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Nationcraft in Twelfth-Century England

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University of Oxford

In fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Trinity 2019

Short Abstract

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This thesis explores how national categories – both generic concepts such as *gens* and *natio*, and particular ethnicising terms – were perceived, constructed and used in the long twelfth century. Its main goal is twofold. On the empirical level, it aims to deepen our understanding of national identifications in twelfth-century England by focusing on exceptions, contradictions and previously side-lined material and themes. On the theoretical level, the thesis is an intervention in a broader discussion of the conceptual nature and chronology of 'nationhood'. Its key purpose is to move beyond the unresolved tension in the literature between constructivist rhetoric and a tendency to reify 'nations' and 'peoples' as bounded entities or groups existing out-there-in-the-world. In order to do so, the thesis introduces the concept of 'nationcraft' that redefines 'nations' as ideology. This heuristic suggests that 'nations', 'ethnic groups', (ethnicised) 'peoples' and medieval 'gentes' are not only 'constructed' in the sense of not being 'natural' ('biological') unchangeable units – they always are and remain 'fictions', 'imagined things', with no substance and independent existence of their own.

The empirical part of this thesis begins from an examination of twelfth-century reinterpretations of the meaning of Britishness and explores exceptional and overlooked uses of the words *Britones* and *Britanni* and other ethnic terms derived from the concept of Britain. The next three chapters address the interplay between 'nationhood' and religious ideas and institutions. They focus on the notion of divine election, the applications of national categories to the cults of saints in twelfth-century England, as well as the motif of the saintly lineage of Norman dukes and its role in reimagining national boundaries at the time. The final chapter explores the political pertinence of national identifications – both as applied to and by individuals (with a special focus on those records documenting explicit changes in national identification at the time) and at the level of political-economic organization. The conclusion discusses the conceptual gaps between modern and medieval thinking about nationhood and postulates two general arguments about national categories in the twelfth century. First, it claims that these categories were not neutral, either in the sense of being taken-for-granted and un-reflected, or politically irrelevant. They were consciously thought about, reinterpreted and instrumentalized by twelfth-century actors. This leads to the second key argument: medieval notions of 'nationhood' cannot be reduced to essentialism, rather, they reflected the central paradox of 'nationcraft' as ideology: simultaneously, its tendency to naturalise 'peoples' and 'countries' as objectively existing and singular entities and the self-awareness of its own performativity and artificiality.

Long Abstract

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This thesis explores how national categories – both generic concepts such as *gens* and *natio*, and particular ethnicising terms – were perceived, constructed and used in the long twelfth century. Its main goal is twofold. On the empirical level, it aims to deepen our understanding of national identifications in twelfth-century England by focusing on exceptions, contradictions and previously side-lined material and themes. On the theoretical level, the thesis is an intervention in a broader discussion of the conceptual nature and chronology of 'nationhood'. Its key purpose is to move beyond the unresolved tension in the literature between constructivist rhetoric and a tendency to reify 'nations' and 'peoples' as bounded entities or groups existing out-there-in-the-world. In order to do so, the thesis introduces the concept of 'nationcraft' that redefines 'nations' as ideology. This heuristic suggests that 'nations', 'ethnic groups', (ethnicised) 'peoples' and medieval 'gentes' are not only 'constructed' in the sense of not being 'natural' ('biological') unchangeable units – they always are and remain 'fictions', 'imagined things', with no substance and independent existence of their own. As ideology, 'nationcraft' is a complex process of thinking and representation (anchored in and reproduced through institutional apparatuses and practices) that combines the (conscious or not) acceptance of certain premises with an explicit and open-ended moulding of arguments, images and ideas. From this perspective, we can understand 'nationcraft' in two complementary senses: if its first meaning, directly

equivalent to the concept of 'racecraft' developed by Karen and Barbara Fields, designates the fictitious character of 'nations', ethnicised 'peoples' and 'ethnic groups', in its second meaning, it is closer to Sigbjørn Sønnesyn's 'ethnopoiesis' and becomes an operational concept that allows us to analyse the 'crafting' of 'ethnic' and 'national' categories by medieval authors, without projecting on them our own objectifying tendencies.

Chapter 1 provides a detailed literature review, placing the thesis in its theoretical and historiographical context. Alongside the introduction, it shows how the field of medieval 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' studies emerged from the 1970s in response to two very different hegemonic paradigms – the traditional meta-narrative of the nation, on the one hand, and the 'modernist' theory of the nation(-state), on the other. It argues that this medievalist literature is characterised by an unresolved tension between the portrayal of 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' as 'subjective' phenomena, which are increasingly discussed through the idiom of social constructivism, and the equally strong tendency to reify 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' by writing about 'ethnic groups' and ethnicised 'peoples' as bounded entities or groups, invested with subjectivity and agency. The chapter consists of three sections that discuss in more detail, first, the Vienna school of historical ethnography and, in particular, the work of Walter Pohl and the concept of 'ethnogenesis', as well as the contributions of Patrick Geary. The second section delves into the historiography of 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' in twelfth-century Britain, specifically, the writings of John Gillingham, Rees Davies and Hugh Thomas. The third section brings together the work of individual researchers, whose approaches are closest to my own and thus form the immediate foundation for the new heuristic of 'nationcraft' developed in this thesis: Susan Reynolds, Sigbjørn Sønnesyn and Geraldine Heng.

Chapter 2 opens the empirical part of the thesis. This chapter examines twelfth-century reinterpretations of the meaning of Britishness and explores exceptional and overlooked uses of ethnic terms derived from the concept of Britain. In the twelfth century the terms *Britones* and *Britanni* were routinely employed to refer to the ancient Britons, the Welsh or the Bretons; and so the accepted view in the literature is that while the concept of Britain was important throughout the long twelfth century, the corresponding ethnic term 'Britons' was not used in the same unifying way as from the eighteenth century onwards. This view, however, does not provide the full picture: in some exceptional cases twelfth-century authors radically reimagined the meaning of Britishness and used ethnic concepts associated with *Britannia*, or even invented new concepts such as John of Salisbury's *gens Britanniarum*, as either synonyms of *Angli*, 'the English', or to designate a single people of Britain as a whole. This chapter discusses these cases against the background of twelfth-century historical tradition and royal and ecclesiastical politics of the time and reflects on the conceptual implications of this exceptional material for our general understanding of medieval national categories. It argues that the possibility for twelfth-century authors of drastically reinterpreting the meaning of ethnic terms reveals the complex and contradictory nature of medieval notions of 'nationhood' that cannot be reduced to pure essentialism.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 address the interplay between 'nationhood' and religious ideas and institutions – a topic that, so far, has received little attention in the historiography of national identity in twelfth-century England. Chapter 3 examines the role of biblical vocabulary and imagery in twelfth-century national discourse, focusing especially on the notion of divine election. It traces a few twelfth-century cases where 'the English' were represented as God's chosen people. The chapter then asks how literally such utterances

should be interpreted and argues that they constituted a continuum, where at the one end of the spectrum there are rhetorical applications that were supposed to help the authors to make sense of a nation's historical destiny, and at the other end – pro-active attempts to construct polities and communities, using the biblical paradigm of divine election as a matrix. This chapter also discusses other intersections between religious and national discourses, most interestingly in the apocalyptic context. It cites several passages where twelfth-century authors placed nations in their visions of the Last Judgement and, intriguingly, even in the post-Apocalyptic eternity, and analyses how such claims reflect the place of national categories in the medieval world-view.

Chapter 4 continues the thesis's discussion of the interplay between religion and nationhood in twelfth-century England and looks at it through the lens of the application of national rhetoric to saints' cults. The chapter demonstrates the crucial link between the cults of saints and the notions of national glory and honour and also poses the question of how the language of nationhood was combined with Christian universalism and used by churchmen at both global and local levels. At the same time, it also reveals that the discourse created by overlapping national and religious idioms was contested: various logics collided within it, albeit often implicitly. The existence of this tension between different visions of how religious and national languages should or should not be combined is at the centre of the chapter's analysis. In this way, the chapter aims to problematise our understanding of the interplay between religion and 'nationhood'. The key argument here is that although medieval Christianity should be seen as a prerequisite and an ideal milieu, both institutionally and ideologically, for the development of national identifications in its constituent political communities, this should not blind us to the more complex dynamics of subduing national rhetoric to the interests of local and universal churches.

Chapter 5 continues an exploration of the notion of collective sanctity associated with 'Englishness' encountered in the two preceding chapters. One variation on this common motif was the idea of the saintly line of English kings, most explicitly represented in Aelred's Genealogia Regum Anglorum but also reflected in the wider traditions of twelfth-century historical and hagiographical writing. This notion reflects not only the interplay between religious and national discourses, but also the tendency of national and genealogical logics to overlap, particularly in their representations of history and community. In order to deepen our understanding of such ideological constructions, this chapter examines an idea that at times accompanied the image of the saintly line of English kings in twelfth-century hagiography: that of the saintly lineage of Norman dukes. The first part of the chapter traces the adoption and ideological uses of the image of the pious Norman dukes in four consecutive hagiographical texts written in twelfth-century England. While this is a well-known *topos* of the earlier Norman tradition, its reception in England has been neglected in the existing scholarship. The chapter then examines further evidence of an interest in pious Norman dukes under Henry II, focusing on the translation of the remains of Richard I and Richard II at Fécamp in Normandy in 1162 and discussing whether the dukes' official cult could have been established. Most pertinently to the main argument of the thesis, Aelred's reimagining of the motif of the unification of the saintly lineage of Norman dukes and the English saintly royal line in Edward the Confessor as the emergence of one people from 'the English' and 'the Normans' manifested in Henry II illustrates the same possibility of the self-conscious and purposeful remaking of national categories, as, for example, in the twelfth-century reinventions of 'Britishness'.

The main goal of Chapter 6 is to refute a wide-spread but misleading assumption that although national categories existed in the Middle Ages they were simply descriptive terms,

devoid of any political significance. The chapter looks at the political pertinence of national identifications – both as applied to and by individuals (with a special focus on those records documenting explicit changes in national identification at the time) and at the level of political-economic organization. It zooms in on the case study of a letter written by John of Salisbury on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury, which reveals how national rhetoric was used as a mobilizing resource within the overlapping structures of lordship and secular and ecclesiastical political institutions. These two themes are bridged by a detailed exploration of the literary figure of the anthropomorphic 'personification' of 'countries'/'nations' (in particular, as conceived in William of Malmesbury's famous image of England and Normandy as conjoined twins). Exploring both gendered and political-economic dimensions of national personifications (in parallel, with a discussion of the theory of the polity as a body, as developed most famously by John of Salisbury), I argue that this figure ideally captures and expresses the central paradox of 'nationcraft' as ideology: simultaneously, its tendency to naturalise 'peoples' and 'countries' as objectively existing and, equally importantly, singular entities (what can be more natural and internally coherent than a body?), and the self-awareness of its own performativity and artificiality (what can be more self-consciously imaginary than a national personification?).

The conclusion to the thesis discusses the conceptual gaps between modern and medieval thinking about 'nationhood'. It argues that, perhaps, the most significant difference here lies in how the interrelation between communities and identifications of different scales is imagined. Modern notions, at least in theory, are strictly hierarchical and predicated on the clear separation of local, national, and supra-national identifications and polities. These three levels are seen as corresponding to substantively different types of groups and communal identifications, among which the nation is constructed as the most

significant and politically legitimate and tends to be objectified. This vision is the foundation of the political order and ideology of modern and contemporary nation-states. Medieval notions, on the other hand, do not reveal either a consistent hierarchy or even a conceptual tendency to distinguish local, national, and supra-national identities. In medieval identity discourse all communities, which from a modern perspective would be classified as local or national or supra-national, were constructed and represented through the same concepts, such as *gens* and *populus*, objectified and invested with the same meaning. Significantly, that allowed medieval authors to be in many ways more flexible in constructing and reinterpreting collective identifications. The conclusion also postulates two general arguments about national categories in the twelfth century. First, it claims that these categories were not neutral, either in the sense of being taken-for-granted and un-reflected, or politically irrelevant. They were consciously thought about, reinterpreted and instrumentalized by twelfth-century actors. This leads to the second key argument: medieval notions of nationhood cannot be reduced to essentialism, rather, they paradoxically combined a tendency to objectify and naturalise 'peoples' with the possibility of self-consciously reinventing 'national' distinctions and boundaries.

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Introduction

Writing about medieval 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' can be frustrating. This frustration is visible, for example, in the publications of two distinguished medievalists who late in their careers spent doing sophisticated work on the topic (among many other important contributions) had to engage in direct polemics with 'modernists'. Without much hope, they reiterated what to them must have seemed like the most basic and self-evident point: national identity and the idea of the nation were not invented in 'modernity', but existed in the middle ages. I am referring here to two articles that appeared in print around the same time in the mid-2000s: R.R. Davies's 'Nations and National Identities in the Middle Ages: An Apologia' and Susan Reynolds's 'The Idea of the Nation as a Political Community'.[1] Both originated in papers given at conferences with a significant or even pre-dominant presence of scholars of 'modern' nationhood and nationalism (held in Ghent and Durham respectively). Reynolds opened her piece by somewhat defensively addressing 'those who need persuading, or willing to be persuaded', while Davies, even more tellingly, began his by comparing the situation of medievalists talking about 'nations' among 'modernists' with being 'young children at an adult evening party'.[2] There is a palpable sense of intellectual injustice and emotional annoyance in these rhetorical choices. Behind this rhetoric looms the following question. Why would 'modernists' not accept 'the obvious': in the words of Reynolds, 'that the concept of the nation that lies at the heart of all forms of nationalism was widespread long before the eighteenth century'?[3]

[1] R.R. Davies, 'Nations and National Identities in the Middle Ages: An Apologia', *La Revue belge d'Histoire contemporaine*, 34 (2004), pp. 567–79; S. Reynolds, 'The Idea of the Nation as a Political Community', in *Power and Nation in European History*, ed. L. Scales and O. Zimmer (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 54–66.
[2] Reynolds, The Idea of the Nation as a Political Community, p. 54; Davies, Nations and National Identities in the Middle Ages: An Apologia, p. 567.
[3] Reynolds, The Idea of the Nation as a Political Community, p. 54.

More broadly, this reflects a rather paradoxical historiographical situation. In the last three-to-four decades, there has been a stream of publications on medieval 'ethnicity' and 'national identity';[4] yet these exact same years saw the establishment and entrenchment of 'modernism' – the view according to which 'nationhood' is an essentially modern phenomenon and thus was non-existent or unimportant before 'modernity' – as the dominant paradigm within ethnicity and nationalism studies.[5] Of course, both 'traditions' (to reify, for a moment, in fact internally rather diverse historiographies) have long and overlapping genealogies connecting them to antecedent writing and theorising of 'the nation'. Still, current research on medieval 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' has come into being as a sub-field – that is, as an ever-growing body of publications on the topic, with conferences, volumes, journal special editions and monographs, as contrasted with an occasional article or book section on medieval 'nationality' or 'nationalism' that had been published much earlier too – against the background of 'modernist' academic hegemony.

But to focus on medievalists' writing on 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' as exclusively a critical response to 'modernism' would be reductive. While, as the above quoted passages from Davies and Reynolds show, this literature indeed is often targeting the 'modernist' dogma, there is much more to it than this debate. One cannot over-emphasise the fact that medievalists tackling this theme in recent decades have been reacting not only to

[4] Already in 1999, Timothy Reuter used the International Medieval Bibliography to estimate that 'about 800–1000' articles on medieval 'ethnicity' were published since the mid-1970s. See: T. Reuter, 'Whose Race, Whose Ethnicity? Recent Medievalists' Discussions of Identity', in Idem, *Medieval Polities and Modern Mentalities*, ed. J.L. Nelson (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 100–8, at 100. Even if one has a feeling that the topic peaked in the 1990s and 2000s, the number of relevant publications is continuing to grow steadily. In comparison, when C. Leon Tipton edited a volume on nationalism in the middle ages in 1972, he found just 15 essays to include from books and articles published in the preceding half-century, and mentioned perhaps another ten or so relevant papers for his 'suggested additional readings'. See: *Nationalism in the Middle Ages*, ed. C. Leon Tipton (New York, 1972).

[5] Three key works were published in 1983: B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983); E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983); *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. E.J. Hobsbawm and T.O. Ranger (Cambridge, 1983).

'modernism', but also to what Walter Pohl has labelled 'the national paradigm',[6] that is the traditional master narrative of 'the nation' – the continuous history of 'peoples' and ethnically labelled 'countries/nations', starting from their origins in the middle ages and extending to the present. There are numerous examples of this tendency, and I will quote only a few important and illustrative ones, starting from Lesley Johnson's concise and sharp introduction to one of the key earlier volumes in the field – *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages* (1995) – that opens not with any response to 'modernism', but with a critical discussion of the catalogue of a high-profile exhibition at the British Museum in 1992 and its central logic, manifest in the phrase: 'The Anglo-Saxons… were the true ancestors of the English today'.[7] Patrick Geary's highly influential book *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe*, published in 2002, as is already evident from its title, focuses on the goal of deconstructing nationalist historiography and its mythology of tracing the existence of European nations to the Germanic and Celtic 'peoples' of Late Antiquity and the early middle ages.[8] The same critical reaction against 'traditional' scholarship has been at the centre of the contributions of the 'Vienna School', inspired by an earlier book by Reinhard Wenskus (1961)[9] and established in the prolific work of Herwig Wolfram and, most prominently, Walter Pohl, whose influence on research into medieval 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' cannot be overestimated.[10] In short, all these and many other scholars have

[6] W. Pohl, 'Introduction – Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile', in *Strategies of Identification: Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. W. Pohl and G. Heydemann (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 1–64, at p. 2.
[7] L. Johnson, 'Imagining Communities: Medieval and Modern', in *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. S. Forde, L. Johnson and A.V. Murray (Leeds, 1995), 1–19, at pp. 1–3.
[8] P.J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, 2002).
[9] R. Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung: Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen gentes* (Cologne and Graz, 1961).
[10] Wolfram's key contribution, in which he also introduced the influential term 'ethnogenesis' into the historiography of Late Antique and early medieval 'peoplehood', is H. Wolfram, *Geschichte der Goten. Entwurf einer historischen Ethnographie* (Munich, 1979), currently in its fifth edition and translated into English as *History of the Goths* (Berkeley, 1988). W. Pohl, *Die Awaren: Ein Steppenvolk im Mitteleuropa, 567–822*

been concerned with deconstructing, in Susan Reynolds' words, a nationalist premise that 'nations are objective realities, existing through history'.[11]

These two arguments – against 'modernism' and the 'traditional' master narrative of 'the nation' – have been shaping the field of research on medieval 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' since its proliferation in the late 1970s and early 1980s. We are still in the middle of this ongoing conversation and contestation, but the first premise of this thesis is that at least in a purely academic context neither of these two cases requires yet another re-statement.[12] What is, however, less clear and, I believe, does require more work is how exactly we understand phenomena such as 'nationhood', 'ethnicity', and 'peoplehood'. Here, as I shall argue in more detail below, many (if not all) historians of medieval (and for that matter, modern) 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' are still caught in a certain 'double-think' that represents these categories as simultaneously 'artificial constructs' and reified groups that not only exist as bounded (even if not unchangeable) communities but are also endowed with collective agency. Here lies the first – theoretical – contribution of this thesis. It is an attempt to develop a more effective and internally coherent heuristic for understanding 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' across time and place. The purpose of having such a heuristic is to be able to take these phenomena seriously in order to study their role in different social systems, but in such a way as to avoid the reification and objectification reproduced through 'methodological nationalism' (broadly understood as including not only

(Munich, 1988) was Pohl's first major intervention in the field (only now being translated into English). Since then, Pohl has written many articles and edited a whole series of important volumes on the topic: his approach and its influence will be discussed in chapter 1, a literature review, below.

[11] S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 251–3.

[12] In addition to the above-mentioned article by Reynolds ('The Idea of Nation as a Political Community', see note 1), Philip Gorski and Caspar Hirschi offer excellent critiques of 'modernism' from sociological and historical early-modernist perspectives. See: Ph.S. Gorski, 'The Mosaic Moment: An Early Modernist Critique of Modernist Theories of Nationalism', *American Journal of Sociology*, 105 (2000), pp. 1428–68; C. Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism: An Alternative History from Ancient Rome to Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 20–33.

'nations', but also 'ethnic groups' and ethnicised 'peoples') that assumes the pre-existence of that which it aspires to define and explain.[13] Crucially, this heuristic is being assembled not only through a critical engagement with both explicit and implicit theoretical assumptions of the current literature on 'ethnicity', 'nationhood' and 'nationalism', but also through reading twelfth-century texts and reflecting on their categories and contradictions. My approach thus crosses the strict and arguably artificial distinction between 'theory' as a separately construed 'methodology' that is to be applied – as if from outside – to 'sources' and, instead, suggests that we may productively think history *as* theory.[14]

Before I outline what this heuristic might look like, I shall say a bit more about the contradiction between constructivist and reifying tendencies, which I see as a prominent feature of the field. First, let me give a couple of instructive examples from the publications of some of the most prominent scholars of medieval 'identity', 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' (while admitting, as is the case for any short quotations, that the following passages are both selective and somewhat taken out of their context). Rees Davies concludes his second lecture delivered as the address of the president of the Royal Historical Society with an assertion that 'peoples are artificial creations' and also speaks about 'the essential fluidity of

[13] The term 'methodological nationalism' was (so far as I can judge) coined by Herminio Martins in the 1970s: 'In general, macro-sociological work has largely submitted to national pre-definitions of social reality: a kind of methodological nationalism – which does not necessarily go together with political nationalism on the part of the researcher – imposes itself in practice with national community as the terminal unit and boundary condition for the demarcation of problems and phenomena for social science. It is an odd paradox that the sociology of nationalism has not itself flourished, but in a way it is not a paradox at all but another symptom of the same methodological and institutional situation' (H. Martins, 'Time and Theory in Sociology', in *An Introduction to Major Trends in British Sociology*, ed. J. Rex (London, 1974), pp. 246–94, at p. 276). Both Martins' definition and his helpful distinction between methodological and political nationalisms are applicable to the discipline of history too. As a side note, it is curious to register Martins' claim that 'the sociology of nationalism has not itself flourished', which reflects the fundamental changes in research on 'nationhood' since the 1970s and so justifies the chronology of historiographical and theoretical horizon suggested in this introduction and the following literature review chapter.

[14] J. Banaji, *Theory as History: Essays on Modes of Production and Exploitation* (Leiden, 2010). See also the recent *Theses on Theory and History* by the Wild On Collective (Ethan Kleinberg, Joan Wallach Scott, Gary Wilder, May 2018): https://theoryrevolt.com/ (Accessed on 04.09.2019).

early medieval peoples and their nomenclature'.[15] But the very same text also contains the following claims: 'Of the peoples of these islands it was, significantly, the English who sorted out their nomenclature earliest and so with a briskness and directness contrasted with the ambiguities and uncertainties of their neighbours. It marked them out as a people who knew where they were going and how to get there'; '[k]ing, people and country formed the unity that was England and the English people'; 'England had taken final shape…'.[16] All these statements present an ethnicised people, 'the English', as a truly existing bounded entity that is also invested with the agency of a singular and purposeful actor. This is of course a methodologically nationalist logic par excellence, reinforced by the temporal rhetoric of a 'finished' process, also evident in Davies' following reflection on the historiography of 'Scottish nationhood': 'Historians may differ in their emphasis as to when and why the process of the creation of a single Scottish nation can be said to be completed…' (but, according to Davies, they agree that this happened at some point in the medieval period).[17] The notion of the creation of 'a country' or 'a single nation' as 'a completed process' is difficult to reconcile with the assertions of 'essential fluidity' and 'artificiality' of 'peoples'; instead, this sounds like a typical teleology of the traditional master narrative of nation-formation.

John Gillingham, who has perhaps been less interested in the theory of medieval 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' in general but is undoubtedly one of the most important commentators on 'national identity' in twelfth-century England in particular, repeatedly insists in his publications that 'nationality' is 'subjective' and is to be understood as 'a

[15] R.R. Davies, 'The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400: II. Names, Boundaries and Regnal Solidarities', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Series, 5 (1995), pp. 1–20, at p. 20 and p. 6.
[16] Ibid., p. 6, p. 11, p. 13.
[17] Ibid., p. 17.

matter of identification' or 'in terms of self-identification'.[18] At the same time, introducing a reprint of his articles as a single book, tellingly titled *The English in the Twelfth Century*, Gillingham writes that these 'essays… deal with the English at a critical period in their history – the 150 or so years from the eve of the Norman Conquest to the reign of King John…'.[19] In this passage, 'Englishness' seems to be understood not as a matter of '(self)identification', but as a fact of the existence of an ethnicised people that is also a subject of its own continuous history, of which a particular section can be deemed 'crucial' – a claim that cannot but be made from a teleological point of view. The same combination of reification and teleology is evident in Gillingham's reference to 'the Scots' 'at this stage of their development' and, more generally, in his assertion that the ethnicised distinction between 'the English' and 'Celtic peoples' did correspond to actual social differences, for instance, in 'economy' and 'warfare'.[20] I would like to emphasise that my point here is not (yet) to judge this last argument as such, but to note that this teleological reification along 'ethnic' lines that constitutes 'peoples' as meaningful entities does seem to be difficult to reconcile with Gillingham's other idea of 'nationality' as a matter of subjective 'identification'.

Hugh Thomas, who has written perhaps the most detailed study of 'ethnicity' in long twelfth-century England, addresses these theoretical difficulties head-on in the relatively lengthy methodological and conceptual introduction to his book.[21] Yet it seems that trying

[18] J. Gillingham, 'Henry of Huntingdon and the Twelfth-Century Revival of the English Nation', in *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, pp. 75–101, at pp. 75–6; Idem, 'Foundations of a Disunited Kingdom', in *Uniting the Kingdom?: The Making of British History*, ed. A. Grant and K.J. Stringer (London, 1995), pp. 48–64, at p. 54.
[19] Idem, *The English in the Twelfth-Century: Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values* (Woodbridge, 2000), p. xv.
[20] Idem, Foundations of a Disunited Kingdom, pp. 58–9.
[21] H.M. Thomas, *The English and The Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity 1066–c.1220* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 3–92.

to set out an explicit theory of 'ethnicity' leads to the same contradiction, only expressed in a more convoluted way. Thomas writes: 'My theoretical approach also involves treating ethnic identity as a process as well as a thing. At any moment in time, ethnicity is a thing, or, more precisely, a complex concept, whether in the mind of an individual or in a society's world-view.'[22] It is a bit difficult to understand this claim literally: how can the notion of 'a complex concept' be a 'more precise' definition' of 'a thing'? But this contradictory claim 'makes sense' in the context of a more general contradiction of insisting – simultaneously – on 'ethnicity' being 'a construct' and the reality of cultural differences between 'ethnic groups'. In another curious claim, Thomas explains that 'ethnic groups have no independent Platonic reality but exist only because people say they do'.[23] Leaving aside 'Platonic reality' (although one may wish to ask whether Thomas believes that some other things, e.g. material objects, have any 'independent Platonic reality'), we note that the statement 'ethnic groups… exist only because people say they do' directly contradicts the notion of objective cultural differences. Thomas' attempt at an explicit solution to this contradiction by positing that 'culture' and 'construct' constitute two different levels of 'ethnicity' (alongside with the third level of individuals) clearly fails to solve the problem, only barely covering it with social-science jargon.

In a sense, Thomas consciously places himself in this contradictory space, since, writing in the early 2000s, after the first wave of medieval 'ethnicity' studies, he directly opposes his approach to some of his immediate predecessors who allegedly went 'too far' in insisting on the artificiality of 'ethnic groups'.[24] Here Thomas' immediate target is Walter Pohl – a fact not devoid of a certain irony, given that Pohl's writings can also be used as an

[22] Ibid., pp. 14–5.
[23] Ibid., p. 10.
[24] Ibid., pp. 18–9.

illustration of the same contradictory tendency. I shall quote just one example from Pohl here (while, of course, discussing his highly influential work in detail in the literature review) – in order to demonstrate that even some of the best current theorising of medieval 'ethnicity' reproduces the contradiction between constructivist and reifying conceptualisations. In his introduction to the relatively recent volume on 'the strategies of identification', Pohl argues that '"ethnic groups" necessarily constitute abstractions. "Ethnic groups" are not reality itself, they are tools for understanding reality'.[25] Yet the very next paragraph opens with an assertion that 'many ethnic groups do not think of themselves as ethnic groups',[26] thus returning us from the strong constructivist claim quoted above to a typical objectifying rhetoric that posits 'ethnic groups' not as 'abstractions', but as actually existing entities that may have an objective reality even regardless of self-identification.

This tendency to mix up constructivism and reification originates in both methodological and political factors. Methodologically, it is rooted in the ambiguity of the 'social constructivist' paradigm that implicitly or explicitly underpins the majority of current writing on the topic. The basic problem here is that to claim that something is a 'social construct' means – in its own right – very little. To quote Karen and Barbara Fields' scathing critique of generic references to 'race' as 'a social construction', 'identifying race as a social construction does nothing to solidify the intellectual ground on which it totters. The London Underground and the United States of America are social constructions; so are the evil eye and the calling of spirits from the vasty deep; and so are murder and genocide. All derive from the thoughts, plans, and actions of human beings living in human societies. Scholars who intone "social construction" as a spell for the purification of race do not make clear –

[25] Pohl, Introduction – Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile, p. 12.
[26] Ibid., p. 13.

perhaps because they do not themselves realize – that race and racism belong to different families of social construction… Race belongs to the same family as the evil eye. Racism belongs to the same family as murder and genocide. Which is to say that racism, unlike race, is not a fiction, an illusion, a superstition, or a hoax. It is a crime against humanity'.[27]

I shall return to the methodological implications of Fields' distinction between 'race' and 'racism', but what matters first is their correct and powerfully articulated observation that a designation of something as a 'social construct' is at best a truism. Of course, if we want to historicise any phenomenon, we must treat it as something that is neither metaphysical nor natural. Hence, saying that 'ethnicity' or 'nation' are social constructions is a necessary first step. But if we stop there, we have not said anything yet, we have only created a possibility for a historical discussion. Moreover, if we do not clarify what kind of 'construction' we are talking about, we risk bringing back – whether unwittingly or consciously – essentialist and objectifying logics through the back door. This speaks directly to what Rogers Brubaker has diagnosed as a key double problem with the 'prevailing analytical idiom' in contemporary ethnicity studies. Brubaker called the first target of his criticism 'groupism', that is 'the tendency to take bounded groups as fundamental units of analysis' and to conceive 'ethnic groups' as 'entities' and cast them as 'actors'.[28] His second target is complacent and cliched constructivism, the intellectual slackness of which is symptomatically revealed in the fact that 'constructivist and groupist language' can be 'casually conjoined' in the same works.[29] As I began showing above and shall further demonstrate below, there is a tendency in medievalists' writing on 'ethnicity' and

[27] K.E. Fields and B.J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London, 2012), pp. 100–1.
[28] R. Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), pp. 2–3.
[29] Ibid., p. 3.

'nationhood' towards exactly the same combination of 'groupism' and 'cliched constructivism'.

Such methodological ambiguity should be read in its political context, in fact, one can argue that the latter explains the former. 'The nation' occupies a contradictory place in mainstream political sensibility today: on the one hand, it is associated with nationalism – largely negatively connotated and linked with the traumatic fascist past; on the other hand, 'nation-state' still remains the main institutional framework of both liberal democracy and international law ('national self-determination', the 'United Nations'), and as such tends to be accepted as legitimate by the majority in the countries where scholars publishing on medieval 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' tend to reside. This political contradiction maps surprisingly well onto the methodological contradiction in the literature. The insistence on 'nationhood' and 'ethnicity' as 'social constructions' corresponds to an unease with nationalism (especially, ethnic or racial nationalism) and constitutes an attempt to disassociate still accepted ethnic and national categories from discredited racist 'science' and the catastrophic politics of the first half of the twentieth century. Yet, the reproduction of methodological nationalism and groupism in the literature shows how difficult it is to think beyond these categories in a consistent and systematic manner while they are still being enacted as political norm and define material reality in both political and everyday spheres.

An instructive parallel here is 'race', again. It seems to me that if we compare the dominant modes of writing on 'race' and 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' in the humanities and social sciences we will see that the former is treated in a way that is systematically more constructivist and abolitionist than the mainstream approaches to the latter. Academic labelling is telling in its own right: 'critical race studies' define the current understanding of

'race' (while various forms of socio-biological revisionism attempting to re-affirm the reality of races remain marginal), yet 'critical nation studies' do not even exist. As Geraldine Heng emphasises in her brilliant work on the invention of 'race' in the European middle ages, it is a basic assumption of 'race studies' to assert that 'race' is an empty signifier (or even 'empty vacuum', to use Ann Stoler's more expressive phrase, quoted by Heng).[30] Thus, in a stark contrast to (many, if not all) historians of 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood', critical scholars of 'race' do not argue over 'objective' and 'subjective' definitions of the concept: whether 'race' is something defined by a list of objective criteria or alternatively a kind of group that believes in itself being a 'race' – while this is still a discussion that underpins some of the most sophisticated recent theorising of medieval 'ethnicity'.[31] Neither do they attempt to suggest that races as 'groups' are 'historical' and 'protean', have 'porous boundaries', are not homogenous and change over time. Few people would argue that 'race is constructed but becomes real' – a logic that seems to be more easily applied to 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood'. While such writing would be able to distinguish itself from 'biological racism' it would still be basically objectifying. Instead, 'race' is understood as a concept that does not reflect any kind of intrinsic differences between groups as such but is doing particular ideological work to sustain certain forms of power hierarchy and material exploitation on both global and local scales.

It is my contention that politics, rather than any substantive differences between concepts themselves, explain such different treatments of 'race', on the one hand, and 'ethnicity'/'nationhood', on the other hand. As I have argued above, 'ethnicity' and 'the nation' retain political legitimacy, even if a deeply ambivalent one, while 'race' has been

[30] G. Heng, 'The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages I: Race Studies, Modernity, and the Middle Ages', *Literature Compass*, 8 (2011), pp. 258–74, at p. 262.
[31] See: Pohl, Introduction – Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile.

challenged more successfully by the Civil Rights movement and global anti-racist decolonisation. Of course, this is not to paint some idyllic 'post-racial' view of the current world – racism is now reasserting itself with vengeance – but, insofar as academic understanding is concerned, it seems to be clear that the *mainstream* frontier is by far more radical and less contradictory when we discuss 'race' than when we talk about 'ethnicity'/'nationhood'. This prompts the question: what would a comparably critical and consistent heuristic for researching and writing about 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' look like?

I would like to suggest that the first premise of such a heuristic would be to define 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' as a form of ideology. 'Ideology' is a highly contested term that can be understood in multiple different ways.[32] What I mean here, though, is something quite simple. I am arguing that 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' are nothing more or less than ideas and therefore when we reify and substantiate such concepts as 'ethnic group', 'nation', 'ethne' or 'people', we objectify and mystify them, thereby undermining our own critical analysis. Such substantiation is inevitable when one attempts to define these ideological phenomena as actually existing (even if 'constructed') 'groups', 'communities' and 'polities'. In spite of any number of 'constructivist' glosses, all such definitions lead to presenting 'nations' and 'ethnic groups' as bounded entities and (collective) actors endowed with agency. From this perspective, it does not really matter whether one is proposing an 'objective' or '(inter)subjective' definition of 'ethnic group' and 'nation' (or, for that matter, an attempt to combine these two approaches). If we treat 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' as ideology, any such groupist definition is already an act of mystification and reification.[33]

[32] In my opinion, the best available overview, both historical and philosophical, is J. Rehmann, *Theories of Ideology: The Powers of Alienation and Subjection* (Leiden, 2013).
[33] For a more detailed discussion of various influential definitions of 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' and their limits see chapter 1, pp. 78–84.

Understanding 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' as ideology is the necessary first step, if we want to move beyond the current impasse created by the contradictory double-think of skin-deep constructivism and ongoing reification. The next step is to make this emerging heuristic more specific. I would like to introduce the concept of 'nationcraft' for this purpose. 'Nationcraft' builds on the critical work of Karen and Barbara Fields referred to above and adapts their neologism 'racecraft' to research into 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood'. 'Racecraft' is coined on the basis of 'witchcraft' and its main analytical point is to avoid being caught in the double bind of, on the one hand, arguing that something – in this case, 'race' – is 'constructed', but, on the other hand, writing about this phenomenon as if it constitutes some kind of independent reality in its own right. Thus, the goal is to be consistent in treating both 'racism' and 'race' as ideologies and to avoid taking them at face value and reify the latter (often, in contradiction to a scholar's own critical intention and discourse). As the Fields write, 'witchcraft has no moving parts of its own, and needs none. It acquires perfectly adequate moving parts when a person acts upon the reality of the imagined thing; the real action creates evidence for the imagined things'.[34] According to them, 'racecraft' works in the same way. I suggest that this is also true of 'nationcraft': 'nations', 'ethnic groups', (ethnicised) 'peoples' and medieval '*gentes*' are not only 'constructed' in the sense of not being 'natural' ('biological') unchangeable units – they always are and remain 'fictions', 'imagined things', with no substance and independent existence of their own.

When I insist on the fictitious character of 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' by designating them 'nationcraft', I by no means wish to deny the real effects of this ideology. But we need

[34] K.E. Fields and B.J. Fields, *Racecraft*, p. 22.

to be able to explain these effects without taking ideological claims themselves at their face value (which inevitably happens if we admit the reality of 'nations', 'ethnic groups' and 'races'). Another tradition I am relying on to achieve this goal is a historical materialist understanding of 'ideology'. Here, we can specify the definition of ideology not simply as any set of ideas that present a limited and selective vision of an inevitably more complex reality, but as the system of hegemonic logics and representations that justify and naturalise social relations, turning the contingent outcomes of historical processes into 'natural order' and 'common sense'. As for the label 'historical-materialist', it should be interpreted not as any reduction of 'ideas' to their 'economic causes', but as an acknowledgment that, on the one hand, ideas are not separated from or floating above the totality of social relations and, on the other hand, they are a material force insofar as they hold people in their grasp and entail practical outcomes. Of course, we should not consider this process from a methodologically individualist perspective (even less so, from any kind of its 'rational choice theory' sub-variant). Individuals do not simply 'choose' this or that ideology, one has to understand how these processes develop through the various sets of relations, such as domination, hegemony, resistance, production, reproduction, the construction of senses of self, to name but a few. The configuration of these relations inevitably varies across time and place, thus explaining all sorts of different invariants – institutional and individual – of the real effects of nationcraft in history. Thus this historical materialist approach to nationcraft distinguishes itself from both the purely literary deconstruction of 'the nation' (an ultimately nihilist critique that cannot address the extra-textual effects of narrativized ideologies without contradicting itself) and those strands of historiography that cannot quite leave behind groupism and reification.

Understanding nationcraft through the lens of ideology helps us to address another difficult theoretical issue that is directly linked with the predominant historiographical interpretations of 'ethnicity', 'nationhood' and 'peoplehood' in the middle ages. Perhaps not surprisingly in the context of the difficult debates with 'modernists' denying any existence or relevance of such categories before 'modernity', medievalists tended to emphasise that, to use Rees Davies' formula, 'the medieval world was undoubtedly a world of peoples, *gentes*'.[35] This claim sounds objectifying, but Davies, as he clarifies on the next page, means that 'there could be no doubting that for medieval authors the world was, and had always been, a world of peoples' (a statement that is also similar to Susan Reynold's influential argument that the concept of 'people' was taken for granted in the middle ages).[36] Of course, this is true, but something problematic begins to happen when this generic argument is combined with, first, contemporary historians' own ambiguous and ultimately objectifying definitions of 'a people' (as, for instance, in Davies' own definition of 'a people' as an 'imagined community, imagined by itself and/or by [the] other' that presupposes the existence of a people, which also is – mystifyingly – endowed with an agency to imagine itself), and, second, a tendency to ascribe an essentialist concept of 'ethnicity', 'nationhood' and 'peoplehood' to medieval authors themselves. As Sigbjørn Sønnesyn writes in a brilliant and, I believe, underappreciated paper on 'The Rise of the Normans as Ethnopoiesis', 'when medieval notions of ethnicity, usually expressed in the sources with terms like *gens* or *natio*, are discussed in modern scholarship, the consensus seems to be that this medieval notion was built around some core elements, including shared biological descent, observable

[35] R.R. Davies, 'The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400: I. Identities', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Series, 4 (1994), pp. 1–20, at p. 4. Tellingly, this comes from a segment where the author explicitly justifies studying medieval 'peoples' and 'identities' against a hypothetical 'modernist' response.
[36] Ibid., p. 5. S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 250–331; in particular, p. 252 and pp. 256-8.

cultural forms, and a shared language'.[37] On the basis of a careful rereading of well-known medieval sources narrating 'the Normans', Sønnesyn argues that the ascription of such biological and cultural essentialism to medieval authors is, at best, not universally correct. Instead, he suggests that the concept of 'ethnopoiesis' (notably, the exact Greek transliteration of 'nationcraft') may capture some medieval historians' notions of 'ethnicity' better, since those authors, far from taking 'peoples' for granted, in fact, explicitly constructed the narrative of the *making* of peoples as political and cultural projects, in a startling contrast to the purely essentialist views of 'ethnicity' attributed to them by a consensus of modern scholarship.[38]

The source materials examined in this thesis, especially the long twelfth-century examples of the reinvention of the meanings of the ethnonyms derived from the concept of 'Britain' analysed in chapter 2, confirm the validity and significance of Sønnesyn's argument. We cannot reduce medieval notions of 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' to essentialism. That historians today tend to do that, I believe, tells us more about their own systematic ambiguity towards these categories – the essentialising element of which they uncritically 'outsource' to medieval authors. Thinking 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' as ideology helps us to avoid this pitfall: while any ideology always operates through some banal – widely 'common-sensical' – terms (in the case of medieval national discourses – the concepts of *gens*, *natio* and *populus*, transmitted through the reception of both the Bible and classical historical, scientific and political literatures; today – 'imagined communities' and 'culture'), it, as an ideology, cannot be reduced to some unwitting automatic acceptance of those

[37] S. Sønnesyn, 'The Rise of the Normans as *Ethnopoiesis*', in *Norman Tradition and Transcultural Heritage: Exchange of Cultures in the 'Norman' Peripheries of Medieval Europe*, ed. St. Burkhardt and Th. Foerster (London, 2013), pp. 203–18, at p. 205.
[38] Ibid., *passim*.

notions. Instead, it is a complex process of thinking and representation (anchored in and reproduced through institutional apparatuses and practices) that combines the (conscious or not) acceptance of certain premises with an explicit and open-ended moulding of arguments, images and ideas. From this perspective, we can understand 'nationcraft' in two different senses: if its first meaning, directly equivalent to witchcraft and the Fields' 'racecraft', designates the fictitious character of 'nations', ethnicised 'peoples' and 'ethnic groups', in its second meaning, it is closer to Sønnesyn's 'ethnopoiesis' and becomes an operational concept that allows us to analyse the 'crafting' of 'ethnic' and 'national' categories by medieval authors, without projecting on them our own objectifying tendency.

At this point, it only remains to introduce the final element of the heuristic this thesis proposes. It identifies and pushes back against another prominent tendency in the literature on medieval 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' to enjoin historians to take medieval 'ethnic' and 'national' categories 'on their own terms'.[39] As before, the popularity of this formula is understandable in the context of the historiographical debates with both 'modernists' on the one hand and 'traditional scholarship' on the other. It simultaneously historicises 'the nation' against those who (are claimed to) treat it as an ahistorical given and also legitimises the concept's application to a period characterised by institutional, material and ideational conditions which are drastically different from those historical circumstances of the late eighteenth-nineteenth centuries used by 'modernists' in their hegemonic definition of 'the nation' and nationalism. The critique of the logically-circular monopolization of 'the nation' by 'modernists' is on point, but the 'taking-on-its-own-terms' approach is problematic in its

[39] Davies, The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400: I. Identities, p. 4; Thomas, *The English and The Normans*, p. 17. Thomas explicitly references Davies here, adding the 'on their own terms' formula: 'As Davies suggests, the peoples of the Middle Ages ought to be studied on their terms' (noteworthy, Thomas' wording is more objectifying: while Davies writes about what 'medieval men and women thought', Thomas turns 'peoples' into objective entities to be studied 'on their own terms').

own right. This seems to be most obviously self-contradictory when scholars suggest studying medieval 'ethnicity' or 'identity' – both fairly recent meta-terms absent as such from the political vocabulary of the middle ages – on 'their own terms'. In fact, this injunction is not so much meant as a strong methodological prescription to describe a given society exclusively in its own categories in order to avoid anachronism and presentism than as a rather desperate plea for legitimacy in the face of the hegemonic 'modernist' paradigm. 'Leave us alone to deal with our sources as we think best' seems to be the sentiment underlying this approach.

The immediate problem here is that 'modernists' themselves seem to be only too happy to do exactly that. One can argue that the hegemony of 'modernism' has been sustained in spite of all those thousands of articles and books on 'ethnicity' and 'national identity' in the middle ages at least in part because medievalists so easily concede that while using the same words they are indeed talking about something else – about some phenomena that are to be understood 'on their own terms'. But I think the main issue here is not even this tendency to lock medieval research on 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' into a field of its own, thus undermining the criticism of the 'modernist' paradigm from the medievalist perspective. What is worse, in my view, is that this move tends to prevent medievalists from using medieval texts and categories to develop their own meta-theories of 'nationhood' or 'ethnicity' in general. Instead, with a few exceptions, medievalists tend to borrow their theories and conceptual languages from other scholars – not unironically, often, from modernists themselves, as the omnipresent use of Anderson's 'imagined communities' in medieval research illustrates best of all.[40] This is a missed opportunity.

[40] One can quote any number of examples; see among many others: Davies, The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400: I. Identities, p. 4; Johnson, Imagining Communities: Medieval and Modern; Thomas, *The English*

Instead of only applying theories from other disciplines such as modern history, historical sociology or ethnography (where, one may add, these theories not infrequently only reinforce the tendency towards reification, as is the case with perhaps the most commonly quoted anti-modernist theoretical alternative of Anthony D. Smith),[41] medievalists should formulate their own theories, using the disruptive potential of medieval concepts and idioms.

To be able to do that effectively, we must leave behind the dichotomy of 'the middle ages' and 'modernity' that underpins this whole debate. Here I am following in the footsteps of Geraldine Heng who similarly emphasises the necessity of deconstructing the narrative of 'modernity' so as to enable us to reassemble our approach to medieval 'race'. To quote Heng's sharp critique at length, '[l]ike many a theoretical discourse, race theory is predicated on an unexamined narrative of temporality in the West: a grand récit that reifies modernity as telos and origin and that, once installed, entrenches the delivery of a paradigmatic chronology of racial time through mechanisms of intellectual replication pervasive in the Western academy, and circulated globally… In the grand récit of Western temporality, modernity is positioned simultaneously as a spectacular conclusion and a beginning: a teleological culmination that emerges from the ooze of a murkily long chronology by means of a temporal rupture – a big bang, if we like – that issues a new historical instant. The material reality and expressive vocabulary of rupture is vouched for by symbolic phenomena of a highly dramatic kind: a Scientific Revolution, discoveries of race, the formation of nations, etc., which signal the arrival of modern time. Medieval time, on the wrong side of rupture, is thus shunted aside as detritus of a pre-Symbolic era falling

and The Normans, p. 13; *Imagined Communities: Constructing Collective Identities in Medieval Europe*, ed. A. Pleszczynski, J.A. Sobiesiak, M. Tomaszek and Pr. Tyszka (Leiden, 2018).

[41] A.D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, 1986).

outside the signifying systems issued by modernity, and reduced to the role of a historical trace undergirding the recitation of modernity's arrival'.[42] Thus 'modernity' is of course not an objectively totally new human condition, enabling novel and previously inconceivable phenomena (including, 'nationhood'), but a particular narrative, in which 'the middle ages' are reduced to the status of a foil for a story to be told about 'modern us'. Whether this narrative represents 'the middle ages' as a source of distant 'origins' or 'the other' of 'modernity', we have no reason to accept this paradigm, which of course does not mean to deny that all sorts of historical changes have happened within the time frame of what we are used to split into the 'medieval' and 'modern' periods.[43] The point is that these changes do not fit and cannot be understood within this myth of 'modernity' – a secular version of the New Testament story, predicated on an absolute divide between 'before' and 'after'. In fact, our starting point should be, in Bruno Latour's apt formula, that 'we have never been modern'.[44]

Rejecting the dichotomy of 'the middle ages', in fact reduced to the almost purely negative notion of 'pre-modern', and 'modernity' as two reified 'conditions' is not only a general methodological, political and ethical stance that helps us to abandon, to use David Graber's words, 'the arrogant, unreflecting assumptions which tell us we have nothing in common with 98% of people who ever lived'.[45] This is also an essential element of redefining our approach to understanding 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood'. Instead of formulating technical definitions of such concepts as 'the nation', 'ethnicity' or 'ethnic

[42] Heng, The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages I, pp. 262–3.
[43] On the periodization and politics of time see: K. Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia, 2008).
[44] Br. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), as understood in D. Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Chicago, 2004), p. 46
[45] Graeber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, p. 47.

group' and then applying them to 'sources', we may more productively think of 'national categories' used in medieval texts and analytical concepts employed by contemporary historians and social scientists as belonging to one continuum. The notion of continuum does not negate changes or differences. In a sense, we may wish to put a certain emphasis on 'differences', insofar as we reject an artificial separation between 'our' allegedly critical analytical terminology and the uncritical usage of accepted, 'taken for granted' notions by medieval authors. Heuristically, an attention to differences is crucial since it is exactly that tool which may help us to destabilise our own uncritical usage of 'ethnic' and 'national' concepts – a necessary step if one wishes to move from taking a certain ideology at its face value and projecting it onto sources under the guise of neutral academic analysis.

A brief example provides an excellent illustration of this disruptive critical potential of medieval categories. In his *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, William of Malmesbury uses a very curious term: *gens occidentalis*. He introduces it in the context of a broad comparison between 'the West' and 'the East' and explains the persistence of one empire in the East, which he also ethnicises by calling it 'Persian', by the passivity and femininity of the people of the East (a clearly racialised representation), contrasted with the robust and warlike 'nature' of *gens occidentalis* that does not tolerate the hegemony of any one people, thus causing the constant process of the translation of imperial power.[46] I shall return more than once to this fascinating construct throughout this thesis, but here I would like to attract our attention to two aspects. First, the concept of one 'Western people' that also somehow encompasses particular peoples, such as 'the Germans' or 'the Franks', is so alien to how modern historians tend to perceive ethnic categories that the translators and editors of the

[46] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, ed. and transl. R.A.B. Mynors, completed R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom (2 vols., Oxford, 1998–9), i, IV.360, pp. 632–5.

Gesta Regum Anglorum for the Oxford Medieval Texts series decided to render William's term in plural instead of the original singular: 'the Western peoples'.[47] This of course banalises a highly original medieval concept. The second consideration is more speculative: it seems to me that modern historians will never treat William of Malmesbury's *gens occidentalis* in the same manner as more familiar *gentes* – those that designate routinely ethnicised peoples (for instance, the 'Franks' or 'Germans' or 'English'). *Gens occidentalis* is never assumed to be a real entity endowed with agency, even though this is exactly how William of Malmebury writes about it. For this medieval author such a *gens* is both a naturalised and a political community with a particular historical fate – a standard pattern we tend to associate with 'ethnicity', but in this case the notion does not seem to make any sense to modern historians. I believe that this reveals a lot about the latter, not least, a clear tendency towards 'methodological statism' lurking behind our thinking about 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood'. William's *gens occidentalis* is totally separated from anything recognizable to modern historians as 'a state' and thus a routine tendency to reify an ethnicised discursive construct from a medieval source is 'blocked'. This is just one example of a productive tension between medieval concepts and our own analytical language that can be activated by thinking the categories of 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' as an ideological continuum.

This rather broad theoretical ambition of the thesis also explains the choice of its title: nationcraft in twelfth-century England. Throughout, I also employ another general term – 'national categories,' by which I mean two interrelated types of concepts. First, I shall use this phrase to refer to the language of medieval sources, to the generic terms *gens* and *natio*, employed in the middle ages to describe peoples and polities, and to ethnic names,

[47] Ibid., p. 633.

such as *Angli* or *Britones*, as well as to the notions represented through those words. Second, 'national categories' are those terms and concepts that we use today to study 'nationhood' in history, as well as to construct it in our political and social lives. Insisting on the applicability of the term to twelfth-century England is central to my aim to directly confront the conceptual apparatus of scholarship with the language(s) of the sources and to rethink our understanding of the former by researching the latter. So 'national categories' here point to my interest in the meta discussion of the construction of 'nationhood' and how we think about it, in contrast to other possible topics, for example, the construction of particular identifications, e.g. 'Englishness' or 'Britishness', in a given period. In this thesis, such specific constructions are first and foremost a source of case studies, not the principal object of my investigation themselves. My choice of this very general phrase also does not imply that my goal is to explore all different ethnic identifications represented in twelfth-century sources from England and beyond. Neither am I intending to consider all possible elements of the construction of 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' in the long twelfth century. A few obvious topics are not discussed in this thesis, some of them clearly under-researched, for instance, the uses and meaning of ethnicised terms in law codes,[48] some being at the centre of a lively ongoing debate, as is the case with language and multilingualism in medieval Britain.[49] So, to formulate the core research question of this thesis, I shall only be examining certain aspects of the process of the construction of national identifications in twelfth-century texts in order to understand how relevant meta-categories were conceived and contested at the time. Answering this question will also help us to explore how

[48] It seems as if not much has been done on this topic since George Garnett's important article '*Franci et Angli*: The Legal Distinction between Peoples after the Conquest', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 8 (1986), pp. 109–37.
[49] See among others: *Language and culture in medieval Britain: the French of England, c.1100–c.1500*, ed. J. Wogan-Browne et al. (Woodbridge, 2009) and El. M. Treharne, *Living Through Conquest: The Politics of Early English, 1020–1220* (Oxford, 2012).

'ethnicity' and 'nationhood', conceived as the continuum of historical and analytical categories, function as a form of ideology across time and place.

The choice of the regional and chronological boundaries for this study – long twelfth-century England (1066–c. 1220) – originates in my first encounter with some texts from this place and time at the beginning of my academic path. Coming across such puzzling constructs as William of Malmesbury's *gens occidentalis*, briefly discussed above, or John of Salisbury's *gens Britanniarum*, to which I shall return in chapter 2, made me think that, in spite of the existence of substantial secondary literature based on this period, we may still be able to understand new things about the medieval construction of collective identifications and build new ways to theorise such phenomena as 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' by (re)reading these texts. Of course, as is the case for any boundary, these ones are somewhat arbitrary and could have been drawn differently (for example, as to incorporate the whole of Britain or a set of comparative cases from 'Europe' – either 'Latin' or 'Christian'). However, in my view, the post-Conquest Kingdom of England does constitute a particularly productive field of research for the project I have envisaged here. The disruption of 1066 – so strong in both cultural and political terms as, to quote Elisabeth van Houts, to produce a collective 'trauma'[50] – led to a crisis of 'English' identification, but in the end did not uproot it. This process left a record that is perfect for understanding the malleability of 'ethnic' and 'national' constructs, as well as their capacity for effective reproduction – in spite of various challenges, redefinitions and alternatives. Highlighting this dynamic is crucial for reconceptualising 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' as ideology – the approach which is at the core of this thesis.

[50] E.M.C. van Houts, 'The Trauma of 1066', *History Today*, 46 (1996), pp. 9–15.

Finally, in terms of its structure, this thesis consists of the introduction, six chapters and conclusion. The first chapter is a literature review that not only puts the thesis in its historiographical context, but also continues to develop the new heuristic for researching 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' across time and place that I have started to assemble in this introduction. Five empirical chapters constitute independent case-studies and, at the same time, are united by a few overarching topics: religion and 'nationhood'; national identifications and memory of the past; the uses of the language of 'nationhood' in political and social practice; authorial agency in the construction and uses of identifications; complexity, variability and internal contradictions in national discourses. The first empirical chapter 2 focuses on the exceptional uses of the various ethnic derivates from the concept of 'Britain'. In the mainstream twelfth-century tradition the words *Britones* or *Britanni* were normally used to designate 'the Welsh', 'the Bretons' or the inhabitants of Britain prior to the arrival of 'the Anglo-Saxons'. However, I have found more than a dozen of examples where these or similar terms were redefined in a radical manner and applied to the people of the whole of Britain and/or were appropriated as a synonym for 'the English', *Angli*. The chapter examines each case in detail and ponders the implications of this exceptional material both for our understanding of the language of 'nationhood' in twelfth-century England and, more generally, for our conceptualization of medieval national categories.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 constitute a block that explores the interplay between religion and 'nationhood' at the time. The first of these three chapters focuses on the idea of the chosen people in twelfth-century England, but it also includes a wider discussion of the usage of biblical vocabulary and images in twelfth-century national discourse.[51] Two

[51] A version of this chapter was published as I. Afanasyev, 'Biblical Vocabulary and National Discourse in Twelfth-Century England', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 36 (2014), pp. 23–38.

following chapters are devoted to the interplay between the notions of national identifications and saint cults. Chapter 4 looks at the discourse of 'Englishness' as applied to saints in twelfth-century hagiographical and historical texts and in some ecclesiastical documents. Chapter 5 explores some very curious ideas about the early Norman dukes' piety in the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman world, linking this topic to the main problematic of the thesis by zooming in on the interconnections between genealogical and national idioms and logics in this (quasi)hagiographical material.[52] Both chapters also consider the limits of the relevance of 'nationalising/ethnicising' logics in medieval religious contexts. Taken together, these three chapters address a gap in the existing literature on twelfth-century nationhood and engage with the thorny question of the ideological and institutional role of a universalist religion in the construction and reproduction of 'nationcraft' in the middle ages. The last chapter of the thesis examines how twelfth-century actors themselves used, but also conceptualised using, 'national categories' in various explicitly political contexts. Finally, the conclusion brings various empirical and theoretical strands of the thesis together to articulate its main argument (already pre-figured in the introduction): an analysis of long twelfth-century texts shows that medieval 'national categories' cannot be reduced to a set of unquestioned assumptions taken for granted by medieval actors, instead, they constituted a form of ideology that was also subjected to both explicit and implicit redefinitions, debates and contestations, which are to be interpreted according to their intellectual, political and socio-economic contexts. The conclusion culminates in an attempt to further outline the productive tensions between the language of 'nationhood' in medieval sources and the analytical idiom of scholars thinking about 'ethnicity' and

[52] This chapter is based on the following article: I. Afanasyev, 'An Unrealized Cult? Hagiography and Norman Ducal Genealogy in Twelfth-Century England', *Historical Research*, 88 (2015), pp. 193–212.

‘nationhood’ today, and, in order to systematise the theoretical contribution of the thesis, sums up a new methodological model for researching the construction and reproduction of ‘ethnicity/nationhood’ across time and place.

Chapter 1: The historiography of medieval 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood'

In the Introduction, I made two historiographical suggestions: first, that it makes sense to talk about the field of medieval 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' studies emerging from the 1970s in response to two very different hegemonic paradigms – the meta-narrative of the nation, on the one hand, and the 'modernist' theory of the nation(-state), on the other. Second, I argued that this medievalist literature is characterised by the unresolved tension between the portrayal of 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' as 'subjective' phenomena, which are increasingly discussed through the idiom of social constructivism, and the equally strong tendency to reify 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' by writing about 'ethnic groups' and ethnicised 'peoples', conceived as bounded entities and invested with subjectivity and agency. This chapter presents this literature more systematically by focusing both on some of the most influential writings on medieval 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' in general and the most relevant works on ethnic and national 'identities' in long twelfth-century England in particular. Its main goal is to situate the thesis within current debate, clarify the terminology and develop its conceptual approach by highlighting both critical departures from and continuities with the various key strands of existing scholarship.

It is important to emphasise that talking about this field of research on 'ethnicity' and 'national identity' in the middle ages should not lead us to suppose that we are postulating the existence of medieval 'ethnicity/nationhood' as a singular object. This would contradict the theoretical perspective formulated in the introduction through the rejection of the reified dichotomy between 'medieval' and 'modern' and the redefinition of 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' as an ideational – ideological – continuum ('nationcraft'). From the historiographical point of view, this would also mean ignoring the complexity of this literature or rather, in fact, several 'bodies' of literature, focused on different periods and

sources, written from different disciplinary perspectives, employing competing methodologies and not always engaged in a dialogue with each other (this last factor augmented by all sorts of linguistic boundaries).

The complexity of the field necessitates a relatively complex structure for this literature review. I shall split it into three rather different sections. First, I shall characterise a particular tradition of writing about 'ethnicity' in the middle ages – that originating in the so-called Vienna school of historical ethnography. While at the empirical level the scholars belonging to and associated with this approach tend to write about the early middle ages, that is, a sub-period different from the chronological focus of this thesis, their influence on the wider field of research on medieval 'ethnicity' and 'national identity' is so significant that one cannot really understand the pertinent historiographical stakes without addressing the work of Walter Pohl, his antecedents and associates, alongside the scholars who, while independent, have evidently been influenced by this tradition and developed their own powerful contributions to the field on this basis (here I refer to Patrick Geary, above all). If any publications on medieval ethnicity can be said to have influenced the discipline as a whole, it would certainly be those of this school. In a brief overview, I shall focus on the theoretical writings of Pohl to sum up both the achievements and the limitations of this tradition, also using this discussion as an opportunity to examine the central concept introduced into medieval studies by the Vienna school of historical ethnography, one which is by now so hegemonic that it already seems passé to the school's own main theorist: 'ethnogenesis'.

Second, I shall analyse the literature that constitutes the relevant historiography for this thesis in the most straightforward sense: publications on 'ethnicity' and 'national identity' in post-Conquest and twelfth-century England. It should be noted that some of this

literature, most importantly, the writings of Rees Davies, are also significant and influential beyond the historiography of high-medieval Britain. For example, Davies' lectures in the capacity of the president of the Royal Historical Society (UK) given in the mid-1990s provided one of the most prominent statements of an anti-modernist position proposed by a medievalist, a systematic 'apologia' (to use Davies' own expression from the title of his later publication) for researching medieval 'nationhood'. In this section, I shall both note the precise thematic and theoretical contributions of the most important and representative scholars in the field and explain where I see the conceptual problems in their explicit and implicit models.

The third section of the literature survey brings together the work of very different individual researchers, whose approaches are closest to my own and thus form the most immediate foundation for a new heuristic I am attempting to develop here. These scholars are: Susan Reynolds who has made several significant interventions in the debates on medieval 'peoplehood' since the 1980s and whose insistence on treating the nation as a concept rather than a thing, as well as her commitment to connecting medieval 'nationhood' to the problematic of 'the state' provide the necessary basis for any further understanding of the theme; Sigbjørn Sønnesyn whose concept of 'ethnopoiesis' is, in in my view, one of the most interesting and important contributions to the ongoing debates on medieval 'ethnicity'/'nationhood'; and Geraldine Heng and her application of critical race theory to an exploration of the invention of 'race' in the European Middle Ages. Naturally, while agreeing with these scholars on some key conceptual aspects, I shall also note where my approach differs from theirs or where I am simply covering different ground. Finally, I shall synthesise this historiographical analysis by briefly returning to the vexed question of

definitions in order to explain how the concept of 'nationcraft' moves us beyond the problems inherent in the standard terminology of the field.

'Ethnogenesis' and beyond

In this section, I shall discuss in more detail some key contributions of the so-called Vienna School of historical ethnography, which I have already referred to on several occasions above. I should note that I am not intending to examine systematically every sort of different empirical and conceptual study that this school and its associates have generated since the publication of Herwig Wolfram's *Geschichte der Goten: Entwurf einer historischen Ethnographie* in 1979, especially through the series of large-scale EU-funded projects led by Walter Pohl, such as, for example, the Transformation of the Roman World in the 1990s and the ongoing Visions of Community: Comparative Approaches to Ethnicity, Region and Empire in Christianity, Islam and Buddhism (400–1600 CE). Instead, I shall focus on a selection of the theoretical articles (many of them – the introductions to various thematic volumes presenting the outcomes of the above-mentioned projects) by Walter Pohl, the school's most famous representative and main theoretician. My goal here is to assess 'ethnogenesis' and other concepts embraced and developed by Pohl as a widely influential, almost normative, even if not uncontested, model for conceptualising 'ethnicity' in the early Middle Ages in particular and for any 'pre-modern' period in general.[53] The

[53] The most systematic critique of the Vienna school and the concept of 'ethnogenesis' has so far been offered by Walter Goffart (the author of the highly influential *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550–800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, 1988)) and his students and followers. A thorough presentation of this critique, alongside with a reply from Pohl, can be found in the volume *On Barbarian Identity: Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. A. Gillett (Turhnout, 2002). See also: A. Gillett, 'Ethnogenesis: A Contested Model of Early Medieval Europe', *History Compass*, 4 (2006), pp. 241–60. This 'attack' on the Vienna school is conducted along two main lines: first, pointing out its continuities with the Interwar scholarship tainted by racism and ethnic nationalism, second, the narratological deconstruction of the early medieval historiographical evidence used by Wolfram, Pohl and others to study

significance of this model lies, first and foremost, in how widely it has become known within medieval studies, but, curiously, not so much beyond this chronologically defined field, confirming yet again the relative isolation research on the middle ages exists in.[54] This influence can be confirmed by any number of references to Pohl's (and his colleagues') publications in books and articles specifically dealing with medieval 'ethnicity'/'nationhood', and, perhaps even more instructively, by the instances of the reproduction of 'ethnogenesis' as the preferred interpretation of the topic in some general synthetic overviews of (early) medieval history, such as, for example, Wickham's *Framing*.[55]

Before I dive into a detailed analysis of the different iterations of Pohl's approach to conceptualizing medieval 'ethnicity', I should emphasise the main contribution of this school/tradition as a whole (already articulated, to some extent, in the work of its widely acknowledged antecessor Wenskus). If one is to sum up this contribution in one sentence, it may be formulated like this: these scholars turned early-medieval 'peoples' from the 'given' of history, simultaneously its subject and its causal factor, into something that is to be studied and explained, rather than taken for granted. As I have already observed and shall argue below more specifically for Pohl's oeuvre, they have done that in often unhelpfully ambiguous and even at times self-contradictory ways. Still, as such, the importance of this contribution cannot be overestimated: without such a Copernican revolution in the epistemological approach to the basic category of 'people'/'Volk', any proper work on medieval 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' as research objects, rather than naturalised and/or

'ethnicity'. For a balanced take on the debate see: I. Wood, *The Modern Origins of the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 312–5.

[54] One recent exception is a volume produced by the University of Cologne Forum 'Ethnicity as a Political Resource' that mainly brings together anthropologists working on modern and contemporary cases, but also includes an article by Pohl. See: *Ethnicity as a Political Resource: Conceptualizations Across Disciplines, Regions, and Periods* (Bielefeld, 2015).

[55] Ch. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400–800* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 82–3. 'The ethnogenesis model is now widely accepted'.

metaphysical givens of history, would hardly be possible. Of course, the Vienna school has not been the only tradition moving into this direction, but, within medieval studies, it has been an especially important one in terms of its systematicity and impact.[56] Hence, the attention paid to it in this literature review.

A key concept introduced by Wenskus – *Traditionskern*, the kernel of tradition – already signified this shift towards the task of understanding the 'peoples' of what was routinely and is still often (even if unfortunately) called today 'the migration period', instead of simply postulating those 'peoples' themselves as the causes for what happened at the time.[57] This concept, which purports to explain how, to use our (rather than Wenskus') language, the 'identity' of 'barbarian' 'peoples' was both formed and sustained over time, reflects the refusal to accept the 'Völker' themselves as self-evident entities. Instead of seeing them as the self-enclosed coherent racialised 'peoples' of the earlier Germanist tradition, Wenskus suggested that they were forged around the aristocratic groups whose genealogical self-consciousness, which he designated 'the kernel of tradition', was imposed on/accepted by all sorts of diverse followers during the 'migration period'. The same emphasis on the process of the 'formation' of 'peoples' is evident in another, even more

[56] Another major historiographical enterprise, the formal establishment of which predated the rise of the Vienna School, that performed a similar shift was the project *Nationes*, set up at the University of Marburg in the 1970s to investigate the formation of European nations in the Middle Ages. In spite of the publication of more than a dozen of thematic volumes by the late 1980s, this initiative has not however achieved anything even closely resembling the international resonance and impact, which the work of Wolfram and Pohl has. Conceptually, though, their main line of inquiry was quite similar, even if their empirical focus was more on the later Middle Ages. In the words of Len Scales, '[q]uite new, by contrast, and in clear reaction against the approaches of the interwar generation, was the way in which the earliest European nations (*nationes*) were now understood: as communities made wholly within history, whose cohesion, such as it may have been, was the outcome of political processes'. See: L. Scales, 'Before and After *Nationes*: Accounting for Medieval Peoples in Twenty-First-Century Germany', *German History*, 33 (2015), pp. 624–45, at p. 631.

[57] Of course, the debate on 'the end of the Roman empire' is also unfinished, and there are influential scholars who insist on the essential role of 'barbarian' 'migrations'/'invasions' for the 'fall of Rome'. Wood, again, provides a helpful overview in *The Modern Origins of the Middle Ages*, pp. 310–29 (see also pp. 52–73 for a discussion of how early modern and eighteenth-century historians framed this debate). For a most radical critique of the 'barbarian invasions' narrative see G. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568* (Cambridge, 2007).

prominent, concept that was initially introduced into the field by Wolfram: ethnogenesis. Wolfram did not coin the word, in fact, he borrowed it from the publications of the Soviet ethnographer Yulian Bromlej – the author of theoretical works on the concept of 'ethnos' which were translated into English in the 1970s.[58]

This Soviet genealogy of the term is not only an intellectual-history/knowledge-production curiosity. It is also, I think, instructive conceptually. On the one hand, the standard orthodox-Marxist vision of 'ethnos' and 'the nation' (within which Bromlej operated) demystified these categories, voided them of any metaphysical content inherent in classic nationalist discourses and unambiguously portrayed all 'ethnic' and 'national' phenomena as historical formations, that is, as the outcomes, not the givens of history. On the other hand, this tradition remained objectifying: 'ethnos' or 'nation' are written about as entities existing 'out-there-in-the-world', defined by a set of objective characteristics that more or less straightforwardly distinguish 'ethnic'/'national' groups from each other, making them internally coherent and externally bounded. There is also a tendency to incorporate 'common origin' as one of the possible features of such groups, thus reproducing the elements of biological essentialism as well. I believe that similar conceptual tendencies, above all, the purposeful or unwitting assertion of reified groupness, are typical of the 'ethnogenesis' paradigm, as introduced to early medieval studies by Wolfram. 'Peoples' are seen as historically formed but are still portrayed as in some sense objectively existing bounded entities and even the agents in historical process. Thus, while one should not lose sight of the scale of transformation in the mainstream approaches to medieval peoplehood represented by Wolfram's 'historical ethnography', one should also not ignore

[58] J.V. Bromlej, 'The Term Ethnos and Its Definition', in *Soviet Anthropology and Ethnology Today*, ed. idem (The Hague – Paris, 1974), pp. 55–72.

the conspicuous continuities that have allowed a new generation of scholars to salvage 'peoplehood' (it is of course ironic that sometimes these continuities were established via Marxist scholarship: the 'modernism' of Anderson and Hobsbawm is another example coming from a different Marxian tradition).

This is the context in which Walter Pohl's hugely influential oeuvre originated. Considering Pohl's own theoretical contributions to the field, it is helpful to begin with his by now classic essay 'Conceptions of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Studies', first published in 1991.[59] The key argument of this essay is structured by the figure of the above-mentioned break between 'traditional research' and a new paradigm. Pohl traces the genealogy of this break to Reinhard Wenskus's seminal book *Stammesbildung und Verfassung* and the work of his own teacher Wolfram.[60] According to Pohl, the main distinction between his and his colleagues' new approach and 'traditional research' lies in the latter taking 'the meaning of the terms "people" or "tribe" for granted', seeing "peoples" as 'racially and culturally highly homogenous group[s] sharing a common descendance and destiny', 'factors of continuity in a changing world, as the real subjects of history – almost immutable in its course, indeed more a natural than a historical phenomenon'.[61] This 'traditional scholarship' is associated by Pohl with the national movements and chauvinist ideologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Political tragedies caused by these, as well as by the resurfacing of nationalism in the Eastern Europe at the time when the article was written, are openly invoked to reinforce the author's academic critique. The use of 'biological metaphors' ('birth, growth, flowering and decay') is criticised in particular, and Pohl admits a certain

[59] W. Pohl, 'Conceptions of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Studies', *Archaeologia Polona*, 29 (1991), pp. 39–49; reprinted in: *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings*, ed. Lester K. Little and Barbara Rosenwein (Oxford, 1998), pp. 15–24.
[60] R. Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung*; Wolfram, *Geschichte der Goten*.
[61] Pohl, Conceptions of Ethnicity, p. 39.

continuity in new literature, on behalf of which he is theorising: 'It is remarkable enough that we still seem to rely upon biological metaphors – for instance when we speak of "ethnogenesis"'.[62] He makes a special effort to emphasise that 'ethnical structures' 'should not be misunderstood as [belonging to] the realm of nature, far beyond the reach of history'.[63]

Now, the concepts in this passage are significant. Here, I believe, we are introduced to the most important ontological dichotomy that underpins a considerable amount of the writing on medieval 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' produced in recent decades: 'nature' vs. 'history'/'society'. In this paradigm, 'nature' refers to some form of ultimate 'reality', defined by objective processes that can be established by properly scientific disciplines, e.g. physics and, most relevantly to this particular debate, biology. This 'reality-as-nature' is discursively presented as 'unchangeable': at least in the temporality of social processes it is a 'given', in the sense of having both essential nature and transtemporal stability. 'History', on the other hand, refers to change and determination by external forces (for example, political, economic, cultural and so on factors). In the context of the debate on medieval 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood', the key argument made by those who rely on the dichotomy of 'nature' and 'history' (or 'society') is that 'peoplehood' belongs to the domain of the latter. A key issue at stake here is a claim that this disavowal of the alleged belief of 'traditional scholarship' in peoples as 'biological' entities constitutes a decisive break with that earlier tradition and, in a sense, introduces the very possibility of studying the phenomena in question in a proper – academic and critical – fashion. As I have already argued above, this claim should in part be accepted, but, at the same time, it also needs to be treated critically.

[62] Ibid., p. 40.
[63] Ibid.

One may argue that the model proposed by Pohl in 1991, while undeniably both sophisticated and advancing a set of useful heuristic principles for any analysis of ethnic identifications in historical and archaeological records, still does not seem to be critical enough and retains an objectifying and mystifying tendency. This tendency comes to the fore in the conclusion of the article we are considering, and it is worth quoting at length: 'The *gentes* could only define themselves *versus* the overwhelming reality of a polyethnic late-Roman state and civilization. The degree of dependence on or refusal of Roman models… laid the basis for the success or failure of a great number of ethnogeneses. It was not any ethnic quality (force, number, talent) that decided their fate; it was their ability to adapt to an environment going through rapid changes, and to give this adaption a credible meaning rooted in tradition and ritual. Slav or Bulgars succeeded because their form of organisation proved as stable and as flexible as necessary; the Avars failed in the end because their model could not respond to new conditions. The Medieval peoples and their cultural characteristics were the result, not the condition of this complex historical process'.[64] Prima facie, the last sentence directly contradicts the preceding statements and their logic. In the latter, Pohl is arguing that it was exactly medieval peoples' 'form of organization', conceived in ethnicising terms ('Avars', 'Slavs' and 'Bulgars' are said to have different 'forms') that explains 'the result', understood in the categories of 'success' and 'failure' – categories that, while not 'biological' as such, reproduce the logic of ethnic survival. Minus a belief in 'common origins' and 'racial' homogeneity, are not we finding ourselves back in the world of 'peoples' as 'culturally highly homogenous group[s] sharing a common… destiny' (if not 'descendance'), which in the beginning of the article Pohl assigned

[64] Pohl, Conceptions of Ethnicity, p. 48.

to ‘traditional research’? Most importantly, writing about *gentes*/peoples doing things, e.g. defining themselves against Roman civilization, succeeding or failing, does, it seems, inevitably turns those peoples into ‘the real subjects of history’ – once again, an approach that Pohl tried to distance himself from at the outset.

Of course, ‘Conceptions of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Studies’ was published almost 30 years ago. We should now ask to what extent this contradictory tendency to mix a critical historicising analysis of early-medieval ‘ethnic’ categories with the arguments that reproduce old reifications both substantively and rhetorically have been overcome in Pohl’s later writings. To answer this question, we should consider two of his more recent theoretical interventions: the conceptual introductions to two important volumes published in 2012–2013: *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300–1100* and *Strategies of Identification: Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe*.[65] The introduction to the latter, tellingly entitled ‘Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile’, is especially significant and provides one of the most sophisticated recent attempts to theorise early-medieval ‘ethnicity’.

When we look at the language of the introduction to the first of the aforementioned volumes (entitled ‘Ethnicity, Religion, Empire’), we quickly notice the familiar categories. The ‘survival’ and ‘failure’ of early-medieval ‘peoples’ appear in the phrases like the following one: ‘many early medieval peoples who failed, such as the Vandals, Huns, Goths or Burgundians’.[66] Even the grammar is suggestive here, the choice of ‘who’ rather than ‘that’ or ‘which’ defines these ‘peoples’ not as abstract political constructs but as living entities,

[65] Idem, Introduction – Strategies of Identification.
[66] Idem, ‘Introduction: Ethnicity, Religion and Empire’, in *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300–1100*, ed. W. Pohl, Cl. Gantner and R. Payne (Farnham, 2012), pp. 1–23, at p. 4.

personified subjects of history. These peoples/'ethnic groups' are reified and invested with agency, turned into a 'they' 'who' are assumed to possess the 'strategies of identification and distinction'. If considered attentively, this constitutes another circular conceptualization: 'peoples' are emerging as outcomes of such strategies, but 'they' are also somehow pursuing those strategies themselves. In contrast to these objectifying claims that are personified, when more critical formulations are suggested a curious linguistic inversion happens – they become abstract, as if presuming a process that happens by itself. For example, the following notion I can only agree with – 'ethnicity' as a 'discourse', a model of 'legitimate rule in the name of a people' – yet it is said to be established by 'the post-imperial centuries'.[67] This abstraction is mystifying: naturally, 'centuries' cannot act in any way and 'establish' anything. Such wording obscures the real agencies at play, while leaving us with 'peoples'/'ethnic groups' as the only suggested actors – an interpretation that one cannot, in my view, reconcile with understanding 'ethnicity' as a discourse.

Another curious aspect of this introduction is that, in contrast to many other publications by Pohl, it explicitly projects a direct continuity between the 'peoples' of the early middle ages (the 'successful', that is, 'surviving' 'groups', one assumes) and modern 'nations': 'the long-term success of ethnic states… paved the way for the eventual development of European nations'.[68] Europe is not accidental here: it is Christianity that is called upon to explain the rise of 'ethnic states' and then 'nations' in Europe, explicitly contrasted to Islam, which (or more precisely the 'visions of community' inherent to it) is claimed to underpin not only the lack of 'ethnic states' in the early-medieval Muslim world but the lack of the 'sense of national community on which states such as Iraq, Lebanon,

[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid., p. 5.

Syria or Jordan could be established after the fall of the Ottoman Empire'. 'Even the Turkish nation was a controversial issue', adds Pohl.[69] This modern digression is significant, and I think a certain amount of unpacking is not a distraction from, but indeed a way towards understanding Pohl's theorising. The notion of post-colonial 'nation-states' as artificial, lacking proper national unity of course presupposes that there are other 'non-artificial' nations, which one predictably finds in Europe. This assumption that only postcolonial 'nations' are 'controversial' or even non-existent, while European nations are historically-grounded and, therefore, real is nothing but an imperialist ideological construct, as Sara Pursley has recently demonstrated in a brilliant two-part article on the paradigmatic case of Iraq: '"Lines Drawn on an Empty Map": Iraq's Borders and the Legend of the Artificial State'.[70]

But even if we leave aside this imperialist discourse as such, the basic logic of thinking about 'ethnic' and 'national' phenomena revealed in these passages seems to be integrating, alongside critical concepts, the elements of nationalist common-sense. The idea that a strong sense of 'national community' should underlie a proper 'state' (rather than the opposite: any sense of national identification as an outcome of political processes, most commonly, the actions of different hegemonic apparatuses and ideologies), the notion that 'people', as an ethnicised group, can 'succeed' or 'fail', as measured by the category of 'survival' – all of this seems to fit into what Pohl himself calls the 'national paradigm'. After making the first step of disenchanting 'peoplehood' by deconstructing the notion of a 'people' as a metaphysical and/or organic given, this scholarship remains limited to what one may call common-sense realism regarding 'ethnicity' (and by implication 'nationhood').

[69] Ibid., p. 2.
[70] https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/32140 (Part 1) and https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/32153 (Part 2). (Accessed on 24.09.2019).

It does not seem unfair to suggest a political interpretation of both changes and continuities between the old and new paradigms: the acknowledgement of the factual heterogeneity of 'groups' unmakes explicitly racialised 'nationhood', which was hegemonic across Europe before the defeat of Nazism in the Second World War; at the same time, salvaging the notion of 'peoples' as entities existing 'out there' corresponds to the ongoing reproduction of national sovereignty/nation-states, logically impossible without the objectification of the abstract notion of 'the people'.

These unresolved tensions are also lurking in Pohl's already-mentioned systemic theoretical account of his view of 'ethnicity' in 'Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile'. In the introduction to this thesis I observed that in this article Pohl somehow simultaneously claims that 'ethnic groups' (notably, not even 'ethnicity', but 'groups' themselves) are *necessarily* abstractions (opposed by him to 'reality'), while immediately also writing of them as entities and subjects that do things. By the end of the article the notion of necessarily-abstract 'ethnicity' seems to be put aside almost completely, and groups as entities and agents have taken the stage. We read again about 'the success' and 'the failure' of ethnic groups, or of the construction of 'successful ethnic groups'.[71] None of this would make sense, if Pohl really thought that 'ethnic groups' were just 'abstractions'. Abstractions cannot fail or succeed, and even less so can they have 'common interests' or 'bounded territory'.[72]

One could spend even more space dissecting various mystifying formulations generated by such double-think (for instance, 'ethnic identities… found their raison d'être

[71] Pohl, Introduction – Strategies of Identification, p. 45.
[72] Ibid., p. 44. Pohl is here referring to the model of the different levels of 'ethnicity' proposed in D. Handelman, 'The Organization of Ethnicity', *Ethnic Groups*, 1 (1977), pp. 187–200. This is a curious return to the relatively old theorising, since then subjected to the devastating critique of such anthropologists and sociologists as Rogers Brubaker.

within the group itself and not in any external identifier such as god, land, state, or city', which seems to suggest that 'ethnic identity' is both its own 'identifier' and 'identified' – both a tautology and yet another objectification of 'ethnic group' that wills itself into existence).[73] But I think I have made my case: there is an internal tension in Pohl's theorising of 'ethnicity'. I cannot emphasise enough that my suggestion here is, first and foremost, to enable the further development of Pohl's paradigm, based on its immanent critique. In 'Strategies of Identification – A Methodological Profile', Pohl makes, in my view, an initial move in a productive direction, when he asks a key question: what really does make 'ethnicity' different from any other type of 'identification': city, religion, nation, family/kinship?[74] However, his attempt to answer this question by insisting on the substantive differences between these categories cannot but lead to their objectification: if one needs to distinguish them objectively, then they need to be invested with some objective and externally measurable features. But this leads to a vision that is irreconcilable with the view (with which Pohl starts) that these categories are abstract notions. Of course, if we do consistently treat these phenomena as abstract ideological claims, we would not run into any trouble when, for example, we encounter a construction of 'urban identification' that looks in sources a good deal like what we are used to call 'ethnicity' (i.e. includes an appeal to common origin – a naturalising element). A possibility of such consistent interpretation is present in Pohl's work, both in his general commitment to seeing 'ethnicity' as 'the result of a historical process' and in his more precise constructivist formulations quoted above. But without getting rid of objectifications – various attempts to continue to treat 'peoples' as bounded entities and historical actors – even the most

[73] Pohl, Introduction – Strategies of Identification, p. 50.
[74] Ibid., p. 14.

promising developments within this paradigm, above all, a suggestion to move away from 'ethnogenesis' and focus on how 'ethnicity' functions,[75] will only be realised in a self-contradictory way.[76]

At this point, we need to travel back in time again, and discuss another historian who, as I already argued above, may be considered alongside the Vienna School: Patrick Geary. Geary's most significant contributions to the debates on medieval 'ethnicity' can be organised into three interventions, arranged chronologically. Firstly, and most importantly in the context of this thesis, it is his relatively early article on 'ethnic identity' as a 'situational construct' in the early Middle Ages, published in 1983.[77] Secondly, and perhaps most influentially, a trade book entitled *The Myth of Nations* (2002).[78] Thirdly and finally, one may briefly mention both Geary's recent publications on the interplay between 'European' and 'national' identities and his ongoing project in the field of historical genetics

[75] Ibid., p. 27.

[76] In Pohl's most recent overview and apologia of the Vienna school, the contradiction between constructivist and objectifying tendencies is further deepened by what seems to be a conscious attempt to occupy the centre ground between two different 'radical' alternatives, which can be, a bit simplistically, mapped on the political coordinates of 'right' and 'left'. Pohl writes that 'paradoxically' 'conservative historical positivists', 'postmodernist deconstructionists' and 'Marxist intellectuals' all agree that 'identity and ethnicity' are an 'inappropriate theme', full of 'ideological risks' (W. Pohl, 'Von der Ethnogenese zur Identitätsforschun', in *Neue Wege der Frühmittelalterforschung – Bilanz und Perspektiven*, ed. W. Pohl, M. Diesenberger, B. Zeller (Vienna, 2018), pp. 9–34, at p. 22). He does not really provide any references to the writings of these 'positivists – postmodernists – Marxists' who denounce 'ethnicity' as a topic, instead quoting Lutz Niethammer, Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, who, so far as I can judge, do not fit any of these three categories. Instead, they are some of the scholars who criticised the concept of 'identity', rather than the theme it is supposed to address. This confusion between the theme and the concept constitutes a self-revealing argumentative strategy: the critics of a particular way of conceiving of the topic through the use of specific conceptual apparatuses (Pohl's way) are turned into cartoonish nihilists who are running away from a 'risky' topic due to some ideological preconceptions, equally ridiculous on both 'the right' and 'the left'. But this attempt to confuse both postmodernist and Marxist deconstructions of 'identity' with the 'positivist' defence of traditional 'peoplehood' does not really add up to a coherent response, and neither can it conceal the internal contradictions of the centrist line represented by Pohl here.

[77] P.J. Geary, 'Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien*, 113 (1983), pp. 15–26.

[78] Idem, *The Myth of Nations*.

that explores ancient genomic data from 'Langobard' cemeteries across Central Europe and Italy.[79]

'Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages', notwithstanding the fact that it was published more than 35 years ago, remains, in my view, one of the best articles on the topic. Geary's short text does not simply proclaim its constructivism only to follow it half-way, but is both consistent and bold. The article draws its inspiration from two rather different intellectual sources: first, the early writings of the Vienna school (the work of Wolfram) and its antecessor Wenskus; second, a rather wide range of sociological and ethnographic theoreticians of 'ethnicity', including authors who are still frequently quoted by historians today – first and foremost, Fredrik Barth (whose introduction to the volume *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* is one of the most commonly referenced publications in the field)[80] and Immanuel Wallerstein – and the scholars, whose names one does not (often) see in today's books and articles by medievalists: Wsewolod Isajiw, Sidney Mintz and Andrew Greeley. Appreciating the importance of Wenskus' contribution, Geary also sees its shortcomings, above all, its still objectifying tendency, or as he explains it in more detail, an assumption that everyone had a specific and singular ethnic identity in the early middle ages, that this identity was unproblematically recognized by others, could only change very slowly over long periods of time and was, in its own right, a source of friction in society.[81] To this objectifying, even if to an extent, critical model of Wenskus, Geary opposes an

[79] Idem, 'Europe of Nations and the Nation of Europe: Origin Myths Past and Present', *Revista Lusófona de Estudos Culturais*, 1 (2013), pp. 36–49; idem, 'European Ethnicities and European as an Ethnicity: Does Europe Have Too Much History?', in *The Making of Medieval History*, ed. G.A. Loud and M. Staub (Woodbridge, 2017), pp. 57–69. On the genetics project see: https://genetichistory.ias.edu/ (accessed on 25.09.2019).
[80] Fr. Barth, 'Introduction', in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, ed. idem (Oslo, 1969), pp. 9–38. Curiously, while this famous text is usually quoted to argue that 'ethnic groups' are made through their mutual boundaries, it does not so much address that question, as the problem of the reproduction of 'ethnic' identifications.
[81] Geary, Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct, p. 18.

interpretation of 'ethnicity' as a 'subjective process', an interpretation that aims 'to determine by what criteria individuals and groups might be so identified [that is being labelled with an ethnonym] and, equally important, under what circumstances ethnicity was perceived at all'.[82]

What is very productive in Geary's approach is that, while, after Barth, he does talk about the 'native model' of constructing ethnicity – the way in which early-medieval actors used such categories as origin, customs, language and law to identify 'peoples' and individuals with 'peoples' – he does not stop at this level. Geary sees through this medieval discourse and does not use the magic formula of 'we should understand medieval notions on their own terms' to justify a reification. He argues – in my view, correctly – that all these categories or characteristics were fluid, arbitrary and, therefore, 'in anthropological terms, fictive, in that a selection or re-creation must be exercised to determine with which of the myriad possible origins an individual or group will identify'.[83] On the basis of this critical reading, Geary, instead of fetishizing (and therefore objectifying) medieval notions, asks a key question: why was 'ethnic identity' mentioned at all, what was the purpose of the relevant speech acts? Here, Geary makes an important distinction between medieval 'theory' and 'practice': in theory, 'ethnic' distinctions were made on the basis of 'cultural ethnicity' (defined through those four characteristics mentioned above), but in practice they were felt in 'political circumstances', what really mattered was 'political ethnicity'. Thus, for Geary, 'ethnicity was not an objective phenomenon, a stumbling block to the assimilation of diverse European peoples', but a political phenomenon belonging to the world of kingship and elite association, as well as, crucially, in opposition to it. 'Ethnicity was perceived and

[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., p. 19.

moulded as a function of the circumstances which related most specifically to the paramount interest of a lordship'.[84] The article's main conclusion is that 'ethnicity' should not be seen as 'an end point' either of the historical process itself or of a modern historian's interpretation: instead, it is a beginning, a code to be deciphered in order 'to understand the process of social change'.[85]

This is an excellent framework, and, from my point of view, there is not much to criticise here. It is a perfect illustration of how a constructivist approach to 'ethnicity' can work, not as an abstract proclamation but as an analytical method that teases out the politics of 'ethnic' identifications in a particular social context. The most important lesson this method has to teach us, and which must be applied to research on 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' across time and place, is that we need to avoid presenting a given 'theoretical' 'native model' of constructing this type of collective identification as the singular objective reality in the period and region under consideration (in fact, a puzzling procedure that de facto achieves objectification by insisting on the subjectivity of the studied phenomenon).

In his famous trade book *The Myth of Nations*, Geary offered a wider and explicitly political reflection on the meaning and implications of his (and his colleagues, not least, the representatives of the Vienna school) scholarly work on early-medieval 'ethnicity'. The main argument of the book is evident from the title: 'nations', understood as essentialised entities with unbroken history going back to the early Middle Ages, are 'myths' produced by modern ethnic nationalisms. As a medievalist, Geary qualifies this standard 'modernist' model with two significant theses. First, he notes that 'while the specific forms of ethnically based nation-states of today may indeed have been called into being by the efforts of

[84] Ibid., pp. 24–25.
[85] Ibid., p. 26.

nineteenth-century romantics and nationalists, this does not mean that other forms of imagining nations did not exist in the [medieval] past'.[86] Second, Geary observes that the conceptual repertoire of Biblical, Classical and medieval notions of peoplehood influenced those 'modern' European models of 'ethnogenesis' (projected onto both the 'peoples' of Europe and non-European 'peoples': the book ends with a detailed and thought-provoking discussion of the role of a Western missionary in the construction of the standard narrative of Zulu 'peoplehood', and how it parallels the writings of the early-medieval 'narrators of barbarian history' and in which ways it has to be re-assessed on the basis of new conceptual models).[87]

So far, so good. But there is a problem: while dismissing nineteenth-century nationalism as 'mythology' (something I of course agree with) and presenting his vision as truly historical knowledge, Geary himself engages in writing that is at least partially equally mythological (even if the content of Geary's myth obviously differs from 'modern' ethno-nationalism). What is this myth? A clue may be found in the book's subtitle: *The Medieval Origins of Europe*. Of course, authors are not always responsible for the titles, and it may be there just because the publishers thought that the narrative of European origins sells well, just as the 'birth of nation' sells well (in fact, ironically, the French edition of Geary's another book *Before France and Germany* was subtitled *La Naissance de France*).[88] But, inevitably, any story of 'origins' is a mythological narrative, and this case fits perfectly well with the wider investment of many historians in the construction of a 'European identity' in their writings on medieval history.[89]

[86] Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, pp. 16–17.
[87] Ibid., pp. 157–74.
[88] P.J. Geary, *Le monde Mérovingien: Naissance de la France* (Paris, 1989).
[89] For a critical discussion of the earlier stages of this process see Chris Wickham's long review of Bartlett's *Making of Europe*: Ch. Wickham, 'Making Europes', *New Left Review*, 208 (1994), pp. 133–43.

Even more problematic is the political framing, which Geary chose for his deconstruction of the 'myth of nations'. The book starts with an introduction that narrates the following story: for a while it seemed that the 'old problems of nationalism' were 'if not entirely solved, then at least manageable' in post-war Europe inescapably moving to unity as materialised in the EU project, but the 1990s brought a totally different picture. 'Nationalism, ethnocentrism, racism – specters long thought exorcised from the European soil – have returned with their powers enhanced by a half-century of dormancy'.[90] The scale of this revisionist denial of the continuous history of Western nationalism and racism is staggering. From particular episodes of vivid violence – physical or symbolic, such as the Paris massacre on 17 October 1961, when a few hundred Algerians were beaten to death and drowned in the Seine by French policemen, and Enoch Powell's notorious 'Rivers of blood' speech in 1968 – to brutal colonial wars across the whole world, the systemic racialised exclusion and oppression of immigrants in metropolitan centres and the calmer but relentless work of what Michael Billig called 'banal nationalism' – one can easily falsify the denial of all those realities in Geary's notion of 'dormant racism and nationalism' in post-war Europe.[91] The disavowal of normalised racism and nationalism before the 1990s underpins Geary's view of the alleged resurgence of those forces in that decade: it is all blamed on the 'far right' – the likes of Le Pen and Milosevic. Again, the structural and continuous reproduction of nationalism and racism at the political core of 'European' societies is ignored and, instead, reduced to the semi-external threat from fringe politicians

[90] Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, pp. 2–3.

[91] Two extremely powerful investigations of this continuous link between hegemonic racism and nationalism in Europe (and the wider world), including in the period from 1945 to the eighties, themselves published already in the latter decade, are: P. Gilroy, *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London, 1987) and E. Balibar and I. Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London, 1991 [originally published in French in 1988]).

(or the polities at Europe's fringe) that 're-emerge' as if out of nowhere to resurrect the old and half-forgotten 'myth of nations'. Alternatively, this 'new' racism is explained as some sort of automatic and thus naturalised reaction to immigration, which is implicitly coded as non-white and explicitly presented as imposed from above: 'the effects of forty years of government policies to provide cheap labor in France and Germany and to settle the obligations of Empire in Great Britain touched off a crisis of identity and a xenophobic reaction in these Western democracies'.[92]

Once again, I do not think that this political discussion is a distraction from scholarly issues: for one thing, it does explicate what is really at stake in these academic debates. But the mythological narrative of European politics in the second half of the twentieth century that Geary constructs also underpins a particular vision of the historiography of medieval 'ethnicity'. We encounter a model very similar to the one proposed by Pohl: it was the historians of the past who took 'nations' and 'peoples' for granted, but now the professional historians have overcome this old malaise (in contrast, to vaguely-designated 'official and semi-official historians' and right-wing politicians). However, as with Pohl but perhaps less explicitly, one may notice the internal contradictions and re-mystifications in this allegedly totally new model. On the one hand, there is a strongly constructivist language: 'ethnic' categories cannot be really taken as referring to 'objectively existing, stable actors in history. Rather, they are constructs, whose nature and very existence must be questioned constantly'. They 'are not stable, objective, and enduring realities'.[93] On the other hand, Geary insists that 'the past matters' and that 'the complex, often violent and ever obscure process by which European peoples and nations have come to the present cannot be

[92] Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, p. 3.
[93] Ibid., p. 166. Here Geary refers to 'the Nguni' and 'the Zulu' (as well as such categories as 'tribes' and 'clans') but he does extend the same logic to the categories found in early-medieval sources.

dismissed by catch phrases like “imagined communities” and “invented traditions”.[94] Maybe this is simply a critique of ‘modernism’, but, one way or another, ‘peoples’ and ‘nations’ are resurrected as actors or, at least, entities that do somehow travel through history. What Geary really means by this is difficult to say and he seems to use formulations that either do not make any sense at all or, in contradiction to his other claims, should actually be interpreted as referring to the objective (even if not unchanging) existence of ‘nations’ and ‘peoples’. For example, ‘ethnogenesis is a process of the present and the future as much as it is of the past’, or the ‘peoples of Europe, like peoples of Africa, America, or Asia, are processes formed and re-formed by history, not the atomic structures of history itself’. Geary reaches for what is, in fact, a rather old metaphor for both peoples and polities (reproduced in early modern political thought): ‘One cannot step into the same river twice. Those rivers that are peoples continue to flow, but the waters of the past are not those of the present of future’. If we look beyond the obscure language of this appeal to dialectics, we see a common-sensical and ultimately objectifying claim that ‘peoples’ are made historically, but also change.

If the key conceptual achievement of the new scholarship on medieval ‘ethnicity’ boils down to a strong-worded negation of a presupposition that ‘peoples’ and ‘nations’ have ‘some essential soul’, as naïve myth-makers of ethno-nationalism allegedly all believed, which however does not deny that these ‘peoples’ and ‘nations’ still exist (even if, admittedly nobody can ‘ensure’ that they ‘will not vanish utterly in the future’), one may, yet again, ask how wide the break between this new paradigm and its disavowed predecessors really is. Calling those ‘peoples’ ‘processes’ or comparing them to Heraclitus’

[94] Ibid., p. 167.

river seems to be a change in rhetoric only, while the ideology of 'nationhood', also morphed in the common-sense acceptance of the reality of 'nations' here and now, remains fundamentally unchallenged. 'Peoples' and 'nations' can go on existing, even henceforth devoid of soul. To add to the general confusion of this vision, at the very end of the book, Geary proposes a mystifying formula: 'the history of the people of Europe has not ended – it never will'. One wonders how this 'never-ending' 'people of Europe' is in any way more historical and less mythological than the 'nations' of nineteenth-century nationalists?

The most recent publications co-authored by Patrick Geary, in fact, the first outputs of his large-scale project that brings together historians, geneticists and archaeologists to provide a historical-genetic perspective on Late-Antique/early-medieval 'barbarian migrations' (using 'the Langobards' as a case-study), offer an interesting contrast to his earliest publications on the topic (especially the 1983 article discussed in much detail above). I do not think it is necessary to discuss here all potential problems with using 'historical genetics' to discuss 'identity', not least because I do not feel qualified to assess the scientific methods used.[95] At this point, I would simply like to note the scale of difference between a consistently constructivist approach embraced by 'early' Geary and, for example, the following proposition from 'late' Geary (and his colleagues): 'This perhaps suggests that in these two cemeteries there may indeed have been a biological basis to the notion that long-term shared common descent can shape social identity and that this is reflected in material culture'.[96] With this claim, however provisionally it is formulated, we return to 'ethnicity' as based in that ultimate reality as conceived within the current

[95] See a comprehensive forum on 'The Genetic Challenge to Medieval History and Archaeology' published by the online journal Medieval Worlds (edited by Walter Pohl): https://www.medievalworlds.net/medievalworlds_no9_2019?frames=yes (accessed on 04.10.2019).
[96] C.E.G. Amorim, St. Vai et al., 'Understanding 6th-Century Barbarian Social Organization and Migration through Paleogenomics', *Nature Communications*, 9 (2018), pp. 1–11, at p. 8.

ontological common-sense: biology/genetics. Moreover, the claim is even stronger: it is not only that 'identity' is 'biologically' real, 'common descent' is invested with a causal agency to 'shape' 'social identity'. The article never explains how this might work, which is not surprising, but this essentialist proposition remains planted in the relatively cautious formulation. This shows, I think, that the debate on 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' is far from over and more critical work on this theme must be done, if we want to avoid the old notions of essentialised groups returning with vengeance and acquiring new scientific legitimacy and political respectability.

'National identity' in long twelfth-century Britain

In this section, I shall focus on the contribution of three historians, who have written about 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' in long twelfth-century England in the most systematic manner and therefore provide the necessary point of departure for my thesis: John Gillingham, Rees Davies and Hugh Thomas. However, I would like to preface this discussion by a short reference to two books published in the 1980s. First is Michael Clanchy's *England and Its Rulers*, the first edition of which appeared in 1983 with the subtitle *Foreign Lordship and National Identity*, thus symbolically marking the introduction of 'national identity' as a key concept for understanding central-medieval England (curiously, though, Clanchy dropped the term from the subsequent editions of his volume).[97] Second is Robert Bartlett's biography of Gerald of Wales.[98] This book is important in the context of this thesis's theme because in its introduction Bartlett insisted on treating Gerald's 'nationality' as the matter of subjective feelings (rather than an objective fact based on 'descent'), which, as I shall show

[97] M.T. Clanchy, *England and Its Rulers, 1066–1272: Foreign Lordship and National Identity* (Oxford, 1983).
[98] R. Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales, 1146–1223* (Oxford, 1982).

below, served as one of the key influences on other authors (most directly, John Gillingham) who later started exploring 'national identity' in twelfth-century England in a systematic fashion.[99]

In a series of important articles published in the 1990s and then collected together in the volume *The English in the Twelfth Century*, John Gillingham has made several foundational interventions in the then maturing historiographical framework on 'national identity' in post-Conquest and twelfth-century England.[100] Perhaps, the most significant of these contributions is Gillingham's systematic exploration of what, as he argues, was a new imperialist paradigm of opposing the 'civilised' English to the 'barbaric' Welsh, Scots and Irish, which, in contrast to the only occasional expressions of prejudice in pre-Conquest texts, became hegemonic in twelfth-century historical writing produced in the Kingdom of England (Gillingham credits William of Malmesbury with the doubtful 'achievement' of being the first author who systematically applied this Classical binary to post-Conquest Britain).[101] Using the same method of exploring the uses of ethnic terms by particular twelfth-century historians, Gillingham also contributed to two other debates central to the historiography of 'national identity' in twelfth-century England: the interplay between 'Englishness' and 'Normanness' and the meaning and purpose of Geoffrey of Monmouth's puzzling but extraordinarily influential history of 'the Britons' that redefined the ethnicised imaginary of 'British' and 'English' history at the time.

[99] Of course, Bartlett himself has also contributed to the development of these debates. One can perhaps single out his article 'Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 31 (2001), pp. 39–56, as an especially important intervention since it helpfully traced the variability of the medieval meanings of 'gens', while at the same time showing their comparability with the modern notions of 'ethnicity'/'race'.

[100] Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century*.

[101] J. Gillingham, 'The Beginnings of English Imperialism', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 5 (1992), pp. 392–409; idem, 'Conquering the Barbarians: War and Chivalry in Twelfth-Century Britain', *The Haskins Society Journal*, 4 (1992), pp. 67–84.

In an article focused on Henry of Huntingdon (d. c. 1157) and his *Historia Anglorum*, Gillingham argued that one can trace the 'revival' of 'the English nation' in the textual evolution of Henry's *History*. While Henry initially expressed the gloomy view of the destruction of 'the English' as a people following the Conquest (a vision common in early twelfth-century texts from England), in the later books of his work he shifted to a more positive interpretation, allowing for the resurrection of politically-relevant contemporary 'Englishness'. Interpreting a particular episode narrated by Henry of Huntingdon for the reign of King Stephen, Gillingham suggests that the author used the terms 'the English' and 'the Normans' not only for two historical peoples, but also to designate two different 'parties' among the post-Conquest elites, thus reflecting the self-identification of the elements of this elite with 'Englishness' (also, as Gillingham argued in more detail in another piece, expressed in the composition of the French-language *History of the English* by Gaimar around the same time[102]).[103] In his article on Geoffrey of Monmouth, Gillingham argued that the former's historical-literary project was driven by a desire to defend the honour of 'the Britons' against that new representation of them as 'barbarians' promoted by William of Malmesbury and others.[104] Much more recently, Gillingham returned to the Galfredian themes in an article investigating the unpublished early section of the *Annals* of Winchester that, while dismissed by the nineteenth-century editors of the *Annals* for the Rolls Series, actually contains a highly creative and amusing reinterpretation of Geoffrey's version of the story of the passage of dominion from 'the Britons' to 'the Saxons'.[105] This material is

[102] Idem, 'Gaimar, the prose *Brut* and the making of English History', in *L'Histoire et les nouveaux publics dans l'Europe médiévale*, ed. J.-Ph. Genet (Paris, 1997), pp. 165–76
[103] Idem, Henry of Huntingdon and the Twelfth-Century Revival of the English Nation.
[104] Idem, 'The Context and Purposes of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 13 (1991), pp. 99–118.
[105] Idem, 'Richard of Devizes and "a rising tide of nonsense": How Cerdic Met King Arthur', in *The Long Twelfth-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past*, ed. M. Brett and D.A. Woodman (Farnham, 2015), pp. 141–56.

directly relevant to the second chapter of this thesis where we examine the reinvention of the meaning of the ethnic terms derived from the concept of 'Britain' in the twelfth century.

While even this rather short summary of Gillingham's contribution to the historiography of 'nationhood' in twelfth-century England shows how critically important his work has been for the field, one should note some theoretical problems with his approach. It is difficult to agree with Gillingham's tendency to objectify 'ethnic' categories, which is most evident in his insistence on the fact of the 'real' differences between 'the English' and 'the Scots', 'the Welsh', and 'the Irish', which is a part of his otherwise incredibly productive exploration of the representation of the latter 'peoples' as 'barbarians'. By suggesting that there was, in fact, a difference in the methods and ethics of warfare, economic development and the persistence vs. the disappearance of slavery between 'the Celtic peoples' and 'the English', Gillingham returns to the vision of 'peoples'/'nations' as really existing bounded entities, clearly and objectively distinguishable from each other by sets of systemic features.[106] For one thing, this conceptualisation of 'peoplehood' is logically impossible to reconcile with Gillingham's equally regular insistence on his understanding of 'nationality' as a subjective phenomenon rooted in (self)-identification (the definition he borrows from Bartlett, without problematizing the transition from Bartlett's application of this formula to an individual medieval author to his own use of it as the definition of the concept in general). Clearly, one can either claim that 'the English' and, for example, 'the Scots' were at such and such a moment in time at two objectively different levels of economic development and also waged wars differently, or claim that 'English' and 'Scot' are (inter)subjective categories, the meaning of which emerges in the acts of self-

[106] Idem, Foundations of a Disunited Kingdom, pp. 58–9.

identification and identification by others. However, one cannot claim both of these things at the same time. The coexistence of these two irreconcilable paradigms in Gillingham's publications reflects the more general historiographical problem I have discussed in the introduction: the unresolved tension in combining constructivist rhetoric and objectifying logic in medievalists' writings about 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood'.

A similar objectifying tendency is implicit in another key claim of Gillingham's, that is, that some 'ethnic' terms in twelfth-century sources should be understood as 'political' rather than 'ethnic'. To tease out this underlying logic, we should look at how exactly this analytic move, which also has its interpretative advantages, is made. Focusing on Henry of Huntingdon's *History*, Gillingham first points out a contradiction in the text. On the one hand, the depiction of the Norman Conquest is both very negative and interpreted as the destruction of 'the English'. In fact, this story constitutes one of the key plots organizing the narrative of Henry's work, who prefigures this, in his view, tragic outcome already when describing the marriage between King Aethelred and Emma, the daughter of Norman Duke Richard I, in the early eleventh-century as a part of God's plan to punish 'the English' for their sins, brought to its conclusion by 1066 and its consequences. On the other hand, as Gillingham shows, other sections of Henry of Huntingdon's *History* reflect a less negative understanding of the relations between 'the Normans' and 'the English': they are even presented as one people fighting 'the Scots' at the Battle of Standard in 1138. He then focuses on Henry's story of the existence of a plot to kill all 'Normans' in England, reinterpreting it not as a confirmation of a strict 'ethnic' divide between two peoples, but as a reflection of the existence of two 'parties' within the elite of the kingdom during King Stephen's reign: the 'Norman' one and the 'English' one. Thus the plot is to be understood as a conspiracy against the members of that 'Norman' party led by actors identifying with

'Englishness'. According to Gillingham, its existence or at least Henry of Huntingdon's representation of it should be seen as confirmation of the fact that by the second quarter of the twelfth century one is justified in talking about the revival of the 'English nation'.[107]

This is a plausible, even if somewhat speculative, interpretation. One could of course question whether relying on one or two authors is enough to provide firm evidence of any substantial political shift in the uses of ethnic idioms in the political practice of the time. One could also point out that the strong chronology of the thesis ('the English nation revived in the second half of the twelfth century') can be called into question: on the one hand, there are stark examples of much earlier positive uses of 'Englishness' in the post-Conquest period (none of them as striking as Lanfranc's famous self-identification as a 'new Englishman' already in the 1070s, to which I shall return in the empirical chapters); on the other, some later authors not only clearly separated 'the English' and 'the Normans', but also insisted on the position of the latter as a dominant group. However, I believe that the key problem here is not in the interpretation as such, but in the logic that underpins it – first and foremost, the notion that an 'ethnonym' may – in some specific (exceptional) circumstances – lose its ethnic meaning and become an exclusively 'political' term. So, what is wrong with this idea? Two things, in my view. First, the implied notion that 'normally' ethnic names have a stable meaning and unproblematically refer to 'neutral' or 'objective' ethnicity, defined, one must assume, on the basis of birth. Second, relatedly, Gillingham seems to suggest that ethnic names only get political when they actually stop being ethnic names and become something else. Taken together, these half-explicit, half-implied notions cannot but posit ethnicity as an objectified phenomenon – something 'out-there-in-the-

[107] Idem, Henry of Huntingdon and the Twelfth-Century Revival of the English Nation, pp. 75–101.

world', available for unproblematic, unambiguous and, most importantly, apolitical representation. In Gillingham's case, this somewhat ambiguous reification is doubled by the ambivalent expression both in the title and throughout the text: 'the revival of the English nation'. The author never explains whether he means by this the revival of 'the English nation' as a political idea or as an actually existing 'nation'. While Gillingham's focus on a particular historical composition (Henry of Huntingdon's *History*) may mean that he talks about ideas, his reference (in the introduction to the book-version of his writings on the topic) to the twelfth century as an especially dramatic and significant period in the history of 'the English' seems to confirm that he does indeed think about 'the English' as a historical subject, travelling through time as a cohesive entity, a people/nation, that therefore can indeed go through the periods of almost-destruction, survival and revival.

If Gillingham writes about national identity in twelfth-century England with an ironic detachment, another key author in the field represents a totally different stylistic and emotional register: that of an empathetic, even sympathetic understanding. I mean, of course, Rees Davies. Perhaps, one example revealing this emotional stance would be enough here. Davies concludes his first lecture on the 'peoples of the Britain and Ireland' (delivered in his capacity as president of the Royal Historical Society) with a set of examples of the national-identification utterances we find in medieval Wales and states: 'For a Welshman there could be no more appropriate point at which to bring this lecture to a close than with such a patriotic affirmation ringing in your ears'.[108] This emphatic self-identification with Wales and Welshness, defiantly expressed against the background of, in this passage, implicit, identification of the audience as the 'English' academic establishment,

[108] Davies, The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400: I. Identities, p. 20.

underpins all of Davies' highly-influential writing on medieval 'peoplehood' (as a side but relevant note: this may also explain his preference for the term 'people', less tied to the notion of statehood than 'nation' and therefore conventionally more conducive for expressing collective identifications not associated with fully sovereign polities). Thus salvaging the medieval sense of peoplehood from the 'modernist' denial of the very possibility of its existence was a personal political commitment for Davies.

Historiographically, Davies' contribution to the current understanding of 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' in medieval Britain and in the later Middle Ages more generally cannot be over-estimated. Stylistic differences notwithstanding, in some ways this contribution reminds one of John Gillingham, as discussed above. This is obviously not accidental: Davies influenced Gillingham and was, in his own turn, influenced by him (tellingly, Gillingham's *English in the Twelfth Century* is dedicated to Davies 'for friendship and inspiration').[109] Davies' identification with subaltern 'Welshness' must have helped him to see and describe in strong terms the imperial character of the Kingdom of England in twelfth-century Britain and, relatedly, the imperialistic construction of 'Englishness' as a hegemonic identification, built around the denigration of neighbouring 'peoples'.[110] In its own right, the growth and conquests of what Davies called 'the first English empire' are also shown to have influenced the consolidation of 'Scottish', 'Welsh' and 'Irish' identifications in the later Middle Ages. Davies also wrote a great deal about the reflection of these political processes and discourses of identifications both in formal historical writing and in a wider range of cultural products (ranging from material objects to laws) of the period. This historical-memory aspect of 'peoplehood' is examined by Davies mainly through the prism of two overlapping

[109] Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century*, p. v.
[110] R.R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles 1093–1343* (Oxford, 2000).

sets of historical and legendary narratives referred to as 'the matter of Britain' and 'the matter of England'.[111] The narrativization of 'Englishness' and 'Britishness' – the contradictory tendency of, at times, distinguishing and, at times, mixing these two ways of naming and representing history, space and identification in the region – are put by Davies at the centre of his investigation of 'peoplehood' at the time (a productive approach, which this thesis attempts to build upon and develop in the chapter 2 concerned with the redefinitions of 'Britishness' in the long twelfth century).

But, while later-medieval Britain remained the main empirical basis for Davies' view of medieval 'peoplehood', his contribution to our understanding of 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' in the middle ages is not restricted to this sub-field defined in geographical terms. Using the material from 'British' sources, Davies attempted to answer the following general question: 'what [did] medieval men and women mean by coralling themselves verbally into collectivities which they called "peoples"[?]'[112] The resulting exploration, set out in Davies' presidential lectures at the Royal Historical Society, constitutes one of the best, concise but systematic, descriptions of the categories used in medieval texts to construct and represent 'national' identifications. In Davies' own order, these building blocks of medieval 'peoplehood' are: names, boundaries, regnal solidarities, laws, customs, language and historical mythology.[113] This is a persuasive list that consists, firstly, of the categories originating in the explicit medieval definitions of 'peoplehood': laws, customs, language, which, alongside with 'common origin' (also discussed by Davies), were

[111] Idem, *The Matter of Britain and the Matter of England: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 29 February 1996* (Oxford, 1996).
[112] Idem, The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400: I. Identities, p. 4.
[113] Idem, The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400: I. Identities; II. Names, Boundaries, Regnal Solidarities; III. Laws and Customs; IV. Language and Historical Mythology, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th Series, 4–7 (1994–7).

repeatedly said throughout the middle ages to distinguish different *gentes*. It also includes analytical terms introduced by modern historians, above all, Susan Reynolds' 'regnal solidarities'. What is especially important in Davies' analysis and makes it different from many other publications on the topic is that his sensibility towards the question of 'English' imperialism and hegemony meant that he never studied medieval identifications as purely textual phenomena. Instead, for Davies they are always connected to political practice, especially the question of conquest, violence and resistance.

Now, this attention to the practice of 'national' identifications, especially its violence, cannot be commended enough. What however should be avoided is a confusion between the real-life consequences of the notions of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood'/'peoplehood' and the way we conceive and write about the nature of the phenomena themselves. The undeniable reality of the former should not lead us to reify the latter. Davies, as I already started arguing in the introduction, does seem to fall into this trap. Of course, we are not talking about any kind of straight-forward and naïve projection of objectively existing biologically-construed 'peoples'. The problem is subtler: like many other scholars in the field (including Gillingham), Davies cannot fully escape the reifying tendency in his writing, in spite of his rhetorical appeal to a constructivist understanding of 'peoplehood'. Davies' publications are characterised by a constant oscillation between claiming that these were medieval actors who 'constructed the world' through 'identifiable and separate ethnic labels' which did not quite reflect the more complex and malleable reality on the ground[114] and writing in a way that cannot but be interpreted as an assertion of the existence of 'peoples' as entities out-there-in-the-world.

[114] Idem, The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400: I. Identities, p. 16.

A fairly lengthy quote is due: 'The oldest and most closely-textured of those [four] peoples [of Britain and Ireland] was the English people, the *gens Anglorum*, it was also the one best served by the remarkable precociousness and ubiquitousness of its common institutions and law. Its identity as a people across these three centuries was further underpinned by the common experience of a single law and single taxation, by a popularised version of its continuous history as a people, and by the growing awareness of a specifically English self-identity in the thirteenth century, the century (as Stubbs put it) when England was reclaimed for the English.'[115] Of course, this writing is still somewhat ambiguous but it does very much look like this 'English people' is an entity that is not reducible to what 'contemporaries' thought. Here 'identity' is just one element of the existence of the people (even if formulated in a strangely tautological manner: 'identity… underpinned by self-identity'), but its 'close texture' (a tellingly physicalising metaphor, perceptions are usually not said to be 'closely-textured') is also defined by institutions and law. The temporality of Davies' logic also matters: his 'English people' is a coherent and continuous historical subject moving through time from the original point when it was first 'made'. Naturally, this does not mean that is unchanging (according to Davies), but one should turn the tables at this point and ask whether anyone has ever believed that 'peoples'/'nations' are unchangeable (certainly that was not the case with the nationalists of the classical age). In contradiction to his constructivist framing, therefore, Davies in fact returns to the standard positivist understanding of 'people' (or 'nation') as a product of historical development, an outcome of institutional/legal/political/cultural history, also defined by a subjective factor called, in the outdated idiom, 'national consciousness', and in

[115] Ibid., p. 18.

Davies – 'self-identity'. It seems to me very revealing that a quote from Stubbs with its standard nineteenth-century methodological and political nationalism – 'England reclaimed for the English' – does not look out of place in Davies' explanation of medieval 'Englishness'.[116] The same combination of historical developmentalism and teleological objectification is evident in Davies' reference to 'Scotland': 'Historians will probably always disagree as to the measure of unity and identity that both the kingdom and the people of what we call Scotland had in the eleventh century; but by the fourteenth century there can really be no argument.'[117] Without repeating myself too much, I should very briefly note that this phrase only makes sense if both the country and the 'people' of Scotland are seen here as entities that exist in their own right and not only in the thought-world of medieval actors, therefore, allowing a historian to 'measure' their 'unity' objectively.

What we see here is the transformation of the medieval ideological discourse of 'national' unity into a reified fact, strikingly exemplified in the following statement by Davies: 'King, people and country formed the unity that was England and the English people.'[118] Here a specific – ethnicising – way of conceiving and representing power, its agents and subjects, which is common in medieval texts, is turned into a neutral description of the objective reality itself. All of that is not to say that those national discourses had only textual reality in the middle ages, on the contrary – they were clearly relevant on the ground. This, however, only increases the burden of responsibility for historians who, unless they want to take this ideology at face value, should be critical and attempt to avoid murky ambiguity in both thinking and writing about these phenomena. Admittedly, Davies'

[116] Ibid. For Stubbs' quote see: W. Stubbs, *The Constitutional History of England in Its Origin and Development* (3 vols., Oxford, 1903–1906, 6th edition), ii, p. 4.
[117] Davies, The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400: I. Identities, p. 18.
[118] Idem, The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400: II. Names, Boundaries, Regnal Solidarities, p. 11.

reification is ambivalent rather than direct, as it tends to be mediated by the assumed medieval beliefs. But this objectification stubbornly resurfaces when 'a people' is narrated as a transtemporal subject invested with agency, which happens, for instance, in the following claim: 'The English… had sorted out their identity and name as a single people – *gens Anglorum*, *Angelcynn* – at least three centuries before the disaster of I066 struck'.[119] The same positivist nation – made at a datable moment in time (in Davies' contradictory version, imagined both from outside by the royal or ecclesiastical authorities and, as in the quote above, somehow by itself), and then existing as a more or less coherent entity (unless it is somehow unmade) is resurrected here, all generic characterisations of 'peoples' as 'artificial creations' notwithstanding. What makes this possible is the problematic definition of 'nationhood' through a personifying metaphor of a feeling, collective but singular, subject, based on the notion that 'a people' can 'self-identify' and 'perceive itself as having a communal identity, a sense of togetherness, *wirgefühl*'.[120]

As I observed in the introduction, a similar tension between constructivism and reification is present and even explicitly embraced (but not resolved) in the most detailed and exhaustive, at the empirical level, study of 'ethnicity' in long- twelfth-century England: Hugh Thomas' *The English and the Normans*. The main purpose of this rather long book is twofold: first, to provide the definitive empirical account of the assimilation of 'the Normans' into 'Englishness', structured around the judiciously argued chronology of this process, conceived not on the basis of a search for one decisive turning point (along the lines of Gillingham's 'rebirth of the English nation'), but through a careful mapping of different stages that led to the eventual outcome. Second, Thomas aims not only to

[119] Ibid., p. 10.
[120] Ibid., p. 7–8.

describe when and how exactly 'the Normans' became 'English', but also to explain this development in a causal register, using for this purpose his conceptual model of how 'ethnicity' works. So, in accordance with this model, Thomas is organising his material at three levels: 'the individual', 'construct', and 'culture', roughly corresponding to the parts 2, 3 and 4 of the book.[121]

A key problem with this model consists in how Thomas conceives the relations between these three levels. Rather than arguing that 'ethnicity' is a 'construct', which can be reproduced through cultural phenomena and by individuals who interiorise it, Thomas seems to consider 'ethnicity' as a construct and, at the same time, a property of 'cultures' and 'individuals'. The last element (the notion of 'ethnicity' as something that individuals are endowed with) is especially difficult to reconcile with any meaningful claim that 'ethnicity' is a 'construct'. To avoid arguing this in purely abstract terms, I would like to quote a relatively lengthy passage from the book, which is revealing, not least, since the author himself basically admits a contradiction inherent in his approach. Thomas writes: 'In talking about English and Normans in terms of descent as well as in terms of constructed identity, however, I face a problem of terminology. This is a problem that also existed in the primary sources. As noted earlier, the term English can and could be used in quite different ways. First, it could describe people with that identity before the conquest and their descendants afterwards. Second, it could describe all those who saw themselves or were seen as English after the conquest, whatever their descent. Contemporaries only rarely distinguished the two. In Part II, when I refer to the English without qualification I will be referring to the former, whom I will also describe as the natives or native English in parallel

[121] Thomas, *The English and the Normans*.

with the Latin *indigeni*, which was used in the *Dialogue of the Exchequer*. Similarly, I will describe the conquerors and their descendants as Normans or immigrants, even though the shift to an English identity was under way from the beginning. Though necessarily somewhat arbitrary, my usage will, I hope, at least be clear.'[122] What this usage does make clear is that Thomas is thinking in terms of what one may call 'ethnic dualism', that is, 'ethnicity' as simultaneously an independent fact (moreover, in this case, explicitly based on 'descent') and a construct. Quite tellingly, Thomas acknowledges that there is a problem since there is no straightforward correlation between 'identity' and 'descent' ('the shift to an English identity was under way from the beginning'), but, for some reason, decides to ignore it and stick to his essentialist theory of 'ethnicity' that does equate 'descent' with identification, while also insisting on talking about 'constructs'. So here what remains an underlying tension in much of the work on medieval 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' comes to the fore as an open and, frankly, puzzling contradiction.

Despite the conceptual shortcomings of Thomas' book, it is important to acknowledge the undeniable significance of his contribution to our understanding of 'ethnicity' in long twelfth-century England. This contribution consists in the most systematic exploration of the references to national identifications in both well-known and rarely discussed sources from the period as a whole. Thomas' systematic overview of the relevant empirical material allows him to analyse a series of cultural and institutional mechanisms of constructing 'ethnicity' at the time. To list a few key spheres, Thomas examines the spatial imaginary, the notion of 'national' honour, Church institutions, practices and ideologies (not least, the cults of saints), royal government, stereotypes and the image of the Other,

[122] Ibid., p. 97.

language, historical writing and literature, and shows how 'English' national identification was reconstructed and reproduced through all these practices and ideologies.[123] While rejecting Thomas's self-contradictory theoretical approach, this thesis therefore very much builds upon his empirical analysis of 'ethnicity' in twelfth-century England.[124]

Towards a new heuristic

This last section of the literature review begins by bringing together an analysis of the works of those scholars whose approaches and concepts I see as the closest – in different ways – to my own understanding of how one may write the history of 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' most productively. For simple chronological reasons, it makes sense to begin with the writings of Susan Reynolds, who made at least a few very significant interventions in the field in the 1980s[125] and continued to publish on medieval 'nationhood' until as recently as 2015.[126] In *Kingdoms and Communities in the Western Europe 900–1300*,

[123] Ibid., pp. 241–390.

[124] Naturally, this thesis is also based, both empirically and conceptually, on the broader historiography of the interplay between 'English' and 'Norman' identifications after 1066. Apart from Gillingham and Thomas considered in much detail above, one should mention in particular: R.W. Southern, 'England's First Entry into Europe', in idem, *Medieval Humanism and the Other Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), pp. 135–57; I. Short, '*Tam Angli quam Franci*: Self-Definition in Anglo-Norman England', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 18 (1995), pp. 153–75; A. Williams, The English and the Norman Conquest (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 155–219. More precisely on the memory of 1066 this thesis is indebted to the work of Elisabeth van Houts: E.M.C. van Houts, 'The Norman Conquest Through European Eyes', *English Historical Review*, 110 (1995), pp. 832–53; eadem, 'The Trauma of 1066'; eadem, 'The Memory of 1066 in Written and Oral Traditions', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 19 (1996), pp. 167–80; eadem, *History and Family Traditions in England and the Continent, 1000–1200* (Aldershot, 1999). Finally, the historiography of the construction of Norman identification as such has also been obviously relevant to my understanding of central-medieval 'ethnicity'/'nationhood'. See: R.H.C. Davis, *The Normans and their Myth* (London, 1976); G.A. Loud, 'Gens Normannorum – Myth or Reality?', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 4 (1981), pp. 104–16; C. Potts, '*Atque Unum Populum ex Diversis Gentibus Effecit*: Historical Tradition and the Norman Identity', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 18 (1995), pp. 139–52; L. Shopkow, *History and Community: Norman Historical Writing in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Washington, 1997); E. Albu, *The Normans in their Histories: Propaganda, Myth and Subversion* (Woodbridge, 2001); N. Webber, *The Evolution of Norman Identity, 911–1154* (Woodbridge, 2005); D. Bates, *The Normans and Empire* (Oxford, 2014).

[125] S. Reynolds, 'Medieval Origines Gentium and the Community of the Realm', *History*, 68 (1983), pp. 375–90; eadem, *Kingdoms and Communities*, pp. 250–331.

[126] Eadem, 'Nations, Tribes, Peoples, and States', *Medieval Worlds*, 2 (2015), pp. 79–88. https://www.medievalworlds.net/medievalworlds_no9_2019?frames=yes (accessed on 10.10.2019).

Reynolds based her discussion of the 'community of the realm' not only on the rejection of 'modernism' (while the volume was published in 1984, it did not yet engage with the then only recently published books by Anderson and Gellner and criticised the previous generation of the 'modernist' historiography and theory of 'the nation'), but also on a sharp critique of 'methodological nationalism'. Without using this term itself, Reynolds offered a perceptive critique of some aspects of the phenomenon. A relatively long quote is justified: 'Most medieval historians would deny that they are nationalists, but that is because, like many historians of the phenomenon of nationalism, they see it as something aggressive, xenophobic, and deplorable, but do not look hard at the ideas which underlie it. Nationalist ideas, however, are more widespread than the unpleasant manifestations of nationalist emotions. The most important is the belief, widely held though seldom recognized and articulated, that "the world is naturally divided into nations, each of which has its own particular character and destiny"'.[127] This remains utterly pertinent, both academically and politically. In 2019, perhaps, not so many medievalists are as comfortable with the word 'nation', as it was the case in the 1980s, but if we substitute 'nation' with 'people' (and perhaps take out 'naturally' from Reynolds' wording above) the problem looks very similar. As I have extensively argued above, the common-sense belief in the existence of 'peoples' is still predominant in the field, in spite of the frequent incantations of constructivism.

If one is to name the main achievement of Reynolds' writings on medieval 'peoplehood', it is her consistent insistence that the notion of 'the nation' and potential communal solidarities expressed through it were the outcomes of the functioning of political structures at the time.[128] This acknowledgment of the role of 'the state' in the

[127] Eadem, *Kingdoms and Communities*, p. 251.
[128] A concise but powerful argument is presented in Reynolds, The Idea of the Nation as a Political Community.

construction of medieval 'regnal solidarities' is of course inseparable from what is perhaps the most famous and far-reaching enterprise of Susan Reynolds as a medievalist: the critique of the concept of 'feudalism' and the standard version of medieval history inherent to it.[129] Not incidentally, this stereotypical 'feudalism' is central to modernists' schemas. When they reduce the whole of medieval politics to the personal 'feudal' ties between different layers of the elite (ruling over the silent majority), they simply construe 'the middle ages' as 'the other' for their model of 'modernity' and 'nation-states'.

Perhaps where I tend to disagree with Reynolds is with respect to her tendency to postulate what seems to me a simplified and therefore potentially objectifying view of the medieval notions of 'nationhood'. Across her different publications, she seems to suggest that medieval actors took the idea of a people for granted. As she wrote already in *Kingdoms and Communities*, 'the idea of a people, like the modern idea of a nation, was a common place that went uncontested just because it was seldom argued'.[130] I see here a problematic tendency to confuse 'common places' with ideational/ideological phenomena that are allegedly 'uncontested'. The idea of a 'nation'/'people' was indeed common in the middle ages, but it was not uncontested. In fact, the argument that it was contested, in multiple different ways, constitutes one of the central empirical claims of this thesis. Reynolds' comparison with 'the modern idea of a nation' is revealing: was there really such a period when 'the nation' was uncontested? Even during the epoch(s) of the hegemony of nationalism, both what 'the nation' is (that is, how to define it, what it is 'made' of) and its very legitimacy and/or existence were contested from different political and intellectual standpoints. Mutatis mutandis, the same is true for the medieval discourses of

[129] Eadem, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford, 1994).
[130] Eadem, *Kingdoms and Communities*, p. 257.

'nationhood'. Somewhat ironically, Reynolds indirectly acknowledges as much on the very same page when she claims that the idea of a 'people' was uncontested in the Middle Ages by suggesting that when King Stephen of Hungary (d. 1038) asserted that 'a kingdom of one language and one way of life… would be weak and fragile', he was in fact pleading a special case, justifying the virtues of immigration and, what one is tempted to call in today's parlance, 'multiculturalism'.[131] As always, 'peoplehood' and its normative political implications were a matter for contestation (which does not need to take the form of a formal philosophical and/or political-theoretical dispute to be recognised as such). To ignore or deny this is not only mistaken empirically, it is also conceptually (and therefore also politically) problematic: if a certain idea is indeed taken for granted to such an extent as to be uncontested, any difference between it being an idea and the whole of reality – de facto – disappears. When we embrace such an interpretation, we – presumably, unwittingly – turn a particular construct of 'peoplehood'/'nationhood' into an objectified totality.

The work of Sigbjørn Sønnesyn can be used as a correction to this notion of 'peoples' understood exclusively as 'natural, inherited communities' in the Middle ages, proposed by Reynolds and many other scholars. In general, Sønnesyn's contribution to our understanding of medieval stems from his wider interest in the ethics of historical writing in the central Middle Ages. This project began with a doctoral dissertation on William of Malmesbury and 'the ethics of history', published now as a book.[132] It is in this context that Sønnesyn explores the medieval notions of 'ethnicity', underpinned by both Biblical and Classical ideas of community, and, even more consequentially, their interpretation and appropriation by the Patristic tradition (St Augustine is, not surprisingly, the key figure

[131] Ibid.
[132] S. Sønnesyn, *William of Malmesbury and the Ethics of History* (Woodbridge, 2012).

here). Most directly pertinent to this thesis is Sønnesyn's theory of medieval 'ethnopoiesis'. Of course, the productive radicalism of Sønnesyn's intervention does not at all consist in a suggestion to substitute 'ethnogenesis' with 'ethnopoiesis' as an analytical term to denote the process of the construction of 'ethnic' identifications 'objectively', as if from 'outside' (that is, from our perspective as historians). In this context, the difference between 'birth' and 'making' is ultimately negligible: even if the latter does not immediately strike one as loaded with all the problematic assumptions of the organic vision of 'peoplehood'/'ethnicity'/'nationhood' inherent in the former, we can see by now how easily objectification and essentialisation creep back in under the label of 'making' (perfectly illustrated by the numerous books entitled *The Making of X*, where 'X' stands for a 'nation' 'made' in a particular moment in time and continuously existing as an entity since then). So the key discovery and, simultaneously, theoretical contribution of Sønnesyn is 'ethnopoiesis' as a concept that captures how medieval actors themselves thought and wrote about the construction of 'peoples'. At least, so far as the case of 'the Normans' is concerned, Sønnesyn has persuasively shown that the medieval authors writing about this 'people' did not assume its existence as 'a given', but explicitly narrated its 'making' out of diverse groups – a process they thought about via a particular ethical and historical vision, which they inherited from the Patristic interpretation of the Classical-Roman tradition.[133]

If I may add a more personal note, I had the first opportunity to read this article as yet an unpublished draft in 2012: back then, I did not really grasp its true significance. I thought the article was very good, but really failed to appreciate the depth of its invitation to rethink medieval 'ethnicity' substantively. This is rather puzzling because I was myself

[133] S. Sønnesyn, The Rise of the Normans as *Ethnopoiesis*.

already thinking and writing about somewhat similar themes, stimulated by an encounter with different but, in a sense, comparable medieval passages, coming from sources dating to the same period Sønnesyn was researching. Here I mean, above all, some twelfth-century redefinitions of the meaning of 'Britishness', which are thoroughly explored in chapter 2 of this thesis, but which I tried to analyse already in an article published in the same year that I became acquainted with Sønnesyn's work: 2012. As I suggested in the conclusion to that article, which was focused on John of Salisbury, John's uses, indeed, creations, of the 'ethnic' terms derived from the concept of 'Britain' are difficult to make sense of, unless one presupposes that this author was self-consciously redefining the content and boundaries of the past and present 'national identities' within the British Isles. Since then, I have arrived at a more holistic conceptualisation of the topic that emphatically foregrounds the self-conscious aspects of medieval notions of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood'. While the explicit route by which I arrived at this position developed through reading medieval sources alongside the (relatively) recent theory of 'ethnicity' and, especially, 'race', having Sønnesyn's writings at the back of my mind must have played a crucial role, which I am pleased to acknowledge here.

If I am to criticise Sønnesyn's model, I may note that his approach is idealistic: his investigation focuses purely on the history of 'ideas', which may be related to some basic historical facts (e.g. Rollo's baptism in 912), but not on any structural factors. Power, social conflicts, material aspects – all of those phenomena are totally absent from the account of how communities, including *gentes*, were thought about in the middle ages. One may of course argue that Sønnesyn can legitimately be interested in the ideas only, that he is not obliged to investigate their grounding in the social, economic, political practices of the period. This, to an extent, is undisputable. The problem however is that by ignoring these

aspects of 'practice' behind the pure notions of identifications and communities in the middle ages Sønnesyn not only avoids a discussion of a significant part of their history, he, in my view, inevitably slips towards misconstruing the main topic of his own investigation: ideas themselves. By ignoring the actual violence of identifications and 'ethnic' discourses, Sønnesyn, it seems, sets himself up to ignore the violence, the conflict, and the contestation at the level of ideas too. We see an idealised picture only. Moreover, not only idealised, but also one-sided, too neat and coherent, in comparison to the actual medieval discourses with all their contradictions and irreconcilable claims about what 'peoples'/'nations' were. As a polemic against the dominant tendency in the literature to ascribe to medieval actors a totalizing essentialist view of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood', Sønnesyn's counter-argumentation is indispensable and productive. But as an attempt to propose a systemic reconstruction of the medieval perceptions of these phenomena this new model becomes problematic in its own right. One cannot simply write the naturalising notions out of the history of medieval uses of the languages of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood'.

A key corrective here is provided by Geraldine Heng's work on the invention of 'race' in the Middle Ages, especially, by her emphasis on both the 'strategic essentialism' of medieval writers and legislators and actual violence that it inevitably entailed and led to.[134] Heng's scholarship is arguably the strongest intervention into the debates on the medieval constructions of 'race' and 'nation' from the perspective of post-colonial paradigm (otherwise, most notably represented in the field by J.J. Cohen).[135] Setting aside Heng's

[134] G. Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2018).
[135] For this tradition in general see, for example: M.R. Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain* (Minneapolis, 2000); J.J. Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis, 2003); *Cultural Diversity in the British Middle Ages: Archipelago, Island, England*, ed. J.J. Cohen (New York, 2008). The contribution of literary scholarship on these topics is of course not restricted to post-colonial scholarship. For some other key works written from different methodological viewpoints see: D. Rollo, *Historical Fabrication, Ethnic Fable and French Romance in Twelfth-Century England* (Lexington, 1998); J. Miller, *Lazamon's Brut and English*

systematic empirical description of how the categories of 'Jews' and 'Muslims' were increasingly racialised in Europe since the middle of the twelfth century, what is especially relevant to the project which I am pursuing in this thesis is her application of 'critical race theory' to research on medieval ideology. A central conceptual move here is Heng's demonstration of an internal contradiction in 'critical race theory' that insists simultaneously on the understanding of 'race' as an empty signifier and the exclusively 'modern' character of this concept. Heng persuasively shows that we should abandon the narrative of 'modernity', if we are to follow a consistently deconstructionist approach to 'race', which should be seen as an ideological option available for the (re)invention under different material and ideational conditions.[136] I have been developing a complimentary approach in my work on medieval 'nationhood'.

I would like to conclude this chapter by returning to the vexed question of definitions. In the introduction I suggested that we should think of 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' as ideological phenomena, abstractions, and that any attempt to define them as polities and/or communities inevitably lead to their reification. This seems to be self-evident in the case of the objective definitions that presume that each 'nation' (or, for that matter, 'ethnic group') has specific/measurable substance that can be captured through a set of empirical characteristics, which also objectively delineate all nations from each other. A typical example of such definition is suggested by Steven Grosby in *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction*: 'the nation is a territorial community of nativity… that [through] its relatively uniform culture provides stability, that is, continuation over time' (incidentally, the fact that a prominent primordialist was commissioned to write this by default authoritative

Historiography (Oxford Univ. DPhil Thesis, 2004); L. Ashe, *Fiction and History in England, 1066–1200* (Cambridge, 2007).

[136] Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages*, pp. 15–54.

book shows the strength of the essentialist tendency within the field).[137] Grosby's definition seems rather old-fashioned for 2005, not to mention 2019. It presupposes 'common descent' ('It is literally 'nativist' in its presupposition of 'nativity') as the objective foundation of 'the nation' and thus aligns itself openly with ethnic nationalism.

But even when objective definitions do not attempt to claim 'common origin' as a fact, they remain ethnocentric. Let us consider perhaps the most famous such definition, proposed for the concept of 'ethnie' by Antony Smith in his attempt to bridge primordialism and modernism through this intermediate category. According to Smith, the criteria for distinguishing an 'ethnie' are a collective name, common myth of descent, shared history, distinctive shared culture, an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity.[138] It seems to be evident that this list can be taken as a set of actually measurable empirical criteria only if one accepts the common-sense notion of the real existence of 'ethnic groups' in the first place (but then any other criteria of distinction and identification could be used alongside or instead of the 'factors' quoted by Smith, thus illustrating the arbitrariness of his 'definition'). It is obvious that, in order to substantiate one abstraction ('ethnie'), this definition operates through a number of other abstractions such as 'shared culture' and 'shared history', mixed with purely discursive phenomena such as 'collective name' or 'origin myth'. Such notions as 'shared culture' or 'shared history' are both arbitrary and tautological, they are not some sort of independent variables that can be used to establish the objective boundaries between groups through outside empirical observations. In general, we can see that all 'objective' definitions plainly and simply take the ideological

[137] St. Grosby, *Nationalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2005), p. 7.
[138] Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nation*, pp. 21–31.

claims of objective unity and identity inherent to the notions of 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' at face value and recast them as scientifically-verifiable criteria.

More interestingly, a slippage towards reification is also typical for what one may call the 'intersubjective' definitions of 'ethnic group', 'the nation' and 'people', even if, at the first glance, they might seem more critical, logically implying the subjectivity of the categories in question. Very curiously and perhaps tellingly, such definitions can be found long before the formation of the current paradigm of research on medieval 'ethnicity' and 'national identity' – the paradigm that allegedly ushered a radical break with the earlier scholarship, which had unavoidably taken 'nations' and 'peoples' for granted. For example, J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, in a review of Wenskus's *Stammesbildung und Verfassung* (1961), published in 1964, asks: 'But when is a people a people?'. And comments: '[t]he answer seems to be "when it has Zusammengehörigkeitsgefuhl". That is what it comes to'.[139] So for Wallace-Hadrill (and Wenskus) a 'people' is a 'people' when it has a 'feeling of belonging together'. Of course, Wenskus has been hailed as a precursor of the 'new' critical paradigm, but we find very similar definitions even earlier. In an article about 'language and nationality' in medieval England published during the Second World War, Vivian Galbraith suggested that 'the nation may be defined as any considerable group of people who believe they are one'.[140] Yet another couple of decades earlier, in his posthumously published theoretical synthesis *Economy and Society*, Max Weber wrote: 'We shall call "ethnic groups" those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization

[139] J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Review of Wenskus, Stammesbildung und Verfassung: Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen gentes', *English Historical Review*, 79 (I964), pp. 137-9.
[140] V. Galbraith, 'Language and Nationality in Medieval England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th Ser., 23 (1941), pp. 113–128, at p. 113.

and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists'.[141] We can move even further back in time to find a paradigmatic example of the intersubjective definition in an explicitly political rather than, formally speaking, academic text – Ernest Renan's lecture 'What is a nation'? (1882), which famously described 'nation' as 'a daily plebiscite'.[142]

Scholars embracing one invariant or another of the intersubjective definition occasionally admit that it is not unproblematic. For example, Rees Davies writes: 'The definition [of what a people is] is, not unexpectedly, as elusive as the concept itself. We might well appropriate for our purposes Benedict Anderson's famous definition of a nation as "an imagined community", imagined by itself and/or by others and accepted as such'.[143] The reference to Anderson and his 'imagined community' is very important and I shall return to it shortly. But let me first spell out why I believe that the intersubjective definition of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood'/'peoplehood' is not simply 'elusive', but completely unfit for purpose. Most obviously, it seems to be circular: 'a people is a people that believes in itself being a people'. Instead of actually defining anything, this formula presupposes the pre-existence of an entity that, simultaneously, wills itself into existence. Of course, one may argue that these are particular individuals (not a people as a whole) that believe in themselves constituting a people/nation. Notably, though, historians rarely clarify their intersubjective definitions in this, one may say, common-sensical manner. One may suggest that they prefer to stay in the space of elusiveness and ambiguity conjured up by 'a people

[141] M. Weber, *Economy and Society: an Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. G. Roth and Cl. Wittich (2 vols., Berkeley, 1968), i, p. 389.
[142] E. Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?: conference faite en Sorbonne, le 11 mars 1882* (Paris, 1882).
[143] Davies, The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400: I. Identities, p. 4.

imagining itself' for good reason, since the empirical specification (individuals identifying with a group, rather than a group identifying itself) runs into both factual and conceptual problems. First, there is an obvious question: how many people need to believe in being a nation for that nation to qualify as such? Galbraith's 'any considerable group' is vague but instructive: not any group would count. What this shows is that, once specified, the definitions fails on its own terms. It stops being purely (inter)subjective and requires some sort of external characteristic (e.g. a certain scale). Second, and this is more important from my point of view, being consistent in defining a 'nation'/'people' as just the matter of individuals' belief in it would inevitably lead to questioning the existence of this 'entity'. People may obviously believe in many things, but, as such, this does not really prove the existence of those things.

It is not particularly surprising for the field defined by the unresolved tension between reifying and constructivist logics that many scholars would stick to the elusive ambiguity of talking about 'peoples' imagining themselves. The convenience of this rhetoric, I believe, explains the enormous popularity of Benedict Anderson's 'imagined communities', including among medievalists, Anderson's 'modernism' notwithstanding. The formula itself neatly allows one to satisfy both constructivist ('imagined') and reifying (but still a 'community') sensibilities. One should not, however, be tempted by this illusory solution of the intersubjective definition. It is either not what it claims to be (in fact, necessitating a further external description of what an 'people'/'nation' is) or is nothing but an anthropomorphic metaphor. 'Groups', 'peoples' and 'nations' cannot 'imagine', 'believe in' or 'feel' anything, even less so imagine themselves (unless, of course, one is happy to conceive them in a metaphysical modality – something that the absolute majority of historians who have been writing about 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' in the recent decades are

extremely unlikely to do). I hope this fairly long discussion demonstrates why the intersubjective definition cannot salvage 'peoples' and 'nations' as entities out-there-in-the-world (even if somehow subjective, fluid and malleable): one should either insist on the legitimacy of the objective/external definitions of these phenomena (an approach I find unsatisfactory for the reasons specified above) or go all the way and, via the immanent critique of the intersubjective definitions, admit that 'peoples'/'nations'/'ethnic groups' are indeed nothing but beliefs, ideas that, under certain historical circumstances, tend to congeal into more or less solid ideology, which can be effectively reproduced over very long periods of time, reinforcing the illusion of the independent, objective existence of these phenomena.

How do these seemingly different but in fact structurally similar objective and subjective definitions of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' relate to each other? I think they constitute two sides of the same coin. And that coin is the ideology of nationalism. Historical nationalism – and in this context I mean by this an ideology that postulates 'the nation' as the main source of sovereignty and the foundation of the state (which therefore also requires the transformation, creation or, for that matter, preservation of a state organised in accordance to the principle of national sovereignty) – has always been based on bringing together, in a contradictory but highly effective way, exactly these two different logics. First, it is the logic of reification, of presenting 'people'/'land'/'country' as an objectively existing entity, constructed through historical, metaphysical, naturalistic, linguistic, racial, and other discourses. Second, it is the logic of voluntarism: the nation is to be built, to be made, achieved in the future.[144] 'We have made Italy. Now we must make Italians', to quote a

[144] The importance of this future-oriented project of 'making the nation' for classical nationalism is emphasised in D. Bell, *The Cult of Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001).

locus classicus of nationalist thought. The voluntarist logic presupposes the nation not as an objective (in any sense – genetic, historical, linguistic) entity, but as a community of belonging, a subjective entity based on, to borrow from Wenskus and Wallace-Hadrill, *Zusammengehörigkeitsgefuhl*, which is to be forged and sustained as an act of collective will. So, what the objective and subjective definitions are in fact doing is taking these two different logics of nationalism at their face value. Separating them of course constitutes one of the ways in which nationalism is salvaged from its contradictions and is reproduced as a hegemonic common-sense view of the world. To move beyond this impasse, I am proposing a theory of 'nationcraft' that systematically treats 'nationhood' as ideology in order to demystify it.

Chapter 2: Reinventing the meaning of 'Britishness' in the long twelfth century

Let us begin with a simple question: who were the Britons or, to use the Latin terms of the time, *Britones* and *Britanni*? I, of course, mean this question not in any 'objective' sense, but in terms of the perceptions and representations in the long twelfth century. The answer might seem straightforward to anyone familiar with the sources: those ethnic names were routinely used to refer to the ancient Britons (the inhabitants of Britain before the Anglo-Saxon conquest), as well as the Welsh and the Bretons on the continent. Most significantly, those 'British' peoples were seen as ethnically and historically distinct from 'the English' – a division that was at the core of the national master narrative in both Anglo-Saxon and post-Conquest England (engendered in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* and reproduced through the overwhelming influence of this text in the twelfth century).[145] This picture is so self-evident that one might be justified in thinking that there are no interesting questions to be asked about the meaning of the ethnic terms *Britones* and *Britanni* in twelfth-century England. Although several studies on the concept of 'Britain' in medieval perceptions have been published, their authors have not had much to say on the uses of the ethnic names associated with it.[146] Presumably, these scholars did not even look at them because they themselves took this distinction between 'the English' and 'the

[145] On the formation and persistence of this vision see, especially: J. Campbell, 'Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past', *Peritia*, 3 (1984), pp. 131–50; Davies, 'The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100–1400. I. Identities; II. Names, Boundaries and Regnal Solidarities; III. Laws and Customs; IV. Language and Historical Mythology'; Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century*, pp. 3–58 (reprinting Gillingham's earlier articles 'The Beginnings of English Imperialism', 'The Context and Purposes of Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain', and 'Conquering the Barbarians: War and Chivalry in Britain and Ireland'). For a detailed study of the representations of a 'transition' from 'British' to 'English' domination in Britain in twelfth-century historical writing, as influenced by Geoffrey of Monmouth see: R.W. Leckie, *The Passage of Dominion: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Periodization of Insular History in the Twelfth Century* (Toronto, 1981).

[146] D. Hay, 'The Use of the Term *Great Britain* in the Middle Ages', in idem, *Europe: the Emergence of an Idea*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 1968), pp. 128–44; Davies, *The First English* Empire, pp. 35–53; A. MacColl, 'The Meaning of *Britain* in Medieval and Early Modern Britain', *Journal of British Studies,* 45 (2006), pp. 248–69.

Britons'/'the Welsh' for granted – a view that seems to be evident in the publications of the most influential of all writers on the topic: Rees Davies. This implicit understanding of the topic is explicitly spelled out and usefully summarized by Hugh Thomas, who, in his book on English and Norman identities, stated that while the concept of Britain was important throughout the long twelfth century, the corresponding ethnic term 'Britons' was not used in the same unifying way as from the eighteenth century onwards.[147] Many scholars may disagree about the eighteenth century, since there exists a substantial literature on early modern Britishness,[148] but any doubts about the main claim are unlikely to arise. It is exactly that assumption that there is nothing to discuss here that I would like to challenge in this chapter.

I first became interested in this topic when I noticed a couple of puzzling passages in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* (c. 1159), a very famous political and ethical treatise that has, however, been neglected in research on national identity in twelfth-century Britain.[149] John claimed that Brennius, a legendary king of the ancient Britons invented, or rather remodeled, by Geoffrey of Monmouth (from Brennus, the leader of the Gauls of Roman historical tradition),[150] belonged to the community of his fellow-countrymen (*nostrates*), thus ignoring the conventional historic ethnicised distinctions between *Britones* and *Angli*.

[147] Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, p. 264.
[148] See, for example: Br. Bradshaw and P. Roberts (ed.), *British Consciousness and Identity: The Making of Britain, 1533–1707* (Cambridge, 1998); C. Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, 1999). It is also worth noting that the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* lists 'Englishman' as one of the possible meanings of the word *Britannus*, but provides only sixteenth-century examples. See: *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, ed. R.E. Latham et al. (London, 1975–2013), fasc. i, p. 218.
[149] For a detailed discussion see: I. Afanasyev, '"*In gente Britanniarum, sicut quaedam nostratum testatur historia*…": National Identity and Perceptions of the Past in John of Salisbury's Policraticus', *Journal of Medieval History*, 38 (2012), pp. 278–94. J. McLoughlin, 'Nations and Loyalties: the Outlook of a Twelfth-Century Schoolman (John of Salisbury, c.1120–80)', in D. Loades and K. Walsh (ed.), *Faith and Identity: Christian Political Experience* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 39–46, does not consider John of Salisbury's peculiar uses of the language of 'Britishness'.
[150] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain: an Edition and Translation of De gestis Britonum*, ed. M.D. Reeve, trans. N. Wright (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 51–9.

On the surface, at least, John's uses of these ethnic names looked contradictory: after all, that very peculiar statement about Brennius and *nostrates* followed and was logically connected to John's arguments on the decline of military prowess in England, illustrated by the references to the wars between the English and the Welsh, whom the author called both *Valenses* and *Britones*.[151] Most interestingly, John seemed to be aware of these contradictions and thus potential challenges against his unusual choice of ethnicised nomenclature, but tried to double-down on it: 'Seek the first see of the English or of the Britons / If you prefer to say of the Britons, no one forbids [it].'[152] In the *Policraticus*, John of Salisbury also coined a unique term: *gens Britanniarum*, the people of the British Isles, which he again associated with *nostrates* and their history.[153] Below I shall return to these intriguing utterances and other examples of John of Salisbury's striking uses of the language of Britishness. For now it is important to emphasize that it was possible for a twelfth-century author to redefine the meaning of the ethnic terms derived from *Britannia* or even to invent new ones and to reimagine the standard master narrative of English national history predicated on the break of *adventus Saxonum* and a clear distinction between 'the Britons' and 'the English'.

This chapter is the result of my attempts to understand how unique John of Salisbury's experiments with the meaning of Britishness were at the time. In what follows, I shall assemble and analyze other examples from long twelfth-century sources that are comparable to the above-quoted passages from the *Policraticus*. I shall first discuss a set of late eleventh- and early twelfth-century cases from both Britain and the continent, then,

[151] *Ioannis Saresberiensis episcopi Carnotensis Policratici sive de nugis curialium et vestigiis philosophorum libri VIII*, ed. C.C.J. Webb (2 vols., Oxford, 1909) [hereafter *Policraticus* (ed. Webb)], ii, pp. 17–20, 41–5.
[152] Ibid., i, p. 6. 'Anglorum sedem primam pete, sive Britonum; si Britonum mavis dicere, nemo vetat.'
[153] Ibid., ii, pp. 393–4.

with a chronological leap, move to late twelfth- and early thirteen-century examples. In the conclusion to the chapter, I shall ponder the conceptual implications of this exceptional material for our understanding of medieval national categories and discourses. One last introductory note is, however, necessary. I should explain why I find this material exceptional and exciting. It might seem self-evident, but in the light of the routine objectifications of national categories I would like to make this as clear as possible. The cases where twelfth-century authors erased the differences between 'the English' and 'the Britons' and/or appropriated the ancient British past or British name for 'the English' are surprising not because they went against some real historically-justified distinctions between those two groups, but because they contradicted a very powerful dominant tradition of distinguishing them embedded in twelfth-century national and historical discourses.[154] It is this break-away from mainstream perceptions that makes these examples significant and invites us to think about their meaning and wider implications. The fact that this mainstream tradition, or rather its new incarnation based on the notions of races and linguistic families, still makes sense to so many people today (note, for example, the frequent references to 'the Celts' in both popular and academic discourses), emphasizes how thought-provoking this twelfth-century material may be.

[154] For a helpful discussion that problematizes and historicizes the notion of a clear distinction between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons see: B. Ward-Perkins, 'Why Did the Anglo-Saxons Not Become More British?', *English Historical Review*, 115 (2000), pp. 513–33. Ward-Perkins compares this story of a radical break in Britain to a different narrative that emerged in post-Roman Gaul and the Frankish Kingdom, in which the tendency to use 'the Gauls' and 'the Franks' as synonyms rather than as the names of two distinct 'peoples' predominated in the middle ages (a parallel, the importance of which was also helpfully pointed out to me by Elizabeth van Houts). Curiously, starting from the sixteenth century, this scheme was substituted with a narrative of 'ethnicity' as 'class' that distinguished 'the Franks' as aristocracy and 'the Gauls' (or Gallo-Romans) as the subdued population – a narrative that, in its own turn, was weaponised in the historical contestations of the French Revolution, eventually to give way to a re-invention of the medieval story of Gallo-Frankish continuity (most famously exemplified and personified in Asterix).

A perfect starting point for this discussion of the unconventional uses of the ethnic names derived from the concept of Britain is Goscelin of Saint Bertin, a prolific hagiographer who arrived in England from Flanders and was active both before and after the Norman Conquest. In the *Liber confortatorius* (c.1082–3), an idiosyncratic treatise addressed to his friend Eve, Goscelin painted a striking vision of the Apocalypse and the Last Judgment that abounds with fairly unusual and numerous references to different 'peoples'. In his description of various ethnicised judgments ('the Lord will judge between nation and nation, between kingdom and kingdom'), Goscelin wrote that 'The Lord will judge between the Gauls and the Britons, *inter Gallos et Britannos*'.[155] In her translation of the source, Monika Otter has interpreted this passage as follows: 'Goscelin uses the classicizing terms "Gauls and Britons", but he surely means Norman French and English'.[156] I believe that Otter's view that the passage must refer to the Norman Conquest is correct, but, as such, this does not explain Goscelin's peculiar choice of terms and there seems to be more to it than simply a stylistic preference for classical vocabulary.

Another quotation from the same vision is very instructive. When Goscelin describes what we might call the post-Apocalyptic order, he mentions that the Apostles will be with the 'nations and languages' they brought to God: St Denis – with the Gauls and Parisians, St Martin – with the people of Tours, St Hilary with the Poitevins, and, most relevant for our purposes, St Augustine [of Canterbury] with the Britons, *cum Britannis* (note also an instructive mingling of 'national' and 'regional' communities in the list – an intriguing feature of medieval national discourse, to which I shall return in the conclusion to this

[155] The Liber confortatorius of Goscelin of Saint Bertin, ed. C.H. Talbot, *Studia Anselmiana*, 37 (1955), pp. 1–117, at p. 111.
[156] Goscelin of St Bertin, *The Book of Encouragement and Consolation [Liber Confortatorius]*, trans. M. Otter (Cambridge, 2004), p. 142, n. 125.

thesis).[157] It is very difficult to imagine that a preference for the term *Britanni* could be neutral in this particular case. Traditionally the story of St Augustine's mission to Britain was understood as an initial event and a corner stone in the narrative of the conversion and Christianization of the English, which itself became one of the key elements of the whole construction of Englishness since Bede.[158] The fact that Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* was to a great extent built around distinguishing and opposing 'the Britons' and 'the English' makes Goscelin's decision to opt for the word *Britanni* in association with St Augustine even more surprising.[159]

We can only speculate about Goscelin's motives in making this unusual lexical choice, and we cannot know whether the author saw the term *Britanni* as a legitimate synonym of *Angli* or attempted to construct a new identification (it may be significant that he was using *Britanni* and not *Britones*, the latter name usually denoting 'the Britons'/'the Welsh'). A key point, however, is that an ethnic concept derived from 'Britain' appears in a context, in which we would expect to see the language of 'Englishness', and this already constitutes a major departure from the mainstream tradition of the time. Furthermore, Goscelin's ease in eradicating the distinction between the Britons and the English is very well illustrated by yet another passage from the same vision of the end of the world. The author is prophesying that certain earthly kings will be crowned in heaven, among them Constantine, chosen by God *a Britannis* ('from the British'), as well as the '*holy kings of Britain* Oswald, Edmund, Kenelm, Ethelbert, Edgar, Edward'.[160] This list of *sancti reges*

[157] The Liber confortatorius of Goscelin of Saint Bertin, p. 113.
[158] H.E.J. Cowdrey, 'Bede and the English People', *Journal of Religious History*, 11 (1981), pp. 501–23.
[159] A. Murray, 'Bede and the Unchosen Race', in H. Pryce and J. Watts (ed.), *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages: Essays in Memory of Rees Davies* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 52–67. Also see W.T. Foley and N.J. Higham, 'Bede on the Britons', *Early Medieval Europe*, 17 (2009), pp. 154–85, which reveals the more complicated nature of Bede's perception of the Britons.
[160] The Liber confortatorius of Goscelin of Saint Bertin, p. 113.

Britannie is curious in its own right (for example, the presence of Edgar deserves attention),[161] but what matters most of all is how Goscelin adroitly ignores the distinction between the ancient Britons and the English or, at the minimum, between their kings. The break of the *adventus Saxonum* is eliminated, and the division between the Britons and the English is overshadowed by a unified narrative framed around the concept of Britain.[162]

Goscelin of Saint Bertin's tendency to experiment with the Britain/British and England/English semantic field manifests itself in an interesting way in his *Life* and *Translatio* of St Edith. In these works he used such peculiar terms as *Anglorum Britannia* ('Britain of the English') and *Anglica Britannia*.[163] Trying to understand what sort of ideological programme might have been hidden behind this employment of the language of 'Britishness', it is difficult or even impossible to go beyond guess-work. Was Goscelin attempting to appropriate 'Britain' for the English – a strategy that would become quite common later in the twelfth century? Was he trying to come up with the concept of a new community/people of the whole of Britain (which, perhaps, in its own right can be seen as a singular *gens* or, on the contrary, as consisting of several 'peoples')? Or, maybe, this was

[161] Edgar was not officially canonized but there might have been a local (abortive) cult in Glastonbury. In his *De antiquitate Glastonie ecclesie*, William of Malmesbury described the translation of Edgar's body by an eleventh-century abbot, referred to a 'manifestation of royal sanctity (regie sanctitatis ostensio)' and adduced a story of a miraculous healing at the king's grave. See: J. Scott, *The Early History of Glastonbury: An Edition, Translation, and Study of William of Malmesbury's De antiquitate Glastonie ecclesie* (Woodbridge, 1981), p. 134. A short passage on the eleventh-century elevation of Edgar's incorrupt body and the king's miracles is also contained in William's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*. See: William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, II.160, pp. 260–2.

[162] Perhaps, relevantly, in his *Miracles of St Edmund*, Goscelin mentions that 'Britain' was divided 'into many parts' under different kings, who pursued their own interests and neglected 'the kingdom' – *regnum* – in singular. Goscelin then reinforces this notion of a singular kingdom of Britain by adding a biblical quote: 'Every kingdom divided against itself shall fall' (Luke 11.17), which he elaborates by arguing that those who decide to resist cannot be conquered by any 'people' or 'nation'. Curiously, in the same structural place in his collection of St Edmund's miracles Herman the Archdeacon (writing in the 1090s) was speaking about 'England' (not 'Britain') and its internal divisions. See: Herman the Archdeacon and Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *Miracles of St Edmund*, ed. and transl. T. Licence, with the assistance of L. Lockyer (Oxford, 2014), p. 6 (Herman) and p. 138 (Goscelin).

[163] 'Le légende de Ste Édith en prose et vers par le moine Goscelin', ed. A. Wilmart, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 56 (1938), pp. 5–101, 265–307, at pp. 69, 286.

merely a technical response to a rather confusing tradition, a way to make sense of the contradictory and tangled narratives of the transition from 'the Britons' to 'the English'. Finally, if there was an ideological rationale of any kind behind Goscelin's statements, what would be its contemporary pragmatics, its links with the politics of the Post-Conquest Kingdom of England? In this particular case, these questions seem to be hardly answerable from the existing evidence, but it is useful to keep them in mind in our developing pursuit of different twelfth-century attempts to reinterpret the meaning of 'Britishness'.

A helpful parallel to Goscelin's examples comes from a source composed around 1066 by Folcard, another hagiographer who migrated from Flanders and was working in England both before and after the Norman Conquest. In the *Life* of John of Beverley, written for Archbishop of York Ealdred, Folcard praised the saint for his teaching activities, the most impressive fruit of which was Bede. Listing the latter's intellectual achievements and the different genres he succeeded in, the author noted that Bede '*avitam Britannicae gentis hebitudinem purgavit*,' that is, 'purged the innate dullness of the British people'.[164] How should we understand this phrase? We might decide that Folcard meant it as a reference to Bede's harsh attacks on the Britons – one of the central topics of the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*. But this does not make much sense in the context of the sentence, which is rather about Bede's own great reputation and his theological and historical œuvre as a whole. So another reading seems to be more plausible: through his praiseworthy writings Bede purged the innate/ancestral dullness of the *gens Britannica*, by which the author meant Bede's *own* people. Thus, quite ironically, Folcard turned Bede, an icon of English national identity, into a member of a somewhat obscure 'British people,' presumably,

[164] *The Historians of the Church of York and its Archbishops*, ed. J. Raine (3 vols., London, 1879–94), i, pp. 239–60, at pp. 244–5.

constructing this *gens* in territorial categories. Folcard's inclination towards the British idiom is also illustrated by his description of the Christianisation of Britain (not England), where he praised personified Britain for her zealousness in the pursuit of faith (such a personification is an interesting detail in its own right). Finally, Folcard names John of Beverley among the 'luminaria Britanniae'.[165] Significantly, this does not exclude the term *Angli* from the author's vocabulary: besides routine examples from various episcopal and royal titles, he mentions John of Beverley's urge to evangelize *rudes Anglorum populi* (the plural form of the phrase only further complicates the author's vision of national categories projected onto history).[166] To sum up, we, again, cannot make much of this isolated quotation, but the sheer possibility of describing Bede, the medieval paragon of an Englishman, as British in a sense, and the mentioning of *gens Britannica* point to much broader and less stable semantics of the ethnic terms derived from the concept of Britain, hiding under the surface of conventional medieval distinctions between 'the English' and 'the Britons'.

Yet another late eleventh-century text confirms the importance of the concept of Britain at the time, and, more pertinently to our topic, the possibility of associating it with a single nation. The source in question is the *Vita Sancti Birini*, a piece of hagiographical writing composed in Winchester in the 1090s. While Goscelin is a possible author of the text, the most recent publisher has put his authorship into doubt.[167] In any case, what is important for us, is the author's apostrophe to Britain, inserted in his description of the mission of St Birinus (d. *c.*650) to the region. One of the phrases of this appeal reads as follows: 'This is the blessed man [Birinus], Britannia… who enriched you with this glory, and

[165] Ibid., p. 243.
[166] Ibid., p. 244.
[167] *Three eleventh-century Anglo-Latin saints' lives: Vita S. Birini, Vita et miracula S. Kenelmi and Vita S. Rumwoldi*, ed. and trans. R.C. Love (Oxford, 1996), pp. lviii–lx.

having enriched you heaped on more, so that you might be a *gens sancta*, *populus adquisitionis*, *ciuitas regis magni*'.[168] The passage is built upon the multi-layering of tradition: an apostrophe to Rome from Pope Leo the Great's *Sermon LXXXII*, that goes back to St Peter's terminology in the First Epistle where he defines Christians as *gens sancta* and *populus adquisitionis* (1 Peter, 2.9), which, in its own turn, reinterprets *gens sancta* from Exodus 19.6 (where God tells Israel 'ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, an holy nation'). While one can discuss whether this utterance may be understood as a literal claim to the Divine election of Britain and the status of God's chosen nation (the topic of the next chapter), another aspect matters more for my argument here. It is instructive that the territorial and political concept 'Britain' can be interpreted as a people/nation. Moreover, the implication is that there is one unified *gens* of Britain. This notion is especially interesting, since it is put in the context of the story of the conversion of Britain. As I mentioned above in relation to Goscelin's matching of St Augustine with *Britanni*, conventionally the distinction between the Britons and the English was crucial to this narrative of Christianization. Here, in contrast, the emphasis is on the land, which allows the author to imagine Britain as a single nation.

It would be naïve to make too much of this statement, which simply follows an authoritative example – Pope Leo's sermon with its personification of Rome. But one also should not ignore at least that the rhetorical possibility for a late eleventh-century author to write about Britain as a *gens* exists. This is also important for a more general understanding of the medieval uses of territorial and political concepts: as Susan Reynolds has convincingly argued, when dealing with a concept of that type, it was normal for medieval authors to

[168] Ibid., p. 14.

assume the existence of a people corresponding to it.[169] I can add two much later but similar examples with 'Britain' here. When Nigel of Canterbury praised *Britannia* in his *Miracles of the Virgin Mary*, written in the last quarter of the twelfth century, he used the words *terra*, *insula* and *gens*.[170] A more entertaining passage comes from Peter of Blois' letters. Writing in the very beginning of the thirteenth century, Peter criticized a certain Thomas, who 'imprudently ascribed the glory of Great Britain solely to beer'.[171] This of course reproduces one of the old national stereotypes about 'the English', but what is interesting for us is that in the next sentence Peter quoted Thomas talking about *gloria sue gentis*, 'the glory of his people'.[172] Thus, again, there is the same idea that Britain constitutes a single *gens*.

To discover further examples of the terms *Britones*/*Britanni* being applied to the English or to the people of Britain we should move to another region: Normandy this time.[173] There one finds two more relevant examples. Both come from sources that also date from the very end of the eleventh century. The first one is from the *De obitu Willelmi* (c.1097–1100), a short treatise inserted in the early twelfth-century redaction of the *Gesta Normannorum ducum*. A phrase from William I's epitaph reads: 'Qui rexit rigidos Normannos, atque Britannos / armis devicit fortiter optinuit.' Now, several different translations have been suggested by Marjorie Chibnall, Frank Barlow, and Elisabeth van Houts. Chibnall's version is the least interesting from our perspective: she understood *Britanni* as 'the Bretons'. Barlow and van Houts had other views: for the former, 'Britanni'

[169] Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities*, pp. 250–331.
[170] Nigel of Canterbury, *Miracles of the Virgin Mary, in Verse: Miracula Sancte Dei Genetricis Virginis Marie, Versifice*, ed. J. Ziolkowski (Toronto, 1986), p. 26.
[171] The *Later Letters* of Peter of Blois, ed. E. Revell (Oxford, 1993), p. 163.
[172] Ibid., p. 164.
[173] For a detailed discussion of long twelfth-century Norman historians' interest in 'England's British past' see E.M.C. van Houts, 'Normandy's View of the Anglo-Saxon Past in the Twelfth-Century', in *The Long Twelfth-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past*, pp. 123–40, at pp. 131–7.

from *De obitu* were 'Britain's men', and the latter translated the term as 'the English'.[174] This is a doubtful example and Chibnall may very well be right in her choice of the Bretons as one authentic meaning of the term. But Goscelin's vocabulary discussed above, especially, his statement about God's judgment *inter Gallos et Britannos* with its implicit reference to the Norman conquest, proves that Barlow and van Houts' readings are also perfectly possible.

More certain and also more interesting is my second instance from late eleventh-century Normandy. It comes from the *Norman Anonymous*, a political and ecclesiological treatise composed sometime between 1096 and 1110. Discussing the rival claims of Rome and Jerusalem, the author stated: 'If the Romans were dead or destroyed and *Scoti* or *Britanni* became the inhabitants in their place, they would be called the Roman church… On the other hand, if the Romans came to live *in Scotia* or *in Britannia* they would not be called the Roman church'.[175] The statement itself is relevant to a discussion of the medieval understanding of national categories: it seems to reflect a distinction between, on the one hand, 'peoplehood' and, on the other hand, church institutions that are ethnicised rhetorically through territorial association. But the fact that the author decided to give such an explanation points to the opposite tendency of blurring the line between national community and 'national' church. In any case, more pertinent to our topic is not the core meaning of the author's idea, but his use of the term *Britanni*. Undeniably, by *Britanni* the author inclusively meant all inhabitants of Britain. Did he, however, conceive this group as a national community in whichever sense, with all the implications of common origin and

[174] The *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis, ed. and trans. M. Chibnall (6 vols., Oxford, 1969–80), iv, p. 111; F. Barlow, *William Rufus* (London, 1983), p. 51; The *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni, ed. and trans. E.M.C. van Houts (2 vols., Oxford, 1992–95), ii, pp. 190–1.
[175] J.R. Ginter and T. O'Sullivan, *Electronic Norman Anonymous Project*, tract 12, 105; http://normananonymous.org/ENAP/index.jsp?view=edition&p=105 [accessed 3 May 2012].

political relevance? Maybe this was no more than a random word employed in a technical way to denote the inhabitants of a land in the framework of a particular argument and should not be understood as hinting at the existence of the concept of 'the Britons' as the people/nation of Britain in twelfth-century Europe. Once again there are more questions than answers. One of the possible ways to explain this mingling of the British and the English by the authors quoted above is to note their external perspective. Of course, it would be a gross oversimplification to make conclusions on the basis of origin, as in the cases of Folcard and Goscelin. One cannot really say anything meaningful about the fact of them being technically 'foreigners' in England on their perceptions of nationhood and vocabulary choices. However, the location matters and this factor may be applied to the authors of the *De Obitu* and the *Norman Anonymous* (both, most likely, working in Normandy). They were not directly included in the English historical and hagiographical tradition and this circumstance may account for their un-canonical terminology.

There are two other relevant examples that are revealing in this context. The first quotation originates in a much earlier period but still deserves our attention. Aimoin of Fleury (*c*.960–*c*.1010) chose the following title for the chapter of his *Historia Francorum* that dealt with Gregory the Great and St Augustine's mission to Britain: 'De beati Gregorii in papam electione, et *Anglorum seu Britannorum* ad fidem catholicam conversione' ('On the election of blessed Gregory as the pope, and the conversion of the English or the British to the catholic faith').[176] Even though in the body of the text the chronicler refers to *natio Anglorum*, the chapter heading shows that for him *Angli* and *Britanni* were synonyms. Was it simply because for a monk in a monastery in the Loire region the British/English

[176] Aimoin of Fleury, Historiae Francorum Libri Quatuor, in *PL*, vol. 139, cols. 627–798, at col. 748.

distinction did not matter that much anyway? A notable text from Northern France (this time dating to the beginning of the twelfth century; c. 1115) provides another key to this question. Guibert of Nogent, in his *Monodiae* (usually called 'Autobiography' by its modern editors), tells a story about a king in Britain who rejected paganism, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and was baptized in the presence of the Apostle Peter and Virgin Mary. This pious anecdote is quite curious and its sources are unclear: it shows that even in the prelapsarian pre-Galfredian days some bizarre legends about the kings of Britain were circulating in Europe. But what interests us here is its very beginning: the author writes that there was a king *apud Anglos* and then specifies that they were since antiquity called *Britones*, not *Angli*, which is 'a new name after a segment of the Saxons who later conquered those lands'.[177] Thus, the passage is ambivalent: the terms *Angli* and *Britones* are used as synonyms, but at the same time one is left with the impression that Guibert highlights the ethnic break and the historic differences between 'the Britons' and 'the English'. Another reading is also possible: the only thing that changed is the name, while the nation is the same, despite the arrival of the Saxons. The second interpretation is closer to the literal sense of Guibert's reference to the English, who were called *Britones* since long ago.

A contradiction embedded in this double reading of Guibert's obscure passage speaks to one of the central paradoxes of 'identity'. On the one hand, it is axiomatically tied to a 'name' (it is impossible to 'identify' something without 'naming' it), but, on the other hand, if taken at its face value as a genuine claim to unity and essence (something that a discourse of identification purports to do), any instance of 'identification' should negate the significance of naming ('A rose by any other name would smell as sweet'). The importance

[177] Guibert de Nogent, *Autobiographie*, ed. E.-R. Labande (Paris, 1981), p. 212.

of ‘names’ for medieval identifications has often been stressed, perhaps most emphatically by Rees Davies who argues that ‘[n]ames are central to the identity of people; to change a people's name is to change its identity; to threaten to abolish its name is to call its very existence into doubt.’[178] This is true in a general sense, but, reading passages like Guibert’s on *Angli* and *Britones* and their changing names (or, perhaps even more so, John of Salisbury’s injunction to use these two ethnic names interchangeably, quoted at the beginning of this chapter), one may start asking whether medieval authors themselves, in fact, saw this contradiction in the association between names and the alleged ‘peoples’ they designate.

To return to ‘Britishness’ itself, one might dismiss Guibert’s example as simply a manifestation of an external perception, to which nuances in the distinctions between ethnic terms and identifications in Britain were not pertinent. But it may be more fruitful to pause and consider the fact that even an author who knew a lot and should have had access to a specific source about legendary British affairs might have thought about ‘the Britons’ and ‘the English’ in terms of continuity rather than break. Moreover, Guibert’s *Monodie* is not his only text relevant to my main question here. Contributing to a topical medieval theme of the comparison between the West and the East in his famous narrative of the First Crusade *Gesta Dei per Francos*, Guibert wrote that ‘Syria, Palestine, and Greece, the seed-beds of the new grace, have lost their internal strength at the roots, while the Italians, French, and Britons… flourished’.[179] It is highly unlikely that in this quote *Britones* can be interpreted as referring to ‘the Bretons’ or ‘the Welsh’. The scale of the sentence’s claim, as

[178] Davies, ‘The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100–1400. II. Names, Boundaries and Regnal Solidarities’, p. 2.
[179] Guibert de Nogent, *Dei Gesta per Francos et cinq autres textes*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens (Turnhout, 1996), p. 92. The translation is quoted from Guibert of Nogent, *Gesta Dei per Francos*, trans. R. Levine (Woodbridge, 1997), p. 31.

well as the mentioning of the Italians and the French (*Galli*), suggests that Guibert meant either 'the English' or the people of Britain as a whole here. This passage should be counted as one more example illustrating the possibility of going beyond the conventional discursive distinction between 'the English' and 'the Britons'. The fact that it comes from a text composed by an author who, as we know from his *Monodie*, was familiar with the traditional vision of historical differences between *Britones* and *Angli*, only makes it more persuasive. This suggests, yet again, that while the idiom of 'Britishness' was largely reserved for the Welsh and the Bretons in the twelfth century, a broader understanding of the corresponding ethnic terminology was also imaginable.

An interesting example of the tendency to brush over the break between 'the ancient Britons' and 'the English' or, at the minimum, to think about the history of these two 'peoples' with an emphasis on continuity, is contained in a text central to the twelfth-century English historical tradition: William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*. Describing the eve of the battle of Hastings, the historian narrates how English scouts decided that almost every man in the Norman army was a priest because they all had clean-shaven faces. William explains that the English leave the upper lip unshaved (note the present tense), 'which Julius Caesar describes as a national custom of the ancient Britons (*gentilitius antiquis Britonibus*)'.[180] This is not an application of the term *Britones* to the English, nor even a full-scaled identification of 'the English' with 'the Britons'. Still the quotation seems to be relevant to our discussion: it shows how common it was in the twelfth century to think in the framework of British-English continuity (if not necessarily shared identification). Is the implication of William's phrase that the ancient Britons and the

[180] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, III.239, p. 450.

'contemporary' English have the same national traits, which makes them a single *gens* in a sense? Probably not; but it is important to understand that this is not a black-and-white issue. There may be many intermediate versions between a complete mingling of the Britons and the English and a radical emphasis on the distinction, two extremes present in twelfth-century historical and national discourse. An author who saw a difference between two peoples and two words at the same time could have allowed for some affiliation between them. This convergence would be most easily achieved within the territorial framework. In William of Malmesbury's case it was also facilitated by a historical parallel between two external conquests of the natives of Britain by the Romans and the Normans.

William of Malmesbury's ethnographic comparison between the ancient Britons and the eleventh-century English finds a remarkable antecedent and parallel in William of Poitiers' long comparison between the achievements of Caesar and William the Conqueror in the end of his *Gesta Guillelmi* (*c*.1071–7). Although such a juxtaposition itself already nudged William's narrative towards obliterating the conventional distinction between the Britons and the English, it might seem at first glance that at least lexically the author did systematically distinguish the terms *Britanni* and *Angli*. He, for example, noted that 'the Britons often gave battle to Caesar, whereas William crushed the English so thoroughly in one day that afterwards they could not muster the courage to fight him again'; or that while Caesar personally did not take part in the battles with *Britanni*, William performed duties both as general and as soldier in his battle against *Angli*.[181] But the passage also contains a more curious statement: 'The Romans captured only Cingetorix of the leaders of Britain (*ex Britanniae maioribus*); the Normans… could have thrown a thousand of the most illustrious

[181] William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi*, ed. and trans. R.H.C. Davis and M. Chibnall (Oxford, 1998), pp. 170–4.

men of that people (*ex ipsa natione*) into chains'.[182] At least, formally, this phrase seems to assume that the Normans dealt in 1066 with the same *natio* of Britain that Caesar conquered in Roman times. Making sense of this statement that seems to be in contradiction with William's otherwise systematic acceptance of the distinction between the Britons and the English is challenging. To do that, we may need to give up on the understanding of medieval notions of nationhood and peoplehood as exclusively essentialist and objectivist. A strong tendency to imagine the existence of a *gens*/*natio* corresponding to each territorial and/or political concept, e.g. Britain, meant that it was possible for medieval authors to use ethnic names in a way that may at first look somewhat contradictory, if we expect to see clear and consistent distinctions between 'peoples'. I shall return to these crucial considerations at the end of this chapter.

It is perhaps not accidental that a few of the examples of the unconventional uses of the ethnic names related to *Britannia* quoted above are taken from the stories of conquests. It should have been easier to think and write about a single *gens* of Britain in the context of the incursions of the 'external' nations. This brings me to some later examples, beginning with a passage in William of Canterbury's vast collection of Thomas Becket's miracles composed between 1172 and *c*.1179. The author refers to the invasion of the *insula Britannorum* by the French and the Flemings.[183] The unusual term used by William implies the existence of *Britanni* – the people of the whole of Britain. It may be argued that this is again no more than a technical use of the word, that one cannot read much of conceptual meaning into such geographical terms. After all, geographical terms would often contain

[182] Ibid., p. 172.
[183] William of Canterbury, Miracula gloriosi martyris Thomae, Cantuariensis archiepiscopi, in *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. J.C. Robertson and J.B. Sheppard (7 vols., London, 1875–1885), i, p. 487.

ethnic names in the genitive case without necessarily claiming the existence of a signified national community. The closet parallel is, of course, royal titles with their routine inclusion of ethnic names, but that in itself is a key mechanism through which a systematic ethnicisation is both achieved and reproduced. However, the rareness, even uniqueness of the expression means that it is difficult to completely dismiss this example, even though in the lack of any context one cannot do more than simply note it. Without preempting further discussion, I might add that there may have been good reasons for the authors at Canterbury to be interested in appropriating the idiom of Britishness, as John of Salisbury's case illustrates so well.

But before we return to John's *Policraticus* and fully engage with this theme, I would like to examine other late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century examples. One of them is to be found in Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum*, written at some point in the 1180s and finished between 1208 and 1219.[184] Describing the defeat of King Harold and the English by the Normans, Saxo noted that Harold's two sons escaped to Denmark with their sister. Sven, who received them at his court, then gave the girl to 'the Russian King Valdermar'. Tracing these genealogical ties across Northern Europe, the author mentioned 'an inheritor of his [Valdermar's] blood and name' who became 'the ruler of our own day', identified by the editor of the *Gesta Danorum* as King Valdermar I.[185] Very curiously, Saxo referred to the 'on the one side *British*, on the other side Eastern blood (hinc *Britannicus*, inde Eous sanguis)' of this *princeps*, thus turning his 'English' descent from Harold's daughter into 'British' origin.[186] What is especially important in this example of using 'British' as a synonym of

[184] Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes*, ed. K. Friis-Jensen, transl. P. Fisher (2 vols., Oxford, 2015), i, pp. xxxiii–xxxv.
[185] Ibid., p. 800, n. 16.
[186] Ibid., pp. 800–1.

'English' is that its application of the adjective 'Britannicus' to 'blood' very clearly demonstrates the conflation of territorial and ethnic idioms in medieval notions of 'ethnicity'. The unification of genealogical and national logics is also noteworthy: it is that mixing of 'British' and 'Eastern' blood that makes the ruler an 'embellishment' of both peoples (*gentes*).

The next example comes from Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia imperialia* (1210–1214), a peculiar treatise incorporating miscellaneous courtly legends and historical materials and written for Emperor Otto IV, grandson of Henry II of England. In this text Gervase invented 'the people of the Britons and the Saxons': describing the 'passage of dominion', the author reported that the king of the Africans, Gormund, was invited to Britain by *populus Britonum et Saxonum*.[187] The appearance of this term is probably a deliberate change, since in Geoffrey of Monmouth's original version Gormund is invited only by the Saxons.[188] Gervase may have tried to come up with a more harmonious vision of the transitional period, as well as to offer a didactic example to his audience (the text of course belongs to the genre of princely instruction). While Geoffrey emphasised the conflict, depicted the Britons as victims and blamed the Saxons for the devastation brought about by Gormund, in Gervase's story it is against the backdrop of the tyranny of one of the British kings that 'the people' invites Gormund and his African army. A more essential question is how to understand what *populus Britonum et Saxonum* means. Is it one people or two peoples? Does Gervase imply some sort of political unity between two ethnic groups or is it indeed one people in a sense closer to Bede's *populus Anglorum et Saxonum*, a term which is itself quite difficult to interpret? We cannot know for sure, but what is significant is that Gervase tried to rewrite

[187] Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, ed. and trans. S.E. Banks and J.W. Binns (Oxford, 2002), p. 428.
[188] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, p. 257.

Geoffrey's story as predicated on the unsurmountable gap between 'the Britons' and 'the English/the Saxons', substituting it with a vision that allowed for the unification of two peoples and offering his readers a continuous historical narrative instead of Geoffrey's focus on an ethnic break.

Gervase of Tilbury may have had compelling reasons for his artful but manipulative editing of Geoffrey's history of the Britons and the Saxons. As another passage in the *Otia imperialia* demonstrates, he was using Geoffrey of Monmouth's legendary British past to claim an illustrious, although morally ambivalent, genealogy for the addressee of his treatise, Otto IV. Referring to Geoffrey's history, he wrote: 'In the *History of the Britons* (*Historia Britonum*), from whom you trace your descent, venerable Prince [Otto], on your mother's side, one reads that Brutus… killed his mother… and his father'.[189] Otto IV was Henry II's grandson, born to the latter's daughter Matilda and Henry the Lion. Postulating Otto's relation to Brutus and the Britons through his mother is a very interesting and important statement indeed. It is one of the earliest examples of an explicit claim that the twelfth- and thirteenth century kings of England originated from the ancient kings of Britain. The question of agency is absolutely crucial here. Can we take Gervase's phrase as a confirmation that such a vision was indeed promoted at Henry II's court? A lot has been made of such indirect hints at Henry II's alleged interest in the legendary British past and kings, above all of Gerald of Wales' story of the king's key encouraging role in the 'finding' of Arthur's bones at Glastonbury.[190] We should be very careful here and avoid the temptation to read royal interests and propaganda in every text whose author was making claims about

[189] Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia*, p. 146.
[190] Gerald mentioned Henry II's role in the discovery of Arthur's remains in his *Speculum Ecclesiae* and *Liber de principis instructione*; in the former he claimed that the body was found on the instruction of the king. See: Giraldi Cambrensis *Opera*, ed. J.S. Brewer, J.F. Dimock and G.F. Warner (8 vols., London, 1861–91), iv, pp. 47–51; viii, pp. 126–9.

royal genealogy and identity. I do not think that there exists any compelling evidence of Henry II's interest in the ancient Kings of Britain,[191] and even this much later phrase from Gervase of Tilbury's idiosyncratic treatise cannot confirm that such an interest can be assumed in Otto IV's case. The significance of this example lies not in those speculations about royal beliefs and agency, but elsewhere. Instead, I would argue that this is a fascinating illustration of medieval thinking about genealogy and nationhood, these being literally intermingled in Gervase's claim that through his mother Otto originated from the Britons. Also, the statement is of course a clear case of using the term *Britones* in such a way as to incorporate both the ancient Britons and the twelfth-century Kingdom of England, thus ignoring all the conventional 'ethnic' and historical divisions between them. An explicit connection to royal genealogy reveals how the reinvention and reinterpretation of medieval national categories was related to contingent political goals, such as, for example, an interest in constructing ancient genealogies for the ruling princely families.

This example invites us to think about the problems that the confused historical tradition posed for twelfth-century authors when they were dealing with 'the passage of dominion', understood as the transition from the rule of 'the Britons' to that of 'the English' ('the Saxons'). Already Bede's story was contradictory: were there three different German peoples (the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes), one people of the Angles and the Saxons, or one *gens Anglorum* of the title?[192] Did these variations in ethnic nomenclature matter at all? Bede was clear at least about one point: the distinction between 'the Britons' and 'the English'. However, later historiographical developments complicated this issue. Smoothing

[191] See also a very helpful critical discussion of Henry II's literary patronage and historical interests in K.M. Broadhurst,'Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine: patrons of literature in French?', *Viator*, 27 (1996), pp. 53–84.
[192] Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), p. 50.

of the sharp division between the history of 'the Britons' and 'the English' began even before Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Gesta Britonum*,[193] which itself emphasized this distinction but, ironically, allowed later authors to appropriate the British past and to include it into the English historical tradition.[194] This process of the appropriation and Anglicization of the British legendary past has attracted quite substantial attention in recent decades.[195] Here I shall only briefly mention a few examples – some well-known, others more obscure – of such discursive Anglicization of the British past and its heroes. Roger of Howden famously transformed Arthur from King of the Britons into King of England.[196] Walter Map, parodying Geoffrey of Monmouth, invented a story about Offa, in which he mentions unwise marriages 'between the Romans and the English' (*inter Romanos et Anglos*), clearly appealing to a *topos* concerning the Britons from the *De gestis Britonum*.[197] Laȝamon stated

[193] The first attempt to preface Anglo-Saxon/English history with British mythical history was probably the bilingual Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS F, dated to c.1100–7 or possibly slightly later. See: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition*, *MS F*, ed. P.S. Baker (Cambridge, 2000), pp. lvii, lxxvi, 1–3.

[194] The interpretation of the intentions and meaning of Geoffrey's holistic project of inventing the ancient British past is notoriously difficult. Two main different but not necessarily completely incompatible theories exist in historiography. John Gillingham argued that the text should be understood as pro-Welsh, as a reaction to the anti-Welsh stereotypes and depictions of the Britons as barbarians that were so common at the time. See: J. Gillingham, 'The Context and Purposes of Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain', pp. 99–118; idem, 'The Beginnings of English Imperialism', pp. 392–409; idem, 'Conquering the Barbarians: War and Chivalry in Twelfth-Century Britain', pp. 67–84. Other authors understood the text as an attempt to construct a glorious past and identity that can be appropriated and used by the political community and, above all, the kings of Post-Conquest England. See, for example: F. Tolhurst, 'The Britons as Hebrews, Romans, and Normans: Geoffrey of Monmouth's British Epic and Reflections of Empress Matilda', *Arthuriana*, 8 (1998), pp. 69–87; P. Dalton, 'The Topical Concerns of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie*: History, Prophecy, Peacemaking, and English Identity in the Twelfth Century', *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), pp. 688–712; V. Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place in Medieval England: From Geoffrey of Monmouth to Thomas of Erceldoune* (Woodbridge, 2016), pp. 18–65.

[195] The crucial work is R.W. Leckie, *The Passage of Dominion: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Periodization of Insular History*. See also: S. Echard, *Arthurian Narrative in the Latin Tradition* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 68–106; M.R. Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain*; Ashe, *Fiction and History in England,* pp. 59–64.

[196] *Gesta regis Henrici Secundi Benedicti abbatis: the Chronicle of the Reigns of Henry II and Richard I. AD 1169–1192*, ed. W. Stubbs (2 vols., London, 1867), ii, p. 159; *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houedene*, ed. W. Stubbs (4 vols., London, 1868–71), iii, p. 97. For a detailed discussion see: M.R. Warren, 'Roger of Howden Strikes Back: Investing Arthur of Brittany with the Anglo-Norman Future', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 21 (1998), pp. 261–72.

[197] Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, ed. and trans. M.R. James, revised C.N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1983), p. 168.

that Merlin had forecast the return of Arthur 'to aid the English'.[198] In the *Draco Normannicus* (c.1168–9), an anonymous Latin poem, ascribed to Étienne de Rouen, the author composed a fictitious letter from King Arthur to Henry II, in which the former speaks about *Anglia nostra* and mentions that Modred captured 'the crown of the English' (*Anglorum diadema*).[199] These quotations are probably the earliest instances of the explicit 'Anglicisation' of King Arthur.[200] Finally, there is a curious Norman text, the *Roman des Franceis*, written by André de Coutances on the eve of the French conquest of Normandy in 1204. In this parody the author refers to Bien (Brennius) and Belin, Maximianus and Constantine as the kings of England, and describes how King Arthur conquered the French with 'his Englishmen'.[201] Arguably even more important than these particular examples is a systematic tendency to refer to 'Britain that is now called England' in twelfth-century historical writing.

These cases of the Anglicization of the British past matter for this discussion because they provide the wider context for the complex theme of the intersections between British and English identifications and historical narratives and, in a sense, mirror my main examples of the unconventional uses of the language of Britishness in the twelfth century.

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[198] Laȝamon, *Brut, edited from British Museum MS. Cotton Caligula A. IX and British Museum MS. Cotton Otho C. XIII*, eds. G.L. Brook and R.F. Leslie (2 vols, Oxford, 1963–78), ii, p. 750, ll. 14295–7. The 'Anglen' are mentioned only in the Cotton MS; Otho has the 'Bruttes'. It is also worth noting that Laȝamon describes his main intention as 'to tell the noble deeds of the English' (i, p. 2, ll. 6–7).

[199] Étienne de Rouen*, Draco Normannicus*, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, ed. R. Howlett (4 vols., London, 1884–89), ii, pp. 702–3, ll. 1134–6, 1141–2.

[200] For an analysis of the imaginary exchange of letters between Henry II and King Arthur, its sources, agendas and contemporary political context, see J.S.P. Tatlock, 'Geoffrey and King Arthur in Normannicus Draco', *Modern Philology*, 31 (1933), pp. 1–18, 113–25. For a recent discussion of the text see: E. Kuhl, 'Time and Identity in Stephen of Rouen's *Draco Normannicus*', *Journal of Medieval History*, 40 (2014), pp. 421–38.

[201] A.J. Holden, ed., 'Le roman des Franceis', in *Études de langue et de littérature du moyen âge: offertes à Félix Lecoy par ses collègues, ses élèves et ses amis* (Paris, 1973), pp. 213–33, at 217–18, ll. 41–5, 61–4, 78. The source has recently been republished, translated into English and commented upon by David Crouch: D. Crouch, 'The Roman des Franceis of Andrew de Coutances: Significance, Text, and Translation', in D. Crouch and K. Thompson (ed.), *Normandy and Its Neighbours, 900–1250: Essays for David Bates* (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 175–98.

The possibility of manipulating the ethnic names *Angli*, *Britones* and *Britanni* in different ways and directions shows how this sphere was open to explicit and conscious reinterpretation. Perhaps, nothing can illustrate such malleability of national categories at the time better than William of Newburgh's *Sermon* on St Alban, composed at the end of the twelfth century. The author names the saint 'our Alban' and adds: 'I am saying "our" confidently, not being afraid of the Britons' slanders.' He continues with a striking statement: St Alban, offended by the sins of his people, 'joined the English' and 'became no longer British but English, no longer one of you but one of us (*ex Britone Anglus, ex vestro noster factus est*)'.[202] What is very interesting here is the explicit legitimation of the appropriation of the British saint and his literal transformation into an Englishman, which differs from a more common twelfth-century way of simply referring to St Alban as the *prothomartyr Anglorum/Anglie* without even admitting any potential difficulty with such a claim.[203] The passage, however, still seems to be predicated on a clear opposition and distinction between 'the Britons' and 'the English'.

This last aspect makes another fragment from the same sermon only more intriguing. While the beginning of the *Sermon* and William's bizarre claims about 'our Alban' changing his national identification in Heaven are sometimes quoted and discussed in the literature,[204] the end of the *Sermon*, so far as I can judge, has been ignored. In this final section of the sermon, William praises St Alban as 'the most glorious lantern of our island'

[202] The *Sermons* of William of Newburgh, ed. A.B. Kraebel (Toronto, 2010), p. 87. 'Confidenter dico nostrum, calumpnias Britonum non formidans … Offensus peccatis gentis sue, que iam usque ad celum pervenerant, transivit ad Anglos, atque, ut ita dicam, ex Britone Anglus, ex vestro noster factus est.' I shall return to this striking passage in the Chapter 4, where the interplay between nationhood and cults of saints will be discussed.
[203] See, for example: The *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis, ii, p. 348; Radulfi de Diceto decani Lundoniensis, *Opera historica*, ed. W. Stubbs (2 vols., London, 1876), i, p. 72; Radulphi de Coggeshall, *Chronicon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Stevenson (London, 1875), p. 19.
[204] Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, p. 287.

and then adds that God, who adorned the whole world with the victories and merits of martyrs, did not abandon even the Britons, totally separated from the world, to whom he gave Alban.[205] The term the author used to designate the Britons in this case is most important: *Britanni*, in contrast to the beginning of the Sermon, where he is talking about *Britones*. This is unlikely to be accidental. One might claim that this is no more than historicizing pedantry, an attempt to distinguish the Ancient Britons and the contemporary Britons – the Welsh. However, a look at Bede, the most important historian for William of Newburgh, and how he used the ethnonyms derived from 'Britain', may offer us a more interesting clue. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede used two different names: *Brettones* and *Britanni*. Curiously, the distinction between two identifications does not map on chronology: *Brettones*, by far the most common term applied by the author to designate 'the Britons', is used for both the Roman period and for the parts of the narrative after the arrival of 'the English'.[206] The context, in which the exceptional name *Britanni* appears, is suggestive. In Bede, *Britanni* are resisting Caesar and, even more relevantly to understanding William of Newburgh's nomenclature, they receive Christian faith under King Lucius (a legendary character produced by a misidentification of a historical figure in the *Liber Pontificalis*).[207] In Bede's wording, these were *Britanni*, and not *Brettones*, whom he represents in a negative light through the text, who preserved Christianity until the time of Diocletian's persecutions.[208] From this passage, Bede almost directly moves to the description of St Alban's martyrdom, which emphasises the territorial construct – Britain – as the space of

[205] The *Sermons* of William of Newburgh, p. 109.
[206] Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, pp. 16–20, 38, 40–54, 62, 116, 140, 146–8, 162, 204, 222, 300, 414, 428, 504, 514, 554, 560–2.
[207] Ibid., p. 22–4.
[208] Ibid., p. 24.

this foundational story.[209] It seems to be almost certain that William of Newburgh directly built on Bede's distinction between *Brettones* and *Britanni* in his sermon on St Alban, whom he, again after Bede, linked with the notion of the glory of 'our island'. So, comparably to other authors considered in this chapter (who, by the way, may also have been influenced by Bede's differentiation of *Brettones* and *Britanni*), William was appropriating not only the famous saint, but also some 'Britishness' for the community of 'the English', with which he identified. For this purpose, he relied on a territorial framework and used the concepts of 'our island' and *Britannia*, which is praised several times in the closing paragraphs of the sermon. And, of course, an artful distinction between *Britones* and *Britanni* was a key element of this ideological construction.

One must be cautious about any attempts to speculate on the exact meaning of such passages, fairly ambivalent as they are, but a comparison with William of Newburgh's take on Geoffrey and the Britons in his *Historia rerum Anglicarum* may help us here. Not only in the famous attack on Geoffrey and his invented British past, which is predicated on radically opposing 'the Britons' and 'the English' and their histories, but also in a description of the wars between Henry II and the Welsh, William clearly saw the Welsh as the direct descendants of the ancient Britons.[210] Instructively, he called the Welsh *reliquiae Britonum*.[211] What are the implications of this approach to distinguishing the ancient Britons/the Welsh, on the on the hand, and the English, on the other hand, for our attempts to understand the meaning of *Britanni* from the *Sermon* on St Alban? This suggests that

[209] Ibid., pp. 28–34.
[210] William of Newburgh, Historia rerum Anglicarum, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II and Richard I*, i, p. 11.
[211] Ibid., i, p. 107. William's statement from the same passage that the Britons hate the English (*gens Anglorum*) by nature is also worth noting for understanding how emphatic his vision of the border between two peoples was.

when William used the word *Britanni* in the *Sermon*, he did not mean the ancient Britons exclusively or even at all, but was referring to the community/people of Britain, 'our island' in his vocabulary, to which the English of course belonged or were even synonymous with, while the hated Welsh, the *Britones*, were excluded. One important insight emerging from this example is that even an author who clearly subscribed to rigid distinctions between peoples and an objectifying, even naturalising, vision of national categories was at the same time capable of skilful reinterpretations of the meaning of national terms and concepts. What, I believe, this is beginning to show is that the discourse of 'nationhood' in the middle ages (in twelfth-century England, in particular) was really a form of ideology to which authors consciously 'subscribed to' (and hence could manipulate, rethink and perhaps even question) rather than one that simply had such a powerful and automatic hold on their imagination that they could not possible think beyond it.

The fact that such manipulations of national categories in medieval sources seem so striking is a reflection of modern scholarship's tendency to objectify 'nationhood', but, in a sense, to outsource this objectification to medieval people who, it is assumed, simply took 'peoplehood' for granted (as representatively argued by Davies and Reynolds). However, the more one looks at medieval evidence, the more obvious it becomes that with all the undeniable presence of essentialism in medieval 'national' notions, voluntarism, that is an understanding, more or less explicit, that the language of 'nationhood' is performative (as in William of Newburgh's literal remaking of St Alban's identification), was an equally important feature of the period's thinking and writing about 'nations' and their history.

A very vivid example of this can be found in the section of the *Annals* of Winchester composed in the late twelfth century by Richard of Devizes, which was recently discussed by John Gillingham on the basis of previously overlooked manuscript evidence. As Gillingham

has shown, the unpublished part of Richard's Annals includes a fascinating re-working of Geoffrey's *De gestis Britonum*.[212] Most relevantly to the theme of this chapter, Richard completely reimagined the genealogy of King Ecgberht of Wessex: after first following a standard Anglo-Saxon genealogy ascending to Woden and his forebears, the author then strikingly diverged and claimed a direct relation to Geoffrey's Kings of Britain Assaracus, Ebraucus, Mandanus and Locrinus. He established this connection through a newly invented character Phillida.[213] The scale of Richard's creative editing of Geoffrey's fantasies is impressive, but what matters most for my argument here is yet another confirmation of the possibility for a twelfth-century author to completely ignore the break of the *adventus Saxonum* and instead to construct a vision of genealogical and, by implication, national continuity between 'the ancient Britons' and 'the English'.

A different, but equally thought-provoking solution to the same problem of the relation between 'the Britons' and 'the English' was offered in another peculiar text from the same period. This is the historical section of a legal manuscript compiled in London at the beginning of the thirteenth century that has been recently reintroduced in discussions of historical and political notions in early thirteenth-century England.[214] This document contains a curious attempt to reconcile 'British' and 'English' narratives, an attempt that led the author to suggest a strikingly original vision of the national past. What makes this case particularly interesting is the fact that the author explicitly addressed two crucial problems in the English historical narrative: the unity of the Anglo-Saxons and the interactions

[212] J. Gillingham, 'Richard of Devizes and "a rising tide of nonsense": How Cerdic Met King Arthur', in *The Long Twelfth-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past*, pp. 141–56.
[213] Ibid., pp. 149–50.
[214] See: B.R. O'Brien, 'Forgers of Law and Their Readers: the Crafting of English Political Identities between Norman Conquest and the Magna Carta', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 43 (2010), pp. 467–73; J. Gillingham, 'Expectations of Empire', pp. 56–67.

between 'the English' and 'the Britons'. The compiler of the manuscript emphasized that the Saxons 'originated *de sanguine Anglorum*… and *Anglici* [originated] from their blood, and they always formed one people and one nation, *populus unus et gens una*'.[215] While many authors automatically reproduced Bede's convoluted representation of the 'Anglo-Saxons' without trying to explain it, this is an attempt at an explicit clarification of the question. It confirms that Bede's ethnic nomenclature did indeed pose a problem for later authors. This is also a rare example of conscious reflection from the period on the composition of a 'national' community. Very often such communities were perceived and described automatically in the middle ages, but here we can see a medieval author purposefully thinking about a 'nation', its boundaries and ethnicised composition.

The same approach manifests itself in the compiler's take on 'the Britons' *vs.* 'the English' question. At this point, he is also reflective and, moreover, original. Describing the *adventus Saxonum* and its consequences, he stated that 'the English… took their wives *de Britonum genere*, and the Britons took their wives from the illustrious blood and stock of the English, that is of the Saxons' (note again the emphasis on the interchangeability of the ethnic terms *Angli* and *Saxones*). Even more surprisingly, he then added a similar reference to the marriages between the English and the Scots, and, finally, summed up that thus there was 'one nation and one people, *gens una et populus unus*, throughout the whole Kingdom of Britain'.[216] This is extremely interesting for all sorts of reasons. The author's vision substantially differs from the conventions of the historical tradition which is built upon notions of distinction and conflict between 'the Britons' and 'the English'. While, as I have shown above, some authors tried to brush over this distinction, such a direct claim for a

[215] *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 658.
[216] Ibid., pp. 658–9.

harmonious idyllic view of the relations between two 'peoples' – basically, an author finding an explicit narrative solution for contested and contradictory claims with the existing 'national' discourse – is pretty much unique for the time. The image of the merging, complete assimilation of two nations into one through intermarriage is also significant, even if not totally atypical for medieval national discourse as, for example, some twelfth-century references to the intermarriage and assimilation of the English and the Normans demonstrate.[217] Besides, there is a political aspect. As Walter Ullmann noted in an article which was published before 'national identity' became a significant topic in medieval studies, the text proposed a vision of a unified Britain, whose harmonious past underlines its imagined unity in the present, the overoptimistic inclusion of the Scots seeming especially instructive in this context.[218] In this 'imperialistic' ideology we may see a likely political rationale that may be found behind other long twelfth-century attempts to experiment with the border between 'the Britons' and 'the English', as well as with the meaning of those ethnic terms themselves.

While the author of the historical section of the London thirteenth-century legal manuscript did not use the words *Britanni* or *Britones* for the single 'nation of Britain' he imagined, his statements may help us to understand the logic and ideology behind John of Salisbury's equally interesting usage of the language of Britishness. As has already been noted, in the *Policraticus* John of Salisbury invented *gens Britanniarum*. Most probably, he

[217] In the *Dialogue of the Exchequer* Richard fitzNigel famously claimed that '…now, with the English and the Normans living side by side and intermarrying, the two nations (*nationes*) are so mixed that today one can scarcely distinguish who is English and who is Norman…'. Richard fitzNigel, *Dialogus de Scaccario: the Dialogue of the Exchequer*, ed. and trans. E. Amt (Oxford, 2007), pp. 80–1. In relation to the same issue of the English and the Normans and their interactions after the Conquest, Walter Map wrote that Henry I 'by arranging marriages between them for both parties… federated the two peoples in firm amity'. Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, p. 436.

[218] W. Ullmann, 'On the Influence of Geoffrey of Monmouth in English History', in C. Bauer, L. Boehm, M. Müller (ed.), *Speculum Historiale: Geschichte in Spiegel von Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsdeutung* (Freiburg, 1965), pp. 257–76, at pp. 264–5.

coined this term from the standard Canterbury formulae referring to Britain, such as, for example, *Britanniarum primas* (as well as the reference to the Church of Canterbury as the 'mother' or 'head' of 'Britain'), which was often used in Canterbury professions under Lanfranc and Anselm.[219] John of Salisbury also came up with another peculiar term: *incolae Britanniarum*, the inhabitants of the British Isles, the community that he designated as a *gens* and which, most notably, incorporated the ancient Britons: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Brennius and his companions-in-arms.[220] These concepts mark two crucial departures from the mainstream tradition: first, the reinterpretation of the meaning of the ethnic names derived from the concept of Britain and second, the erasure of the explicit distinction between 'the ancient Britons' and 'the English'. John of Salisbury constructed a unified national narrative framed territorially and articulated in British idiom: a vision of the past and present that equally included the Briton Brennius, St Alban and Constantine (both described as 'produced' by *Britannia nostra*), St Cuthbert ('a standard-bearer of our people in the Divine law'), St Edmund, Harold and Henry II, an illustrious king of the English and *maximus regum Britanniae* ('the greatest among the kings of Britain').[221]

But ideologically this language of Britishness was not at all inclusive; on the contrary, it clearly aimed at the exclusion and subjugation of the Welsh (whom John of Salisbury named both *Valenses* and *Britones*). At the core of John of Salisbury's national discourse lies the appropriation of the British past, name, and identity. Was there a pragmatic political goal behind the invention of the *gens Britanniarum*? On the one hand, it seems far-fetched

[219] *Canterbury Professions*, ed. M. Richter (Torquay, 1973), pp. 29–31, 33, 35; nos. 36, 38, 40, 41, 47, 55. In addition, he may also have used the charters of Anglo-Saxon kings that often referred to Britain. For more detail and references, see note 183 below.
[220] *Policraticus*, VI. 19 (ed. Webb, ii, p. 54); Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, pp. 51–9.
[221] *Policraticus*, VI. 17 (ed. Webb, ii, pp. 44–5); Prologus (i, p.13; VIII. 13 (ii, p. 324); II. 1 (i, p. 66); VIII. 21 (ii, pp. 393–4); VI. 6 (ii, pp. 19–20); VIII. 25 (ii, p. 424).

to claim the existence of an immediate political agenda on the basis of a few quotations scattered through a voluminous work, addressed primarily to a narrow circle of intellectuals. On the other hand, it is highly unlikely that these quotations were random and appeared in the *Policraticus* accidentally. They are too original and too different from the conventions of the twelfth-century tradition for such a reading to be plausible. Moreover, the emphasis on Britain and the attempt to imagine a single people of the British Isles would have fitted the archbishops of Canterbury's pan-British ambitions, most importantly, their attempts to establish primacy over York and to control the Welsh Church.[222] Already several decades before the *Policraticus*, Eadmer of Canterbury was relating the term *gens* to Britain, while talking about Anselm's status of the *totius Britannie primas*.[223] It is also pertinent that the twelfth-century claims for the Welsh Church's independence often included an appeal to the national distinction between 'the Welsh' and 'the English'; and, more generally, national rhetoric played a role in ecclesiastical politics in Wales.[224]

Can one also relate John of Salisbury's peculiar national terms and constructs to a secular project of the dominance of English kings in the region?[225] As Davies and Gillingham have shown, this secular project, operated by both the kings of England and, in the twelfth century, various aristocratic groups, was mainly framed through a clear distinction between

[222] Michael A. Faletra, *Wales and the Medieval Colonial Imagination*, p. 65, suggests that the interests and ambitions of Canterbury explain John of Salisbury's statements on Wales, the Welsh and the Britons. Faletra, however, does not discuss John's peculiar reinterpretations of the British ethnic names.
[223] Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. and trans. R.W. Southern (Oxford, 1972), p. 79. Eadmer's statement that some people thought that Anselm's monastic lifestyle was not appropriate for 'the primate of so great a nation (*primas tantae gentis*)' is interesting in its own right.
[224] Bishop Bernard's letter to Pope Innocent II (quoted by Gerald of Wales in his *De Invectionibus*) is a good illustration. In this letter, the bishop of St David's buttresses his claim for the independence of his see from Canterbury with a reference to the distinction between the peoples of these two provinces that are differing in 'natione, lingua, legibus et moribus, iudiciis et consuetudinibus'. See: Giraldus Cambrensis, De Invectionibus, p. 142.
[225] For a general examination of the political and intellectual culture of the period and connections between intellectuals and the court under Henry II and his heir, see: A. Chauou, *L'idéologie Plantagenêt: royauté arthurienne et monarchie politique dans l'espace Plantagenêt (XIIe–XIIIe siècles)* (Rennes, 2001); R. Kennedy and S. Meecham-Jones (ed.), *Writers of the Reign of Henry II: Twelve Essays* (Basingstoke, 2006).

'the English' and 'the Welsh', 'the Scots' and 'the Irish'. In his relatively recent reconsideration of the references to 'Britain' in the documents of some tenth-century English kings, George Molyneaux re-affirmed this case by demonstrating how the increasingly fundamental structural and institutional differences between 'the Kingdom of England' as such and surrounding polities of 'Welsh' and 'Scottish' rulers made imagining 'Britain' as a single political unit unlikely already in the late Anglo-Saxon period.[226] In light of this evidence, one may argue that it was only the above-mentioned 'Canterbury agenda' in the domain of ecclesiastical politics that motivated John of Salisbury's reinvention of the language of 'Britishness'. Of course, the rhetoric of 'one kingdom and one people/nation' in Britain that appeared in the early thirteenth-century London legal compilation, may also allow us to speculate that in a pre-figurative sense John might have suggested a vision of national community and its past that was ultimately favourable for both the king's interests and those of the archbishops of Canterbury. Crucially, one should not forget that for all his intellectualism John was not living in 'an ivory tower': on the contrary, as Archbishop Theobald's secretary he was actively engaged in pan-European and English ecclesiastical and secular politics when he wrote the *Policraticus* in the late 1150s.[227]

An interesting aspect of John of Salisbury's national discourse is that an invention of *gens Britanniarum* did not mean that *gens Anglorum* was abandoned. Quite the reverse: John used the word *Angli* as an alternative or even interchangeable term. The most startling manifestation of this is the following statement from the *Entheticus in Policraticum*, the

[226] George Molyneaux, 'Why Were Some Tenth-Century English Kings Presented as Rulers of Britain?', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 21 (2011), pp. 59–91.
[227] In her recent article on the notorious *Laudabiliter* and its context (including John of Salisbury's role), Anne Duggan stated that the focus of 'the concept of a "British Isles" united under the lordship of the English king … was political, not ecclesiastical'. See: A.J. Duggan, 'The Making of a Myth: Giraldus Cambrensis, Laudabiliter, and Henry II's Lordship of Ireland', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 3rd series, 4 (2007), pp. 107–70, at p. 131.

introductory poem to the treatise, which I quoted in the opening paragraphs of this chapter: 'Seek the first see of the English or of the Britons / If you prefer to say of the Britons, no one forbids [it].'[228] In this striking phrase *Britones* and *Angli* become synonyms, and not by implication (as for example, in Goscelin's quotation considered above), but literally. John's hedging formula 'no one forbids it' presumably points out to its opposite: in fact, this was a problematic use of the word. Did *gens Britanniarum*, a new and original term, constitute an attempt to appropriate the British name and identity without clashing directly with the tradition that reserved the term *Britones* for the Welsh, the Bretons, and the ancient Britons? But if, at the lexical level, the terms *Angli* and *Britones* and *gens Britanniarum* could have been used by John of Salisbury as synonyms, what about the peoples themselves? Did he see 'the English' and 'the people of the British Isles' as the same single nation?

It is difficult to go beyond pure speculation here, but a passage from William of Malmesbury, which I already discussed in the introduction, may help us to develop a deeper perspective on the issue. The historian inserted in his narrative of the First Crusade a broad comparison between the West and the East; his principal idea is that 'the Eastern people' is passive and therefore tolerates one empire, while in the West there is always a continuous translation of power (from the Romans to the Franks and later to the Germans). But what matters is the term that William uses for the Westerners: *gens occidentalis*. It is essential that he conceptualizes this community in what we may call ethnicising, or for that matter, racialising categories: this is clearly more than a technical, overarching word. Most instructively, William talks about the 'nature' of *gens occidentalis*: it is the robust and untamed nature of 'the Western people' that does not allow the domination of one power

[228] *Policraticus* (ed. Webb, i, p. 6).

to continue for too long in the region.[229] This however does not mean that he cannot include more conventional *gentes* in the discussion: *Franci* and *Teutones* are part of his argument. This mingling and lack of a strict hierarchy between groups of different scales – local/national/supranational – is absolutely fundamental to our understanding of medieval national thinking. One may argue that at least the ideal type of nationhood operating today is predicated on the notion of the different scales of identifications and very clear distinctions between local, national and supra-national identifications and polities. This scheme also presumes the 'sacralisation' of nationhood as the primary form of identification and political community. In contrast to this model, medieval national discourse easily accommodated the possibility of conceptualizing and articulating communities of evidently different scales using the same terms, concepts and ideas (for example, the ubiquitous word *gens* and its interpretation as both a 'natural' and a political community). This makes it easier to understand how John of Salisbury came up with the idea of *gens Britanniarum*. There was no contradiction between seeing 'the English' as a nation, which, among other things, was distinct from and opposed to 'the Welsh' (*Britones*), and at the same time imagining a broader and vaguer *gens Britanniarum* that provided a more suitable framework for expressing John's political agendas. But we should not dismiss an alternative reading: John of Salisbury might have consciously attempted to appropriate the British name and identity for 'the English' and his emphasis on the interchangeability of *Britones* and *Angli* in a reference to the status of Canterbury is a strong argument in favour of this interpretation.

[229] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, pp. 632–4.

What are we to make out of this set of intriguing exceptions in how twelfth-century authors understood and used the language of 'Britishness'?[230] We may take this discussion in several directions. One way would be to concentrate on what we may call the genealogy of 'Britishness'. Can we read these quotations as the traces of an early stage in the development of 'Britishness' as a somewhat contradictory combination of a synonym for 'Englishness' and a wider identity that includes all inhabitants of Britain as a whole (an ideological language that is still relevant in the early twenty-first century)? It may be curious to discuss further evidence from the late Middle Ages, a period before the proliferation of the language of 'Britishness' from the sixteenth century onwards. I shall restrict myself to just one case: at the Council of Constance (1414–8), the English representative Thomas Polton was manipulatively talking about both *natio anglicana* and *natio Britannica* in his debates with the French clergy on the rights of the English 'nation' and English Church.[231] It is very interesting that this re-invention of the British nation occurred again in the context of ecclesiastical politics (although, it is of course difficult to completely distinguish secular and church spheres on the fifteenth-century international scene). There probably exist other late medieval examples of the instrumentalization of 'Britishness' beyond its narrower meaning referring exclusively to ancient Britain and the Welsh; and the period of Edward I with its conquests and clear interest in historical legitimation looks quite promising in this regard.

[230] I should add that there definitely exist other comparable examples and, probably, quite a lot of them, although hunting for them is a slow process. For instance, Bibliotèque nationale de France MS lat. 6237, associated with the literary activities of Richard of Poitiers and dating to the 1160s, contains a striking reference to the *Prophecies* of Merlin on *Britones id est Anglos* (f. 18v; I am grateful to Jaakko Tahkokallio for this example). Of course, this comes from a text written in France, but still the phrase 'the Britons, that is the English' is a very instructive illustration of how some twelfth-century authors were able to completely obliterate the distinction between 'the Britons' and 'the English', to see them as one people and to use both ethnic terms as synonyms.

[231] Quoted from J.-P. Genet, 'English Nationalism: Thomas Polton at the Council of Constance', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 28 (1984), pp. 60–78, at p. 68; Genet's discussion does not consider the dynamics of British/English distinction and interchangeability.

But this is a matter for another research project. Moreover, one should be very careful to avoid the pitfall of the delusionary continuity of identity, which is so easily imagined when the same ethnic names are encountered in sources across centuries. It is, of course, important to compare how the language of 'Britishness' was constructed and functioned in different periods and political contexts, but here I would prefer to focus on the meaning of the twelfth-century examples discussed above for the understanding of national categories in their time.

It is clear that such reinterpretations of 'Britishness' were exceptional in twelfth-century England. In spite of all those relatively numerous cases, the fact remains that the mainstream perception was still to distinguish and set apart 'the Britons' and 'the English'. By the late twelfth century the legendary British past narrated in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Gesta Britonum* became a legitimate part of the English historical tradition and was often discursively Anglicized. This development, though important itself, is still quite far from both complete blurring the ethnic distinction between 'the English' and 'the Britons' and constructing a single nation of Britain. But it is exactly that exceptional status that makes this material so interesting and important. For one thing, it allows us to problematize the mainstream tradition as well. If it was possible for some authors to come up with alternative visions and reinterpretations of national categories, it must mean that conventional views could be not simply technical reproductions of pre-existing notions and *topoi*, but also resulted, at least in some cases, from conscious decisions on how to construct and represent national communities and their histories. Should we think about these different 'approaches' to the medieval construction of nations as predicated on either ethnic or territorial frameworks, that is, imagining communities with a focus on, on the one hand, common origins/kinship and, on the other hand, territorial/political continuity, independent

of ethnic breaks? Many scholars have noted the role of the image of land/country in twelfth-century English constructions of historical narratives and identity,[232] but one should not exaggerate the differences between 'ethnic' and 'territorial' thinking about nationhood. Such distinctions may make sense, but they are fairly artificial, and the prevailing tendency traceable in sources was to mix both visions. It is especially instructive that the authors of the twelfth-century statements reinterpreting the meaning of 'Britishness', which one might want to understand as typical manifestations of the territorial model of identification, often invested their constructs with what we tend to see as ethnic or quasi-ethnic rhetoric: references to origins, genealogy and nature. At this point the complexity of medieval national notions comes to the fore.

The exceptions considered in this chapter are also significant because they raise the question of the striking changeability of national discourses. Even though national myths are always based on beliefs in continuity and stability of ethnic groups, these are fantasies. In practice, we can see how easily national rhetoric can be twisted, and how terms, as well as the communities they signify, can be reinterpreted, even when these new views are formulated in explicit contradiction to dominant perceptions. The particular situation of post-Conquest England was an especially favourable milieu for the appearance of new national representations. 1066 and its consequences, which were often perceived as a national catastrophe in the twelfth century, 'the destruction of the English,' to use Henry of

[232] The role of the image of land/country in twelfth-century English constructions of the past and identity has been noted by many scholars. See: Leckie, *The Passage of Dominion*, pp. 72, 74; D. Rollo, *Historical Fabrication, Ethnic Fable and French Romance*, pp. 57–8, 74–5; P. Damian-Grint, *The New Historians of the Twelfth-Century Renaissance: Inventing Vernacular Authority* (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 191; Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, pp. 261–73; Ashe, *Fiction and History in England*, pp. 55–64, 97–105; Webber, *The Evolution of Norman Identity*, pp. 7–8; idem, 'England and the Norman Myth', in J. Barrow and A. Wareham (ed.), *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks*, (Farnham, 2008), pp. 211–28; O. de Laborderie, 'Les historiens anglais de la première moitié du XIIe siècle et la redéfinition de l'identité nationale', *Cahiers de Recherches Médiévales et Humanistes*, 19 (2010), pp. 43–62, at pp. 54–8.

Huntingdon's wording,[233] encouraged authors to experiment with ethnic vocabulary and ideas.[234] It is probably not accidental that quite a few of my examples of the unusual interpretations of British idiom come from the late eleventh or early twelfth centuries, from the texts of such authors as Folcard and Goscelin, who were witnesses of the conquest. The potential crisis of English identification, the arrival of people from the continent with their own complicated identifications and different perceptions would have opened new possibilities in imagining national communities in the region.

An instructive example of how this process could have worked is Orderic Vitalis' obsession with 'Albion'. Amanda Hingst has recently noticed that the chronicler mentions 'Albion' on no fewer than twenty six occasions. According to Hingst's analysis, Orderic used this territorial concept to represent 'the pan-ethnic and hegemonic kingdom of England' and to reconcile 'the pre- and post-Conquest kingdoms into a historical and geographical body defined by the *regnum Albionis* and by the king who ruled all the peoples within it'.[235] Thus, Orderic's approach is a bit different from what we have seen with the language of 'Britishness', but the point is a motivation to re-think nations and polities as a response to a crisis of a particular identity that used to be relatively stable but became problematic as a result of a serious challenge.[236] In the end, English identification was successfully reconstructed and reasserted and went on to dominate both the intellectual and political landscape of twelfth-century England. A newly reinterpreted British identification, on the

[233] Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. 338.
[234] For a relevant discussion of 1066 and its effects on historical writing in England see: E.M.C. van Houts, 'The Trauma of 1066', pp. 9–15.
[235] A.J. Hingst, *The Written Word: Past and Place in the Works of Orderic Vitalis* (Notre Dame, 2009), pp. 51–69. Orderic Vitalis, however, distinguished the ancient Britons ('now called the Welsh') and the English as is evident from his account of the English conquest of Britain with a reference to 'the writings of Gildas the Briton and Bede the Englishman, *scripta Gildae Britonis et Bedae Anglici*' (The *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis, vi, p. 382).
[236] It of course would be a mistake to believe in the stability of national constructs even in the 'calm' periods. Identities and discourses that represent them always in flux.

contrary, was not taken over by the mainstream tradition and did not enter the language of politics until much later. Instructively, the kings of post-Conquest England did not use Britain in their titles (in contrast with the Anglo-Saxons rulers and the post-Conquest archbishops of Canterbury).[237] But even an option not fully realized at a particular moment matters if we want to understand how national discourses and identification work. Exceptions remain exceptions but they teach us not to simplify the perceptions that existed in the past, and even more importantly, they help to pose general questions.

One of the most important of these questions, and which the material discussed here invites us to ask, is to what extent all these changes in the meaning of ethnic terms were a matter of deliberate, conscious choice of the authors. As I have already emphasized, in the middle ages peoples were often portrayed as really existing entities, grounded in 'nature' and possessing objective features. But the ease with which medieval writers were able to manipulate the images and verbal articulations of those allegedly objectively existing nations makes one doubt that essentialism is an exhaustive, unproblematic conceptualization of medieval notions of nationhood. How to reconcile these confusing tendencies? One way out of this contradiction would be to draw a line between language and notions, words and things. Guibert of Nogent's reference to 'the Britons who are now called the English' and John of Salisbury's insistence on the synonymous meaning of *Angli* and *Britones* might encourage us to choose this interpretation. But it still feels like the answer lies deeper: both in the general paradoxical nature of any national discourse trapped

[237] On the use of 'Britain' in Anglo-Saxon royal titles see E. John, '"Orbis Britannie" and the Anglo-Saxon Kings', in idem, *Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies* (Leicester, 1966), pp. 1–63; and the most recent contribution by Molyneaux, 'Why Were Some Tenth-Century English Kings Presented as Rulers of Britain?'. For the post-conquest period such examples are quite rare. Denys Hay noted the title 'the monarch of Britain' in two charters of William I and William II (Hay, 'Use of the Term *Great Britain* in the Middle Ages', p. 129). One more instance is quoted by Stephen Marritt: *totius Britannie monarchiam* is mentioned in a charter from Exeter dated to the time of Henry I: S. Marritt, 'Prayers for the King and Royal Titles in Anglo-Norman Charters', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 32 (2009), pp. 184–202, at p. 190.

in the contradiction between the constructivist reality and essentialist fantasy and in the particular features of medieval national thinking that cannot be reduced to essentialism pure and simple.[238] What was alien to the medieval world view was the scheme of the hierarchical structure of polities and identifications (local – national – supranational), as well as the twentieth-century habit of distinguishing allegedly objectively existing, historically and ethnically justified communities from 'artificial' entities (e.g. post-colonial states with their drawn-on-the-map straight-line borders that are routinely portrayed in both media and academic texts as failing at proper 'nation-building'). Here we are witnessing another contradiction. On the one hand, in medieval notions and discourse any community could be objectified, constructed and represented within what looks to us like an ethnicising framework predicated on the ideas of common origin, blood, and nature, but also, to use a modern term, culture. On the other hand, and somewhat ironically, for all this objectification, this also made medieval discourses of identification more open to creative and manipulative reinterpretation, as the twelfth-century examples of the reinvention of the meaning of 'Britishness' considered here beautifully illustrate.

[238] See Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France*, pp. 1–21, on how this intriguing combination of essentialism and constructivism worked in the age of modern nationalism.

Chapter 3: *Alius populus suus*: biblical vocabulary and national discourse in twelfth-century England

In the introduction to a relatively recent general book on religion, society, and politics in high medieval Britain, Henry Mayr-Harting felt compelled to justify his decision to omit from consideration the interplay between religion and national identity, despite not being convinced about the significance of the topic.[239] Attempting to engage with this theme, one may begin by observing a stark contrast between the unexhausted potential of this perspective on twelfth-century national identifications and the existing literature on 'nationhood' and 'ethnicity' in Anglo-Saxon England that portrays religion as one of the salient, even decisive, factors in the construction of 'the English people' (*gens Anglorum*) at the time.[240] It is not that this topic has not been researched for the twelfth century at all. On the contrary, scholars have productively examined certain aspects of it. Most obviously, considerable attention has been given to the role that ethnic prejudice played or did not play in the attitude of Norman and other continental clergymen towards the native Anglo-Saxon saints after 1066.[241] Also in connection with the cults of saints, a series of articles by

[239] H. Mayr-Harting, *Religion, Politics and Society in Britain 1066–1272* (Harlow, 2011), pp. xviii–xix.
[240] H.E.J. Cowdrey, 'Bede and the English People', *Journal of Religious History*, 11 (1981), pp. 501–23; N. Banton, 'Monastic Reform and the Unification of Tenth-Century England', in S. Mews (ed.), *Religion and National Identity* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 71–85; P. Wormald, 'Engla Lond: The Making of an Allegiance', *Journal of Historical Sociology*. 7 (1994), pp. 1–24; N. Brooks, 'Canterbury, Rome and the Construction of English Identity', in J.M.H. Smith (ed.), *Early Medieval West and Christian Rome: Essays in Honour of Donald A. Bullough* (Leiden, 2000), pp. 221–46; idem, 'English Identity from Bede to the Millennium', *The Haskins Society Journal*, 14 (2003), pp. 33–51; St.J. Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (New York, 2003), pp. 45–105. Late medieval England also seems to be better studied from this perspective; see, for example: A. Ruddick, 'National Sentiment and Religious Vocabulary in Fourteenth-Century England', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 60 (2009), pp. 1–18; eadem, *English Identity and Political Culture*, pp. 257–307 (the chapter 'God and England: Ecclesiastical Rhetoric and a Political Theology of Nationhood').
[241] S. Ridyard, '*Condigna Veneratio*: Post-Conquest Attitudes to the Saints of the Anglo-Saxons', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 9 (1986), pp. 179–206; D. Townsend, 'Anglo-Latin Hagiography and the Norman Transition', *Exemplaria*, 3 (1991), pp. 385–433; R.F. Pfaff, 'Lanfranc's Supposed Purge of the Anglo-Saxon Calendar', in T. Reuter (ed.), *Warriors and Churchmen in the High Middle Ages* (London, 1992), pp. 95–108; E. Cownie, 'The Normans as Patrons of English Religious Houses, 1066 – 1135', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 18 (1995), pp. 47–62; P.A. Hayward, 'Translation Narratives in Post-Conquest Hagiography and English Resistance to the Norman

Paul Hayward must be noted, in particular, his publications on St Alban as the Prothomartyr of the English and St Gregory as the Apostle of the English.[242] It seems that in these articles Hayward was not directly concerned with national identifications as such, but they still reveal a great deal about the use of national rhetoric in the politics of sanctity in eleventh- and twelfth-century England. Another relevant contribution is the comprehensive chapter on the English Church and English saints in Hugh Thomas' book on English and Norman identities from 1066 to *c.*1220, which demonstrates the importance of the *Ecclesia Anglicana* and the cults of saints for the reconstruction and reproduction of the sense of Englishness following the Conquest.[243] Finally, one should mention Sigbjørn Sønnesyn's excellent article on the links between Christian ethics and the notions of community in twelfth-century historical writing.[244] This is a long and impressive list, but one crucial theme seems to be missing: the use of biblical language and images in the construction and representation of national identifications. So far as I can judge, this topic has not yet been explored systematically for Anglo-Norman and Angevin England.[245]

This gap is especially striking since the importance of the Bible as the ultimate foundation of medieval national notions is one of the commonplaces in the scholarly literature on the subject.[246] Nonetheless, there have been no systematic attempts to

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Conquest', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 21 (1998), pp. 67–93; J. Rubenstein, 'Liturgy Against History: The Competing Visions of Lanfranc and Eadmer of Canterbury', *Speculum*, 74 (1999), pp. 279–309; Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, pp. 290–4.

[242] P.A. Hayward, 'Gregory the Great as 'Apostle of the English' in Post-Conquest Canterbury', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 55 (2004), pp. 19–57; idem, 'The Cult of St Alban, *Prothomartyr Anglorum*, in Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman England', in J. Leemans (ed.), *More than a Memory: the Discourse of Martyrdom and the Construction of Christian Identity in the History of Christianity* (Leuven, 2005), pp. 169–99.

[243] Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, pp. 283–96.

[244] *S.O. Sønnesyn, 'In vinea Sorech laborare*: The Cultivation of Unity in Twelfth-Century Monastic Historiography', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 36 (2013), pp. 167–87.

[245] A partial exception is I. Short, '*Tam Angli quam Franci*', pp. 153–75, at pp. 170–2, that analyzes biblical metaphors used by Aelred of Rievaulx in his portrayal of the unification of the English and the Normans under and, literally, in Henry II.

[246] See, for example, S. Reynolds, 'Medieval *Origines Gentium* and the Community of the Realm', p. 376; Davies, 'The Peoples of Britain and Ireland 1100–1400: I. Identities', pp. 4–5.

examine how biblical idiom was employed in twelfth-century references to national communities (both in the Kingdom of England and Europe in general, so far as I can tell). In this chapter I shall not attempt to cover this enormous topic as a whole.[247] My aim is less ambitious: to analyze several instructive examples of the appearance of biblical vocabulary and ideas in national discourse in twelfth-century England. Looking into the uses of biblical language in twelfth-century national discourse, I shall mainly, but not exclusively, focus on one particular idea – the notion of divine election (expressed, however, in a whole range of various passages across the Old and New Testaments). When I first approached this topic, my starting point was a simple empirical question: were the English described as God's chosen people in the twelfth century? Trying to answer this question, I have been able to find some relevant quotations, and a detailed analysis of them constitutes the bulk of this chapter. In studying this material, my main interest lies in the interplay between religious and national idioms and in establishing what the examples of the interaction between those two languages can tell us about the construction and uses of national categories at the time. In the conclusion, I shall discuss various ways to conceptualize the interplay between religion and national identity in the middle ages and situate my twelfth-century material in this theoretical context.

The notion of divine election, not necessarily only in its Judeo-Christian versions, is one of the wide-spread, almost self-evident elements of 'ethnicity', as was noted

[247] The scale of this task may be well illustrated by a reference to Philippe Buc's fundamental book on biblical exegesis and the understanding of power in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and Julie Barrau's equally thorough new book on the use of the Bible by intellectuals and prelates at the times of Becket: Ph. Buc, *L'Ambiguïté du Livre: Prince, pouvoir, et peuple dans les commentaires de la Bible au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1994); J. Barrau, *Bible, Lettres et Politique: L'Écriture au service des hommes à l'époque de Thomas Becket* (Paris, 2013).

by Max Weber among many others.[248] One would expect to find its manifestations in twelfth-century England, even more so due to the prominent place that the Bible, through knowledge of both the text directly and of the liturgy in which it featured, occupied in the intellectual and literary background of the authors at the time.[249] But, this assumption has not even been checked, not to mention confirmed and analyzed in any detail. Before embarking on this task, I would, however, like to make a brief historiographical and theoretical digression and invoke two important articles on the idea of divine election in the earlier middle ages. As I already mentioned, while the idea of God's chosen people does not usually figure in discussions of identifications in twelfth-century Britain, it has been considered crucial for Anglo-Saxon England, where the imagining of the English as a new chosen people (primarily by Bede in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*) is central to the understanding of the formation of English identity;[250] or at least has been, until recently challenged and significantly qualified by George Molyneaux. Molyneaux has mostly concentrated on the *Old English Bede*, showing the absence of the idea of the English as a chosen people and, more generally, of any national propaganda in this source; but he has also argued that tracing it in Bede's Latin text is a possible but not particularly compelling

[248] M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. G. Roth and Cl. Wittich (Berkley, 1978), 391. See also: C. C. O'Brien*, God Land: Reflections on Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge (MA), 1988); St. Grosby, *Biblical Ideas of Nationality*; A. Smith, *Chosen Peoples*; M. Vessey, Sh.V. Betcher, R.A. Daum and H.O. Maier (ed.), *The Calling of the Nations: Exegesis, Ethnography, and Empire in a Biblical-Historic Present* (Toronto, 2011). For an excellent concise discussion of the role of the notion of divine election in the construction of early medieval ethnicity see, W. Pohl, 'Introduction – Strategies of Identification, pp. 1–64, at pp. 32–8.

[249] For a general discussion of liturgy in medieval England see: R.W. Pfaff, *The Liturgy in Medieval England: a History* (Cambridge, 2009). More relevantly, for an examination of the interplay between history, liturgy and the sense of community see: S.O. Sønnesyn, '"Only Through Time Time Is Conquered": Liturgy, History and The Timeless Aspirations of the Temporal', in J. Bergsagel, Th. Riis and D. Hiley (ed.), *Of Chronicles and Kings: National Saints and the Emergence of Nation-States in the Early Middle Ages* (Chicago, 2015), pp. 23–50.

[250] See the works quoted in the note 240, especially, Wormald. This understanding has been reproduced not only in some general works on ethnicity and nationalism (e.g. A. Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 36–43), but even in popular writings: R. Williams, 'Chosen people: Bede's three-dimensional view of the past endures, because it celebrates as much as it argues', *Times Literary Supplement*, 5701 (6 July 2012), pp. 13–5.

interpretation.[251] This criticism is important since it reminds us how easy it is to exaggerate the role of religious concepts in the construction of medieval national identifications and to turn an array of more or less casual statements into a coherent political programme.

While in this thesis I consider any form of national discourse a form of ideology that serves to naturalise the notion of ethnicised peoples independently of whether a particular statement pursues a politically pragmatic goal or not, we should nonetheless be careful to avoid exaggerating the consistency and explicit utilitarianism of such discourses. A practice of lexical and conceptual borrowing (especially, from the Bible) poses another problem, that of the referential status of the utterances concerned. Trying to distinguish whether, for instance, a representation of the English as God's chosen people was a merely rhetorical comparison or a factual statement, we are stepping into problematic territory. Formulated very strictly, this distinction can be misleading. However, it may be fruitful to see this as a continuum, ranging from the conscious or unconscious uses of biblical idiom at the level of expression to the purposeful attempts to produce new meanings (for example, to construct a new vision of community) on the basis of biblical vocabulary and ideas. Below, I shall more than once return to this distinction. Adding to the list of theoretical difficulties, Mary Garrison has noted in her reassessment of the perception of the Franks as the New Israel in the Carolingian period that 'it is essential to keep sight of the distinctness… of the notion [of election] in different times and places,' thus getting over an illusion of sameness.[252] We should not only locate the idea of a chosen people in the sources of a particular period but

[251] G. Molyneaux, 'The Old English Bede: English Ideology of Christian Instruction?', *English Historical Review*, 124 (2009), pp. 1289–323.

[252] M. Garrison, 'The Franks as the New Israel? Education for an Identity from Pippin to Charlemagne', in Y. Hen and M. Innes (ed.), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 114–61. See also: *eadem*, 'Divine Elections for Nations – a Difficult Rhetoric for Medieval Scholars?', in L.B. Mortensen (ed.), *The Making of Christian Myths in the Periphery of Latin Christendom (c. 1000–1300)* (Copenhagen, 2006), pp. 275–314.

also set out its specific uses and limits in texts and extra-textual praxis of that period, not restricting ourselves to a supposedly self-evident meaning of this topical notion.

Keeping all these theoretical precautions in mind, I can now return to the question about the idea of God's chosen people in twelfth-century England. Eadmer of Canterbury's *Life* of St Wilfrid (d.709) provides a perfect starting point for answering it. In this *Life* Eadmer narrates how the birth of Wilfrid was announced by a miraculous light and then compares it with the miracle of the burning bush. He writes that as God once entrusted to Moses the liberation of his people (*populus suus*) from the Egyptian servitude, so now the Lord designated Wilfrid with celestial fire to lead 'his [God's] other people' out of the darkness of sin.[253] It is obvious that the *alius populus suus*, to which Eadmer refers, is the English (significantly, Wilfrid's English origin is emphasized earlier in the chapter).[254] One might assume that this crystal-clear presentation of the English as God's chosen people originated in the Anglo-Saxon *Lives* of Wilfrid. But it did not. Comparison with earlier texts (Stephen of Ripon's *Life*, a brief account in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and Frithegod's metrical *Life*) shows that it was Eadmer who was the first to explicitly use the image of God's people in the interpretation of the miracle at Wilfrid's birth.[255] Stephen of Ripon included a comparison with the burning bush and Moses in his *Life* of Wilfrid, but he did not go as far as to claim that the English were an elect nation. It is another, and difficult, question as to whether such references may be understood as an implicit appeal to the notion of divine election. But even if the idea had been hidden in the early text, the important thing is that

[253] Eadmer, 'Vita Wilfridi Episcopi', in *The Historians of the Church of York*, i, pp. 161–226, at pp. 164–5.
[254] Ibid., p. 163: …*De inclyta gentis Anglorum prosapia puer Dei Wilfridus… natus*.
[255] Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, pp. 516–30; Stephen of Ripon, 'Vita Wilfridi Episcopi', in *The Historians of the Church of York*, i, pp. 1–103, at pp. 2–3; Frithegod, 'Vita Sancti Wilfridi', in ibid., pp. 105–59, at p. 108.

Eadmer decided to make it explicit. This, for a start, demonstrates that it at least was possible to think of the English as a chosen people in the twelfth century.

It is also instructive whom Eadmer portrayed as the audience of the portent in his narrative. He wrote that 'the nobility of almost the entire English kingdom learned' from it, as they understood God's intention to lead 'his people out of the darkness of vices'.[256] Thus, at least in the author's mind, there was a link between the notion of the divine election of the English and the responsibility of the secular political elite. At the same time, Eadmer's statement is not that strong; it does not suppose that the English are *the* chosen people. The choice of the word *alius* (one of many) rather than *alter* (one of two) points to a vision that allows for the co-existence of many chosen nations – a model that was probably easier to harmonize with universalist Christian notions.[257]

Eadmer's statement on the election of the English appears in a text devoted to a distant national past.[258] But was this idea applicable to the English in the present? William of Malmesbury's *Commentary on the Book of Lamentations* contains a revealing passage. In this work, written at a later stage of William's life and career, the author dwells on the question of the link between the decline of morals and God's punishment. At one point he states that sinful behaviour 'doomed God's people to miserable servitude under the yoke of pagan nations,' that it made the Jews 'once beloved of God' be justly defeated by the Babylonians, the Macedonians, and the Romans, that it made Christian armies yield to the Turks and Saracens, and, finally and most relevantly to our purposes, that it brought

[256] Eadmer, 'Vita Wilfridi Episcopi', p. 164.
[257] Cf. Thomas' discussion of representing the English as *a*, rather than *the*, people of God by Bede and his successors: Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, p. 22.
[258] Although, of course, one may note that, as the famous episode of a discussion between Lanfranc and Anselm on the status of old 'English' saints in general and St Elphege in particular, narrated by Eadmer in his *Life* of St Anselm, illustrates, there were obvious contemporary stakes involved in the representation of the English people's Christian history before the Conquest. See: Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. and transl. R.W. Souther (Oxford, 1962), pp. 50–4.

miseries upon 'us,' who once were 'a nation if not strong numerically, at least superior to many in learning and courtesy'.[259] Undeniably, 'us' refers to the English, as both Michael Winterbottom and Rodney Thomson have argued.[260] It is not too far-fetched to interpret the inclusion of William's *gens* in this threefold scheme along with the Jews, God's original chosen nation, and the Christians, normally understood as God's new chosen people in the Christian tradition, as a claim to the divine election of the English. However, in contrast to Eadmer, who used the idea of divine election in a positive context, William of Malmesbury chose its negative and pessimistic facet. The reference point is the defeated and enslaved Jews rather than triumphant and victorious God's people. The oppressors (the Normans, although their presence is only implicit) are also represented in biblical categories: they are compared to the Babylonians, who were merely an instrument of God's punishment, unworthy in themselves. This downbeat view of the Normans is interesting in its own right and similar explanations of the Norman Conquest were common in twelfth-century England,[261] but for now let us concentrate on the nature of William's reference to divine election.

Above all, this is a trope that allows the author to conceptualize a particular event in national history, to make sense of the tragedy of 1066 by explaining it within a biblical paradigm. However, there is more to it than simply typological thinking. The denigration of the Normans is instructive; it is also manifest in one of the versions of William of Malmesbury's *Gesta pontificum Anglorum*, where certain Englishmen complain that 'the

[259] William of Malmesbury, *Liber super explanationem Lamentationum Ieremiae Prophetae*, ed. M. Winterbottom and R.M. Thomson (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 84–5.
[260] See a concise discussion by M. Winterbottom, 'William of Malmesbury and the Normans', *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 20 (2010), pp. 70–7; and R.M. Thomson, 'William of Malmesbury's Diatribe against the Normans', in *The Long Twelfth-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past*, pp. 113–21.
[261] The most obvious parallel is provided by Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, pp. 384–5: 'In the year of grace 1066, the Lord, the ruler, brought to completion what he had long planned for the English nation (*gens Anglorum*). For he delivered them up for destruction to the violent and cunning Norman people'.

English had been no worse in the past than the Normans were now'; bishop Wulfstan explains to them that they are being punished by God through the unworthy, comparing the Normans to the Devil.[262] The Normans, of course, were Christians too, but in *the Commentary on the Lamentations* they are implicitly turned into the pagans of the worst sort. This emphasizes a rather strong claim for a very special status of the English in the eyes of God. One is tempted to read the passage as evidence for William's literal belief in the divine election of the English. But a reference to the Christians, who are also included in the list of typological comparisons with the original chosen people, may prove that William of Malmesbury was more interested in the notion of divine election and its satellite ideas – a direct link between the moral condition of a community and God's punishment, justification of defeats at the hands of unworthy enemies – as rhetorical and explanatory formulae rather than descriptive statements.[263] Perhaps, the chosen-people *topos* may often be better understood as a mode of thinking and writing rather than as a claim to any factual reality.

The context of my next example of an appeal to the image of a chosen people is somewhat similar to that of William of Malmesbury's passage and also has the Norman Conquest as its background. It comes from a hagiographical text written by the early-twelfth-century author Dominic of Evesham. Dominic's work survived within the so-called *Chronicle of Evesham* composed by Thomas of Marlborough in the first third of the thirteenth-century.[264] The text describes how Walter, the first abbot of Evesham of

[262] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum: The History of the English Bishops*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom and R. Thomson (2 vols., Oxford, 2007), i, pp. 94–6.
[263] The most systematic treatment of William of Malmesbury's ethical thinking is provided by S.O. Sønnesyn, *William of Malmesbury and the Ethics of History* (Woodbridge, 2012).
[264] On Dominic see J.C. Jennings, 'The Writings of Prior Dominic of Evesham', *English Historical* Review, 77 (1962), pp. 298–304.

continental origin, tested the relics 'venerated by the English' by putting them to fire. The author comes up with the following explanation of the abbot's extravagant act: Walter was wondering how it was possible that the nation [the English] that originated from the stock of so many saints was defeated and subdued by the French (*quomodo gens de tot sanctorum virorum prosapia orta ab ipsis Francigenis esset debellata et eis subjugata*).[265] Hence, the abbot decided to verify whether those English saints were indeed worthy of veneration and put them to the ordeal. The notion of the origin of a people from the stock (*prosapia*) of saints is an extremely interesting variation on the common medieval idea of the origin of a nation from a kin/lineage. However, what is of paramount significance for our question about the notion of divine election is the author's commentary on Walter's doubts. Dominic writes that the abbot was confused because he did not know that 'the sons [did] not walk in Lord's ways as their fathers had done'.[266] This passage is clearly an allusion on the phrase from 1 Samuel (8.3) on the corruption of Samuel's sons that led, according to the biblical story, to a change of political regime in Israel. Taking into consideration the context, that is, the discussion of the fate of the English as a nation, it is feasible to understand the author's biblical comparison as an implicit attempt to represent the English as a chosen people punished for its moral degradation. Thus, we have here another example of conceptualization of the Norman Conquest through a half-tacit resort to an image of a chosen people.

These earlier texts create an impression that, when used at all (admittedly rarely) in post-conquest England, the idea of a chosen people was mainly tied to the notion of divine punishment. It served as both an explanation and a consolation for those authors who were

[265] *Chronicon Abbatiae de Evesham, ad annum 1418*, ed. W.D. Macray (London, 1863), p. 335.
[266] Ibid., p. 335.

troubled by 1066 and were inclined to perceive the event as a tragedy framed within a national narrative. The decline of morals and sinfulness accounted for the defeat of the nation, while God's special attitude (the Lord punishes those whom he loves) might have comforted and given hope. One has to wait until Henry II's reign to get an example of a triumphalist appeal to the notion and rhetoric of divine election. A splendid passage of that sort is found in Aelred of Rievaulx's *Sermon* on the occasion of the translation of Edward the Confessor in 1163, discovered and published by Peter Jackson several years ago. One of Edward's miracles which Aelred chose to include in the sermon is the king's vision of the death of a Danish king, who drowned in the midst of preparations for the invasion of England. Aelred narrates: 'On the holy day of Pentecost moreover, while [Edward] stood by the altar of the Holy Trinity in Westminster to hear the solemn service of the mass, he saw Sven, king of the Danes, his armies prepared and his ships drawn up, hurrying to ransack England. Preparing to climb into his ship from a little boat his foot slipped, he toppled between the two and drowned, and by his death he freed both peoples, that is the Danes and the English, at once from sin and danger. For that nation (*gens*) led their ships back to shore and returned home in peace, while our people (*noster populus*), as if Pharaoh had been conquered and our enemies put to flight, passed easy days and the age of full peace from then thereafter in great tranquility under this new Moses (*sub hoc nouo Moyse*)'.[267] In addition to the introduction of a parallel between Moses and Edward (and hence the biblical Jews and the English), what is significant in this passage is the notion of peoples/*populi*, notably described in ethnic terms (as well as used interchangeably with *gentes*), as moral agents that can sin collectively. Of course, again, we see here an adaptation of a common

[267] P. Jackson, '*In translacione sancti Edwardi confessoris*: The Lost Sermon by Aelred of Rievaulx Found?', *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 40 (2005), pp. 45–83, at p. 72–5. The translation into English is by Tom Licence.

biblical idea of peoplehood, understood within a framework of a moral relationship between God and peoples.

In the sermon, Aelred develops an extensive comparison between Moses and Edward the Confessor. The biblical Moses 'protected God's people by law', defended them, ruled them with wisdom, nurtured and loved them, and his actions and total excellence converged upon 'this Moses of ours' [Edward], who established a law and dictated justice for his nation. The juxtaposition goes further: 'The Lord summoned Moses out of Midian to rule his people, and this our Moses, recalled from Neustria, was put in charge of the English people… One was pursued by Egyptians, the other by Danes… One freed his people from Pharaoh's tyrannical oppression… the other, armed with God's grace, shook off from the necks of his people… the yoke of captivity that the Danes had imposed.'[268] This lengthy comparison between Edward and Moses and the English and the biblical Jews goes, it seems, beyond mere rhetoric to fashion the English as a new chosen people. It is also noteworthy that Aelred opted for the term *populus*, consistently used in Jerome's Bible to refer to God's people. The choice of Moses is instructive: while he was indeed considered as an exemplary prince in the middle ages, Moses was not a standard prototype for King Edward, who was usually likened to King Solomon (a comparison that Aelred pursues in this sermon too). It is plausible that Aelred chose Moses exactly because he wanted to bring the divine election of the English into his sermon, rather than merely to praise the saintly king's justice and peacefulness, for which an analogy with Solomon would suffice. What we have here is a glorification not just of the saint but also of the people, and, crucially for our theme, this praise is expressed in religious idiom – both in form and in substance.

[268] Ibid., pp. 75–6.

The author and the occasion make this example only more remarkable. Aelred was consistently involved in what is difficult not to describe as propagandistic writing since he composed the *Genealogia regum Anglorum* for Henry Plantagenet on the eve of his coronation in 1154. National categories and rhetoric played an important role in Aelred's works:[269] in the *Genealogia* he included the future king in the line of the pious English rulers (significantly, omitting the Danish kings from the list), thus trying to impose a distinctively English identification on Henry.[270] The ideology behind Aelred's *Life* of Edward the Confessor is more complex. Here Henry unites both two ruling lines and two peoples – the English and the Normans, the merger prefigured in the depiction of King Edward as 'a child born of the dual sanctity of two lineages'.[271] And it is biblical rhetoric and vocabulary that are used by Aelred to represent his vision of national harmony: Henry is 'the corner stone', in whom two peoples are united.[272] Moreover, perhaps less explicit than in the sermon's passage quoted above but still similar equation of 'the English' and the biblical chosen people through the representation of the liberation of *Angli* from 'the Danish yoke' as if from 'the Egyptian servitude' is proposed by Aelred in the *Life* of Edward.[273] Curiously, when he describes the same miraculous vision of the death of the Danish king in the *Life*, Aelred does not compare Edward with Moses at that point. Still, we may say that he is clearly flirting with the imagery

[269] On Aelred's visions of national identity see: R. Ransford, 'A Kind of Noah's Ark: Aelred of Rievaulx and National Identity', in *Religion and National Identity*, pp. 137–46; E. Freeman, *Narratives of a New Order: Cistercian Historical Writing in England, 1150–1220* (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 55–87.
[270] Aelred of Rievaulx, 'Genealogia regum Anglorum', in *PL*, 195, cols. 711–38.
[271] Aelred of Rievaulx, 'Vita S. Edwardi Regis et Confessoris', in *PL*, 195, cols. 737–90, at cols. 741, 773–4. The idea of the unification of two lineages, the English and the Norman, in the figure of Edward the Confessor can be traced to Turgot of Durham's *Life* of St Margaret. See, 'Vita S. Margaretae Scotorum Reginae', in *Symeonis Dunelmensis Opera et Collectanea*, ed. J.H. Hinde (Surtees Society, 1868), i, *app*. III, pp. 234–54, at p. 237. This text will be at the centre of my discussion in the chapter of the thesis devoted to the notion of 'saintly' Norman dukes.
[272] Aelred of Rievaulx, 'Vita S. Edwardi Regis et Confessoris', cols. 738–9. See also: Short, '*Tam Angli quam Franci*', pp. 170–2.
[273] Aelred of Rievaulx, 'Vita S. Edwardi Regis et Confessoris', cols. 744–5, and 748–9.

and rhetoric of divine election in this passage. For example, he writes that 'the Lord struck the head of the house of the wicked' and cursed his armies that came 'like a whirlwind to scatter us', which is a close paraphrase of the Book of Habakkuk 3.13–14.[274] It is interesting that Aelred does not quote this biblical passage in full, avoiding the explicit references to God's chosen people in the lines surrounding the ones that he is borrowing from the Bible ('Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed', the very beginning of Habakkuk 3.13).

More generally, the author is framing the whole episode within the same logic of a people's collective moral agency and, more specifically, linking it to the notion of God's punishment of the English for their sins – a punishment carried out by another 'nation', unworthy in its own right.[275] As we have seen above, this is the theme that other twelfth-century authors explored; including William of Malmesbury who overtly connected it with the notion of God's chosen people. A key difference in Aelred's narrative is that here, as King Edward himself is made to say, those sins and God's retribution are safely located in the past. Aelred's Edward explains that, while 'because God was angry with our fathers he gave us into the power of the Danes', they mistakenly attributed that to their own strength, but this time could not win, since God, who 'killeth, and maketh alive, he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up' (1 Samuel 2.6), changed his attitude towards 'us', the English.[276] In parallel to Aelred's much better known positive reinterpretation of King Edward's 'green tree prophecy' (to which I shall return in more detail in chapter 5), this may be seen as a

[274] Ibid. Col. 749.
[275] On the theological and philosophical underpinnings of Aelred's notions of community, mediated via Roman and biblical idioms of 'friendship' and 'love' see Marsha L. Dutton, 'The Sacramentality of Community in Aelred', in *A Companion to Aelred of Rievaulx (1110–1167)*, ed. M.L. Dutton (Leiden, 2017), pp. 246–67. In this essay, Dutton does not discuss the application of these notions to polities and ethnicised communities by Aelred, but, as Sønnesyn demonstrates in his works, such an application was conventional at the time.
[276] Aelred of Rievaulx, 'Vita S. Edwardi Regis et Confessoris', cols. 749.

part of his general attempt to recast the relationship between 'the English' and God as a story of forgiveness and redemption.

In Aelred's narrative the good King Edward – through his interconnected saintliness and the morally appropriate execution of royal authority – guarantees the flourishing of England, understood as 'peace for the people, glory for the leading men (*proceres*), and liberty for the church'.[277] Aelred then projects this idealised structuration of 'national' community (internally organized through what seems to be a variation on the three orders theme) on his own time, tying it to the positive vision of Henry II's legitimate kingship. One may argue that, at least so far as Aelred's approach is concerned, the canonization and veneration of Edward the Confessor as a royal and explicitly ethnicised saint enacts both discursively and performatively (two dynamics brought together in the ritual of Edward's translation in 1163) the righteous national community, constructed in terms of its hegemonic institutions – royalty, secular leadership, the church, particular monastic communities, peoplehood – and reproduced through a positively-coded moral relationship with God.

It is perhaps naïve to even ask whether we should interpret all of this as the author's own (wishful) thinking or an unashamed piece of propaganda commissioned by the king. In chapter 5, I shall return to the interplay and even the absence of an apparent boundary between genealogical and national narratives in medieval discourse, as reflected in Aelred's *Life* and other texts concerned with the genealogy of Edward the Confessor. For now, it is sufficient to note that Aelred easily blurs these two conceptions: to trace the fate of the nation, it is enough to follow that of the royal lineage, an approach especially evident in the

[277] Ibid., cols. 744–5.

author's *Genealogia Regum Anglorum*. However, from this perspective, Aelred's *Sermon* looks rather interesting, for it definitely prioritizes national over genealogical logic. In this text, Edward the Confessor is a representative and protector of the people, not a distinguished member of his lineage. The king's sanctity, and the fact that he is worthy of comparison to Moses, are used by Aelred to glorify not the royal lineage, but the English, who, in emulation of their ruler, are aspiring to the status of an elect nation. If the sermon was indeed preached in front of Henry II and the secular and ecclesiastical leaders of the kingdom at Westminster on 13 October 1163, it deserves to be considered as one of the most impressive statements of English national identification in the twelfth century.

The next quotation I would like to consider here, even though, strictly speaking, it is not directly connected to the notion of divine election, returns us to the problem of individual authors' idiosyncratic visions in the twelfth century. In his famous attack on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Gesta Britonum*, William of Newburgh not only ridiculed the book's central character, King Arthur, but also aimed a couple of mocking phrases at Merlin. After exhausting his somewhat clumsy irony on Arthur, William switches to Merlin, juxtaposing him and 'our Isaiah'.[278] By *noster* the chronicler presumably means Christian, so contrasting a Christian prophet, through whom God speaks, with pagan Merlin, the Devil's representative. But this is not simply diabolic Merlin; he is, most significantly, *propheta Britonum* – a British prophet or, rather, the prophet of the Britons. It is instructive that the passage as a whole, which constitutes the prologue to William's *Historia rerum Anglicarum*, is constructed along ethnic lines: the distinction between the Britons and the English and the histories of these two peoples is crucial for the author. Does it mean that 'our Isaiah' is

[278] William of Newburgh, Historia rerum Anglicarum, i, pp. 17–8.

also our 'English Isaiah', reminding us of Aelred's 'our Moses' and pointing to another instance of the tacit employment of the idea of divine election in twelfth-century England? That would be a rather stretched reading. However, the fact remains: in a text focused on the division between the English and the Britons, the latter are deprived of Christian identity and demonized, while the former's Christianity is at least implicitly underlined.

In general, this is an example of a manipulative use of religious and national idioms on the part of William of Newburgh. By mixing two vocabularies the author succeeds in promoting his national community at the expense of the Britons. As I already discussed in the previous chapter, William's obsession with the conflict between the Britons and the English (in the present, as well as in the past) found another expression in that striking passage from his *Sermon* on St Alban. So, William claimed that, offended by the sins of his people, Alban 'joined the English' and 'became no longer British but English, no longer one of you but one of us (*ex Britone Anglus, ex vestro noster factus est*)'.[279] This statement is extremely interesting for the broader topic of the interplay between religion and national identity in relation to saints' cults, but for now it is enough to note William's tendency to frame the national confrontation within religious discourse either by appropriating a British saint for the English or by robbing the Britons of Christian affiliation. And the *Sermon* on St Alban does contain a claim for the election of the English – by the saint, if not necessarily by God.

The issue of the conflict between 'the Britons' and 'the English', centred on the passage of the dominion over Britain, returns us to the question of whether these events were understood by Bede and his twelfth-century successors within the biblical framework,

[279] *The Sermons of William of Newburgh*, p. 87.

whether Britain was represented as a new Promised Land and the English as a new chosen people. Bede may, or may not, have perceived and told this story on the basis of a biblical scheme,[280] but it is important to avoid a mechanistic imposition of this vision on twelfth-century historians. Without any textual confirmation, we cannot just assume that they followed Bede's presentation, or rather its more or less implicit foundations, and saw the English as God's chosen people that took over the Promised Land of Britain. But at least one twelfth-century text, a rather less known one, does contain a fragment in which a twelfth-century writer makes use of this biblical model, though not without a rather curious twist. Depicting the final eclipse of the Britons' power over Britain and the ultimate victory of the English, Alfred of Beverley (d.1154–7) said that 'as it was written about the children of Israel, [they – the English] were fruitful, and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly mighty and filled in the land'.[281] The phrase is a verbatim quotation from Exodus 1.7; it directly compares the English to the '*filii Israhel*' and seems to imply that they can also claim the status of God's chosen people. An interesting, and maybe even subversive, detail is that the *terra* in the original is not the Promised Land, but Egypt, since Exodus starts from the propagation of the Israelites in Egypt after the death of Joseph. Whether this was Alfred's meaningful commentary on the English claim to Britain or a coincidence, it is difficult to say. It is, however, unlikely that the author accidentally invoked an explicit association between the fate of the English and the Israelites; Alfred did want his readers to see the conquest of Britain within the biblical paradigm.

If Alfred of Beverley's passage still looks more like a manifestation of typological thinking, of an understanding based on the well known biblical images, rather than a

[280] For a relevant discussion see: C. O'Brien, 'Bede on the Jewish Church', in P. Clarke and Ch. Metheun (ed.), *The Church on its Past* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 63–73.
[281] Alfred of Beverley, *Annales, sive Historia de gestis regum Britanniae*, ed. Th. Hearne (Oxford, 1716), p. 76.

'political' statement on the English as God's people, my next example is indeed such an overt claim. Herbert of Bosham, in his *Life* of Thomas Becket, written in the 1180s, later than other eyewitnesses' works, resorts to a whole range of biblical parallels when he reaches the climax of his narrative, the murder of the saint. Considering the gravity of the sin, Herbert quotes several passages from the Bible, where divine punishment befell the people for the indulgence of its individual representatives, namely, Solomon, Achan, Heli and his sons. Presumably not accidentally, he puts stress on several cases when rulers were to blame for the Lord's wrath. The author's next turn is extremely interesting: he disclaims any prophetic ability and emphasizes that he 'does not pray for, wish for, or voluntarily foretell evil' to his people (*genti meae nec oro nec opto nec voluntarius propheto malum*).[282] Herbert then addresses God, begging him to take pity on '*gens tua*, *gens Anglorum*'. This is probably as close as we can ever get to a literal claim for the divine election of the English in the twelfth century.

Should we interpret Herbert's doubts as a sign of the tension between loyalty to the Church's cause and to the national community? That would mean reading into twelfth-century perceptions a straightforward opposition that in fact was absent from them; moreover, the glory of a national church was closely associated with a nation's prestige. But the author's strained explanation of his motives is significant for another reason: it shows that he took seriously the religious language that he was using to criticize the king. This whole thing – a fear of divine retribution targeted at the nation rather than at guilty individuals, and the people's special relationship with God – was more than mere rhetoric. In Herbert's case, biblical examples and vocabulary were employed not only to typologically

[282] Herbert of Bosham, Vita Sancti Thomae, archiepiscopi et martyris, *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, iii, p. 511.

describe a current situation but also to embody his views of the world, of his people and its election by God.

We should not miss another aspect here: from a very early stage Becket was, against the odds, perceived as an English saint. It was said that the English particularly venerated him and that he was their special patron.[283] This makes one wonder whether Herbert's extensive comment on the dangers of divine retribution for the martyrdom was an intervention against some mainstream attempts to forge a quasi-harmonious vision of Becket's unproblematic place in the ranks of English saints. Herbert's passage is pointed primarily against Henry II and, in the light of the former's combative character, it is not surprising that he was not persuaded by the king's penitence even a decade later. But it is interesting that he decided to problematize the relations between the martyr and his people too and, instead of the by then fairly conventional trouble-free image of Becket as the patron and honour of England and the English, chose to emphasise the danger of God's potential retribution against the English.[284] Many themes discussed above come together here: above all, the entanglement of the assertion of the divine election of the English with the notion of God's punishment of his people.

Finally, my last example is coming from a letter addressed to Alan de Lille by Peter of Blois. In this text dated to 1167, Peter referred to the English as the *gens Anglorum christianissima*, which was rightly compared to the Angels by St Gregory. He then added that this land is so adorned with martyrs, confessors and virgins that 'one can truly call it *genus*

[283] Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, pp. 394–5.
[284] The positive association between Thomas Becket and England/the English is common the sources; one of the most telling examples can be found in a letter by Peter of Blois, where he claims that 'the Lord gave England our Thomas' and, in an apostrophe, invites England to exult in her acquisition of such a powerful patron, 'Petri Blesensis Epistolae', *PL*, 207, cols. 1–560, at col. 136.

electum, gens sancta, populus adquisitionis' (1 Peter, 2.9).[285] At least a couple of things are of note in this short, but instructive passage. It is very interesting that saints play a key role in Peter's application of the biblical image of chosen people to the 'contemporary' English. Equally important is the equation of *gens* and *terra*, which shows once again how ethnic and territorial frameworks merged in medieval national discourse.

Before we can decide what general observations can be made on the basis of these chronologically and substantially diverse cases of both explicit and implicit representations of the English as God's chosen people, let me add more complexity by adducing some other examples of the uses of the notion of divine election in various contexts in the long twelfth century. First of all, we can return to the late eleventh-century *Life* of Saint Birinus and its lengthy apostrophe to Britain, itself based on an apostrophe to Rome from Pope Leo the Great's *Sermon LXXXII*. Describing the conversion of Britain from paganism to Christianity through the agency of St Birinus, the author wrote: '*Britannia*… this is he [Birinus] who enriched you with this glory… so that you might be a *gens sancta*, a people of increase, the nation of the great king'.[286] *Gens sancta* and *populus adquisitionis* – this is how St Peter defines Christians in his First Epistle (1 Peter, 2.9), reusing 'gens sancta' from Exodus 19.6 (where God tells Israel 'ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, an holy nation'). This fourfold layering of allusions and reinterpretations is curious in its own right, but, to concentrate on the last link in the chain of tradition, the passage from the *Life* of Saint Birinus shows that it was conceivable in the period to apply the idea of a chosen people to a country, thus framing it territorially rather than ethnically. But what did the late eleventh-century author want to say by personifying Britain and calling her *gens sancta*? Primarily,

[285] Alain de Lille, *Lettres familières (1167–1170)*, ed. Fr. Hudry (Paris, 2003), p. 96
[286] *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives*, pp. 14–5.

this is a literary exercise, an adaptation of a canon to the description of the author's particular subject, the conversion of Britain and St Birinus' role in it. But nothing excludes the possibility that the author was literally claiming the divine election of Britain. Even more important from a conceptual perspective is the application of the idea of election to the land, as it manifests the flexibility of medieval national and religious notions.

The same feature can be illustrated by an example from the letter collection of Arnulf of Lisieux, where the author employed the same biblical quotation that mentions God's people to refer to two very different communities. In the first case, Arnulf inserted the phrase 'God hath visited his people' (Luke 7.16) in a letter congratulating Thomas Becket on his accession to the archbishopric of Canterbury in 1162.[287] The tone of the letter creates the impression that '*plebs sua*' is the Church of England, not the English or the kingdom. In the second case, Arnulf used the formula to flatter King Louis VII of France. Lauding the birth of the king's heir, the bishop of Lisieux claimed that thus God 'visited his people' and demonstrated his clemency towards the *regnum Francorum*.[288] Yet again we are facing a familiar question: were these identifications of the English Church (or England) and of the French Kingdom with God's people merely verbal formulae, maybe even used unconsciously by the author, whose style had inevitably absorbed biblical phraseology? We, however, should not be concerned only with the elusive dichotomy between actual beliefs and rhetoric; what matters is the blending of national and religious vocabularies in the political language of the time.

Assessing the significance of my 'English' examples, it must also be noted that some other applications of the idea of God's chosen people were much more widespread in the

[287] *The Letters of Arnulf of Lisieux*, ed. F. Barlow (London 1939), p. 63.
[288] Ibid., p. 80.

twelfth century. Most obviously, the description of the Christians and/or the Christian Church as God's people was a commonplace of the tradition. Sometimes this Christian universalist meaning could be combined with an ethnic one, as Orderic Vitalis' rather curious use of the expression *populus Dei* may illustrate. Orderic employed it in two speeches on good secular government and the obligations of lay rulers that he put in the mouths of the Bishops Odo of Bayeux and Serlo of Sées.[289] In both cases the author repeated the typical rhetoric of Christian tradition, but in his narrative the speeches are addressed to the Norman dukes, thus implying that the *populus Dei* stands for the Normans here.

The Crusades constituted another important religious context for the appeals to the notions of divine election.[290] What is most relevant to my discussion is that, even within this single framework, various visions developed. Thus, different authors could have referred to a particular nation, the Crusaders in general, or the people of the newly established kingdom of Jerusalem as 'God's people'.[291] Finally, yet another religious use of the 'populus Dei' formula was possible, as, to take one of the authors quoted above, Aelred of Rievaulx's *Pastoral Prayer* shows. In this text, it is the community of monks that is designated as God's chosen people.[292] Aelred of Rievaulx's use of the idea of God's people in two very different

[289] The *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis, iv, p. 150; vi, p. 62.
[290] See, for example: N. Morton, 'The Defence of the Holy Land and the Memory of the Maccabees', *Journal of Medieval* History, 36 (2010), pp. 275–93. I am grateful to Christopher Tyerman for this reference.
[291] It is, of course, not always easy to distinguish in this context the use of the word *Franci* as an ethnic name and as an umbrella term for all crusaders. There are, however, some instructive cases. Robert the Monk, for example, seemed to preserve the ethnic and maybe also political meaning of the term *Franci*, when he repeatedly described gens Francorum as God's chosen people (*gens a Deo electa et dilecta*) in the very beginning of his *History*: *The Historia Iherosolimitana of Robert the Monk*, ed. D. Kempf and M.G. Bull (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 4–5.
[292] Aelred of Rievaulx, Oratio Pastoralis, in *Aelredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia*, ed. A. Hoste and C.H. Talbot (Turnhout 1971), i, pp. 755–63, at p. 758.

meanings makes a crucial point about medieval authors' inventive approach to biblical language.

What status should we ascribe to these half-dozen cases in which the English are represented as God's chosen people? Even if these were only exceptions, a point that is yet to be established through both more systematic research into national discourse in twelfth-century England and comparative analysis of the uses of the notion of divine election in medieval Europe in general, they still matter.[293] These exceptions are significant because they allow us to see the complexity of twelfth-century national discourse, but also because they help to understand its basic characteristics better. Taking complexity first, we have seen that even within the set of a few examples, there are substantial variations in the authors' uses of the idea of God's chosen people: some authors appealed to it implicitly by interweaving relevant biblical quotations into their narratives; others went further, explicitly describing the English as an elect nation. There were also conceptual variations: for some writers the notion of divine election was a rhetorical tool to make sense of the historical dramas of the past (above all, the Norman Conquest); for others, it was a trope to glorify their people, sometimes in overtly ideological contexts, as, for instance, in Aelred's sermon on Edward the Confessor. It is always difficult to judge whether such utterances are factual statements or exercises in rhetoric (even though, it seems important to distinguish rhetoric as mere literary embellishment and rhetoric that makes a point), but they still help us to map twelfth-century national discourse by highlighting its possibilities and limits: what one could and could not say about national communities at the time.

[293] They matter even if they are much less systematic than some later examples, such as for example the representation of France and 'the French' as God's chose people. See: J.R. Strayer, 'France: the Holy Land, the Chosen People, and the Most Christian King', in *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of E.H. Harbison*, ed. Theodore K. Rabb and Jerold E. Seigel (Princeton, 1969), pp. 3–16.

To outline other important junctions at the intersection between religious and national discourses in twelfth-century England, we can consider two more examples. First, in an eccentric passage in the Anglo-Norman *Life* of Edward the Confessor, the nun of Barking inverts national and religious idioms and switches her attention from the English to the Christians, who are saved by Christ in the same manner as the English were saved by Edward the Confessor. Now it is the English and their struggle against the Danes that become a metaphor for the war which 'we Christians' should conduct against the Devil. In a striking passage, the word Danes is used to refer to the Devil and his forces: 'Destroyed is [the Devil's] power and his *Danes* have gone back to hell'.[294] This endowment of an ethnic term with a religious meaning is an ultimate illustration of the interdependence of national and religious vocabularies in the middle ages. Second, an episode in the *Life* of St Modwenna, written by Abbot Geoffrey of Burton in the first half of the twelfth century, shows how the logic of Christian universalism might have been indeed employed in opposition to national distinctions. Reacting to a dispute between several ethnicised groups ('the Irish', 'the Scots' and 'the English') over the right to possess the saint's body, a character in the *Life* (a certain 'bishop of Scotland') claims that '[o]ur God is a God of peace and love, who commands us, whether we are English, Scots, Irish or anything else (*siue Anglis siue Scottigenis siue Hiberniensibus siue ceteris*), to love one another as ourselves [and] to do to others as we wish to be done to us…'.[295] Perhaps echoing St Paul and his 'there is neither Jew nor Greek' (Galatians, 3.28–29), Geoffrey of Burton submits the logic of national distinctions to the higher principle of Christian unity and love.

[294] Ö. Södergård, *La Vie d'Edouard le Confesseur: Poème anglo-normand du XII^e siècle* (Uppsala, 1948), p. 133, ll. 762–3.
[295] Geoffrey of Burton, *Life and Miracles of St Modwenna*, ed. and trans. R. Bartlett (Oxford, 2002), pp. 170–3.

However, this same passage from Geoffrey of Burton's work does not presuppose the total abandonment of national categories. After all, God is expected to judge which nation is worthy to have the holy body and the English finally got it by the divine will.[296] Thus, what is in common between this episode, which makes at least some use of the logic of Christian universalism, and the above-examined references to the English as God's chosen people, is that they both reveal the essential place that national notions held in medieval thinking and writing. One way to pinpoint the significance and centrality of these notions is to notice that the God of twelfth-century authors thought in national categories too. This basic idea of God's concern with nations found various expressions at the time. Its manifestations range from Henry of Huntingdon's powerful and pessimistic conceptualization of the Norman Conquest as a result of God's decision to destroy the *gens Anglorum* to the maybe even more curious understanding of Thomas Becket's martyrdom as a reflection of the Lord's will to 'honour the kingdom of England among others and to adorn the English'.[297] This latter example is striking because it comes from a text written not in England, but in, at the first glance, a rather unlikely place: the papal curia. Pope Honorius III chose this rhetoric in his letter sanctioning the translation of Thomas Becket's body in Canterbury in 1220, thus showing that the papacy was comfortable with the language of nationhood.[298]

But probably the most beautiful and original illustration of the medieval belief in God's attention to national communities is the inclusion of nations in visions of the Last

[296] Ibid., p. 173.
[297] Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. 338.
[298] *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, vii, p. 583. One may add here that the role of the papacy in the forging of medieval national categories was emphasized already in the interwar and mid-twentieth century literature on medieval 'nationalism'. See the (shortened) essays by Coulton and Hertz in *Nationalism in the Middle Ages*, pp. 70–8.

Judgment. Whereas we might expect that Christian authors should have seen an individual, the Church or the humankind as the subjects of the eschatological process, medieval texts contain a number of examples where apocalyptic narratives are framed nationally. Such a perception seems to underline the well-known passage in the very end of Gerald of Wales' *Descriptio Kambriae*, where an old Welshman tells King Henry II that the Welsh will not be destroyed except by the anger of God and 'no people other than that of Wales will answer for this corner of the world before the Supreme Judge at the Last Judgment'.[299] This instance might be dismissed as a purely proverbial expression of ethnic and political opposition to the English and the English king's rule. But William of Malmesbury's statement, that God endowed England with so many uncorrupted bodies of saints in order to fortify the nation's belief in the Resurrection, is difficult to refute on similar grounds.[300] Here we are dealing with a thoughtful discussion of the function and purpose of saints, and there is no reason to doubt that William was indeed serious in his depiction of a God who is especially concerned with the attitudes of the English to the Resurrection and their salvation.

In any case, all such brief references are overshadowed by Goscelin of Saint-Bertin's lengthy and colourful vision of the Apocalypse in the *Liber confortatorius*, which I have already discussed in relation to its unconventional uses of the language of Britishness. What matters here is that the whole eschatology is built by the author around ethnicised peoples. Building, so far as one can tell, on the imagery and language from the Book of Micah that describes the Lord's judgement between 'peoples' ('[Dominus] judicabit inter populos multos'; instructively, in this passage the words *populi* and *gentes* are used interchangeably;

[299] Gerald of Wales, 'Descriptio Kambriae', in Giraldi Cambrensis *Opera*, vi, pp. 155–227, at p. 227.
[300] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, i, II.207, p. 386: *Quod ideo fieri caelitus, ut natio pene extra orbem posita, ex consideration incorruptelae sanctorum, fidentius ad spem resurrectionis animaretur*.

Micah: 4.1–3) , Goscelin wrote that the 'Lord will judge between nation and nation, between kingdom and kingdom, between the Assyrians and the Hebrews, between the Romans and the nations they subjugated, between the Gauls and the Britons…'.[301] Describing then the arrangement that will follow the Last Judgment, Goscelin makes the following remarkable statement: [God] will join apostles with the nations and languages which they have made bear fruit for God: St. Denis with the Gauls and the Parisians, St. Martin with the people of Tours, St. Hilaire with the Poitevins, St. Augustine with the Britons, St. Bertin with the people of Sithiu, St. Edith with the nuns of Wilton.[302] This passages is interesting for all sorts of reasons, but the presence of 'peoples' in what we can call the post-Apocalyptic order is most pertinent to this chapter's topic. The fact that it is possible to trace the kernel of Goscelin's vision to both the already mentioned chapter of the Book of Micah and also to the passage from the Book of Isaiah, where the Lord is said 'to judge among the nations' in the last days (Isaiah: 2.1–4),[303] points to a crucial feature of medieval national discourse, also visible in other quotations examined above. Medieval national notions were to a significant extent predicated on the Bible and expressed through biblical language; at the same time, medieval authors used this idiom creatively, often proposing representations of nationhood that went far beyond the initial biblical template.

[301] The Liber confortatorius of Goscelin of Saint-Bertin', at p. 111. The translation into English is by Monica Otter: Goscelin of St Bertin, *The Book of Encouragement and Consolation*, p. 142.
[302] Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *The Book of Encouragement and Consolation*, pp. 144–5.
[303] Another source for Goscelin's vision of the Apocalypse was presumably a passage from St Gregory the Great's sermon, where, on the day when the Judge will come, the apostles are said to lead those whom they converted (Peter – Judea, Paul – the world, Andrew – Achaia, John – Asia, Thomas – India). See: 'Sancti Gregorii Magni Romani Pontificis XL Homiliarum in Evangelia Libri Duo', in *PL*, 76, XVII, cols. 1075–1312, at col. 1148. Another twelfth-century text from England that used this fragment is the sermon *De Ordinatione Beati Gregorii Anglorum Apostoli*, most likely composed by Archbishop Anselm. In this sermon, the preacher claims that St Gregory himself will lead the English at the Day of Judgement, thus providing us with another example of the inclusion of nations in the eschatological perspective. See: A. Wilmart, 'Edmeri Cantuariensis Cantoris Nova Opuscula de Sanctorum Veneratione et Obsecratione', *Revue de Sciences Religieuse*s, 15 (1935), pp. 184–219, 355–79, at p. 212.

It is difficult to think of a better illustration of the fundamental place that national categories occupied in medieval world-view than Goscelin's inclusion of national communities in his depiction of the post-Apocalyptic eternity. To these textual quotations one can add a splendid visual example, originating in twelfth-century Bohemia. In one of the manuscripts of Augustine's *De civitate Dei* produced in Bohemia in the 1170s and now kept in the Library of the Metropolitan Chapter of the Cathedral in Prague, there is an illustration, depicting heavenly Jerusalem. Exceptionally, it includes a group of four figures, two clerics and two lay people, identified in an inscription as *Boemenses*, the Bohemians.[304] Thus, this illuminated manuscript literally and visually made a nation part of the image of Heaven, confirming a possibility for medieval people to imagine the relevance of nationhood even in the other world, although we can safely assume that such ideas were in reality inseparable from down-to-earth political matters, such as, for example, the competition between German and Czech elites in twelfth-century Bohemia.

This chapter has been focused on one aspect of the interplay between religion and national identifications in twelfth-century England: various uses of biblical language and images in reference to national communities. A couple of general considerations regarding the interaction between Christianity and 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' in the medieval period may serve as an appropriate conclusion. This interaction can be approached from two opposite perspectives. First, it is crucial to avoid oversimplification when we are trying to make sense of the descriptions of the Christians as a people, including God's new chosen people. The tendency to always understand such references as only metaphors has been

[304] P. Sommer, D. Třeštík, J. Žemlička and Z. Opačič, 'Bohemia and Moravia', in N. Berend (ed.), *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy: Scandinavia, Central Europe and Rus' c.900–1200* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 214–62, at p. 241

criticized in recent scholarship on early Christian identity, which has emphasized the role of ethnic reasoning in the process of constructing the early Christian community.[305] Even more relevantly to the theme of this chapter, Robert Bartlett has shown how Christian identity was described 'in terms of race and blood', 'ethnicized' in the high middle ages.[306] These observations once again reveal how the categories of identification do not have any fixed internal features that define them, but, instead, are abstractions that can be construed through any number of overlapping discursive models. We, therefore, should not be surprised by the presence of ethnicising logic in the medieval understanding of Christian identification, coupled with the Augustinian adaptation of Roman civic ethics centered on the concept of *populus*.[307]

Second, there is the opposite perspective: the influence of Christianity, both ideologically and institutionally, on the construction of nationhood in the middle ages. Although 'modernism' seems to preserve its dominant position among historians and social scientists, so much work has been done on medieval national identifications that, at least for a medievalist readership, there must be no need to prove that Christianity did not inhibit the development of nationhood at the time. But, as this chapter has set out to demonstrate, we should claim more often and state more clearly that it would be a mistake to merely set aside religious and national notions and to think that national identification was possible in

[305] See especially D.K. Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York, 2005), but also: C. Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford, 2007); L. Nasrallah, *Prejudice and Christian Beginnings: Investigating Race, Gender, And Ethnicity in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, 2009).
[306] R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350* (London, 1993), pp. 250–2.
[307] On Augustine's and, more generally, patristic ideas of community and polity see: J. Duquesnay Adams, *The Populus of Augustine and Jerome: a Study in the Patristic Sense of Community* (New Haven, 1971). On the reception and reinterpretation of Augustine's legacy in twelfth-century historical writing see: S.O. Sønnesyn, *William of Malmesbury and the Ethics of History*; idem, '*In vinea Sorech laborare*: The Cultivation of Unity', pp. 167–87.

medieval times in spite of Christian universalism. On the contrary, Christianity provided the cultural context and language for the expression of national distinctions. Here we can return to Caspar Hirschi's recent thought-provoking book on the pre-modern origins of nationalism, where he offered a theoretical model that generalizes this phenomenon. Hirschi argues that the common culture that unites independent and more or less equal polities is a necessary condition *for*, rather than an obstacle *to*, the proliferation of national identifications.[308] Hirschi himself prioritizes the secular politics and the anachronistic adaptation of Roman imperialism as the crucial factor in the development of nationalism in Renaissance Europe, but we are not obliged to follow him in this (as well as, to accept his, in my view, erroneous chronology) and may emphasize the independent role of culturally and institutionally uniform Christianity in the development of medieval nationhood. Thus, in a direct opposition to one of the modernists' key dogmas, medieval Christianity should be seen as a prerequisite and an ideal milieu for the construction and expression of national identifications in its constituent political communities. Biblical language was, of course, one of the main cultural mechanisms at work here. The various uses of this idiom in medieval (and not only medieval) references to national communities can be seen as a continuum, where at one end of the spectrum pole there are rhetorical applications that were supposed to help the authors to make sense of a nation's historical destiny, and at the other end – pro-active attempts to construct polities and communities, using the biblical paradigm of divine election as a matrix. The significance of the latter is obvious, but we should not underestimate the former and exaggerate the distance between these two poles.[309] After all, writing about communities and their past is always an essential part of the ongoing

[308] Hirschi, *The Origins of Nationalism*, pp. 34–40.
[309] For a comprehensive discussion of the place and function of rhetoric in medieval historical writing see: M. Kempshall, *Rhetoric and the Writing of History, 400–1500* (Manchester, 2011).

process of (re)constructing them. A few examples of representing the English as God's chosen people, which tended to be closer to the rhetorical pole, allow us a glimpse of this mechanism's functioning in twelfth-century England.

Chapter 4: Cults of saints and the language of nationhood in Twelfth-Century England

On 29 December 1220, the fiftieth anniversary of Thomas Becket's murder in Canterbury cathedral, another Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, preached in front of a monastic audience in Rome. In this sermon Langton compared England to a rose-bush that never stops 'to torment the church with the thorns of persecution'. Among many other martyrs, St Ælfheah and St Edmund were produced by this thorny bush and St Thomas was 'the rose that ultimately adorned' it.[310] One might suppose that Langton's appeal to this rather negative vision of England and her role in the proliferation of the English martyrs was partially motivated by the location where the sermon was delivered. Being in Rome – the centre of the universal church – might have encouraged the archbishop to emphasize the conflict between ecclesiastical and secular powers and to deny any positive association between the saints and their homeland. It seems, however, that this critical view had more to do with Langton's own ideas and personal experience, above all, his long engagement in the conflict with King John.[311] At least, some other clergymen in Rome were ready to extol the optimistic and harmonious relationship between England and its saints. Just a few days before Stephen Langton delivered his sermon in Rome, none other than Pope Honorius III wrote in a letter sanctioning the translation of Thomas Becket's body in Canterbury that the '*Rex caelestis* honoured the kingdom of England among others and adorned the English, *gens Anglica*, through the martyr'.[312]

[310] *Selected Sermons of Stephen Langton*, ed. Ph.B. Roberts (Toronto, 1980), p. 57.
[311] See, for example: D. Baumann, *Stephen Langton: Erzbischof von Canterbury im England der Magna Carta (1207–1228)* (Leiden, 2009).
[312] *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket,* vii, p. 583.

This remarkable quotation brings to the fore the dynamic of the mutual reinforcement of religious and national discourses in the central middle ages (which I started mapping out in the previous chapter) and, more specifically, points to a crucial link between the cults of saints and the notions of national glory and honour. It also poses the question of how the language of nationhood was combined with Christian universalism and used by churchmen at both global and local levels. Furthermore, the comparison between Langton's sermon and Honorius' letter shows that the discourse created by the interplay between national and religious idioms was contested. Various logics collided within it, albeit often implicitly. The existence of this tension between different medieval visions of how exactly religious and national languages were to be combined will be at the centre of this chapter's discussion.

But to begin with, it would be helpful to summarize what we already know about the cults of saints and national identifications in twelfth-century England. There are at least three important things. First, there certainly was a general tendency to associate certain saints with England or even the English. The best concise presentation of the relevant evidence is provided in the comprehensive chapter of Hugh Thomas' book *The English and the Normans* entitled 'Church, Saints, England, and the English'.[313] Moreover, Thomas has clearly shown that it was not merely a formal, technical association: the saints were seen as the pride of England. Second, the attitude of the Normans or, to put it in less essentializing terms, of some clergymen who had arrived from the continent after 1066 and obtained various ecclesiastical posts in the English church towards the Anglo-Saxon saints was not unproblematic and sometimes (but not always) their hostility and doubts were articulated

[313] Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, pp. 283–96.

along ethnic lines.[314] Third, primarily, as a result of Paul Hayward's meticulous work, there are the detailed descriptions of how and in which political and institutional contexts a few important saints acquired 'titles' that included explicit references to the English: St Gregory the Great and St Augustine of Canterbury – the (competing) 'Apostles of the English' and St Alban – the 'Prothomartyr of the English'.[315] Taken together, this is substantial material but it is also noteworthy that all existing research on the topic is primarily centered on the English vs. the Normans theme. Paul Hayward's articles on St Gregory and St Alban are a bit different in this regard, but they are mainly concerned with Post-Conquest institutional politics and do not really examine national notions associated with the cults. It is, therefore, worth looking in more detail at how the language of nationhood was employed in references to saints across various genres, including hagiography, history, homilies and official church documentation. In tracing these references, I shall especially focus on three issues: notions of national glory and honour, the interplay between national and universalist logics, and the presence of contradictions, one may even say, an implicit debate on the relation between saints' cults and nationhood in twelfth-century England and, by implication, Europe.[316]

In the title of his recent detailed overview of medieval saints and their cults, Robert Bartlett repeats the question that Augustine asked about saints: 'Why can the dead do such great things?'.[317] In the context of this chapter, we can reformulate this question: what

[314] For various perspectives on this topic see the literature quoted in the note 240 in the previous chapter.
[315] P.A. Hayward, 'Gregory the Great as 'Apostle of the English', pp. 19–57 (this articles discusses both St Gregory and St Augustine as the apostles of the English promoted correspondingly by Christ Church, Canterbury and St Augustine's, Canterbury); idem, 'The Cult of St Alban, Prothomartyr Anglorum, pp. 169–99.
[316] On the notion of national saints in the high Middle Ages see: *Of Chronicles and Kings: National Saints and the Emergence of Nation States in the High Middle Ages*, ed. J. Bergsagel, Th. Riis and D. Hiley (Copenhagen, 2015).
[317] R. Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things? Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton, 2013).

great things could the saintly dead do for their national communities according to medieval notions? It would be unnecessary to come up with some formal classification, but there are at least two basic things that we can distinguish: on the one hand, saints were believed to be able to maintain the mundane well-being and security of a community, while on the other hand, they were also able to uphold its ethical standards, as well as to assist its salvation. These two issues – earthly prosperity and peace and spiritual benefits – were of course often mentioned alongside each other. Thus Eadmer noted in the prologue to his Life of St Wilfrid that Britain was rich in its abundance of the most holy men and 'the grace of God by the merits of these men adorned the whole island to such an extent that worship and obedience to him increased everywhere; and also public and private affairs enjoyed peace and prosperity'.[318]

Now, this is predictable and quite trivial; but what is more interesting in Eadmer's comment is the emphasis not on one particular saint, but on the country's saints as a group. This notion was widespread in long-twelfth-century England and was expressed in two main forms: first, in the idea of the numerous uncorrupted bodies of the saints 'owned' by England and the English; second, in the image of the saintly kings of the English. Once again, these two ideas were often interconnected, as for example, William of Malmesbury's take on it may illustrate. In his *Gesta Regum Anglorum* William inserted a rather long digression on the saints of the English, curiously introduced immediately after one of the historian's complaints about the ill-treatment of England by the Normans (William's famous story – which I shall examine in more detail in chapter 6 – of the female Siamese twins, one of whom died earlier and poisoned the still-alive body of the second; the wonder that he

[318] Eadmer, 'Vita Wilfridi Episcopi', in *The Historians of the Church of York*, i, pp. 161–226, at p. 161.

interpreted as signifying the disastrous relation between Normandy and England). In the beginning of his narrative on the saints, William claimed that nowhere else in the world can one find so many incorrupt bodies of saints and that this must be explained by God's special love for the English.[319] The author comes up with an intriguing explanation of the causal connection between God's love for the people (the use of the term *populus* may indicate an implicit appeal to the notion of divine election) and the number of the uncorrupt bodies: the incorruption of bodies, according to this vision of Heaven's purpose, was supposed to support 'this nation's' hope in the resurrection.[320] I already discussed this placement of the nation within an eschatological context in the previous chapter; here what matters more is William's narrative leap from the uncorrupted bodies that included those of Archbishop Aelfheah and St Cuthbert to the royal saints (both male and female), who actually constitute the bulk of the rather lengthy digression, culminating in the story of Edward the Confessor's piety and miracles.[321] The strong association between the idea of numerous national saints and the image of saintly royal lineage was also articulated by Goscelin of St Bertin, who, very curiously also in the eschatological context, was writing about the 'holy kings of Britain Oswald, Edmund, Kenelm, Ethelbert, Edgar and Edward'.[322] Yet another variation on the theme of the saintly English kings is found in the early-thirteenth-century *Life* of St Waldef by Jocelin of Furness. Jocelin contends that the English kings were famous not only for their richness and glory but also for their sanctity and miracles and claims that after 'sancto rege Adwolfo' there were nine other saintly kings, whose 'sanctity' flowed into the tenth:

[319] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, II.207, p. 386.
[320] Ibid. 'Quod ideo fieri caelitus, ut natio pene extra orbem posita, ex consideration incorruptelae sanctorum, fidentius ad spem resurrectionis animaretur'.
[321] Ibid., II.207–227, pp. 386–416.
[322] The Liber confortatorius of Goscelin of Saint Bertin, p. 113.

predictably, Edward the Confessor.[323] It is noteworthy that in the same *Life* of Waldef, Jocelin also referred to the uncorrupted bodies of the English saints, confirming that these two images were both important *topoi* of the tradition.[324] In the twelfth century the climactic realization of the notion of English kings' sanctity was of course Aelred of Rievaulx's *Genealogia Regum Anglorum*, where the whole text is based on the idea of the lineage of the saintly kings of the English.[325]

An independent approach was chosen by Henry of Huntingdon, who devoted a whole book of his *Historia Anglorum* to 'the miracles of the English', thus creating the most systematic narrative on the English national saints as a group. It is very interesting in its own right that the first saint Henry chose to mention was St Alban, whom the historian described as both the 'protomartyr of the English' and 'protomartyr of Britain'. Henry felt compelled to stress that St Alban should be venerated and exalted by the *gens Anglie* (the people of England), presumably indicating that there may have existed an alternative opinion, excluding St Alban from the pantheon of English saints on the basis of his Britishness.[326] William of Newburgh's appropriation and Anglicization of St Alban will allow me to return to this curious theme later in this chapter. At this point, however, I would like to point out another important feature of Henry of Huntingdon's *Liber de miraculis Anglorum*. While the chronicler explicitly chose the national framework to write about the saints, his declared goal was not to make any claims about the honour of the English or God's special attitude to the people and the country. On the contrary, Henry's rhetoric is rather universalist: the

[323] G.J. McFadden, *An Edition and Translation of the Life of Waldef, Abbot of Melrose by Jocelin of Furness* (Columbia University PhD thesis, 1952), p. 93. For more detail on Jocelin of Furness and his hagiographical writings see: H. Birkett, *The Saints' Lives of Jocelin of Furness: Hagiography, Patronage and Ecclesiastical Politics* (York, 2010).
[324] G.J. McFadden, *An Edition and Translation of the Life of Waldef*, pp. 198–200.
[325] For a detailed analysis see: E. Freeman, *Narratives of a New Order*, pp. 55–87.
[326] Henry, Archdeacon of Huntindgon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. 624.

book is supposed to show the glorious works of the eternal God and to describe the genuine miracles in contrast to certain 'fictitious' miracles, promoted by 'ordinary people and men in religion either for money or to enrich the resting place of their saints'.[327] This shows how national and religious discourses can interplay in different ways without any clear national or institutional agenda, while still working as ideology that naturalises nationhood as such within the broader worldview of a given period.

It is noteworthy that Henry of Huntingdon decided to establish the canon of English saints almost exclusively based on Bede, to which he added only very few 'recent' saints and only one twelfth-century saint (St Wulfric). Henry's focus on a Christian rather national message was also revealed at the very end of the book, where he did speak of 'happy England', *felix Anglia*, that was decorated with so many saintly fathers, but he still gave much more attention to the religious question of why there were fewer miracles in the present days.[328] Instructively, the answer is not framed nationally: Henry mentioned the sins of 'our age', but did not refer to any special sinfulness of the English. We may, therefore, already at this stage distinguish two main types of collective references to 'national saints': first, the inflated claims (as, for example, William of Malmesbury's quotation about the number of the incorrupt bodies of saints given to the English by God) that made a lot out of the notions of national honour and a nation's special status in the eyes of God; second, rather neutral statements that simply used the national framework in an automatic way, while focusing substantive argument on piety and Christian ethical ideas.

Independently of this distinction, it is difficult to disagree with Hugh Thomas' judgment that: 'The evidence that people often linked saints with England and Englishness

[327] Ibid., p. 622.
[328] Ibid., p. 694. We should note that in this passage *Britannia* is also mentioned, confirming Henry of Huntingdon's tendency to use both concepts.

after the conquest, as before, is cumulatively overwhelming'.[329] One of the most interesting strands of evidence here is represented by various apostrophes to England inviting her to rejoice in one of her saints. Thus, in a letter to Richard, Bishop of Syracuse, Peter of Blois states that 'the Lord gave England our Thomas [Becket], so that we would not envy India in her Thomas [the Apostle]'. He also addresses England and the West: 'Exsulta, Anglia, exsulta, occidens'. [330] Again we see here a recognizable pattern: a saint is firmly connected with a country but this does not presuppose any challenge to Christianity as a universal religion. On the contrary, not only is the association with England combined with association with the West (the West as a region or the Western Church or both) but through a parallel with Thomas the Apostle it is also harmoniously built into the image of the whole world glorifying the name of the Lord. Interestingly, Peter of Blois felt compelled to emphasize that he is not putting Thomas Becket at the same level as St Thomas the Apostle, because an Apostle is greater than a martyr.[331] This constituted a formal hierarchy, which was presumably relevant to the twelfth-century perceptions of universal and national saints in general.

Another noteworthy idea in Peter of Blois' discussion of Thomas Becket and his role as a patron of England is a 'hope' that 'when the Lord intends [to punish] us (*nobis*) with the whip of his indignation', the martyr would intervene 'for us' and obtain the Judge's mercy.[332] So the saint is seen as a heavenly protector and suppliant on behalf of the nation/country given to her by God. Such a vision is predicated on the whole set of notions about the relations between God and peoples, most fundamentally, on the very idea that a

[329] Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, p. 386.
[330] Petri Blesensis Epistolae, *PL*, 207, cols. 1–560, at col. 136.
[331] Ibid. 'Non laboro martyrem apostolo comparare, cum apostolus sit maior martyre'.
[332] Ibid.

nation (not an individual or the Church or the Christians in general) can be one of the possible subjects in the interaction between humans and the Divine – the idea that is, of course, central to the Old Testament. This vision also invests God with an explicit concern for nations, their spiritual well-being and honour. Here we can also recall that Peter of Blois expressed an interest in English national saints even before Thomas Becket's martyrdom. In his letter to Alain de Lille, which I mentioned in the previous chapter, he referred to *Anglorum gens christianissima*, whose land is 'inebriated with the blood of martyrs, illuminated with the candles of confessors, and decorated with the lampades of the virgins', which made it a true *genus electum* and *gens sancta*.[333] Such rhetoric, in a letter exchanged between two continental clerics, shows very clearly how deeply the notions of saints 'decorating' and glorifying particular nations and countries were engrained in the language of twelfth-century churchmen.

Considering the cult of Thomas Becket, we can find an even better manifestation of this model in a letter of Pope Honorius III sanctioning the translation of the saint's body in 1220, as already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. The pope not only associated Becket's martyrdom with the honour and divine adoration of both the kingdom of England and the English, but also described the saint as 'one of the English (*unus ex Anglicis*), placed among the angels by the hand of the Lord'.[334] Thus, the saint's national identification matters even in heaven (we will encounter other examples of this somewhat peculiar view later in the chapter). But equally important is Honorius' other statement: St Thomas would be 'an intercessor for the sins of all peoples (pro peccatis omnium populorum)'.[335] Moreover, Honorius invokes the local level too and glorifies Canterbury,

[333] Alain de Lille, *Lettres familières*, p. 96.
[334] *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket,* vii, p. 583.
[335] Ibid.

once again making a reference to the multitude of different peoples and nations. The medieval church was based on (often illusory) harmony between local, national, and universal levels, and Honorius' letter illustrates this principle really well. It was perfectly possible to emphasize the national identification of a saint and at the same time claim him (or her) for the cause of the Universal Church, to simultaneously associate a saint with the concept of national honour and with the image of an intercessor on behalf of all Christians. It is instructive that this combination of national and universal idioms was available and presumably comfortable for both internal and external uses, both for those writing from the perspective of a national community and for those representing the Universal Church (a pope is an example of the latter par excellence).

Yet another perfect illustration of how this system worked is an adaptation of this very passage on God's special favour to the English from Honorius' letter in one of the offices for the translation of St Thomas Becket. It seems that in general Becket's Englishness though prominent in hagiographical writings was sidelined in the majority of the liturgical texts associated with his cult.[336] However, one office, which was written before July 1221 and preserved within the *Sarum Breviary*, emphatically stressed it. The author of the lessons for the office twice repeated almost verbatim the pope's claim that the King of heaven specially marked out the English above others and that one of the Englishmen was placed among the angels to be an intercessor for the salvation of peoples.[337] To this phrase he also added a formula of his own, noting that the *gens Anglorum* exulted in the Lord. A curious and potentially important detail: in the second quotation, located at the very end of the liturgical text, the author slightly changed the wording of the original by turning *specialiter*

[336] For an edition of a representative collection of the offices for the Becket's Feast day and the translation of his body see: K.R. Slocum, *Liturgies in Honour of Thomas Becket* (Toronto, 2004), pp. 135–317.
[337] Ibid.

into the comparative *specialius* and thus claiming even higher election for the *gens Anglorum*. In any case, the most important aspect is the author's readiness to borrow the language of nationhood from the papal letter and use it in the institutionalized liturgical context. It is in a sense ironic that this office that explicitly appealed to notions of national honour and to the idea of a positive association between the saint and his nation was written by someone from Stephen Langton's close circle or maybe by the archbishop himself.[338] As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, Langton was able to propose a rather different, negative, vision of the relation between Thomas Becket and England. This returns us again to the issue of the coexistence of opposing approaches to the interplay between sanctity and nationhood at the time. Depending on context, rhetorical needs and practical interests, even the same author could opt for various models. When the emphasis was on the liberty of the Church and its persecution by the secular power, it was natural to apply the pessimistic vision of the relation between a martyr and his or her country. When the promotion of the cult was at stake, a positive association with the nation was an obvious strategy to establish or as in Becket's case to uphold the saint's reputation and significance.

But can we really reduce this language of nationhood to merely self-serving rhetoric on the part of the promoters of the cults? It may be more fruitful to broaden our vision and to trace its uses beyond the writings with clear institutional agendas. A passage from an exchange of letters between Peter of Celle, Abbot of St Rémy at Reims and later Bishop of Chartres, and the monk, Nicholas of St Albans, provides us with an instructive example. So far as one can judge from a few letters written by Peter of Celle, the communication was private, basically a correspondence between old friends that at some point turned into

[338] Ibid., p. 244.

personal and rather aggressive theological polemic. Intriguingly, Peter of Celle used quite a lot of references to national categories to frame his increasingly unfriendly engagement with Nicholas; I will examine this rhetorical strategy in another chapter. Here, we are interested in a passage from the first, still very agreeable, letter. Asking Nicholas to pray for him, Abbot Peter mentions that God showered his addressee's land (*fines uestros*) with copious blessing. This, according to Peter, was the result of Thomas Becket's martyrdom: God blessed 'the land on which He rained the blood of the great priest Thomas' and Angels, 'often and in great numbers', were revisiting 'the land from which they took up such a treasure [the martyr]'.[339] Peter of Celle assigned this positive association between Becket and his land not only to divine powers, but also to pilgrims. He claimed that people coming to venerate the tomb blessed the *gens, populus et natio*, from which so great a witness of Christ originated.[340] We can briefly note a curious use of *gens*, *populus* and *natio* as synonyms, as I believe this is how we should understand the phrase with its typical medieval rhetorical repetitiveness, rather than trying to figure the hypothetical different meanings of those three words. But for my central argument here this quotation is significant because Peter of Celle did not have any direct, institutional stake in Becket's cult. Still, it was natural for him to assume that the saint's land and nation deserved certain special favours and blessings from both God and other Christians. Another example of the same unbiased acceptance of a saint's national status can be found in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, where St Cuthbert is described as a 'standard-bearer of our nation in God's law'.[341] John of Salisbury was not connected to Durham or any other community interested in the promotion of St Cuthbert's cult; there are no reasons to believe that he had any Northern

[339] The *Letters* of Peter of Celle, ed. J. Haseldine (Oxford, 2001), pp. 574–6.
[340] Ibid., p. 576.
[341] Policraticus (ed. Webb, i, p. 66): 'Cuthbertus signifer quidam gentis nostrae in lege Domini'.

slant and thus might have been motivated by local loyalty to praise this saint.[342] Still, in the context that had nothing to do with the cult, it was natural for John to extol St Cuthbert, using national idiom. We thus may assume that biased promotions of saints as patrons of their nations that aimed to protect those saints' status and to boost their veneration worked or at least were supposed to work exactly because the underlying logic was wired into medieval notions and discourses.

At the same time, we should take note of another detail that may be indicative of the more complex nature of medieval notions of the relation between saints and national communities. One of the most common rhetorical elements of the passages explicating those links are the various hedging formulae with which the authors in question introduced their claims. Almost always, the relevant claims were not made as neutral factual statements; on the contrary, the authors were explicitly articulating them as personal opinions. These frequent uses of the grammatical first person (such as, for example, 'credo') are especially telling against the background of conventional medieval style that often did not give too much space to the direct expression of authorial voice. It is safe to suppose that these rhetorical tropes point to the contested status of the corresponding claims: they must not have been generally accepted and thus required special authorial pleading.

Let us consider some particular examples of such explicit attempts to argue in favour of what we may describe as the national veneration of saints. In the preamble to his *History* of Glastonbury William of Malmesbury writes that while people can respect the deeds of saintly foreigners (*alienigena*), there is much more delight in reading about a saint 'who was a compatriot (qui compatriota fuerit)'.[343] Notably, the notion of 'compatriots' does not

[342] On St Cuthbert's cult in the local context after 1066 see: W. Aird, *St Cuthbert and the Normans: the Church of Durham, 1071–1153* (Woodbridge, 1998).
[343] J. Scott, *The Early History of Glastonbury*, p. 40.

seem to be conceived by William in any narrow ethnicising sense here. For one thing, the introduction is addressed to Henry of Blois, the Bishop of Winchester, who was raised on the continent, so a certain openness of the category is required for him to be considered a 'compatriot' of the Glastonbury saints. Moreover, the saints whose lives and deeds are narrated in the work can be ethnicised differently as 'ancient Britons', 'Irishmen' and 'Englishmen'. Finally, one may ask how this preference towards national saints could be accommodated in a religious culture so obviously centered on cults that had nothing to do with any national perspective (the Virgin Mary, the Apostles, and the early Christian Martyrs). One of the possible ways to explain these contradictions would be to read William's phrase in a territorial rather than an ethnic framework. The author might have associated saints with a country rather than with an ethnic group (and his choice of the term *compatriota* probably confirms this reading). This does not solve the problem of the undeniable popularity of the core universalist cults but may account for both the inclusion of Henry of Blois in the community of 'compatriots' (with, presumably, William himself and the saints he was writing about) and the assembling of the saints of various ethnicities within one territorially framed narrative. But we should also ask what the intention of the author's utterance was. Its compositional place at the very beginning of the text encourages us to interpret it as a polemical point. This emphasis on national saints, this, so to speak, religious patriotism was maybe less self-evident than William of Malmesbury would have liked it to be. It may have needed a certain justification in the eyes of the contemporaries and thus the author's seemingly confident statement should be seen as an attempt to promote a not-generally-accepted stance towards the importance of the national aspect of religious practices and ideologies at the time.

A passage in Orderic Vitalis' *Historia Ecclesiastica* provides an instructive parallel. Introducing a section on St Guthlac, a short version of his *Life* written on an abbot of Crowland's request, Orderic proclaimed that he 'indubitably believes' that knowing the 'saintly deeds of the overseas Saxons or English (sancta gesta transmarinorum Saxonum uel Anglorum)' will be as useful to the *fideles Cisalpini* as the deeds of Greek and Egyptian saints.[344] This statement invites many questions. Here we see an interesting mixture of national and supranational perspectives on hagiography. On the one hand, a national frame works as a descriptive category: Orderic perceives the saints of the English as a coherent group. On the other hand, their importance is presumed to be wider; the author is claiming their special relevance to all Cisalpine Christians (quite a curious community in its own right). This is of course connected with Orderic's peculiar personal situation: he operated simultaneously in the Norman (Continental) and English contexts (both spatial and ideological), developed a strong local attachment to his Norman monastery of St Evroul and at the same time kept an articulated English self-identification. In this context we would expect Orderic to be emphatic in his attitude to English saints but not restricting their pertinence to the national level. The fairly strong words Orderic employs ('indubitanter credo') point to a statement with a not unproblematic status; most probably he had to persuade his readers that 'the saintly deeds of the Saxons or the English' were indeed of particular use and importance. Maybe this is a problem of the audience and it is only Orderic's emotional attempt to attribute supranational relevance to national saints that is controversial. Such a reading would in a sense confirm William of Malmesbury's idea that it is especially pleasurable to get to know the deeds of one's saintly compatriots. Alternatively,

[344] The *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis, ii, p. 324.

the real problem may have been that any attempt to glorify a group of saints on the basis of their national affiliation was often frowned upon and thus required rhetorical hedging.

Thomas of Monmouth, the author of the notoriously antisemitic *Life and Miracles* of William of Norwich, provides us with a rare example of an explicit discussion of the tensions between local and universal cults. The main rationale of his passionate response to the sceptics who cast doubt upon William's sanctity was, of course, connected with the interests of the local religious institutions in the promotion of the cult.[345] It is, however, interesting that Thomas chose what we would call the national rather than the local level to frame his diatribe. To those critics who thought that it was presumptuous to glorify as a saint somebody whom the universal church did not formally accept, Thomas (quite funnily) replies that there would not have been that many saints left if that principle had been implemented.[346] He then asks the following rhetorical questions: do Britain and Gaul celebrate all saints that are venerated in Rome (the passage is also noteworthy for the personification of countries and the choice of *Britannia* over *Anglia*) and are St Edmund and St Cuthbert, who are renowned in every part of England, equally well known to the peoples of Greece and Palestine? As the answer to these questions is plain to Thomas, he claims that there is nothing wrong in celebrating those saints that the Universal Church 'does not know or does not honour'.[347]

It is difficult to know how enthusiastic the papacy that was starting a transition to uniform papal canonizations exactly around the time Thomas of Monmouth was writing (the

[345] On the text and the cult see: http://yvc.history.qmul.ac.uk/rationale.html (accessed 14 February 2014). This project led by Miri Rubin is expected to produce a new edition of the *Life* of William of Norwich, accompanied by an extensive commentary on its social, cultural and ideological contexts.
[346] The *Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich* by Thomas of Monmouth, ed. and trans. A. Jessopp and M.R. James (Cambridge, 1896), pp. 59–60.
[347] Ibid., p. 60.

mid-twelfth century) would have been about this argumentation,[348] but what matters to us is this indication of a mental and rhetorical habit of putting saints cults into national context. A country was a meaningful, moreover, desirable framework for medieval hagiographers, even when they were dealing with the cults of clearly local scope. It is indicative of this approach that at the very beginning of his *Life* of William of Norwich Thomas combines local and national frameworks. He starts from mentioning the revelation of the divine grace in Norwich, but immediately broadens his vision, claiming that a new saintly patron was given to the whole of England.[349] Thus, a normative reference point for both veneration and holy patronage is the country. But we should ask again why this was so. One cannot get rid of the idea that this focus on the national context for the saints' cults is somewhat puzzling, especially when authors proactively insisted on the preeminence of the national framework, as Thomas of Monmouth and William of Malmesbury did.

It is very difficult to objectively assess such claims and to establish whether they represented mainstream thinking or, on the contrary, artful attempts to justify radical visions in their turn motivated by institutional interests. We can, however, compare them with some divergent views, which should allow us to map various ideological stances within twelfth-century writings on saints in relation to nationhood. An interesting and also reflective commentary on the issue of the interplay between nationhood and the veneration of saints can be found in Abbot Geoffrey of Burton's *Life* of St Modwenna. One of the crucial episodes in the *Life*, written in the first half of the twelfth century (most likely, under Henry I), is the argument between the Irish, the Scots and the English over the right to possess the

[348] E.W. Kemp, 'Pope Alexander III and the Canonization of Saints', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th Series, 27 (1945), pp. 13–28; A. Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. J. Birrell (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 22–32.
[349] The *Life and Miracles of St William of Norwich*, p. 10. Later in the text the first bishop of Norwich Herbert Losinga says in a vision that William's relics are celebrated throughout England (Ibid., p. 116).

saint's body (which I already briefly mentioned in the previous chapter). This topical element was already present in the author's main source – the eleventh-century Life of St Monenna, attributed to certain Conchubranus, an eleventh-century Irish hagiographer.[350] Geoffrey, however, elaborated the story, inserting a fragment of his own composition, a speech by Columbcille, bishop of Scotland, who was supposed to resolve the dispute. The following words, which the author put in the mouth of the bishop, are of particular interest for our theme: 'Our God is a God of peace and love, who commands us, whether we are English, Scots, Irish or anything else (siue Anglis siue Scottigenis siue Hiberniensibus siue ceteris), to love one another as ourselves [and] to do to others as we wish to be done to us…'.[351] So, here, belonging to the Christian community (and 'ecclesia Dei') is clearly put above national boundaries and loyalties. But what maybe is even more curious is that this still does not presuppose the complete abandonment of national categories. Yes, there is an evident moral hierarchy, a firm belief in the preeminence of Christian love and commonality over national ambitions. At the same time God is indeed expected to judge which nation is worthy to have the holy body and the English finally got it by the divine will.[352] In the end, what Geoffrey of Burton was doing was attempting to find a harmonious place for national distinctions in the Christian universe rather than rejecting them altogether. He presumably saw a contradiction between aggressive national feelings and Christian ethics (even more so when the former were applied to a religious issue) and was trying to find a way of reconciling national loyalties with a much more significant Christian identification. It is instructive that while telling the story of the English victory in the dispute for the body (the

[350] M. Esposito, 'Conchubrani Vita Sancti Monennae', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 28C (1910), pp. 202–51.
[351] Geoffrey of Burton, *Life and Miracles of St Modwenna*, pp. 170–3.
[352] Ibid., p. 172.

event important to Abbot Geoffrey from an institutional perspective, since it provided a basis for his own monastery's status), the author also emphasised that the saint herself 'did not wish the Scots and the Irish to be deprived of her care… and made sure that her relics were kept by them for their protection'.[353] In general, Geoffrey's moral awareness in this fragment provides an insight into the actual relevance of national categories to him and by extension to his contemporaries from a similar milieu: he encountered an anecdote in which national distinctions played a crucial role, was troubled by it and readjusted it according to his understanding. This is valuable as a relatively rare medieval example of an explicit reflection on the significance of national identification and its correlation with Christianity. To sum up this case, in Geoffrey of Burton's *Life* of St Modwenna we again see not a mutual exclusion, nor even an opposition between national and religious discourses, but a complex and also ethically charged interplay between these two modalities.

But some authors did come up with rather critical judgments on the relations between saints and their national communities. Again, we do not discuss here those writers who totally ignored national contexts while discussing saints (it would be difficult to give exact numbers, but I would assume that there were many authors of this sort; this serves as a useful reminder that the material in this chapter should be considered within a broader context). What interests us here are the various attempts to overturn the logic of positive association and to propose more problematised visions of the links between the origins of particular saints and the fates of their nations. The cult of Thomas Becket is a perfect focal point for addressing this theme, since, as has already been demonstrated above, the perception of him as both a paramount English saint and an ornament to the English

[353] Ibid., pp. 174–5.

represented mainstream thinking. I will give two examples of more negative views, one coming from outside England and one by an author based within the kingdom. The first instance is from one of Walter of Châtillon's poems (written before 1180). In this text Walter devotes quite a lot of space to the martyrdom of Becket and very openly criticizes Henry II, who is even associated with the Antichrist.[354] But what matters most for us is Walter's claim that the murder of Becket was an unheard-of event in English history and that never before had any king of Britain (note the British framework) been stained with such a disgrace. Walter contends that this terrible event is going to be recorded in the history of the English people ('hystoria gentis Anglice').[355] Walter refused to perceive Becket's martyrdom as an event that can be reinterpreted positively and portrayed as a reflection of God's blessing of the English. It was a disgrace that stained the country and, especially, its royal line.

A somewhat similar attitude was proposed by Herbert of Bosham in his *Life* of Becket. It is of note that Herbert wrote his *Life* much later than other contemporaries of the archbishop, in the 1180s, and thus presumably was in a good position to react to what was already becoming the mainstream idea of the positive connection between the martyr and England. It seems as if this harmonious picture was promoted both at Canterbury and by the papacy and probably was looked at favourably by Henry's court (the official penitence of the king in 1174 was the crucial juncture in the development of this tendency, allowing all sides to pursue their interests). Herbert would not have any of this quasi-harmony. As I discussed in the previous chapter, when he reached the climax of his narrative, the murder of the saint, Herbert quoted several passages from the Bible, where divine punishment befell the people for the indulgence of its individual representatives, namely, Solomon, Achan, Heli

[354] Walter of Châtillon, *The Shorter Poems: Christmas Hymns, Love Lyrics, and Moral-Satirical Verse*, ed. and transl. D.A. Traill (Oxford, 2013), pp. 33, 212.
[355] Ibid., p. 33.

and his sons. Presumably not accidentally, he puts stress on several cases where rulers were to blame for the Lord's wrath. The author's next turn is extremely interesting: he disclaims any prophetic ability and emphasizes that he 'does not pray for, wish for, or voluntarily foretell evil' to his people (genti meae nec oro nec opto nec voluntarius propheto malum).[356] Herbert then addresses God, begging him to take pity on *gens tua, gens Anglorum*. Again, the national framework is present and absolutely relevant, but the logic of the positive association is inverted: the martyrdom remains a problematic page in the history of the nation, by no means a divinely sanctioned honour. It would be difficult to establish whether Herbert's representation was literally an intervention in the ongoing debate on the status of Becket's cult and the acceptable understanding of the nation's place in it. We do not know whether such 'debate' existed in any practical sense. But what this example does reflect is the existence of some very different options for the conceptualization of the relations between saints and their national communities. Stephen Langton's Roman sermon devoted to Thomas Becket, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, confirms that this was the case.

Becket's cult allows us to trace other examples of the texts produced outside England but noting the Englishness of the saint. An interesting passage is contained in Cardinal Boso's *Life* of Pope Alexander III. Here the proposed model is similar to that in the letter of Pope Honorius III: the combination of Becket's image as an explicitly English saint with an emphasis on his popularity and importance for the universal Church. What makes this case even more interesting is the fact that the text was obviously not addressed to an English audience, so it reflects some basic attitudes within the Roman Church rather than a

[356] Herbert of Bosham, 'Vita Sancti Thomae, archiepiscopi et martyris', *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, iii, p. 511.

particular discursive strategy aimed at the English ecclesiastical or secular elites. Boso called Becket *illustrator Anglorum* – the title that probably expresses the martyr's contribution to the glory of the English rather his role as their 'enlightener'.[357] At the same time, Boso contended that 'the Western Church exulted with great joy' at Thomas Becket's miracles and noted that the saint was celebrated even among the *extranei gentes*; it is unclear whether this latter formula referred to other peoples than the English or to some nations outside the core of the Christendom. It is interesting that Boso ascribed the initiative to canonize Becket not to the English, but to 'the French clergy and people' (clerus et populus Gallicanus), at whose request Alexander decided to include the martyr in the roll of the saints.[358] In this passage we see yet another attempt to use a 'win-win' strategy and construct a harmonious image of a saint that brings together the notions of national honour, on the one hand, and the logic of Christian universalism, on the other hand.

A more sophisticated approach to the same task was taken by Jocelin of Furness in the above-mentioned *Life* of St Waldef. Summing up the various affiliations of the saint at the very end of the text, the author addressed apostrophes to the universal church, a national community, a monastic order and a particular monastery. So the cult is associated with four different levels of communities that are supposed to work together, constituting the structure of the Christian society. But what is even more interesting is that Jocelin managed to simultaneously claim St Waldef's special status for two national communities: England and Scotland. He first invited England to rejoice at acquiring the seventh incorrupt saintly body, building on a long tradition of predicating national honour on the number of saints who avoided bodily decay. It is very instructive how Jocelin listed different religious

[357] *Le Liber pontificalis: Texte, Introduction et Commentaire*, ed. L. Duchesne (2 vols., Paris, 1886–92), ii, p. 426.
[358] Ibid.

institutions that possessed the bodies of those seven saints (Canterbury – Archbishop Elphege, London – Edward the Confessor, Bury – St Edmund, Ely – Etheldrida and Wiburga, Durham – St Cuthbert, and, finally, Melrose – St Waldef), but also stated that the saints 'were shining over the whole kingdom'.[359] Second, Jocelin, allegedly without seeing any contradiction, claimed that 'the Kings of Scotland and their whole kingdom' should rejoice at having 'so great a father and patron'.[360] We may wonder how one saint was able to be a patron and a glory of two competing kingdoms. But this would have made a good deal of sense from the perspective of an author interested in the promotion of the cult, as well as in securing patronage from various elites and attracting pilgrims. The interplay between local, national, and universalist logics engraved in medieval religious culture and ecclesiastical institutions provided an ideal milieu for such discursive games.

Probably the best illustration of the intersection between universal and national logics as applied to the cults of saints in the middle ages is the veneration of saints who themselves were not members of a particular national community. We are so used to such associations between saints and nations that we tend to overlook their contingent nature and their origin in haphazard historical circumstances (St George and England being the most obvious example).[361] But even when there was some direct connection between a saint and a nation he or she came to be associated with, the peculiarity of such links should still be noted since it demonstrates the inadequacy of a reductive opposition between universal and national structures proposed in the classic modernist theory of the nation.

[359] G.J. McFadden, *An Edition and Translation of the Life of Waldef*, pp. 198–200.
[360] Ibid., p. 199.
[361] On the cult of St George in England see: J. Bengtson, 'Saint George and the Formation of English Nationalism', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 27 (1997), pp. 317–40.

Again the examples are so well-known that we cannot quite appreciate their oddity, the fact that they are not self-evident. Let us consider two saints connected with the Christianization of England: St Gregory the Great and St Augustine of Canterbury. By the twelfth century both were specially venerated in England and considered 'Apostles of the English'.[362] But how exactly did these two universally acclaimed saints fit into the notions about the English?

The most vivid insight into such entanglement of universal ecclesiastical and national categories and discourses in the case of St Gregory is provided by the *Sermo de Beato Gregorio* by Odo of Canterbury (d. 1200). Already the first sentence of this text is revealing: 'Let us rejoice, the sons of the Universal Church; let the English people, converted to the Lord by blessed Gregory, now rejoice! (Gaudeamus universi Ecclesiae filii, gaudeat specialius nunc Anglorum populus, per beatum Gregorium conversus ad Dominum)'.[363] Even though in the next phrase Odo notes that 'it is just that the universal Church exalts St Gregory in such solemnity', he gives considerably larger attention to the relationships between the saint and the *populus Anglorum*. The preacher's main point is that the English people must especially exalt Gregory because 'the English' were converted through his agency: 'For the others he is an apostle in general, but for us he is the Apostle in particular (nobis autem proprie est apostolus)', 'the patron', and the 'only father'. Here we can plainly see that the existence of the universal church and the unsurprisingly important place that St Gregory occupied in its tradition do not in any way prevent an appropriation of the saint in the English national context. The alleged opposition between ecclesiastical and national structures did not

[362] On the developments of the cults of St Gregory and St Augustine as the apostles of the English see P. Hayward, Gregory the Great as 'Apostle of the English'.
[363] *The Latin Sermons of Odo of Canterbury*, ed. Ch. De Clercq with the assistance of R. Macken (Brussels, 1983), p. 241.

bother Odo and his contemporaries; quite the reverse, the national veneration of St Gregory was organically built into his universal cult.

Odo's sermon is a very rich, dense source. It is interesting for all sorts of reasons. Note, for instance, a rare explicit identification with one's nation in the past, the identification grammatically expressed in the use of the first person pronouns. Odo says that 'even when we were pagans, [Gregory] loved us so much that he envisaged our salvation and compared us to the Angels'.[364] This is a curious statement because it bears on the crucial issue of national origins. At the minimum, this implies that the English were already a single nation before the Christianization. Such a belief was not inevitable against the background of a very convoluted historical tradition that went back to a confused story Bede had told about the origins of the English (were they one people or three peoples at the point when they arrived in Britain?). Nevertheless, Odo did see his English people to which he systematically refers as 'we' and 'us' as a coherent national entity already in the pre-Christian period. Unfortunately, it is impossible to say on the basis of the passage, whether Odo thought of the English as a nation before the migration from the continent or not. Anyway, the imagining and articulation of 'us' in that distant past is already impressive for medieval national discourse, which gets personal only extremely rarely. Even more rarely do we get such a perfect manifestation of the intersubjectivity of national identification: in Odo's sermon his vision of national community and its path to the salvation is literally offered to his audience (his *fratres*, the monastic community at Christ Church, Canterbury) but also rhetorically imposed on the people, *populus Anglorum*, as a whole. Here the practical mechanism of the identity-formation and confirmation (one would expect that the

[364] Ibid. This is, of course, based on the famous anecdote from Bede. See also a recent article by R.W. Rix, 'Northumbrian Angles in Rome: religion and politics in the anecdote of St Gregory', *Journal of Medieval History*, 38 (2012), pp. 257–77.

monks in the audience shared Odo's self-association with and an optimistic view of the English) is combined with a normative statement about a nation and its religious fate and duty.

This religious aspect is of a particular interest. Odo asks a series of rhetorical questions that present his understanding of the relationships between the English (the 'us' of the sermon) and St Gregory. The time element is crucial to this construction that is based on the comparison between the (quasi)historical moment in the past (the time of the Angles–Angels anecdote) and the present, between the pagan and Christian stages in the history of the English, between Gregory's corporeal and eternal lives. The essence of Odo's claim is the ascendance of Gregory's involvement with the English: if the saint loved them as pagans, he loves them even more now when they are Christians; if he prayed for them in his earthly life, he prays even more efficiently in the heavens; if he then compared 'us' to the Angels, we will live eternally with the Angels through him.[365] In Odo's sermon the topical Christian history of salvation is invested with national meaning: it is the English people (rather than all Christians or an individual) that becomes the subject of the Divine salvation. This peculiar vision is confirmed in a further statement: '[Gregory's] laud is the conversion and salvation of the whole of England' (there is a second part too: 'His laud is the stature and ordination of the Universal Church').[366] What did the 'salvation of the whole of England (salus totius Angliae)' mean? Could a country/a nation be saved in the Christian sense? Or is this just rhetoric? Instructively, Odo felt a necessity to emphasise his argument, thus revealing some tensions in making this national claim over St Gregory. He 'is not afraid of offending the "universitas" by "usurping" the universal father'; he is also not afraid of

[365] *The Latin Sermons of Odo of Canterbury*, p. 241.
[366] Ibid.

provoking envy by postulating his nation's duty and right of specially praising the saint. The Church should congratulate 'us' rather than be angry with 'us' because of this.[367] What should we make of this rhetoric? It probably points to the existence of the different attitudes towards such 'usurpations' (to use Odo's own radical term) of universal saints for the sake of a nation. The emphatic character of Odo's utterances has to be due to the polemical or at least partially problematic nature of his ideas. At the same time, it is evident that it was possible to make such an argument, that to combine national and universal logic in the dealings with the cults of saints was an option available to medieval authors. Significantly, one could claim a connection between a saint and a nation not only for the historical past but also for the actual present and, maybe more pertinently to the religious mind, for the Divine eternity.

We have seen how Odo claimed St Gregory for the English, but a reverse argument can also be made. Could Odo use all this national rhetoric to buttress the veneration of St Gregory at Christ Church, Canterbury in particular and in England in general? The emphasis on the special relationship between the saint and the English people might have been aimed at promoting his cult: maybe the national logic was so obvious to Odo's audience that he believed that it might be applied for a pious cause. After all, this is the meaning of Odo's statements if we take them at their face value ('the English people must especially venerate St Gregory'). This interpretation becomes even more convincing in the light of the earlier history of the veneration of St Gregory at Christ Church, Canterbury. Paul Hayward has compellingly shown that the promotion of St Gregory's cult (including the confirmation of his status as the apostle of the English) was launched by Archbishops Lanfranc and Anselm

[367] Ibid., pp. 241–2.

in response to the project to establish St Augustine of Canterbury as the apostle of the English (pursued by the community of St Augustine's, Canterbury).[368] One of the most interesting textual manifestations of this symbolic struggle (that was essentially about the institutional competition and structuring of ecclesiastical authority) is the sermon *De ordinatione beati Gregorii anglorum apostoli* that was preserved in Eadmer's 'personal manuscript' (Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 371), but was most probably composed by Anselm of Canterbury.[369] The main argument is similar to that of Odo's sermon: the English must especially venerate St Gregory because it is through him they received the faith and in him were to be found the origins of their salvation.[370] Most relevantly to our discussion, this position is promulgated by the preacher who is evidently not an Englishman himself (at one point he addresses the English as '*vos Angli*, brothers brought to us in the Christian faith').[371] If Anselm was indeed the author of the sermon, it is curious how natural it was for him to use national rhetoric and logic in this religious context. We see here with great clarity how instrumental the church and its agents were in asserting the ideology of nationhood across Christendom.[372]

The national identification of saints and the prestige associated with their cults might have been so important that it made sense to claim their belonging to one's national community even when such an association was very evidently problematic. The most remarkable illustration is St Alban's transformation from a Briton into an Englishman in

[368] P.A. Hayward, 'Gregory the Great as 'Apostle of the English', pp. 19–57.
[369] Ibid., pp. 48–54.
[370] Edmeri Cantuariensis Cantoris Nove Opuscula de Sanctorum Veneratione et Obsecratione, ed. A. Wilmart, *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, 15 (1935), pp. 184–219.
[371] Ibid., p. 212–3.
[372] Cf. J. duQuensay Adams, 'The Patriotism of Abbot Suger', Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Western Society for French History, 15 (1988), pp. 19–29.

William of Newburgh's Sermon on St Alban, already very well familiar to us.[373] What is most interesting in this curious case is again a half-acknowledged problem with such appropriation. William over-zealously states that he is 'saying "our" confidently, not being afraid of the Britons' slanders'. Yet another aspect that adds more complexity to both this particular example and to our overall understanding of the interplay between religious and national logics at the time is the complete lack of references to national categories in the main body of William's sermon. Its principal message has nothing to do with the English, dealing with various themes of Christian ethics and piety. William of Newburgh was quite obsessed with national issues, especially with the conflict between the English and the Britons in both the past and the present, so it is not surprising that he made such fuss around which national community St Alban belonged to. Still, this was only an introductory comment that reflected at once the relevance of national categories to medieval authors, while at the same time, the relatively marginal role this aspect played within their hagiographical and homiletic writings as a whole.

What is the meaning of this material? We offer two important conclusions. First, national categories clearly were a routine part of medieval religious discourse in general and hagiographical discourse in particular. It was totally natural to apply national rhetoric while speaking about saints, to frame hagiographical narratives or even casual references to saints in national terms. This did not necessary contradict the logic of Christian universalism; moreover, authors often strove to combine various logics and associate saints with as many different communities as possible, ranging from local religious institutions through nations

[373] The *Sermons* of William of Newburgh, p. 87. 'Confidenter dico nostrum, calumpnias Britonum non formidans… Offensus peccatis gentis sue, que iam usque ad celum peruenerant, transiuit ad Anglos, atque, ut ita dicam, ex Britone Anglus, ex uestro noster factus est'.

to the universal church and the Christendom. Second, and in slight contradiction to the first point, this mechanical, almost ubiquitous usage of national categories in the references to saints did not mean that there were no alternative approaches to the issue. If we pay attention to various rhetorical strategies employed by twelfth-century authors, the contentious nature of the association between saints and their national communities becomes visible. It is not that such associations were unacceptable to many medieval clergymen; the point is that more systematic attempts to turn relatively random references to saints' national affiliations into ideologies, usually pursued with rather obvious institutional agendas in mind, did require justification. The very careful or, otherwise, exaggerated rhetoric deployed by the authors when they were making strong claims about saints and nationhood shows that not everyone within the medieval church was happy with the attempts to impose too much of national logic on the veneration of saints. Furthermore, sometimes authors turned this logic upside down and challenged the quasi-harmonious associations between saints and their nations, bringing to the fore the biblical *topos* of the divine punishment of a sinful people. In general, the dialectic of naturalization and contestation as reflected by this material is one of the defining tensions through which nationcraft operates as a form of ideology across time and place.

Chapter 5: Lineage and 'ethnicity': genealogy, hagiography and the unrealised cult of Norman dukes in the twelfth century

In the two preceding chapters, we repeatedly encountered the notion of collective sanctity associated with 'Englishness'. One variation on this common motive is the idea of the saintly line of English kings, most explicitly represented in Aelred's *Genealogia Regum Anglorum* but also reflected in the wider traditions of twelfth-century historical and hagiographical writing (for example, in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*). This notion reflects not only the interplay between religious and national discourses (which I emphasised in those two chapters), but also the tendency of the national and genealogical logics to overlap, particularly in their representations of history and community. In order to deepen our understanding of such ideological constructions, I shall use this chapter to look at an idea that at times accompanied the image of the saintly line of English kings in twelfth-century hagiography: that of the saintly lineage of Norman dukes.

In his now classic *Great Cat Massacre* Robert Darnton emphasised the heuristic role of surprise in historical research: when we are astonished at what sources tell us, 'we know we are on to something'.[374] The material that I shall discuss here may not be as unusual, opaque and, in a sense, exciting as the mass murder of cats in eighteenth-century Paris or a police inspector's dossier on both famous and forgotten philosophers of the Enlightenment, but my interest in it has also been triggered by a feeling of surprise. I was leafing through the nun of Barking's Anglo-Norman *Life* of Edward the Confessor and suddenly came across the following passage on Norman Dukes Richard II, Robert and, most strikingly, William the Bastard (the Conqueror of England): '…Their good life was completed by holy death. Their

[374] R. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York, 1984), pp. 4–5.

holy death adds to their glory, and their life and their rest is in God'.[375] Such hagiographical praise looked strange against a background of a rather problematic attitude towards the Normans and the Norman Conquest in twelfth-century England. But it turned out that this is not a unique example. The nun of Barking merely translated (though not without some important changes) a corresponding passage from Aelred of Rievaulx's Latin *Life* of Edward (1162–1163).[376] Aelred's hagiographical representation of the Norman lineage had, in its turn, at least two twelfth-century antecedents: Turgot of Durham's *Life* of St Margaret and Osbert of Clare's *Life* of Edward the Confessor. This peculiar tradition invites us to reflect on the flexibility and complexity in the ways medieval historians and hagiographers used and reshaped the memory of the past, including in relation to the categories of collective identification.

In the first part of this chapter, I shall concentrate on this tradition by examining how the authors of the aforementioned four texts written in England developed and employed the image of, to use the nun of Barking's wording, the Norman *saint lignage*. In the second part, I shall examine some other ways of commemorating the Norman dukes and their piety under Henry II, focusing especially on the translation of the remains of Dukes Richard I and Richard II in Fécamp in 1162. I shall also ask what even an unrealised cult (Norman dukes were never formally canonised) can tell us about the interplay between religious ideas and practices and the visions of community in the central middle ages.

[375] 'Mes tant di ke lur bone vie / Fu par sainte mort acomplie / Lur sainte mort aoist lur los, / En Deu lur est vie et repos'. *La Vie d'Edouard le Confesseur*, pp. 112–3, ll. 127–30. I am grateful to Jane Bliss who kindly made available a copy of her then unpublished English translation of the nun's *Life* of Edward (J. Bliss, *La Vie d'Edouard le Confesseur by a Nun of Barking Abbey* (Liverpool, 2014)). Jane Bliss's translation has been used for the quotations from the source throughout this chapter.

[376] Aelred of Rievaulx, Vita S. Edwardi Regis et Confessoris, col. 741.

Norman 'saint lignage'

The ultimate source of the dukes of the Normans' depiction as pious and, even more so, saintly rulers is, naturally, the Norman tradition itself. This hagiographical aspect has not gone unnoticed by modern scholars, although much more attention has been given to other elements, both secular and religious, of the Norman myth and identification.[377] The representation of the dukes in hagiographical terms found its most vivid expression in Dudo of St Quentin's *Gesta Normannorum* (1015–1030). To give just one example, Dudo explicitly calls Richard I 'the blessed and saintly duke' and states that he was endowed with all the gifts of the Beatitudes in the gospels.[378] Another major historical oeuvre of the eleventh-century Norman tradition, William of Jumièges' *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* (1070), lacks the rhetorical excesses of Dudo and is more restrained in its praise of the dukes. Nevertheless, it systematically presents them as pious rulers, supporters of the Church, and

[377] On 'hagiography' of the first three Norman dukes see: V.B. Jordan, 'The Role of Kingship in Tenth-Century Normandy: Hagiography of Dudo of Saint-Quentin', *Haskins Society Journal*, 3 (1991), pp. 53–62. See also P. Bouet, 'Dudon de Saint-Quentin et la martyre de Guillaume Longue Épée', in P. Bouet et F. Neveux (ed.), *Les Saints dans la Normandie médiévale* (Caen, 2000), pp. 237–58. For the works that concentrate on the religious elements of the Norman tradition see: C. Potts, 'When the Saints Go Marching: Religious Connections and the Political Culture of Early Normandy', in C. Warren Hollister (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Political Culture and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 17–31; eadem, *Monastic Revival and Regional Identity in Early Normandy* (Woodbridge, 1997); C. Beaune, 'Les ducs, le roi et le saint sang', in Fr. Autrand, Cl. Gauvard et J.-M. Moeglin (ed.), *Saint-Denis et la Royauté: études offertes à Bernard Guenée* (Paris, 1999), pp. 711–32; S. Kahn Herrick, 'Heirs to the Apostles: Saintly Power and Ducal Authority in Hagiography of Early Normandy', in R.F. Berkhofer III, A. Cooper and A.J. Costo (ed.), *The Experience of Power in Medieval Europe, 950–1350* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 12–24; eadem, *Imagining the Sacred Past: Hagiography and Power in Early Normandy* (Cambridge, MA, 2007). Literature on Norman identity and historical tradition is extensive: L. Boehm, '*Nomen gentis Normannorum*: Der Aufstieg der Normannen im Spiegel der normannischen Historiographie', in *I Normanni e la loro espansione in Europe nell'alto medoievo* (Spoleto, 1969), pp. 623–704; R.H.C. Davis, *The Normans and their Myth*; G.A. Loud, 'Gens Normannorum – Myth or Reality?', pp. 104–116; C. Potts, '*Atque Unum Populum ex Diversis Gentibus Effecit*', pp. 139–52; C. Carozzi, 'Des Daces aux Normands: Le mythe et l'identification d'un peuple chez Dudon de Saint-Quintin', in C. Carozzi et H. Taviani-Carozzi (ed.), *Peuples de moyen âge: problèmes d'identification* (Aix-en-Provence, 1996), pp. 7–25; L. Shopkow, *History and Community*; E. Albu, *The Normans in their Histories*; H.M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, pp. 32–45; N. Webber, *The Evolution of Norman Identity*; S. Sønnesyn, 'The Rise of the Normans as Ethnopoiesis'.

[378] *De Moribus et actis primorum Normannie ducum, auctore Dudone Sancti Quintini decano*, ed. J. Lair (Caen, 1865), pp. 293–5. 'Ricardum Northmannicae regionis ducem beatum sanctumque' (See also Christiansen's English translation: Dudo of St Quentin, *History of the Normans*, transl. E. Christiansen (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 167–70). For a detailed analysis of Richard's 'sanctification' by Dudo see: V.B. Jordan, 'The Role of Kingship in Tenth-Century Normandy', pp. 58–62.

patrons of the monasteries.[379] William of Poitiers, the author of the *Gesta Guillelmi*, emphasised not only Duke William's but also the whole lineage's piety when he described his main hero as 'vir… dignus pio parente ac piis maioribus (a man, worthy of his pious father and his pious ancestors)'.[380] Taking into consideration the wide dissemination of Dudo's text and of the various versions of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* (as well as knowledge of William of Poitiers' work) in post-conquest England,[381] the image of pious or even saintly Norman dukes had the potential to be taken over by twelfth-century English authors. And this is indeed what happened.

But to what extent did this Norman *topos* influence authors in England? As Rebecca Slitt's recent analysis of William of Malmesbury's reaction to it shows, not everybody was convinced. In his *Gesta Regum Anglorum* William turned Duke William Longsword (killed in 942) from an innocent martyr into a villain who had been deservedly punished for his perfidy.[382] He was also the first historian to blame Duke Robert for poisoning his brother Richard III, thus presenting Robert's later pilgrimage to Jerusalem as a pious deed performed for a very good reason.[383] At the same time, William of Malmesbury is still positive enough towards Richard I and Richard II. The latter is especially praised for his achievement in *Dei rebus* and compared to a monk or hermit; although even at this point William cannot abstain from introducing ambivalence, noting that Richard's reputation seriously suffered from his brother Robert's misuse of the promotion to the archbishopric of

[379] The *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, i, pp. 130–4; ii, pp. 6, 38–40, 44–8, 78–84.
[380] William of Poitiers, *Gesta Guillelmi,* p. 80.
[381] G.C. Huisman, 'Notes on the Manuscript Tradition of Dudo of St Quentin's Gesta Normannorum', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, VI (1983), pp. 122–35; *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, i, pp. xcv–cxxi. On the influence of Dusdo see also: B. Pohl, *Dudo of St Quentin's Historia Normannorum: Tradition, Innovation and Memory* (Woodbridge, 2015).
[382] R.L. Slitt, 'The two deaths of William Longsword: Wace, William of Malmesbury, and the Norman Past', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 35 (2012), pp. 193–208. See: William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, II.145, pp. 232–4.
[383] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, II.178, p. 308.

Rouen.[384] William of Malmesbury's meticulous and sometimes non-flattering attention to the dukes of the Normans represents, however, an exception rather than the rule. Apart from the evidently different and more complex case of William the Conqueror, there was a tendency towards the, more or less, neutral and terse depiction of the Norman dukes in twelfth-century English historical works. They were certainly considered relevant: the dates of the beginnings of their rule and of their deaths were noted by many chroniclers; the dukes' names were also mentioned in relation to King Ethelred's marriage to Emma and the fate of their offspring.[385] But the majority of the authors were not interested in the dukes' piety: at best they noted that Duke Robert died on pilgrimage.

There were, however, exceptions to this dominant neutrality: a few twelfth-century authors did make something of the pious-dukes cliché pioneered by Norman historians and hagiographers. One may, for example, list such works as the *Brevis Relatio* (1114–1120), a short chronicle whose author, a monk of Battle, retold a number of stories exemplifying the dukes' piety;[386] the *Quadripartitus* whose compiler called William the Conqueror Henry I's 'blessed father (beatus pater)';[387] the *Warenne (Hyde) Chronicle*, which begins with Duke Robert's pilgrimage to Jerusalem, an event twice described as devotionally motivated;[388] and the *Annals of St Neots*, whose compiler added a lengthy vision of Rollo to the standard

[384] Ibid., i, II.178, pp. 304–6.
[385] See, for instance: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, MS F*, pp. 71, 79–80, 89, 96–97, 106, 110, 112, 114, 116; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, MS E*, ed. S. Irvine (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 50, 55, 62, 64, 75–77; Eadmer, *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, ed. M. Rule (London, 1884), pp. 5–6; The *Chronicle* of John of Worcester, ed. R.R. Darlington and P. McGurk, transl. J. Bray and P. McGurk (3 vols., Oxford, 1995), ii, pp. 306, 396, 372, 474, 508, 522; *Symeonis monachi opera omnia*, ed. Th. Arnold (2 vols., London, 1882–5), ii, pp. 111, 120–1, 125, 136, 156, 158; Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, pp. 314, 328, 338, 344, 352, 364, 366.
[386] The *Brevis Relatio de Guillelmo nobilissimo comite Normannorum*, Written by a Monk of Battle Abbey, ed. E.M.C. van Houts (Cambridge, 1997). Another later twelfth-century chronicler from Battle described William the Conqueror as the *piissimus dux* (*The Chronicle of Battle Abbey*, ed. and transl. E. Searle (Oxford, 1980), p. 32).
[387] *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, p. 535.
[388] *The Warenne (Hyde) Chronicle*, ed. and transl. E.M.C. van Houts and R.C. Love (Oxford, 2013), pp. 2–4.

entry on his appearance in Neustria in 876, foreseeing his baptism and transformation into a model Christian prince.[389] There also was a separate thread of tradition formed by four consecutive texts in which Norman ducal piety played a prominent role. The first part of this chapter is devoted to these four texts.

The earliest work in England that made use of the image of a pious Norman duke was the *Vita S. Margaretae Scotorum Reginae* (1104–7), ascribed to Turgot, prior of Durham and later bishop of St Andrews.[390] The passage which interests us here is the genealogical section of the *Life*.[391] Notably, the discussion of the queen's noble parentage is built around the figure of Edward the Confessor, rather than of Margaret herself. This is achieved through a narrative trick: the author mentions the queen's grandfather King Edmund Ironside, but then, prior to proceeding backwards to Edmund's ancestors, switches his attention to the king's half-brother Edward the Confessor. This should be explained by the intention not only to praise Margaret's origins in the English royal kin, but also to include Norman genealogy. Obviously, it would have been impossible to bring it in while concentrating solely on Margaret, who was not straightforwardly connected with the Norman ducal stock. Most significantly, the shift of emphasis allowed the author to imagine

[389] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition, The Annals of St Neots with Vita Prima Sancti Neoti*, vol. 17, ed. D. Dumville and M. Lapidge (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 73–5.

[390] 'Vita S. Margaretae Scotorum Reginae', in *Symeonis Dunelmensis Opera et Collectanea*, ed. J.H. Hinde (London, 1868), i, app. III, pp. 234–254. Lois Huneycutt's English translation of the Life is published as an appendix to her book on Queen Matilda. See: L.L. Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship* (Woodbridge, 2003), app. II, pp. 161–178. Turgot's authorship of the text seems plausible enough. In the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography's article on Turgot, Robert Bartlett states that 'doubts about the attribution of the work… are groundless'. See: http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27831 (accessed 5 February 2012). Julian Harrison's opinion is less strong: 'Although Turgot remains the most plausible candidate, judgment on the authorship of this *Life* will be reserved for the time being, since this is a complex issue in its own right' (J. Harrison, 'The Mortuary Roll of Turgot of Durham (d. 1115)', *Scriptorium*, 58 (2004), pp. 67–83, at p. 68).

[391] Historicity of the genealogical section is noteworthy, since the text as whole is more concerned with a normative model of pious queenship than with the facts of Margaret's life and career. For more detail on the character of the source see L.L. Huneycutt, 'The Idea of the Perfect Princess: The *Life of St Margaret* in the Reign of Matilda II (1100–1118)', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 12 (1990), pp. 81–98.

the unification of English and Norman lineages in Edward the Confessor, thus conceiving an important idea elaborated later in the twelfth century. Describing Edward as the most pious and gentle king, *pater patriae* and another Solomon, Turgot states that the king's piety was not a miracle, for he acquired his virtuous character from his not only most noble but also most religious grandfathers: Edgar, king of the English, and Richard, duke of the Normans.[392] While Edgar is praised briefly through the reference to St Dunstan's prophecy (at the day of the king's birth the archbishop heard the Angels promising peace and joy to the church of the English),[393] the discussion of Richard is more detailed. Turgot compares the duke to David and recounts how Richard built the monastery of Fécamp, where he, although dressed in secular clothes, acted as a monk and was accustomed to serving meat and drink during meals. To those who would like to know more about the duke's magnificence and his works of virtue, Turgot suggests reading the *Gesta Normannorum* (a detail interesting in its own right as a very rare example of a direct reference to a Norman historical text by a twelfth-century English author).[394]

[392] Vita S. Margaretae Scotorum Reginae, p. 237. '...Piissimus ille atque mansuetissimus fuerat Edwardus, qui se patrem patriae exhibuerat; et alter quodammodo Salomon, id est pacificus, magis pace quam armis regnum protexerat... Nec mirum: nam sicut a majoribus gloriam dignitatis, ita vitam quoque honestatis quodam quasi haereditario jure est assecutus: Rege Anglorum Edgaro, et Comite Normannorum Ricardo, avis, non solum nobilissimis, sed etiam religiosissimis, progenitus'.

[393] 'Sit pax, sit magna Anglorum ecclesiae laetitia, quamdiu puer natus regnum tenuerit, et Dunstanus mortalis vitae viam concurrerit'. Interestingly, Turgot used the version of St Dunstan's prophecy from Osbern of Canterbury's Life of the Archbishop (*Memorials of St Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. W. Stubbs (London, 1874), pp. 69–161, at 93), while the majority of twelfth-century authors preferred the initial variant of the phrase in Adelard of Ghent's text (1005–12). 'Pax Anglorum ecclesiae exorti nunc pueri et Dunstani nostri tempore' (*Memorials of St Dunstan*, pp. 53–68, at p. 56). With or without minor variations, this prophecy (invented by Adelard) was quoted by Eadmer, William of Malmesbury, John of Worcester, the author of the *Historia Regum* (probably Symeon of Durham), Aelred of Rievaulx, etc. Another rather curious detail is Turgot's omission of the possessive pronoun 'noster,' which is attached to Dunstan by both Adelard and Osbern. It looks as if Turgot perceived 'noster' as referring to the community of Canterbury (and not, for instance, to the Church of the English or to the people), and deemed it inappropriate for an author who did not belong to Canterbury.

[394] Vita S. Margaretae Scotorum Reginae, p. 237. There was a manuscript containing one version of the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* in the library of Durham cathedral (*Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, vol. I, xcviii; British Library, MS Harley 491, ff. 3r – 46v; listed as 'Liber de gestis Normannorum' in a mid twelfth-century Durham library catalogue (*Catalogi Veteres Librorum Ecclesiae Cathedralis Dunelm*. (London, 1838), pp. 1–10, at p. 3)). However, it is not evident whether Turgot meant this particular text or not. He might instead have been

A crucial issue here is the ideology behind Turgot's depiction of Margaret's (or rather Edward's) genealogy. As the work was dedicated to Henry I's wife Matilda, a daughter of Queen Margaret,[395] we are dealing with the difficult question of whether this was a case of royal patronage (or even commission) or the author's own initiative. Was Turgot reflecting royal propaganda which could have portrayed the marriage between King Henry I and Matilda as the unification of two lineages and two peoples, the Normans and the English? Apart from retrospective thinking (which was already going on in the twelfth century),[396] it is not obvious whether there was any conscious harmonizing 'dynastic' policy at the time. Richard Southern argued that at least initially the marriage to Matilda was not conceived by Henry to attract the English.[397] Matilda's descent from the English royal lineage is emphasized in several near-contemporary writings: *ASC* E, Eadmer of Canterbury, William of

referring to Dudo of St Quentin's book (originally entitled *Gesta Normannorum*), where one does find a highly rhetorical eulogy of Richard I's piety and even sanctity. It is interesting that the most vivid detail in Turgot's depiction of Richard, the duke acting as waiter to the Fécamp monks, is absent from both Dudo's work and William of Jumièges' *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*. Even if the source of this episode is uncertain, there are some curious parallels. In the *Brevis Relatio* there is a passage on Duke Richard II's participation in a meal at Fécamp. After the Holy Mass he and his two sons Richard and Robert went to the monks' refectory, where the duke's sons 'carried the dishes from kitchen window to their father, who personally set the first course before the abbot and then before all other monks' (The *Brevis Relatio de Guillelmo nobilissimo comite Normannorum*, pp. 46–7). The *Brevis Relatio* is of course later than the *Life* of St Margaret. Moreover, this work ascribes the waiting role not to Richard I, but to Richard II. But it is still significant that stories of this kind, praising Norman dukes' piety and humility, were circulating in early twelfth-century England. One of the possible sources of these pious political anecdotes is the *Libellus de revelatione, aedificatione et auctoritate Fiscannensis monasterii*, a history of Fécamp written in the monastery itself in the late eleventh century. In this, Duke Richard II also serves as a waiter to Abbot William of Volpiano and his monks whom he has invited to reform Fécamp (Libellus de revelatione, aedificatione et auctoritate Fiscannensis monasterii, in *PL*, vol. 151, cols. 699–724, at col. 721). Although none of the surviving manuscripts of the *libellus* has an English provenance, we cannot rule out the possibility that this text was known in England as a result of the intensive contacts between English and Norman religious institutions after 1066. An even more likely source for both Turgot and the author of the *Brevis Relatio* is oral tradition, transmitted through the same Anglo-Norman ecclesiastical connections. One can easily imagine that the continental clergymen who arrived in England were retelling different stories of Norman dukes' piety and religious patronage, which originated from their home communities in the duchy.

[395] Vita S. Margaretae Scotorum Reginae, p. 234.

[396] See, for example: Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium*, p. 436. 'Henry… by arranging marriages between them for both parties… federated the two peoples in firm amity'.

[397] R.W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and his Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought, 1059–c. 1130* (Cambridge, 1966), p. 188.

Malmesbury and Orderic Vitalis.[398] It is, however, instructive to note that all these authors had more or less clear 'English' agendas and sympathies. An ethnic dimension is also brought into the politics of the royal marriage in William of Malmesbury's famous claim that the Norman barons who supported Duke Robert against Henry I openly insulted the king 'calling him Godric and his consort Godgifu'.[399] We might suppose that some sort of propaganda, which could employ national rhetoric, surrounded the marriage of Henry I with Matilda.[400] At the minimum, it was possible for slightly later writers to see it from that perspective. It is also noteworthy that Henry I's struggle for Normandy against his brother Robert was going on around the time the *Life* was composed. Both these contexts make the author of the *Life*'s attempt to emphasize at a fairly early date the unification of the two pious lineages and to push forward a positive and reconciliatory view of both English and Norman royal/ducal families, interesting, at the very least.[401]

A passage in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum* shows that such a vision could have taken hold at the time. Discussing the fate of Henry I's only legitimate son William who died in the White Ship disaster in 1120, the chronicler claims that through William 'it was supposed King Edward's prophecy was to be fulfilled: the hope of England, it was thought, once cut down like a tree, was in the person of that young prince again to

[398] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition, MS E,* 110 ([Matilda], 'Malcolmes cynges dohter of Scotlande & *Margareta þære goda cwæne Eadwardes cynges magan. & of þan rihtan Ænglalandes kynekynne')*; Eadmer, *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, p. 121 ('Matildis filia Malchomi… et Margaritae, quae scitur exorta de semine regum Anglorum'); William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, pp. 714–6 ([Matilda] 'licet genere sullimis utpote regis Eduardi ex fratre Edmundo abneptis'); The *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis, v, p. 298 (Matilda was a daughter of Malcolm and Margaret 'cuius origo de stripe Elfridi regis filii Egberti regis processit').

[399] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, p. 716.

[400] C. Warren Hollister, *Henry I*, ed. and completed A. Clark Frost (New Haven, 2001), pp. 126–30; J.A. Green, *Henry I: King of England and Duke of Normandy* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 53–8.

[401] There is no evidence to suggest why Turgot could have been personally interested in the promotion of this particular ideology. The issue is complicated by the absence of the crystal-clear identification of authorship. If Turgot was the author of the *Life*, it is curious that he was not biased against the Normans after his own misfortunes following 1066 (described in the *Historia Regum*). See: *Symeonis monachi opera omnia*, ii, pp. 202–5.

blossom and bear fruit'.[402] Even considering William of Malmesbury's claims about Queen Matilda's role as an instigator of his historical project, we can only guess whether this retrospective representation of Prince William reflects a genuine ideological position of the royal court or is merely another of the historian's idiosyncratic ideas.[403] However, we can assume that the origins of this image lay in the genealogical model reconciling and uniting English and Norman lineages constructed or simply witnessed for the first time in Turgot's *Life* of Margaret.

Osbert of Clare was another twelfth-century author who used the image of pious Norman dukes and the idea of the unification of the English and Norman lineages in his *Life* of Edward the Confessor (finished by 1138). Was he aware of Turgot's *Life* or not? On the one hand, Osbert's representation of Edward the Confessor's lineage, with an emphasis on the dual origin from pious English kings and Norman dukes, strikes one as conceptually almost identical to Turgot's passage on the parentage of St Margaret (which is in fact the chapter on Edward the Confessor's genealogy, as has been shown above). On the other hand, there are no clear textual links and explicit borrowings. Thus we can only speculate that Osbert might well have had direct knowledge of the *Life* of St Margaret. Besides some evidence of a relatively wide dissemination of Turgot's *Life*,[404] one may take into

[402] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, V.419, p. 758. See also Kirsten Fenton's discussion of William's representation of the marriage between Henry and Matilda in the context of identity and dynastic issues: K.A. Fenton, *Gender, Nation and Conquest in the Works of William of Malmesbury* (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 123–8.

[403] Thus it seems that there is no evidence to claim (*pace* C. Warren Hollister, 'The Anglo-Norman Succession Debate of 1126: Prelude to Stephen's Anarchy', *Journal of Medieval History*, 1 (1975), pp. 19–41, at p. 22; and L.L. Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland,* p. 77) that Prince William was perceived by King Henry and/or 'throughout the kingdom' as the fulfillment of Edward's prophecy. It is also doubtful that the green tree prophecy was widely known before it was popularised by William of Malmesbury, Osbert of Clare and Aelred.

[404] The general picture of the dissemination of Turgot's text might provide circumstantial evidence for answering this question. Turgot's original work is known through British Library, MS. Cotton Tiberius D.III, ff. 179v-186r (composed in 1180s; see: J. Harrison, 'The Mortuary Roll of Turgot of Durham (d. 1115)', p. 68), and the Bollandists' printed version derived from a now lost manuscript at the Cistercian abbey of Vaucelles. Madrid, Biblioteca del Palacio Real, MS. II 2097, ff. 1v-17v., compiled at Dunfermline Abbey before 1488, is a massively interpolated version which has been recently analysed and dated to the mid thirteenth century by A.

consideration that its dedicatee Queen Matilda had close connections with Westminster, Osbert's monastery.[405] It would be reasonable if a hagiographical book dedicated to and probably used by the queen who was a patroness of Westminster (and who was also buried there) was known in the abbey. Furthermore, the substance and structure of the genealogical sections of both texts are so close to each other that it is tempting to suppose that the earlier author directly influenced the later one.

Osbert emphasises the origin of Edward from the line of 'the ancient kings of the English' ('ex antiquis Anglorum regibus'), as well as his dual parentage. As a son of Ethelred and Emma, a daughter of Richard duke of the Normans, the king acquired nobility of blood from both sides.[406] Then Osbert praises the English line: Edgar (the first to obtain the monarchy among kings of the English), his son Edward the Martyr (innocently killed and crowned in the heavens), Ethelred. It is important that Osbert also included a eulogy for female members of the royal lineage. He exalts two saints: Edith, a daughter of Edgar, and Eadburh, an aunt of the same king.[407] Osbert ascribes the origins of Edward the Confessor's

Taylor, 'Historical writing in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scotland: The Dunfermline compilation', *Historical Research*, 83 (2010), pp. 228–252. In spite of the fact that only two manuscripts survive, there is some evidence for the wider dissemination of the book in the twelfth century. It is listed in the mid twelfth-century Durham library catalogue as the 'Vita Margaretae Reginae' (*Catalogi Veteres Librorum Ecclesiae Cathedralis Dunelm*., p. 5). It was certainly known to William of Malmesbury, whose description of Margaret looks very much like a brief summary of the *Life*. William lists the same details and, significantly, numbers illustrating the queen's piety (William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, p. 554). The *Life* might have been the source for John of Worcester's relatively lengthy account of Margaret's death, even though some of the details are different (The *Chronicle* of John of Worcester, iii, p. 66). Aelred of Rievaulx also probably knew Turgot's work, which he mentions in the *Genealogia Regum Anglorum* as a book showing the praiseworthy life and precious death of Margaret (Aelred of Rievaulx, Genealogia Regum Anglorum, in *PL*, vol. 195, cols. 711–737, at col. 735). Finally, in his version of *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, Robert of Torigni refers twice to the *Life* of Margaret (whom he confuses with Matilda), by which he presumably means Turgot's text (*Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, ii, pp. 216, 240–242). Taken together these random testimonies suggest that the *Life*, though written for Queen Matilda, was conceived with an eye to achieving a wider audience and some publicity.

[405] William of Malmesbury claimed that Matilda left the court and spent many years at Westminster (William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, p. 756).

[406] La Vie de S. Édouard le Confesseur par Osbert de Clare, ed. M. Bloch, *Analecta Bollandiana*, 41 (1923), pp. 5–131, at p. 69.

[407] Osbert had a special interest in Eadburh and wrote her *Life*: The Life of St Edburga of Winchester by Osbert of Clare, Prior of Wesminster, in S.J. Ridyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 253–308.

maternal kin as being not only in the dukes of the Normans but also in the kings of the French.[408] In contrast to Turgot, he concentrates on dukes Richard II and Robert rather than on Richard I. Richard is described as more of an anchorite than a prince, more of a monk than a duke.[409] The foundation of Fécamp by Richard is noted too, thus forming a parallel to the description of Edgar as the 'founder of monasteries'. The main illustration of Robert's piety is his abandonment of the principality for the sake of pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre and his subsequent death in Nicaea. Basically we see the same model as in the *Life* of Margaret, but not without substantial changes in detail. If there was no direct influence of Turgot over Osbert, this would be a remarkable affinity in the authors' constructions of the images of English and Norman lines.

The aspect that makes Osbert's attempt to represent the Norman dukes positively in the genealogical section of the *Life* even more curious is his negative view of the Norman Conquest as reflected in the recounting of the green tree prophecy. He repeated the pessimistic understanding of Edward's ante-mortem vision, mourned the tragedy of 1066, and noted that even 'today' there were no kings, dukes, and bishops of English origin.[410] However, Osbert's aspiration for the promotion of the cult of Edward required the support of the ruling monarch.[411] It is instructive that Osbert resorted to the argument of the genealogical connection between Edward the Confessor and the Norman dukes in his letter to King Stephen's brother Henry, bishop of Winchester. The letter aimed to make Henry of

[408] La Vie de S. Édouard le Confesseur par Osbert de Clare, p. 69.
[409] '…Qui magis in occulto circumferebat anachoritam quam principem, monachum potius exprimebat quam ducem'. This characterisation is likely to have been borrowed from William of Malmesbury, who states that Richard II 'was as devoted to prayer and abstinence as any monk (monachum) or hermit (heremitam)' (William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, pp. 304–306).
[410] La Vie de S. Édouard le Confesseur par Osbert de Clare, pp. 106–9. Cf. *The Life of King Edward the Confessor who Rests at Westminster*, ed. F. Barlow (Oxford, 1992), pp. 116–22; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, pp. 414–416.
[411] It is relevant that the contemporaries perceived Stephen as a king from 'the Norman line'. See, for instance: The *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis, vi, p. 454.

Blois support a petition to the pope for the canonization of King Edward. Trying to persuade Henry to back the request, Osbert noted that the bishop's grandfather King William, the Conqueror of England, was born from Robert, the duke of the Normans, who died *pro Christo* on pilgrimage and whose aunt, the illustrious Queen Emma, was the mother of Edward the Confessor.[412] The same genealogical argument was used in the letter to the pope written by Osbert in the name of King Stephen, in which Edward the Confessor was represented as both one of 'the saintly kings of the English' and a relative of the Norman dukes.[413]

At first glance, it seems problematic for King Stephen, or somebody looking for his support, to use the image of saintly English kings or the idea of Edward the Confessor's dual origin, since it was Empress Matilda who could have reasonably appealed to her direct descent from the English royal lineage. But this was not the case. The idea was not exploited in Matilda's 'official propaganda', even though William of Malmesbury (a partisan of the empress's cause) did resort to it in his *Historia Novella* (c. 1142). In William's version, Henry I, binding the nobles and prelates of England on oath to accept Matilda if he died without a male heir, stressed that on Matilda's mother's side the royal lineage went back for many centuries and that from Ecgberht up to Edward who lies in Westminster 'the line of that same royal blood never failed… in succession to the monarchy'.[414] This episode as a whole again poses the question of the complex interrelations between the idiosyncratic ideological statements of the intellectuals and the dominant discourses of political practice. It also demonstrates that the application of national rhetoric to genealogical ideology was far from

[412] The *Letters* of Osbert of Clare, Prior of Westminster, ed. E.W. Williamson (Oxford, 1929), p. 84.
[413] Ibid., p. 86. Interestingly, Robert's pilgrimage and pious death in Nicaea were not mentioned.
[414] William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, ed. E. King, trans. K.R. Potter (Oxford, 1998), pp. 6–8.

straightforward at the time, and that the logic of 'antecessorial' continuity could be no less persuasive than that of direct kinship and familial succession.

When Aelred of Rievaulx wrote his *Life* of Edward the Confessor after the official canonisation in 1161, the distance from 1066 and the arrival of Henry II at the English throne made the political and ideological context quite different from that obtaining in the times of Turgot and Osbert. Aelred of Rievaulx knew Turgot's *Life* of St Margaret and, obviously, Osbert's *Life* of Edward, which was the main source for his own version. Aelred's genealogy of Edward is based on a corresponding passage in Osbert's text. However, there are some changes. First, Aelred's representation of holy lineages goes further back in the past and begins with King Alfred who was consecrated and anointed king in Rome by Pope Leo. Second, Dunstan's vision and singing angels are mentioned in connection with Edgar (it might be of interest that in Aelred's wording, angels are promising peace to England, not to the Church of the English). Third, Edward the Martyr is omitted. Fourth, Aelred removes Osbert's section on Edith and Eadburh, thus eliminating female saints from his vision of the glorious English royal lineage. This is in complete accordance with Aelred's gender perceptions and textual strategies as realised in his *Genealogia Regum Anglorum*, where the role of women is reduced to purely maternal and matrimonial functions.[415] Fifth, a curious adjective is used for King Ethelred. The author calls him 'rex strenuissimus' (the most vigorous king) which sounds like a piece of bitter satire, especially in the context of the king's conventionally bad reputation at the time.[416] It might be a reference to William of

[415] Aelred of Rievaulx, Genealogia Regum Anglorum, *passim*. For more detail, see: E. Freeman, *Narratives of a New Order*, pp. 70–87.
[416] For more detail, see: S. Keynes, 'The Declining Reputation of King Æthelred the Unready', in D. Hill (ed.), *Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 227–53.

Malmesbury's ironic description of Ethelred, who was 'active (strenuus) and well-built for slumber' and always 'lay yawning'.[417]

These are minor changes, but two further points are more important. Aelred coined the phrase which raised the rhetoric from praising the piety and nobility of the kings of the English and of the Norman dukes to glorifying the sanctity of the two lineages: 'King Aethelred took as his wife Emma, daughter of the noblest duke of the Normans, Richard, so that from the dual sanctity of the two stocks an even holier child might be produced'.[418] Aelred also seriously shortened Osbert's praise of Richard and Robert. All details of the dukes' piety are compressed into one general phrase about their praiseworthy life and precious death.[419]

Notably, in his earlier *Genealogia Regum Anglorum* (1153–1154) Aelred did not exploit the potential of the idea of the unification of English and Norman lineages. In that work he exclusively concentrated on the English parentage of Henry (as well as his connection with St Margaret and the Kings of Scotland). Aelred may not have been very comfortable with the necessity of integrating the Norman lineage into English history, trying instead to impose an English identification on Henry. However, the focus on Edward the Confessor and the existing tradition of representing the saintly king as an heir of two pious lineages gave him an opportunity in the later work to develop the idea of the unification more fully. It can be found not only in the section on the genealogy of Edward but, in a much more explicit way, in Aelred's famous reworking of the green tree prophecy story. As it would be tedious to recount it again here, it is sufficient to note the undisguised

[417] William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum Anglorum, i, p. 272.
[418] Aelred of Rievaulx, Vita S. Edwardi Regis et Confessoris, col. 741. '...Ethelredus Emmam Richardi nobilissimi ducis Normannici filiam duxit uxorem, ut ex duplicata utriusque generis sanctitate soboles sanctior crearetur'.
[419] Ibid. '...Laudabilis eorum vita et mors nihilominus pretiosa'.

ideological character of Aelred's reinterpretation of the prophecy as positively fulfilled in the marriage of Henry I and Matilda, the birth of Empress Matilda and Henry II's ascent to the English throne.[420] The unification of the English and the Normans under and, literally, in Henry II (the mixture of genealogical and national thinking typical for medieval perceptions) was foreshadowed by a pious story of the unification of two holy lineages in the figure of Edward the Confessor. The propagandist nature of Aelred's representation of both Edward and Henry is already absolutely clear in the prologue to the *Life*, dedicated to King Henry. Relying on a biblical image, the author claims that with Henry as 'the cornerstone, the two walls of the English and Norman peoples have met'.[421] The same idea is elaborated in the explanation of the above-mentioned green tree prophecy later in the text.[422] However, Aelred's tendency to emphasise English rather than Norman parentage is quite visible in this passage. Once again we are dealing with an intellectual's attempt to promote a particular vision of royal genealogy and identity, reconciling an author's own ideology with his understanding of royal interests. The same model is applicable to another work which contains discussion of the English and Norman genealogies of Edward – the Anglo-Norman translation of Aelred's *Life* by the nun of Barking.

The accretion of tradition in combination with rhetorical intensification, which were already visible in Aelred's book (for example, he first used the word *sanctitas* in a reference to the English and Norman lineages), culminated in the nun of Barking's Anglo-Norman *Life* of Edward (probably written before 1170–1173/4). It is instructive that the genealogical section of the nun's work contains more than an average number of alterations and additions to Aelred's Latin text. The most important change is the explicit placement of the

[420] For a detailed analysis see: I. Short, '*Tam Angli quam Franci*', pp. 153–75, at pp. 170–2.
[421] Aelred of Rievaulx, Vita S. Edwardi Regis et Confessoris, cols. 738–9.
[422] Ibid., col. 774.

ruling monarch, Henry II, in the centre of the discussion of Edward's dual genealogy. Aelred did tie Henry II in with Edward, but he did not refer to the former in the genealogical chapter of his *Life*. Other variations deserve attention. The nun of Barking starts with Alfred (though she does not mention the anointment in Rome) who 'reigned in this country in the days of good Englishmen'.[423] Predictably, the key figure in the English lineage is Edgar. The nun writes that he surpassed his predecessors not only in goodness and glory but also in 'great sanctity (de grant sainteé)'.[424] Such ease with the word 'sanctity' seems to be typical of her style. The praise of Edgar through St Dunstan's singing angels is present in the nun's text, but with some interesting details. First, she does not mention Dunstan; second, she presents it as a pun: Angels sang on earth 'Joy be to the Angles, peace be to land'.[425] There is the classical wordplay *Angeli*/*Angli*, as well as, the usage of two different meanings of *terre*. The nun understands the prophecy as relating to the English and England (the former had joy and the latter peace 'for as long as [Edgar] held the kingdom'), rather than to the Church of the English.

The nun's handling of the idea of the unification of two lineages reveals substantial differences from Aelred and the earlier authors. Her version gives much more attention to the dukes of the Normans; apart from a reference to the sanctity of Edgar there is no praise of the English kings' holiness or even piety. The dukes' sanctity, together with their valour and virtue, is stated to be 'now known to everybody'.[426] The choice of the present tense and use of the word 'ore' already show the current relevance of the dukes' sanctity, and the next sentence explicitly demonstrates its presence in 'contemporary' England. 'England

[423] *La Vie d'Edouard le Confesseur*, p. 111, ll. 69–70.
[424] Ibid., ll. 80.
[425] Ibid., ll. 84–85. 'Unt li angles en terre chanté: Joie aient angle, pais ait terre'.
[426] Ibid., p. 112, ll. 101–104. 'La seinteé de son [Emma's] bon pere, / De sun nevu et de son friere / Et lur force et lur grant vertu / Est ore a tut le mund seü'.

knows this still, for through them her war is ended: by the glorious King Henry, who sprang from this saintly lineage and who has freed England and enriched her Church'.[427] An essential shift of emphasis is evident: the nun reshapes Aelred's text to celebrate the virtues and sanctity of the Norman lineage. Furthermore, in contrast to Aelred, who did his best to represent Henry II as the fruit of the union of two stocks and two peoples, in the nun's narrative the king is tied predominantly to the Norman lineage (which also gets all the glory of being a saintly one).

An especially vivid sign of the nun's Norman slant is the inclusion of William I ('Gillame li franz bastarz') who is absent from Turgot's, Osbert's, and Aelred's lists of pious Norman dukes. The striking claim for William's saintly death ('sainte mort') even makes one suspect possible irony – a reading which is, however, difficult to reconcile with the meaning of the whole passage, as well as with the generally straightforward style of the author's writing.[428] The nun also might have been deliberately ambiguous at the point where her appraisal of the dukes' piety rises to a crescendo in the reference to their good lives and holy deaths, leaving the readers to decide whether to take or reject this claim.[429] Let us consider two other quotations. One comes from the nun's text; she applies to Edward the Confessor the following phrase: 'the praiseworthy life he has led, is fulfilled by holy death (Et la sue loable vie / Est par sainte mort acomplie)'.[430] The verbal parallel to the nun's

[427] Ibid., ll. 105–110.
[428] Even if Orderic Vitalis's colourful story of the unpleasant postmortem fate of William the Conqueror's body was not widely known (The *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis, iv, pp. 100–8), a more conventional image of William's death and burial also does not seem to favour an application of the nun's 'sainte mort' to describe them.
[429] This would not be surprising after all we now know about the use of ambivalence and ambiguity by twelfth-century authors, especially in the communication with their royal patrons. See, for instance, David Rollo's splendid study: *Historical Fabrication, Ethnic Fable and French Romance*. See also Paul Hayward's recent article: 'The Importance of Being Ambiguous: Innuendo and Legerdemain in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum* and *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*', *Anglo-Norman Studies,* 33 (2011), pp. 75–102.
[430] *La Vie d'Edouard le Confesseur*, p. 123, ll. 465–466.

appraisal of the Norman dukes' lives and deaths is evident, and it is noteworthy that the author used the same formula for the dukes as for the officially canonised king. The second quotation, however, demonstrates that this does not necessarily suppose a literal claim for sanctity. In the *Chronicle of the dukes of Normandy*, Benoît wishes for his patron King Henry II that 'his end may be most holy and good (saintisme e buenne seit sa fins)'.[431] Obviously Benoît did not perceive Henry II as a saint. Rather, it was perfectly possible to speak of a ruler (even if still alive) in such pseudo-hagiographical terms, referring to an ideal of pious Christian prince rather than to any canonically formal sanctity.

The last part of the nun's genealogical section also differs from the original. While Aelred has a neutral phrase on Edward and the composition of his own work, she inserts a clearly ideological statement: King Ethelred acted wisely when he took a wife of such lineage, for his heirs were able to take after her in loving God and doing good.[432] This sounds like a propagandistic intervention, an implicit polemic against the idea of the direct link between Ethelred's marriage with Emma and the awful consequences of the Norman Conquest. This view, presumably fairly popular earlier in the twelfth century, is expressed in the works of influential chroniclers William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon. William avoided any direct judgment on this contentious issue in his *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (written for the royal audience); but his attitude emerges in the *Vita Dunstani*: 'To prolong the harm [Aethelred] did so that it affected posterity, he contrived that his successors should lose all England by marrying Emma, daughter of Richard duke of Normandy, the result being that in after years the Normans were able to claim England as of right and bring

[431] *Chronique des Ducs de Normandie par Benoît*, ed. C. Fahlin (4 vols., Uppsala, 1951–1979), ii, p. 288, l. 32067.
[432] Ibid., p. 113, ll. 131–134.

it under their control, something better seen today than put down in writing'.[433] Henry of Huntingdon explicitly stated that the marriage was a part of the God's plan for the extermination of the English for their sins.[434] Thus, the nun's attention to the Norman lineage, muting the English lineage's sanctity (absolutely crucial to Aelred) and exaggerating the Norman dukes' holiness looks both polemical and propagandistic. As always it is more difficult to explain the motives lying behind such ideology. They might be connected with the nun's own political views and historical perceptions or with the traditions of her community;[435] also they might reflect the nun's understanding of Henry's ideological interests. It is equally possible that both factors played their role simultaneously. A wider context deserves attention if we are to understand the relation of this material to other relevant developments in literary and ecclesiastical politics under Henry II.

Henry II and the memory of early Norman dukes

Henry II's pattern of literary patronage clearly reveals an interest in Norman history and genealogy.[436] Henry commissioned two verse histories of the dukes of the Normans; yet

[433] William of Malmesbury, *Saints' Lives: Lives of SS. Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus and Indract*, ed. and transl. M. Winterbottom and R.M. Thomson (Oxford, 2002), pp. 296–7.
[434] Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. 338. From a different perspective Orderic Vitalis wrote that the Normans 'won power in England through Emma, Duke Richard's daughter' (The *Ecclesiastical History* of Orderic Vitalis, vi, p. 168).
[435] Martin Aurell noted that at the time when the nun was most probably writing her *Life* of Edward the abbess was Adela, sister of Eustace fitz John, who was a supporter of Empress Matilda during the civil war. Aurell supposed that the figure of Abbess Adela and more generally Barking's royal connections may partly explain the nun's treatment of Henry II's genealogy. See: M. Aurell, *L'Empire des Plantagenêt 1154–1224* (Paris, 2003), pp. 150–151 (M. Aurell, *The Plantagenet Empire 1154–1224*, transl. D. Crouch (Harlow, 2007), pp. 136–7). It might be worthwhile to mention that William I issued a charter granting Barking his protection and confirming the rights the abbey enjoyed in King Edward's day. See: *Regesta Regum Anglo-Normannorum: the Acta of William I (1066–1086)*, ed. D. Bates (Oxford, 1998), no. 10.
[436] K.M. Broadhurst, 'Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine: Patrons of Literature in French?', pp. 56–9, 67–70. See also: U. Broich, 'Heinrich II. als Patron der Literatur siener Zeit', in W.F. Schirmer und U. Broich (ed.), *Studien zum literarischen Patronat im England des 12. Jahrhunderts* (Köln und Opladen, 1962), po. 25–216, at pp. 64–88, 92–93; S.M. Cingolani, 'Filologia e miti storiografici: Enrico II, la corte plantageneta e la letteratura', *Studi medievali*, 32 (1991), pp. 815–32. The most detailed discussion may be found in a recent book on Henry II and vernacular historiography, C. Urbanski, *Writing History for the King: Henry II and the Politics of Vernacular Historiography* (2013).

was he interested in the dukes' piety? Wace's earlier *Roman de Rou* does not contain any reference to the dukes' sanctity (although Richard I's and Richard II's piety is noted).[437] On the other hand, Benoît is very generous in applying the adjective 'saintly' to the dukes, their lives and their deaths. The author's laudatory rhetoric sometimes exceeds even that of the archetypal eulogy of the Norman dukes in hagiographical categories: Dudo's *Gesta Normannorum*, actually the main source for Benoît's apotheoses of the dukes.[438] Jean-Guy Gouttebroze has argued that Wace's unwillingness to praise the dukes' piety, rooted in the author's views on the prerogatives of ecclesiastical and secular powers, was the main reason for Henry II's dissatisfaction with his work that resulted in the shift of patronage to Benoît.[439] Benoît certainly emphasized his attention to ducal piety and connected it to his intention to please 'good king Henry'.[440] There is a passage that contains Benoît's invective against those who, in contrast to himself, keep silent about Duke Richard's 'haute escience'; whereas 'it is good to talk about [the duke's] belief and love towards the Creator'.[441] In one manuscript of the *Chronique des Ducs de Normandie*, Wace is explicitly blamed by Benoît as somebody who left unmentioned Richard I's piety: '…que sa haute escience tace / Autresi cum fist maistre Wace'.[442] Any assessment of the king's role in the differences between Wace's and Benoît's rhetoric and approach to the depiction of the dukes is doomed to be

[437] Interestingly, Wace does not mention Edward the Confessor's sanctity either, even though he was writing his work exactly when the official canonisation took place (1161).
[438] *Chronique des Ducs de Normandie par Benoît*, i, p. 423, ll. 14627–14638; ii, pp. 194–5, ll. 28728–28792; 342, l. 33979. Benoît's description of Duke William Longsword gives a good impression of his style: 'Li dux, li haut, li pretios, / Li saintismes, li glorios, / Que eisi fu martirié, / Munde, senz vice e senz pechié / Trové e pris en bone veie, / Sai que li angeles en conveie / S'alme en la sainte compaignie / U est Jacob e Jeremie, / Davi e saive Salemon'.
[439] J.-G. Gouttebroze, 'Pourquoi congédier un historiographe, Henry II Plantagenêt et Wace (1155–1174)', *Romania*, 112 (1991), pp. 289–311.
[440] *Chronique des Ducs de Normandie par Benoît*, ii, ll. 28708–28722.
[441] Ibid., ll. 25836–25847.
[442] Quoted from J.-G. Gouttebroze, 'Pourquoi congédier un historiographe', p. 308. The reading is different in the manuscript used by Carin Fahlin in her edition of the poem.

speculative. But some further evidence for Henry's interest in the dukes' pious memory does exist.

In 1162 Dukes Richard I and Richard II were exhumed from their tombs in Fécamp (Normandy) and placed behind the main altar of the Holy Trinity in the abbey church. As Robert of Torigni attests, the translation was conducted in the presence of King Henry II and four Norman bishops.[443] The ceremony was also described by Wace, Benoît and the author of the thirteenth-century French *History* of Fécamp and documented in three charters. While Robert's, Wace's and Benoît's reports are laconic, their existence is still impressive in comparison with the silence of contemporary narratives on the translation of Edward the Confessor in Westminster in 1163. Despite the presence of evidence, the Fécamp translation usually receives only brief attention from modern scholars.[444] The best discussion of the episode can be found in an archaeological article by Sara Jones, who convincingly identified the four twelfth-century reliefs from Fécamp as parts of the new tomb built for the dukes in 1162, reconstructed the ceremony on the basis of available sources and put it into the political context.[445] Jones emphasized the secular meaning of the ritual: the celebration and legitimization of Henry's control over Normandy. But it is tempting to speculate whether there might have been more to it, whether there was a

[443] The Chronicle of Robert of Torigni, Abbot of the Monastery of St. Michael-in-Peril-of-the-Sea, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, iv, pp. 212–3.
[444] See for example: J.C. Holt, 'The End of the Anglo-Norman Realm', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 61 (1975), pp. 223–65, at pp. 244–5; C. Beaune, 'Les ducs, le roi et le saint sang', p. 721; E. Bozoky, 'Le culte des saints et des reliques dans la politique des premiers rois Plantagenêt', in M. Aurell (ed.), *La cour Plantagenêt (1154 – 1204)*, pp. 277–91, at pp. 281–2; N. Vincent, 'The Pilgrimages of the Angevin Kings of England, 1154–1272', in C. Morris and P. Roberts (ed.), *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 12–45, at p. 28; D. Power, 'Henry, Duke of the Normans (1149/50–1189)', in Ch. Harper-Bill and N. Vincent (ed.), *Henry II: New Interpretations* (Woodbridge, 2007), at pp. 85–128, at p. 122.
[445] S.E. Jones, 'The Twelfth-Century Reliefs from Fécamp: New Evidence for Their Dating and Original Purpose', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 138 (1985), pp. 79–88. When I visited Fécamp in July 2012, I was very much disappointed to find out that the sarcophagus is not anymore on display after a theft of one of the reliefs from Holy Trinity church in 2008.

project to canonize the dukes. The ceremony in Fécamp was an episcopal translation: it was conducted by four Norman bishops (Evreux, Lisieux, Bayeux and Avranches) in the presence of papal legate, cardinal priest of SS. Neri e Achille, Henry of Pisa. Even though the pontificate of Alexander III (1159–81) was an important stage in the establishment of the papal control of canonizations, it was still a transitional period and an episcopal translation might still have been perceived as a legitimate way to promote an official cult.[446] It is also notable that the bodies and relics of several martyrs and confessors with an established reputation for sanctity (Flavian, Contest, Sidonius, Afra, Genevieve, and Perpetua) were translated along with the dukes. Finally, Henry II's charter granting peace to all who would attend the ceremony in Fécamp applies the hagiographical term 'elevation' to it ('Concedo quod omnes illi qui venerint apud Fiscannum ad leuand(um) comitem Ricardum habeant meam firmam pacem').[447]

All this evidence is, however, inconclusive and the fact remains that the cult of the dukes never took off. Significantly, the second charter of Henry II related to the translation confirms the grant of the land of Hogues to Fécamp just 'for the honour of the Dukes Richard' ('pro honore comitum Ricardorum') without any hagiographical implications.[448] Even more revealingly, the charter of Cardinal Henry of Pisa that authorized the translation and granted indulgence to pilgrims made a clear distinction between the official saints translated on that date and the dukes who were placed behind the main altar as the founders and special patrons of Fécamp but not as saints; it was the dukes who were

[446] E.W. Kemp, 'Pope Alexander III and the Canonization of Saints', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th Series, 27 (1945), pp. 13–28. On episcopal and papal canonizations before the mid-twelfth century see: E.W. Kemp, *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church* (Oxford, 1948), pp. 36–81. On the evolution of canonization from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries see also: A. Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, transl. J. Birrell (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 22–32.

[447] I am grateful to Nicholas Vincent for sending me this document (as well as another charter referred to in note 75) from his forthcoming edition of Henry II's charters (item 918).

[448] This is item 919 in Vincent's forthcoming edition of Henry II's charters.

supposed to benefit from the prayers of the monks and the proximity to the saints buried at the altar.[449] The thirteenth-century verse history of Fécamp describes the ceremony of the dukes' elevation in splendid detail but still does not call Richard I and Richard II saints, differentiating them from the confessors and martyrs translated on the same day.[450] Lastly, there are no later traces of the cult of the dukes in Fécamp: instructively, the dukes are commemorated in the liturgical books from Fécamp as patrons and, in general, as important figures in the history of the abbey, but again not as saints.[451] Even if there was a project to promote the official veneration of the dukes Richard I and Richard II (or of one of them), nothing came of it in 1162 and the ceremony of the dukes' translation bore a commemorative rather than a canonizational character.[452]

[449] *Neustria Pia*, ed. A. du Monstier (Rouen, 1663), p. 254. The original is Fécamp, Musée de la Bénédictine ms. charte 47.

[450] Histoire de l'Abbaye de Fécamp en vers français du XIII siècle, ed. A. Långfors, in *Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae*, 22 (1927–1928), pp. 1–280, at pp. 221–30. A misinterpretation of one phrase from the poem made some historians believe that the dukes were perceived as holy intercessors at the time. The thirteenth-century author mentioned that the shrine with the dukes' bones was placed so as to always be in front of those singing mass at the main altar; the idea was to make the prayers 'por euz' more efficient (p. 229, ll. 5007–5014). It is evident that the poet meant the prayers *for* the dukes, not the prayers 'by them' (*pace* L. Musset, 'Les sépultres des Souverains normands: Un aspect de l'idéologie du Pouvoir', in *Autour de Pouvoir ducal Normand X – XII siècles, Cahiers des Annales de Normandie*, 17 (1985), pp. 19–44, at p. 33; and C. Beaune, 'Les ducs, le roi et le saint sang', p. 721). This understanding is endorsed by the aforementioned Latin charter of legate Henry of Pisa that refers to the monks' prayers for the dukes ('precibus monachorum facilius impetrare mereantur veniam delictorum,' *Neustria Pia*, p. 254). In fact this document seems to be one of the key sources for the author of the verse history of Fécamp. I am grateful to Jane Bliss and Richard Ingham who advised me on the meaning of the passage from the verse *History* of Fécamp.

[451] *The Ordinal of the Abbey of the Holy Trinity of Fécamp* (Fécamp, Musée de la Bénédictine, Ms 186), ed. D. Chadd (2 vols., London, 1999–2002), ii, pp. 663, 693–5. The translation of two Richards is mentioned in the Fécamp calendar from a missal preserved in an early fifteenth-century manuscript. The wording is revealing: 'translatio ducum *cum* corporibus sanctorum' (ii, pp. 766–7).

[452] In 1171 the relic of Holy Blood was 'found' in Fécamp; thus the monastery hoped for another cult to promote its reputation and attract pilgrims. See: Discours pronouncé à l'assemblée générale de la Société de l'histoire de Normandie, par M.H. Omony, suivi d'une relation inédite de l'invention de précieux sang dans l'abbaye de Fécamp au XII siècle (Rouen, 1913), pp. 10–23; A. Legris, 'Le Précieux Sang de Fécamp', *Revue catholique de Normandie*, 24 (1915), 278–282; O. Kajava, 'Etudes sur deux poèmes français relatifs à l'abbaye de Fécamp', *Annales academiae scientiarum fennicae*, 21 (1928), pp. 21–120; R. Herval, 'En Marge de la légende du Précieux-Sang-Luques-Fécamp-Glastonbury', in *L'Abbaye Bénédictine de Fécamp, ouvrage scientifique du XIIIe centenaire* 658–1958 (4 vols., Fécamp, 1959–1963), pp. 1105–26; C. Beaune, 'Les ducs, le roi et le saint sang', pp. 711–32.

The question about the role of Henry II in the events in Fécamp is also complicated. The near-contemporary accounts of the ceremony provide at least three different views on Henry's involvement in it. The king is not mentioned at all in the *Roman de Rou*; Wace instead pointed out his own presence at the translation ('si que jel vi e jeo i ere') and emphasized that it was the monks who held the dukes very dear ('li moigne en grant chierté les unt').[453] Henry simply participates in the ceremony in Robert de Torigni's chronicle.[454] And, finally, he is directly responsible for the translation in Benoît: '[the dukes] were elevated… by the good king who was a son of Maud, the good empress'.[455] The author of the thirteenth-century verse history of Fécamp made a lot of Henry's emotional reaction at the sight of Richard I's bones and his melodramatic gestures during the ceremony.[456] But these details are fairly typical of all medieval stage rituals, not to mention the fact that they are from a much later source. The author of the poem thought that Henry II was eager to uncover the bodies of the dukes, but he still stated that it was the bishops and legate Henry of Pisa who originally proposed the elevation of the saints and the dukes, and Abbot Henry de Sully (not to be mixed with Abbot Henry de Sully who discovered King Arthur's bones at Glastonbury) who invited the king to Fécamp.[457] There is no way to check the truth of this version but there is a certain plausibility to it: in a manner similar to the story of the canonization of Edward the Confessor, initiated by Westminster but supported by the

[453] Le *Roman de Rou* de Wace, ed. A.J. Holden (3 vols., Paris, 1970–3), i, pt. III, ll. 2241–2246.
[454] The Chronicle of Rober of Torigni, p. 213.
[455] *Chronique des Ducs de Normandie par Benoît*, ii, p. 287, ll. 32056–32061.
[456] Histoire de l'Abbaye de Fécamp en vers français du XIII siècle, pp. 226–9, ll. 4937–5021. S. MacLean, 'Recycling the Franks in Twelfth-Century England: Regino of Prüm, the Monks of Durham, and the Alexandrine Schism', *Speculum*, 87 (2012), pp. 649–81, at p. 669, suggests that the elevation of Charlemagne in Aachen in 1165 (allegedly prompted by Henry II) was based on the translation of Edward the Confessor in Westminster in 1163. It seems that the Fécamp ceremony might have been another source of inspiration for Frederick Barbarossa.
[457] Ibid., pp. 224–5, ll. 4859–4869, 4878–4884.

king,[458] the translation of the saints and the dukes-founders was probably proposed by the monastic community and its abbot (a relative of the king) Henry de Sully, and then used by Henry II to organize a ritual aimed at emphasizing his connection with the Norman ducal lineage and commemorating his important forebears Dukes Richard I and Richard II.[459] Although there is not much evidence to confirm or dispute such interpretation in our case, Judson Emerick's work on the Carolingian reconstruction of Saint-Denis and his assessment of the graves of the Salian emperors at the Speyer cathedral (Speyer II) suggest an interesting parallel to the ceremony at Fécamp. Emerick argues that the key aim of such burials *ad sanctos* in proximity of the high altar was to claim the priest-like pastoral status and the role of the leaders of church and people in salvation.[460] Thus, although the translation in 1162 was clearly not an attempt at official canonization, it may have represented more than a local or even familial commemorative ritual: an episode in the process of re-establishing the symbolic authority of kingship, which does not neatly fit into the distinction between secular and religious spheres.[461]

[458] B.W. Scholz, 'The Canonization of Edward the Confessor', *Speculum*, 36 (1961), pp. 38–60, at pp. 51–60.
[459] Cf. Urbanksi, *Writing History for the King*, pp. 75–6, 189–90. In her discussion of the translation of Richard I and Richard II in 1162 Urbanski floats the idea that 'a contemporary audience may well have recognized' the ceremony as 'the formal recognition of the sanctity of Henry [II]'s ancestors' and suggests that 'the presence of saints (or even quasi-saints) in a lineage constituted a powerful argument for the continued dominance of their descendants' (at p. 190). This ignores the fairly conclusive evidence against the canonization theory discussed above. A reference to 'quasi-saints' also makes the argument unhelpfully.
[460] For a detailed discussion of the Carolingian case, see J.J. Emerick, 'Building *more romano* in Francia in the 3rd quarter of the 8th century: the abbey church of Saint-Denis and its model', in C. Bolgia, R. McKitterick and J. Osborne (ed.), *Rome Across Time and Space: Cultural Transmission and the Exchange of Ideas c.500–1400* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 127–50. See also Emerick's forthcoming article that examines both Saint-Denis and Speyer II in M. S. Bjornlie (ed.), *The Life and Legacy of Constantine*, (to be published by Ashgate in 2015).
[461] As a postscript, I would like to note that an interest in the Norman dukes' piety faded in thirteenth-century and late-medieval England. A couple of examples may be invoked to illustrate this thesis. First, Matthew Paris' Anglo-Norman translation of Aelred's *Life* of Edward the Confessor reveals an indifferent attitude to Norman ducal piety. Matthew retained a reference to the 'glorious lives and precious deaths' of dukes Richard and Robert, but it is clear from an introduction which he added to the original text that his real historical interest lay with the kings of 'the island of the English', whom he classified into two categories: renowned warriors (Arthur, Edmund Ironside and Cnut) and saints, martyrs, and confessors (Oswald, Oswin, Edmund). See: *La Estoire de Seint Aedward le Rei* attributed to Matthew Paris, ed. K.Y. Wallace (London, 1983), p. 1, ll. 1–18. Second, while medieval liturgies of Edward the Confessor often incorporated genealogical sections from both Osbert's and Aelred's lives they cut narration short exactly at the point when examples of Norman ducal piety

What matters even more from the perspective of this thesis's overarching theme is how this material not only serves as another case study of the three-way interplay between hagiography, genealogy and 'ethnicity', but also reflects some of the authors' self-conscious approaches to the construction of the past and national identifications. This latter possibility is, perhaps, most clearly visible in Aelred's interventions, as considered in this chapter. Building on the earlier authors' creative adaptation of the Norman tradition's image of the pious Dukes of Normandy to the hagiographical writing in England, Aelred reinterpreted the notion of the unification of two saintly lineages as the unity between two ethnicised peoples – the English and the Normans. This particular example of the imaginative re-writing of the contested history of the relations between these two peoples was predicated on the lack of a clear boundary between national and genealogical logics in the middle ages (most tellingly, many medieval ethnic origins narratives began from one founding figure establishing at the same time a polity and its ruling line). Even more importantly, this shows that Aelred did not take the existing notions of ethnic distinctions for granted, but, instead, was capable of reinventing both their shape and meaning. In fact, in a discursive act typical for the functioning of 'nationcraft', he made up a new unified 'people', personified in Henry II. This should be counted as one more example that proves the limits of the standard

were to be discussed (*Ordinale Exon.*, ed. J. N. Dalton, Henry Bradshaw Society [HBS] 37–38, 63 and 69 (1909–40), iii, pp. 375–80; *Breviarium ad usum insignis ecclesiae Sarum*, ed. Fr. Procter and Ch. Wordsworth (Cambridge, 1886) iii, pp. 909–14; *The Hereford Breviary*, ed. W.H. Frere, HBS 26, 40 and 46 (1904–15), ii, pp. 370–1). After the loss of Normandy in 1204 hagiographical discourse on the dukes of the Normans vanished from England. Even though casual references to 'saintly' lives and deaths of Norman dukes continued to appear in the (primarily French) literature of later periods (see: N. Cazauran, 'Richard sans peur: un personnage en quête d'auteur', *Travaux de Littérature*, 4 (1991), pp. 21–43), the absence of any wide-scale political interest and, even more importantly, of a local religious community keen to promote the dukes' veneration predetermined that their cult never came into being. See, however: M. de Boüard, 'Y a-t-il eu, au XVI siècle, un projet de beatification de Guillaume le Conquerant?', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 10 (1987), pp. 25–34.

interpretation of the medieval notions of ‘nationhood’ as essentialist and, instead, reveals their dynamic, performative, ‘constructivist’ elements.

Chapter 6: The 'politicisation' of national categories in twelfth-century England

Oliver Zimmer, one of the leading historians of modern nationalism, who has described his theoretical stance as 'qualified modernism',[462] claims in the theoretical introduction to his textbook on European nationalism in 1890–1940 that while national categories existed in the pre-modern world view, they were just 'descriptive terms', devoid of any political meaning and significance.[463] Andreas Wimmer, perhaps the most influential sociologist of ethnic boundaries-making and nationalism of his generation, opens his book on wars, state-formation and ethnic exclusion, with a similar statement: 'Before the age of nationalism set in at the end of the eighteenth century, individuals did not pay much attention to their own ethnic background or that of their rulers'.[464] Why would I then begin with these quotes, which the majority of medievalists researching 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' would disagree with by default? There are three reasons. First, and least significantly, these claims reflect the reproduction of 'modernist' orthodoxy, despite the numerous publications on medieval 'ethnic' and 'national' categories. Wimmer, whose book appeared as recently as 2013, simply repeats the same double dichotomy of 'modernity'/'the age of nationalism' vs. 'pre-modern'/'the age of dynasty', which already formed the axiomatic foundation for Anderson's thesis in *Imagined Communities*.[465] In parentheses, one may note that this is based on a naïve notion of 'dynasty', one that remoulds a simplified picture of the peculiar inter-state system of early-modern Europe as

[462] O. Zimmer, 'Nation, Nationalism and Power in Switzerland, *c.*1760–1900', in *Power and Nation in European History*, p. 334.
[463] Idem, *Nationalism in Europe, 1890–1940* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 15–26.
[464] A. Wimmer, *Waves of War: Nationalism, State-Formation, and Ethnic Exclusion in the Modern World* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 1.
[465] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 1–36, especially pp. 19–22.

the ahistorical reified phenomenon of 'dynasty', allegedly universally defining any pre-modern/pre-nationalist political culture and practice. Second, as I already argued in the introduction, a certain strand in the medievalist historiography of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood', which construes these categories as the taken-for-granted elements of the medieval worldview, seems to reinforce, indirectly, the same idea of medieval uses of 'ethnic' terms as 'descriptive'.

Third, and most importantly, both arguments ('modernist' and 'medievalist') are predicated on the same assumption that 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' can in general be 'neutral' in the first place. As in Wimmer, people allegedly may have 'ethnicity', but 'not pay much attention to it'. The vagueness of the wording (how can one measure 'attention'?) conceals an inevitable objectification: 'ethnicity' is reconfigured as a fact, the property of an individual or a group, without it being always an ideological construction and social practice. This, in my view, returns us to a typical nationalist two-steps vision (yet again confirming my contention that supposedly critical academic theories take nationalism's ontology at face value): in the first instance, 'ethnicity' is a more or less objective element of reality (not necessarily 'biological', but first and foremost, 'cultural'), in the second instance, it may be actualized politically, leading to 'nationalism' or 'ethnic' politics proper. Such an understanding misses the point of 'nationcraft' functioning as ideology, which has to remake the world in its own image before it can become a political project (this distinction is conceptual rather than temporal: in practice, these two elements – ideological and institutional – must go together).

So I am beginning with Zimmer & Wimmer not in order to refute their claims empirically, but to attune us to how the secondary literature in the field of ethnicity and nationalism studies itself works as ideology by naturalizing 'ethnicty'/'nationhood' through

separating ‘descriptive’ and ‘political’ uses of relevant categories. No such conceptual distinction was made explicitly in the middle ages. However, as I have argued throughout this thesis, we can tease out a similar tendency from below the surface of the twelfth-century discourse on ‘nationhood’: at times, our authors sound as if they were treating ethnicising terms as purely descriptive, but on other occasions they are clearly politicising them. How can we make more of this unresolved tension, without artificially making it fit ‘our’ own only too simplified separation of ‘political’ and ‘descriptive’ uses of ‘national’ categories? I shall try to answer this question by, first, focusing on those passages in which twelfth-century authors emphasised ‘ethnic’ identifications of particular individuals, especially the cases, where the fluid character of such identifications is made directly visible. In the second section of the chapter, I shall turn this lens upside down and consider some examples, in which the metaphor of personification is applied to collective entities – countries and, by extension, peoples. In the final third part, I shall examine one case-study that begins to trace the direct links between ‘nationcraft’ and the political-economic organization of the twelfth-century Kingdom of England.

Individual (self)identification: between strategic essentialism and fluidity

A good starting point for this discussion is constituted by those quotations, where twelfth-century authors explicitly stated the importance of ‘ethnic’ affiliation in defining various visions of history. As is very well-known, William of Malmesbury claimed that his mixed Norman and English background gave him an opportunity to describe William the Conqueror objectively, while English and Norman historians could not avoid national slants

in their texts.[466] What is interesting here is the author's recourse to strategic essentialism. William relies on the naturalising objectification of nationhood: it is literally the presence of the blood of both peoples in him ('utriusque gentis sanguinem traho') that guarantees his balanced attitude towards the king, but the English and the Normans cannot escape either their national enmity or their national pride. This is also a very instructive example: a radically essentialist vision of nationhood resurfaces exactly at the point when national categories are ideologically and rhetorically instrumentalized. Clearly, there are many potential ways of thinking about identifications in a post-conquest situation, including in cases of mixed origins. Moreover, we know that people did identify themselves differently in post-Conquest England, some of them in the ways that evidently did not fit into the essentialist model employed by William of Malmesbury: most famously, Lanfranc of Canterbury who described himself as a 'new Englishman' (a case, to which I shall return later). But William relied on the logic of objectified nationhood in order to establish his authority as a historian with a monopoly on the trustworthy account of the past. Of course, for this rhetorical exercise to make sense, it should have been predicated on a wider acceptance of the association between nationhood and political pragmatics. William of Malmesbury expected his readers to believe in the paradigm of nationally motivated clashes of different historical narratives, thus revealing (presumably, not absolutely idiosyncratic) thinking about national categories as by definition ideologically charged, rather than neutral.

Another curious case of a historian insisting on a direct connection between national identification and a vision of the past is found in John of Salisbury's *Historia Pontificalis*.

[466] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, III.Prefatio, p. 424.

Describing the place of his own text in the tradition of Christian historical writing, John mentioned Sigebert of Gembloux's *Chronicle*, which he however criticised for the author's pro-German bias. Sigebert, according to John of Salisbury, 'gave more attention to those events that concerned his Germans (*sui Teutones*)' and 'inserted certain things contrary to the privileges of the Roman Church'.[467] This accusation looks curious, not least because Sigebert (d. 1112) in the beginning of his *Chronicle* explicitly refers to the 'origins of our people, that is of the Kingdom of the Franks' (*origo gentis nostrae, regni scilicet Francorum*).[468] This phrase provides us with a very interesting example of a direct identification between a *gens* and a kingdom, thus once again showing that association between a nation and a polity was not at all alien to medieval notions of 'nationhood'. But so far as John of Salisbury's text is concerned, there seems to be a contradiction between Sigebert's self-identification and John's anti-German attack. It should of course be noted that John read one of the numerous continuations of Sigebert's text (he described it as continuing up to the year 1148) and reacted towards its pro-imperial and anti-papal stance (characteristic of Sigebert's original too). But this, in a sense, makes the example only more interesting. Not only does it demonstrate the logic assuming the ideological relation between national identification and the politics of historical narration, but it also shows that such a connection could be read into a text on the basis of its contents. Being confronted with one of Sigebert's continuators' imperial slant, John of Salisbury made sense of it in terms of 'nationhood'. This is a perfect illustration of the fact that the logic of 'nationhood' was among the explanatory modes available at the time, and, for that matter, was not neutral, but, on the contrary, loaded with political meaning.

[467] John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, ed. and trans. M. Chibnall (London, 1956), p. 3.
[468] Sigebert of Gembloux, *Chronica*, ed. G.H. Pertz (Hannover, 1844), p. 300.

These two cases that I have examined in some detail fit into a more general picture of the habit twelfth-century authors had of mentioning their 'ethnic/national' affiliations. For instance, in *La Vie de saint Nicolas* Wace wrote 'Jo sui *Normanz* s'ai a non Guace' (to incorporate at least one example from a vernacular text).[469] William of Newburgh appealed to the history of 'our people, that is, the English' in the prologue to his chronicle.[470] William is quite instructive in his somewhat self-serving views on the relation between national identification and authorial authority. In his famous attack on Geoffrey of Monmouth, he, on the one hand, powerfully asserts the ultimate truthfulness of English historical narrative as represented by Bede's *History* of the *gens Anglorum*. William goes as far as to claim that it is a sacrilege, a breach of *fas* (Divine law), to doubt Bede's wisdom and truthfulness.[471] On the other hand, his criticism of Geoffrey is very much predicated on emphasising the latter's affiliation with the Britons and what William understood as his attempts to glorify his compatriots and malign the English. Moreover, William's praise of Gildas, again directly linked to his wish to use him as a reliable authority, is built around national categories: Gildas' Britishness is brought to the fore, but thanks to his critical description of the Britons only serves as a confirmation of his trustworthiness.[472] A general assumption here was that normally a historian should and would glorify his 'nation'. Such notions of a national bias as a routine element of historical writing should be put alongside some other authors' claims about the relation between historical texts and the concept of *patria*. Here I can return to William of Malmesbury and recall that he stated that he wrote his *Gesta Regum Anglorum* out of love for his fatherland (among other reasons).[473] Henry of Huntindgon's claim that

[469] *La vie de saint Nicolas par Wace: poème religieux du XIIe siècle*, ed. Einar Ronsjö (Lund, 1942), v, 35.
[470] William of Newburgh, Historia Rerum Anglicarum, i, p. 11.
[471] Ibid., p. 18.
[472] Ibid., p. 11.
[473] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, I.Prologus, p. 14.

only brutes do not wish to know history of their *patria* reveals similar thinking.[474] To these particular examples one can also add a very obvious general observation of the omnipresence of ethnic names in the titles of twelfth-century historical works.[475] All this paints a picture where national categories constituted a basic framework for perceptions and representations of history, but also more narrowly served as significant means to both establish one's own authority and undermine the legitimacy of alternative visions. It is that latter function that we can count as one of the foremost and undoubtedly politicized practical uses of nationhood in twelfth-century England, and, by extension, in medieval Europe.

Historical writing may be the most obvious domain of the pertinence and instrumentalization of national categories in the middle ages, but it was by no means the only one. I have already discussed in some detail the key role that nationhood played in the politics of sanctity in twelfth-century England. Here I shall examine some further uses of nationhood in the context of ecclesiastical politics. But before turning to them, I would like to add one example related to saint cults that was not discussed above and is relevant to the theme of individual ethnicity. It is the episode with a pilgrimage of Abbot Lambert from Angers to Bury St Edmund's. Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, who allegedly described it from Lambert's own words, wrote that the brethren at the monastery were surprised at the abbot's love of the saint. The reason for their wonder apparently was Lambert's national identification. In the reported words of the abbot: 'Why did I praise [St Edmund] more than the English, while I am not an Englishman, but an Angevin (*cum non Anglus, sed Andus*

[474] Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. 4.
[475] For an overview see: M. Innes, 'Historical Writing, Ethnicity, and National Identity: Medieval Europe and Byzantium in Comparison', in S. Foot and Ch.F. Robinson (ed.), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing; Volume 2: 400–1400* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 539–75.

essem)?'.[476] This is a perfect illustration of certain normative assumptions about the relation between nationhood and the veneration of local saints (as opposed to the major universal Christian saints who were by definition venerated everywhere): it was a country/nation that was the main framework for their cults. Lambert's story shows that this logic was interiorized at the time.[477] It was also rhetorically used by hagiographers to emphasize the exceptional reputation of the saints they were trying to promote: if even foreigners knew and praised a saint against the normal expectations of exclusively national loyalty, it was one of the ultimate ways to establish a cult's status. On a totally different, but equally relevant note, one may observe that in the story of Lambert 'English' and 'Angevin' identities are given the same status, thus once again problematising an analytical distinction between 'local' and 'national' identifications.

One of the most interesting examples of the usage of national categories at the individual level also comes from a communication inseparable from ecclesiastical politics. It is the already mentioned famous self-description of Lanfranc as a *novus Anglus*, a new Englishman, which the Archbishop of Canterbury employed in one of his letters to Pope Alexander II.[478] What did it mean for Lanfranc to call himself an 'Englishman'? One should not, of course, ignore qualifications such as 'new' or 'rough' applied to an ethnic term by Lanfranc, as well as by those authors who later picked up his formula: for example, William of Malmesbury who described Lanfranc as *novus*/*rudis* Englishman (the same adjective is applied to Archbishop of York Thomas).[479] Such qualifications emphasize the acquired

[476] Herman the Archdeacon and Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *Miracles of St Edmund*, ed. and transl. T. Licence (Oxford, 2014), pp. 298–300.
[477] See a discussion of the historicity of the story in T. Licence, 'The Cult of St Edmunds', in *Bury St Edmunds and the Norman Conquest*, ed. T. Licence (Woodbridge, 2014), pp. 104–30, at pp. 117–8.
[478] The *Letters* of Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, ed. H. Clover and M. Gibson (Oxford, 1979), pp. 36–8.
[479] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, III.301, p. 536; Idem, *Saint's Lives: Lives of SS. Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus and Indract*, ed. and transl. M. Winterbottom and R.M. Thomson (Oxford, 2002), p. 60 (*Vita Wulfstani*).

nature of these new identifications and their difference from 'ethnicity' by origin. It is indicative that neither Lanfranc nor other people forgot about his Lombard background.[480] Still, it is important to retain the possibility of such transformations, as perceived by medieval actors. At times, the radical edge of such testimonies is lost in translation. For example, that passage on Lanfranc as 'rudis Anglus' is rendered in the *Oxford Medieval Texts* edition as follows: 'Lanfranc… was still unfamiliar with England'.[481] This perhaps does reflect the pragmatic meaning of William of Malmesbury's words, but rather dramatically simplifies his representation of the archbishop's identification. For William, Lanfranc is indeed an 'Englishman', and we should not explain away the inherent contradictions of this newly acquired 'Englishness'. Moreover, the notion of Lanfranc's 'roughness' or 'coarseness' as an 'Englishman' is in its own right rich with conceptual substance. It reframes 'ethnicity' as a process that can literally be learned, not least through one's familiarization with the traditions and rituals of a given polity and its institutions.

This institutional grounding of 'ethnic' identifications is important. It is instructive that Lanfranc in his letter to Alexander II mentioned that he is almost ignorant of 'English affairs (*res Anglicae*)' and William of Malmesbury called the archbishop a *rudis* Englishman because he did not know 'what order of sitting in council was established by ancient custom (*antiquus mos*)'.[482] Predictably, being an 'Englishman' was associated not only with origin and corresponding identification, it also presupposed knowledge of the traditions, law, and customs of the country and its key institutions, not least the Church – *ecclesia Anglorum*. Such inclusion of cultural components in the understanding of 'ethnicity' can be

[480] See, for example, William of Malmesbury's description of Lanfranc as 'gente Langobardus' in William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum*, i, p. 48.
[481] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, III.301, p. 537.
[482] The *Letters* of Lanfranc, 38; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, vol. I, III.301, p. 536.

corroborated by rare but consistent medieval theoretical statements on the differences between *gentes* which very often included laws, customs, and language in the list, as well as by numerous particular examples of twelfth-century descriptions of 'nationhood'.[483] To quote just one relevant passage, discussing the papal legates who participated in the Second Crusade, John of Salisbury stated that bishop Theodwin, *natione Teutonicus*, was regarded a barbarian by the French because he differed from them in language and customs (*moribus et lingua dissonans Francis*).[484] While the habit of medieval churchmen of appealing to – often negative – 'national' stereotypes is well-documented,[485] what is perhaps more interesting here is a more general pattern, vividly reflected by the context in which William of Malmesbury felt a need to characterise Lanfranc as a *rudis Anglus*. As pointed out above, this was written in relation to the ritualistic and procedural traditions of the English Church. One can perhaps argue that these were the churchmen for whom the language of 'nationhood', firmly placed within the framework of the Universal Church, was the most convenient way of structuring and organising political and institutional realities.

That letter to Alexander II was not the only text where Lanfranc associated himself with 'the English'. In a letter to an Irish bishop written a decade later he wrote that 'neither overseas churches (*transmarinas aecclesias*) nor we English (*nos Angli*) hold' such and such a

[483] See, for instance, the much-quoted passage from Regino of Prüm, who in the early tenth century wrote that 'different nations (*nationes populorum*) are distinguished by origin, customs, language and laws' (*Reginonis abbatis Prumiensis Chronicon cum continuatione Treverensi*, ed. Fr. Kurze (Hanover, 1890), pp. xix–xx). To cite a less well-known fragment, in the mid thirteenth-century encyclopaedia *Summa Britonis* the relevant entry reads: '*natio* means 'people' (*gens*), which is distinguished from another [nation] in accordance with its own origin, consanguinity and grouping, as the Gauls [the French], the Britons and the Germans' (*Summa Britonis sive Guillelmi Britonis Expositiones Vocabulorum Biblie*, ed. L.W. Daly and B.A. Daly (2 vols., Padua, 1975), ii, p. 462).

[484] John of Salisbury, *Historia Pontificalis*, p. 55.

[485] See among numerous others: Meyvaert, P., '"*Reinaldus est malus scriptor Francigenus*" – Voicing National Antipathy in the Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 66 (1991), pp. 743–63; Cl.V. Weeda, 'Ethnic Stereotyping in Twelfth-Century Paris', in *Difference and Identity in Francia and Medieval France*, ed. M. Cohen and J. Firnhaber-Baker (Farnham, 2010), pp. 115–35.

view on infants' communion.[486] Besides a much more confident identification with 'the English', there are two other important aspects. First, Lanfranc uses 'overseas churches' and 'the English' in one line, showing that an ethnic term could substitute for an ecclesiastical institution, clearly viewed in a 'national' perspective. Second, this lexical arrangement might reveal one of the crucial factors of Lanfranc's own acquisition of English identity, that is, his inclusion in the English Church (*Ecclesia Anglorum/Anglicana*). As a member of the national church Lanfranc became an Englishman, and the same factor probably was at work with many continental clergymen entering English religious communities after 1066.[487] A similar mechanism might have existed in the secular sphere too. An intriguing parallel to Lanfranc's case is provided by Étienne de Rouen's *Draco Normannicus* (1168–9). In this idiosyncratic text Henry II is several times strikingly called *rex Anglus*.[488] This strange and unique title, which differs from standard royal styles *rex Anglie/Anglorum*, makes one wonder what the author actually meant by the 'king Englishman' formula. It is of course very difficult to judge to what extent the rulers of post-Conquest England personally associated themselves with 'Englishness', but from Aelred of Rievaulx's representation of Henry Plantagenet as the cornerstone between the English and the Normans and an heir of the old English royal lineage we do know that this was a conceivable ideological construction at the time.[489] In any case we can speculate to what extent this case is comparable with Lanfranc's self-identification as a 'new Englishman'. The title of the king of England may have turned its holder into an 'Englishman,' and in the same manner the office of the archbishop of Canterbury allowed or even motivated Lanfranc to call himself an 'Englishman'.

[486] The *Letters* of Lanfranc, p. 156.
[487] As also argued by Thomas, *The English and the Normans*, pp. 200–35, 283–96.
[488] Étienne de Rouen, Draco Normannicus, ii, pp. 677, 681, 705–706.
[489] Aelred of Rievaulx, Genealogia Regum Anglorum*,* vol. 195, cols. 711–738; Idem, Vita S. Edwardi Regis et Confessoris, in *PL*, vol. 195, cols. 737–790, at col. 774.

Naturally, we should not interpret any such examples as the reflections of some genuine and systematically coherent 'national' consciousness. There were situational utterances, employed for pragmatic purposes of different kind. John of Salisbury's letters provide instructive material on the matter. The most interesting feature of this evidence is the striking inconsistence of John's self-identifications. Scholars have struggled to say something meaningful about his national feelings and several quotations from his letters vividly show possible difficulties in establishing John's own national identity.[490] Not only contradictions but also John's habit of using ethnic terms in ironic contexts makes things complicated. In a letter to Peter of Celle, John metaphorically asked his friend to give him a good quantity of wine – enough 'to satisfy an Englishman (*Anglicus*) and a toper'.[491] Here John not only identifies himself as an Englishman but also deploys a classical medieval stereotype of the English inclined to drinking (the author notes that 'assiduity in drinking made the English (*Angli*) famous *apud exteras nationes*'), thus (ironically) exploiting cultural dimensions of 'ethnicity'. In a later letter to a certain Baldwin, John mentions *Francia nostra* and *nos Francos*.[492] The example is also not that straightforward since its stylistics and *topoi* again denote some irony: the opposition of 'we French' and the countrymen of the addressee appear through satire, drawing on the same cliché of the heavily drinking English. However, there is another instance of John's 'French' identity: in a letter to Baldwin, archdeacon of Totnes, John uses the term *Franci nostri*.[493] In the end, it remains difficult to say whether such statements are more than merely wordplay, which is still significant as a

[490] See: C. Brooke, 'John of Salisbury and His World', in *The World of John of Salisbury*, ed. M. Wilks (Oxford, 1984), pp. 1–20, at p. 9; J. McLoughlin, 'Nations and Loyalties: The Outlook of a Twelfth-Century Schoolman', pp. 39–46.
[491] *The Letters of John of Salisbury: The Early Letters (1153–1161)*, ed. W.J. Miller, S.J. and H.E. Butler, revised C.N.L. Brooke (London, 1955), i, pp. 57–58.
[492] *The Letters of John of Salisbury: The Later Letters (1163–1180)*, ed. W.J. Millor, S.J. and C.N.L. Brooke (Oxford, 1979), ii, p. 546
[493] Ibid.

confirmation of the habitual recourse to the idiom of 'nationhood', perhaps distantly comparable to what Michael Billig called 'banal nationalism' for the contemporary world.[494]

Another example of a reference to a fluid identity should help us to further unpack those periodically resurfacing contradictions in the ways people thought and wrote about 'nationhood' in long twelfth-century England. It comes from a chapter of Goscelin of Saint Bertin's *Liber confortatorius* (c. 1082–1083), entitled 'From Transience to Stability'. In this chapter Goscelin described Eve, the addressee of the treatise, as 'the well-born daughter of a Danish father and a Lotharingian mother, who became English (*et patre Dano et matre Lotaringa a claris natalibus filiam emersisse Anglicam*)'.[495] It is worthwhile, first, to look in more detail into the context of this remarkable description. The passage as a whole reflects general notions framing Goscelin's perception of Eve's fluid 'ethnicity'. The crucial element of the author's argument is the dichotomy between the mutability of the terrestrial homeland ('the land of birth or rather the land of death,' as he puts it) and Heaven's eternity (*patria eterna*). Starting from individual migrations (probably invoking his own movement from Saint Bertin to England) Goscelin then mentions migrations of entire peoples and kingdoms (*gentes and regna*), including Israel to Egypt, Canaan, and Babylon, the Trojans to Rome, and 'nowadays the Normans to England or Britain'.[496] Taking a broader view, he states that even lands and seas change. At this point Goscelin shifts rhetoric and argues that the same sun and stars are shining on the Angevins and the English, thus, advancing another reason to deny the importance of the distinction between *patria* and foreign lands.

[494] M. Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London, 1995).
[495] The Liber confortatorius of Goscelin of Saint Bertin, p. 41.
[496] Ibid.

The passage reveals two important features of Goscelin's vision, typical for medieval perceptions in general. First, nations (*gentes*) are understood as a part of the Divine order, a part in the same sense as seas and lands.[497] Crucially, though, such naturalization emphasizes not the stability of these phenomena, but, on the contrary, their mutability and fluidity. Second, fatherland and, by implication, ethnicity did matter. The 'patria eterna' metaphor made sense only because the concept of terrestrial patria was itself meaningful; the effectiveness of Goscelin's argument clearly depended on the assumptions about the basic significance of these categories to his audience.[498] Goscelin uses a rather curious example to illustrate both the importance and the insecurity of patriotic attachment. He writes about 'daughters of kings and princes' fostered in the happiness of their homeland only to be married in 'foreign nations' and 'far-away kingdoms' where they have to learn 'barbarian customs' and 'strange languages'. So, in Goscelin's narrative *gentes* are constructed as both objectifying and simultaneously fundamentally unstable and transient entities, the reality of which is not of the same order as the reality of the eternal Heaven. This is the general conceptual framework of Goscelin's statement on Eve's acquired English identification.

So, Eve, according to Goscelin, was 'the well-born daughter of a Danish father and a Lotharingian mother, turned out English'. A logical question is what actually made Eve 'English' in spite of her parents' different ethnicity? Here we should quote the relevant

[497] The eternity of *gentes* is even more evident in the vision of Apocalypse, contained in the book IV of the *Liber confortatorius*. Quite remarkably, *gentes* still exist even in the post-apocalyptic Divine eternity. See: The Liber confortatorius of Goscelin of Saint Bertin, pp. 111–5.

[498] For a classic, but somewhat misleading discussion of the evolution of the meaning of *patria* throughout the Middle Ages see: E. Kantorowicz, '*Pro Patria Mori* in Medieval Political Thought', *American Historical Review*, 56 (1950–51), pp. 472–92. For a more detailed analysis based on German and English material respectively see: P. Monnet, 'La *patria* médiévale vue d'Allemagne, entre construction impériale et identités régionales', *Le Moyen Âge*, 107 (2001), pp. 71–99; L.O.A. Fradenburg, 'Pro Patria Mori', in K. Lavezzo (ed.), *Imagining a Medieval English* Nation (Minneapolis, 2004), pp. 3–38.

phrase in full: '…hodieque Normanni in Angliam, Britanniam [transferuntur], in qua te quoque cum Anglica gente constat fuisse aduenam, sed et patre Dano et matre Lotaringa a claris natalibus filiam emersisse Anglicam'.[499] While it was easier to believe in almost eternal essentialist *gentes* and tell their stories in the form of national master narratives, it was difficult to ignore the reality of changing identifications when authors dealt with individual experience. A few words of the quotation from the *Liber confortatorius* do not allow us to say much with any certainty; we probably are on safe ground only with a (simple but not that insignificant) statement like this: it was possible (at least, in the view of one author) for someone born of a Dane and a Lotharingian to be perceived as 'English'. We, however, could speculate a bit on the case. What were other factors (besides an association with the land) that contributed to Eve's turn into 'English'? May it be that it was a membership in an English ecclesiastical institution that made her 'English'? It is probably relevant that the institution in Eve's case was Wilton, an important abbey, closely linked with the late Anglo-Saxon royal family. May it be a reference to Eve's own self-identification, known to Goscelin? Was it the author's comment on his own experience of living in England for decades and actively engaging with the country's historical and hagiographical traditions? Most importantly, was this process of turning 'English' understood by Goscelin as objective and inevitable, as, in a sense, a natural result of living in England, or was it a matter of choice? Did agency matter?[500] We, unfortunately, do not have any evidence to answer those questions in this particular case, but there is another example that seems relevant.

[499] The Liber confortatorius of Goscelin of Saint Bertin, p. 41.

[500] We can also look at the problem of fluid identities from an opposite perspective: what about the possibility of preserving one's national identification even in circumstances potentially favouring its change? Migration to another land and inclusion in a foreign ecclesiastical institution did not make Orderic Vitalis forget his English origin. In the epilogue to the Ecclesiastical History (written when he was sixty seven) Orderic described his English childhood and the shock of his forced move to Saint-Évroul in Normandy. Orderic had to abandon his fatherland and kinsfolk ('patriam et parentes'), came into Normandy as an exile ('exul in Normanniam ueni') and was renamed as 'Vitalis' for his English name sounded harsh to the Normans (The *Ecclesiastical History* of

Here we should once again return to William of Newburgh's *Sermo de Sancto Albano*. This seems to be the only one direct example of a deliberate and conscious change of national identification in twelfth-century sources, but of course a very peculiar one. In William's sermon, St Alban's transformation from a Briton into an Englishman is represented as the saint's conscious decision, an act of moral will. This is by no means an ordinary case: it is unclear how literally we can take this posthumous change of national identification ascribed to a saint. However, what is evident in this text is an instrumentalization of national categories. William wants to appropriate St Alban as English, but being, as we have seen, unusually sensitive to the historic and ethnic distinction between 'the English' and 'the Britons', he feels a need to explicitly justify such an appropriation. It is very curious that numerous authors who were involved in the development of the notion of St Alban as the *protomartyr Anglorum* in the eleventh and twelfth centuries did not see any problem with this somewhat frivolous use of an ethnic term, or at least did not want to engage in an open debate about the issue.[501] In any case, William of Newburgh decided to tell his audience why he described St Alban as 'our' saint, although he was a Briton. He explained that St Alban, offended by the sins of his people (the Britons), 'joined the English' and 'became no longer British but English, no longer one of you but one of us' (ex Britone Anglus, ex vestro noster factus est).[502] Should we understand this statement as a direct confirmation of the

Orderic Vitalis, vi, p. 554). It is rather curious that Orderic's migration at the relatively early age of ten years and his active involvement with the life of his Norman monastery as well as with the Norman historical tradition did not cause a change of identification; at least, the epilogue demonstrates that his English origin and his time in England were still important and relevant to him. Obviously, we can only guess about the reasons for such strength of initial identification but it might be that one factor involved is revealed through a biblical analogy used by Orderic in his narration of his 'exile'. Orderic compares himself to Joseph in Egypt. It may well be that this example from the Bible provided him with a model of an enduring loyalty to one's ethnic identification in spite of living and having a successful career in another land. This shows how biblical imagery could have influenced individual perceptions of identity and construction of national categories more generally.

[501] For a detailed discussion see: Hayward, 'The Cult of St Alban, *Prothomartyr Anglorum*', pp. 169–99.

[502] The *Sermons* of William of Newburgh, p. 87.

possibility for a twelfth-century author to imagine that nationhood, after all, can be a matter of political and/or moral will? It is of course easy to disqualify this case because the context is too peculiar and William's words resemble a rhetorical exaggeration rather than a factual claim (although how would we be able to say for sure?). But we should put it in the context of some other statements that are actually not that uncommon in twelfth-century sources. These are various references to the creation of peoples, which shift us back to a collective level. They range from the descriptions of certain rulers as the founders or creators of peoples, as in Henry of Huntingdon's designation of Rollo as the *auctor gentis* (the Normans) in what seems to be a typical medieval mixture of national and genealogical logics,[503] to maybe even more interesting claims about royal edicts ordering the creation of a new people, as in one entry in the *Annals* of Winchester, where Cnut is said to 'order the English and the Danes to become one people'.[504] What this all seems to reflect is a fundamental ambiguity in the medieval notions of 'nationhood': an uneasy combination of an essentialist belief in the objectivity of nations and the parallel existence of the notions of creation, change and politics, almost an explicit theory of 'nationcraft'.

'National' personifications

'[A] portent appeared on the borders of Brittany and Normandy: a woman, or rather a pair of women, with two heads, four arms, and everything else double down to the navel, below that two legs, two feet, and everything else single. One of them laughed, ate, and talked; the other cried, fasted, and said nothing. There were two mouths to eat with, but only one channel for digestion. In the end one died, and the other lived; the survivor carried

[503] Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, p. 388.
[504] Annales monasterii de Wintonia (A.D. 519–1277), in *Annales Monastici*, ed. H.R. Luard (5 vols., London, 1864–9), ii, p. 15. '[Cnut] edixit… ut nemo Dacorum… noceret Anglo, sed essent Angli et Daci populus unus'.

round her dead partner for nearly three years, until the heavy weight and the smell of the corpse were too much for her also. Some people thought, and the idea was even published (*et litteris etiam traditum*), that these women signified England and Normandy…'.[505] This well-known passage from William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, constituting one of the author's stronger-worded criticisms of the Norman conquest and its consequences, explicitly speaks to the theme of the interplay between borders, monstrosity and nationhood, much discussed and theorised by scholars of later medieval Britain's representational and imaginary landscapes.[506] Here, however, I would like to focus on a figure – in both literal and literary senses – that enables such a representation: a personified country/nation.

The fragment reveals the linguistic-cum-ideological pairs that constitute this image, but also operate through it. First, this is a nation as a body and an emotive subject that *feels* but is rarely invested with any other agency (in contrast to modern and contemporary linguistic personifications of countries/nation states that – in everyday, media and even academic discourses – 'do' such stuff as, for example, going to war or introducing new policies). As the dualistic image of William's conjoined twins perfectly illustrates, the standard construction of feeling associated with the personified nation is binary: it is defined by a dichotomy of morbid sadness and exalted happiness. The second key pair inserted into the image of a personified nation is simultaneously more abstract and more realist. This is the implied interpretation of the embodied figure as both a territory and a collective community – a people. The latter meaning is directly explained in rhetorical and grammatical treatises from the later middle ages. For example, Geoffrey of Vinsauf noted in

[505] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, II.207, pp. 384–5.
[506] D. Rollo, *Historical Fabrication, Ethnic Fable and French Romance in Twelfth-Century England* (Nicholasville, 1998); J.J. Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 1999).

his works on the art of versification written in the early thirteenth century that one can speak of 'keen England, blunt Germany, weaving Flanders, feminine France, boastful Normandy' because of 'the keen Englishmen, the blunt Teutons, the Flemish weavers, the feminine French, and the Norman boasters'.[507]

This banal explanation of how a country can be invested with anthropomorphic characteristics should not obscure a key fact: as an image and ideological construct, personification served to naturalise the abstraction of ethnicised territory. This logic vividly plays out in William of Malmesbury's narrative of England and Normandy as conjoined twins. The historian both underscores the territorial separation of these two entities (England and Normandy are 'geographically divided – *spatiis terraum sint divisae*') and emphasises the unnaturalness of their unification under one harsh rule (*dominium*).[508] What is interesting here is not so much William's scepticism towards Norman rule, but the worldview that underlies his criticism: the alleged organic entity of an ethnicised country, signified by a 'normal' body, is turned into a deadly monstrosity by its immoral and exploitative unification with another polity, thus presupposing national boundaries as a positive normativity. This pairing of territoriality and ethnicity – both symbolically represented and naturalised by an anthropomorphic personification – is reinforced in William's narrative by an immediate transition from the negative allegory of the conjoined twins to a positive claim of God's special endowment of 'the English' with the uncorrupted bodies of saints to encourage this people's eschatological optimism (as already discussed in chapter 3). Instructively, this is a passage, in which the term *natio* is explicitly interpreted

[507] E. Gallo, *The Poetria Nova and Its Sources in Early Rhetorical Doctrine* (The Hague, 1971), pp. 67–9.
[508] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, II.207, pp. 384–6.

not only as an ethnic but also a territorial category: 'the English' are a '*natio pene extra orbem posita* (nation situate[d] almost beyond the world)'.[509]

Returning to the figure of personification, we should not stop at a purely literary interpretation of William of Malmesbury's passage. The author's language is suggestively political-economic in its focus. In fact, it is exactly in a political-economic dimension that William deviates from the standard medieval mode of personifications focused on feeling rather than agency. In the passage, 'vigorous *Anglia* sustains with [her] money almost dead and exhausted/impoverished Normandy'.[510] It is not uncurious that the *Oxford Medieval Texts* translation simplifies the passage by rendering it through a more common-sensical, but technically imprecise passive construction, in which 'Normandy is supported by the financial strength of England'.[511] For William, this 'economic' vitality of England is however threatened by the monstrous unification with Normandy and, most tellingly, *violentia exactorum* – the violence of 'exactors' or 'tax collectors'. It is interesting that the whole fragment is structured by an implicit dichotomy of naturalisation of a country/nation and the perceived unnaturalness of foreign domination (the theme of foreignness reinforced by William's alternative explanation for the threat of England's financial exhaustion: he mentions not only the greed of its [new] princes, but also the ferocity of the neighbouring *gentes*).[512] The morbid monstrosity of the latter is represented not only through a symbolic comparison with the border-land conjoined twins, but also via a direct application of this

[509] Ibid., p. 386. This theme of the spatial edginess in the construction of medieval 'Englishness' is examined in K. Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000–1534* (Ithaca, 2006).
[510] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, II.207, p. 386.
[511] Ibid., p. 387.
[512] Ibid., p. 386.

metaphor to England and Normandy: 'whatever money these two engulf in their greedy jaws descends into a single maw'.[513]

One can argue that this deeply ambiguous and purposefully controversial passage speaks to the aporias of the interplay between high-medieval political economy and the construction of ethnicised territories. Such ethnicised territories – something that both 'we' today and medieval authors have routinely (and uncritically) been calling 'countries'/'nations' – were a logically necessary outcome of the (re)production of particular political-economic configurations. Those configurations, however, were never factually bounded by such territorialisations and, instead, also functioned at the level of regional hegemonies and sub-hegemonies (of which 'Anglo-Norman England' nested simultaneously in many interconnected worlds - the British Isles, the Kingdom of France and Latin Christendom, to list only the most obvious ones – is a prime example). Hence, there was a contradiction between a tendency to naturalise and close off – even if only at the level of imagination and representation – such ethnicised territories and the contingent practices of politics at the level of a wider regional system (again, the Norman Conquest is a perfect instance of how the latter process may have played out). It makes sense, though, that when seen through the lens of the ideology of naturalised ethnicised territories, such multi-layered, overlapping and excessive – especially, violence-wise – political-configurations looked like 'monstrosities'. Imagining named 'countries'/'nations' as anthropomorphically embodied persons must have been one way to spell out, but also potentially 'exorcise' the threat of dissolution and ambiguity, engendered by the contradictions of a wider system.

[513] Ibid.

William of Malmesbury's passage on England and Normandy as an antagonistic pair of conjoined twins then reflects a highly poetic engagement with this contradiction and the anxiety it causes. The author represents his anxiety through yet another dichotomy between the nostalgic past of the lost *nobilitas antiquorum* vs. the threat of imminent exhaustion and death caused by unnatural domination and unjust plunder (England is described as 'pensionibus addicta', expropriated via or enslaved by rents/payments).[514] There is a glimpse of hope too: the pessimistic prophecy introduced by the story of the conjoined twins is conditional, England can still acquire her freedom and be happy (*felix* – as I shall briefly demonstrate below, a key emotional term within the discourse of personified countries). This can be read as another intersection of ideological projections and political-economic logics. We can see that William is not really troubled by the over-exploitation of commoners, which inevitably constituted the foundation of any system of domination. As such, the production of England's wealth – or in the historian's mystifying formula, England's anthropomorphic vigour capable of generating *pecunia* (money) – is posited as a positively connotated process.[515] It is the 'monstrous' channelling of these resources into the realisation of the excessive ambitions of violent and greedy [Norman] rulers that is condemned. This of course should not surprise us: as a member (even if a sub-hegemonic one) of the elite, William was implicated in the system of exploitative domination structured – at a different but related level from the precise mechanisms of lordship and land-owning – by the production of ethnicised territory, legible for the extraction of surpluses. A naturalisation of this complex relationship via the figure of the personified nation/country was his and other intellectuals' contribution to the ideological reproduction of ethnicised

[514] Ibid.
[515] The literary tradition of praising the 'natural' richness of 'England/Britain' goes back already to early medieval historiography, especially Bede. See: Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People, pp. 14–6.

territory. However, the use of the wealth extracted from such territories (ultimately, people working it) was contested too, and here lies the key stake of William's morbid story. William is projecting an idealised image of the reproduction of ethnicised territory, disrupted by the divergence of surpluses towards the aggressive and greedy dominion of post-Conquest lordship, wasting wealth on the wrong goals: one would assume, internal and external warfare, as contrasted to the enrichment of the Church and its particular institutions, such as William's own monastery. So, William's notion of England's *libertas*, also imagined through an anthropomorphic metaphor of 'breathing freedom', should be read not so much, or at least not only in purely ethnicising terms, but rather as a discursive intervention in the inter-elite struggle over the 'correct' configuration of a political-economic regime of accumulation, of which the production of 'ethnicised territory' was a key building bloc.

There is yet another important dimension to William's short but expressive story: gender.[516] It is of course not accidental that the conjoined twins in the narrative are female. Personifications of 'countries/nations/peoples' are almost always gendered as female, as part of the patriarchal familial discourse of power that presupposes the figures of a male ruler and feminized subject. For medieval Europe, the two most important traditions conveying this image were, predictably, Rome and the Christian church. With the former, the city itself was standardly personified as a woman much like all ancient cities were, and this principle was then transferred to the provinces of the empire – in its own right, an excellent illustration of the symbolic side of the process of the production of territory by apparatuses of domination. The Christian church was represented as a female figure too, paired with the masculine images of divine persons (most systematically, as the bride of

[516] For a systematic analysis of the interplay between gender and 'nationhood' in William of Malmesbury's writings see: K.A. Fenton*, Gender, Nation and Conquest*.

Christ). This model of rulership, conceived as a marriage between the male sovereign (human or divine) and the female (collective) subject, was systematically reproduced in numerous images and rituals of power in the middle ages. One important ritual through which this model was often re-staged was the entrance of the ruler into a city – a penetrative performance, hinting at a sexual act. This mode of gendering was systematically reproduced at the discursive and visual levels too: personified countries are grammatically female and, if represented figuratively, are portrayed as women. Perhaps, the most famous medieval example of this mode of representation comes from a late tenth-century Gospel book that contains an image of several countries personified as female figures and inscribed *Germania*, *Gallia*, *Sclauinia* (but also, tellingly, *Roma*), who express their loyalty to the enthroned figure of Emperor Otto III.

Gendered and political-economic dimensions of the image are not unrelated. Here, William of Malmesbury's passage is instructive again. It combines the notion of a personified country as a passive figure, subjected to the male ruler and defined by emotions, with an almost organic capacity to generate stuff (in this case, money/wealth). It is difficult to ignore a parallel here to a generic transhistorical patriarchal construction of 'the woman' – a passive figure, defined by feeling rather than doing, but also used in (and potentially praised for) her re-productive function. At least, at the level of the imaginary, we see the same patriarchal model of power projected upon women and political communities at the point of their naturalising mystification through personifications. This is one node where we can relatively clearly see the triangle formed by, first, patriarchy and its gendered relations and imaginary, second, statist political-economic configurations, and, third, the ethnicization of both territory and people. Taken together, these modes of both organising

and representing life form the foundation of the transhistorical logics of state-systems and the regimes of exploitative domination, through which they are reproduced.

To turn back to the texts, we can look at the *Miracles* of Saint Edmund written in the post-Conquest period that provide a range of examples of national personifications. In fact, one of the first miracles described by Archdeacon Herman speaks to the theme that is very similar to that which is central to William of Malmesbury's passage considered at length above. Describing Saint Edmund's miraculous delivery of Bury St Edmunds and its community from the tribute extractions imposed by Swein (who is eventually claimed to be killed by the angry saint),[517] Herman makes a more general point: Anglia 'would be happy, prosperous, and sweet beyond measure were it not for the tributes imposed by its kings'.[518] Again, we see the same tendency to use the lexicon of emotions attributed to a personified nation to criticise excessive taxation, especially in the context of foreign domination. 'Sad England suffers and groans, bereft of its prince. Whether it wants to or not, it carries out the demands imposed by the invader king'.[519] 'Happiness' and 'sadness' are two key emotions (expressed also through references to celebration and grief) within the discourse of national personifications. To quote just a couple of passages, Herman, for example, writes about 'England griev[ing] at the mighty setback to [her] fortune'.[520] The setback is, in fact, the death of Cnut, which confirms that – utterly unsurprisingly – there is nothing automatic about medieval authors' recourse to the language of nationhood and ethnic conflict: other factors, for instance, a king's perceived adherence to the ideas of just and pious rulership, were often more important than his foreignness. On the opposite end of the emotional

[517] Herman the Archdeacon and Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *Miracles of St Edmund*, p. 20–2.
[518] Ibid., pp. 14-5.
[519] Ibid., p. 16.
[520] Ibid., p. 42.

continuum formed of the dichotomy of 'happiness' and 'sadness', Herman mentions that '*Anglia* rejoiced' at some effects of Edward the Confessor's rule.[521]

What does this idiom of feelings attributed to personified nations do at the level of ideology? One can point out two interrelated aspects. First, it configures 'national community' (metaphorically represented by a personification) as largely passive, capable of a reactive emotion, but lacking its own constitutive agency. Second, it sustains the notion of totalising national unity. The grammatical singularity of personification inevitably produces the image of a coherent uniform 'nation', united in its political emotion. Of course, we should not naïvely claim that medieval authors understood such imagery literally. After all, it is exactly this notion of unity that is also a predicate for the idea of national betrayal, which, by the way, does make an appearance in Herman's text, when he singles out the English courtiers of Swein as 'wretched' in contrast to the Danish ones, whose presence at the court of the Danish 'tyrant' is to be expected.[522] So the point is not that Herman and other historians and hagiographers employing personifications straight-forwardly thought of nations as singular actors literally comparable to one embodied person. Rather, it is that they purposefully chose this metaphorical language to assert the notion of national totality and unity as a normative stance. This is the role that literary devices play in the reproduction of ideological fiction.

One can cite more illustrations of long-twelfth-century authors having recourse to national personifications,[523] but it is time to ask where this material fits into a broader picture. One possible direction is historiographical: we may use these discursive

[521] Ibid., p. 46.
[522] Ibid., p. 20.
[523] For example, William of Newburgh wrote that as a result of the internal conflicts during King Stephen's reign 'wounded/exhausted and feeble England was dissolving/wasting away'. See: William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, i, p. 69.

personifications of countries to qualify Kantorowicz's thesis that the notion of secular kingdoms as symbolic mystical bodies (and, therefore, also corporate entities) resulted from the secularization of the notion of the mystical body of the Church.[524] The two notions are obviously related, but should not be seen as a temporal development of one into the other: it was perfectly possible for medieval actors to imagine embodied polities before a particular application of the notion of 'mystical body' to secular kingdoms, as studied by Kantorowicz.

An obvious example that comes to mind in this context is John of Salisbury's conceptualisation of *res publica* as a human body in Book V of the *Policraticus* (an idea the author claims to borrow from Plutarch, but the treatise he refers to – *Institutio Traiani* – must have been his own invention).[525] Being a *locus classicus* of medieval political theory, this organic and anthropomorphic theory of *res publica* is of course very well known. Here, I would like to relate it, briefly, to some of the issues raised above – first and foremost, the political-economic and social aspects of the figure of a personified country. John of Salisbury compares the prince to the head of a body, the clergy to its soul, judges and the governors of provinces to the 'eyes, ears and tongue' (in fact, it is the correct execution of justice that is the focus of Book V), soldiers and officials to its arms. The textual visualisation of this image gets more expressive when John speaks of *quaestores* and *commentarienses* – basically, the treasurers, financial officials of a polity – whom he compares to the 'stomach and intestines' and claims that if they 'amass' and 'retain' too much, they generate innumerable and incurable diseases, so that 'their fault/sin threatens the destruction of the

[524] E.H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 193–272.
[525] Policraticus (ed. Webb), i, p. 282.

whole body'.[526] The notion of rent-extraction/taxation as food-consumption in this passage resembles William of Malmesbury's image of conjoined 'England and Normandy' swallowing money into 'a single maw'. John's focus on over-consumption and greedy, extensive retention of the accumulated resources obviously speaks to a similar fear and criticism of excessive taxation and extractions. But we may go further and assume that John also reflects in this passage on the necessity of the circulation of money for the normal functioning of any tributary system. To recast John's metaphor of threatening constipation in banal political-economic terms, if money is only accumulated at the centre and is not somehow recircuited back to the tax and/or rent payers, the latter will not be able to pay the next instalment of payments within the regular tributary cycles.

Tellingly, the theme of morbid disfigurements (so vivid in William of Malmesbury's vision of conjoined twins) is also important in John of Salisbury's personifying theory of polity. The author compares 'the peasants' (*agricolae*) to the feet of a body and argues that the prince should take a special care of them because they 'raise and sustain the mass of the whole body' and without them even the strongest body cannot move and has to 'either repulsively, uselessly and vexingly creep/crawl on its own hands or be moved by the effort of brute animals'.[527] This powerful image reflects both the normative assumptions and ideological anxieties inherent in medieval intellectual notions of political-economic configurations (and, as a side note, one may observe how John of Salisbury unites 'the political' and 'the economic' within his singular body of *res publica*, confirming, in a sense, the artificiality of their separation into distinct spheres of life). It does not seem too speculative to suggest that these assumptions and anxieties are focused on the question of

[526] Ibid., p. 283.
[527] Ibid.

reproduction. How can a political-economic configuration represented as a given polity be reproduced through time, without descending into (auto)destructive morbidity? Here, the desired notion of social harmony, of all social groups occupying their legitimate place and performing their necessary functions within an indisputably hierarchical but somehow also just system, is perfectly conveyed by the figure of a body – a paradigmatic representation of organic holism. But bodies also happen to be frail and can easily be disfigured, reflecting the darker side of any system of exploitative domination and its fragile reproduction, the antinomies of which caused so much anxiety for medieval authors. John of Salisbury's conception of *res publica* as a body is suggestively abstract, it can be applied to any territorial polity. But, as we have already seen in the chapter 2 of this thesis, John himself did also project it on ethnicised kingdoms, thus making this famous idea directly relevant to our discussion of national personifications.

To conclude this section, I would like to offer a final, speculative, argument concerning the general ideological meaning of national personifications. National personifications may seem paradoxical. On the one hand, they are decidedly objectifying and naturalising – they literally turn the abstraction of nationhood into a body, that is both an object and something that tends to be perceived as a 'natural' entity. Furthermore, as I discussed above, personification eludes a distinction between 'people' and 'territory', thus reinforcing the efficiency of the objectification of the abstract nation. On the other hand, personifications are also self-evidently a figure of speech – a rhetorical and grammatical tool that cannot but be distinguished from any attempt to represent reality mimetically. But this is exactly the central paradox of 'nationcraft' as a mode of both describing and making (political) reality. As I have argued throughout this thesis the discourse of nationhood works through such aporetic tension of objectification and self-conscious voluntarism. It is in this

context, I believe, that personification becomes a powerful metaphor that effectively conveys both sides of this contradictory equation by portraying a country-people as something both so 'natural' that it can be represented as one anthropomorphic body and, simultaneously, retaining a sense of its explicitly made-up, symbolic character.

Church, lordship and the language of 'nationhood'

In the previous section, I started looking at the political-economic aspects relevant to our understanding of how national categories were constructed and reproduced in the middle ages. But so far, I have only done that at the rather abstract level of the interplay between long-twelfth-century authors' notions/images of ethnicised territories/personified countries and the formal model of a feudal/tributary political-economic configuration (as applied to the conditions of post-conquest England). The next question is whether we can find some more direct evidence for the actual mechanisms of functioning of such links between political economy and the reproduction of ethnicization of both people and territory. In this thesis, I have not really focused on the goal of finding such evidence, but here I would like to zoom in on, at least, one particular document that may allow us to discuss these issues in a specific rather than an abstract manner. In spring or summer 1156, John of Salisbury sent a letter to the Bishop of Norwich. This was an official business letter written by John in his capacity of a secretary of Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury. In this letter, John tried hard to explain to the Bishop of Norwich why King Henry II could not 'remit' a particular tax and, moreover, could not 'abstain from further exactions [of tax]'. [528] This document provides a curious snapshot of the interplay between the political-economic

[528] *The Letters of John of Salisbury*, i, pp. 21-2.

and legal regimes of the interconnected state and ecclesiastical apparatuses, lordship, and the discourse of collective identifications.

The tax in question is 'scutage' or 'shield-money', a tax on the knight's fee in lieu of actual military service. The reasons for levying and then refusing to remit this tax, as well as John's choice of rhetoric to justify this 'policy', are of direct relevance to the main theme of my thesis. As John explains, Henry II had to resort to these financial exactions because of a conflict with his younger brother Geoffrey who refused to give up 'his paternal inheritance' (Anjou, Touraine and Maine). What really interests us here is a description of Geoffrey's attempt to resort to the help and protection of the King of France. John decidedly chooses to frame the emerging conflict in ethnicising terms. He not only mentions that Geoffrey went to the King of France, but also accuses him of 'stirring up the French to our loss and attempting to oppose their throats to our wealth, strength, and good fortunes'. He also expresses a hope that, as a result of this conflict, 'rex et gens Francorum (the king and the people/nation of the French)' will be delivered to 'our' hands.[529]

The explicitly 'economic' vocabulary John relies on is also instructive: he is talking about *dispendium* – expense, cost, loss – and 'wealth'. So the conflict is both ethnicised, presented as a fight between 'us' and 'the French', and described as a matter of material interests. Of course, the latter argument inverses the actual dynamic of the situation: the extraction of extraordinary taxes to fund royal campaigns on the continent. So, what is this story really about? It seems to provide a glimpse of how the practice of war and its ideological representation as a matter of an 'ethnic' conflict between 'us' and 'them' was used by the state apparatuses and their agents (in both secular and ecclesiastical structures

[529] Ibid.

of the realm) to discipline elites into providing the crown with additional financial resources. Inevitably, this practice was underwritten by the exploitation of the commoners who were the ultimate creators of value circulated towards the hegemonic centre via both rents and ordinary, as well as extra-ordinary, taxation.

One should however note several ambiguities related to this particular document. First, who are 'us'? Are we to assume that the implied 'ethnic' signified is *Angli*? Or perhaps a vague reference to 'our fathers' who, as John seems to indicate, already overcame 'the French' in the past may be a reference to 'the Normans', although that phrase can also refer to the successful campaigns of Henry I as 'the king of the English' against the King of France a generation earlier. In any case, a certain element of ambiguity here should be retained: once again, we should not ignore a certain flexibility of 'ethnic' nomenclature in twelfth-century texts and documents. As the use of the legal formula 'Angli et Franci' to address the subjects of the King of England (still common in the mid-twelfth century) reminds us, the elites and their clerks could somehow combine the use of 'the French' as a legal (or quasi-legal) category within the kingdom and also use it as – we may assume – an effective propaganda tool when referring to the king's enemies outside the realm. This latter mechanism can in part be reflected in chroniclers' habit of describing the ongoing clashes between English and French kings under Henry II and his children as the wars between 'the English' and 'the French'.[530] To recap, this document allows us to see a direct link between the idiom of 'ethnicity', war and the functioning of a particular political-economic regime (beyond purely narrative evidence that abounds in chronicles), but also leaves us with some

[530] See, for example: William of Newburgh, Historia Rerum Anglicarum, ii, p. 490.

difficult questions about the ambiguity of the discourse of collective identifications at the time.

Another important issue we can consider, even if largely speculatively, in relation to this curious letter composed by John of Salisbury on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury is its audience. Was it meant for the Bishop of Norwich exclusively or did the letter imply its announcement to and circulation among other ecclesiastical, but perhaps also secular holders of lands within the diocese, who were affected by Henry II's fiscal measures discussed in the document? Also, was this letter unique, or were similar letters, formulated by John or other members of the archbishop's apparatus, sent to other bishops? Although we do not know the factual answer to this second question, it is really difficult to imagine that such a letter could have been completely exceptional. This simply would not have made any sense from a purely pragmatic point of view. It must have been the case that such letters – on this or that occasion, but presumably, quite regularly in comparable circumstances – were sent across the kingdom as a whole. The rareness of their survival from our period are likely explained by the norms and rules that governed the creation of letter-collections, which were usually focused on either particular legal disputes or other conflicts and moral and philosophical, as well as rhetorical expositions. Technical administrative letters may have been included in such dossiers (as the document under consideration confirms), but, naturally, without any aspiration to representativeness. Taking this into account, we may argue that in the middle of the twelfth century (but probably earlier too) the Church apparatus was used to link the practicalities of royal politics, ideologically reframed within the discourse 'ethnicity'/'nationhood', with the wider institutions and social actors of the realm.

To return to the first question of the previous paragraph, we cannot really know who exactly was meant to be the letter's audience beyond the bishop himself. For the later period, the use of the Church and its infrastructure for the propaganda of the government's actions presented in ethnicising terms is well testified in both administrative documents and sermons.[531] Moreover, this late-medieval interpellations of royal subjects with 'national' identifications was clearly meant to reach not only 'the elites' (however understood), but also commoners. Relatedly, it engendered new politics of citizenship and 'ethnicity' at the local, especially, urban level within the space of, to use Rees Davies' term, 'the first British empire'.[532] This dynamic is not yet visible in the mid-twelfth century records, although the royal propaganda letters from the end of 1190s, studied by John Gillingham, already can be directly compared to late-medieval evidence.[533]

In a sense, what is really interesting about John of Salisbury's letter to the Bishop of Norwich is that it is placed in what we can call a 'feudal' or, perhaps, better 'lordship' social and political-economic context, rather than that of the functioning of the centralising apparatuses of both secular and ecclesiastical governance under Edward I and during the Hundred Years' War. Even for the negotiation of feudal/lordship dues, the language of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' was apparently both appropriate and, in the opinion of the king, the archbishop and their clerks, potentially effective. This seems to confirm that as a form of ideology, 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' is not a unique feature of one particular state-system, which we are used to calling 'nation-state' (independently of how one conceptualises its

[531] See, for example, A. Ruddick, *English Identity and Political Culture in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 257–307.
[532] I am relying here on the wonderful paper written by Eliza Hartrich for a volume on 'Ethnicity and Nationhood before Capitalism', which I am co-editing with Nicholas Matheou for the *Past & Present* Supplement Series.
[533] J. Gillingham, 'Royal Newsletters, Forgeries and English Historian: Some Links between Court and History in the Reign of Richard I', in M. Aurell (ed.), La cour Plantagenêt (1154–1204) (Poitiers, 2000), pp. 171–86.

historical genealogy – in the modernist interpretation or within the narrative of its medieval origins). Instead, it is a function of any state-system that, by definition, requires the disciplining of both people and space into ethnicised groups and territories. The excessive rhetoric of John of Salisbury's letter reveals the ideological fundamentals of this discourse. Most obviously, this is the standard 'us and them' dichotomy, and this particular example revealingly highlights how reductive such a model of representation is: the messy and inevitably cyclical politics of overlapping kinship, lordship and regal competitions and struggles is reconfigured into an existential war between two ethnicised peoples. Beyond that, two other ideological elements are crucial: first, the appeal to the common well-being of 'us', conceived in the categories of wealth and riches. This is of course a key tool of the ideology of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' – to reframe the operations of power-holders as the interest of everyone subjected to that very power and appealed to in ethnic idiom to mobilise on its behalf. Second, this is the imaginary of ethnicised conflicts in existential terms. When John writes that the *rex et gens Francorum* will be delivered to 'our' hands, he is obviously indulging a fantasy of a decisive, perhaps, even final victory over the 'national' 'other'. This fantasy may not have much to do with the pragmatic goals of a particular political move, but appeals to and, simultaneously, ethnicises the libidinal desires of the audience, transforming 'nationhood' from an abstraction into an emotional experience (here one might speculate that when John paints the image of Fortuna giving the enemies *in manibus nostris* he is using a metaphor that is – inevitably, even if unconsciously – sexualised). We cannot quite know what the communicative modality of the document was: did it mean to persuade and mobilise the bishop himself, or was it more of a blue-print for possible rhetoric to be used across the diocese to secure the support for royal taxation? Perhaps, formulating this question in this binary way is misleading in the first place. The

power of 'nationhood' as ideology consists exactly in linking the imaginary 'interests' of 'the state' (or 'the king and kingdom', to use a more authentic expression) with the sensibilities of both elite and non-elite actors, who are taught to associate themselves – emotionally and pragmatically – with 'the state'. In fact, this is one of the key modes in which the discourse of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' works as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Let me emphasise once again that the efficiency of this rhetoric cannot be considered separately from the institutional mechanisms and political-economic relations through which it 'flowed'. So, both the dynamics of a peculiar political-economic configuration of long-twelfth-century England with its combination of a strong state apparatus and legal lordship (brought about by the Conquest and its engineered, as well as unintended, consequences) and the infrastructure of the Church are the essential elements of the workings and material outcomes of this ideology. However, at this point we should also not ignore the complexity of the situation and postulate a reductionist vision that would portray the medieval church as a propaganda machine used by the secular powers to secure their short-term interests by presenting them through patriotic rhetoric. It is especially interesting to note that this particular issue was explicitly problematized at the time. From the earlier discussion of nationhood and cults of saints, we are already familiar with the situation of half-explicit, half-implicit debate about the propriety of the pragmatic amalgamation of national and religious languages. Attempts to use the institutional capacities of the church seemed to spark a similar discussion among twelfth-century authors.

A very vivid illustration can be found in Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence's *Life* of Thomas Becket. Guernes included in his work the text of the *Constitutions of Clarendon* (1164), but also accompanied it with his own critical commentaries on each of the articles. It

is revealing how the author interpreted article thirteen of the document: 'And if it should happen that any one deforce the lord king of his right, archbishops, bishops, and archdeacons ought to constrain him to make satisfaction to the lord king. If someone were able to obstruct the king the prelates should pass judgment on him to the advantage of the king', which, it is worth pointing out, does not at all make any direct or even implicit references to nationhood.[534] Guernes glossed this provision with a most curious statement, which, on the face of it, might seem like a peculiar response to it. 'The King is obliged to protect the holy Church and its clergymen; they should not bear arms or wage great wars. They must, whoever they may be, serve God night and day, they are not to oppress the king's enemies for him or push away the French or the Welsh from God'.[535] In this passage, Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence completely transforms the reference point of that particular article of the *Constitutions of Clarendon*: escaping from its clearly 'internal' judicial context, he restates it as a problem of war, violence and 'nationhood'. The fact that Guernes wrote about 'the French and the Welsh' at this point shows the extent to which the logic of national conceptualization of royal wars was interiorised in the twelfth century.

If we recall another article of the *Constitutions* – '[i]t is not permitted the archbishops, bishops, and priests of the kingdom to leave the kingdom without the lord king's permission. And if they do leave they are to give security, if the lord king please, that they will seek no evil or damage to king or kingdom in going, in making their stay, or in returning'[536] – we see that the author's association of 'internal' legal provisions with

[534] *Select Charters and Other Illustrations of English Constitutional History from the Earliest Times to the Reign of Edward the First*, ed. W. Stubbs (Oxford, 1870), pp. 129–34, at p. 134. This particular translation is provided in *Source Problems in English History*, ed. Al.B. White and W. Notestein (New York, 1915), which is reproduced online: https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/cclarendon.asp (accessed on 29.09.2019).
[535] Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, *La vie de Saint Thomas de Canterbury*, ed. J.T.E. Thomas (2 vols., Louvain, 2002), i, p. 162, ll. 2521–30.
[536] *Select Charters and Other Illustrations of English Constitutional History*, p. 132.

ethnicised conflicts was not completely arbitrary, but suggested both by the general ideological tendencies of the period and the particular document he was reflecting upon. What is perhaps most important for us here is that Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence is obviously troubled by this interplay between violence, 'nationhood' and religion. He is making a simultaneously moral and institutional argument against this practice and the ideology that enables it. The king must protect the Church, not use it; the clergy should serve God, it must not play any role in ethnicised wars.

This of course perfectly demonstrates how misleading the idea that medieval national categories could ever have been neutral and devoid of political significance really is. Not only were there different views on the appropriateness of the pragmatic uses of Church institutions and doctrines for national propaganda, independently of an individual's ethical opinion on the matter, but the perception of the issue as a whole was predicated on a fundamental belief in the politicization of nationhood. Moreover, this politicization was occurring simultaneously in two related senses: first, there was an admission of the fact that national categories were indeed used consciously for political purposes; second and deeper, there was a notion that wars and conflicts of the time had a national character. Here religious and historical cultures were of great pertinence to the ideas about the political reality of the authors' and political actors' time: it was the Bible and chronicles that systematically painted the world as organized around peoplehood and the existential struggles between those different peoples. As Len Scales has shown, even the idea of genocide was widespread in medieval perceptions.[537] Those grand notions of dramatic

[537] L. Scales, 'Bread, Cheese and Genocide: Imagining the Destruction of Peoples in Medieval Western Europe', *History*, 92 (2007), pp. 284–300.

national struggles created the background against which it made sense to employ national mobilization rhetoric, as in the case of John of Salisbury/Theobald's letter discussed above.

To sum up, nationhood, clearly accepted in the middle ages as one of the basic frameworks to describe the world, was politicized and instrumentalized in many ways in twelfth-century England. Apart from various spheres examined above through particular examples, there were other important domains that should not be ignored. A whole separate sphere that deserves a systemic analysis is law. Here I can only briefly note that ethnicity was a legal category in Post-Conquest England – a fact that is one of the most powerful arguments in favour of a deep relevance of nationhood on the ground. At least, normatively everyone was expected to understand what it meant to be 'English' or 'French' after 1066.[538] It is equally important that these legal categories were explicitly different from simple assertions of ethnicity by birth, as it is well illustrated by the exclusion of those continental people who were present in England before 1066 from the legal category of *Franci* used for the followers of the Conqueror.[539] This is of course yet another example of a political manipulation of national categories.

A very different sphere that is relevant is preaching, where national categories were sometimes used, as, for instance, one of Stephen Langton's sermons shows, where the Archbishop of Canterbury discussed at length the vices of 'the English', pretty much dwelling upon the existing national and cultural stereotypes of Englishmen's inclination towards drunkenness.[540] The most significant aspect here is a hint at another potentially powerful

[538] R. Sharpe, 'Peoples and Languages in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Britain and Ireland: Reading the Charter Evidence', in Dauvit Broun (ed.), *The Reality behind Charter Diplomatic in Anglo-Norman Britain* (Glasgow, 2011), pp. 1–119. Sharpe clearly shows how the uses of ethnic terms and references to languages were motivated by the changing legal and political practice in the twelfth century.
[539] For a detailed analysis see G. Garnett, '*Franci et Angli*: The Legal Distinction between Peoples after the Conquest', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 8 (1986), pp. 109–37.
[540] *Selected Sermons* of Stephen Langton, p. 45. 'Immoderantia gule et ebrietas Anglicana nota est hominibus omnibus'.

mechanism for imposing national identity on the ground. Finally, one may add that the end of the twelfth century saw a rise of explicit uses of national propaganda in royal politics, as both John Gillingham's work on royal 'newsletters' and the first edicts obliging people to take part in 'national' defence show.[541] At the same time, this may be an effect of the evidence available to us: with the proliferation of documentary and administrative practices in the late twelfth century, all political applications of national categories are more visible in sources. We should not understand this material as simply a straightforward reflection of the relevance of national identifications on the ground. Rather it was exactly those practices that were creating that relevance and significance. An impressive rise in the explicit uses of national rhetoric in the political and social struggles of the thirteenth century (not to mention, the late Middle Ages where national rhetoric was commonly used by popular movements of different types) shows how efficient those instrumentalized discourses were.

[541] J. Gillingham, 'Royal Newsletters, Forgeries and English Historian: Some Links between Court and History in the Reign of Richard I', in M. Aurell (ed.), *La cour Plantagenêt* (1154–1204) (Poitiers, 2000), pp. 171–86.

Conclusion

A few years ago, Chris Wickham, a historian not especially interested in the issue of 'ethnic' and 'national' identifications as such, but perhaps in fact benefitting from this relative distance from the routine debates within the field, made an important observation about medieval 'ethnicity'. In his short concluding remarks to the volume *Visions of Community* (one of the newer volumes edited by Walter Pohl and his colleagues), Wickham writes that if, as the articles in the volume suggest, we accept the notions of common origin, history and political identity as the key markers of 'ethnicity', central medieval Italian cities will neatly fit that definition.[542] We, however, do not tend to refer to, for instance, Pisan or Genovese medieval identifications as 'ethnic', and for Wickham this poses the question of the limits of the applicability and relevance of 'ethnicity' in the early and central Middle Ages. The observation is acute, but rather than employing it to question the 'usefulness' of 'ethnicity' for studying medieval history, we can perhaps take it more productively in a different theoretical direction. In fact, it may be used to (re)formulate two of this thesis's key conceptual arguments.

First, at the most general level, the fact that medieval urban identifications look very similar in our sources to what we normally associate with so called 'ethnic groups' and 'nations' confirms yet again that as such those 'ethnicising/nationalising' categories are empty signifiers. They are abstractions that, rather than reflecting the essence of a supposed group, can be super-imposed on any type of polity (real or imaginary). So, they are not defined by any content of their own, instead they are, in a sense, the predictable effects of certain socio-political and political-economic configurations. Put another way,

[542] Ch. Wickham, 'Conclusions', in *Visions of Community*, pp. 551–5, at pp. 553–4.

they are both simultaneously the effects and ideological mechanisms of state-systems that – at the nexus of power-knowledge and political-economic axes – function by organising and disciplining both space and people via the interrelated processes of ethnic categorisation and territorialisation. While this argument begins to formulate a theory of the reproduction of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood', to which I shall return below, for now I simply want to reiterate a general proposition: 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' are, ontologically, ideological abstractions and, linguistically, empty signifiers, which is empirically confirmed by a tendency to apply them to such different types of polities as 'kingdoms', 'cities', 'empires' (as well as, of course, so called 'modern states'). The concept of 'nationcraft', which I have introduced in this thesis, reflects this understanding of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' as ideological abstractions.

Second, Wickham's observation returns us to a theme, which I have been touching upon throughout this thesis, but have not yet sufficiently addressed. In abstract terms, this can be defined as the problem of the interplay between scale and hierarchy when thinking about collective identifications. Are polities of different scales imagined as engendering substantively different or the same types of communities/groups? It seems to me that in the world of systemically reified nation-states that we are now living in, a hierarchical scheme defines both common-sense and academic discourses in this area. What I mean is that one tends to think (or at least to speak as if) different types of polities correspond to meaningfully different types of communities and identifications. To make this less abstract, one can consider the habitual scheme of distinguishing local, national and supra-national levels. There is a strong tendency to treat 'the national' as substantively different from both 'the local' and 'the supra-national' (the technical nature of the latter also speaks for itself: anything above 'the nation' cannot even be described per se, it is defined by not being 'national'). This is not at all to suggest that individuals do not identify strongly with non-

national entities: in fact, it is enough to consider the appeal (but also the loathing) of, for example, 'Londoner' or 'European' identifications to see that this is the case. But, in a sense, it is exactly the appeal (or, again, from the opposite, explicitly nationalist, perspective – the shortcomings) of these identifications that they are perceived as somehow substantively different from 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' (which is either criticised as toxic or praised as the only legitimate foundation of sovereignty). Only those local identifications, which are – historically contingently – seen as potential 'nations-in-the-making', are explicitly perceived as 'ethnicities' (Basque or Catalan identifications are the most obvious examples in the European context). Another dimension of this hierarchical scheme is the stagiest model of the historical rise of communities and polities, developing from small groups/tribes – to ethnicities – to nation-states (within academia, most prominently promoted by Anthony Smith's distinction between 'ethnie' and 'nations', which continues to influence how numerous historians, not least many medievalists, conceptualise this theme). In general, it seems obvious that this vision stems from the powerful reification of ethnicity and, especially, nationhood within the capitalist-cum-statist world system of the last few hundred years and that it invests 'the nation' with a particular political legitimacy (and therefore the myth of socio-cultural substance).

Yet, as Wickham's example of Italian medieval cities with their 'ethnicity'-looking discourses of identification shows, this schema does not really apply to medieval thinking about communities and polities. This is important not only for our understanding of medieval perceptions and practices, but also as a tool with which we can unthink our own rigid, reified concepts within both academic and political idioms. So, let us rehearse some further medieval examples of this different modality of ideologically substantiating the imagined communities at different scales, which we have already encountered in this thesis.

A good place to start is a passage already discussed in the chapters on the idiosyncratic constructions of Britishness and the overlaps between religious and national languages in long twelfth-century England. '[The Lord] will join apostles with the nations and languages (*nationes et linguae*) which they have made bear fruit for God: St Denis with the Gauls and the Parisians, St Martin with the people of Tours, St Hilaire with the Poitevins, St Augustine with the Britons, St Bertin with the people of Sithiu, St Edith with the nuns of Wilton,' wrote Goscelin of St Bertin in his *Book of Consolations*.[543] As is so often the case, already the difference in the grammar of Latin and its translation into English is instructive. While in the Latin original, all the so called 'nations' (or, equally curiously, 'languages') are signified by one plural collective name (*Galli*, *Turoni*, *Pictaui*, *Britanni*, *Vultoniae*), this simply does not work as well in English. Reflecting the absolute contingency of the historical sedimentation of the categories of identification, some collective names are very banal, some are easily available to specialist historians, some sound so 'artificial' that they need to be rephrased via the 'people of place X' formula. This linguistic aspect reflects a conceptual gap. For 'us', it does not make much sense to place in the same set such apparently different groups as a 'nation' or a 'people' (the Gauls and the Britons), the inhabitants of a region (the Poitevins) and, most surprisingly, a monastic community (the nuns of Wilton). Even more counter-intuitive is to designate all those groups with the same terms, but Goscelin did exactly that, moreover, choosing two categories – 'nations' and 'languages' – that belong to the discourse of ethnicization.

Nothing illustrates this crucial feature of the medieval lexicon of 'ethnicity/nationhood' better than William of Malmesbury's description of *gens occidentalis*,

[543] The Liber confortatorius of Goscelin of Saint-Bertin', p. 113; Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, *The Book of Encouragement and Consolation*, pp. 144–5 (Otter's translation).

which I briefly discussed already in the introduction to this thesis. The Oxford Medieval Texts translation helpfully highlights this peculiarity by turning the singular Latin form into plural: 'the peoples of the West'.[544] The translators must have opted for a different form not by accident, but because the original phrase did not seem to make sense. And the key reason for that is that William's *gens occidentalis* encompasses 'the Romans', 'the Franks', and 'the Germans'. The logic of twentieth-century thinking about 'peoples' and 'nations' rebels against this peculiar multiple singularity of 'ethnic' groups simultaneously united under one 'ethnicising' term. It is significant that William is not simply using the word *gens*, he also invests this 'Western people' with 'ethnic'/'racialising' attributes such as its putative 'nature' (conceived in the typical medieval environmentalist-cum-medical knowledge register) and its historical and political destiny. The methodological statism so prevalent in modern and contemporary disciplinary history is also a factor: it is always easier for us to imagine a singular people if it supposedly corresponds to a singular state, with more or less clearly defined boundaries and institutions.[545]

William of Malmesbury's idiosyncratic concept also attracts our attention to the fact that broader systems of hegemony – for instance, the world of Western Christendom structured, to an extent, by the apparatuses of the Church – may also be invested with ethnicising dimensions at the ideological level, even if such ethnicizations feel counter-intuitive for us. We can see how, contrary to a stereotypical view that attributes the lack of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' in medieval Europe to its system of dispersed, fractured and multiple sovereignties, these overlapping levels of polities were all potentially seen as

[544] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, i, IV.360, pp. 632–5.
[545] As the late Immanuel Wallerstein argued in *Unthinking Social Science: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms* (Cambridge, 1991), this combination of methodological statism and nationalism is sustained by the centrality of the pair 'state' and 'society', imagined as two super-imposed levels with coinciding contours, in the axiomatic logic of all academic disciplines within the humanities and social science.

gentes, with all the ethnicising ideological inscriptions that the term carried. Medieval imaginaries of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' were thus broader, more encompassing, less hierarchical and simultaneously more flexible. In contrast to the rigid discourse of 'nationhood' associated with the nation-state, any political entity could have been ethnicised. Again, these differences and contrasts perhaps tell us more about 'ourselves': they bring to the fore the extent to which it is difficult for us to think beyond bounded 'sovereign states-as-nations' and ethnic groups as cultural (and/or racialised) units. Medieval categorisations, while violent in their own right (let us not forget that, for example, William's *gens occidentalis* is instrumentalised in an explicitly Orientalist context, called upon to both represent and justify the superiority of 'the Westerners' over 'the Persians', subjected to the former's crusading wars), may be used to de-reify 'ethnicity'/'nationhood'. In a variation on what Brecht called the 'alienation effect', we may use medieval lexicons to dissociate the language of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' from a historically-specific form of polity (so called 'modern state' or 'nation state') and, therefore, de-mystify it by explicating its real status as a set of empty signifiers, which should appropriately be labelled 'nationcraft'.

While the theory of 'nationcraft' is this thesis's main conceptual contribution, applicable to research on the ideology of ethnicisation across time and place, it also pursues a general argument about the medieval notions of 'nationhood'. Against an influential tendency in the existing literature on the topic, I have been arguing that medieval ideas of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' cannot be reduced to taking these categories and distinctions for granted, as part of one uniform world-view based on the Bible and ancient literary tradition. It should be noted that such an interpretation is understandable as a response to the 'modernist' paradigm, which has completely denied the relevance or even possibility of

national notions in the Middle Ages. Moreover, it does capture an important aspect of medieval perceptions: clearly, there was a tendency to see 'peoples' as a given at the time. But, equally importantly, this is not the whole story and by insisting on the exclusively essentialist understanding of 'nationhood' in the middle ages we are misconceiving it. So, building on the second meaning of 'nationcraft' spelled out in the introduction as the process of self-conscious 'crafting' of 'national' and 'ethnic' boundaries, distinctions and categories by historical actors, I have been looking from different empirical angles at how some authors explicitly constructed, contested and manipulated the language of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' in the long twelfth century. This should lead us to use medieval history differently, neither as a narrative of 'the origins' of the modern nation nor as the non-national Other, but as a repertoire of different concepts along the continuum of 'nationcraft'.

To briefly recap how this investigation proceeded in the empirical chapters of the thesis, I first explored a set of examples, where the mainstream (for the period) distinction between 'the English' and 'the Britons' was reimagined through all sorts of different reinventions of the meaning of the ethnonyms derived from the concept of 'Britain'. In the perhaps most suggestive case of John of Salisbury, this led to the actual invention of a new category of collective identification: *gens Britanniarum* (encompassing both 'the English' and the ancient 'British' heroes borrowed from Geoffrey of Monmouth's narrative). The chapter not only offered an explanation of such re-imaginings and appropriations of 'Britishness' (oscillating between using it as a synonym for 'Englishness' and a new broader category) in the context of both ecclesiastical and secular politics on the British Isles across the long twelfth century, but also argued that we can make sense of these examples only by allowing the possibility that medieval authors could indeed see beyond the purely

essentialist vision of ethnicised 'peoplehood' and were capable of self-consciously re-making national categories.

In the next three chapters, forming a thematic bloc united by an overarching concern with the interplay between religious and national logics and languages in the Middle Ages, I focus on two main topics: the application to 'the English' of the biblical notion of Divine election in the twelfth century and the ethnicising framing of hagiographical discourses. These empirical themes also bring to the fore the contradictory nature of the national imaginary. On the one hand, such insertions of ethno-national categories into the religious world-view undoubtedly served to naturalise the former. This tendency perhaps reaches its ultimate logical conclusion in the representation of 'nations'/'peoples' as agents not only in salvation history in general, but of the eschatological process in particular (or even of the post-Apocalyptic order, as in Goscelin's most vivid vision). On the other hand, both the appeals to the idea of 'the chosen people' and the association of saints with their 'nation' were often used polemically; being applied as rhetorical strategies to argue different, sometimes directly contradictory, causes. So, this develops a sub-argument to the thesis's main claim: medieval actors not only explicitly constructed national categories, but also both implicitly and explicitly contested or even debated how they were used. Through various cases considered in those chapters, for example, Aelred's reimagining of the motif of the unification of the saintly lineage of Norman dukes and the English saintly royal line in Edward the Confessor as the emergence of one people from 'the English' and 'the Normans' manifested in Henry II, or William of Newburgh's direct appropriation of St Alban, historically considered as belonging to 'the Britons', for 'the English', we observe the same possibility of the self-conscious and purposeful remaking of national categories, as in the twelfth-century reinventions of 'Britishness'.

Finally, the last chapter of the thesis looked at the political pertinence of national identifications – both as applied to and by individuals (with a special focus on those records documenting explicit changes in national identification at the time) and at the level of political-economic organization. I zoomed in on the case study of a letter written by John of Salisbury on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury, which reveals how national rhetoric was used as a mobilizing resource with the overlapping structures of lordship and secular and ecclesiastical political institutions. These two themes are bridged by a detailed exploration of the literary figure of the anthropomorphic 'personification' of 'countries'/'nations' (in particular, as conceived in William of Malmesbury's famous image of England and Normandy as conjoined twins). Exploring both gendered and political-economic dimensions of national personifications (in parallel, with a discussion of the theory of the polity as a body, as developed most famously by John of Salisbury), I argue that this figure ideally captures and expresses the central paradox of 'nationcraft' as ideology: simultaneously, its tendency to naturalise 'peoples' and 'countries' as objectively existing and, equally importantly, singular entities (what can be more natural and internally coherent than a body?), and the self-awareness of its own performativity and artificiality (what can be more self-consciously imaginary than a national personification?).

While I emphasise that medieval notions of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood' cannot be reduced to an essentialist vision, it is important to avoid over-stating this case. Of course, the point is not to argue the impossible – for example, that every twelfth-century author, not to mention, every person interpellated with this or that 'ethno-national' identification at the time had some complex ideas about these categories and self-consciously saw them as artificially constructed and contested. That was not the case, even if I am persuaded that scholars routinely underestimate how clear-sighted people can be about various socio-

political fictions even as they continue to indulge them.[546] My aim, however, has been to find exceptions, contradictions and contestations that explicate the breaches in the totality projected by any effective ideology – and nationhood is nothing if not a highly successful ideology (the power of which has grown today in comparison to the middle ages, along with the power of hegemonic relations of domination and exploitation that we are used to calling 'the state'). In this – in such openings – lie both the heuristic and political value of exceptions, on which this thesis has been focused to a great extent.

But we should not be uncritically enamoured with this complexity or with the contradictions and potential voluntarism of medieval authors. We should read these against the grain, not least, because the majority of such utterances were formulated within the logics and discourses of domination. These are not some utopian liberational moments salvageable from the past. It is essential to highlight the fluidity of medieval categories of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood', but by no means should we interpret them as a prefiguration of liberal attitudes to these issues (such a reading would be decidedly anachronistic). Instead, we should see these examples as sites where the contradiction between claiming something is natural and simultaneously vigorously policing it becomes visible (to borrow from Butler's explanation of her own grappling with similar issues as raised by her argument about the performativity of sex and gender).[547] It is by focusing on such contradictions that we can understand how 'nationcraft' works as ideology, while avoiding the danger of falling back on explicit or implicit objectifications.

Insisting on treating 'ethnicity' and 'nationhood' as ideology, as a set of abstract notions and empty signifiers that never become 'real' in any common-sensical way, does not

[546] Cf. David Graeber's discussion of (dis)belief in magic and fetishes. See: D. Graeber, *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (Basingstoke, 2001), pp. 229–61.
[547] J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2nd edition, New York, 1999), p. xx.

mean denying the very real effects of these ideological constructs. Moreover, this approach must directly lead to the next question: if these are all abstractions and fictions, why and how are they reproduced over long periods of time? The question of reproduction will indeed be the last key element of a new heuristic for researching the long history of 'ethnicity'/'nationhood', which I have attempted to work towards in this thesis. Eventually, we shall develop such a theory, which, I expect, will be centred on the interplay between 'the state' and political-economic configurations, or more precisely, the processes of the territorialisation and ethnicisation of both land and people by hegemonic institutions to make them legible for extraction and exploitation. However, it would be impossible to develop such a theory successfully if one continues to take (even if partially) the internal logic of 'nationcraft' at face value and accept as a given what requires explanation. Herein lies the value of the consistently deconstructionist approach advocated for in this thesis. It implies that 'nations' always remain constructs. It is not merely that they were constructed at some point in the past and are not based on biology, genetics or *Volksgeist*. Our task as historians should be to understand how the ideology of 'nationcraft' functions in each particular context, across time and place. Following this approach will allow us to see both the similarities and differences between the multiple ways of imagining and reproducing collective identifications, without falling into the trap of an unwitting or ideological objectification and essentialisation of the nation.

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