The Cerne Giant in Its Early Medieval Context

By Thomas Morcom and Helen Gittos

Abstract:
The recent dating of the Cerne Abbas Giant came as a surprise. This huge, naked figure was cut into a Dorset hillside not, as many have supposed, in prehistory, nor in the early modern period, but in the early Middle Ages. This means that for the first time it is possible to place the Cerne Giant within a cultural context. In this article, we propose an explanation for when and why he was originally cut as an image of Hercules. We also argue that, contrary to conventional views, he *is* referred to in an early medieval source and that this, in turn, helps to demonstrate that by the eleventh century he was being reinterpreted in a surprising way, as Saint Eadwold. This is only one example of many such reimaginings, among which one of the most enduring is that he is neither classical hero nor saint but instead an image of the pagan god Helith. We end by showing how that idea came into being.

New Dating Evidence

The Cerne Giant is a massive image of a naked man carved into the chalk bedrock of a hillside above the village of Cerne Abbas (Fig. 1). He stands almost 60m high, brandishing a club in his right hand, with his left arm outstretched. His feet are turned towards his right, as if walking. His bald head is tear-drop shaped, with eyes, eyebrows, nose, and mouth. On his naked torso are depicted an erect penis, nipples,

This paper came out of conversations in response to the National Trust press release about the new dates for the giant. We are extremely grateful to Martin Papworth for generously sharing the results and discussing them with us. David Musgrove at BBC HistoryExtra gave us the opportunity to talk about our ideas at an early stage. Our thoughts have been shaped by comments from, and conversations with, many people. Moira and Brian Gittos contributed significantly through sharing their knowledge of the area, discussing arguments as they developed, helping with the logistics of visits, and commenting on the text. It has been huge fun to work with John Charman, Michael Shapland, Harriet Still, Hugh Willmott, and Andrew Ziminski and to explore Cerne and develop a wider research project on the village and its surroundings. It has also been a tremendous pleasure to get to know some of the people who live in Cerne who have been generous in sharing both their knowledge and hospitality, notably Jonathan and Jane Still, Janet and Paul Gleeson, Gordon and Elizabeth Bishop, John Chalker, Robin Mills, Chris Copson, Bob and Sue Foulser, and other members of the Cerne Historical Society. We learned a great deal from Tim Tatton-Brown, who shared his thoughts about Cerne. Barbara Yorke provided many suggestions and references as well as encouragement. Lloyd Bosworth kindly made the maps that accompany this article. We have also benefited from discussions with and/or help from Stuart Ackland, John Baker, John Blair, Stuart Brookes, Derek Craig, Ruby Ellis, Paul Everson, the Finch Lewis family, Richard Gem, Alan Gittos, Michael Hare, Andy, James, and Robyn Hudson, Peter Jones, Tristan Lake, Ryan Lavelle, Rosalind Love, Harry Mawdsley, Llewellyn Morgan, Julian Munby, Claire Pinder, Carole Raddato, Andrew Reynolds, Adrián Rodríguez, Sarah Semple, Harriet Soper, David Stocker, Jo Story, Jo Thomas, Kyle A. Thomas, and Alex Wilson.

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Fig. 1. The Cerne Abbas Giant, Cerne Abbas, Dorset, England. Photo: Ray Gaffney. Copyright National Trust. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

ribs, a belt, and a belly button; the latter appears to have been incorporated into his penis in 1908, making his phallus more prominent now than it was originally.[1]

There have been discussions for centuries about when the Cerne Giant was first carved. In 1996, a trial was held in the village hall to test three arguments: that it was cut in prehistory or in the early Romano-British period; that it was carved in the seventeenth century; and that its origins matter less than its subsequent biography.[2] With no conclusive evidence to go on, Martin Papworth, senior archaeologist for the National Trust, set out to try to find some. In spring 2020, he worked with Mike Allen and Philip Toms to date the monument using a technique called optically stimulated luminescence (OSL) together with environmental analysis of the soils. OSL is a method for dating when minerals, in this case the quartz in the chalk, were last exposed to sunlight. This might be because the quartz crystals were covered over either by hillwash or by newly deposited chalk placed on top. The technology has been used since the 1980s, especially for dating layers of sediment but

[1] Timothy Darvill, "The Cerne Giant: An English Hill-Figure," and William Keithley, Martin Papworth, and David Thackray, "Owning and Managing a Giant," in Timothy Darvill, Katherine Barker, Barbara Bender, and Ronald Hutton, *The Cerne Giant: An Antiquity on Trial*, Bournemouth University School of Conservation Sciences, Occasional Paper 5 (Oxford, 1999), 7–17 and 18–26, esp. 18.

[2] Darvill, Barker, Bender, and Hutton, *The Cerne Giant*.

also brick and mortar. Studies that have checked OSL dates with independent dating methods have demonstrated their reliability.[3] In order to take soil samples, four small trenches were cut across the upper line of the giant's elbows and the soles of his feet.[4] We await the final publication of the results, but nonetheless it is clear that they reveal a great deal about how and when the giant was originally constructed and subsequently maintained. This article is intended to help contextualize the archaeological evidence, and it has already led to the initiation of new research on the history of this rather extraordinary place.[5]

Initially, the outlines of the giant were lightly scooped out as terraces about 65cm wide and 15cm deep into the natural chalk of the hillside.[6] Without maintenance, rain and rabbits would gradually fill in the outlines with soil. As a comparison, a white horse cut into chalk near Uffington (Berkshire) in the 1860s, and not thereafter maintained, was still visible in 1922 but had disappeared by 1949.[7] The Cerne Giant was maintained in two ways:

- By scouring the chalk to clean it of hillwash and overgrowth.
- Or, more labor intensively, by also bringing in chalk from elsewhere and packing it into the trenches.

The former leaves less trace than rechalking, although because only the outline is kept clean, the hillwash builds up by the sides of the outlines, so there is more archaeological evidence than one might think. The stratigraphy shows that after the initial cutting, silt washed down the hillside and filled the shallow trenches. There was then a major effort to rechalk the giant using "chunky chalk" which survives to a depth of 35cm and includes pieces of flint within it (Figs. 2, 3).[8] After this, more silt accumulated, followed by another rechalking, this time also using "chunky chalk" but from a different source which contained no flint.[9] Above that, there are layers of rammed chalk of different textures, of which the most recent ones can be identified with known rechalkings, especially the most recent ones in 1956,

[3] Geoff A. T. Duller, *Luminescence Dating: Guidelines on Using Luminescence Dating in Archaeology* (Swindon, 2008), and Andrew S. Murray and Jon M. Olley, "Precision and Accuracy in the Optically Stimulated Luminescence Dating of Sedimentary Quartz: A Status Review," *Geochronometria* 21 (2002): 1–16.

[4] Martin Papworth, "Cerne Abbas Giant: Four Excavation Trenches and Interim Report of OSL Dating," *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society* 142 (2021): 239–40.

[5] This is being led by Helen Gittos and Hugh Willmott.

[6] For this and what follows here see Papworth, "Cerne Abbas Giant," and some additional references given below.

[7] David Miles, Simon Palmer, Gary Lock, Chris Gosden, and Anne Marie Cromarty, *Uffington White Horse and Its Landscape: Investigations at White Horse Hill, Uffington, 1989–95, and Tower Hill, Ashbury, 1993–4*, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph 18 (Oxford, 2003), 76.

[8] Papworth, "Cerne Abbas Giant"; Martin Papworth, "Cerne 7: Naming of Parts," *Archaeology National Trust South West* (blog), *National Trust*, 25 March 2020, https://archaeologynationaltrustsw.wordpress.com/2020/03/25/cerne-7-naming-of-parts/ (last accessed 10 September 2021); and Martin Papworth, "Cerne Giant: The OSL Dates," *Archaeology National Trust South West*, 12 May 2021, https://archaeologynationaltrustsw.wordpress.com/2021/05/12/cerne-giant-the-osl-dates/ (last accessed 4 October 2021).

[9] Papworth, "Cerne 7: Naming of Parts."



Fig. 2. Excavations in progress showing the trench through the giant's left foot, 2020, Cerne Abbas, Dorset, England. Photo: Martin Papworth. Copyright National Trust. See the online edition for a color version of this image.



Fig. 3. A section down to the lower chunky chalk cut into the geological chalk, 2020, Cerne Abbas, Dorset, England. Photo: Martin Papworth. Copyright National Trust. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

1978, 1995, 2008, and 2019.[10] In other words, the giant has been largely kept visible through scouring, except for two major rechalkings; it is only within recent times that regular rechalking has become the preferred method of maintenance.

The OSL dates are useful because they give us information about the early stages of the chronology. They cannot precisely date when the figure was cut, but rather when the silt began to accumulate within his outlines and when the hillwash built up downslope of them.[11] The dates indicate that the outlines of the giant were silting up in the period 700–1110 AD, with a midpoint date of 905 (this date comes from his right elbow). This is confirmed by a second sample, from the silt in the bottom of the trench in his right foot, which gave dates of 650–1310 AD, with a midpoint date of 980. These early medieval dates are confirmed by two other samples from higher up in the stratigraphy which both have a midpoint date of the mid-thirteenth century.[12] They are also supported by the analysis of snail shells in the soils, which reveals that the early levels contain snails first introduced into Britain in the Middle Ages.[13] It is therefore most likely that the giant was cut in the early Middle Ages

[10] Papworth, "Cerne Abbas Giant"; Martin Papworth, "Dating the Cerne Giant: Results!" *Archaeology National Trust South West*, 9 May 2021, https://archaeologynationaltrustsw.wordpress.com/2021/05/09/dating-the-cerne-giant-results (last accessed 10 September 2021); and Keithley, Papworth, and Thackray, "Owning and Managing a Giant," 18–26.

[11] Miles et al., *Uffington White Horse*, 77.

[12] P. S. Toms, "Optical Dating of Sediments: Cerne Abbas Giant, UK," University of Gloucestershire Luminescence Dating Laboratory, 5 March 2021 (unpublished report); Papworth, "Cerne Giant: The OSL Dates"; and Papworth, "Cerne Abbas Giant."

[13] Papworth, "Cerne Abbas Giant," 240, and Rebecca Mead, "The Mysterious Origins of the Cerne Abbas Giant," *New Yorker* 97, no. 13 (24 May 2021), https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/05/24/the-mysterious-origins-of-the-cerne-abbas-giant (last accessed 6 September 2023).

rather than earlier or later, although it could have happened anytime within the period of c. 700–1100. The dates also suggest that he was not much cleaned after having been initially cut but that he was then substantially rechalked.

An early medieval date certainly fits with the form of his face. The distinctive tear-drop shape is akin to other human faces in Anglo-Saxon art, such as the ones on the Sutton Hoo scepter, the Finglesham buckle, and figurines from Kent and East Anglia (Figs. 4–7).[14] There are some parallels for this shape from Scandinavia, but it is quite different from classical models, and it is less common from the eighth century onwards.[15] An early medieval date also fits with recent work on the depiction of human forms in this period. Images of naked human bodies began to be produced from the seventh century onwards, and males tended not to be depicted completely naked but often as wearing a belt.[16] It is not clear whether the lines beneath the giant's ribs were meant to indicate the base of his torso, as is often shown on classical images, or the line of his belt; a LiDAR survey suggests they did once extend right across his torso and, if so, are likely to be a belt.[17] For these reasons, the physical form of the Cerne Giant is compatible with the new dating.

However, the dating evidence produced by these excavations came as a shock—to the archaeologists involved, to the local community, and to the interested public.[18] It also came as a surprise to those of us who study the early Middle Ages. In what follows, we demonstrate that an Anglo-Saxon context for the giant's creation makes good sense.

Hercules

At first glance, an early medieval date seems odd for a figure which looks like the classical god Hercules. The resemblance has been recognized since at least the mid-eighteenth century, when the giant was identified as "our High Admiral Hercules" by William Stukeley.[19] Stuart Piggott in the 1930s made the case more fully, and the giant is now accepted as an image of Hercules in the *Lexicon iconographicum*

[14] For discussion of depictions of the human form with lots of illustrations see Lisa Brundle, *Image and Performance, Agency, and Ideology: Representations of the Human Figure in Funerary Contexts in Anglo-Saxon Art, AD 400–680* (Oxford, 2019), and Tristan Nicholas Lake, "Fleshing Out the Body: Nakedness and the Human Body in the Visual Culture of Early 'Anglo-Saxon' England (5th–7th Centuries AD)" (PhD diss., University of Durham, 2021), 364–90.

[15] There are many illustrations of human faces in Benjamin C. Withers and Jonathan Wilcox, ed., *Naked before God: Uncovering the Body in Anglo-Saxon England*, Medieval European Studies 3 (Morgantown, 2003); Leslie Webster, *Anglo-Saxon Art: A New History* (Ithaca, NY, 2012); Brundle, *Image and Performance*; and Lake, "Fleshing out the Body."

[16] Brundle, *Image and Performance*, 118–26; Lisa Brundle, "Exposed and Concealed Bodies: Exploring the Body as Subject in Metalwork and Text in 7th-Century Anglo-Saxon England," *Medieval Archaeology* 64/2 (2020): 193–225; and Lake, "Fleshing out the Body," 214–20, 542–52.

[17] Papworth, "Dating the Cerne Giant: Results!"

[18] "After 12 months of scientific analysis, the National Trust can for the first time reveal the likely age of the Cerne Giant, Britain's largest and perhaps best-known chalk hill figure," National Trust press release, 12 May 2021; Papworth, "Cerne Giant: The OSL Dates"; and Mead, "Mysterious Origins."

[19] William Stukeley, "The Cerne Giant," *Minute Book of the Society of Antiquaries of London* 9 (1764): 199–200.



Fig. 4. The face of the Cerne Giant, Cerne Abbas, Dorset, England. Photo: Mark Way, CC BY-ND 2.0, via Flickr. See the online edition for a color version of this image.



Fig. 5. Face on the "scepter" from Sutton Hoo, early seventh century, Suffolk, England. London, British Museum, 1939,1010.160. Photo: Copyright Trustees of the British Museum. See the online edition for a color version of this image.



Fig. 6. Face on a buckle from Finglesham, seventh century, Kent, England. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, LI1326.23. Photo: Copyright Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford. See the online edition for a color version of this image.



Fig. 7. Face on a figurine from Carlton Colville, seventh century, Suffolk, England. London, British Museum 2001,0902.1. Photo: Copyright Trustees of the British Museum. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

mythologiae classicae.[20] The club is the clue. Hercules was one of the most frequently depicted figures in the classical world, and his distinctively knotted club acted as an identificatory label, like the keys of Saint Peter or the wheel of Saint Catherine.[21] He was usually depicted in motion, as at Cerne, and the ribs, lower line of the stomach, and nakedness are all typical (Figs. 8–13).

Alongside his club, he was most often associated with his lionskin mantle, and it is likely that one of these originally hung from the giant's left arm.[22] Of all the various poses he tended to be depicted in, the outstretched position of the giant's left arm fits best with those where the mantle was draped over it (Figs. 9–10).[23] By contrast, when he is wielding his club in his right hand and a bow in his left, he tends to look down the shaft of the arrow rather than straight ahead.[24] The images of the constellation Hercules always have him with one leg bent, quite unlike the pose at Cerne. It is also unlikely to have been a more complex image, such as his leading the mare of Diomedes or holding the Hydra, especially given that the archaeology shows the original image has been little altered in the areas examined and the LiDAR survey does not show significant evidence for other features.[25] His full-frontal stance, though, is reminiscent of the unusual pose of an early third-century plaque from Corbridge, probably Hercules holding the Hydra (Fig. 11).[26] It is also akin to the pose on many of the third-to-fourth-century monuments, both stelae and altars, from the Gallo-Roman sanctuary of Hercules at Deneuvre in northeast France (Figs. 12, 13).[27] His erect penis is unusual, but there are examples of ithyphallic images of Hercules, particularly from Roman Britain, including statuettes found in Colchester (Fig. 10), London, and Verulamium.[28] And it fits with Hercules himself: the mortal failings of the great hero included greed, anger, pride—and lust.[29] It therefore seems

[20] Stuart Piggott, "The Hercules Myth – Beginnings and Ends," *Antiquity* 12 (1938): 323–31, and *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae* (hereafter *LIMC*), 8 vols. (Zürich, 1988), 5.1:254, 262: "The ithyphallic figure, basically an apotropaic symbol, emphasizes either his fecundity or lust, well attested in myth."

[21] John Boardman et al., "Herakles," in *LIMC* 4.1:728–838, 4.2:444–559 (plates), 5.1:1–253, 5.2: 6–186 (plates); L. J. Balmaseda, "Hercules (in peripheria occidentali)," in *LIMC*, 5.1:254–62; 5.2:186–88 (plates); Amy Smith, "Classical Art," in *The Oxford Handbook of Heracles*, ed. Daniel Ogden (Oxford, 2021), 345–68; and Raimund Wünsche, ed., *Herakles—Herkules, Staatliche Antikensammlungen München* (Munich, 2003).

[22] Darvill, "Cerne Giant," 11.

[23] Boardman et al., "Herakles," in *LIMC*, 4.2: nos. 305 (Roman), 419, 509.

[24] Examples include Boardman et al., "Herakles," in *LIMC*, 4.2: nos. 26, 28, 29, 30, and 1087, although 1093 looks more centrally.

[25] Papworth, "Dating the Cerne Giant: Results!"

[26] Boardman et al., "Herakles," in *LIMC*, 5.1: no. 2069, and E. J. Phillips, *Corpus of Sculpture of the Roman World: Great Britain*, vol. 1/1, *Corbridge, Hadrian's Wall East of the North Tyne* (Oxford, 1977), no. 6, p. 3–4.

[27] Gérard Moitrieux, *Hercules salutaris: Hercule au sanctuare de Deneuvre (Meurthe-et-Moselle)*, Études lorraines d'archéologie nationale 2 (Nancy, 1992), pl. 10–27.

[28] Colchester, England, Colchester Museum Collections, COLEM 1936.901A; London, Museum of London G22143; Lynn F. Pitts, *Roman Bronze Figurines from the Civitates of the Catuvellauni and Trinovantes*, BAR British Series 60 (Oxford, 1979), 28–29, 61–64, 108–09 (nos. 58–60, 62, 66, 70, 275); and Emma Durham, "Depicting the Gods: Metal Figurines in Roman Britain," E-Monograph 28, *Internet Archaeology* 31 (2012): https://doi.org/10.11141/ia.31.2.

[29] Boardman et al., "Herakles," in *LIMC*, 4.1:728.



Fig. 8. Roman gilded statue of Hercules, second century BC, Rome, Italy. Rome, Musei Capitolini, MC1265. Photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

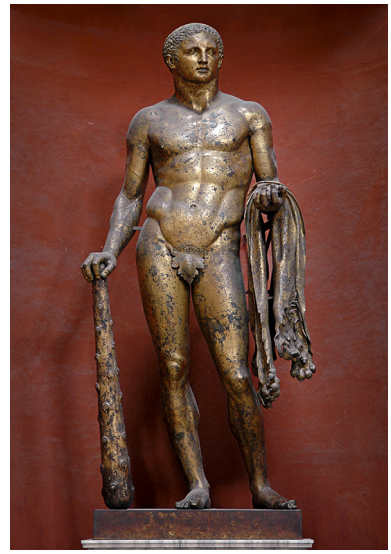


Fig. 9. Roman gilded statue of Hercules, second century AD, Rome, Italy. Rome, Pio-Clementino Museum, MV.252.0.0. Photo: Sergey Sosnovskiy, CC BY-SA 4.0. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

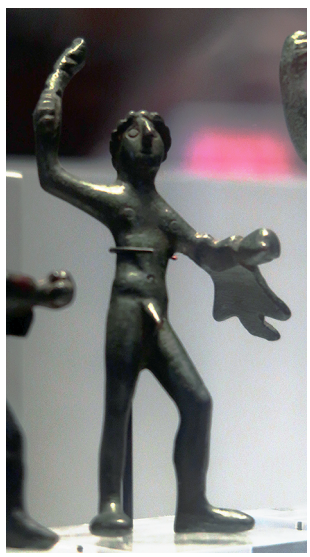


Fig. 10. Statuette of Hercules, Colchester, England. Colchester, Colchester Collections, 1936.901A. Photo: Helen Gittos. See the online edition for a color version of this image.



Fig. 11. Sculpture depicting Hercules, late Roman, Corbridge, England. Corbridge Roman Town Museum, DP045083. Photo: Copyright Carole Raddato. See the online edition for a color version of this image.



Fig. 12. Sculpture depicting Hercules, late Roman, Deneuvre, France. Deneuvre, Musée Les sources d'Hercule, S.A.8. Photo: Copyright Carole Raddato. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

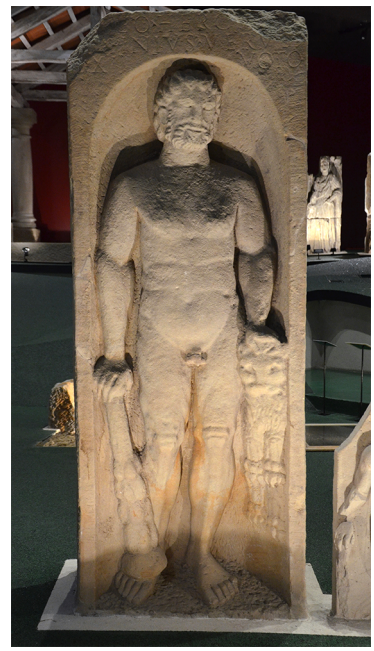


Fig. 13. Sculpture depicting Hercules, late Roman, Deneuvre, France. Deneuvre, Musée Les sources d'Hercule, A.A 359. Photo: Copyright Carole Raddato. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

clear that the Cerne Giant was cut as an image of Hercules, standing alone, carrying his emblematic club above his head, his left hand held out, probably once having his mantle draped over it, following local iconographic traditions.

Hercules was always complex. He was a model for manly might, courage, and both physical and mental strength, a hero fit for emperors to ally themselves with, as did Caracalla (198–217 AD) among others. Theodoric, in the sixth century, had ambitions to build a ceremonial hall at his palace in Ravenna in Hercules's honor.[30] Hercules was also, though, a man who "went insane, killing his first wife and children, feasted and imbibed to an epic degree, and exhibited an almost legendary promiscuity."[31] His polysemous character, capable of sustaining many readings, contributed to his continued popularity.[32]

[30] Stefanie A. H. Kennell, "Hercules' Invisible Basilica (Cassiodorus, *Variae* I, 6)," *Latomus* 53/1 (1994): 159–75.

[31] Kennell, "Hercules' Invisible Basilica," 167.

[32] Boardman et al., "Herakles," *LICM*, 4.1:728, 730, and Ogden, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Heracles*, esp. essays by Ogden, "Labor IV: The Erymanthian Boar (and Pholus)," 71–79; Ogden, "Labor VII: The Cretan Bull," 107–12; Ogden, "Labor VIII: The Mares of Diomede (and Alcestis)," 113–23; and Alexandra Eppinger, "The Early Christian Heracles," 522–39.

Hercules in the Early Middle Ages

We can, therefore, be pretty sure that at some stage in the eighth, ninth, or tenth centuries, a gigantic, instantly recognizable image of Hercules was cut into the chalk of this Dorset hillside. The question is: why?

Interest in Hercules did not end in antiquity. He continued to be a well-known cultural figure throughout the Middle Ages.[33] As in the classical past, he remained a character about whom views varied. At one extreme, he was a Christ-like figure, who defeated death, overcame the guardian of the underworld, Cerberus, and was rejuvenated by eating apples from the tree of the Hesperides. At another extreme, he was a personification of vice. And sometimes he was portrayed more ambivalently as a mortal hero, not a god, whose great deeds could be emulated in spite of his depravity.[34]

It is that sort of complex portrayal of him which is found in the *Liber monstrorum de diversis generibus* [Book of Monsters of Various Kinds]. This text survives in five manuscripts written in the ninth and tenth centuries, and Michael Lapidge has argued that it was originally composed in the period of c. 650–750, either by Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury, or, more likely, by a colleague or pupil of his.[35] This is intriguing in relation to Cerne because Aldhelm ended his career as bishop of Sherborne in 706–709/10—only ten miles from Cerne (Fig. 15).[36] Hercules features three times in the *Liber monstrorum*, first as a monster himself:

> Who does not admire [or "wonder at"] the courage and weaponry of Hercules, who, at the western entrance to the Mediterranean, erected pillars of an amazing size as a spectacle for the human race, and who constructed trophies of his wars in the East by the Indian Ocean, as a memorial for posterity, and afterwards travelled in battles through almost the entire world, and spattered the earth with so much blood, and at the point of death wrapped himself in flames to be consumed?[37]
>
> (1.12)

[33] Ogden, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Heracles*, esp. Eppinger, "The Early Christian Heracles," and Emma Stafford, "The Reception of Heracles," 540–56; Ruth Webb, *Demons and Dancers: Performance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA, 2008), 58, 63, 64, 78, 99, 151; Jacob A. Latham, *Performance, Memory, and Processions in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, UK, 2016), 219; and Kennell, "Hercules' Invisible Basilica," 167–71. This is not, though, well represented in the otherwise excellent G. Karl Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme: The Adaptations of the Hero in Literature from Homer to the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1972), and not much discussed in Emma Stafford, *Herakles* (London, 2012), 202–06.

[34] Eppinger, "The Early Christian Heracles," and Alexandra Eppinger, "*Hercules cinaedus*? The Effeminate Hero in Christian Polemic," in *TransAntiquity: Cross-Dressing and Transgender Dynamics in the Ancient World*, ed. Domitilla Campanile, Filippo Carlà-Uhink, and Margherita Facella (London, 2017), 202–14.

[35] Michael Lapidge, "'Beowulf', Aldhelm, the 'Liber Monstrorum' and Wessex," *Studi medievali* 23 (1982): 150–92, at 163–76.

[36] Michael Lapidge, "Aldhelm [St Aldhelm] (d. 709/10), Abbot of Malmesbury, Bishop of Sherborne, and Scholar," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, 2004), 619–23.

[37] "Quis Herculis fortitudinem et arma non miretur, qui in occiduis Tyrrheni maris faucibus columnas mirae magnitudinis ad humani generis spectaculum erexit, quique bellorum suorum tropaea in Oriente iuxta Oceanum Indicum ad posteritatis memoriam construxit, et postquam paene totum orbem cum bellis peragrasset et terram tanto sanguine maculauisset, sese moriturum flammis ad deuorandum inuoluit." Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the "Beowulf"-Manuscript* (Cambridge, UK, 1995; repr. Toronto, 2003), 114, 264–67.

Later on, he appears again as a slayer of monsters—the Nemean lion (2.1), the Hydra, and other snakes (3.3, 3.20).[38] Hercules is also mentioned in the early glossaries, where he is glossed as "fortis." "Herculaneus" was also glossed as "eunuchus," which probably relates to the stories about his time in Queen Omphale's court when he dressed as a woman and undertook women's work, an episode which has inspired both comedy and, sometimes, censure.[39]

Boethius, in his *Consolation of Philosophy*, written in the early sixth century, was more positive:

> Harsh labours make the fame of Hercules:
> He tamed the arrogant Centaurs,
> Stole the spoil from the savage lion,
> Pierced the Stymphalian birds with arrows sure;
> He seized the fruits from the watching dragon . . .
> Go then, you brave, where leads the lofty path
> Of this great example.[40]

This text was read in the early Middle Ages. A version was made in Old English c. 890–930 by someone in southern England, soon after claimed to have been King Alfred himself.[41] In the Old English, the key message of this passage is summarized and the heroic examples omitted but, as Susan Irvine has shown, it does elaborate on two other references to Hercules.[42] In one, the writer adds a comment about Hercules's drowning of the tyrant Busiris as having been done "very justly by the judgement of God."[43] In the second example, the writer again amplifies Boethius: "the famous Hercules, son of Jove" killed the Hydra by surrounding it with wood and burning it with fire.[44] The epithet, and the explanation of how the deed was done, are both additions. Hercules crops up several times in the Old English version of Orosius's *Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, written in the late ninth or early tenth century,

[38] There are also references to Hercules in the *Liber monstrorum* at 2.6, 2.14, and 3.1.

[39] Michael W. Herren, "The Transmission and Reception of Graeco-Roman Mythology in Anglo-Saxon England, 670–800," *Anglo-Saxon England* 27 (1998): 87–103, at 98, 99, 101; Jan Hendrick Hessels, *An Eighth-Century Latin-Anglo-Saxon Glossary* (Cambridge, UK, 1906), 62; and Eppinger, "*Hercules cinaedus*?"

[40] "Herculem duri celebrant labores. / Ille Centauros domuit superbos, / Abstulit saevo spolium leoni / Fixit et certis volucres sagittis, / Poma cernenti rapuit draconi /. . . / Ite nunc fortes ubi celsa magni / Ducit exempli via!" Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. S. J. Tester, in *Boethius: The Theological Tractates and the "Consolation of Philosophy"*, ed. and trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester, Loeb Classical Library 74 (Cambridge, MA, 1973), 381–83.

[41] Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine, eds., *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's "De consolatione philosophiae"*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2009), 1:140–46.

[42] Susan Irvine, "Wrestling with Hercules: King Alfred and the Classical Past," in *Court Culture in the Early Middle Ages: The Proceedings of the First Alcuin Conference*, ed. Catherine Cubitt, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 3 (Turnhout, 2003), 171–88, and Barbara Yorke, "King Alfred and Weland: Traditional Heroes at King Alfred's Court," in *Transformation in Anglo-Saxon Culture: Toller Lectures on Art, Archaeology and Text*, ed. Charles Insley and Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Oxford, 2017), 47–70.

[43] "Swiðe ryhte be Godes dome." Godden and Irvine, eds., *Old English Boethius* 1:274, 2:24 (chapter 16), and Irvine, "Wrestling with Hercules," 172–74.

[44] "Se foremæra Erculus to, se was Iobes sunu." Godden and Irvine, eds., *Old English Boethius* 1:361, 2:82, 462 (chapter 39), and Irvine, "Wrestling with Hercules," 174–76.

probably in Wessex. On one of these occasions, he is described as "se ent": the giant.[45] In one of the Old English dreambooks, if a man dreams about Hercules, that means "he will form a friendship."[46] By contrast, Ælfric, writing in the late tenth century as a monk and scholar at Cerne Abbas, took a different view: he was "the hateful Hercules" and "the immense giant who killed all his neighbours."[47] Wulfstan, archbishop of York, similarly saw him as "that giant Hercules" whom heathens, misled by the devil, took to be a god.[48]

In short, Hercules divided people. This was as true in antiquity as it was in the early Middle Ages.[49] What is important for our purposes is that his fame resonated, such that writers could mention his name, or casually refer to one of the legends, and expect their audience to know whom they were talking about.

Interest in Hercules did wax and wane, though. One of the high points was during the ninth century, and the references in English texts from this period need to be understood within the wider cultural context of which they were part. To demonstrate this, we will give some examples in broadly chronological order. In c. 798, Alcuin, scholar and abbot of Saint-Martin, Tours, in a letter to Paul, patriarch of Aquilea, talks about the Adoptionist heresy being broken "by the club, not of Hercules, but of the gospel."[50] At about the same time, Theodulf, bishop of Orléans, included in his poem C*ontra iudices* [Against Judges] a long description of an antique vase decorated with images of the labors of Hercules.[51] Lawrence Nees has argued this was used to contrast the pagan antique past negatively to Christian values.[52] In the mid-ninth century, Sedulius Scottus, in a poem celebrating Bishop Hartgar of Tongres's victory in a battle with a Viking army, praises the bishop's strength as akin to the "arms of Hercules."[53] In another poem, Sedulius similarly acclaims Count Eberhard of Friuli's victory over an Arab army:

[45] *The Old English History of the World: An Anglo-Saxon Rewriting of Orosius* 3.9, ed. and trans. Malcolm R. Godden, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 44 (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 192–93 and xi–xii for discussion of the date.

[46] "Herculem uiderit amicitiam iungit." László Sándor Chardonnens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics, 900–1100*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 153 (Leiden, 2007), 313.

[47] "þam hetelan ercule, þam ormætan ente þe ealle acwealde his nehgeburas." Walter W. Skeat, ed., *Ælfric's Lives of Saints* 2.384, lines 112–14, EETS o.s. 82 (London, 1885); Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, 115, 124–25; and Irvine, "Wrestling with Hercules," 181–82.

[48] "Ercules se ent." Wulfstan, "De temporibus Anticristi," in *Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschreibenen Homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit*, ed. Arthur S. Napier (Berlin, 1883), no. 42, pp. 191–205, at 197.

[49] Boardman et al., "Herakles," in *LICM*, 4.1:728; Eppinger, "Early Christian Heracles"; and Eppinger, "*Hercules cinaedus?*"

[50] Ernst Duemmler, ed., *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, vol. 2, MGH Epistolae 4 (Berlin, 1895), no. 139, p. 221; Stephen Allott, *Alcuin of York: His Life and Letters* (York, 1974), 113; and Lawrence Nees, *A Tainted Mantle: Hercules and the Classical Tradition at the Carolingian Court* (Philadelphia, 1991), 119–20.

[51] Nees, *Tainted Mantle*, 21, and Katherine Barker, "Medieval Giants: Bible, History, Heritage and Landscape," in Darvill, Barker, Bender, and Hutton, *The Cerne Giant*, 88–108, at 98–99.

[52] Nees, *Tainted Mantle*, 61, 67, 209.

[53] "Herculis armis." Sedulius Scotus, *"On Christian Rulers" and "The Poems"*, trans. Edward G. Doyle, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 17 (Binghamton, 1983), 110; Ludwig Traube, ed., *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*, vol. 3, MGH Poetae Latini medii aevi 3 (Berlin, 1886), 177; and Nees, *Tainted Mantle*, 174 n. 61.

> You defeat the Moorish hordes, subduing
> Fierce Saracen rebels with the mighty
> arms of Hercules![54]

In a poem to celebrate the visit of Emperor Lothair (840–55) to Liège, Sedulius hailed him as "a valiant warrior, mightier / than Hercules, who exalts his name to heaven."[55] Also in the mid-to-late ninth century, the great Carolingian scholars Hrabanus Maurus and Remigius of Auxerre both refer, if only briefly, to Hercules as a personification of virtue.[56] Beyond the Carolingian empire, there is evidence for the commissioning of pictures, perhaps mosaics, displaying "the Herculean labours of the emperor" Basil I (867–88) on a ceiling in the imperial palace in Constantinople.[57] As these examples show, he was "the ideal figure to be held up to emperors faced with threats from powerful external enemies . . . since from the earliest times Hercules had been credited with restoring order and bringing civilization," and, for this reason, it was not uncommon for bishops and emperors to be likened to him.[58]

The apotheosis of interest in Hercules during the ninth century is the remarkable throne of Charles the Bald in St. Peter's, Rome (Fig. 14). This wooden chair is decorated with "the largest and most significant group of ivories produced in the early medieval west."[59] On the front are the twelve labors of Hercules, on which Hercules's body was picked out and emphasized by being gilded.[60] Hercules also appears as a constellation on the gable at the top of the throne.[61] Dendrochronological dates for the wood indicate that the throne was originally made in the middle decades of the ninth century, and the Hercules cycle was added c. 870.[62] Near the top of the pediment is a likeness of the late ninth-century Carolingian king Charles the Bald. It is therefore probable that the Hercules scenes were added for Charles's imperial coronation in Rome in 875.[63]

Nees has suggested that this throne exhibits the kind of complex, competing attitudes to Hercules that run throughout the tradition. He argues that this is not simply a depiction of Hercules as a role model for strength and valor; rather, that

[54] "Tu potes cunctos superare Mauros, / Tu Saracenos superas tyrannos / Herculis armis." Sedulius, *"On Christian Rulers" and "The Poems"*, trans. Doyle, 139; Traube, ed., *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*, 203; and Nees, *Tainted Mantle*, 174 n. 61.

[55] "hic armipotens, meritum qui tollit in astra; / Hercule fit potior hic vir, hic armipotens." Sedulius, *"On Christian Rulers" and "The Poems"*, trans. Doyle, 155; Traube, ed., *Poetae Latini aevi Carolini*, 216; and Nees, *Tainted Mantle*, 174 n. 61.

[56] Nees, *Tainted Mantle*, 160.

[57] Nees, *Tainted Mantle*, 163, and Leslie Brubaker, *Vision and Meaning in Ninth-Century Byzantium: Image as Exegesis in the Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus*, Cambridge Studies in Palaeography and Codicology 6 (Cambridge, UK, 1999), 156, 171.

[58] Alexandra Eppinger, "*Exemplum virtutis* for Christian Emperors: The Role of Herakles/Hercules in Late Antique Imperial Representation," in *Herakles: Inside and Outside the Church: From the First Apologists to the End of the Quattrocento*, ed. Arlene Allan, Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides, and Emma Stafford, Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity 18 (Leiden, 2020), 73–93, at 89.

[59] Nees, *Tainted Mantle*, 148.

[60] Nees, *Tainted Mantle*, 193.

[61] Nees, *Tainted Mantle*, 324.

[62] Nees, *Tainted Mantle*, 180, 194 n. 2.

[63] Nees, *Tainted Mantle*, 235.



Fig. 14. Throne of Charles the Bald, ninth century, Basilica of St. Peter, Vatican City. Photo: Copyright Bridgeman Images. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

the ivories were commissioned by Hincmar, bishop of Rheims, in response to the decision to crown Charles the Bald as emperor of the Romans in 875, to which, he further argues, Hincmar was opposed. These labors, in which Hercules is presented as more entangled than victorious, were "intended as an admonition to the king to beware of the dangerous and potentially unchristian path upon which he had ventured."[64] Nonetheless, Nees acknowledges that Charles the Bald, others in his circle, and, indeed, visitors, probably saw something different: "I do not mean to deny that the virtues of Hercules or his fame would have been unknown to Charles the Bald, or that he would not have been flattered to be likened in some way to Hercules and his great deeds, or incited to fight against enemies with the power and success of Hercules."[65] This extraordinary work of art, so closely bound up with Carolingian conceptions of kingship, demonstrates two things: the potency of the Hercules legends in the late ninth century and the extent to which they were capable of multiple interpretations by different audiences.

[64] Nees, *Tainted Mantle*, 235.
[65] Nees, *Tainted Mantle*, 202.

Old St. Peter's in Rome might seem distant from Dorset, but the Carolingian and West Saxon royal families were intimately connected. In c. 856, the elderly King Æthelwulf of Wessex married the young Judith of Flanders, the daughter of Charles the Bald. Two years or so later, after her husband's death, Judith married her stepson Æthelbald. These marriages were just the most visible manifestations of a network of connections between Wessex and the Carolingian empire involving trade, diplomacy, and intellectual exchange.[66]

All of this demonstrates that an early medieval date for the cutting of the Cerne Giant makes sense, particularly during the spike of interest in the Hercules legends during the ninth century. It is remarkable that the mid point of the OSL dates for the creation of the giant fits so well with the addition of the Hercules plaques to the throne of Charles the Bald. We should be willing to place conceptually the goldsmith in Metz who picked out Hercules in gold leaf on Charles's throne next to the men or women who picked out the outline of Hercules in white chalk at Cerne. These two acts, so seemingly different, were part of the same cultural milieu.

Hercules in Cerne

This explains the context in which a gigantic image of Hercules was cut in the early Middle Ages, but it does not explain why it was done in that place: why Cerne?

We do not know much about Cerne Abbas in the period—there is no evidence for major events taking place there, nor that there was an earlier minster church.[67] Although there has been some metal detecting, no significant concentration of material has turned up.[68] Nonetheless, there are clues in the landscape which suggest a plausible reason why the giant is there (Figs. 15–16).

The West Saxon royal family owned a lot of land in the area in the tenth century. The manor of Cerne itself was owned by Æthelmær, a descendant of King Æthelred I (r. 865–71).[69] King Edgar (r. 959–75) owned land at Muston, 3.5 miles to the southeast.[70] Edgar's grandmother, Wynflæd, had land at Piddletrenthide,

[66] Joanna Story, *Carolingian Connections: Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Francia, c. 750–870* (Aldershot, 2003), 213–55.

[67] Teresa Anne Hall, *Minster Churches in the Dorset Landscape*, BAR 304 (Oxford, 2000), 90.

[68] Early medieval finds from the vicinity recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme include a stirrup mount (SOM-B5A823) and a gilded copper-alloy pyramidal mount from a scabbard from Minterne Magna (DOR-A779A2). Much more has been recorded from the parish of Piddletrenthide, including substantial numbers of Roman objects and, from the early medieval period, a sceat of c. 675–700 (DOR-5B9807), an eleventh-century coin (SOM-FA6C66), a later pre-Conquest strap fitting (DOR-F47BEC), and a lead spindle whorl (DEV-FB417B): https://finds.org.uk/ (last accessed 5 October 2021).

[69] Peter H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (1968), revised as *The Electronic Sawyer*, https://esawyer.lib.cam.ac.uk/ (last accessed 5 October 2021), Sawyer no. 1217; John Mitchell Kemble, *Codex diplomaticus ævi Saxonici*, 6 vols. (Cambridge, UK, 1839–48), 3:224–26, no. 656; and Herbert P. R. Finberg, *Early Charters of Wessex*, Studies in Early English History 3 (Leicester, 1964), 174, no. 613.

[70] Edward A. Fry, "*Inquisitiones post mortem* for Dorset VIII," *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries* 12 (1911): 364–71, at 371, and George D. Squibb, "The Foundation of Cerne Abbey," in *The Cerne Abbey Millennium Lectures*, ed. Katherine Barker (Cerne Abbas, 1988), 11–14, at 11, 13.

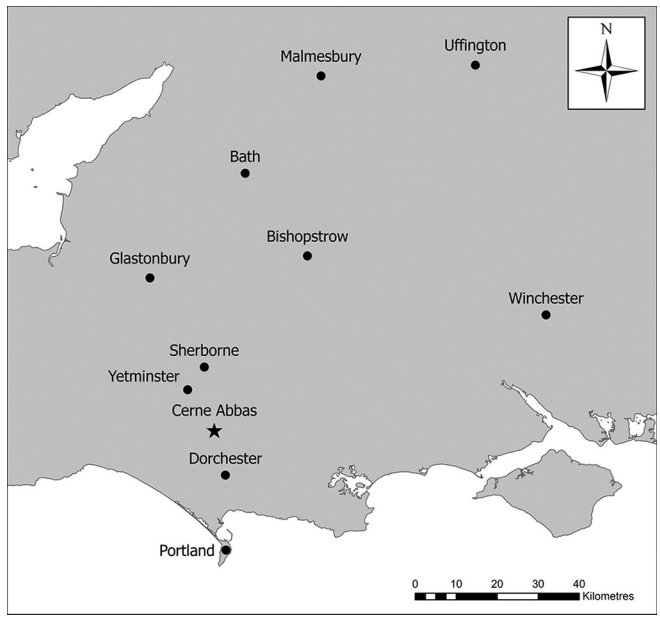


Fig. 15. Map of Cerne Abbas in its regional context. Drawn by Lloyd Bosworth, based on the Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey (GB), using the EDINA Digimap Ordnance Survey Service.

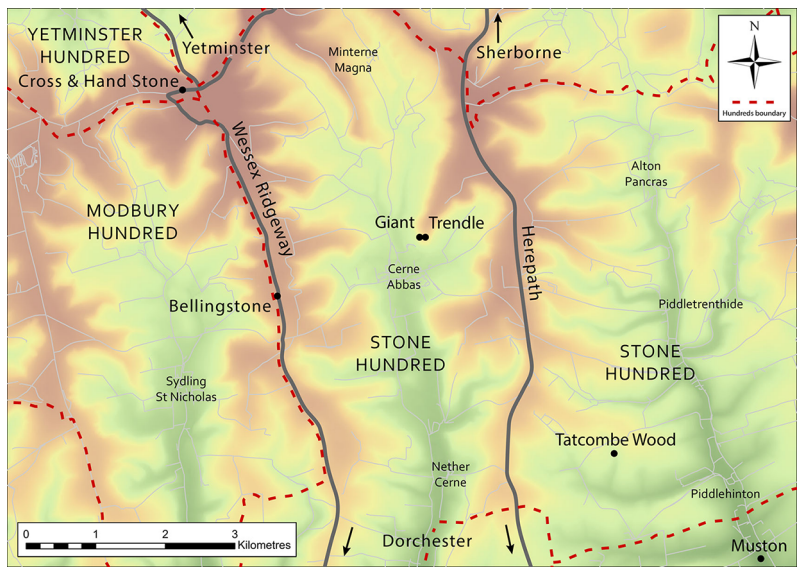


Fig. 16. Map of the Cerne Abbas region and features mentioned in the text. Drawn by Lloyd Bosworth, based on the Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey (GB), using the EDINA Digimap Ordnance Survey Service (https://digimap.edina.ac.uk), and Stuart Brookes, *Domesday Shires and Hundreds of England* [data set] (York: Archaeology Data Service [distributor], 2020), https://doi.org/10.5284/1058999. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

the next village to the east.[71] By the early eleventh century, all of this was in church hands: Muston had been granted to the newly founded monastery at Cerne and Piddletrenthide to the nunnery at Shaftesbury. The history of the Cerne estate is curious and suggests it was of special interest to Æthelmær. In 987, he and some of his associates granted a large number of estates to the monastery at Cerne with the caveat that the land at Cerne itself would only go to the monastery after his death.[72] No satisfactory explanation for this has been given. As Barbara Yorke says, "It seems extraordinary to found a monastery in an estate centre, but not to give the monks control of that estate."[73] For some reason, Æthelmær was keen to keep hold of Cerne for his own use; it may have been one of the properties he liked to call home.

Æthelmær himself was one of the most powerful men in the English court. He was ealdorman of the Western Provinces, a title he inherited from his father Æthelweard (d. 998?), and the title was probably also held later on by his own son-in-law. Æthelweard had been one of the leading thegns in King Æthelred's court during the 980s and the senior ealdorman from the early 990s. Æthelmær, his son, became ealdorman when his father died, and he was also steward to King Æthelred.[74] In 1013 it was Æthelmær who led the submission of the thegns of the southwest to the Viking warleader Swein Forkbeard at Bath.[75] Both men were also patrons of Ælfric, one of the foremost scholars of his time, and Æthelweard also commissioned a translation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle from Old English into Latin. In the prologue to that text, he describes himself as a descendant of King Æthelred I (r. 865–71), elder brother of King Alfred.[76] In the late tenth century, Cerne was not only in the powerful hands of a kinsman of the king, it was also close to that man's heart.

It is unfortunate that we know so little about how Æthelmær acquired the estate at Cerne and who had owned it previously. Intriguingly, from the mid-eleventh century, there was a tradition that the local saint of Cerne, Eadwold, had been a member of the East Anglian royal family, the brother of Edmund, the king martyred

[71] Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. 744; S. E. Kelly, ed., *Charters of Shaftesbury Abbey*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 5 (Oxford, 1996), 102–06; and G. B. Grundy, "Saxon Charters of Dorset," *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society* 59 (1937): 95–118, at 107–112.

[72] Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. 1217; see n. 69 for this and other references.

[73] Barbara Yorke, "Æthelmær: The Foundation of the Abbey at Cerne and the Politics of the Tenth Century," in *Cerne Abbey Millennium Lectures*, ed. Barker, 15–26, at 23.

[74] Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred "the Unready" 978–1016: A Study in Their Use as Historical Evidence*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, third ser., 13 (Cambridge, UK, 1980), 138, 188, 192, 210; Yorke, "Æthelmær," 15, 19; Catherine Cubitt, "Ælfric's Lay Patrons," in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 18 (Leiden, 2009), 165–92, esp. 167; Ann Williams, *Æthelred the Unready: The Ill-Counselled King* (London, 2003), 29–31, 66, 69; Patrick Wormald, "Æthelweard [Ethelwerd] (d. 998?), Chronicler and Magnate," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/8918; and Ryan Lavelle, *Alfred's Wars: Sources and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge, UK, 2010), 2–6. Both of these names were so common in the late tenth and eleventh centuries it is difficult to be sure about their biographies, but the entry in the *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* seems unduly cautious.

[75] Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Revised Translation*, with David C. Douglas and Susie I. Tucker (London, 1961), 92 [s.a. 1013].

[76] Alistair Campbell, ed., *The Chronicle of Æthelweard* (London, 1962), 2.

by the Great Viking Army in 869.[77] Perhaps members of that family were granted refuge by Alfred's kinsmen and given lands in Cerne on which to settle after the conquest of East Anglia in the late ninth century. There were certainly connections between Æthelmær's kin and the earls of East Anglia in the late tenth century; it is conceivable these continue earlier ones.[78]

Although we do not know much about who owned Cerne before the late tenth century, we can reconstruct quite a lot about the local topography. By the late eleventh century, Cerne was in the hundred of Stone, later renamed Totcombe and then amalgamated with the hundred of Modbury to the west.[79] Conventionally, it is thought that the meeting place for the Stone hundred is unknown, but there are two plausible candidates: the Cross and Hand stone on the northern boundary or the Bellingstone to the west (Figs. 16, 18, 19).[80] The meeting place for the hundred of Totcombe was probably southeast of Cerne, on the ridge between the two major settlements of Cerne and Piddletrenthide: Tatcombe Wood on the earliest ordnance survey maps may preserve the placename.[81]

The giant himself dominates the valley floor, especially the field that is now immediately below (Fig. 17). There are huge views from the top of Giant Hill, south towards Dorchester and east and west to the ridges either side of it. It would be hard to move through this landscape without standing out against the skyline. To the west is a ridgeway route from Dorchester to Yetminster (Fig. 16). It seems likely this was an important track, not least because it is marked by the Cross and Hand stone (Fig. 18). This is the remains of what appears to be an early medieval column, made from stone from Portland, some twenty miles south.[82] It stands on Gore Hill, where the trackway meets the boundaries of the hundreds of Stone, Modbury, and Yetminster (Fig. 16). To the east of Giant Hill is another important routeway, the herepath leading from Dorchester to Sherborne. It is described as such in the bounds of a late tenth-century charter.[83] The meaning of the Old English word "herepath" has been much debated; in Alex Langlands's latest assessment,

[77] See below.

[78] On links with the family of Byhrtnoth see Cubitt, "Ælfric's Lay Patrons," 167, 170.

[79] Ann Williams, *The Dorset Domesday: Introduction and Translation* (London, 1991), 38 n. 6, 44.

[80] The latter was suggested by M. D. Jones, "Field Names in Cerne Abbas and the Open-Field System," *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society* 64 (1943): 69–74; the former by Mary D. Jones, *Cerne Abbas: The Story of a Dorset Village* (London, 1952), 34–36; and Rodney Castleden, *The Cerne Giant* (Wincanton, UK, 1996), 90.

[81] Dorset 31: North West, Ordnance Survey map, 1st edition (6 inches to the mile) (Southampton, 1888), grid reference SY6799; Olof S. Anderson, *The English Hundred-Names*, 3 vols., Lunds universitets årsskrift 30/1 (Lund, 1934–39), 2:114–16; and Williams, trans., *Dorset Domesday*, 44.

[82] Rosemary Cramp, ed., *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture 7: South-West England* (Oxford, 2006), 128 ("Batcombe Down 1"). All the Anglo-Saxon uses of Portland stone come from a six-mile radius around Cerne Abbas, with outliers at Winchester and from near Cranborne. The local examples are from Henstridge, Melcombe Horsey, Melbury Bubb, Buckland Newton, and Cattistock: C. Roger Bristow and Bernard C. Worssam, "Regional Geology," in *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture 7*, ed. Cramp, 13–24, at 21–22; and Bernard C. Worssam, "Regional Geology," in *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture 4: South-East England*, ed. Dominic Tweddle (Oxford, 1995), 10–21, at 16. For other stones on routeways in the area: Katherine Barker, "Medieval Giants: Bible, History, Heritage and Landscape," in Darvill, Barker, Bender, and Hutton, *The Cerne Giant*, 88–108, at 92–94.

[83] Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, Sawyer no. 744 (see n. 69), and S. E. Kelly, *Charters of Shaftesbury*, 103.

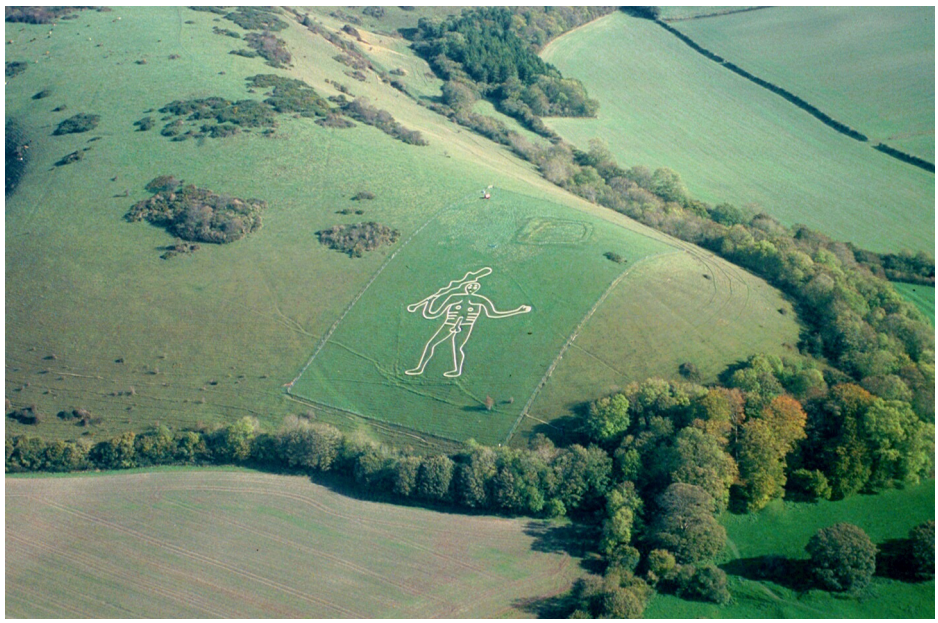


Fig. 17. Aerial view showing the field below the giant and the "herepath" curving up onto Giant Hill from the bottom right, Cerne Abbas, Dorset, England. Photo: Pete Harlow, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

these were "routes purposely constructed to deal with the threat posed by the raiding *here* [army]."[84] The herepath leads up on to Giant Hill itself (Fig. 17).

The giant can also be seen from the ridge opposite—the Dorset Ridgeway route from Dorchester to Yetminster (Fig. 16). Remarkably, on that ridge, opposite the giant, is a substantial stone, known as the Bellingstone (Figs. 16, 19). The importance of this stone has been little recognized, probably because it did not get onto the first edition of the Ordnance Survey maps—and it is now buried in a hedge. It is at least 1.5 meters tall and of Holywell Nodular Chalk, which must have been brought up from the base of Giant Hill.[85] The earliest reference to it is in 1226 when the abbots of Cerne and Milton perambulated the shared boundaries of their estates, on which was "the stone called Bellingeston."[86] Although the view of the giant from Bellingstone is now obscured, without the hedges the sight lines would be good

[84] Alexander Langlands, *The Ancient Ways of Wessex: Travel and Communication in an Early Medieval Landscape* (Oxford, 2019), 201.

[85] Thanks to John Charman for the identification and to Jonathan Still for alerting us to it.

[86] Edward Alex Fry and George S. Fry, eds., *Full Abstracts of the Feet of Fines Relating to the County of Dorset, Remaining in the Public Record Office, London, from Their Commencement in the Reign of Richard I*, 2 vols., Dorset Records 5, 10 (Dorset Record, 1896–1910), 1: doc. 74; Jones, "Field Names," 73; Frederick Joseph Harvey Darton, *English Fabric: A Study of Village Life* (London, 1936), 280–81; J. Peter Traskey, *Milton Abbey: A Dorset Monastery in the Middle Ages* (Tisbury, UK, 1978), 72–73; and Rodney Legg, "Making and Re-Making the Cerne Giant," in Darvill, Barker, Bender, and Hutton, *The Cerne Giant*, 129–34, at 132.



Fig. 18. Cross and Hand Stone, early medieval(?), Dorset, England. Photo: K. Jukes. Copyright *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

(Figs 22, 23).[87] Etymologically, the first element in the name could be a surname, but it could also be a noun derived from OE *bellan*, to roar, bark, bellow, which was used later in the Middle Ages to refer to the noise made by rutting deer. If so, it would mean "stone at the bellowing place."[88] This is one of the candidates for the meeting place of the hundred of Stone. Even more excitingly, it has been suggested that the building closest to the giant, known as North Barn or Beauvoir Court, is an early medieval building; research is underway to test this hypothesis.[89] All of this indicates the extent to which we need to think of the giant as only one element of a more complex landscape.

Powerful confirmation of this comes from the history of the names for what is now called Giant Hill. This name was first recorded in the late nineteenth century; before then, it was known as Trendle Hill, after the earthwork immediately above the giant's head (Fig. 24).[90] The original function and date of the Trendle are

[87] Thanks to Moira Gittos for doing the analysis of this.

[88] Anthony David Mills, ed., *The Place Names of Dorset*, part 4, English Place-Name Society 86–87 (Nottingham, 2010), 181; neither the surname Bell nor Belling is attested in Dorset in the Middle Ages: Patrick Hanks, Richard Coates, and Peter McClure, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of Family Names in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2016). Thanks to John Baker for discussing this.

[89] C. Juppe, "1400 Years of History?" *Dorset Life* (May 2011), https://www.dorsetlife.co.uk/2011/05/1400-years-of-history/ (last accessed 30 August 2023), and Brian and Moira Gittos, pers. comm., July 2021. Helen Gittos and Michael Shapland (forthcoming).

[90] Mills, ed., *Place-Names of Dorset*, part 4, 137; Joseph Bettey, "The Cerne Giant Revisited," in Darvill, Barker, Bender, and Hutton, *The Cerne Giant*, 75–87, at 80; and Ronald Hutton, "Naming

unknown, and no archaeological investigation of it has been undertaken. It takes the form of a terraced platform, on the edge of the hill, surrounded by a bank and ditch (Fig. 1).[91] Inside it, the recent LiDAR survey clearly shows there is another feature on a different alignment. It is not clear whether this is a stone-built building or something quite different; the whole feature may date from multiple periods. Conjectures about what the Trendle was have ranged from an Iron Age temple, to a Romano-British signal station, to a late medieval chapel.[92] For the moment at least, it is noteworthy that this feature was sufficiently important to eclipse the giant in the local toponymy of the place.

What emerges from all of this is that the giant is on a hillside from which there are impressive views over Dorset. It is close to major routeways but not on them. It is on a spur that juts out from a ridge and is slightly lower than that ridge (Fig. 17). Easy access to it is quite restricted; the top of the hill is best reached from the herepath. It was not, though, the meeting place of the hundred of Stone. All of these characteristics are typical of a special type of meeting place that has been identified by Stuart Brookes and John Baker, known as a hanging promontory site.[93] They have argued these sites were places for meetings of larger groupings comprising more than the men of the local hundred. Remarkably, the hundred meeting place for one of their archetypal sites, Kiftsgate in Gloucestershire (Fig. 21), is marked by a stone that looks very similar to the Bellingstone.[94]

One reason why people might assemble in such a place is for the purpose of mustering an army, usually under the leadership of the local ealdorman. Such muster sites certainly existed: it has been possible to identify a few on the ground, and recent research indicates some of their key features.[95] Places suitable for mustering required significant logistical support such as would be available at a major aristocratic estate: water, shelter, and provisions for horses as well as men. They were located so as to make use of major routeways, especially the herepaths, and places where there were lookouts. They also needed to be marked in some visible way. Given the long-standing characterization of Hercules as a "model of masculinity, especially among warriors," and his currency in the ninth and tenth centuries, a giant image of him would have made an ideal backdrop with which to monumentalize a muster site in the landscape.[96] Intriguingly, Harold Godwinson is said to have fought under a personal banner on which was woven

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Places and the Role of the Landscape," in Darvill, Barker, Bender, and Hutton, *The Cerne Giant*, 87–88, at 87.

[91] *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Dorset*, vol. 1, *West* (London, 1961), xxxiv (plan), 82, and Darvill, "Cerne Giant," 14.

[92] Castleden, *Cerne Giant*, 178–80, 186; Darvill, "Cerne Giant," 14–15; and M. Papworth, "Cerne 10: The Luxury Portacabin," *Archaeology National Trust SouthWest*, 30 March 2020, https://archaeologynationaltrustsw.wordpress.com/2020/03/30/cerne-10-the-luxury-portacabin/ (last accessed 11 October 2021).

[93] John Baker and Stuart Brookes, "Monumentalising the Political Landscape: A Special Class of Anglo-Saxon Assembly Site," *Antiquaries Journal* 93 (2013): 147–62.

[94] Thanks to Stuart Brookes for pointing out the resemblance.

[95] John Baker and Stuart Brookes, "Explaining Anglo-Saxon Military Efficiency: The Landscape of Mobilisation," *Anglo-Saxon England* 44 (2015): 221–58.

[96] Smith, "Classical Art." It could be analogous to the examples discussed in John Baker, "Meeting in the Shadow of Heroes? Personal Names and Assembly Places," in *Power and Place in Europe in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Jayne Carroll, Andrew Reynolds, and Barbara Yorke (Oxford, 2019), 37–63.



Fig. 19. Bellingstone, Dorset, England. Photo: Brian and Moira Gittos. See the online edition for a color version of this image.



Fig. 20. Blowing Stone, Kingston Lisle, Oxfordshire, England. Photo: Ballista, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons. See the online edition for a color version of this image.



Fig. 21. Kiftsgate Stone, Gloucestershire, England. Photo: Stuart Brookes. See the online edition for a color version of this image.



Fig. 22. The Bellingstone beside the Dorset Ridgeway, Dorset, England. Photo: Brian and Moira Gittos. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

in the purest gold an image of a fighting man which, it has been conjectured, could have been inspired by Cerne.[97] This place, on major routeways, with access to copious fresh water and the supplies of an ealdorman's estate, would have suited well. It is worth remembering that the first recorded encounter between an Anglo-Saxon and a Viking raiding party was at Portland, only sixteen miles south, when the rather naive reeve, Beaduheard, who had ridden from Dorchester to meet them, was killed (Fig. 15).[98] In

[97] Derek F. Renn, "*Burhgeat* and *gonfannon*: Two Sidelights from the Bayeux Tapestry," in *Anglo-Norman Studies XVI: Proceedings of the Battle Conference*, ed. Marjorie Chibnall (Woodbridge, UK, 1994), 177–98, at 192 n. 66. Thanks to Michael Shapland for this reference.

[98] Campbell, ed., *Chronicle of Æthelweard*, 26–27; David Dumville and Michael Lapidge, eds., *The Annals of St. Neots, with Vita prima Sancti Neoti* s.a. 789, in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, 17 vols. (Cambridge, UK, 1984), 17:39.

the late ninth century, when Charles the Bald's throne was being fitted with ivory plaques of the labors of Hercules, Cerne was close to the front line. The excavation of a later mass grave, probably of Vikings, on Ridgeway Hill, Weymouth, some ten miles away, graphically demonstrates the horrors involved.[99] Cutting a chalk figure of Hercules as fighting warrior, with club poised to strike, would have served as a fine rallying point, a backdrop for a call to arms, a sermon in chalk—and, perhaps, as something with which to keep a gathering army busy. It may be analogous to the regimental badges cut into the chalk at Fovant (Wiltshire) by soldiers stationed there during World War I.[100]

The White Horse at Uffington (Berkshire) perhaps served as inspiration (Fig. 15). This chalk-cut horse is much older—it dates from the early Iron Age—but it was being maintained throughout the early Middle Ages, in a landscape known to have been charged with mythological and strategic importance.[101] The two sites share not only chalk-cut figures but also special stones which can be made to resound by blowing them. The legend of the Blowing Stone at Uffington (Fig. 20) is that it was originally on the ridgeway at Kingstone Down, that it was used there by King Alfred to summon his troops to fight the Battle of Ashdown, and that it was brought down to its current place in the valley by the local blacksmith in more recent times.[102] There is no historical basis for this story except for the name itself, which is first recorded on a mid-eighteenth-century map. Etymologically, the name may, as with the Bellingstone, have come from Old English *bellan*, to roar, bark, bellow.[103] Indeed, you can still find the well-worn hole, purse your lips as if to blow a trumpet, and make a sound that could certainly rouse the neighbors, if not quite the whole vale. The Bellingstone can also be blown, and the name suggests that it too was once considered a stone capable of rousing an army.

To sum up, thanks to the archaeological work led by Martin Papworth we now know that the Cerne Giant was first made by scooping out the outlines of the figure in narrow terraces in the chalk bedrock. The OSL dates indicate this is likely to have taken place in the early medieval period. We have argued that he is clearly a depiction of the classical hero Hercules and that an early medieval date for his carving fits well with the interest in Hercules as hero present especially in the ninth and early tenth century in the networks in which Æthelweard's great-grandad and great-great-grandad belonged. Although it is not possible to say precisely who commissioned the giant, its location in Cerne, marking a hanging promontory site, next to

[99] Louise Loe, Angela Boyle, Helen Webb, and David Score, *"Given to the Ground": A Viking Age Mass Grave on Ridgeway Hill, Weymouth*, Dorset National History and Archaeological Society Monograph Series 22 (Oxford, 2014).

[100] V. Holyoak, "Chalk Military Badges on Fovant Down," English Heritage Schedule Entry 1020132, Fovant, Wiltshire (1 June 2001), https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1020132?section=official-list-entry (last accessed 30 August 2023).

[101] Miles et al., *Uffington White Horse*, esp. 78, 252, and Andrew Reynolds and Alexander Langlands, "Travel as Communication: A Consideration of Overland Journeys in Anglo-Saxon England," *World Archaeology* 43/3 (2011): 410–27, at 418.

[102] Felix Rolt, "Blowing a Trumpet for a Stone: The Blowing Stone at Kingston Lisle," *Oxoniensia* 84 (2019): 69–84.

[103] Margaret Gelling, *The Place-Names of Berkshire*, part 2, English Place-Name Society 50 (Cambridge, UK, 1974), 373. In Ted Johnson South, ed., *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto: A History of Saint Cuthbert and a Record of His Patrimony*, Anglo-Saxon Texts 3 (Cambridge, UK, 2002), chaps. 16 and 18 (pp. 54–57), King Alfred is said to have blown his horn three times in order to summon his troops before the battle of *Assandune* (thanks to Barbara Yorke for this reference).



Fig. 23. View of the Cerne Giant from the field east of the Bellingstone, Cerne Abbas, Dorset, England. Photo: Brian and Moira Gittos. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

a herepath, on what was later an ealdorman's estate, makes good sense as a special meeting place, the mustering point for a West Saxon army.

Cerne Reimagined: From Hercules to Hermit

As the excavations at Cerne demonstrate, chalk figures need tending at least once a generation if they are to remain visible.[104] In the case of the giant, this has clearly happened repeatedly despite massive changes in the ownership of the land and the communities who cared for him. Each scouring may have served as a focal moment for reinterpreting the giant, as new generations sought to understand his place in the landscape. Indeed, these reimaginings were probably essential to his survival. For a long time, it has been thought that the earliest reference to the giant was in 1694 when the churchwardens' accounts of St. Mary's, Cerne record a payment of three shillings for repairing the giant.[105] However, we believe there is a key source that has been overlooked, which preserves evidence for one such reinterpretation.

[104] Miles et al., *Uffington White Horse*, 76, and Leslie Grinsell, "The Cerne Abbas Giant: 1764–1980," *Antiquity* 54 (1980): 29–34, at 30, and Philip Schwyzer, "The Scouring of the White Horse: Archaeology, Identity, and 'Heritage'," *Representations* 65 (1999): 42–62, at 42–43.

[105] Vivian Vale and Patricia Vale, *The Parish Book of Cerne Abbas: Abbey and After* (Wellington, UK, 2000).

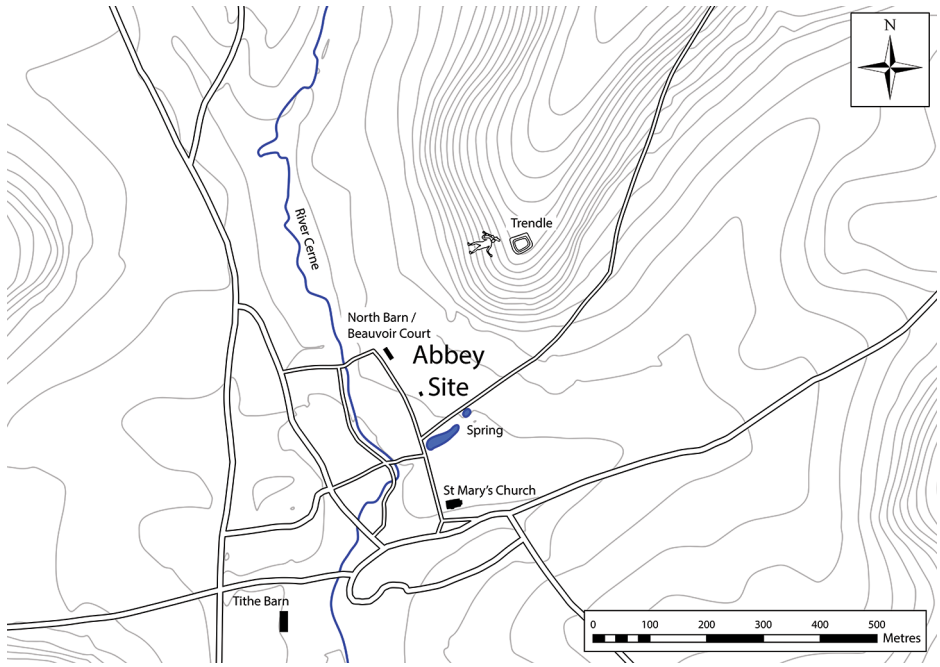


Fig. 24. Map of Cerne Abbas, Dorset, England. Drawn by Lloyd Bosworth based on Ordnance Survey data, Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey (GB), using the EDINA Digimap Ordnance Survey Service. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

In the late tenth century, a Benedictine monastery was founded at Cerne beside a spring (Fig. 24). Precisely when it was established is unclear, but it preceded the earliest surviving charter relating to Cerne, which records the grant by Æthelmær of several estates in Dorset to the monastery in c. 987.[106] Within a century, Cerne was prospering; by 1086, it was the third-wealthiest abbey in the west of England.[107] This was in part due to it being the center for the veneration of Saint Eadwold, whose relics the community acquired at some stage, perhaps as late as the 1020s.[108] The motivation for doing so may have been an attempt by the abbey to capitalize on the resurgence in the veneration of Saint Edmund in this period, particularly at Bury St. Edmunds, as Eadwold was believed to be Edmund's brother.[109] Our best source of evidence for eleventh-century devotion to Eadwold is a manuscript (London, British Library, Sloane MS 1772) which is an antiquarian compilation primarily comprising hagiographic texts from a range of dates and hands. On fols. 15r–18v is *In natale sancti*

[106] Finberg, *The Early Charters*, no. 613 (S 1217), and Squibb, "The Foundation of Cerne Abbey," 11–14. On Æthelmær's patronage of Cerne, see Catherine Cubitt, "Ælfric's Lay Patrons," 166–70.

[107] David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England, 940–1216*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK, 1963), 702–03.

[108] Tom Licence, "Goscelin of St. Bertin and the Life of St. Eadwold of Cerne," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 16 (2006): 182–207, at 186. See also Julian M. Luxford, "The Cerne Abbey Relic Lists," *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries* 35/355 (2002): 103–07.

[109] Licence, "Goscelin of St. Bertin," 186, and Tom Licence, "The Origins of the Monastic Communities of St. Benedict at Holme and Bury St Edmunds," *Revue bénédictine* 116 (2006): 42–61.

Edwoldi, a set of eight lessons marked up for reading during the offices on Eadwold's feast day, 29 August (Fig. 25). The lessons were written by a single scribe in a mid-twelfth-century, Pregothic script.[110] This text was edited for the first time by Tom Licence in 2006. Licence argues that these lessons were adapted from a life of the saint composed by Goscelin of St. Bertin, a monk from Saint-Omer, France, who emigrated to England in c. 1060–65.[111] Soon after he came to England, he settled for a while at Sherborne at the behest of his mentor, the abbot Herman.[112] Licence proposes it was soon after this, in the 1060s or 1070s, that Goscelin wrote his *Life of Eadwold*. The stylistic parallels between the text of the lessons and other saints' lives written by Goscelin are compelling.[113] As Licence suggests, it is likely that Goscelin wrote a now-lost life of the saint, the text of which is reproduced in abbreviated form in the lessons. Goscelin may have adapted the text of his life into the lessons himself, as he did elsewhere, notably at St. Augustine's Abbey, Canterbury.[114] It is likely that he visited Cerne, as was his practice with other religious houses, and this is how he acquired knowledge of the monastery's traditions.[115]

The lessons present Eadwold as the brother of Edmund, king of East Anglia c. 855–69/70, who was venerated as a martyr following his death at the hands of the Great Viking Army. According to the lessons, Eadwold was offered the throne following his brother's death, but he repudiated his royal heritage to take up the life of an itinerant hermit. Upon doing so he was granted a divine vision of an unknown location called *Fons argenteus* [Silver Fountain], where he could achieve his desired eremitic isolation. The fifth lesson presents the miracle by which the end of his search is indicated. It is this passage that is critical to our argument:

> Fifth lesson: Stopping awhile, blessed Eadwold fixed his staff in the top of the sloping cliff. But behold, a magnificent and very propitious sign of celestial favour smiled upon him. For the wood once cut from the stem, dried-up and dead in the seasoned traveller's hand, he now sees turn green, now sprout, now burgeon with buds, leaves and blossom; having ostensibly burst forth into a tree it remains there still, a prominent ash. When his staff took stable root, God's exile recognized, with the end of his quest, the home prepared for his eternal rest. From his vantage point he gazed at the fountain flowing below, pure and clear and worthily called silver, as was declared by this heavenly sign and the

[110] Licence, "Goscelin of St. Bertin," 183–84.

[111] Licence, "Goscelin of St. Bertin," 186–87, and Thomas J. Hamilton, "Goscelin of Canterbury: A Critical Study of His Life, Works and Accomplishments" (PhD diss., University of Virginia, 1973), 145–46.

[112] Hamilton, "Goscelin of Canterbury," 146–47.

[113] Licence, "Goscelin of St. Bertin," 188–96.

[114] Richard Sharpe, "Goscelin's St Augustine and St Mildreth: Hagiography and Liturgy in Context," *Journal of Theological Studies* 41/2 (1990): 502–16.

[115] Goscelin demonstrates a substantial knowledge of Cerne when he reports a miracle attributed to Saint Augustine of Canterbury at the monastery. See Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *Historia minor de adventu sancti Augustini*, in *Anglia sacra*, ed. Henry Wharton, 2 vols. (London, 1691), 2:68: "Inde etiam Monasterium in honorem principum Apostolorum Petri dedicatum Cernelium est appelatum; quod constat Monachorum choru decoratum. Illum autem fontem Augustini nomine consecratum credentibus esse saluberrimum, hic unum docebat Miraculum, teste Provincia palam declaratum." [Hence also the monastery dedicated to the foremost of the Apostles, [Saint] Peter, was called Cernelium; it is evident that it was decorated by its congregation of monks and that its baptismal font, consecrated in the name of [Saint] Augustine, has great healing properties for believers. It displayed a single miracle, demonstrated publicly with the entire region as a witness.]

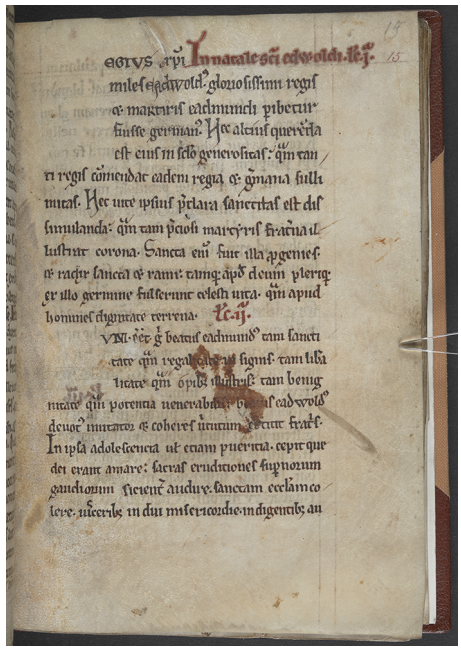


Fig. 25. Lessons of Saint Eadwold, c. 1150, Sherborne(?), England. London, British Library, Sloane MS 1772, fols. 15v–16r. Photo: Copyright British Library Board. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

> shepherd's information. Down the hillside he ran with triumphant jubilation; having found the long-sought place he fell at Christ's feet and adored the Living Fountain whom he thirsted for deep within his heart, as if that angel who in Apocalypse shows John the fount of living water were commanding him: "here worship God."[116]

In this reading, Eadwold is described standing at the top of a "sloping cliff," holding in his hand his pilgrim's staff, now beginning to blossom, and gazing down upon the spring that marked his new home.[117] This is strikingly similar to the spatial relationship between the Cerne Abbas Giant, the nearby holy spring, and the abbey (Fig. 24). Today the water source is known as Augustine's well and is hard up against the south side of the post-Conquest abbey (Fig. 26). In the tenth and eleventh century, the spring may have been nearer the giant, along the

[116] Licence, "Goscelin of St. Bertin," 201–02, 205–06.

[117] This depiction of Eadwold's miracle has parallels with Goscelin's account of Saint Augustine's legendary founding of Cerne, wherein he fixed his staff in the ground and a spring burst forth at that point, on the site of which a church and later the monastery was founded; see Goscelin of Saint Bertin, *Historia maior de aduentu beatissimi Anglorum apostoli Augustini*, ed. Godfrey Henschen and Daniel Papebroch, *AS* Mai, 7 vols., 3rd ed. (Paris, 1866), 6:372–92. Goscelin probably wrote his account of this miracle later than his Life of Saint Eadwold and may have intentionally echoed the earlier work to strengthen connections between contemporary local cult and the putative instigation of ecclesiastical activity in the area. For further discussion, see James William Lloyd, "The West Country Adventures of Saint Augustine of Canterbury," *Folklore* 131/4 (2020): 413–34.



Fig. 26. The site known as "Silver Well" or "Saint Augustine's Well" in the grounds of Cerne Abbey, Cerne Abbas, Dorset, England. Photo: Brian Deegan, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Geograph. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

spring line at the bottom of Giant Hill.[118] It would have been hard to hear that lesson in the monastic choir at Cerne and not to look up at Giant Hill and think of the giant on that hill.

Goscelin has reimagined the chalk figure, not as Hercules brandishing a knotty club, but as the hermit Eadwold holding a pilgrim's staff, from the sides of which a series of new branches are in the process of sprouting.[119] A case can be made that Goscelin understood the configuration of the chalk figure and the monastery along these lines, that he drew upon the relationship of these two local landmarks in his writing of the miracle, and that, consequently, he participated in the reimagining of this depiction of Hercules as Eadwold by the monastic community.

The reinterpretation of Hercules' club as a miraculously sprouting staff has visual parallels in manuscript illuminations that depict the cross as a green tree (Fig. 27).

[118] John Charman, "The Geology of Cerne and Its Impact on Village Life," https://cerneabbashistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/TheGeologyofCerne.pdf (last accessed 30 August 2023); thanks to Tim Tatton-Brown for this point.

[119] The use of *baculum* to incontrovertibly refer to a pilgrim's staff can be attested as early as 1165; cf. G. W. S. Barrow, ed., *The Acts of Malcom King of the Scots 1153–1165: Together with Scottish Royal Acts Prior to 1153 Not Included in Sir Archibald Lawrie's "Early Scottish Charters"* (Edinburgh, 1960), 276. Even as early as the writings of Bede, however, it is evident that *baculum* is being employed to refer to a simple staff employed for support, rather than a crozier specifically; see Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 2, *Books 4–5, Lives of the Abbots, Letter to Egbert*, trans. J. E. King, Loeb Classical Library 248 (Cambridge, MA, 1930), 190.

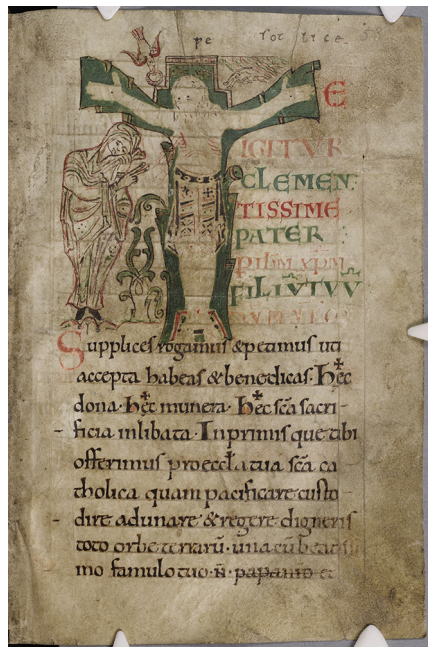


Fig. 27. Image of the cross as a green tree, c. 1060, Sherborne(?), England. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 422 (the Red Book of Darley), p. 53. Photo: Parker Library, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, CC BY-SA 4.0, via the Parker Library. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

This was a trend in artistic representation specific to the second half of the eleventh century. In the Gospels of Judith of Flanders (New York, Morgan Library, MS M.708), the Red Book of Darley (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 422), and London, British Library, MS Arundel 60, Christ's cross is depicted as a living tree from which the spike-like nubs of new branches extend, in a manner readily comparable with the short, pointed protrusions from the giant's staff. It is likely that the production of the Red Book of Darley was associated with Sherborne and would have been there for Goscelin to see. For Goscelin, the imagery of the cross as a green tree was so current that he may have interpreted the giant's club as a living tree first and as Hercules's weapon second.[120] Furthermore, the giant's nudity, while striking to a modern audience, would also have been compatible with early medieval conceptions of sanctity. Most obviously, the delineation of the exposed ribs on the torso fitted with the ascetic lifestyle of a hermit. Nakedness itself was also sometimes viewed as a signifier of holiness.[121] The depiction of revered religious figures as naked occurs elsewhere in tenth- and eleventh-century visual art, such as in a depiction of Noah in the

[120] For further on the cross as a green tree, see Thomas N. Hall, "The Cross as a Green Tree in the Vindicta Salvatoris and the Green Rod of Moses in *Exodus*," *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 72/4 (1991): 297–307, and Nicole Fallon, "The Cross as Tree: The Wood-of-the-Cross Legends in Middle English and Latin Texts in Medieval England" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2009), 61–64.

[121] Arthur West Haddan and William Stubbs, eds., *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1869–78), 1:119.

Junius manuscript and a carved capital of Abraham preparing to sacrifice Isaac in Jaca Cathedral in Aragon, Spain (Figs. 28, 29).[122] While such examples in visual art are comparatively uncommon, it is important to stress that Goscelin's life primes the viewer to consider the giant in relation to the theological symbolism of his outline. Licence notes that Goscelin, in writing his *Life of Eadwold*, draws on Saint Jerome's descriptions of hermits.[123] Goscelin is likely to have been aware of Jerome's well-known motto "Naked to follow the naked Christ," which was taken throughout the medieval period to exemplify the expected conduct of the Christian ascetic.[124] On the most literal level, for hermits "nakedness and endurance were themes in the rhetoric of imitating Christ," such as in the example of Godric of Finchale casting his naked body into brambles to aid in abstaining from sin.[125] When taken alongside the Old English literary evidence for frank and heterogeneous engagement with sexual topics, the suggestion that prudishness on the part of the monastic community with regard to the figure's nudity would preclude its interpretation as a saint is anachronistic.[126] Saint Eadwold would not have been depicted like this if the image had been newly created at this point, but it is perfectly conceivable that a pre-existing figure could have been reinterpreted in this way.

To return to Goscelin's account of Eadwold's blossoming staff, it should be noted that the image of a saint's staff miraculously blooming into an ash tree is not unique. The original source is probably the Rod of Aaron, which sprouted buds and blossomed overnight (Numbers 17.8). The image also appears in two other Anglo-Latin hagiographies: William of Malmesbury's *Gesta pontificum Anglorum* and the *Life of Kenelm*.[127] In neither case, however, is there mention of the miracle being performed on a hillside, nor of a holy well situated below it. It is this precise spatial configuration that strongly suggests Goscelin sought to associate the giant—one of the most striking topographical features in the landscape of Cerne—with Eadwold, the local saint. Goscelin, like other hagiographers at this time, drew upon features in the local

[122] Kirk Ambrose, "Male Nudes and Embodied Spirituality in Romanesque Sculpture," in *The Meanings of Nudity in Medieval Art*, ed. Sherry C. M. Lindquist (Farnham, UK, 2012), 65–83, at 69–70.

[123] Licence, "Goscelin of St. Bertin," 189, 191–92.

[124] For Jerome's formulation of *Nudus nudum Christum sequi*, see Jerome, "Homilia in Lucam Evangelistam [16, 19–31]," in Jerome, *Tractatus sive homiliae in psalmos, in Marci evangelium, aliaque varia argumenta*, ed. G. Morin, B. Capelle, and J. Fraipont, CCSL 78 (Turnhout, 1958), 507–16, at 514. For a full discussion of the medieval interpretation of this motto, see Matthäus Bernards, "Nudus nudum Christum sequi," *Wissenschaft und Weisheit* 14 (1951): 148–51.

[125] Tom Licence, *Hermits and Recluses in English Society, 950–1200* (Oxford, 2011), 136, 146. See also Eugenia Smagina, "The Nudity of Hermits in Monastic Literature and Its Symbolic Value," *Vostok: Afro-Aziatskie obshchestva. Istoriia i sovremennost* 6 (2018): 142–49.

[126] Cf. Hugh Magennis, "'No Sex Please, We're Anglo-Saxons'? Attitudes to Sexuality in Old English Prose and Poetry," *Leeds Studies in English* 26 (1995): 1–27, at 16–18.

[127] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta pontificum Anglorum: The History of the English Bishops*, vol. 1, *Text and Translation*, ed. Michael Winterbottom with R. M. Thomson (Oxford, 2007), 576–77. Winterbottom notes this is one of the few accounts of Aldhelm's miracles that is not attested in an early written source, suggesting he drew the narrative from local traditions current in the area at the time: *Gesta pontificum Anglorum*, ed. Winterbottom, 577. *Vita et miracula Sancti Kenelmi*, in Rosalind C. Love, ed., *Three Eleventh Century Anglo Latin Saints' Lives: Vita S. Birini, Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi, and Vita S. Rumwoldi* (Oxford, 1996), 58–59. Love tentatively attributes authorship of the text to Goscelin: *Three Eleventh Century*, xc, xciii, xcvii, ci.



Fig. 28. The Nakedness of Noah, c. 960–1000, England. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11, p. 78 Photo: Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, CC BY-NC 4.0, via Digital Bodleian. See the online edition for a color version of this image.



Fig. 29. Sacrifice of Isaac, Jaca Cathedral, Aragon, Spain, late eleventh century. Photo: Miguel Heneres, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

landscape that served as physical testaments to the miracles that had taken place there. In his *Life of Saint Mildrith*, he dwells on a stone venerated by local people on which, he says, you could see her footprints.[128] The footprints were evidence that the miracle happened, that Mildrith had been in that very place, and demonstrated the fervency of popular devotion. The blossoming-rod miracles fulfilled a similar function by connecting the cult with the local topography. In Goscelin's *Life of Eadwold*, the giant was similarly presented as proof of Eadwold's presence in the area. Reimagined in this way, the giant was a hagiography in chalk, providing a large-scale illustration of one of Eadwold's miracles. Within the monastic choir, the lessons were the central element in the liturgy of Eadwold's feast day, probably well into the twelfth century. Outside on the hill, the giant embodied that hagiography in the land itself.

Why Reimagine the Giant?

The shift from Hercules to Eadwold might have been inadvertent, occasioned by a period in which the chalk outline fell into disrepair and the figure's original function was forgotten. This would fit with changes that have been proposed in the mustering system during the tenth century.[129] It is more likely, though, that the giant was intentionally reidentified by the monastic community—and that this was codified by Goscelin. This would mean that the reinterpretation of the giant as Eadwold by the monks of Cerne was an accelerated, intellectual endeavor, making

[128] Helen Gittos, *Liturgy, Architecture, and Sacred Places in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2013), 20–31; see also John Blair, "Saint Cuthman, Steyning and Bosham," *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 135 (1997): 173–92.

[129] Baker and Brookes, "Explaining Anglo-Saxon Military Efficiency."

use of established hagiographic motifs to bring the pre-existing figure on the hillside into line with their own agenda. Several specific reasons for doing so can be suggested.

First was a desire to erase Hercules from the landscape by reidentifying him as someone else. From the late tenth century, the negative attitude toward Hercules became more dominant. Ælfric, who lived in Cerne for eighteen years, conceived of Hercules as a hateful giant renowned for his violence and would have had a poor opinion of a large-scale representation of him right next to his monastery. Further contemporary evidence for the undesirability of worshipping beside Hercules comes from the prosimetric *Life of King Edward Who Rests at Westminster*, written no later than 1075. The author of this text employed classical references to comment on the crisis in England immediately prior to the Conquest. In the following passage, Harold and Tostig are described as united in possessing the strength of Hercules:

> These two, the most noble offspring of a cloud-born land,
> Both with the strength of Hercules, propitious oaks of the kingdom,
> Excel above [all] Englishmen when joined in peaceful alliance.[130]

In this section of the *Life of Edward*, classical and biblical allusions are often used ironically. The verse offers ostensible praise by invoking once powerful and celebrated individuals, but this is tacitly undercut through the subtext that all of them have degenerated toward brutishness, ignominy, and ruin.[131] These include the titan Atlas, restrained beneath the globe; angels fallen from heaven; the warring brothers Polynices and Eteocles, who savagely killed each other rather than share the throne in Aeschylus's *Seven Against Thebes*; and, most pertinently for our purposes, Hercules, who descended from preeminent heroism to violent madness and agonized death. This technique serves as a means of commenting on the similar deterioration in the nobility of Harold and Tostig through their ruinous infighting.[132] The increasing dominance of Cerne's cultural landscape by a monastic community, rather than a martial elite, may have necessitated the reidentification of the giant from hero to hermit.

There are also reasons why the monastic community at Cerne would have wanted to identify the chalk figure as Eadwold. In the early eleventh century, Sherborne and Cerne seem to have been vying for control of Eadwold's relics. This is indicated by the *Translatio* of Eadwold, a text focused on the saint's burial, which was appended to a later version of his life preserved in a fourteenth-century hagiographical compendium compiled by John of Tynemouth. The relevant passage depicts Eadwold's corpse as enthusiastic to be interred at Cerne but not at Sherborne:

[130] Frank Barlow, ed. and trans., *Vita Ædwardi Regis qui apud Westmonasterium requiescit, S. Bertini monacho ascripta* (London, 1962), 37–38.

[131] For an analysis of the full scope of the use of classical references in the *Vita Ædwardi*, see Elizabeth Muir Tyler, *England in Europe: English Royal Women and Literary Patronage, c.1000–c.1150* (Toronto, 2017), 136–201; for the ability of the poet's use of classical allusion to "both flatter and to sound a more cautious note," see Simon Keynes and Rosalind Love, "Earl Godwine's Ship," *Anglo-Saxon England* 38 (2010): 185–223, at 223.

[132] For the argument that the text was written by Goscelin, see Rhona Beare, "Did Goscelin Write the Earliest Life of Edward the Confessor?" *Notes and Queries* 55/3 (2008): 262–65, but for the comprehensive counterargument, see Keynes and Love, "Earl Godwine's Ship," 204–06, and Tom Licence, "The Date and Authorship of the *Vita Ædwardi Regis*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 44 (2016): 259–85, at 275–77.

> under the supervision of Bishop Almarus and Saint Dunstan, the bones of Saint Eadwold were raised from the ground, but when they were to be carried to the episcopal see of Sherborne, they could not be moved from that place. The bishop, therefore, knelt along with the other people, humbly continuing in prayer; and Almar *comes*, who had arrived there, prayed to God with the rest of them that they may carry the saint to Cerne if he deigned for it. And lo! You (Eadwold) thought to leap from the bier and even to be carried away to there. Then, therefore, the blessed Eadwold, on the twelfth of August, was translated with great honour to Cerne, and relocated to the church of St. Mary.[133]

There is clearly some confusion in this account because it involves an anachronistic assemblage of individuals. Tom Licence, however, proposes that the *Translatio* was also authored by Goscelin as an accompaniment to his *Life of Eadwold*, and he considers the narrative as evidence for a struggle between Sherborne and Cerne for the saint's relics.[134] In this context, the giant's presence, as an enduring token of the saint's miracle at Cerne, vindicated Cerne's possession of the relics. Goscelin stresses the permanence of Eadwold's association with Cerne and the abbey's suitability as his final resting place in the lessons, where he describes the site of the miracle as "the home prepared for his eternal rest": the saint, he asserts, belonged here, in this place, by this spring, beneath this hill.

There were good reasons why the monks of Cerne may have wanted both to erase Hercules and to replace him, conceptually, with Eadwold. But the reinterpretation of the chalk figure as an image of the local saint was not ultimately successful, perhaps because of the decline in the local significance of Eadwold later in the Middle Ages.

Hercules or Helith?

Among the many guises of the Cerne Giant, there is one more that concerns us. There is a popular theory that he was not originally Hercules but an image of a pre-Christian god called Helith.[135] This idea was most fully expounded by Rodney Castleden, and it resurfaced in recent reports of the new dating.[136] The claim is

[133] "Procurante igitur Almaro episcopo et decernente sancto Dunstano, osa sancti Edwoldi de terra eleuata, cum ad episcopalem sedem Schireburnie ferri deberent, a loco illo moueri non potuerunt. Episcopus igitur cum populo genua flectit orationibus humiliter instans; et Almarus comes qui tunc aderat, vt ad Cernelium portaretur si ipse sanctus dignaretur, cum ceteris deum exorat. Et ecce statim putares ipsum feretrum vltro exilire, ac etiam exportari velle. Sic ergo beatus Edwoldus pridie idus augusti cum magno honore Cernelium deportatu ecclesia sancta Marie collocatur; qui et innumeris miraculorum signis illustrare non desinit. Prefatus vero Almarus monasterium in eodem loco fundauit et multis possessionibus adauxit." Carl Horstman, ed., *"Nova Legenda Angliae": As Collected by John of Tynemouth, John Capgrave and Others, and First Printed, with New Lives, by Wynkyn de Wörde A. D. MDXVI. Now Reprinted with Fresh Material from MS. and Printed Sources*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1901), 1:363–64.

[134] Licence, "Goscelin of St. Bertin," 186, and see also Mark Faulkner, "Ælfric, St. Edmund, and St. Edwold of Cerne," *Medium Ævum* 77/1 (2008): 1–9, at 3–4.

[135] Castleden, *Cerne Giant*, 90–102.

[136] Mark Brown, "Cerne Giant in Dorset Dates from Anglo-Saxon Times, Analysis Suggests," *The Guardian*, 12 May 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/science/2021/may/12/cerne-giant-in-dorset-dates-from-anglo-saxon-times-analysis-suggests (last accessed 30 August 2023), and Mead, "The Mysterious Origins."

that "Helith" refers to a pagan deity worshipped in the Dorset area, which the giant depicts, and whose veneration may have been centered at the site.

The first writer to mention Helith, and the source for all later references, is Walter of Coventry (fl. 1290–1300; Fig. 30). Walter is thought to have been a Benedictine monk at St. Mary's Abbey, York, best known for the *Historical Collections of Walter of Coventry*. This is a derivative historical compilation which draws heavily on earlier writers.[137] In relation to Cerne, Walter says:

> In the county of Dorset are the abbeys Kernelis and Middiltun for men and Sceaston for women; in that region the god Helith was previously worshipped. But when he was preaching the word of God, Saint Augustine saw in his mind's eye that the Divine Presence was in that place, and, becoming cheerful, said: "I see God, who will reward us with his grace." This event, or rather this utterance, gave that place a name so that it was called Kernel, derived from two words, one Hebrew, one Latin—Hel is the word for God in Hebrew.[138]

Walter was more of a compiler than a composer, and the source for this passage was William of Malmesbury, whose works Walter regularly borrowed from.[139] In his *Gesta pontificum Anglorum*, William gives a lengthier version of the above passage.[140] Walter's reliance on William's account is obvious; he either lifted much of the Latin directly from the *Gesta pontificum* or reproduced it in a slightly condensed form. Intriguingly, the only section of Walter's account without a direct parallel in William's work is the reference to the worship of Helith. In fact, William of Malmesbury never uses Helith's name or any variant spelling of it.

Given that Walter was based in York and was producing decidedly imitative chronicles at the end of the thirteenth century, he is unlikely to have independently sourced his information about local tradition in Dorset, even in the improbable case that a folk memory of the worship of a pagan deity had been preserved until then. Rather, a textual source for Walter's claim regarding Helith can be suggested. In the *Gesta pontificum*, at the point where Walter inserts the reference to Helith, William gives an account of local opposition to Augustine of Canterbury's mission to convert Dorset.[141] In this passage, William constructs the conversion of Dorset as a competition between the Devil and Augustine for the souls of the locals. A jealous demon enrages the inhabitants, inciting them to humiliate the Christian missionaries by fixing fish tails to them.[142] This account by William of Malmesbury

[137] Lisa M. Ruch, "Walter of Coventry," in *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle* (2016), ed. Graeme Dunphy and Cristian Bratu, https://doi.org/10.1163/2213-2139_emc_SIM_02516.

[138] "In Dorsetensi pago sunt abbatiae Kerneliensis, Middletunensis, virorum; Sceaftoniensis feminarum; in quo pago olim colebatur deus Helith; sed praedicans ibidem verbum Dei Sanctus Augustinus vidit mentis oculo Divinam adesse praesentiam hilarisque factus ait, 'Cerno Deum, Qui nobis suam retribuet gratiam': eventus vel potius verbum Kernelliensi loco indidit vocabulum ut vocaretur Kernel, ex duobus verbis Hebraico et Latino; quod Hel Deus dicatur Hebraice." William Stubbs, ed., *Memoriale fratris Walteri de Coventria: The Historical Collections of Walter of Coventry. Edited from the MS. in the Library of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge*, 2 vols. (London, 1872–73), 1:60. The passage continues with a brief description of Eadwold residing at Cerne until his death.

[139] Richard Kay, "Walter of Coventry and the Barnwell Chronicle," *Traditio* 54 (1999): 141–67, at 154.

[140] William of Malmesbury, *De gestis pontificum Anglorum libri quinque*, ed. N. E. S. A. Hamilton, Rerum Britannicarum Medii Ævi scriptores 52 (London, 1870), 184–86.

[141] Ibid.

[142] For further on the unusual fish-tail narrative and William of Malmesbury's adaptation of it, see Lloyd, "The West Country Adventures," 416–23.

is a reworking of a story in Goscelin of St. Bertin's *Longer Account of the Arrival of Augustine*:[143]

> And when he [Augustine] had reached the district that is called Dorset . . . he fell into a certain region, like the seat of Pluto in the underworld. There the impious people, blinded by their darkness and hating the Divine light, not only would not listen to the life-giving lessons, but also raged against the saints of God in a complete tempest of mockery and disgrace, and expelled them from their property . . . But the messenger of God . . . passed a sentence on them worthy of their terrible merits, not via a prayer of cursing, as he desired salvation for everyone, but through divine judgment and the example of Elijah.[144]

In Goscelin's account, there is no mention of Augustine contending with the Devil; instead he is pitted against the enmity of the locals. The phrase *Heliæ typo atrocibus* is crucial to the present argument. This reference to the figure of Helias does not, however, indicate a pagan deity, Helith.[145] Instead, "Helias" is the Latin rendering of the name of the Old Testament prophet Elijah.[146] From this misidentification, a potential explanation for Walter of Coventry's claim as to the worship of a god named Helith in Dorset can be suggested.

When writing his passage on Cerne, Walter drew mostly upon William of Malmesbury's *Gesta pontificum* but also Goscelin's *Historia maior*. When faced with William's strange passage about Augustine having a fish tail mockingly affixed to him, Walter consulted the analogous account by Goscelin to clarify its meaning. Reading Goscelin's dense prose style alongside William's account of Augustine contending with the Devil for the souls of the pagans of Dorset, Walter might reasonably have misinterpreted the phrase *Heliæ typo atrocibus* as referring to that "savage figure Helias." He failed, therefore, to understand the typological comparison being made between Augustine and Elijah, and instead took Helias to refer to the demon that William presents as Augustine's enemy in Dorset. A similar confusion between Helias as a Christian figure and Helios as a pagan sun deity, due to their similarity in spelling, is derided by Bede in his *Thirty Questions on the Book of Kings*.[147] Walter,

[143] William has been demonstrated to directly adapt and paraphrase Goscelin's work elsewhere in the *Gesta pontificum*; see Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, ed. and trans. Rosalind C. Love (Oxford, 2004), cxviii.

[144] "Cumque Provinciam, quae Dorsete appellatur attigisset; . . . incidit in quamdam villam velut in tartaream Plutonis sedem. Ibi plebs impia tenebris suis excaecata, & Divinam lucem exosa, non solum audire nequibat vivifica documenta, verum tota ludibriorum & opprobriorum tempestate in Sanctos Dei debbachata, longe proturbat eos ab omni possessione sua . . . At Dei nuntius . . . dignam suis meritis sententiam nonmaledicentis voto, qui omnium salutem optabat, sed Divino judicio & Heliae typo atrocibus injecit." Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *Vita Sancti Augustini Episcopi: Cantuariensis Primi, Anglorumque Apostoli,* in *Acta sanctorum ordinis Sancti Benedicti in sæculorum classes distributa: Sæculum I*, ed. Lucas d'Archery and Johannes Mabillon, 9 vols. (Paris, 1668), 1:526.

[145] For there being no earlier references to Helith than this date in the late twelfth century, see H. J. M. Green, "Religious Cults at Roman Godmanchester," in *Pagan Gods and Shrines of the Roman Empire*, ed. Martin Henig and Anthony King, University of Oxford Committee for Archaeology 8 (Oxford, 1986), 29–55, at 44.

[146] Lloyd, "The West Country Adventures," 418.

[147] Bede, *In Regum libros quaestiones XXX*, in *Opera exegetica: Pars II*, ed. Charles W. Jones, CCSL 119 (Turhout, 1962), 289–322, at 319. For further discussion of Bede's discussion of Elijah in relation to Helios, see Rosalind Love, "Bede and John Chrysostom," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 17 (2007): 72–86, at 79–81.

consequently, recorded the worship of the heathen deity Helith in pre-Christian Dorset as an extremely condensed rendering of the account of Augustine's mission in the region. Perhaps Walter applied the common Middle English derivational suffix -th to *Heliæ* as an effective method of anglicizing the Latin term and producing a name more apposite to an ancient British deity.

It is important to stress that even in Walter of Coventry's misinterpretation, no association is made between Helith and Cerne specifically, nor is the deity linked with the giant. The first person to connect Helith to Cerne was the antiquarian John Leland in the sixteenth century. In his *Collectanea*, Leland comments: "The god Helith was worshipped in the village of Cernel in the time of Augustine, apostle to the English."[148] His source for this is reasonably certain, as he had a copy of Walter of Coventry's *Historical Collections*.[149] Leland produced a precis of Walter's condensed version of Goscelin's and William's accounts and, in doing so, conflated Walter's discussion of Helith with the ensuing passage on Augustine's founding of Cerne. This was repeated by William Camden, who employed Leland's notes in the writing of his highly influential *Britannia*: "Cerne Abbey which was built by Augustine the English Apostle, when he had dash'd to pieces the Idol of the Pagan Saxons there, call'd Heil, and had reform'd their superstitious ignorance."[150] The first association between Helith and the Cerne Giant comes even later and was made by the Reverend John Hutchins, as reported to the Society of Antiquaries by the bishop of Carlisle in 1764.[151] Hutchins, like Camden, refers to the deity as "the Saxon idol Heil," suggesting the *Britannia* as his source. Hutchins also mentions the narrative of fish tails being attached to Augustine alongside his conjecture that the giant is Heil, meaning that he is drawing on the same textual tradition as all the sources above.[152] This claim as to the giant's identity as Helith was then repeated by William Stukeley, with whom Hutchins corresponded on the matter,[153] and independently by the Egyptologist Flinders Petrie in 1926.[154] The only source Petrie provides for the association of the giant, Cerne, and Helith is, once again, Walter of Coventry.

Thus, if the above argument for Walter of Coventry's misinterpretation of the word *Heliæ* in his source material is accepted, then the entire case for there being evidence for the local worship of Helith in Dorset collapses. Leland and Hutchins compounded this initial error through the erroneous association of Helith, first with

[148] "Deus Helith colebatur in pago de Cernel, tempore Augstini, Anglorum Apostoli." *Joannis Lelandi antiquarii de rebus Britannicis collectanea*, ed. Thomas Hearne, 2nd ed., 6 vols. (London, 1770), 1:285.

[149] Cf. James P. Carley, "'Many Good Autors': Two of John Leland's Manuscripts and the Cambridge Connexion," *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 15/3 (2014): 27–56, at 30.

[150] William Camden, *Camden's "Britannia": Newly Translated into English. With Large Additions and Improvements*, trans. Edmund Gibson (London, 1695), 46. For the reliance of Camden on Leland, see Oliver Harris, "John Leland and the 'Briton Brykes,'" *Antiquity Journal* 87 (2007): 346–56.

[151] *Minute-Book of the Society of Antiquaries*, vol. 9 (London, 1762–65), 200. For a full discussion of this claim and the relevant correspondence, see D. Morgan Evans, "Eighteenth-Century Descriptions of the Cerne Abbas Giant," *Antiquaries Journal* 78 (1998): 463–71.

[152] *Minute-Book*, 201.

[153] *Minute-Book*, 235.

[154] William Matthew Flinders Petrie, *The Hill Figures of England*, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland Occasional Paper 7 (London, 1926), 3–4.

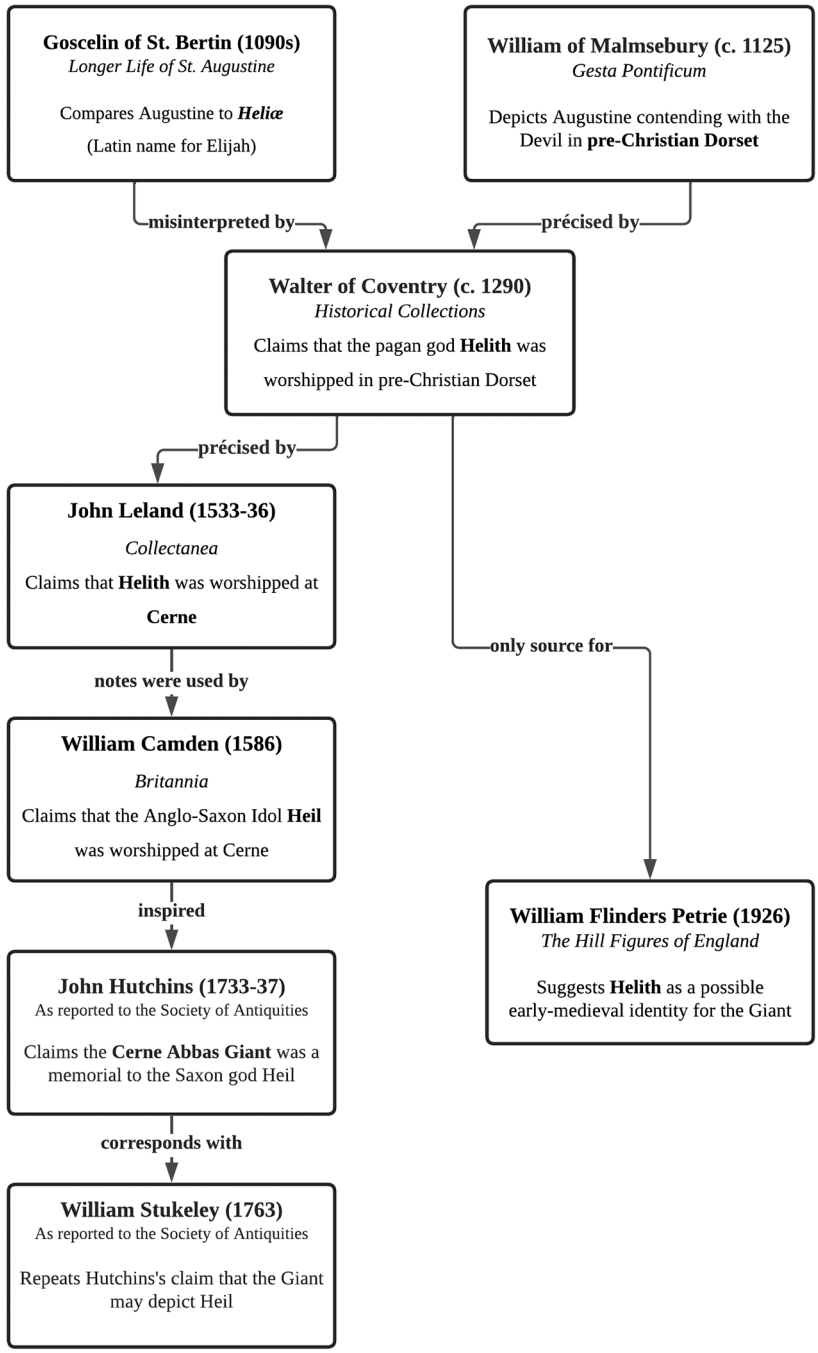


Fig. 30. Schematic representation of the relationship of textual references to the pagan deity "Helith." Diagram: Thomas Morcom.

Cerne and then with the giant. There is some humor, therefore, in the fact that Goscelin is prominently involved in two reidentifications of the Cerne Giant: once, intentionally, as Eadwold, but a second time, inadvertently, as Helith, a spurious pagan god.

Conclusion

The stratigraphic layers of the archaeologists' trenches and interviews with locals about him in the *New Yorker* tell the same tale: the giant is loved and has been looked after. He has survived so long because he has Hercules's capacity for reinvention. As Jonathan Still, the vicar of St. Mary's, Cerne, says, "The giant is absolutely essential to what this place is, and who these people are. He is an active personality in this community."[155] This is at least in part because, for all the apparent simplicity of his form, his stance, the shape of his club, even the presence of his ribs, are freighted with the weight of myth. But he isn't as unknowable as has been thought.

We are arguing that the archaeological dates make good sense. He probably was first made in the early Middle Ages, specifically in the ninth or early tenth century when there was much interest in Hercules. It is likely that he was made to mark a muster station for West Saxon armies meeting on an estate belonging to the ealdorman of the Western Provinces. By the mid-eleventh century, he had been repurposed by the monastery founded, or refounded, at his feet as an image of Saint Eadwold—a convenient way of erasing Hercules and proclaiming the monastery's rights to the saints' relics. In the late thirteenth century, Walter of Coventry, trying to write about Cerne at a distance, misinterpreted Goscelin's Latin and inadvertently created a deity called Helith. In the sixteenth century, Leland read Walter of Coventry's account as relating to Cerne Abbas. In the eighteenth century, Hutchins connected worship of an early medieval deity to the giant, and in the twentieth century, Rodney Castleden wove more connections into this web. All of this is part of the history of the giant and what continues to attract so many people to him.

[155] Mead, "The Mysterious Origins."

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