both the right and the popular choice. In his version of the story, then, WM permits Cnut to progress in his character from being a barbarian to being the primary advocate of peace and justice. It also means that WM does not doom Cnut to inadequacy for English kingship because of his earlier behaviour as an invader.

WM acknowledges the injustice of Cnut's accession, but still praises the way he conducted his kingship of England. He writes at the beginning of Cnut's uncontested reign as king: 'iniuste quidem regnum ingressus sed magna ciuilitate et fortitudine uitam componens'.<sup>14</sup> This comment presents a striking contrast to the way in which WM castigates Æthelred for his failed leadership. In both cases, WM associates worthiness for kingship of England with the king's conduct, character and behaviour as king. He does not permit his conquering king to diminish English kingship: once Cnut is king, WM stresses his 'ciuilitas' and 'fortitudo'.

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step towards peace among mortals who were already exhausted by so much misery.' *GR* ii.180.8–9, i, 318–9.

<sup>13</sup> 'Edmund, overwhelmed by the unanimous and universal shouts of approval, gave peace a chance, and made a treaty with Cnut which assigned himself Wessex, and the other Mercia.' *GR* ii.180.9, i, 318–19.

<sup>14</sup> 'There was no great justice in his succession to the throne, but he arranged his life with great statesmanship and courage.' *GR* ii.181.1, i, 320–1. Cf. Gillingham, 'Civilizing the English?', 37.

Cnut's transformation and progress are most evident when Cnut succeeds to the whole kingdom of England on the death of Edmund Ironside. When Eadric delivers the news that he has killed Edmund for Cnut, Cnut delivers what William deems to be just punishment:

'Edmundum pro te primo deserui, post etiam ob fidelitatem tui extinxi.' Quo dicto Cnutoni faties immutata iram rubore prodidit, et continuo prolata sententia 'Merito ergo' inquit 'et tu moriere, cum sis lesae maiestatis reus in Deum et in me, qui dominum proprium et fratrem michi federatum occideris. Sanguis tuus super caput tuum, quia os tuum locutum est contra te quod misisti manus in christum Domini.' Mox, ne tumultus fieret, in eodem cubiculo proditor fauces elisus et per fenestram in Tamensem precipitatus perfidiae meritum habuit.<sup>15</sup>

To promote Cnut's authority as a king delivering just sentence, William has Cnut speak in language evocative of biblical kingship. Cnut's words invoke 2 Kings 1:16,<sup>16</sup> wherein a young man kills Saul at Saul's request, and brings the diadem and bracelet to David, but David kills him for slaying 'the Lord's anointed'. In both cases, the transgressor's intent is unimportant: the fact that he has killed a king makes the sentence just. By using David's language and argument, William has Cnut include himself in the tradition of Old Testament kings and act with the according authority.

In no way does WM interpret the English loss as a sign of shame, nor does he portray the English as victims of conquest. He makes a point of showing Cnut seeking to conciliate the English: 'Ita cum omnis Anglia pareret uni, ille ingenti studio Anglos sibi conciliare, aequum illis ius cum Danis suis in consessu in concilio in prelio concedere.'<sup>17</sup> WM then explains that Cnut chose his wife—Emma, already known to the

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<sup>15</sup> ' "First I abandoned Edmund for you," [Eadric] said, "and then also put him to death out of loyalty to you." At these words Cnut's expression changed; his face flushed with anger, and he delivered sentence forthwith. "Then you too," he said, "will deserve to die, if you are guilty of high treason against God and myself by killing your own lord and a brother who was in alliance with me. Thy blood be on thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying that thou hast lifted up thy hand against the Lord's anointed." And then, to avoid a public disturbance, the traitor was strangled in that same chamber and thrown out of the window into the Thames, thus paying the due penalty for his perfidy.' *GR* ii.181.2., i, 320–1.

<sup>16</sup> Mynors et al., *GR*, i, 320 n.2.

<sup>17</sup> 'Thus all England obeyed a single master, and he took great pains to conciliate the English, allowing them the same rights as his own Danes in order of seating, in council, and in battle.' *GR* ii.181.3, i, 322–3.

English as their queen—in part so that his subjects would be less likely to resent foreign rule.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, now that Cnut has been chosen king, William becomes more positive in his attitude towards Cnut: he begins to approach the moral standards expected of the office. William summarizes the transformation by explaining Cnut's deeds as king of England as self-conscious self-correction. He writes that Cnut venerates English saints, restores English monasteries and honours his predecessor Edmund, concluding: 'Ita omnia quae ipse et antecessores sui deliquerant corrigere satagens, prioris iniustitiae neuum apud Deum fortassis, apud homines certe abstersit.'<sup>19</sup> According to WM, that Cnut recognized his sins and endeavoured to redeem himself was at least enough for men to recognize him as worthy and legitimate. WM still at this point in the narrative admits uncertainty ('fortassis') about Cnut. But as we will see, by the time WM comes to later events in Cnut's reign, he writes without hesitation or qualification about Cnut absolving himself of sin.

William presents Cnut as an imperial ruler like Caesar in order to buttress Cnut's authority as a worthy king in the Roman tradition. Yet he does so in a way that makes England the seat and centre of Cnut's authority, thereby making England both a participant in the Roman tradition and a place with an improving effect. The relevant passage describes Cnut's regal generosity and campaigns while he is king of England:

Wintoniae masime munificentiae suae magnificentiam ostendit, ubi tanta intulit ut moles metallorum terreat aduenarum animos, splendor gemmarum reuerberet intuentium oculos; Emmae suggestu, quae in talibus thesauros dilapidabat sanctitate prodiga, dum ille in exteris terris dura meditaretur prelia. Nam nescia uirtus eius stare loco, nec contenta Danemarkia quam auito et Anglia quam bellico iure obtinebat, martem in Sweuos transtulit. Sunt illi Danis contermini, pertinacioribus studiis iram Cnutonis emeriti.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *GR* ii.181.3, i, 322–3.

<sup>19</sup> 'Thus he did his best to correct all the misdoings of himself and his predecessors, and wiped away the stain of earlier injustice, perhaps before God and certainly in the eyes of men.' *GR* ii.181.5, i, 322–3.

<sup>20</sup> 'At Winchester especially he exhibited the munificence of his generosity, where his offerings were such that foreigners are alarmed by the masses of precious metal and their eyes dazzled as they look at the

There are several things worth noting about this passage that inform the way in which William constructs the location and quality of Cnut's authority. First, William characterizes Cnut in classical language used to describe Caesar: in writing of Cnut's 'nescia uirtus eius stare loco', he quotes the early lines of Lucan's *Pharsalia*.<sup>21</sup> William's description does not criticize greed: it conveys imperial ambition. Second, WM's comment about the impertinent designs of the Swedes draws attention away from the fact that Cnut once had these designs on England. Now that he is king of the English, he is the defender and others are the enemy.

Third, the passage makes England the fount of Cnut's authority and power. William's emphasis on Cnut's generosity to Winchester suggests that Cnut is a successor to the Old English kings, many of whom were buried there. The foreigners marveling at Cnut's works indicate that England is a destination for outsiders: Cnut and England are central, not remote. Fourth, William refers to Cnut's campaigns in 'foreign lands' (while his Norman wife Emma promotes his good works in England), which transforms England into the centre of his prospective northern empire. Cnut is not a Viking invader threatening to engulf England in a greater barbarian world, but a king of England with a restless spirit of imperial expansion: one who draws outsiders in by conquest or by reports of his lavish generosity. In commenting on Cnut's right of conquest ('Anglia quam bellico iure obtinebat'), WM is acknowledging Cnut as England's just ruler. The passage transforms Cnut into England's Caesar of the northern world.

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flashing gems ... [This] was prompted by Emma, who bestowed her treasure on such things with lavish piety, while her husband was planning hard campaigns in foreign lands; for his was 'the valour that knows not how to stand still', and not content with Denmark which he held by inheritance and England which was his by right of war, he set upon the Swedes. They are neighbours of the Danes, and had roused Cnut's resentment by their obstinate ambitions.' *GR* ii.181.5, i, 322–3.

<sup>21</sup> '“valour that knows not how to stand still”', *GR* ii.181.5, i, 322–3; Mynors et al., *GR*, i, 322 n.2; cf. Lucan on Caesar, *Pharsalia*, i.143–5.

WM makes a remarkable statement about the persistence of the English and their honour in battle when he describes their behaviour in Cnut's campaign against the Swedes. He gives them the opportunity to prove their worth despite being the victims of a foreign conquest. WM singles out the English forces as the most exemplary in battle, and then explains why they distinguished themselves so well:

promptissimis ea pugna Anglis, hortante Goduino comite ut pristinae gloriae memores robur suum oculis noui domini assererent: illud fuisse fortunae quod ab eo quondam uicti fuissent, istud uirtutis quod illos premerent qui eum uicissent. Incubuere igitur uiribus Angli, et uictoriam consummantes comitatum duci, sibi laudem pararunt.<sup>22</sup>

The word 'igitur' makes it apparent that Godwine's exhortation was the reason and motivation behind the success of the English, whom WM essentially transforms into invaders. And as WM explains later in his narrative, he considers Godwine '[m]aximus ... iustitiae propugnator',<sup>23</sup> which suggests that Godwine's words would carry some moral weight for WM. The story of Godwine's advice and the English victory bear several intriguing implications for WM's narrative. First, Godwine's observation offers the suggestion that the initial defeat was not the fault of the English: accountability is allocated instead to fate. But this does not absolve the English of responsibility in the present. For a second implication is that to be twice-defeated would be most shameful, which is an especially interesting point given that WM's is the most potent castigation of Æthelred, and on these same grounds. The victory—which is on behalf of the imperial ambition WM praises—also permits the English and their earl to emerge untarnished by earlier defeat. Fortune, as WM's Godwine attributes it to the earlier defeat, provides a

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<sup>22</sup> 'The greatest readiness in battle was shown by the English, who were encouraged by Earl Godwine to remember their former glory and display their courage before the eyes of their new lord: they owed it to fortune, he said, that they had once been beaten by Cnut; they would owe it to their own valour that they were too much for those who had beaten him. The English therefore exerted all their strength, and by completing their victory secured earldom for their leader and renown for themselves.' *GR* ii.181.6, i, 322–5.  
<sup>23</sup> 'The principal champion of justice', *GR* ii.188.1, i, 334–5.

convenient scapegoat: the English have less shame to compensate for in this test of their valour.

WM shows the English and Cnut working in concord to a common purpose. The fact of conquest has not diminished the English; if anything, Cnut's victories (both imperial and legal) reflect well on England. The English are inspired to victory primarily by the words of their own countryman—words spoken to motivate the English to defend the honour of their king, their earl and themselves in victory.

In one particularly key passage later into Cnut's reign, WM describes Cnut atoning for wrongdoing: 'Cnuto quinto decimo anno regni Romam profectus est. Ibi aliquantis diebus commoratus et elemosinis per aecclesias peccata redimens, nauigo Angliam rediit'.<sup>24</sup> ASC mentions Cnut's trip to Rome, but not that Cnut was redeemed from sin.<sup>25</sup> This addition is particular to WM, and it makes clear that there is no hesitation in confirming that the absolution Cnut sought was effected.

WM diminishes what he considers to be Cnut's remote, Viking origins and barbaric behaviour, instead emphasizing his good behaviour as king of England, and the progress his character makes towards that end. The office of English kingship essentially activates his character. Once Cnut is the English king, his character improves and fulfils many qualities of ideal kingship in a classical and biblical tradition. The sense is that there is something particular about English kingship worthy of aspiration, and which establishes a high standard for those who hold it. Although Cnut's behaviour was reprehensible as an invader, WM permits him to redeem himself, not in an instant, but over time as king.

WM continues to praise Cnut's distinguished military exploits as England's king. In his description of Cnut's raid in Scotland, WM writes: 'et mox Scottiam rebellantem

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<sup>24</sup> 'In the fifteenth year of his reign Cnut set off for Rome, and spent some days there; then, after redeeming his sins by distributing alms among the churches, returned to England by sea.' *GR* ii.182.1, i, 324–5.

<sup>25</sup> ASC (DE) 1031 [1027].

regemque Malcolmum expeditione illuc ducta paruo subegit negotio.<sup>26</sup> There is no parallel for the phrase ‘paruo ... negotio’ in ASC.<sup>27</sup> WM’s addition of this phrase underlines the impressiveness of Cnut’s power as an English king with imperial ambition. It is worth contrasting this sense with WM’s criticism of Cnut when he was an invader of England, a role which made his ambition barbaric and reprehensible instead of regal and Roman.

WM reiterates explicitly that Cnut has improved his character, and suggests that this improvement makes him worthy of office. The implication is that conquest alone could not make him a just ruler for WM. Cnut’s efforts to improve the link between England and the continent prove his authority and quality as an English king for WM. WM includes Cnut’s Letter to the English in 1027, which described Cnut’s successes, first remarking:

Veruntamen non inoperosum uidebitur si epistolam, quam Roma digrediens  
Anglis suis per Liuingum Tauistokiensem abbatem, mox episcopum  
Cridintunensem misit, apponam ad documentum emendationis uitae et regalis  
magnificentiae.<sup>28</sup>

WM does not simply include the letter, but explains directly that it should be read as evidence of Cnut’s improvement. This suggests two important things: first, that it is crucial for WM’s narrative to show both that Cnut is legitimate; otherwise, the English would appear shamed by defeat—and doubly so because Danish rule did not last for more than a generation. Second, proven progress of Cnut’s character does indeed make him legitimate and overcomes his past. Furthermore, Cnut wrote the letter as sovereign of England: indeed, the first realm mentioned in Cnut’s title at the letter’s outset is England:

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Soon after, he led an expedition to Scotland, and had little difficulty in subduing the Scots, who were in revolt, and their king Malcolm.’ *GR* ii.182.1, i, 324–5.

<sup>27</sup> ASC (DE) 1031 [1027]. D reports that the lordship bond did not last, but WM probably did not have D (see Whitelock, *EHD*, 124); E mentions the submission of Malcolm without comment.

<sup>28</sup> ‘But it will not be unhelpful if I append the letter, which on his departure from Rome he sent his English subjects by the hand of Lyfing abbot of Tavistock, later Bishop of Crediton, as evidence of his amended life and royal generosity.’ *GR* ii.182.1, i, 324–5. See also: Treharne, *Living Through Conquest*, 17, 28–47.

‘ “Cnuto rex totius Angliae et Danemarkiae et Norregiae et partis Swauorum” ’<sup>29</sup>—a pattern of which John makes much, as we will see.

The letter explains Cnut’s honourable reception by Pope John XIX and Emperor Conrad II, and describes their willingness to meet Cnut’s grievances on behalf ‘totius populi mei tam Angli quam Dani’.<sup>30</sup> It also recounts Cnut’s victories in easing travel to Rome and in reducing the need for it: archbishops need no longer travel to receive the pallium. Cnut makes England less remote from the civilized, Christian world—yet according to the letter, Cnut’s authority as king of England, recognized by the pope and emperor, makes these changes possible. Because of Cnut’s deeds, England is central instead of peripheral:<sup>31</sup> like a microcosm of Rome, it can save souls, house saints and confirm bishops. By preserving and praising Cnut’s deeds William helps his overall image of pre-Conquest England: Cnut’s successes show that the office of kingship in England is recognized by authorities on the continent. This recognition in turn provides further testimony in WM’s narrative that Cnut is a worthy English king.

For WM, Cnut’s authority and legitimacy as an English king arises particularly from his efforts to maintain English traditions for eternity. William observes that Cnut ordered the Old English kings’ laws, especially those of Æthelred, to be observed forever:

Omnes enim leges ab antiquis regibus et maxime ab antecessore suo Egelredo latas sub interminatione regiae multae *perpetuis temporibus* observari precepit; in quarum custodiam etiam nunc tempore bonorum sub nomine regis Eduardi iuratur, *non quod ille statuerit sed quod obseruarit*.<sup>32</sup> [italics added]

Edward is worthy here because he preserved laws: the passage implies by extension that Cnut, who actually codified English law, is more worthy. William explicitly connects

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Cnut, king of all England, Denmark, and Norway, and of part of the Swedes’, *GR* ii.183.1, i, 324–5.

<sup>30</sup> ‘of all my people, both English and Danes’, *GR* ii.183.3, i, 326–7.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. WM’s description of Cnut’s Winchester as a centre of western Christendom, above, 162–3.

<sup>32</sup> ‘He gave orders that all the laws enacted by the ancient kings, and particularly by his predecessor Æthelred, should be observed *in perpetuity* under threat of a royal fine; and for the observance of these laws, even now that times have improved, an oath is taken in the name of King Edward, *not because he established them, but because he kept them*.’ [italics added] *GR* ii.183.9, i, 328–31.

Cnut to his immediate predecessor Æthelred and to Edward the Confessor, the last lauded English king, and not to any Norman king. This has the effect of making Cnut less remote: he is presented not as an invader, but as one in a line of English kings with a legal legacy.

WM characterizes the period of Cnut's reign as one in which the king was wise, pious and good, and the English people were as well. WM appears to imply a connection. Cnut's reign was not a time of subjection: WM explains that during Cnut's reign ('tunc'), many among the English distinguished themselves quite well: 'Erant tunc in Anglia summi et sapientissimi uiri, quorum precipuus Egelnodus'.<sup>33</sup> This comment comes immediately after WM has praised Cnut for keeping his promise and for upholding English law. WM expresses no lamentation for any loss, and gives Cnut personal credit for England's improvement.

WM includes details that highlight Cnut's regal piety, supporting his positive characterization of Cnut as king both with evidence and style of writing. WM uses language to emphasize that Cnut's reform and redemption are both thorough and evident in his behaviour. WM reports:

Porro Cnuto Glastoniensem aeclesiam, ut fratris sui Edmundi manes inuiseret (sic enim eum uocare solitus fuerat), festinauit, factaque oratione super sepulchrum pallium misit uersicoloribus figuris pauonum, ut uidetur, intextum.<sup>34</sup>

That Cnut considers and treats Edmund as his brother, not only honouring him but moving with attentive haste ('festinauit') conveys the sense that Cnut's piety is genuine and his character entirely reformed.

WM shows Cnut as a pious English king who distributes his generosity widely, and hence impressively. WM goes on to mention and includes the charter of privileges

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<sup>33</sup> 'In those days there were in England men of high quality and wisdom, chief among whom was Æthelnoth', *GR* ii.184.1, i, 330–1.

<sup>34</sup> 'Cnut, moreover, hastened to the church of Glastonbury to visit the remains of his brother Edmund (for so he used to call him), and having offered prayers he placed over his tomb a pall woven with figures apparently of peacocks in various colours.' *GR* ii.184.2, i, 330–1.

which Cnut grants to Æthelnoth, bishop of Winchester.<sup>35</sup> He adds that Cnut took the counsel of Æthelnoth in giving money to Chartres and other churches on the continent. WM's image of the king deferring to the advice of an important bishop suggests that his character is particularly worthy of praise.

WM makes a point of giving further evidence for the great generosity of Cnut. He writes of Fulbert: 'Extat inter cetera opuscula eius epistolarum uolumen, in quarum una gratias agit Cnutoni magnificentissimo regi, quod largitatis suae uiscera in expensas aecclisiae Carnotensis effuderit.'<sup>36</sup> WM is evidently acquainted with the whole volume of Fulbert's letters,<sup>37</sup> but he chooses to include the details of only one: that which extols the regal and pious virtues of Cnut. And indeed, this is the last detail which WM gives us about Cnut's lifetime before announcing Cnut's death and subsequent burial at Winchester.<sup>38</sup> No trace of the barbarically behaved invader remains, only the testimony (to Cnut's piety and generosity) of important ecclesiastical figures in England and on the continent—the kind of testimony which WM characteristically considers persuasive.

## Conclusions

For WM, Cnut had power over England through right of conquest, a power which could have been tainted because of the injustice and barbarity which WM acknowledged in Cnut. His authority was more complicated than that of an English king who had inherited: Cnut was not a 'natural lord' of England, nor did he hail from a civilized, Christian background. But WM chooses to mediate the problems posed by a foreign ruler and to imbue Cnut with authority as an English king, despite his potential inadequacy as a

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<sup>35</sup> *GR* ii.184.2–185.4, i, 330–3.

<sup>36</sup> 'Among his other works is to be found a volume of letters, in one of which he expresses his thanks for the great generosity of King Cnut, in lavishing the bounty of his munificence on the costs of Chartres Cathedral.' *GR* ii.186.1, i, 332–5.

<sup>37</sup> Thomson, *GR*, ii, 176–7.

<sup>38</sup> *GR* ii.187.2, i, 334–5.

Danish invader held to the standards of the perceived supremacy of Rome and continental civilization. WM portrays his authority deriving from his successes in linking England to the Roman world in space and time, and from the particular high quality of the office of kingship in England. He judges Cnut responsible for his own behaviour and character and deems him worthy and capable of—and ultimately successful in—overcoming his past through consistent behaviour befitting his new office.

We find echoes of WM's interest in the classical past in his portrayal of Cnut. His Cnut was Caesar-like in that he preserved the laws and customs of conquered lands instead of replacing them. Yet there is a degree of irony in how WM portrays the fount of his authority as located in England, and in how he casts Cnut's imperial ambitions as centred in England, not in Denmark. As we will see similarly with Henry, WM is careful not to portray Cnut as a Danish Caesar—king of a Danish empire, in which Denmark is the heart and England is a province. Rather, England is both the seat and the making of Cnut's authority as a European king.

Cnut was a king who could have been seen as an invader of a remote place, hailing from a region still more remote, doomed to inadequacy for the office of English kingship because of his barbaric behaviour consistent with his origins. Instead, Cnut bridged England with the heart of the western world, and drew his authority from the fact of his kingship in England. Over the course of his narrative of Cnut's reign, WM permits Cnut to prove himself and ultimately speaks of Cnut's absolution without reservation. Consistent with his overall historiographical project, WM thereby revives the history of England and its pre-Conquest kings, promoting a vision of England not as a distant, barbaric or invaded territory, but as a noble kingdom ruled by a king of quality.

### **Henry on Cnut**

The moment in which Cnut becomes king, as for WM, is important for Henry: it defines his change from unwelcome and destructive invader to legitimate king of England. As we have seen, WM portrays Cnut as a barbarian who flaunts wrongdoing before becoming king of England. Henry, however, never reveals any overt animosity towards Cnut. He shows Cnut as sensitive to his obligations as defender of the English even before he becomes their king. He avoids the need to change Cnut's character dramatically by showing him to have a sense of his duties and responsibilities even before taking the throne.

Henry makes Cnut worthy of being an English king by offering original insights into his mind and motivations, even as he mostly follows the details of ASC. That the Danes inflicted damage upon England over the course of several years and battles makes their conquest different from the Norman Conquest, providing historians with different things to explain. Nevertheless we will find important repeated patterns in the way Henry distributes responsibility in conquest.

Henry's Cnut is less responsible for the damage the Danes inflicted upon England. Henry portrays Cnut with the intentions not of an evil destroyer, but of a leader defending his people—both Danish and English. Thus even before Cnut becomes king, he has the potential of being a worthy ruler of England. Will and intent are important factors for Henry in determining whether a conqueror merits blame.

Cnut is not accountable for his actions against the English as an invader because he was the instrument of God, and as king, Henry has him do nothing shameful. Henry's approach to invasion and conquest suggests that he does not find English kingship to be inhabited illegitimately by Cnut. Rather, Cnut makes it more glorious to be an English king and even brings the land and its people into closer contact with God's will. We will begin by examining Henry's subtle changes in tone as Cnut wins royal rule in England,

then turn to Henry's narrative changes which make Cnut's character exemplary of English kingship. Lastly we will consider these details in the context of Henry's particular providential picture of England. Henry represents Cnut's conquest into something that is characteristic of, and represents progress for, England.

As I will argue, while Cnut is an invader, Henry is restrained about describing his good qualities, and shows him as the inferior leader to king Edmund by comparison. Yet he makes a point of anticipating and mentioning the qualities that will make him one of the greatest English kings. For Henry, Cnut's transition to the office would not be enough to compensate for Cnut's prior history as an invader and enemy of the English. Henry narrates a Cnut who, even as a conqueror, would be worthy of English kingship.

In his narrative of Cnut as invader, Henry ensures that Cnut has little improving to do on becoming king. In the passage below, Henry's narrative bemoans the suffering of English prisoners at Cnut's orders, but also anticipates Cnut's role as king of England by suggesting that his behaviour and mental state are motivated by his sense of responsibility for the English people—behaviour more befitting a defending king than an invader.

Henry retells the conflicts of 1014:

Cnut uero cum exercitu suo moratus apud Geinesburh usque ad PASCha, cum hominibus Lindeseige concordatus est. Quod audiens, rex Adelred cum maximo exercitu superueniens, prouinciam illam combussit, et prouinciales pene omnes interfecit. *Cnut uero intime dolens, gentem illam sui causa destructam, perrexit cum nauibus ad Sandwic.* Ibiq[ue] emittens obsides nobilissimos, qui erant patri suo traditi, abscidit eis manus et nasum. Preter hoc malum iussit rex exercitui, qui erat apud Grenewic, reddi xxi M. libras.<sup>39</sup> [italics added for material not in ASC]

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<sup>39</sup> 'But Cnut, with his army, stayed at Gainsborough until Easter, and came to an agreement with the men of Lindsey. When King Æthelred heard of this, he came down with a very great army, burnt that district, and put to death nearly all the inhabitants of the area. *Then Cnut, inwardly grieving that this people had been destroyed on account of him, went with ships to Sandwich.* There he put ashore the noble hostages who had been given to his father, cutting off their hands and noses. In addition to this evil deed, the king commanded that £21,000 be rendered to the army which was at Greenwich.' *HA* vi.10, 352–5. This last sentence is a near-literal translation of ASC (E) 1014, in which the appellation of king refers to Æthelred: ASC (CDE) 1014.

Henry appears to use the word ‘malum’ to refer to Æthelred’s deed of killing most of the people of the province, as in the sentence he refers to a subsequent deed of the king. The second specific crime which Henry criticizes in this section is Æthelred’s order to pay off the raiding army (‘iussit rex ... libras’)—a criticism familiar and unsurprising. It is noteworthy that he does not specify that Cnut deserves any blame for these events.

That Henry characterizes the hostages as noble shows that Henry regrets their fate. But Henry also implies that Cnut’s actions were motivated by grief and the desire to avenge the deaths of the people of Lindsey by punishing Æthelred. Henry does not excuse Cnut’s treatment of the hostages; nevertheless he gives a reason for Cnut’s behaviour. Henry’s account is similar to ASC, but the addition of Cnut’s inward feeling of grief for causing English deaths brings Cnut’s character closer, and suggests that he is inwardly thinking like a king of England, even if the effects of his behaviour remain lamentable and tragic.

Henry’s next comment reduces the impact of the deaths in Lindsey and the mutilation of the hostages by describing another, greater misfortune sent by God. Henry writes: ‘Addidit autem Dominus malis solitis malum insolitum. Mare namque ascendens solito superius, uillas cum populo submersit innumero.’<sup>40</sup> If anything, the phrase ‘malis solitis’ evokes not the recent presence of Cnut as an invader, but rather the failures of Æthelred as a defending king. Henry makes a significant change in reporting this event as compared to ASC.<sup>41</sup> ASC does not describe the flood as an unusual misfortune, nor does it mention God at all.<sup>42</sup> By invoking God in describing the tragedies of this year—adopting ASC’s narrative style but not its content, notably at this specific point in time—

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<sup>40</sup> ‘Moreover to these customary evils the Lord added an unaccustomed evil. For the sea, rising higher than it was accustomed, submerged villages with countless people.’ *HA* vi.10, 354–5.

<sup>41</sup> But cf. Greenway, *HA*, 354 n.45, citing only the similarity.

<sup>42</sup> ASC (CDE) 1014.

Henry reminds that providential power to cause disaster is always behind, and always stronger than, that of the individual kings.

Henry does not give his invader-Cnut a violent and destructive personality. Yet before Cnut is king of England, Henry makes a unique point of showing that he is inferior in glory to Edmund. ASC and John describe Edmund gathering his forces to fight Cnut; Henry reverses the story and has Cnut gather more forces to fight Edmund.<sup>43</sup> Henry mentions Edmund's 'belli festium decus'<sup>44</sup> at Brentford, going on to add: 'Rex igitur Cnut, summo timore perstrictus, manum suam multis copiis ad se mandatis augmentavit.'<sup>45</sup> That Cnut fears, and so must order more forces to fight Edmund, highlights Edmund's strength as a defending king. Furthermore, it shows that while the English king Edmund is winning great and glorious victories,<sup>46</sup> Cnut—the invader—is not an equally glorious king. Just as Cnut is 'perstrictus' by fear, so is Henry constrained by the need to avoid praise for an enemy, and to reserve praise for Cnut until he is king.

Henry makes a fascinating change from ASC in the moment when Cnut becomes king of England after his victory in Essex at ASC's *Assandun*, when he takes up the royal sceptre in London. ASC (E) observes: 'Pær hæfde Cnut sige 7 gefeaht him eall Engaland'.<sup>47</sup> But this comment is sandwiched between two others: 'Ða dyde Eadric ealdormann swa he oftor ær dyde: astealde þone fleam ærest mid Magesæton 7 swa aswac his cynehlaforde 7 ealle þeode.'<sup>48</sup> and a report of the deaths of 'eall se dugoð on Angelcinne.'<sup>49</sup> Cnut's victory comes amidst—literally and figuratively—betrayal and death for the English.

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<sup>43</sup> Above, 55, 103–4; see: Greenway, *HA*, 357 n.56.

<sup>44</sup> 'the joyous glory of the battle', *HA* vi.13, 356–7.

<sup>45</sup> 'And so king Cnut, constrained by great fear, increased his troop by summoning many additional forces.' *HA* vi.13, 356–7.

<sup>46</sup> *HA* vi.12–13, 356–7.

<sup>47</sup> 'There Cnut had the victory and won himself all England.' [E] ASC (CDE) 1016; Swanton, 152.

<sup>48</sup> 'Then Ealdorman Eadric did as he so often did before, first started the flight—with the Magonsæte—and thus betrayed his royal lord and the whole nation.' [E] ASC (CDE) 1016; Swanton, 152.

<sup>49</sup> 'all the chief men in the English race.' [E] ASC (CDE) 1016; Swanton, 151–2.

Henry writes: ‘Rex uero Cnut, tanta fretus uictoria, Lundoniam et scepra cepit regalia.’<sup>50</sup> The first significant change from ASC is that Henry speaks of Cnut in regal terms, instead of language that suggests the subjugation of a whole land to his own conquering and arbitrary will, as in ASC. Already the words ‘scepra’ and ‘regalia’ suggest more that Cnut has assumed an office, not forced his will on a whole nation. This change is subtle but no less marked. The second change is that Henry puts this sentence after describing the treachery of Eadric and the deaths, not between. For him, Cnut’s victory is not one disaster among many. Rather, Cnut assumes royal authority, an event which marks a change from betrayal and death into more honourable things like single combat and collective approval of a kingdom divided between him and Edmund.

The sentence discussed above beginning ‘Rex uero Cnut’ is the first in which Henry refers to Cnut as king not just of the Danes, but also of the English. From this moment the tone of Henry’s narrative begins to change: Henry recognizes that Cnut possesses authority as a king of England because his actions now have justice for the English people. Henry praises the strength and skill of both Cnut and Edmund, referring to them both as kings. He includes an account (not in ASC) of how nobles on both sides propose a duel between them:

Hinc autem formidantes fortitudinem regis Edmundi, illinc uero Cnut regis dixerunt intra se proceres, ‘Cur insensati necis periculum tocies incurrimus? Pugnent singulariter, qui regnare student singulariter.’ Placuit sententia regibus. Nec enim mediocris erat rex Cnut probitatis.<sup>51</sup>

It is Cnut who initiates the cessation of the duel he fights with Edmund, motivated in part by self-preservation, and proposes that the two kings share power in England and

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<sup>50</sup> ‘King Cnut, strengthened by this great victory, took London and the royal authority.’ *HA* vi.13, 360–1.

<sup>51</sup> ‘But the nobles, fearing on one side the strength of King Edmund and on the other that of King Cnut, said amongst themselves, “Why do we so often rush foolishly into mortal danger? Let those who want to reign as individuals fight as individuals.” The idea satisfied the kings. For King Cnut was not lacking in prowess.’ *HA* vi.13, 360–1. See also: Greenway, *HA*, 360 n.68.

Denmark: the people assent ‘pre gaudio lacrimante’.<sup>52</sup> These remarks make a striking statement about royal responsibility, and in this respect one of the most important in the *Historia*. The nobles propose the duel not just to save lives, but also because they decide that the dispute is really between two individuals, the kings. Especially in light of the current discourse about collective identities in twelfth-century historical writing—including national identity, political allegiances and the differences between representations of and feelings about the English and the Normans<sup>53</sup>—this comment is important because it suggests that English kingship has less to do with origin, birth or being a natural lord<sup>54</sup> than with the desire and ability to be an English king and execute the power and duties consequent to the office. The implication is that one who is worthy can be king. And indeed, Henry’s picture of the distribution of responsibility here is entirely consistent with Henry’s vision of English kings and the English past: merit, aspiration on England’s behalf, and worthiness of remembrance count for more than origins.<sup>55</sup>

Something subtle has changed. ASC showed an English people who preferred their natural lord as king.<sup>56</sup> Henry does not: as we have seen, his English expressed a preference for Æthelred personally—but not because he was natural lord.<sup>57</sup> Here in his account of 1016, Henry shows us an English nobility who prefer that would-be kings shoulder more responsibility by deciding amongst themselves who should be king.

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<sup>52</sup> ‘with tears of joy’, *HA* vi.13, 360–1; cf. WM’s rational Cnut, above, 159–60.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. J. Gillingham, ‘Henry of Huntingdon and the Twelfth-Century Revival of the English Nation’, in his *The English in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, 2000), 123–144, esp. at 127–8, 140–2; P.A. Hayward, ‘The Importance of Being Ambiguous: Innuendo and Legerdemain in William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta Regum* and *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*’, *ANS* 33 (2010), 75–102; E. van Houts, ‘Historical Writing’, in C. Harper-Bill and E. van Houts (eds.), *A Companion to the Anglo-Norman World* (Woodbridge, 2003), 103–21, esp. at 113–14.

<sup>54</sup> See L. Ashe, ‘The Anomalous King of Conquered England’, in C. Melville and L. Mitchell (eds.) *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Leiden, 2012), 173–93, esp. at 191.

<sup>55</sup> Above, 22–34.

<sup>56</sup> Above, 54–5.

<sup>57</sup> *HA* vi.10, 352–3.

Henry's kings live up to the expectations set for them by their respective subjects: they acquiesce to the suggestion and are confident both with the arrangement and in their own strength. These qualities are important for Henry's English kings—less so origin, and perhaps less so the will of the people, although he changes even this into something consistent with his own idea about what should constitute an English king: an individual with the character and qualities necessary to defend and to improve his people.<sup>58</sup>

Finally, the passage offers a further insight into distribution of responsibility among the kingdom's non-royal leaders. Nobles on both sides apparently deem it their duty to defer to the king-candidates in determining the succession. And for Henry (as we will see in the famous waves anecdote), an English king who in turn defers to Providence fulfils his ultimate and most important responsibility.

Henry's Cnut enforces the loyalty of the English to their king, whether it is to himself or to his English predecessor, Edmund. When Eadric reports to Cnut that he has killed Edmund, Henry writes that Cnut avenges Edmund:

Cui cum rem gestam denudasset, respondit rex, 'Ego te ob tanti obsequii meritum, cunctis Anglorum proceribus reddam celsiorem.' Iussit ergo eum excapitari, et caput in stipite super celsiorem Lundonie turrim figi.<sup>59</sup>

This story expands upon ASC, which reports Eadric's death without further detail.<sup>60</sup>

The story permits Henry to show Cnut as English king in the role of a just avenger of treachery against his fellow English king—and hence as a just avenger of legitimate English kingship, which Cnut himself now purports to hold. Through the story, Henry develops Cnut's character by showing that he has a sense of justice and loyalty, even towards Edmund, his former enemy. Cnut's past as an enemy and his foreign origins do

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Gaimar, who casts single combat the English barons' idea, *EE* ll.4255–78, 232–9.

<sup>59</sup> 'When [Eadric] disclosed what had happened, the king answered, "As a reward for your great service, I shall make you higher than all the English nobles." Then he ordered him to be beheaded, and his head to be fixed on a stake on London's highest tower.' *HA* vi.14, 362–3. It is possible that Henry draws on a story about Eadric from oral tradition; see: Greenway, *HA*, 362 n.70; Wright, *Cultivation of Saga*, 205–12.

<sup>60</sup> ASC (CDE) 1017.

not detract from his legitimacy in delivering punishment to a traitor. Eadric is the traitor and enemy of England, whereas Cnut—in decided contrast—is England’s defender and advocate.

Through his description of Cnut’s relations with his new subjects, Henry shows us his view of the will of Providence: that the English should not resist their king, whoever he is. Once Cnut is king of the English—and not before—Henry casts him as the instrument of God’s justice meting out deserved punishments to the English.

Henry maintains that Cnut was justified in taking violent action against the English for their disloyalty to King Edmund. He writes: ‘Postea uero rex dignam retributionem nequitie reddidit Anglis.’<sup>61</sup> After describing Cnut’s execution of several English nobles and the tax levied throughout England, Henry describes these as just penalties: ‘Dignum igitur exactorem Dominus iustus Anglis imposuit.’<sup>62</sup> Henry again employs the word ‘dignus’ to describe the actions of the invading Danes against the offending English, and credits Cnut personally with enacting consequences for the English that reflect divine will. Cnut is not a passive vessel of divine punishment: Henry considers Cnut’s own actions to be worthy and just.

Cnut is not reprehensible or responsible for retributions against the English: he is the instrument of God executing what is warranted for them. We will observe a similar pattern in how Henry describes William. As we will see, Henry praises Cnut’s unparalleled authority as a king in piety, generosity and military prowess. After Cnut assumes the royal authority, Henry describes Cnut’s deeds in terms of their benefit for or justice to the English people. In this way becoming king of England marks the emergence of Cnut’s authority and worthiness to rule England in an imperial manner with its consequent glory.

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<sup>61</sup> ‘Later, the king paid the English a fitting recompense for their villainy.’ *HA* vi.15, 362–3.

<sup>62</sup> ‘In this way the just Lord imposed on the English the tax gatherer they deserved.’ *HA* vi.15, 362–3. Not in ASC.

Illustrating Cnut's piety is a way for Henry to show Cnut's worthiness for office and his particular distinction in holding it. In describing Cnut's pilgrimage to Rome,<sup>63</sup> Henry characterizes Cnut as a king of England who should be counted among worthy kings within the western world:

Quis autem numeret elemosinas eius, dapsilitates eius, et magnalia que gessit rex magnus in peregrinatione illa? Non fuit rex sub occidentali mundi limite qui tam splendide, tam famose, Rome sancta loca petisset.<sup>64</sup>

Henry makes the distinction between inclusion and exclusion ('sub occidentali mundi limite') on a world-scale—the West versus implied outlying barbarian lands—not between the northern realms and the continent. He thereby includes Cnut in the civilized world and diminishes the importance of his Danish origins to his office. Cnut's pilgrimage to Rome creates a connection with the centre of Christendom, and Henry's rhetorical description casts it as an ideal royal pilgrimage—one which he conducts as a king of England.

For Henry, Cnut's status as a lord of many lands is a source of his authority and his glory as an English king. He hails Cnut's illustrious victories in war, writing: 'Nec enim ante eum tante magnitudinis rex fuerat in Anglia. Erat namque dominus tocius Dacie, tocius Anglie, tocius Norwagie, simul et Scotie.'<sup>65</sup> The sense of totality in conquest ('tocius') suggests that Henry conceives of Cnut as a European emperor, not a king of unimpressive origin. He draws Cnut out of England's remote past by making his reign into its own temporal classification: before Cnut, English kings had limited authority; Cnut initiates an era wherein kings of England are almost emperors of the

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<sup>63</sup> Briefly mentioned in ASC (DE) 1031 [1027].

<sup>64</sup> 'Who may number his alms, his bountiful gifts and the mighty deeds that the great king performed on the pilgrimage? There was no king within the bounds of the western world who visited the holy places of Rome in so much splendour and glory.' *HA* vi.16, 366–7.

<sup>65</sup> 'Before him there had never been in England a king of such great authority. He was lord of all Denmark, of all England, of all Norway, and also of Scotland'. *HA* vi.17, 366–7. Cf. Dudo and WJ for the tradition of naming Danes 'Daci'; for Dudo's attempts to link the Danes etymologically with Trojan origins, see: S. Reynolds, 'Medieval *origines gentium* and the community of the realm', *History* 68 (1983), 375–90, at 376; cf. ASC and John, below, 192 ff.

northern world. This sense of the imperial evokes the Roman tradition: Cnut rules a remote realm in the North, but also multiple regions in the manner of a Caesar—a figure whom Henry will later connect explicitly with William, another conqueror of England. Importantly, Henry’s admiration also means that Cnut’s conquering nature enhances his status as an English king instead of detracting from it. The crucial point is that Henry only praises Cnut’s conquests once he is making them as an English king.

Cnut’s efforts to link England with the continent prove his authority and quality as an English king. Henry observes of Cnut: ‘tria gessit eleganter et magnifice’, one of which was the reduction of taxes for travel on the pilgrimage road to Rome.<sup>66</sup> Cnut’s successes show that the office of kingship in England is recognized by authorities on the continent. By praising Cnut’s deeds and casting them on such a grand scale, Henry improves the character of the English kingship which Cnut holds, in no way suggesting that Cnut is an illegitimate king because he is an invader.

Henry imbues Cnut with authority among kings on account of his piety, which he characterizes as ‘eternal’ in its praise of God. Henry is the first to recount a story wherein Cnut challenges the sea to submit to him, but it does not:

Rex igitur resiliens ait, ‘Sciant omnes habitantes orbem, uanam et friuolam regum esse potentiam, nec regis quempiam nomine dignum, preter eum cuius nutui celum, terra, mare, legibus obediunt eternis.’ Rex igitur Cnut numquam postea coronam auream ceruici sue imposuit, sed super imaginem Domini que cruci affixa erat, posuit eam in *eternum*, in laudem Dei regis magni. Cuius misericordia Cnut regis anima quiete fruatur.<sup>67</sup> [italics added]

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<sup>66</sup> ‘he performed three fine and magnificent deeds’ HA vi.17, 366–7.

<sup>67</sup> ‘So jumping back, the king cried, “Let all the world know that the power of kings is empty and worthless, and there is no king worthy of the name save Him by whose will heaven, earth and sea obey eternal laws.” Thereafter King Cnut never wore the golden crown on his neck, but placed it on the image of the crucified Lord, in *eternal* praise of God to the great king. By whose mercy may the soul of King Cnut enjoy rest.’ HA vi.17, 368–9.

Like the classicizing historiographical technique of inserting pre-battle speeches,<sup>68</sup> placing the words in Cnut's mouth gives his declamation more immediacy and import by drawing him into the present voice. Cnut's words inspire not on the field of battle, but in the realm of regal piety. This passage also cleverly conveys Cnut's authority: Cnut claims that all kings possess empty power, yet he passes judgment on them with the authority of a king.<sup>69</sup> In this way Henry's narrative compares Cnut's authority to that of other kings—and deems it superior and timeless. Cnut is accountable only to God—and because he recognizes this, he is a still more ideal English king.

## Conclusions

The major historiographical change Henry makes to ASC is to make the Danish invasions—and with them, King Cnut's accession—appear to be not a rupture and shameful defeat, but rather a constituent part of England's history. He connects their effects more explicitly with justice, and with the providential pattern of English history throughout time.<sup>70</sup> This historiographical style diminishes the sense that the Danish presence should have been resisted, and that the English were oppressed by—and would have preferred to be without—Danish rule.

Three of Henry's remarks clearly place the Danish kings as God's agents, and show that the providential plan never included the successful defence of the English against invasion. First, Henry adds to the details for 1004 and observes that God intends for Swein to have England: 'Suein uir fortissimus, cui Deus regnum Anglie destinauerat,

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<sup>68</sup> See J.R.E. Bliese, 'Rhetoric and morale: a study of battle orations from the central middle ages', *Journal of Medieval History* 15 (1989), 201–26.

<sup>69</sup> But cf. A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England. I: c. 500–c. 1307* (Ithaca, 1974), 197, for the interpretation that Henry intended this passage to reveal the emptiness of worldly power in contrast with God's.

<sup>70</sup> Above, 22–34.

cum nauibus multis uenit ad Norwic, et eam predauit et combussit.’<sup>71</sup> God’s intent is reason enough to explain Swein’s raiding. Second, Henry omits ASC’s comment that almighty God rescued London from the Danes during an attack in 1016.<sup>72</sup> Third, as we have seen, Henry refers several times to Cnut as God’s agent in England, and develops his piety and loyalty to God as among the most important of his worthy character traits.

In his theme of the five plagues, Henry posits a new idea about the providential plan in relation to English history—meaning his *Historia* provides a new different story about its kings.<sup>73</sup> This is a major factor which explains his picture of Cnut—not twelfth-century politics, ethnic loyalties, conflicted parentage or ambiguity resulting from a confusion of multilingual sources. Because Henry has made cyclical invasion an intrinsic and characterizing part of English history and its development, Cnut’s conquest is not a rupture that casts a lingering aura of defeat and shame over the English past. Not only is repeated conquest part of God’s plan for England, but it is also part of how English kingship develops and distinguishes itself to an increasing degree over time.

### **John on Cnut**

As we saw in Part Two, John frequently blamed treachery and misfortune on the Danes, Danish blood, or Danish influence. Given this consistently negative picture of the Danes, and his consistent praise for English kings, how does John account for the conquest and subsequent rule of Cnut?

John’s Cnut improves in authority, quality and character after becoming king such that John ultimately gives a favourable report of his Letter to the English. John never offers a glowing report of his character, as in general he reserves the Danes for the taking

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<sup>71</sup> ‘Swein, a very powerful man, for whom God had destined the kingdom of England, came with many ships to Norwich, and plundered and burnt it.’ *HA* vi.3, 342–3.

<sup>72</sup> ASC (CDE) 1016.

<sup>73</sup> Above, 22–34.

of blame, but does acknowledge Cnut as a legitimate king of England. Throughout John advocates the blamelessness of the English in causing or meriting defeat, deeming them worthy of blame only when they rebel against their legitimate king. The moment in which the king becomes legitimate is an important factor for John's attitude towards a conquering king. By highlighting that the English accept Cnut as king, John makes him appear more legitimate than does ASC.

As a conqueror and a Dane, Cnut has a past to overcome if he is to be a legitimate English king in John's estimation. Starting in 1017—after Cnut has been established as king of the English—John records Cnut's title expanding according to his conquests year by year until 1031, the year of his Letter to the English. Thus in John's narrative, Cnut's authority improves in scale over time. John always lists England first, which suggests that England is Cnut's primary realm. It is as though as an English king, but not before, it is acceptable for Cnut to be a conqueror of other realms. This attitude is very similar to that of Henry and WM, although they differ in how they treat the moment in which Cnut actually becomes king.

John makes the English less wretched than does ASC, and avoids placing suggestion of blame for conquest on Cnut. Once the English are Cnut's subjects, John criticizes them for disloyalty to him. In this respect he accepts Cnut's kingship as legitimate. But it should be noted that John continues to criticize the English for disloyalty to the æthelings as well. John holds them accountable for any kind of disloyalty to their current king.

John does not overtly praise Cnut's character, but makes only minor concessions to it—unlike his contemporaries WM, Henry and Gaimar. John's consistent use of the Danes as scapegoats evidently made it hard for him to praise one who had previously been a Danish invader and an enemy of the English for several years. Yet Cnut is now a

king of England, and as such, John's narrative pattern commits him to praising the king. John solves this conundrum ingeniously by making Cnut look better by contrast with the worse invader who preceded him: Swein. His available sources for the two invaders certainly made this fairly easy to achieve, but most of the details, epithets and conclusions about Swein's terrible character are original.

John refers to Swein as a tyrant ('tirannus') or as behaving like one three times,<sup>74</sup> all without precedent in ASC.<sup>75</sup> He adds a new detail about Swein's raiding: 'obuia queque more solito rapiendo et demoliendo'.<sup>76</sup> This short phrase accomplishes two effects: first, it showcases Swein's arbitrary and wanton violence; second, it indicates that this violence is not just an isolated instance of a single raid, but rather typical of his character.

John essentially claims that Swein was never a king of the English, thus permitting him to maintain the consistent high quality and character of English kings. He writes: 'Quibus omnibus ad uelle peractis, ad suam classem reuersus, ab omni Anglorum populo rex, *si iure queat rex uocari, qui fere cuncta tirannice faciebat, et appellabatur, et habebatur.*'<sup>77</sup> [emphasis added] There are several striking and important implications of this passage. As we saw with WM's comments about Æthelred in Chapter 2, here again we have an example of an historian questioning and even denying kingship based upon the individual's behaviour, even when his kingship is agreed upon by people at the time. For John, the word 'rex' is mere appellation which cannot in substance be applied to one—in England, at least—who behaves 'tirannice'. The people said he was king, but John suggests that he was not. This is quite a claim for an historian to make in any time

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<sup>74</sup> JW [1013], ii, 474–5; [1014], ii, 476–7.

<sup>75</sup> See also: McGurk, JW, ii, 474–5 n.2–2, n.9.

<sup>76</sup> 'destroying and plundering whatever he came across according to his normal practice ...' JW [1013], ii, 474–5. See also: McGurk, JW, ii, 474 n.2–2.

<sup>77</sup> 'When everything had been executed as he desired he returned to his fleet, and by all the people of the English he was called, and acknowledged as, king, *if he could rightfully be called king who did almost everything tyrannically.*' JW [1013], ii, 474–5.

period. Like WM's comments, John's observation is equally a step beyond 'rex inutilis': this is rex nihil, no king at all. Because Swein was never truly king, he is not an exception—for which John must account—to the high standards he has established for English kings.

Indeed, John does not call Swein king, continuing to refer to him only as a tyrant, an appellation not in ASC:<sup>78</sup> 'Interea Suanus tyrannus sue classi sumptus affluenter parari et tributum fere importabile solui precepit'.<sup>79</sup> In this important respect, John and WM seem more interested in these distinctions of what makes a king of England than does ASC. Furthermore, this is the first time John remarks that the tribute is unreasonably high, whereas ASC does so initially in 1011.<sup>80</sup> It is significant for John's narrative that this is also the first time he specifies that the Danes (Swein in particular) demanded the tribute, rather than that the English proposed it. For John, it is an opportunity to apportion more blame and criticism to Swein and the Danes—and away from the English and their kings.

John renders Swein's character unequivocally and fully malevolent. John explains: 'Suanus tyrannus post innumerabilia et crudelia mala, que *uel in Anglia uel in aliis terris* gesserat'.<sup>81</sup> [emphasis added] This passage is significant because it understands the potential conundrum that one man's justified conquest is another man's unjust invasion. John makes it clear that Swein is simply of evil character, bringing his unjustified arbitrary violence to all lands.

That Swein is so violent and disastrous not only permits John to show Cnut is the better king by contrast, but also allows him to explain English defeat in a way that avoids

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<sup>78</sup> See also: McGurk, JW, ii, 475 n.9.

<sup>79</sup> 'Meanwhile, the tyrant Swein ordered lavish provisions to be prepared for his fleet and an almost insupportable tribute to be paid.' JW [1013], ii, 474–5.

<sup>80</sup> Above, 53–4.

<sup>81</sup> 'After many cruel atrocities, which he perpetrated *both in England and in other lands* ...' JW [1014], ii, 476–7. On the possibility that a *Passion of St Edmund* was a source for Swein's insults to St Edmund, see McGurk, JW, ii, 476 n.2.

their victimization. Swein's cruelty provides an excuse or reason for the capitulation of the English to him. ASC reports that the inhabitants of London surrender 'forþam hi ondreddon þæt he hi fordon wolde.'<sup>82</sup> Yet as we have seen repeatedly in John, to surrender because of such dread would reflect badly on the honour of the English. John writes instead:

Ciues etiam Lundonienses obsides illi miserunt et pacem cum eo fecerunt, metuebant enim furorem illius in tantum super se exardescere, ut omnibus suis rebus ablatis, uel oculos illorum erui, uel manus uel pedes detruncari, iuberet.<sup>83</sup>

The word 'etiam' seems to have concessive force here. With it John conveys the desperation of the English, making their surrender seem understandable and not cowardly. This is consistent with John's aversion to representing the English and their kings as fearful: indeed, his 'ut' clause replaces ASC's reference to the Londoners' fears of destruction.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, John adds to his grievances against Swein that Thorkell and Swein plunder and commit crimes whenever they wish, but without claiming that English resistance was futile:<sup>85</sup> his object here is to make Swein's reign seem so disastrous that Cnut's reign will seem a rescue by contrast. Again as we saw repeatedly in Chapter 2, John does not dwell on the ineffectiveness of the English, especially at the ends of annals.

Importantly, John maintains that the English nobles did not explicitly forbid Cnut—their future king—from becoming king of England. Resolving this potential error of the English is a particular concern of John's. He keeps the English in control of their own futures, especially while they are facing the prospect of conquest during the period of Cnut's attacks. He does not blame them for the conquest, thus leaving room for them to accept Cnut's eventual legitimacy without shame. John also modifies details of the

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<sup>82</sup> 'because they were afraid he would do for them.' [E] ASC (CDE) 1013; Swanton, 144.

<sup>83</sup> 'Even the citizens of London sent him hostages and made peace with him, for they feared his fury would be inflamed to such an extent against them that, when he had confiscated all their property, he would order their eyes to be torn out or their hands or feet cut off.' JW [1013], ii, 474–5.

<sup>84</sup> McGurk, JW, ii, 474 n.5–5.

<sup>85</sup> JW [1013], ii, 474–5; see also: McGurk, JW ii, 475 n.10.

narrative in order to make the English seem consistent and loyal to their promises. In his 1014 entry, John preserves the vow of England's leading men but makes an important change to ASC. ASC records that the kingdom's leading men outlawed all Danish kings ('ælcne Dæniscne cyning');<sup>86</sup> John writes: 'Ad hec principes se non amplius Danicum regem admissuros in Angliam unanimiter sponderunt.'<sup>87</sup> The use of the singular ('Danicum regem') indicates that the counsellors' vow is directed specifically at Swein. By changing the prohibition from plural to singular, John makes room for the English to accept Cnut in the future without breaking their promise. This slight change makes the English look dramatically less naïve and victimized: their unanimous resolution is not pathetically and ironically reversed twice in a row as in ASC. John continues to narrate the improvement of English honour over time.

John makes Cnut's character seem less that of a cruel conqueror than does ASC, which makes him a more defensible candidate for legitimate kingship of England. In his entry for 1014, consistent with ASC, John reports that Cnut mutilated the English hostages given to his father at Sandwich.<sup>88</sup> But there are some important differences. In its entry for 1014, ASC reports: 'Se Cnut gewende him ut mid his flotan—7 wearð þet earne folc þus beswican þurh hine'.<sup>89</sup> ASC laments that Cnut's response to Æthelred's raiding is the cause of their wretchedness and trials. But John entirely omits the comment that the English were 'earne' or 'beswican', which has the effect of relieving Cnut of blame for bringing these about. Furthermore, ASC reports that he had the hostages put ashore.

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<sup>86</sup> ASC (CDE) 1014, above, 54–5.

<sup>87</sup> 'At this the leading men promised unanimously that they would not allow the Danish king into England.' JW [1014], ii, 478–9.

<sup>88</sup> JW [1014], ii, 478–9; see also: McGurk, JW, ii, 478 n.3.

<sup>89</sup> 'Cnut himself went out with his fleet—and thus the wretched people were betrayed through him', [E] ASC (CDE) 1014; Swanton, 145; cf. *HA*, above, 172.

John casts this in slightly different language: Cnut permitted them to depart ('abire permisit'). This is a classic instance of John's preservation of the details of ASC, but making subtle (and in this case almost unnoticeable) shifts of emphasis. ASC's comment that Cnut had them put ashore conveys the impression that Cnut continues to dictate what happens to them. John stresses the merciful part of the situation: Cnut permitted them to go. The words 'permisit abire' are critical because they convey concession and release. Mutilation could in some cases be seen as merciful compared to the punishment of death and massacre;<sup>90</sup> here, John seems to imply that whereas Cnut could have killed them, he let them go. Furthermore, aside from referring to this collectively with other events of the year as 'omnia mala', John does not criticize Cnut overtly and in particular—unlike WM but similar to Henry. John is incrementally preparing his narrative to lead to Cnut's eventual legitimate kingship of England.

When John describes the election of Cnut in 1016, he includes a passage not in ASC that describes the exchange of promises and loyalty between Cnut and the English.<sup>91</sup>

Cuius post mortem [of Æthelred] episcopi, abbates, duces et quique nobiliores Anglie in unum congregati, pari consensu, in dominum et regem sibi Canutum elegere, et, ad eum in Suthamtoniam uenientes, omnemque progeniem regis Agelredi coram illo abnegando repudiantes, pacem cum eo composuere, et fidelitatem illi iurauere, quibus et ille iurauit quod et secundum Deum et seculum fidelis esse uellet eis dominus.<sup>92</sup>

This passage suggests that for John, making a king in England can be more about election and an exchange of oaths on both sides than it is about heritage alone—or at least that this is a valuable way of helping to legitimize a Danish conqueror, who has for so long been an enemy. For John, drawing attention to Cnut's Danish heritage would only hinder

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<sup>90</sup> Above, 50–2; see also: D. Whitelock, 'Wulfstan Cantor and Anglo-Saxon law', *Nordica et Anglica*, ed. A.H. Orrick (The Hague, 1968), 83–92, at 83–7.

<sup>91</sup> See also: McGurk, JW, ii, 484 n.4–4.

<sup>92</sup> 'After his [Æthelred's] death, the bishops, abbots, ealdormen and all the nobles of England, assembled together and, by general agreement, elected Cnut as their lord and king, and, coming to him at Southampton, renounced and repudiated in his presence all the descendants of King Æthelred and made peace with him and swore fealty to him, and he swore to them that he would be a faithful lord to them, both in religious and in secular matters.' JW [1016], ii, 484–5.

legitimacy, given John's consistent portrayal of the Danes as enemies. This passage certainly makes Cnut look less the part of an evil conqueror, but John does not yet call him king—which suggests that he does not think the nobles were right to repudiate Æthelred's descendants. Indeed, as we will see, his narrative confirms that John holds the nobles accountable for this action.

While Cnut is still an enemy to most of England, John stresses that the citizens of London 'clitonem Eadmundum unanimi consensu in regem leuauere.'<sup>93</sup> He reiterates the citizens' responsibility for elevating Edmund to the kingship when he describes Edmund's approach to Wessex: 'Qui solii regalis sullimatus culmine intrepidus'.<sup>94</sup> England may seem to have multiple and competing kings, but the ætheling ascends to the throne with consent. John provides this reminder that English initiative remains an important factor in lifting an individual to royal dignity, not conquest alone. That they have more responsibility in raising their kings to the throne also means that they are more accountable in their failure to honour either. As we have seen above, the nobles repudiate the æthelings in accepting Cnut king. As we will see, John criticizes the nobles for so willingly giving up their rightful heirs—yet without placing blame on Cnut.

When Cnut raids London as an invader, John writes favourably of the English resistance: they invaders were driven back 'a ciuibus ... uiriliter resistentibus'.<sup>95</sup> As we saw in Part Two, John makes resistance look successful and honourable during the Danish invasions. But after Cnut is officially king, John holds the English to account: for disloyalty both to their new king and to the æthelings.

Cnut becomes king twice: once by the agreement of the nobles, and once on the death of Edmund Ironside. But for John the conquest is complete only when Edmund—the former ætheling and only other viable and legitimate contender for the throne—is

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<sup>93</sup> 'by unanimous agreement raised the ætheling Edmund to the throne.' JW [1016], ii, 484–5.

<sup>94</sup> 'He, raised to the height of royal dignity', JW [1016], ii, 484–5.

<sup>95</sup> 'by the citizens' vigorous resistance', JW [1016], ii, 484–7.

dead. As we will see, it is also at this moment that resistance on the part of the English stops being praiseworthy, and in which John names Cnut ‘rex’.

For John, Cnut becomes king contingent not primarily on the agreement of English, but rather on the death of Edmund, despite their agreement to split the kingdom. Their agreement was not quite enough for John to assert full approval of Cnut’s legitimacy. As we have seen, John describes Cnut’s kingmaking twice, but only on the second occasion does he actually begin to refer to him as king. And the particular occasion is telling about John’s criteria for English kingship: the death of King Edmund, the former *ætheling* and legitimate English holder of the throne. John starts referring to Cnut as ‘*rex Canutus*’ immediately upon Edmund Ironside’s death—never before: ‘*Cuius post mortem rex Canutus omnes episcopos et duces necnon et principes cunctosque optimates gentis Anglie Lundonie congregari iussit.*’<sup>96</sup> John places the two side by side grammatically: ‘*post mortem*’ (of Edmund) and ‘*rex Canutus*’, as though the two are intimately related: the legitimacy of the latter depends entirely on, and follows logically from, the former. For John, the resolution of tension between Cnut and another legitimate contender for the throne is what permits the conqueror to reign legitimately as an English king. As we will see, the same is true of John’s attitude towards the conqueror William. It is not only a question of an *ætheling*’s life or death, but of how John renders his presence, claim and relation to the conquering king.

John criticizes the English for rejecting the *æthelings*, yet does so in a way that preserves Cnut’s authority as king. John writes of Cnut: ‘*quasi nesciens, interrogavit eos sagacissime ... utrum fratribus et filiis eius [of Edmund] liceret in regno Occidentalium*

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<sup>96</sup> ‘After [Edmund’s] death King Cnut ordered all the bishops and ealdormen and chief men and all the nobles of the English people to assemble at London.’ JW [1016], ii, 492–5.

Saxonum post patrem eorum regnare, si Eadmundus moreretur uiuente illo.’<sup>97</sup> It is striking that John should have Cnut ask such a question, because it articulates what appears to be an ongoing concern for John himself: the conundrum posed when a conqueror displaces all æthelings who are denied their right, or even eligibility, for rule. John describes and condemns at length the response of the English to Cnut’s question:

At illi coeperunt dicere se proculdubio scire quod rex Eadmundus fratribus suis nullam portionem regni sui, nec se spirante neque moriente, commendasset; dixeruntque hoc se nosse, Eadmundum regem uelle Canutum adiutorem et protectorem esse filiorum eius donec regnandi etatem habuissent. Verum illi, testante Deo, falsum perhibuerunt testimonium et fraudulentè mentiti sunt, estimantes illum sibi et mitiorem esse propter mendacium eorum et se ab eo pretium sumere magnum. Ex quibus falsis testibus quidam non post multum tempus ad eodem rege interfecti sunt.<sup>98</sup>

John accuses the English of being deceitful before God, but does not refer to Cnut’s shrewdness in the same terms. In choosing the word ‘estimantes’, John suggests that the English misunderstand Cnut, and that he is indeed not a king who will reward lies: he will reward only loyalty, both to himself and even to those whom he has replaced. Furthermore, Cnut is the one who punishes the ‘falsi testes’ who repudiated the æthelings. John’s Cnut shrewdly tests the loyalty of his English nobles, but he is true to his word and supports the loyalty due England’s kings and æthelings. These personal qualities are, perhaps ironically, what permit John to present Cnut—who has overthrown the line of kings whose interests he defends here—as a legitimate English king.

Once John begins to call Cnut ‘rex Canutus’, the transition is complete. John opens his entry for 1017 with another direct acknowledgement of Cnut as king of the English, and acting as such: ‘Hoc anno rex Canutus totius Anglie suscepit imperium

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<sup>97</sup> ‘he asked them with great acuity, as if he did not know ... whether [Edmund’s] brothers and sons should be permitted to reign in the kingdom of the West Saxons after the death of their father, if Edmund should he die during [Cnut’s] lifetime.’ JW [1016], ii, 494–5.

<sup>98</sup> ‘And they began to say that they knew beyond doubt that king Edmund had not entrusted any portion of the kingdom to his brothers, either in life or in death; they said they knew this, the Edmund wished Cnut to be the guardian and protector of his sons until they were old enough to rule. They, indeed, as God is a witness, gave false testimony, and deceitfully lied, thinking that he would be more gracious to them because of their lies, and they would receive from him handsome payment. Certain of these false witnesses were killed by that same king not long after.’ JW [1016], ii, 494–5.

idque in quattuor partes diuisit'.<sup>99</sup> Furthermore, after John names Cnut king, his imperial-style title remains stable or improves consistently over time. This is important because it is a reflection of how John regularly associates England's defending kings with consistent behaviour, and its conquering kings constant personal improvement.

There are three points to make about this element of the narrative. The first is that Cnut did in reality expand his empire; John's conveyance of this story might seem unsurprising. The significance is in the style in which he conveys it, especially in light of his consistent narrative patterns in his attitudes towards defending and conquering English kings. John now supplies no negative comments to temper the progress through which he shows Cnut to be a reformed man who is now primarily king of England.

Second, John seeks to portray this progress as positive, which is evident in his preservation and extension of Cnut's epithets through the progression of narrative time and Cnut's reign. John begins the annals of 1021, 1027, 1028, 1029 and 1031 with Cnut and his titles (as though anchoring them). 1021 begins Cnut's title with the words: 'Canutus rex Anglorum et Danorum'.<sup>100</sup> This epithet repeats at the start of 1027 ('Cum regi Anglorum et Danorum Canuto'<sup>101</sup>) and of 1028 ('Canutus rex Anglorum et Danorum'<sup>102</sup>). The beginnings of 1029 and 1031 add the Norwegians: 'Canutus rex Anglorum, Danorum et Norreganorum ad Angliam rediit'<sup>103</sup> and 'Canutus rex Anglorum, Danorum et Norreganorum'.<sup>104</sup>

These parallel annal beginnings—wherein King Cnut is always equal or greater in glory—cleverly herald the content and style of opening of Cnut's letter to the English, which John includes in the 1031 annal. It begins: 'Canutus, rex totius Anglie et

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<sup>99</sup> 'In this year king Cnut undertook the government of the whole of England, and he divided into four parts', JW [1017], ii, 502–3.

<sup>100</sup> 'Cnut, king of the English and of the Danes', JW [1021], ii, 506–7.

<sup>101</sup> 'When Cnut, king of the English and of the Danes', JW [1027], ii, 510–11.

<sup>102</sup> 'Cnut, king of the English and of the Danes', JW [1028], ii, 510–11.

<sup>103</sup> 'Cnut, king of the English, the Danes, and the Norwegians, returned', JW [1029], ii, 510–11.

<sup>104</sup> 'Cnut, king of the English, the Danes, and the Norwegians', JW [1031], ii, 512–13.

Denemarcie et Norreganorum et partis Suanorum'.<sup>105</sup> The editors point out that John's reference to the Norwegians here is an insertion if Cnut's visit to Rome (at which the letter was presented) was in 1027, unless Cnut used the title before his conquest.<sup>106</sup> In any case it makes sense that John uses it here in Cnut's title, to help the pattern of Cnut's continued imperial expansion—as an English king. For Cnut is now king of all the previous peoples, with the addition of the Swedes. That a letter in Cnut's narrative voice echoes John's own narrative voice lends authority to the claims of both. ASC refers to 'Cnut cyng' near the beginning of several annals, but importantly does not give him epithets declaring whom he rules.<sup>107</sup>

Of particular importance is that in naming the peoples of whom Cnut is king, John consistently places the English first. For John's purposes, Cnut's primary role as king is his role as king of the English. Now that he is an official English king, England is the seat of his authority and the root of his expansion—a root of which we are reminded at the start of these series of annals leading up to Cnut's letter of 1027, which John includes in the entry for 1031.<sup>108</sup> Even John's choice and placement of verbs underlines the image of England as Cnut's primary responsibility. He sailed from England in 1028, 'rediit' in 1029 and went from there to Rome in 1031.

The letter is important because it presents Cnut's own voice describing his deeds on behalf of the English kingdom.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, John's placement of the letter is important. By incorporating the letter after Cnut's exploits in Norway in 1028, John can present it as a true culmination of Cnut's imperial authority—an authority which John has

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<sup>105</sup> 'Cnut, king of all England and Denmark and the Norwegians and part of the Swedes', JW [1031], ii, 512–13.

<sup>106</sup> McGurk, JW, ii, 513 n.4. It is certainly possible that Cnut was using the Norwegian title, given his deeds in Norway.

<sup>107</sup> E.g. ASC (CD) 1023; (E) 1025, (CDE) 1028–1031.

<sup>108</sup> For the dating of Cnut's letter, see: Treharne, *Living Through Conquest*, 29; *Councils*, i, 506–13; McGurk, JW, ii, 512 n.1. ASC (DE) also records events of 1027 in 1031, but does not include the letter.

<sup>109</sup> JW [1031], ii, 512–19. See also: Treharne, *Living Through Conquest*, 29–38.

rendered, both in narrative time and word order, as developing primarily from Cnut's kingship of England. Indeed, he writes: '... cuius epistole textum *hic* subscribere dignum duximus.'<sup>110</sup> [emphasis added] His ordering and dating here was consistent with ASC, but the relative order in which he included additional material was after all his choice. And indeed, it appears to be John's own change to the letter to include Norway as one of Cnut's self-named conquests as an English king.

Third, John shows that as a now-legitimate English king, Cnut's power and authority can only improve. This is further evidence of John's high expectations for English kings and the standards to which he holds them. Furthermore, for John, being king can transform a conqueror. Neither his heritage nor his personal past mar in any way the impressiveness of his conquests. When he becomes a conqueror of England, John casts him as conquering on England's behalf, even though he was king of the Danes first. As we find across the twelfth-century chroniclers, the timing of historical events, and how narrative time represents them, are both essential considerations in understanding how they view the legitimacy and kingship of a conqueror.

By drawing attention to Cnut's piety, John adds credence to Cnut's legitimacy. In its entry for 1020, ASC (D) reports that King Cnut consecrates the minster at Ashingdon,<sup>111</sup> but John is unique in specifying that construction of the church was done on the orders of King Cnut: 'Eodem anno ecclesia quam rex Canutus et comes Turkillus in monte qui Assandun dicitur construxerant, illis presentibus, a Wlstando Eboracensi archiepiscopo et multis aliis episcopis cum magno honore et gloria dedicata est.'<sup>112</sup> I

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<sup>110</sup> 'We considered the text of his letter worthy of being subjoined *here*.' JW [1031], ii, 512–13.

<sup>111</sup> ASC (D) 1020.

<sup>112</sup> 'In the same year the church which King Cnut and Earl Thorkell had built on the hill called Ashingdon was dedicated in their presence by Wulfstan, archbishop of York, and by many other bishops with great ceremony and magnificence.' JW [1020], ii, 506–7.

suggest that this is not inference.<sup>113</sup> Rather, John is showing Cnut doing what great kings do to show him becoming worthy of English kingship.

## **Conclusions**

John does not extol Cnut's virtues at great length. But by giving specific examples of his acting in order to preserve loyalty, on behalf of the kingdom, as an England-based conqueror and as an investigator and judge of loyalty to the æthelings, John transforms him into a legitimate king of England. Despite Cnut's election to the kingship and the division of the kingdom between Cnut and Edmund, John only deems Cnut to be king when Edmund is dead. As we will see, in John's narrative of William and the Norman Conquest, the viability of members of the House of Cerdic continues to be a crucial consideration in how he establishes the kingship and character of his conquerors over time.

## **Conclusions: comparing the chronicles**

WM, Henry and John rework what little information was available about Cnut's reign to write three narratives of his transformation into a worthy English king. WM begins by describing Cnut's ruthless behaviour as an invader, acknowledging the lack of justice in how Cnut attained the throne but highlighting his good deeds, and ultimately roundly praising him for his piety, legal achievements and imperial authority.<sup>114</sup> It is worth comparing WM's picture of Cnut to that of Æthelred. At the outset of Æthelred's reign, WM casts doubt on whether Æthelred reigned, and hence on whether he truly held

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<sup>113</sup> But cf. McGurk, JW, ii, 507 n.4, for the claim that John's description of these men as cofounders could be inference.

<sup>114</sup> Above, 156–70.

kingship of England.<sup>115</sup> There may not have been justice in Cnut's accession—but WM never questions that it was an accession.

For Henry, Cnut is a praiseworthy conqueror, but only as an English king, and in that context of the providential framework of Henry's narrative. His Cnut is an invader, yet Henry tempers Cnut's character to show his potential for kingship even before he becomes king. It is important to note that Cnut's deference to Providence in story of the waves occurs only now that Cnut is an English king. When Cnut is a Danish conqueror, he does not appeal to Providence for the victory. A transition has taken place: Cnut was already a king—a Danish king—but it is as an English king that he proves his worthiness.

John does not frame his storyline of English history with any kind of providential plan. Yet Cnut still improves over time and distinguishes himself as an English king. Each of the three writers rewrites Cnut's character and story differently, but several key similarities stand out. All three attribute greater degrees of responsibility and credit to Cnut than do their sources. For all, English kingship itself is the catalyst for Cnut's reformation or improvement: it is something worthy of aspiration, and Cnut proves himself worthy by aspiring and succeeding.

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<sup>115</sup> Above, 42.

## PART THREE: CONQUERING KINGS

### WILLIAM I

William, like Cnut, was a conqueror, but his legacy had more immediate relevance for these twelfth-century historians through temporal proximity—1066 was less distant than 1016—and through the sustained Norman presence in England. A greater volume of narrative sources about William's reign, English and Norman, was available; a greater range of narrative decisions had to be made in rewriting history. What was the significance of William and the Norman Conquest for later writers? Even in their regret about the disasters wrought by this enduring Conquest, WM, Henry and John do not associate them with William's character or legitimacy. They universally extricate him from criticism: in WM's case by narrating a consistently good character; in Henry's and John's, by permitting him to redeem himself as an English king. The shared effect is an argument for William's legitimacy not because he is a Norman or a conqueror, but because he is simply better at being an English king than any other possible candidate.

#### **WM on William**

WM sets the tone for his account of William's kingship of England in his preface to his third book. He begins with a disarming protestation of his own balanced perspective:

Ego autem, quia utriusque gentis sanguinem traho, dicendi tale temperamentum seruabo: bene gesta, quantum cognoscere potui, sine fuco palam efferam; perperam acta, quantum suffitiat scientiae, leuiter et quasi transeunter attingam<sup>1</sup>

This self-justification goes some way towards defending the validity of the account he will subsequently give of William's kingship. But it is his next comment which reveals

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<sup>1</sup> 'For my part, having the blood of both nations in my veins, I propose in my narrative to keep the middle path: his good deeds, so far as they have come within my knowledge, I will publish unadorned; his misdeeds, I will touch on lightly and as it were in passing, so far as is needed to make them known.' *GR* iii.preface, i, 424–5.

the quality and degree of his defence of William: ‘ut nec mendax culpetur historia, nec illum nota inuram censoria cuius cuncta pene, etsi non laudari, excusari certe possunt opera.’<sup>2</sup> These lines show that identifying and defining the responsibilities of kings—and the grounds on which they should be judged—was a central concern for WM in recounting the Norman Conquest. WM presents a William worthy of kingship of England; his defence is strong because he tempers it. He does not praise William with panegyric (as does WP) nor does he openly side with the English or Normans. Rather, by making both English and Norman perspectives appear unreasonable or biased, WM assumes a stance of objectivity and so presumes to anticipate the reader’s shared judgment. To claim that nearly all of William’s actions can be accounted for and excused—despite any misdeeds—is a staunch and subtle defence which makes itself the more compelling for its appearance of balance and objectivity. The persuasive power of WM’s defence is in its credibility.

In the subsequent analysis we will see this borne out as we follow WM’s form, pattern and reasoning in his assessments and characterization of William. As we will see in Henry and John’s accounts, William undergoes a transition or change to worthiness of kingship of England, as does Cnut. But for WM, there is no such transition. Because 1066 matters more than 1016 for WM in his view of English history, his rhetorical style and strong moral purpose demand a William of consistently good character.<sup>3</sup>

Monika Otter argues that WM conveys the major historical break of 1066 in his *Vita Wulfstani* by telling two separate narratives which deliberately pass over the events

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Thus my history will not be accused of falsehood, nor shall I be passing sentence on a man whose actions, even when they do not merit praise, at least almost always admit of excuse.’ *GR* iii.preface, i, 424–5.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S.O. Sønnesyn, *William of Malmesbury and the Ethics of History* (Woodbridge, 2012); B. Weiler, ‘William of Malmesbury on Kingship’, *History* 90 (2005), 3–22; R.M. Thomson, ‘William of Malmesbury as Historian and Man of Letters’, in his *William of Malmesbury*, rev. edn (Woodbridge, 2003), 14–39; but for a different view, cf. J. Gillingham, ‘Civilizing the English? The English Histories of William of Malmesbury and David Hume’, *Historical Research*, 74 (2001), 17–43, at 37.

of 1066. By avoiding rendering the Battle of Hastings as a structural break, the narratives give more of a semblance of continuity across the Conquest. What this strategy reveals, as Otter suggests, is that early twelfth-century writers did perceive the Conquest as a major rupture, drawing attention to it by avoidance but seeking to understand it in the context of larger patterns of causation in history.<sup>4</sup>

This argument is particularly relevant for present purposes because WM sustains his avoidance of rendering 1066 as a narrative rupture in *GR*. Indeed, Otter suggests that the *VW* and the anonymous *Vita Ædwardi* endeavour to convey the experience of conquest through by connecting their conquest narratives with the lives of major historical figures.<sup>5</sup> WM does this in *GR* as well: the separate narratives he tells do not end or begin with the Conquest, but instead follow the character development of William, as though the best way to understand the historical purpose of the Norman Conquest is to establish not only why William is a legitimate and worthy English king, but also why he was always meant to be.

In *GR*, WM tells three narratives of William, and each one defends William's worthiness for kingship. One narrative is the account of Edward's bequest and the victory at Hastings,<sup>6</sup> the second is of William's years as duke of Normandy, the third is of William's kingship of England. In this way WM resolves the dynastic severing brought about by the Conquest as he does in his *VW*.<sup>7</sup> WM's decision to treat narrative time in this way suggests that the Conquest might indeed have been seen as a strike against William's worthiness, and that William could have been (and indeed was, as in *ASC*<sup>8</sup>) held accountable for the consequent disasters. WM attempts to absolve William by

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<sup>4</sup> M. Otter, '1066: The Moment of Transition in Two Narratives of the Norman Conquest', *Speculum* 74 (1999), 565–86, esp. at 566–8; on WM's *VW*, see 569–79.

<sup>5</sup> Otter, '1066', 585–6.

<sup>6</sup> Discussed above in relation to Harold, 112 ff.

<sup>7</sup> WM, *VW* ii.1.1, 60–1; cf. Otter, '1066', 569–79, 584.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. C. Clark, 'The narrative mode of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* before the Conquest', in P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (eds.), *England Before the Conquest* (Cambridge, 1971), 215–35, at 234.

communicating his worthiness through three separate stories which, together, show him as legitimate and consistently worthy.

For WM, subsequent history confirmed that William was the legitimate king of England. Hence, the pre-Conquest William was a future legitimate king of England, and for WM his character was largely beyond reproach. How does he make this defence and argument as he progresses through his narrative of William's conquest and reign? As we have seen, the way in which WM attributes responsibility to Harold creates the necessary space for William's legitimacy as an English king. Indeed, unlike John and unlike WM's own account of Cnut, WM makes William perpetually eligible for legitimate kingship of England.<sup>9</sup> William's character and behaviour are consistently good, thereby preparing for the inevitable justice and worthiness of his kingship—and kingship of England specifically. It is important to stress that WM's support for William does not derive from a bias towards Norman sources. The good character traits which WM chooses to include do not indicate any preference on WM's part for Norman sources or agendas. WM defends William's kingship, but not because William is a Norman king, and not on the same basis as his earlier Norman sources, WP and WJ. Rather, WM uses them—as he uses ASC—to make an English story. WM makes a compelling case for William's worthiness of English kingship based on his character.

We have already examined WM's advocacy of William's legitimacy through his criticism of Harold.<sup>10</sup> There remains a final point to make about WM's narrative of pre-Conquest England. WM modifies the character and accountability of the English in order to defend William's kingship and to absolve William from responsibility or blame. He portrays certain individuals as virtuous when resisting illegitimate threats, but entirely changes their character subsequently when describing these individuals in conflict with

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. Gillingham, 'Civilizing the English? The English Histories of William of Malmesbury and David Hume', *Historical Research*, 74 (2001), 17–43, at 37.

<sup>10</sup> Above, 112–125.

William. Before the Conquest, WM praises the strength and unity of English resistance against Tostig's raids:

Eodem anno Tostinus, a Flandria in Humbram nauigio sexaginta nauium delatus, ea quae circa oram fluminis erant piraticis excursionibus infestabat; sed ab Eduino et Morcardo concordis potentiae fratribus impigre de prouintia pulsus uersus Scottiam uela conuertit<sup>11</sup>

WM refers to Tostig as 'piraticus'; Tostig then joins with the Norwegian king Harold Fairhair, both of which place Tostig safely outside the realm of honourable enemies.<sup>12</sup>

The words 'potentia' and 'concors' are important because this sense of strength and mutual loyalty among the English vanishes with William's arrival. The juxtaposition of dishonourable enmity with unified resistance emphasizes the moral quality of the resistance. WM is selective about the quality and value of English resistance—not based on origin or nationality, but on the moral calibre of what or whom they resist. Because WM deems William's cause just, WM narrates resistance against him as quite the opposite of what we see here: he will portray it as weak, indecisive, disloyal and reprehensible.

WM begins establishing William's character and justice with a narrative of William's tenure as duke, drawing largely on material from WP. WM similarly gives William a royal character even in these early years of his career: a few examples from this extended narrative will serve to illustrate. WM stresses the considerations most likely to be the ones for which William could be impugned, and relates anecdotes that show William was particularly and specifically undeserving of blame. Hence when WM reaches his narrative of the conquest itself and William's reign as king, he has already established William's character and thus his worthiness of English kingship.

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<sup>11</sup> 'In the same year, Tostig sailed with a fleet of 60 ships from Flanders to the Humber and despoiled everything near the mouth of the river with piratical raids; but by Edwin and Morcar, two brothers who used their power as one, he was vigorously driven out of the province, and turned his sails towards Scotland.' *GR* ii.228.9, i, 420–1.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Cicero and WM on lawful enemies; discussed above, 119, 122.

WM's William respects his adversaries, which permits WM to suggest that the Conquest was not the illegitimate work of pirates (as, for instance, WM has deemed Tostig). To highlight that William is special and distinguished in his character, WM describes his good behaviour as superior to that of others: 'Quid quod inestimabili presumptione fortitudinis numquam subito, nec nisi prenuntiata die, illum aggredi dignatus, nostri temporis morem animi magnitudine contempserit?'<sup>13</sup> By casting William as unique among those of his era in his just behaviour before battle, WM shows that he will make a uniquely impressive English king.

WM describes William's triumph against King Henry of France in the Battle of Mortemer in 1054 in a way that makes rebellion against the king seem not a serious threat, but a minor hindrance to William's deserved and impressive military victory:

Illud quoque pretereo, quod iterum ruptis amicitiiis rex Henricus, Normanniam ingressus ... Verum Willelmus, qui se uideret propter fidei dissimulationem immoderate premi, tunc tandem consciae uirtutis arma concutiens regias copias quae citra flumen erant ... tanta internitiae cecidit ut nichil postea Frantia plus metueret quam Normannorum ferotiam irritare.<sup>14</sup>

Although WM claims he will neglect ('praeterire') the story, he in fact details it at length as a further argument for William's impressive military leadership.

WM has begun to establish William's character through important stories from his tenure as duke. He continues to do so as he begins a separate story about William's preparation for kingship and his reign as king of England. At the beginning of iii.238, WM demarcates a new narrative beginning after relating a miracle story from Nantes. He begins with Edward's death and William's express and specific preparation to realize his

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<sup>13</sup> 'How can I do justice to the incredible courage and self-confidence he showed in never stooping to a surprise attack, always naming the day beforehand, as though his proud spirit disdained the normal practice of our times?' *GR* iii.234.1, i, 434–5. For the implications of this passage for WM's moral message, cf. S.O. Sønnesyn, *William of Malmesbury and the Ethics of History* (Woodbridge, 2012), 201.

<sup>14</sup> 'Another point to I must pass over: how, when friendly relations were again broken off, King Henry invaded Normandy ... Whereupon William, who found himself unduly hard-pressed by breaches of loyalty, at length with a display of deliberate valour fell upon those of the royal forces who were on his side of the river ... and cut them to pieces with such slaughter that France for the future was to fear nothing more than rousing the fury of the Normans.' *GR* iii.234.1, i, 434–7.

claim. It is significant that the story of William's kingship merits a new beginning in WM's view. This fresh start provides a means for endorsing William's claim to kingship of England by showing that he has an English king's character, without undue investigation into—or attempts to account for—how he obtained and secured this office: perhaps at the expense of the English.<sup>15</sup> WM reminds his readers that he has narrated William's deeds as duke, then remarks: 'modo aliud narrandi exordium ordo temporum flagitat, ut de regno eius, quantum nostra sciscitatio penetrare potuit, mendatium arguam, ueritatem pronuntiem.'<sup>16</sup> WM essentially describes his forthcoming narrative as a truth-seeking endeavour that will result in, or require, a judgment. He investigating William's reign; the ensuing narrative reveals his verdict.

WM explains that William warns Harold of his intent, thereby strengthening WM's picture of William as an honourable conqueror as opposed to a piratical one:

Alter interea illum per nuntios leniter conuenire, de rupto federe expostulare, precibus minas insuere: scieret se ante annum emensum ferro debitum uendicaturum, illuc iturum quo Haroldus tutiores se pedes habere putaret.<sup>17</sup>

This report enhances the portrait of William as a leader who keeps his word and who observes honourable conduct.<sup>18</sup> WM shows that there was no deception on William's part, nor did he resort to a surprise attack. William was a successful conqueror, but might not be considered praiseworthy by a defeated people. By including these observations, WM absolves William of any potential blame for employing these strategies to defeat England or for making the English into victims.

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<sup>15</sup> WM hints at this earlier in referring to the Conquest a disaster; above, 123.

<sup>16</sup> 'The order of events now calls for a fresh start, for I must give the result of my enquiries into his reign as king, refuting falsehood, setting forth the truth.' *GR* iii.238.1, i, 444–5.

<sup>17</sup> 'William meanwhile was sending messages of mild remonstrance, complaining of the breach of faith, and mingling threats with his entreaties; for he warned Harold that before the year was out, he would claim what was his due by force of arms, and come to a place where Harold supposed his footing secure.' *GR* iii.238.3, i, 446–7. Cf. *WP*, *GG* ii.4, 106–7.

<sup>18</sup> Above, 201–5.

William has not yet been crowned king of England, but Edward is dead and WM considers Harold illegitimate.<sup>19</sup> In the interim WM makes a point of associating William with leadership worthy of a king. In describing William's relation with his men as their duke and military leader, WM suggests that the 'milites' have royal virtues. Their royal qualities reflect on William, making William appear to be not only a good military leader, but also worthy of being a king. WM writes:

ordines atiesque ita instituebat ut milites proceri corpore precellentes robore essent, duces et antesignani preter scientiam rei militaris etiam consilii et aetatis maturitate pollerent, ut, si singulos uel in atie uel alibi cerneres, non proceres sed reges putares.<sup>20</sup>

This passage evokes the ideals of leadership to which WM has held Æthelred and Harold: the king as military leader is directly responsible—and accountable—for the conduct of his men. This is a consistent theme in WM's attitude towards royal responsibility. The implication is that if William's men are worthy enough to evoke royalty, William was responsible for making them so—and hence deserves the credit.

Like WP, WM uses the pope's support to add legitimacy to the justice of William's claim.<sup>21</sup> But the way in which WM does so reveals that he uses the appearance of balanced judgment to support William's kingship. He writes:

Verum tunc Willelmi industria, cum prouidentia Dei consentiens, iam spe Angliam inuadebat et, ne iustam causam temeritas decoloraret, ad Apostolicum ... misit, iustitiam suscepti belli quantis poterat facundiae neruis allegans.<sup>22</sup>

WM explains that Harold did not approach the pope, and gives as Harold's possible reasons only those which do not reflect well on Harold: Harold thought it unnecessary;

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<sup>19</sup> Above, 117.

<sup>20</sup> 'The troops of his battle-line he organized in such a way as to have knights of outstanding stature and strength, with captains and commanders remarkable no less for their maturity of years and judgement than for skill in arms, so that if you had seen any one of them in the field or elsewhere, you would have thought him no mere magnate but of royal blood.' *GR* iii.238.5, i, 446–9.

<sup>21</sup> See WP, *GG* ii.3, 104–5.

<sup>22</sup> 'But at that time William, his energy allied with the providence of God, was already in full expectation of invading England, and for fear that by acting rashly he might throw doubt on a just cause, he sent to the pope ... to urge the justice of his campaign with all the eloquence at his command.' *GR* iii.238.7, i, 448–9. Cf. WP, *GG* ii.3, 104–5.

was too proud; failed to believe in the justice of his own cause; was afraid. The pope considers both sides of the argument (‘super negotio singulorum sententias sciscitatus’) before ruling in William’s favour, giving William the token of kingship.<sup>23</sup> The pope’s support adds legitimacy to William’s claim. But WM’s narrative defends William, for Harold’s side has never been presented to the pope: how could the pope weigh both sides if he has only heard one? In his praise of William’s efforts to seek the pope’s support, WM includes a further condemnation of Harold for failing to pursue his cause—which suggests that even Harold is not fully persuaded about the justice of his cause. Harold may not have needed papal support, but both the pope’s decision and Harold’s arrogant indifference convey an aura of illegitimacy in contrast with William’s humble petition for approval from an authority higher than himself.<sup>24</sup> WM then explains that in preparing for his invasion of England, William takes counsel and prays: a favourable wind and smooth sailing to Hastings follow immediately.<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that William shows piety even in his wartime preparations: William succeeds in both military and religious endeavours.

At this point WM narrates the Battle of Hastings for the second time: he has explained its outcome at the end of Book II, but now provides a detailed account in Book III. In looping back again to a report of the battle, WM makes the battle appear not like a rupture in the English past, but rather an episode in the narrative of William’s kingship.<sup>26</sup> William has proven his character as a duke, and behaved like the king of England from the time of Edward’s death (in preparing to claim England, in his preparation of troops, in his deference to advice, in securing papal approval and in prayer to God). The battle

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<sup>23</sup> GR iii.238.7–8, i, 448–9.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. M. de Jong’s recent arguments about Louis the Pious, who in displays of humility actually earned greater authority and legitimacy: *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840* (Cambridge, 2009), esp. at 3–4, 52–8, 113–14.

<sup>25</sup> GR iii.238.8–9, i, 448–51; following WP, GG ii.1–8, 100–15.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Otter, ‘1066’, discussed above, 198–209.

changes nothing about William's worthiness or claim: WM remains consistent with his earlier comment that the battle itself was 'leui' in light of God's plan.<sup>27</sup>

WM makes William's actions as conqueror just, not tyrannical or cruel. A prime instance of this is WM's portrayal of William's actions on the battlefield: William chooses the path of justice, instead of pressing the advantage which he could easily do. William punishes one of his own men for attacking Harold after Harold falls in battle: 'Iacentis femur unus militum gladio proscidit; unde a Willelmo ignominiae notatus, quod rem ignauam et pudendam fecisset, militia pulsus est.'<sup>28</sup> This comment about a conqueror's display of justice to his opponent after victory in battle is very similar to WM's comment about Cnut punishing Eadric, the killer of Edmund Ironside.<sup>29</sup> In both cases WM makes a deliberate effort to show his conquering kings behaving with justice—if symbolic only—and not with partiality to their respective national or ethnic origins.

In this account of the battle, WM gives what appears to be a balanced perspective on William and Harold: 'Emicuit ibi uirtus amborum ducum.'<sup>30</sup> It is certainly reasonable to suppose that he wished to acknowledge that both fought well. Indeed, William's victory appears the more impressive since he fought a worthy opponent.<sup>31</sup> But given his earlier indictment of Harold, it is difficult to sustain the idea that this comment alone means that he is trying to compensate for Norman criticism of Harold, or that he is 'seeking to redress the pro-Norman bias of one of his main sources.'<sup>32</sup> By offering an attitude towards Harold that seems balanced and objective rather than vindictive, WM

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<sup>27</sup> *GR* ii.228.11, i, 422–3.

<sup>28</sup> 'One of the knights hacked at his thigh with a sword as he lay on the ground; for which he was branded with disgrace by William for a dastardly and shameful act and degraded from his knighthood.' *GR* iii.243.1, i, 456–7. This detail is not in WP, but he expresses a similar sentiment of restraint from devastating the English: *GG* ii.40, 172–3; see also Thomson, *GR*, ii, 235.

<sup>29</sup> Above, 161.

<sup>30</sup> 'On that field both leaders were distinguished by their valour.' *GR* iii.243.1, i, 454–5.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. WP, *GG* ii.40, 172–3

<sup>32</sup> Thomson, *GR*, ii, 234–5.

makes his ultimate endorsement of William's kingship that much more convincing.

The value WM places on 'spectata audacia' appears again in his account of William's victory. WM specifically describes the manifestation of William's physical presence during the battle: 'Item Willelmus suos clamore et presentia hortari, ipse primus procurrere, confertos hostes inuadere'.<sup>33</sup> WM underlines William's 'spectata audacia' by repeating his praiseworthy absence of fear:

Perstitit tamen magnanimi ducis et corpus et animus, quanuis familiari susurro a custodibus corporis reuocaretur; perstiti, inquam, donec uictoriam plenam superueniens nox infunderet. Et proculdubio diuina illum manus protexit, ut nichil sanguinis et eius corpore hostis hauriret, quamquam illum tot iaculis impeteret.<sup>34</sup>

It is worth comparing this passage about William's 'familiaris' with WM's account of Harold's brother Gyrth, who tries to restrain Harold as the 'familiaris' does William.<sup>35</sup>

But Gyrth goes further in that he actually advises Harold to quit the field of battle—and WM implies that Harold should have listened to the advice. In battle, Harold's rashness is William's courage. The outcome proves who was wise and who was foolish, and whom God supports. Throughout, WM adds reasons to the providential explanations, as though comments on God's will alone would not suffice to prove William's right kingship.

WM makes a short detour from a chronological account to describe the Normans. In explaining the benefit of their achievements for England here, WM enhances the impression that William's victory is a good thing for the nation. It is no coincidence that these two items—Norman achievements on England's behalf and the conclusion of the battle—occur together in WM's narrative. WM's 'detour' characterizes the Normans as competitive and ambitious, and also as welcoming and responsible for increasing

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<sup>33</sup> 'William too encouraged his men by shouts and by his presence, leading the charge in person and plunging into the thick of the enemy', *GR* iii.244.1, i, 456–7. Cf. *WP GG* ii.22, 132–7.

<sup>34</sup> 'But the brave duke never flinched in body or in spirit, however much his bodyguard tried to recall him by murmuring friendly remonstrance; he never flinched, I repeat, until night supervened and made the victory complete. And without a doubt it was God's hand that protected him, so that though the enemy beset him with a hail of missiles, not a drop of his blood was spilt.' *GR* iii.244.1, i, 456–7.

<sup>35</sup> Above, 120–3.

religious devotion in England.<sup>36</sup> He finishes this segment with the words: ‘Sed, quia de his satis dictum, Willelmi gesta prosequamur.’<sup>37</sup> His next words, which begin iii.247, mark an instantaneous switch back to the battlefield of Hastings: ‘Ille, ubi perfecta uictoria potitus est, suos sepeliendos mirifice curauit; hostibus quoque, si qui uellent, idem exsequendi licentiam prebuit.’<sup>38</sup> On its own, this passage represents William as victorious after the fact, without dwelling upon how he obtained this victory. William is honourable in his treatment of the enemy. Furthermore, WM’s immediately preceding description of the Normans’ bringing a flowering of devotion to England—‘recenti ritu patriam florere’—shows that this victory for William is also a victory for England, not a defeat.

WM has commented earlier on the disaster that befalls England on that day.<sup>39</sup> He ascribes the catastrophe to the mysterious plan of Providence, but without linking it to William personally. He frames his general comments about the Norman Conquest with reference to God’s hidden plan.<sup>40</sup> But when he pursues the specific details of William’s deeds, he does not present William’s actions or choices as blameworthy or progressively disastrous.

WM’s account of events between the Battle of Hastings and William’s coronation is brief—and what is omitted is significant. WM entirely eliminates the sense that William had to struggle or use violence in order to secure the throne after Hastings. Unlike ASC, WM does not refer to William’s ravaging on the way to Berkhamsted in D or even E’s conclusion that William conquered the land.<sup>41</sup> But WM does not make these changes from the perspective of a Norman writer celebrating the achievement of a

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<sup>36</sup> *GR* iii.246.1–2, i, 460–1.

<sup>37</sup> ‘But of this I have said enough; let us pursue the story of William.’ *GR* iii.246.2, i, 460–1.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Having secured a complete victory, he saw his dead splendidly buried, and gave the enemy to permission to do the same if they wished.’ *GR* iii.247.1, i, 460–1.

<sup>39</sup> *GR* ii.227.1, i, 414–17; iii.245.1, i, 456–7.

<sup>40</sup> Above, 113.

<sup>41</sup> ASC (DE) 1066.

Norman conqueror. Rather, WM minimizes the involvement of the Normans and simply continues to cast William as the rightful English king because of his legitimacy and worthiness of character.

WM explains that William's progress was that of a royal army, not as an enemy. This sense—that he should be seen as a king (and of the English, not as an invader)—makes a dramatic departure from ASC, conspicuously ignoring the evidence that William ravaged his new realm:

Sensim ergo Willelmus, ut triumphatorem decebat, cum exercitu non hostili sed regali modo progrediens, urbem regni maximam Lundoniam petit, moxque cum gratulatione ciues omnes effusi obuiam uadunt. Prorupit omnibus portis unda salutantium, auctoribus magnatibus<sup>42</sup>

The phrase 'ut triumphatorem decebat' shows that WM finds William to be fulfilling his obligations and living up to the expectations for kings. Furthermore, WM enhances the image of William as the right English king by showing both people and magnates welcoming William as their king with enthusiasm. WP adds that the Normans added their support;<sup>43</sup> but, unlike WP, WM only mentions the English.

In this brief account of the two months between Hastings and the coronation, WM accomplishes still more. As we shall see, he undermines the justice of English claims to the throne by showing their behaviour as unworthy of it. Only in recognizing William's authority is their behaviour worthy. WM endorses the justice of William's kingship through William's efforts to obtain it legitimately and through the conviction with which the English acclaim him.

Because elements of WM's account reflect material found in both ASC (D) and (E), it is worth comparing their accounts of the English resistance with WM's. The

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<sup>42</sup> 'So William went forward with his army slowly, as a victorious general should—a royal progress rather than an enemy advance—and made for London, the largest city in his kingdom, where all the citizens soon poured out to meet him with rejoicing. They burst out in waves from every gate to welcome him, on the authority of the magnates', *GR* iii.247.1–2, i, 460–1.

<sup>43</sup> WP, *GG* ii.30, 150–1.

important things to note about D are the desire to have Edgar as king and the justice of this potential accession. It describes things worsening daily to the end, but significantly does not blame this trend on any particular individuals or actions:

Aldred arcebiscop 7 seo burhwaru on Lundene woldon habban þa Eadgar cild to kyng, eallswa him wel gecynde wæs, 7 Eadwine 7 Morkere him beheton þæt hi mid him feohtan woldon, ac swa hit æfre forðlicor beon sceolde, swa wearð hit fram dæge to dæge lætre 7 wyrre eallswa hit æt þam ende eall geferde.<sup>44</sup>

The annal then criticizes the English for failing to acknowledge God's punishment on them and to submit earlier. ASC implies here that these individuals should have recognized and accepted that they were victims, whereas WM will empower them by suggesting that they should and could have improved the situation in England. ASC (E) expresses Edgar's willingness to fill the role of king and the people's support and claims that this angers William.<sup>45</sup> E expresses not only the will of the monks and the people, but also Edgar's intent to become king: a direct challenge to William.

WM recasts the story to give the English the potential—and thus the responsibility—to extract themselves from defeat and to supply a king. Because they fail, he allocates to them a great degree of fault for failing to do so, which in turn makes them unworthy of the throne:

Ceteri proceres Edgarum eligerent, si episcopus assertores haberent; sed proximo urgente periculo et domesticae litis discidio, nec illud quidem effectum. Ita Angli, qui in unam coeuntes sententiam potuissent patriae reformare ruinam, dum nullum ex suis uolunt, alienum induxerunt.<sup>46</sup>

This passage has several important elements. First, WM eliminates any sense that Edgar was meant to be king or that it was his natural right. This narrative gesture is similar to

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<sup>44</sup> 'Archbishop Ealdred and the garrison in London wanted to have prince Edgar for king, just as was his proper right; and Edwin and Morcar promised him that they would fight for him, but always when it should have been furthered, so from day to day the later the worse it got, just as it all did in the end.' ASC (D) 1066; Swanton, 199–200.

<sup>45</sup> Above, 128.

<sup>46</sup> 'The other nobles would have chosen Edgar, if they had had the bishops on their side; but in the face of immediate danger and as they were divided by internal quarrels, this too came to nothing. Thus the English who, had they agreed on one course of action, could have rebuilt the ruins of their country, through reluctance to accept one of their own number gave an outsider his chance.' *GR* iii.247.2–3, i, 462–3.

WM's omission of the reference to Æthelred as the natural lord of the English in his account of 1014.<sup>47</sup> WM is consistent in his pattern of downplaying natural right and origin as important considerations in determining worthiness or legitimacy in an English king.

Second, and equally remarkable, WM eliminates Edgar's intent to be king from ASC (E). This develops his characterization of Edgar: lazy, indecisive, greedy—and hence wholly unworthy of being an English king. He is apparently incapable of inspiring loyalty: WM does not mention any promise from Edwin and Morcar to help Edgar. Instead he characterizes these individuals as unable to agree or to support one another. This reduces the sense of internal loyalty among the English which could have posed a threat to William's legitimacy. ASC criticizes them for not submitting, whereas WM suggests that the English could still have taken control of their own destiny. Both narratives show the English being punished for their sins, but WM makes more room for their responsibility—both causal and moral.

WM also eliminates D's sense that the situation in England worsened to the end. Indeed, WM's next observation is on the conviction with which the English acclaimed William king: 'Tunc ille, *haud dubie rex conclamatus*, die Natalis Domini coronatus est ab Aldredo archiepiscopo; cauebat enim id munus a Stigando suscipere, quod esset is archiepiscopus non legitime.'<sup>48</sup> [emphasis added] It is noteworthy that WM paraphrases WP here—this material is valuable to show William as the rightful English king. WM chooses to include WP's account of William rejecting Stigand because Stigand had been excommunicated—an episode which ASC does not mention. William exhibits concern ('caueo') for behaving justly according to law.

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<sup>47</sup> Above, 77–8.

<sup>48</sup> 'Then William, *chosen king by acclamation beyond all doubt*, was crowned on Christmas Day by Archbishop Ealdred; for he was careful not to receive this office from Stigand, because he was not legally archbishop.' *GR* iii.247.3, i, 462–3; cf. WP, *GG* ii.30, 150–1.

After William's coronation, WM all but omits accounts of William suppressing rebellion, claiming that these events merit summary only: 'Omnium deinde bellorum quae gessit haec summa est.'<sup>49</sup> There are several noteworthy points about this comment. First, unlike WP, WM mentions fighting and resistance to William. This provides his account with a sense of realism and balance not found in WP. But this sense of realism has a narrative purpose: to render William a legitimate king of England and to free him of criticism for his conquest. Unlike ASC, WM conveys no sense that things worsen in England under his rule, nor does WM accuse William of failing to keep his promises. The raids appear as minor incidents, not long campaigns to quell many rebellions.

WM does more than minimize events temporally. Instead of pursuing a narrative framed by the chronology of William's campaigns, he pursues a narrative organized around a sequence of individual traitors. This narrative strategy at this particular moment in William's reign permits WM to focus responsibility—and hence blame—for the violence and disasters in England upon traitors instead of upon William. For WM, the English resistance to William is never justified, because WM maintains that William is their legitimate and worthy king. Being of English origin is not enough to redeem the rebels' actions.

After William is king, WM casts resistance to him as treachery. He allocates responsibility to specific traitors in particular. By identifying several culprits on whom he places all of the blame, WM preserves the English and their king, William, from shame. WM accuses Edgar, Morcar, Waltheof, the English and Danes of breeding tyranny,<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> 'All the campaigns which he then fought can be summarized as follows.' *GR* iii.248.1, i, 462–3; cf. ASC for 1068–1070: Thomson notes that WM telescopes the events of these years, *GR*, ii, 237; cf. WJ, *GND* vii.19, ii, 178–81. On WM's tempered account of William's northern campaigns, cf. Sønnesyn, *William of Malmesbury*, 209; on the campaigns themselves, see: W.E. Kapelle, *The Norman Conquest of the North: The Region and its Transformation, 1000–1135* (London, 1979), 108–19; E.A. Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest of England: Its Causes and Results* (6 vols., Oxford, 1823–1892), iv, 234 ff.

<sup>50</sup> *GR* iii.248.2, 462–3.

making no mention of Hereward.<sup>51</sup> By explaining response to treachery as the reason for William's devastation of York, WM makes William's action look just and not like unnecessary violence. WM reports:

Eboracum, unicum rebellionum suffugium, ciuibus pene deleuit fame et ferro necatis. Ibi enim rex Scottorum Malcolmus cum suis, ibi Edgarus et Marcherius et Waldefus cum Anglis et Danis nidum tyrannidis sepe fouebant, sepe duces illius trucidabant<sup>52</sup>

WM again describes the Danes negatively, making them a convenient enemy to deflect attention from civil discord.

WM himself points out that the structure of his narrative will now follow the traitors, remarking: 'quorum singillatim exitus si commemorauero, fortasse superfluum non ero'.<sup>53</sup> WM's play at hesitation—a familiar strategy<sup>54</sup>—actually suggests that the indictment of traitors which follows is essential to the narrative. Furthermore, it is interesting that WM seeks to describe at length the designs and deaths of the traitors but not of William's ruthless harrying of the land. He visits the responsibility on several few and specific traitors, which has the effect of minimizing the distress of those who suffered perhaps for their own sins, but at William's hands.

WM groups Malcolm, king of Scots, with the English traitors because he is their ally. WM's criticism of Malcolm is interesting because of the way in which the relationship between Malcolm and William serves to legitimize William's kingship. He makes an editorial comment about Malcolm, explaining that the Scottish king raided in England not to help Edgar but to aggravate William:

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. ASC (D) 1072; (E) 1070–1071.

<sup>52</sup> 'York, the only remaining refuge for rebels, he almost wiped out, so many of the citizens perished by famine or sword; for that was where Malcolm king of the Scots with his forces, where Edgar and Morcar and Waltheof with English and Danish troops often made a snug nest for tyranny, and often cut to pieces William's generals.' *GR* iii.248.2, i, 462–3.

<sup>53</sup> 'If I record the ends of these men one by one, I shall perhaps not go too far', *GR* iii.248.2, i, 462–3.

<sup>54</sup> Discussed in P.A. Hayward, 'The Importance of Being Ambiguous: Innuendo and Legerdemain in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum* and *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*', *ANS* 33 (2010), 75–102.

Malcolmus omnes Anglorum perfugas libenter recipiebat, tutamentum singulis quantum poterat impendens; Edgarum precipue ... Eius causa conterminas Angliae prouintias rapinis et incendiis infestabat, non quod aliquid ad regnum illi profuturum arbitraretur, sed ut Willelmi animum contristaret, qui Scotticis prediis terras suas obnoxias indignaretur.<sup>55</sup>

WM gives Malcolm no hint of good character or commitment to loyalty (whether to Edgar or William). More significant, WM undercuts the bond between Malcolm and Edgar that would in its mutual loyalty have perhaps posed a threat to William—and to WM's picture of William as the legitimate English king. Again, WM does not credit those who fail to support William with enough good character or enough unity to carry out a resistance. As such, they do not deserve the fruits of that resistance. Because Malcolm attacks not to further the cause of the right English king—or even the cause of a different claimant—WM suggests that all Malcolm is doing is unjustly attacking and provoking England and its king. WM acknowledges England as William's ('*terras suas*'), and in so doing makes Malcolm's actions seem the more inimical and treacherous.

In the one instance of resistance to William which WM does not censure, WM begins with William's victory and the surrender, before explaining how he achieved the victory at York: '*Et primo urbem metropolim, quam Angli cum Danis et Scottis obstinate tenebant, in deditionem accepit, ciuibus longa inedia consuptis*'.<sup>56</sup> WM adds that before the surrender, the battle was '*ingenti et graui*' and '*non incruenta sibi uictoria multos suorum amittens*'.<sup>57</sup> Despite this bloody conflict, WM mentions no specific losses among the resistance and omits the sense that York was wholly destroyed. The English

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<sup>55</sup> 'Malcolm had a warm welcome for all runaways on the English side, and gave them each as much protection as he could, Edgar especially ... For his sake he ravaged the neighbouring provinces of England with robbery and arson, not that he thought it would forward Edgar's hopes of becoming king, but to annoy William, and make him angry at the sight of his own lands exposed to Scottish forays.' *GR* iii.249.1, i, 462–3.

<sup>56</sup> 'First he accepted the surrender of the metropolitan city, which was held tenaciously by English with Danes and Scots, after exhausting the citizens by a lengthy famine.' *GR* iii.249.2, i, 462–3.

<sup>57</sup> 'massive and severe ... a victory far from bloodless, for he lost many of his own men.' *GR* iii.249.2, i, 464–5.

themselves are not victims, nor is their loss shameful; indeed, nothing in the resolution of the English and their allies here merits blame.

WM reserves blame for English traitors, and by extension the Danish threat, for William's ravaging of the northern coast. He thus redistributes responsibility from the king for causing damage, making him into a just avenger of unjust resistance. Those who resisted are ultimately to blame: WM conveys the impression that had the traitors accepted William as their rightful English king, this devastation would not have happened; the great sights of the region would still be visible in WM's day. WM gives no hint whatsoever implying that William was cruel or rash in his actions.<sup>58</sup>

WM gives reasons for William's decision to devastate the region, thereby defending the actions he takes as a defending king:

cum propter recentem iram, tum quia Cnutonem Danorum regem, filium Suani, aduentare rumor sparserat. Ea precipti ratio, ut nichil circa oram maritimam predo piraticus inueniret, secum asportaturus si cisius remeandum uel fami consulturus si diutius manendum putaret.<sup>59</sup>

This evokes WM's initial claim in his Book III Preface that most of William's actions can be excused. This approach is worth comparing with John's, who frequently offers specific reasons to excuse or explain the behaviour of his kings. WM's earlier observation that William lost many of his own men makes William's anger—and WM's reasons justifying William's actions—appear more reasonable. The Danes continue to serve as a convenient enemy in cases where the historian seeks to avoid concentrating on civil discord, disloyalty and the blame that should result for such situations.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. WJ for the claim that the rebels knew that they were in the wrong: 'deliberata sententia tam inconsulte temeritati congrua', *GND* vii.21, ii, 182–3; WP alludes only to 'imprudencia' and 'iniquitas' of English but does not describe rebellions, *GG* ii.32, 156–7.

<sup>59</sup> 'partly because of his recent anger, but also since a rumour had spread that Cnut king of the Danes, son of Swein, was approaching, the purpose of this order being to leave nothing near the seashore, which a raiding pirate could find and carry off if he had to make a rapid return home, or use for food if he thought he could stay longer.' *GR* iii.249.2–3, i, 464–5.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. e.g. John, above, 98–9.

This blame reserved exclusively for traitors and foreign threats, and not for William, persists in WM's conclusion of this story. He concludes: 'Itaque prouintiae quondam fertilis et tirannorum nutriculae incendio, preda, sanguine nerui succisi'.<sup>61</sup> WM does not even utter William's name as the perpetrator. Rather, a region that succoured the worst kind of men earns its deserved punishment as a result. The traitors have full causal and moral responsibility for the devastation of the region.

One question which the twelfth-century historians had to address was how William could be a legitimate king of England given the existence of other, potentially more legitimate contenders for the throne in 1066. Perhaps the most striking instance of the depth of WM's support for William—and WM's conviction that legitimate kingship of England was fundamentally based on character and behaviour—is his indictment of Edgar the Ætheling. With significant venom, WM blames Edgar for failing to resist or to distinguish himself properly given his status. WM maintains and strengthens the theme of Edgar's inadequacy which he had introduced earlier.<sup>62</sup> The Conquest itself was a disaster, but WM supports William: he criticizes those among the English whom he deems failed in their duty to defend their own interests or the cause of justice.

WM characterizes Edgar as dishonourable and opportunistic, thereby creating a contrast with the king:

Edgarus, cum Stigando et Aldredo archiepiscopis regis dedititius, sequenti anno facto ad Scottum transfugio iusiurandum maculauit; sed cum ibi aliquot annis degens nichil ad presens commodi, nichil ad futurum spei preter cotidianam stipem nactus esset, Normanni liberalitatem experiri pergens, ad eum tunc ultra mare degentem nauigauit.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> 'Thus a province once fertile and a nurse of tyrants was hamstrung by fire, rapine, and bloodshed', *GR* iii.249.3, i, 464–5.

<sup>62</sup> Above, 210–11.

<sup>63</sup> 'Edgar, who had surrendered to the king with Archbishops Stigand and Ealdred, stained the honour of his oath in the following years by escaping to join the king of the Scots; but as, after spending several years there, he had been offered, apart from his daily allowance, no privileges for the present and no hope for the future, he went on to test the liberality of the Norman duke, and took ship to join him, for at that time he was living overseas.' *GR* iii.251.1, i, 464–5.

WM's account modifies the characterization of Edgar in ASC, wherein Edgar never accepts William's rule and tensions persist between them,<sup>64</sup> and differs from John's loyal subject.<sup>65</sup> In *GR*, Edgar does not honour his lord or his oath as he should be. Rather, WM portrays Edgar attempting to take advantage of William's generosity. This makes Edgar appear querulous and unwilling to fulfil his obligations. This marked character change highlights William's generosity and legitimacy the more.

WM's censure increases as he conveys Edgar's laziness, a quality he has condemned before.<sup>66</sup> WM comments: 'Quod regi gratissimum fuisse ferunt, ut incentore bellorum Anglia uacaret', which suggests that he views Edgar's presence as a potential threat to William's legitimate rule, were Edgar ever motivated enough to foment rebellion.<sup>67</sup> WM continues: 'Receptus ergo Edgarus et magno donatio donatus est, pluribusque annis in curia manens pedetemptim pro ignavia et, ut mitius dictum sit, pro simplicitate contemptui haberi cepit.'<sup>68</sup> WM casts contempt for Edgar in the passive voice, making it seem a more general and prevalent opinion. There is no mercy in WM's critique of Edgar. WM calls attention to his own sweetness in amending his condemnation of Edgar, which indeed underlines his opinion that Edgar's legacy does not deserve to be remembered more mildly.

WM holds Edgar accountable, which has implications for his attitude towards William's responsibilities. In allocating blame to Edgar, WM explicitly removes it from William. Immediately thereafter, WM comments of Edgar's acceptance of money from William: 'Quantula enim simplicitas ut libram argenti, quam cotidie in stipendio

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<sup>64</sup> Below, 235.

<sup>65</sup> Below, 275–6.

<sup>66</sup> Above, 68.

<sup>67</sup> 'The king is said to have been delighted at this removal from England of a man who might stir up trouble', *GR* iii.251.1–2, i, 464–7.

<sup>68</sup> 'Edgar was kindly received therefore, and given a large sum of money; and at the court he remained for some years, coming by degrees to be despised for his indolence or, to use a kinder word, his simplicity.' *GR* iii.251.2, i, 466–7.

accipiebat, regi pro uno equo perdonaret!’<sup>69</sup>—a comment which, as Thomson has noted, is particular to WM.<sup>70</sup> Equally as original as this comment are its implications for WM’s distribution of responsibility. WM even blames Edgar for William’s failure to uphold his end of the agreement. Edgar is a fool for accepting William’s terms of making peace, but WM does not blame William for pressing his advantage. WM’s interpretation is not balanced: Edgar is fully blameworthy.

WM attaches no importance to Edgar’s English origins in any respect, including both his personal worth and his claim to any particular office or rights in England. WM claims that Edgar spurned offers of welcome from the German and Greek emperors, remarking: ‘quosdam enim profecto fallit amor patriae, ut nichil eis uideatur iocundum nisi consuetum hauserint caelum.’<sup>71</sup> For WM, Edgar is reprehensible for not availing himself of the opportunities abroad. Edgar’s loss is not England’s loss of a more legitimate heir. It is his loss alone. Edgar’s lineage made him worthy of patronage, but not in relation to a specific place. Nor does lineage suffice to make him a worthy contender for kingship. Foolishness and lack of good character make him reprehensible anywhere. For WM, good values in kings are the same in England as elsewhere. His English kings set the standard for worthiness in Europe, but the key point is that this standard is not based on a king’s origin. It is based entirely on the individual. WM considers heredity a secondary consideration, only insofar as it is useful in a particular case for a particular king.

Finally, WM condemns Edgar with narrative time. Although WM is discussing events of the mid-1070s, he chooses this point in the narrative to describe Edgar’s pitiful and shameful end even though he was still living (and would not die until 1126): ‘Vnde

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<sup>69</sup> ‘Indeed, what simplicity it shows to let the king off the payment of a pound of silver, which was his daily allowance, in return for one horse!’ *GR* iii.251.2, i, 466–7.

<sup>70</sup> Thomson, *GR*, ii, 239.

<sup>71</sup> ‘for some people are simply misled by the love of their country, so that they can enjoy nothing unless they can breathe familiar air.’ *GR* iii.251.3, i, 466–7.

Edgarus fatua cupidine illusus Angliam rediit; ubi, ut superius dixi, diuerso fortunae ludicro rotatus, nunc remotus et tacitus canos suos in agro consumit.<sup>72</sup> WM addresses Edgar's character thematically, as a traitor, not temporally, as a persistent and potential other claimant for the kingship.

WM's castigation of Edgar reveals that for WM, the status of *ætheling* has no bearing on an individual's suitability or even legitimacy for kingship of England. His criticism of Edgar is an implicit—and indeed at times, explicit—defence of William's particular worthiness for kingship of England. WM allocates a significant portion of blame for disaster onto specific individuals of high rank, thereby localizing accountability in them and not in the English as a whole. This strategy remains consistent with WM's pattern. WM blames Edgar for not assuming responsibility, for not living up to the expectations accordant to his position, and for permitting himself to be a victim. For WM, foolishness and inactivity (as in his condemnations of Harold and *Æthelred*) are inexcusable. For WM, Edgar cannot be an unconsenting victim. Hence, he alone is responsible for what befalls him.

WM describes Edwin and Morcar as acting in concord and with power, praising their unity in response to Tostig's threat to the kingdom.<sup>73</sup> WM again mentions their peaceful and successful defence of Northumbria in Edward's day: '*et communi umbone pacifice tuebantur*'.<sup>74</sup> This changes with William. It is certainly plausible and unsurprising that, whereas Edwin and Morcar might have been successful leaders before William, they might yet prove unsuccessful after William's assumption of power. The essential element of WM's narrative is that they undergo a complete change in character.

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<sup>72</sup> 'Thus it was that Edgar, deceived by this foolish longing, returned to England where, as I have said above, he suffered a turn of Fortune's wheel, and now, in solitude and silence, wears out his gray hairs in the depths of the country.' *GR* iii.251.3, i, 466–7.

<sup>73</sup> Above, 200–1.

<sup>74</sup> 'and kept it in peace with a defence force which they shared' *GR* iii.252.1, i, 466–7.

WM characterizes the brothers' resistance as entirely without honour. ASC reports: 'Her Eadwine eorl 7 Morkere eorl hlupon ut, 7 mislice ferdon on wuda 7 on feldon'.<sup>75</sup> But WM changes the tenor of the passage, adding specific cause for blaming their actions. He reports that when Harold was killed: 'ad terras suae potestatis profugientes, aliquot annis pacem Willelmi turbauerunt, clandestinis latrociniis siluas infestantes nec umquam comminus et aperte martem agentes'.<sup>76</sup> Whereas they previously ruled 'pacifice', WM now makes them responsible for damaging the 'pax' of William. They are a scourge in the woodland, through which WM implies strong reproach for their failure to engage in honourable combat.

Even when William faces the dishonourable treachery of Edwin and Morcar, WM explains that William still intended to treat them with the great respect due their station and with mutual loyalty had they accepted:

Postremo nec ui nec dolo hostium sed suorum perfidia trucidati, regem ad lacrimas flexere; quibus ipse et coniugia cognatarum et amicitiae dignationem iam pridem indulsisset, si quieti adquiescere uellent.<sup>77</sup>

It is noteworthy that WM preserves and magnifies this element of ASC (E) 1071: ASC only mentions Edwin betrayed by his own men, but WM suggests that the reaction spread to both brothers. WM omits ASC's mention of Hereward, thereby removing any possible contenders for the heroism he has reserved for William. Indeed, the mention of 'lacrimae' conveys William's depth of emotion and intent to do right by them. William is only generous, peaceful, and attempting to support the cause of mutual loyalty to these high-ranking English men; WM does not suggest that he imposes Norman fraud or force on the

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<sup>75</sup> 'Here Earl Edwin and Earl Morcar ran off and travelled variously in woods and open country.' [D] ASC (D) 1072 [1071], (E) 1071; Swanton, 207.

<sup>76</sup> 'the brothers escaped to regions which were under their own control, and there disturbed William's peace for some years by infesting the forests with covert brigandage and never fighting openly and at close quarters.' *GR* iii.252.3, i, 468–9.

<sup>77</sup> 'At length they were cut down, not by the force or fraud of their enemies but by the treachery of their own men, and the king was moved to tears. He himself would long ago have married them to his own kinswomen and honoured them with his friendship, had they been content to remain at peace.' *GR* iii.252.3, i, 468–9.

English as a defeated people. This is worth comparing to WP, who describes Edwin and Morcar submitting willingly to William and William giving—instead of only intending—forgiveness.<sup>78</sup> WM creates traitors to take the responsibility and blame for the disasters which he, unlike WP, acknowledges happened during Williams reign. WM’s traitors get what they deserve: betrayal by their own men.

Waltheof provides the means to highlight the king’s admirable devotion to loyalty even when it is directed to those who do not necessarily deserve it. WM’s very first comment, ostensibly about Waltheof, primarily praises William’s generosity and loyalty: ‘Waldefus, amplae prosapiae comes, multam familiaritatem noui regis nactus fuerat, quod ille, preteritarum offensarum immemor, magis illas uirtuti quam perfidiae attribuebat.’<sup>79</sup> WM then remarks that the king gave friendship and his niece in marriage to Waltheof, but: ‘uero ... non permansit in fide, prauum ingenium cohibere impotens.’<sup>80</sup> WM makes a character judgment about Waltheof: he is inherently corrupt.

WM comments on different interpretations of Waltheof and their credibility: he says that credible English sources offer the excuse (‘excusatio’) that ‘necessitas’ and not ‘uoluntas’ drove Waltheof’s actions (‘necessitate interceptum, non uoluntate addictum’). He then explains that this claim seems (‘uidetur’) to be supported by God because of the miracles at Waltheof’s tomb.<sup>81</sup> He has stated that William’s actions merit excuse (‘excusari’)<sup>82</sup> without qualification; here, despite the quality of the English sources, he qualifies attempts to explain Waltheof and does not stand behind them.<sup>83</sup> WM does not qualify his indictment of Waltheof’s ‘prauum’: he lets character argue for itself.

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<sup>78</sup> WP, *GG* ii.34, 160–3.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Waltheof, an earl of noble lineage, had been a great friend of the new king, who was prepared to forget his past offences and ascribe them to a high spirit rather than disloyalty.’ *GR* iii.253.1, i, 468–9.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Even so he did not remain loyal, being unable to control his innate perversity.’ *GR* iii.253.2, i, 468–9.

<sup>81</sup> *GR* iii.253.2, i, 468–71.

<sup>82</sup> Above, 197–8.

<sup>83</sup> See J. Huntington, ‘The Taming of the Laity: Writing Waltheof and Rebellion in the Twelfth Century’, *ANS* 32 (2009), 79–95: for the suggestion that Waltheof’s ethnicity was not WM’s primary concern, 80, 83–7, 95; but cf. the comment that WM was ‘perplexed’ by Waltheof’s behaviour, 83.

WM justifies William—as king, not because he is a foreign conqueror—in his harsh policy to English. This passage echoes the theme of reciprocal loyalty: by failing to merit the king’s trust, the people deserve punishment. WM hereby distributes responsibility for the disasters in England away from the king and entirely onto those whom he charges with treachery:

Inde propositum regis fortassis merito excusatur, si aliquanto durior in Anglos fuerit, quod pene nullum eorum fidelem inuenerit. Quae res ita ferocem animum exasperabat ut potentiores primum pecuniis, mox terris, nonnullos etiam uita exueret.<sup>84</sup>

This mode of explanation is consistent with WM’s initial claim about William’s actions: his behaviour can at least be excused (‘excusari’).<sup>85</sup> WM makes William the worthy English king, and explains that his subjects have proven themselves unworthy of their king. The implication is that they should be loyal, whether he or they are of English or Norman descent. Instead of portraying William’s actions as the oppressive violence of a foreign conqueror, WM makes them the explicable responses of a king dealing with civil rebellion in his own land.

WM makes a case for William’s justice, emphasizing again that there were reasons for his actions. He transforms William’s exclusion of the English from office into an action with a rationale—and for which William was thus not at fault:

At iste certis de causis uiuentes quosdam canonicè deposuit, et in locum illorum qui morentur cuiuscumque gentis industrium præter Angligenam imposuit. Exigebat hoc, nisi fallor, indurata in regem peruciatia, cum sint Normanni, ut ante dixi, in conuiuentes aduenas naturali benignitate procliues.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> ‘It perhaps provides some proper justification for the king’s policy if he was somewhat too harsh towards the English, that he found almost none of them trustworthy—behaviour which so exasperated his ferocity that he deprived the more powerful among them the first of their revenues, then of their lands, and some even of their lives.’ *GR* iii.254.1, i, 470–1.

<sup>85</sup> *GR* iii.Preface, i, 424–5.

<sup>86</sup> ‘But for specific reasons William deposed some of the clergy in their lifetime legally, and in the place of those who died put a competent man of any nationality except English. He was driven to this, unless I am mistaken, by their ingrained prejudice against the king, for the Normans, as I have said before, have a natural kindness which predisposes them to foreigners living in their midst.’ *GR* iii.254.3, i, 470–1.

Because these behaviours could be construed as unfair to the English, WM makes a particular point of explaining why they were reasonable: his actions were ‘canonice’ as opposed to criminal, motivated ‘certis de causis’, as opposed to by arbitrary will. WM’s show of humility—in this case, protestations of his own possible error—disarms the reader into thinking WM is, if anything, attempting to be more objective here. Again, WM stresses the importance of competence over origin in the clergy and in the king. WM is writing a history of the deeds of English kings, yet is indifferent to nationality or origin when discussing character or justice. As we have seen, WM dismisses Edgar’s English origins in view of Edgar’s weak character.

WM ends his discourse on the traitors by bringing in God’s judgment in favour of William. ASC (E) refers to a foolish plan to remove the king from English kingship; (D) reports that Roger, Waltheof and others ‘ræddon þær þæt hi woldon heora kynehlaford of his cynerice adrifan’.<sup>87</sup> WM explains that Roger, Ralph, Waltheof and others ‘in necem regis coniurant’,<sup>88</sup> suggesting that Waltheof supposedly informed the king on the advice of Archbishop Lanfranc, but he hardly condones Waltheof’s action as heroic. WM notes that Waltheof did not admit to his own responsibility in forming the plot: ‘causa sua dumtaxat celata, detulit’.<sup>89</sup> WM does not go so far as to justify Waltheof’s death.<sup>90</sup> But he has repeatedly censured dishonesty (e.g. in Harold), lack of decision and unity among defenders (at the time of Hastings) and both Æthelred and Harold for actions which suggests their own doubt about their respective causes.<sup>91</sup> WM’s Waltheof is dishonest, disloyal and inconstant—the very qualities which WM decries most harshly in his failed defending kings. WM concludes of the revolt: ‘Sed obsistebat eis Deus, omnes conatus

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<sup>87</sup> ‘there planned that they would drive their royal lord from his kingdom.’ ASC (D) 1076 [1075]; (E) 1075; Swanton, 210–11.

<sup>88</sup> ‘were forming a conspiracy to kill their king’, *GR* iii.255.2, i, 472–3.

<sup>89</sup> ‘only concealing his own responsibility, denounced [them].’ *GR* iii.255.2, i, 472–3.

<sup>90</sup> Above, 222, for the partial justification of William’s policies.

<sup>91</sup> Above, 67, 204–5.

eorum in irritum deducens.’<sup>92</sup> After giving the final sentence of God against the rebels, WM has proven his narrative point; and indeed, he has little to say about rebellion thereafter.

WM sustains his narrative of William’s constancy, portraying William as balanced and successful in ruling, without any negative comment about his holding the throne unjustly or violently. He writes: ‘At uero rex Willelmus in subiectos leniter, turbide in rebelles agens feliciter omni Anglia potiebatur, Walenses omnes tributarios habens.’<sup>93</sup> WM gives no impression that William’s power was questioned, only that he was behaving with justice in securing his authority. Indeed, he is behaving like a defending king.

WM continues to minimize the suffering of the English throughout this period. He goes on to relieve their memory of shame by praising their particular distinction in battle in Normandy, calling them ‘inuicti’ abroad: ‘ducta expeditione illuc de Anglis, qui sicut facile in solo suo potuerunt opprimi, ita in alieno semper apparuere inuicti.’<sup>94</sup> This also shows that WM remains particularly concerned to redeem England’s past: he compensates for their repeated losses in England with their impressive victory in Maine. He omits the sense of ASC that the English behave shamefully in despoiling the land.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, WM’s decision to compare the English with invincibility suggests that England’s repeated defeats remained a niggling problem. Furthermore, WM explains that William found Philip ‘semper infidum’ because Philip was jealous of William’s glory.<sup>96</sup> WM also

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<sup>92</sup> ‘But God withstood them and brought all their attempts to nought.’ *GR* iii.255.3, i, 472–3.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Meanwhile King William, by a mixture of mildness towards the submissive and severity towards rebels, was successfully holding the whole of England in his power, while he had all the Welsh as tributaries.’ *GR* iii.258.1, i, 476–7.

<sup>94</sup> ‘leading an invasion of English troops, who, though they could be so easily defeated in their own country, always showed themselves invincible on foreign soil.’ *GR* iii.258.1, i, 476–7.

<sup>95</sup> ASC (D) 1074 [1073]; (E) 1073.

<sup>96</sup> *GR* iii.258.1, i, 476–7.

calls William's son Robert ill-advised for supporting the French king ('*fatuo consilio*').<sup>97</sup> These characterizations of Philip inherently justify William, because it means his actions against Philip are just: Philip has failed to uphold his side of the lordship bond.<sup>98</sup>

WM defines the limits of William's authority with the word '*solus*' to reveal the great magnitude of his worthiness by contrast with the minimal true threats to his authority. The repeated idea of single exceptions to an ideal reign presents a different picture to ASC's discussion of William's good and bad deeds.<sup>99</sup> WM's '*solus*' occurs three times, and in each instance there is always only one exception.<sup>100</sup> The first two instances relate to the threat posed by Cnut IV of the Danes. He writes in the first case: '*Solus eius maiestatem concutiebat Cnuto rex Danorum ... rumore in populos sato quod Angliam inuaderet ... et profecto fecisset, nisi Deus eius audatiam uento contrario infirmasset.*'<sup>101</sup> The Danes once again serve a narrative purpose as William's adversary and the adversary of England (grouping them together through a common enemy). In this instance, WM makes the Danes strong enough to be a real challenge for William, but it is nevertheless a challenge to which he is equal. The narrative value of the Danes posing a danger lies in the reciprocal impressiveness of William's ability to fill his responsibility as a defending king in every other way.

This passage furthers WM's argument that William's conquest was a just one, and that God endorses it by preventing a subsequent conquest. According to WM, even Cnut recognizes that it would be against God's will to invade.<sup>102</sup> This has the effect of giving external support (within the narrative itself) to William's legitimacy as king of England.

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<sup>97</sup> *GR* iii.258.2, i, 476–7. WM has already accused Robert of troubling William ('*irritare*') by raiding Normandy, iii.257.1, i, 474–5; cf. Bates, *William the Conqueror*, 239.

<sup>98</sup> WM sustains this: cf. below, 245.

<sup>99</sup> ASC (E) 1086 [1087]; below, 228.

<sup>100</sup> Below, 225–226, 229.

<sup>101</sup> 'The only person who shook his royal state was Cnut king of the Danes ... A popular rumour was put about that he would invade England ... and indeed he would have done so, had not God taken the drive out of his rash attempt with a contrary wind.' *GR* iii.258.3, i, 478–9.

<sup>102</sup> *GR* iii.261.2, i, 480–1.

The point here is that any potential limitations to or criticisms of William's kingship are single, small and irrelevant compared with the evidence in William's favour.

WM continues to stress the perpetuity of William's peaceful rule by identifying but a single exception or challenge to it in any given circumstance. He writes: 'Rex igitur Danorum, ut dixi, solus erat obstaculum ne Willelmus continua feriretur laetitia'.<sup>103</sup> The word 'continua' is crucial, cutting across narrative time and historical time to show that the positive quality of William's character and rule was consistent throughout time. This is the second occasion on which WM uses the word 'solus' to connote the minimal nature of any disruption to William's worthiness or success. WM repeatedly explains that very little prevented William from being an ideal king. Yet WM continues to defend William not because he is a Norman, but because WM deems him worthy of being an English king. The threat of the Danish king also helps to excuse the financial and military burden which William places on the kingdom:<sup>104</sup> it is not the act of an oppressive conqueror, but a reasonable thing for a defending king to do given a clear and present foreign threat.

Near the end of his narrative of William's reign, WM makes a point of describing William's deeds and character. That WM chooses to include these descriptions at this point in the narrative is significant: the excursus permits him to show William in the best possible light before holding William to account at the end of his life. He writes:

'Hactenus circumuagari licuerit, dum occasione gestorum Willelmi quaedam succurrebant quae pretermittenda non putabam; nunc familiarem eius uitam et mores interiores lector qui uolet audiet.'<sup>105</sup> He goes on to describe William's humility, piety, building projects, wisdom, generosity and successful leadership against rebellion in the

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<sup>103</sup> 'So the king of the Danes was, as I said, the only obstacle between William and continual peace and happiness', *GR* iii.262.1, i, 482–3.

<sup>104</sup> *GR* iii.262.1, i, 482–3.

<sup>105</sup> 'I hope this digression may be permitted me, for William's achievements put me in mind of certain topics, which ought not, I thought, to be passed over, and now the reader who so wishes shall hear of his private life and inner character.' *GR* iii.267.1, i, 492–3.

manner of a defending king. WM also describes him atoning for bad deeds, as a pious king should.<sup>106</sup> This praise of William is WM's verdict: the most important thoughts with which WM chooses to conclude his final story about William. The result is that the most positive evidence is nearest in memory when WM reaches the end of William's life.

WM's turn from following a chronological progression to a description of the king's qualities and virtues resembles the narrative style of other *Vitae* and *Res gestae* apparently known to WM, including *Vita Ædwardi* and Asser's *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*. But WM is unusual in comparison; like ASC at least in form, he placed this description at the end of the king's life. *Vita Ædwardi* includes a similar description of the king's qualities at the beginning: it describes the respect earned, appearance, public and private dignity and generosity.<sup>107</sup> The narrator subsequently explains that he must go back in time to describe prior events more fully.<sup>108</sup> Like WM, Asser acknowledges a deviation from a chronological narrative to describe the king's 'vita' and 'mores': 'de vita et moribus et aequa conversatione, atque, ex parte non modica, res gestas domini mei Ælfredi, Angulsaxonum regis'.<sup>109</sup> Asser places this acknowledgment of digression ('digressus sum') in the middle of his narrative of Alfred's reign. Neither of these earlier narrators needs to atone for their respective kings' lives by providing a closing statement in their favour at the end. WM, however, does. He is narrating the life of the conqueror of England who brought about the most dramatic change in England's history, and his choices show that this still needs to be explained—or needs to be explained again, in a new historical setting. Concentrating William's virtues at the end of his life—the point at which his legacy begins—leaves his memory in the best state going forward.

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<sup>106</sup> *GR* iii.267.5, i, 494–5.

<sup>107</sup> *LKE* i.1, 14–21.

<sup>108</sup> *LKE* i.3, 28–9.

<sup>109</sup> 'about the life, behaviour, equitable character and, without exaggeration, the accomplishments of my lord Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons', Asser, *LKA* c.73, 54; *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and other contemporary sources*, ed. and trans. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge (Harmondsworth, 1983), 88.

In particular, WM's description of William's virtues at this point directly counters ASC. In his account of William's end, WM differs most (and most importantly) from ASC, which discusses the good and bad of William's reign at the end of his life, never resolving the sense that William was an illegitimate conqueror.<sup>110</sup> Whereas ASC's closure is bitter, WM begins to approach a closure that will leave no questions of William's responsibility or fault lingering on into his narrative. What WM refers to as 'circumuagari' is actually essential to his defence of William, even though he claims to leave it to the reader's discretion.<sup>111</sup> WM's self-deprecation underscores a crucial element of the narrative. He manipulates narrative time in order to make his absolution of William more potent, memorable and persuasive. That he places it at this point in time, and in response to ASC, suggests that WM thought his point required proving.

At this point in the narrative WM deliberately and explicitly connects his William of the present with his William of the past. He does so in using the deposition of Stigand as further evidence for William's constancy in character and justice. He writes: 'Porro Willelmus, propositi quod in Normannia ceperat tenax, Stigandum perperam et falso archiepiscopum ... deponi passus est.'<sup>112</sup> WM employs strong, active language like 'ceperat' and 'tenax' to show that William does not only practice justice: he is assiduous in its pursuit. WM conveniently avoids the question of why Stigand persisted in his role if William was so 'tenax' justice, remarking only on William's absolution without dwelling upon the prior duration of any injustice. By connecting this righting of a wrong to William's behaviour in Normandy, WM underlines that this king is the same man—with

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<sup>110</sup> ASC (E) 1086 [1087].

<sup>111</sup> On the central importance of WM's digressions to his narrative, see: M. Otter, 'Functions of fiction in historical writing', in N. Partner (ed.), *Writing Medieval History* (London, 2005), 109–130, at 116–19; cf. discussion above, 17.

<sup>112</sup> 'Then William, tenacious in the design he had formerly pursued in Normandy, permitted Stigand, wrongly and falsely archbishop, to be deposed', *GR* iii.269.1, i, 496–7. Cf. WP, *GG* ii.33, 160–1, who explains that William waited to depose Stigand out of consideration for the English and respect for the pope's decision.

the same worthy character—as he was in Normandy. WM has made this point before. Now, as he nears the end of William’s life, he makes it more sharply. This suggests that for WM, demonstrating William’s consistent character and just behaviour over time was an essential part of justifying his quality as an English king.

WM keeps his narrative here devoid of panegyric, rendering it with a greater semblance of realism by acknowledging that William had flaws—or rather, only single exceptions to full praise. WM imbues his account with humility calculated to redeem, a strategy we will encounter again at William’s death. Indeed, the only criticism which WM proffers about William is greed: ‘Sola est de qua ... culpetur’.<sup>113</sup> The different versions of this passage vary in tone: the earlier version casts the behaviour as definite greed unworthy of William; WM’s later revisions as necessary interest in money for the purpose of ruling the kingdom.<sup>114</sup> The common thread to the versions is that WM was nevertheless seeking to justify William. Both cast it as the only point for any potential criticism, and WM for the third and final time uses the ‘solus’ defence for William. If there is but one point for blame, possible or deserved, WM implies that William distinguished himself and fulfilled his responsibilities as king in all other respects.

Yet WM pursues this search for explanations for William’s behaviour in both versions. WM even seeks to account for the one item for which William may be culpable. WM makes an allowance for the effects of fear (‘timere’) in William, here making it a valid excuse and rational reason for William’s behaviour. WM’s reasoning here is particularly striking because, as we have seen repeatedly, WM castigates defending kings for fear and deems this fear responsible for panic in the ranks and for defeat. Here WM seeks to excuse William’s apparent greed:

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<sup>113</sup> ‘The only point on which he is ... criticized’, *GR* iii.280.1, i, 508–9.

<sup>114</sup> For an overview of the *GR*’s MS tradition and revisions, see: Mynors et al., *GR*, i, xiii–xxiv.

Non est hic aliquid aliud excusationis quod afferam, nisi quod quidam dixit:  
'Necesse est ut multos timeat, quem multi timent.' Nam ille pro timore  
inimicorum prouintias suas pecunia emungebat, qua impetus eorum uel tardaret  
uel etiam propelleret<sup>115</sup>

In this passage, WM converts fear from a reprehensible trait in a leader into a defensive strategy: his fear drives him to be the more rigorous in his defence of the kingdom. But he only does so for William. This means that WM is willing to modify his criteria for English kings in order to support his exoneration of William. By permitting fear to be a legitimate reason in this particular case, WM modifies the considerations and criteria to fit the situation: to make William, a conqueror, into a defending English king.

By introducing the disasters in the years preceding William's death as the workings of Fortune, WM avoid any implication that they were William's responsibility, either morally or causally. He adopts material from ASC (E) 1085 [1086] and 1086 [1087], but omits the tone of accusation for all the people in England, as well as the scorn and blame it has for William. ASC explains the disasters as punishment for sin: 'Ac swylce þing gewurðað for folces synna þæt hi nellað lufian God 7 ri<ht>wisnesse.'<sup>116</sup> WM, however, makes no such mention, as though collective sin alone would no longer be an adequate explanation: 'Veruntamen, quia alea fortunae incertis iactibus uoluitur, multa tunc tempore aduersa prouenere.'<sup>117</sup> WM then goes on to describe a violent dispute at Glastonbury, Bishop Walcher's murder, pestilence, illness and storms.<sup>118</sup> WM absolves William, his men and the English of blame for events which could be interpreted primarily as divine punishment. The events do not represent shame for them. WM has

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<sup>115</sup> 'Nor is there any other excuse I can suggest, except that, as someone said, "he must fear many men, whom many fear." For it was fear of his enemies that drove him to squeeze the money from his provinces, with which either to slow up their attacks or even to drive them off entirely', *GR* iii.280.2, i, 508–9.

<sup>116</sup> 'But such things happen because of the people's sins, in that they will not love God and righteousness.' ASC (E) 1086 [1087]; Swanton, 218.

<sup>117</sup> 'But the roll of Fortune's dice is determined by random throws, and this was a period during which many disgraceful events occurred.' *GR* iii.270.1, i, 498–9.

<sup>118</sup> *GR* iii.270–272, i, 498–501.

stressed the uncertainty of Fortune only, making no moral attribution.<sup>119</sup> WM certainly does not eliminate Providence from his overall narrative. Yet in explaining this specific event, he replaces punishment for sin with Fortune. By rewriting causation, he morally redeems the English and their king.

WM's elimination of blame for sin in these years continues for William in particular. WM makes no suggestion that William's illness or death stemmed from a fault of his own, as does ASC. ASC explains them as God's punishment for William's raiding in France and disloyalty to his French lord.<sup>120</sup> WM includes a description of William's raids in France, which portrays an angry William seeking to avenge insult: 'exercitu coacto Frantiam infestus ingreditur. Omnia proterit, cuncta populatur; nichil erat quod furentis animum mitigaret, ut iniuriam insolenter acceptam multorum dispendio ulcisceretur.'<sup>121</sup> But unlike ASC, WM does not accuse William of breaking his lordship bond with, or betraying, the king of France.<sup>122</sup> There is indeed nothing in WM to suggest that the king's anger was unjust, excessive or any cause of God's punishment.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, WM continues to deviate in interpretation from ASC: he renders the cause of the king's illness as purely physical: 'Quo successu exhilaratus, dum suos audatius incitat ut igni aditiant pabula, propius flammas succedens foci calore et autumnlais estus inaequalitate morbum nactus est.'<sup>124</sup> WM relates the same events as does ASC, but in a way that does not accuse William of failing to fulfil his responsibilities as king. He tells the story so as to ascribe no fault to William.

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. discussion of Fortune as an explanation for events, above, 10–11; 18–22.

<sup>120</sup> ASC (E) 1086 [1087].

<sup>121</sup> 'he called his army together and entered France with hostile intent. He laid it all low, he ravaged everything; nothing could pacify his furious resolve to avenge, by injuring many, the insult he had received.' *GR* iii.282.1, i, 510–11.

<sup>122</sup> ASC (E) 1086 [1087].

<sup>123</sup> On the king's prerogative to anger in the twelfth century—'Ira et Malevolentia'—see J.E.A. Jolliffe, *Angevin Kingship* (London, 1955), 87–109.

<sup>124</sup> 'Encouraged by this success, he was urging his troops too rashly to add fuel to the fire, when he went too close to the flames, and the heat of the blaze with the exceptional warmth of the autumn brought on an illness.' *GR* iii.282.2, i, 510–11.

WM does not claim that William's death was a punishment from God. Instead, WM chooses to stress William's voluntary will and intent to die with proper absolution: 'Quo audito querimonia domum repleuit, quod eum preoccuparet mors emendationem uitae iam dudum menditantem. Resumpto animo, quae Christiani sunt exsecutus est in confessione et uiatico.'<sup>125</sup> WM explains the desires and behaviours of William's spirit, as well as his actions: WM behaves as a good Christian in making confession and taking the viaticum. In this way WM shows that William's obligation and intent are consistent with the responsibilities of his kingship. The will to be reformed was essential (for kingship previously and in the twelfth century):<sup>126</sup> the king was to hold himself accountable, and recognize his own accountability to God. WM highlights it here because it is of great value in establishing and defending a king's reputation.

WM establishes a favourable legacy for William by explaining that he dies having resolved things well: 'Ordinatis ergo bene rebus ... decessit'.<sup>127</sup> WM could say no more than this to establish—and to try to persuade his readers to maintain or adopt—a positive memory for William. In this simple sentence WM shows that there are no outstanding charges against William as king to which he failed to answer during his lifetime. Without scope for blame, the resulting narrative is a completed one of a worthy English king, one not responsible for disaster but who fulfilled well the responsibilities of his kingship.

After William's death, WM relates the difficulties in his burial to the transience of

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<sup>125</sup> 'On hearing the news, he filled the house with complaints that death should overtake him when he had long been planning to reform his life. Regaining his composure, he did all that a Christian should do in the way of confession and the last rites.' *GR* iii.282.2, i, 510–11.

<sup>126</sup> See e.g. early medieval Mirrors for Princes, including the ninth *abusio* of Pseudo-Cyprian's *De XII Abusivis Saeculi*; Smaragdus's *Via Regia*; Sedulius Scottus's *Liber de rectoribus christianis*; for their influence on subsequent thought about kingship, see e.g.: H.H. Anton, 'Pseudo-Cyprian: De duodecim abusivis saeculi und sein Einfluß auf den Kontinent, insbesondere auf die karolingischen Fürstenspiegel', in H. Löwe (ed.), *Die Iren und Europa im früheren Mittelalter* (2 vols., Stuttgart, 1982), ii, 568–617; R. Meens, 'Politics, mirrors of princes and the Bible: sins, kings and the well-being of the realm', *Early Medieval Europe* 7 (1998), 345–57; J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'The *Via Regia* of the Carolingian Age', in B. Smalley (ed.), *Trends in Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford, 1965), 22–41.

<sup>127</sup> 'Having thus set all his affairs in order, he passed away', *GR* iii.282.3, i, 512–13.

earthly glory, an important theme for Henry.<sup>128</sup> Yet the effect it has is not one which belittles William's kingship of England. Indeed, if anything, it enhances it by making it seem more real, earthly and tangible. ASC explains that the world's prosperity is fleeting, and that instead of vast lands and wealth, William now has only a grave.<sup>129</sup> WM adopts this moral message about transience, but does not dwell on William's loss of the trappings of royalty. WM writes: 'Varietatis humanae tunc fuit uidere miseriam, quod homo ille, totius olim Europae honor antecessorumque suorum omnium potentior, sedem aeternae requietionis sine calumnia impetrare non potuit'.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, ASC refers only to the seductive and ultimately false qualities of rule: power, possession of lands, gold jewels—thus continuing to suggest that William was first and foremost a greedy illegitimate conqueror. But WM has given William a character of substance, which is not something his death could render inconsequential as it could riches. WM mentions William's 'potentia' and 'honour' recognized throughout Europe, but not riches. He continues to make the point that William is a legitimate king of England—and one who sets the standard for European kingship. The standard moral point about the death of kings stands, but so does William's legacy.

WM's comment is not exclusively a comment on the futility of worldly rule. Rather, by making William a man who dies like other men—as opposed to a saint, or a heroic, almost semi-divine figure as in WP—WM makes William's worthiness for kingship of England more tangible and persuasive. In a post-Conquest world, praise of William specifically intended to justify the Norman Conquest was no longer relevant as it was for Norman propaganda; audience and circumstance had changed. WM advanced

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<sup>128</sup> Cf. N.F. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago, 1977), 11–48; above, 22–34.

<sup>129</sup> ASC (E) 1086 [1087].

<sup>130</sup> 'At that point the pitiful ups and downs of human life were well displayed: that man, who at one time reflected honour on the whole of Europe and was the most powerful of all his line, could obtain no place for his eternal rest without due process of law', *GR* iii.283.1, i, 512–13.

William's cause as an English king, not as a Norman conqueror or because William was a Norman. WM fosters a sense of gritty reality: William is a man, neither saintly nor divine, of consistently good character, who only falls short of perfect praise in single instances only. Reasons can always be found for his actions as king. In this way WM creates credibility for his interpretation of William's kingship of England and of how William carried out the accordant responsibilities. This is a very effective narrative strategy for a human audience, contemporary and future, who might need persuading that WM's was the real William. Indeed, WM's efforts to explain and justify William's behaviour suggest that he believed it was necessary for his audiences. If William were unequivocally accepted as an English king, there would be little cause for WM to explain—and to account favourably—for his actions. WM endeavoured to establish William's character as he understood it—and to make clear its importance to English kingship.

## Conclusions

The contrast between WM and his sources is particularly evident in ASC's conclusion about Edgar: 'Ferde þa syððan into Normandige. 7 Eadgar æþeling Æwardes mæg cynges beah þa fram him, forþig he næfde na mycelne wurðscipe of him; ac se ælmihtiga God him gife wurðscipe on þam towardan.'<sup>131</sup> In this view, Edgar was wronged, William can never be legitimate, and all are shamed: Edgar, William and the English. WM allocates moral and causal responsibility in a completely different way—and hence to a different narrative effect.

WM's *GR* actually possesses none of the balance or objectivity which WM claims it has. WM unequivocally endorses William and his kingship of England, and the whole narrative unfolds towards this end. WM's apparent humility, digressions and changes to

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<sup>131</sup> 'Then [William] went into Normandy; and Edgar ætheling, the relation of King Edward, revolted from him, for [Edgar] received not much honour from [William]; but may the Almighty God give [Edgar] honour hereafter.' ASC (E) 1085 [1086]; Swanton, 217.

the narrative are not isolated scenes:<sup>132</sup> they constitute the substance of the narrative and guide the story to its end. WM's defence of William does not contradict WM's descriptions of the Conquest as a disaster and the misfortunes of having foreigners in the land,<sup>133</sup> or with WM's more acute misgivings about the Normans later on in life.<sup>134</sup> They are separate considerations for WM. His endorsement of William has everything to do with how he constructs William's character, and actually has very little to do with William's Norman origins—or with the Norman bias of his Norman sources—at all.

Nor is WM's narrative a condemnation of the English.<sup>135</sup> He eliminates their suffering at William's hands, and explains the justice behind any punishment of the English. Having established that the Conquest itself was a disaster, he holds specific English nobles accountable and punishable for breaches of faith to their king. In according these high-ranking Englishmen so much blame, WM implies that they had the power and autonomy to choose otherwise: they were not inevitably victims. They were not shamefully defeated; in any case, they should not have behaved without honour. They were English, and WM thought better of how the English should behave to their king. WM's writing resists the idea that what happened to England was shameful, or that anyone should go on thinking this. Rather, what did not happen was worthy of blame. England's primary leaders and defenders did not hold consistently in a cause; they did not support one another; they did not give loyalty to their new king.

Yet that WM gave these men the capability of doing these things is in itself a redemption of sorts. He replaces the certainty of suffering with the possibility of

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<sup>132</sup> But cf. Hayward, 'The Importance of Being Ambiguous', 86.

<sup>133</sup> *GR* ii.227.1, i, 414–17; iii.245.1, i, 456–7.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. WM, *Commentary* i.2194–2252, 84–6; see also Winterbottom et al., *Commentary*, xi; M. Winterbottom, 'William of Malmesbury and the Normans', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 20 (2010), 70–77.

<sup>135</sup> Cf. *GR* iii.245; on WM's narrative of the progress of the English from barbarism to civilization, see: J. Gillingham, 'The Context and Purposes of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, in his *The English in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, 2000), 19–39, at 28–9, idem, 'Foundations of a Disunited Kingdom', in his *The English in the Twelfth Century*, 93–109, at 104.

autonomy and glory. WM believed Edgar had the power of self-determination, which he chose to waste in laziness. WM's great censure for these men is also an acknowledgement of their great responsibility, both causal and moral. The praise and responsibility which WM allocate to William are also part of WM's story of England. The English and their rightful king, regardless of their origins, are particularly, specially capable of behaving with good character—and of being a model to the rest of Europe in this regard.

### **Henry on William**

Henry does not hold William personally accountable or responsible for his invasion, or the damage caused thereafter. This damage he reduces in order to help justify William's legitimacy. As we have seen, he reserves the bulk of the blame for Harold. The Conquest represents God's plan for a change of dynasty in England, of which William is the agent. For Henry, William is only responsible and punishable for his own greed—and he is accountable directly to God. Henry makes room for individual responsibility in that, although William was God's agent in conquest and had a claim to the throne, William can still incur God's wrath through his own behaviour. Henry holds William to—and often has him meet—many of the high expectations he has established for a defending king.

William was a conqueror, but this does not inhibit Henry's acceptance of him as a legitimate king of England. Whereas his contemporaries downplay the conquest, Henry embraces it. Henry praises William's brilliance as a king in part because he was a successful conqueror. Henry's approach to conquest in England makes it both a punishment for the defeated and an opportunity to bring in great new kings. This is consistent with his treatment of Cnut. Neither king is perfect, but Henry diminishes any received impression of their cruelty, instead praising them as conquerors and highlighting their subsequent achievements on England's behalf.

Henry treats the dynastic change brought about by the Conquest not as an illegitimate severing or break, but rather as natural and right (and not just because of his claim through kinship, but because it is God's will). Henry does not portray English kingship as degraded or unfulfilled if inhabited by a conqueror. Again, as in 1016, conquest is a source of greater glory for English kings. That a legitimate heir as acknowledged by the defeated English is alive does not detract from William's kingship. The providential plan for England overrides what the English think is the right legitimacy for their country. This interpretation of divine destiny allows Henry to explain repeated defeats in the English past as normal and as improvements in its kings. He transmutes a history with suffering victims into a progression of glory. We will see that Henry achieves this effect, and the sense of both pattern-repetition and progress, through his approach to narrative time.

As we saw in Part Two, Henry shows how the nature of personal responsibility lies in an individual's power not to influence God's plan, but rather to influence how and when God implements it. Harold had this influence, and according to Henry, God's plan was realized with William.

Before he reaches the point in the narrative when William becomes king, Henry describes the destruction that God plans for the English by the Normans.<sup>136</sup> This is indeed a recurring theme in Henry,<sup>137</sup> but he actually renders the destruction by William and the Normans much less grave and lamentable than does ASC. By reducing the post-Conquest damage in England, Henry can more easily endorse the idea that William is now a rightful and defending king of England according to the providential plan. His English persist

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<sup>136</sup> *HA* vi.27, 384–5.

<sup>137</sup> As noted by Greenway, *HA*, 384 n.150.

stubbornly despite his references to destruction; his conquests are always new beginnings as well, of the same providential pattern he has identified for the island.<sup>138</sup>

For Henry, the fulcrum of William's reign is one event in 1066—but it is not his personal victory at Hastings nor his coronation; neither is it the general consolidation of his power nor the acquiescence of the English. It is also unrelated to the presence or potential legitimacy of the ætheling according to English tradition, as we will see with John. It is the implementation of God's plan—the fact that God chose this particular time to change rule in England—of which the comet (not stressed by WM) and William's victory are the evidence. Immediately after reporting William's victory at Hastings and coronation, Henry writes: 'Sic facta est mutatio dextere excelsi. Quam cometa ingens in exordio eiusdem anni designauerat.'<sup>139</sup> From this point, as we will see, William is the rightful English king, both in terms of how Henry describes him and the loyalty owed him. For Henry, the significance of 1066 is not in the Battle of Hastings itself. The important event happens in the space between God's plan and its realization.

Henry makes William's transition into a legitimate English king immediately evident in his narrative in the events of 1066. Henry uses Halley's comet as evidence of this providential change. The comet was visible in the spring, but narratives relocate mention of it in order to help their particular vision of its meaning. The narrative location of Henry's comet is a significant point here. The version of ASC for 1066 (ACD) mention the comet, but they do so at the beginning of their entries for the year, which is also where the Bayeux Tapestry portrays it.<sup>140</sup> It is important that Henry's comet is discussed at the end of 1066, not at the beginning. For Henry, the comet is not a negative portent of

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<sup>138</sup> Above, 22–34.

<sup>139</sup> 'Thus occurred a change in the right hand of the Most High, which the huge comet had presaged at the beginning of the same year.' *HA* vi.30, 394–5. Cf. BT Plates 26–8: a right hand appears over the Church of St Peter at the time of Edward's interment, before the scene of his death.

<sup>140</sup> BT plate 32; cf. Greenway, *HA*, 395 n.179, which points out the similarity between ASC and the *HA* but not the difference.

impending doom, which casts a shadow over the narrative of the end of true English rule under Harold. It does not presage disaster, but rather confirms a change in rule and dominion which Henry has already narrated.<sup>141</sup> This change in rule is part of Henry's pattern of English history as a whole, which for him is characterized by repeated conquests across time.

That the English accept William as their king 'pacifice' reflects positively on William's prompt taking of legitimacy. The adverb is particular to Henry, and replaces a great deal of conflict in ASC accounts of 1066. Henry reports: 'Willelmus uero tantapotitus uictoria, susceptus a Lundoniensibus pacifice, et coronatus est apud Westmunster ab Aldredo Eboracensi archiepiscopo.'<sup>142</sup> Unlike ASC, Henry mentions no ravaging, violence or discord between William and English in 1066 outside the decisive battle.<sup>143</sup> ASC (DE) (Henry's more likely source) discuss also in 1066 the locals' wish to have Edgar as king; (E) describes his anger, and (D) his ravaging on the way to Berkhamsted. As far as Henry is concerned, these might as well not have happened; these details would certainly undermine the ostensible veracity of the word 'pacifice'. Henry ends what is the equivalent of his 'annal' for 1066 with the date of the battle and William's future building project on the site. This peaceful and promising closure to the year contrasts starkly with the ongoing conflicts described in ASC, despite the two narratives' similar attribution of the year's events to divine will. Their respective versions of the year contain different events.

Henry takes advantage of the earliest opportunity to illustrate William's piety on behalf of England. In the sentence immediately following his mention of the date of the Battle of Hastings, Henry writes: 'Quo in loco rex Willelmus abbatiam nobilem postea

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<sup>141</sup> Above, 131.

<sup>142</sup> 'Then William, taking possession of this great victory, was received peacefully by the Londoners, and was crowned at Westminster by Ealdred, Archbishop of York.' *HA* vi.30, 394–5.

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Greenway, *HA*, 395 n.177, noting the similarity to ASC (DE) 1066 only.

pro defunctis suis construxit, et eam digne nomine Belli uocauit.’<sup>144</sup> Even though this event took place later (and ASC mentions it only after William’s death),<sup>145</sup> Henry chooses to mention it now, during his account of the events of 1066. Henry also adds the detail that William founded it for the fallen, which leaves open the interpretation that it was for the honour of all those who died, English and Norman. Here again we see the importance of narrative time. William’s pious deed is not an afterthought to a gloomy and oppressive reign, but rather a bright light that dims the deed of conquest, even in the narrative moment in which Henry describes the decisive battle.

One particularly striking change Henry makes to William’s character is that Henry’s William engages in significantly less ravaging of England. As we have seen, his ravaging on the way to Berkhamsted in 1066 is entirely absent, and Henry does not discuss his building projects in and extensive harrying of the north. When William appropriates property, Henry depersonalizes the English lands which William gives away, as compared to ASC (E) 1067.<sup>146</sup> ASC reports: ‘7 he geaf ælces mannes land þa he ongean com.’<sup>147</sup> Henry changes the comment by making the reference to land both impersonal and vague in terms of quantity: ‘Et eodem anno rediens, diuisit terram militibus suis.’<sup>148</sup> By eliminating the comment that William is taking lands away from the English, Henry omits the sense of theft in William’s distribution of lands.

English resistance ceases to be praiseworthy the moment William becomes king, for the most part. But Henry preserves English heroes by dissociating them from treachery against the one he considers to be the rightful king. His treatment of both

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<sup>144</sup> ‘In that place King William later built a noble abbey for the souls of the departed, and called it by the fitting name of Battle.’ *HA* vi.30, 394–5.

<sup>145</sup> See ASC (E) 1087 [1086]; Greenway, *HA*, 395 n.181.

<sup>146</sup> ASC (D) 1067 does not mention the redistribution of lands, but Henry appears to have known a version closer to (E).

<sup>147</sup> ‘And he bestowed every man’s land when he came back.’ ASC (E) 1067; Swanton, 200. See also: Greenway, *HA*, 396 n.182.

<sup>148</sup> ‘And he came back in the same year, and divided the land among his warriors.’ *HA* vi.31, 396–7.

traitors and heroes reveals high expectations for behaviour among the English. Henry shifts a greater degree of responsibility and accountability for the crime of treachery against William onto the English than does ASC, thereby underlining the idea that William is the rightful English king. Henry states multiple times and implies on other occasions that the English who resist William's authority are treacherous—as does ASC for later events but without a corresponding tone of exoneration for William. After reporting that William divided up the land in England, Henry writes: 'Sed Edgar iuuenis cum multibus militibus'<sup>149</sup> went to Scotland and formed a marriage alliance between his sister and King Malcolm. Henry subsequently explains of the Northumbrians who killed William's earl and 900 men: 'Rex uero adueniens cum exercitu, ciuitate predata, magnam gentis perfide stragem dedit.'<sup>150</sup> ASC also reports these events, but provides more detail on the damages and deaths William inflicted—and importantly, it does not describe the Northumbrians as treacherous as Henry does ('perfide').<sup>151</sup>

After Henry identifies the moment in which God's plan was realized, he consistently casts William as a defending English king, reducing ASC's sense of conquest and oppression during his reign. Furthermore Henry mentions William in describing King William's and King Philip's supportive roles in the accession of Arnulf to rule of Flanders. ASC mentions this accession, but not the involvement of the kings.<sup>152</sup> Henry chooses to highlight and to include William's diplomatic endeavours as a king of the English.

As William consolidates his power as king, Henry makes the process seem smoother. He covers the years 1071 to 1074 in the space of a few sentences, highlighting

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<sup>149</sup> 'But Edgar the atheling, with many soldiers', *HA* vi.31, 396–7.

<sup>150</sup> 'Then the king arrived with his army, and sacking the city, he made great slaughter of the treacherous people.' *HA* vi.31, 396–7.

<sup>151</sup> ASC (D) 1068 [1069]; (E) 1069.

<sup>152</sup> ASC (D) 1071 [1070]; (E) 1070.

William's successes in construction, victories and reconciliations.<sup>153</sup> Henry also relates William's subjection of Wales in 1081 in a single sentence.<sup>154</sup> By selecting these simple details that show William in an impressive light, Henry avoids conveying the ongoing struggles that are an equally ongoing reminder of his presence as a conqueror seeking to maintain his power by any means possible. This will become apparent in a comparison between ASC's and Henry's narratives of William's reign.

Henry, like WM, departs from ASC in representing Edwin and Morcar as inimical and predatory. ASC reports of the earls: 'Her Ædwine eorl 7 Morkere eorl uthlupon 7 mislice ferdon on wudu 7 on felda.'<sup>155</sup> Henry gives a much more negative cast to their activities, rendering this information: 'Willelmi regis anno quinto, Markerus et Edwinus consules ceperunt *predari* per campos et nemora.' [italics added]<sup>156</sup> ASC's earls are at worst aimless; Henry's are destructive. He uses language for the English earls—who were claimants to the throne—that rather befits the activities of illegitimate and violent conquerors. This is especially striking given Henry's silence on William's ravaging, and provides evidence that Henry is casting William as a defender by holding others responsible for ravaging in England.

Consistent with this silence, William's castle-building is not a sign of opposition, but an impressive part of the English landscape. Henry praises the king's skill in the construction of castles, observing that the Ely castle he built still stands: 'Rex uero ducens exercitum terra et mari insulam obsedit, pontem parauit, domum belli artificiose construxit, que usque hodie perstat'.<sup>157</sup> ASC does not mention the castle.<sup>158</sup> That Henry

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<sup>153</sup> HA vi.33–4, 396–9.

<sup>154</sup> HA vi.35, 400–1.

<sup>155</sup> 'Here Earl Edwin and Earl Morcar ran off and travelled variously in woods and open country.' ASC (D) 1072 [1071]; (E) 1071; Swanton, 207.

<sup>156</sup> 'In King William's fifth year [1071], Earls Morcar and Edwin took *to ravaging* through fields and woods.' HA vi.33, 396–7.

<sup>157</sup> 'Then the king led an army by land and sea and besieged the island, building a bridge and very skilfully constructing a castle, which still survives today', HA vi.33, 396–7.

<sup>158</sup> Greenway, HA, 397 n.188.

cites it and its duration through time, invokes his frequent Bede-like references to things that last and persist in England, as we saw in Part Two. William has a part in this creation of admirable persistence, which makes the castle-building seem less invasive, and more a part of continuity in the patterns of English history.

Although Henry repeatedly underlines the reprehensible treachery of the English during these earlier years of William's reign, he keeps the ætheling Edgar and Hereward (whom, unlike WM, Henry discusses) free of any blame. Unlike ASC, Henry does not represent these men involved in any direct conflicts with William. Henry makes a further change to ASC for 1069 in that he does not connect Edgar with the treacherous Northumbrians.<sup>159</sup> Henry can thus avoid implicating Edgar in explicit involvement with treachery. Henry mentions Hereward little, but when he describes William's siege of Ely he never suggests that William and Hereward engaged in battle. He writes of William: 'uiros predictos introiens insulam cepit, preter Herewardum, qui suos uiriliter strenuissimus eduxit.'<sup>160</sup> Henry's Hereward is still heroic, but ironically he can only be heroic because he is leading his men away from battle with William, not into battle with him. Henry avoids the idea that Hereward is a rebel by not forcing him into direct opposition with William.

This narrative decision of avoiding direct conflicts has two key implications. First, he lets them continue to be paragons of English heroism without an overt reminder that they pursued interests contrary to those of their king. Second, it further shows that Henry considered William a fully legitimate English king, because otherwise there would be no need to obscure conflict with him. If Henry lamented William's rule, to showcase the resistance of the ætheling and Hereward would make them look more honourable, not less.

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<sup>159</sup> Above, 241.

<sup>160</sup> 'he killed the aforesaid men, except for the valiant Hereward, who bravely led his men away.' *HA* vi.33, 396–7.

When the English army does fight on behalf of King William, Henry makes it seem to be less shameful for them and to reflect positively on William. ASC reports of his campaign in Maine:

On þisum geare Willelm cyng lædde engliscne here 7 frencisce ofer sæ 7 gewan þæt land Mans. 7 hit englisce men swyðe amyrdon: wingearðas hi fordydon 7 burga forbærndon 7 swiðe þet land amyrdon. 7 hit eall abegdon Willelme to handa<sup>161</sup>

There are three things to note about this description. The chronicler calls the army ‘here’, which evokes the damaging Danish raids in England’s past.<sup>162</sup> He emphasizes the general damage caused by the English in referring to it twice. The verb ‘abegdon’ implies both exerted force and resistance, evoking unwilling submission to William’s force.

Henry tells the story rather differently. He provides similar details more concisely, but the specific differences are very important to his narrative.<sup>163</sup> He writes: ‘Angli uero terram illam destruxerunt uillas comburendo, uineas cedendo, et eam regi subdiderunt.’<sup>164</sup> Henry eliminates the repetition of the general destruction and transforms the implication of William’s force and violence. His English are winning a victory of conquest on behalf of their king, not simply ruining and subjugating a land. And as we have seen with Henry’s praise of William and Cnut, Henry praises regal conquest (by English kings, or kings he has made into English kings). This is no longer a shameful mission of destruction and coercion, but a victory for England’s king on behalf of England.

Henry makes William’s subsequent reconciliations with Edgar and King Philip of France amicable, thereby reducing the sense that William’s rule was a persistent source of conflict throughout his reign. The first reconciliation which Henry retells from ASC is

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<sup>161</sup> ‘In this year King William led an English and French raiding-army across the sea and won the land of Maine, and the English greatly despoiled it; they did for vineyards, burned down towns, and greatly despoiled that land, and bent it all into William’s hand’, [E] ASC (D) 1074 [1073]; (E) 1073; Swanton, 209.

<sup>162</sup> Above, 43–56.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Greenway, *HA*, 398 n.190, citing ASC (E) 1072 only.

<sup>164</sup> ‘The English destroyed that land, burning villages, and cutting down vineyards, and they made it subject to the king.’ *HA* vi.33, 398–9.

William's meeting with the ætheling Edgar. ASC reports: '7 he [Edgar] wæs on þes cynges hyrede 7 nam swilce gerihta swa se cyng him geuðe.'<sup>165</sup> Henry's sense is different: 'Proximo uero anno, iuit rex in Normanniam, et Edgarus iuuenis concordatus ei in curia regis diu permansit.'<sup>166</sup> Henry's Edgar stays a long while, which could suggest that the reconciliation was amicable. If Henry wished to convey a sense of irony or disdain, he might have left the account more similar to ASC; he makes a change, which conveys a subtle difference in meaning.

Well into his narrative of William's reign, Henry finds the resistance more unconscionable. He repeatedly describes the plot of Ralph and others to drive king out of kingdom as treason ('prodicio'). His details are similar in content to ASC, but the specification of treason is entirely particular to Henry.<sup>167</sup> Henry writes: 'Radulfus, cui rex consulatum Estangle dederat, regem a regno expellere precogitauit, consilio Waltheof consulis et Rogeri ... et in ipsis nuptiis hanc prodicionem polocuti sunt.'<sup>168</sup> This is an important change in narrative sense. Like John, Henry is more explicit than ASC in stating that opposition to the king is treachery. Henry brings the charge of treachery not because he has a pro-Norman bias opposed to those of the English subjects, but because these subjects are disloyal to their king.

Henry then amplifies the charge of treachery by referring to the discussions and plotting at the wedding as perverse and corrupt. He describes the king punishing the traitors: 'Ceterorum uero qui nuptiis prauis interfuerant, multos fugauit, multos oculis

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<sup>165</sup> 'and [Edgar] was in the king's court and took such rights as the king granted him.' ASC (E) 1074; Swanton, 210.

<sup>166</sup> 'In the next year [1074] the king went into Normandy, and Edgar the ætheling was reconciled with him and stayed for a long while in the king's court.' *HA* vi.33, 398–9.

<sup>167</sup> But cf. Greenway, that this is a 'somewhat abbreviated and rearranged' version of ASC (E) 1075, *HA*, 398 n.192; cf. ASC, above, 223.

<sup>168</sup> 'Ralph, to whom the king had given the earldom of East Anglia, laid a plan, together with Earl Waltheof and Roger ... to drive the king out of the kingdom ... and at the wedding they spoke out about this treason.' *HA* vi.34, 398–9.

prouauit.<sup>169</sup> With the word ‘prauus’ Henry criticizes them for betraying their king and conveys corruption in their character. Henry mentions treachery (‘prodicio’) again at the end of vi.34, when he recounts that the Northumbrians murder many at a peaceful assembly: ‘Porro Nordhymbri prodicione occiderunt Walcherum episcopum Dunelmie, in quodam placito pacifice statuto iuxta Tinam, et centum homines cum eo.’<sup>170</sup> This event is in ASC, but not the identification of ‘prodicio’ nor that the nature of the meeting was peaceful (‘pacifice’).<sup>171</sup> With his descriptive additions, Henry makes the traitors’ behaviour seem the worse, since they murdered not in battle but at a harmonious and lawful gathering held in the name of peace.

Henry shows William as a defending king by perpetuating a portrayal of him as exceptionally effective at defusing the threat of invasion. Would-be invaders are too intimidated by him even to make the attempt. Henry renders the story in ASC with no significant changes: ‘Radulfus autem consul, adducens Cnut filium Suein regis Dacorum et Hacun consulem, rediit in Angliam cum cc puppibus. Sed cum non auderent contra regem Willelmum pugnare, transfretauerunt in Flandriam.’<sup>172</sup> Henry makes causation clearer than does ASC’s paratactic construction.<sup>173</sup> He has a new purpose in retelling the story. The effect is to show that William’s military strength is evidently enough to dissuade the Danes from attacking, even though they have allies within the kingdom.

The second reconciliation which Henry improves dramatically (and temporally) after William’s with Edgar is the reconciliation with Philip I of France. ASC renders this agreement with great scepticism: ‘Her on þisum geare wurdon sæhte Franc\|a/ cyng 7

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<sup>169</sup> ‘Of the rest who had been present at the treacherous wedding, he banished many and had many others blinded.’ *HA* vi. 34, 398–9.

<sup>170</sup> ‘In addition, the Northumbrians treacherously killed Walcher, bishop of Durham, at an assembly held peacefully on the Tyne, and a hundred men with him.’ *HA* vi.34, 398–401.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. Greenway, *HA*, 400 n.198, for the similarity with ASC (E) 1080 only.

<sup>172</sup> ‘Earl Ralph, however, bringing Cnut, son of the Danish king Swein, and Earl Hákon, returned to England with 200 ships. But as they did not dare fight against King William, they crossed over into Flanders.’ *HA* vi.34, 398–9. Cf. ASC (E) 1075.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. discussion above, 36: whereas the paratactic construction of annals may imply causation; Henry makes it explicit.

Willelm Englalandes cyng, ac hit heold litle hwile.<sup>174</sup> After William besieges Dol, Henry writes: ‘Postea uero rex Anglie et rex Francie concordati sunt.’<sup>175</sup> Henry makes two changes. First, he makes the two kings equal by describing their status in the same way: each is a king of his respective realm. Second, he makes the reconciliation stronger, because his passage suggests that it was a firm agreement, especially by contrast with ASC’s tone of impermanence and futility. With only a few small textual changes, Henry’s William is not prone to conflict and violence, but rather skilled at resolution.

Henry sides with William against his son Robert in their conflict. He reports that the king curses his son Robert,<sup>176</sup> which might seem a reprehensible action for a king. But later in his narrative, Henry explains that Robert betrayed his brother Henry: ‘Que res Deo ualde displicuit, sed uindictam in tempora distulit.’<sup>177</sup> Henry makes William not responsible or blameworthy, but rather just enactor of providential will in dealing with internal treachery. God planned punishment for Robert, which makes it appear that William’s cursing of Robert is still part of the reflection of God’s plan for the English. On a related note, this is yet another example of Henry’s interpretation of God’s infinite justice, within which specific events and people precipitate its realization in the workings of history. Henry’s sense of destiny is one which has been entirely decided in advance, but it is also one in which he stresses the interaction between God and those who provoke his anger—or win his favour—in real time. Within this providential framework, Henry chooses to emphasize the personal responsibility of kings.

Henry makes William’s rule and his defence of England less destructive than does ASC. He mentions William’s tax, but makes no comment about it being excessive,

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<sup>174</sup> ‘Here in this year the king of the French and William, king of England, were reconciled, but it held only a little while.’ ASC (E) 1077; Swanton, 213.

<sup>175</sup> ‘Afterwards the king of England and the king of France were reconciled.’ HA vi.34, 398–9.

<sup>176</sup> HA vi.34, 398–9. Greenway points out that only the Hyde Chronicle also refers to the curse, HA, 399 n.197.

<sup>177</sup> ‘This was very displeasing to God, but He deferred vengeance for a time.’ HA vi.40, 406–7.

expensive or unreasonable,<sup>178</sup> as does ASC which reads: ‘se cyng let beodan mycel gyld 7 hefelic ofer eall Engaland’.<sup>179</sup> Although Henry excoriates the greedy character of the Normans in vi.38, he does not single out William for great or frequent criticism. Furthermore, like ASC, Henry reports on William’s preparatory measures when faced with the threat of Danish and Flemish invasion in 1085. Yet ASC continues to refer to William’s forces as ‘swa mycclan here ... swa næfre ær þis land ne gesohte’.<sup>180</sup> Henry preserves neither of these elements, only remarking on how extraordinary it was that England could house them: ‘Willelmus rex ... rediit a Normannia in Angliam, cum tanto exercitu Francorum, Normannorum, Britannorum, quod mirum uidebatur quomodo hec terra pascere posset eos.’<sup>181</sup> Henry makes several important changes to ASC. He makes the episode general and impersonal, removing the unequivocal sense that it was a negative reaction of the men at the time. Importantly for his depiction of William personally, Henry eliminates the explanation that William laid waste to English land near the sea so it could not be raided. Henry’s William does not need to damage England gratuitously in order to defend it. By reducing ASC’s bitterness and minimizing suggestions of William’s violent and oppressive excesses, Henry makes William’s actions appear to be more those of a king defending his kingdom than of a conqueror oppressing the subjugated land.

Henry uses God’s will to endorse William’s cause. He preserves the wording of ASC almost to the letter but adds a layer of providential approval for William’s defence. Henry explains the failure of the king of Denmark and the count of Flanders to marshal an invasion of England as the will of God: ‘Cum autem apparatus eorum Deo uolente

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<sup>178</sup> *HA* vi.35, 400–1.

<sup>179</sup> ‘the king had a great and heavy tax ordered over all England’, ASC (E) 1083 [1084]; Swanton, 215.

<sup>180</sup> ‘a greater raiding-army ... as had ever sought out this country before’, ASC (E) 1085; Swanton, 215.

<sup>181</sup> ‘King William returned from Normandy to England with so great an army of Frenchmen, Normans, and Bretons, that it was a wonder this land was able to feed them.’ *HA* vi.36, 400–1.

defecisset, remisit magnas partes exercituum ad natale solum.<sup>182</sup> This kind of explanation is new and characteristic of Henry's historical writing. Nor does Henry leave William out: in his next sentence about the Domesday survey, Henry dubs him 'rex potentissimus'.<sup>183</sup> And as we will recall, Henry has established that William rules rightfully as of the realization of Providence in 1066. Henry's epithet and its location in the narrative provide a reminder of the dissuasive effect of William's defensive power, which is in turn a manifestation of God's will.

Henry also improves the character of the king who orders the Domesday survey. ASC chronicler suggests that William's survey was either invasive or pedantic, and reflected badly on William: 'Swa swyðe nearwelice he hit lett ut aspyrian ... hit is sceame to tellanne, ac hit ne þuhte him nan sceame to donne',<sup>184</sup> explaining that no single animal was omitted from the record. Henry, conversely, makes the enquiry seem a kingly thing to do:

Misit autem dehinc rex potentissimus iusticarios suos per unamquamque scyram, id est prouinciam, Anglie, et inquirere fecit per iusiurandum quot hide, id est iugera uni aratro sufficientia per annum, essent in unaquaque uilla, et quot animalia.<sup>185</sup>

Henry not only calls William 'rex potentissimus' but also erases the sense that it was a degrading enterprise for William.

There are several points to make about Henry's treatment of William's relationship with law and justice, and how he distributes responsibility. Henry's narrative suggests that the English owe him allegiance because he is their king, regardless of whether he always behaves justly. As we will see, God ultimately punishes William for

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<sup>182</sup> 'But when, by God's will, their preparations came to nothing, [the king] sent back the greater part of the armies to their native soil.' *HA* vi.36, 400–1.

<sup>183</sup> 'the mighty king', *HA* vi.36, 400–1.

<sup>184</sup> 'He had investigated so very narrowly ... (it is shameful to tell—but it seemed no shame to him to do it)', ASC (E) 1085; Swanton, 216.

<sup>185</sup> 'The mighty king, thereafter sent his justices through every shire, that is, province, of England, and made them enquire on oath how many hides (that is yield sufficient for one plough per annum) there were in every village and how many animals.' *HA* vi.36, 400–1.

behaving badly as an English king—but not as a conqueror. In this regard William is no different from the rest of the English, for whom he was originally the agent of God’s vengeance. Ultimately he too shares in what they suffered, making him part of Henry’s repeated pattern for England.

When Henry relates William’s 1086 Christmas court—an important event for the succession—he amplifies both William’s strength and his adherence to English tradition. He writes: ‘Willelmus *rex fortis* ... cum *de more* tenuisset curiam suam in Natali apud Glouceastre ... Henricum filium suum iuniorem uirilibus induit armis.’<sup>186</sup> [emphasis added] ASC makes no reference to custom, nor does it provide William with an epithet of kingly power.<sup>187</sup> In holding court at this time-honoured place and in arming his son, William honours tradition as an English king, not as a conqueror imposing authority.

In referring to the king’s acquisition of English treasure, ASC comments of William: ‘he dyde ærest æfter his gewunan’.<sup>188</sup> Henry omits this line in describing the quality of justice in the king’s behaviour: ‘Postea rex adquisitis magni thesauri copiis super quoscumque aliquam causam inuenire poterat, siue iuste, siue iniuste, iuit in Normanniam.’<sup>189</sup> This might appear to be an almost literal translation of ASC (E),<sup>190</sup> but Henry does not describe William’s behaviour as characteristic. This is an important omission, because Henry loses ASC’s sardonic tone, which implies that William simply did what he wanted, regularly exercising arbitrary power. Henry does not deem it his responsibility to pass judgment on this isolated action of William’s. To do so is the province of Providence: regardless, the people owe allegiance to their king.

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<sup>186</sup> ‘while *by custom King William the strong* had held his court at Christmas at Gloucester ... he clothed Henry his younger son with the arms of manhood.’ *HA* vi.37, 402–3.

<sup>187</sup> ASC (E) 1085 [1086].

<sup>188</sup> ‘he did first as he was accustomed’, ASC (E) 1085 [1086]; Swanton, 217.

<sup>189</sup> ‘Afterwards the king, having acquired great quantities of treasure from whomsoever, on whatever grounds, whether just or unjust, went to Normandy.’ *HA* vi.37, 402–3.

<sup>190</sup> But cf. Greenway, *HA*, 402 n.208, noting only the similarity.

Henry does not hold English law and custom as important criteria in judging William's legitimacy as an English king. In vi.37, he says nothing about the ætheling leaving because of not receiving enough honour from William, as does ASC.<sup>191</sup> Not only is this another example of how Henry reduces William's conflicts as king, but it also shows that Henry's approach to responsibility is not guided by the duties, honours and obligations owed to an ætheling because of English traditions.

For Henry, the English remain wretched and shamed, deserving of punishment. But as we have seen, Henry does not blame oppressors for making them so; they have brought divine punishments on themselves through sin. William too is punished for his own greed on his deathbed as in ASC, but this is the greed he shares with his fellow Normans after he is king of the English. It is an important distinction that his conquest of England was not an indication of his greed.

Henry has high expectations for the character and behaviour of the English, as compared to others:

Anno uigesimo primo regni Willelmi regis, cum iam Domini iustam uoluntatem super Anglorum gentem Normanni comlesent, nec iam uix aliquis princeps de progenie Anglorum esset in Anglia, sed omnes ad seruitutem et ad merorem redacti essent, ita etiam ut Anglicum uocari esset obprobrior, huius auctor uindictæ Willelmus uitam terminauit. Elegerat enim Deus normannos ad Anglorum gentem exterminandam, quia prerogatiua seucie singularis omnibus populis uiderat eos preminere. Natura siquidem eorum est, ut cum hostes suos adeo depresserunt, ut adicere non possint, ipsi se deprimant, et se terrasque suas in pauperiem et uastitatem redigant. Semperque Normannorum domini, cum hostes contriuerint, cum crudeliter non agere nequeant, suos etiam hostiliter conterunt. Quod scilicet in Normannia, et Anglia, Apulia, Calabria, Cicilia, et Antiochia, terris optimis quas eis Deus subiecit, magis magisque apparet.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Above, 234.

<sup>192</sup> 'In King William's twenty-first year [1087], when the Normans had fulfilled the just will of the Lord upon the English people, and there was scarcely a noble of English descent in England, but all had been reduced to servitude and lamentation, and it was even disgraceful to be called English, William, the agent of this vengeance, ended his life. For God had chosen the Normans to wipe out the English nation, because He had seen that they surpassed all other people and their unparalleled savagery. Indeed, their character is such that when they have brought their enemies so low that they can cast them down no further, they bring themselves down, and reduce their own lands to poverty and waste. Always the Norman lords, when they have crushed their enemies, since they cannot avoid acting brutally, crush their own men also in wars. This is increasingly apparent in the best lands that God has made subject to them, that is, in Normandy and England, Apulia, Calabria, Sicily, and Antioch.' *HA* vi.38, 402–3.

Henry conveys the implication that the English can change, but do not. As such they are more responsible for their sins. The Normans cannot change: they are violent and destructive by nature. This means that Henry's expectations for them are not as high as for the English—and that the failure of the English is the more tragic, because they failed to achieve even the potential for their own moral improvement. Yet as we will see, Henry does not group William exclusively with the Normans, and he changes William's character with respect to ASC.

In the same subsection, Henry makes what might seem to be a criticism of how William uses his power as king, as frequently happens in ASC. Henry observes: 'In Anglia igitur iniusta telonea et pessime consuetudines his temporibus pullulauerunt.'<sup>193</sup> Both ASC and Henry describe God-sent plagues as punishments for sin. But what is striking is that Henry casts these tribulations primarily as collective Norman vice, not as personal vices of William's—indeed, Henry does not mention William by name in connection with this comment at all. This is unlike the tone taken in ASC on William's taxation and royal policy.<sup>194</sup>

In this section Henry describes increasing injustices throughout England.<sup>195</sup> ASC makes the injustices seem entirely driven by the king, not distributed across the Norman leadership: 'Se cyng 7 þa heafod men'.<sup>196</sup> Henry Henry distributes responsibility more widely, across leaders in England: 'Principes omnes auri et argenti cupiditate cecati adeo erant'.<sup>197</sup> Even more particularly, Henry adds two specific sentences about the vices of justices, sheriffs and reeves, making two observations which are not in ASC:<sup>198</sup> 'Quanto

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<sup>193</sup> 'And so in England they increased in those times unjust tolls and very evil customs.' *HA* vi.38, 402–3.

<sup>194</sup> E.g. ASC (E) 1066, wherein William collects tributes; on taxes, (D) 1067, cf. below, 264.

<sup>195</sup> *HA* vi. 38, 402–5.

<sup>196</sup> 'The king and the principal men', ASC (E) 1086 [1087]; Swanton, 218.

<sup>197</sup> 'All the leaders had been so blinded by a desire for gold and silver', *HA* vi.38, 402–3. Cf. Henry's *De contemptu mundi*, above, 30.

<sup>198</sup> Greenway, *HA*, 403 n.212.

magis loquebantur de recto, tanto maior fiebat iniuria. Qui iusticiarii uocabantur caput erant omnis iniusticie.’<sup>199</sup> He is emphatic that injustices are rampant, especially among those officers for whom it is their primary responsibility.

Henry criticizes the Normans at points—but these are charges we have seen before. After King Edward foretells the imminent destruction of the Godwineson brothers by God’s wrath, Henry observes of them: ‘Et isti quidem iusticarii erant regni!’<sup>200</sup> Henry blames Harold alone for personal injustice: ‘Haraldus rex periurus i anno, et tamen non pleno quem propria perdidit iniusticia.’<sup>201</sup> These are not criticisms which Henry reserves for the Normans alone, and in particular he does not single out William as alone in his accountability.

Henry’s muting of blame for William personally by folding it into explanation by inevitable Norman character is a significant point in considering Henry’s approach to collective responsibility and accountability. When it comes to blame, where William is involved, Henry treats him as one of a collective group. Yet as we have seen, when William distinguishes himself well, Henry does not hesitate to give him individual credit.

Henry can be critical of William, but even in retelling a story from ASC his version follows a different narrative pattern—and has different implications. Henry preserves ASC’s moralizing interpretation of William’s death, but does not end on a negative note. Henry explains that William’s plundering in France that year angered God and so God sent him illness and death. The specific identification of God’s actions is particular to Henry; ASC speaks more generally of death sparing none and of a pitiful

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<sup>199</sup> ‘The more they spoke of right, the greater injustice was done. Those who were called justices were the source of all injustice.’ *HA* vi.38, 402–3.

<sup>200</sup> ‘And these, indeed, were the justices of the realm!’ *HA* vi.25, 382–3.

<sup>201</sup> ‘Harold, the perjured king, for one incomplete year, was destroyed through his own injustice.’ *HA* vi.42, 410–11.

thing happening to William after his pitiful actions.<sup>202</sup> Like ASC, Henry reiterates the necessity to outline both good and evil in the king's life to provide moral examples.<sup>203</sup>

There is a major and important narrative difference. ASC ends its review of William's life with the comment about 'both the good and evil'. Its final lingering message about this king is thus ambivalent at best. Henry begins his review of William's life with this comment, making the general moral indictment again later, but without direct reference to William. This makes way for an improvement from this point, culminating in Henry's summary which makes him England's greatest king so far.<sup>204</sup> ASC and Henry part company dramatically in their final conclusions about William.

Indeed, this difference in interpretation is evident throughout Henry's narrative about William's reign. In the light of the numerous improvements Henry has made to William's character (including epithets of strength and his adherence to English tradition) as well as the omissions of ravaging in the north and details of his violence, the good nevertheless seems to outweigh the bad for Henry. William's power is good and praiseworthy, not an indication or constant reminder of an unwelcome and overbearing conquest as in ASC.

One key difference is that ASC never identifies William as a natural English king. As such his punishment is shared with no one, and it follows a reign of unjust violence. In ASC, he suffers because he is an oppressive conqueror, an outsider. But Henry makes him into an English king. He is guilty of greed—but so are his Norman advisors, Henry reminds us, and the English themselves were at the time of his arrival. For Henry this repeating pattern of punishment by conquest is standard for the experience in England, regardless of the king's origin.

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<sup>202</sup> ASC (E) 1086 [1087].

<sup>203</sup> *HA* vi.38–9, 404–7; ASC (E) 1086 [1087].

<sup>204</sup> Below, 256.

Thus we see Henry—on many occasions and in many respects—represents William’s character differently from his sources. Unlike ASC, Henry does not criticize William as king of England. Yet it must be stressed that this is not because Henry is a Norman, or because Henry had any particular project to defend Norman rule; indeed, his narrative of 1087 indicates that this was far from his intent. Rather, at the moment of the implementation of God’s plan in 1066, William became enfolded into English history. For Henry, he was thenceforward part of the providential plan particular to England, a new iteration of the same repeated pattern in England’s history. That he was a conqueror was not problematic for Henry, for it was part of what it meant to partake in English history. This is evident still further on those occasions when Henry does not appear to improve William’s character from ASC, because the narrative implications are very different.

## **Conclusions**

Henry’s *Historia* is not organized around antagonism between English and Norman. As we have seen, Henry finds it acceptable for the king to be skilful and Hereward to be valiant and heroic in the same conflict, even though they are on opposing sides. This avoidance of direct conflict in the narrative shows that Henry still holds loyalty to one’s lord and the rightful king in highest regard. This is also evident in his repeated condemnations of Harold for breaking his oath to William, to whom he owed allegiance.<sup>205</sup> Henry’s praise for the Norman William and the English Hereward need not be interpreted as a case of Henry’s being deliberately ambiguous. That he claims to esteem both would only indicate ambivalence or deliberate obfuscation if navigating Anglo-Norman politics were Henry’s primary preoccupation in writing history. But I

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<sup>205</sup> Above, 125 ff.

argue this is not the case; the patterns of his narrative transcend time, moment and origins in favour of character and behaviour of English kings.

As we saw with Henry's portrayal of Cnut, William as conqueror is an imperial, Caesar-like king. Henry's ultimate verdict on William as a king is positive and full of praise. In his summary of the eleventh-century kings, Henry writes of William:

'Willelmus omnium predictorum summus xxi anno glorifice splenduit. De quo dictum est: / Cesariem Cesar tibi se natura negavit, / Hanc Willelme tibi stella comata dedit.'<sup>206</sup>

Although Henry includes the moralizing reference of taking the good with the bad, this passage is a remarkable improvement on the William of ASC. The connection Henry makes in the couplet between William and the comet underlines the sense that the comet was not a portent of disaster, but a herald of a glorious reign.

Henry does not hold William in any way personally accountable for the destruction caused by the conquest. According to him, there is simply less destruction. He is responsible only in the sense of causation: he is the instrument of God, putting the perpetual plan into action. When William is punished, it is for taking part in the sins already rampant within England—a greed he shares with the English, not as a foreign conqueror. Henry does not deem William bad or reprehensible for being a conqueror, nor does it prevent his being an English king. He is just as sinful—and in the same ways—as were the English for whom he was the punishment. Henry makes him into an English king by explaining him as part of the providential plan for England, and as such makes him more worthy of the office than does ASC. Whereas his contemporaries try to make William seem less a conqueror, Henry makes him less destructive—but nevertheless narrates conquest itself as a natural and integral part of England's history throughout time.

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<sup>206</sup> 'William, higher than all the preceding, shone gloriously until his twenty-first year. Of whom it was said: / If nature denied you, Caesar, a head of hair, / The long-haired star, William, gave it to you.' *HA* vi.42, 410–11. On the couplet, see: Greenway, *HA*, 411 n.238.

One implication is that powerful kings who expand their territory are quintessentially and ideally English, because they are the manifestation of God's grand plan for England. Through enduring conquest England almost becomes more English. Indeed, as Henry's summary in vi.42 shows, the conqueror is always greater than his predecessors. Henry's narrative of the Norman Conquest cannot be explained solely as a conflict between Norman superiority over the victimized English, since he treats the Danish conqueror and the Norman conqueror in the same way. The Norman Conquest was a crucial event in England's history, but even more important for Henry is its role in the repeating pattern of invasion—whereby the English and their inadequate kings are punished for their sins, but also improve under the rule of conquerors who bring with them a model of achievement and moral virtue.

The frequency and certainty with which Henry cites English treachery against King William is noteworthy, especially as compared with ASC and John. Henry does not concern himself with loyalty to the *ætheling* who might have been king, only to the king who is. As we have seen, his transition to accepting William's rule happens at the moment he cites the change in Providence, a part of his pattern of England's history of conquest. Henry's attitude towards the loyalty owed to the king is entirely contingent upon how he perceives the manifestation of the providential plan—and not upon a would-be king's heritage, ethnicity, politics or even his character.

William is a part of the natural progression of conquest and new rule throughout England's past, which is enough to make William a legitimate king. For Henry, as his theme of the five plagues suggests, change in England's rule is the *status quo*. This is the key to understanding Henry's approach to royal legitimacy, responsibility and expectations in England. For something to remain the same is the aberration.<sup>207</sup> Thus the

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<sup>207</sup> For Henry's views on worldly impermanence, above, 22–34.

people who attempt to remain the same and to resist their new king are doing something wrong. They are responsible for their treachery and accountable to Providence.

Henry's approach is worth comparing to that of John, for whom—as we shall see—the legitimacy of the ætheling was so important that he could only defend and advocate William's legitimacy by reconciling the conquering king with the ætheling. For John, resolving the succession based on English traditional practice was important. But for Henry, the important theme is resolving the succession based on the English tradition of Providence and its plan for a repeated pattern of invasion. Both historians value and cast their narratives according to English tradition, but this tradition means very different things to them because they have very different pictures of how causation and responsibility in history operates.

Henry's ultimate verdict on accountability and deserved punishments is not only a condemnation of people who resist a certain king. It is with those who, by resisting a certain king whom Henry deems rightful, resist the will of God—and includes the kings themselves, if and when they choose to resist God. This attitude reflects his overall view of historical causation, and does not mean that he categorically condemns the English. His narrative conveys tragedy, but also acceptance of the pattern he has identified in England. The five plagues structure, in its imposition of order, does not mean that Henry is an historian more detached than are his contemporaries.<sup>208</sup> Rather, it reflects his keen awareness of the insular experience of tragedy, his belief in the workings of progress, and his desire to redeem and to explain England's ascendant development.

For Henry, English kingship owes a great deal of its glory to the infusion of invaders.<sup>209</sup> But that is part of the point—English kingship is not taken over by a Norman; a Norman becomes an English king and a king of the English. For Henry, the English

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<sup>208</sup> But cf. J. Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past', in his *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), 209–28, at 211.

<sup>209</sup> Cf. Henry's comments on Cnut's and William's surpassing quality as English kings: above, 179, 256.

kings who were conquerors win from him the most praise. But they win praise because they are English kings.

### **John on William**

Like WM and Henry, John characterizes William more as a just English king and defender than an arbitrary and violent conqueror. He does this by rewording ASC, by including material from other sources, and by distributing responsibility for questionable actions across more factors and people. He does not hold William personally accountable for the disasters in England, like WM and Henry. But unlike them, he does not employ a framework of providential history to condemn William. John's goal is not merely to soften the violence of William's conquest, for at times his language is more critical of William than ASC. Yet these criticisms must be viewed in the context of the narrative thread of John's chronicle, which lessens their impact, as opposed to ASC, which heightens it. John distributes responsibility more widely, and in so doing lessens the implication of William's own involvement in bringing disasters upon the country.

It might seem that John's attitude towards English kings was simplistic: an English king could do no wrong. But John has high expectations for English kings: there were still criteria that he made them fulfil before they could appear worthy. They had to be of good character to attain kingship. To succeed was not enough for John to endorse a conqueror. What he does is to build the foundation of reason underneath, ascribing cause of success to a king's good character and not to divine punishment of the English. John could not accept William as a king by right of conquest alone. He had to reduce William's conquering legacy, make him a worthy defender of the English, and make him a legitimate English king. How he did so will be the subject of this section.

Several twelfth-century accounts of 1066 employ prophecy to provide a sense of continuity across the Conquest, evading direct engagement with the Conquest as a major rupture in England's history.<sup>210</sup> These narratives are different from ASC's dramatic sense of a new era and its grudging acceptance of William. Narrative time is also an important consideration in John's narrative of William as an English king. For John, William's legitimacy and what is due him as an English king is not static, but changes over time based on the situation in England. Whereas ASC provides frequent reminders of William's oppression and violence, John's William is less violent and improves over time, growing into the role of king and defender. I argue that 1066—the year of conquest—for John is not the important year. 1073 (in reality 1074) marks the change in John's attitude to William. For John, this year is the true turning point: for this is the year in which King William reconciles with the Ætheling, Edgar. At this moment John begins to write of William consistently as an English king, king of the English and defender instead of conqueror<sup>211</sup>—which seems to become possible only when no other legitimate heir exists. At this point it becomes possible for John to absorb William entirely into the role of an English king. John thereby makes William's assumption of kingship a peaceful reconciliation, not a conquest. That he should expend such effort making William less a conqueror suggests that John finds value in reconciling the past—and in writing reconciliation into the past.

John helps his cause—making the transition natural and believable—by improving William's behaviour beforehand, and by continuing to make the English distinguish themselves well. Thus the 'teamwork' that arises thereafter between them and William establishes the bond of people and their king. The key implication is that if the

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<sup>210</sup> Cf. Otter, '1066'; above, 198–9.

<sup>211</sup> The only exception is John's description of Waltheof's execution: JW [1075], iii, 26–9.

English are not wretched, as they are in ASC, the Conqueror cannot be guilty of making them so.

John's subtle differences, as well as what he chooses to preserve, must be examined in the context of his whole narrative of William's reign, and in particular the way in which it unfolds over narrative time. John essentially defends William as an English king, and even shows evidence of his legitimacy after the reconciliation. John does not completely diverge from ASC's account, but, like Henry, makes subtle changes to the received picture of the English and their conquering king. The effect of his subtlety is considerable. Throughout his narrative, John changes the narrative window into the past so little that one could be almost unaware that he is seeing an entirely different vision of the English and their king.

A theme that remains consistent in John is his persistence in showing the English as loyal and possessing military strength. In this regard his account differs from ASC's accounts. He refrains from criticizing them, suggesting that they were wretched, or showing them as incompetent. By showing the English as less compelled to treachery because of oppression, wretchedness and weakness than does ASC, John makes it less defensible to maintain that they were a conquered people, or that the Conquest brought about a change in their character. This also helps to release William from the characterization of oppressor, since according to John there is less narrative evidence that the English were wretched. And, as we will see, John ceases to cast the resistance to William as positive after the reconciliation with the ætheling has been effected. Especially after this moment, John harmonizes the character of the English and the man he makes into their king: William.

John was interested not just in any particular English king, but in maintaining the tradition of them. For him, the English tradition of legitimate succession was a crucial

element of creating this royal continuity. Establishing the kings' legitimacy on the grounds which he deems important, then, was essential. We see this in several respects even before he narrates the Norman Conquest. John invokes the House of Cerdic when describing the succession of Edward:

Cuius frater Eaduardus, annitentibus maxime comite Goduino et Wigornensi presule Liuingo, Lundonie leuatur in regem, cuius pater Agelredus, cuius pater Eadgarus, cuius pater Eadmundus, cuius pater Eaduardus Senior, cuius pater Alfredus.<sup>212</sup>

John alone includes this genealogy: it is not in ASC.<sup>213</sup> That John names the kings of the House, going back to the impressive example of Alfred, shows that John wants to cultivate this continuity in England's kings even when it is not present in ASC.

A further instance of John's attention to royal legitimacy is the way he narrates the succession after the death of Cnut. Cnut's sons Harald I (Harefoot) and Harthacnut were the initial contenders; their half-brothers Alfred and Edward—sons of Æthelred and hence of the House of Cerdic—were in Normandy. John makes it apparent that Cnut's sons—who are, apparently, not æthelings in his view because of their Danish heritage—have claims inferior to those of an English ætheling, wherever one might be. Harold claims to be Cnut's son, but John says of this assertion: 'licet id uerum esset minime'.<sup>214</sup> He goes on to write of Harald that he, 'adepta regia dignitate', tyrannically seizes treasures from his mother.<sup>215</sup> His tyrannical behaviour entirely discounts him from having a just claim: Harald 'consentientibus quam plurimis maioribus natu Anglie, *quasi iustus heres* coepit regnare, non tamen ita potenterut Canutus quia *iustior heres* expectabatur

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<sup>212</sup> 'At London, mainly by the exertions of Earl Godwine and Lyfing, bishop of Worcester, his brother Edward ascended the throne, whose father was Æthelred, whose father was Edgar, whose father was Edmund, whose father was Edward the Elder, whose father was Alfred.' JW [1042], ii, 534–5.

<sup>213</sup> McGurk, JW, ii, 534 n.2.

<sup>214</sup> 'but that is quite untrue', JW [1035], ii, 520–1.

<sup>215</sup> 'having gained the royal dignity ... tyrannically', JW [1035], ii, 520–1.

Heardecanutus.<sup>216</sup> [emphasis added] Even Harthacnut, whom John considers to have the better claim, never deserves the loyalty which John claims is owed to the æthelings. In his entry for 1036, John refers to the arrival of ‘innocentes clitones Alfredus et Eaduardus’ and then explains it as a serious and unjust problem ‘grauiterque ... iniustum esset’ that the leading men of the kingdom prefer Harold to the æthelings.<sup>217</sup> Despite the presence of foreign rule, John only recognized the one royal dynasty.<sup>218</sup> Yet dynasty itself was only important to him when it proved convenient for his agenda of endorsing the king in power. This illuminates the importance John placed on redeeming the English past over narrative consistency in establishing technicalities for the legitimacy of kings: similarly, he notably ignores Æthelred’s heirs in narrating Cnut’s assumption of power.

Twelfth-century historians had different motivations behind the importance they assigned to an ætheling, based on the picture of English history they wanted to present. For John the ætheling was an important figure and role—unsurprisingly, given his interest in a lofty tradition of English kings. As David Dumville observes, ‘The ætheling was in theory eligible for the kingship.’<sup>219</sup> This was precisely the problem which John—as a supporter of tradition in English kingship—faced in his project of redeeming William and converting him into a rightful English king. That being an ætheling was not a formal office meant there was more room for the historian to explain and defend legitimate kings, and perhaps more of a need to do so as well.

John downplays William’s oppression of the English, but only makes the dramatic changes in the years after the reconciliation in 1074 [1073]. His attitude towards

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<sup>216</sup> ‘With the consent of many of the nobles of England he began to reign *as if the rightful heir*, not, however, as powerfully as Cnut because Harthacnut, *the heir with the stronger claim*, was awaited.’ JW [1035], ii, 520–1. Cf. ASC (CD) 1035; (E) 1036 [1035]. JW appears to have had little incentive to change ASC’s account dramatically based on his assumptions that those with Danish heritage could not be claimants as natural lords.

<sup>217</sup> JW [1036], ii, 522–3.

<sup>218</sup> D.N. Dumville, ‘The ætheling: a study in Anglo-Saxon constitutional history’, *ASE* 8 (1979), 1–33, at 30.

<sup>219</sup> Dumville, ‘The ætheling’, 12.

William's taxation of the English illustrates this particularly well. ASC (D) for 1067

reads:

7 her se kyng sette micel gyld on earm folc, 7 þeahhwæðre let æfr\ē/ herigan eall þæt hi oferforon. An\d/ þa he ferde to Defena\scire/ 7 besæt þa burh Exancester .xviii. dagas, 7 þær wearð micel his heres forfaren, ac he heom wel behet, 7 yfele gelæste, 7 hig him þa burh ageafon, for þan þa þegenas heom geswicon hæfdon.<sup>220</sup>

John's 1067 entry is similar in content, but shortens the account and omits several details:

Post hec, hieme imminente, rex Willelmus de Normannia Angliam rediit, et Anglis importabile tributum imposuit. Dein in Domniam hostiliter profectus, ciuitatem Execestre, quam ciues et nonnulli Anglici ministri contra illum retinebant, obsedit, et cito infregit. ... ciues autem dextris acceptis regi se dedebant.<sup>221</sup>

John retains D's reference to William's oppressive tax, but renders the reference to 'micel gyld on earm folc' as: 'et Anglis importabile tributum imposuit'. John preserves the sense of the tax's gravity, but makes two key omissions: the comment that the English were 'earn' and the comment William always ('æfre') permitted wanton raiding. John's account thus conveys less despair about the state of the English people. By reporting William's actions without suggesting that they are the cause of English misery or deliberately intended to take advantage of English weakness, John makes William appear less brutal.

John eliminates from ASC some of the details that make William appear weak or ineffectual. John modifies the account of the siege of Devon to make it look more rapid and effective with the adverb 'cito'. He also omits ASC's comment that William lost many men.<sup>222</sup> The king remains an oppressor, but the effect John introduces is that

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<sup>220</sup> 'And here the king set a great tax on the wretched people, and yet nevertheless always allowed to be raided all that they went across. And then [1068] he traveled to Devonshire, and besieged Exeter stronghold for 18 days—and there the great part of his raiding-army perished. But he promised them well—and performed badly—and they gave up the stronghold to him because the thegns had betrayed them.' ASC (D) 1067; Swanton, 200–1.

<sup>221</sup> 'After this, as winter approached, William returned to England from Normandy and imposed an unbearable tax upon the English. Then invading Devon, he laid siege to, and quickly broke into, Exeter which the citizens and a few English thegns held against him. ... Then the citizens accepted pledges and gave themselves up to the king.' JW [1067], iii, 4–7.

<sup>222</sup> See also: McGurk, JW, iii, 6 n.5.

William's campaign is not tainted by damage and destruction. The king rather appears strong and successful in a campaign not excessively prolonged and without extensive collateral damage.

John does not show the English as weak or beset by internal treachery. John makes an interesting change to ASC, reporting not only that the citizens surrendered the city, but also that they and 'nonnulli milites' were defending it 'contra illum retinebant'.<sup>223</sup> John's choice of the word 'nonnulli' suggests emphasis not on the scarcity of the defenders, but on the fact that more than a few were present; his use of the imperfect shows us that the defence was not a single instance, but took place over time. John actually reverses the explanation of internal betrayal by the thegns, making them among the stalwart defenders. ASC (D) casts William as a breaker of promises, and explains Exeter's submission to William as arising from the English thegns being traitors to their people. John omits the comment that William turned back on his promise. This further change in sense shows William enforcing his authority as king, doing so by direct and honest military means, not by deceiving the rebels into submission.

Not only do the English distinguish themselves in the defence, but John also transforms their submission from the military loss of an outpost to the giving of deference to their king—which is indeed a normal behaviour for subjects ('ciues autem dextris acceptis regi se dedebant'). John has the citizens surrendering themselves—not Exeter—to the king. Whereas D's account makes it seem the English have lost specific ground to the enemy, John's account suggests more a reconciliation between the English and their king.

John makes William's actions as king appear—although still harsh—less fierce and spiteful. John thus minimizes the association between William and conquest, and

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<sup>223</sup> 'which the citizens and a number of English thegns were holding against him.' JW [1067], iii, 4–5.

hence at the same time makes the English look less like victims and less shamed by defeat. John does not take an acerbic tone to William because he is a conqueror. Instead, he eliminates some of the references that remind the reader that William is a conqueror so as to make him seem more an English king.

John casts the arrival of Edgar into England in 1069 as a cause for concern. Unlike his narrative of the dispute with the æthelings in 1036, this is a problem posed not to England by illegitimate rulers, but to John: he must reconcile the arguably prior claim of the native heir with William's legitimacy as king of the English. John does not describe the resistance as a heroic last stand, instead emphasizing its distressing effects, foreshadowing William's legitimacy as king. Yet Edgar is an ætheling, and John cleverly sidesteps any overt criticism of Edgar by holding others responsible for causing Ealdred's concern, among them Danes and earls. John tries to relieve both English kings and potential ones of wrongdoing and cause for blame.

That William's relationship with the ætheling is important for John is suggested by Ealdred's distress at Edgar's arrival and behaviour. In his 1069 entry, John reports:

Suani regis Danorum filii, Haroldus, Canutus, et patruus eorum Esbernus comes, et comes Turkillus, .cc. et .xl. nauibus de Danemarcia uenientes, in ostio Humbre fluminis applicuerunt, ubi eis clito Eadgarus, comes Waltheofus, et Marlesuein, multique alii, cum classe quam congregauerant, occurrerunt. De quorum aduentu Eboracensis archiepiscopus Aldredus ualde tristis effectus, in magnam incidit infirmitatem ... ut Deum rogauerat, uitam finiuit<sup>224</sup>

There are some notable differences between John and ASC.<sup>225</sup> John reports that Edgar joined forces with the Danes. As we have seen in John's account of the Danish invasions, the Danes provide a convenient scapegoat: a bad influence which eliminates the impression that Edgar alone was acting against his king and lord. Furthermore, ASC (DE)

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<sup>224</sup> 'Harold and Cnut, the sons of Swein, king of the Danes, and their uncle earl Osbeorn, and earl Thorkell came with 240 ships from Denmark and landed at the mouth of the Humber. There the ætheling Edgar, earl Waltheof, and Mærleswein and many others joined them with the fleet they had assembled. Much affected with distress at their arrival, Ealdred, archbishop of York, became very ill, and died, as he had entreated God', JW iii, [1069], 8–9.

<sup>225</sup> See above, 241.

1068 has Edgar bringing Northumbrians to make peace with the people of York, an episode to which John does not refer. By eliminating Edgar's potentially subversive attempt to unify groups of the English against William, John dissociates Edgar from the fault of initiating treachery, implying that John thought Edgar was indeed at fault.

Ealdred's distress is particular to John, and the implication is that the alliance between these English and the Danes against their king is what troubles Ealdred.<sup>226</sup> This is consistent with John's continued hostility towards the Danes.<sup>227</sup> The additive effect of John's omissions sound a new moral tone, providing an unwritten reminder that William is king and that his subjects owe him allegiance. Edgar is important because he is an *ætheling*: John manages his reputation and partially avoids blackening his name (unlike WM). Indeed, John is conspicuously silent about Edgar's involvement in the rebellion: to provide more detail would necessitate implicating him in it. Through Ealdred's reaction to the arrival of Edgar and his English and Danish allies, John instead implies that Edgar owes loyalty to his king, and that William deserves it, but at the expense of neither individual. As we shall see, writing this peaceful resolution into the past permits John to preserve the honour of both.

John accounts for William's violent behaviour where ASC does not. In his 1069 entry, John eliminates ASC's account of William's surprise attack on Edgar and the Northumbrians, during which he was responsible for the hundreds of deaths, the ravaging of the region and the taking of treasure.<sup>228</sup> Not only does John thus eliminate a conflict between William and the *ætheling*, but he also omits an entire episode that shows the king exhibiting wanton cruelty and violence.

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<sup>226</sup> Not in ASC; McGurk, JW, iii, 9 n.4, n.5. JW's inclusion of the report about Ealdred probably indicates John's interest in material with a Worcester connection.

<sup>227</sup> Above, 91–107; below, 269–70.

<sup>228</sup> ASC (D) 1068 [1069]; (E) 1069. McGurk suggests that the change could be deliberate or indicate a 'defective exemplar', JW, iii, 9 n.4.

John only uses the Normans as scapegoats when it is useful to exonerate William. John does not vilify the Normans or preserve a sense that they and the English are enemies—nor does he suggest that the king is an enemy of the English. He reports that the Norman garrison sets fire to houses so that the Danes cannot use them, but that the fire then encroached on whole city, including St Peter:

Normanni qui castella custodiebant, timentes ne domus, que prope castella erant, adiumenta Danis ad implendas fossas castellorum essent, igne eas succendere coeperunt; qui nimis excrescens, totam ciuitatem inuasit, monasteriumque sancti Petri cum ipsa consumpsit.<sup>229</sup>

John's account suggests that the Normans did not intend to burn St Peter's, implying that it was an accident, whereas ASC (D) explicitly blamed the 'frenchiscan'.<sup>230</sup> This additional information serves to remove the Normans' intent to destroy, thereby relieving them of blame.

John then explains that divine vengeance followed ('Sed hoc ultione diuina citissime in eis uindicatum est grauissime'), and that this vengeance took the form of raids by the Danes.<sup>231</sup> But John does not state explicitly that God's vengeance is directed at, and seeking to punish, the Normans. This is worth comparing to Henry, who as we have seen makes explicit whom God holds accountable and punishable, and why. According to John, divine vengeance appears to follow because the monastery had been burnt, not because a particular party intended to burn it. The absence of intent is crucial for John's attitude towards distributing responsibility. It is apparent that John's vision of responsibility—and his account of events in history and historical causation—is, unusually among his contemporary Latin chroniclers, not guided by a providential view

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<sup>229</sup> 'the Norman garrison in York began setting fire to the houses near the castle as they feared that they might be of use to the Danes in filling up the castle's ditch. The fire spread too far, encroached on the whole city and burned it together with the monastery of St Peter.' JW [1069], iii, 8–9.

<sup>230</sup> ASC (D) 1068 [1069].

<sup>231</sup> 'This was quickly followed by heavy divine vengeance.' JW iii, [1069], 8–11.

of history.<sup>232</sup> Furthermore John sometimes defends the Normans and on other occasions makes them perpetrators of injustice:<sup>233</sup> this indicates that they as a group are less important to him than are individuals to his story of the past and his mode of historical explanation.

It is intriguing that John should describe the Danes as divine punishment, especially since he so rarely refers to Providence. ASC does not describe this Danish invasion this way. The Danes provide a particularly convenient enemy for John. That they are the instrument of God's vengeance means that the Normans are not. As such John can describe the mutual violence between the English and the Normans in this year without making either—or the king—into the enemy. Furthermore, John's Danes kill 3000 Normans, whereas ASC explains they kill hundreds and attack only one castle.<sup>234</sup> John thereby not only implies that more damage was inflicted, but also attributes it to an external enemy. This lessens the impact of his report of William's actions which resemble ASC. D accuses William of killing hundreds of men, including those who could not escape, and of ravaging and disgracing the minster; E explains simply: '7 se cyng Willelm for into þære scire 7 hi eall for<dy>de.'<sup>235</sup> John writes: 'Quod ubi regi innotuit Willelmo, exercitu mox congregato, in Northymbriam efferato properavit animo, eamque per totam hiemem deustare, hominesque trucidare, et multa mala non cessabat agere.'<sup>236</sup> This description might seem to preserve ASC's account of William's despicable behaviour.

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<sup>232</sup> Above, 148–51.

<sup>233</sup> Above, 268; below, 271–2.

<sup>234</sup> ASC (D) 1068 [1069]; see: McGurk, JW, iii, 10 n.7.

<sup>235</sup> 'And the king William went into that shire and completely did for it.' ASC (E) 1069; (D) 1068 [1069]; Swanton, 203.

<sup>236</sup> 'When King William learned of this, he immediately assembled an army and hastened angrily to Northumbria, devastated it for the whole winter, killing men and ceaselessly inflicting many calamities.' JW [1069], iii, 10–11.

But there is more to the situation than the magnitude of William's misdeeds. John's key innovation is not in the scale of responsibility, but in its distribution. He blames others, not just William, for these calamities in Northumbria. John subsequently explains that William promised the Danish earl Osbeorn ('Danicum comitem Esbernum') money if Osbeorn would permit William's army unchecked run of the coasts ('rapere') if William left at the end of the winter without fighting a battle. John observes of Osbeorn: 'Ille autem auri argentique nimis audidus, non sine magno dedecore sui petitis concessit.'<sup>237</sup> These observations are important because John visits on Osbeorn both for his great greed and his shame in accepting the bribe.<sup>238</sup> It is also significant that John mentions Osbeorn's Danish heritage: this is consistent with John's pattern of blaming Danish blood for failure and shame among the English in his chronicles of Æthelred's reign.

The Normans—but not William himself—provide a scapegoat for John in this case. John observes next that the Normans had devastated Northumbria and other shires in the previous year, adding the comment: 'sed presenti et subsequenti fere per totam Angliam, maxime per Northymbriam et per contiguas illi prouincias'.<sup>239</sup> Based on John's entry for 1069, William hardly seems innocent; but then, neither do Osbeorn or the Normans. John has not wholly exonerated William—yet. He does not entirely change the events of ASC, but does bring in new scapegoats (groups and circumstance) to tone down the animosity among the English, the Normans and their king. The important point is that John either distributes responsibility more widely or exonerates on occasions when the account of ASC shows William's motives as questionable or reprehensible.

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<sup>237</sup> 'Osbeorn, who was exceeding greedy for gold and silver, agreed to William's proposal—to his great disgrace.' JW [1069], iii, 10–11.

<sup>238</sup> See McGurk, JW, 11 n.8; cf. WM on Æthelred, above, 65–7.

<sup>239</sup> 'but in this and in the following year they laid waste almost all England (though particularly in Northumbria and in its adjacent provinces)', JW iii, [1069], 10–11.

In his 1070 entry, John records that William convened a council at Winchester with the support of the pope and his legates: ‘*Concilium magnum in octauis Pasce Wintonie celebratum est, iubente et presente rege Willelmo, domno Alexandro papa consentiente*’.<sup>240</sup> Only ASC (A) 1070 mentions the council, but does not suggest that William ordered and hosted it. John’s addition of the legal language and the consent of the pope adds authority to his narrative of William’s actions as king.

Before the reconciliation, John’s descriptions of William are overall less acerbic than are those in ASC, but—as we have seen—he does not yet omit a sense of William’s injustice. One action for which ASC appears to criticize William is for raiding the monasteries. ASC’s accounts claim that William alone permitted all the minsters to be raided, and they devote much of their respective annals to describing the details of the raids.<sup>241</sup> Yet John implicates more men in responsibility than just the king. In 1070 entry, John reports:

*Willelmi Herefordensis comitis et quorundam aliorum consilio, tempore Quadragesimali, rex Willelmus monasteria totius Anglie perscrutari, et pecuniam, quam ditiores Angli, propter illius austeritatem et depopulationem, in eis deposuerant, auferri et in erarium suum iussit deferri.*<sup>242</sup>

It must be stressed that John does not deny that William has behaved violently, especially given that he explains that William’s violence was the reason why the rich English hid their wealth. Yet whereas ASC (DE) do not mention William’s counsellors,<sup>243</sup> John begins his sentence with a definite attribution about the idea’s origin. This makes William’s counsellors (other Normans) responsible for the idea at least. Here again we find John using the Normans inconsistently as a convenient scapegoat to ameliorate his

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<sup>240</sup> ‘A great council was held at Winchester, in the octave of Easter [11 April], at the command and in the presence of King William, with the consent of Pope Alexander’, JW [1070], iii, 10–11.

<sup>241</sup> ASC (D) 1071 [1070]; (E) 1070.

<sup>242</sup> ‘During Lent, King William, on the advice of William, earl of Hereford, and of some others, ordered that the monasteries all over England be searched and that the wealth which the richer English had deposited in them, because of his severity and plundering, be seized and taken to his treasury.’ JW [1070], iii, 10–11.

<sup>243</sup> See McGurk, JW, iii, 11 n.1.

portrayal of William as an English king—but not yet to absolve William entirely of blame.

But much of John's 1070 entry conveys criticism of William's unjust behaviour, and shows him as a conqueror seeking to consolidate his position in England. John describes the king's behaviour in critical language:

Abbates etiam aliqui ibi degradati sunt, operam dante rege ut quamplures ex Anglis suo honore priuarentur, in quorum locum sue gentis personas subrogaret, ob confirmationem scilicet sui quod nouiter adquisierat regni.<sup>244</sup>

John goes on to explain that the king deprived men of office with no clear cause, imprisoned others on suspicion but not evidence, and uncanonically deposed and guarded Æthelric.<sup>245</sup> Here John provides more detail than ASC: neither D 1071 [1070] nor E 1070 continues on in this fashion after mentioning the monastery-wealth seizures.

It seems likely that John derived these stories from a *vita* of Wulfstan,<sup>246</sup> because these comments segue into a praise of Wulfstan's fearlessness in standing up to the king and demanding justice from him. In this respect, the function of these criticisms could be less to denigrate William and more to showcase an important Worcester personality. Furthermore, the story aids John's enduring cause of praising the English resistance, while justice is on their side; that is, before John deems William wholly legitimate.

John's English continue to distinguish themselves, but John only praises rebellion before the reconciliation. Yet he only mentions Hereward twice.<sup>247</sup> As we have seen with Henry, these authors who praise both the conqueror and the particularly heroic defenders avoid bringing them into direct conflict.

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<sup>244</sup> 'Some abbots were also deposed there, the king striving to deprive so many Englishmen of their offices. In their place he would appoint men of his own race and strengthen his position in the newly acquired kingdom.' JW [1070], iii, 12–13.

<sup>245</sup> JW [1070], iii, 12–15.

<sup>246</sup> On JW's sources, above, 36–8.

<sup>247</sup> JW [1070]; [1071].

In his 1071 entry, John emphasizes the positive qualities of an unsuccessful rebellion. He reports that Edwin and Morcar flee because the king seeks to take them into custody, ‘et aliquandiu contra illum rebellauerunt.’<sup>248</sup> Unlike ASC,<sup>249</sup> John provides the reason for the earls’ flight, thus making it less cowardly and shameful, and highlights the duration of their resistance. The earls distinguish themselves more, which means an additional challenge to William’s authority—to which, as the legitimate king, he is allowed to respond.

Although John reports that the earls recognize that their rebellion was unsuccessful,<sup>250</sup> he omits ASC’s references to their travels through woods and fields without object.<sup>251</sup> His omission suggests that he found their behaviour shameful and hence not worthy of inclusion in the *Chronicon*; WM and Henry, more inclined to criticize, do so openly.<sup>252</sup> John describes Edwin’s intent to go to Malcolm before he is killed, and Morcar’s intent to winter and his reasons for surrendering.<sup>253</sup> John thus suggests that the rebels planned and strategized, which helps to redeem them even though they were ultimately unsuccessful. This is consistent with John’s pattern of making the defeats of the English less shameful.

John describes William’s severe punishments for the rebels in 1071, including imprisonment or mutilation and subsequent freedom. He is more specific about these punishments than is ASC.<sup>254</sup> This might at first appear to cast William in a negative light. But ASC (E) reports: ‘þa men he ateah swa swa he wolde’;<sup>255</sup> (D) has: ‘þa menn ealle he toc, 7 dyde of heom þæt he wolde’.<sup>256</sup> Out of context, we cannot tell whether John is

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<sup>248</sup> ‘and they rebelled against him for some time.’ JW [1071], iii, 18–19.

<sup>249</sup> ASC (D) 1072 [1071]; (E) 1071.

<sup>250</sup> JW [1071], iii, 18–21.

<sup>251</sup> McGurk, JW, iii, 20 n.4.

<sup>252</sup> Above, 211–12, 220, 242.

<sup>253</sup> JW [1071], iii, 18–21.

<sup>254</sup> JW [1071], iii, 20–1.

<sup>255</sup> ‘[he] dealt with the men just as he wanted’, ASC (E) 1071; Swanton, 208.

<sup>256</sup> ‘[he] seized all the men and did with them what he wanted’, ASC (D) 1072 [1071]; Swanton, 208.

making a moral comment on whether the punishments were deserved. John represents the punishments as more brutal than does ASC.

John continues to portray William as successful in his military exploits. John's is the only Chronicle to offer an explanation as to why William went to Scotland: 'ut eam sue dicioni subiugaret'.<sup>257</sup> ASC explains only that William went, '7 he þær naht ne funde þæs þe heom þe betere wære'.<sup>258</sup> But John eliminates this dismissive comment, skipping immediately to William's success. His next comment—part of the same sentence—refers to Malcolm becoming William's vassal: 'cui rex Scottorum Malcolmus, in loco qui dicitur Abernithici, occurrit, et homo suus deuenit'.<sup>259</sup> John omits a dismissive comment about William's military pursuits, instead (again) casting his raid as though it were successful almost instantaneously (and by extension without any losses worth the mention).

John makes the English distinguish themselves on the offensive. Not only are they successful in military campaigns, but they are acting in support of their king, which is significant because it shows William and the English acting in concord, not as a people dominated by an oppressor. ASC describes their destructive behaviour to their enemy,<sup>260</sup> but John pointedly only describes them as providing aid to their king. Of William's raid on Le Mans in 1073, John writes: 'Rex Anglorum Willelmus ciuitatem que uocatur Cinomannis, et prouinciam ad illam pertinentem, maxime Anglorum adiutorio, quos de Anglia secum duxerat, sibi subiugauit'.<sup>261</sup> The description of William as 'rex Anglorum' highlights the mutual loyalty between William and the English—as well as their common cause.

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<sup>257</sup> 'in order to bring it under his control.' JW [1072], iii, 20–1. See also: McGurk, JW, iii, 22 n.3 no.2.

<sup>258</sup> 'and there he found nothing he was the better for.' [D] ASC (D) 1073 [1072]; (E) 1072; Swanton, 208.

<sup>259</sup> 'Malcolm, king of the Scots, met him at the place called Abernethy and became his man.' JW [1072], iii, 20–1.

<sup>260</sup> ASC (D) 1074 [1073]; (E) 1073.

<sup>261</sup> 'William, king of the English, subdued the city called Le Mans and the province attached to it, being greatly helped by the English he had brought with him from England.' JW [1073], iii, 22–3.

John effects a significant change in ASC's character of the English offensive. The editors suggest that John could be echoing ASC's report of the English and their destructive campaign.<sup>262</sup> But John does not echo ASC;<sup>263</sup> indeed, the import of his version is almost exactly opposite in sense to ASC. John downplays the damage which the English inflict, and minimizes the narrative words that would show them as potentially unjust invaders. First, the comment that the English helped William abroad is particular to John: ASC suggests that he is acting alone. ASC describes the English engaging in the same behaviours as the Danes in the Danish invasions of England.<sup>264</sup> The conspicuous absence of these references suggests that John sought to erase any suggestion that the English behaved badly. Second, John explains that the English aided their king. Not only does he make the English look like an effective (but not brutal) fighting force, but he also makes William's ensuing reconciliation with the ætheling look like a natural follow-up. A new sense of a common cause is present.

The critical year for John is 1073 (really 1074), wherein he records William's smooth reconciliation with the last ætheling of the pre-Conquest era who is a potential contender against William: Edgar. It is this reconciliation that makes William a fully legitimate English king, because now there is no ominous question hanging over the narrative of a more legitimate claim. This is similar to the pattern we saw with Cnut, where John deemed Cnut a legitimate king on the death of Edmund. After the passage recounting William's victory in Le Mans with the aid of the English (discussed below), John writes: 'Clito Eadgarus de Scottia per Angliam uenit in Normanniam, et cum rege se repacificauit.'<sup>265</sup> In reporting the reconciliation, John may have used an exemplar similar

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<sup>262</sup> McGurk, JW, iii, 22 n.2.

<sup>263</sup> Cf. WM, above, 224.

<sup>264</sup> Above, 43–56.

<sup>265</sup> 'The ætheling came to Normandy from Scotland, passing through England, and was reconciled with the king.' JW [1073], iii, 22–3.

to E, deliberately eliminated material in D, or seen versions similar to both.<sup>266</sup> In any of these cases he is unique in bringing a tone of amicable resolution and acknowledgment of William's legitimacy to the narrative of English history.

According to John, the agreement is between Edgar and William only; others are not involved. Unlike ASC (D) 1074 [1075], John skips directly to the reconciliation, without any suggestion that Malcolm advised it. ASC (E) 1074 reports that the king accepted Edgar and all of Edgar's men back into his graces, but John makes no mention of Edgar's men. Regardless of what versions of ASC John had at hand, the most important message of this annal is the peace between the king and the *ætheling*.

John's account is most similar to E, but in this crucial sentence there is a significant difference. E begins by stating that William removed Edgar and his men from the status of outlawry, then conveys the sense that Edgar took what the king gave him: the initiative was the king's; Edgar had to accept what he was granted.<sup>267</sup> In John, Edgar is the one who reconciles himself ('*se repacificauit*') with the king. Whereas ASC casts the reconciliation as William changing his decree and dictating the terms to Edgar, John implies that Edgar's journey to Normandy and subsequent reconciliation were entirely Edgar's initiative.

John does not include MS E's 'intervening entries', covering 1073 and 1074, when William returns to England and then returns to Normandy. The editors suggest that this omission is probably why he dated the reconciliation with Edgar early.<sup>268</sup> This is possible, but this conclusion operates on the assumption that John did not have material resembling these entries. It ignores the other possibility: John deliberately omitted these details, simplifying and drawing time together for a purpose. By conflating E's annals of

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<sup>266</sup> Above, 36–8.

<sup>267</sup> Above, 245.

<sup>268</sup> McGurk, JW, iii, 22 n.3 no.2; cf. ASC (D) 1075 [1074]; (E) 1074.

1073 and 1074, John makes the reconciliation look smooth, not preceded by excessive violence, and a natural succession to William's victories with the English in Normandy.

The dramatic import of this ætheling-initiated reconciliation is evident in that afterwards, John suddenly casts rebellion as treachery, evil instead of heroic. After the reconciliation, John makes the rebels into a more conspiratorial, dangerous enemy with criminal intent. He follows the basic account of ASC, but he does not preserve the foolishness of ASC's traitors, only their inimical nature. Thus we see a subtle shift in the character of those opposing King William. This has the effect of making William appear more legitimate by contrast. I argue that for John, William is now an English king since he has effectively replaced the ætheling. His subjects now owe him unequivocal loyalty. We see this attitude in John's portrayal of breaches in loyalty to the king as conspiracy, treachery and in need of redemption.

In his 1074 entry, John portrays the rebels engaging in intentional and the evil effects their behaviour has on others. John states what ASC at most implies in order to make the rebels' behaviour into treachery: he explicitly refers to their plan as 'magna coniuratio'. He reports that Roger earl of Hereford and his allies 'magnam coniurationem, plurimus assentientibus, contra regem Willelmum ibi fecerunt'.<sup>269</sup> John's next comment makes the rebels' behaviour seem even more inappropriate. ASC describes Ralph and Roger luring the Bretons,<sup>270</sup> but John instead has: 'comitemque Waltheofum suis insidiis preuentum, secum coniurare compulerunt.'<sup>271</sup> The statement of compulsion, and the conspiracy which 'coniurare' conveys, draws a sharp contrast between the victim, Waltheof, and the traitors. John persists in marking this contrast by showing Waltheof's awareness of this wrong and his subsequent action to rectify the situation: 'Qui mox ut

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<sup>269</sup> 'formed there a large conspiracy against King William with the agreement of many.' JW [1074], iii, 24–5.

<sup>270</sup> ASC (D) 1076 [1075]; (E) 1075.

<sup>271</sup> 'They forced Earl Waltheof, who had been trapped by their wiles, to join the plot.' JW [1074], iii, 24–5.

potuit, Landfrancum ... adiit, penitentiamque ab eo pro facto licet non sponte sacramento accepit'.<sup>272</sup> Waltheof's haste in seeking absolution conveys his awareness of the gravity of the treacherous situation in which he has become embroiled.

John implies both that one must still do penance for an unwilling oath, and that one can be absolved of it through this penance, at least in the eyes of God. Apparently for John, an oath need not be binding if one is penitent. This is interesting to compare with WM and his portrayal of Harold: an unwilling oath remains binding, and his Harold was never penitent. John seems to suggest through this episode that redemption is possible. Indeed, his attitude towards narrating William's reign is consistent: John redeems him, as he does with Cnut, even though William was a conqueror of the English. John consistently praises him. This material and sense is new, and particular to John. Through its effects, he shows the plot as a breach of loyalty and obligation to the rightful king. Foolishness cannot be blamed. By making the traitors fearful and an evil influence instead of merely foolish (which could still imply good intentions) it thus appears more reasonable for King William not to pardon them. Now that William is an English king, especially after the reconciliation, there is no cause against him that can be just or heroic.

John eliminates specific observations that William lost—and lost badly—his military campaign in Brittany. John reports with D and E that the king invaded Brittany and besieged Dol until King Philip forced him to retreat.<sup>273</sup> But he omits ASC's references to his losses of men, horses and treasures, including D's comment that the losses were innumerable.<sup>274</sup> Especially without these major setbacks, John's version of the retreat implies no dishonour for William. John does not mention fear, which as we

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<sup>272</sup> 'As soon as he could, Waltheof went to Lanfranc ... and received absolution from him for the oath into which he had entered unwillingly.' JW [1074], iii, 24–5. Not in ASC; John mentions only Waltheof's subsequent trip to Normandy: McGurk, JW, iii, 24 n.5.

<sup>273</sup> JW [1075], iii, 28–9; cf. McGurk, JW, iii, 28 n.3.

<sup>274</sup> ASC (D) 1077 [1076]; (E) 1076.

have seen is his primary criterion for deeming a retreat shameful. The result is that William—and by extension his English forces—appear stronger and more impressive.

Another interesting change is John's description of the siege itself. Both ASC and John explain that William's siege ended when the French king arrived. But ASC describes the duration of the siege as the Bretons' holding of the castle until that point,<sup>275</sup> whereas John does not mention their defence at all. He instead describes William besieging 'tamdiu',<sup>276</sup> hinting at the French king's sluggish response. John highlights only what the enemy defence did badly, and only what William did well.

The case of William's relationship with Robert Curthose is especially interesting because in it we can see how the authors treat Robert's potentially conflicting bonds: duty to his continental ally and feudal lord, King Philip; to his men; to his father, the English king. John magnifies the sense of ASC (D) that Robert is in the wrong, in so doing helping to underline his message that William is in the right as king of England. The episodes in 1077 and 1079 (both of which are after the reconciliation) show how John has different expectations for the kind of loyalty owed an English king, even a conquering one. In both years, John provides specific information about Robert's destructive behaviour, giving the ideal justification for William's anxiety and casting William in the right by means of contrast. A corollary is that John is not concerned with the interests of Normandy, and discusses them only insofar as they affect English interests.

In his 1077 entry, John reports:

Rotbertus, Willelmi regis primogenitus, eo quod Normanniam, quam sibi ante aduentum ipsius in Angliam, coram Philippo rege Francorum dederat, possidere non licebat, Franciam adiit, et auxilio Philippi regis, *in Normannia magnam frequenter predam agebat, uillas comburebat, homines perimebat, et patri suo non paruam molestiam et anxietatem inferebat.*<sup>277</sup> [emphasis added]

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<sup>275</sup> ASC (D) 1077 [1076]; (E) 1076.

<sup>276</sup> 'for some time', JW [1075], iii, 28–9.

<sup>277</sup> 'Robert, the eldest of William's sons, had not been allowed to take possession of Normandy, which William had given him, in the presence of the French king, Philip, before his coming to England. For this

This episode is not present in ASC; (D) and (E) only refer to Robert's campaign against William when it ends in 1079, not when it begins in 1077.<sup>278</sup> ASC (D) 1079 reports that Philip as well as William gave rule of Normandy to Robert, and adds how the best men in the land had accepted Robert as their lord;<sup>279</sup> John claims only that it was William's grant, as though eliminating the idea that Philip truly possessed overlordship of Normandy, or that the men of Normandy had any authority.

In his 1079 entry, John reports:

Rex Willelmus filio suo Roberto, ante castellum Gerbothret, quod ei rex Philippus prestiterat, dum pugnam intulerit, ab ipso uulneratus in brachio, de suo deiectus est emissario: sed mox ut illum per uocem cognouisset, festinus descendit, ac illum suum caballum ascendere iussit, et sic abire permisit. Ille autem, multis suorum occisis nonnullisque captis, ac filio suo Willelmo cum multis aliis uulnerato, fugam iniit.<sup>280</sup>

That Robert recognized his father and permitted him to depart is not in ASC.<sup>281</sup> John suggests that Robert shows a degree of deference and respect to his father and king of the English, as he should. As in his 1077 entry, John specifies the calamities Robert has caused: slaying and imprisoning William's men, and wounding his own brother, William—specifics which what remains of D's entry does not provide. Based on the last surviving line of D for 1079,<sup>282</sup> the entry did not provide details, only the mention of harm: 'Ne wylle we þeh her na mare scaðe awritan þe he his fæder ge'.<sup>283</sup> That John chooses to describe harms caused by Robert adds to the narrative specific evidence of why Robert was in the wrong.

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reason he went to France, and, with the help of King Philip, *ravaged in Normandy far and often, burnt townships, killed people, and caused his father much trouble and worry.*' JW [1077], iii, 30–1.

<sup>278</sup> See also: McGurk, JW, iii, 30 n.2.

<sup>279</sup> ASC (D) 1079.

<sup>280</sup> 'King William whilst he was campaigning against his son Robert before the castle of Gerberoi (which king Philip had given Robert), was wounded in the arm by him, and forced off his horse. As soon as Robert recognized William's voice, he quickly dismounted, and ordered his father to mount his horse, and in this way allowed him to leave. William then retreated, after many of his men had been slain, and some had been taken prisoner, and his son William and many others wounded.' JW [1079], iii, 30–3.

<sup>281</sup> See McGurk, JW, iii, 32. n.3.

<sup>282</sup> ASC (D) defective from this point.

<sup>283</sup> 'We do not want, though, to write more here of the harm which he [did] his father', ASC (D) 1079; Swanton, 214.

These new details aid William's cause by making his retreat explicable. Because the damage caused by Robert is so comprehensive, the possibility that William retreated out of fear alone becomes very small. This is a familiar strategy of John's; in this case it enhances not only William the military leader, but William the king to whom loyalty is owed.

John only relates what Robert did wrong by William, and in two annals, without even leaving open the possibility that Robert was doing right by any others—or by his own rights as a lord of Normandy. ASC (D) comments that Robert did ill by his father, but also shows him being a lord to his men, and acting according to the will of his ally, King Philip. The significance of John's narrower moral interpretation is twofold. First, because John explains and gives examples of how King William is wronged, he does not permit a reading in which William was wrong in his treatment of Robert. Second, John places the interests of England and the English (and their fate) over those of Normandy, showing he is particularly intent on the history of England and its kings.

In his 1080 entry, John offers a reason for William's raids: avenging the deaths of his own men. John writes: 'Ob quorum detestande necis uindictam, rex Willelmus eodem anno deuastauit Northymbriam.'<sup>284</sup> By stressing how vile were the deaths of William's men, John helps to justify William's actions by showing that they were understandable given the circumstances. ASC (E) describes the treachery of the Northumbrians but not William's response;<sup>285</sup> John may have seen a lost source. John's decision to include William's actions indicates his interest in portraying a king who defends the interests of his subjects, and builds the vision of English history wherein mutual loyalty is rewarded.

John associates new legal language with William's behaviour, thereby adding to his legitimacy as king. He does so both before and after the reconciliation, but only after

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<sup>284</sup> 'King William laid waste Northumbria the same year to avenge the appalling death of these men.' JW [1080], iii, 36–7.

<sup>285</sup> ASC (E) 1080.

does John make striking changes to existing material in ASC—which in some ways is even more significant than is adding material not present in ASC at all, because it suggests a deliberate change in sense and meaning. After the reconciliation, John highlights William’s relationship to the law, recasting several events from ASC that appear to show his arbitrary will as lawful behaviour. In his 1082 entry, John writes: ‘Rex Willelmus fratrem suum Odonem, Baiocensem episcopum, Normannie in custodiam posuit.’<sup>286</sup> ASC (E) refers to the same event, but makes it taking or seizing: ‘Her nam se cyng Odan biscop.’<sup>287</sup> John’s slight change in verbal emphasis makes William’s action appear legal and hence justified.

In his entry for 1083, John describes William’s royal commands, meting out justice in accordance with the findings of judicial investigations:

Hinc moto iudicio, *dum maxima abbatis esse culpa patuit*, rex eundem summouit, et in *monasterio* suo in Normannia posuit. *De monachis uero quamplures per episcopatus et abbatias, iussu regis, custodiendi disperguntur.*<sup>288</sup> [italics indicate material shared with WM]

In this annal, John draws frequently on what is probably a source shared by WM for his *De antiquitate Glastonie ecclesie*, as the two share wording.<sup>289</sup> ASC includes this episode,<sup>290</sup> but the king is not in this role; ASC does not even mention William’s involvement. It is important to remember that John always had a choice about what to include—and the manner of its inclusion. John chooses to convey a reading of events that underlines William’s legal relationship to kingship.

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<sup>286</sup> ‘King William placed his brother Odo, bishop of Bayeux, in custody in Normandy.’ JW [1082], iii, 38–9.

<sup>287</sup> ‘Here the king seized Bishop Odo.’ ASC (E) 1082; Swanton, 214. Cf. McGurk, JW, iii, 39 n.2, noting the connection but not the difference.

<sup>288</sup> ‘At a judicial investigation it was clear that the abbot was most to blame, and the king summoned that abbot and sent him back to his monastery in Normandy. At the royal command, many of the monks were distributed and confined among various bishoprics and abbeys.’ JW [1083], iii, 40–1.

<sup>289</sup> McGurk, JW, iii, 40 n.2.

<sup>290</sup> ASC (E) 1083.

We have seen how John minimized English despair at the 1067 tax. This pre-reconciliation tax is worth comparing with the subsequent tax of 1084,<sup>291</sup> of which John writes with significantly less venom. John eliminates the rancor of ASC's 'mycel gyld 7 hefelic',<sup>292</sup> writing: 'Rex Anglorum Willelmus de unaquaque hida per Angliam sex solidos accepit.'<sup>293</sup> Reminding the reader that William was king of the English permits the reading that it was his prerogative to institute a tax, not that he was a conqueror extorting money out of his victims. John's entry reads more like a sober annal than does ASC account for this year, but the annal's sobriety should not obscure the interpretive departure John makes from ASC<sup>294</sup>—a departure John does not make as decidedly before the reconciliation.

In his entry for 1085, John makes a remarkable change and completely eliminates the strong sense of oppression that ASC conveys. ASC (E) reports that William ravaged the coast so that it could not be raided. John removes the ravaging, ASC's comment that the people were much oppressed that year and the remark that it would be hard to provide for his armies.<sup>295</sup> Instead, John provides what might appear to be a straightforward description of William's defensive precautions: that the king collected soldiers in Normandy and distributed them throughout the kingdom to defend against a potential Danish invasion.<sup>296</sup> John's description is far from straightforward: ASC describes a conqueror; John describes a defender. John explains that the Danish king Cnut IV's preparations to invade England 'cum classe ualida'<sup>297</sup> was William's reason for amassing

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<sup>291</sup> Cf. ASC and JW on the tributes paid to the Danes in Æthelred's reign, above, 53–4, 185.

<sup>292</sup> 'great and heavy tax', ASC (E) 1083 [1084]; Swanton, 215.

<sup>293</sup> 'William, king of the English, collected six shillings from every hide in the whole of England.' JW [1084], iii, 40–1.

<sup>294</sup> On the annalistic style and the tendency of its minimalist and sober form to mislead modern historians, cf. S. Foot, 'Finding the meaning of form: narrative in annals and chronicles', in N. Partner (ed.), *Writing Medieval History* (London, 2005), 88–108, esp. at 88–9, 94–6.

<sup>295</sup> ASC (E) 1085; see McGurk, JW, iii, 42 n.3.

<sup>296</sup> JW [1085], iii, 42–3.

<sup>297</sup> 'with a strong fleet', JW [1085], iii, 42–3.

large forces and ordering the distribution of provisions: ‘Vnde rex Willelmus’.<sup>298</sup> By identifying the king’s reasoning, John suggests that his actions were not arbitrary, but motivated by defence of his country. John’s William of 1085 is more than a conqueror who does not oppress. He is a good English king, one who seeks to defend his kingdom just as John described Æthelred, Edmund, Cnut (to a large degree), Edward, and Harold. The changes remain consistent, and represent more marked departures from ASC, after the reconciliation.

John’s most important modification is in the 1086 entry, wherein he makes a subtle change that preserves the 1074 reconciliation. ASC explains that Edgar left England because William did not honour him appropriately, expressing the wish that God honour Edgar in the future.<sup>299</sup> John entirely reverses the situation, showing Edgar (apparently willingly) offering deference to King William’s will and doing his bidding. John writes: ‘Eo tempore, clito Eadgarus, licentia a rege impetrata, cum .cc. militibus mare transiit, et Apuliam adiit.’<sup>300</sup> John introduces the king’s permission, which has several effects. It makes the reconciliation seem secure and amicable, and it provides an important reminder that Edgar now owes—and pays—allegiance to King William.

One of the most remarkable differences between John’s account and that of ASC is that John assigns to William no ultimate punishment on his deathbed. John mentions nothing bad about William and does not hold him responsible or accountable for the deeds of his life that could be, and often were, considered reprehensible. By portraying William’s absolution as he passes from the earthly realm, John preserves the consistent positive aspect of William’s character that he established during William’s reign and maintained at a high level after the reconciliation. This helps to show how crucial the

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<sup>298</sup> ‘For this reason William’, JW [1085], iii, 42–3.

<sup>299</sup> Above, 235.

<sup>300</sup> ‘At that time the atheling Edgar, having asked the king’s permission, crossed the sea with 200 knights and went to Apulia.’ JW [1086], iii, 44–5.

temporal element is to John's narrative of William. ASC's overt and implied criticism is of William as a person and runs throughout his life and after. But for John, once William is truly an English king (which he can be through reconciliation and good behaviour) he is no longer an unjust conqueror. It is as though the office, and rightful holding of it, makes him the more worthy.

John's account is dramatically different from ASC in the way it describes the end of William's life. John describes William's illness after burning Mantes.<sup>301</sup> Yet importantly (and also unlike Henry), he makes absolutely no suggestion that the two are related, nor that the illness was a punishment, nor that William got what he deserved. He eliminates ASC's moralizing discourse on William's good and bad deeds,<sup>302</sup> describing only good things (without suggesting that they must be accepted or acknowledged along with the bad). The striking feature of ASC in terms of narrative time is that William's death strikes a sour note in the narrative. The tone is one of regret and resignation; it reminds the reader that William was a conqueror, and does not resolve that problem before proceeding in its narrative.

John makes William's death into a favourable end. John reports that the viaticum strengthens William as he departs this realm: 'et sic, celesti munitus viatico, postquam .xx. annis, mensibus .x., et .xxviii. diebus, genti Anglorum prefuit, .v. iduum Septembrium, die <...>, regnum cum uita perdidit'.<sup>303</sup> The comment that William departed this world 'sic'—in a manner of contrition, absolution and making things right—confirms his good character, and there is no suggestion that he has left some debts unaddressed. Indeed, with the added protection of the viaticum he dies stronger than he was before.

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<sup>301</sup> JW [1087], iii, 46–7; but cf. McGurk, JW, 46 n.7, suggesting JW paraphrases ASC.

<sup>302</sup> ASC (E) 1086 [1087]; above, 228.

<sup>303</sup> 'In this way, fortified by the holy viaticum, he abandoned both life and kingdom on Thursday, 9 September, after ruling the English for twenty years, ten months, and twenty-eight days.' JW [1087], iii, 46–7.

On his deathbed, William frees all those he had imprisoned in his lifetime.<sup>304</sup> At this point it is worth recalling John's comments about unjust imprisonments on William's orders, because this action resolves these injustices and helps to redeem William—before William's death, and—crucially for John's narrative—before the narrative goes any further.<sup>305</sup> The redemption here is especially remarkable since John includes no criticism of William whatsoever, unlike E, in which William frees prisoners, but we are reminded of his poor character as well. John's is a true absolution of William. We cannot know what the damaged segment of the D MS contained, but it is worth observing that most of John's material for this entry is very similar to E. The differences in John perhaps approach John's originality, or at the minimum his choices based on his available material.

## Conclusions

There is a final word to say about John's report of William releasing the prisoners. This is taken from ASC, but John uniquely provides the names of specific people.<sup>306</sup>

fratrem suum, Odonem Baiocensem episcopum, comites Morkarum et Rogerum, Siuardum cognomento Barn, et *Wlnothum regis Haroldi germanum*, quem a pueritia tenuerat in custodia, et omnes quos uel in Anglia uel in Normannia custodie manciparat, laxauit. [italics added]<sup>307</sup>

The key point here is that, in describing his King William on his deathbed—a crucial moment for establishing his good character, his life and his legacy—John not only names Harold, but also calls him king. This is important because the narrative timing of this mention shows that John has no compunction in acknowledging both William and Harold as English kings. He does not need to erase one in order to legitimize the other.

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<sup>304</sup> JW [1087], iii, 46–7.

<sup>305</sup> Above, 272.

<sup>306</sup> Cf. ASC (E) 1087 [1086]; see also: McGurk, JW, iii, 46 n.6.

<sup>307</sup> 'he set free his brother, Odo, bishop of Bayeux, earls Morkar and Roger, Siward called Barn, and *Wulfnoth, King Harold's brother* (whom he had kept in custody since childhood), as well as all he had kept imprisoned either in England or in Normandy.' JW [1087], iii, 46–7.

His narrative transcends English and Norman heritage, and it transcends a static judgment about right and wrong in the Norman Conquest and its aftermath.

To use the lives of kings explicitly as moral examples was a relatively standard practice in medieval moral treatises and historiography. It happens in ASC, WM and Henry. But John turns entirely from this tradition, making dramatic changes to his kings' characters and showing them as morally upstanding without drawing attention to the fact that he is doing so. Modern historians tend to see John's *Chronicon* as another version of ASC. Yet in some important ways, John is the most original among the twelfth-century historians in how he treats responsibility, causation and the writing of history.

It is interesting to compare John with his contemporaries in their respective attitudes towards King William. Henry repeatedly casts William as an instrument of God: he belongs to the heavenly, repeating pattern of justice and improvement which Henry has identified in England's development. WM repeatedly offers explanations as to why he is justifying William. John shows; otherwise he is silent as to his reasoning. John could have solved the problem of William's questionable legitimacy by making Harold the usurper. However, to make Harold a sinner and perjurer would have necessitated explanation by providential history: conquest as punishment for sin. And John, strikingly, avoids this mode of historical writing. One of John's goals was to make both conqueror and defender legitimate English kings; his account emphasizes amicable reconciliation and comfortably refers to Harold and William as kings in the same sentence. In omitting a providential mode of explanation altogether, John actually changes the content of ASC more than do WM and Henry. WM emphasizes differently the material that he does use from the ASC; Henry retains providential explanation, but magnifies it, renders it cyclical in employing the five plagues theme, and accords the king more individual responsibility within this overarching scheme. WM's strategy is in rhetoric; Henry's is in redesigning

providential explanation; John's is in addition and omission. All assume a high degree of royal responsibility in English kings, and all seek the same end: redemption of the English past.

### **Conclusions: comparing the chronicles**

WM's conviction that legitimate kingship of England was fundamentally based on character and behaviour is why he found Edgar a problematic heir and unworthy of rule. WM's rhetorical heritage, the progression of his narrative towards Henry I's reign and the central importance of moral exempla,<sup>308</sup> contribute to a narrative style which demands a William more consistently good, or at the very least, reasonably justifiable. WM is not deliberately obscuring William's history: rather, as I argue, these are the lenses through which he views William.

Structurally, Henry and John's resemble ASC more closely than does WM's. It was less important for them than for WM to represent William as unequivocally good from the beginning. John's narrative does not appeal to a providential framework of justice and judgment. Henry's narrative consistently evokes the tragedy within this world; furthermore, unlike WM, the premise of his vision of England's history is a repeating cycle of conquest, through which the land ultimately develops and improves. For Henry, then, it is not essential that William be thoroughly good: he is still the English king who shines above all the rest. WM obscures the moment of transition;<sup>309</sup> for Henry and John, William undergoes a transition of moment.

What is significant is that, although in structurally different ways, all three emphasize William's character and behaviour as essential and constitutive elements of

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<sup>308</sup> B. Weiler, 'William of Malmesbury, King Henry I, and the *Gesta Regum Anglorum*', *ANS* 31 (2008), 157–76; idem, 'William of Malmesbury on Kingship'; Thomsn, 'William of Malmesbury as Historian and Man of Letters'; Sønnesyn, *William of Malmesbury*; above, 198.

<sup>309</sup> Cf. Otter, '1066'; above, 198–9.

making him a legitimate and worthy English king. Their collective indifference to the *ætheling* is a symptom of their shared, fundamental belief about the nature of English kingship. Nor is it a symptom of a preference for a Norman point of view. Although WM (in particular) and Henry make extensive use of their Norman sources, they do so in different ways and to different effect. The extent to which these writers were pro-English, pro-Norman, or even products of their own mixed parentage cannot explain their consistent and collective attitudes towards English kings and kingship.<sup>310</sup>

Although each narrative is different, all three writers have a pattern of continuity for England's succession of kings. For WM, it is only the kings he considers worthy whom he actually counts as reigning kings. Henry's kings are linked by the providential structure of cyclical conquests. John seamlessly links the distinguished rule of Harold with that of William: Harold is Edward's successor, just as William is Harold's. In all cases, the succession of one worthy individual to another in the office of English kingship is the primary consideration; the king's heritage or origin are ultimately matters of complete indifference.

This shared mode of thinking was, in a way, English. These writers' thoughts about kingship display a degree of consistency with the practice in Anglo-Saxon England, in which the king's eldest son was not necessarily the obvious heir—as indeed continued to be the case during the reign of William I; his second son was the one to inherit England. The Norman custom of primogeniture not only did not take over immediately in England, and it had no hold on these three writers' minds, visions of the past or beliefs about kingship.

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<sup>310</sup> But cf. arguments for the importance of mixed heritage, above, 26.

## PART THREE: CONQUERING KINGS

### CONCLUSIONS

England was twice defeated in the eleventh century, and the first conquest was ephemeral: the Danes were unable to maintain their control of England. It is unsurprising that these twelfth-century historians minimized the end of Cnut's reign, when indeed they could have chosen to expand upon their limited source material, had they wanted to further extol this king. To have done so, however, might have called in to question the image of him as a successful king, if it were seen that he, perhaps like Edward, was unable to make lasting provisions for the succession. In the sense that Cnut did not establish an enduring dominion, his conquest was less important to English history—and hence to the narrative structure of the three histories—than was William's conquest.

Gillingham has asserted that WM's more tempered account of William's early life, as opposed to Cnut's, is because WM associated diplomatic behaviour with French influence.<sup>1</sup> But it is possible to look at this another way: because William's dynasty had already lasted longer than Cnut's, the Norman Conquest was a more important episode in England's past to redeem and to explain. I argue that the striking commonality between the narratives of Cnut's and William's careers is in the three historians' shared belief that English kingship was intimately connected with the worth of each man.

Despite the temporal and effective differences in the two conquests, each historian is consistent in how he perceives, evaluates and narrates the responsibility of Cnut and William as English kings. Both prove their worth as kings and merit loyalty. In all three narratives English kingship itself almost has a redeeming or inspiring influence on the

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<sup>1</sup> J. Gillingham, 'Civilizing the English? The English Histories of William of Malmesbury and David Hume', *Historical Research*, 74 (2001), 17–43, at 37.

conquerors: they are English kings because they distinguish themselves as great men, and they are great men because they are English kings.

The three invasion narratives are explicable more by patterns than politics. Their narratives of the Norman Conquest cannot be about the conflict between the English and the Normans alone, because they defend Cnut's and William's worthiness for the throne of England based on the character of each. Nor does justification of the Norman Conquest go far enough in explaining their defence of William. All three writers viewed the Norman Conquest as the most important event in English history, but it was also outside living memory: conquest meant something different to subsequent generations.<sup>2</sup> Orderic, from a temporal and geographical distance, lamented the Norman yoke in terms more explicit than WM, Henry and John: as Pauline Stafford has observed, the 'severity' of 1066 cannot be the only reason for criticizing kings.<sup>3</sup>

The positive reports of Cnut and William reflect a belief that English kingship was or should be based upon character and behaviour and not upon origins. Despite these historians' varying degrees of contempt for the Danes and the Normans, belonging to a conquering race in no way tainted the potential of either individual for full worthiness of being an English king. The goal common to WM, Henry and John was to redeem not only the defeat at the hands of the Normans, but the whole of English history—and it is in these terms that it makes sense to evaluate the strikingly similar pictures of Cnut and William. The three sets of invasion narratives reveal a shared assumption that the king had a proportionally high degree of responsibility, moral and causal, as compared to the collective he ruled or the collective whence he came.

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<sup>2</sup> P. Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London, 1989), 20–3; on changes in memory over time and chroniclers' categories of evidence, see E. van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe, 900–1200* (London, 1999), 19–39; in relation to changing narratives of the Norman Conquest, 123, 128–36.

<sup>3</sup> OV iv.ii.172, ii, 202–3; Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, 22.

There is one final comparison to make before moving on to the overall conclusions, and that is the comparison between defenders and conquerors. All three writers are consistent even here in their expectations for English kings and beliefs about their moral and causal responsibility. The failure of the English defence in the eleventh century mattered to these historians because it was related to the potential to succeed. Equally, the successes of the conquering kings mattered, because these historians believed they had the capability of reigning well. We see this in the high degree of credit they ascribe to the conquering kings. The anguish of defeat does not translate into blame for the conquerors: rather, in different ways, the conquerors earn the office.

The similarity in how these historians represent defending and conquering kings is rooted still more deeply in their thought about English kingship than at the level of morality and causation. They represent—and conceive of—the conquering kings as defending kings of England. Æthelred, Harold, Cnut and William are equal in the sense that these historians evaluate them as kings according to their performance as defenders. All have an equal ability to do well as English kings: WM, Henry and John hold them equally responsible.

The conquerors are, for these writers, legitimate defending kings. There is thus little to add here to the conclusions of Part Two: Defending Kings, which is precisely the point: these conclusions apply to conquering kings. This points to a coherent and shared vision of English kingship across the three writers and their narratives of the eleventh century.

With these multiple comparisons, I have attempted to make a case for consistency within each historian's respective mode of thought and writing about England's eleventh-century defending and conquering kings. One of my aims has been to show that motivations for writing history went beyond regret at native England's fall, concern to

transmit and translate extant sources, the wish to please contemporary patrons, or the desire to reconcile English and Norman points of view. In his prologue, WM claimed to be writing for posterity.<sup>4</sup> This claim is perhaps more than a rhetorical device borrowed from classical writing,<sup>5</sup> for it is often the effect he and his contemporaries achieve best. The true alliance these historians sought to forge was between themselves and their future readers, and in this they have been—and continue to be—perpetually successful.

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<sup>4</sup> *GR* i.prologue; i, 16–17.

<sup>5</sup> But cf. A. Gransden, 'Prologues in the Historiography of Twelfth-Century England', in her *Legends, Traditions and History in Medieval England* (London, 1992), 125–51.

**PART FOUR**  
**CONCLUSIONS: KINGS AND CONQUEST**

I have asked, and sought to answer, what is the nature of royal responsibility in post-Conquest invasion narratives. I have shown that all three writers discussed in this thesis apportion a high degree of two kinds of responsibility to their English kings, and that each author's approach to conquest in the eleventh century is consistent. In what way, then, do these findings illuminate each author's storyline of English history and his approach to narrating the past? This is not the place to begin a comprehensive analysis of each writer's corpus. What I will do is suggest an answer to this further question with the aid of several examples from the three historians' works outside the scope of the foregoing analysis. I have chosen these examples because they illuminate by contrast some of the implications of my findings about kings and conquest for each writer's narrative as a whole. This will entail a brief glance at WM's expectations for and evaluation of an eleventh-century king who was neither conqueror nor defender; John's reports of a king's character which differ dramatically in two of his works; finally, Henry's narrative structure and patterns, and the significance of his distinction between the past and the present.

For WM, even daunting and recurring crises were not inevitable: they could have been prevented by secular rulers' proper behaviour. The German emperors were in the wrong for initiating and perpetuating the investiture controversy and leading armies against Rome. As we have seen, WM attributes to Æthelred the vast responsibility for causing the Danish invasions: they are a punishment for his misdeeds.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, WM credits Harold with causing the Norman invasion and holds him accountable for the sins

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<sup>1</sup> Above, 62–80.

of the English: had he not perjured himself initially, the disasters of the Norman Conquest might at least have been mitigated. King Stephen in WM's own day was, like Harold, at fault for breaking oaths.<sup>2</sup> All of the cases of failed rulership at times of invasion (or indeed civil war) present recurring problems: WM's point is that they could have been prevented, had the secular rulers done their duties. For him, the individual actions of rulers are the ultimate cause of crises of invasion—and ultimate causes are more important and deserve more censure than proximate causes.

Not only does this significant attribution of responsibility and blame for defending kings release the English people from the full weight of condemnation for sin, but it also releases the conquerors from condemnation for bringing invasion and its consequent disasters. Indeed, WM's conquerors cannot easily be described as agents of conquest. This is particularly apparent when one contrasts his narratives of defending kings (like Æthelred and Harold) and potential kings (like Edgar ætheling) with his narratives of the conquerors. WM criticizes the Danes and laments many of the actions and customs of the Normans, but his conquerors are remarkably impervious to association with—and hence being tainted by—their respective peoples of origin.<sup>3</sup> This may not signal a great advance in the concept of an individual as distinct from other isolated individuals, but it certainly indicates the concept of an individual as distinct from a group. WM writes of his conquerors in the eleventh century according to a consistent pattern; his interest is not in the unique inner qualities of each king, as though he were an objective biographer. But it is a pattern in which WM evaluated and judged an individual king's worthiness for the English throne based not on his origins, but on his actions.

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<sup>2</sup> Above, 10–11, 64.

<sup>3</sup> Esp. in view of Gillingham's arguments about the importance of origins, ethnicity and barbarism to WM: see e.g. J. Gillingham, 'The Beginnings of English Imperialism', 3–18, esp. at 5–10, 18; idem, 'Henry of Huntingdon and the Twelfth-Century Revival of the English Nation', 123–144, at 129, both in his *The English in the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge, 2000).

For WM, the comparative case is what he writes about an eleventh-century king who was neither defender nor conqueror: Edward the Confessor. The king who by choice abandons the succession to chance, Fortune, or factors beyond his control could not quite be a worthy English king (if a king at all) in WM's view, which adds a moral dimension to the vacuum of kingship. Edward seems to escape this criticism on account of his virtues: WM portrays him as belonging to a pious, heavenly realm, and not as participating in worldly glory.<sup>4</sup> Edward has none of Harold's rashness, and if he is absent from worldly affairs, he has piety where Æthelred does not. WM has Edward explicitly address concerns about the king's failure to provide for the succession: Edward explains that the outcome will be as God wills,<sup>5</sup> and WM does not question that Edward is in touch with God's will because of his miracles<sup>6</sup> and his prophecies.

The problems Edward poses to WM's expectations for England's defending kings mean that there is a great deal for him to explain away, much of which cannot be reconciled. Indeed, contemporary historians have remarked on the inconsistencies in WM's portrayal of Edward. Some have ascribed this to WM's own difficulties in reconciling the varied accounts of Edward.<sup>7</sup> But WM was not just reconciling different historical accounts—he was reconciling his beliefs about English kingship and royal responsibility. Specifically, he faced the problem of reconciling his hard-line expectations for defending kings with a pious king who, he concludes, manifestly fulfilled God's will. Edward embodied this problem for WM: whereas Edward succeeded in the latter, he unequivocally failed in the former.

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<sup>4</sup> *GR* ii.220.1–2, i, 406–7; material primarily from *LKE* i.1, 18–21; i.5–6, 60–5.

<sup>5</sup> *GR* ii.221.1, i, 406–7.

<sup>6</sup> *GR* ii.222.1–224.2, i, 406–11.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g.: S. Baxter, 'Edward the Confessor and the Succession Question', in *Edward the Confessor: The Man and the Legend*, ed. R. Mortimer (Woodbridge, 2009), 77–118, at 77; G. Garnett, 'Conquered England, 1066–1215', in N. Saul (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of Medieval England* (Oxford, 2000), 61–101, at 64.

WM was unable to reconcile the two characterizations of Edward, but this does not mean he was confused about the evidence. What it does mean is that he was unwilling to relinquish either his beliefs about either the responsibilities of defending kings or about the providential plan in order to resolve the one with other.<sup>8</sup> Herein we see the same kind of paradox found in Suetonius's *Divus Iulius*, in biblical invasion narratives, and indeed in Asser:<sup>9</sup> what should the king (or an individual) do in threatening circumstances, or in situations in which any course of action may lead to an unwelcome end? It meant a related problem for the historian: if what happened was meant to happen, how much individual responsibility should be ascribed to a king in determining that he either deserved particular credit—or that he should have done better? WM, even in accepting the providential plan, is reluctant to accept entirely Edward's blamelessness in the defence of the kingdom.<sup>10</sup>

WM was a writer familiar with the succession crises of his own era, writing of the eleventh-century past with the benefit of hindsight. WM expressly held his kings to a uniquely high standard of accountability as compared to his sources. If WM perceived a king to have wilfully created a power vacuum, succession crisis or invasion by abandoning the duties of his post, that king merited nearly a full measure of blame. Furthermore, there was nothing inherent about a conquering king which disqualified him from kingship. WM stressed the moral failings of native potential kings to enhance the legitimizing character and behaviour he described in the conquerors. WM's equivocal stance on Edward reveals to us the strength of these expectations and that they conflicted with the idea that a good king could be one whose only redeeming feature, WM seems to suggest, was his piety. Piety was an essential virtue of all, including WM's audience,

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<sup>8</sup> This supports R.M. Thomson's arguments that WM's classical reading led him to incorporate values not usually prioritized in a Christian framework, 'William of Malmesbury as Historian and Man of Letters', in his *William of Malmesbury*, rev. edn (Woodbridge, 2003) 14–39, at 29–30.

<sup>9</sup> Below, 307.

<sup>10</sup> *GR* ii.196.3, 350–1.

which included kings and the Benedictine community. But piety was barely sufficient, if indeed it was sufficient, to redeem WM's Edward.

For John, the comparative cases are his different rewritings of ASC, in two different works, of the actions and character of a later eleventh-century king: William Rufus. His revisions of ASC for 1087 [1088] permit a glimpse into the extent to which he sustains his narrative patterns both in different annals and other works.<sup>11</sup> ASC reports:

þa wearð he on his mode swiðe gedrefed; sende þa æfter englisce mannan 7 heom fore sæde his neode 7 gyrnde heora fultumes 7 behet heom þa betsta laga þa æfre ær wæs on þisan lande, 7 ælc u<n>riht geold he forbead 7 geatte mannan heora wudas and slætinge; ac hit ne stod nane hwile. Ac englisce men swa þeah fengon to þam cyngre heora hlaforde on fultume.<sup>12</sup>

The important implication is that the people were right to support Rufus because he was their king and lord—and they were right to do so irrespective of either his behaviour or of the effectiveness of his defensive measures.

In addition to the *Chronicon*, John wrote a brief account of English history: the *Chronicula*.<sup>13</sup> In its entry for 1088, John emphasizes Rufus's promises to the English people and his failure to honour them. Unsurprisingly, given the examples we have seen of indicted kings, the *Chronicula* points out expressly not only that Rufus's promises were short-lived, but also that the king deceived the people in making promises he had no intention of keeping:

Rex autem audita Normannorum traditione, Anglos ad se conuocat celerrime. Quibusquam uellent eligere meliorem, promittit legem dummodo sibi sint in auxilium contra impetum hostium. Regiis promissis fidem adhibent Angli et usque ad triumphum gloriam fideliores existunt regi quam illi qui regali adhesere lateri Normanni. Tandem rex Anglorum maxime auxilio potitus de inimicis uictoria que dudum illis promiserat mentitus est omnia.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For an overview of the 1088 rebellion, see: F. Barlow, *William Rufus* (New Haven, 2000), 70–85.

<sup>12</sup> '[Rufus] became greatly troubled in his mind, then sent for English men and announced his need to them, and begged their support, and promised them the best law there ever was in this land; and forbade every unjust tax, and granted men their woods and coursing—but it did not last long. But nevertheless the English men came to the support of the king their lord', ASC (E) 1087 [1088]; Swanton, 223–4.

<sup>13</sup> On the *Chronicula*'s composition, contents and phases, see Hayward, Winchcombe, i, 73–6.

<sup>14</sup> 'But having heard about the treachery of the Normans, the king quickly assembled the English to himself. To anyone who wanted the better to be chosen, he promised law provided that they were for him in providing assistance against the enemy force. The English trusted these royal promises, and until the glory

The material may derive from ASC, but the interpretation is original and not derivative.<sup>15</sup>

John unreservedly castigates Rufus for failing to do his responsibilities as king.

Yet in the *Chronicon*, John does not accuse Rufus of failing to honour his promises. In a manner which differs notably from both ASC and his own *Chronicula*, John makes this bold revision:

Huius uero rei ut ad aures regis peruenit notitia, *insolito* turbatur molestia, iure autem regio, militari, ut impiger, fretus audacia, mittit legatos, uocat quos sibi credit fidos, uadit Lundoniam, belli tractaturus negotia, expeditionis prouisurus necessaria. Congregato uero quantum ad presens poterat Normannorum, sed tamen maxime Anglorum, equestri et pedestri, licet mediocri, exercitu, statuens leges, promittens fautoribus omnia bona, fretus Dei clementia, qua maior*>* hostium esse audiebat multitudinem, tendere disposuit Roueceastram.<sup>16</sup> [emphasis added]

First, John suggests that Rufus is not usually troubled by adding the adverb ‘insolito’ to ASC’s account, which has the effect of making him appear a more secure and authoritative ruler. Second, whereas ASC calls his army English only, John explains that Rufus’s army included both English and Normans.<sup>17</sup> As in his unqualified mention of Harold and William of Normandy as kings of England,<sup>18</sup> John displays no concern for reconciling English and Norman interests. For him, indeed, these political or ethnic interests do not need to be reconciled as they are unimportant: character, behaviour and loyalty are the qualities which guide how he shapes his narrative. Third, unlike ASC, John makes a point of demonstrating Rufus’s worthiness for rule through honourable

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of victory they were more faithful to the king than those Normans who stuck to the royal side. At length the king obtained victory from his enemies with the utmost help from the English, but he cheated them in everything which he had promised them just a short time ago.’ *Chronicula* from G, fols. 37r–151v; Hayward, *Winchcombe*, i, 82–3.

<sup>15</sup> But cf. Hayward, *Winchcombe*, i, 82–3.

<sup>16</sup> ‘When the king heard this news, he was *unusually* troubled, but confident in his royal rights and his energetic military valour. He sent envoys, summoned those he believed he could rely on, and went to London to prepare for the affairs of war, and to provide the provisions needed for an army. He gathered together an army of horsemen and footsoldiers, although of moderate size, made up principally of Englishmen and of as many Normans as he could find. He made laws, promised bountiful rewards to his supporters, and, placing his trust in God’s mercy, for he knew that the enemy had a larger force, prepared to march on Rochester.’ JW [1088], iii, 49–50.

<sup>17</sup> Darlington and McGurk, JW, iii, 51 n.8.

<sup>18</sup> Above, 286–8.

behaviour. His story is one of internal rebellion, not invasion, written in the post-Conquest era. Nevertheless, John's portrayal of this English king is consistent with his revision of ASC in his narratives of eleventh-century defending and conquering kings.

What John wrote in the *Chronicula* reveals that he conceived of (and perhaps subscribed to) an interpretation in which fault existed. To write the redeeming history of the English in the *Chronicon*, however, he could not tell the same story as in the *Chronicula*. WM similarly tempers his narrative of Harold in *GP*, stressing only Harold's pious deeds to suit his present purpose—yet he is conspicuously silent about Harold's qualities as a defender.<sup>19</sup> For John, Rufus could not be a true and worthy king of England if he abjured his responsibilities. Were John to describe Rufus's behaviour, he would have to acknowledge Rufus's fault as he does in the *Chronicula*. His silence in the *Chronicon*—as we have also seen in his conspicuous silences on Edgar ætheling<sup>20</sup>—is not just an absence. There is something to avoid.

The *Chronicula* and the *Chronicon* have something in common: an awareness of royal power and its ability to influence outcomes. The *Chronicon*'s artful silence and the *Chronicula*'s individually directed blame indicate that John perceived of royal responsibility as a thing of substance. The views John expresses—or chooses not to express—do not admit of any idea that the king is the victim of circumstance or fate, or that he is part of a larger collective that deserves blame for sin. John's attitudes towards and expectations for English kings in this regard are consistent across his works, across genre, and beyond the era of Conquest. The patterns in his narratives do not reflect the efforts of a patchwork compiler.

Bede is the authority which Henry acknowledges as highest, but what is especially interesting is that he praises the authority of Bede by comparing him to a king: 'Qui regia

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<sup>19</sup> Above, 117.

<sup>20</sup> Above, 266–8.

uirtute sua et aliorum uicia compescens, cum regibus ipsis inferior non sit, dignissime regum in ordine quasi rex ponatur.’<sup>21</sup> This comment, if no other, reveals the high expectations Henry had for kings. His comment further indicates the connections Henry perceived among things that endure in the earthly realm: the legacies left in the authority of great kings and great historians.

The actions of kings and other men of England caused Henry to think about how to interpret Providence and to narrate its workings. As part of his narrative of disdain for King Stephen’s reign, Henry argues with ASC 1137, citing his own observations and those of others as evidence that God could be seen to be inflicting just punishments. He opposes these to the suggestion that God was asleep during Stephen’s reign.<sup>22</sup> Henry questions and challenges both his sources and himself in his interpretations as an historian. What is interesting is that Henry defends the position that, regardless of what happens, God is directly involved. As we have seen, when Henry writes about responsibility and blame, he describes the providential plan not only in general, but also in the specific moments when it makes itself manifest in the earthly realm.

For Henry, the comparative case is his internal distinction between the past and the present. He makes this division explicit at the end of his sixth book and beginning of the seventh, dated to 1087. In the final chapter of his sixth book, Henry writes: ‘Verum iam rebus usque ad tempora nostra perductis, nouis nouus liber est donandus.’<sup>23</sup> He summarizes the kings he has treated in this book, Æthelred to William, and ends the book. He begins his seventh book explaining that his distinction between past and present is

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Since he who restrained the vices of others by his own regal virtue is not inferior to the kings themselves, he should be placed as a king, most deservedly in the sequence of kings.’ *HA* iv.12, 230–3; see also: N. Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago, 1977), 20–1.

<sup>22</sup> *HA* x.22, 744–7; see also: Partner, *Serious Entertainments*, 21. Note that Stephen gives up the fight for his own cause: cf. WM on Æthelred’s cowardice, above, 67.

<sup>23</sup> ‘But now affairs have been brought down to our own time, and new events demand a new book.’ *HA* vi.42, 410–11.

based on the nature of his sources, writing: ‘Hactenus de his, que uel in libris ueterum legendo repperimus, uel fama uulgante percepimus, tractatum est. Nunc autem de his, que uel ipsi uidimus, uel ab his qui uiderant audiuius, pertractandum est.’<sup>24</sup> By Henry’s own definition, William’s reign is the final event in the historical record of the English before the era of living memory.

Henry does not end English history with the Norman Conquest. Henry’s framing is worth comparing with WM’s *GR*, which is also divided into books. WM also does not make the Conquest a major historical break in framing his narrative: the Conquest is not, structurally, a major change produced by William. WM gives his William a new beginning at the start of Book III, making his whole career as a future king of England the subject which moves the book forward.<sup>25</sup> Even if they are both deliberately obscuring the trauma of 1066, the narrative effect is to delineate a specific story of English history. WM begins his third book with William’s career as a duke, which itself is only important because he will be an English king. Henry’s English past ends with the end of William’s reign, not the end of Edward’s or Harold’s. Henry includes William as a king in the English past.

This bears repeating. William is not a shadow obscuring the English past: he is part of that past, as much a part as a native king, or a conqueror like Cnut. Henry concludes Book VI by identifying William as the most worthy of the English kings in the past<sup>26</sup>—and with this comment, in a narrative in which theme and structure are indeed inseparable, the book ends.

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<sup>24</sup> ‘Down to this point the matters discussed have been those that I have either discovered from reading the books of the ancients or learned from common report. Now, however, the matters to be studied are those that I have either seen for myself or heard about from those who did see them.’ *HA* vii.1, 412–13. Cf E. van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe, 900–1200* (London, 1999), 20–39.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. M. Otter, ‘1066: The Moment of Transition in Two Narratives of the Norman Conquest’, *Speculum* 74 (1999), 565–86.

<sup>26</sup> Above, 256.

Each author had a real and consistent agenda which he imposed upon all aspects of his reconstruction of the past. I deliberately chose the word 'Conquest' in the singular for titling these conclusions to reflect the reality that each author's approach to conquest in the eleventh century is part of a larger pattern. This has three important implications for thinking about historical writing in twelfth-century England. First, we cannot trust their accounts of individual character or conquest, because the pattern supersedes the particularities of a particular conquest or king, and indeed dictates the attitude each historian will take. Everything they write about royal responsibility and kings' characters in the Norman Conquest is also true of what they write about these in the Danish Conquest. They do not share the same views, but each writer's narrative is internally consistent. This consistency is particularly striking given the marked differences in the conquests. The Danish invasions spanned decades; the Norman a single day. Danish rule did not last; Norman rule persisted. The Danish Conquest was over one hundred years in the past for these writers; the Norman retained echoes of recent memory. The problem with accepting their accounts of the eleventh-century invasions is that their narrative agendas obscure the particularities of each.

The second implication is related: the Norman Conquest cannot be considered the determining factor either in the structure of these narratives or in the motivation behind writing them. It is something larger: invasion itself. For all three, England's history of invasion demands an ordered explanation if its history is to be redeemed.

Third, ethnic or political considerations neither motivated the production of these histories nor dominated their themes. If this were true, we might expect these historians' judgments about kings and the loyalty owed these kings to reflect the authors' sympathies to the particular peoples whence the kings hailed. WM's, Henry's and John's narrative patterns reveal that the purported divide between their sympathies for the English and the

Normans is irrelevant to their views of kingship.<sup>27</sup> These historians created a *patria* to suit England's history of conquest—and it was one in which a conqueror could be a king more worthy or legitimate than a native. The cause of English patriotism has been advanced as a motivation for these historians in writing their histories.<sup>28</sup> This I do not dispute in principle. One problem is that these conclusions tend to oversimplify the kind of patriotism which the Anglo-Norman historians display. Campbell suggests that according to these writers, the English and not their conqueror created the *patria*. If anything, the reverse is true: where defending English kings failed, the conquerors infused the land with new life and a sense of progress; for Henry in particular, Cnut and William were the greatest English kings in history. The *patria* might seem to be something long-suffering against invasion. But although defending kings are meant to defend against invasion, all three writers agreed that a conqueror could be just as English a king of the *patria* if he fulfilled his responsibilities as king.

### **Changes and continuities in English approaches to explanation and responsibility**

I move outwards now, from comparisons and implications within the three authors' works to comparisons with insular writing and thought before the twelfth-century. There were several profound changes in the mode of explanation for invasion narratives, and in explicit and implied expectations for kings, between earlier insular invasion narratives and the twelfth century. The twelfth-century narratives are not traditional salvific narratives in which invasion is explained by the sins of the people.<sup>29</sup> Even for WM and Henry, who use the providential framework for their overall narrative of why things

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<sup>27</sup> But cf. e.g. Gillingham, 'Henry of Huntingdon', 129; R.H.C. Davis, *The Normans and their Myth* (London, 1976), 123–30; the literature on these historians' mixed parentage, above, 26.

<sup>28</sup> J. Campbell, 'The Late Anglo-Saxon State: A Maximum View', in his *The Anglo-Saxon State* (Hambledon, 2000), 1–30, at 10–11; see also: J. Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past', in his *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), 209–28.

<sup>29</sup> Above, 7–10.

occurred, explanation is more complicated and varied. Several differences are worth remarking on here.

These narratives are not, unlike their sources written in the eleventh century, based on direct experience of invasion. The succession crisis of the White Ship disaster and the civil conflict between Stephen and Matilda would have been familiar,<sup>30</sup> but not the true threat of external conquest. Their sense of conquest and invasion narrative seems to arise more from experience of a different kind: the experience of literature. In many ways, these histories have more in common with biblical and classical invasion narratives than with the eleventh-century works written during, or in the immediate aftermath and living memory of, conquest.<sup>31</sup>

Patrick Wormald described a sermon of Wulfstan wherein Wulfstan ‘steered well clear of threatening earthly sanctions against a king who failed to keep his promises’, threatening the king with ‘the Last Judgement, not deposition’ should he break a promised trust.<sup>32</sup> Yet Wulfstan wrote less about the Apocalypse and more about judgment of individual sins and earthly punishments, as the Danish invasions became a pressing reality in his own day.<sup>33</sup> In many ways for the twelfth-century historians, deposition was perhaps a nearer concept than the Last Judgment: they did not have direct experience with external invasion, but they did have experience with the power that the Norman kings imposed, with the absent kingship that resulted from kings who spent a great deal of their time in Normandy (which indeed might resemble exile in that the king was not there to defend England), with the resultant chaos when an heir died before his time, and with

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<sup>30</sup> The latter to WM only after completing *GR*.

<sup>31</sup> See above, 11–12.

<sup>32</sup> P. Wormald, ‘Æthelred the Lawmaker’, in D. Hill (ed.), *Ethelred the Unready* (Oxford, 1978), 47–80, at 75.

<sup>33</sup> See J. Wilcox, ‘Wulfstan and the twelfth century’, in M. Swan and E.M. Treharne (eds.), *Rewriting Old English in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 2000), 83–97, esp. at 96; for the changes in emphasis of Wulfstan’s writing over time, see M. Godden, ‘Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, in M. Godden et al. (eds.), *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E.G. Stanley* (Oxford, 1994), 130–62, at 142–62.

civil conflict in which there were multiple claimants for rule who had to defend their respective claims. These historians held eleventh-century kings personally accountable for England's fate, and one may imagine they thought the same of their present-day kings. Yet their narratives cannot be reduced to experience: their world of reading and thought provided many possible kinds of explanation and causation on which they drew in writing their histories. Ultimately, twelfth-century historians ventured into territory Wulfstan's sermon did not. By holding the king to such high account, the twelfth-century historians necessarily give him farther to fall, should he fail the duties of office through his own actions.

Kingship in England was more explicitly contingent on behaviour, as opposed to origin, in the three twelfth-century histories than in ASC. Æthelred's kingship is not questioned because he is the natural lord in ASC, but for the later writers this is not enough: Henry suggests that Æthelred is unworthy, WM that he is not even a king, and John must show that his efforts and behaviour are worthy in order to make him into an English king. The later historians seem to accept a king's exile less than does ASC: if he was not present, leading in both justice and in battle, they could not truly present him as a king.

I have noted some important differences in the way the eleventh- and twelfth-century sources treat kings and conquest. But I do not argue for a complete break with the Anglo-Saxon past. Indeed, in some ways their histories reflect elements of the history they sought to redeem.<sup>34</sup> Recent work has highlighted continuities in thought, values and themes in literature across the Conquest.<sup>35</sup> In three important ways, my findings here support the arguments for continuities through pre- and post-Conquest England.

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<sup>34</sup> Esp. Bede; above, 8–9.

<sup>35</sup> See e.g. E. Treharne, *Living Through Conquest: The Politics of Early English, 1020–1220* (Oxford, 2012); L. Ashe, '“Exile-and-return” and English Law: The Anglo-Saxon Inheritance of Insular Romance', *Literature Compass* 3 (2006), 300–317; L. Ashe, 'The Anomalous King of Conquered England', in C.

First, heredity and dynasty were of less immediate importance to the three historians in determining whether a man was worthy of being an English king. In this regard, they display more continuity with actual practice in Anglo-Saxon England than do their Norman counterparts. The Anglo-Saxon monarchy was not based solely on hereditary principles: several of the Anglo-Saxon kings before Cnut were elected, their authority deriving from the support of high-ranking nobles and clergy.<sup>36</sup> As Ann Williams has shown, heredity by direct descent was the exception rather than the norm in late Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>37</sup> Orderic, writing in Normandy, was more particularly concerned with primogeniture in the succession than were his contemporaries writing in England.<sup>38</sup> The twelfth-century English historians' criteria for kingship—and the relative importance they assign to direct descent—resonates more with English practices than Norman ducal practices. This is important because it underlines that WM, Henry and John were not writing from an imperial Norman perspective in a conquered land.

Second, the twelfth-century invasion narratives materially resemble the invasion narrative of Asser's *Life of Alfred* in its implication that Alfred's courageous and spirited military defence was perhaps more important than his brother's piety and prayer in defeating the Vikings.<sup>39</sup> WM is reserved about Alfred's successes, which might seem surprising given Alfred's still-current epithet 'the Great'.<sup>40</sup> WM praises Alfred's piety, learning and generalship, but did not find him to be the epitome of an exemplary military

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Melville and L. Mitchell (eds.) *Every Inch a King: Comparative Studies on Kings and Kingship in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Leiden, 2012), 173–93.

<sup>36</sup> J.G. Haahr, 'The Concept of Kingship in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum* and *Historia Novella*', *Mediaeval Studies* 38 (1976), 363–4.

<sup>37</sup> A. Williams, 'Some Notes and Considerations on Problems Connected with the English Royal Succession, 860–1066', *ANS* 1 (1979), 144–167.

<sup>38</sup> Chibnall, *OV*, ii, xxxvii, 364; idem, 'Les droits d'héritage selon Orderic Vital', *Revue historique de droit français et étranger*, 4 série, 48 (1970), 347. William's eldest son, Robert, inherited Normandy, consistent with this custom.

<sup>39</sup> Asser, *LKA* c.37–8; on Asser's portrayal of Alfred's generalship, see: J. Campbell, 'Asser's *Life of Alfred*', in his *The Anglo-Saxon State* (Hambledon, 2000), 129–55, at 146–7.

<sup>40</sup> WM probably knew a version of *LKA*: Thomson, *GR*, ii, 92–4; idem, 'William's Reading', in his *William of Malmesbury*, 40–75, at 69.

general: in addition to praise of his victories, WM describes him as ‘preproperus’, plagued with Danish invasions, and forgetful of his own fears during those years.<sup>41</sup> For WM, as for his contemporaries, the crisis of invasion—especially repeated invasion—magnified the relative importance of a king’s military responsibilities. WM never criticizes piety, but Edward the Confessor’s piety was not enough to make WM endorse him as a worthy defending king of England. WM rather praises the actions and characters of Cnut and William, whom he ultimately succeeds in representing as defending kings. In this regard WM’s attitude towards kingship is like Asser’s. These attitudes are again worth comparing to some of the Carolingian attitudes about kingship in similar moments: that is, moments in which the nature of rule came under close scrutiny. Louis the Pious’s solution to a critique of his behaviour as king was to perform a public penance: piety was a means to win approval, and in this milieu itself a strategic endeavour.<sup>42</sup> Here, the penitent king could be reinstated. None of the twelfth-century writers who characterize a king as a weak military leader ascribe to him a contrite character—and perhaps more importantly, they give no indication that contrition would soften their criticism in any case. Henry appeared to recognize that his defending kings could not be in two places at once, but still holds them morally responsible for invasion and defeat. John, on the other hand, makes a point of stressing his kings’ good intent and military prowess despite defeat. There is no middle ground.

Certainly, all the situations were different, but my objective here is to point out a similarity in English attitudes towards royal responsibility, and the relative importance of their many obligations at particular times, with reference to this continental example from the reign of Louis the Pious, which illuminates different expectations for kings in times of crisis. In the longer narratives of the twelfth-century, the patterns of thought about the

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<sup>41</sup> *GR* ii.119–24, i, 178–97.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. M. de Jong’s arguments: above, 9, 206 n.25.

past are more sustained and the thoughts about responsibility during invasion are more evident than in Asser's narrative; the scope of these works is quite different. Yet in how they grapple with the question of the extent to which a king can influence the events of an invasion, and in what ways he is morally responsible for doing so, the twelfth-century narrators build on an idea that was nascent in Asser.

Third, and most important, the twelfth-century historians display continuity with the sense of an English past. With Bede they share an interest in interpreting the pattern and development of English history, and explicitly endeavour to emulate him; with ASC, they share a sense of imposing temporal order on events.<sup>43</sup> Their marked differences in how they present royal responsibility as compared to their eleventh-century sources is, I suggest, actually a sign of greater overall continuity in English thought. For what do they achieve by making English kingship so contingent upon behaviour and character? Based on their characterizations, what this allows them to do is to present their conquering kings not as foreign conquerors, but as English kings. The narrative efforts to which they go to accomplish this convincingly, repeatedly and consistently makes them just as English as their sources. Just as the word 'Angelcynn' incorporated peoples of different origin into the nation of the English,<sup>44</sup> so these newly articulated ideas about royal responsibility firmly incorporate foreign kings into English kingship. The twelfth-century historians continue a pre-Conquest tradition of inclusion—be it in the people, the island<sup>45</sup> or the monarchy—adapting past events and circumstances to suit their purpose of narrating a history of a single entity.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. S. Foot, 'Finding the meaning of form: narrative in annals and chronicles', in N. Partner (ed.), *Writing Medieval History* (London, 2005), 88–108, at 94–7.

<sup>44</sup> S. Foot, 'The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity before the Norman Conquest', *TRHS*, 6th series, 6 (1996), 25–49; cf. P. Wormald, 'Engla Lond: the Making of an Allegiance', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7 (1994), 1–24, esp. at 10, 17–18.

<sup>45</sup> Anglo-Saxon kings at times claimed to include the whole island of Britain in their dominion: see R.R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles, 1093–1343* (Oxford, 2000), esp. at 9–10.

Acceptance and resignation at defeat do not characterize the three narratives. The historians were doing more than trying to account for what had happened. By allocating responsibility—both moral (obligation) and causal (the ability to make things happen differently)—they could lessen the shame of the past by visiting blame or credit upon the kings, and hence achieve a redemption. Their works also reveal their assumptions about kings and the relative importance of their responsibilities. What WM, Henry and John knew (of classical, biblical, patristic and historical writing) and experienced (of kingship) instead revealed to them the unrealized possibilities in narrating English history, including an exploration of multiple modes of explanation and the king's capacity to have an effect. Their works are based not solely on the hope of 'reanimating the pre-Conquest past'.<sup>46</sup> Rather, they reconstituted the past in a way that minimized the shame of defeat or the sense that invasion irreparably damaged the land. If they sought to animate anything, it was a new English past: one in which the conquerors could also be English kings—perhaps even more so than defenders. These historians took a century in which England was twice conquered and used the circumstance of invasion, the behaviour kings and the redistribution of responsibility to achieve a redemption of the English past.

### **Re-thinking England's eleventh century**

What, then, are the implications and the significance of the patterns outlined and identified here? In many regards they suggest a need to reevaluate the way we view England's eleventh-century past. Historians since the twelfth century have tended to think these twelfth-century authors—WM in particular—intelligent, perceptive and accurate. This belief arises in part because these men were thorough and well-read researchers: there is no denying the extent of their reading and education, and the verve with which

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<sup>46</sup> R.W. Southern, 'Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing 4. The Sense of the Past', *TRHS*, 5th Series, 23 (1973), 249.

they applied these to their historical materials.<sup>47</sup> But it is also a belief which persists because the twelfth-century historians have crafted a particular vision of the past so well, according to a certain agenda, that subsequent historians have tended to accept them at their word. The tendency has been to treat them as receptors, not interpreters; WM in particular disarmingly and tendentiously protests his own impartiality. Thus the twelfth-century historians, through their choices about what to perpetuate or to invent, have defined how modern historians (indeed, historians since that time) think about the eleventh century.<sup>48</sup>

The idea that modern historians must be cautious in how they evaluate the content or truth value of the twelfth-century chroniclers is nothing new. But it is something about which modern historians—and indeed future historians—must be more vigilant than they have been. In 1909, J.H. Round criticized E.A. Freeman for misreading the twelfth-century chroniclers, claiming that Freeman read the Latin based on his pre-existing beliefs about how the events of the Norman Conquest played out.<sup>49</sup> Yet Round frames his own arguments about the events of 1066 around different readings of twelfth-century historians, still treating them as authoritative because they are near-contemporary chroniclers of the Norman Conquest.<sup>50</sup> As we have seen, Henry definitively placed the events of the conquest in the past—a place and time outside the reach of any direct or even indirect witness—and placed himself in the present.<sup>51</sup> Sayles praised WM as an historian and concluded that Edward was incompetent.<sup>52</sup> But it was WM who initially established the evaluative framework that made Edward’s incompetence something so

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<sup>47</sup> For this argument initially, see esp. R.W. Southern, ‘Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing 4. The Sense of the Past’, *TRHS*, 5th series, 23 (1973), 243–63.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066–1307*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 2013), on the need to understand twelfth-century writing in England through pre-1066 sources, xii, 357; on the Anglo-Saxon heritage of literacy, 30–5.

<sup>49</sup> J.H. Round, *Feudal England: Historical Studies on the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, reset edn (London, 1964), 262.

<sup>50</sup> Round, *Feudal England*, 260–9.

<sup>51</sup> Above, 300–2.

<sup>52</sup> G.O. Sayles, *The Medieval Foundations of England*, 2nd edn (London, 1950), 280-1.

powerful and influential, causally and morally, that it should be considered a major effective factor in both the causes and outcomes of invasion. On the other hand, Sayles viewed John as a copyist who offered no new insights into the past.<sup>53</sup> There are two problems with this: one, it undervalues John's original contributions and interpretations of the past and how these might shed light on twelfth-century values and expectations. Two, it assumes interpretative continuity in the eleventh- and twelfth-century chronicles, hence muddling the possible differences modern historians might perceive in the different narrative traditions.

Modern historians do not tend to see the need to defend the tradition of casting Anglo-Saxon and Norman kings as English kings.<sup>54</sup> But in the twelfth century, historians were saying something very new indeed by including foreign conquerors as part of the 'English' past. Scholars today acknowledge that there has been a tendency to accept WM's *GR* as 'informative and trustworthy', and that there are inherent dangers therein.<sup>55</sup> WM's protestations of doubt or uncertainty<sup>56</sup> are part of an intentional narrative style to make the narrative more effective and believable.<sup>57</sup> Everything these writers said about kings and conquest was part of a larger pattern and agenda with which they rewrote the whole of the English past.

The reliance on these twelfth-century narratives for information and interpretation about the eleventh-century conquest continues, to a degree, to this day. There are similarities in modes of explanation between these twelfth-century narratives and modern historical writing, which are not found in these historians' sources. But the resemblance is superficial, because their motives in writing history were different from modern ones; the

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<sup>53</sup> Sayles, *Medieval Foundations*, 280.

<sup>54</sup> Consider e.g. the Yale English Monarchs Series, which includes Anglo-Saxon and Norman kings.

<sup>55</sup> M. Otter, 'Functions of fiction in historical writing', in N. Partner (ed.), *Writing Medieval History* (London, 2005), 109–130, at 119.

<sup>56</sup> See e.g. J. Huntington, 'The Taming of the Laity: Writing Waltheof and Rebellion in the Twelfth Century', *ANS* 32 (2009), 79–95, at 89.

<sup>57</sup> Above, 17.

presence of the providential framework and the desire to redeem English past are two major differences. Part of what I would like to do is to issue a caveat about accepting the sympathy of reasoning between the twelfth and subsequent centuries because of the very different visions of the past in each period, and because of the ways in which original modes of explanation in the twelfth century operated in relation to the modes of their sources. They appear similar in content and often in acknowledgment of English sins, but the distribution of responsibility and the relative importance of royal origins were markedly different. The highly sophisticated interpretative patterns which these twelfth-century writers impose upon the past, and indeed on their interpretations thereof, render these similarities in reasoning less substantial than we might imagine.

We continue to read the eleventh-century past through a twelfth-century lens. For twelfth-century writers, the Danish Conquest was over one hundred years in the past; it had ended; it was of less immediate and relevant import than was the Norman Conquest. Lawson remarks that the Danish Conquest tends to be forgotten today, because it was short-lived and did not have major consequences.<sup>58</sup> But how much of this is because twelfth-century historians did not present it to us as a major conquest? The Æthelred chronicler appears to have written during Cnut's reign, but even to read his account gives the impression that the Danish Conquest had more than minor consequences; indeed, it was only the end of years of repeated invasion and devastation.

### **Sourcing the reputations of kings**

One of my aims in this thesis has been not to revise the reputations of eleventh-century kings, but to revise the story of these reputations' origins. Much as early medieval and

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<sup>58</sup> M.K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (Harlow, 1993, 214; but cf. R. Fleming, *Kings and Lords in Conquest England* (Cambridge, 1991), 21–52.

Late Antique scholarship continues to resist Gibbon's idea of decline and fall,<sup>59</sup> so I resist the idea of a 'decline' (or indeed, a rise) in a king's reputation. Each new generation made up its own mind about how to read a king's career: some did so according to a pattern of thought about the past, or according to a perceived peculiarity of the individual which suited the spirit of the present age. Historians did not necessarily narrate a king's reign in a way that reduced (or magnified) the perceptions of the age immediately prior. In rewriting eleventh-century material, no century demonstrates this better than the twelfth. Using similar source material, WM, Henry and John produced drastically different interpretations of the past and of particular kings. These writers did not receive reputations: they created them.

As I have discussed, Æthelred's personal notoriety can be traced to WM and to Henry, but not to the narrative sources written immediately after his reign. Historians continue to attempt to account for Æthelred's failures, or to describe a linear trajectory in the decline of his reputation, when—as John shows—a reproofing reading of his character was in no way inevitable. These approaches do not take into account the interpretations which WM and Henry imposed upon him, and the larger trend among the Anglo-Norman historians of assigning a greater degree of responsibility to kings in explaining the conquests.

The source of Cnut's impressive reputation equally resides in the twelfth century. There is general acceptance here that Cnut was the best and most successful pre-Conquest king in England.<sup>60</sup> These claims are based on a variety of evidence, including laws. But Henry's *HA* continues to provide the keystone for evaluating Cnut according to these

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<sup>59</sup> E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (6 vols., London, 1776–1789); A. Rogers, *Late Roman Towns in Britain: Rethinking Change and Decline* (Cambridge, 2011); cf. the 'decline' conceit in J. Barzun, *From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Western Cultural Life* (London, 2001).

<sup>60</sup> But cf. the modern preoccupation with Alfred in this regard: e.g. A.P. Smyth, *King Alfred the Great* (Oxford, 1995); D. Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge, 2007). S. Keynes, 'The cult of King Alfred the Great,' *ASE* 28 (1999), 225–356.

criteria of success.<sup>61</sup> There is little written narrative evidence about Cnut's reign from the eleventh century;<sup>62</sup> ASC is generally silent save for Cnut's pilgrimage. Stories of Cnut found in twelfth-century sources, like Cnut and the waves,<sup>63</sup> are retold in biographies, but this is because they are good stories, not because they have evidence behind them. Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote history this way: the effect is something that remains memorable, if not always verifiable.<sup>64</sup>

Williams claims that twelfth-century historians considered King Cnut and the tenth-century King Edgar 'worthy of admiration' because Edgar prevented Scottish and Danish invasions (unlike Edward and Harold) and because Cnut was a conqueror who preserved the English church and kingdom.<sup>65</sup> Williams suggests that these kings' reputation is the reason for twelfth-century admiration. But it can be argued the other way around. The twelfth-century writers chose to highlight particular accomplishments or qualities they perceived in these men which resonated with the story of English history they wished to tell. The familiar reputations of these kings germinated in these later narrative sources. Even King Edgar the Peaceable was not popular with everyone in his lifetime, judging from the reaction outside ecclesiastical circles following his death; in the eleventh century, the immediacy of invasion appears to have brought Edgar's generosity to foreigners under Wulfstan's scrutiny.<sup>66</sup> Henry was a keen admirer of Edgar, naming him a second Solomon 'Qui tot bona perennia breui tempore statuerat',<sup>67</sup> an attribution

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<sup>61</sup> See e.g. Lawson, *Cnut*, 214–15.

<sup>62</sup> Above, 155–6.

<sup>63</sup> Above, 180–1.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. W.C. Sellar and R.J. Yeatman, *1066 and All That* (London, 1930).

<sup>65</sup> A. Williams, 'England in the Eleventh Century', in C. Harper-Bill and E. van Houts (eds.), *A Companion to the Anglo-Norman World* (Woodbridge, 2003), 1–18, at 1.

<sup>66</sup> Byrhtferth praised King Edgar's generosity to strangers, *Vita S. Oswaldi*, i, 425, 435. This generosity was also the basis for Wulfstan's retrospective criticism of Edgar: ASC (CDE) 959. See also: S. Jayakumar, 'Some Reflections on the "Foreign Policies" of Edgar "the Peacable"', *Haskins Society Journal* 10 (2002), 17–37, at 19–21; S. Keynes, 'Edgar, *rex admirabilis*', in D. Scragg (ed.), *Edgar, King of the English 959–975: New Interpretations* (Woodbridge, 2008), 3–58, at 56–7.

<sup>67</sup> 'who in a brief time had established so many good deeds for eternity', *HA* v.26, 322–3.

which reflects his preoccupation with moral endurance in this world.<sup>68</sup> Even Henry echoed Wulfstan's reservations about Edgar's excessive generosity to pagan foreigners,<sup>69</sup> but not for the same reasons. Even a good, pious English king was responsible for defending his kingdom, and Henry looked on failure with scepticism; his reservations did not, however, extend to foreign rule if the king were worthy. Cnut was a conqueror who assumed power after years of Danish raiding: in the twelfth-century narratives, the import of the violence diminishes rapidly upon Cnut's accession in the twelfth-century narratives. They forgive his background unreservedly—and so, it seems, has subsequent historical judgment about Cnut as an English king.

Even William's reputation as an English king has been shaped by twelfth-century renderings of his character and legitimacy. Until relatively recently, the Norman Conquest was credited with bringing civilization, order and culture to an otherwise backwards Anglo-Saxon realm.<sup>70</sup> This has begun to change,<sup>71</sup> but echoes of twelfth-century moral defence of William persist. Those who opposed him during his reign still tend to be portrayed as disloyal or uninspiring.<sup>72</sup> Joanna Huntington recently observed that modern historians' uncertainty about Waltheof's 'complicity' in the rebellion against King William 'echoes the ambiguity of contemporary chroniclers.'<sup>73</sup> This point might be modified slightly: modern historians' uncertainties about how to characterize eleventh-century events echo not contemporary chroniclers, but the subtle revisions of character

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<sup>68</sup> Above, 22–34.

<sup>69</sup> *HA* v.24, 318–21.

<sup>70</sup> On the divisiveness among modern historians over 'English' and 'Norman' causes, see e.g. R.A. Brown's introduction to *The Norman Conquest of England: Sources and Documents* (Woodbridge, 1984), xiv; but arguing for the limitations of overvaluing the 'Old English achievement', xvii.

<sup>71</sup> See e.g. Wormald, arguing that historians have underrated influence of Anglo-Saxon law: *MEL*, esp. x, 3–28.

<sup>72</sup> But cf. Hereward, for whom a heroic written tradition persisted, e.g. in the works of Matthew Paris: *De Gestis Herwardi Saxonis*, ed., trans. and rev. T.A. Bevis (March, 1982), 1.

<sup>73</sup> Huntington, 'The Taming of the Laity', 85. See also: F.S. Scott, 'Earl Waltheof of Northumbria', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4th series, 30 (1952), 149–215, at 203–5; F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edn (Oxford, 2001), 610–12; D. Bates, *William the Conqueror*, 232–3; W.E. Kapelle, *The Norman Conquest of the North: The Region and its Transformation, 1000–1135* (London, 1979), 134.

and responsibility made generations later, in the twelfth-century. Indeed, to use the word ‘complicity’ suggests a sense of wrongdoing and treason; ‘involvement’ would be more neutral. Given the twelfth-century chronicles’ universal endorsement of William’s kingship—which they suggest is based on his character and his quality as a defender of England, not a conqueror—even phrases like this suggest that modern historians continue to accept the twelfth-century argument that William truly was the just, legitimate English king, and that to oppose him was treachery. The subtle twelfth-century changes to the eleventh-century sources for William’s reign amount to a marked change in accepting a conqueror as an English king.

And who put Edgar ætheling most decidedly off the map, if not WM? WM single-handedly defined Edgar’s reputation in historical writing for years to come. To consider but one example, in the mid-twentieth century, Frank Barlow described the loyalty needed for an English king on Edward the Confessor’s death, and concluded: ‘But Edgar was incapable of inspiring such loyalty’.<sup>74</sup> But as we have seen, there is nothing in the eleventh-century sources—ASC or even in WP—which accuses Edgar of lacking the personal capacity to inspire loyalty. WM however, writing years later, does so in no uncertain terms.

WM’s dismissal of Edgar is sometimes ascribed to the result of the ‘impression’ Edgar made on WM; Hooper implies that John, WM and OV are of a kind in receiving this ‘impression’ from the eleventh century.<sup>75</sup> But what do we mean by ‘impression’? It certainly cannot be something inherent in the source material, because John’s Edgar becomes a loyal ally of William, and both WM and John read versions of ASC and, as far as we can tell, little else about Edgar. WM made the impression on Edgar’s reputation, not the other way around. If we are to speak of impressions, it is important to consider not

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<sup>74</sup> F. Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England, 1042–1216*, 3rd edn (London, 1972), 78.

<sup>75</sup> N. Hooper, ‘Edgar the Ætheling: Anglo-Saxon prince, rebel, crusader’, *ASE* 14 (1985), 197–214, at 197.

only *that* an historian reached a certain conclusion about the evidence, but also *why* he was motivated to consider the evidence in a particular way given his attitude towards the past and towards historical explanation.

Both eleventh- and some twelfth-century sources employed the explanation of conquest as caused by collective sin: it is the change in the distribution of that sin and that responsibility that is significant between the two centuries. Ann Williams has suggested that eleventh-century contemporaries agreed that the fall of the English kingdom was because of the people's sins, claiming that later writers (apparently modern historians) 'have required more specific causes, and have been more accustomed to apportion blame than praise'.<sup>76</sup> It was as early as the twelfth century that historians sought causes more specific than collective sin, but they did not apportion more blame and less praise. Rather, they apportioned more of the existing blame, and more of the available praise, to the kings. This is why the concept of 'distribution' is important. The point is that, even within WM and Henry who preserve the providential framework, they apportion to the kings a higher degree of responsibility than do their sources.

Henry was the first to organize Anglo-Saxon history into the Heptarchy, which then permitted him to write a history of the unification of Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>77</sup> But his structuring of the past—which, as we have seen, is inseparable from his thematic agendas in rewriting history—has continued to shape how historians understand Anglo-Saxon history. The idea of the Heptarchy shaped subsequent historical views and debates about the Anglo-Saxon past.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, Campbell pointed out that the Heptarchy proved

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<sup>76</sup> Williams, 'England in the Eleventh Century', 1.

<sup>77</sup> For Henry's theme of unification: *HA* i.4, iv.30; cf. Greenway, *HA*, lx–lxi.

<sup>78</sup> Greenway, *HA*, lx; cf. D.N. Dumville, 'Essex, Middle Anglia, and the expansion of Mercia in the South-East Midlands', in S. Basset (ed.), *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (Leicester, 1989), 123–40, at 126, 140; on the trend of accepting the Heptarchy, see: S. Foot, 'The historiography of the Anglo-Saxon "nation-state"', in L. Scales and O. Zimmer (eds.), *Power and the Nation in European History* (Cambridge, 2005), 125–42, at 132.

misleading to historians,<sup>79</sup> and Henry's story of unification has been as well: only recently has the idea of 'unification' come under scrutiny.<sup>80</sup>

Campbell acknowledged Henry's originality and claimed that Henry re-ordered his material intelligently.<sup>81</sup> But he appeared to characterize his intelligence as 'intellectual grasp.'<sup>82</sup> Henry's intelligence was not in the purely practical organization of his material, but rather in his purposeful organization of his material, which served his aim of writing a moral history of the impressive earthly development of England. Henry's narrative possessed a strong a moralizing theme, a sense of tragedy, a pattern for England's history of conquest that eradicated chaos and made sense of disorder—a pattern which laid the foundation for a story of unification and of improvement under conquering kings who were themselves worthy of being English. The kind of story Henry told has shaped subsequent historical narratives about Anglo-Saxon England, both explicitly and in ways so powerful and subtle as to be almost subliminal.

### **The narrative foundations for a late Anglo-Saxon state**

Campbell's seminal article 'The Late Anglo-Saxon State: A Maximum View' builds a useful and persuasive case based on coins, writs, charters and the evidence from Domesday Book.<sup>83</sup> The strength of the Anglo-Saxon state—and indeed, the strength of it as a model for the Old English past—need not necessarily depend upon individual kings, but more on their ability to tax and to raise an army.<sup>84</sup> However, the 'certainty' with which Campbell claimed that late 'Anglo-Saxon England was a nation-state' is not

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<sup>79</sup> Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views', 212–13.

<sup>80</sup> For a challenge of the idea of 'unification' in modern scholarship, see esp. G. Molyneaux, *The Formation of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdom, c.871–c.1016* (D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 2010), 1–16, esp. 2; cf. Foot, 'The historiography', 129–30.

<sup>81</sup> Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views', 212–13.

<sup>82</sup> Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views', 220.

<sup>83</sup> For arguments against the 'maximalist view', cf. P. Hyams, 'Feud and the State in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *The Journal of British Studies* 40 (2001), 1–43, at 2–3; cf. comprehensive discussion in Foot, 'The historiography', 125–42.

<sup>84</sup> Behaviours described repeatedly in ASC: see above, 43–62.

underpinned by evidence from the eleventh century—a point which Campbell himself acknowledged. He wrote: ‘The most striking evidence of national consciousness comes from post-Conquest historians.’<sup>85</sup> Yet, as I have endeavoured to argue, post-Conquest narratives do not constitute evidence for eleventh-century perceptions.

Several of the essential constituent elements of the proposed ‘state’—the nature of royal responsibility among them—reveal a kind of thinking about the eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon past that originated in the twelfth century, a kind of thinking which persists in modern historical thought. In evaluating the reasons for the military failures of these conquests, and in considering the effects which the king’s actions had on outcomes, Richard Abels’s analysis reflects a mode of explanation more similar to the three twelfth-century writers than to the more exclusively salvific modes of earlier insular historical writing.<sup>86</sup> Lawson discussed how James Campbell has dramatically shaped modern historians’ views of the ‘late Anglo-Saxon state’, explaining that Campbell characterizes tenth- and eleventh-century England as, amongst other things, ‘thoroughly governed, and ruled by kings whose ability to coerce should never be underestimated’.<sup>87</sup> He explains that power was distributed beyond kings and nobles; his comments about kings are of particular interest here.

But did the Anglo-Saxons see themselves as having a strong state? The disparity between versions of ASC and John offers a perspective: John built an entirely original narrative of consistent, effective leadership throughout the eleventh century, and in doing so he is making dramatic interpretive changes to his eleventh-century sources. Nor should

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<sup>85</sup> Campbell, ‘The Late Anglo-Saxon State’, 10–11; see also: Campbell, ‘Some Twelfth-Century Views’, 209–28.

<sup>86</sup> R. Abels, ‘From Alfred to Harold II: The Military Failure of the Late Anglo-Saxon State’, in R.P. Abels and B.S. Bachrach (eds.), *The Normans and their Adversaries at War: Essays in Memory of C. Warren Hollister* (Woodbridge, 2001), 15–30.

<sup>87</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, 217. Cf. parallels in constitutional historians’ use of the word ‘govern’ in relation to kingship with the twelfth-century views: e.g. WM on Æthelred (above, 42) with Stubbs’s more general distinction: ‘The king in the monarchic state does little more than represent the unity of race; he has a primacy of honour but not of power; he reigns but does not govern.’ W. Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England: In its Origin and Development*, 6th edn (3 vols., Oxford, 1903–1906), i, 37–8.

the insights which WM and Henry offer go unmentioned, because they have been perhaps more subliminal, but also more powerful influences on subsequent historical thinking about the eleventh century. WM and Henry wrote about the defending kings Æthelred and Harold as though they had failed miserably in their duties as king. I have argued that these narratives thereby impart a high degree of potential influence to English kings, for their narratives repeatedly suggest ways in which the king might have either prevented or stopped the invasion by acting differently. I have also argued that the authors write about the eleventh-century invasions and kings according to a consistent pattern. In these two regards, then, these historians establish a strong impression that English kingship was a strong, consistent institution in which the normal expectation and normal practice of English kings was to be highly effective—and again, by effective, I mean both ‘successful’ and ‘has an effect’.

In the former regard, for the kings to fail so badly (and in WM’s case, so badly that he does not even consider them kings) implies that they should have been able to do very well as English kings. This vision of royal responsibility is entirely consistent with John’s narrative of reliably effective eleventh-century kingship. And in the latter regard, the narrative pattern of all three historians generates a sense of an infrastructure of rule—even the potentially misleading impression, perhaps, of government.<sup>88</sup> It is these twelfth-century narrative patterns which lend a semblance of consistency, presence and reliability independent of an individual king to the idea of an Anglo-Saxon state.

### **Implications for the individual**

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<sup>88</sup> It has been traditional to advance and to discuss arguments about whether the concept of ‘government’ can be usefully applied to the Middle Ages, or to seek the origins of government therein; for a rejection of ‘government’ as it is traditionally defined in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and an argument for analyzing the experience of power, see most particularly: T.N. Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century* (Princeton, 2009), 16–21.

Scholarship has ranged widely across the debate over how medieval writers understood the concept of the individual. There has been the claim that the twelfth century saw the discovery of the individual;<sup>89</sup> more recently, there has been the suggestion that twelfth-century writers' interest in the unique individual has been overstated, because their interest in types and moralizing structures were more important to them than the individual.<sup>90</sup> These frameworks were certainly important; indeed, part of the central argument of this thesis is that these three historians wrote about the past in consistent patterns with consistent agendas.

WM, John and Henry must have thought about the individual in order to evaluate him so relentlessly against the role of king in which he was meant to perform.<sup>91</sup> As we have seen, they all attributed motives to these men: WM explained Æthelred's behaviour as a result of his desire to wallow in laziness; Henry explained that Cnut's grief over the destruction of peoples was motivation for him to avenge a wrong; throughout, John explained the kings' conscientious efforts to defend the kingdom.<sup>92</sup> In the case of WM's narrative of Edward (at which we have just glanced briefly), by contrast, the king's character proves an amorphous entity which WM cannot always represent in a consistent way, according to his conflicting expectations for a king to be pious and a military leader. Retaining both of these expectations appears to be more important to WM than does a resolution of Edward's personal, individual character. Similarly, WM's Harold appears differently in the *Gesta Pontificum* because the ecclesiastical framing of the narrative calls for the stressing of different expectations for kings. John too does not represent his kings as individuals consistently across his works. The intent to represent the whole and

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<sup>89</sup> See e.g.: C. Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050–1200* (London, 1972).

<sup>90</sup> S. Bagge, 'The Individual in Medieval Historiography', in J. Coleman (ed.), *The Individual in Political Theory and Practice* (Oxford, 1996), 35–57, at 41.

<sup>91</sup> But cf. Bagge, 'The Individual', 41, for the claim that twelfth-century writers minimized 'the importance of human actions and plans in history, in favour of God's providence or other supernatural factors.'

<sup>92</sup> Above, 68, 172–3. But cf. Bagge, who claims that there was an 'awareness of motives', rather than that historians attributed motives, 'The Individual', 40.

unique ‘individual’ truthfully, as we might say of biography, does not appear to have been the goal of the three writers. Ascription of motives itself reveals an ulterior motive on the part of each writer: to win sympathy or justify blame within their respective overall projects of redeeming English history.

I suggest that these historians understood a tension between the individual and the general, which is why their expectations are so specific, their omissions so pointed, the poignancy of Henry’s lament so acute. They define and outline the role of a king, which is a type; they write about invasion with an internally consistent pattern; but they evaluate the individual man against their expectations for a king and within their patterns of explanation. This resonates with classical narratives in which the individual set himself against fate or chance,<sup>93</sup> not later Christian salvific narratives in which he was an actor or agent within a providential plan.

### **The paradoxes of distributing responsibility**

In Suetonius’s *Divus Iulius*, there is a paradox. Caesar, the leader deserves punishment for failing his men and abusing his power, but it is not their place to punish their leader. If they do not act, it is possible that no justice will come to the leader: a moral vacuum could result. But the men do take revenge—breaking their sworn oath—and so they, the *damnati* are punished themselves with madness and *clades*: the workings of fate show that their allegiance must be unconditional.<sup>94</sup> Even if they are the agents of fate in bringing a just end to Caesar, they are still responsible and held accountable for failing to

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<sup>93</sup> Cf. B. Smalley, ‘Sallust in the Middle Ages’, in R.R. Bolgar (ed.), *Classical Influences on European Culture, A.D. 500–1500* (Cambridge, 1971), 165–76; idem, *Historians in the Middle Ages* (London, 1974); above, 10 ff.

<sup>94</sup> Suetonius, *Divus Iulius* 76–88. For background on Suetonius’s expectations for rulers and their moral qualities, see A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars* (London, 1983), c.5–7; see also G.B. Townend, ‘Suetonius and his Influence’, in T.A. Dorey (ed.), *Latin Biography* (London, 1967), 79–111; but for a critique of Townend see K.R. Bradley, ‘Review Article: The Rediscovery of Suetonius’, *Classical Philology* 80 (1985), 254–65.

adhere to their oath. The tragedy in Henry's narratives of defending kings resembles the Suetonian paradox: failure may be inescapable, but the kings are still held responsible and morally answerable for failure. So, too, do WM and John's arguments about Harold's purported oath to William resemble Suetonius: by breaking the oath he has condemned himself to punishment.

In Christian historiography, God seems to fill the moral vacuum by bringing certainty of justice: if a wrongdoer is not punished in this life, he certainly will be in the next one. But interpretation of the workings of divine justice in the earthly realm remained open to medieval historians. They did not all interpret it in the same way. Was the earthly manifestation of justice for a wrongdoing king punishment and shame for him and his people? Or was it that he was not actually a king at all? Even the earliest narratives appropriated into the Christian tradition—the Old Testament invasion narratives which tell of the establishment of kingship in Israel—are inconclusive about whether God meant to punish the people with a bad king, to disinherit a dynasty or only to punish it if a king did not fulfil his responsibilities.<sup>95</sup> A providential framework, then, which appears to resolve a moral paradox, opens a new question of interpretation: in histories meant to redeem the English past, written according to consistent patterns, what room is there for the individual responsibility of kings? Here, we have had the opportunity to investigate how twelfth-century historians explored it.

For indeed, the twelfth-century historians did not find that the existing providential framework could alone resolve the questions of redemption and responsibility. In John it is particularly evident. He does not use the providential framework, which in itself is striking, because it shows that there was an awareness of

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<sup>95</sup> Texts positing kingship contingent on behaviour include 3 Kings 9–12; Ps 131:11–12; cf. also Exod 19:4–6; texts which advance unconditional kingship under God's covenant, including punishing bad kings but maintaining the dynasty, include 2 Kings 7; Ps 88:19–37; 3 Kings 9:4–8; Ps 2; Ps 109; Ps 110:5–9. Cf. W. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, 1997), 601–10.

other modes of explanation. Furthermore, John is aware of the limitation of a providential framework: he would have to write a story in which the English or their kings incurred shame in defeat. By choosing not to use this framework, John sidesteps those problems. Classical and Christian modes of explanation resisted the moral vacuum, and did so in different ways: whether with appeals to fate, a sense of tragedy that things could or should have been otherwise, or with a providential plan. Twelfth-century writers also apply particular patterns of causation, explanation and contingency to their narratives of the past, which ensure that there is no moral vacuum. But they do so in original ways as compared to their historical sources and their sources of historical thought. Existing modes were not sufficient.

The true paradox is not one of opposition between biblical and classical ideals for kings and considerations about their responsibilities. Rather, twelfth-century writers faced a perpetual problem about leadership and allegiance. At what point does a man's bad behaviour render him not a king, and hence not deserving of loyalty? Equally as important, at what point does a man's good behaviour render him worthy of kingship, and hence deserving of unconditional loyalty? If leadership is conditional upon behaviour, what then are these conditions, and in what order of priority should they be considered? WM, Henry and John, despite their different audiences, genres, and even characterizations of particular kings, are in agreement. Character and behaviour in justice and military endeavours are not just things that legitimate kings do well or poorly.<sup>96</sup> They are the prime factors which can—and, in these historians' eyes, do—make or unmake a king. The essential quality of these factors is apparent in the efforts the historians expend to construct—or the certainty with which they accept—a particular pattern of allocating responsibility. They write in such a way as to establish the legitimacy of the invaders, to

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. J.L. Nelson, 'Bad Kingship in the Earlier Middle Ages', *Haskins Society Journal* 8 (1999), 1–26.

criticize those defenders who failed—or, in the case of John, to obscure the negative qualities of the defenders from the historical record in the knowledge that to include them would necessitate airing the inevitable conclusion of these kings' personal responsibility and consequent culpability.

### **Royal responsibility and redeeming history**

These twelfth-century writers subscribe to a view of royal responsibility and contingency most consistent with the Old Testament's expressions of conditional kingship. According to these narratives, invasion had been one of the driving forces behind kingship itself: the expectations for the king to deliver and to fulfil his responsibilities were consequently high, and this is a sentiment which twelfth-century writers explicitly share. But twelfth-century writers make a marked departure from these ancient narratives. Old Testament stories, although they differ about whether or not kingship is conditional, do have something in common: the idea that kingship is first and foremost inextricably linked to a dynasty.<sup>97</sup> They refer to the punishment of a dynasty, or to its exclusion from kingship in the future.

The idea of a dynasty as a fundamental characteristic of kingship posed a problem to historians who sought to write a redemptive history of a realm in which the native kings were repeatedly replaced by conquering outsiders. The realm would incur shame in the present and the future because a single king lost the kingship for his descendants as well. Had the historians accepted the idea of unconditional Davidic kingship, this explanation would leave God in the impossible position of having broken his own covenant to preserve a dynasty's rule, since both Æthelred and Harold were replaced by conquering kings. The historians do not, however, suggest that Æthelred and Harold

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<sup>97</sup> On this idea in the Old Testament and in Pseudo-Cyprian's ninth *abusio*, see R. Meens, 'Politics, mirrors of princes and the Bible: sins, kings and the well-being of the realm', *Early Medieval Europe* 7 (1998), 345–57.

unkinged themselves and their lines. Rather, based on their behaviour, WM suggests that they were never really kings in the first place; Henry that they could not do their duties; John, contrarily, that their behaviour was above reproach and hence not problematic.

WM, Henry and John avoid the shame of having kingship taken away from the dynasty by dissociating kingship from dynasty. For the three historians, an English king can neither lose nor gain the kingdom for his heirs. He can only win or lose it for himself. In this regard the historians depart from the Old Testament's conditional kingship: the conditions themselves are different. The dynasty has precedence over behaviour in the ancient tradition; it is a secondary consideration in the twelfth-century narratives. Noble birth remains necessary, but it is not sufficient—nor is it the primary consideration—for worthiness of rule.

Twelfth-century historians wrote narratives which showed that behaviour and character among the conditions of kingship had primacy: this is a new and significant departure from their sources. These historians evaluated the individual's character and behaviour first before determining whether or not he was a legitimate king of England. They did not consider him inevitably a king, evaluate his quality as a king, and then interpret history and the providential plan accordingly. Kingship itself had to be earned. And if the king fulfilled his responsibilities well, this made him more an English king than insular origins could accomplish alone.

WM, Henry and John imposed consistent agendas upon their reconstructions of the English past, patterns of belief which resonated deeply with the problems at the root of biblical and classical discussions of successful and failed rule. The shared problem—whether or not the leader was worthy of allegiance—had to be addressed yet again in the twelfth-century attempt to understand and to narrate England's eleventh-century past. Invasions and crisis again brought the nature of kingship and leadership under scrutiny. In

their projects of rewriting the English past, the three historians evinced a united belief in the king's moral and causal responsibility. This belief resonates with the earliest biblical invasion narratives which told of the origins of kingship, as well as with the elements of tragedy, fate and potential moral vacuums in classical writing. In these regards, twelfth-century narratives do indeed reflect a renaissance of ancient ideas about rule.

Twelfth-century historians shared a collective awareness that prior modes of explanation (and ways of distributing responsibility) were, if not always inadequate, at least challenging to their project of redeeming the English past. Yet despite these narrative challenges—and despite the numerous possible interpretations open to the historians through their reading, their lives and their experience of rule—all three shared clear ideas about the responsibilities of kings. What this amounts to, in the end, is a distinct phenomenon in England's twelfth-century thought about the past.



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