

**Anglo-Scandinavian Literature  
and the Post-Conquest Period**

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### **Abstract**

This thesis concerns narratives about Anglo-Scandinavian contact and literary traditions of Scandinavian origin which circulated in England in the post-conquest period. The argument of the thesis is that in the eleventh century, particularly during the reign of Cnut and his sons, literature was produced for a mixed Anglo-Danish audience which drew on shared cultural traditions, and that some elements of this largely oral literature can be traced in later English sources. It is further argued that in certain parts of England, especially the East Midlands, an interest in Anglo-Scandinavian history continued for several centuries after the Viking Age and was manifested in the circulation of literary narratives dealing with Anglo-Scandinavian interaction, invasion and settlement. The first chapter discusses some narratives about the reign of Cnut in later sources, including the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, hagiographical texts by Goscelin and Osbern of Canterbury, and the *Liber Eliensis*; it is argued that they share certain thematic concerns with the literature known to have been produced at Cnut's court. The second chapter explores the literary reputation of the Danish Earl of Northumbria, Siward, and his son Waltheof in twelfth-century sources from the East Midlands and in thirteenth-century Norwegian and Icelandic histories. The third chapter deals with an episode in the Middle English romance *Guy of Warwick* in which the hero helps to defeat a Danish invasion of England, and examines the romance's references to a historical Danish right to rule in England. The final chapter discusses the Middle English romance *Havelok the Dane*, and argues that the poet of *Havelok*, aware of the role of Danish settlement in the history of Lincolnshire, makes self-conscious use of stereotypes and literary tropes associated with Danes in order to offer an imaginative reconstruction of the history of Danish settlement in the area.

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## List of Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
1: Patron and Pilgrim: Post-Conquest Narratives of Cnut's Reign	19
2: Anglo-Danish Family Histories: Siward, Waltheof and Hereward	71
3: <i>Guy of Warwick</i> and Danish Sovereignty in England	143
4: Narratives of Danish Conquest in Middle English Romance: <i>Havelok the Dane</i>	173
Conclusion	219
Works Cited	221

## Introduction

The impact of Scandinavian settlement in the north and east of England between the ninth and eleventh centuries has long been recognised as an important factor in the early history of those regions. The distribution of Scandinavian place-names and personal-names provides a vivid picture of the scope of the settlement,<sup>1</sup> while the evidence of material culture casts light on the process of cultural assimilation,<sup>2</sup> and linguistic history demonstrates its lasting influence on England as a whole.<sup>3</sup>

Historians have disagreed about the size, dating and character of the settlement, but there is no question that it left a permanent impression on England.<sup>4</sup> Despite this wealth of evidence, the influence of the Scandinavian settlement on literature in

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the value of place-name evidence in understanding the Scandinavian settlement, see L. Abrams and D. N. Parsons, 'Place-Names and the History of Scandinavian Settlement in England', in J. Hines, A. Lane and M. Redknapp, eds., *Land, Sea and Home* (Leeds, 2004), pp. 379–431; see also the essays collected in Kenneth Cameron, ed., *Place-Name Evidence for The Anglo-Saxon Invasion and Scandinavian Settlements: Eight Studies* (Nottingham, 1977), Margaret Gelling, *Signposts to the Past* (Chichester, 1988), pp.215-236, Gillian Fellows Jensen, 'Scandinavian Influence on the Place-Names of England', in P. S. Ureland and G. Broderick, eds., *Language Contact in the British Isles* (Tübingen, 1991), pp.337-354, and Barbara E. Crawford, ed., *Scandinavian Settlement in Northern Britain: Thirteen Studies of Place-Names in their Historical Context* (London and New York, 1995). The classic study of personal-names remains Gillian Fellows Jensen, *Scandinavian Personal Names in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire* (Copenhagen, 1968); see also Fellows Jensen, *The Vikings and Their Victims: The Verdict of the Names*, Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies, 1994 (London, 1995), and Cecily Clark, 'Onomastics', in Richard M. Hogg, ed., *The Cambridge History of the English Language, Volume 1* (Cambridge, 1992), pp.452-489 (465-7).

<sup>2</sup> For a recent summary see D. M. Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society and Culture* (Manchester, 2006), and thematic bibliography at pp.282-289.

<sup>3</sup> Recent studies of language contact between Norse and English speakers include J. Hines, 'Scandinavian English: A Creole in Context', in Ureland and Broderick, eds., *Language Contact in the British Isles*, pp. 403–27, P. Bibire, 'North Sea Language Contacts in the Early Middle Ages: English and Norse', in T. R. Liszka and L. E. M. Walker, eds., *The North Sea World in the Middle Ages: Studies in the Cultural History of North-Western Europe* (Dublin, 2001), pp. 88–107, and Matthew Townend, *Language and History in Viking Age England: Linguistic Relations between Speakers of Old Norse and Old English* (Turnhout, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> For varying assessments of the nature and scale of the settlement, see F. M. Stenton, 'The Danes in England', *Proceedings of the British Academy XIII* (Oxford, 1927), H.R. Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain* (London, 1977), P. H. Sawyer, *The Age of the Vikings* (London, 1962), D. M. Hadley, "'And they proceeded to plough and support themselves": The Scandinavian Settlement of England', *Anglo-Norman Studies XIX* (Woodbridge, 1997), pp.69-96, Hadley, "'Cockles amongst the Wheat": The Scandinavian Settlement of England', in William O. Frazer and Andrew Tyrrell, eds., *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain* (London and New York, 2000), pp.111-135, and D. M. Hadley and J. D. Richards, eds., *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Turnhout, 2000).

England has consistently proved far more difficult to assess. There has never been any shortage of attempts to identify parallels between English and Norse literature, but the limited and uneven nature of the evidence has meant that examples of direct influence in either direction are few. Roberta Frank summarised the difficulties with reference to Old English poetry:

Our science is weak. Anglo-Saxonists cannot confidently distinguish late Old English poems from early ones, let alone Scandinavian motifs from native English or common Germanic imagery; and Nordicists have dating troubles of their own. So much has been lost, the two cultures had so many opportunities to interact during the first millennium, that any argument for a literary connection, whether the link proposed is specific or vague, lateral or vertical, can always be challenged on methodological grounds.<sup>5</sup>

It has always seemed a reasonable proposition that a situation in which two cultures, with a shared inheritance of myth and legend and closely-related languages, were in frequent contact over a period of at least four centuries – at a conservative estimate – would provide many opportunities for mutual literary influence. With regard to Old English literature, persuasive arguments have been put forward for the relevance of Anglo-Scandinavian contexts for *Beowulf*,<sup>6</sup> as well as for the poems of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*,<sup>7</sup> but while such studies have demonstrated the many broad similarities between Norse and English literature, it has often proved impossible to pin down instances of direct influence.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Roberta Frank, 'Anglo-Scandinavian Poetic Relations', *ANQ* 3:2 (1990), 74-9 (75).

<sup>6</sup> See for instance Ursula Dronke, 'Beowulf and Ragnarök', *Saga-book of the Viking Society* XVII (1966-9), 302-325, Roberta Frank, 'Skaldic Verse and the Date of *Beowulf*', in Colin Chase, ed., *The Dating of Beowulf* (Toronto, 1981), pp. 123-139, Magnús Fjalldal, *The Long Arm of Coincidence: The Frustrated Connection between Beowulf and Grettis saga* (Toronto, 1998), and J. Michael Stitt, *Beowulf and the Bear's Son: Epic, Saga, and Fairytale in Northern Germanic Tradition* (New York and London, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> John Niles, 'Skaldic Technique in *Brunanburh*', *Scandinavian Studies* 59 (1987), 356-366; Roberta Frank, 'Did Anglo-Saxon audiences have a skaldic tooth?', *Scandinavian Studies* 59 (1987), 338-355.

<sup>8</sup> For assessments of the problem and reviews of recent scholarship, see Richard Dance, 'North Sea Currents: Old English-Old Norse Relations, Literary and Linguistic', *Literature Compass* 1 (2004), 1-10, Robert E. Bjork, 'Scandinavian Relations', in P. Pulsiano and E. Treharne, eds., *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 388-99, and Heather O'Donoghue, *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2004), pp.136-148.

Many of the problems which confront the study of connections between Old Norse and Old English literature are only magnified in dealing with the post-Conquest period, when opportunities for contact between England and Scandinavia were fewer, and the literature of both cultures developed in divergent ways under a variety of new influences. However, some of the methodological issues identified by Frank are less problematic in the later period: particularly, the greater amount of contextual information which is generally available for post-Conquest texts with regard to date, authorship and provenance helps to clarify the range of cultural influences which may be at play within a particular text. Any assessment of the extent of Scandinavian influence in *Beowulf*, for instance, varies considerably depending on the century to which the poem is assigned; post-Conquest literature can at least usually be dated more precisely than this. More importantly, the post-Conquest period saw an explosion in historical writing and interest in narratives about English history.<sup>9</sup> This phenomenon included attempts to understand the nature of England's Viking Age past, and as a result many literary traditions of Anglo-Scandinavian origin appear in writing for the first time, adapted to suit the needs and interests of new audiences. It is the argument of this thesis that an analysis of these narrative traditions can provide insight into the nature of literary contact between England and Scandinavia during and after the Viking Age, as well as helping to explain later interpretations of this period in English history.

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<sup>9</sup> See Richard Southern, 'Aspects of the European tradition of historical writing: 4, the sense of the past', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 23 (1973), 243-263, James Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past' in *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), pp.209-228, Andrew Galloway, 'Writing History in England', in David Wallace, ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 1999), pp.255-283, and Judith Weiss, 'Insular Beginnings: Anglo-Norman Romance', in Corinne Saunders, ed., *A Companion to Romance: From Classical to Contemporary* (Oxford, 2004), pp.26-44.

## Old Norse literature and the post-Conquest period

Previous attempts to address the question of the impact of the Scandinavian settlement on English literature from the eleventh century onwards have adopted a variety of approaches. One common avenue of inquiry is to search for analogues between narratives in Middle English romance and Norse mythology, working from the assumption that Scandinavian settlers in England brought with them mythological narratives closely related to those preserved in later Norse texts. Although this is not an unreasonable hypothesis, it is one for which the evidence is patchy and inconclusive, and attempts to prove it have met with varying success.<sup>10</sup> This thesis is not primarily concerned with the presence of Scandinavian mythological narratives in England, and only a brief summary of the debate will therefore be attempted here.

There is no question that some settlers from Scandinavia brought with them traditions which appear to correspond to those found in later collections of Norse myth and heroic legend: the depiction of recognisable scenes from these legends on sculpture from northern England is particularly striking evidence of this.<sup>11</sup> John McKinnell has argued that the nature of these sculptures suggests that the stories depicted on them must have existed in some kind of literary form:

The sculptures clearly imply that some myths and heroic tales were sufficiently familiar in northern England in the Viking Age to be recognized from a few symbolic motifs, and this familiarity with whole stories cannot have been supplied by the graphic images themselves. It seems overwhelmingly probable that the sculptors

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<sup>10</sup> On the question of the knowledge of Norse mythology in England, see especially John Lindow, 'Norse Mythology and Northumbria: Methodological Notes', *Scandinavian Studies* 59 (1987), 308-324, John McKinnell, 'Norse Mythology and Northumbria: A Response', *Scandinavian Studies* 59 (1987), 325-337, and Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* (Cambridge, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> See Richard Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England* (London, 1980); David M. Wilson and Ole Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art* (London, 1980), pp.103-8; Sue Margeson, 'The Völsung legend in medieval art', in Flemming G. Andersen et al., eds., *Medieval Iconography and Narrative: A Symposium* (Odense, 1980), pp.183-211; John McKinnell, 'Eddic poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian northern England', in James Graham-Campbell, Michael Hall, Judith Jesch and David N. Parsons, eds., *Vikings and the Danelaw* (Oxford, 2001), pp.327-344 (Appendix 1, List of mythological and legendary subjects in Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture).

and those who commissioned and saw their work knew these stories chiefly in the form of poetry, the medium which could most easily preserve the memory and recitation of them.<sup>12</sup>

As McKinnell suggests, the sculptural evidence may indicate that oral poetry about Scandinavian myths and heroic legends existed in England; however, the distribution of the sculptures suggests this was a highly localized phenomenon, belonging to the early period of Scandinavian settlement in England. It is impossible to know whether the narratives depicted on these sculptures ever circulated outside a small, culturally isolated group of Scandinavian settlers, or to judge what kind of literary form they may have had; McKinnell's arguments about Eddic poetry are persuasive, but necessarily hypothetical. Similar difficulties arise when considering the evidence for other kinds of Norse poetry which may have been composed in England, such as many of the skaldic verses identified by Judith Jesch as likely to have been composed or performed in England.<sup>13</sup> Some of the mythological and heroic legends which are preserved in their most developed form in later Norse literature were evidently known in some form in Viking Age England, but it is difficult to determine whether such narratives could have had a lasting influence on the literary culture of any part of England after the Viking Age.

Nonetheless, various attempts have been made to identify evidence for the continuing circulation of such narratives throughout the medieval period and afterwards. McKinnell pointed out that the narrative of Thor dressing as Freyja, preserved in the Eddic poem *Þrymskviða*, has a potential analogue in East Midlands

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<sup>12</sup> McKinnell, 'Eddic poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian northern England', p.330. On this basis McKinnell argues "there is a strong case for supposing some Anglo-Norse origins for both *Völundarkviða* and *Þrymskviða*" (*ibid.*, p.338); see also McKinnell, 'The Context of *Völundarkviða*', *Saga-book of the Viking Society* XXIII (1990-3), 1-27.

<sup>13</sup> Judith Jesch, 'Skaldic verse in Scandinavian England', in Graham-Campbell et al., *Vikings and the Danelaw*, pp.313-325 (320); see also Matthew Townend, 'Whatever Happened to York Viking Poetry? Memory, Tradition and the Transmission of Skaldic Verse', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* XXVII (2003), 48-90.

folk plays of the ‘Wooing Ceremony’ type.<sup>14</sup> Paul Beekman Taylor compared the journeys of Gawain in three romances of northern English origin, including *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, to narratives about Thor’s journeys to the land of the giants.<sup>15</sup> Unlike some of the other narratives about Thor in Norse sources which have been securely identified in English contexts – such as the story of his fishing for the Miðgarð serpent, illustrated on the Gosforth cross – there is no evidence that any of these narratives about Thor and the giants were ever known in England; while the parallels suggested by Taylor are interesting, the case for a direct connection is inconclusive. This is also the case with suggestions of a link between the figure of the Old Man in the *Pardoner’s Tale* and Odin,<sup>16</sup> or Taylor’s argument that Chaucer’s characterization of the Wife of Bath reflects Norse myths about the god Njörðr and the giantess Skaði;<sup>17</sup> like Skaði, he observes, the Wife is attracted to her husband by his ‘clene and faire’ feet, and he therefore argues that this relationship between fair skin, feet, and fertility is suggestive of “a folk-tale reflection of Nordic myth in fourteenth-century England”.<sup>18</sup> Again, there is no evidence for the knowledge of this myth in England, although the surviving evidence is so uneven that this need not cast doubt on his theory. Along similar lines, Rory McTurk has drawn attention to parallels between Chaucer’s *House of Fame* and the story of Odin’s theft of the mead of poetry in *Skáldskaparmál*, suggesting that both descend independently from a

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<sup>14</sup> John McKinnell, ‘Eddic poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian northern England’, pp.327-344. These plays are not recorded before the nineteenth century.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, *Sharing Story: Medieval Norse-English Literary Relationships* (New York, 1998), and ‘Icelandic Analogues to the Northern English Gawain Cycle’, *Journal of Popular Culture*, 4 (1970), 93-106.

<sup>16</sup> For which see R. A. Barakat, ‘Odin: Old Man of the Pardoner’s Tale’, *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 28 (1964), 210-15.

<sup>17</sup> P. B. Taylor, ‘Alice in Iceland: An Image of The Wife of Bath in Nordic Myth’, *Journal of Popular Culture*, 24:2 (1990), 75-80.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, ‘Alice in Iceland’, 79.

hypothetical oral source which Chaucer may have encountered in Ireland.<sup>19</sup> Building on Taylor's theory about the link between the Wife of Bath and a version of the Skaði myth, McTurk suggested that Chaucer's presentation of the Wife is influenced by an Irish version of the story; he suggests, however, that it is more likely that such a myth owed its existence to "England's relatively long-established Germanic inheritance" rather than any direct influence from Norse tradition.<sup>20</sup>

The question of whether such parallels can be attributed to common Germanic legend or direct influence from Scandinavia is an ever-present difficulty in attempting to assess the relationship between English and Norse literature; the problem is only ameliorated when, as in the case of the sculptural evidence, an Anglo-Scandinavian milieu seems to be the only possible context within which the evidence can be interpreted. The tendency to lean on etymological associations of certain Norse-derived words in the Middle English texts is also problematic: the nature of the influence of the Old Norse language on English makes it dangerous to attach much interpretative significance to the presence of a word of Old Norse origin in any particular text, as Taylor does in his arguments about 'scathe'.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the extent of Norse linguistic influence on English ought to be a reminder that Scandinavian literary influence could in theory be just as wide-ranging: narratives can travel as far as words.

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<sup>19</sup> Rory McTurk, *Chaucer and the Norse and Celtic Worlds* (Aldershot, 2005), pp.24-66.

<sup>20</sup> McTurk, *Chaucer and the Norse and Celtic Worlds*, pp.106-147 (128).

<sup>21</sup> He suggests that the use of the ME word *scathe*, 'harm, damage', in relation to the Wife of Bath is intended to recall the name of the giantess Skaði ('Alice in Iceland', 79-80); for a discussion of his argument, see McTurk, *Chaucer and the Norse and Celtic Worlds*, pp.126-7. For a recent study of the presence of Norse-derived vocabulary in Early Middle English texts where no literary relationship seems likely, see Richard Dance, *Words Derived from Old Norse in Early Middle English: Studies in the Vocabulary of the South-West Midlands Texts* (Tempe, 2003).

### **‘Anglo-Scandinavian literature’: is there any such thing?**

This study approaches the question of the literary impact of Scandinavian settlement in England by considering a selection of small groups of related narratives which can be shown to have their roots in an Anglo-Scandinavian cultural milieu. Recent studies of the Danelaw in the ninth and tenth centuries have increasingly emphasised the importance of avoiding overly simplistic assumptions about the construction of ethnic and cultural identity in this period, and attempted to move away from the two opposing models which were formerly the focus of critical debate over the settlement: that the Danish settlers either retained a distinctive ethnic identity for some time after settling in England, or quickly assimilated into the native population.<sup>22</sup> It has come to seem more appropriate to talk of the development of an Anglo-Scandinavian society, a fusion of the two cultures which is reflected in the linguistic, artistic and archaeological evidence; as Katherine Holman puts it:

there does seem a good deal of evidence for the emergence of a new Anglo-Scandinavian society and culture in northern and eastern England. Just as the law of the Danelaw was neither Scandinavian or English, so the stone sculptures produced there in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the artefacts found in archaeological excavations and the personal names used by the settlers all testify to something that was different from what had gone before but also, crucially, from what was found back in Scandinavia... the ethnicity in question is not Scandinavian, it is Anglo-Scandinavian.<sup>23</sup>

As we have seen, John McKinnell’s arguments about the composition of certain Eddic poems would posit an Anglo-Scandinavian oral literature to accompany the emergence of this new culture in the Danelaw; unfortunately, the conditions for the preservation of such a literature were not favourable, partly because of its oral nature,

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<sup>22</sup> See for instance Hadley, ‘And they proceeded to plough and support themselves’, pp.82-93 and ‘Cockles amongst the Wheat’: The Scandinavian Settlement of England’, pp. 111-135, and also Simon Trafford, ‘Ethnicity, Migration Theory, and the Historiography of the Scandinavian Settlement of England’, in Hadley and Richards, eds., *Cultures in Contact*, pp.17-39.

<sup>23</sup> Katherine Holman, *The Northern Conquest: Vikings in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2007), pp.186-7.

and partly because centres of literary production had been disrupted by the impact of Viking activity on ecclesiastical institutions in the region.<sup>24</sup> Whether there was an Anglo-Scandinavian literature in the Danelaw, and what it might have looked like, must therefore remain open questions.

However, the situation is much clearer for the later period of Scandinavian settlement in England, during the reign of Cnut (1016-1035). In the first place, thanks to the corpus of skaldic verse which was composed and performed for Cnut, we have better evidence for literary production at his court than for that of any king in England since Alfred. In recent years the skaldic poems – the most significant of which are the three *Knútsdrápur* composed by Sigvatr Þórðarson,<sup>25</sup> Óttarr svarti<sup>26</sup> and Hallvarðr háreksblei,<sup>27</sup> Þórarinn loftunga's *Tøgdrápa*,<sup>28</sup> and the anonymous *Liðsmannaflokkr*<sup>29</sup> – have been productively analysed in ways which have considerably added to our understanding of the culture of the Anglo-Danish court, casting light especially on the public image cultivated by the king and the likely audience for such poetry among Danes resident in England.<sup>30</sup> In Matthew Townend's words:

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<sup>24</sup> See Lesley Abrams, 'The Conversion of the Danelaw' in Graham-Campbell et al., *Vikings and the Danelaw*, pp.31-44.

<sup>25</sup> For text see *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1912-1915), IB, pp.232-4. A new edition of the poetry from the kings' sagas covering the reign of Cnut is in preparation for the Skaldic Project; see <http://abdn.ac.uk/skaldic/db.php?table=volumes&id=1> (accessed September 2012).

<sup>26</sup> *Skjaldedigtning*, IB, pp.272-5.

<sup>27</sup> *Skjaldedigtning*, IB, pp.293-4; for discussion see Roberta Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', in Alexander Rumble, ed., *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway* (London, 1994), pp.106-124 (119-121), and Judith Jesch, 'Knútr in poetry and history', in Michael Dallapiazza et al., eds., *International Scandinavian and Medieval Studies in Memory of Gerd Wolfgang Weber* (Trieste, 2000), pp.243-256 (245-248).

<sup>28</sup> *Skjaldedigtning*, IB, pp.298-9. Þórarinn also composed a *Höfuðlausn* in praise of Cnut, of which only the refrain survives; see *Skjaldedigtning*, p.298, and Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', p.116.

<sup>29</sup> *Skjaldedigtning*, IB, pp.391-3; R. G. Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace: A Study in Skaldic Narrative* (Toronto, 1991), pp.86-90.

<sup>30</sup> See especially Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*; Jesch, 'Skaldic Verse in Scandinavian England', pp.313-325, Jesch, 'Knútr in poetry and history', and Matthew Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*: skaldic praise-poetry at the court of Cnut', *Anglo-Saxon England* 30 (2001), 145-179.

during the reign of Cnut the Danish king's court came to represent the focal point for skaldic composition and patronage in the Norse-speaking world... [S]uch an extant collection of skaldic praise-poetry is remarkable in terms of its sheer quantity: Cnut can be ranked alongside Earl Hákon Sigurðarson, Óláfr Haraldsson and Haraldr harðráði as one of the most prominent of patrons for extant skaldic verse, and without question he is the most important non-Norwegian according to such terms.<sup>31</sup>

Townend has convincingly argued that this centre for skaldic composition is best located at Winchester, in light of the considerable evidence for an aristocratic Danish presence in the city,<sup>32</sup> and has also demonstrated that the king's patronage of Norse poetry continued throughout his reign, reaching its height in the late 1020s. The existence of the poems presupposes an audience capable of understanding and appreciating the complexities of skaldic verse, suggesting that Scandinavian culture and literary traditions continued to be prized at court. Yet here too it is most appropriate to speak of an Anglo-Scandinavian culture, rather than a purely Scandinavian one. Cnut's court appears to have been essentially bilingual, in that both Old English and Old Norse were spoken there:<sup>33</sup> the king's law codes, like those of his Anglo-Saxon predecessors, were issued in English,<sup>34</sup> and while the poems indicate a continuing use of the Norse language, it has long been recognised that they

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<sup>31</sup> Townend, 'Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*', 145-6.

<sup>32</sup> See Barbara Yorke, *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1995), pp.143-5; the evidence from Winchester includes the hogback-shaped gravestone from the Old Minster, with an inscription in Old English showing Norse linguistic influence, and a rune-stone which probably came originally from the New Minster cemetery (see Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle and R. I. Page, 'A Scandinavian Rune-Stone from Winchester', *The Antiquaries Journal* 55:2 (1975), 389-394, and Martin Biddle, 'Excavations at Winchester 1965: Fourth Interim Report', *The Antiquaries Journal* 46:2 (1966), 308-332), as well as metalwork and bone objects decorated in the Ringerike style (Signe Horn Fuglesang, *Some Aspects of the Ringerike Style: A phase of 11th century Scandinavian art* (Odense, 1980), pp.47-69).

<sup>33</sup> The question of whether any particular individuals at Cnut's court, or in Viking Age England generally, were bilingual is of course a different matter; for discussion of this issue see Townend, *Language and History in Viking Age England*, pp.181-211, and also Townend, 'Viking Age England as a Bilingual Society', in Hadley and Richards, eds., *Cultures in Contact*, pp.89-105; Bibire, 'North Sea Language Contacts in the Early Middle Ages', pp.97-107; and Magnús Fjalldal, *Anglo-Saxon England in Icelandic Medieval Texts* (Toronto, 2005), pp.12-21.

<sup>34</sup> See M. K. Lawson, 'Archbishop Wulfstan and the Homiletic Element in the Laws of Æthelred II and Cnut', in Rumble, ed., *The Reign of Cnut*, pp. 141-64, and Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1999), vol.i, pp. 345-66.

contain a number of features apparently designed to render them more comprehensible to a mixed group of listeners, including a reduced use of inflexions, experimental metre, and the adoption of some English vocabulary.<sup>35</sup> As these two languages thrived side by side, so also did two literary traditions which, though on the face of it diametrically opposed to each other, apparently co-existed without tension: Roberta Frank has shown how the poets are able to exploit imagery drawn from both pagan mythology and Christian piety to praise the king, blending the two groups of allusions to form an innovative new poetic language.<sup>36</sup>

In discussing the literary culture of Cnut's court, we are dealing with a group of people who were not only capable of switching, apparently without difficulty, between two distinct literary traditions, but were also ready to appreciate the creative mixing of those traditions which is found in the poetry. We should think of multiple literary cultures not only co-existing in time and space, but also interacting in productive and meaningful ways, even exploiting what appears on the surface to be a clash of ideological beliefs and priorities. This is a well-recognised point with regard to the Norse poems, but the mutual cultural accommodation of this period has not generally been thought to have left much trace in texts produced in England. It will be argued in the following chapters that the post-Conquest literary records of Cnut's extensive patronage of the English church exhibit a similar kind of cultural blending; furthermore, as we shall see, many members of the Anglo-Danish aristocracy – the same group who must have formed part of the audience for the skaldic poems – not only witnessed Cnut's public gestures of royal piety, but also followed the king's

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<sup>35</sup> See Dietrich Hofmann, *Nordisch-englische Lehnbeziehungen der Wikingerzeit*, Bibliotheca Arnemagnæana 14 (Copenhagen, 1955), pp.75-9, 88-93; Russell Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History: Some Aspects of the Period 1009-1016', *Speculum* 62 (1987), 265-298; and Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', pp.108-9.

<sup>36</sup> Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', pp.110-3.

example in becoming benefactors of English churches themselves. In doing so they engaged with well-established cultural practices of memorialisation and record which allowed for the preservation of oral legends and family narratives which might otherwise have gone unrecorded.

### **Narrative and history at the Anglo-Danish court**

The narratives we will discuss survive, largely by chance, in post-Conquest texts ranging from Latin hagiography to vernacular romance, but what they have in common is an interest in the history of Scandinavian conquest and settlement in England. We know that narratives of conquest played an important role in the literary culture of the Anglo-Danish court: stories of Scandinavian invasion, both of the immediate and the distant past, were apparently welcomed as part of an official narrative which provided legitimacy to the rule of Cnut and his sons. Several of the skaldic poems commemorate the events of the 1014-1017 conquest of England, in which many of the audience for the poems would of course have participated: Óttarr's *Knútsdrápa*, for instance, celebrates the conquest in detail, describing Cnut's voyage to England and devoting a stanza to each of the battles in England in which the Danes triumphed,<sup>37</sup> while *Liðsmannaflokkr* deals with the siege of London and may, as Poole suggests, have been composed in the jubilation of its immediate aftermath.<sup>38</sup> Cnut and his followers presumably enjoyed hearing about these triumphs, but the commemoration of the conquest in this way also serves a political function – for

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<sup>37</sup> See Poole, 'Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History', 265-298.

<sup>38</sup> Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, pp.86-115.

example, in attributing the principal glory of the conquest to the king and downplaying the role of his over-mighty earls.<sup>39</sup>

At the same time, as Roberta Frank has argued, the evidence of the skaldic verse makes it clear that Cnut and his court were aware of the place of the eleventh-century Danish conquest within a longer history of Scandinavian activity in England, and made use of this history for political purposes.<sup>40</sup> The most famous instance is the refrain of the *Knútsdrápa* by Sigvatr Þórðarson, which seems to draw an implicit comparison between Cnut's conquest and the triumph of Ívarr over Ælla of Northumbria:

Ok Ellu bak,  
at, lét, hinn's sat,  
Ívarr, ara,  
Jórvík, skorit.<sup>41</sup>

This reference, Frank suggests, is not merely intended to praise Cnut by comparing him to another successful invader; it implies a historical precedent for Danish rule in England which confers legitimacy on Cnut's own reign:

If Cnut's skalds portrayed him as a descendant of Ívarr, whose capture of York and the kingdom of Northumbria in 867 was the most successful and lasting achievement of the Danes in England to date, it was with Cnut's blessing... A skald who says to Cnut, 'O warrior, you bound your fleet to Ælla's family inheritance', is reminding his listeners that Cnut is heir to Ívarr's conquests, that in possessing England the king has only reclaimed what was his by right.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For the different nuances of *Liðsmannaflokkur* and the *Knútsdrápur* in this respect, see Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, pp.99-107.

<sup>40</sup> Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', pp.110-113.

<sup>41</sup> *Skjaldedigting*, IB, p.232; 'And Ívarr, who dwelt in York, had Ælla's back cut by an eagle'. This translation follows Roberta Frank's interpretation of the lines in 'Viking atrocity and skaldic verse: the rite of the blood-eagle', *English Historical Review* 99 (1984), 332-343. The name Ælla appears in later skaldic verse as the defining element in a kenning for England or the English; for a collection of examples see Matthew Townend, 'Ella: An Old English Name in Old Norse Poetry', *Nomina* 20 (1997), 23-35.

<sup>42</sup> Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', pp.112-3; the reference to 'Ælla's family inheritance' comes from the *Knútsdrápa* by Hallvarðr háreksblei.

Elsewhere, Frank has argued that the poets' use of the term *skjoldungr* is intended to have a similar political resonance, associating Cnut with ninth-century Danish conquerors of England and implying his descent from the legendary Scyld, a common ancestor in the genealogies of both English and Danish royal houses.<sup>43</sup> These references are valuable evidence for the knowledge and use of these legends among the poems' putative audience at court, a point we shall return to later.

The place where the official narrative of Cnut's conquest reaches its fullest form is, of course, the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, commissioned by Cnut's widow Emma during the brief reign of Harthacnut, 1040-2.<sup>44</sup> As has long been recognised, the *Encomium* is a text aimed at a specific and immediate political situation, but it also looks back to the Danish conquest of twenty years before as a foundational narrative for the Anglo-Danish dynasty which – the *Encomium* strenuously argues – is continued by Harthacnut. For the moment the details of this narrative need not concern us; for the purposes of this study, the most remarkable fact to note is its appearance in a text such as the *Encomium*. It is difficult to see how a work of Latin historiography could have been made accessible to the audience at court for which its polemical purpose shows it must have been intended, yet we must assume that, for it to be at all effective as polemic, at least some members of that audience understood its contents and something of its method. That method involves a sophisticated approach to the uses of narrative and history, and this implies a degree of sophistication on behalf of the audience who were intended to receive it. Elizabeth Tyler, discussing

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<sup>43</sup> Frank, 'Skaldic Verse and the Date of *Beowulf*', pp.126-9; see also 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', pp.111-2.

<sup>44</sup> The *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, edited by Alistair Campbell, reprinted with an introduction by Simon Keynes (Cambridge, 1998); on the context of the *Encomium*, see Eric John, 'The *Encomium Emmae Reginae*: A Riddle and a Solution', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 63 (1980), 58-94, Andy Orchard, 'Literary Background to the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 11 (2001), 157-184, and Elizabeth M. Tyler, 'Talking about history in eleventh-century England: the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* and the court of Harthacnut', *Early Medieval Europe* 13 (2005), 359-383.

the *Encomium* in the context of contemporary Latin historiography, has recently argued for the importance of paying attention to the text's self-conscious fictionality:

While many of his fictions have long been recognised as such by scholars, I do not think we have recognized how *openly* and *deliberately* fictional the *Encomium* is. And yet, the members of Harthacnut's court more than any other audience would have recognized the flagrant nature of many of these fictions... [T]hat audience would have asked what that fiction was doing, what meaning it created.<sup>45</sup>

These 'family fictions', as Tyler calls them, concern the dynastic relationships of Emma, her husbands and her sons: the picture which emerges from the *Encomium* is of an Anglo-Danish dynasty, its legitimacy guaranteed by Emma's marriage to Cnut, and including both Harthacnut and his half-brother Edward as legitimate members despite their different parentage. As Tyler observes, an informed audience – including Emma, Harthacnut and Edward themselves, and others who had been directly involved in the events described in the *Encomium* – would have been fully aware of the distortions of fact the encomiast uses in order to produce this picture: his statement that Cnut wooed Emma after searching through many kingdoms for a suitable bride; his evasion about her previous marriage to Æthelred; his implication that Cnut was the father of Emma's older sons, including Edward and Alfred.<sup>46</sup> Tyler is interested in the *Encomium*'s place in a developing eleventh-century understanding of fictionality, indebted to classical rhetoric and particularly to Virgil, and she persuasively argues that the text is best interpreted within that context; what is of particular significance here, however, is her emphasis on the complicity of the audience at Harthacnut's court in the fictions put forward by the *Encomium*. As she

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<sup>45</sup> Elizabeth M. Tyler, 'Fictions of Family: The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* and Virgil's *Aeneid*,' *Viator* 36 (2005), 149-179 (154).

<sup>46</sup> Tyler, 'Fictions of Family', 152-3; see also John's comments in 'The *Encomium Emmae Reginae*', 63-5, which make a similar point.

argues, the audience's complicity in accepting this fabrication as a fiction or myth rather than a lie is essential for understanding how the text works:

audience and, in particular, a complicity between author and audience, play an integral role in fiction: an account is not fiction after all but a lie if the author knows it is not true but the audience does not and when the author is trying to persuade his audience to believe rather than to make-believe. The *Encomiast* shows a keen interest in issues of complicity, although it suits his pragmatic ends to let fictions and lies (a notion to which he explicitly refers) remain indistinct categories.<sup>47</sup>

The dynastic narrative which the *Encomium* proposes would have no political efficacy unless the audience to which it is addressed were prepared to accept an obviously fictional myth of origins for Danish rule in England. This suggests that the audience at Harthacnut's court – Danes and English alike – were attuned to the use of such semi-historical narratives for political purposes, and indeed that they took an active role in the telling of them: the encomiast's source for his account of the conquest of 1014-1017 must have been informants at the Anglo-Danish court, and this account contains stories no less obviously fictional than the 'family fictions' discussed by Tyler. The encomiast's story about the Danes' magical raven banner, for instance, draws on a motif which is common to several strands of Scandinavian literary tradition, and which may have reached Cnut's court via Danelaw legends about the sons of Ragnar.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps some among the encomiast's informants and audience really believed the Danes had a supernatural banner which predicted their victory at the battle of Assandun, but it seems more likely that such a story was accepted as a self-evident myth, which associated Cnut's conquest with earlier Danish invasions of England, just as Sigvatr's *Knútsdrápa* implicitly compares Cnut with Ívarr. In this context, the encomiast's observation that his readers may find the story of the raven

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<sup>47</sup> Tyler, 'Fictions of Family', 151-2.

<sup>48</sup> The motif of the raven banner is discussed in greater detail in chapter 2.

banner difficult to believe seems like a knowing aside rather than any real anxiety about credibility;<sup>49</sup> it would seem that the audience at Harthacnut's court understood, in Tyler's words, "that fiction, too, can be useful *and* truthful".<sup>50</sup>

In light of what this suggests about the uses of narrative, legend and myth in the process of cultural accommodation which followed the Danish conquest, this study will examine what the evidence of later texts can tell us about the nature of such narratives, and their impact on literature in England during and after the eleventh century. Appropriately, the narratives themselves frequently attempt to understand and interpret the character of Scandinavian settlement in England, providing various legendary histories which work to explain why Scandinavians came to settle in the first place and to find a role for the settlement within dominant narratives of local and national history. Because these narratives are not easily classified either as history or fiction, discussion of them has often been constrained by a concentration on how useful they are as historical evidence; as the answer is generally that they bear little relation to verifiable fact, they have frequently been dismissed as worthless. However, to view them only in this way is to ignore the potential meaning of such narratives both as cultural artefacts of the period in which they emerged and as contributions to the development of later historiography.

To this end, the first chapter considers some stories about Cnut which appear in eleventh- and twelfth-century sources; it will be argued that the evidence suggests fictional narratives had a part to play in the process by which the English church helped to confer legitimacy on the Danish conquest through a mutually beneficial relationship of royal patronage. We will then consider the evidence for the development of an oral legend about the family origins of the Danish Siward, earl of

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<sup>49</sup> *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, II.9, pp.24-5.

<sup>50</sup> Tyler, 'Fictions of Family', 175.

Northumbria, and examine the preservation of this material in the context of hagiographical legend associated with his son Waltheof. The final two chapters address the relevance of Anglo-Scandinavian contexts for narratives in vernacular romance, suggesting that stories about the eleventh-century Danish conquest influenced part of the romance traditions centred on Guy of Warwick and Havelok the Dane.

## Chapter 1

### Patron and Pilgrim: Post-Conquest Narratives of Cnut's Reign

The contemporary written sources for the reign of Cnut are sparse, in contrast to those for the turbulent period which preceded his accession. Between 1017 and 1035 the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entries comprise only brief accounts of the king's journeys to Denmark and Rome, his dealings with Norway and Scotland and one-sentence records of the death or exile of notable men.<sup>51</sup> Stenton observed some time ago that Cnut's reign was "so successful that contemporaries found little to say about it",<sup>52</sup> but in recent years much has been done to fill out the history of Danish rule in the eleventh century, drawing particular attention to the ways in which the documentary sources can be supplemented with other evidence for the period.<sup>53</sup> With good reason, these historically-focused studies have tended to overlook one narrative source of information for Cnut's reign: the numerous post-Conquest stories about the king's interactions with his English subjects which are preserved in the context of royal patronage of religious houses and the cults of particular saints. These narratives, the earliest of which date from the late eleventh century, are discussed only briefly by M. K. Lawson and Timothy Bolton in their detailed studies of Cnut's relations with the English church:<sup>54</sup> their discussions focus primarily on the evidence of charters, and they treat the later stories about Cnut's visits to English churches as, at best,

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<sup>51</sup> For a comparison of the *Chronicle* entries for Cnut's reign, see *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. Michael Swanton (London, 1996), pp.154-9. Subsequent references to the *Chronicle* are to *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, general editors David Dumville and Simon Keynes (Cambridge, 1983-). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

<sup>52</sup> F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd edition (Oxford, 1971), p.399.

<sup>53</sup> See especially the essays in Rumble, *The Reign of Cnut*, M. K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (London, 1993), republished as *Cnut: England's Viking King, 1016-1035* (Stroud, 2011; hereafter *Cnut*), and Timothy Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great: Conquest and the Consolidation of Power in Northern Europe in the Early Eleventh Century* (Leiden, 2009).

<sup>54</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, pp.111-147; Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, pp.77-106.

confirmation of the other evidence. The late date of the stories, the clear influence of hagiographical convention on their form and details, and their generally hyperbolic nature do not encourage confidence in their factual accuracy. It is likely that some of these stories are based on real events of the reign of Cnut, but this chapter will not primarily be concerned with the accuracy or plausibility of the narratives; it might almost be said that a distinguishing characteristic of these stories is that they are particularly implausible, or rather, that they have the appearance of being highly embellished. The overall picture of Cnut's patronage of the English church is confirmed by other sources and seems to be substantially accurate, but it is assumed, for the purposes of this study, that the stories are to a large extent literary fictions, narratives intended to make a particular point as much as to record a particular event (although, as will be seen, they may have multiple functions). This chapter will attempt to show that if read in this way, they may provide valuable evidence for the literary culture of Cnut's Anglo-Scandinavian court.

### **Cnut as Patron and the *Liber Eliensis***

In the last twenty years, the role of church patronage as a political strategy in Cnut's reign has been extensively studied.<sup>55</sup> Jan Gerchow characterised Cnut's behaviour as follows:

[Cnut] had to establish a relationship with the Anglo-Saxon church; he had to repent, and make good the destruction he and his father had caused, and he totally relied on the Anglo-Saxon church for his legitimacy as a Christian king. Cnut's foundations, translations and

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<sup>55</sup> See Jan Gerchow, 'Prayers for King Cnut: the Liturgical Commemoration of a Conqueror', in Carola Hicks, ed., *England in the Eleventh Century* (Stamford, 1992), pp.219-238; T. A. Heslop, 'The production of *de luxe* manuscripts and the patronage of King Cnut and Queen Emma', *Anglo-Saxon England* 19 (1990), 151-95; Lawson, *Cnut*, pp.111-147; Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, pp.77-106; David Rollason, 'The cults of murdered royal saints in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 11 (1983), 1-22 (15-18), and on Cnut's patronage of particular cults, Susan J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A study of West Saxon and East Anglian cults* (Cambridge, 1988), especially pp.150-4, 194-6, and 224-6.

his donations to the Anglo-Saxon church document his efforts to gain the support and backing of the English ecclesiastical establishment. His *memoria* is the most prominent of all Anglo-Saxon kings and reflects the extraordinary strength of these efforts.<sup>56</sup>

As he suggests, Cnut's relationship with the English church grew out of the particularly fraught circumstances of conquest and the long history of Viking activity in England: his acts of repentance and reparation atoned not only for injuries inflicted during the invasion led by Cnut and his father, but also for Danish attacks dating back to the ninth century.<sup>57</sup> Lawson made a convincing case that Cnut's patronage of East Anglian and Fenland religious houses was a reaction to possible resistance from that quarter early in his reign,<sup>58</sup> and Timothy Bolton extended this argument with a detailed examination of Cnut's patronage in different areas of England, concluding that "a study of Cnut's interaction with the ecclesiastical aristocracy in England reveals a subtle politician, who gradually extended his authority over the Church, while using it for his own ends".<sup>59</sup>

Gifts to religious houses, confirmation of the privileges granted by previous kings, translations of saints' relics and lavish gifts to their shrines – all these are familiar strategies of ecclesiastical policy which had been used by kings in Anglo-Saxon England for centuries, and Cnut, facing a charged political situation in the aftermath of a violent conquest, seems to have implemented these strategies in an

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<sup>56</sup> Gerchow, 'Prayers for King Cnut', 236.

<sup>57</sup> For Cnut's patronage of the cult of St Edmund of East Anglia, see Lawson, *Cnut*, pp.132-6, and Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.224-6. The cult of St Edmund had been similarly adopted by the ninth-century Danish rulers of East Anglia; see Lesley Abrams, 'The Conversion of the Danelaw', pp.31-44.

<sup>58</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, pp.132-141. East Anglia had shown considerable military resistance to Viking attack from the 990s onwards: the best-recorded examples are the battles at Maldon in 991, a battle against Svein in 1004 where numerous East Anglian leaders were killed, Ringmere in 1011, and Assandun in 1016 (Lawson, *Cnut*, p.132).

<sup>59</sup> Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, p.106.

especially targeted way.<sup>60</sup> However, no other English king is credited with such strikingly theatrical gestures of public piety as are associated with Cnut. The earliest evidence appears in the *Encomium Emmae*, whose author was an eyewitness to the king's behaviour during a visit to St Omer on the way to Rome:

Ingressus monasteria et susceptus cum magna honorificencia humiliter incedebat, et mira cum reuerentia in terram defixus lumina et ubertim fundens lacrimarum ut ita dicam flumina tota intentione sanctorum expetiit suffragia. At ubi ad hoc peruentum est, ut oblationibus regiis sacra uellet cumulare altaria, o quotiens primum pauimento lacrimosa infixit oscula, quotiens illud pectus uenerabile propria puniebant uerbera, qualia dabat suspiria, quotiens precabatur ut sibi non indignaretur superna clementia! Tandem a suis ei innuenti sua porrigebatur oblatio, non mediocris, nec quae aliquo clauderetur in marsupio, sed ingens allata est palleati extento in gremio, quam ipse rex suis manibus altari imposuit, largitor hilaris monitu apostolico. "Altari" autem cur dico, cum uidisse me meminerim, eum omnes angulos monasteriorum circuisse, nullumque altare licet exiguum preterisse, cui non munera daret et dulcia oscula infigeret? Deinde adsunt pauperes, munerantur etiam ipsi protinus singulatim omnes. Haec et alia his mirificentiora a domno Cnutone gesta uidi ego, uester uernula, Sancte Audomare, Sancte Bertine, cum fierent uestris in caenobiis; pro quibus bonis tantum regem impetrate uiuere in caelestibus habitaculis, ut uestri famuli canonici et monachi sunt orantes orationibus cotidianis.

[When he had entered the monasteries, and had been received with great honour, he advanced humbly, and with complete concentration prayed for the intercession of the saints in a manner wonderfully reverent, fixing his eyes upon the ground, and freely pouring forth, so to speak, rivers of tears. But when the time came when he desired to heap the holy altars with royal offerings, how often did he first with tears press kisses on the pavement, how often did self-inflicted blows punish that revered breast, what sighs he gave, how often did he pray that the heavenly mercy might not be displeased with him! At length, when he gave the sign, his offering was presented to him by his followers, not a mean one, nor such as might be shut in any bag, but a man brought it, huge as it was, in the ample fold of his cloak, and this the king himself placed on the altar with his own hand, a cheerful giver according to the apostolic exhortation. But why do I say on the altar, when I recall that I saw him going round every corner of the monasteries, and passing no altar, small though it might be, without giving gifts and pressing sweet kisses upon it? Then poor men came and were all forthwith given gifts

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<sup>60</sup> In most cases, Cnut's patronage was a continuation of his predecessors' policies, especially those of Edgar and Æthelred; for a full exposition of this argument, see Ridyard, *Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, and also Lawson, *Cnut*, pp.114-7. Some historians have attributed this to the influence of Archbishop Wulfstan (see for instance Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford, 1957), pp.63-4), others to Queen Emma, who had frequently participated in Æthelred's acts of patronage and continued to do so during her marriage to Cnut (for this argument see Ridyard, *Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.194-5).

one by one. These things and others more wonderful were seen done by the lord Knútr by me, who am your servant, St. Omer and St. Bertin, when they came to pass in your monasteries! And for these benefits, cause so great a king to live in the heavenly dwellings, as your inmates, both canons and monks, pray in their daily supplications.]<sup>61</sup>

As Lawson has shown, there are contemporary continental parallels for this public display of royal piety: such gestures were intended to encourage a closer identification between the king and Christ, in such a way that “[the king’s] acts of humility were really statements about the elevated nature of his power”.<sup>62</sup> The *Encomium* account draws attention to another key element of this kind of interaction between king and church: the magnificent gifts presented by the king win for him the prayers of the canons and monks – as well as the good opinion of the encomiast, recalled and recorded some fifteen years later.<sup>63</sup> Twelfth-century chronicles from England have a number of such stories about Cnut’s behaviour when visiting religious sites. At the simplest level, there is this story from Durham:

The pious and religious king of the English Cnut so venerated and honoured the church of that holy bishop and confessor worthy of God, Cuthbert, that he walked barefoot to the saint’s most sacred body from the place called Garmondsway (that is a distance of five miles). Moreover, he gave freely and in perpetual possession to the saint and those who served him the vill of Staindrop with all its appurtenances.<sup>64</sup>

There is this claim by Goscelin in his *Translatio* of St Eadgyth of Wilton:

[T]his foreign king Canute, captivated by what he had learned of the piety of holy Edith and her frequent miracles, was as devoted to her

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<sup>61</sup> *Encomium Emmae*, ed. and trans. Campbell, II:21, pp.36-37.

<sup>62</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, pp.124-8 (126); for similar arguments and further continental parallels, see also Gerchow, ‘Prayers for King Cnut’, 222-9, and Barbara C. Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography and the Art of the Monastic Revival* (Cambridge, 1990), pp.133-46.

<sup>63</sup> For the date of Cnut’s visit to St Omer, see John, ‘The *Encomium Emmae Reginae*’, 76-7; it probably took place in 1027, unless (as John thinks possible) Cnut undertook a second pilgrimage to Rome in 1031.

<sup>64</sup> ‘Huius sancti presulis et Deo digni confessoris Cuthberti ecclesiam etiam pius et religiosus rex Anglorum Cnut multo uenerabatur honore, in tantum ut ad ipsius sacratissimum corpus nudis pedibus a loco qui uia Garmundi dicitur (id est per quinque miliaria) incedens ueniret, et ei suisque seruatoribus mansionem Standrope cum omnibus suis appendiciis libere in perpetuum possidendam donaret’, Symeon of Durham, *Libellus de Exordio atque Procursu istius hoc est Dunhelmensis Ecclesie*, ed. and trans. David Rollason (Oxford, 2000), pp.167-9.

in affection and reverence as if he had been her brother Æthelred or her nephew Edmund.<sup>65</sup> Whenever he came to Wilton and visited the nuns under her protection, he did not presume to ride into the sacred courtyard, but in his reverence was accustomed to get down from his horse in front of the door and go on foot into the Lord's shrine, together with his men, so that a layman might teach the distinction between holy and secular, between the sacred precincts of the church and stables for horses, and give an example to the priests themselves. Such reverence for the virgin intercessor and the holy place possessed him that he appeared in the holy places neither avariciously nor without generosity, but with a propitiatory sacrifice.<sup>66</sup>

There are two points about these episodes to which we shall return: both lay heavy emphasis on the act of journeying to the holy place, such that the journey is deliberately made difficult in order to turn it into a literal and spiritual pilgrimage; and both are linked to a particular gift or presentation to the house, including in the Durham story a specific list of estates.<sup>67</sup>

In the light of the contemporary evidence provided by the encomiast, historians have been prepared to accept these two accounts of Cnut's behaviour as likely to be authentic.<sup>68</sup> More scepticism has attached to two slightly later narratives in the *Liber Eliensis*, which both describe Cnut visiting Ely to confirm its royal privileges and possessions. These narratives appear consecutively in Book II, ch.85, and the first and most famous is as follows:

Qua difficultate ad suam festivitatem rex Canutus in Ely pervenit et,  
de longe audiens monachos, cantilenam composuit.

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<sup>65</sup> Compare the statement by William of Malmesbury that Cnut was accustomed to refer to Edmund Ironside as his brother (*Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, 1998), ii.184, vol.i, pp.330-1), and his promotion of the cult of Edward the Martyr (on which see Ridyard, *Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon-England*, pp.157-169); it was evidently Cnut's policy to present himself as a member of the West Saxon royal family (Lawson, *Cnut*, pp.129-130).

<sup>66</sup> Goscelin's life and translation of Eadgyth are edited by André Wilmart, 'La Légende de Ste Édith en prose et vers par le moine Goscelin', *Analecta Bollandiana* 56 (1938), 5-101, 265-307, and translated by Stephanie Hollis in *Writing the Wilton Women: Goscelin's Legend of Edith and Liber confortatorius*, ed. Hollis, with W. R. Barnes, Rebecca Hayward, Kathleen Loncar, and Michael Wright (Turnhout, 2004) pp.23-93 (77-8).

<sup>67</sup> For Durham's possession of these estates, see *Libellus de Exordio*, p.168, n.38.

<sup>68</sup> See for instance Julia Barrow, 'Demonstrative behaviour and political communication in later Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007), 127-150, and also Lawson, *Cnut*, p.125.

Quodam igitur tempore cum idem rex Canutus ad Ely navigio tenderet, comitante illum regina sua Emma et optimatibus regni, volens illic iuxta morem purificationem sancte Marie sollempniter agere, quando abbates Ely suo ordine incipientes ministerium in regis curia habere solent, et dum terre approximarent, rex in medio virorum erigens se, nautis innuit ad portum pusillum ocius tendere et tardius navem ineundo protrahere iubet; ipse oculos in altum contra ecclesiam, que haut prope eminent, in ipso rupis vertice sitam, vocem undique dulcedinis resonare sensit et erectis auribus quo magis accedit amplius melodiam haurire cepit: percepit namque hoc esse monachos in cenobio psallentes et clare divinas horas modulantes: ceteros qui aderant in navibus per circuitum ad se venire et secum iubilando canere exortabatur; ipsemet ore proprio iocunditatem cordis exprimens, cantilenam his verbis Anglice composuit dicens, cuius exordium sic continetur:

‘Merie sungen ðe muneches binnen Ely  
 ða Cnut ching reu ðer by.  
 Roweþ cnites noer the lant  
 and here we þes muneches sæng.’

Quod latine sonat: ‘Dulce cantaverunt monachi in Ely, dum Canutus rex navigaret prope ibi. Nunc milites navigate propius ad terram et simul audiamus monachorum armoniam’, et cetera que sequuntur, que usque hodie in choris publice cantantur et in proverbiiis memorantur. Hoc rex agitans, non quievit cum venerabili collegio pie ac dulciter concinere, donec perveniret ad terram. Et quando cum processione, ut mos est principem aut celsiorem personam, a fratribus digne susceptus in ecclesia duceretur, mox bona a predecessoribus suis Anglorum regibus ecclesie collata suo privilegio et auctoritate ad perpetuam munivit firmitatem et desuper altare maius, ubi corpus sacre virginis ac sponse Christi Æðeldreðe pausat in sepulcro, in faciem ecclesie coram universis iura loci perpetuo libera esse sancivit.<sup>69</sup>

[With what difficulty King Cnut arrived at Ely for its festival and, hearing the monks from afar, composed a song.

So then, on one occasion, this same King Cnut was making his way to Ely by boat, accompanied by Emma, his queen, and the nobles of the kingdom, desiring to celebrate solemnly there, in accordance with custom, the Purification of St Mary, starting from which date the abbots of Ely are accustomed to hold, in their turn, their position of service in the royal court. When they were approaching the land, the king rose up in the middle of his men and directed the boatmen to make for the little port at full speed, and then ordered them to pull the boat forward more slowly as it came in. He <raised> his eyes towards the church which stood out at a distance, situated as it was at the top of a rocky eminence; he heard the sound of sweet music echoing on all

<sup>69</sup> *Liber Eliensis*, ed. E. O. Blake (London, 1962), pp.153-4.

sides, and, with ears alert, began to drink in the melody more fully the closer he approached. For he realised that it was the monks singing psalms in the monastery and chanting clearly the Divine Hours. He urged the others who were present in the boats to come round about him and sing, joining him in jubilation. Expressing with his own mouth his joyfulness of heart, he composed aloud a song in English the beginning of which runs as follows:

Merie sungen ðe muneches binnen Ely  
ðā Cnut ching reu ðer by.  
Roweþ cnites noer the lant  
and here we þes muneches sæng.

... This and the remaining parts that follow are up to this day sung publicly by choirs and remembered in proverbs.

The king, while tossing this around {in his mind}, did not rest from singing piously and decorously in concert with the venerable confraternity, until he reached land. And when, greeted fittingly by the brothers, he was led in procession into the church – as is customary treatment for a member of the royal house or a particularly exalted personage – he thereupon confirmed by his charter and authority, in perpetual stability, the possessions granted to the church by the kings of the English preceding him. And upon the high altar, where the body of Æthelthryth, the holy virgin and betrothed of Christ, rests in her tomb, facing the church before everyone, he solemnly decreed that the rights of the place were free in perpetuity.]<sup>70</sup>

In spirit this story is a more elaborate version of those recorded at Durham and Wilton, but its most interesting feature is of course the English verse attributed to the king. Perhaps because of its brevity, this verse has received little critical attention, but some analysis of the verse and its prose context may make it possible to understand how the narrative itself came about. On linguistic grounds, the verse in its extant form cannot be a product of the early eleventh century, but it may well be a twelfth-century modernisation of an earlier verse. In his assessment of the language of the lines, Skeat judged that they could not predate 1100, but concluded that nonetheless “it is quite likely that they represent an earlier tradition”,<sup>71</sup> and

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<sup>70</sup> Trans. by Janet Fairweather in *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp.181-3. The verse may be translated: ‘Merrily sang the monks in Ely, when Cnut the king rowed past there. Row, boys, near to the land, and let us hear these monks sing’.

<sup>71</sup> Skeat’s opinion is quoted in Charles William Stubbs, *Historical Memorials of Ely Cathedral* (London, 1897), pp.49-52 (50). Skeat also attempted a reconstruction of the form in which the verse might have existed in Cnut’s lifetime, which runs:

Myrige sungon tha munecas binnen Elige,

subsequent critics have generally accepted that the lines were part of an existing popular tradition which predates their prose context.<sup>72</sup> The *terminus ad quem* for the verse is the latest date of the compilation of Book II of the *Liber Eliensis*, which is some time between 1154 and 1174,<sup>73</sup> but it seems inherently unlikely that Cnut would be named in a song newly composed at that date, and so we may be justified in considering some possible earlier contexts for these lines. Is it feasible to draw any conclusions about the verse or the supposed poem from which it came, and the situation in which either or both might have been composed?

The first point to be made is that the prose context of the verse cannot be trusted to reflect accurately the circumstances of the verse's composition, or of its preservation, circulation and use. Some of the details of the prose narrative suggest that it is likely to be the fabrication of a later author, attempting to make sense of the story but erring in points of fact: Janet Fairweather is sceptical, for instance, of the statement that the monks' singing in the church could ever be heard from the waterside, as the prose claims.<sup>74</sup> The compiler's possible error in this detail should encourage us to question other parts of his story which are not explicitly confirmed by the verse. The lines must predate their prose context, and the narrative is partly a vehicle for recording them; the verse should therefore be used, as far as possible, as an interpretative lens through which to view the prose, and not the other way around.

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Tha Cnut cyning reow be strande;  
Rowath, cnihtas, nyr tham lande  
And hyre we thara muneca sang. (Stubbs, p.51).

<sup>72</sup> See most recently Michael Swanton, *English Poetry before Chaucer*, 2nd edition (Exeter, 2002), p.255, and Douglas Gray in *From the Norman Conquest to the Black Death: An Anthology of Writings in England* (Oxford, 2011), p.170.

<sup>73</sup> The dating of the *Liber Eliensis* is a difficult subject; the history of the materials which went to make up the compilation is extremely complex, and it is difficult to judge how extensively the compiler has preserved his earlier sources. On some possible dates for the various parts of the work, see Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, pp.xlvi-xlix.

<sup>74</sup> She suggests that if the story has any truth, it may be that the monks had in fact processed to the waterside to greet the king (*Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely*, p.182, n.385).

In this way, the relationship between the verse and its prose context provides a striking parallel with the situation in which most skaldic verse has been preserved and transmitted. Given how productive the study of the poetry produced for Cnut has been in illuminating the culture of his Anglo-Danish court, we may attempt to read the Ely song using some of the methods which have proved successful in that area.

The verse is presented as a spontaneous composition by the king – what in an Old Norse context might be called a *lausavísa* – which is prompted by the situation of the moment, and it certainly offers the illusion of immediacy which has sometimes been identified as a generic characteristic of skaldic verse.<sup>75</sup> The first two lines are in the past tense, but the third and fourth adopt the imperative, as if the speaker is at that moment urging the men to row. Although the prose context attributes the verse to the king, this is obviously implausible in itself, and rendered more unlikely by the fact that the second line refers to Cnut in the third person. A switch of speaker between the second and third lines is not impossible, but perhaps ‘we’ in the last line indicates that the verse might more appropriately be interpreted as spoken by one of the ‘cnites’ addressed, encouraging his comrades to speed their work. For this rhetorical device we might compare the opening of *Liðsmannaflokkur*, a series of verses supposedly spoken by the *liðsmen* or household troops of Cnut during the siege of London in 1016:

Gǫngum upp, áðr Engla  
ættlǫnd farin rǫndu  
morðs ok miklar ferðir  
malmregns stafar fregni;

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<sup>75</sup> See Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, p.109, with reference to *Liðsmannaflokkur*. Poole distinguishes between *lausavísur* – verses which are presented within a saga narrative as spontaneous compositions, spoken by a character in the saga in response to a particular situation – and what he calls ‘excerpted verses’, which are presented as extracts from longer poems quoted as evidence or to illustrate a point. In these terms Cnut’s song is a *lausavísa*, although the Ely author claims it was part of a longer poem; however, as Poole demonstrates, the distinction between the two kinds of verse is largely a fiction created by the prose contexts in which they are preserved (*Viking Poems on War and Peace*, pp.3-22).

verum hugrakkir Hlakkar,  
hristum spjót ok skjótum,  
leggr fyr órum eggjum  
Engla gnótt á flótta.<sup>76</sup>

This rhetorical device, which Poole calls ‘incitation’, creates a fictional sense of immediacy; although *Liðsmannaflokkur* may have been composed as little as a few months after the events it goes on to narrate, it was certainly not spoken in the heat of battle.<sup>77</sup> The speaker is purportedly a member of the army (although, like the Ely song, it came to be attributed to the leader of the army in some of the prose compilations in which it survives),<sup>78</sup> and after the opening verse the poem swiftly transitions from exhortation to narrative, mixing past- and present-tense narration as the speaker provides an account of the Danish conquest of England.<sup>79</sup> It is essentially the same poetic illusion as that produced by the lines “roweþ cnites noer the lant / and here we þes muneches sæng”, which caused the Ely compiler to attribute these words to Cnut at the very moment of approaching the land. The switch from the past-tense narration of the first two lines to real-time exhortation may seem awkward in the English verse, but it is a generic feature found not only in *Liðsmannaflokkur* but in skaldic narration generally.<sup>80</sup> In such a poem it would not be a surprise to find the king addressed in the third person as he is told about his own deeds, and this may

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<sup>76</sup> *Skjaldedigting*, IB, p.391. “Let us go ashore, before warriors and large militias learn that the English homelands are being traversed with shields: let us be brave in battle, brandish spears and hurl them; great numbers of the English flee before our swords” (translated by Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, p.86).

<sup>77</sup> For a discussion of the textual history, date and attribution of *Liðsmannaflokkur*, see Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, pp.86-115.

<sup>78</sup> The verses survive in three prose sources: two redactions of the saga of Óláfr helgi (the *Legendary Saga* and the fragmentary version by Styrmir fróði Kárason), which both identify the speaker of the verses as Óláfr, and *Knýtlinga saga*, which attributes them to the *liðsmen*. See Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, pp.90-8.

<sup>79</sup> Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, pp.107-9.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Judith Jesch’s analysis of the tenses and modes of address in Hallvarðr háreksblei’s *Knútsdrápa* (Jesch, ‘Knútr in poetry and history’, pp.245-8): as she observes, that poem “illustrates the shifts between descriptive, narrative and vocative, and past and present tense, that are required in the situation of utterance when the poet recalls the king’s past deeds in his presence” (p.253).

explain the use of the past tense and the third person in the first two lines; however, we should be careful about placing too much weight on such limited evidence.

If the Ely compiler is correct in saying that the lines he quotes are the beginning of a longer poem, they may be the surviving part (in modernised form) of a song composed to celebrate a royal visit to Ely. The adaptation of traditional literary idioms associated with battle to a peace-time, Christian context such as that of the Ely verse, commemorating Cnut's visit to the monastery and his pleasure at the monks' singing, has firm parallels in the corpus of skaldic verse composed for Cnut. As has already been observed, the poets developed a new language of allusion to address Cnut in his role as a Christian king,<sup>81</sup> and in this context we might especially note that in his *Knútsdrápa*, Hallvarðr háreksblei praisés Cnut for his closeness to the 'Lord of monks', a kenning for God:

Esat und jarðar hǫslu,  
orðbrjótr Dǫnum forðar  
moldreks, munka valdi  
mæringr an þú næri.<sup>82</sup>

Cnut's patronage of the church, the occasion of the story told by the Ely author, was a subject treated by the king's poets, who found that the generosity associated with a successful warrior-king could be translated into the liberality of a Christian king to the church. In Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Knútsdrápa*, Sigvatr commemorates Cnut's 1027 pilgrimage to Rome thus:

Kómu fylki  
farlystir, 's bar  
hervíg í hug,  
hafanda staf;  
rauf ræsir af  
Rúms veg suman

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<sup>81</sup> See especially Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', pp.115-124.

<sup>82</sup> *Skjaldedigtning*, IB p.294. "There is not under the earth-tree [Yggdrasill] an illustrious prince closer to the Lord of monks [God] than you; the breaker [generous sharer] of the earth-ruler's [giant's] words [gold] protects Danes" (translated by Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', p.121).

kærr keisara,  
klúss Pétrúsi.

Svá mun fár feril  
fetum suðr metinn  
hringdrífr hafa.<sup>83</sup>

The *hringdrífr* of pre-Christian poetry has found a new outlet for his generosity, and his poets a new language in which to extol it.<sup>84</sup> This extravagant generosity on Cnut's pilgrimage to Rome was remembered too by twelfth-century chroniclers: John of Worcester and William of Malmesbury, who both give the text of the letter Cnut sent from Rome to the English people, note that he gave lavish gifts to churches in Rome during his time there,<sup>85</sup> and Henry of Huntingdon's comment is typical:

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.

[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.]<sup>86</sup>

Sigvatr imagines Cnut's pilgrimage as inspired by a pious eagerness, a 'longing to travel' borne out by the swiftness of his journey, and invokes the vocabulary of love and personal affection to suggest Cnut's closeness to Emperor and Pope; as we shall see, this eager love, flattering to both the king and the place to which he is journeying, is a regular feature of the stories about Cnut in the English sources.

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<sup>83</sup> *Skjaldedigtning*, IB p.234. 'There came to the king whose mind had been on battle a longing to travel, pilgrim staff in hand. The king, dear to the Emperor, close to Peter, travelled quickly some of the way to Rome. Few ring-givers have thus measured with their feet the southern path.'

<sup>84</sup> It is a new language literally as well as metaphorically: on the loanwords *kærr*, *keisara* and *klúss*, see Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', p.118, and on the expression 'to measure with feet', see Hofmann (*Nordisch-englische Lehnbeziehungen der Wikingerzeit*, p.93), who argues this is a formula borrowed from Old English poetic diction.

<sup>85</sup> See *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, ed. R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk, trans. Jennifer Bray and P. McGurk, (Oxford, 1995), vol.ii, pp.512-9, and William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol. i, pp.324-331.

<sup>86</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by Diana Greenway (Oxford, 1996), vi.16, pp.366-7. The same connection of ideas also appears in *Knýtlinga saga*, probably via the lost *Knúts saga* and based ultimately on the *Knútsdrápur*; see Poole, *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, pp.98-9.

While a visit to Ely might not have had quite the same importance as a pilgrimage to Rome, it may nonetheless have been an appropriate occasion for a poem praising Cnut for his generosity to the English church. As the evidence of the skaldic verse suggests, there was an audience in England for praise poetry which translated the conventions of the form into a specifically Christian context. The most likely audience of the Old Norse poems, besides the king, is his aristocratic Danish followers, men who had participated in the original conquest of England and subsequently been given land there. These men followed Cnut's lead in patronage to the English church, and accompanied him on visits to religious houses: it was most likely during a royal visit such as that described in the *Liber Eliensis* that the names of Cnut and more than thirty of his Scandinavian followers were entered into the *Liber Vitae* of Thorney Abbey,<sup>87</sup> and perhaps on another such occasion that Cnut, together with his brother Haraldr and three other Danes named Þorð, Kartoca and Thuri entered into confraternity with Christ Church, Canterbury, a fact recorded in a Canterbury gospel-book (BL MS Royal 1.D.ix, f.43v).<sup>88</sup> Thorkell, within whose earldom Ely was situated, was present with Cnut at the dedication in 1020 of the church at Assandun to commemorate those killed in battle there,<sup>89</sup> and in Bury St Edmunds tradition he was credited with helping to establish the monastery at Bedericesworth.<sup>90</sup> Other Danish patrons of English religious houses included Tovi pruða, who was remembered as the founder and first patron of the church at

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<sup>87</sup> See Dorothy Whitelock, 'Scandinavian Personal Names in the *Liber Vitae* of Thorney Abbey', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society XII* (1937-45), 127-153, and Gerchow, 'Prayers for King Cnut', pp.236-7.

<sup>88</sup> These names correspond to ON Þorðr, Kárr-Tóki and Þórir; on the inscription see John Frankis, 'Sidelights on post-conquest Canterbury: towards a context for an Old Norse runic charm ("DR" 419)', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 44 (2000), 1-27 (16-17). For identification of Þorðr, who owned land in Kent and Surrey, see Simon Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', in Rumble, ed., *The Reign of Cnut*, pp.43-88 (80), and Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, pp.15-19.

<sup>89</sup> See ASC C and D, s.a. 1020.

<sup>90</sup> See Antonia Gransden, 'Legends and Traditions concerning the Origins of the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds', in Gransden, *Legends, Tradition and History in Medieval England* (London, 1992), pp.81-104, and also *Liber Eliensis*, II.86.

Waltham,<sup>91</sup> the Danish thegn named Ork (or Urk) and his wife Tola who founded a house at Abbotsbury,<sup>92</sup> Bovi, who may have founded an abbey at Horton in Dorset,<sup>93</sup> Thorkell hoga, a patron of Peterborough Abbey,<sup>94</sup> and Siward digri, Earl of Northumbria, who founded a church in York towards the end of Cnut's reign or shortly afterwards, and dedicated it to the Norwegian king Oláfr Haraldsson (d.1030).<sup>95</sup> Such men presumably made up part of the audience for the verses in praise of Cnut as Christian king, and they might have appreciated a poem commemorating royal visits such as those in which they had themselves participated.

We know that Cnut welcomed poetry which praised him for his generosity to the church as well as for his military exploits, and there are features of the Ely verse which might suggest an awareness of the generic conventions of skaldic poetry such as that which was composed in England during Cnut's reign. The tradition recorded by the Ely compiler that Cnut's song was composed during a royal visit may therefore be a more romantic version of the truth: perhaps a poem commemorating the king's visit really was performed in front of the king and his men on such an occasion. What form it may have taken must remain a matter of speculation: it may have been in English verse or in Old Norse, paraphrased into English on that occasion or at a later

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<sup>91</sup> *The Waltham Chronicle: an account of the discovery of our holy cross at Montacute and its conveyance to Waltham*, ed. and trans. Leslie Watkiss and Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford, 1994), pp.xvi-xix and pp.2-25. On Tovi, whose name appears in the Thorney *Liber Vitae*, see Ann Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England* (Basingstoke, 1999), pp.126-8; Williams, 'Thegnly Piety and Ecclesiastical Patronage in the Late Old English Kingdom', *Anglo-Norman Studies XXIV: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2001* (Woodbridge, 2002), pp.1-24; Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, pp.20-2; Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', p.80.

<sup>92</sup> See Williams, 'Thegnly Piety and Ecclesiastical Patronage in the Late Old English Kingdom', pp.22-3 and Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', p.80.

<sup>93</sup> See Keynes, 'The lost cartulary of Abbotsbury', *Anglo-Saxon England* 18 (1989), 207-43.

<sup>94</sup> *The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus, a monk of Peterborough*, ed. W. T. Mellows (London, 1949), p.70; see Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, pp.67-8.

<sup>95</sup> See ASC D s.a.1055 and Bruce Dickins, 'The Cult of S. Olave in the British Isles', *Saga-book XII* (1937-45), 53-80 (55). On early promotion of Oláfr's cult by Cnut and his followers, see Matthew Townend, 'Knútr and the Cult of St Óláfr: Poetry and Patronage in Eleventh-Century Norway and England', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1 (2005), 251-79.

date for the benefit of the monks of Ely whom it partly concerned.<sup>96</sup> It is not impossible that there was someone at Cnut's court capable of writing verse in English which mimicked the features of the Old Norse poetry composed for the king. It is an interesting question whether the lines in their reconstructed eleventh-century form would have been intelligible to a speaker of Old Norse; as has already been mentioned, it seems that the skaldic verse composed for Cnut is partially adapted to be more comprehensible to an English-speaking audience, and conceivably the trend worked equally well in the opposite direction, enabling Norse-speakers to appreciate an adapted form of English verse.<sup>97</sup>

Discussion of a court context for the Ely verse can only be speculation; the Ely context in which the verse survives is equally important, and better-attested. Before considering this, we should consider a second story about a visit to Ely by Cnut, which immediately follows the narrative of the song in the *Liber Eliensis* (II:85). The purpose of both stories is to demonstrate Cnut's affection for Ely, and the second episode shows the king going to great lengths to satisfy his eagerness to celebrate the feast of the Purification there:

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<sup>96</sup> Cf. Roberta Frank's observation, in reference to the refrains of Hallvarðr háreksblei's *Knútsdrápa* and Þórarinn loftunga's *Hofuðlausn*, that "the *Encomium Emmae* quotes a pseudo-Virgilian tag to illustrate Cnut's closeness to God: 'You, Caesar, have divided sovereignty with Jove' – a remarkable classicization of the... skaldic refrains, the gist of which Emma could have conveyed to the author" (Frank, 'King Cnut in the verse of his skalds', p.117).

<sup>97</sup> An interesting parallel to the *Liber Eliensis* verse is the inscription on a mid-eleventh-century disc-brooch found at Sutton in the Isle of Ely. This silver brooch is decorated with an English version of Ringerike ornament and inscribed on the back with a brief verse in English and a collection of undecipherable pseudo-runes (see Fuglesang, *Some Aspects of the Ringerike Style*, pp.47-64, and Elisabeth Okasha, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Non-Runic Inscriptions* (Cambridge, 1971), pp.116-7). The verse makes use of both alliteration and end-rhyme, and despite its brevity is not without some attempt at literary effect: as E. G. Stanley observes, it capitalises on the dual meaning of the word *agan* and, partly by making the brooch speak in the first person, plays with an abundance of personal pronouns (E. G. Stanley, 'The Late Saxon Disc-Brooch from Sutton (Isle of Ely): Its Verse Inscription', in *A Collection of Papers with Emphasis on Old English Literature* (Toronto, 1987), pp.400-408). As an object decorated in an imitation of Scandinavian ornament and belonging to a woman with the English name *Ædwen*, it is a useful example of Anglo-Scandinavian fashions in the Danelaw; as a sample of eleventh-century occasional verse from the Ely area, it makes a useful comparison with the Cnut verse, which also combines alliteration and rhyme.

Ad hanc igitur solempnitatem ipsum regem aliquotiens pre nimio gelu et glacie inibi contigit non posse pervenire, usquequaque paludibus et aquis gelatis, sed sic a bonitatis sue studio rex non mutatur, licet nimium gemens et anxius fuisset, in domino Deo confisus, super mare de Saham, cum non cesserat vehemens pruina, usque in Ely trahere se in vehiculo et desuper glaciem cogitavit, sed, si quis eum prederet, securius et minus pavide asperum iter perficere nec differre asseruit. Casu enim tunc astitit ibi vir magnus et incompositus ex insula quidam Brithmerus Budde, pro densitate sic cognominatus, in multitudine et ante regem se progredi spondit. Nec mora, rex festinus in vehiculo secutus est, admirantibus cunctis illum tantam audaciam presumpsisse. Quo perveniens, cum gaudio solempnitatem ex more illic celebravit. Nam sicut in Sapia legitur, ‘Fortis est, ut mors dilectio, et dilectio custodia legum est’, in sola dilectione ac devotione Christi virginis Æðeldreðe rex gloriosus nitebatur et completur in eo illud Dominicum, ‘omnia possibile credenti.’ Ad gloriam vero beate virginis narrare consueverat rex sic sibi accidisse et a Domino concessisse, quod magnus rusticus et incompositus per viam nullum offendiculum senserat, ut et ipse agilis et mediocris stature directe et intrepide subsequi licuisset. Et quidem ipse liberalis animi atque munificus laborem viri rependere volens, ipsum cum possessione sua eterne libertati donavit, unde filii filiorum eius usque ad diem hanc liberi ex istius modi donatione et quieti consistunt.<sup>98</sup>

[Now then, it happened on several occasions that the king was unable to come to this festival because of the excessive frost and ice in the locality, the marshes and meres being frozen all around. But the king was not in such circumstances swayed from the zeal of his goodness. Although he had been groaning deeply and full of anxiety, he trusted in the Lord God and took it into his head, at a time when a severe frost was continuing unabated, to travel all the way to Ely over the mere from Soham in a wagon upon the ice. But he declared that he would complete, and not defer, the difficult journey more confidently and less fearfully, if someone would go ahead of him. Well, it chanced that standing by in the crowd [on that occasion] was a certain large and rugged man from the Isle, Brihtmær surnamed *Budde* on account of his bulk, and he promised to go ahead of the king. Without delay the king followed behind in the wagon at a fast pace, while everybody marvelled that he should have attempted such a great act of daring. When he arrived at Ely he joyfully celebrated the festival there according to custom. For, in accordance with what is set forth in the Book of Wisdom – ‘Love is strong as death’, and ‘Love is the keeping of laws’ – the glorious king relied only upon the love and devotion of the virgin of Christ, Æthelthryth, and in him there was fulfilled the utterance of the Lord: ‘All things are possible to a believer’. Indeed, to the glory of the blessed virgin, the king was accustomed to recount that it had [so] come about and been granted to him by the Lord that a large and rugged countryman had perceived not the slightest hindrance anywhere along the way, so that he himself also, an able-bodied man of ordinary stature, had been permitted to follow after, unswervingly and without fear. And moreover the king, being generous-minded and munificent, and wishing to reward the

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<sup>98</sup> *Liber Eliensis*, ed. Blake, p.154.

man's effort, made a grant whereby he, together with his land-holding, became entitled to perpetual freedom. Hence, the sons of his sons right to this day have remained [free on the strength of a grant of this description and] in enjoyment of exceptions.]<sup>99</sup>

This story has elements of the burlesque which make it rather less credible than the preceding episode of the royal visit. However, like the story of the spontaneous verse, it is linked to the confirmation of a royal gift or privilege, and the story serves to explain the gift by providing an occasion which motivates it. The story of the king's song marks a visit on which the possessions granted to the abbey by previous kings were confirmed and renewed; this second narrative not only records the king's gift to Brihtmær Budde but, more importantly, links Cnut's visit to the Feast of the Purification. In the introduction to the first story (which also takes place on this feast) the compiler observes that the abbots of Ely began a period of service of the royal court on that date. This was a privilege which had been granted to the abbey by Æthelred and continued by Cnut, and although, as Keynes notes, the exact nature of this service is unclear,<sup>100</sup> its memory was evidently still valued in twelfth-century Ely. The loss of this privilege at the time of the Norman Conquest is lamented elsewhere in the *Liber Eliensis*:

It is recorded, moreover, that this item of customary practice existed at the church from the time of its restoration, that it brought about great advancement of the monastery and great freedom, that it was not allowed to be assailed or suppressed by outside agencies, until England, pitifully weighed down under the Norman yoke, was despoiled of all her former glory, so that the church of Ely – once most famous, and a beauty among the daughters of Jerusalem – she who had been free – has now been overwhelmed by the bitterness of disaster.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> *Liber Eliensis*, trans. Fairweather, p.183. Additions in square brackets are Fairweather's.

<sup>100</sup> Simon Keynes, 'Ely Abbey 672-1109', in Peter Meadows and Nigel Ramsey, eds., *A History of Ely Cathedral* (Woodbridge, 2003), pp.3-58 (30, 35-6).

<sup>101</sup> *Liber Eliensis*, trans. Janet Fairweather, p.175. "Hoc autem consuetudinis ab ipso renovationis sue tempore apud ecclesiam ad magnam loci provectionem et libertatem fuisse memoratur nec ab aliunde impeti aut subici patiebatur, donec Anglia sub Normannorum iugo misere depressa ex omni pristino spoliatur honore, unde Elyensis ecclesia quondam famosissima, inter filias Ierusalem speciosa, que fuerat libera, calamitatis nunc oppressa amaritudine" (Blake, p.147).

This may explain why the compiler makes a point of noting that both the story of the king's song and the episode of Brihtmær Budde take place on the Feast of the Purification (and the latter story is contingent on it, in that February frost plays a vital role in rendering the Isle inaccessible). Keynes concluded, speaking about the story of the song, that "of course the tale remains no more than a charming story";<sup>102</sup> to the Ely compiler, however, both narratives must have seemed an important reminder of the abbey's past royal favour, which he doubtless hoped might one day be restored.<sup>103</sup>

We will shortly discuss how these stories might have suited the political agenda of Cnut in his desire to appear generous to the English church, but both narratives also have obvious advantages from an Ely perspective: by dramatising scenes which illustrate the king's affection for Ely, and laying particular emphasis, in each case, on his desire to be physically present on the Isle, they provide a flattering picture of Ely's importance to this royal visitor. The fact that in Cnut's time Ely was only accessible by boat is an important factor in both stories: in the second it prevents the king reaching the Isle during winter; in the first it may provide a contextual explanation for the verse's exhortation to the men to row. This was no longer the case by the time the *Liber Eliensis* was compiled, but the past inaccessibility of the Isle clearly remained a subject of interest, even of pride, at Ely in the twelfth century: the Preface to Book I of the *Liber Eliensis* describes the geographical situation of the abbey at length.<sup>104</sup> In the *Gesta Pontificum* William of Malmesbury comments, presumably recording what he had been told on his visit to Ely:

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<sup>102</sup> Keynes, 'Ely Abbey 672-1109', p.36.

<sup>103</sup> On Ely's extensive losses of lands after the Conquest, partly a result of the house's support for Hereward and his rebels (on which see chapter 2 below), see Emma Cownie, *Religious Patronage in Anglo-Norman England 1066-1135* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp.111-2.

<sup>104</sup> Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, pp.2-5.

The island could not in those days [the time of Abbot Bryhtnoth, d.999] be approached except by water; but our contemporaries, able to bring more expertise to bear, have overcome nature and thrown a causeway over the swamp, thus providing a land route and making it possible to reach the island on foot.<sup>105</sup>

The stories of an eleventh-century king's determination to reach Ely therefore have a tinge of nostalgia, and they laud Ely's special status as a place which must be sought out, almost as if St Æthelthryth herself is being wooed by an enthusiastic royal suitor. In doing so they cast the abbey and the king in a mutually flattering light: Cnut is presented not only as a generous donor or a pious supplicant at the saint's shrine (though he is both), but also as an enterprising, energetic king who performs "an act of great daring", admired by everybody, in order to reach the Isle, and who is able to compose a spontaneous verse which enjoys lasting popularity. If this originated as propaganda, it was evidently effective, since the *Liber Eliensis* was perpetuating these stories more than a century after Cnut's death. Keynes is quite right to call the story of Cnut's song 'charming'; it is intended to charm.<sup>106</sup>

It may be, therefore, that the two Ely narratives should be considered as a tradition which grew up around the simple facts of Cnut's visit to the Isle, his gifts to the abbey, and some kind of demonstrative act of piety, and that this was amplified, at some point during the century which intervened between his reign and the compilation of the *Liber Eliensis*, into these two colourful stories: perhaps both were

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<sup>105</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom and R. M. Thomson (Oxford, 2007), iv.184, vol.i, p.491. William visited Ely some time before the summer of 1125; he makes this observation in connection with the story of how Abbot Bryhtnoth removed the body of St Wihtburh to Ely from Dereham, an event also recounted in the *Liber Eliensis*, II:53 (Blake, pp.120-3). At another point in his history William notes that the formerly difficult journey between Soham and Ely (i.e. the journey undertaken by Cnut and Brihtmær Budde) had been made easier in his own day by the building of a road across the marshes (*Gesta Pontificum* ii.74, vol.i, pp.234-5).

<sup>106</sup> If what the *Liber Eliensis* says about the abbots' service at the royal court is true, there may have been a significant amount of regular involvement between the abbey and royal circles; furthermore, Archbishop Wulfstan chose to be buried at Ely, apparently because of his early affection for the place (*Liber Eliensis* II:87). Along with Cnut's donations the *Liber Eliensis* also lists Queen Emma's gifts to Ely, including altar-hangings of her own working (II.79).

part of the song which came to be attributed to the king, “sung publicly by choirs and remembered in proverbs”. We may note that although the compiler of the *Liber Eliensis* gives no information about his source for the Brihtmær Budde narrative, he claims that the king himself was accustomed to recount what had happened and to explain the meaning of the story; since this story follows so closely after the song narrative, this may just possibly indicate that the compiler knew of them from a source in which Cnut was the speaker.

Cnut’s well-attested public expressions of penitence and devotion constitute a dramatic performance, intended to be observed and interpreted in a certain way by the English church and by his Danish followers. His pilgrimage to Rome is the supreme example of such a gesture, and the official interpretation of the act was first given written expression in the king’s letter from Rome to the English people;<sup>107</sup> the gesture was subsequently praised by the skalds, who present the act in the spirit in which it was intended, and the same message was later, after Cnut’s death, memorialised by the encomiast as part of the fullest official narrative of the king’s reign. Thus the significance of Cnut’s pilgrimage to Rome was commemorated in three languages, the key interpretative point being perhaps most pithily expressed by Sigvatr in his *Knútsdrápa*: the king who had gained his throne by military campaigns was now intent only on peaceful Christian journeying. In light of what has been said about the characteristics of the Ely song, we may wonder whether it was not popular tradition but some kind of official text which memorialised Cnut’s travels within England, mythologising the conventional round of royal visits and gifts as a kind of pious wanderlust, what Sigvatr calls the king’s “farlystir”, ‘longings to travel’.

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<sup>107</sup> Although no Old English version survives, this letter was presumably written in the vernacular, like the king’s letter sent from Denmark in 1019 or 1020 and addressed to the English people and to Earl Thorkell (for which see *English Historical Documents c.500-1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, 2nd edition (London, 1996), pp.452-4).

## **Cnut and the waves**

With this in mind, we may turn to perhaps the most famous of the post-Conquest stories about Cnut's piety, Henry of Huntingdon's account of how the king demonstrated that he had no power over the sea:

De cuius regis potentia pauca sunt perstringenda. Nec enim ante eum tante magnitudinis rex fuerat in Anglia. Erat namque dominus tocius Dacie, tocius Anglie, tocius Norwagie, simul et Scotie. Enimuero extra numerum bellorum quibus maxime splenduit, tria gessit eleganter et magnifice. Primum est quod filiam suam imperatori Romano, cum ineffabilibus diuiciis, maritauit. Secundum, quod Romam pergens omnes malas exactiones in uia que per Gallias Romam tendit, quo uocantur tolonea uel transuersa, data pecunia sua diminui fecit usque ad medietatem. Tercium, quod cum in maximo uigore floreret imperii, sedile suum in littore maris cum ascenderet statui iussit. Dixit autem mari ascendenti, 'Tu mee dicionis es, et terra in qua sedeo mea est, nec fuit qui inpune meo resisteret imperio. Impero igitur tibi ne in terram meam ascendas, nec uestes uel membra dominatoris tui madefacere presumas.' Mare uero de more conscendens, pedes regis et crura sine reuerentia madefecit. 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.

[A few words must be devoted to the power of this king. 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. In addition to the many wars in which he was most particularly illustrious, he performed three fine and magnificent deeds. The first is that he gave his daughter in marriage to the Roman emperor, with indescribable riches. The second, that on his journey to Rome, he had the evil taxes that were levied on the road that goes through France, called tolls or passage tax, reduced by half at his own expense. The third, that when he was at the height of his ascendancy, he ordered his chair to be placed on the sea-shore as the tide was coming in. Then he said to the rising tide, 'You are subject to me, as the land on which I am sitting is mine, and no one has resisted my overlordship with impunity. I command you, therefore, not to rise on to my land, nor to presume to wet the clothing or limbs of your master.' But the sea came up as usual, and disrespectfully drenched the king's feet and shins. 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 the great king. By whose mercy may the soul of King Cnut enjoy rest.]<sup>108</sup>

This story is also told by Gaimar, with some slightly different details. Unlike Henry, Gaimar places the scene at Westminster, on the Thames, rather than at the seashore; he directly connects the episode with Cnut's pilgrimage to Rome (although Henry mentions both events consecutively, he draws no causal link between them); and he makes no reference to the king renouncing his crown. In Gaimar's narrative, the story comes after the addition of Norway to Cnut's empire:

Donc fu Cnuth de treis regnes sire,  
poi trovot ki l'osout dedire;  
e nepurquant si fut desdit  
e son comandement despit.  
A Londres ert desur Tamise;  
li floz veneit pres de l'eglise  
ki Westmuster ert apelé.  
Li reis a pié s'est aresté  
en la greve sur le sablun.  
Li flodz veneit par contençon:  
mult s'apresma, pres del rei vint.  
Cnuth en sa main sa verge tint  
si dist al flod: 'Return' arere;  
fui desur mei, ke ne te fere!  
La mer pur lui pas ne leissat,  
e plus e plus le flod montat.  
Li reis estut si atendit,  
de sa verge l'ewe ferit:  
l'ewe pur ço n'ad pas leissé;  
ainz vint al rei, si l'ad moilé.  
Quant li reis vit ke trop atent,  
li floz ne fait pur li niënt,  
de la greve se trest arere  
puis s'arestut sur une pere,  
tendi ses mains vers orient.  
Oiez k'il dit oiant sa gent.  
'Cestui ki fait la mer monter,  
deit l'om bien creere e aürer.  
Il est bon rei, jo su cheitif,  
home su mortel, mes il est vif.  
Tote rien fait le son comand,  
lui pri jo k'il me seit guarand.  
A Rome voil l'aler requere;

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<sup>108</sup> *Historia Anglorum*, ed. and trans. Greenway, vi.17, pp.366-9.

de lui tendrai tote ma terre.’  
Puis fait son aire apariller,  
aler en volt sanz demorer.  
Or e argent porta asez.

[From that time on, Cnut was lord over three kingdoms, and few people were to be found who dared oppose his wishes. Nevertheless he did meet resistance and his orders were [on one occasion] treated with contempt. He was in London on the bank of the River Thames, and the tide was coming in near the church called Westminster. The king has dismounted and was standing on the sand along the strand. The tide kept rising and rising remorselessly, and as it got closer, it came right up to the king. Cnut grasped his sceptre in his hand and addressed the tide: ‘Turn back and get away off me, otherwise I shall strike you!’ The sea did not leave off on his account, and the tide kept rising and rising. The king stood his ground and waited, then struck the water with his sceptre. This did not make the water leave off; on the contrary it came right up and drenched him.

Understanding that he had waited too long, and that the tide was taking not the slightest notice of him, he retreated from the strand. Then, standing up on a stone, he stretched out his hands towards the east. Just hear what he said in the presence of his people: ‘He who causes the sea to rise is the right and proper person to place one’s trust in and to honour. He is a just and virtuous king, whereas I am a miserable wretch. I am a mere mortal, whereas he is everlasting. Every single thing obeys his command, and he is the one to whom I pray for protection. My intention now is to go [as a pilgrim] to Rome to worship him, and all my land I will [henceforth] hold as his vassal.’

Whereupon, wishing to start out without delay, he begins preparations for his journey. He took large amounts of gold and silver with him.]<sup>109</sup>

Lawson, in a useful discussion of this incident, treats it as a “planned act of piety” like those discussed above;<sup>110</sup> in his view, as a display of royal humility, it is of a piece with the continental examples he cites and with the account given by the encomiast. The story is not, however, quite as straightforward as it looks – an ambiguity reflected in the widespread misunderstanding of Cnut’s actions which has entered modern popular discourse. It is not clear, in either version, whether the point of the story is that Cnut was supposed to have *demonstrated* he was powerless over the tide, or to have *learned* that he was powerless when his commands were not obeyed. It is a fine distinction, but an important one, and neither Henry nor Gaimar is explicit on the

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<sup>109</sup> Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis: History of the English*, ed. and trans. Ian Short (Oxford, 2009), pp.254-6, ll.4695-4731. Additions in square brackets are Short’s.

<sup>110</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, pp.124-6.

matter. Gaimar seems to imagine the moment occurring spontaneously – the king happens to be on the shore when the tide begins to rise – while Henry appears to suggest it was planned, with Cnut ordering his chair to be placed on the shore for the purpose; but neither makes it clear whether the king knew what was going to happen as the tide rose. The question of whether the king expects his command to be obeyed makes the difference to whether we read this story as an orchestrated act of public piety, like Cnut’s tears and prostrations at St Omer, or a fable about a foolish and arrogant king forced to recognise the limits of his power, or even a form of conversion narrative. The unqualified approval Henry gives the act, as one of Cnut’s “three fine and magnificent deeds”, suggests he at least tended towards the first view, but the other interpretations seem equally likely.

Since it is difficult to imagine how this story can have any basis in a real event, commentators on the episode have tended to see it as the stuff of legend: Ann Williams suggested it may have come to Henry of Huntingdon from oral tradition in the East Midlands,<sup>111</sup> while Antonia Gransden described it as “purely legendary” and evidence of Henry’s taste for fables, inserted in the *Historia Anglorum* as part of a triad, “a characteristic mythopoeic feature”.<sup>112</sup> Certainly the story derives part of its effect from having elements of the mythic, and it is entirely possible that it had entered oral tradition by the twelfth century; however, I would suggest that the origins of the story lie with narratives of church patronage such as those discussed above. Before we discuss how this story may have arisen, we should first observe that it is not the only narrative in which Cnut is presented as admitting himself powerless over the sea. Two separate but clearly related stories, found in hagiographical texts from Wilton and Canterbury, show Cnut being converted to the worship of English saints

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<sup>111</sup> Ann Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp.179-180.

<sup>112</sup> Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England* (London, 1974), vol.i, pp.197, 200.

when he is saved from shipwreck by divine intervention. Both stories are told by Goscelin and date from the last quarter of the eleventh century. In the first, from Goscelin's *Translatio S. Edithe*, it is St Eadgyth of Wilton who comes to the king's aid:

On one occasion, returning to his ancestral kingdom of Denmark, he was hurled about by fierce storms in that wide sea. Then, seeing that he was almost being overcome by the waves, he called out with frequent cries: 'Saint Edith, help! Christ, free us by the merits of Saint Edith!' Thereupon the glorious virgin, appearing joyfully to him as he was tossed by the storm, said: 'Behold I am here for you, Edith, whom you have called upon; I have come to your aid when called; and behold, for you I have calmed this storm through Him whom the winds and the sea obey' (Mt 8.27). At these words he looked round, and behold – a marvellous sight: all the storms of winds (Ps 10.7, 106.25) had quietened, and after the danger great peace and joy smiled on the scene. And there he was rescued, with all his fleet, and when he returned to England and came to Wilton, he repaid God through the holy mediator Edith by giving thanks with solemn gifts, and publicized this great miracle with prolific testimony.<sup>113</sup>

Goscelin probably began writing his life of Eadgyth at Wilton, c.1080,<sup>114</sup> and some ten years later, when he was resident at St Augustine's, Canterbury, he wrote an account of the translation of St Mildrith which contains a very similar story. In this version, Cnut is returning from pilgrimage to Rome when his ship is nearly wrecked in a storm in the English Channel, and the king is saved when he appeals to St Augustine. In gratitude, Cnut agrees to honour his promise to permit the translation of St Mildrith from Minster-in-Thamet to St Augustine's.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Hollis, *Writing the Wilton Women*, p.78.

<sup>114</sup> On the career of Goscelin and the dating of his works, see *The Life of King Edward who rests at Westminster*, ed. and trans. Frank Barlow (Oxford, 1992), pp.xlvi-lii and 133-149, R. W. Southern, 'The First Life of Edward the Confessor', *English Historical Review* 58 (1943), 385-400 (398-9), and Stephanie Hollis in *Writing the Wilton Women*, pp.217-244.

<sup>115</sup> The *Translatio sancte Mildrethe virginis* is edited by D. W. Rollason as 'Goscelin of Canterbury's account of the translation and miracles of St Mildrith', *Mediaeval Studies* 48 (1986), 139-210; this episode is at pp.169-170. The *Translatio* should probably be dated to some time in the 1090s, and perhaps soon after the translation of Mildrith's relics which took place in 1091; see Richard Sharpe, 'Goscelin's St Augustine and St Mildreth: Hagiography and Liturgy in Context', *Journal of Theological Studies* 41 (1990), 502-516, and Sharpe, 'The Setting of St Augustine's Translation, 1091',

Stories of a miraculous delivery from shipwreck are not by any means uncommon in medieval hagiography, and Goscelin has a number of similar tales in his account of the miracles of St Augustine and elsewhere.<sup>116</sup> The two narratives are clearly related, and it seems likely that Goscelin simply reused the episode of Eadgyth's intervention in his account of the translation of St Mildrith. He may of course have invented the story entirely, since William of Malmesbury has a very different account of how Cnut was taught to honour Wilton's saint:

Cui successit Cnuto, natione Danus, uir efficax, sed qui pro gentilitiis inimicitiis sanctos Anglos non diligeret. Qua consuetudine contumacior, cum quadam Pentecoste apud Wiltunam esset, in ipsam uirginem sollemnes cachinnos effudit: nunquam se crediturum filiam regis Edgari sanctam esse, qui uitiis deditus maximeque libidinis seruus in subiectos propior tyranno fuisset. Haec dum ille, stomacho suo seruiens, cruditate ructaret barbarica, contradicebat Ednodus archiepiscopus qui aderat. Cnuto concitator aperiri sepulchrum iubet, uisurus quid sancti mortua uirgo afferet. Effracto ergo mausoleo, defuncta, oppanso ante fatiem uelo, cingulotenus assurgere, et in contumacem regem impetum facere uisa. Hoc ille metu turbatus, longe reducto capite debilitatoque rigore genuum, lapsus humo concidit. Ruina corpus attriuit, adeo ut intercepto diutius anhelitu exanimis putaretur. Sed, redeunte paulatim uigore, letum erubuit, quod, quanuis seuerè castigatus, penitentiae reseruatus sit. Habetur ergo in plurimis locis Angliae festum eius uenerabile, quod nemo impune temerare presumat.

[[Æthelred's] successor Cnut was a Dane, a man of action but one who had no affection for English saints because of the enmity between the two races. This cast of mind made him wilful, and when at Wilton one Whitsun he poured out his customary jeers at Eadgyth herself; he would never credit the sanctity of the daughter of King Edgar, a vicious man, an especial slave to lust, and more tyrant than king. He belched out taunts like this with the uncouthness characteristic of a barbarian, just to indulge his ill temper; but Archbishop Æthelnoth, who was present, spoke up against him. Cnut became even more excited, and ordered the opening of the grave to see what the dead girl could provide in the way of holiness. When the tomb was broken into, Eadgyth was seen to emerge as far as the waist, though her face was veiled, and to launch herself at the contumacious king. In his fright he drew his head right back; his knees gave way, and he collapsed on to the ground. The fall so shattered him that for

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in R. Eales and R. Sharpe, eds., *Canterbury and the Norman Conquest: Churches, Saints and Scholars, 1066–1109* (London, 1995), pp.1-13.

<sup>116</sup> In the *Translatio S. Edithe* the Cnut story is followed by an account of how Ealdred, Archbishop of York, is saved from shipwreck in the Adriatic sea, en route to Jerusalem, by Eadgyth's intervention (*Writing the Wilton Women*, pp.77-8).

some time his breathing was impeded, and he was judged dead. But gradually strength returned, and he felt both shame and joy that despite his stern punishment he had lived to repent. As a result Eadgyth's feast day is kept in many parts of England. Let no one violate it with impunity!]<sup>117</sup>

Either Cnut's reputation had seriously declined at Wilton by the time William heard this story, or there were a number of competing traditions preserved within the community even in the twelfth century; either way, it is possible that Goscelin knew of this other story and chose to suppress it, as a tale which presented his saintly subject's father Edgar in a distinctly unfortunate light. The *Translatio S. Edithe* depicts Edgar as an ideal Christian king and emphasises the generosity of Cnut to Eadgyth's shrine; William's story would not fit well with either of these purposes. The shipwreck story may conceivably have been invented to replace the other tale, as it serves essentially the same function in persuading Cnut of Eadgyth's holiness. However, the shipwreck fits well with the overall picture of Cnut and Emma which emerges from Goscelin's account, and which seems likely to come from reliable Wilton tradition. His description of the golden shrine commissioned by Cnut for the body of St Eadgyth – and the punishment visited on the greedy workmen who skimped on the materials for it – clearly derives from information at Wilton, especially as this shrine still housed the saint's relics at the time when Goscelin was writing.

Goscelin's statements are the only evidence for Cnut's patronage of Wilton – no documentary record of any gift has survived – but as a house with strong connections to the Anglo-Saxon royal family Wilton must have been a likely focus for

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<sup>117</sup> *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, ii.87, vol.i, pp.298-301. William's depiction of Cnut's hostility to Edgar is surprising, as it is unparalleled in the other post-Conquest sources from England, but we may compare the third stanza of Óttarr's *Knútsdrápa*, where Cnut's victory over the English kings is acclaimed as a triumph over Edgar's descendants: "ætt drapt, Jóta dróttinn, Játgeirs", 'Lord of the Jutes, you smote the race of Edgar'.

patronage from both Cnut and Emma.<sup>118</sup> Emma may have been the driving force behind this continuation of royal favour: Goscelin claims that marriage to Æthelred had led the queen to feel a sister's affection for Eadgyth, and he tells a story in which Emma helps to restore an estate unjustly taken from Wilton by one of the king's Danish thegns.<sup>119</sup> There are indications that other members of the Anglo-Danish aristocracy also patronised Wilton and the cult of St Eadgyth: Earl Godwine's daughter, the saint's namesake and future queen of Edward the Confessor, was educated at Wilton, as was her niece Gunhild, daughter of Harold Godwinson. A generation later, Eve, to whom Goscelin's *Liber confortatorius* is addressed, was placed at Wilton by her parents, a well-born Danish man named Api and a Lotharingian woman named Olive.<sup>120</sup> Goscelin's comments about the affection of Cnut and Emma for Wilton, especially Cnut's habit of dismounting before entering the precincts, suggest regular visits to the nunnery, and it would be interesting to

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<sup>118</sup> For Wilton's wealth and status in the late Anglo-Saxon period, see Barbara Yorke, *Nunneries and the Anglo-Saxon Royal Houses* (London, 2003), pp.83-92, and J. Crick, 'The Wealth, Patronage, and Connections of Women's Houses in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Revue Bénédictine* 109 (1999), 154–85. On patronage by Cnut and Emma of the cult of the saintly children of Edgar, Eadgyth and her brother Edward, see Ridyard, *Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.140-169, and Rollason, 'The cults of murdered royal saints in Anglo-Saxon England', 15-18.

<sup>119</sup> *Writing the Wilton Women*, pp.79-80. The thegn, Agemund, dies without repenting of his crime, but is miraculously brought back to life, saying that St Eadgyth is refusing to let him die while he keeps what is rightfully hers; he asks for the queen to be sent for and Emma, though at first reluctant to visit a corpse which has come back to life, agrees to visit him and to return the land to Wilton. There may be some connection between this narrative, with the vengeful Eadgyth, the revived corpse, and the discomfited royal visitor, and William of Malmesbury's story about Cnut and Eadgyth's tomb. Goscelin also has a different story in the *Translatio* where Eadgyth's corpse comes to life to protest against ill treatment when a nun tries to cut a piece of her head-band (*Writing the Wilton Women*, p.72); perhaps such tales were particularly popular at Wilton. The thegn Agemund may perhaps be the man granted land by Cnut at Cheselbourne in Dorset in 1019; see Keynes, 'The lost cartulary of Abbotsbury', 230-1.

<sup>120</sup> On Queen Eadgyth's education see Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford, 2001), pp.257-9, and on Eve see *The Book of Encouragement and Consolation: The Letter of Goscelin to the Recluse Eva*, trans. Monika Otter (Cambridge, 2004), pp.5-9, and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Goscelin and the Consecration of Eve', *Anglo-Saxon England* 35 (2006), 251-270. Further evidence of Anglo-Danish support for Eadgyth's cult is provided by Goscelin's statement that his patron, Bishop Herman, encouraged him to write about St Eadgyth because of a miracle performed for a Danish man named Sweyn; Sweyn, while living in England, was accused of being a spy and imprisoned, but St Eadgyth's intervention broke his shackles and proved his innocence (*Writing the Wilton Women*, p.24).

know whether their daughter Gunhild, a contemporary of Godwine's daughter Eadgyth, was among the women of noble birth educated at Wilton.

The nuns of Wilton appear to have enjoyed some degree of protected status after the Conquest: the English abbess Godgifu kept her position and a number of women from supplanted aristocratic families took refuge there, among them Queen Eadgyth, who spent part of her later life in retirement at Wilton. As a conservative community which included a number of well-connected and highly-educated noblewomen, Wilton doubtless provided a favourable environment for the preservation of traditions about its pre-Conquest prosperity and royal favour. Elizabeth Tyler has recently suggested that the nuns of Wilton may have formed an early audience for the *Vita Ædwardi Regis*,<sup>121</sup> and Goscelin's works on the cult of St Eadgyth, based on information obtained from the community and partly intended for their use, certainly indicate an appetite at Wilton for the commemoration of the nunnery's history.<sup>122</sup>

By contrast, St Augustine's, the subject of Goscelin's other shipwreck narrative, had suffered severe disruptions in the years before Goscelin's arrival in c.1091: objections to Lanfranc's imposition of Abbot Wido in 1087 led to the expulsion of the rebellious monks and their replacement by monks from Christ Church and elsewhere, creating in effect a new community.<sup>123</sup> In this period St Augustine's also faced a serious challenge to its claim to possess Mildrith's relics from the new community of St Gregory's. The monks responded to this threat partly

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<sup>121</sup> See Elizabeth Tyler; 'The *Vita Ædwardi*: The Politics of Poetry at Wilton Abbey', *Anglo-Norman Studies* XXXI (2009), 135-156 (152-156).

<sup>122</sup> On the relationship between Goscelin's works on Eadgyth and the Wilton community see Stephanie Hollis in *Writing the Wilton Women*, pp.11-12; she argues convincingly that the impetus for these texts came from within the community.

<sup>123</sup> See Richard Sharpe, 'Goscelin's St Augustine and St Mildrith', 503-4; it is not clear how many monks were expelled, but Sharpe comments, "There can have been few besides Wido and his immediate associates who celebrated both Easter and Christmas 1089 at St Augustine's" (504).

by forging a writ of Cnut giving royal authority for the translation to St Augustine's.<sup>124</sup> There are no surviving contemporary records of the translation, and several of Goscelin's statements about it are highly questionable, particularly the dating which links it to Cnut's pilgrimage to Rome;<sup>125</sup> as Frank Barlow observes, "any story connecting King Cnut and Queen Emma with the translation of St Mildred must be regarded with suspicion, since the monastery was engaged in establishing a case for the validity and effectiveness of the deed" throughout the last decade of the eleventh century.<sup>126</sup> Goscelin's description of the removal of the relics from Thanet in the face of hostility from the islanders is clearly based on hagiographical convention and probably little else;<sup>127</sup> it seems that when he came to write about Mildrith he found information about her translation in short supply, and decided to draw on traditions about Eadgyth, another female royal saint and nun, with whose legend he was intimately familiar.

While the connection between the shipwreck story and Cnut's pilgrimage to Rome may therefore be Goscelin's invention, it seems likely that a conventional story of a miraculous rescue from shipwreck was attached to Cnut's patronage of Wilton at an early date. This narrative provides a striking counterpart to the story of Cnut and the tide. The two stories ask the same question – whom do the waves obey? – and give the same answer, though only Goscelin quotes the scriptural basis for it (cf.

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<sup>124</sup> S. E. Kelly, *The Charters of St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury, and Minster-in-Thamet* (Oxford, 1995), pp.121-2.

<sup>125</sup> See Richard Sharpe, 'The Date of St Mildrith's Translation from Minster-in-Thamet to Canterbury', *Mediaeval Studies* 53 (1991), 349-54. For discussion of some other problematic features of Goscelin's work on Mildrith, see Frank Barlow, 'Two Notes: Cnut's Second Pilgrimage and Queen Emma's Disgrace in 1043', *The English Historical Review*, 73: 289 (1958), 649-656, Marvin Colker, 'A Hagiographical Polemic', *Mediaeval Studies* 39 (1977), 60-108, and Richard Emms, 'The Historical Traditions of St Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury', in Eales and Sharpe, *Canterbury and the Norman Conquest*, pp.158-168 (162-3).

<sup>126</sup> Barlow, 'Two Notes', 650.

<sup>127</sup> For parallels see Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1978).

Matthew 8:27): not Cnut and his fleet, but God and his saints. In the Mildrith story it is the sailors who are made to ask the question which, in the Gospel story, is spoken by the disciples: “‘Qualis est hic’ dicebant et mirantes naute, ‘cui in uice Domini qui mirabilis est in sanctis suis parent elementa, obediunt uenti et mare?’”<sup>128</sup> The narratives link Cnut’s pious journeys to his power, or lack of it, over the sea, and we may further note (though perhaps it is stretching a point) that both the stories of the king travelling to Ely also involve watery elements: in one episode the king has to confess himself powerless over the marsh (and for this the *Liber Eliensis* uses the word *mare*, of which the usual meaning would be ‘sea’), and must reach Ely ‘relying only upon the love and devotion of the virgin of Christ, Æthelthryth’; in the other, Cnut’s warriors transfer their skill at rowing to serve a peacetime Christian function, in eagerness to worship St Æthelthryth and honour her monks.

These narratives all dramatize a renunciation of royal power in favour of Christian humility, expressed in terms of authority over the sea. Before considering how these narratives may have arisen, we should consider why such stories had particular potency in connection with Cnut, whose mythology of kingship, as depicted in the verse of his skalds and in the *Encomium Emmae*, was closely linked to naval power. Descriptions of magnificent royal fleets feature repeatedly in these texts: ships and sea-journeys are closely associated with the king’s royal authority (the extent of his empire, his defeat of his enemies) and with the personal qualities for which he is praised (his daring, ambition, and youthful success). Sea-power is both the means by which his power was achieved and a splendid demonstration of it. So, for instance, Sigvatr describes the king’s fleet sailing from England to take part in the Holy River campaign:

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<sup>128</sup> Rollason, ‘Goscelin of Canterbury’s account of the translation and miracles of St. Mildrith’, p.170. On the classical allusions in this passage, see Rollason, pp.142, 169-170.

skreið vestan -viðr  
varr- glæstr, sás bar  
út andskota  
Aðalráðs þaðan.

Ok bóru í byr  
bló segl við ró  
(dýr vas döglinga fōr)  
drekar landreka;  
en, þeirs kómu,  
kilir, vestan, til  
of -leið liðu  
Limafjarðar brim-.<sup>129</sup>

This description of the voyage, full of dynamic movement, makes the king's ships vessels of his imperial power: by comparison the battle itself hardly registers, since Sigvatr devotes two stanzas to the journey and only one to the battle. The description of Cnut as 'andskota Aðalráðs', 'the enemy of Æthelred', recalls past triumphs, and naval power plays a particularly important role in the skalds' depiction of the conquest of England: Óttarr begins his *Knútsdrápa* with a description of Cnut launching his ships:

Hratt lítt gamall, lýtir  
lōgreiðar, framm skeiðum;  
fórat fylkir æri  
folksveimuðr þér heiman;  
hilmir bjótt ok hættir  
harðbrynjuð skip kynjum;  
reiðr hafðir þú rauðar  
randir Knútr fyr landi.<sup>130</sup>

The young warrior is shown personally preparing and launching his ships, asserting his authority over the 'chariots of the sea'.<sup>131</sup> In the account of the conquest which

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<sup>129</sup> *Skjaldedigtning*, IB, pp.233-4. 'The splendid wave-timbers sped from the west, bearing from there the enemy of Æthelred. The king's dragon-ships bore blue sails on the sailyards, in a favourable wind; glorious was the king's journey. The keels which came from the west went over the wave-road to Limfjord.'

<sup>130</sup> *Skjaldedigtning*, IB, p.272. 'You pushed out your ships at a young age, destroyer of the chariot of the sea. A younger king than you has never gone from home with an army. Prince, you prepared armoured ships, greatly daring; Cnut, in your rage you raised red shields out from the land.'

<sup>131</sup> For discussion of this convention in skaldic verse, see Judith Jesch, *Ships and Men in the Late Viking Age* (Woodbridge, 2001), pp.171-9.

follows, Óttarr has a very different idea to Gaimar of how Cnut's power was displayed on the banks of the Thames:

unnuð eigi minni  
(ulfs gómr veit þat) rómu,  
hnekkir hleypiblakka  
hlunns, á Tempsar grunni.<sup>132</sup>

As Roberta Frank has argued, these poems do not merely follow poetic convention in these depictions of the king setting out with his fleet; they actively “advertise their prince’s ships as a symbol of power”, and their references to longships and the *dreki* or dragon-ship (a word which first appears in skaldic poetry in the verse of Sigvatr’s *Knútsdrápa* quoted above) are intended to demonstrate Cnut’s place at the forefront of eleventh-century naval technology.<sup>133</sup>

Along similar lines, the author of the *Encomium Emmae* devotes two chapters to the surpassing size and magnificence of the fleets with which Cnut set out to conquer England.<sup>134</sup>

Tantus quoque decor inerat pupibus, ut intuentium hebetatis  
luminibus flammeae magis quam [l]igneae uiderentur a longe  
aspicientibus. Si quando enim sol illis iubar inmiscuit radiorum,  
hinc resplenduit fulgur armorum, illinc uero flamma dependentium  
clipeorum. Ardebat aurum in rostris, fulgebat quoque argentum in  
uariis nauium figuris. Tantus siquidem classis erat apparatus, ut, si  
quam gentem eius uellet expugnare dominus, naues tantum  
aduersarios terrerent, priusquam earum bellatores pugnam ullam  
capescerunt.

[So great, also, was the ornamentation of the ships, that the eyes of the beholders were dazzled, and to those looking from afar they seemed of flame rather than of wood. For if at any time the sun cast the splendour of its rays among them, the flashing of arms shone in one place, in another the flame of suspended shields. Gold shone on

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<sup>132</sup> *Skjaldedigtning*, IB, pp.274-5. ‘You won no less fame on the bank of the Thames, ruler of the leaping rollers’ steed. The wolf’s jaw knew that.’

<sup>133</sup> Frank, ‘King Cnut in the verse of his skalds’, p.113.

<sup>134</sup> *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. Campbell, I.4 (pp.12-13) and II.4 (pp.18-21). Although the encomiast’s account is partly influenced by classical models, nothing in his descriptions of the ships conflicts with the written or archaeological evidence for eleventh-century Scandinavian warships; see Elizabeth M. Tyler, ‘“The eyes of the beholders were dazzled”: treasure and artifice in *Encomium Emmae Reginae*’, *Early Medieval Europe* 8 (1999), 247-270, and Simon Keynes and Rosalind Love, ‘Earl Godwine’s ship’, *Anglo-Saxon England* 38 (2009), 185-223.

the prows, silver also flashed on the variously shaped ships. So great, in fact, was the magnificence of the fleet, that if its lord had desired to conquer any people, the ships alone would have terrified the enemy, before the warriors whom they carried joined battle at all.]<sup>135</sup>

As with the subject of Cnut's generosity to the church, the *Encomium* offers a similar picture of the king, within a different literary idiom, to that presented by the skalds; it confirms the impression given by the *Knútsdrápur* that naval power continued to be an important part of Cnut's public image as king. The encomiast must have learned this, implicitly or explicitly, from Emma herself or his other sources of information at Harthacnut's Anglo-Danish court.

Within this context, we should read the gesture described in the story of Cnut and the waves as an act of more than ordinary royal humility: there is a special significance in a king whose praise poetry elsewhere lauds his dominance over the seas dramatically and ostentatiously yielding that power to God. In order to consider this point, we must first discuss the best-attested example of Cnut's involvement in the cult of an English saint: the translation of the relics of the martyred Archbishop Ælfheah from London to Canterbury in 1023.

### **The translation of Ælfheah**

Ælfheah, Archbishop of Canterbury, was killed in 1012 by members of Thorkell's army after spending seven months in captivity on their ships at Greenwich, and in June 1023 his body was translated with great ceremony from St Paul's to Christ Church, Canterbury, with the permission of the king and in the presence of Cnut, Emma, and the infant Harthacnut. MS. D of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records the event as follows:

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<sup>135</sup> *Encomium Emmae*, ed. and trans. Campbell, pp.18-21.

Her Cnut kyning binnan Lundene on sancte Paules mynstre sealde fulle leafe Æðelnoðe arcebiscope 7 Bryhtwine biscope 7 eallon þam Godes þeowum þe heom mid wæron þæt hi moston nyman up of þam byrgene þone arcebiscope sancte Ælfheah, 7 hi þa swa dydon on .vi. idus Iunii. 7 se brema cyng 7 se arcebiscope 7 leodbiscopas 7 eorlas 7 swiðe manege hadode 7 eac læwede feredon on scype his þone halgan lichaman ofer Temese to Suðgeweorke, 7 þær þone halgan martyr þan arcebiscope 7 his geferum betæhton, 7 hi þa mid weorðlican weorode 7 wynsaman dreame hine to Hrofesceastre feredan. Ða on þam þryddan dæge com Imma seo hlæfdie mid hire cynelican bearne Hardacnute, 7 hi þa ealle mid mycclan þrymme 7 blisse 7 lofsange þone halgan arcebiscope into Cantwarebyri feredon, 7 swa wurðlice into Cristes cyrcan brohton on .iii. idus Iunii. Eft syððan on þam eahteoðan dæge, on .xvii. Kalendas Iulii, Æðelnoð arcebiscope 7 Ælfsie biscope 7 Bryhtwine biscope, 7 ealle þa þe mid heom wæron, gelogodon sancte Ælfeages halgan lichaman on norðhealde Cristes weofodes, Gode to lofe, 7 þam halgan arcebiscope to wurðmynte, 7 eallon þam to ecere hælðe þe his halgan lichoman þær mid estfulre heortan 7 mid ealre eadmodnyse dæghwamlice seceað. God ælmihtig gemiltsie eallum Cristenum mannum þurh sancte Ælfeages halgan geearnunga.<sup>136</sup>

[In this year, at St Paul's minster in London, King Cnut gave full permission to Archbishop Æthelnoth, Bishop Brihtwine and all the servants of God who were with them to take up the archbishop and saint Ælfheah from his tomb, and they did so on 8 June. And the glorious king, the archbishop, the bishops, earls, and a great number of ecclesiastics and lay people carried the holy body by ship across the Thames to Southwark, and there entrusted the holy martyr to the archbishop and his companions. And then, in a distinguished company and with glad rejoicing, they conveyed him to Rochester. Then on the third day Queen Emma came with her royal child Harthacnut, and then they all with great glory and jubilation and songs of praise carried the holy archbishop into Canterbury, and thus brought him with honour into Christ Church on 11 June. Afterwards, on the eighth day, 15 June, Archbishop Æthelnoth and Bishop Ælfsige and Bishop Brihtwine and all who were with them placed the holy body of St Ælfheah on the north side of Christ's altar, to the praise of God and the honour of the holy archbishop, and for the eternal salvation of all who daily seek his holy body with pious hearts and all humility. May Almighty God, through the holy merits of St Ælfheah, have mercy on all Christians.]

This public ceremony was a politically-charged action for a number of reasons: it was a form of reparation for the most high-profile killing of the Danish conquest, as well as an opportunity to remove a potential focus of anti-Danish feeling in London and to

<sup>136</sup> *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS. D*, ed. G. P. Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol.6 (Cambridge, 1996), p.64; hereafter *ASC MS. D*. The translation is noted much more briefly in C, E and F.

win the support of Canterbury;<sup>137</sup> it must have also played some part in the tense relationship between Cnut and Thorkell, who had spent the previous two years in exile for an unknown reason but was formally reconciled with the king in the same year as Ælfheah's translation.<sup>138</sup>

Apart from the chronicle entry, the fullest account of the translation is that written by Osbern at Christ Church in the late eleventh century.<sup>139</sup> Osbern's narrative is imaginative and in some respects difficult to trust, but it emphasises two themes which should interest us in connection with what has been observed about the recurring motifs in stories about Cnut's patronage of English churches: the king's personal involvement in the removal of the relics by ship, and the contrast between Cnut and other Danish leaders, particularly Thorkell. Osbern presents the translation as an act of atonement, which is undertaken by Cnut after he witnesses the punishments visited on Thorkell and the other Danish killers of Ælfheah:

Sed illos qui mortis ipsius auctores extiterant.' non sine terribili uindicta uindex Dei ira transire sinebat. Vt enim pauca de pluribus proluxa breuiter attingam.' propono Ducem Haconem proprio se mucrone transuerberantem. uatem matheseos disciplinis intentum. gutturi suo stilum infigentem... Ex quibus rebus tam uehemens cunctos Danorum principes formido inuasit.' ut uix eos terra teneret. sed marinis se tempestatibus dantes. existimabant in pelago martyris iram effugere posse. quos ab eius ira tellus tueri non posset.

Sed mox ut in altum spumantibus remis eductum fuisset.' centum sexaginta naues aduersis uentorum flatibus acte.~ in profundo maris summerse sunt. quadraginta uero itemque uiginti quinque ad exterarum atque ignotas regiones appluse. & quasi que insidiarum gratia uenissent ab eisdem miserabiliter interempte.

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<sup>137</sup> See Lawson, *Cnut*, pp.130-2, and Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut*, pp.79-81.

<sup>138</sup> See Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', pp.54-7, and Pauline Stafford, *Unification and Conquest: a political and social history of England in the tenth and eleventh centuries* (London, 1989), pp.70-4.

<sup>139</sup> The prose life and translation of Ælfheah, together with a verse *passio* which has not survived, were composed probably between 1080-89; see Jay Rubenstein, 'The life and writings of Osbern of Canterbury', in Eales and Sharpe, *Canterbury and the Norman Conquest* (London, 1995), pp.27-40. The *Translatio* is edited and translated by Rosemary Morris and Alexander Rumble as an appendix in Rumble, *The Reign of Cnut*, pp.283-315.

Remansit tamen in Anglia male audax princeps malorum Thurkillus. pauco tempore predo futurus. sed in eternum damnati spiritus preda mansurus. Nam paruo tempore euoluto.' uenit princeps Danorum Cnut cum multo nauigio in terram Anglorum. dissidensque ab illo propter quasdam res male ac perfide actas.' quicquid residuum infandi populi esse poterat.~ sicut tabule stilo deleri solent deleuit. ipsumque ducem sex tantummodo nauibus munitum in Danamarcum fugauit.

Qui cum ad terram euasisset.' suspectus Danorum principibus ne intestina bella moliretur.' statim per cuncta regionis illius loca agitatus. ad ultimum ab ignobili uulgo occisus. ferisque & auibus est miserabiliter proiectus. Sic ergo de terra & mari sublatis sunt.' qui uirum sanctum & cum honore nominandum. Elfegum archiepiscopum occiderunt.

[But the Avenger did not allow those who were responsible for his death to escape without the terrible avenging wrath of God. Let me deal briefly with a few items from many more lengthy. Earl Hákon was run through by his own sword, like a soothsayer, intent upon the disciplines of astrology, running a pen through his own throat... After this he so violently attacked all the leaders of the Danes that the earth would scarcely sustain them, but abandoning themselves to the storms of the sea, they believed they could escape the wrath of the martyr on the waters; but the ocean could not protect them from his anger. For as soon as they had set out with foam-flecked oars upon the deep, 160 ships driven by adverse gusts of winds were submerged in the depths of the sea; 40 and 25 were driven to strange and unknown regions, and were mercilessly slaughtered by whoever ambushed them.

But the cowardly leader of the evil ones, Thorkell, remained in England for a little while to be a pillager, but to remain in eternity as the booty of a damned soul. For, a little while afterwards, Cnut, the prince of the Danes, came to the land of the English with a great fleet and, disagreeing with him because of certain deeds which had been evilly and perfidiously done, he wiped out as many as he could of the rest of the faithless people, just as writing tablets are wont to be effaced with a stilus, and exiled the earl himself to Denmark with only six ships. When he reached land, he was suspected by the leaders of the Danes, lest he should foment internecine strife; he was straightway pursued through all the districts of that land, and was finally killed by an ignorant mob and thrown ignominiously to the wild beasts and the birds. Thus, therefore, were struck down by sea and land those who had killed the holy and honourable man, Archbishop Ælfheah.]<sup>140</sup>

The avenging power of God having been visited on the killers through storm and shipwreck, Cnut takes prudent action to propitiate the divine wrath. On the advice of Archbishop Æthelnoth he decides to translate the saint's relics to Canterbury, and

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<sup>140</sup> Rumble, *Reign of Cnut*, pp. 296-9.

with his housecarls standing guard around the city,<sup>141</sup> has the tomb opened.

Addressing the saint's body, Cnut asks forgiveness for the injuries inflicted on Ælfheah by the Danes, and the king and archbishop, with the help of two monks, remove the body from its resting-place to "a royal longship with golden dragon prows".<sup>142</sup> Craftily negotiating the threat of violent opposition from the citizens of London, the king steers the ship (taking the helm himself) across the river to Southwark,<sup>143</sup> where Cnut, cheerfully joking with Æthelnoth, entrusts the martyr's body to the archbishop and a force of housecarls.

The removal of relics in the face of opposition is, as has already been observed in relation to Goscelin's story about Mildrith, a common hagiographic trope,<sup>144</sup> and we can probably discount what Osbern says about hostile crowds, since the *Chronicle* suggests a stately procession rather than a hurried removal. However, the use of ships to carry the body out of London, a detail confirmed by the *Chronicle*'s "on scype", may well have been part of the pageantry of the translation. In Osbern's narrative, the use of the royal dragon-ship creates a sharp contrast between the Danes who were responsible for Ælfheah's death and Cnut, who turns his naval power to the martyr's service.<sup>145</sup> This positive portrayal of the king is paralleled in the *Chronicle* account,

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<sup>141</sup> Osbern says they are the soldiers of his household, "quos lingua Danorum huscarles uocant" (Rumble, p.302).

<sup>142</sup> "regia nauis aureis rostrata draconibus" (Rumble, p.308).

<sup>143</sup> "Mox remota a litore nauis, sedebat rex gubernaculum tenens, nauim ad ripam fluminis contrarium dirigens", 'Soon the ship had sailed from the shore with the king at the helm, steering it to the opposite bank of the river' (Rumble, pp.308-9). Southwark was the site of the Danish garrison and later of a church dedicated to St Óláfr; see William Page, *London: Its Origin and Early Development* (London, 1923), pp.44-54 and Bolton, *Empire of Cnut*, pp.61-2.

<sup>144</sup> See Rumble, pp.287-8, and for parallels Geary, *Furta Sacra*; however, in this case it may also reflect political reality if, as Lawson suggests, the relics of Ælfheah were becoming a focus of anti-Danish feeling in London (see Lawson, *Cnut*, pp.130-2).

<sup>145</sup> John Frankis, discussing the evidence for a small Scandinavian presence at Christ Church in the years after the Norman Conquest, suggested the possibility that Osbern (who was certainly brought up in England, but whose name corresponds to ON *Ásbjörn* and who was at least able to recognise *huscarl* as a Danish word) may himself have been of Scandinavian descent, and particularly interested in Ælfheah for this reason (Frankis, 'Sidelights on post-conquest Canterbury', 17-19; on Osbern's use of *huscarl* see also Townend, *Language and History in Viking Age England*, pp.185-6).

which memorialises the event in language which suggests the influence of liturgical commemoration of Ælfheah. Amid the praise of the merits of the martyr, the references to the royal family are distinctly flattering: Cnut is called “se brema cyng” and Harthacnut (here in his first recorded public appearance) is described as the “cynelican bearne”, implicitly recognising his position as heir.

It is possible that Osbern’s account, like the *Chronicle* entry, reflects an early interpretation of the event, perhaps preserved as part of the commemoration of Ælfheah’s translation at Canterbury. The Christ Church community appears not to have made any written record of Ælfheah’s life and death before Osbern composed his works on these subjects in the 1080s; his *Vita* describes the 1011 siege of Canterbury and Ælfheah’s murder at Greenwich but shows little sign of being based on older sources.<sup>146</sup> The translation, however, in which a number of Christ Church monks were directly involved, seems to have been better remembered. Osbern indicates that part of his account of the translation was based on oral information obtained from two eyewitnesses who had been members of the Christ Church community and whom Osbern had known personally: they claimed that they helped the archbishop and king to break open the martyr’s tomb.<sup>147</sup>

The Christ Church narrative of Ælfheah’s translation not only memorialises the martyr and records the honour done to Christ Church by the acquisition of his relics, but also commemorates the cathedral’s royal patrons by recording the role of Cnut and Emma in permitting and witnessing the translation. The commemoration of patrons was an important duty of any religious house, and as Jan Gerchow has shown,

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<sup>146</sup> Of Osbern’s *Life of Ælfheah*, R. W. Southern commented, “The one thing which he makes clear is that almost nothing was known about Elphege at Canterbury except that he had been murdered by the Danes” (Southern, *Saint Anselm and his Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought 1059-c.1130* (Cambridge, 1966), p.250).

<sup>147</sup> One of Osbern’s informants, Godric, was later dean of Canterbury between c.1044 and c.1070; the other, Ælfweard the Tall, had been a disciple of St Dunstan (see Rumble, *Reign of Cnut*, p.304 n.25 and 26).

the mutually beneficial relationship of patronage and memorialisation played an important role in the legitimisation of Cnut's kingship.<sup>148</sup> In light of Ælfheah's fate, Gerchow's characterisation of Cnut's behaviour is more directly applicable to the king's involvement in this translation than to any other aspect of his patronage:

Cnut's *memoria* is part of the legitimization of a Viking conqueror, a neophyte and founder of a northern empire, as king of the English. By his gifts, Cnut expressed repentance for damage done in the course of military campaigning. In return he received the *memoria* of the monks, which was of vital importance for the spiritual legitimization of his kingship.<sup>149</sup>

It is possible that the success of this strategy at Canterbury should be attributed to the influence of Archbishop Æthelnoth (1020-1038). Æthelnoth, who features prominently in Osbern's account of the translation, was Cnut's own appointment to the archbishopric, chosen perhaps because he had anointed Cnut as king in 1016 or 1017; Osbern observes that Æthelnoth was "much in favour with the king because he had anointed him".<sup>150</sup> The close relationship between Æthelnoth, Cnut and Emma is supported by the claim of the *Encomium Emmae* that Æthelnoth refused to consecrate Harald as king after Cnut's death: he declared that no one but Harthacnut should succeed, and for this action the encomiast calls him "a man gifted with high courage and wisdom".<sup>151</sup> Æthelnoth must have been instrumental in the translation of Ælfheah's relics, and this, as much as veneration for Ælfheah, may have encouraged the memorialisation of the translation at Christ Church.<sup>152</sup> There is some evidence to

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<sup>148</sup> See Gerchow, 'Prayers for King Cnut', especially pp.235-8.

<sup>149</sup> Gerchow, *ibid.*, p.238.

<sup>150</sup> "regi propterea quod illum sancto crismate liisset ualde acceptus", Rumble, *Reign of Cnut*, pp.300-1; on the date and form of the consecration see Bolton, *Empire of Cnut*, pp.80-1. Cnut may have intended to give the metropolitan see of Canterbury authority over the church of Denmark: Æthelnoth is known to have consecrated at least one bishop in England for a Danish see, Gerbrand, bishop of Roskilde (see Nicholas Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066* (Leicester, 1984), pp.294-5).

<sup>151</sup> "uirum omni uirtute et sapientia peditum", *Encomium Emmae*, iii.1, pp.40-1.

<sup>152</sup> As Rumble observes (*Reign of Cnut*, p.286), there is no mention in Osbern's account of the non-Canterbury ecclesiastics involved in the translation, who are named in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The

suggest there was an incipient cult of Æthelnoth at Canterbury in the years following his death in 1038, although if any account of his life was written in that period, it has not survived.<sup>153</sup> Osbern's account nonetheless must preserve some elements of earlier Christ Church tradition in focusing so heavily on Æthelnoth and his role as counsellor to Cnut.

Cnut's interactions with Canterbury also provide one possible context for the story of his attempt to command the waves. In both the earliest versions of the story, the king's failure to command the tide is presented as the impetus which inspires a particular act of humility and patronage: Gaimar links it to Cnut's pilgrimage to Rome, Henry of Huntingdon to the presentation of the royal crown to a figure of the crucified Christ. Lawson compares Cnut's gift of the crown to the similar act of Henry II of Germany at his imperial coronation in 1014, when he hung his crown above the altar of St Peter's, and notes in this connection:

Of all continental rulers, the German emperors may have been the ones Cnut was most eager to imitate, for in the second half of his reign he perhaps wished to see his own position in the northern world as emulating theirs in Europe.<sup>154</sup>

In light of this parallel, the gift of the crown seems likely to be based on a real event, and the king's demonstrative renunciation, like his lavish donations to religious houses, is a practice which seems to have been imitated by his followers: according to the Waltham Chronicle, Tovi pruða girded his sword on the Holy Rood of Waltham, declaring his intention henceforth to fight only for Christ, while his wife Gytha

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emphasis is on Æthelnoth as counsellor and supporter of the king; we might compare his role here to his appearance in William of Malmesbury's account of Cnut's visit to Wilton, where he rebukes the king for scorning St Eadgyth.

<sup>153</sup> This suggestion was made by Brooks, *Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, p.298. On literary production at Christ Church during the pontificate of Æthelnoth, and its relation to the royal court, see Brooks, pp.266-278, and Heslop, 'The production of *de luxe* manuscripts and the patronage of King Cnut and Queen Emma', pp.153-5.

<sup>154</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, p.128. See also Gerchow, 'Prayers for King Cnut', pp.222-230, who discusses the gift of the crown in reference to the depiction of Cnut and Emma in the frontispiece to the New Minster *Liber Vitae* (BL Stowe MS. 944).

presented the figure with a crown and ornaments made from her own jewels.<sup>155</sup> Henry is the first to link the crown to the story of the waves, but the gift itself is recorded in an earlier source: it first appears in Goscelin's *Translatio sancte Mildrethe*, where Goscelin says that one Easter Cnut gave up his crown and placed it on a crucifix at Winchester.<sup>156</sup> The story of the waves is in all versions of the *Historia Anglorum*, but the reference to the gift of the crown to a crucifix first appears in the third version of the text, dating to c.1140; Diana Greenway suggests that Henry's source for it may have been a version of the Mildrith legend – though not Goscelin's *Translatio* itself – which he used elsewhere in the *Historia Anglorum*.<sup>157</sup> As she notes, the final sentence – “may the soul of King Cnut enjoy rest” – appears to indicate a liturgical context for the story, probably a commemoration of Cnut as patron. Cnut was buried at the Old Minster, Winchester, and commemorated in calendars both there and at the New Minster, the origin of the *Liber Vitae* (London, British Library, MS. Stowe 944) whose frontispiece depicts Cnut and Emma as patrons of the church. The frontispiece, produced in 1031, shows the royal couple

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<sup>155</sup> *The Waltham Chronicle*, ch.12-13, pp.20-23. The chronicler's comment that this was the sword with which Tovi was knighted is obviously anachronistic, but the episode otherwise seems credible; alternatively, it may be a misinterpretation of the pre-Conquest practice of presenting a sword or other object as token of a donation of land (for this practice, see M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 2nd edition (Oxford, 1993), pp.38-41).

<sup>156</sup> Rollason, 'Goscelin of Canterbury's account of the translation and miracles of St. Mildrith', 163. Thomas Rudborne, writing in the fifteenth century, believed that a crowned crucifix which at that time stood in Winchester was the one crowned by Cnut (see Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography*, pp.45-6).

<sup>157</sup> *Historia Anglorum*, ed. Greenway, p.368, n.95, and see Greenway, 'Henry of Huntingdon and the Manuscripts of his *Historia Anglorum*', *Anglo-Norman Studies IX* (1986), 103-126. The presentation of the crown is also mentioned by Ralph of Diceto (based closely on Henry of Huntingdon; see *The Historical Works of Master Ralph de Diceto, Dean of London*, ed. William Stubbs, Rolls Series 68 (London, 1876), vol.i, p.174), by Henry Knighton (*Chronicon Henrici Knighton vel Cnitthon, Monachi Leycestrensis*, ed. J.R. Lumby, Rolls Series 92 (London, 1889), vol.i, p.28) and 'John of Brompton' (see *Historiæ Anglicanæ Scriptores Antiqui X*, ed. R. Twysden (London, 1652), column 912). The last two, like Henry, associate the gift of the crown with the attempt to command the tide but add that the crown was given to Winchester.

presenting a cross to the altar of the New Minster, and in return receiving from the hands of angels a crown and a veil, as the monks look on from below.<sup>158</sup>

A Winchester context for the story is therefore plausible in light of Goscelin's reference to the crown. However, a Canterbury charter with the date 1023 claims that Cnut presented his crown to Christ Church, along with the port of Sandwich. The charter survives in several Latin versions and one Old English version, the oldest of which dates to the second half of the eleventh century.<sup>159</sup> It is probably a post-Conquest forgery, but appears to be based on a genuine charter of the early eleventh century.<sup>160</sup> The charter links the gift of the crown and dominion over the water in a particularly striking way: the king gives the port together with its landing-places, rights of ferry and toll, and the water dues from both sides of the River Stour, as far inland as the distance a small axe could be thrown by a man on a ship close to the shore at high tide. Ownership of the port of Sandwich was an important and controversial issue for the community of Christ Church, and the subject of a long-

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<sup>158</sup> For discussion of the *Liber Vitae* and its frontispiece, see Jan Gerchow, *Die Gedenküberlieferung der Angelsachsen* (Berlin, 1988), pp.155-185, and 'Prayers for King Cnut', pp.222-235; Elizabeth C. Parker, 'The Gift of the Cross in the New Minster *Liber Vitae*', in Elizabeth Sears and Thelma K. Thomas, eds., *Reading Medieval Images: The Art Historian and the Object* (Ann Arbor, 2002), pp.176-186; Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography*, pp.25-6, 63; Richard Gameson, *The Role of Art in the Late Anglo-Saxon Church* (Oxford, 1995), pp.82-3, and Simon Keynes, 'The *Liber Vitae* of the New Minster, Winchester', in David Rollason et al., eds., *The Durham Liber Vitae and its Context* (Woodbridge, 2004), pp.149-163. For a facsimile of the manuscript see *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster and Hyde Abbey Winchester, British Library Stowe 944, together with Leaves from British Library Cotton Vespasian A.viii and British Library Cotton Titus D. xxvii*, ed. Simon Keynes, *Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile*, 26 (Copenhagen, 1996).

<sup>159</sup> The Old English charter is Canterbury Cathedral Archives and Library, Chart. Ant. S260; see Peter Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* (London, 1968), no.959, and the Electronic Sawyer edition at <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/959.html> (accessed September 2012).

<sup>160</sup> Kemble judged it to be spurious (see J. M. Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici* (London, 1839-48), vol.iv, no.737) but Robertson thought it likely to be genuine, and detected Scandinavian influence in the vocabulary of the Old English version (*Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. A. J. Robertson, (Cambridge, 1956), pp.406-11); see Nicholas Brooks, 'The Anglo-Saxon Cathedral Community, 597-1070', in Patrick Collinson, Nigel Ramsey and Margaret Sparks, eds., *A History of Canterbury Cathedral* (Oxford, 1995), pp.1-37 (28-31). A fifteenth-century list of benefactions to Canterbury says that Cnut's crown was on the head of the great cross in the nave of the cathedral (see William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum* (London, 1846), vol. i, 97).

standing dispute with St Augustine's.<sup>161</sup> The gift of the port, though not of the crown, was recorded in manuscripts A and F of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* at Christ Church in the late eleventh century; they date the gift to 1031 and 1029 respectively, and the former dates it by reference to a pilgrimage to Rome by Cnut in that year.<sup>162</sup> As we have seen, St Augustine's tradition (as represented by Goscelin) associated a 1031 pilgrimage with the translation of St Mildrith and the story of Cnut's rescue from shipwreck, and possibly with the donation of a crown to Winchester; the association between the pilgrimage, the gift of the port of Sandwich and the donation of a crown to Christ Church might almost represent rival claims at the two Canterbury houses.

If the presentation of a crown to Christ Church really took place – and in the light of the continental parallels cited by Lawson, this seems entirely possible – and was associated with the granting of a port and specifying the extent of rights over an area of water, this may be the origin of the story which links Cnut's gift of the crown and his renunciation of power over the sea. The fact that the gift is associated with both Canterbury and Winchester need not be a problem, since the king may well have presented his crown on more than one occasion: Barbara Raw observes, in support of the truth of the story, that the earliest crowned crucifixes depicted in English manuscript art are those in the *Ælfwine Prayer-book*, written and decorated at the New Minster, Winchester, between 1023 and 1035, and the *Bury Psalter*, produced at Christ Church at about the same time.<sup>163</sup>

It may be that the story of the waves originated because a public ceremony took place in which the king made an acknowledgement of divine power over the sea.

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<sup>161</sup> See Brooks, *Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, pp.292-4.

<sup>162</sup> On these entries see Timothy Graham, 'King Cnut's Grant of Sandwich to Christ Church, Canterbury: A New Reading of a Damaged Annal in Two Copies of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', in Mark C. Amodio and Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, eds., *Unlocking the Wordhord* (Toronto, 2003), pp.172-190.

<sup>163</sup> Raw, *Anglo-Saxon Crucifixion Iconography*, pp.45-6.

Apart from the translation of Ælfheah, we know of a number of other royal visits to Canterbury during which gifts were accompanied by memorable public ceremony. The first took place early in Cnut's reign, during the pontificate of Archbishop Lyfing, when the king confirmed the privileges of Christ Church in a ceremony in which he took the charters of freedom of earlier kings and laid them on the altar in the cathedral.<sup>164</sup> This public act was recorded by a message sent to the shire-court of Kent, and copied into a gospel-book (BL MS. Royal 1. D. ix) with the note that Cnut and his brother Harold had entered into confraternity with the monastery. As Brooks observes:

If the *mund* or security of the church, its estates and men, was to be safeguarded, the visible demonstration of royal support in a public ceremony was, it would seem, of greater value than a formal royal diploma... Both the king and the metropolitan church had much to gain from such close and public collaboration.<sup>165</sup>

This gift and the ceremony which accompanied it were recorded in writing, but such events also impressed themselves on the memories of eyewitnesses and were preserved in oral tradition.<sup>166</sup> One vivid example of the role of oral tradition in the recording of royal gifts to Christ Church is provided by Eadmer in his *Historia Novorum*. When Eadmer attended the Council of Bari with Anselm in 1098, he saw the Bishop of Benevento wearing a cope he recognised, which prompted him to recall:

sum verborum quæ puer a senioribus ecclesiæ nostræ, Edwio scilicet magnifico viro, Blachemanno atque Farmanno, aliisque nonnullis olim audieram. Solebant etenim iidem memorabiles viri sæpe narrare, quod, ipsis adolescentiæ primordia agentibus, Ymma regina... inter multa bona quæ ecclesiæ Christi Cantuariensi contulit, brachio beati apostoli Bartholomei ipsam ecclesiam, disponente

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<sup>164</sup> See F. E. Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs* (Manchester, 1952), no.26, pp.181-182, and Brooks, *Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, pp.288-290. He dates this visit to 1018.

<sup>165</sup> Brooks, *Early History of the Church of Canterbury*, pp.288, 290.

<sup>166</sup> For a recent discussion of the relationship between charters, narrative, and memory in the Anglo-Saxon period see Sarah Foot, 'Reading Anglo-Saxon Charters: Memory, Record, or Story?', in Elizabeth M. Tyler and Ross Balzaretto, eds., *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West* (Turnhout, 2006), pp.39-65.

domino suo Cnud rege Anglorum, sublimaverit. Quæ res qualiter acta fuerit... uno sensu, pari ordine referebant.

[a story which I had heard long ago when I was a boy from the elders of our Church, namely Edwin, a man of fine presence, Blackman and Farman and others. They, who were persons of note, used often to tell the story of how, when they were quite young, Queen Emma... among the many gifts which she gave to the Church of Christ at Canterbury, enriched that Church with an arm of St Bartholomew the Apostle, her Lord Cnut, King of England, being a party to the transaction. How this came about... they used to recount all of them consistently and in like sequence.]<sup>167</sup>

The story they told was how Emma, a queen famous for “her goodness and the benevolence with which she cared for the churches”,<sup>168</sup> acquired the arm from the Bishop of Benevento, who was travelling with it around Europe to earn money for his church. She declared she was ready to purchase the relic on condition that the bishop would formally swear to its authenticity, and this ceremony took place at Canterbury in the presence of a great number of clergy, lay people and monks, “among whom the men mentioned above, from whom we received the story, declared that they themselves had been present”.<sup>169</sup> After the oath had been sworn, the queen bought the relic for several pounds of silver and, together with Cnut, presented it to Christ Church. In return Archbishop Æthelnoth gave the Bishop of Benevento the valuable cope which Eadmer saw at the Council; Eadmer adds that when he asked the bishop where the cope had come from, his testimony confirmed the truth of the Canterbury story.<sup>170</sup>

This example suggests how a public ceremony might be preserved in oral tradition within a community, in this case for a period of more than seventy years.

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<sup>167</sup> Eadmer, *Historia Novorum in Anglia, et Opuscula Duo De Vita Sancti Anselmi et Quibusdam Miraculis Ejus*, ed. Martin Rule, Rolls Series 81 (London, 1884), pp.107-8, and translated by Geoffrey Bosanquet in *Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England: Historia Novorum in Anglia* (London, 1964), p.112.

<sup>168</sup> “bonitas sua et qua super ecclesias respiciebat largitas ei pepererat”, *Historia Novorum*, p.108; *Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England*, p.112.

<sup>169</sup> “inter quos etiam supra memorati viri a quibus hæc accepimus se præsentis fuisse testati sunt”, *Historia Novorum*, p.109; *Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England*, p.113.

<sup>170</sup> *Historia Novorum*, pp.107-110; *Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England*, pp.112-114.

Eadmer gives no indication of a date for the queen's visit, but Emma was certainly present at Canterbury for the translation of Ælfheah in 1023, on which occasion, according to Osbern, she "gave offerings in the form of various precious objects"; there may have been other unrecorded visits too.<sup>171</sup> The history and value of such gifts was evidently recorded in part by the collective memory of the community: Eadmer's recollection of how the story was told by the monks 'consistently and in like sequence' suggests not an anecdotal retelling but a deliberate effort to remember and preserve the provenance of the relic. In this way the relationship between patron and community was also preserved; the royal couple's generosity had served its intended purpose in winning not only the support but also the continuing prayers of the monks.<sup>172</sup>

## Conclusions

The twelfth-century chroniclers arrived at an almost entirely positive view of Cnut, but the raw material which allowed them to come to this conclusion was not merely the documentary evidence of visits and royal donations: the short narratives which served to explain or memorialise these events perpetuated an image of Cnut which emphasised a number of consistent elements in the behaviour of England's Danish king. Whether these stories had written form before that in which they now exist, or whether they were preserved in oral tradition at houses like Ely, Wilton, St Augustine's and Christ Church, Canterbury, cannot be known. However, it is

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<sup>171</sup> "oblatisque muneribus in diuersis cararum rerum speciebus", Rumble, *Reign of Cnut*, pp.312-3.

<sup>172</sup> For instance, a Christ Church obituary-list from the end of the thirteenth century (London, British Library, MS. Cotton Galba E, III.2, fos.32r-34r) includes the entry, 'Obiit Cnut Rex, qui Ecclesie Christi dedit brachium Sancti Bartholomei Apostoli et portum de Sandwico cum aurea corona sui capitis, Apeldre, Heselerste, Palstre, Wytricchesham et Folkestane prius ablatam reddidit.' The list is edited by Robin Fleming, 'Christchurch's Sisters and Brothers: An Edition and Discussion of Canterbury Obituary Lists', in Marc Anthony Meyer, ed., *The Culture of Christendom* (London, 1993), pp.115-153 (126-130).

significant that they are attached to particular events, in every case either a royal visit or the involvement of the king in the translation of a saint's relics; since such events were accompanied by the donation of gifts and confirmation of privileges it may well have been thought important to record and commemorate the occasion. We have some evidence for the existence of commemorative records of presentations in the late Anglo-Saxon period. The first part of Book II of the *Liber Eliensis* is based on the *Libellus Æthelwoldi Episcopi*, an early twelfth-century Latin translation of a vernacular text detailing the lands acquired for Ely by Bishop Æthelwold during the tenth-century refoundation of the abbey.<sup>173</sup> It has been proposed that a similar work, now lost, may lie behind the extended account in the Ramsey Chronicle of the life of Æthelric, bishop of Dorchester (1016-1034), and his acquisitions of land for the abbey.<sup>174</sup> This account includes four vivid narratives telling how Æthelric obtained estates from local Danish landowners.<sup>175</sup> It is possible that an account of this nature may be the source for the stories about Cnut in the *Liber Eliensis*, where they would

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<sup>173</sup> See *Liber Eliensis*, ed. Blake, p.xxxiv; the section based on the *Libellus* is roughly ch.1-49 of Book II, with some material interspersed from other sources. The *Libellus* was translated at the instigation of Bishop Hervey (1109-1131) and survives independently in two twelfth-century manuscripts, as well as in the *Liber Eliensis*. For a recent study of the *Libellus* see Catherine Clarke, *Writing Power in Anglo-Saxon England: Texts, Hierarchies, Economies* (Cambridge, 2012), pp.145-170.

<sup>174</sup> *Chronicon Abbatie Ramesiensis*, ed. W. Dunn Macray (London, 1886), pp.112-144, and see Antonia Gransden, *Legends, Tradition and History in Medieval England*, pp.66-70.

<sup>175</sup> These lands were obtained "not necessarily by scrupulous means, but always with Cnut's help" (Gransden, p.66). In two of these stories, Æthelric acquires the estates because their Danish owners are forced to flee the country for fear of violence from their English neighbours (*Chronicon Ramesiensis*, pp.140-4). Another story tells how he manages to trick a Danish settler, with whom he is staying while travelling with the royal party, into selling him the vill of Ellington in Huntingdonshire: when the man is drunk, Æthelric obtains a promise that he will sell the land if the bishop can raise the purchase money by the following morning, and when the Dane has fallen into a drunken stupor Æthelric dispatches a messenger to Cnut for a loan (*Chronicon Ramesiensis*, pp.135-140). The estate of Ellesworth is acquired from a Dane named Thurkill, whose wife turns to a witch to persecute her stepson, eventually murdering him; the witch confesses to Æthelric, who is given the land by Thurkill in gratitude for establishing the truth of the matter in court. These stories throw an unusual light on relations between the English and recent Danish settlers in the Bedfordshire/Huntingdonshire area, and it is particularly interesting to see that in every case the king is presented as siding with Æthelric against the Danes: what lies behind these narratives may be attempts by Cnut to win support from a hostile region (on resistance to Cnut in East Anglia, see above, n.58). Æthelric's predecessor as bishop of Dorchester, Eadnoth, had been killed in battle against the Danes at Assandun. Firmer evidence for Cnut's patronage of Ramsey is that he gave permission for the relics of St Felix to be translated there from Soham, and provided money from the royal treasury for the building of a second church (Lawson, *Cnut*, p.141).

serve a similar function in recording the abbey's rights and privileges. As the story of Cnut and the waves is also linked to a specific gift, the donation of the crown, we should perhaps look to such an occasion for the origin of that legend too, while the importance of royal approval in the commemoration of translations ensured the preservation of the narratives from Wilton and Christ Church.

It is of course also likely that for post-Conquest hagiographers and monastic historians, Cnut may have been a figure to whom common motifs could usefully be attached: this may be the simplest interpretation of William of Malmesbury's depiction of him as a scornful barbarian who is forcibly converted to the worship of English saints, or of Osbern's picture of a penitent king compensating the English church for the misdeeds of his ancestors. To the first generation of Anglo-Norman historians, stories about a foreign king who learned to respect the English church, a pagan civilised by contact with the power of Anglo-Saxon saints, might have had obvious appeal. However, it is important to recognise that this paradigm reflects with some accuracy the politics of Cnut's reign and the image he and his advisors appear to have deliberately cultivated. It is true that the post-Conquest narratives draw on hagiographic convention in their depiction of the king, but this does not mean that they can be dismissed out of hand as late inventions: the contemporary evidence of Cnut's documented benefactions, the presentation of the king in the skaldic verse composed for him, and the language attributed to him in his letter from Rome – gestures intended for a variety of audiences, but displaying a remarkable consistency in their forms of expression – provides abundant proof that such conventions were politically useful, and that familiar literary modes were capable of being adapted with sometimes startling creativity to suit the demands of new audiences.

The purpose of this chapter has been to suggest that the stories about Cnut share a number of themes and preoccupations which suggest they have more in common than the fact that they all feature the same person and are of roughly similar date – in particular, that they share a thematic association between travel, royal generosity and the king’s power over the sea. These themes can usefully be read in conjunction with the literature which is more firmly associated with the court of Cnut, the verse of his skalds and the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*: comparison with the king’s public image as it is constructed in these texts makes it clear why the story of the waves, for instance, had more resonance when attached to the figure of Cnut than it would have had for any other English king. Unlike Cnut’s documented interactions with the English church, which have been extensively studied, little critical attention has been paid to the more fantastic narratives which illustrate this subject in post-Conquest hagiography and historiography. Although the story of Cnut’s song is often mentioned in passing in histories of Middle English verse, it has only ever been the subject of linguistic, not of literary analysis; in the same way, the story of the waves, though probably the only reason Cnut’s name is familiar to non-medievalists, has not been satisfactorily examined. In the twelfth century Cnut’s reign came to be seen (in Stenton’s words) “through a haze of kindly tradition”,<sup>176</sup> and modern historians were for a long time content to accept this illusion without closer examination. Studies of the political and literary culture of early eleventh-century England have only recently begun to pierce the haze. It is an extraordinary fact that, as Freeman observed of Cnut long ago, “the man who is said, in the traditions of other lands, to have ordered the cold-blooded murder of his brother-in-law, and that in a church at the holy season of Christmas, appears in English tradition as a prince whose main characteristic is

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<sup>176</sup> Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.412.

devotion mingled with good humour”;<sup>177</sup> it represents a remarkable divergence between English and Scandinavian historical writing which is largely the result of the role of church patronage and monastic *memoria* in interpreting Cnut’s reputation in England. Since the colourful post-Conquest stories about a pious, good-tempered king helped to create this illusion in the first place, it is no surprise that they have been largely discarded by modern historians in favour of more reliable sources; but the very fact that they contributed so extensively to the image of Cnut which has persisted from the twelfth century to the present day makes them worthy of greater attention. This chapter has been an attempt to read them in a different light, and to give them a place in the literary history of Anglo-Danish England.

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<sup>177</sup> Edward A. Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest of England: Its Causes and Results* (Oxford, 1870-1876), vol. i, p.437. The reference is to the murder of Úlfr Þorgilsson in Roskilde in 1027; see *Óláfs saga helga*, ch.152-3, in Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslensk Fornrit XXVI-XXVIII (Reykjavík, 1941-1951), vol. ii, pp.283-6.

## Chapter 2

### Anglo-Danish Family Histories: Siward, Waltheof and Hereward

Having considered some aspects of Anglo-Danish literary culture in the early eleventh century, we may now examine the literature of a slightly later period and a different, though related, Anglo-Scandinavian milieu: specifically, the group of oral legends from the East Midlands concerning the Danish Siward, Earl of Northumbria, his son Waltheof, and the English rebel Hereward. This chapter will attempt to elucidate the process by which, within a few decades of their deaths, these men became the subjects of elaborate oral narratives heavily influenced by Scandinavian models, apparently intended for audiences with a degree of competence in this literary form. Preserved in a monastic context, the prose Latin accounts of Siward and Hereward are evidence of an oral tradition which seems to have been the closest thing to Norse saga known to have been composed in England. This evidence comes from the southern part of the East Midlands, particularly the area which had once been (in the terminology of Cyril Hart) the ‘outer Danelaw’:<sup>178</sup> that is, the shires of Huntingdon, Northampton, Cambridge and Bedford, as well as two of the Danish Five Boroughs, Stamford and Nottingham. The Scandinavian affinities of the narratives in question have often been attributed to the lasting influence of Danish settlement in this area, but these men and their followers also had direct connections to Scandinavia: Siward was of Danish origin, and rose to prominence in England in the reign of Cnut, while his son Waltheof is known to have employed a skald, Þorkell Skallason, who was apparently resident in England at least until Waltheof’s death in 1076 and who composed poetry for the earl in Old Norse. This suggests a family who not only had ongoing ties to

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<sup>178</sup> Cyril Hart, *The Danelaw* (London, 1992), pp.8-19.

Scandinavia, but who continued to value Norse cultural and literary traditions of patronage and commemoration; as Judith Jesch observes:

the very use of the Old Norse language to commemorate a subject of purely English interest helps to suggest the contours of an audience conversant with that language, attuned to the cultural values of skaldic poetry, imbued with Norse concepts of loyalty and treachery, and politically in opposition to the new regime, somewhere in England in the late 1070s.<sup>179</sup>

It is very likely that both Siward and Waltheof had other men of Scandinavian descent in their retinue,<sup>180</sup> and in their resistance against Norman rule, Waltheof and Hereward both collaborated with fleets sent by the Danish king, Waltheof at York in 1069, Hereward at Peterborough and Ely in 1070-1. The turbulent decade which followed the Norman Conquest provided a wealth of material for chroniclers and story-tellers over the next century, and whatever the Anglo-Danish alliances of the anti-Norman rebels may suggest about the political allegiances of the east of England, they are a reminder that the Danish strain in that material was not a matter of the distant past but a subject of continuing interest.

Just as Angus McIntosh is right to emphasise, in the context of Anglo-Norse linguistic relations, the importance of remembering that “what we mean by ‘languages in contact’ is ‘users of language in contact’ and to insist upon this is much more than a mere terminological quibble and has far from trivial consequences”,<sup>181</sup> it is worth considering how the legends of Siward, Waltheof and Hereward provide us with concrete examples of English and Scandinavian ‘story-tellers in contact’, particularly with regard to the skald Þorkell – a Scandinavian in the employ of an English earl –

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<sup>179</sup> Jesch, ‘Skaldic verse in Scandinavian England’, p.322.

<sup>180</sup> John of Worcester’s account of Siward’s 1054 expedition to Scotland records that many English and Danes were killed there, and these may have been Siward’s followers; see *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. ii, p.574.

<sup>181</sup> McIntosh, ‘Codes and Cultures’, in Margaret Laing and Keith Williamson (eds.), *Speaking in our Tongues: Proceedings of a Colloquium on Medieval Dialectology and Related Disciplines* (Cambridge, 1994), pp.135-7 (137).

and the English priest Leofric, Hereward's chaplain and biographer, a man apparently of catholic literary tastes, of whom it is said that he made an effort to assemble tales of giants and warriors from ancient stories and record them in the vernacular.<sup>182</sup> The oral transmission of narrative material between medieval speakers is at any time difficult to reconstruct, but these three East Midlands legends make it possible to see something of this process in action.

These legends make the point particularly clear because they provide evidence that among the Anglo-Danish population of England literary traditions of Scandinavian origin were not merely being handed down but were still in productive use at the end of the eleventh century. We can be fairly sure that narratives of much earlier origin were circulating in the Danelaw at this period, as the development of legends about Ragnar loðbrók indicates,<sup>183</sup> but it is nonetheless remarkable that it was possible for men like Siward (d.1055), Waltheof (d.1076) and Hereward (d. after 1071) to become the focus of newly-created narratives formed out of a combination of traditional motifs and episodes. First formulated probably in the last decades of the eleventh century, these narratives were retold over a fairly wide area for a considerable period of time: they are recorded in a number of variant forms throughout the twelfth century and into the middle of the thirteenth, and in this light the fact that stories of Waltheof's death ultimately reached Norway and Iceland, there

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<sup>182</sup> See *Gesta Herwardi*, edited by T. D. Hardy and C. T. Martin as an appendix to their translation of Gaimar's *Lestoire des Engles*, Rolls Series (London, 1888-9), vol.i, pp.339-404 (339). The *Gesta Herwardi* has been translated by Michael Swanton as 'The Life of Hereward the Wake' in his *Three Lives of the Last Englishmen* (New York, 1984), pp. 43-88, reprinted with introduction and notes in T. Ohlgren, ed., *Medieval Outlaws: Ten Tales in Modern English* (Stroud, 1998), pp.12-60.

<sup>183</sup> See the arguments of de Vries in 'Die Wikingersaga', *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 15 (1927), 81-100, and further 'Die ostnordische Überlieferung der Sage von Ragnar Lodbrók', *Acta Philologica Scandinavica* 2 (1927), 115-149, 'Die westnordische Tradition der Sage von Ragnar Lodbrok', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 53 (1928), 257-302, and 'Die Entwicklung der Sage von den Lodbrokssöhnen in den historischen Quellen', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 44 (1928), 117-163; see also Rory McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga Loðbrókar and its Major Scandinavian Analogues* (Oxford, 1991), and Alfred Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles 850-880* (Oxford, 1977).

to feature prominently in several of the thirteenth-century *konungasögur*, is not as surprising as it might seem at first glance.

### **Waltheof and Siward: the Crowland context**

The evidence for an oral narrative about Siward survives almost solely as the result of the fame of his son Waltheof, the outcome of a strange sequence of events which brought this son of a “Danish warrior of the primitive type”<sup>184</sup> to be venerated as a saint and martyr for his part in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest. It is therefore necessary to begin with a consideration of the early literary records of Waltheof’s cult, the context within which the Siward narrative was somewhat incongruously preserved. Waltheof was apparently born late in his father’s life, the product of Siward’s second marriage to a descendant of the earls of Bamburgh, and named for one of his mother’s ancestors.<sup>185</sup> He was Earl of Northampton and Huntingdon at the time of the Conquest, and was among the English noblemen who swore allegiance to William in 1066, but in 1069 he took part in the northern uprising against the king, and, joining forces with a fleet sent by the Danish king Sveinn Úlfsson, was in the army which captured York from the Normans. When the rebellion failed Waltheof made peace with the king, married William’s niece Judith, and was given his father’s earldom of Northumbria. In 1075 he became involved in the Revolt of the Earls and this time, although he again submitted to William and apparently repented of his crime, he was sentenced to death. He was beheaded in Winchester in 1076, the only

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<sup>184</sup> This is Stenton’s characterisation of Siward in *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.417.

<sup>185</sup> Waltheof’s namesake was ealdorman of Bamburgh in the last decade of the tenth century, and Siward’s wife Ælfleda was his great-granddaughter; see William Kapelle, *The Norman Conquest of the North* (London, 1979), pp.30-1, and Christopher Morris, *Marriage and Murder in eleventh-century Northumbria: a study of ‘De Obsessione Dunelmi’* (York, 1992). The name Waltheof is an anglicisation of ON *Valþjófr*, but it is not recorded in Siward’s native Denmark until the sixteenth century; see Gillian Fellows Jensen, *Scandinavian Personal Names in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire* (Copenhagen, 1968), pp.330-1.

recorded political execution of William's reign.<sup>186</sup> His body, at first thrown ignominiously into a ditch, was later claimed by the monastery of Crowland, a Benedictine abbey in the Lincolnshire Fens of which Waltheof had been a patron. There in 1092, sixteen years after his death, his body was translated and found to be incorrupt; miracles were reported at his tomb, and he began to be regarded by the monks of Crowland as a martyr.<sup>187</sup>

Waltheof's cult was of very limited spread within England: all but one of the pilgrims to his shrine who are named in the record of his first miracles are from south Lincolnshire and the neighbouring counties.<sup>188</sup> Although there is evidence that Waltheof was being venerated by the nuns of Romsey Abbey in Hampshire in the period 1098-1102, since Anselm wrote to urge the suppression of the cult there,<sup>189</sup> his fame seems otherwise to have been strongly tied to Crowland and its sphere of influence, and the monks of Crowland diligently engaged in the production of texts in support of his claim to sanctity. Orderic Vitalis, who spent five weeks staying at Crowland sometime during the abbacy of Geoffrey of Orléans (1109-1124),<sup>190</sup> was commissioned to write an account of the early history of the abbey – partly with the

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<sup>186</sup> The sources for Waltheof's life are discussed by Forrest Scott, 'Earl Waltheof of Northumbria', *Archaeologia Aeliana* 30 (1952), 149-215.

<sup>187</sup> On the development of the cult, see Carl Watkins, 'The Cult of Earl Waltheof at Crowland', *Hagiographica* III (1996), 95-111, and Ann Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest*, pp.63-5, 146-7.

<sup>188</sup> The final, incomplete miracle story concerns a woman of Norman origin, Athelis, but she too may have been living in the neighbourhood of Crowland.

<sup>189</sup> Watkins, 'The Cult of Earl Waltheof', 99; see *Sancti Anselmi Opera Omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt (Edinburgh, 1949), vol. iii, p.144. It is not clear why Romsey should have preserved Waltheof's memory, but Anselm mentions a man claiming to be a son of Waltheof who was lingering in the area, and tells the nuns to send him away; this son is otherwise unrecorded. It may be significant that Christina, sister of Waltheof's one-time ally Edgar Ætheling, was a nun (possibly abbess) at Romsey; ASC E, s.a. 1085 and *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford, 1969-80), vol.iv, Book VIII, p.272. On Christina, see Knowles, Brooke and London, *The Heads of Religious Houses: England and Wales, I, 940-1216* (Cambridge, 2001), pp.219, 295, 297. Christina herself may have been dead by the time of Anselm's letter, and almost certainly by the time of the marriage of her nephew, David of Scotland, to Waltheof's daughter Matilda in 1114, but perhaps a combination of family connections and political sympathies briefly kept interest in Waltheof alive.

<sup>190</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. ii, pp.xxv-xxix, 322-351. His visit most likely took place between 1114 and 1123 (vol.i, p.25).

aim of replacing archives which had been destroyed by fire in 1091 – and an epitome of Felix’s *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, “at the request of the brethren and loving command of Abbot Geoffrey”,<sup>191</sup> together with a verse epitaph for Waltheof and a lengthy account of the earl’s life and death. Both the history and the epitome of Felix’s *Vita* were incorporated into Book IV of Orderic’s *Ecclesiastical History*, but copies also remained at Crowland, and Orderic’s exculpatory version of Waltheof’s rebellion and execution formed the basis of a later *vita* of the earl.

Orderic’s work reflects the early preoccupations of the cult at Crowland in arguing for Waltheof’s innocence of the crime for which he had been executed: Waltheof was a controversial saint who could be easily painted as a traitor and oath-breaker, and it was a central work of the promoters of his cult at Crowland to challenge this view of their patron. William of Malmesbury, who also visited Crowland some time during the writing of his *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum* (no later than the summer of 1125), records the prior’s efforts to persuade him of Waltheof’s sanctity:

God, it seems, signifies his assent to the English version, for He manifests many extraordinary miracles at the tomb. They say that when Waltheof was thrown into chains he purged his misdeeds by never passing a day without deep sobs. The prior of the place told me how, influenced by the miracles, he handled the noble and quite incorrupt body; the head had been stuck back on to the trunk, and only a red line witnessed to his violent end. So the prior (he said) did not scruple to call him ‘saint’ whenever Waltheof was spoken of, and would grant in his name the prayers and spiritual benefits of the place when they were asked for.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, Book IV, vol.ii, p.323.

<sup>192</sup> “Anglorum astipulationi diuinitas assentiri uidetur, miracula multa et ea permaxima ad tumbam illius ostendens. Aiunt enim in catenas coniectum cotidianis singultibus perperam commissa diluisse. Michi prior loci narravit se miraculis commotum corpus nobile ab omni labe immune contrectasse, caput reliquo corpori compaginatum rubra tantum quasi linea signum cedis ostentante, uidisse. Quapropter non se dubitare illum in omni sermone sanctum appellare, in illius nomine orationes et beneficia loci petentibus dare dicebat”; *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, iv.182, vol. i, pp.488-9.

The near-contemporary accounts of Orderic and William of Malmesbury are apparently independent of each other, but must have drawn on the same available sources at the abbey, oral and written. Both record a number of features of Waltheof's story which were rapidly becoming consistent elements in the Crowland narrative of his death, particularly the assertions that he was entrapped in the earls' plot, that his confession to Lanfranc provided full absolution for his crime, and that both his penitential tears before his death and the incorrupt state of his body afterwards demonstrated his innocence in the eyes of God. These features had evidently become part of the official version of his story, vocally promoted by the monks of Crowland and recorded by the visiting monk-chroniclers. Both accounts acknowledge that Waltheof's sanctity was a matter of ongoing discussion, and frame the interpretative debate along ethnic lines. William had previously commented on this in the *Gesta Regum*:

[Waltheof] did not remain loyal, being unable to control his natural perversity... Some, however, say it was force of necessity and not inclination that made him join the traitors. Such is the excuse put forward by the English, for the rest of the story is Norman; but they are Englishmen of the highest credit.<sup>193</sup>

Orderic claims that Waltheof was executed because of "the malice of the Normans who were envious of him and feared him for his great integrity,"<sup>194</sup> and his epitaph on Waltheof says the saint was "sentenced to die by cruel Norman judgement".<sup>195</sup> He also records the story of a Norman monk named Ouen who denied Waltheof's sanctity on the grounds that the earl was a traitor who had deserved to be executed for

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<sup>193</sup> "non permansit in fide, prauum ingenium cohibere impotens... quanuis quidam dicant necessitate interceptum, non uoluntate addictum, infidelitatis sacramentum agitasse. Anglorum est ista excusatio (nam cetera Normanni afferunt), Anglorum qui plurimum ueritate prestant"; *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, iii.253, vol. i, pp.468-9.

<sup>194</sup> "malignitate Normannorum qui ei nimis inuidebant eumque pro ingenti probitate eius metuebant", *Ecclesiastical History*, vol.ii, pp.344-5; he further claims that Waltheof was executed because his enemies coveted his lands, p.320.

<sup>195</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. ii, p.351.

his crime. Abbot Geoffrey rebuked him (gently, Orderic says, because he was a foreigner), but the monk died a few days later, a punishment from God for doubting Waltheof's holiness.<sup>196</sup> This emphasis on Norman hatred of Waltheof's cult is, as Watkins points out, almost certainly an exaggeration: unlike some of the Fenland abbeys, Crowland was by no means hostile to Norman influence, and Geoffrey, the abbot who challenged the Norman monk's scepticism, was himself of Norman origin.<sup>197</sup> However, the accusation of Norman prejudice must have served a useful purpose for the promoters of the cult, helping to exonerate Waltheof from the charge of treachery attached to his ignominious death, and the presentation of the debate in these terms, in this early period when the first literary records of the cult were being produced, must reflect the narrative which was accepted at Crowland. In this narrative, Norman-English rivalries were central to the proof of Waltheof's innocence and therefore of his sanctity.<sup>198</sup>

The accounts provided to William of Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis show the monks of Crowland actively engaged in the production of multiple literary records of Waltheof's life, promoting an official narrative of his controversial death which excused his crime and validated his claim to holiness. It is in this context, among a

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<sup>196</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. ii, p.348.

<sup>197</sup> Watkins, 'The Cult of Earl Waltheof at Crowland', 102; he compares Crowland with Thorney, where the monks rejected the imposition of their first Norman abbot. For a variety of views on the uses of Waltheof's cult in the twelfth century see Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest*, pp.146-7, Joanna Huntington, 'The Taming of the Laity: Writing Waltheof and Rebellion in the Twelfth Century', *Anglo-Norman Studies XXXII* (2009), 79-95, R. W. Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970), p.137, and Cownie, *Religious Patronage in Anglo-Norman England*, pp.119-121, who argues for a "distinctly non-Norman aura about Crowland and the cult of Waltheof" (p.120). Abbot Ingulf, who presided over the first translation of Waltheof's body in 1092, had been educated in Normandy; however, the English abbot of Crowland who had brought the earl's body to the abbey, Wulfketel, was deposed c.1085, and Orderic (presumably recording the Crowland view) claimed this was because he was 'an Englishman hated by the Normans', *Ecclesiastical History* vol.ii, pp.344-5; see Knowles, Brooke and London, *Heads of Religious Houses*, p.247.

<sup>198</sup> This is not to reject the arguments of Watkins and Williams that Waltheof's cult lacked a political dimension, but while they are correct in asserting that his cult was evidently not the focus of *resistance* to Norman rule, the interpretation of his death as a martyrdom seems to have encouraged a victim narrative to develop at Crowland in which the English and their saints were at risk from Norman enmity and had to be defended from attack.

series of hagiographical texts reflecting a distinctive institutional stance, that the narrative of Siward's life is recorded. A thirteenth-century manuscript of likely Crowland origin, now MS. Douai 852, preserves a cycle of texts related to Waltheof, his cult, and his family, together with works on two other Crowland saints, Guthlac and Neot.<sup>199</sup> One of these Waltheofian texts is a Latin prose work entitled *Gesta antecessorum comitis Waldevi*, which gives an account of Siward's life consisting of a collection of fantastic stories with strong Scandinavian parallels.<sup>200</sup> There is evidence that narratives about Siward also existed in Anglo-Norman and in English: an Anglo-Norman text closely related to the *Gesta antecessorum* survives from the abbey of Delapr , near Northampton,<sup>201</sup> and this makes reference to stories about Siward in an 'English book' belonging to 'Richard le Chauntour de Notyngham'. This book may have been an English version of the Siward narrative in the *Gesta antecessorum*. However, as the Douai manuscript provides the fullest record of the narratives relating to Siward and Waltheof, it will be the focus of the following discussion.

### **A Siwards saga?**

The stories about Siward in Douai MS. 852 are the somewhat confused remnants of an oral tradition centring on the earl, which was evidently at one point an elaborate and fully-developed legend. The manuscript bears remarkable testimony to the

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<sup>199</sup> On MS. Douai 852 see Chr tien Dehaisnes, *Manuscrits de la biblioth que de Douai* (Paris, 1878), and discussion in *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge, 1956), pp.39-42. The manuscript is in a variety of twelfth- and thirteenth-century hands, and may have been compiled to mark the second translation of Waltheof's relics in 1219; see Watkins, 'The Cult of Earl Waltheof', 97-8.

<sup>200</sup> The texts relating to Waltheof are edited by Francisque Michel in *Chroniques anglo-normandes* (Rouen, 1836-40), vol.ii, pp.99-142.

<sup>201</sup> This now survives only in a seventeenth-century transcript of a manuscript from Delapr . The first part of the narrative, the lives of Siward and Waltheof, is almost identical with the Latin version in the Douai MS; the second part, which deals with the Senlis and Scottish earls of Huntingdon, is unique. The manuscript from which the transcript was made seems to have been written by a nun of Delapr  between 1220 and 1237. See Gunther, 'An early thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman MS', *The Bodleian Quarterly Record* vi:69 (1931), 225-230.

existence of a complex oral narrative of a kind which has few contemporary parallels in England, but despite general acknowledgement of this fact there has been little attempt to determine the circumstances in which such an oral tradition might have circulated in the period between Siward's death in 1055 and the appearance of stories about him in the manuscripts from Delapr e and Crowland in the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>202</sup> A detailed examination of the evidence for the composition and transmission of the Siward narrative is needed: this will show that it is possible to reconstruct something of the process by which this development took place, and suggest that the evidence points to an East Midlands context for the growth and preservation of the tradition.

The structure of the *Gesta antecessorum* falls naturally into two parts: the first is a tightly-structured and internally consistent account of Siward's youthful adventures, and the second is a summary of his years as earl of Northumbria which contains two distinct, unconnected narrative episodes. It will be helpful to provide a brief summary of these two parts of the narrative, so that they can be discussed separately.<sup>203</sup> The *Gesta antecessorum* opens with a Danish man named Beorn who, 'according to the stories of the ancients' ("tradunt relaciones antiquorum"), was the son of a human woman and a bear, and who in token of his ancestry had the ears of a bear. His son, Siward ("cognomento *Diere*, id est grossus"),<sup>204</sup> leaves his father's

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<sup>202</sup> The fullest discussion is in C. E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England*, (Edinburgh, 1939), pp.127-135, and see also Axel Olrik, 'Siward Digri of Northumbria: A Viking saga of the Danes in England', *Saga-Book* VI (1908-9), 212-237, A. H. Smith, 'The Early Literary Relations of England and Scandinavia', *Saga-Book* XI (1928-1936), 215-32 (224-6), R. M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England* (London, 1970), pp.56-7, and Christine Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon: Parallels and Analogues* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.125-133.

<sup>203</sup> The text is printed by Michel, *Chroniques anglo-normandes*, pp.104-111, and most of it is translated by Wright in *Cultivation of Saga*, pp.129-133.

<sup>204</sup> *Diere* is a scribal error for *digri*; this phrase does not appear in the Delapr e text and is a marginal addition in the Douai manuscript, but the *Vita Edwardi Regis*, written around ten years after Siward's death, confirms it was a contemporary nickname: "Siwardus, dux Northumbrorum, Dan[ic]a lingua 'Digara', hoc est fortis, nuncupatus" (*The Life of King Edward who rests at Westminster*, ed. Barlow, p.34). It appears in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum*, from where the compiler of the Douai

house at an early age with fifty companions and a well-stocked ship, and sails to Orkney, where he fights a dragon and drives it out of the island. Sailing on to Northumbria in search of another dragon, he meets an old man sitting on a mound, who addresses him by name and tells him to go instead to London, where he will be granted land by the king. The old man gives the disbelieving Siward a banner named Ravenlandeye, “quod interpretatur *corvus terre terror*” (‘which being interpreted is, *raven, terror of the land*’). When Siward arrives in London he meets Tostig, who is identified as the Danish earl of Huntingdon; Tostig is said to be hated by King Edward because of his marriage to Earl Godwine’s daughter. Offended because Tostig pushes past him at a narrow bridge, Siward lies in wait for the earl, murders him, presents his head to the king, and obtains from him Tostig’s earldom of Huntingdon. Some time later he also receives the earldom of Northumbria, Cumberland and Westmoreland.

Thus far the story has no basis in history, apart from the statement, which there seems no reason to doubt, that Siward was of Danish origin.<sup>205</sup> Nothing is known of Siward’s early life before the first time his name appears in a York charter of 1033 as earl of southern Northumbria,<sup>206</sup> and there are no other records of his parentage, or of any involvement in the English campaigns of Svein or Cnut in the early part of the century. The only aspect of the narrative which may bear some

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MS. may have copied it: there Waltheof is described as “filius Siwardi magnificentissimi comitis, quem Digera Danico uocabulo, id est fortem, cognominabant” (iii.253, p.468). For other instances of *digri* (from ON *digr* ‘big, fat’), see Gösta Tengvik, *Old English Bynames* (Uppsala, 1938), p.310.

<sup>205</sup> On Siward’s career, see Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, p.572; Kapelle, *The Norman Conquest of the North*, pp.27-49; Keynes, ‘Cnut’s earls’, pp.65-6; and Dorothy Whitelock, ‘The Dealings of the Kings of England with Northumbria in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries’, in Peter Clemons, ed., *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in some Aspects of their History and Culture* (London, 1959), pp.70-88 (83-5).

<sup>206</sup> Siward may have held the earldom for some years previously, as the fate of his predecessor, Eiríkr, the Norwegian earl of Hlaðir, cannot be traced beyond 1023. Scandinavian sources claim that Eiríkr died in England, but William of Malmesbury believed he had returned to Denmark after being exiled at the same time as Thorkell hávi, in 1021 or 1022; see William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii.181 and Keynes, ‘Cnut’s earls’, pp.57-8.

distant relation to historical fact is the story of the murder by which Siward gained his earldom: this may be a reflection of the belief recorded by Symeon of Durham that Siward was responsible for the death of Eadulf, his predecessor as earl of northern Northumbria, in 1041, and that by this means he gained control of the land north of the Tees.<sup>207</sup> However, the story of the insult at the bridge must be complete invention, and the role attributed to Tostig is extremely confused: Tostig was Siward's successor, not his predecessor, as earl, and Siward only gained the earldom of Huntingdon in the early 1050s, after he had been earl of Northampton for some ten years, and of Northumbria for more than twenty.<sup>208</sup> Tostig became earl of Northumbria on Siward's death in 1055, when Waltheof was apparently too young to succeed to the earldom.

So far, then, the *Gesta antecessorum* is almost entirely fiction, and the only episode which may be based on real events is highly fictionalised. However, from the point when Siward is granted his earldom the narrative accords more closely with what can be verified about his career. The break in the story is marked in the Delapré text with the statement that more of Siward's deeds are recorded in the English book belonging to "Richard le Chantour de Notyngham",<sup>209</sup> while the *Gesta* acknowledges the change with a general observation that Siward maintained peace in Northumbria for many years, in accordance with a prophecy recorded by some unnamed "antiqua Anglorum historia" that a man born of a union between a rational and an irrational being – i.e. the woman and the bear – should defend England from its enemies. It

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<sup>207</sup> Symeon of Durham, *Libellus de Exordio atque Procursu istius hoc est Dunhelmensis Ecclesie*, iii.9, pp.168-171. This was first suggested by Freeman, *Norman Conquest of England*, vol. i, pp.791-2.

<sup>208</sup> Kapelle, *Norman Conquest of the North*, pp.28-9. Siward seems to have held the earldom of Huntingdon from c.1051 to his death. The earldom in Siward's time included the shires of Huntingdon and Northampton, probably Rutland and Bedfordshire, and possibly also Cambridgeshire, including the Isle of Ely; it may possibly be identified with the earldom of the *Mediterranei*, which included at least Huntingdonshire and is said by John of Worcester to have been held by Thuri in Harthacnut's reign (JW s.a.1041); see Scott, 'Earl Waltheof', 157-63.

<sup>209</sup> Gunther, p.228.

then recounts how Siward leads an army to Scotland in support of its deposed king, named as ‘Duneval’. During his absence his son Osbeorn Bulax is killed, and on hearing of his death, Siward reacts so violently that he smashes a stone sphere with his axe.<sup>210</sup> After many years (in fact he died the year after his expedition to Scotland), Siward feels his own death approaching and chooses to die in his armour rather than in bed like a cow (‘more vaccino’). He is buried at York, having given his banner Ravenlandeye to the church he founded there.<sup>211</sup>

All the Siward material is, as will be seen, a composite of numerous motifs drawn principally from Scandinavian tradition; there is, however, a clear distinction between the two parts of the narrative, and they have individual features which make it possible to speculate about the evolution of the legend in oral and subsequently in written tradition. The basic facts of the last two stories are confirmed in part by the evidence of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and versions of both are also told by Henry of Huntingdon, with dialogue which does not appear in the *Gesta antecessorum*.

Henry records Siward’s reaction to Osbeorn’s death in 1054 as follows:

Circa hoc tempus Siwardus consul fortissimus Nordhymbre, pene gigas statura, manu uero et mente predura, misit filium suum in Scotiam conquirendam. Quem cum bello cesum patri renuntiassant, ait, ‘Recepitne uulnus letale in anteriori uel posteriori corporis

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<sup>210</sup> This expedition took place in 1054, and the death of Siward’s son is confirmed by ASC D: “Her ferde Siward eorl mid miclum here on Scotland, ægðer ge mid scyphere 7 mid landfyrde, 7 feaht wið Scottas, 7 aflymde þone kyng Macbeoðen, 7 ofslah eall þæt þær betst wæs on þam lande, 7 lædde þonan micele herehuðe swilce nan man ær ne begeat, ac his sunu Osborn, 7 his sweostorsuna Sihward, 7 of his huscarlum 7 eac þæs cynges wurdon þær ofslægene on þone dæg Septem Dormientium.” (ASC MS. D, p.74; ‘In this year Earl Siward went with a great army to Scotland, with both a fleet and a land-army; he fought against the Scots and put to flight the king Macbeth, and killed all those who were best in that country, and he took from there such great war-booty as no man had ever got before; but his son Osbeorn and his nephew Siward and some of his huscarls and of the king’s were killed there on the day of the Seven Sleepers’).

<sup>211</sup> Siward’s church was dedicated to the Norwegian king Oláfr Haraldsson, who was recognised as a saint in England from at least c.1050. ASC D, s.a. 1055, records “On þisan gere forðferde Syward eorl on Eoferwic, 7 he ligeð æt Galmaho on þam mynstre þe he sylf let timbrian 7 halgian on Godes 7 Olafes naman” (ASC MS. D, p.74; ‘In this year Earl Siward died in York, and he lies at Galmaho in the minster which he himself had built and consecrated in the name of God and Olaf’). See Dickins, ‘The Cult of S. Olave in the British Isles’, p.55, and Edvard Bull, ‘The Cultus of Norwegian Saints in England and Scotland’, *Saga-book* VIII (1913-4), 135-148.

parte?’ Dixerunt nuntii, ‘In anteriori.’ At ille, ‘Gaudeo plane, non enim alio me uel filius meum digner funere.’ Siwardus igitur in Scotiam proficiscens, regem bello uicit, regnum totum destruxit, destructum sibi subiugauit.

[Around this time Siward, the mighty earl of Northumbria, almost a giant in stature, very strong mentally and physically, sent his son to conquer Scotland. When they came back and reported to his father that he had been killed in battle, he asked, ‘Did he receive his fatal wound in the front or the back of his body?’ The messengers said, ‘In the front’. Then he said, ‘I am completely happy, for I consider no other death worthy for me or my son.’ So Siward set out for Scotland, and defeated the king in battle, destroyed the whole realm, and having destroyed it, subjected it to himself.]<sup>212</sup>

Henry was writing seventy years after Osbeorn’s death, and it is clear that by this time the story had already taken on a distinctly literary shape. It is particularly striking that in Henry’s story Siward’s questions about Osbeorn’s manner of death are followed by what is apparently a revenge attack on Scotland, since a close Scandinavian parallel to this story draws an explicit connection between the manner of the wounds and vengeance for the killing.<sup>213</sup> This appears in *Egils saga*, when Kveld-Úlfr asks for the details of the death of his son Þórólfr, who has been killed in battle against Haraldr

hárfagri:

Kveld-Úlfr spurði Qlvi vandliga frá atburðum þeim er gjörzk höfðu á Sandnesi þá er Þórólfr fell, svá at því hvat Þórólfr vann til frama áðr hann felli, svá ok hverir vápn báru á hann, eða hvar hann hafði mest sár, eða hverneg fall hans yrði. Qlvir sagði allt þat er hann spurði, svá þat at Haraldr konungr veitti honum sár þat er ærit mundi eitt til bana, ok Þórólfr fell nær á foetr konungi á grúfu.

Þá svaraði Kveld-Úlfr: ‘Vel hefir þú sagt, því at þat hafa gamlir menn mælt, at þess manns mundi hefnt verða ef hann felli á grúfu, ok þeim nær koma hefndin er fyrir yrði er hinn felli. En ólíkligt er at oss verði þeirar hamingju auðit.’<sup>214</sup>

[Kveld-Úlfr questioned Qlvir closely about everything that had happened at Sandnes when Þórólfr fell: what brave deeds Þórólfr did before he fell, whose weapon injured him, where he received his worst wounds, and how his death occurred. Qlvir told him

<sup>212</sup> *Historia Anglorum*, vi.22, pp.377-9.

<sup>213</sup> Olrik thought the element of revenge was absent from both versions of the story of Osbeorn’s death, “a motive which the tradition could do without” (‘Siward digri’, 231), but the juxtaposition of the wounds conversation and the expedition is suggestive of revenge. Henry may have thought so, since he connects the two episodes with the word ‘igitur’.

<sup>214</sup> *Egils saga*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson (London, 2003), ch.24, pp.31-2.

everything he asked, that King Haraldr gave him the wound which alone was enough to kill him, and that Þórólfr fell forwards at the foot of the king.

Then Kveld-Úlfr replied, “You have said well, because old men say that he who falls forwards will be avenged, and that vengeance will come near to the one before whom he falls. But it is not likely that such will be our luck.”]

The importance laid on the location of Osbeorn’s wounds in Henry of Huntingdon’s story seems to suggest the existence in England of the idea that wounds in the front are a mark of honour, which is presented in the saga as an old belief or superstition (“þat hafa gamlir menn mælt”). It may well have been a genuine superstition, but here it is also a literary motif: the adaptation of the story to fit the motif of a father’s reaction to a son’s death reveals the shaping influence of a developing narrative tradition, which is also evident in the difference between the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* account and that of Henry and the *Gesta*. The Chronicle states that Osbeorn died in battle, on campaign with his father in Scotland, but both the stories told by Henry and the *Gesta* have it that Siward is apart from his son and hears of his death from messengers (in the first case, when Siward has sent his son to Scotland alone; in the second, while Siward is himself in Scotland and absent from Northumbria). This allows the introduction of a conventional reaction motif; in Henry’s story it is the dialogue about the placement of the wounds, while in the *Gesta* it is the separate but related motif of violent reaction to news of a death. Olrik compared the *Gesta*’s version to perhaps the most famous example of this motif in Norse literature, the reactions of the sons of Ragnar loðbrók to their father’s death in *Ragnars saga*.<sup>215</sup> As we shall see, this is not the only potential connection between the Siward material and legends relating to the sons of Ragnar.

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<sup>215</sup> Olrik, ‘Siward Digri of Northumbria’, 226; see *Völsunga saga ok Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*, ed. Magnus Olsen (Copenhagen, 1906-8), pp.161-2.

Henry's account of Siward's death bears a close resemblance to the version in the *Gesta antecessorum*, although once again, he preserves it in the form of speech:

Siwardus, consul rigidissimus, pro fluuio uentris ductus mortem sensit imminere. Dixitque, 'Quantus pudor me tot in bellis mori non potuisse, ut uaccarum morti cum dedecore reseruarer! Induite me saltem lorica mea impenetrabili, precingite gladio. Sullimate galea. Scutum in leua. Securim auratam michi ponite in dextra, ut militum fortissimus modo militis moriar.' Dixerat, et ut dixerat armatus honorifice spiritum exalauit.

[Siward, the stalwart earl, being seized by dysentery, felt that death was near. And he said, 'How shameful it is that I, who could not die in so many battles, should have been saved for the ignominious death of a cow! At least clothe me in my impenetrable breastplate, gird me with my sword, place my helmet on my head, my shield in my left hand, my gilded battle-axe in my right, that I, the bravest of soldiers, may die like a soldier.' He spoke, and armed as he had requested, he gave up his spirit with honour.]<sup>216</sup>

Parallels between this story and various Norse examples of warriors choosing the manner of their death have been discussed at length by Wright and Olrik,<sup>217</sup> and there is no need to rehearse them here. Instead we may consider the significance of the fact that it is this story, together with that of Osbeorn's death, which appears both in Henry of Huntingdon and in the *Gesta antecessorum*. These two independent and unrelated episodes essentially comprise the second part of the *Gesta* narrative, and as they are closely tied to the known events of Siward's life, they may have been the earliest part of the Siward legend. They were certainly in existence and in a recognisably literary shape within a century of Siward's death, when they were recorded by Henry of Huntingdon in the second quarter of the twelfth century. Olrik characterised Henry's version of the stories as lacking "names, details, places, combination of scenes, and supernatural features – all of which gives the saga its life and its Northern colour", and consequently saw them as secondary to the version in

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<sup>216</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, vi.24, pp.379-381.

<sup>217</sup> Wright adduces parallels including Saxo's account of Starkad and the death of Egill in *Hakonar saga Goða*, *Cultivation of Saga*, pp.128-9, but see also Olrik, 'Siward Digri', 212-237 (226).

the *Gesta*.<sup>218</sup> This sparseness of detail is partly the result of Henry's own style, and partly because within the chronicle the episodes are not intended to provide a narrative account of Siward's life but only to elaborate on the plain record of the two deaths which Henry found in his written sources. However, the lack of circumstantial detail which Olrik noted as such a contrast with the *Gesta antecessorum*, whatever it says about Henry's deficiencies in 'Northern colour', may reveal something about how the episodes may have developed. Both episodes make substantial use of direct speech, and in each case the words attributed to Siward are effectively the point of the story. The focus of the story of Osbeorn's death is on Siward's questioning of the messengers (not, as in the *Gesta antecessorum*, on the smashing of the stone sphere),<sup>219</sup> and it is this dialogue which forms the strongest point of the parallel between his reaction and that of Kveld-Úlfr in *Egils saga*. In the story of Siward's death, too, it is the verbal declaration by the earl that he will not die like a cow which is the key element. Henry may have been responsible for augmenting the speech with the list of weapons with which Siward asks to be armed, but the basic similarity between his words and those reported in the *Gesta antecessorum* make it clear that this was a common element in the oral sources of both texts, and not an innovation attributable to either. The core of each story may therefore originally have been a memorable utterance, rather than a narrative. The importance of speech surely indicates that Henry recorded these stories essentially in the form he heard them: the

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<sup>218</sup> Olrik, 'Siward Digri', 232.

<sup>219</sup> There may be some connection between the story of Siward's smashing of the stone in Dundee and the legend that Athelstan, after defeating Constantine in battle in Scotland and before turning south to Brunanburh, struck a miraculously large dent in a stone at Dunbar. Robert Mannyng, in the fourteenth century, claimed this dent could still be seen (Robert Mannyng, *The Chronicle*, ed. Idelle Sullens, (Binghamton, N.Y., 1996), ll.627-634; in 1301 Edward I used it as evidence to prove English dominion over Scotland (see *Anglo-Scottish Relations 1174-1328, Some Selected Documents*, ed. and trans. E. L. G. Stones (London, 1965), pp.96-117, and Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, pp.40-1. The legend was associated with the Yorkshire-based hagiography of St John of Beverley, but Mannyng's reference suggests it was known in the East Midlands.

centrality of the verbal utterance to each story makes it unlikely that the substance (if not the form) of the speech was Henry's own invention.

By contrast, there is only one instance of direct speech in the *Gesta antecessorum*, although several conversations are reported, and that is attributed not to Siward but to the old man on the mound. This must be a deliberate decision by the Latin redactor, who perhaps perceived the dramatic qualities of the old man's prophetic speech (in which he addresses Siward by name and predicts what will happen to him in London) and either recorded or reconstructed words to perform this function. Despite the lack of direct speech, the story of Siward's warlike death in the *Gesta antecessorum* is essentially the same as Henry's account, with the addition of the place of his death and burial, but next to Henry's story the reference to Siward's reaction to the death of Osbeorn is perfunctory, forming a minor part of the summary of Siward's years as earl of Northumbria.

The vagueness which characterises the *Gesta's* record of this period in Siward's life contrasts notably with the early part of the text, which forms a cohesive narrative, covering a brief period of time and possessing its own internal causal logic. Siward's youthful dragon-slaying, his encounter with the old man on the mound, and his killing of Tostig are not a series of unrelated episodic adventures but a structured account which purports to explain how Siward came to obtain an earldom in England. Such a narrative must have been compiled, at least in outline, at the same time and as a single unit. It draws motifs from multiple oral traditions which, as we shall see, were current in the Danelaw, knitting them together to compile a narrative about Siward's early life, and as there is nothing original about this part of the story and nothing to tie it specifically to Siward, it is perhaps most likely to have been composed some time after Siward's death, when the circumstances of his life had

been forgotten or were perceived to be less relevant. The only partial exception is the Tostig episode, which may be distantly based on the murder of Eadulf, but it has been so completely moulded into a literary shape that it is difficult to believe any part of it strongly recalls the historical event. The encounter on the bridge as a motive for the murder and the way in which the promise made by the king is fulfilled in an unexpected way are both entirely literary features.<sup>220</sup>

Furthermore, the garbled identification of Siward's predecessor as earl and the setting at London and Westminster strongly suggest an attempt to reconcile an existing narrative with historical information from another source, and it may be that in these details we can trace the hand of the compiler at Crowland or Delapré who produced the summary of the Siward narrative. The compilers of the Douai manuscript were evidently concerned to provide some degree of historical accuracy, as the treatment of the genealogy at the beginning of the *Gesta antecessorum* makes clear: the genealogy has been erased and corrected in a contemporary hand, and the altered genealogy has subsequently been copied into the beginning of the text headed *Vita et passio venerabilis viri Gualdevi comitis Huntendonie et Norhantonie*. As the text of the *Gesta antecessorum* underwent a process of correction during the composition of the manuscript, apparently with the aim of reconciling the text the compilers had to hand with other written sources, it is likely that other alterations were made at this point: the specific referents in the story of the bridge – the name of Tostig, the explanation of his relationship with the king, and especially the reference to the earldom of Huntingdon (rather than Northumbria) – may have been additions of

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<sup>220</sup> It is tempting to compare the dispute on the bridge with Gaimar's comment that under the Danish kings, the English were expected to give the Danes precedence when they met at a bridge-crossing; Gaimar claims that the English would be punished if they did not give way, and that this was the cause of great resentment against the Danes (*Estoire des Engleis*, ll.4766-4778). Perhaps Gaimar had heard a story like that told of Siward and Tostig in the *Gesta antecessorum*, although for the purposes of that text both men are Danish.

this kind. The frame narrative for the latter part of the story in the *Gesta antecessorum*, which provides a summary of Siward's period as earl of Northumbria, must also be the work of the compiler: its (inaccurate) characterisation of Siward's rule as a time of peace and its reference to a prophecy in the "antiqua Anglorum historia" which says that a man born of a rational and irrational being would defend England from its enemies both suggest an attempt to compensate for a lack of information by providing a historical gloss on Siward's life.

### **Crowland, Huntingdon, and an East Midlands context for the \*Siwards saga**

Although the *Gesta antecessorum* is substantially based on oral sources, it is important to recognise that in its written form it is of a piece with the concerns of other texts in the Douai manuscript, in providing a narrative of both family history and the history of the honour of Huntingdon. The monks of Crowland were naturally more interested in their patron Waltheof than in his father, and so the majority of the related texts in the manuscript deal with Waltheof's death and the growth of his posthumous cult. However, the *Gesta antecessorum* is followed in the manuscript by the text entitled *De Comitissa*, which follows the story of Waltheof's widow Judith and their daughters, tracing the descent of the honour of Huntingdon through three generations.<sup>221</sup> The last-named earl is David, who died in 1219. The emphasis in the *Gesta antecessorum* on Siward's acquisition of Huntingdon thus provides a form of prologue to the later history of the earldom, albeit one which, with its tales of casual murder and enigmatic old men, is somewhat out of keeping with the rest of the manuscript. Certainly the Crowland monks did not think Siward had gained the earldom of Huntingdon at Odin's instigation, but perhaps they were not averse to the

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<sup>221</sup> *Chroniques anglo-normandes*, vol.ii, pp.123-131. The earldom passed to the Scottish royal house through the marriage of Waltheof's daughter Matilda.

suggestion of the *Gesta antecessorum* that there was some supernatural agency at work in the connection between Waltheof's family and the earldom. The story of bear ancestry is assimilated to this purpose with similar ease; at least, this seems to be the aim of the otherwise inexplicable reference to the prophecy of the man born of a rational and irrational being.

It is therefore necessary to reassess the level of involvement of the monastic compilers in the *Gesta antecessorum*, and the extent to which it has been shaped to fit its manuscript context. The Siward narrative is not merely a fossilised relic of an oral saga, recorded in garbled form by a monk who did not understand what he was writing; it is part of a series of texts with a specific purpose, perhaps compiled for a particular occasion (the second translation of Waltheof's relics in 1219), and determined by the interests and needs of the community at Crowland. In addition, as far as it is possible to tell, the oral narrative underlying the *Gesta antecessorum* evolved to some degree in the East Midlands, rather than in Northumbria, as previous commentators have assumed. Wright thought that the Siward material was of Northumbrian provenance, observing that "Henry of Huntingdon's two stories are but the *disjecta membra* of a *Siwards saga* which must have been still current in Northumbria during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,"<sup>222</sup> and quoting Thomas Arnold's comment about Siward's death that "this story, which Henry perhaps heard from some old retainer of the great Northumbrian earl, is thoroughly Scandinavian in its spirit."<sup>223</sup> Olrik also assumed that the hypothetical *Siwards saga* must have developed in Northumbria, where interest in Siward would be greatest, and which was, in his view, the only area of England where "there must have been a

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<sup>222</sup> Wright, *Cultivation of Saga*, p.129.

<sup>223</sup> *Henrici Archidiaconi Huntendunensis, Historia Anglorum*, ed. Thomas Arnold, Rolls Series 74 (London, 1879), p.196, n.

Scandinavian population pure enough to bring forth a work of such Northern colouring".<sup>224</sup> It is indeed probable that it was in Siward's northern earldom that stories were first told about him – perhaps at York, where he was buried – if only because Siward's connection with his southern possessions was brief by comparison with that of his son Waltheof. Whether those stories were anywhere near as fully-developed as the saga which lies behind the Crowland material is, of course, another matter. It may be that the two stories told by Henry of Huntingdon – belonging to the second section of the saga, and based more closely on historical events – rather than being disjointed remnants of a longer oral narrative, were in fact the earliest components of the saga, and that only these stories were ever current in Northumbria.

It is of course dangerous to argue from silence when considering the survival of oral narratives – the preservation of the Siward legend is the exception and not the rule – but it is nonetheless the case that there is no evidence for Wright's belief that the saga was still current in Northumbria in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the evidence of the Crowland *Gesta antecessorum*, of the text from Delapré, of Henry of Huntingdon, and of the reference to 'Richard the Chauntour' of Nottingham, that it was current in the East Midlands. The two stories known to Henry may have found their way south during Waltheof's time as earl of Huntingdon – short narratives perhaps retold by the likes of Arnold's hypothetical "old retainer" – and circulated in that form in a limited area around Northampton or Huntingdon. Henry, writing in the second quarter of the twelfth century, apparently knew nothing more about Siward than these two episodes, based on direct speech, and already in literary form; the early part of the saga, which, as we shall see, contains some distinctively East Anglian elements, may have developed subsequently.

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<sup>224</sup> Olrik, 'Siward Digri', 232.

The references to Northumbria in the early part of the Siward material suggest an attitude to the region more likely to resonate with a southern audience. Northumbria is used as the setting of one of Siward's adventures, but in a way which suggests it is seen as a distant and exotic location, where supernatural monsters are more easily to be met with than in the Fenland: it is in Northumbria that Siward seeks a dragon to fight after killing one in the Orkneys, and there that he meets the old man on the mound who directs him south to London. This use of Northumbria as a wild, liminal country suggests the attitude of an audience to whom Northumbria was as alien and unknown as the Orkneys. It is also suggestive that the story about the acquisition of Siward's earldom of Huntingdon takes place in London and Westminster, concentrating on the king's decision to grant the earldom to Siward. The complete absence of any reference to the ancestral earls of Northumbria, into whose family Siward married – and who were indeed the more distinguished of Earl Waltheof's ancestors – suggests ignorance on this score. Huntingdon was obviously of more significance to the compiler of the *Gesta antecessorum* than Siward's more important role in Northumbria, and his account of Siward's life has been influenced by the concerns of an audience nearer to the place where the manuscript was produced at Crowland; however, this southern outlook seems to extend beyond the immediate interference of the Crowland compiler to the whole of the first section of the *Gesta antecessorum*.

To reposition the Siward material within an East Midlands context is to draw it geographically closer to the few English parallels which exist for a number of its distinctive features. There are some points of contact between the early part of the Siward narrative and the legends surrounding the sons of Ragnar loðbrók, the best evidence for which in England (despite the historical connection of the Ragnarssons

with the Viking kingdom of Northumbria) occurs in East Anglian sources.<sup>225</sup> The banner ‘Ravenlandeye’, given to Siward by the old man on the mound, may be linked to the raven banner which formed part of the legend of the Ragnarssons.<sup>226</sup> The earliest appearance of this banner is in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for 878, referring to the battle in Devon in which the brother of Ívarr and Halfdan was killed: “þar wæs se guðfana genumen þe hi ræfen heton.”<sup>227</sup> In the twelfth-century compilation known as the *Annals of St Neots*, this reference is expanded with an account of the banner’s supernatural properties:

In quo etiam acceperunt illud uexillum quod Reafan nominant. Dicunt enim quod tres sorores Hynguari et Hubbe, filie uidelicet Lodebrochi, illud uexillum tex`u`erunt et totum parauerunt illud uno meridiano tempore. Dicunt etiam quod, in omni bello ubi praecederet idem signum, si uictoriam adepturi essent, appareret in medio signi quasi coruus uiuus uolitans; si uero uincendi in futuro fuissent, penderet directe nichil mouens – et hoc sepe probatum est.<sup>228</sup>

[In that battle they took the banner which is called ‘Raven.’ For they say that the three sisters of Inguar and Ubbe, that is, the daughters of Lodebroch, wove that banner and had it entirely prepared in one noon-tide. They also say that in every battle where this banner is carried, if they are to have the victory, there appears in the middle of the banner a raven flying like a living bird; but if they are to be defeated, it hangs down, motionless – and this has often been proved.]

The two sentences describing the banner both begin “dicunt...”, perhaps intending to attribute this information to popular oral tradition,<sup>229</sup> but given the composite nature

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<sup>225</sup> On the East Anglian context for legends about Ragnar, see Alfred Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles 850-880*, pp.54-67, and Wright, *Cultivation of Saga*, pp.137-144; on the development of the Ragnar legend in Scandinavia, see Niels Lukman, ‘Ragnarr Lothbrok, Sigifrid, and the Saints of Flanders’, *Medieval Scandinavia* 9 (1976), 7-50, and Rory McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*.

<sup>226</sup> For a description of the relevant sources, see Lukman, ‘The Raven Banner and the Changing Ravens: A Viking Miracle from Carolingian Court Poetry to Saga and Arthurian Romance’, *Classica et Medievalia* 19 (1958), 133-151.

<sup>227</sup> This is found in the B, C, D and E manuscripts of the Chronicle.

<sup>228</sup> *Annals of St Neots*, s.a.878, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* (Cambridge, 1985), v.17, ed. David Dumville and Michael Lapidge, p.78.

<sup>229</sup> Although on the problematic nature of such statements in medieval chronicles see Elisabeth van Houts, ‘Genre aspects of the use of oral information in medieval historiography’, *Gattungen mittelalterlicher Schriftlichkeit*, ed. B. Frank, T. Haye and D. Tophinke, *Script Oralia* 99 (Tübingen, 1997), pp. 297–311 (303-5).

of the chronicle it is difficult to tell at what stage or from what source, oral or written, this detail may have entered the text. All that can be definitely stated about the provenance of the *Annals of St Neots* is that the unique manuscript was written at Bury St Edmunds some time between c.1120 and c.1140,<sup>230</sup> although Hart has convincingly hypothesised that the original compilation of the chronicle took place at Ramsey at the end of the tenth century.<sup>231</sup> Either way, this suggests an East Anglian context for this version of the banner motif which connects it to the sons of Ragnar.

A banner with very similar properties to that in the *Annals of St Neots* is described in the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, where it is said to have belonged to Cnut. The raven on this banner also appears only in battle, beating its wings like a living bird if its owner will be victorious, but silent and drooping in defeat. The encomiast claims that the banner was carried by the Danes in battle against Edmund Ironside at Assandun in 1016, but gives no indication of his source for this, only saying “though I believe that it may be incredible to the reader, yet since it is true, I will introduce the matter into my true history.”<sup>232</sup> It seems probable that it was originally attached to Ívarr and Ubbe, and became part of the cycle of legends about them among the Danes in England; by that means it may have become known at the Anglo-Danish court, where, as we have seen, stories about Ívarr’s conquest of England were known.

All three raven banners in English tradition are therefore associated with Danes, and two of them have similar properties which suggest a likely common

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<sup>230</sup> Dumville and Lapidge, pp.xv-xvi. The familiar title of the text derives from the manuscript having belonged at one time to the priory of St Neots, eight miles south-west of Huntingdon.

<sup>231</sup> Cyril Hart, ‘The East Anglian Chronicle’, *Journal of Medieval History* 7 (1981), 249–82.

<sup>232</sup> “quod licet credam posse esse incredibile lectori, tamen, quia uerum est, uerae inseram lectioni”, *Encomium Emmae Reginae* II.9, pp.24, 25, and see Campbell’s comments at pp.96-7.

origin, although Siward's has lost any distinctively supernatural qualities.<sup>233</sup> It is probable that the banner 'Ravenlandeye' has been borrowed into the narrative of Siward's life from another oral tradition, and we may speculate whether the episode in which it features – the incident of the old man on the mound – has been absorbed in its entirety, banner and all, from a strand of the Ragnarssons tradition. A number of other sources, chiefly from the twelfth century, bear witness to the existence of legends about the sons of Ragnar circulating in the East Midlands in that period.<sup>234</sup> Several of the variant forms of the legend centre on the martyrdom of St Edmund of East Anglia and these narratives may have had their ultimate origin, as Jan de Vries suggested in 1927, in attempts by Scandinavian inhabitants of the Danelaw to explain or justify the murder of Edmund at the hands of the Danish army.<sup>235</sup> The role of the Danes in these legends differs significantly from the presentation of Ívarr and Ubbe in contemporary vernacular texts, where, as John Frankis has shown, the figures who appear under these names are generally envisaged not as Danish invaders but as savage pagans of indeterminate racial origin, who attain "almost mythic status as archetypal opponents of Christianity".<sup>236</sup> The stories from the East Midlands, however, provide alternative interpretations of the Danes' presence in England. Geoffrey of Wells, who wrote the *Infantia S. Eadmundi* at the request of the monks of Bury St Edmunds some time between 1148 and 1156, tells how the sons of Ragnar

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<sup>233</sup> Possibly, however, the old man's comment that the banner will convince Siward's companions of the truth of his words, i.e. of their prospects for success in London, might be a remnant of the banner's prophetic qualities in the other sources, specifically its ability to predict victory or defeat.

<sup>234</sup> See Wright, *Cultivation of Saga*, pp.107-144.

<sup>235</sup> de Vries, 'Die Wikingersaga', and see McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*, pp.210-235. On the development of the hagiographical tradition and the legends surrounding Edmund's cult in East Anglia, see Grant Loomis, 'The Growth of the Saint Edmund Legend', *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 14 (1932), 83-115, Dorothy Whitelock, 'Fact and fiction in the legend of St Edmund', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology* 31 (1969), and the texts collected by Lord Francis Hervey in *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi* (London, 1907).

<sup>236</sup> John Frankis, 'Views of Anglo-Saxon England in Post-Conquest Vernacular Writing', in Herbert Pilch, ed., *Orality and Literacy in Early Middle English* (Tübingen, 1996), pp.227-247 (235); see also R. I. Page, 'A Most Vile People': *Early English Historians on the Vikings*, Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies, 1986 (London, 1987).

were incited to attack Edmund because their father taunted them that the East Anglian king had surpassed them in glorious deeds.<sup>237</sup> In the version given by Roger of Wendover, Ragnar is shipwrecked on the coast of England and murdered by Edmund's huntsman, Beorn; when his sons are told that Edmund is responsible, they come from Denmark to avenge their father's death.<sup>238</sup> Revenge is also the motive in a story told by Gaimar about the Danish invasion of Northumbria: in his version, the Danes are brought to invade England by a man named Beorn Butsecarl, seeking vengeance for the rape of his wife by the king of Northumbria.<sup>239</sup> Gaimar's story deals with the defeat of Ælla and Osbryht, rival kings of Northumbria, by the Danes, and so it seems likely that his version was in origin a Northumbrian tradition, most likely from York, a location which features prominently; however, Gaimar probably learned of it from Lincolnshire sources.<sup>240</sup> Henry of Huntingdon may have been drawing on stories of this kind when he describes the individual characteristics of Ívarr and Ubbe in a way which tallies remarkably well with the way they are presented in Scandinavian tradition, particularly in his emphasis on Ívarr's "fox-like cunning and smooth words".<sup>241</sup>

It may have been in the context of such legends that the motif of the raven banner persisted; the detail may simply have been borrowed into the Siward narrative from one strand of this contemporary tradition. If the banner legend originated in

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<sup>237</sup> *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi*, pp.134-161.

<sup>238</sup> *Flores Historiarum*, ed. Henry Richards Luard, Rolls Series 95 (London, 1890), vol. i, pp.433-441. Roger may have been writing during his time as prior of Belvoir in Leicestershire, and his story clearly derives from one strand of the East Anglian cycle of legends about St Edmund.

<sup>239</sup> Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis*, ll.2587-2834; see Alexander Bell, 'Buern Bucecarle in "Gaimar"', *Modern Language Review*, 27 (1932), 168-174. A related story was recorded in the fourteenth century by Thomas of Malmesbury in his *Eulogium Historiarum sive Temporis*; see Wright, *Cultivation of Saga*, pp.107-116.

<sup>240</sup> See Bell, 'Buern Bucecarle in "Gaimar"', and McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*, pp.210-235.

<sup>241</sup> "uulpiculari astutia, uerbisque delinitis", *Historia Anglorum*, v.5, p.282; he also says that "Hinguar erat ingentis ingenii, Vbba uero fortitudinis admirande", 'Hinguar had great cunning, while Ubba had remarkable courage' (pp.280-1). On the similarity between these descriptions and the Scandinavian sources see Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles*, pp.195-200.

England as part of a saga about Ragnar and his sons, it may conceivably have travelled to Scandinavia from England in that context, although there is no sign of the banner in any version of *Ragnars saga* which now survives. The English examples of the motif considerably predate any of the Scandinavian ones, and the raven banner which appears in *Orkneyinga saga* and related texts is perhaps as likely to have travelled from England to the north as the other way around.<sup>242</sup> According to *Orkneyinga saga*, the Orkney earl Sigurðr Hloðvisson (d.1014) owned a raven banner, which was carried before him at the Battle of Clontarf.<sup>243</sup> This banner was woven for him by his mother, and it is said to bring victory to the one before whom it is carried, but death to the one who carries it. The banner which is the work of a female relative recalls the daughters of Lodbrok in the *Annals of St Neots*, but the raven on this banner does not magically appear and disappear; in fact it does not seem to be an omen of victory or defeat, as the banner is in the English sources. There is a specific connection between this story and the Siward narrative in that Sigurðr not only bears a name cognate with that of Siward of Northumbria, but also shares Siward's byname *digri*. This may simply be a coincidence: the nickname, though rare in England, was fairly common in Scandinavia.<sup>244</sup> Judith Jesch suggests that if the story of a raven banner was known in royal circles during the reign of Cnut and his sons, as its

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<sup>242</sup> For a detailed consideration of this point see Judith Jesch, 'England and *Orkneyinga saga*' in Batey, Jesch, and Morris, eds., *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic* (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 222-239 (232-5).

<sup>243</sup> *Orkneyinga Saga*, ed. Finnbogi Guðmundsson, ÍF XXXIV (Reykjavík, 1965), pp.24-7. The banner also appears in the accounts of the Battle of Clontarf in *Njáls saga* (ch.157) and *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallssonar* (ch.2); see Jesch, 'England and *Orkneyinga saga*', p.234. Neither of these texts mentions the image of the raven, although as Jesch notes, one of the men asked to carry the banner in *Njáls saga* is called Hrafn.

<sup>244</sup> E. H. Lind, *Norsk-isländska personbinamn från medeltiden* (Uppsala, 1920-1925), cols 60-61. It is possible that if anything about Sigurðr digri of Orkney was known by the Danes in England, his nickname might have been borrowed for Siward of Northumbria, a modern-day namesake for whom it was felt to be physically appropriate; compare the story of how Hereward's companion Godwine Gille got his nickname because he was thought to be (physically?) similar to a legendary namesake, Godwine 'the son of Guthlac, who was formerly celebrated in the songs of the ancients' (see below, pp.141-2).

appearance in the *Encomium* indicates, it may have travelled to Orkney from there;<sup>245</sup> the banners of Siward and Sigurðr are most likely to be independent outgrowths of the same English stories about the sons of Ragnar, rather than the result of borrowing from an Orkney tradition, as Olrik thought.<sup>246</sup>

There is one further point to consider: the name of Siward's banner, Ravenlandeye, appears to have been influenced by the banner *Landøyðan* ('land-waster') which belonged to Haraldr harðráði. According to Snorri, this banner was Haraldr's most valuable possession, since it brought victory to the one before whom it was borne into battle,<sup>247</sup> and this banner was carried by Haraldr's army in England in 1066, both at Fulford and at Stamford Bridge.<sup>248</sup> It is quite possible that the name of the banner formed part of the tales about Haraldr which were in circulation in England in the twelfth century: a story of his semi-legendary exploits in the East was known to William of Malmesbury, who describes how Haraldr strangled a lion in Constantinople with his bare hands.<sup>249</sup> The Siward legend is linked to the Haraldr material through later Icelandic tradition which connected Waltheof and Haraldr, naming Waltheof as one of those who fought against Haraldr in England in 1066, and as will be seen, it is likely that some of the legendary material concerning the events of that year came to Scandinavia from England; the name of the banner provides a further point of contact.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> She examines the evidence that either Earl Þorfinnr or Kálfr Arnason spent some time in England with Cnut, perhaps as chief of the king's bodyguard; see Jesch, 'England and *Orkneyinga saga*', pp. 231-2, and *Orkneyinga saga* ch.31.

<sup>246</sup> Olrik, 'Siward digri', 228-9.

<sup>247</sup> *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, ch.22, in *Heimskringla*, vol. iii, p.96.

<sup>248</sup> *Morkinskinna*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1932), pp.272-9; *Fagrskinna*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1902-03), pp.287, 292-4.

<sup>249</sup> *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, iii.260, vol.i, pp.479-481; see R. I. Page, *Chronicles of the Vikings* (London, 1995), pp.100-4, and Blöndal, 'The Last Exploits of Harald Sigurdsson in Greek Service', *Classica et Mediaevalia* 2 (1939), 1-26.

<sup>250</sup> See Forrest Scott, 'Valþjófr jarl: an English earl in Icelandic sources', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* XIV (1953-7), 78-94.

The connection of the raven banner motif with the figure of the old man on the mound is unique to the Siward story, but the old man himself is a familiar type in Scandinavian legend. Sitting on a burial mound as means of accessing wisdom or supernatural aid is a feature of both Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon tradition:<sup>251</sup> to take one famous example from *Völsunga saga*, Rerir is sitting on a howe when Odin sends him an apple which enables his wife to conceive a son, Völsung.<sup>252</sup> Burial mounds feature in several strands of the Ragnarssons legend.<sup>253</sup> Gaimar says that, after the battle at which the raven banner was taken, the Danes raised the mound ‘Ubbelawe’ over Ubbe’s body in Devon.<sup>254</sup> Nothing more is known of this mound; as it does not appear in any other sources, Gaimar presumably learned of it from Lincolnshire tradition. Ívarr’s burial mound in England features prominently in Old Norse legends relating to English history. Its construction is described in *Ragnars saga*:

Ok þa er hann la i banasott, meðlti hann, at hann skyldi þangat fera, er herskat veri, ok þess kvazt hann vęnta, at þeir mundi eigi sigr fa, er þar kęmi at landinu. Ok er hann andaz, var sva giort, sem hann meðlti fyrir, ok var þa i haug lagidr. Ok þat segia margir menn, þa er Haralldr konungr Sigurdarson kom til Englandz, at hann kęmi þar at, er Ivar var fyrir, ok fellr hann i þeirre faur. Ok er Vilhialmr bastardr kom i land, for hann til ok braut haug Ivars ok sa Ivar ofuinn. Þa let hann giora bal mikit ok léttr Ivar brenna á balinu. Ok eptir þat berzt hann til landsins ok fęrr gagn.<sup>255</sup>

[And when Ívarr lay in his last illness, he said that he should be carried to the place where armies came to harry, and he said he thought they should not have the victory when they came to the land. And when he died, it was done as he had said, and he was laid in the *haugr*. And many people say that when King Haraldr Sigurðarson came to England, he landed at the place where Ívarr was, and he died on that expedition. And when William the Bastard came to the land, he went to the place and

<sup>251</sup> Hilda Roderick Ellis, *The Road to Hel: A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature* (New York, 1968), pp.105-111.

<sup>252</sup> *Völsunga saga*, ed. R. G. Finch (London, 1965), pp.2-3.

<sup>253</sup> See McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*, pp.246-7, and Lukman, ‘Ragnarr Lothbrok, Sigifrid, and the Saints of Flanders’, 39-40.

<sup>254</sup> *Estoire des Engleis*, ll.3144-56; and see the note by Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel* (Oxford, 1899) vol. ii, p.93, regarding the location of the mound.

<sup>255</sup> *Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*, ed. Olsen, p.169.

opened Ívarr's mound and saw Ívarr, undecayed. Then he had a great fire made and had Ívarr burned in the flames. After that he fought battles across the country and won the victory.]

This mound also appears in *Hemings þáttr*, into which it may have been borrowed from a version of *Ragnars saga*. There, Haraldr harðráði and Tostig see a mound from the sea as they approach Cleveland in 1066, and Haraldr asks for the name of it:

þeir taka land ok ganga þar vpp sem Klifflond heita konvngr spyR  
T(osta) hvat heitir hæð sv er þar er norðr a landit. T(osti) s(egir) eigi  
er her hverri hæð nafn gefit. konvngr s(egir) nafn man þo þersi eiga  
ok skalltv segia mer. T(osti) s(egir) þat er havgr Ivars beinlavsa.  
konvngr svarar fair hafa þeir sigrað England er at hans havgi hafa  
fyrst komit. T(osti) s(egir) forneskia er nv at trva slikv.<sup>256</sup>

[They landed and came on shore at a place called Cleveland. The king asked Tostig, "What is the name of the hill which is along the land to the north?" Tostig said, "Not every hill has a name given to it." The king said, "But this one has a name, and you shall tell it to me." Tostig said, "That is the *haugr* of Ívarr the boneless." The king replied, "Few who have landed in England near this mound have been victorious." Tostig said, "It's superstition to believe such things now."]

This belief about Ívarr's mound surely originated among Danish settlers in England, as part of the cycle of legends about the sons of Ragnar. The mound where Siward encounters the old man also seems to be situated near the sea, since Siward encounters it immediately on landing in Northumbria; like the raven banner, it is interpreted as an omen of victory or defeat.<sup>257</sup> The connection here between the appearance of a raven banner/mound episode in the Siward material, the legend of the Ragnarssons, and traditions about the last campaign of Haraldr harðráði in England is extremely suggestive, especially when we remember that Waltheof features with disproportionate prominence in the Icelandic stories of this campaign.

The connection between the legends of the sons of Ragnar and the Siward material in the *Gesta antecessorum* is obscure, but there is one further point which,

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<sup>256</sup> *Hemings þáttr Áslákssonar*, ed. Gillian Fellows Jensen (Copenhagen, 1962), p.46.

<sup>257</sup> See Ellis, *The Road to Hel*, p.37; cf. the account of the burial of Harold Godwinson in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, ll.577-592, ed. Frank Barlow (Oxford, 1999), p.34.

while speculative, is worthy of discussion. According to the *Gesta antecessorum*, Siward's Danish father was named 'Beorn Beresune': both Siward and Beorn feature among the names of the sons of Ragnar in Scandinavian tradition. Although these are among the most common Old Norse names and no argument can be firmly built upon their appearance in both traditions, we may briefly consider whether there is any connection between the Siward material and these two characters in the Ragnarssons legend. In Saxo's account, Bjorn and Sivard are credited with the death of Ælla of Northumbria, which is more usually attributed – always, in the English sources – to Ívarr and Ubbe. Sigurðr ormr-í-auga does not appear in any of the English versions of the Ragnar legend, but Beorn features several times, although not always as one of Ragnar's sons: Geoffrey of Wells gives the names of the three sons of Ragnar as "Inguar, Hubba, et Bern", but in both Roger of Wendover and in Gaimar's story of Beorn Butsecarl, the man who is responsible for bringing the Danes to England (from different motives and in different ways) is named Beorn.<sup>258</sup> Beorn, although identified in continental sources as one of the sons of 'Lothbrok',<sup>259</sup> apparently became partly detached from his brothers in some strands of the English tradition, and his role was reinterpreted in varying ways.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> In Roger of Wendover's story, Berne is the name of the huntsman who murders 'Lothbrok' and then, when captured in Denmark, falsely tells Lothbrok's sons that Edmund is responsible for the crime, inciting Hinguar and Hubba to take revenge on the English king.

<sup>259</sup> In c.1070 by William of Jumièges, who calls him Björn Ironside, 'Bier Costa Ferreae'; *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*, ed. and trans. Elisabeth M.C. van Houts (Oxford, 1992-5), i.4(5)-10(11), vol. i, pp.16-27; see Elisabeth van Houts, 'Scandinavian Influence in Norman Literature of the Eleventh Century', *Anglo-Norman Studies VI* (1983), 107-121. William's statement that Beorn was shipwrecked in England on the way to Frisia is particularly interesting in light of Roger of Wendover's story, which uses shipwreck to explain both Lothbrok's presence in East Anglia and the journey to Denmark of Beorn the huntsman.

<sup>260</sup> It may be worth noting, in connection with burial mounds, that this son of Ragnar was sometimes identified in late sources with the Swedish king Björn who was known as 'Björn at haugi', 'Björn of the Barrow'; see for instance *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ed. and trans. by Christopher Tolkien as *Saga Heiðreks konungs ins vitra* (London, 1960); for Björn at haugi, see pp.61-2. No explanation is given for the nickname.

As for Sigurðr ormr-í-auga, his absence from the English sources makes it difficult to tell what part, if any, he took in the Ragnarssons legend before it travelled to Scandinavia;<sup>261</sup> his role may have been expanded at a late date after the link was made between the Ragnar tradition and the Vǫlsung material, which took place through the introduction of Áslaug/Kraka, daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr, as Ragnar's second wife. The coincidence of the names encouraged, and may perhaps have inspired, this link.<sup>262</sup> There are no strong narrative parallels between the stories of Siward of Northumbria and the Sigurðr of the Ragnarssons legend, although Sigurðr is the only one of the sons of Ragnar to have a direct encounter with an Odinic figure comparable to the old man on the mound who offers Siward patronage and protection. In Saxo's account, Sivard is wounded in battle and healed by a man who gives his name as Rofnar (i.e. Hropr, a name of Odin<sup>263</sup>) in return for a promise to consecrate to him all the souls of the men Sivard will afterwards kill. Rofnar pours dust on Sivard's eyes and little snakes appear in them, and this, says Saxo, is how Sivard got the nickname *ormr-í-auga*.<sup>264</sup> Sivard is the only one of the sons of Ragnar to be assisted by Odin in disguise, in an act of patronage which involves the giving of a name to the hero; he is also the only one to be associated with snakes, a feature which appears prominently in the stories about Ragnar himself, and which may have helped to make the link between the Ragnar legend and that of Sigurðr the slayer of Fafnir. There is no evidence that the serpent-slaying exploits of Ragnar, recorded by Saxo and *Ragnars saga*, were known in England, but those of Sigurðr the Vǫlsung

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<sup>261</sup> The historical Sigurðr was active in northern France from c.880 until his death in 887; see Lukman, 'Ragnarr Lothbrok, Sigifrid, and the Saints of Flanders', 9.

<sup>262</sup> See Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles*, pp.40-50, and McTurk, *Studies in Ragnars saga Loðbrókar*, pp.96-8.

<sup>263</sup> On the name, see the comments of Hilda Ellis Davidson in Saxo Grammaticus, *The History of the Danes*, trans. Peter Fisher (Cambridge, 1979-1980), vol.ii, p.155.

<sup>264</sup> Lukman argues, unconvincingly, that this story originates from Flemish hagiography surrounding the healing sand of the grave of St Arnulf; see 'Ragnarr Lothbrok, Sigifrid, and the Saints of Flanders', 24.

certainly were, at least as early as the tenth century;<sup>265</sup> the legend of Sigurðr seems to have been particularly in vogue at the court of Cnut.<sup>266</sup> An association between the name Sigurðr and serpents may have helped contribute to the narrative which grew up around Siward of Northumbria. Although it is treated perfunctorily in the *Gesta antecessorum*, Siward begins his career by contending with dragons: when he meets the old man on the mound, he has already encountered one serpent in the Orkneys and is in search of another to fight. Like both his legendary namesakes, Siward is given assistance and patronage by an Odinic figure, who promises him a favourable wind to guide his ship to London and tells him what to do to achieve success there. The narrative of Siward's early life is drawn from the common stock of Germanic legend, but perhaps to those who first told stories about the earl it seemed particularly appropriate to draw on stories associated with famous heroes of the same name, just as it was the name Sigurðr which in later Scandinavian tradition encouraged the link between the Völsung and Ragnar cycles.

The narrative material which comprises the voluminous legend of Ragnar and his sons belongs to a tradition shared by England and Denmark, but the surviving evidence suggests it was most popular among the descendants of Danish settlers in the Danelaw. This was probably reinforced by its literary use at the court of Cnut, where skaldic poets found an audience for comparisons between Cnut and Ívarr, and where the Sigmund legend may have been depicted in stone even in the Old Minster at Winchester.<sup>267</sup> This was the specific cultural milieu in which Siward himself first came to prominence, and since these stories were most likely to have been borrowed for his legend after his death, they bear testimony to a living and productive Anglo-

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<sup>265</sup> See Rauer, *Beowulf and the Dragon*, pp.42-4.

<sup>266</sup> See Roberta Frank, 'Skaldic Verse and the Date of *Beowulf*', pp.123-139, and Lawson, *Cnut*, p.122.

<sup>267</sup> See Biddle, 'Excavations at Winchester 1965', 329-332, and Dominic Tweddle et al., *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture Volume IV: South-East England* (Oxford, 1995), pp.314-322.

Scandinavian narrative tradition which continued to thrive in some parts of England long after the end of Cnut's reign.

### **Siward, Godwine and Úlfr: the bear genealogy**

The genealogy attributed to Siward in the *Gesta antecessorum* requires detailed consideration, as it not only offers a further link between the Siward legend and Scandinavian tradition, but also may help to clarify some aspects of the transmission of narrative material about Waltheof from England to Iceland. The *Gesta antecessorum* opens with the following genealogy:

Tradunt relaciones antiquorum quod vir quidam nobilis, quem Dominus permisit, contra solitum ordinem humane propaginis, ex quodam albo urso patre, muliere generosa matre, procreari, Ursus genuit Spratlingum; Spratlingus Ulsium; Ulsius Beorn, cognomento Beresune, hoc est *filius ursi*. Hic Beorn Dacus fuit natione, comes egregius et miles illustris. In signum autem illius diversitatis speciei ex parte generantium, produxerat ei natura paternas auriculas, sive ursi. In aliis autem speciei materne assimilabatur. Hic autem, post multas virtutis ac milicie experiencias, filium genuit fortitudinis et milicie paterne probum imitorem. Nomen autem huic Siuardus.<sup>268</sup>

[The stories of the ancients say that a certain nobleman, Ursus – whom the Lord permitted, contrary to the normal manner of human procreation, to be created from a white bear as father and a noblewoman as mother – begot Spratlingus; Spratlingus begot Ulsius; Ulsius begot Beorn, nicknamed *Beresune*, that is, 'Bear's Son'. This Beorn was a Dane by race, an excellent earl and famous soldier. However, as a sign of the difference of species between his parents, nature had given him the ears of his father, that is, of a bear. In everything else he was like his mother's species. And after many deeds of courage and military experiences, he had a son, very brave and a noble imitator of his father's military skill. His name was Siwardus.]

The story of a man descended from a bear is a widespread folk-tale, common to several cultures,<sup>269</sup> and it appears in various forms in Scandinavian tradition: the late Icelandic tradition is represented by *Hrólfs saga kraka*, in which the celebrated

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<sup>268</sup> Michel, *Chroniques anglo-normandes*, vol.ii, pp.104-5.

<sup>269</sup> For general discussion of the 'Bear's Son' motif, see J. Michael Stitt, *Beowulf and the Bear's Son: Epic, Saga, and Fairytale in Northern Germanic Tradition* (New York & London, 1992) and Gwyn Jones, *Kings, Beasts and Heroes* (London, 1972), pp.129-143.

champion of the legendary king Hrólfur, Böðvarr Bjarki, is said to be the son of Björn, a king's son who has been transformed into a bear by his stepmother.<sup>270</sup>

However, the passage in the *Gesta antecessorum*, with the personal names of the genealogy and the specific reference to the Danish origins of Beorn Beresune, is evidently a version of the ancestry attributed to the family of Úlfr Þorgilsson by both English and Danish sources. Saxo Grammaticus gives a version of this genealogy in the *Gesta Danorum* in his account of the ancestry of Úlfr:<sup>271</sup> he tells the story of the daughter of a Swedish farmer who was captured by a bear and bore him a son, Beorn, who became the father of Þorgils Sprakalegg. Þorgils' son Úlfr, Saxo says, betrayed in his manners his descent from a wild beast; this is evidently a rationalisation of the motif which gives the descendant of the bear physical features belonging to his ancestry, such as superhuman strength or a bear's ears.

This genealogy must lie behind that in the *Gesta antecessorum*, although the version attached to Siward is, in its present form, impossible: Úlfr's son Beorn certainly cannot be Siward's father. The genealogy of the sons of Úlfr, who was married to Cnut's sister Estrith, was known in England, although the *Gesta antecessorum* is the only source to share Saxo's connection between it and the bear's son motif. John of Worcester gives a similar genealogy for Beorn Estrithson, but he apparently did not know of the bear. John identifies Beorn as the son of "Danici comitis Vlfi filii Spraclingi filii Vrsi, ac frater Suani Danorum regis".<sup>272</sup> Timothy Bolton has recently argued that the scribe of the *Gesta antecessorum* copied this genealogy from a text of John of Worcester, thereby introducing several superfluous generations into Siward's ancestry, as a result of confusing Siward's father Beorn

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<sup>270</sup> *Hrólfs saga Kraka og Bjarkarímur*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (København, 1904), pp.47-55.

<sup>271</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, *Danorum Regum Heroumque Historia: Books X-XVI*, ed. and trans. Eric Christiansen (Oxford, 1980-1981), Book X, pp.28-30.

<sup>272</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. ii, pp.548-9, s.a. 1049.

with Björn Estrithson.<sup>273</sup> The correct genealogy, he argues, is that given in the so-called ‘Chronicle of John of Brompton’, a late fourteenth-century compilation which belonged to the abbot of Jervaulx Abbey. One source of this compilation may have been a version of the *Gesta antecessorum*, perhaps the copy which was used as an exemplar by the main hand of the Douai MS.<sup>274</sup> In this genealogy Siward’s father is Bern, the son of a bear (without the addition of the *Gesta antecessorum*’s ‘Spratlingus’ and ‘Ulsius’, representing Þorgils Sprakalegg and Úlfr). Since the Delapré MS also has the simple Bear-Beorn-Siward genealogy, this is a plausible argument.

Bolton argues that the scribe’s error inadvertently preserves a genuine link between Siward and the family of Úlfr, and that both were descended from a Danish family who traced their line back to ‘Beorn Beresune’. The stories of Saxo and the *Gesta antecessorum*, he argues, “testify to variant traditions of the same myth which was told by two lines of the same family”, preserved in oral form for several generations in England and Denmark.<sup>275</sup> Nothing else is known of Siward’s antecedents apart from this unreliable genealogy, and there is no other evidence for a family connection between Siward and Úlfr; but the genealogy may indicate that there was a belief in such a connection, at least at Crowland. If there really was a genealogical link between Siward and Úlfr, it surely cannot have been straightforward

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<sup>273</sup> Timothy Bolton, ‘Was the Family of Earl Siward and Earl Waltheof a Lost Line of the Ancestors of the Danish Royal Family?’, *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 51 (2007), 41-71.

<sup>274</sup> This theory was first proposed by Steenstrup, *Normannerne* (Copenhagen, 1876-82), vol.iii, pp.437-40. For the Chronicle of John of Brompton, see *Historiæ Anglicanæ Scriptores Antiqui X*, ed. R. Twysden, 725-1284; the account of Siward is at col. 945-6.

<sup>275</sup> Bolton, ‘The Family of Earl Siward’, 71. It may be worthy of note that both Úlfr and Siward had sons named Ásbjörn (‘magic bear’); though a common Old Norse name, it would be a particularly appropriate choice in a family which claimed descent from a giant bear. On the name *Ásbjörn* in England, see W. G. Searle, *Onomasticon Anglo-Saxonicum* (Cambridge, 1897), pp.371-2, and Fellows Jensen, *Scandinavian Personal Names in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire*, pp.18-19. Bolton discusses the evidence for the role of bears in pre-Christian cultic practice, and notes that in one redaction of the Lund Annals Ívarr Ragnarsson shape-shifts into a polar bear; this may be another link between the Siward material and the Ragnarssons legend (Bolton, ‘The Family of Earl Siward’, 67).

scribal confusion which introduced John of Worcester's text into the Douai genealogy; it would be a remarkable coincidence if, as Bolton seems to suggest, the compilers of the Douai text, looking for a genealogy for a man named Beorn, accidentally lighted on one who was indeed related to Siward. Something must have motivated the decision to include John of Worcester's genealogy in the *Gesta antecessorum*, and this may have been a tradition of a family connection between Siward and the family of Úlfr.

This may possibly help to explain the imagined family relationship between Waltheof and the family of Godwine which appears in the Icelandic sources. It is perhaps surprising that if Siward was indeed first cousin to Úlfr, their relationship would not have been better remembered in Danish, if not in English, records. Úlfr, whose career in England was short-lived, is chiefly remembered in English sources for his connection with the family of Earl Godwine.<sup>276</sup> Godwine married Úlfr's sister Gytha, and it is probably as a result of this alliance that the genealogy became known to John of Worcester, perhaps through a source which provided a history of Godwine and his family, including his wife's ancestors. For the period of his chronicle in which this genealogy appears, John of Worcester was working with a version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which no longer survives; his account is closest to D, but contains some additional information about a number of Danish and Anglo-Danish families, including Godwine and his sons.<sup>277</sup> There is evidence that legendary stories

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<sup>276</sup> He was involved in the initial conquest of England and signed several English charters as *earl* or *dux* between 1020 and 1024, but returned to Denmark soon after 1024 and was murdered in 1027, at Roskilde, on Cnut's orders; see Dorothy Whitelock, 'Scandinavian Personal Names in the *Liber Vitae* of Thorney Abbey', 134-5, and Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', pp.62-4; also Campbell, *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, Appendix C, pp.82-7. The story of his death is told in *Óláfs saga helga* ch.152-3, where Úlfr's family connection with Godwine is mentioned (in *Heimskringla*, vol. ii, pp.283-6).

<sup>277</sup> For instance, he alone provides the name of Thorkell hávi's English wife Eadgyth (ii, p.506, s.a.1021) and the names of the father, husbands and sons of Cnut's kinswoman Gunhild (ii, p.510, s.a.1029 and p.540, s.a. 1044), and has unique accounts of the exile of Earl Hákon in 1029 (ii, p. 510) and the wedding at Lambeth of Gytha, the daughter of Osgod Clapa, to Tovi pruða, where Harthacnut

about Godwine and Úlfr existed in both English and Norse tradition, particularly concerning their dealings with Cnut, and it appears that some of these stories were attached to both earls (who were not only connected to each other by marriage but stood in parallel relationships to Cnut), or transferred from one to the other in oral tradition. For instance, the thirteenth-century *Knýtlinga saga* tells a story in which Úlfr encounters Godwine, the son of a Wiltshire farmer, while taking refuge in his father's house after the battle of Sherston in 1016. Impressed by the boy's attentive hospitality, the Danish earl takes Godwine to join Cnut's fleet, marries him to his sister, and arranges for him to be appointed earl.<sup>278</sup> This might be dismissed as a late fiction (or as Alistair Campbell called it, a "wild Norse tale"<sup>279</sup>) were it not for the fact that Walter Map tells a very similar story about Godwine's origins, though he says that it was King Æthelred who spotted Godwine's potential.<sup>280</sup> It is likely that *Knýtlinga saga* preserves the earlier story, and that at some point in English tradition the name of Æthelred came to replace that of the less familiar Danish earl. The story may have originated as an explanation for how Godwine came to marry Úlfr's sister.

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suffered a fatal stroke (ii, pp.532-4, s.a. 1042). Regarding events in Denmark, John of Worcester is also the sole authority for Svein Estrithson's oath of fealty to Emperor Henry III in 1049 (ii, p.548) and the first English source to identify by name Harald and Cnut, the sons of Svein who came to England with a fleet in 1069 (iii, p.8). For discussion of how such information may have become known at Worcester, see *The Crawford Collection of Early Charters and Documents now in the Bodleian Library*, ed. A. S. Napier and W. H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1895), pp.143-4, and Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', pp.46-7.

<sup>278</sup> *Knýtlinga saga* ch.11, ed. Bjarni Guðnason in *Danakonunga sögur* (Reykjavik, 1982), pp.91-321 (109-111).

<sup>279</sup> *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, p.85.

<sup>280</sup> Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, ed. and trans. by M.R. James, revised by C.N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1983), Dist. V, ch.3-4, pp.412-437. The composition of *De nugis curialium* is usually dated to c.1181-2. Walter Map has several legendary stories about Godwine, mostly concerning his dealings with Cnut (*De nugis curialium*, Dist. V, ch.3-4, pp.412-437); Map, from the Welsh borders, may have learned these stories from Gloucestershire tradition, but the unique surviving manuscript of his work was produced for a monk of Ramsey abbey, John of Wells (d.1388) in the fourteenth century.

In the same way, the story told by Map about how Godwine came to marry Cnut's sister by trickery with the king's seal<sup>281</sup> has close parallels with a similar story told of Úlfr by Saxo Grammaticus.<sup>282</sup> Map tells how Cnut plots to kill Godwine by sending him to Denmark on the pretence of wanting him to share the rule with Cnut's sister, who is acting as regent. On the voyage Godwine opens the sealed letters which contain Cnut's orders, and finds they contain his death-warrant. He amends the letters so that they entrust him with the government of Denmark and arrange for his marriage with the king's sister.<sup>283</sup> This story, which appears in a very similar form in the *Vita Haroldi*,<sup>284</sup> makes use of a widespread motif in the business of the sealed letters, found also in a Danish context in Saxo Grammaticus's story of Amleth, from where it eventually reached *Hamlet*.<sup>285</sup> It may have been something of a free-floating motif in which the part of the king is consistently played by Cnut, but the victim varies: it may be that a similar story lies behind John of Worcester's unexplained, unique assertion that Hákon Eiríksson, who drowned in the Pentland Firth in 1030, was sent abroad by Cnut on the pretence that he was being sent on an embassy.<sup>286</sup> We may connect the

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<sup>281</sup> *De nugis curialium*, Dist. V, ch.4, pp.432-7.

<sup>282</sup> *Danorum Regum Heroumque Historia*, ed. Christiansen, Book X, pp.31-2.

<sup>283</sup> Godwine probably did go to Denmark on Cnut's orders, perhaps in 1022-3; the evidence for his expedition is discussed by Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', pp.70-74.

<sup>284</sup> *Vita Haroldi, The Romance of the Life of Harold, King of England*, ed. Walter de Gray Birch (London, 1885), pp.13-15.

<sup>285</sup> See Wright, *Cultivation of Saga*, pp.224-9 and G. N. Garmonsway, *Canute and his Empire*, Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies, 1963 (London, 1964), pp.8-9.

<sup>286</sup> 'Canutus... post festiuitatem sancti Martini Danicum comitem Hacun, qui nobilem matronam Gunnhildam, sororis sue et Wyrtegeorni regis Winidorum filiam, in matrimonio habuit, quasi legationis causa in exilium misit. Timebat enim ab illo uel uita priuari uel regno expelli' ('Cnut... after the feast of St Martin sent the Danish earl Hákon, who had married the noble lady Gunhild, his sister's daughter by Wyrtegeorn, king of the Wends, into exile as if he were sending him on an embassy, for Cnut feared that he would be deprived of life or expelled from his kingdom by Hákon'), *Chronicle of John of Worcester*, s.a. 1029, and in the following year, 'Predictus comes Hacun in mari periit. Quidam tamen dicunt eum fuisse occisum in Orcada insula' ('The aforementioned Earl Hákon was drowned in the sea. Some, however, said he was killed in the Orkneys.'). See *John of Worcester*, pp.510, 511. Campbell is sceptical of this story (*Encomium Emmae*, pp.71-85), which does not accord well with the Scandinavian sources for Hákon's life. Hákon, the son of Eiríkr of Hlaðir and probably of Cnut's sister Gytha, held an earldom in England with responsibility in Worcestershire, and attests a number of charters between 1019-26; see Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', pp.61-2. ASC C records the death of "Hacun se dohtiga eorl" s.a. 1030.

story of the sealed letters to the account in *Óláfs saga helga* of Úlfr's misuse of the king's seal.<sup>287</sup> according to Snorri, Úlfr forged a letter from Cnut to have Harthacnut accepted as king of Denmark, and sealed it with the royal seal, which had been secretly obtained by Queen Emma. This was discovered by Cnut, who subsequently arranged for Úlfr to be killed.<sup>288</sup>

Godwine was certainly the subject of a number of legends by the twelfth century:<sup>289</sup> William of Malmesbury's story about Godwine's marriage to Cnut's sister, who makes money selling English girls as slaves to Denmark, is one such tale,<sup>290</sup> and Gaimar's account of Godwine's rebellion and return is another.<sup>291</sup> The connection between Godwine and Úlfr was better remembered in Scandinavian than in English sources, John of Worcester excepted;<sup>292</sup> even the *Vita Ædwardi Regis*, although it was commissioned by Eadgyth, daughter of Godwine and Gytha, and apparently written while Gytha was still alive, does not mention Úlfr and calls Gytha the sister of Cnut.<sup>293</sup> However, if Úlfr himself was soon largely forgotten in England, his family were not: three of his sons retained particular links to England and played prominent roles in the political crises of the mid-eleventh century. When Svein

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<sup>287</sup> *Óláfs saga helga*, ch.148, in *Heimskringla*, vol. ii, pp.275-7.

<sup>288</sup> *Óláfs saga helga*, ch.152-3, in *Heimskringla*, vol. ii, pp.283-6. Perhaps there is also some obscure connection between this story and the claim in the *Encomium Emmae* that Harald Harefoot and Godwine forged a letter from Queen Emma to her sons in Normandy, bringing Alfred to England, where Godwine had him killed (*Encomium Emmae*, III.2-3).

<sup>289</sup> The numerous stories about Godwine are collected by Wright, *Cultivation of Saga*, pp.213-236; see also Frank Barlow, *The Godwins: The Rise and Fall of a Noble Dynasty* (London, 2003), pp.31-3, and Emma Mason, *The House of Godwine: The History of a Dynasty* (London, 2004), pp.31-3.

<sup>290</sup> *Gesta Regum* ii.200, vol. i, pp.362-3. William says that Cnut's sister was Godwine's first wife, and his second, "cuius genus non comperi" ('whose origin I do not know'), was the mother of his sons.

<sup>291</sup> Gaimar says Godwine was married to Cnut's daughter, and wanted to make their son heir; for that reason he arranged the murder of Alfred, after which he fled to Denmark. He later returned to present Edward with caskets of gold and jewels he had won from the king of Sweden (*Estoire des Engleis*, II.4791-5034).

<sup>292</sup> See also *Óláfs saga helga*, ch.152 (in *Heimskringla*, vol. ii, p.284), which, other than some mistakes with the names of Godwine's children, is substantially correct.

<sup>293</sup> It appears to have been written in stages between 1065-7; see arguments in *The Life of King Edward who rests at Westminster*, pp.xxix-xxxiii, and Frank Barlow, *The Godwins*, pp.23-4. The confusion may have arisen because Cnut's sister was also called Gytha; she was married to Eirikr, earl of Hlaðir in Norway and of Northumbria from c.1016.

Estrithson appealed for English assistance in his wars against Magnús of Norway in 1047 and 1048, Godwine argued for fifty ships to be sent in support of his nephew, but was unable to persuade the king or the other earls to agree with him.<sup>294</sup> The Danish fleet who aided Waltheof's rebels in 1069 was sent by one of Úlfr's sons, Svein, and led by another, Ásbjörn;<sup>295</sup> the story of how Ásbjörn was bribed by the Conqueror to leave the country, angering his brother Svein and leading in time to his exile from Denmark, was known to John of Worcester and William of Malmesbury.<sup>296</sup>

Ásbjörn held an earldom in England under Harthacnut but was exiled on the accession of Edward, perhaps because of his support for his brother's claim to the English throne.<sup>297</sup> Around the same time, in 1045, his brother Björn was given an earldom by Edward, which he held for two years before he was murdered by his cousin Swein Godwineson;<sup>298</sup> since this earldom covered eastern Mercia, including part of Lincolnshire and Huntingdonshire, he might well have been remembered longer at Crowland than in other parts of the country.<sup>299</sup> After his death parts of this earldom were given to Siward, so the *Gesta antecessorum*'s story that Siward's predecessor was murdered is not so far from the truth, although it makes the victim

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<sup>294</sup> *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol. ii, pp.544-5. Svein's requests and the English refusals are recorded in ASC D, s.a. 1048 and 1049, without mention of Godwine's involvement.

<sup>295</sup> Three of Svein's sons also took part; John of Worcester names two of them as Harold and Cnut, but Gaimar names a third son, 'Buern Leriz'; *Estoire des Engleis*, ll.5431-5. The Danes stayed long enough to receive the spoils of Hereward's sack of Peterborough and sail away with them to Denmark; the Peterborough Chronicle records that many of the monastery's treasures were lost in a storm at sea, and those which came safe to land in Denmark were destroyed when some Danes drunkenly set fire to the church where they were being kept; see *The Peterborough Chronicle 1070-1154*, ed. Cecily Clark (Oxford, 1970), pp.2-4. According to Hugh Candidus, the monastery's sacristan Ywar later travelled to Denmark in an attempt to recover what had been taken; see *The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus, a monk of Peterborough*, ed. Mellows, p. 82.

<sup>296</sup> John of Worcester vol. iii, pp.8-14, and William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, iii.261, vol. i, p.480. Two of Svein's sons returned in 1075 to support the revolt of the earls, the conspiracy which led to Waltheof's execution (*Peterborough Chronicle* s.a. 1075, p.5).

<sup>297</sup> This is confirmed by Adam of Bremen, iii.14 (*History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. Francis J. Tschan (New York, 1959), pp.124-5); see Freeman, *The Norman Conquest* vol. ii, pp.60-65.

<sup>298</sup> Plummer examines the differences between the accounts of Björn's death in John of Worcester's chronicle and ASC C, D and E in *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, vol. ii, pp. 229-31. John of Worcester is the only one to provide a genealogy for Björn in his narrative of the events of 1049.

<sup>299</sup> For the extent of the earldom see Frank Barlow, *The Godwins*, pp.47-55.

not Björn but his more famous cousin, Tostig. The evidence of the chronicles suggests that Úlfr's sons may have been reasonably well-known in the east of England, both through their family connection with Godwine and through their involvement with the rebellions of 1069-70, in which both Waltheof and Hereward were involved. It seems possible that it was some idea of a family connection between the descendants of Siward and Úlfr, and not merely scribal error, which introduced the inaccurate genealogy into the Douai MS.

### **Waltheof in Iceland**

The belief that there was a link between the families of Waltheof, Godwine and Úlfr may have helped to contribute to the confusion in the Icelandic accounts of Waltheof, where he is universally said to be the son of Godwine. In particular, the idea found in the Norse sources of rivalry between the 'brothers' Tostig and Waltheof may reflect an attempt to reconcile legendary stories about Siward's youth with information about the genealogy of the sons of Godwine and/or Úlfr. Waltheof features in four prose vernacular histories of the kings of Norway: *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna*, *Heimskringla* and *Hemings þáttr*.<sup>300</sup> The Norse sources are late and historically inaccurate accounts of Waltheof's life,<sup>301</sup> but as we are concerned here with the growth and spread of literary traditions, and not with the accuracy of their information, it is worth investigating whether there are any points of contact between the two strands of the

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<sup>300</sup> He is also mentioned in *Játvarðar saga* in the account of the battle of Hastings; curiously, his role in the battle of Fulford is here played by Gyrrh Godwineson, who is said to be Morcar's brother, and escapes alive from the battle. Waltheof's presence at Fulford is mentioned in *Orkneyinga saga* as in *Morkinskinna*. See *Játvarðar saga*, ed. G.W. Dasent in *Icelandic Sagas and other Historical Documents relating to the Settlement and Descents of the Northmen on the British Isles* (London, 1894), vol.i, pp.388-400, and *Orkneyinga Saga*, p.86.

<sup>301</sup> See the discussion in Scott, 'Valþjófr jarl: an English earl in Icelandic sources', 78-94, and more briefly in Scott, 'Earl Waltheof of Northumbria', 164-70. Scott concludes that the Icelandic sources have nothing to add to our knowledge of Waltheof, but it should be noted that if it were not for the Norse sources there would be no evidence that Waltheof had a skald in his retinue, surely the single most important fact they provide.

Waltheof legend: both the English and Norse accounts of him are essentially literary inventions,<sup>302</sup> and the Icelandic sources are of great interest in bearing testimony to the fame of Waltheof as both military hero and saint, which in England appears to have been quickly forgotten everywhere outside Crowland's sphere of influence.

The core of the Icelandic stories about Waltheof is based on skaldic verse about the earl, of which some fragmentary evidence survives: this consists of two stanzas of a *Valþjófsflokkur* written in praise of the earl by his retainer Þorkell Skallason, and *Haraldsstikki*, the sole surviving stanza of an anonymous poem in praise of Haraldr harðráði. *Haraldsstikki*, though it is quoted only in *Heimskringla*, may lie behind the belief found in all the prose texts that Waltheof was present at Haraldr's first battle in Yorkshire, leading the English army alongside Earl Morcar. There is no English evidence that Waltheof took part in any of the battles of 1066, and it is possible that in the account of Fulford his name has been substituted for that of Morcar's brother Edwin,<sup>303</sup> but *Haraldsstikki* refers to the Norwegians' opponents on this occasion as 'Valþjófs liðar':

Lógu fallnir	í fen ofan
Valþjófs liðar	vöpunum höggunir,
svát gunnhvatir	ganga móttu
Norðmenn yfir	at nóum einum.

[The forces of Waltheof lay fallen down in the marsh, hacked by weapons, so that the battle-bold Norwegians could walk across on corpses alone.]<sup>304</sup>

In *Morkinskinna*, the earliest of the four texts, this is the only context in which

Waltheof appears, and here, as in all the prose texts, he is incorrectly identified as the

<sup>302</sup> Scott correctly characterised the texts of Douai 852 as "legend rather than history" ('Earl Waltheof of Northumbria', 151-2), and largely dismissed their evidence from his survey of the historical Waltheof.

<sup>303</sup> For discussion of this point see Scott, 'Earl Waltheof of Northumbria', 164-70. The location of Haraldr's first battle in England is not given in the Icelandic sources, nor in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, but it must be the same as that identified by Symeon of Durham and Gaimar as Fulford, just outside York; see *Estoire des Engleis*, ll.5215-8.

<sup>304</sup> *Haraldsstikki*, ed. and trans. Matthew Townend, in Kari Ellen Gade, ed., *Poetry from the kings' sagas 2: from c.1035 to c.1300* (Turnhout, 2009), vol. ii, pp.807-8.

son of Earl Godwine.<sup>305</sup> In both *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, he is further considered to have fought against William at Hastings, a belief which appears to be based on a misreading of Þorkell Skallason's *Valþjófsflokkur*. Two stanzas of this poem are quoted in *Heimskringla*:

Hundrað lét í heitum  
hirðmenn jofurs brenna  
sóknar Yggr, en seggjum  
sviðukveld vas þat, eldi.  
Frétts, at fyrðar knóttu  
flagðviggs und kló liggja;  
ímleitum feksk áta  
óls blakk við hræ Frakka.

[The Yggr <= Óðinn> of battle [WARRIOR = Waltheof] caused a hundred retainers of the ruler [William] to burn in hot fire, and that was a scorching evening for the men. It is known that people lay beneath the claw of the troll-woman's steed [WOLF]; food was given to the dark-coloured horse of the troll-woman [WOLF] from the carrion of the Normans.]

Víst hefr Valþjóf hraustan  
Viljalnr, sás rauð malma,  
hinn, es haf skar sunnan  
hélt, í tryggð of véltan.  
Satts, at síð mun létta,  
snarr en minn vas harri  
- deyrat mildingr mæri -  
manndráp á Englandi.

[William, who reddened weapons, the one who cut the rime-flecked sea from the south, has indeed betrayed the bold Waltheof under safe conduct. It is true that killings will be slow to cease in England, but my lord was brave; a more splendid munificent prince will not die.]<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> “Þar como ímoti honom Norðimbra iarlar synir Goþina i. Þeir Marokari oc Valþiofr af Hvndatvni”, *Morkinskinna*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, p.267; ‘There the earls of Northumbria, the sons of Godwine, Morcar and Waltheof of Huntingdon, came against him’. *Morkinskinna* is usually considered to have been written c.1220, though the surviving manuscript dates to c.1275; on the dates of and relationship between *Morkinskinna* and *Fagrskinna*, see *Fagrskinna, a Catalogue of the Kings of Norway*, trans. Alison Finlay (Leiden, 2004), pp.2-14.

<sup>306</sup> Þorkell Skallason, *Valþjófsflokkur*, ed. and trans. Kari Ellen Gade, in *Poetry from the kings' sagas 2*, vol. ii, pp. 382-4.

These verses probably refer to Waltheof's involvement in the resistance against William at York in 1069, rather than to the events of 1066.<sup>307</sup> However, both *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla* have additional (and slightly different) accounts of Waltheof's death which cannot have derived from the skaldic verses. *Fagrskinna* tells of Waltheof's submission to William and his death:

Litlu síðar for Valþiofr a fund konongs. oc hafðe aðr latet taca ser grið af kononge oc riðu meðr honum tvæir riddarar. Viliamr konongr fagnaðe hanum væl oc at skilnaðe veitti konongr homum iarl-dom a Norðimbralande. þer hafðe hann ifir fyr verit iarl oc þa er iarlinn hafðe tækit bref oc innsighle þa for hann a brout oc com a hæiðe nocora. þer como a mot hanum xii riddarar alvapnaðer oc marger svæinar. Þessa Riddara hafðe Viliamr konongr sennt æftir hanum at lata drepa hann. Iarlenn liop af hestennom þui at hann hafðe engan hærbunað. hann bra sværði oc varðe sic um rið. En firir þui at marger velto um varð iarlenn handtækinn oc biosk Riddare einn til at hoggva hann. En þa er iarlenn vissi hværr hann skyllði hoggva þa firir gaf hann þeim Riddara vannlega oc sva konongenom. oc allum oðrum þeim er æftir hanum hafðu faret. oc til iartegna gaf hann Riddara silkikyrtill sinn þeim er hoggva skyllði hann. Þui nest lagðe hann sik til iarðar i cross oc rette baðar hendr i fra ser. oc var hann þa hals hoggvin. oc af hans blöðe fengo marger menn bot. oc er Valþiofr sann hæilagr maðr. Fra þessom tíðendum sægir innilega Þorkæll sunr Þorðar skalla. hann var hirðmaðr Valþiofs iarl. oc orte hann cvæðe eftir fall iarlens oc er þetta þar i.<sup>308</sup>

[A short time afterwards, Waltheof went to meet the king; he had previously obtained a truce for himself with the king, and two knights rode with him. King William received him well, and when they parted the king gave him the earldom of Northumbria, of which he had previously been earl. And when the earl had received the writ and seal-ring he went away and came to a certain moor. There twelve fully armed knights came against him, and many attendants. King William had sent these knights after him to have him killed. The earl leapt from his horse, because he had no armour. He drew his sword and defended himself for a time, but because there were so many of them it ended that the earl was captured and one of the knights prepared to kill him. And when the earl knew which of them was going to kill him, he entirely forgave that knight, and also the king and all the others who had come after him. And as a token he gave his silk kirtle to the knight who was going to kill him. Then he lay down on the ground in the shape of a cross, and stretched out both his arms away from his body, and then he was beheaded. Many people have got healing through his blood, and Waltheof is truly a saint. Þorkell, the son of Þorðr Skalli, tells of these

<sup>307</sup> See Alistair Campbell, *Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History*, Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies, 1970 (London, 1971), pp.15-16, and Scott, 'Valþjófr jarl'.

<sup>308</sup> *Fagrskinna*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1902-03), pp.298-9.

events in detail; he was a retainer of Earl Waltheof, and after the earl's death he composed a poem about it, of which this is part.]

The author then quotes the first four lines of the second stanza of *Valþjófsflokkr*.

Snorri's account is shorter, and rather closer to the truth in making Waltheof's execution the result of a judicial process:

Jarl fór með fá menn, en er hann kom á heiðina fyrir norðan  
Kastalabryggju, þá kómu móti honum ármenn tveir með sveit manna  
ok tóku hann ok settu í fjötur, ok síðan var hann hoggvinn, ok kalla  
enskir menn hann helgan.<sup>309</sup>

[The earl set out with a few men, but when he came to a moor north of Castlebridge he was met by two of the king's officers with a body of men. They took him and put him in chains, and later he was beheaded. The English call him a saint.]

Both accounts agree with *Valþjófsflokkr* in attributing Waltheof's death to William's bad faith, but little else in either story can have come from skaldic sources: the references to Waltheof's sanctity and the clear hagiographic overtones of the *Fagrskinna* narrative must derive from some other source.

The motif of William's betrayal of Waltheof recurs in *Hemings þáttr*, where Waltheof plays a prominent role in several invented scenes intended to illustrate the characters of Haraldr harðráði, Tostig and William.<sup>310</sup> Presumably as a result of his reputation for sanctity,<sup>311</sup> Waltheof is used as an exemplary figure whose honour is contrasted with Tostig's untrustworthiness, while the level of trust they place in his word reveals the difference between Haraldr and William. As in all the Icelandic sources, Waltheof is identified as the youngest son of Godwine, who is here said to be earl of Northumbria, and the author, assuming that Waltheof and Tostig are brothers, indicates a particular rivalry between the two earls: Tostig twice urges Haraldr to kill Waltheof, prompting the Norwegian king to tell him that he trusts Waltheof's promise

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<sup>309</sup> *Haralds saga*, ch.97, p.196.

<sup>310</sup> *Hemings þáttr Áslákssonar*, ed. Fellows Jensen, pp.46-56.

<sup>311</sup> After his death the author comments, "hygia menn hann goðan mann", *Hemings þáttr*, p.56.

better than Tostig’s sworn oath.<sup>312</sup> As Scott observed, there is at least a “ring of truth” in two details relating to Waltheof and the earldom:<sup>313</sup> once when Waltheof says that he does not think Tostig intends him to have much inheritance,<sup>314</sup> and again when William, after Hastings, offers Waltheof his father’s earldom of Northumbria in return for loyalty.<sup>315</sup> Although *Hemings þáttr* is wrong in identifying Godwine as Waltheof’s father, it is correct in this presentation of William’s agreement with Waltheof: as the Crowland sources agree, he was given his father’s earldom of Northumbria at the time of his marriage to Judith in 1070. Whether or not it reflects any historical truth, the *Hemings þáttr* characterisation of Tostig as Waltheof’s rival for Northumbria mirrors the equally unhistorical Crowland story, preserved in the *Gesta antecessorum*, of enmity between Tostig and Siward. The coupling of the names of the two Northumbrian earls in this way may suggest that the *Hemings þáttr* story, like that in the *Gesta*, has its ultimate origins in an attempt to explain the complicated eleventh-century history of the earldom they both held, a subject in which, as the *Gesta* shows, the monks of Crowland had a considerable interest but about which they had little reliable information.

*Hemings þáttr* also contains a striking reflection of the most controversial feature of the Crowland debate over Waltheof’s sanctity, the value of his oath. The treatment of Waltheof by Haraldr and William provides an opportunity to contrast the character of the two kings, when Haraldr, after capturing Waltheof at the battle of Fulford, allows him to go free despite Waltheof’s refusal to swear an oath to him; Waltheof later keeps his promise to warn Haraldr of danger, and thus keeps his faith

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<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.46-7.

<sup>313</sup> Scott, ‘Earl Waltheof of Northumbria’, 169.

<sup>314</sup> “mer litz sem Tosti mvni mer litla erfð ætla”, *Hemings þáttr*, p.46.

<sup>315</sup> “þa mællti Vilialmr gefa man ek þer grið Valþiofr ef þv villt sveria mer trvnað skalltv þa hafa foðvrleifð þína ok iarldom”, *Hemings þáttr*, p.55; ‘Then William said, ‘I will make a truce with you, Waltheof, if you will swear loyalty to me, and you shall have your inheritance and earldom.’”

better than the people of York who desert Haraldr for Harold Godwineson.<sup>316</sup> Some time later, William captures Waltheof at Hastings and receives the same refusal; at first he accepts it and allows Waltheof his freedom, but then changes his mind: ‘it is unwise to allow a man to ride away free who will not swear us any oaths’, he says, and orders Waltheof’s death.<sup>317</sup> These episodes are clearly literary invention, but they are predicated on the idea that Waltheof is a saintly and honourable man: Haraldr is wise to trust him, while William, in refusing to do so, makes Waltheof a martyr. The prominent role given to the swearing of oaths – Waltheof’s unwillingness to swear any, and the force of his promise – is noteworthy, considering the problematic nature of Waltheof’s oaths in the English sources of his life, and the prevalent view (recorded by William of Malmesbury) that he was a traitor and oath-breaker. In the English sources the controversial question of Waltheof’s guilt centres on two oaths: the oaths of loyalty he swore to William and the oath he supposedly swore to the rebellious earls, promising that he would not reveal their plot. The nature of the oaths Waltheof swore and broke is the crux of the debate over his innocence and his sanctity in the Crowland texts: Orderic gives Waltheof a lengthy speech in which he denounces oath-breakers, doubtless Orderic’s own invention but clearly reflecting the ideological work which was being done at Crowland to recast this central issue of treachery and fidelity in Waltheof’s favour. This deliberate inverting of the central charge against Waltheof is already present in *Valþjófsflokkur*, which claims that it is William, and not Waltheof, who has broken faith, and this accusation against William is followed by *Fagrskinna* and *Heimskringla*, although without explicit reference to oath-swearing: both say that Waltheof is arrested after he has made a truce (*grið*) with

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<sup>316</sup> Tostig sarcastically comments on this as an example of English untrustworthiness – “mvnv þer nv sia trunað landz manna” (*ibid.*, p.48), ‘now you will see the good faith of the people of this country!’ – to which Waltheof is clearly supposed to be an honourable exception.

<sup>317</sup> “vraðlegt er at lata þan mann brott riða liðvgan er ors vill eigi eiða sveria”, *ibid.*, p.56.

William and while he is under a promise of safe conduct from the king. The author of *Hemings þátr* elaborates on this tradition by adding the story of Waltheof's two encounters with Haraldr, in order to parallel this with William's treatment of the earl, but the theme is essentially the same; the emphatic assertion of the trustworthiness of Waltheof's word in *Hemings þátr* – particularly Haraldr's comment to Waltheof that “hefir þv vel halldit þin orð” (‘you have kept your word well’) – would please even the most staunch defenders of Waltheof's honour at Crowland. Is this a coincidence, or does it reflect some knowledge among the Norse writers of the most contentious feature of Waltheof's fame?

The misconception about Waltheof's parentage in the Norse texts must have arisen at an early stage, and the confusion in the genealogy may help to show how it came about. Either there really was a family connection between Waltheof's ancestors and the family of Úlfr and the bear ancestry belonged equally to the two branches of the family, or else the attribution of the bear story to Siward helped to promote the idea that there was such a family connection. The Crowland sources know of course that Waltheof's father was Earl Siward, but the confusion in the *Gesta antecessorum* about Godwine's family may lead us to suspect that they had no very clear idea about any other eleventh-century family relationships. As there are significant differences between the Norse versions of Waltheof's death and the Crowland narrative, we may be sure that they did not know Orderic's story or the Crowland *Vita* based on it. But there may well have been other traditions recorded at Crowland, arising from the same process of composition as that which produced the *Gesta antecessorum*: a scholarly attempt to rationalise conflicting oral traditions and

reconcile them with the fragmentary records available at the monastery.<sup>318</sup> In the *Gesta antecessorum*, this editorialising impulse led to the copying of John of Worcester's genealogy of Úlfr into the account of Waltheof's ancestors; perhaps the hypothetical text may also have involved some attempt to explain a family relationship between Waltheof and Tostig, even a precursor to the confused story in the *Gesta antecessorum* of Siward's murder of Tostig. It may well have contained the same heavy emphasis on the trustworthiness of Waltheof's oath which is shared by the English and Norse accounts, as well as the Crowland reading of his treatment by William as a betrayal and a breach of faith by the king – perhaps even the focus on how Waltheof was given his Northumbrian earldom, which both Orderic and *Hemings þáttr* explain.

It is of course possible that the Norse sources' belief in a family connection between Waltheof and the Godwinesons arose in Norway or Iceland,<sup>319</sup> or even elsewhere in England, but Crowland is a particularly good candidate since there is so little evidence for interest in Waltheof anywhere else. Furthermore, there is some evidence for direct communication between Crowland and Norway. The fifteenth-century Crowland Chronicle tells how Abbot Geoffrey of Orléans, during the first flowering of Waltheof's cult at Crowland, sent messengers far and wide seeking assistance in the rebuilding of the monastery. Two monks named Swetman and

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<sup>318</sup> A parallel to the existence of multiple hagiographical traditions within a single community may be provided by the variant strands of the legend of St Edmund of East Anglia recorded at Bury St Edmunds, where Abbo's *Life* had been supplemented, by the twelfth century, with numerous elaborations and quasi-historical interpolations; see Grant Loomis, 'The Growth of the Saint Edmund Legend', and Whitelock, 'Fact and fiction in the legend of St Edmund'.

<sup>319</sup> After the Norman Conquest, a number of Godwine's descendants took refuge in Norway: according to William of Malmesbury, Magnús berfœttr was accompanied on his 1098 expedition to Ireland by the son of Harold Godwineson, also named Harold (*Gesta Regum* iii.260). *Fagrskinna* records the marriage of Harold Godwineson's daughter Gytha and lists her descendants (ch.77), and says that Tostig's two sons went to live in Norway after their father's death, where one of them, Skúli, became an advisor to King Óláfr and was known as 'konungsföstri' (*Fagrskinna*, ch.78). See Mason, *The House of Godwine*, pp.194-201, and Barlow, *The Godwins*, pp.169-70.

Wulsin the younger were sent to Denmark and Norway, and the Norwegian embassy bore fruit: the chronicle contains a letter from the abbot to the king of Norway which makes reference to a certain Norwegian merchant, a man named Thorwy, who had been so impressed by the messengers that he had come on pilgrimage to Crowland and there decided to enter the monastery himself. This letter is dated in the chronicle to shortly after Geoffrey's arrival at Crowland in 1109. The Crowland Chronicle is a fifteenth-century compilation which falsely purports to be the work of Abbot Ingulf (1085-1108) and the theologian Peter of Blois,<sup>320</sup> but recent investigation has shown that it draws in a number of places on early sources;<sup>321</sup> it is a mixture of dubious tradition and complete invention which may have been overlaid on a foundation of some authentic records, and although its statements must always be treated with care, there is nothing especially improbable about the story of the Norwegian merchant.<sup>322</sup> Circumstantial evidence lends weight to it. The abbacy of Geoffrey was the period during which Orderic stayed at Crowland, and Orderic's *Ecclesiastical History* features some unique narratives relating to Norway which have specific connections to the East Midlands. Stephen Marritt has recently argued that Crowland is the most likely place for Orderic to have learned this information.<sup>323</sup> One of these episodes is a remarkable story about the murder of the young son of David, earl of Huntingdon and

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<sup>320</sup> The chronicle was first printed in full by William Fulman in *Rerum anglicarum scriptorum veterum* (Oxford, 1684), vol. i ('Ingulf' at pp.1-107, 'Peter of Blois' at pp.108-32). The chronicle of Pseudo-Ingulf was further edited by Walter de Gray Birch as *The Chronicle of Croyland Abbey by Ingulph* (Wisbech, 1883); the whole chronicle was translated by Henry T. Riley, *Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland, with the continuations by Peter of Blois and Anonymous Writers* (London, 1854). Fulman based his edition on the text in Cotton MS. Otho B.xiii, which was largely destroyed in the 1731 fire in the Cotton library; for a description of what survives of the manuscript, see *The Crowland Chronicle Continuations 1459-1486*, ed. Nicholas Pronay and John Cox (London, 1986), pp.49-53.

<sup>321</sup> On the chronicle's manifest inaccuracies, see W. G. Searle, *Ingulph and the Historia Croylandensis: An Investigation Attempted* (Cambridge, 1894), pp.61-148, but also David Roffe, 'The Historia Croylandensis: a Plea for Reassessment', *English Historical Review* 110 (1995), 93-108.

<sup>322</sup> The story is in *Rerum anglicarum scriptorum veterum*, ed. Fulman, vol. i, pp.113-4, and see Riley, *Ingulph's Chronicle*, pp.235-7.

<sup>323</sup> Stephen Marritt, 'Crowland Abbey and The Provenance of Orderic Vitalis's Scandinavian and Scottish Material', *Notes and Queries* 53:3 (2006), 290-2.

future king of Scotland (1124-53), the second husband of Waltheof's daughter Matilda, by a cleric who had previously lived in Norway:

This man was punished for an appalling crime which he had committed in Norway, by having his eyes put out and his hands and feet cut off. He had attacked a certain priest who was celebrating Mass, and when the people had withdrawn after receiving the sacraments he had struck him in the stomach with a huge knife and murdered him, horribly scattering his bowels over the altar. Afterwards Earl David took him into his care in England for the love of God, and provided him and his small daughter with food and clothing. Using the iron fingers with which he was fitted, being maimed, he cruelly stabbed his benefactor's two-year-old son while pretending to caress him, and so at the prompting of the devil he suddenly tore out the bowels of the suckling in his nurse's arms. In this way David's first-born child was killed. The murderer was bound to the tails of four wild horses and torn to pieces by them, as a terrible warning to evil-doers.<sup>324</sup>

This gruesome story is found only in Orderic and in two late Scottish sources, neither of which has the Norwegian connection: in both of these versions the killer is Scottish and the episode takes place in Scotland. No other sources even record the existence of the child. As Chibnall notes, the story "has generally been regarded as untrue",<sup>325</sup> but Orderic's version has given historians pause; despite its lurid details it has a certain plausibility, not least in locating the story in England, during the period when David was earl of Huntingdon and before he gained the Scottish throne.<sup>326</sup> Matilda and David married in 1114, shortly before Orderic's visit to Crowland, and the texts of the Douai manuscript, particularly the *De Comitissa*, testify to the keen interest which Crowland continued to take in Waltheof's descendants and in the earls of Huntingdon. The marriage of David and Matilda is recorded in the *De Comitissa*,

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<sup>324</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, Book VIII, vol. iv, pp.275-7.

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. iv, p.276 n.1.

<sup>326</sup> See R. L. G. Ritchie, *The Normans in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1954) p.252 n.3, and on David's movements in England between c.1114-24, see Richard Oram, *David I: The King who made Scotland* (Stroud, 2004), pp.64-72.

although their unfortunate child is not.<sup>327</sup> If there is any truth in the story, it provides further support for the presence of a Norwegian cleric in England; if not, it may be another example of the kind of fantastical stories about their aristocratic patrons which the monks of Crowland recorded in the Douai MS.

Besides this story, Orderic has a description of the geography of Norway probably based on a written, most likely Latin, source, containing information about Magnús berfœttr and Sigurðr Jórsalafari.<sup>328</sup> Whatever his source was, it spoke very favourably about Magnús, who is described as “physically strong and handsome, brave and generous, active and honourable, and outstanding for his integrity,”<sup>329</sup> and provided a detailed account of the cause and progress of Magnús’ expedition against the Irish, and of the encounter near Anglesey in 1098 in which Hugh of Montgomery, the Norman earl of Shrewsbury, was killed by the Norwegians.<sup>330</sup> Orderic also tells an anecdote about a wealthy citizen of Lincoln entrusted with Magnús’ treasure around the time of the Norwegian king’s later expedition to Ireland in 1103.<sup>331</sup> This man, who may be identified with Arcil, a moneyer whose name appears on coins found in Norwegian hoards,<sup>332</sup> helped equip Magnús for the expedition, and after the king was killed spent his treasure at great profit to himself. In addition, Orderic has a unique story about merchants travelling from Norway to England whose ships were

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<sup>327</sup> Michel, pp.126-7.

<sup>328</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, Book X, vol. v, pp.218-221.

<sup>329</sup> “corpore fortis et formosus, audax et largus, agilis et probus, et multa honestate conspicuus”, *ibid.*, vol. v, pp.218, 219.

<sup>330</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, vol.v, pp.220-5. Cf. John of Worcester, vol. iii, pp.86-9, and William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, iii. 260, vol. i, pp.478-81 and iv.329, pp.570-1; these two accounts share some details with each other, such as Magnús’ conquest of the Orkneys and the Mevanian islands, but William has confused Magnús berfœttr with Magnús, the son of Haraldr harðráði. See J. E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales* (London, 1948), vol. ii, pp.408-10. The event is also recorded in *Heimskringla* (*Saga Magnús konungs berfœtts*, ch.10, vol.iii, pp.222-4). Both Snorri and Orderic mention the byname of the other Norman earl involved in the encounter, Hugh digri, earl of Chester.

<sup>331</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, Book XI, vol.vi, pp.48-51.

<sup>332</sup> Francis Hill, *Medieval Lincoln* (Stamford, 1990), pp.30-2, 52-3, 173-4.

plundered by Robert de Mowbray in 1095 but recompensed on appeal to the king.<sup>333</sup>

The story of the Lincoln moneyer seems likely to have had an oral Lincolnshire source, and Orderic may have heard it at Crowland. Information about Sigurðr Jórsalafari's adventures in Jerusalem may also have become known to Orderic during his time in England, or via an English source:<sup>334</sup> Sigurðr spent the winter of 1107-8 in England, on his way to the east, and William of Malmesbury describes him as "a good-looking and brave young man, [who] sailed not long ago to Jerusalem by way of England, and there performed countless brave feats against the Saracens."<sup>335</sup>

### **Legends of Waltheof and the *Roman de Waldef***

Crowland thus offers one context within which the transfer of narrative material between England and Scandinavia was apparently taking place during the early decades of the twelfth century.<sup>336</sup> It is impossible to be sure whether stories about Waltheof formed any part of this, but it seems likely in light of the limited interest in Waltheof elsewhere in England: Crowland was one of the few places where Snorri's

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<sup>333</sup> *Ecclesiastical History*, Book VIII, vol. iv pp.280-1.

<sup>334</sup> "An English captive, who was of noble birth, bore [Magnús] a third son, Sigurd, who was brought up by Thorer, son of Ingrid and foster-son of King Magnus. He survived his two brothers to reign for many years, and established bishoprics and monasteries, which had been unknown to his ancestors, in the kingdom of Norway. Before he came to the throne he sailed to Jerusalem, besieged from the sea the wealthy city of Tyre which is almost surrounded by sea, and, while the forces of Jerusalem attacked from the land side, Sigurd stormed it from the deep. Afterwards, returning by way of Russia, he married a king's daughter, Malmfrid, and soon after he returned home he ascended the throne by God's will." (*Ecclesiastical History*, vol. v, p.221).

<sup>335</sup> "adolescens spetiosus et audax, non multum est quod Ierosolimam per Angliam nauigauit, innumera et preclara facinora contra Saracenos consummans, presertim in obsessione Sidonis", *Gesta Regum*, iii. 260, vol. i, pp.480, 481; cf. *Magnússon saga*, ch.3, where Snorri quotes a verse from Einarr Skúlason as evidence for this stay in England (*Heimskringla*, vol.iii, pp.239-240).

<sup>336</sup> One hagiographic text of Crowland origin did find its way to Iceland: one recension of *Thomas saga Erkibyskups* is based upon a life of Thomas Becket written by Roger, a monk of Crowland (see Smith, 'The Early Literary Relations of England and Scandinavia', 227). According to the Crowland chronicler, Roger's translation was sent to Canterbury by the abbot on the occasion of the translation of St Thomas' body in 1220 (Fulman, p.474; Riley, *Ingulph's Chronicle*, p.317). On the transmission of hagiographical material from England to Iceland, see Fjalldal, *Anglo-Saxon England in Icelandic Medieval Texts*, pp.83-100, Christine Fell, 'The Icelandic saga of Edward the Confessor: the hagiographic sources', *Anglo-Saxon England* 1 (1972), 247-258, and Fell, 'Anglo-Saxon saints in Old Norse sources and vice versa', in Hans Bekker-Nielsen, Peter Foote and Olaf Olsen, eds., *Proceedings of the Eighth Viking Congress, Århus 24-31 August 1977* (Odense, 1981), pp.95-106.

comment on Waltheof, “kalla enskir menn hann helgan”, was actually true. If it is the case, as has been suggested, that a rhyming phrase in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* – “þær wes þæt brydeala mannum to beala”,<sup>337</sup> ‘there was that bride-ale, a harm to [many] men’ – preserves an echo of a poem about the fatal bridal feast at which the Revolt of the Earls was planned, there may have been some form of verse circulating about Waltheof in England as well as in Scandinavia. William of Malmesbury’s description of Waltheof’s heroics at York may just indicate something of the same sort:

In the battle of York Waltheof had laid low many of the Normans single-handed, beheading them one by one as they issued from the gate; he had great strength of arm, powerful chest muscles, his whole frame tough and tall.<sup>338</sup>

However, this does not constitute anything like evidence for a legend of Waltheof in England. The use of the name ‘Waldef’ for the hero of an Anglo-Norman romance of Norfolk provenance led some early critics to propose a connection between the *Roman de Waldef* and a lost legend of Waltheof.<sup>339</sup> This theory has been comprehensively disproved by the romance’s most recent editor, A. J. Holden, who demonstrates that apart from the name, there are no similarities between the life of the earl and the romance hero, who is said to be a king of Norfolk.<sup>340</sup> The Anglo-Norman poet appears to have drawn his stock of character names from a variety of hagiographical and chronicle sources, and this doubtless accounts for the use of the

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<sup>337</sup> *The Peterborough Chronicle*, ed. Clark, p.5; ASC D has “þær wæs þæt brydealo, þæt wæs manegra manna bealo” (*ASC MS. D*, p.87).

<sup>338</sup> “Waldefus in Eboracensi pugna plures Normannorum solus obruncauerat, unos et unos per portam egredientes decapitans; neruosus lacertis, thorusus pectore, robustus et procerus toto corpore”; *Gesta Regum*, vol i., pp. 468-9. This passage from the *Gesta Regum* was incorporated into the *Vita et Passio* in the Douai MS.

<sup>339</sup> See for instance A. Brandl, *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* CXXVIII (1912), 401-3.

<sup>340</sup> *Le Roman de Waldef*, ed. A. J. Holden (Cologne-Genève, 1984), pp.20-23; see also Rosalind Field, ‘Waldef and the Matter of/with England’, in Judith Weiss, Jennifer Fellows and Morgan Dickson, eds., *Medieval Insular Romance: Translation and Innovation* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.25-39.

name Waltheof (along with Guthlac, the other Crowland saint, and the names Svein and Cnut, who appear as kings of Colchester and Canterbury respectively). The *Roman de Waldef* is the earliest and (even in its unfinished state) the longest of the Anglo-Norman ‘ancestral romances’, but until recently it had been little studied: Holden did, however, prove that it had a considerable influence on *Gui de Warewic*.<sup>341</sup> It was translated into Latin c.1400 by Johannes Bramis, a monk of Thetford Priory. The Anglo-Norman poet claims that his story had been a popular legend in England before the Conquest, but this seems improbable; a statement made by Bramis that an English as well as a French version of the romance existed in East Anglia in his time is more credible, although no other trace of such a romance now survives. The English romance used by Bramis was most likely a translation of the Anglo-Norman poem. The Anglo-Norman romance is dated by Holden to c.1200-1210, and it is probably not a coincidence that interest in Waltheof as a saint appears to have been at its height in the early part of the thirteenth century: the 1219 translation of his relics doubtless encouraged this interest, and both the Douai and Delapr  accounts of his life date probably to the 1230s.

All we might venture to say is that in the light of the fully-developed Siward legend, it is possible that some stories circulated about his son, and the parallel case of the Ragnarssons material shows how much variation could exist in related stories within a fairly limited geographical area. The legends of Edmund and the Ragnarssons in East Anglia provide a model for the circulation of variant narratives, emerging in part as the outgrowth of a hagiographical tradition, but co-existing with an established narrative associated with one institutional house. It may have been one version of such a tradition about Waltheof which resulted in his appearance in the

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<sup>341</sup> *Le Roman de Waldef*, pp.29-32.

Icelandic sources, especially since the *Fagrskinna* story in particular shows the influence of an unidentified hagiographical source.<sup>342</sup>

## **Hereward**

Further light on the process by which anecdote was turned into saga is provided by the legend of Hereward, a near contemporary of Waltheof and a fellow rebel against Norman rule. Like Siward, Hereward became the subject of an elaborate and fantastic narrative within a few decades of his death; the legends connected to the two men seem to have developed concurrently, apparently within the same geographical area and perhaps among similar communities. The narrative about Hereward is preserved in the *Gesta Herwardi*, a Latin prose text surviving only at the end of a thirteenth-century collection of legal documents from Peterborough Abbey known as the Register of Robert of Swaffham (Peterborough Cathedral Manuscript 1, folios 320-339).<sup>343</sup> A version of the *Gesta Herwardi* was used in the compilation of the *Liber Eliensis*, where it is said that the text was compiled in the early twelfth century by a monk of Ely called Richard. Richard wrote at the request of a patron, who is unnamed in the text, but has been identified on convincing grounds with Hervey, Bishop of Ely between 1107-1131,<sup>344</sup> and this provides a reliable basis for dating the *Gesta Herwardi* to those years. The certain evidence of Hereward's life is confined to the Domesday record of his (possible) land-holdings and to the chronicle records of two events, the plundering of Peterborough Abbey in 1070 and the siege of Ely by the

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<sup>342</sup> See Jesch, 'England and *Orkneyinga saga*', pp.227-8, for a discussion of these elements in the *Fagrskinna* passage, particularly with regard to similarities to accounts of the death of St Magnús.

<sup>343</sup> For a description of the Register of Robert of Swaffham, see J. D. Martin, *The Cartularies and Registers of Peterborough Abbey*, Northamptonshire Record Soc. 28 (Peterborough, 1978), 7-12, and N. R. Ker, ed., *Medieval Manuscripts in British Libraries* (Oxford, 1969-) IV, 162-4.

<sup>344</sup> *Liber Eliensis*, ed. Blake, pp.xxxiv-xxxvi.

Normans in the following year.<sup>345</sup> In the chronicle accounts of these events he is mentioned as a fairly minor figure in the revolt, and at Peterborough at least he was remembered as not much better than a thief.<sup>346</sup> However, the *Gesta Herwardi* offers a full and adulatory account of Hereward's early life in exile, set during the 1060s in Northumbria, Cornwall, Dublin and Flanders, and then goes on to record numerous stratagems and tricks played by Hereward against the Normans, claiming to be based on a variety of first-hand accounts of his life. If it can be dated with some confidence to the period 1107-1131, these stories must already have been in oral circulation a short time after his death.<sup>347</sup>

The *Gesta Herwardi* is a mixture of historical fact and romantic adventures, many of which went on to influence later outlaw legends such as the stories of Robin Hood.<sup>348</sup> Some evidence of how closely co-located the legends of Hereward and Siward must have been is provided by Hereward's first exploit, which makes reference to a story of monstrous bear ancestry like that attributed to Siward. After he

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<sup>345</sup> On the historical evidence for Hereward's life, see J. Hayward, 'Hereward the Outlaw', *Journal of Medieval History* 14 (1988), 293-304 and Cyril Hart, *The Danelaw*, pp.625-648.

<sup>346</sup> A Peterborough addition to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry for 1070 records how "Hereward 7 his genge" sacked the abbey in protest at the appointment of the Norman abbot Turolde (Clark, *The Peterborough Chronicle*, pp.2-4). According to the twelfth-century Peterborough writer Hugh Candidus, Hereward's actions caused particular outrage because he was a tenant of the monastery, a statement confirmed by Domesday Book (see *The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus*, pp.77-82; on Hereward's Domesday holdings, see *The Lincolnshire Domesday and the Lindsey Survey*, trans. and ed. C. W. Foster and Thomas Longley (Horncastle, 1924), p.58; for further notices of a Lincolnshire Hereward, possibly the same man, see pp.163, 224-5, 232-3).

<sup>347</sup> The date of Hereward's death is not given in the *Gesta Herwardi*, which says only that he lived on "for many years" after his pardon by William after the siege of Ely, but even if this is true he cannot have died very long before the date of the *Gesta*.

<sup>348</sup> Like Robin Hood, he is a young nobleman unjustly dispossessed of his inheritance who wages a mischievous campaign of guerrilla warfare against his enemies, while living a comfortable life in an inaccessible hideout. Hereward takes refuge in the Fens rather than the greenwood, but he has Robin Hood's taste for tricks – putting the shoes on his horse backwards, so as to send his pursuers in the wrong direction – and a similar retinue of assorted outlaws with their own individual stories. His capture of Thorold, abbot of Peterborough, is a prototypical Robin Hood adventure, while his multiple disguises, facility for wrestling and other feats of strength, and his function as a focal point for popular rebellion against the landowning classes are all features which recur in the Robin Hood legend. See J. C. Holt, *Robin Hood* (London, 1982), pp.64-75 and Maurice Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend* (London, 2000), pp.10-38. Late tradition associated Robin Hood with Waltheof's earldom of Huntingdon (see Holt, *Robin Hood*, p.162), and the antiquarian William Stukeley believed he had identified the original of Robin Hood among the descendants of Waltheof's daughter Alice (Keen, *The Outlaws of Medieval Legend*, pp.178-9).

is outlawed at the age of eighteen for his unruly behaviour, Hereward goes to stay with his godfather, 'Gisebert de Ghent', in Northumbria. Gisebert has a custom of testing the strength of aspiring knights by having them fight against wild beasts which he keeps in cages, and among the beasts is a very large bear, the offspring of a famous Norwegian bear which is said to have had the head and feet of a man and human intelligence; this bear understood human speech and was cunning in battle, and according to 'the stories of the Danes' ("fabula Danorum"), was said to have fathered Beorn, king of Norway, on a human woman. When the bear kept by Gisebert breaks loose, only Hereward is strong enough to fight and kill it; the *Gesta Herwardi* claims that this feat won him universal acclaim and made him the subject of songs in that region.<sup>349</sup>

This episode has troubled some critics of the *Gesta Herwardi*, both for its supernatural elements and for its introduction into Hereward's early life of a man whose name appears to connect him to Gilbert of Ghent.<sup>350</sup> The connection with Gilbert is inherently improbable: there is no evidence that Gilbert was in England before the Conquest and little to connect him with either Hereward or Northumbria.<sup>351</sup> It is possible, as van Houts suggests, that if Hereward was indeed in Flanders in 1065-7 he may have met Gilbert there,<sup>352</sup> but it seems more likely that Gilbert's name has been inserted into a story which had nothing to do with him – or, indeed, with Hereward. The sentient Norwegian bear must instead be connected to the traditions

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<sup>349</sup> *Gesta Herwardi*, ed. Hardy and Martin, p.343.

<sup>350</sup> For discussion of the episode, see Elisabeth van Houts, 'Hereward and Flanders', *Anglo-Saxon England* 22 (1999), 201-23 (215-7); P. G. Schmidt, 'Biblisches und hagiographisches Kolorit in den *Gesta Herwardi*', in Walsh and Wood, eds., *The Bible in the Medieval World: Essays in Memory of Beryl Smalley* (Oxford, 1985) pp.85-95 (91-2); Olrik, *The Heroic Legends of Denmark* (New York, 1919), pp.374-5.

<sup>351</sup> He is first recorded in England as part of the Norman force occupying York in 1069, by Simeon of Durham, *Historia regum*, s.a. 1069, in *Symeonis monachi opera omnia*, ed. Thomas Arnold (London, 1882-5) vol. ii, 188.

<sup>352</sup> van Houts, 'Hereward and Flanders', 215-7.

about the ancestry of Siward, as the localisation of the episode in Northumbria, together with the name Beorn, suggests. Axel Olrik in his study of the Siward narrative noted the appearance of the bear story in the *Gesta Herwardi* as an indication of how widely a legend of bear origins had circulated in Scandinavian-influenced areas of England,<sup>353</sup> but in fact, when the geographical context of the two texts is taken into account, the episode in the *Gesta Herwardi* seems to indicate precisely the opposite: the Fenland origins which both texts share, together with the reference to Northumbria as the location of Hereward's exploit, suggest a more direct influence of the Siward legend on the Hereward saga. Despite the minor differences between the two stories, it seems unlikely that the episode in the *Gesta Herwardi* can have arisen independently from the Siward legend as preserved in the *Gesta antecessorum*. Neither version of the story tells the whole legend as it appears in the Scandinavian sources, both lacking such details as the abduction of the woman, the killing of the bear, or the son's revenge on its killers; they deal only with the offspring of the bear and the physical characteristics which reveal its animal parentage. Both, however, indicate that the story is traditional: the *Gesta Herwardi* attributes it to "fabula Danorum", and the *Gesta antecessorum* to "relaciones antiquorum".

It seems certain that the bear legend first belonged to the Siward story, rather than to Hereward, although the *Gesta Herwardi* predates the Siward narrative in the Douai MS. by about a century. The legend is tangential to the Hereward story, a short episode whose only purpose is to demonstrate the hero's early strength and courage; it appears to have been adapted to suit this purpose, in that it features a monstrous bear with human intelligence, rather than a man descended from a bear. In the *Gesta antecessorum*, by contrast, it provides the focal hero Siward with a legendary ancestry

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<sup>353</sup> Olrik, 'Siward digri', 220 n.1.

of preternatural origins, a distinguished line of forebears with more than human power and ferocity. Siward's Danish origins are almost certain, and the statement that Beorn was the name of his father is plausible;<sup>354</sup> Hereward himself had no direct Scandinavian connections.<sup>355</sup> If this can be taken as evidence for the existence of the bear story in the Fenland in the first three decades of the twelfth century, this provides a further link between the first part of the Siward legend and this region, and at an early date.

An episode in the *Roman de Waldef* should also be mentioned in this connection. In the Anglo-Norman poem, Waldef's son Gudlac, living as a young man in Morocco, accidentally kills the nephew of the king in a brawl and is forced to flee the country. He is shipwrecked on the coast of Denmark and there, while walking on the beach, he encounters a child being attacked by a great white bear. He kills the bear and saves the child, who turns out to be the son of Svein, the king of Denmark. Gudlac is rewarded by the king, and takes part on his behalf in a battle against the Norwegians, who have invaded the country. In gratitude, Svein provides him with ships and men for his return to England.<sup>356</sup> It seems likely that this episode is an adapted version of the Hereward story: in both accounts the encounter with the bear takes place when the young hero has been sent away from home for violent behaviour; he saves innocent victims from an out-of-control bear; he is rewarded highly for this deed by the local ruler. The bear in the Waldef story is not sentient, nor is there any trace of the motif of human-bear progeny; the combat has simply become a means for the hero to gain favour with a Danish king. The change of setting

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<sup>354</sup> Olrik's belief that it belonged originally to Siward, and was suggested by the names of his parents being Beorn and Bera and his own extraordinary strength, is not convincing in the light of the wide distribution of the legend in Scandinavia; see Olrik, *The Heroic Legends of Denmark*, pp.374-5.

<sup>355</sup> Although see the arguments of Peter Rex, *Hereward: The Last Englishman* (Stroud, 2007), pp.21-50, about Hereward's own possible Danish ancestry.

<sup>356</sup> *Le Roman de Waldef*, ed. Holden, ll.11821-12518.

from Northumbria to Denmark was presumably intended to facilitate Gudlac's assistance to the Danish king against the Norwegians; it is somewhat reminiscent of the various stories of Earl Godwine's expeditions against the Norwegians (or Swedes) on behalf of Cnut, which, though based on fact, appear in fantastically exaggerated form in Gaimar, Walter Map and the *Vita Haroldi*.<sup>357</sup> The polar bear episode presumably became known to the Anglo-Norman poet from some East Anglian version of the Hereward legend; the name 'Hereward' is used for an unconnected character in the romance,<sup>358</sup> and the bear episode was, if the *Gesta Herwardi* is to be believed, one of his most celebrated exploits, even the subject of popular ballads.

The prologue to the *Gesta Herwardi* provides a detailed if somewhat unclear account of the process of the text's composition. Asked by his patron to seek out information on Hereward, Richard located a short account of his life and translated it into Latin, augmented by oral accounts, "things we happened to hear from our own people with whom [Hereward] was familiar":<sup>359</sup> Richard says he has himself met men who fought alongside Hereward, and describes the appearance of two of them, Siward of Bury St Edmunds and Leofric the Black. He based his narrative on an English work in a fragmentary state which had been written by Hereward's chaplain Leofric, a priest of Bourne in Lincolnshire, from which he was able to extract information with great difficulty; besides this, Richard and his assistants attempted to supplement their

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<sup>357</sup> We might also remember that Svein Estrithson sought English help against the Norwegians on more than one occasion, though he seems never to have received it; and Svein's assistance to Gudlac, which means the English hero returns to his homeland at the head of a Danish fleet, aligns him with the anti-Norman rebels Waltheof and Hereward who both (at different times) sought Danish aid of this kind.

<sup>358</sup> Furthermore, Waldef, like Hereward, saves a woman from a forced marriage by arriving at the wedding feast in Dublin, where she recognises him by means of a ring; however, both may have borrowed the episode from an early version of the Horn legend, as the poet of *Waldef* claims to have used a romance of 'Aalof', probably a poem about either Horn or his father. See Judith Weiss, 'Thomas and the Earl: Literary and Historical Contexts for the *Romance of Horn*' in Rosalind Field, ed., *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Romance* (Cambridge, 1999), pp.1-13.

<sup>359</sup> Swanton, *Three Lives*, p.45; "subjungens etiam et ea quæ a nostris audire contigerit, cum quibus conversatus est", *Gesta Herwardi*, p.339.

work with “a large book” about Hereward’s exploits which they had heard existed in a certain place,<sup>360</sup> but although they sent to this unnamed place in search of the book, they were unable to find it.

Despite this account of the text’s composition, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the nature of the sources with which Richard was working. The prologue manifests considerable unease about the composite nature of the work, over and above what might be expected from a conventional modesty topos. Richard describes Leofric’s work as consisting of “only a few loose pages, partly rotten with damp and decayed and partly damaged by tearing”,<sup>361</sup> and says he gleaned from it nothing more than a few details about Hereward’s parentage and reputation, as well as the story of his return to his ancestral home. However, his comment about Leofric is extremely interesting: he says “it was the endeavour of this well-remembered priest to assemble all the doings of giants and warriors he could find in ancient fables as well as true reports, for the edification of his audience; and for their remembrance to commit them to writing in English”.<sup>362</sup> What kind of stories did Leofric collect? It is immediately obvious from the *Gesta Herwardi* that, like Siward, Hereward has had a number of pre-existing narrative episodes grafted on to his legend; only his involvement in the East Anglian rebellion against William can be substantiated by other sources, and everything else in the text falls somewhere between plausible tradition and clear literary invention. The general outline of the narrative is parallel to the early adventures of Siward, although in a more episodic form: Hereward is exiled

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<sup>360</sup> *Gesta Herwardi*, p.339.

<sup>361</sup> *Three Lives*, p.45; “pauca et dispersa folia, partim stillicidio putrefactis et abolitis et partim abscissione divisis”, *Gesta Herwardi*, p.339. Michael Swanton agrees that Richard’s claim to have been translating directly from an Old English manuscript “is supported by occasional paleographical details”; see *Three Lives*, p.xxvi.

<sup>362</sup> *Three Lives*, p.45; “Hujus enim memorati presbyteri erat studium, omnes actus gigantum et bellatorum ex fabulis antiquorum, aut ex fideli relatione, ad edificationem audientium congregare, et ob memoriam Angliæ literis commendare”, *Gesta Herwardi*, p.339.

at the age of eighteen for his ungovernable behaviour, which is possibly a matter of historical fact, but is surely to be compared with the statement in the *Gesta antecessorum* that Siward left home because he “held his native soil in contempt, despising to succeed his father in his inheritance”.<sup>363</sup> Both Hereward and Siward then engage in adventures around the sea-routes of the British Isles, though Siward only makes it from Orkney to Northumbria before the old man on the mound intervenes; Hereward manages to save a princess in Cornwall and prove his skill in Ireland before he eventually reaches Flanders (via shipwreck in the Orkneys). Elisabeth van Houts has argued that Hereward’s adventures in Flanders may be based on fact,<sup>364</sup> and certainly some aspects of the Ely siege must also have had their origin in near-contemporary accounts of what happened there. As with the Siward material, it is the later, better-documented part of the hero’s life which must have been the original core of the legend; anecdotes about real events, episodic in nature but somewhat shaped into a literary form, were supplemented by a fantastic account of the hero’s youth, composed as a continuous narrative and almost entirely fictional.

Stories about Hereward survive in a number of sources, besides the *Gesta Herwardi* and the closely-related version in the *Liber Eliensis*.<sup>365</sup> There is an abbreviated account of his life in the first part of the chronicle of Crowland Abbey, which shows knowledge of a version of the *Gesta Herwardi*, but (unlike the *Liber Eliensis*) does not borrow wholesale from it. The Hereward legend is mentioned in three distinct places in the chronicle, the references giving the impression of having been imperfectly compiled from multiple sources. Hereward is first mentioned in the

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<sup>363</sup> “natale solum habuit contemptui, patri suo jure hereditario succedere vilipendens”, *Gesta antecessorum*, p.105.

<sup>364</sup> van Houts, ‘Hereward and Flanders’, 201-23.

<sup>365</sup> The relationship between the text of the *Gesta Herwardi* in the Register of Robert of Swaffham and that which lies behind the *Liber Eliensis* is discussed by Blake, *Liber Eliensis*, pp.xxxiv-xxxvi. On the confused account of the siege of Ely in the *Liber Eliensis* see *ibid.*, pp.liv-lvii; see also Keynes, ‘Ely Abbey 672-1109’, pp.43-6.

entry for the year 1062, prompted by a reference to Leofric of Brunne, who is named as Hereward's father,<sup>366</sup> and the subsequent account of his early life reads as a summary of the *Gesta Herwardi*, vague about his specific accomplishments, but with the addition of information about Crowland's own connection to Hereward: agreeing with the *Gesta Herwardi* that Hereward's wife Turfrida retired to Crowland as a nun, the chronicler asserts that both Hereward and Turfrida were buried at the monastery (Turfrida only four years before the time of writing), and that their daughter "is now surviving and living in our neighbourhood, and has been lately married to an illustrious knight, one on the most intimate terms with our monastery, Hugh Evermue by name, lord of the vill of Depyng."<sup>367</sup> The chronicler then returns to Hereward during the account of the siege of Ely,<sup>368</sup> and later, in recording the death of Ivo Taillebois in 1114, the chronicler (no longer claiming to be Abbot Ingulf, but the compiler of the First Continuation) repeats two stories which appear in the *Gesta*, Hereward's capture of Thorold, abbot of Peterborough,<sup>369</sup> and Ivo's decision to employ the witch against Hereward's forces at Ely.<sup>370</sup> The claim that Hereward was buried at Crowland cannot be verified and it is possible that it is a late chronicler's elaborate attempt to claim a connection between his own house and a local hero, but there is nothing in the *Gesta* to contradict it, and it is not inherently improbable.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> On the disputed question of Hereward's parentage, see Freeman, *The Norman Conquest* vol iv., pp.826-33, David Roffe, 'Hereward 'the wake' and the barony of Bourne: a reassessment of a Fenland legend', *Lincolnshire History & Archaeology*, 29 (1994), 7-10, and Peter Rex, *Hereward: The Last Englishman*, pp.36-50. According to Pseudo-Ingulf, this Leofric "showed himself, in many respects, a beneficent adviser and friend to our monastery" (Riley, p.134).

<sup>367</sup> Riley, *Ingulph's Chronicle*, p.136; Fulman, pp.67-8. On Hugh, see David Roffe, 'Hereward 'the wake' and the barony of Bourne'.

<sup>368</sup> Fulman, pp.70-1; Riley, *Ingulph's Chronicle*, pp.141-3.

<sup>369</sup> On Thorold, abbot of Peterborough, see *The Peterborough Chronicle*, ed. Clark, pp.2-3, and *Hugh Candidus*, ed. Mellows, pp.84-5.

<sup>370</sup> Fulman, pp.124-5; Riley, *Ingulph's Chronicle*, pp.258-9.

<sup>371</sup> Domesday shows that Hereward was a tenant of Crowland, although he forfeited his lands at some point before he "fled the country", whether in the early days of his exile or after the siege of Ely is not clear; see *The Lincolnshire Domesday and the Lindsey Survey*, pp.224-5, 232-3. With regard to Hereward's connections to Crowland it is however worthy of note that Orderic Vitalis does not make

Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis* also includes some stories about Hereward: he has nothing to say about Hereward's early life or any part of his exploits as an outlaw before his appearance at the siege of Ely, but unlike the *Gesta Herwardi*, he gives an account of Hereward's death.<sup>372</sup> He says that a group of Norman knights decide to kill Hereward on hearing he is about to make peace with William and fight on behalf of the king in Le Mans: they set upon him while he is at dinner, due to the negligence of his chaplain Ailward who falls asleep on guard. The Hyde Chronicle attaches to Hereward a story not mentioned by Gaimar or the *Gesta*, in which Hereward pretends to be a corpse in order to enter a Norman castle.<sup>373</sup> This popular ruse is attributed by Dudo to Hæsten at the capture of Luna, and by Saxo to Frodi at Plescovia and London;<sup>374</sup> a very similar story is told by Snorri in *Heimskringla*, in which Haraldr harðráði gains entrance to a besieged town in Sicily by feigning his own death.<sup>375</sup> The attribution of this common strategy to Hereward is a reminder of how easily one of the existing stock of narrative episodes could be assimilated into a legend of this type; its appearance in the Hyde Chronicle and not in the *Gesta Herwardi* suggests that stories about Hereward were indeed circulating in a variety of forms, such stand-alone episodes probably being more common than the fuller, connected narratives recorded in the *Gesta Herwardi* and the *Liber Eliensis*, and perhaps dropping in and out of the legend.

It is just possible that some stories about Hereward were in verse form: the Crowland chronicle mentions songs being sung in England about Hereward's deeds

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any reference to Hereward in his account of the years 1069-71 (*Ecclesiastical History* Book IV, vol.ii, pp.224-258); if Hereward were as well-remembered at Crowland as Pseudo-Ingulf claims, one might expect his connections with the monastery to be mentioned by Orderic, whose stay in England must have taken place not long after the likely date of Hereward's death (and supposed burial at Crowland).

<sup>372</sup> The account of Hereward is at ll.5467-5710.

<sup>373</sup> *Liber Monasterii de Hyda*, ed. Edward Edwards, Rolls Series 45 (London, 1866), p.295.

<sup>374</sup> See Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* (London, 1921), p.348.

<sup>375</sup> *Haralds saga*, ch.10, pp.80-1.

even before his return from exile, and claims they were still heard in the streets at the time of writing,<sup>376</sup> and in the *Gesta Herwardi* Richard comments that after Hereward's defeat of the bear, the women in Northumbria sang about him in their dances.<sup>377</sup> P.G. Schmidt has argued that this statement in the *Gesta* should not be taken literally, seeing in it an echo of the songs and dances with which the women of Israel praised David for his triumph over Goliath,<sup>378</sup> and perhaps one should in any case be suspicious of an Ely author's testimony about songs circulating in Northumbria. But more weight may be placed on the Crowland tradition (the usual caveats about the late date of the pseudo-Ingulf Chronicle notwithstanding): the two separate references to songs about Hereward in the Crowland chronicle are not mere repetitions of the *Gesta*, and seem to indicate a more immediately local knowledge of song traditions about Hereward's deeds.

The literary history of some of Hereward's other adventures indicates how closely this Latin prose biography is related to developing traditions of Anglo-Norman romance. The story of Hereward's intervention at the wedding-feast has notable similarities to an episode associated with King Horn, which appears in the Anglo-Norman *Romance of Horn* and the subsequent Middle English versions. Judith Weiss proposed a relationship of mutual influence between the *Gesta Herwardi* and the *Romance of Horn*, whereby an early version of the Horn story influenced the *Gesta*, which in turn was known to the author of the Anglo-Norman romance.<sup>379</sup> Such features as the disguise as a minstrel, the use of a ring as a token, and the encounter where the woman offers drink to the unrecognised hero are common to both episodes,

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<sup>376</sup> Fulman, pp. 67-8; Riley, *Ingulph's Chronicle*, pp.135-6.

<sup>377</sup> *Gesta Herwardi* p.344.

<sup>378</sup> Schmidt, 'Biblisches und hagiographisches Kolorit in den *Gesta Herwardi*', pp.91-2; the relevant passage is I Samuel 18:6.

<sup>379</sup> Weiss, 'Thomas and the Earl: Literary and Historical Contexts for the *Romance of Horn*', pp.1-13.

though the memorable detail that Hereward's harping causes his hands to bleed does not appear in the *Horn* story. There are other general similarities between the two legends, although perhaps they are common enough in romance not to indicate a relationship between the Horn and Hereward traditions: both heroes spend time in Ireland, Rimenhild's gifts of armour to Horn in *Horn Childe* recall those given by Turfrida to Hereward, and as Weiss notes, the name Aalof appears in both stories. The Hereward narrative provides an opportunity to trace the way in which disparate oral traditions contributed to the earliest stages of Anglo-Norman romance, and to observe mutual influence at work between the two genres.

### **Conclusions**

What light can the Hereward legend shed on the development of the Siward narrative? The most likely period of the first compilation of the *Gesta Herwardi* is exactly contemporary with the earliest records of Waltheof's cult at Crowland – certainly with the work of Orderic and William of Malmesbury and with possibly the majority of the texts in the Douai MS. All these texts drew heavily on oral sources, committing to writing the contemporary traditions of the community at Crowland as well as providing new versions of existing materials. It does not seem unreasonable to speculate that the oral traditions about Siward's youth which appear in the thirteenth-century Douai MS. were compiled at the same time as Richard of Ely was gathering together a similarly disparate collection of stories about the deeds of Hereward; in this light the Siward material may be seen as a part of the twelfth-century rediscovery of

England's pre-Conquest past, a project in which oral traditions played an important role.<sup>380</sup>

If any truth lies behind Richard of Ely's statement about the literary interests of Leofric the priest, it is possible that Leofric may be the source of the more obviously fictional episodes in the account of Hereward's early life. If he did not invent them himself, he may have been the one who chose to use these stories in order to shape the narrative into something closely resembling the "ancient fables" he knew about giants and warriors. It is impossible to ascertain how much of the *Gesta Herwardi* is really based on Leofric's English work, but it seems clear that at some stage of the development of the narrative it was in the hands of someone who was familiar with a range of literary forms, and who was interested in making the life of Hereward conform closely to existing patterns. Perhaps it was Leofric who was responsible for the whole of the early part of the *Gesta Herwardi*: borrowing a detail from the Siward legend to invent the story of combat with a giant bear, adopting phrases from familiar Biblical and hagiographic sources (as Schmidt argues),<sup>381</sup> and incorporating the story of the rescued princess from some version of the Horn legend, he created a series of youthful adventures for Hereward which would provide a suitable beginning for the account of his activity in Flanders and at Ely. Whether the more fanciful, literary aspects of the later part of the narrative – such as the violent interruption of the Norman feast, or Hereward's multiple disguises – were also Leofric's work is impossible to tell, but they must surely have been the result of a conscious reshaping of the original text (which perhaps comprised only the oral

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<sup>380</sup> See the work of van Houts, 'Genre aspects of the use of oral information in medieval historiography', pp. 297–311, and 'The Memory of 1066 in Written and Oral Traditions', *Anglo-Norman Studies XIX* (Woodbridge, 1997), 167-179, and more generally James Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past', pp.209-228.

<sup>381</sup> Schmidt, 'Biblisches und hagiographisches Kolorit in den *Gesta Herwardi*'; a parallel may be drawn with Rauer's argument for hagiographical influence in the story of Siward's dragon-fight (*Beowulf and the Dragon*, pp.125-133).

stories of Hereward's own men, contemporary with his lifetime) by a writer aware of a variety of literary forms and genres.

Is this how the Siward narrative also developed? The evidence of the multiple sources which tell stories about Hereward offers an insight into the vibrancy of oral tradition in this region, and the ease with which episodes could be adopted from one legend into another. The *Gesta Herwardi* gives a glimpse into this process at work when it speaks of one of Hereward's companions, his nephew "Godwine Gille, who was called Godwine because he was not inferior to the Godwine, son of Guthlac, who was greatly celebrated in the tales of the ancients".<sup>382</sup> R.M. Wilson linked this comment to a reference in the hagiography of Crowland's St Guthlac: in the first life of the saint, written in the first part of the eighth century, the author Felix observes that Guthlac derived his name, interpreted by Felix as *belli munus*, from a tribe called the Guthlacingas.<sup>383</sup> Apart from this reference, nothing is known of this tribe, although the observation is repeated by Orderic Vitalis in the epitome of Felix's *Vita* which he made during his stay at Crowland.<sup>384</sup> Guthlac was venerated at Crowland for centuries after his death in 714, and legends about the tribe to which he may have belonged could have survived in the area; either Leofric, who had been a priest at Bourne, or another of Hereward's predominantly Lincolnshire-based companions may have known something of these "songs of the ancients". The enigmatic nature of the reference may suggest that the author of the *Gesta Herwardi* expected the name of Godwine son of Guthlac to be recognised, although given the disparate and primarily oral nature of his sources, it is possible that he did not have anything to add to what

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<sup>382</sup> "Godwinus Gille qui vocabatur Godwinus, qui non impar Godwino filio Guthlaci, qui in fabulis antiquorum valde prædicantur", *Gesta Herwardi*, p.372.

<sup>383</sup> *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. Colgrave, pp.76-7; see Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, p.32, and also W.F. Bolton, 'The Background and Meaning of *Guthlac*', *Journal of English and Philology* 61 (1962), 595-603.

<sup>384</sup> *Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, vol.ii, p.325.

seems like a soldier's joke. The comment is a reminder that when we speak of oral tradition, we are really only speaking about people telling stories to each other, and about each other. The Siward legend provides an opportunity to trace the path of some of these stories in the former Danelaw.

### Chapter 3

#### *Guy of Warwick and Danish Sovereignty in England*

The relationship between the legends of Siward and Hereward and the Anglo-Norman romances *Horn* and *Waldef* suggests how narrative material originating in eleventh-century Anglo-Danish family myths of origin influenced and was influenced by the earliest stages of vernacular romance as it was simultaneously developing in England. In later romances, narratives of Anglo-Danish interaction feature most often as tales of Viking aggression (with the notable exception of *Havelok*, which will be discussed in the next chapter);<sup>385</sup> however, that does not mean that the influence of Anglo-Scandinavian historical traditions ceases to be relevant. The romances which centre on the hero Guy of Warwick demonstrate one way in which these traditions could interact: these texts use Danish invasion as a national conflict in which an Anglo-Norman hero can win a patriotic triumph, but also seem to reflect some knowledge of arguments surrounding a historical Danish right to rule in England. Although the romances about Guy mostly focus on a pious narrative about the adventures of a Christian knight in foreign lands, his story is nominally set in the time of Æthelstan, on whose behalf Guy fights two combats in England during his long career: as a young knight he kills an Irish dragon which has been terrorising Northumberland, and many years later, after becoming a pilgrim in penance for his youthful exploits, he fights in single combat to repel an invasion by the Danish king Anlaf. These two episodes differ markedly from the rest of Guy's adventures, and the final combat in particular is distinguished by an abrupt shift in attitude towards its subject-matter:

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<sup>385</sup> For examples and discussion see Robert Allen Rouse, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England in Middle English Romance*, Studies in Medieval Romance (Cambridge, 2005), and John Frankis, 'Views of Anglo-Saxon England in Post-Conquest Vernacular Writing', pp.227-247.

despite the fact that “the historical background [of *Gui*] seems to be one of the sketchiest”<sup>386</sup> among the Anglo-Norman ancestral romances, this final episode attempts to make coherent literary use of the Anglo-Saxon setting of the story. It is only loosely based on the facts of Æthelstan’s reign, but it deserves greater attention than it has received as a depiction of a Danish invasion of southern England: the episode shows an interest in explaining the origins of these events, re-imagining them within the context of developing ideas about historical writing in the vernacular.<sup>387</sup>

### ***Guy of Warwick* and Danish invasion**

The invasion in *Guy of Warwick*, which is led by a figure identified as Anlaf of Denmark and culminates in a single combat between Guy and the Danes’ champion Colbrand, has generally been taken to be a version of the battle of Brunanburh, though rearranged to give all the glory of the victory to Guy himself.<sup>388</sup> It locates the battle in Winchester, and in depicting the progress of a Danish invasion through the south of England it may have been influenced, as we shall see, by accounts of the late tenth- and early eleventh-century campaigns of Svein Forkbeard and Óláfr Tryggvason, especially those of 993 and 1006; however, later chroniclers repeating the story of Guy universally placed the combat in the reign of Æthelstan. Æthelstan’s victory at Brunanburh in 937 over the combined forces of Constantine of Scotland and Óláfr Guðfriðsson became the focus of numerous traditions, although reliable historical

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<sup>386</sup> M. Dominica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* (Oxford, 1963), p.167.

<sup>387</sup> For a recent overview of the relationship between the *Guy* romances and historiography, see Judith Weiss, ‘*Gui de Warewic* at Home and Abroad: A Hero for Europe’, in Alison Wiggins and Rosalind Field, eds., *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, Studies in Medieval Romance (Cambridge, 2007), pp.1-11. A full account of the versions of the legend from the twelfth century to the present day is provided by Velma Bourgeois Richmond, *The Legend of Guy of Warwick* (New York, 1996), and see also Ronald S. Crane, ‘The Vogue of Guy of Warwick from the Close of the Middle Ages to the Romantic Revival’, *PMLA* 30 (1915), 125-194.

<sup>388</sup> See for instance Rouse, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.62-3.

records of the battle are few.<sup>389</sup> The poem with which the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records the battle is only the first of numerous literary representations of the event in English and Scandinavian tradition,<sup>390</sup> and this part of the *Guy of Warwick* romances may represent a late and fictionalised offshoot of the legend; in presenting this Anglo-Saxon victory as the single-handed triumph of the Norman knight Guy, these texts provide a version of the story filtered through romance conventions and adapted for the preoccupations of thirteenth-century audiences.<sup>391</sup>

The textual history of the Guy legend is complex. The earliest surviving version of the story is the Anglo-Norman verse romance *Gui de Warewic*, which was written in England in the early thirteenth century, some time before 1215.<sup>392</sup> It may have been the work of a canon of Osney Abbey near Oxford, founded by Robert d'Oilly in 1129, which later came under the patronage of the Earls of Warwick; it is likely that the romance was composed to flatter that family, possibly to celebrate the wedding of Henry, Earl of Warwick, and Margaret d'Oilly shortly before 1204.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> For a collection of references to the battle in other chronicle sources, see Alistair Campbell, *The Battle of Brunanburh* (London, 1938), pp.147-160.

<sup>390</sup> The Old English poem is edited by Campbell, *The Battle of Brunanburh*. A large number of texts relating to the battle are collected in Michael Livingston, ed., *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook* (Exeter, 2011); for a survey of later traditions, see Patrizia Lendinara, 'The Battle of Brunanburh in Later Histories and Romances', *Anglia* 117 (1999), 201-235, and on Scandinavian records of the battle, Campbell, *Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History*, pp.5-7. Legends which grew up around Brunanburh include the account of the battle in the first part of the Crowland chronicle, attributed to pseudo-Ingulf, which focuses on the heroics of Turketul, later abbot of Crowland; see *Ingulph's Chronicle of the Abbey of Croyland*, pp.73-5. *Egils saga* shows that Brunanburh also attracted such accretions in Norse literary tradition; for a comparison of these two narratives of the battle, see C. W. Whistler, 'Brunanburh and Vinheith in Ingulf's Chronicle and Egil's Saga', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* VI (1908-9), 59-67, and A. Keith Kelly, 'Truth and a Good Story: *Egil's Saga* and Brunanburh', in Livingston, ed., *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, pp.305-314.

<sup>391</sup> See Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past', and Rosalind Field, 'Romance as history, history as romance', in Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows and Carol M. Meale, eds., *Romance in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1991), pp.163-173. On Guy of Warwick specifically, see Rouse, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England in Middle English Romance*, pp.60-3.

<sup>392</sup> This is edited by Alfred Ewert as *Gui de Warewic: roman du XIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1932-3), 2 vols; for discussion see Marianne Ailes, 'Gui de Warewic in its Manuscript Context', in Wiggins and Field, *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, pp.12-26.

<sup>393</sup> Emma Mason, 'Legends of the Beauchamps' ancestors: the use of baronial propaganda in medieval England', *Journal of Medieval History* 10 (1984), 25-40 (31-2).

Five Middle English versions of the romance survive.<sup>394</sup> The Auchinleck MS. contains a translation of the poem which seems to have been composed in three distinct sections, probably by three different translators.<sup>395</sup> The first is a version in couplets, which recounts Guy's early life as far as his victory over the dragon in Northumberland; this is followed by a version in tail-rhyme stanzas which tells the story of Guy's later adventures and closes with his death.<sup>396</sup> Finally, there is an account of the life of Guy's son Reinbrun, which begins by repeating some of the material about Guy which is also included in the stanzaic version.<sup>397</sup> A shortened text of the romance appears in Caius MS. 107, Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, and there is a fifteenth-century version in Cambridge University Library MS. Ff.2.38.<sup>398</sup> In general, the English versions of the romance are close translations of the Anglo-Norman poem.<sup>399</sup> As well as the verse romances in Anglo-Norman and Middle English, there are accounts of the Guy legend in chronicles by Peter Langtoft, Gerard of Cornwall, and Henry Knighton, all written during the fourteenth century. These chronicle versions will be considered later; they find a place for the fictional combat with Colbrand in their accounts of Æthelstan's reign, attempting to reconcile the romance with their sources despite the absence of Guy's exploits from any

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<sup>394</sup> See Alison Wiggins, 'The Manuscripts and Texts of the Middle English *Guy of Warwick*', in Wiggins and Field, *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, pp.61-80.

<sup>395</sup> Two of the Middle English versions are edited by J. Zupitza in *The Romance of Guy of Warwick, edited from the Auchinleck MS. in the Advocates' Library, Edinburgh and from MS. 107 in Caius College, Cambridge*, EETS e.s. 42, 49 and 59 (London, 1883-91, reprinted as one volume 1966). Quotations are taken from this edition; as Zupitza prints the Auchinleck and Caius texts in parallel, the manuscript referred to will be identified as A and C respectively.

<sup>396</sup> This has been separately edited by Alison Wiggins as *The Stanzaic Guy of Warwick* (Kalamazoo, 2004).

<sup>397</sup> The Auchinleck MS. also contains the *Liber Regum Anglie*, a chronicle which includes the story of Guy and Colbrand in the account of Æthelstan's reign, and the *Speculum Gy de Warewyke*, a didactic piece which makes use of the figure of Guy without telling any part of his story.

<sup>398</sup> Edited by Zupitza as *The Romance of Guy of Warwick: the second or 15<sup>th</sup> century version*, EETS e.s. 25 and 26 (London, 1875-6; reprinted as one volume, 1966).

<sup>399</sup> Maldwyn Mills, 'Techniques of Translation in the Middle English Versions of *Guy of Warwick*', in Roger Ellis, ed., *The Medieval Translator II*, Westfield Publications in Medieval Studies v. 5 (London, 1991), pp.209-229, and Rosalind Field, 'From *Gui* to *Guy*: The Fashioning of a Popular Romance', in Wiggins and Field, *Guy of Warwick: Icon and Ancestor*, pp.44-60.

contemporary historical record. Guy was claimed as an ancestor by the Earls of Warwick, who began to name their sons after their supposed tenth-century forebear,<sup>400</sup> and in time the historicity of the romance was reinforced by physical evidence of his existence: ‘Guy’s Cliff’ in Warwick was pointed out as the site of the hero’s hermitage, and, according to Gerard of Cornwall, Colbrand’s axe was preserved in Winchester Cathedral in the fourteenth century.<sup>401</sup> The veracity of the Guy legend only began to be a subject of doubt in the seventeenth century, by which time Guy had become one of the best-known heroes of medieval romance.<sup>402</sup>

Guy cannot be identified with any real figure, and his exploits are essentially fictitious, but his name may derive from Wigod, cup-bearer to Edward the Confessor, who was from Wallingford and who was connected to the d’Oilly family.<sup>403</sup> the fictional Guy is said to be the son of Siward of Wallingford, the steward of the Earl of Warwick, and Guy begins his career as a cup-bearer to the Earl.<sup>404</sup> His story begins when he falls in love with the haughty Felice and resolves to win her love by a series of knightly adventures. He is absent from England for this purpose for seven years, and on his return volunteers to fight a dragon on Æthelstan’s behalf; after marrying Felice, he leaves England again, this time to undertake battles on behalf of the church rather than for love, and when he returns he becomes a pilgrim. Only the threat of Danish invasion draws him back to martial pursuits, when Æthelstan is inspired by an angelic dream to seek out Guy to fight the invaders. Although the two English

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<sup>400</sup> Mason, ‘Legends of the Beauchamps’ ancestors’, 33-4.

<sup>401</sup> Girardus Cornubiensis, *De Gestis Regum Westsaxonum*, quoted in the *Liber Monasterii de Hyda*, ed. Edward Edwards, Rolls Series 45 (London, 1866), pp. 118-123 (p.121); see Richmond, *The Legend of Guy of Warwick*, pp. 68-70.

<sup>402</sup> See Crane, ‘The Vogue of Guy of Warwick’, p.191.

<sup>403</sup> Ewert, *Gui de Warewic*, pp.iv-v; Richmond, *The Legend of Guy of Warwick*, pp.14-15.

<sup>404</sup> Judith Weiss notes that there may be a connection between the name of Guy’s father and the historical Siward of Arden, son of the Thorkell whose estates formed the basis of the first earldom of Warwick; see ‘*Gui de Warewic* at Home and Abroad’, pp.8-9, Mason, ‘Legends of the Beauchamps’ ancestors’, 31-2, and Ann Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest*, pp.100-5.

episodes form only a small proportion of Guy's lengthy adventures, they became the most celebrated of his feats: he is named as a famous dragon-slayer in *Beves of Hamtoun* for his victory over the dragon in Northumberland,<sup>405</sup> and subsequent versions of the story singled out his combat against Colbrand for special attention.<sup>406</sup> Guy's dragon-fight is a relatively short episode, taking up less than two hundred lines in the Auchinleck version,<sup>407</sup> but it contains a number of details which suggest it may originally have been linked to the later Danish invasion narrative: the fact that the beast comes from Ireland to attack Northumberland seems to suggest a parallel with the Irish-Norse kings of York, especially a figure such as Óláfr Guðfriðsson or Óláfr Cuaran.<sup>408</sup> Óláfr Guðfriðsson was one of Æthelstan's opponents at Brunanburh, and the structure of a story about combat in the north of England which precedes a battle in the south – although in the romance it has become detached from the later invasion narrative and been developed into a dragon-fight – suggests that there may originally have been a connection between the two episodes.<sup>409</sup> The two combats may possibly have formed the basis of Guy's legend, having then been augmented by the Anglo-Norman poet with a series of chivalric adventures overlaid with Christian piety.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> *The Romance of Sir Beves of Hamtoun*, ed. Eugen Kölbing, EETS E.S. 46, 48, 65 (London, 1885, 1886, 1894), p.122-3.

<sup>406</sup> See Laura A. Hibbard, *Medieval Romance in England: A Study of the Sources and Analogues of the Non-Cyclic Metrical Romances* (New York, 1960), pp.127-139.

<sup>407</sup> A 7138-7306; the Caius version considerably shortens the episode.

<sup>408</sup> Margaret Ashdown suggested this in passing in 'The Single Combat in Certain Cycles of English and Scandinavian Tradition and Romance', *The Modern Language Review* 17 (1922), 113-130 (123, n.2).

<sup>409</sup> But cf. the events of 993-4 as described in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: the army led by Óláfr Tryggvason and Svein sacked Bamburgh in Northumberland, then raided around the mouth of the Humber before moving to the south coast where they harried widely through southern England, causing "unasegendlice yfel"; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MS. C*, ed. ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, vol.5* (Cambridge, 2001), pp.86-7 (hereafter *ASC MS. C*).

<sup>410</sup> On the structural parallels between the two episodes see Carol Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge, 1987), p.83-4. Andrea Hopkins discusses *Guy of Warwick* as a prototypical romance of Christian piety in *The Sinful Knights: A Study of Middle English Penitential Romance* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 70-118; see also Velma Bourgeois Richmond, *The Popularity of Middle English Romance* (Bowling Green, 1975), pp.182-7.

The dragon-fight has been too thoroughly accommodated to the purposes of the romance to offer more than a trace of a connection with narratives of Scandinavians in the British Isles; it is the second episode which makes full use of a narrative of Danish invasion to present Guy as a national hero. The episode may be briefly summarised. While Guy is abroad for the second time, Æthelstan holds a parliament to discuss a threatened invasion of England by Anlaf of Denmark. In response to Æthelstan's request for advice, Guy's tutor Heraud describes the history of the Danish king's claim to England, acknowledging that the Danish kings once had a just right to rule the country but arguing that they lost it by defeat in battle. The narrative then turns back to Guy, until the point when he returns home from pilgrimage to find that Anlaf, with an army of fifteen thousand men, has ravaged the land up to the walls of Winchester, capturing and burning towns and castles. Anlaf challenges Æthelstan to find a knight who can defeat his champion, the giant Colbrand, but after another parliament to discuss the crisis the king is unable to find any warrior who will undertake the combat. A dream leads him to Guy, who has come unrecognised to the gates of the city as a pilgrim, and after some persuasion Guy agrees to fight Colbrand. Watched by crowds of Danes and English, he fights and kills the giant, and Anlaf, in accordance with the agreement he has previously made with Æthelstan, concedes defeat. The Danes leave England, promising never to return, and Guy, renouncing the world for the last time, becomes a hermit and dies shortly afterwards.

From a close examination of the details of this episode, it becomes clear that even if the rest of Guy's crusading adventures are the stuff of romance invention,<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> Although Judith Weiss suggests the possible influence of legendary stories about English members of the Varangian Guard in Constantinople, or about Haraldr harðráði's adventures in the east; the fame of Haraldr, she suggests, may perhaps account for the name of Guy's companion Heral. See Weiss,

the final section reflects the influence of some real information about Danish invasion on the part of the Anglo-Norman poet. Three points deserve more attention than they have yet received: the surprisingly credible presentation of a Danish invasion of the south of England, including the movements of the army, the time of year, and the response of the king and his counsellors; the manner in which the single combat is conducted, with the exchange of oaths and hostages, and the characterisation of the Danes; and the discussion of a historical Danish right to England, which reflects a tradition of early Danish sovereignty found in other sources.

Apart from the names of the English king and his opponent, the events of Æthelstan's reign do not provide a likely model for the poem's presentation of this episode. Apart from the obvious issue that Brunanburh was a full-scale battle and not a single combat, the chief difference between the historical event and the narrative in *Guy* is the location: while *Guy*'s combat takes place outside Winchester, the site which the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* locates "ymbe Brunanburh" was most likely in the north of England.<sup>412</sup> The preoccupations of the Anglo-Norman legend can be seen in the fact that the battle which was Æthelstan's greatest military achievement is reduced to a single combat between his champion and an African giant, the historical leaders of both armies being relegated to a secondary role. There is no sign of Brunanburh's other players: Constantine is absent, there are no Welsh, Scots or Irish forces, and Anlaf is presented as the king of Denmark alone. The Middle English versions give the Danes only one leader, but the Anglo-Norman poem mentions two, Anlaf and

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'Gui de Warewic at Home and Abroad', pp.8-9, and Christine Fell, 'The Icelandic Saga of Edward the Confessor: its version of the Anglo-Saxon emigration to Byzantium', *Anglo-Saxon England* 3 (1974), 179-96.

<sup>412</sup> On attempts to locate the site of the battle, see the discussion in Campbell, *The Battle of Brunanburh*, pp.57-80, J. McN. Dodgson, 'The Background of Brunanburh', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* XIV (1953-7), 303-316, Michael Wood, 'Brunanburh Revisited', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* XX (1980), 200-217, and Paul Cavill, 'The Place-Name Debate', in Livingston, ed., *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, pp.327-349; Cavill argues convincingly that the evidence points to Bromborough on the Wirral as the most likely site.

Gunlaf, and this may reflect confusion between Óláfr Guðfriðsson, who was present at Brunanburh, and his cousin and namesake Óláfr Cuaran, with whom he was often conflated.<sup>413</sup> Such simplification is understandable in a romance which is chiefly interested in its protagonist's triumph over a single gigantic opponent, but it may lead us to suspect that in the absence of information about Æthelstan's victory at Brunanburh, later invasions had more influence on the romance's view of the situation. Much like the protagonist of the fourteenth-century romance known as *Æthelston*, this Æthelstan is a fictional Anglo-Saxon character whose name is attributable to contemporary views of the Anglo-Saxon past rather than to any resemblance to his historical namesake.<sup>414</sup>

This is also suggested by the characterisation of the king and his passive role in the defence of his country: Æthelstan discovers Guy and persuades him to fight on his behalf, but the king has no role as military leader in this poem, and is helpless without a champion to take the combat for him. Compared to, for instance, the Danish invasion at the beginning of *Horn Childe and Maiden Rinnild*, found alongside the versions of *Guy* in the Auchinleck MS., there is more focus on the nation and less on the person of the king, while the role of national defender is delegated to the hero Guy.<sup>415</sup> Æthelstan's victory at Brunanburh was perhaps the most glorious triumph of his reign, celebrated not only in the Old English verse of the

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<sup>413</sup> See Ashdown, 'The Single Combat', 119, n.1. Gunlaf is said to be king of "Suadthede", the Swedes (*Gui de Warewic*, 10798). Following the earlier version of the story, the chronicler Henry Knighton preserves the two leaders, naming them Olaf and Golan, kings of Dacia and Norway respectively: *Chronicon Henrici Knighton*, ed. Lumby, vol. i, p.21. See also *Fragments of an Early Fourteenth-Century Guy of Warwick*, ed. Maldwyn Mills and Daniel Huws (Oxford, 1974), p.83, where two names seem to be mentioned although most of the line is lost.

<sup>414</sup> *Athelston: A Middle English Romance*, ed. A. McI. Trounce, EETS o.s. 224 (London, 1951) and see Elaine M. Treharne, 'Romanticizing the Past in the Middle English *Athelston*', *Review of English Studies* 50 (1999), 1-21, and Rosalind Field, 'Athelston or the Middle English *Nativity of St Edmund*', in R. Field, P. Hardman, and M. Sweeney, eds., *Christianity and Romance in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2010), pp.139-149.

<sup>415</sup> On the king and the nation in *Guy*, see Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley, 1986), pp.65-6.

*Chronicle* but in Scandinavian literary tradition:<sup>416</sup> none of this can be seen in the romance, and it is difficult to recognise the decisive Æthelstan of William of Malmesbury and the other chroniclers in this helpless king.<sup>417</sup> Anlaf, by contrast, is presented as a strong and formidable enemy, who would be intimidating even if he were not accompanied by a fearsome giant whose strength is worth sixty knights (C 10322-3). His army is “styf and starke” (C 10309), while the English are presented collectively as cowardly and weak. Heraud tells Æthelstan that since justice is on his side he need have no fear that he will be able to defend his land, and predicts that he will find many Englishmen to fight on his behalf:

Yf he will com in-to your londe  
Ye shall fynd men hem to with-stonde.  
Ye have meny a dow3ty knyght,  
And men that dare ryght well fyght.  
Yf they com thei shall a-bye:  
Maketh no doele, ne be not sorye.

(C 8796-8801)

However, this statement takes on an ironic quality when a thousand lines later Æthelstan seems unable to find any of these “men that dare ryght well fyght” to challenge Colbrand. Unlike Guy’s other adventures, this is a battle for a national cause rather than a personal or religious motive, but the focus is largely on Guy himself rather than the people he is defending, although there is an appeal to patriotic feeling in Æthelstan’s second speech to his parliament:

Oure beth the Rych cytees,  
The brod land, the large sees:  
All ys oure more and lesse.

(C 10378-10380)

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<sup>416</sup> As the foster-father of Hákon the Good, victor of the battle of Vinheiðr and the patron of Egill Skalla-Grímsson, Æthelstan was among the best-known of Anglo-Saxon kings in Scandinavia and Iceland; see John Hines, ‘Kingship in *Egils saga*’ in Hines and Slay, eds., *Introductory Essays on Egils saga and Njáls saga* (London, 1992), pp.15-32 (25-7).

<sup>417</sup> See William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol. ii, pp. 116-120, and Michael Wood, ‘The Making of King Aethelstan’s Empire: an English Charlemagne?’ in Wormald, Bullough and Collins, eds., *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 1983), pp.250-272 (265-7).

The general impression is of a nation in decline, weakened not only by external attack but by failings and cowardice among the nobility. No one comes forward to answer Æthelstan's request for a champion to take on Colbrand:

They stode all styll, and lokyd down,  
As a man had shavyn ther crown.  
(C 10394-5)

It seems that with the glittering exception of Guy, English knighthood is in a poor state: when Guy makes enquiries about the brave knights he knew in England before his pilgrimage abroad, he is told they are absent or dead, and as Æthelstan despairingly concludes:

Full bold be these danys,  
And gret cowardys the Englyssh  
(C 10420-1)

Æthelstan himself is not free from blame: lamenting the absence of Guy, he regrets that he was not more generous to his knights, arguing that if he had given Guy a third or half share in his kingdom long ago, he would have been repaid by Guy's service in the fight against the invaders. This acknowledgement of a failure in largesse runs contrary to the usual image of Æthelstan, who was memorialised by post-Conquest chroniclers as wise, generous and pious.<sup>418</sup> This Æthelstan fears losing control of his kingdom, and in the Caius version is particularly concerned about being forced to flee the country (C 10374); this, together with the fictional Æthelstan's acknowledged errors of policy and the sorry state of the English nobility in the face of Danish attack, is more reminiscent of the reign of Æthelred than that of Æthelstan.

In creating this picture of an England helpless in the face of wide-ranging attacks by a Danish army, the poet who devised the role of national saviour for his

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<sup>418</sup> On Æthelstan's reputation in post-Conquest chronicles and histories, see Treharne, 'Romanticizing the Past in the Middle English *Athelston*', 5-9, and in popular legend, Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 156.

Anglo-Norman hero may have had in mind something like this entry from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for the year 1006:

7 þa ofer þone midne sumor com þa se micla flota to Sandwic, 7 dydon eal swa hi ær gewuna wæron, heregodon 7 bærndon 7 slogon swa swa hi ferdon. Ða het se cyng abannan ut ealne þeodscipe of Wesseaxum 7 of Myrcnum, 7 hi lagon ute þa ealne ðone hærfest on fyrdinge ongean þone here, ac hit naht ne beheold þe ma ðe hit oftor ær dide, ac for eallum þissum se here ferde swa he sylf wolde, 7 seo fyrdinge dyde þære landleode ælcne hearm þæt him naðer ne dohte ne inghere ne uthere. Ða hit winter læhte, þa ferde seo fyrd ham, 7 se here com ða ofer ða Sancte Martines mæssan to his friðstole Wihtlande 7 tylode him þær æghwær þæs ðe hi behofedon. 7 þa to ðam middan wintran eodan him to heora gearwan feorme ut þuruh Hamtunscire into Berrucscire to Readingon, 7 hi a dydon heora ealdan gewunan, atendon hiora herebeacen swa hi ferdon. Wendon þa to Wealingaforda 7 þæt eall forswældon, 7 wæron him ða ane niht æt Ceolesige, 7 wendon him þa (i)andlang Æscedune to Cwicelmeshlæwe, 7 þær onbidedon beotra gylpa, forðon oft man cwæð gif hi Cwicelmeshlæw gesohton þæt hi næfre to sæ gan ne scoldon; wendon him þa oðres weges hamwerd. Ða wæs ðær fyrd gesomnod æt Cynetan, 7 hi þær togædere fengon, 7 sona þæt wered on fleame gebrohton 7 syþþan hiora herehyfe to sæ feredan. Ac þær mihton geseon Wincesterleode rancne here 7 unearhne ða hi be hiora gate to sæ eodon... Ða wearð hit swa micel ege fram þam here þæt man ne mihte geþencan 7 ne asmeagan hu man hi of earde adrifan sceolde oþþe ðisne eard wið hi gehealdan, forðan þe hi hæfdon ælce scire on Wesseaxum stiðe gemearcod mid bryne 7 mid heregunge. Agan se cyning þa georne to smeagenne wið his witan hwæt him eallum rædlicust þuhte þæt mon ðissum earde gebeorhgan mihte ær he mid ealle fordon wurde. Ða gerædde se cyng 7 his witan eallum þeodscipe to þearfe, þeah hit him eallum lað wære, þæt man nyde moste þam here gafol gildan.<sup>419</sup>

[Then after midsummer the great fleet came to Sandwich, and acted just as was their custom: they harried and burned and slew as they went. Then the king summoned out all the nation from Wessex and Mercia, and they stayed out in military service against the army all through the autumn, but it did no more good that it had often done before, because for all this the army went about exactly as they chose, and the levy did every kind of damage to the people of the country, so that they got no good from the native army or the foreign army. When winter came, the [English] army went home, and the [Danish] army went after Martinmas to its secure camp in the Isle of Wight, and got for themselves everywhere whatever they needed. Then towards midwinter they went to the provision prepared for them, out through Hampshire into Berkshire to Reading, and they followed their old custom, lighting war-beacons as they went. Then they turned to Wallingford and burned it all, and spent one night at Cholsey, and then went along Ashdown to Cuckamsley Barrow, and there they waited for what they had been

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<sup>419</sup> ASC MS. C, pp.91-2.

proudly threatened with, because it had often been said that if they reached Cuckamsley Barrow they would never get to the sea. Then they went home another way. The English army was then gathered at the Kennet, and they came together there and at once put that troop to flight, and afterwards carried their booty to the sea. There the people of Winchester could see the proud and undaunted army as they went past their gate to the sea... Then there was so much fear of that army that no one could think or consider how they were to be driven from the land or this country was to be defended against them, because they had cruelly scarred every shire in Wessex with burning and ravaging. The king began earnestly to consider with his counsellors what seemed most advisable to them all, so that this country might be protected before they completely destroyed it. Then the king and his counsellors decided, for the benefit of the whole nation, though it was hateful to them all, that it was necessary for tribute to be paid to the army.]

There are a number of elements in this entry which provide close parallels with the narrative in *Guy*: the combination of references to both Guy's hometown of Wallingford and the site of his combat at Winchester is particularly striking. As in the Chronicle, the invasion in *Guy* begins shortly after midsummer: in the Anglo-Norman romance Anlaf's challenge occurs on the feast of St John the Baptist, June 24<sup>th</sup> (*Gui de Warewic*, 10855), and the time of year is preserved, more vaguely, in the English translation ("Hyt was in a somers daye", C 10360). The general fear caused by the invasion and the ineffective results of summoning a defensive English army appear in the romance too: when Æthelstan addresses his barons to ask for their counsel, their sole suggestion is that he summon up an army from the country who will be ready to fight against the Danes (C 10425-10431). In order to highlight Guy's crucial role as his country's saviour, this suggestion is apparently not followed up, but the crisis parliament and the hopeless situation of the nation recall the efforts which attracted the scorn of the chronicler writing about the events of 1006. The only thing missing is the figure of Guy and the motif of single combat, but it is easy to see how the romance episode could be fitted into this scenario to provide an alternative and conclusive ending to a story of national danger.

There are other elements in the invasion narrative which reflect, by accident or design, historical elements of Danish incursions into southern England and the responses of the Anglo-Saxon kings. When Guy returns to England and hears that Æthelstan is besieged at Winchester, he is told that the king has ordered a general three-day fast in the hope that God will send a champion to fight against Colbrand (C 10294-10307). Such public fasts are attested as an English response to Viking attacks. The law code VII Æthelred ordains such a fast for the three days preceding Michaelmas in an unspecified year:<sup>420</sup> the code was issued “ðā se micle here com to lande”, perhaps a reference to the arrival in August 1009 of the army led by Thorkell hávi which the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* calls “se ungemetlica unfriðhere”,<sup>421</sup> ‘the immense hostile army’. Likewise, some elements of the combat and treaty in *Guy* recall the manner in which Anglo-Saxon rulers dealt with the threat of Danish invasion. Before the combat, the two kings swear a formal oath with great solemnity:

When þe folk was samned bi boþe side,  
 Þe to kinges wiþ michel pride  
     After þe relikes þai sende,  
 Þe corporas, & þe messe gere:  
 On þe halidom þai gun swere  
     Wiþ wordes fre & hende.

(A 253.1-6)

Anlaf promises that if his champion is defeated he will leave the country and never return, nor will he and his descendants make any claim to rule England; Æthelstan swears to become Anlaf’s vassal and pay him tribute. They also exchange hostages

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<sup>420</sup> *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*, ed. and trans. A. J. Robertson (Cambridge, 1925), p.114, and Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred ‘the Unready’ 978-1016* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 217-9. The law code is undated and the reference to the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday before Michaelmas could fit any of the years 992-5, 998-1000, 1004-6, 1009-11, and 1015; Keynes agrees with Robertson in favouring 1009. See also Clare A. Lees, *Tradition and Belief: Religious Writing in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Minneapolis, 1999), pp.1-3.

<sup>421</sup> *ASC MS. C*, s.a. 1009, p.93.

before the battle.<sup>422</sup> There are several historical examples of the swearing of such oaths on holy relics: Alfred's treaties with the Danes regularly contain this feature, and pagan Danes seem to have had no objection to swearing on Christian relics, although on one occasion, according to the Chronicle, Alfred allowed the Danish army to swear on a holy ring associated with the worship of Thor.<sup>423</sup> The swearing on relics in this poem does not therefore necessarily indicate whether the Danes in *Guy* are conceived of as pagan or Christian, although the fifteenth-century version has Anlaf swear to leave "in peyne of renayenge of hys laye" (10204), 'on pain of renouncing his faith';<sup>424</sup> this is not found in the Anglo-Norman or other English versions, but evidently one translator of the romance thought of Anlaf as pagan. The only certain pagan in the Danish army is the giant Colbrand, who swears 'bi Apolin' (A 266.7).<sup>425</sup> In the English versions he is said to come from Africa (A 235.8) or 'ynd' (C 10320), but he has a name of Scandinavian origin,<sup>426</sup> and the Anglo-Norman original gives him a different ethnic identity, distinguishing between the Ethiopian giant Guy fights during his adventures abroad, who is called a 'Sarazin' (for example *Gui*, 8435), and Colbrand, who is consistently referred to as 'le Sedne'. *Sedne* can mean 'Saxon' as well as 'Saracen',<sup>427</sup> and since this word is only used in the poem to refer to Colbrand, it suggests he may have originally been conceived of as a Saxon

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<sup>422</sup> Similar oaths and hostages were exchanged between Æthelred and Óláfr Tryggvason in 994, although there the treaty preceded Óláfr's baptism; *ASC MS. C*, p.87.

<sup>423</sup> *ASC MS. C*, s.a. 877, p.61; see the note to the corresponding passage in Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' in *Alfred the Great*, ed. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (London, 1983), pp.245-6, n.90. See also Richard P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley, 1988), pp.85-6.

<sup>424</sup> See *Guy of Warwick: the second or 15<sup>th</sup> century version*, p.442, note to line 10204.

<sup>425</sup> In the equivalent Anglo-Norman passage he swears by 'Mahun' (*Gui de Warewic*, 11234); both are generic pagan gods.

<sup>426</sup> The name is an Anglicisation of ON *Kolbrandr*; for occurrences of the name in England see Jón Stefansson, 'The Oldest Known List of Scandinavian Names', *Saga-Book of the Viking Club* IV:II (1906), 296-311 (302), and Gillian Fellows Jensen, *Scandinavian Personal Names in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire*, pp.177-8.

<sup>427</sup> See the entry under *Sesson* in the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary*, ed. William Rothwell (London, 1990), fasc. 6, p.704.

giant, ethnically distinct from the opponents Guy fights on his expeditions outside England.

Although the large-scale battle is turned into single combat, the Danish army and Anlaf are given a role to play in the contest as spectators, and their presence is felt through their speech. The Danes watching the fight taunt their English opponents, their confidence in victory briefly but deftly sketched:

Pan gun þe Danis ost  
Ich puken oþer & make bost,  
    & seyð among hem alle,  
‘Now schal þe Inglis be slain in feld.  
Gret trouage Ingland schal ous 3eld,  
    & euermore ben our þral.’  
(A 264.7-12)

This attitude recalls the arrogance of the “rancne here 7 unearhne” seen passing by Winchester in 1006. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entry also contains some vainglorious boasting, although there it is on the English side; here it is the Danes who make boasts they are unable to fulfil.<sup>428</sup> When Guy defeats their champion, the whole Danish army partakes in the shame of the loss:

The danys mad gret sorrow that day:  
The king aulof was well sorye,  
And all hys men that stod hym bye.  
To theyre shyppys be they wente  
All for-shamyd and for-shente.  
(C 10769-10773)

As soon as the battle is over the Danes at once know themselves to be beaten and fulfil their promise to leave the country. In doing this they obey the terms of the oath Anlaf has sworn with Æthelstan; the finality of their defeat emphasises the glory of Guy’s victory, but it also underlines the point made during the parliament scene that

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<sup>428</sup> For discussion of the reference to English boasting in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* see Page, “A Most Vile People”, pp.27-8.

this conflict is a struggle between two nations which claim legitimate rule over England, not between a landed king and a group of opportunistic raiders.<sup>429</sup>

The verisimilitude of the Danish episode of *Guy* did not escape the notice of later writers looking for material about the reign of Æthelstan. The earliest chronicler to incorporate the Guy legend into Anglo-Saxon history is Peter Langtoft, in his *Chronique d'Angleterre*, which was completed around 1307.<sup>430</sup> Unlike the romance versions, Langtoft's account makes the combat with Colbrand the last in a sequence of battles between Æthelstan and the combined forces of the Danes and Scots. After Æthelstan has defeated Constantine in Scotland, he hears of another attack directed against England. Robert Mannyng's translation of the *Chronicle* closely follows Langtoft's account:

Constantyn of Scotlond did ȝit more trispas.  
He broght þe Kyng Anlaf, aryued vp in Humber,  
seuen hundreth schippes & fiftene, so fele were þe numbere,  
Æthelstan herd say of þer mykelle oste;  
he & Edmunde, his broþer, dight þam to þat coste.  
At Brunnesburgh on Humber þei gan þam assaile;  
fro morn vnto euen lasted þat bataile.<sup>431</sup>

Defeated, Anlaf takes refuge at Sandwich,<sup>432</sup> and from there sends messengers to Æthelstan at Winchester to challenge him to find a champion to fight against Colbrand. As in the romances, Æthelstan is led to the pilgrim Guy by a heavenly dream, but as might be expected, the single combat is given considerably less prominence than in the stories which focus on Guy. Mannyng's translation gives it only four lines:

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<sup>429</sup> Contemporary writers were aware that the Vikings did not always keep such promises; see Page, 'A Most Vile People', pp. 9-10.

<sup>430</sup> *Chronicle of Pierre de Langtoft in French Verse from the Earliest Period to the Death of King Edward I*, ed. Thomas Wright, Rolls Series 47 (London, 1866-68). The Anlaf episode is at vol.i, pp.330-3.

<sup>431</sup> Robert Mannyng, *The Chronicle*, ed. Sullens, II: 664-670.

<sup>432</sup> In both 1006 and 1009 the Danish fleet mustered at Sandwich, and it was the first point of arrival for Svein and then Cnut in 1013 and 1015; see *ASC MS. C*, pp.91-2, 97, 100.

Pat was Guy of Warwik, as þe boke sais.  
Per he slouh Colibrant with hache Daneis  
Anlaf turned again, I trowe him was wo  
He and alle his to schippe gan þei go.<sup>433</sup>

(The Danish axe is Mannyng's addition). Langtoft's *Chronicle* has a particularly confused account of the Danish invasions, but separating Brunanburh and the Winchester combat into two distinct events makes sense of the inconsistency between the different traditions about Æthelstan's reign.<sup>434</sup> In Mannyng's version of the *Chronicle* the brief reference to Guy is only one of several legends about Æthelstan: Andrew Galloway argues that Langtoft's inclusion of the Guy legend represents "a clear Normanizing of a seminal instance of Anglo-Saxon heroic identity",<sup>435</sup> and that Mannyng attempted to compensate for this by seeking out additional information about Æthelstan's reign. In both versions Æthelstan is clearly at the forefront of defence against the Danes: Langtoft finds a place in the sequence of events for Guy's famous combat without diminishing the role of the king.

### **Danish sovereignty in *Guy of Warwick***

One consequence of Langtoft's adaptation of the Guy legend to fit his history is that there is no reference either in Langtoft's chronicle or in Mannyng's translation to the ultimate motive for Anlaf's attacks on England which is put forward in the romance: that the Danes once had a legitimate claim to rule England which Anlaf is attempting to resurrect. This is in some ways the most noteworthy aspect of the treatment of the

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<sup>433</sup> Robert Mannyng, *The Chronicle*, ed. Sullens, II: 697-700.

<sup>434</sup> For discussion of this point see Robert Rouse, 'Romancing the Past: The Middle English Tradition', in Livingston, ed., *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, pp.315-323.

<sup>435</sup> Andrew Galloway, 'Writing History in England', in David Wallace, ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 1999), pp.255-283 (271). The legends about Æthelstan include the story that he was responsible for the death of his brother Edwin (605-12), also told by William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum* vol. i, ii.139, pp.226-7, and that while he was in Scotland fighting Constantine, he struck a blow against a stone which can still be seen in Dunbar (631-2).

Danish invasion in *Guy of Warwick*, since as a result of this the invaders are not conceived of as indiscriminate raiders but as would-be conquerors with a reason to think themselves entitled to claim the country. The appearance of this tradition in the romance may also shed some light on the sources which the Anglo-Norman poet was using for his narrative of the Danish invasion. It appears in both the Anglo-Norman and English versions of the legend, and not only draws on an existing tradition that there was once a Danish right to sovereignty in England, but must also have helped to spread this story as the legend of Guy became widely-known. The discussion of the claim occurs in the context of the parliament which Æthelstan calls to ask the advice of his “baronage” about the threatened invasion.<sup>436</sup> It becomes clear that the poem does not conceive of Anlaf’s attack as a random act of aggression: Æthelstan asks for reassurance that while the Danes once had a claim to rule England, the justice of their claim has long since been defeated. The elderly Heraud, Guy’s tutor and the wisest of Æthelstan’s counsellors, explains how the story has been passed down to him:

Myn eldren seide, ich vnder-stonde,  
 De Dennisch men hadde riȝt in þis londe,  
           Wip-ou ten eni faile,  
 Whilom, & nouȝt ful ȝore it is,  
 & sippe þai han it lore, y-wis,  
           And here folk in bataile.  
 (A 17.7-12)

The Caius text elaborates a little on this decisive battle:<sup>437</sup>

And sethen longe tyme a-goone  
 Many of hem were here sloone:  
 A grete bateyle there they tynte  
 Right with strengthe of swerdus dynte;  
 Therfor haue thei loste there right:

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<sup>436</sup> The second part of the Auchinleck *Guy* places this episode in the third section of the narrative, after Guy’s death, presumably because it deals chiefly with Heraud and is a starting-point for his quest to find Reinbrun. Moving the episode creates several narrative discontinuities which the translator of the third section does nothing to resolve: it is a close translation of the corresponding Anglo-Norman passage, and there has been no attempt to acknowledge that the parliament to discuss the Danish threat now takes place after Guy has driven the Danes out of England once and for all.

<sup>437</sup> The equivalent passage in the Anglo-Norman is ll. 9135-9142 (Ewert, *Gui de Warewic*, pp.73-4).

Thei were dyscomfyt in that fight.  
(C 8803-9)

The question of the Danish challenge is presented as a matter of great antiquity: “many winters beth passid,” Æthelstan says, “sith thei fyrste chalengid this lande” (C 8792-3). The Auchinleck version has Æthelstan specifically remind his barons of what their “eldren” (16.6) have told them about the Danish claim, and Heraud echoes this reference to oral tradition passed down by his ancestors: it is information which only he can give the king in his role here as the aged and wise counsellor. However, the very antiquity of the claim makes it vague and unspecific: it is not clear what decisive battle the poet may have been thinking of. Brunanburh is itself the best candidate for a victory of this kind, and it is possible that the poet’s version of Anglo-Saxon history is simply confused; the romance clearly imagines this battle to have taken place some time before Æthelstan’s own reign. However, it is Heraud’s reference to the “riȝt” which the Danes are supposed once to have held in England which suggests that the idea of a previous battle is tied into a wider legendary tradition concerning a Danish claim to England.

For the purposes of the poem, Æthelstan’s parliament and Heraud’s speech lay the groundwork for the later appearance of Anlaf, presenting his attempt to conquer England as an unjust assertion of an ancestral right which was overthrown long ago. Although it is convenient for this poem to have the Danes placed firmly in the wrong so that the justice of Guy’s triumph is clear, this view of a historical Danish claim to England is not the invention of the Anglo-Norman poet. Several other sources make reference to such a claim, the earliest being Gaimar in his *Estoire des Engleis*. Gaimar mentions a number of Danish kings who ruled in England, in a series of passages not derived from either of his two main sources, Geoffrey of Monmouth’s

*Historia Regum Britanniae* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. One of these kings is Havelok, and it seems likely that Gaimar encountered these traditions, as he did the Havelok legend, in Lincolnshire or East Anglia.<sup>438</sup> He claims that the Danes believed they had a right to rule England dating back to before the arrival of the Saxons, when England was ruled by a king named Dan from whom later Danish kings were descended.

Gaimar mentions this tradition of Danish sovereignty in England on two separate occasions. He first uses it as an explanation for the beginning of Danish raids on England in the Viking Age, prompted by the reference in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to the arrival of a small number of Viking ships on the coast of Wessex in 787:<sup>439</sup>

E en cel tens vindrent Daneis  
 pur guereier sur les Engleis:  
 un senesçal al rei oscistrent,  
 la terre saisirent e pristrent,  
 mult firent mal par les contrees,  
 si nen u[re]nt ke treis navees.  
 Puis realerent en lur païs  
 si asemblerent lur amis;  
 en Bretagne voldrent venir,  
 as Engleis la voldrent tolir  
 car entr'els eurent esgardé  
 e dit ke ço est lur herité,  
 e mulz homes de lur linage,  
 urent le regne en heritage  
 ainceis kë Engleis i entrast  
 ne home de Sessoigne i habitast:  
 li reis Danes tint le regnez,  
 ki de Denemarch[e] fu nez:  
 si fist Ailbrith e Haveloc,  
 e plus en nomerent ovoc,  
 purquai il distrent pur verité,

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<sup>438</sup> See Alexander Bell, 'Gaimar's Early 'Danish' Kings', *P.M.L.A.* 65 (1950), 601-640, and Elizabeth Freeman, 'Geffrei Gaimar, Vernacular Historiography, and the Assertion of Authority', *Studies in Philology* 93 (1996), 188-206. Besides Havelok, Gaimar also refers to an otherwise unknown Danish king named Walsing or Wassing, a sixth-century contemporary of Cynric and Ceawlin of Wessex (ll. 897-922).

<sup>439</sup> For the treatment of this incident in other chronicles, see Page, 'A Most Vile People', pp.21-5.

Bretaigne ert lur dreit herité.

(2065-86)

[It was during this time that the Danes arrived to wage war on the English. They killed a certain royal steward, seized and secured the land and, despite their only having three ships, caused a great deal of damage throughout the region. They then returned home and enlisted their allies with the intention of coming to Britain to seize the island from the English, for they had reached the decision between them, and claimed that this country was part of their heritage, and that many of their ancestors had established an inheritance claim before any English had even arrived or before anyone from Saxony came to live there. King Danr, who was born in Denmark, had ruled over the kingdom, as had Adelbriht<sup>440</sup> and Haveloc, and they named others in addition who had done so. It was on this basis that they claimed it to be true that Britain was their rightful inheritance.]<sup>441</sup>

Gaimar provides this as an explanation for all Danish attacks on England from the ninth century onwards, rationalising Viking activity as a coordinated attempt at national expansion. As in *Guy of Warwick*, the Danes are imagined not as opportunistic plunderers but as would-be conquerors who target England specifically because their ancestors had once ruled there.

Gaimar returns to this subject in his account of the meeting between Cnut and Edmund Ironside at Deerhurst in Gloucestershire in 1016. In common with a number of early writers, Gaimar repeats the tradition that on this occasion the two kings made preparations for a single combat to determine which of them should rule England.<sup>442</sup>

Gaimar describes them arranging how they will be armed and meeting on a ship in the middle of the Severn,<sup>443</sup> as they face each other before beginning the combat, Cnut interrupts and speaks “mult sagement”, ‘very wisely’ (4307), about his grounds for claiming to rule England. He tells Edmund that they are both the sons of kings who

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<sup>440</sup> This is probably a reference to Adelbriht, the king Gaimar names as Havelok’s father-in-law and a Danish king of Norfolk; see *Estoire des Engleis*, ll.47-54.

<sup>441</sup> *Estoire des Engleis*, ed. and trans. Short, pp.114-5.

<sup>442</sup> The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says only that the kings “comon togædere” to reach a settlement which would divide England between them (*ASC MS. C*, p.103), but the tradition that a combat was proposed and never carried out appears as early as the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*. c.1040-2 (*Encomium Emmae*, II.8). Ashdown discusses the meeting and the traditions surrounding it in ‘The Single Combat’, 113-6; see also Wright, *Cultivation of Saga*, pp.191-5.

<sup>443</sup> All other accounts, including the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, say it was an island in the river; see Wright, *Cultivation of Saga*, p.195.

have ruled the country, but that his ancestors held England many years before the coming of the Saxons:

e bien sachez, loi[n]gtenement  
l'urent Daneis nostre parent:  
prés de mil anz l'out Dane aince[i]s  
ke unc i entrast Certiz li reis.  
Certiz, ço fu vostre anciën;  
e li reis Danes fu le mien.  
Daneis le tint en chef de Deu,  
Modret donat Certiz son feu:  
il ne tint unkes chevalment,  
de lui vindrent vostre parent.  
Pur ço vus di, si nel savez,  
si vus od mai [vus] combataz,  
l[i] un de nus ad greignur tort,  
ne savom liequels en ert mort.  
Pur ço vus vol un offre fere  
e ne m'en voil de rien retrere:  
partum la terre dreit en dous,  
l'une partie en aiez vus,  
l'autre partie me remaigne!

(4315-4333)

[Our Danish ancestors, I'll have you know, have been ruling here for a very long time. Almost a thousand years before king Cerdic came to the throne, Danr was king. Cerdic was your ancestor, and king Danr was mine. A Dane held the land in chief from God. It was Mordred who granted Cerdic his fief; he never held it in chief, and your family is descended from him. In case you don't already know, I'll tell you that if you fight me, one of us is going to be in the wrong more than the other, though we don't know which one of us will die as a result. This is why I'm willing to make you an offer [of peace] – one that I will not seek to back down from: let us divide the kingdom exactly in two, with one part going to you and the other remaining with me.]<sup>444</sup>

Cnut repeats the argument attributed to the Danes by Gaimar as the first cause of Viking activity in England, and here the circumstances seem to validate it as a fair argument indicating a legitimate claim to rule the country. For Gaimar, the story of Dan explains why Cnut and Edmund chose to divide the country between them instead of proceeding with the planned single combat, because both have a well-founded right to claim sovereignty. Although the Arthurian reference is probably

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<sup>444</sup> *Estoire des Engleis*, pp.234-7.

Gaimar's own innovation, it is nonetheless possible that he was using a source which claimed some such precedent for Cnut's reign in the sovereignty of the Danish kings Dan, Havelok or Ailbrith. It seems to have been a source with a more solidly pro-Cnut slant than the tradition known to other chroniclers, who agree that Cnut stopped the combat because he was at best impressed and at worst intimidated by his Anglo-Saxon opponent. Of all the accounts of this supposed single combat, Gaimar's is the most favourable to Cnut.<sup>445</sup> William of Malmesbury has Cnut refuse to enter into combat because he is physically smaller than Edmund and fears the Saxon king's strength;<sup>446</sup> Henry of Huntingdon says that Edmund was winning the combat when Cnut stopped it to propose a settlement.<sup>447</sup> Walter Map provides a dialogue between the two in which Cnut taunts Edmund for being short-winded, to which Edmund replies, "Not too short, if I can bring so great a king off his feet"; Map calls this a "memorable phrase".<sup>448</sup> By the early thirteenth century, Roger of Wendover has Cnut claiming to be so overwhelmingly impressed by Edmund's virtues that he cannot fight him, and is eager to be Edmund's joint-king and sworn brother.<sup>449</sup> In Gaimar's account, it is rather the other way around: Edmund admires "le humilité ot e le dreit" (4349) with which Cnut makes his argument, and agrees to the division of the

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<sup>445</sup> Except, of course, for the *Encomium Emmae*: according to the encomiast, when Edmund offered single combat to Cnut, 'the king, being a wise man, is said to have answered thus: "I will await a time when conquest will be fitting, and when anticipating no misfortune, I shall be sure of victory; but as for you, who desire combat in the winter, beware lest you fail to appear even when the time is more appropriate"' ('rex sapiens dicitur sic respondisse: "Ego tempus luctae prestolabor congruae, dum non casum suspectus certus fuero uictoriae; tu uero, qui aues duellum in hieme, caue ne deficias etiam aptiori tempore"', *Encomium Emmae* II.8, pp.24-5.) The *Encomium* places the challenge and Cnut's refusal during the winter of 1015-16, and there is no connection between this episode and the partition of the kingdom (which takes place after Assandun and is, according to the encomiast, the suggestion of Eadric streona; see *Encomium Emmae* II.12-13, pp.28-31).

<sup>446</sup> *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol. i, ii.180, pp.316-9.

<sup>447</sup> *Historia Anglorum*, vi.13, p.360. Henry says that Cnut, although resisting with great vigour, could not withstand the incomparable strength of Edmund, whom the Danish king praises as "iuuenum omnium fortissime", 'the most valiant of young men'.

<sup>448</sup> "memorable uerbum", Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, dist. v. c. 4, pp 424-7.

<sup>449</sup> *Flores Historiarum*, vol.i, pp.545-6; for comment on this episode see Phillip Pulsiano, "'Danish Men's Words Are Worse than Murder': Viking Guile and The Battle of Maldon", *Journal of English and German Philology* 96 (1997), 13-25 (21-2).

kingdom along the lines proposed by the Danish king. His response to Cnut's argument implicitly accepts it as a valid interpretation of the history, and Cnut's offer to divide the kingdom, in this light, is a magnanimous one: he has a prior claim to rule the whole country, but chooses to reach a settlement to prevent either himself or Edmund from being killed in the combat.

In substance, the speech attributed to Cnut repeats what Gaimar has already said about the motivation behind Danish raids on England, and this speech, like that passage, is Gaimar's attempt to explain why the Danes believed themselves to have a prior right to the country, dating back to before the foundation of the kingdom of Wessex. The idea that the Saxons were granted land in England by Mordred, nephew of King Arthur, is found in Geoffrey of Monmouth,<sup>450</sup> but it is Gaimar's innovation to claim there was a period of continuous Danish rule in England. Dan does not appear in any other sources from England, but there are references in Scandinavian tradition to a king named Dan, progenitor of the Danish nation.<sup>451</sup> Saxo Grammaticus begins the first book of the *Gesta Danorum* by naming Dan and Angul, sons of Humbli, as the originators of the Danish and English nations respectively,<sup>452</sup> and a king Dan is mentioned by Snorri in the prologue to *Heimskringla* and in chapter 17 of *Ynglinga saga*, as the first person to be called king by the Danes.<sup>453</sup> These brief references do not suggest that Dan ever held land in England, but they support the likelihood that

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<sup>450</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. by Michael D. Reeve and trans. by Neil Wright (Woodbridge, 2007), XI.177, pp.248-251. Oddly, and perhaps coincidentally, the earl who speaks up against Heraud at Æthelstan's parliament in the Anglo-Norman poem is also named Modred (*Medyok* in Auchinleck and *Moderyse* in Caius); see *Guy of Warwick: the second or 15<sup>th</sup> century version*, p.426, note to line 8563.

<sup>451</sup> For a list, see Saxo Grammaticus, *The History of the Danes*, vol. ii, pp.25-6. Orderic Vitalis, in tracing the descent of the Normans from Troy, comments that the Danes took their name from Danus, son of Antenor, who settled in the north after escaping from the sack of Troy; see *The Ecclesiastical History*, vol.v, Book IX, pp.24-5.

<sup>452</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, vol.i, p.14.

<sup>453</sup> *Heimskringla*, vol.i, pp.4-5, 35.

the ultimate source of Gaimar's information was of Danish origin.<sup>454</sup> Though King Dan is most probably a purely legendary figure, there are better-substantiated examples of Danish rule in England before Cnut, and they may have become part of the official narrative of Cnut's reign in a manner somewhat like that envisaged by Gaimar.<sup>455</sup> Recalling that the *Knútsdrápur* present Cnut as the successor to the legendary ninth-century Danish kings who defeated Ælla of Northumbria, we may note that in his account of early Danish rule in England Gaimar also has a lengthy narrative about the defeat of Ælla, the story that the Danes were brought to Northumbria by Buern Butsecarl to avenge the rape of his wife by King Osbryht.<sup>456</sup> Gaimar evidently had access to sources for Viking Age history which were unknown to other chroniclers, and the story that Cnut justified his claim to rule England by reference to earlier Danish sovereignty may have been derived from one such source.

Gaimar was not the only chronicler to attempt to make sense of Cnut's rule in England by reference to legendary Danish kings: Henry Knighton, writing in the late fourteenth century, uses the story of Havelok to explain why Cnut considered himself to have a legitimate right to rule England.<sup>457</sup> He gives a brief version of the Havelok story, in which Havelok, son of Birkelani, king of Denmark, marries the daughter of Egelwoldus, king of England, and thus rules both countries, Denmark by his own hereditary right and England by his wife's. Of the fifteen sons and daughters which

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<sup>454</sup> Bell discusses what he calls the "tantalizing air of eponymity" in the name Dan and the other Danish kings named by Gaimar, with comparison to other legends about eponymous founders of towns and peoples; see 'Gaimar's Early 'Danish' Kings', 608-610. It is tempting to connect Saxo's 'Angul' with the warrior 'Engle' from whom Robert Mannyng says the English took their name (*Chronicle* I: 14173-218), but both names may simply be the result of etymological speculations.

<sup>455</sup> For the existence in Scandinavia and Iceland of a tradition of a pre-Cnut Viking empire which included England, see Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, 'Helpful Danes and Pagan Irishmen: Saga Fantasies of the Viking Age in the British Isles', *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 5 (2009), 1-21.

<sup>456</sup> *Estoire des Engleis*, ll. 2587-2834.

<sup>457</sup> Knighton, vol.i, ch. 5, pp.18-27; see Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, vol. ii, pp.178-181 and Richmond, *The Legend of Guy of Warwick*, pp.72-6. Knighton relates the single combat between Cnut and Edmund as a separate event in chapter 2, p.11.

he agrees with the English poem in giving Havelok, the second in age is Cnut, who rules Denmark after his father. Knighton then returns to the reign of Æthelstan to give an example of a previous Danish attack on England, when Guy of Warwick defeated Colbrand at Winchester; after Guy's victory, he says, England was free of the Danes until the time of Cnut. Knighton explains that Cnut invaded England because he was jealous of his older brother Gormundus, whom Havelok had made heir to England. According to Knighton's interpretation, Cnut thus had an ancestral claim to England, although in this case derived directly from his parents (presumably from his English mother, although this is not clear) and not from any ancient Danish rule in the country.<sup>458</sup> However, it is evident that the legend of Havelok as a Danish king of England lies behind this rationalisation of the story.<sup>459</sup>

Might some version of the story told by Gaimar be the tradition which lies behind Heraud's speech in *Guy of Warwick*? There is no mention in Gaimar, as there is in *Guy*, of a right lost in battle; Cnut clearly considers his claim to be valid even up to his own day, and Edmund implicitly accepts this by agreeing to the division of the kingdom. However, a pre-Saxon setting for Heraud's story fits well with Æthelstan's statement that the battle took place many years ago, and it may be that whoever first attached the figure of Guy to the events of Æthelstan's reign was aware of a story like that known to Gaimar. The idea that the Danes had lost their right in battle is useful

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<sup>458</sup> Of course, Cnut could claim an ancestral right to England on the grounds that his father had ruled there, and this is precisely what some of the accounts of his meeting with Edmund have him arguing: see for instance William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii.180, where Cnut is reported to have said "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 between them" (p.319).

<sup>459</sup> Knighton, vol.i, p.19. He mentions a history of Grimsby which provided him with the story of Havelok, but does not say whether it was this source or his own invention which suggested the link with Cnut. He comments that Grimsby had been first settled by Grim and gained its name from him, and that Havelok was brought up there, but has no story to explain why Havelok left Denmark or how he regained the country; it is possible, therefore, that he knew the story of Havelok in an abbreviated form somewhat removed from the romance versions which will be discussed in the next chapter.

for the story as it appears in *Guy*, where they are to be defeated by Æthelstan's champion, a prototypical national hero, and retreat from England forever; it may, therefore, be an innovation originating with the *Guy* legend which is intended to underline the justice of Guy's combat. If it were not sufficient that the Guy of the romances has God on his side, he has history to support him too; the Danes have not had a right to rule in England for many years, and their attack is unjust. Heraud's story, framed as a response to Æthelstan's uncertainty about the Danish claim, is almost a refutation of the tradition which is voiced by Gaimar's *Cnut*.<sup>460</sup>

## Conclusions

*Guy of Warwick* provides support for the idea that there was a tradition of long-standing Danish sovereignty in England, although in the romance this tradition has become displaced from what may have been its original connection with Anglo-Scandinavian historical narratives. The appearance of this idea in the romance provides a further link between the story of Guy and Colbrand and the tradition of the single combat between Cnut and Edmund in 1016. Margaret Ashdown surveyed a number of examples of single combat in historical and romance narratives, including the Guy-Colbrand and Cnut-Edmund duels, and proposed that many of them could be explained by the existence of a tradition about a single combat fought by Óláfr Cuaran, which became linked to the battle of Brunanburh.<sup>461</sup> While this would

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<sup>460</sup> John Gillingham notes that Richard FitzNigel, writing in the 1170s, observes in his *Dialogue of the Exchequer* that the Danes invaded England in the Anglo-Saxon not only for plunder but because, "as the history of Britain tells more fully", they claimed an ancient legal right to rule England; see Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity, and Political Values* (Woodbridge, 2000), p.119, and also Scott Kleinman, 'The Legend of Havelok the Dane and the Historiography of East Anglia', *Studies in Philology* 100 (2003), 245-277 (263).

<sup>461</sup> Ashdown, 'The Single Combat'. She does not give much weight to the *Guy of Warwick* version of the Brunanburh story, but reads the account of Vinheiðr in *Egils saga* (ch.52-5) as supporting the theory that a single combat was associated with the battle, or later became linked with it: *Egils saga*

explain the otherwise obscure connection between the Guy legend and the reign of Æthelstan, the appearance of the Danish sovereignty motif in both the Guy and Cnut stories of single combat suggests the two may be more directly linked. In the light of the parallels between the invasion narrative in *Guy* and the accounts of Viking activity in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, it appears that the composer of the Anglo-Norman romance was working more closely with a historical source than has previously been assumed. If he had access to a source which contained a version of the story of a combat between Cnut and Edmund – not found in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, but appearing in numerous texts from the mid-eleventh century onwards – this may have formed a more immediate model for the Guy-Colbrand duel than a combat at Brunanburh, particularly if it provided him with the idea that the Danes claimed an ancient right to sovereignty in England. The histories of Winchester and Oxford which Gaimar claims to have had access to, might well have included such a story,<sup>462</sup> the possible contents of these lost works are especially tantalising in the light of the connections between the Guy legend and Winchester and Osney, near Oxford. The romances of *Guy of Warwick* in both Anglo-Norman and Middle English cast the Danes in the character of rampaging Vikings, terrorising England until defeated in single combat by the English and Christian hero Guy; ironically, however, it may be that in Heraud's speech the romances unwittingly preserve a trace of the legend by which Cnut and his followers legitimised the conquest of England by a Danish king.

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gives a detailed account of the hazelling of the field in preparation for the battle, which might more appropriately suggest the arrangements for a single combat or holmgang than a large-scale battle.

<sup>462</sup> Gaimar mentions a 'book of Oxford', a history of Winchester, and 'an English book of Washingborough' (*Estoire des Engleis*, ll.6435-6507); see Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, p.79.



## Chapter 4

### Narratives of Danish Conquest in Middle English Romance: *Havelok the Dane*

By the thirteenth century, the period of Scandinavian invasion and settlement in England was a distant memory, but it has long been recognised that legends about Viking invasion lie behind the narratives of some of the so-called ‘Matter of England’ romances, especially *Havelok the Dane* and *King Horn*. These poems are among the earliest surviving romances in Middle English,<sup>463</sup> and they share the same essential plot: each poem tells the story of a legendary hero of England’s past who is dispossessed of his kingdom as a child and, after growing up in exile and finding a wife in his new country, eventually returns to his homeland to win the inheritance which has been taken from him. Both legends may be ultimately based on heroes of the Viking Age, and both are set in a period of English history when the most serious threat facing a king in the British Isles is perceived to be from ship-borne invaders. These texts would therefore seem to be clearly relevant to the question of narratives about Anglo-Scandinavian invasion, but can the poems as they stand tell us anything useful about that subject?

*King Horn* is much less helpful than *Havelok* in this regard: although the plot is ultimately indebted to stories of Viking invasion (and, as has been mentioned, has some connections to the growth of the Hereward legend), the pagan invaders who drive Horn out of his land are ‘Sarazins’ (42), not Danes, and Diane Speed has convincingly argued that they are depicted with racial and religious characteristics which suggest they are more closely related to Saracens as presented in the *chansons*

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<sup>463</sup> *King Horn* is dated to c.1250, *Havelok* to the end of the thirteenth century; see *Havelok*, ed. G.V. Smithers (Oxford, 1987), and *King Horn*, ed. R. Allen (London, 1984). Quotations from the texts are from these editions, by line-number.

*de geste* than to Scandinavian invaders.<sup>464</sup> Unlike *Havelok* and the episode of Danish invasion in *Guy of Warwick*, *King Horn* shows no real interest in the historical setting of its story. However, a later version of the Horn story, *Horn Childe and Maiden Rinnild*, an early fourteenth-century poem found only in the Auchinleck MS.,<sup>465</sup> appears to be an attempt to recreate the conventions of heroic literature, exhibiting an archaizing impulse which is consistent with the poem's setting in the Anglo-Saxon past; in this poem the invading Danish army provides an undifferentiated alien force against which the poem is able to define and glorify the triumphs of an idealised English king.

*Havelok* has a similar historical setting, but its version of Viking Age England is radically different: it presents us with a Danish protagonist who is not only a sympathetic hero, but also a just and legitimate king of England. Early critics of the poem often sought for a Scandinavian origin for the story and its hero, proposing various historical models as the original of *Havelok*. Suggestions have included Óláfr Cuaran, the tenth-century Norse king of Dublin and York whose byname *Havelok* shares in the Anglo-Norman accounts,<sup>466</sup> and Óláfr Tryggvason,<sup>467</sup> while G.V. Smithers argued that the story may have originated as “pro-Danish propaganda” designed to glorify Cnut;<sup>468</sup> there are, however, no direct parallels between the *Havelok* legend and the life of any historical figure. Another method of accounting for the Danish element in *Havelok* was adopted by Edmund Reiss, who sought to

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<sup>464</sup> Diane Speed, ‘The Saracens of King Horn’, *Speculum*, Vol. 65 (1990), 564-595.

<sup>465</sup> Edited by Maldwyn Mills, *Horn Childe and Maiden Rinnild* (Heidelberg, 1988).

<sup>466</sup> First suggested by Gustav Storm, ‘Havelok the Dane and the Norse King Olaf Cuaran’, *Englische Studien*, III (1880), 533-35 (originally printed in *Forhandlinger i Videnskabs-Selskabet i Christiania*, Aar 1879, no. 10); see also Charles W. Dunn, ‘Havelok and Anlaf Cuaran’, in J. B. Bessinger and R. P. Creed, eds. *Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honour of Francis Peabody Magoun, Jr* (London, 1965), pp.244-9.

<sup>467</sup> See Alexander Bugge, ‘Havelok and Olaf Tryggvason: A Contribution towards the Further Understanding of the Kings’ Sagas’, *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* VI (1910), 257-95.

<sup>468</sup> Smithers, p. lvii.

identify mythological origins for the story: he saw the character of Havelok's foster-father Grim as a distant echo of Odin, argued that Odin's occasional adoption of the appearance of a ferryman lies behind Grim's role in transporting Havelok from Denmark to England, and even suggested that the name of Grim's son, Hugh Raven, reflects that of Odin's raven Huginn.<sup>469</sup> Each of these approaches, historical and mythological, reflects a desire to pin down something distinctively Norse in the story of Havelok and to make the hero more obviously a product of the Danish origins which are attributed to him in the poem.

Neither approach sheds much light on the legend as we have it: the story in its twelfth- and thirteenth-century forms is far removed from any of these potential origins. The Middle English poem, in particular, is evidently the product of a considerable amount of literary reshaping: the carefully-patterned diptych structure, doubling the plot of the orphaned royal heir persecuted by a usurping guardian, is only the most obvious example of this process.<sup>470</sup> Although early critics spoke of the 'saga-structure' of *Havelok*,<sup>471</sup> there is nothing particularly reminiscent of Norse literature about the structure of the poem: the exile-and-return motif is widespread in romance and folktale and cannot be considered typical of any one literary tradition.<sup>472</sup> The influence of romance is apparent, too, in numerous motifs in the story, such as Havelok's birthmark and the light which reveals his identity, or the executioner who is charged to kill him and saves his life instead. The poet, for all his delight in brutal rough justice which is apt to produce the impression, as Smithers puts it, "of savagery

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<sup>469</sup> Edmund Reiss, 'Havelok the Dane and Norse Mythology', *Modern Language Quarterly* 27 (1966), 115-124.

<sup>470</sup> For the prevalence of this 'diptych' structure in the Middle English verse romances, see Carol Fewster, *Traditionality and Genre in Middle English Romance* (Cambridge, 1987), pp.14-22.

<sup>471</sup> See C. W. Whistler, 'The Saga of Havelok the Dane', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society* III (1902), 395-412, and more recently Rosalind Field, 'Romance as history, history as romance', p.166.

<sup>472</sup> For a recent study of exile-and-return in insular romance, see Rosalind Field, 'The King Over the Water: Exile-and-Return Revisited', in Corinne Saunders, ed., *Cultural Encounters in the Romance of Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2005), pp.41-53.

and a streak of cruelty in the author, and of a crudity in his outlook and in his writing”,<sup>473</sup> is a product of the thirteenth century, immersed in a feudal mentality of oath and obligation, and particularly well-informed about contemporary legal administration and the procedures of local and national government. How, then, ought we to read the significance of the Danish element in *Havelok the Dane*? It is undeniable that there is distant, perhaps fossilised, Norse influence on the circumstantial details of the story – the geographical setting, characters with Scandinavian names, and probably the ultimate historical model for the hero, whoever that may have been – but is there anything more substantial than this?

The most successful attempt to answer this question was made by Thorlac Turville-Petre, who discussed the poem in the context of what he saw as a thirteenth-century preoccupation with the construction of English identity. *Havelok*, he argues, is an attempt to integrate the regional identity of the East Midlands, influenced by an awareness of the region’s Danish history, with a sense of national identity.<sup>474</sup> This is a persuasive argument, particularly when the poem is interpreted in the context of historiographical narratives about Viking attacks. Such narratives – the familiar story of Danes as violent invaders – are an important context for the poem, as Turville-Petre has shown, but the poem also demonstrates an awareness of alternative narratives about Scandinavians in England, and works to negotiate between these conflicting approaches. There are two aspects of this question which may profitably be explored. The first is the role of Denmark as the ancestral homeland of several of the poem’s leading characters, which involves the poem in an imaginative

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<sup>473</sup> Smithers, p. lix.

<sup>474</sup> Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature and National Identity, 1290-1340* (Oxford, 1996), and see also Turville-Petre, ‘*Havelok* and the History of the Nation’, in Carol M. Meale, ed., *Readings in Medieval English Romance* (Cambridge, 1994), pp.121-134, and Turville-Petre, ‘Representations of the Danelaw in Middle English Literature’, in Graham-Campbell et al., *Vikings and the Danelaw*, pp.345-355.

reconstruction of the Danish settlement in England; the poem seems to make a deliberate choice to focus on settlement rather than invasion. The second is the possibility of an awareness on the part of the poet of what might be distinctively Scandinavian about a hero like Havelok, leading to an attempt to reconcile alternative models of heroism from two different literary traditions. Both these approaches rely on the idea that the Danish element in *Havelok the Dane* is more than an empty signifier or a holdover from the historical origin of the legend which had lost its meaning for the audience of the thirteenth-century romance; to a poem which is demonstrably interested in the foundational history of the area in which it was produced, the Danish strain in that history is still of great relevance, and the poem's decision to explore it is a conscious literary choice.

### **Settlement in *Havelok***

Recent work on *Havelok* has emphasized the importance of understanding how far the apparent simplicity of the poem masks a carefully-constructed fiction: its distinctive world is not a naive reflection of the surroundings of the poet and his audience, but the product of literary artistry and an expression of the poem's interest in social relationships, law and justice, and moral behaviour.<sup>475</sup> *Havelok's* Denmark is a part of that fictional world, the home of the hero and a number of the poem's most prominent characters, and the location of several crucial scenes; it is difficult to believe that a poet so interested in representing the details of social and economic life in Lincoln and Grimsby could have given no thought to his depiction of Denmark. Certainly, the poem shows very little knowledge about Denmark as a place: it does

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<sup>475</sup> See especially R. M. Liuzza, 'Representation and Readership in the Middle English *Havelok*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 93 (1994), 504-519, Ananya J. Kabir, 'Forging an Oral Style? *Havelok* and the Fiction of Orality', *Studies in Philology* 98 (2001), 18-48, and Nancy Mason Bradbury, 'The Traditional Origins of *Havelok the Dane*', *Studies in Philology* 90 (1993), 115-142.

not mention a single Danish place name, real or invented, and the names given to the Danish characters often mix Norse and English in a way which does not suggest any consistent attempt to distinguish between the two peoples.<sup>476</sup> Most of the Norse personal names in the poem probably reflect the residual Scandinavian influence on naming practices in Lincolnshire. However, there is one significant exception: in *Havelok*, the hero's Danish father is called Birkabeyn, a name which indicates some knowledge of recent Norwegian history.<sup>477</sup> This may represent a deliberate choice, a Norse name for a Norse character.<sup>478</sup>

In many ways, the poem's treatment of the Danish element in the Havelok story is of a piece with its approach to English history. By beginning in an imprecisely defined long-ago past "bi are-dawes" (27) and ending with Havelok's fifteen sons and daughters all becoming kings and queens, the poem makes no attempt to locate Havelok in a dynastic history of England or Denmark, and comparison with the other versions of the Havelok legend which exist from the twelfth century onwards makes this immediately obvious. The earliest version appears in Geoffrey Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, composed in the second quarter of the twelfth

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<sup>476</sup> See Smithers, pp. lx-lxii. For a useful discussion of the personal names in the poem in the context of other contemporary accounts of East Anglian history, see Kleinman, 'The Legend of Havelok the Dane and the Historiography of East Anglia', 245-277.

<sup>477</sup> The name 'Birkabeyn' was a nickname of Sverrir, King of Norway between 1184 and 1202, which derived from his followers' custom of wearing birch-bark on their legs. This name was known in England, since it is used by Roger of Howden in his Latin *Chronica*; see Smithers, p.101. In the *Lai d'Haveloc* and in Gaimar Havelok's father is called Gunter, but the Anglo-Norman prose *Brut* versions of the story, though otherwise based primarily on Gaimar, use the name Birkebein; see *The Oldest Anglo-Norman Prose Brut Chronicle*, ed. and trans. Julia Marvin (Woodbridge, 2006), ll.2040-70 and the comments at pp. 318-9. The earliest prose *Brut* is roughly contemporary with the Middle English poem; see Marvin, 'Havelok in the Prose *Brut* Tradition', *Studies in Philology* 102 (2005), 280-306.

<sup>478</sup> Smithers thought that the name Ubbe, for the nobleman who first recognises Havelok's identity after his return to Denmark, may have been inspired by Ubbe Ragnarsson (Smithers, p.lx); the name is rare in England (see Fellows Jensen, *Scandinavian Personal Names in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire*, pp.319-330) and it is possible the poet may have borrowed it from a chronicle account as an appropriate name for a high-ranking Danish character, though the form of the name in English sources is usually 'Hubbe'. John Frankis observes: "It is scarcely conceivable that the author of *Havelok* (or whichever of his precursors introduced the name into the story) wished to identify Havelok's supporter with the killer of St Edmund, but he may possibly have wished to cast doubt on old prejudices by postulating a good and loyal Dane named Ubbe" (Frankis, 'Views of Anglo-Saxon England', p.241); and we should bear in mind that, as already mentioned, not all English accounts of Ubbe are negative.

century;<sup>479</sup> Gaimar's history places the Havelok story in the reign of Constantine, nephew of King Arthur; where the English poem has Havelok and Goldburh as heirs to England and Denmark, two distinct and unified kingdoms, in Gaimar the heroine's father, a Dane, rules a kingdom comprising East Anglia, Lincolnshire and part of Denmark. Like the Anglo-Norman *Lai d'Haveloc*,<sup>480</sup> which is closely related to Gaimar's account, and like the account of Havelok which a later interpolator inserted into Robert Mannyng's *Chronicle*, this tradition presents a more integrated view of the political situation than the English poem, and finds a place for Havelok in the chronology of British history. There is none of this in the English version, but the poem by no means exists in a vacuum of romance time and space. In common with many Middle English romances about the Anglo-Saxon past, the poem creates a sense of its historical setting allusively, gesturing towards the pre-Norman world rather than attempting to recreate it.<sup>481</sup> The name *Birkabeyn* for the Danish king is paralleled by *Athelwold* for the English king, who has his capital at Winchester (l.158). As Thorlac Turville-Petre has convincingly argued, such details, and the frequent use of English place-names in the poem, are intended to signal to the audience that the world of *Havelok* "is not contemporary England, and yet it bears a relationship with the nation as it is now".<sup>482</sup>

The fact that less detail is provided about Denmark does not preclude the poem from showing an interest in the Anglo-Danish identity which is forged over the course of the story by the migration of Havelok and Grim's family, the union of

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<sup>479</sup> *Estoire des Engleis*, ll.37-818. For a recent discussion of the alternative dates which have been proposed for the text, see Paul Dalton, 'The Date of Geoffrey Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, the Connections of his Patrons, and the Politics of Stephen's Reign', *The Chaucer Review* 42 (2007), 23-47; Dalton suggests it should be dated between 1141-50.

<sup>480</sup> Edited by Alexander Bell, *Le Lai d'Haveloc and Gaimar's Haveloc Episode* (Manchester, 1925).

<sup>481</sup> See Rouse, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, especially pp. 102-5, and Field, 'Romance as history, history as romance'.

<sup>482</sup> Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, p.149.

Havelok and Goldburh, and Havelok's coronation as king of "Hengliche and Denshe, heye and lowe" (2945). The narrative gives a prominent role to the migration and settlement of Scandinavian characters in England, specifically in Lincolnshire, where the poem was composed. After rescuing the orphaned Havelok from the treacherous guardian who has tried to kill him, Grim flees Denmark and is driven by a strong wind to the English coast. With characteristic close attention to detail, the poet describes the dwelling Grim constructs there for his family:

In Humber Grim *bigan* to lende,  
In Lindeseye rith at þe north ende.  
þer sat is ship upon þe sond;  
But Grim it drou up to þe lond,  
And þere he made a litel cote  
To him and to hise flote.  
Bigan he, þere for to erþe,  
A litel hus to maken of erþe,  
So þat he wel þore were  
Of here herboru herborwed þere.  
(734-743)

Grim settles there and continues to ply his trade at sea, and the place where he lives, the poet makes a point of noting, is and always will be named after him:

And for þat Grim þat place aute  
þe stede of Grim þe name laute,  
So þat Grimesbi it calle  
þat þer-offe speken alle;  
And so shulen *men* callen it ay  
Bituene þis and Domesday.  
(744-9)

This settlement narrative is therefore also a foundation myth for the town of Grimsby; the permanence of Grim's new settlement, mentioned at this early point in the poem, foreshadows the eventual happy union between the English and Danish kingdoms which is brought about by the marriage of Havelok and Goldburh. Grim and Havelok have been driven from Denmark by the threat of violence, but they find a safe home in England and are able to participate in productive economic activity there. The list

of fish caught by Grim, which follows this description of the founding of Grimsby, and the account of his transactions at Lincoln and the surrounding towns (750-787) are brought forward as evidence of the hard work which brings Grim (and presumably his namesake town) prosperity and success.

It has often been observed that while many Middle English romances are closely and carefully localised in a particular area, this is especially pronounced in *Havelok*: the poet was clearly well-acquainted with Lincoln, the city in which Havelok is employed as a kitchen-boy, and which is referred to as “þe gode borw” numerous times in the poem. He makes reference to the fish-market by the bridge in the city which was still held in the eighteenth century (876 and 882),<sup>483</sup> and identifies the place near Lincoln where Godrich is executed:

Bi-souþe þe borw unto a grene  
Pat þare is yet, als Y wene  
(2829-30)

Such self-authenticating statements locate the poem in a physical space which is not bound by temporal limitations; the world in which Grim and Havelok live and move is imaginatively accessible to an audience familiar with these places, although it may be distant in time.

This narrative strategy is exactly paralleled in what is known of the oral traditions about Havelok which existed in the area where the poem is set. In discussions of the Havelok legend the relationship between the written versions of the story has tended to predominate, but as Nancy Mason Bradbury has persuasively argued,<sup>484</sup> the records of oral culture can also help us to understand the Middle English poem. The best contemporary evidence for these traditions is provided by Robert Mannyng, writing in Lincolnshire in the second quarter of the fourteenth

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<sup>483</sup> Smithers, p.109.

<sup>484</sup> Mason Bradbury, ‘The Traditional Origins of *Havelok the Dane*’, 117-129.

century. In his translation of Peter Langtoft's *Chronicle*, Mannyng deviates from his source to express his surprise that he cannot find the story of Havelok in the chronicle sources: neither Bede, Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury nor Langtoft tells of King Athelwold and Havelok's rule of England. He goes on:

Bot þat þise lowed men vpon Inglish tellis,  
right story can me not ken þe certeynte what spellis.  
Men sais in Lyncoln castelle ligges 3it a stone  
þat Haelok kast wele forbi euerilkone.  
& 3it þe chapelle standes þer he weddid his wife,  
Goldeburgh, þe kynges douhter, þat saw is 3it rife,  
& of Gryme, a fisshere, men redes 3it in ryme,  
þat he bigged Grymesby, Gryme þat ilk tyme.<sup>485</sup>

Mannyng was writing at the Gilbertine priory of Sixhills, about halfway between Lincoln and Grimsby, and as far as can be ascertained from this description, the story which was "rife" in the fourteenth century in that area agrees with the Middle English poem at some of the points where it diverges from the Anglo-Norman versions; for instance, Havelok's throwing of the stone is only found in the English tradition. It has sometimes been assumed that the oral traditions Mannyng describes had their origin in the English poem, and that this is the "ryme" he mentions in which the English still read of Havelok.<sup>486</sup> However, unless Mannyng knew a different version of the poem to the one which survives (which is possible), this does not account for all the details in this passage: the chapel in which Havelok marries Goldburh is not mentioned in the English poem as we have it. The stone-casting episode is in the poem, but the statement that the stone still lies in Lincoln castle is not; Mannyng cannot therefore be referring to any extant written version of the story when he mentions what "men sais"

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<sup>485</sup> Robert Mannyng, *The Chronicle*, ed. Sullens, II: 519-38. A later revision of Mannyng's *Chronicle* in the Lambeth MS. omits the quoted passage and substitutes an interpolation summarising the story of Havelok, following the version of the story represented by Gaimar and the *Lai*; see *The Lay of Havelok the Dane*, ed. W. W. Skeat and revised by K. Sisam (Oxford, 1915; repr. 1967), pp. xvii-xix.

<sup>486</sup> Skeat identified two verbal parallels between *Havelok* and Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne* which he argued were imitations of the poem; see Skeat and Sisam, *The Lay of Havelok the Dane*, p.xxiii, and notes to ll.679-680 and 819-820, pp.110-111.

about this landmark. His comment provides evidence that the Havelok legend was not only widely-known in this area but also an important strand in the foundation myth of the region, important enough for Mannyng to question why otherwise well-informed chroniclers fail to include it, and reinforced by the pointing out of lasting physical reminders of Havelok's historicity.

This foundation narrative is also recorded on the thirteenth-century seal of Grimsby, which depicts Grim, Havelok and Goldburh, with Grim as the most prominent figure, armed and considerably larger than the other two.<sup>487</sup> Grim's role in the history of Grimsby was still being retold in the seventeenth century, when the antiquarian Gervase Holles recorded several versions of the story from inhabitants of the town.<sup>488</sup> In one of these versions Grim is said to have found the child Havelok drifting in a boat in the Humber, in the manner of Scyld Scefing, but in other respects they are remarkably consistent with the older literary versions: Grim's occupation as a fisherman, Havelok's great strength and work as a kitchen-boy, and the Danish connection are all preserved, and at that time, Holles says, a large stone of the kind mentioned by Robert Mannyng (although in this case in Grimsby rather than Lincoln castle) was still pointed out as 'Havelok's stone'.<sup>489</sup>

The Grimsby seal, like Mannyng's reference to the stories still told about Havelok, is a reminder that *Havelok the Dane* forms part of a tradition which still had considerable cultural resonance in the area where it was composed. The poem cannot be considered only in relation to the other surviving literary versions of the legend, as if it were solely of interest to historians like Gaimar and Mannyng; nor only in relation to other romances, English and Anglo-Norman, as if it were simply a

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<sup>487</sup> For discussion of the seal see Mason Bradbury, 'The Traditional Origins of *Havelok the Dane*', 124-5.

<sup>488</sup> Reprinted in Skeat and Sisam, *The Lay of Havelok the Dane*, pp.xx-xxi.

<sup>489</sup> Skeat and Sisam, *The Lay of Havelok the Dane*, p.xxi.

combination of motifs from a variety of romance sources. One of the recurring questions in studies of *Havelok* is the issue of its intended audience; as Robert Levine put it, who composed *Havelok* for whom?<sup>490</sup> This question has most often been addressed in terms of social class: is *Havelok* a peasant fantasy which shows how a kitchen-boy can rise to be king, or a bourgeois treatise on the value of hard work, or an aristocratic romance?<sup>491</sup> However, while we may know little about the class of the audience for whom *Havelok* was written, it is reasonable to assume that they shared the poet's local interests. The dialect of the poem is typical of the area around Lincoln, and contains a large number of words restricted to the East Midlands and linguistic features showing strong Norse influence.<sup>492</sup> The heavy Norse influence on the language of *Havelok* speaks eloquently for the Scandinavian character of this area. The region around Lincoln, one of the Five Boroughs of the Danelaw, was an area of extensive Norse settlement, and the name Grimsby is indeed, as *Havelok* claims, place name evidence of this settlement; as Snorri accurately observes in *Hákonar saga góða*, in speaking of the impact of Norwegian rule in this part of England, "Mörg heiti landsins eru þar gefin á norrœna tungu, Grímsbær ok Hauksfljót ok mörg önnur".<sup>493</sup> Grimsby was not alone among English towns in preserving legends about the Scandinavian origins of its name and founder. There are parallels in both Norse and English traditions about the founding of Scarborough: in *Kormaks saga* the hero and his brother are credited with establishing the town while raiding in the British Isles

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<sup>490</sup> Robert Levine, 'Who Composed *Havelok* for Whom?', *Y.E.S.* 22 (1992), 94-104.

<sup>491</sup> These three views are best represented by, respectively, Derek Pearsall, 'The Development of Middle English Romance', *Mediaeval Studies* 27 (1965), 91-116 (99), John Halverson, '*Havelok the Dane* and Society', *The Chaucer Review* 6 (1971), 142-151, and Susan Crane, *Insular Romance*, p. 43.

<sup>492</sup> See the extended discussion in Smithers, pp.lxxv-lxxxix. Both surviving manuscripts of the poem are from Norfolk; see Angus McIntosh, 'The Language of the Extant Versions of *Havelok the Dane*', *Medium Ævum* 45 (1976), 36-49.

<sup>493</sup> *Hákonar saga góða*, ch. 3, in *Heimskringla*, vol. i, p.153; 'Many names of places in the country are Norse, such as Grimsby, Hauksfljót, and many others'.

(“Þeir settu fyrst virki þat er heitir Skarðaborg”),<sup>494</sup> and since elsewhere in the saga it is said that Kormakr’s brother Þorgils has the nickname Skarði, he is presumably to be identified with the Scarthe whom Robert Mannyng refers to as the founder of Scarborough.<sup>495</sup> In his *Chronicle* Mannyng mentions two otherwise unknown authors, ‘Thomas of Kendale’ and ‘Master Edmond’, who both tell the story of how the brothers Scarthe and Flayn gave their names to Scarborough and Flamborough.<sup>496</sup> These lost narratives may have been in chronicle form or, since Mannyng calls the work of Thomas of Kendale a “tale”, they may have been closer to a verse narrative like *Havelok*. Mannyng mistakenly associates Scarthe and Flayn with the earlier Anglo-Saxon settlement of England (linking them to another onomastic story involving the hero Engle), but the existence of these legends indicates that Grimsby was by no means the only English town which looked back to Norse settlement as a local myth of origins.

However imperfectly such traditions may have been preserved in Yorkshire, the evidence of *Havelok* suggests that in Grimsby the Danish identity of the town’s namesake was a prominent part of the town’s foundation narrative. This may have been because at the time of the poem’s composition contact with Scandinavia was associated not only with the Viking Age past but also with the contemporary commercial identity of the town: Grimsby, like many other ports on the east coast of England, maintained strong trading links with Norway, and Norwegian ships and merchants were a constant presence in the town.<sup>497</sup> It was perhaps as a result of this that the house of Augustinian canons at Grimsby which was founded between 1128

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<sup>494</sup> *Kormaks saga*, ch. 27, ed. T. Möbius (Halle, 1886), p.54.

<sup>495</sup> Robert Mannyng, *The Chronicle*, ed. Sullens, II:514.

<sup>496</sup> See Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, pp. 44-5.

<sup>497</sup> See Edward Gillett, *A History of Grimsby* (London, 1970), pp. 6-9, and Henry Goddard Leach, *Angevin Britain and Scandinavia*, pp.40-2.

and 1132 was dedicated to St Óláfr.<sup>498</sup> Again, Norse tradition agrees with the English evidence: *Orkneyinga saga* shows Norse merchants passing through Grimsby, where Kali (later Earl Rǫgnvaldr) meets Haraldr gilli, future king of Norway, among a large number of men from Norway, Scotland and the Orkneys, and composes a poem in which he expresses his relief at returning to Norway after enduring the mud in Grimsby harbour.<sup>499</sup> Such commercial contact between England and Scandinavia is not far removed from the world of *Havelok*: Havelok himself travels to Denmark in the character of a merchant when he sets out to regain his kingdom.

In this light, the Danish element in *Havelok the Dane* comes to seem more than just local colour. Although the Scandinavian character of the area may have been formed in the Viking period, where the story of Havelok has its distant origins, the world in which the poem was composed was one in which contact with Scandinavia continued to be a part of daily life. Thorlac Turville-Petre characterises the area well: “North Lincolnshire was a region where a stable population of partly Scandinavian origin and an economy based on the local industries of farming and fishing fostered a strong sense of a separate cultural heritage which could not fit comfortably into the overarching national myth.”<sup>500</sup> This is evident in the poem’s treatment of its principal English setting. Although geographically part of England, this region – and Grimsby in particular – functions in the poem as a kind of no-man’s land between England and Denmark, which is decisively part of neither. Unlike Lincoln, Grimsby is a new place, founded by a Danish man on English soil and inhabited by his Danish family. This coastal port is naturally the place through which characters journeying between England and Denmark have to travel, but it is also the

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<sup>498</sup> Bruce Dickins, ‘The Cult of S. Olave in the British Isles’, 53-80; see also Gillett, *A History of Grimsby*, p. 8.

<sup>499</sup> *Orkneyinga saga*, ch. 59-60, pp.130-2.

<sup>500</sup> Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, p.143.

place where the dual Anglo-Danish identities of Havelok and Grim's family intersect. When Havelok moves from Grimsby to Lincoln, he is journeying further into English territory, where parliament draws people from throughout England and where he can begin to prove his right to be king of two realms, and it is there that he marries his English wife; however, it is at Grimsby that he is greeted as king by Grim's family, that Goldburh learns of his royal status, and that he embarks to regain his kingdom. On his return, the decisive battle between the Danes led by Havelok and the English forces of Godrich takes place near Grimsby. Havelok only travels to London in order to be crowned, when he has already been accepted as king of England.

What does the idea of Denmark signify for the poet of *Havelok*? On the one hand, Denmark is envisioned as a place where acts of terrible brutality can take place: the murder of Havelok's young sisters, told in a scene of carefully-evoked pathos, exceeds in cruelty any of the violent deeds which take place in England, and this prompted Maldwyn Mills to argue that the poet sees Denmark as "an essentially dangerous place",<sup>501</sup> full of enemies seeking to hurt Havelok. However, there is one memorable exception: as the time approaches for Havelok to return to Denmark, he has a vision which is far removed from the violent experiences he has undergone there. When Havelok and Goldburh have returned to Grimsby after their marriage, Havelok tells his wife about a dream in which he is seated on a high mountain in Denmark:

Me þouthe Y was *in* Denemark set,  
 But on on þe moste hil  
 Þat euere yete kam I til.  
 It was so hey þat Y wel mouthe  
 Al þe werd se, als me þouthe.  
 Als I sat up-on þat lowe  
 J bigan Denemark for to awe,  
 Þe borwes and þe castles stronge;

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<sup>501</sup> Maldwyn Mills, 'Havelok's Return', *Medium Ævum* 45 (1976), 20-35 (32).

And mine armes weren so longe  
 Þat I fadmede al at ones  
 Denemark with mine longe bones.  
 And þanne Y wolde mine armes drawe  
 Til me and hom for to haue,  
 Al þat euere in Denemark liueden  
 On mine armes faste clyueden,  
 And þe stronge castles alle  
 On knes bigunnen for to falle –  
 Þe keyes fellen at mine fet.

(1287-1304)

This intimate physical connection between Havelok and his country is not paralleled in the other versions of the story; there, Goldburh is the one who dreams of Havelok regaining his sovereignty, and she sees lions coming out of the forest to pay feudal homage to their lord.<sup>502</sup> Only in the English poem does the dream have a specific geographical location and this emphasis on the union between the king and his land. Havelok's dream encompasses not only the towns and castles of Denmark but also its people, tenderly drawn towards him and clasped in his arms, and when he describes how in a second dream he flies across the sea to England to restore the land to Goldburh, he is accompanied by his people:

Anoper drem dremede me ek  
 Þat Ich fley ouer þe salte se  
 Til Engeland, and al with me  
 That euere was in Denemark lyues  
 But bondemen and here wiues;  
 And þat Ich kom til Engelond -  
 Al closede it intil min hond,  
 And, Goldeborw, Y gaf [it] þe.  
 Deus, lemman! hwat may þis be?

(1305-1313)

The restoration of Havelok and Goldburh to their proper places is imagined as a dream-world invasion, or migration, from Denmark, and it is stripped of any kind of threat of violence by being figured as a love-gift between husband and wife. The

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<sup>502</sup> In Gaimar's version, the dream is of a battle between a savage bear, boars and foxes; trees bow to Cuheran and the seas rise around him, but he is saved by a pair of lions (195-238). Not only the content but the mood of the dream is entirely different in the English poem.

dream inspires a longing for Denmark in Havelok: Goldburh counsels him to go and regain his country,<sup>503</sup> telling him

schal Ich neuere bliþe be  
Til I with eyen Denmark se  
(1340-1)

Such a vision seems to indicate an interest in the country of Havelok's birth unparalleled in other versions of the story; where those dreams focus solely on the revelation of Havelok's royal status, this vision links that identity closely to the land and people of Denmark.

### **Havelok and Anglo-Danish identity**

Despite this interest in Denmark, the poem is less concerned with Havelok's Danish origins than with the Anglo-Danish identity which comes into being once Grim and his family, with Havelok, have settled in England. The marriage of Havelok and Goldburh is the most prominent representation of this harmonious union between Denmark and England, since it is through Goldburh that Havelok comes to rule England. This is not the only marriage in the poem which promotes union between an English and a Danish partner: after his coronation Havelok marries Reyner, Earl of Chester, to Gunnild, Grim's daughter – "Gunnild of Grimesby" (2867), as the poet calls her, as if to emphasise her link to the town her father founded. These unions may be Anglo-Danish but they take place on English soil, and it is important that Havelok, although born in Denmark and heir to that kingdom, eventually leaves his realm in the hands of a regent in order to live in England. Like Grim, whose settling in England has left its mark on the landscape in the form of Grimsby, Havelok has

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<sup>503</sup> For a discussion of Goldburh's role as counsellor in this episode, see Alexandra H. Olsen, 'The Valkyrie Reflex in Havelok the Dane', in Loren C. Gruber, ed., *Essays on Old, Middle, Modern English and Old Icelandic* (Lewiston, N.Y., 2000), pp. 317-335.

exchanged his homeland for a new country, and become part of English history. It is tempting to see Grim and his family as the poem's representative of the Scandinavian ancestors of a Lincolnshire audience: Grim settles peacefully, in uninhabited land, and works industriously and successfully at his trade until his name is permanently inscribed on his adopted country.

At the same time, the poet is undoubtedly aware that relations between England and Denmark have not always consisted only of the harmonious migration personified by Grim and his family. This is alluded to in an oblique fashion towards the end of the poem, when Godrich tries to incite the English against Havelok and persuade them "ageynes Denshe men to fare" (2576) by evoking the familiar image of the Dane as destroyer. He tells them that Havelok has brought "uten-laddes" (2581) who have seized a priory in Grimsby, and elaborates on the supposed enormities of these foreign aggressors:

He brenne kirks and prestes binde;  
He strangleth monkes and nunnes bape  
(2584-5)

As the audience has been told less than fifty lines before that Havelok has in fact founded a priory at Grimsby, in memory of Grim, the contrast between this distorted picture of the Danes and the truth of Havelok's piety is particularly ironic.<sup>504</sup>

Although the Denmark which Havelok has at this point just left behind is certainly a dangerous place, none of the characters who travel between Denmark and England are nun-strangling Viking raiders: they are merchants, fishermen and finally settlers.

However, Godrich's patriotic appeal to the English places him temporarily in the role

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<sup>504</sup> See Turville-Petre, 'Representations of the Danelaw in Middle English Literature', pp.352-3.

of the national leader exhorting his men against the Danish threat, and it receives an enthusiastically positive response from the English earls:<sup>505</sup>

‘Ye, lef, ye!’ *quoth* þe erl Gunter;  
‘Ya!’ *quoth* þe erl of Cestre, Reyner,  
And so dide alle þat þer stode,  
And stirte forth so he were wode.  
(2607-10)

Godrich, though a traitor, is not treated by the poet entirely without sympathy, unlike the equivalent usurper Godard in Denmark: on assuming the throne Godrich shows himself to be an effective king, able to enforce national law almost as well as his predecessor Athelwold, and unlike Godard he does not kill the royal child in his care. Here and in the battle which follows he is allowed to achieve an almost heroic status, declaring he will fight as long as he can bear arms (2606) and that he will not live happily until he has driven the invaders out of England (2599-2600). In battle he lives up to these boasts, fighting valiantly against the Danes, and Havelok even offers to forgive Godrich’s treachery because he is so strong and “so god knith” (2722). He is defeated and his oath-breaking is rewarded with a traitor’s punishment, but unlike Godard he is not flayed alive. Maldwyn Mills sees this difference in the fates of the two traitors as indicative of the poet’s belief in the more civilised nature of English justice compared to the brutality of Danish law,<sup>506</sup> but it may rather be the result of the poet’s grudging sympathy for Godrich, who – always excepting his treachery and oath-breaking – is presented as a just king and a brave warrior.

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<sup>505</sup> On this scene see David Burnley, ‘Comforting the troops: an epic moment in popular romance’, in Mills et al., *Romance in Medieval England*, pp.175-186 (184-6).

<sup>506</sup> Mills, ‘Havelok’s Return’, 20-35, and see also Robert Rouse, ‘English Identity and the Law in *Havelok the Dane, Horn Childe and Maiden Rinnild and Beues of Hamtoun*’, in Saunders, ed., *Cultural Encounters in the Romance of Medieval England*, pp.69-83, Rouse, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 103, and Diane Speed, ‘The Construction of the Nation in Medieval English Romance’, in Meale, ed., *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, pp. 135-157; for the opposite view, see Frankis, ‘Views of Anglo-Saxon England’, pp.240-1.

Perhaps, despite the fact that Havelok is the hero and Godrich the villain, the poet was also unable to resist the influence of a familiar narrative pattern in which the central hero figure is the king who defends his land against foreign invaders, especially Scandinavian ones. The poet is alert to the historical resonances of a battle between English and Danes, and his sympathy is not all on the Danish side: it is significant that the Danish claimant of the English throne makes his case on the hereditary rights of his English wife, and rules only as a result of his marriage to her. Havelok is not a conqueror of England; he upholds the proper order of the native English succession. Turville-Petre describes Havelok as a mirror image of the idea of Danes as invaders: in this poem it is the Danish Havelok who brings social harmony and national unity to England.<sup>507</sup> Nonetheless, the poet seems to be aware of an alternative figure of the Danish warrior which Havelok – at the moment of fighting against an English army – comes close to resembling, and without necessarily accepting Bugge’s suggestion that this represents “some dim memory of the days when Óláfr Tryggvason came to England as leader of a Viking host”,<sup>508</sup> we may read Godrich’s speech as the manifestation of some tension between the English and Danish sympathies of the poet. The literary trope of the Dane as destructive invader is called up so that it can be disproved by Havelok’s obvious piety and the justice of his cause, but it casts a shadow over the climactic battle which almost tips the poem’s support towards the brave Godrich, defender of his land against foreign aggressors.

It is possible to see a similar moment of tension between different literary models associated with Norse warriors at an earlier point in the poem, when Havelok is still a child. After living with Grim’s family for several years in Grimsby, Havelok comes to a sudden realisation about his responsibilities to his foster-father. In a

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<sup>507</sup> ‘Representations of the Danelaw in Middle English Literature’, pp. 352-4.

<sup>508</sup> Bugge, ‘Havelok and Olaf Tryggvason’, 284.

speech which marks his first decision as an adult, he begins to understand that he has been living indolently at home, and it is time for him to begin a life of honest labour instead of idleness:

Haelok was war þat Grim swank sore  
For his mete, and he lay at hom –  
Pouthe ‘Ich am nou no grom!’  
Jch am wel waxen, and wel may eten  
More þan euere Grim may geten.  
Jch ete more, bi God on liue,  
Pan Grim an hise children fiue!  
Jt ne may nouth ben þus longe.  
Goddot, Y wile with þe[m] gange  
For to leren sum god to gete.  
Swinken Ich wolde for mi mete –  
Jt is no shame for to swinken!  
Pe man þat may wel eten and drincken  
Pat nouth ne haue but on swink long –  
To liggen at hom it is ful strong.  
(789-803)

He concludes:

Shal Ich neuere lengere dwelle –  
Tomorwen shal Ich forth pelle.  
(810-811)

Shortly afterwards, a dearth of food forces him to leave Grim and his family and go to seek work in Lincoln. This speech is Havelok’s moment of self-realisation, and it marks the decisive moment when he moves away from Grim’s protection and out into the world. The scene is quite different in the *Lai*: there, it is Grim who suggests that life as a fisherman is not a suitable occupation for a boy of Havelok’s royal birth, and sends him from Grimsby so that he can begin to find his true place in the world. Unlike in the English poem, Havelok does not go to Lincoln alone and starving, dressed in Grim’s old sail, but is accompanied by two of Grim’s sons as his attendants; it is altogether a more genteel scenario. The emphasis the English poet places on Havelok’s willingness to work – a theme further developed once he reaches Lincoln, where he literally elbows his way past the competition to gain employment

in the earl's kitchen – has frequently been interpreted as a sign of the poet's 'bourgeois' sympathies: John Halverson argues that it demonstrates the poet's identification with the point of view of "the prosperous, hard-working middle-class", and even that "there is something here of what has since been called 'the protestant ethic'".<sup>509</sup> Sheila Delany agrees that this decision shows that Havelok "heartily adopts the middle-class work ethic".<sup>510</sup> Otherwise, the poet's preoccupation with food is cited as an example of his 'realism', and Smithers seeks real-life inspiration for the dearth of food which sends Havelok from home in the famines of 1258 and 1294.<sup>511</sup> However, it is worth looking more closely at how the poem constructs this moment of realisation. Havelok is made to define himself by a rejection of a certain model of behaviour, lying about at home, a lifestyle which he condemns as "ful strong"; we might identify this as the behaviour of the *kolbíttr* or *eldhúsfíflit*, familiar in Norse tradition from the development of a very different kind of hero than the one Havelok turns out to be. Like the image of the rapacious Viking in Godrich's speech, which is evoked only to be disproved by the piety and justice of Havelok's behaviour, Havelok's decision to leave a life of ease may be a gesture towards another literary model of a hero, one which seems to be closely linked to his Scandinavian identity. It is possible that an earlier incarnation of the character might have involved this typical story of indolent beginnings, but more interesting is the possibility that the poet may have been aware of this model of behaviour as typical of a Danish hero, and gives Havelok this speech in order to repudiate this way of reading the character through narrative irony: instead of lounging by the kitchen fire at home, he commences his life of hard work in the kitchen of the Earl of Lincoln.

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<sup>509</sup> Halverson, 'Havelok the Dane and Society', 147.

<sup>510</sup> Sheila Delany, *Medieval Literary Politics: Shapes of Ideology* (Manchester, 1990), p.68.

<sup>511</sup> Smithers, pp.114-5.

If we can think of such Norse traditions as part of the poet's conscious presentation of Havelok as a hero, it means that the Scandinavian aspect of *Havelok the Dane* does not lie only in the origins of the story – not only in fading memories of a real Anglo-Danish hero or in some distant association between Grim and Odin – but in its thirteenth-century context too. It appears in a self-conscious use of stereotypes and literary tropes associated with Danes which works to reshape and re-present the relationship between Norse settlers and the English culture into which they had by this time assimilated, offering an imaginative reconstruction of Danish settlement and Anglo-Danish union which satisfies a wish to find an important place for local heroes in national history.

#### **Danish invasion in *Horn Childe***

It is perhaps not surprising that no Middle English romance other than *Havelok* shows any comparable alertness to Scandinavian tradition as a meaningful, living part of its hero's identity. However, as *Horn Childe* shows, the conventions of Germanic heroic literature in the broadest sense were still available for use by an author or adaptor of later romance, and we may wonder whether it was the influence of Scandinavian settlement which kept these traditions alive for longer in certain areas of England. If this poem is anything to judge by, a fourteenth-century poet was well able to exploit the narrative motifs preserved in older legends and give new expression to attitudes reminiscent of both Old Norse and Old English poetry. It has often been assumed that *Horn Childe* is not worthy of serious study: Chaucer's dismissive reference to it in *Sir Thopas* has frequently been echoed by critics who have considered it a debased

version of the superior earlier romance.<sup>512</sup> However, it deserves a more considered reading. The ethic of the poem is predominantly heroic:<sup>513</sup> it delights in scenes of battle and loving descriptions of weapons and armour; there are multiple speeches about the importance of a warrior's loyalty to his leader and the cowardice of flight, and the duty of revenge is strongly emphasised. The account of the courageous death of Horn's father in battle, outnumbered and cornered by his enemies but fighting to the last, is a model of heroic tragedy. These features are most thickly clustered together in the extended prologue, which tells the story of Horn's father Hafeolf at much greater length than *King Horn* does: the earlier romance has only a brief account of King Murry's death at the hands of a group of invaders, with no more detail than is necessary to set up the main plot which begins with Horn's exile. In *Horn Childe*, the life of Horn's father is developed at such length that it has been suggested that it preserves a separate legend about Hafeolf which has been joined to the Horn story at a later date.<sup>514</sup> The whole course of events, from the initial Danish raids on northern England to Hafeolf's decision to march against them and his victory in battle, only to be defeated by a second wave of invaders from Ireland,<sup>515</sup> though interwoven with the story of the young Horn's education, has its own self-contained narrative arc of victory followed by heroic defeat.

The poem begins by drawing attention to the value of information about "our elders", the heroes of a previous age, setting the story firmly in the English past:

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<sup>512</sup> For a summary of negative critical judgements of the poem, see Mills, *Horn Childe and Maiden Rimmild*, p. 9.

<sup>513</sup> See A. McL. Trounce, 'The English Tail-Rhyme Romances', *Medium Ævum* I (1932), 87-108, 168-82; II (1933), 34-57, 189-98; 3 (1934), 30-50. Trounce attributed this to what he believed to be the early date of *Horn Childe*; he thought it earlier than *King Horn*, perhaps the earliest of all Middle English romances.

<sup>514</sup> See Mills, *Horn Childe and Maiden Rimmild*, pp.59-68. Hafeolf may represent the 'Aalof' mentioned in *Waldef* and the *Gesta Herwardi*; see Weiss, 'Thomas and the Earl', pp.1-13.

<sup>515</sup> Although it is not stated in the poem, it seems likely that these invaders from Ireland were originally Hiberno-Norse, given the history of the area and York's position as one-time part of a kingdom extending across the Irish Sea; see Mills, *Horn Childe and Maiden Rimmild*, pp.58-9.

Mi leue frende dere:  
Herken & 3e may here,  
& 3e wil vnderstonde,  
Stories 3e may lere  
Of our elders þat were  
Whilom in þis lond.

(1-6)

That this setting in English history refers specifically to the Anglo-Saxon past is soon reinforced by the appearance of a Danish army to fight the poem's first battle. The Viking activity depicted in this poem is of the acquisitive, opportunistic kind, and the Danes do not seem to be in search of conquest, only plunder:

Out of Danmark com an here  
Opon Inglond forto were,  
Wiþ stout ost & unride;  
Wiþ yren hates, scheld & spere:  
Alle her pray to schip þai bere,  
In Clifland bi Teseside.  
Schepe & nete to schip þai brouzt  
& al þat þai haue mouzt  
In herd is nouzt to hide.

(49-57)

As in *Havelok*, this interest in long-ago English history has a particular local dimension. While the geography of *King Horn* is famously impenetrable, with Horn's kingdom of Suddene having been identified as anywhere between south Denmark and the Isle of Man, *Horn Childe* makes it straightforward: Hafeolf is king of Northumbria, ruling "fram Humber norþ... into þe Wan See" (10-11), and the places named in the first part of the story are all located in the North Riding of Yorkshire. The site of the Danish landing is "Clifland bi Teseside" (54), the king feasts in York and Pickering, and the battles take place at various locations around Yorkshire. After Hafeolf's battle with the Danes at "Alerton More" (67), the poet includes an authenticating detail of the kind we have already seen in *Havelok*:

Þe Danis men were al slan,  
It bigan to mirke.

Whoso goþ or rideþ þerbi,  
ȝete may men see þer bones ly,  
Bi Seyn Sibiles Kirke.

(80-4)

The specificity of the references to places in Yorkshire is not matched in the rest of the story, which takes place in southern England, Wales and Ireland, and several of the Yorkshire locations find an echo in historical and legendary campaigns of the Viking Age. The reference to Scarborough in *Kormaks saga* has already been discussed; in *Heimskringla* Cleveland is named as the place where Harald harðráði landed in 1066 before fighting battles in York and Scarborough and meeting Harald Godwineson at Stamford Bridge,<sup>516</sup> while the version of the same story in *Hemings þáttr* additionally observes that the site of this landing was not far from the grave-mound of Ívarr.<sup>517</sup> Whether or not any of these traditions about Norse landings in Yorkshire lie behind the story of *Horn Childe*, the named locations in the poem serve the function of tying Hafeolf's career to places of local significance; it seems that at least the story of Hafeolf, if not the rest of the legend of Horn, has a function in local history somewhat as we find in *Havelok*.

Instead of using Scandinavian settlement as a foundation myth to bolster regional identity, however, *Horn Childe* takes an interest in Norse activity only in so far as it provides a stage to glorify the heroic behaviour of Hafeolf. The invading armies from Denmark and Ireland provide an alien aggressive force against whom Hafeolf proves himself as an ideal Anglo-Saxon king. The poem's emphasis on the importance of loyalty and the cowardice of flight is brought out strongly in scenes of preparation for battle such as the moment when Hafeolf hears that invaders have arrived in his land:

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<sup>516</sup> *Haralds Saga Sigurðarsonar*, ch. 83, in *Heimskringla*, vol. iii, pp.178-9.

<sup>517</sup> *Hemings þáttr*, p.46.

He bad þe harpouŕ leuen his lay:  
‘For ous bihoueþ anoþer play,  
Buske armour & stede.’  
He sent his sond niȝt & day,  
Also fast as he may,  
His folk to batayl bede.  
‘Bid hem þat þai com to me  
Al þat hold her lond fre,  
Help now at þis need.  
Better manly to be slayn  
Pan long to liue in sorwe & pain,  
Oȝain outlondis þede.’

(157-168)

After victory in battle, Hafeolf rewards his followers with gifts, and makes Horn’s companions swear an oath of loyalty to their young leader:

Pat ȝe schal neuer fram him fle,  
For gold no siluer, lond no fe,  
Oȝein outlondis here

(136-8)

In both cases a reference to an “outlondis” army helps to define laudable masculine behaviour within a paradigm of invasion and defence of the homeland. In this model Hafeolf is the supreme example of kingly virtue, and the invaders provide necessary antagonists against which the poem is able to characterise Hafeolf’s particular form of heroic kingship. The knightly virtues exhibited later in the poem by Horn in tournaments and quests undertaken for love are of a different nature, individual and personal rather than governed by the need for a collective defence of the nation.

The marked difference between these two sections of the poem, as well as the poet’s ability to deploy generically typical features of heroic literature – demonstrated not only in Hafeolf’s two speeches but also in the account of his death in battle – suggests an attempt to create a deliberate literary effect: it seems like conscious archaising, almost an antiquarian recreation of a particular ethic to fit the poem’s setting in the Anglo-Saxon past. The poem shows a particular interest in the trappings

of heroic society, which extends to a surprising awareness of Germanic literary tradition. Although there are some features which suggest the author's knowledge of French romance, particularly the Tristan legend,<sup>518</sup> the love between Horn and Rimmild is given less prominence in *Horn Childe* than in *King Horn*, although it remains important to the plot. The preoccupations of this poem are all military and it shows a special interest in descriptions of weapons and armour, which are invested with significance and often with glamour, as in the description of the army riding to war:

Pai busked hem wel hastily  
To com to þe kinges cri,  
Wiþin elleuen niȝt,  
Pat eueriche street & eueri sty  
Glised þer þai ridden by,  
Of her brinis briȝt.

(169-173)

In Horn's battle against his father's killer, a special point is made of his reclaiming Hafeolf's sword "Blauain" (804), and the sword becomes a symbol which links father and son, marking the moment when Horn achieves revenge for his father's death as a stage in his own maturity. This interest in weapons and armour notably distinguishes the poem from *Havelok*, in which the hero tends to fight with an axe or a club rather than a precious sword. *Horn Childe* is more concerned with large-scale battles than *Havelok* is: the single battle in *Havelok* is described in a perfunctory fashion, through a series of individual encounters which serve to illustrate the whole. Furthermore, although the other versions of the Havelok story have the hero's father dying in battle like Hafeolf, the English poem removes this detail so that Birkabeyn dies peacefully in his bed.

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<sup>518</sup> See ll.310-2, where it is said that Horn and Rimmild are more in love than any pair of lovers except Tristan and Isolde.

The most striking example of the poem's awareness of heroic convention is the sword given to Horn by Rimmild, of which she says:

It is þe make of Miming,  
Of al swerdes it is king  
& Weland it wrouzt.  
Bitterfer þe swerd hiȝt,  
Better swerd bar neuer kniȝt.  
(400-4)

This is one of three references to Weland in post-Conquest texts: the hero of the fifteenth-century romance *Torrent of Portyngale* also has a sword made by Weland, intriguingly named Hathelok, and Weland is briefly mentioned by Geoffrey of Monmouth as the maker of a goblet.<sup>519</sup> A poet who knew enough about heroic legend to name Weland as a smith, and thought it added to his presentation of the value of Horn's sword, may well have been able to recognise the generically typical features in the death of Hafeolf; there is a generic consciousness about the correlation of the heroic elements in the poem, and in this context a reference to Weland is part of an archaising approach which places a particular value on what is ancient and ancestrally handed down from "our elders".

### ***Havelok, Horn Childe* and narratives of vengeance**

*Horn Childe* is the work of a poet who is capable of effectively employing the conventions of heroic literature for his own purposes, adopting its style and ethics of behaviour while also alert to, and drawing deliberate parallels with, the generic features found in other romances. To turn from this text to *Havelok* is to become more aware of the extent to which the earlier poem, too, is a negotiation between alternative narrative traditions. To illustrate this point, it is instructive to compare one

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<sup>519</sup> For knowledge of Weland in Anglo-Saxon England, see Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England*, pp.13-16.

motif in *Horn Childe* and *Havelok*: the hero's duty of vengeance. The two legends have an exact structural parallel in this point, although the details differ: having grown up in exile, the hero's task as an adult is to avenge the wrongs which have been done to his family during his childhood. Although for both *Havelok* and *Horn* this act of vengeance also entails regaining the father's kingdom, the two actions are in fact carefully separated in both texts, though presented in reverse order: in *Havelok* he first wins control of Denmark and then subsequently gets revenge on Godard for his crimes, while *Horn* kills his father's slayer in Ireland and only after several other adventures proceeds to win back his kingdom.

Given all that we have seen about the heroic ethics of *Horn Childe*, it is not a surprise to find the duty of vengeance emphasised there. Unfortunately, the poor preservation of the text has left each of the two crucial episodes which would deal with this theme in a fragmentary state: both the combat in which *Horn* defeats his father's killer and the final battle in which he regains his father's kingdom have been lost due to the loss of leaves from the sole manuscript. However, one important passage survives in which *Horn* triumphantly proclaims how he has killed his enemy:

King Malkan was mi faders ban,  
& now for soþe Ich haue him slan,  
Ðe soþe forto sain.  
Mi fader swerd Y wan today,  
Y kepe it while Y liue may,  
Ðe name is Blauain.

(799-804)

This link between avenging his father's death and regaining his sword makes clear the importance of this motif as a symbol of *Horn*'s growth to adulthood: winning back his father's sword indicates that *Horn* is ready to regain his kingdom. The campaign to win this kingdom must have formed the dramatic climax of the poem, but all that now survives is the account of *Horn*'s preparations to return to his homeland:

Into Norþhumberland forto fare  
To winne þat his fader ware,  
Wiþ kniȝtes stiþe on stede.  
Wiþ erl, baroun & wiþ swain,  
To winne his fader lond oȝain,  
ȝif Crist him wold spede.

(1123-8)

At this point, comparison with *King Horn* helps to clarify the fundamental importance of the revenge motif to the story of Horn. There it is present from the very beginning, when as a child Horn is set adrift by his father's enemies who intend to drown him because they fear he will seek revenge for his father when he is grown up (105-116). When in Ireland, Horn undertakes a battle with a pagan knight on behalf of his new patron, and it is only in the course of the duel that he realises he is fighting his father's killer. The detail of the sword found in *Horn Childe* is not present here, but a similar function of equating the prowess of father and son is performed by a passage in which the pagan knights say they have never had such hard blows from anyone except King Murry (869-874). This comment also alerts Horn to the identity of his opponent:

Horn him gan to agrise  
And his blod arise.  
Bifore him saw he stonde  
That driven him of londe  
And that his fader slow.  
To him his sword he drow.

(875-880)

He makes the pagans flee, and kills them all:

To dethe he hem alle broghte:  
His fader deth well dere hi boghte

(891-2)

Horn has not undertaken this combat for the purposes of revenge, but the emphasis throughout the account of the battle is on the motive of vengeance. Towards the climax of the poem, when he sets out to regain his kingdom, this purpose is twinned with the final avenging of his father's death. He proclaims:

That lond I shall ofreche  
And do my father wreche  
(1293-4)

This double motive for returning to the hero's homeland is also present in *Havelok*, although here it is the murder of the hero's sisters and the treatment of Havelok himself which is to be revenged, not the father's death. The regaining of the kingdom is closely linked to the duty of vengeance, and both are tied to the hero's growth to maturity, marking the moment when he shows himself worthy to take his father's place. In *Havelok*, the subject of revenge is introduced before his return to Denmark, when he prays:

Haue merci of me, Louerd, nou!  
And wreke me yet on mi fo  
Pat Ich saw biforn min eyne slo  
Mine sistres with a knif  
And siþen wolde me mi lyf  
Haue reft, for in þe se  
Bad he Grim haue drenched me.  
(1363-1369)

He lists the wrongs Godard has done him, and this narrative is repeated a few lines later, again in Havelok's voice, as he presents the sons of Grim with his plan to return to Denmark. The recounting of Havelok's injuries takes thirty lines, and contains a declaration of his intent which links his growth to manhood and martial strength with his return to Denmark:

Forþi fro Denemark hider he [i.e. Grim] fledde,  
And me ful fayre and ful wel fedde,  
So þat [her] vnto þis day  
Haue Ich ben fed and fostred ay.  
But nou Ich am up to þat helde  
Cumen þat Ich may wepne welde,  
And Y may grete dintes yeue,  
Shal I neuere hwil Ich lyue  
Ben glad til þat Ich Denemark se!  
(1432-1440)

He goes on to ask Grim's sons to accompany him on his expedition, and promises to reward them richly (the end of his speech and their response are lost on the missing leaf of the manuscript). In both these speeches the emphasis is not placed on the treachery of Godard's seizing the kingdom, or the justice of Havelok's claim to rule Denmark, but the personal injuries done to Havelok and his family.<sup>520</sup> Godard's murder of Havelok's sisters does not appear in the Anglo-Norman *lai*, and may be an invention of the English poet; these later references back to the pathos of their deaths – usually including the formulaic reminder that they were slain “with a knif” and, in Havelok's speech to Grim's sons, the gruesome detail that they were cut into pieces (1412-5) – add a personal dimension to Havelok's return to Denmark, making it emphatically a quest of family vengeance as well as the regaining of an unjustly seized kingdom.

In the Danish part of the story, the poem separates out the two purposes of Havelok's return: first comes the lengthy episode in which he is recognised by Ubbe, (1626-2158), then he is accepted as king (2159-2364), and only then does he set out to get revenge on Godard. He swears a formal oath of vengeance on the book and altar in the presence of all his men:

He swor he ne sholde neuere blinne  
 Til þat he were of Godard wreken  
 (2368-9)

This vengeance is not carried out by Havelok himself, since Godard is judged and sentenced by an assembly of Danes, but the emphasis is again on his crimes against Havelok's family as much as his treachery: the assembly suggest to Havelok that Godard's crimes should be written above him on the gallows, with the inscription:

Dis is þe swike þat wende wel  
 Þe king haue reft þe lond il del,

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<sup>520</sup> See also 2395-8 and 2453-2460.

And hise sisters with a knif  
Boþe refte here lif

(2483-2486)

Similarly, after Godrich's death Goldburh says "nu Ich am wreke of mi fo" (2850).

The role of the revenge motif in *Havelok* is easily overlooked, perhaps because this poem is so much more concerned with institutional law and justice than the Horn poems are, but it is fundamental to the movement of the story between England and Denmark and central to Havelok's growth to adult maturity.

It may be significant, then, that the motif of personal revenge appears with remarkable frequency in legends about Danish settlement in England. In *Havelok* it helps to motivate the hero's return *from* England *to* Denmark, but the opposite scenario is put forward in a variety of sources to explain why certain Danes came (or returned to) England from Denmark. The vengeance motif is a consistent feature of the English legends about Ragnar loðbrók, which have already been discussed: in the story told by Roger of Wendover, the sons of Ragnar come to England to avenge the death of their father at the court of Edmund of East Anglia; in Gaimar's story of Beorn Butsecarl, a Danish army comes to invade Northumbria to avenge the rape of Beorn's wife. A closer parallel to *Havelok* is the story (which may be based on fact) that Svein Forkbeard's return to England in 1012 was motivated by vengeance for the death of his sister and her family in the St Brice's Day massacre; William of Malmesbury's telling of this story suggests some kind of tradition behind it,<sup>521</sup> and the likelihood that revenge was also part of Danish legends about the invasion is supported by Adam of Bremen's statement that Svein came to England to avenge his brother Hring, who ruled part of Northumbria but was betrayed and killed by the

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<sup>521</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ii.177, vol.i, pp.300-1. See Keynes, *Diplomas*, p.214, and Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p.380.

Northumbrians.<sup>522</sup> Similarly, Thorkell's raiding in England is said in the *Encomium Emmae* to have been motivated by a desire for revenge for his brother, who had been killed in England.<sup>523</sup> None of these stories is very close to the situation of child-murder presented in the Middle English *Havelok*, but they all reflect a similar desire to tell a narrative of military invasion and national conquest in solely personal terms, and in a way which encourages sympathy for the invader. It is possible that the poet of *Havelok* knew a story which sought to justify a Danish attack on England in this manner; the poem's repeated emphasis on the horrible crime, part of a sustained narrative strategy which works to increase the audience's sympathy for Havelok,<sup>524</sup> would fit well into this wider context of narratives about Danish invasion.

With this in mind, we may note one further possible similarity between a detail in *Havelok* and some narratives of the Danish conquest of 1014-16. The plot contrivance by which Havelok, while only a kitchen-boy, is forcibly married to the English princess Goldburh hinges on two elements: a verbal pun and a variation of the 'oath literally obeyed' motif. When King Athelwold is dying, he makes Godrich promise he will look after Goldburh until such time as she is old enough to marry, when

he schulde hire yeve  
 Þe heste man that micthe live,  
 Þe beste, fayreste, þe strangest ok

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<sup>522</sup> Adam of Bremen, ii.25, 51, pp.71, 90; see Lawson, *Cnut*, pp.29-30.

<sup>523</sup> *Encomium Emmae*, I:2; for discussion of the story see Campbell's comments at pp.73-4, Keynes, 'Cnut's earls', pp.54-60, and John, 'The *Encomium Emmae Reginae*', 68-70. The brother may have been named Heming: in *Jómsvíkinga saga* Thorkell has two brothers, Sigvaldi and Heming, and the later may be the Heming said by John of Worcester to have led an army to England in 1009 (*The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol.ii, pp.462-3). The story about Thorkell's revenge also appears in Scandinavian tradition: the *Legendary Saga of Oláfr helgi* (ch.9) says that Thorkell was seeking vengeance for his brother, who had been leader of the *þingamannalið* and was killed in England along with the whole army. In the Flateyjarbók supplement to *Jómsvíkinga saga*, 'Hemingr jarl, bróðir Þorkels háva' is said to be one of the leaders of the *þingamannalið*, and he is killed in London during an uprising against the Danes after the death of Svein. The supplement was edited by Campbell as an appendix to his edition of the *Encomium Emmae*, Appendix IV, pp.92-3.

<sup>524</sup> For discussion of this point see Liuzza, 'Representation and Readership', 512-3.

(Pat dede he him sweren on þe bok)  
(198-201)<sup>525</sup>

Athelwold's intention is that she should marry the highest nobleman in the land and then rule England as queen. After Athelwold's death, however, Godrich repents of his promise and imprisons Goldburh in a castle at Dover; at this point the poem leaves her lamenting her sorrow, and turns to Denmark to introduce Havelok. This first stage of the narrative concludes with a pious exclamation:

Of Goldeboru shul we nou laten,  
Pat nouth ne blinneth for-to graten  
Per sho liggeth *in* prisoun.  
Jhesu Crist, þat Lazarun  
To liue broucte fro dede-bondes,  
He lese hire wit hise hondes,  
And leue sho mo[te] him yse  
Heye hangen on galwe-tre  
Pat hire haued *in* sorwe brouth,  
So as sho ne misdede nouth.  
Sa[ye] we nou forth *in* hure spelle!  
(328-338)

Godrich's violation of his oath is recalled by the use of the word *heye*: rather than being married to the highest man in England, it is implied, Goldburh is left wishing she could see her treacherous guardian hanging high on the gallows.

The poem then goes on to tell of Havelok's childhood and the similar betrayal by his guardian; Goldburh is not mentioned again until the parliament at Lincoln brings Godrich into contact with Havelok. Havelok's extraordinary height has already been established:

For þanne he weren alle samen  
At Lincolne at þe gamen,  
And þe erles men woren al þore,  
Pan was Hauelok bi þe shuldren more  
Pan þe meste þat þer kam.  
Jn armes him noman nam  
Pat he doune sone ne caste.

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<sup>525</sup> The MS. reading in l.197 is *beste*, but this is clearly an error since the oath is repeated by Godrich at 1081-2; see Smithers, pp.91-2.

Havelok stod ouer hem als a mast.  
Als he was heie, al[s] he was long  
He was boþe stark and strong –  
Jn Engelond non hise per  
Of strengþe þat euere kam him ner.  
(980-991)

Hearing of Havelok's physical prowess, Godrich sees a way to fulfil the literal terms of his promise to Athelwold, while violating the spirit of the oath:

Þe knithes speken þer-of alle,  
So þat Godrich it herde wel,  
Þe speke of Havelok, eueri del –  
Hw he was strong man and hey,  
Hw he was strong, and ek fri,  
And þouthte Godrich, 'þoru þis knaue  
Shal Ich Engelond al haue,  
And mi sone after me,  
For so I wile þat it be!  
Þe king Apelwold me dide swere  
Vpon al þe messe-gere  
Pat I shude his douthe[r] yeue  
Þe hexte [man] þat mithe liue,  
Þe beste, þe fairest, þe strangest ok –  
Pat gart he me sweren on þe bok.  
Hwere mithe I finden ani so hey  
So Havelok is, or so sley?  
Pou I southe heþen into Ynde,  
So fayr, so strong, ne mithe Y finde.  
Havelok is þat ilke knaue  
þat shal Goldeborw haue!  
Þis þouthte with trechery,  
With traysoun, and wit felony:  
For he wende þat Havelok wore  
Sum cherles sone and no more.  
(1069-1093)

His treachery focuses on the potential ambiguity of the conditions he has agreed to: Havelok is physically "Þe beste, þe fairest, þe strangest" in England, though in a different social class from the noble husband envisioned by Athelwold for his daughter and heir. The fact that Havelok is the best man in England in ways unknown to Godrich, and therefore an entirely fitting partner for Goldburh, provides the passage with heavy irony. Emphasis is laid especially on the double meaning of the

superlative *hexte*: Athelwold's intention is clearly that Goldburh should marry the 'highest' man in England, in other words the man of the highest social status; Godrich maliciously chooses to interpret his promise to refer to the 'tallest' man, and in that sense there is no man "so hey / so Haelok is".

Havelok's height is, of course, a physical correlation of his *heye* nature, a literal embodiment of both his outstanding character and his royal birth. This is made clear to Goldburh when his true identity is revealed to her for the first time on her wedding night: Havelok's nobility is figured by his body in the light which streams from his mouth and the birthmark on his shoulder, causing her to exclaim:

Wat may þis bimene?  
He beth heyman yet, als Y wene:  
He beth heyman er he be ded!  
(1260-1262)

Goldburh's revelation is confirmed by the voice of an angel, assuring her that she is not "yeuen unkyndelike" (1251), as she had feared, but married to her social equal.

Godrich's duplicity with his oath is roundly condemned as treason, wickedness comparable to that of the arch-traitor Judas, and in explaining how he has exploited the dual meanings of *heye*, the poet draws attention to a third meaning, the appropriate punishment for such treachery:

He wende þat Haelok wer a þral –  
Per-þoru he wende hauen al  
Jn Engelond þat hire rith was.  
He was werse þan Sathanas  
Pat Iesu Crist in erþe shop –  
Hanged worþe he on an hok!  
(1098-1103)

Hanging features prominently in the poem's vituperations towards Godrich, but it is ironically the traitor himself who, in forcing Havelok to consent to marry Goldburh, threatens him by saying "J shal hangen þe ful heye" (1152). The three meanings of

*heye* are linked together at this moment in the poem: Havelok's physical height, an outward expression of his innate nobility, brings about his marriage to Goldburh despite Godrich's deliberate misinterpretation of his oath, while the third meaning – an appropriate punishment for treachery, to be hanged 'full heye' on the gallows – lurks in the background, a promise to the audience that Godrich will get his reward.<sup>526</sup>

The play on multiple meanings of 'high' is only implicit in other versions of the story. Gaimar has nothing resembling it, but something similar occurs in the traitor's speech in the *Lai*, where Havelok is described as "plus fort",<sup>527</sup> and in the version in the Anglo-Norman prose *Brut*: there the oath specifies that Goldburh should marry the "plus fort homme e plus vaillaunt" (2053-4), 'the strongest and most worthy man', and Havelok is described as follows:

E si estoit le plus haut, le plus fort, e le plus vaillaunt de corps de  
qi homme oi parler nule parte en cel temps.

[And indeed he was the tallest, the strongest, and the most stalwart of body of whom anyone had heard at this time.]<sup>528</sup>

The wordplay here (if indeed any is intended) centres on the overlap between the vocabulary of superlative physical strength and 'worth' in a more general sense, without the specific focus on Havelok's unusual height or on the punishment deserved by Godrich, both of which are peculiar to the English romance.

It may not be a coincidence that a similar example of wordplay on the word *heye* in a context of treason and ambiguous oaths occurs in some versions of a legendary narrative about the death of Eadric streona at the hands of Cnut. The English ealdorman Eadric, criticised in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for his disloyalty

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<sup>526</sup> In the end Godrich is not hanged for treachery, but burnt at the stake; the Danish traitor Godard is flayed alive and then hanged. For discussion of these punishments see W. R. J. Barron, 'The penalties for treason in medieval life and literature', *Journal of Medieval History* 7 (1981), 187-202 and Rouse, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.103-5.

<sup>527</sup> *Le Lai d'Haveloc*, ed. Bell, ll.351-375.

<sup>528</sup> *The Oldest Anglo-Norman Prose Brut Chronicle*, pp.180-1, ll.2061-2.

to the English cause during the years 1009-16, came over the course of the eleventh century to be accused of a variety of other treacherous crimes, including an involvement in the death of Edmund Ironside.<sup>529</sup> Eadric was briefly earl of Mercia under Cnut, but was executed along with a number of other Englishmen in 1017; the legend explains this fact by claiming that he was personally killed by the king or one of his men as retribution for his part in Edmund's murder. The details of the stories vary widely,<sup>530</sup> but several include a dialogue between the king and the murderer in which the crime is revealed, and the drama of the scene hinges on some form of ambiguous statement by Cnut which appears to promise reward for the murderer but in fact orders his death. In the *Encomium Emmae*, the earliest account of the story, Eadric is not directly accused of Edmund's murder – his crime is betraying Edmund by his duplicitous behaviour during the Danish conquest – but the element of the ambiguous promise is already present. The encomiast introduces the story by explaining Cnut's attitude to those among the English army who had betrayed Edmund:

Erat autem adhuc primaeva aetate florens sed tamen indicibili prudentia pollens. Unde contigit, ut eos quos antea Aedmundo sine dolo fideliter militare audierat diligeret, et eos quos subdolos scierat atque tempore belli in utraque parte fraudulenta tergiuersatione pendentes odio haberet, adeo ut multos principum quadam die occidere pro huiusmodi dolo iuberet. Inter quos Edricus, qui a bello fugerat, cum praemia pro hoc ipso a rege postularet, ac si hoc pro eius uictoria fecisset, rex subtristis, “Qui dominum,” inquit, “tuum decepisti fraude, mihine poteris fidelis esse? Rependam tibi condigna premia, sed ea ne deinceps tibi placeat fallatia.” Et Erico

<sup>529</sup> See Keynes, *Diplomas*, p.214; he observes that Eadric was accused of “an assortment of murders, base stratagems and acts of treachery”. Among other crimes, he was blamed for the murder of Svein's sister Gunhild and her family while they were in his custody as hostages in a peace-treaty (see *Flores Historiarum*, vol. i, pp.534-5). Eadric's reputation was known in Scandinavia: in *Heimskringla* he appears as Heinrekr strjóna, the murderer of King Edmund (*Oláfs saga helga*, ch. 26), and *Knýtlinga saga* says he accepted a bribe from Cnut to kill Edmund (*Knýtlinga saga*, ch.16).

<sup>530</sup> For a selection see Wright, *Cultivation of Saga*, pp.205-212, and Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest*, vol. i, Appendix DDD, pp.740-2. All versions of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* have only a brief notice along the lines of “On þisum geare wæs Eadric ealdorman ofslægen”, though F adds “on Lundene swyðe rihtlice” (‘in London, very justly’).

duce suo uocato, “Huic,” ait, “quod debemus persoluito, uidelicet, ne nos decipiat, occidito.” Ille uero nil moratus bipennem extulit, eique ictu ualido caput amputauit, ut hoc exemplo discant milites regibus suis esse fideles, non infideles.

[He was, however, as yet in the flower of youth, but was nevertheless master of indescribable wisdom. It was, accordingly, the case that he loved those whom he had heard to have fought previously for Eadmund faithfully without deceit, and that he so hated those whom he knew to have been deceitful, and to have hesitated between the two sides with fraudulent tergiversation, that on a certain day he ordered the execution of many chiefs for deceit of this kind. One of these was Eadric, who had fled from the war, and to whom, when he asked for a reward for this from the king, pretending to have done it to ensure his victory, the king said sadly, “Shall you, who have deceived your lord with guile, be capable of being true to me? I will return to you a worthy reward, but I will do so to the end that deception may not subsequently be your pleasure.” And summoning Eiríkr, his commander, he said: “Pay this man what we owe him; that is to say, kill him, lest he play us false.” He, indeed, raised his axe without delay, and cut off his head with a mighty blow, so that soldiers may learn from this example to be faithful, not faithless, to their kings.]<sup>531</sup>

The involvement of Eiríkr is an interesting detail here: it adds a plausible touch to the encomiast’s story, or at least suggests that his source was someone at the Anglo-Danish court who remembered the key players of 1016-17.<sup>532</sup> The moralisation on loyalty is presumably the encomiast’s own addition, but he may well have correctly identified one motive behind Eadric’s execution; in any case, it is easy to see how such a dramatically satisfying story might quickly have arisen about a man as unpopular as Eadric evidently was at the time of the Danish conquest. The story is favourable to Cnut and portrays him as Edmund’s avenger, an image which might well have been welcomed by the king, judging by his public veneration of Edmund: according to William of Malmesbury, Cnut visited the site of Edmund’s burial at Glastonbury one year (possibly 1032) on the anniversary of Edmund’s death and

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<sup>531</sup> *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. and trans. Campbell, pp.30-3.

<sup>532</sup> At the time the *Encomium* was written, Eiríkr had been dead (or at least absent from England) for nearly twenty years; his son Hákon had died in 1030, though Hákon’s widow and children were living in England until 1044, when they were exiled and returned to Denmark after a stay in Bruges (ASC D, s.a. 1045; *John of Worcester*, 1044).

presented a cloak decorated with peacocks at his tomb, and Cnut was in the habit of referring to Edmund as his brother.<sup>533</sup>

The great unpopularity of Eadric streona among English and Danes alike doubtless helped in the wide dissemination of stories of his death, and the tale appears in a large number of chronicle sources from the eleventh century onwards. Many feature lurid elaborations as to the manner of Edmund's death and the punishment of his murderer (who is sometimes not Eadric or his son, but one or more unnamed servants, for varying reasons): Gaimar has a lengthy story including a description of the elaborate machine used to kill Edmund,<sup>534</sup> while some versions have Eadric being thrown into the Thames with a catapult, or his head fixed on the Tower of London. The details of the ambiguous dialogue also differ, but several contain wordplay centring on the idea that Eadric's reward is to be made 'higher' than other men – but by being hanged for treason. Henry of Huntingdon's version is typical: there, after Eadric's son has killed Edmund, Eadric goes to Cnut and tells him what has happened:

Edricus igitur ad regem Cnut ueniens, salutauit eum dicens, 'Aue, solus rex.' 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.

[Then Eadric came to King Cnut and saluted him, saying, 'Hail, sole king!' When he 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.]<sup>535</sup>

In Walter Map's account almost everything else about the story is different – the murderer is a servant who is angry because Edmund has refused him the property of

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<sup>533</sup> *Gesta Regum*, ii.184, vol.i, pp.330-1; see Lawson, *Cnut*, pp.129-130.

<sup>534</sup> *Estoire des Engleis*, ll.4399-4482.

<sup>535</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, pp.360-3.

Minsterworth, near Gloucester, which Map himself held – but the ambiguous dialogue remains:

Properat et Chnuto seruus astat, et ait: ‘Salve, rex integer, qui semirex heri fuisti; et utinam auctorem tue remuneres integritatis, cuius manu sublatus est tuus hostis, et unicus euulsus e terra.’ Tunc rex, licet tristissimus, placido uultu retulit: ‘Deus bone! Quis michi tam amicus extitit, ut faciam eum precelsum pre consortibus suis?’ Seruus ait: ‘Ego.’ Tunc rex eum sublime<m> rapi fecit, et in altissima quercu suspendi, debito meritoque fine seruorum.

[The serf hastened to appear before Cnut and said: ‘Hail to you, whole king, who were yesterday but half a king; and may you recompense the author of your wholeness by whose hand your enemy has been removed and your one foe rooted out of the earth.’ The king, though much saddened, replied with unmoved face: ‘Good God! who has been so much my friend, that I may set him on high above all his fellows?’ ‘I’, said the serf. Then the king had him caught up on high and hanged on the tallest oak: the due and proper end of serfs.].<sup>536</sup>

The double-meaning word ‘high’ – *celsiorem*, in Henry’s version – appears as *heye* in the vernacular chronicle of Robert of Gloucester. There it is Eadric’s son who is guilty of the crime, and the king promises to give him his proper “mede” and make him a “hey mon”:

Pou seist soþ quap þe king . þou ast mucþe ydo vor me  
Icholle wel þin mede zelde . bi þe treuþe ich ou to þe  
Icholle make þe hey mon . bi time ich abbe iþoʒt  
Pat þou ne ssalt of þin lifelode . neuere carie noʒt.  
(6368-71)<sup>537</sup>

After telling of the death of Eadric, the chronicler helpfully explains exactly how

Cnut’s ambiguous promise to the son was carried out:

þe luþer traitour is sone . auauuced was ʒut bet  
Vor is robe & is dignete . was al wel bi set  
He ʒef him such auauucement . as he wolde he suor is oþ  
Pat he ne dorste neuer eft . carie of mete ne of cloþ  
A robe he let him ssape uerst . of blod red scarlet þere  
þe ssarpe stones bi þe stret . is tailors were  
Vor he let him mid hors to drawe . fram strete to strete  
Pat þe peces folle of is ffless . aboute moni & grete

<sup>536</sup> Walter Map, *De nugis curialium*, pp.430-3.

<sup>537</sup> *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, ed. William Aldis Wright, Rolls Series 86 (London, 1887), vol.i.

Þe tailors corue so moni peces . uor is robe ne ssolde pow3e  
 He ne dorste carie no3t . of þe winter cow3e  
 Suþþe he let smite of is heued . bi þe ssoldren as me sey  
 & let it sette vp on þe tour . of londone an hey  
 & so he was hey man ymad . as he bihet him to is mede  
 Alle traitours & louerd suiken . god late hom so spede.

(6386-98)

This version revels in the grim humour of the king's ambiguous promise, which is here extended to include such further details as a red robe (of blood), the double meaning of the promise that the traitor will no longer *carie of mete ne of cloþ*, and play on the word *auauncement* as well as *hey man*; the chronicler shares the bloodthirsty relish of his contemporary the *Havelok*-poet in describing the punishment meted out to traitors. Turville-Petre, comparing *Havelok* and Robert of Gloucester's *Chronicle* in their presentation of Danish invaders, observed that there are "mirror-image correspondences" in their narratives of the Danish conquest: in Robert's chronicle the savage Danes take advantage of English weakness, brought about by the treachery of Eadric, to establish an illegitimate rule. But in *Havelok*:

the golden age of Anglo-Saxon England under Edmund (in *Havelok* appearing as Athelwold) is destroyed by the traitor within, Eadric (the wicked Godric of the poem). The Danes under Cnut (now recast as Havelok) establish peace and justice once again, not by conquest or treachery this time, but – and this is the crucial difference – by just succession.<sup>538</sup>

Turville-Petre argues that the poet of *Havelok* intended to provide an alternative to the predominantly negative view of the Danes in contemporary chronicles, and suggests that the name Godrich for the villain of the English poem was chosen as a deliberate reference to Eadric, a particularly appropriate name for a traitor in an Anglo-Saxon context.<sup>539</sup> As the story of Eadric's death seems to have been widely known, it may

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<sup>538</sup> Turville-Petre, 'Representations of the Danelaw in Middle English Literature', pp.352-3.

<sup>539</sup> Scott Kleinman makes a different argument for the influence of Eadric on the character of Godrich: he notes a tendency in some later chronicles to equate Lindsey and Mercia and suggests that, as the equivalent to Godrich in Gaimar's version of the story is Edelsi, king of Lindsey, the name Godric may

be that some version of it inspired the repeated wordplay on the different meanings of *heye* in the English poem.

In closing, we may further briefly note that something not unlike the wordplay in *Havelok*, where *heye* in reference to the hero has the dual meanings ‘tall’ and ‘noble’, features in *Liðsmannaflokkr*: there it is said of Earl Thorkell ‘hár þykki mér... hinn jarl’, which seems to be a play on the earl’s nickname *hár* or *hávi*, ‘the tall’, a name well-attested in the later Scandinavian sources.<sup>540</sup> *Liðsmannaflokkr* can be contextualised with some degree of confidence to the Danish army in London in 1016-17, and this is exactly the time and place in which Eadric’s execution is most plausibly located; it is the context in which stories about his death must first have begun to circulate.<sup>541</sup> However, this may simply be coincidence, and in the absence of early vernacular forms of the story, it is difficult to attach much meaning to the specific word rather than the general theme of the wordplay.

## Conclusions

Recently, in drawing attention to a brief fourteenth-century Lincolnshire reference to a lost legend of ‘Drogo the sheriff’, Stephen Marritt has emphasised the importance of seeing Anglo-Scandinavian culture in this region as a living tradition, not a matter of survival and memory: “in Lincolnshire there was an extensive literary, and probably oral, tradition which drew, variously, on Anglo-Scandinavian material, tradition and

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have been chosen by analogy with Eadric, earl of Mercia. See Kleinman, ‘The Legend of Havelok the Dane’, 268-271. A parallel between the two traitors is also mentioned in passing in Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, p.153.

<sup>540</sup> Poole translates the line ‘‘This earl... seems to me outstanding’, noting that *hár* is an ‘‘honourable general epithet’’, and that *Liðsmannaflokkr* seems to play on the epithets which were to become conventionally attached to Thorkell and Cnut in later Norse literature (Cnut’s epithet is *riki*, ‘the powerful, the great’); see *Viking Poems on War and Peace*, p.99.

<sup>541</sup> The *Encomium* does not mention the place of Eadric’s death; ASC F places it at London, and the Worcester Chronicle adds that Eadric’s body was thrown over the city wall (*Chronicle of John of Worcester*, vol.ii, pp.504-5). Later versions of the story almost universally locate it in London.

continued contact”.<sup>542</sup> Although we cannot be certain exactly which narratives about Scandinavian settlement and conquest were known to the poet of *Havelok* or his audience, it would appear that the poem, interested in the history of Danish settlement as a foundational myth for Lincolnshire, chooses to situate its Danish hero within a wider nexus of legendary material about Scandinavians in England; rather than attempting, as early criticism of the poem did, to identify these narratives as *sources* for various elements of the poem, it is more helpful to think of such stories as part of its imaginative context, a kind of mental hinterland of narrative material.

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<sup>542</sup> Stephen Marritt, ‘Drogo the sheriff: a neglected lost romance tradition and Anglo-Norwegian relations in the twelfth century’, *Historical Research* 80:208 (2007), 157-184 (184).

## Conclusion

Recent studies of Scandinavian settlement in England have emphasised the importance of focusing attention on the process of migration and settlement, and not just its consequences;<sup>543</sup> in other words, attempting to theorize the social behaviours which gave rise to the Scandinavian migration, influenced its nature and distribution, and determined its long-term impact on England. In this respect, the literary sources agree with the modern historians: there is considerable evidence for a body of narrative material existing in medieval England which shows an interest in the process of migration and settlement of Danes in England. This material offers a variety of legendary narratives to explain how people of Danish birth came to settle in England: whether they are in search of revenge, or seeking to claim their birthright, or led by divine providence like Siward, or merely want to pursue their trade in peace, like Grim and his family in *Havelok*, their behaviour is firmly motivated and satisfactorily explained within the world of the narrative. At one level all the traditions which we have considered as belonging to an Anglo-Scandinavian milieu fulfil the function of origin myths for that hybrid culture, answering the question which has occupied historians for the past century or more: why did the Danes come to England, and what impact did their presence have?

Unsurprisingly, the answer given is usually a positive or at least a self-justificatory one, implicitly rejecting the view of Danish activity in England as primarily rapacious and destructive. An impulse to mythologize the Danish settlement in this way may have taken root at an early date in the oral literature of the Danelaw, as the legends surrounding the Ragnarssons suggest; we may wonder

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<sup>543</sup> See for instance Simon Trafford, 'Ethnicity, Migration Theory, and the Historiography of the Scandinavian Settlement of England', in Hadley and Richards, eds., *Cultures in Contact*, pp. 20-1.

whether such legends survive most notably from East Anglia and the southern Danelaw because that area, where the density of Scandinavian settlement was relatively low, saw fiercer competition between alternative narratives about Danish activity. The role of such exculpatory legends in the political strategy of Cnut as king of England is clear: the records of his public acts, particularly his policy towards the church, suggest that these narratives worked to place Cnut's reign within a history of Anglo-Scandinavian interaction, on the one hand emphasising that there was historical precedent for his rule – and thus legitimacy – in previous Danish invasions of England, and repeating the triumphs of the king's own conquest, but on the other hand dissociating himself from the worst crimes attributed to the Danes. As a result of the mutual cultural accommodation which characterised the relationship between Cnut's followers and the English hierarchy, this was a fruitful period for the transmission of Scandinavian narrative material into contexts where it was likely to be recorded and preserved. At the same time, such narratives must have circulated in oral tradition, and of these we may assume that only a tiny part has survived. Using written sources as evidence for a culture and literature which remained predominantly oral is a risky endeavour, but this thesis has aimed to show that a close study of the transmission of particular groups of narratives can nonetheless help to shed some light on the impact of Anglo-Scandinavian traditions on literature in England.

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