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**NARRATIVES OF INVASION IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND**

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English

by

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**ABSTRACT**

Invasions feature prominently in medieval English writing. A major historical factor in the development of such literature was the persistence of historical incursions and invasions of England by Scandinavians from the late eighth through the eleventh centuries. Because most of the Scandinavians involved in these various forms of aggression were not Christian, especially before the eleventh century, writers working from ecclesiastical and dynastic interests developed a motif whereby an army of Scandinavian (or Scandinavian-coded) pagans would invade the lands of an English (or English-coded) Christian people. The motif of pagan invasions offered an abstract space where various authors and political actors explored concepts of identity. Some texts use the stereotype of the pagan invader as an image against which to construct a collective identity, but they also include moments where that image functions more like a mirror where Christian kings and heroes behave very similarly to the pagans they oppose. This dissertation situates these texts in the historical context of a dominant cultural group (the English) articulating concerns over the growing cultural influence of a distinct group (the Scandinavians). Nevertheless, ethnic differences are not invariably treated negatively. Either for political opportunity or through genuine sentiment, texts engaging the motif of invasion allow for the acceptance of Christian Scandinavians. Understanding the motif of invasion and how it was used strategically by various parties offers scholars a window into Anglo-Scandinavian relations during a period critical to constructions of English identity and political unity.

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## Introduction

### Northern Pagans Across a Sea of Ink

Invasions feature prominently in medieval English writing. From adaptations of Old Testament stories to poems commemorating battles to narratives of legendary history, invasions erupt through English literature across genres. A major historical factor in the development of such literature was the persistence of historical incursions and invasions of England by Scandinavians from the late eighth through the eleventh centuries. What began as small-scale raids at the close of the eighth century gave way to major invasions in the ninth century, then saw prolonged political power struggles in the tenth century, and culminated in full conquests during the eleventh century. Because most of the Scandinavians involved in these various forms of aggression were not Christian, especially before the eleventh century, writers working from ecclesiastical and dynastic interests developed a motif whereby an army of Scandinavian (or Scandinavian-coded) pagans would invade the lands of an English (or English-coded) Christian people.

The motif of pagan Scandinavians invading England developed on fertile ground. After all, the establishment of a region called England on the island of Britain was the story of a pagan invasion. A version of this story survives in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, composed in the early eighth century. In retelling his own history of the invasion of Britain by pagan Germanic peoples, Bede drew on Gildas' *De excidio et conquest Britanniae*, composed circa 540, which told the same story from the

perspective of the Britons.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the trope of a believing people being invaded and destroyed by pagans after angering God is common in the Bible.<sup>2</sup> Ecclesiastical and sacred histories warned that invasion by pagans was a real threat, and the incursions by Scandinavians gave this warning real urgency, thus lending immediacy to the development and sustainment of a literary motif in which pagan Scandinavians invade the Christian English. However, this motif did not function exclusively in religious terms; it later lent itself to political propaganda by those fighting against the rising Scandinavian powers in Britain, most famously the West Saxon dynasty. As such, a versatile motif of pagan invasions could function both in the sacred and the secular spheres. Although the motif first grew out of Latin soil, it remained most resilient and stable in vernacular texts. This versatility and resilience allowed the motif to remain current even after attacks by Scandinavians ceased altogether by replacing the traditional northern pagan enemy with Muslims in the post-Crusade era.

Both religion and ethnicity are important in the motif of invading pagan Scandinavians, particular in the vernacular texts of the tenth and eleventh centuries. I use the term “Scandinavian” to refer loosely to all peoples tracing their cultural identity to the North Germanic speaking communities of Scandinavia (i.e., Norway, Sweden, and Denmark). This broad application includes, but is not limited to, communities that settled in Iceland, Britain, and Ireland. My analysis rejects the use of capitalized “Viking,”

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Winterbottom, “Historical Introduction,” Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain and other works*, ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom (London: Phillimore, 1978), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Karen George, *Gildas's De Excidio Britonum and the Early British Church* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), 16-19; Stephen Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 109; Patrick Wormald, “*Engla Lond*: The Making of an Allegiance,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7 (1994): 1-24; N. J. Higham, *The English Conquest: Gildas and Britain in the Fifth century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 12.

which is frequently used in scholarship to denote ethnicity.<sup>3</sup> I use lower-case “vikings” outside of direct quotations to refer to raiding parties whose membership need not be exclusively Scandinavian. As primary sources in Old English and Old Norse-Icelandic make clear, “viking” referred to the activity of raiding and those who participated in it, including the ethnically English. Contemporary English sources do not refer to Scandinavians settled in England as *wicing*, instead preferring the word *Dene* (Dane) to mark their ethnicity.<sup>4</sup> Rejecting capitalized “Viking” as an ethnic term allows for a clearer reading of constructions of ethnicity in the primary sources, while illuminating the instability of identity that allowed for the integration of Christian Scandinavians in England despite powerful anti-pagan sentiments.

Although all degrees of violent incursions in England by Scandinavians play into the motif of invasion, I nevertheless distinguish between raids and invasions aiming at conquest. I use the term “viking raids” when referring to piracy and attacks whose primary goal is material moveable goods, such as a single payment of tribute. These are distinguished from dynastic invasions which aim at territorial control and expansion. For example, Sveinn Forkbeard’s attack in England in 994 where he left after receiving payment constitutes a viking raid, but his invasion in 1013 where he was crowned King of England constitutes a conquest. Raids are significant to the invasion motif because successful raids signal potential vulnerability to permanent conquest. However, it is

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<sup>3</sup> In a brief and efficient analysis of the term “Viking,” Judith Jesch summarizes “Some scholars prefer to restrict the term to those who indulged in the typical ‘Viking’ activities of raiding and pillaging outside Scandinavia, thus perpetuating the pejorative meaning of the word found already in the Viking Age. Other scholars find it convenient to use the term for all Scandinavians in Scandinavia and people of Scandinavian ancestry outside Scandinavia during the period in question.” Judith Jesch, *The Viking Diaspora* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 7.

<sup>4</sup> Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, 113.



helpful to distinguish between the two to form a clearer picture of the reality on the ground at particular moments.

### **Origins of the Motif**

The Bible warns that a people who earn God's wrath will be destroyed. One way for these destructions to come about is through invasion by pagans, as in Jeremiah 25.9:

Ecce ego mitam et assumam universas cognationes aquilonis, ait  
 Dominus...et adducam eos super terram istam, et super habitatores ejus, et  
 super omnes nationes quæ in circuitu illius sunt: et interficiam eos, et  
 ponam eos in stuporem et in sibilum, et in solitudines sempiternas

Behold I will send, and take all the kindreds of the north, saith the  
 Lord...and I will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants  
 thereof, and against all the nations that are round about it: and I will  
 destroy them, and make them an astonishment and a hissing, and perpetual  
 desolations.<sup>5</sup>

In Jerimiah, these invaders come from the north. The Bible provides a precedent for the inhabitants of Britain as a Christian people: if they are not good Christians, God can destroy them by way of another people attacking, and this pagan threat is, according to scripture, located northward. As such, historical aggression by a pagan people,

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Tweedale ed. *The Holy Bible: Douay-Rheims Version* (London: Baronius Press, 2008), 866.

particularly one located in the north, could be read as a foreseen sign of moral and religious failing.

Gildas takes exactly this position in his *De excidio*.<sup>6</sup> Writing shortly after a wave of invasions by pagan Germanic people, he describes the moral decay in Britain after the Romans leave. He laments how the Britons had abandoned good Christian practices saying, “omnia quae discliquerunt deo et quae placuerunt aequali saltem lance pendebantur, si non gratiora fuissent” (Things pleasing to God weighed the same in the balance—unless indeed things displeasing were regarded with more favour).<sup>7</sup> Gildas likens the state of the Britons to the sinful people denounced by the prophets in the Bible. In their own sinfulness, the Britons were attacked by the northern inhabitants of Britain, and an unnamed tyrant and his council invite the pagan Saxons to deal with the northern threat: “Tum omnes consiliarii una cum superbo tyranno caecantur, adinvenientes tale praesidium, immo excidium patriae ut ferocissimi illi nefandi nominis Saxones deo hominibusque inuisi, quaesi in caulas lupi, in insulam ad retundendas aquilonaes gentes intromitterentur” (Then all the members of the council, together with the proud tyrant, were struck blind; the guard—or rather the method of destruction—they devised for our land was that the ferocious Saxons [name not to be spoken!], hated by man and God, should be let into the island like wolves into the fold, to beat back the peoples of the north).<sup>8</sup> The Saxons, whom Gildas likens to wolves hated by God and men, are the destruction of the land, but the fault still lies with the Britons.<sup>9</sup> Although the instrument

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<sup>6</sup> George, *Gildas's De Excidio Britonum and the Early British Church*, 29-41; Higham, *The English Conquest*, 67-89.

<sup>7</sup> Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain*, 25 and 96.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 and 97.

<sup>9</sup> Higham, *The English Conquest*, 36-37.

of destruction, for Gildas the Saxons represent God's punishment for the sinful Britons.<sup>10</sup> Gildas goes on to describe how the Saxons arrive in their ships from across the sea and treacherously take hold of eastern Britain, leading to a series of conflicts with the Britons. As Nicholas Howe notes, "the clash between the two peoples has always been for Gildas a clash between Christian and pagan, Roman and barbarian."<sup>11</sup> Gildas describes the pagan Saxons as animalistic and treacherous, providing a lasting model for pagan invaders as divine punishment that the English, the very descendants of the Saxons that Gildas complains about, would draw on in the coming centuries.

Bede retells Gildas' narrative in his *Historia* but adds specificity. After describing attacks on the Britons by the Irish and the Picts, Bede writes:

initum namque est consilium quid agendum, ubi quaerendum esset  
 praesidium ad euitandas uel repellendas tam feras tamque creberrimas  
 gentium aquilonalium inruptiones, placuitque omnibus cum suo rege  
 Uurtigerno ut Saxonum gentem de transmarinis partibus in auxilium  
 uocarent. Quod Domini nutu dispositum esse constat, ut ueniret contra  
 inprobos malum, sicut eidentius rerum exitus probauit.

They consulted as to what they should do and where they should seek help to prevent or repel the fierce and very frequent attacks of the northern nations; all, including their king Vortigern, agreed that they should call the

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<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 41.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

Saxons to their aid from across the seas. As events plainly showed, this was ordained by the will of God so that evil might fall upon those miscreants.<sup>12</sup>

The unnamed tyrant in Gildas is now named Vortigern, but the Britons still share collective blame for inviting pagans from overseas to deal with the northern threat. Bede earlier refers to the Picts and the Irish, the northern people attacking the Britons, as *gentibus transmarinis* despite acknowledging that the Picts also inhabit the island of Britain. This identification marks them as a different people from the Britons and signals how the Saxons, who are themselves people *transmarinis*, would continue to function as a divine punishment against the sinful Britons.<sup>13</sup> Howe comments that Bede saw the Irish and the Picts as the counterpart to the barbarians who sacked Rome, and that in calling them “transmarine peoples,” Bede follows Gildas’ model of historiography of migrations to Britain.<sup>14</sup> However, given that those presented as coming from overseas are consistently violent, threatening to subjugate or irradicate the present inhabitants, and are framed as military agents of divine punishment, a model of invasion is more appropriate than one of migration. Moreover, like Gildas, Bede presents the Britons as deserving of these invasions:

Qui inter alia inenarrabilium scelerum facta, quae historicus eorum Gildas flebili sermone describit, et hoc addebant, ut numquam genti Saxonum

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<sup>12</sup> *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 48-49.

<sup>13</sup> Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, 9.

<sup>14</sup> Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 50-51.

sive Anglorum, secum Britanniam incolenti, uerbum fidei praedicando  
 committerent.

To other unspeakable crimes, which Gildas their own historian describes  
 in doleful words, was added this crime, that they never preached the faith  
 to the Saxons or Angles who inhabited Britain with them.<sup>15</sup>

Bede argues that by not attempting to convert the pagan invaders who settled on their  
 land, the Britons failed in their Christian duty. Their punishment is that the invading  
 Germanic peoples, who *do* eventually accept Christianity, will displace them to become  
 the dominant group in Britain. As Bede reframes Gildas' narrative of invasion by pagans  
 as divine punishment, it offers a warning to the English: if they became morally corrupt,  
 they too could be driven away by pagans, just as their ancestors had done to the Britons.

The story of Vortigern's invitation of the Germanic peoples who would establish  
 dominance in Britain is later recorded in English in the Old English Chronicle.<sup>16</sup> The C  
 text annal for 449 reads, "On heora dagum Hengest and Horsa fram Wyrhtgeorne gelapode  
 Brytta kyninge gesohtan Brytene on þam stede þe is genemned Hypwinesfleot ærest  
 Bryttum to fultume, ac hy eft on hy fuhton"<sup>17</sup> (In their days Hengest and Horsa, invited

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<sup>15</sup> *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 68-69.

<sup>16</sup> I call the vernacular set of chronicles typically styled the "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle" the "Old English Chronicle" or simply the "Chronicle," to avoid any ethnic implications, especially given the fact that use of the term "Anglo-Saxon" is "vanishingly rare in Old English," David Wilton, "What Do We Mean by *Anglo-Saxon*? Pre-Conquest to the Present," *JEGP* 119, no. 4 (October 2020): 425-56, quote at 438. On the use of "Anglo-Saxon" more broadly, see Mary Rambaran-Olm, M. Breann Leake, and Micah James Goodridge, "Medieval Studies: the Stakes of the Field," *Postmedieval* 11, no. 4 (December 2020): 356-70; Erik Wade, "Representation and Inclusion in the Old English Classroom," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Teaching* 27, no. 2 (2020): 19-40.

<sup>17</sup>Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition Volume 5 MS C*. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001) 28.

by Vortigern king of the Britons, came to Britain at the place which is called Ebbfleet, first to the help of the Britons, but afterwards fought against them).<sup>18</sup> There is general consensus among scholars that the earliest annals of the Chronicle up to circa 892, known as the Common Stock, were compiled in the court of King Alfred the Great.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the Chronicle was produced in the aftermath of the arrival in 865 of what the Chronicle describes as a *micel hæþen here* (great heathen army).<sup>20</sup> By the time that Alfred became king of the West Saxons, much of England had already fallen to these invading pagan Scandinavians in a manner eerily similar to how the Britons had lost control of southern Britain to Germanic pagans. Written histories offered an additional reminder that the Christian English could likewise be overcome by pagans from overseas.

Even after Alfred's reign, the Chronicle remains mindful of invasions by Scandinavians. This is particularly true during periods of intense aggression. As Ryan Lavelle notes, "If nothing else, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for the reigns of Alfred and King Æthelred II is a catalogue of Viking Activity."<sup>21</sup> These attacks by Scandinavian pirates and warlords had profound effects on the English. As Mary Rambaran-Olm argues for during the Reign of Æthelred the Unready, but also applicable more broadly, "The results of previous raids and the persistent threat of further invasion had created a chronic fear in the English people" some of whom interpreted previous invasions as

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<sup>18</sup> Dorothy Whitelock ed., *English Historical Documents: c. 500-1042* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979), 152.

<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Brooks, "Why is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* about Kings?" *Anglo-Saxon England* 39 (March 2011): 48; Simon Keynes, "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Michael Lapidge, John Blair, Simon Keynes, and Donald Scragg (Oxford, 1999), 35–6.

<sup>20</sup> O'Brien O'Keefe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS C*, 58.

<sup>21</sup> Ryan Lavelle, "Geographies of Power in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: The Royal Estates of Anglo-Saxon Wessex," in *Reading the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ed. Alice Jorgensen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 188.

divine punishment.<sup>22</sup> Stephen Harris convincingly argues that English collective identity “from Bede onward envisioned a chosen people, like Israel, scourged for their disobedience and rewarded for their loyalty.”<sup>23</sup> In this paradigm, northern pagan invaders consistently attacked the English, and some day these invaders might conquer them entirely as had happened to other Christians who lost God’s favor.

However, the invasions by Scandinavians also offered political opportunities. As Jayne Carrol notes, from the end of the eighth century to the reign of Cnut and his sons, “the Scandinavians had a profound impact upon the holding of power in pre-Conquest England.”<sup>24</sup> Writing before the attacks by Scandinavians, Bede lists several English rulers who achieved overlordship in Britain beyond their own kingdom.<sup>25</sup> The Chronicle reproduces Bede’s list giving these rulers the title of *bretwalda*, and adds that the West Saxon king Egbert was the eighth king to be *bretwalda*.<sup>26</sup> The concept of the *bretwalda* provided a precedent for the most powerful king holding sway over all Britain.<sup>27</sup> When the invading Great Army toppled the kings of Northumbria, East Anglia, and Mercia, the West Saxon dynasty that successfully resisted their invasions during the ninth century

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<sup>22</sup> M. R. Rambaran-Olm, “Trial by History’s Jury: Examining II Æthelred’s Legislative and Literary Legacy, AD 993-1106,” *English Studies* 95, no. 7 (October 2014): 777-802 at 795. On concerns over the persistent and historical attack by Scandinavians more broadly see Simon Keynes, “An abbot, an archbishop, and the viking raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007): 151-220; Malcolm Godden, “Prologues and Epilogues in the Old English Pastoral Care, and Their Carolingian Models,” *JEGP* 110, no. 4 (October 2011): 441-73; Malcolm Godden, “Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England,” in *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E. G. Stanley*, edited by Douglas Gray, Malcolm Godden, and T. F. Hoad, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 130-62.

<sup>23</sup> Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, 158. For Bede’s identification of the English with the Israelites more broadly see Andrew P. Scheil, *The Footsteps of Israel: Understanding Jews in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 23-97.

<sup>24</sup> Jayne Carrol, “Concepts of power in Anglo-Scandinavian verse,” in *Aspects of Power and Authority in the Middle Ages*, ed. B. M. Boltan and C. E. Meek (Turnhout: Brepols Publishing, 2007), 217.

<sup>25</sup> *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 148-50.

<sup>26</sup> Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Volume 5 MS C, 53.

<sup>27</sup> Steven Fanning, “Bede, Imperium, and the Bretwaldas,” *Speculum* 66, no. 1 (January 1991): 1-26.

leveraged the threat of pagan invasion to pursue imperial ambitions.<sup>28</sup> The lingering threat of invasion provided a justification and impetus for territorial expansion.

In his prefatory letter to the Old English version of Gregory's *Regula pastoralis*, King Alfred recalls

hu ða kyningas ðe ðone onwald hæfdon ðæs folces [on ðam dagum] Gode  
and his ærenwrecum hersumedon; & hie ægder ge hiora sioda hiora  
onweald innanbordes gehioldon, & eac ut hiora eðel gerymdon.<sup>29</sup>

...how those kings who had dominion over people in those days obeyed  
God and his representatives; and they upheld peace, good conduct, and  
dominion within, and also expanded their homeland outwards.<sup>30</sup>

For Alfred, territorial expansion was the mark of a good king. Alfred's program of vernacular translations also included Orosius's *Historia aduersum paganos*. As Renée Trilling notes, "Orosius's historiographical model...was particularly well suited to the political climate of an island under invasion by a conquering force."<sup>31</sup> Even during Alfred's reign the pagan threat intersected with the idea that the mark of a successful ruler is expansion of the realm. Alfred's descendants would strive for a better future (at least for themselves) by expanding their political influence far beyond Wessex, and the

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<sup>28</sup> Torben R. Gebhardt, "From Bretwalda to Basileus: Imperial Concepts in *Late Anglo-Saxon England?*" in *Transcultural Approaches to the Concept of Imperial Rule in the Middle Ages*, ed. Christian Scholl, Torben R. Gebhardt and Jan Clauß (Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2017), 157-83.

<sup>29</sup> Henry Sweet, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1871), 3.

<sup>30</sup> Scott T. Smith, *Land and Book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 150.

<sup>31</sup> Renée R. Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 135.



motif of invading pagans, strengthened by the historical presence of pagan Scandinavians in Britain, would serve them as a tool for propaganda.

### **Chapter Breakdown**

Chapter 1 examines the invasion motif in the Chronicle poems the *Battle of Brunanburh* and the *Capture of the Five Boroughs*. It contextualizes the poems in the reigns of King Æthelstan and his brother King Edmund in the first half of the tenth century. Both *Brunanburh* and *Capture* commemorate victories by the West Saxons over their Scandinavian rivals, the dynasty of Dublin and York. However, the poems adopt defensive posturing despite being composed in a period of West Saxon expansion and political dominance across Britain. The chapter contrasts the use of the invasion motif in these vernacular poems, where the West Saxon kings are presented as defenders, with the more triumphant depictions of Æthelstan in panegyrics produced in other languages projecting imperial grandeur internationally, thus shedding light on how the West Saxon court utilizes the motif for propaganda in England. The chapter also examines the presence of Scandinavians in Æthelstan's court as well as the Christianization of Anglo-Scandinavians who had settled in England, and how these factors begin to complicate the easy association of Scandinavians and paganism foreshadowing how the motif would need to adopt a new pagan invader in the future.

Chapter 2 analyzes the use of the invasion motif in two texts composed during the reign of Æthelred II, the secular poem the *Battle of Maldon* and Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*. Æthelred's reign was marked by increased aggression from Scandinavians that culminated in the conquest of England by Sveinn Forkbeard in 1013. *Maldon*

commemorates the efforts by ealdorman Byrthnoth to resist a Scandinavian raid in 991. His effort ended in defeat, marking the first in a series of military setbacks for the English. *Maldon*, which commemorates contemporary events, explicitly identifies the invaders as heathen, Scandinavian vikings, but it does not portray Scandinavians as inherently evil. Byrthnoth's forces include Christians with Scandinavian names who choose to die avenging their lord against the pagan vikings. Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, which operates at a greater historical distance from contemporary invasions, is less generous toward Scandinavians. The "Life of St Edmund," set during the arrival of the Great Army in the mid-ninth century, presents violence as customary to Scandinavians. Ælfric's account of the biblical story of Maccabees identifies the English with the Maccabees and the invading Scandinavians with biblical pagans and offers a model for resisting invading pagans. This chapter demonstrates how the motif was reinvigorated during a period of renewed aggression, and how writers could use historical distance to sustain the motif despite the growing number of Christian Scandinavians in England.

Chapter 3 treats how the reign of Cnut the Great, the Danish king of England, further challenged the association between Scandinavians and paganism. Cnut invaded England in 1016 becoming king through conquest, and the Chronicle records his invasion in much the same terms as it does other Scandinavian invaders. However, Cnut made a show of his Christian piety as king, even working with Archbishop Wulfstan of York, the notoriously anti-pagan author of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. Cnut issued two surviving proclamations in 1020 and 1027 in which he presents himself as a Christian ruler who defends his subjects from Scandinavian aggression, much like his West Saxon predecessors had done. And like the West Saxons, he used the opportunity to expand his

political authority building an empire across the North Sea. Cnut's proclamation of 1027 also mentions his pilgrimage to Rome for the coronation of Emperor Conrad II, an event likewise commemorated in Sigvatr Þórðarson's *Knútsdrápa*, attesting that Cnut's Christianity was proclaimed to his Scandinavian and English subjects alike across languages. Finally, the chapter analyzes the portrayal of Cnut in the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* commissioned by his widow Emma of Normandy some years after his death. Following the model of the Norman dukes, the *Encomium* depicts Cnut as a Christian Scandinavian ruler of a diverse people. Thus, the reign and legacy of Cnut in England significantly challenged the once easy association between Scandinavians and paganism, pressuring the motif to identify a new pagan enemy in order to remain viable.

Chapter 4 examines the use of the invasion motif in the Arthurian section of Laʒamon's *Brut*. Laʒamon composed the *Brut* circa 1200, long after the Norman Conquest of 1066, the last successful invasion of England, and after the widespread adoption of Christianity in most of Scandinavia. As such, the motif had lost its historical immediacy. However, this chapter makes the case that Laʒamon was familiar with English texts from the tenth and eleventh centuries that had used the motif. Recognizing the old tropes, he reapplied the invasion motif when adapting Wace's *Roman de Brut* for an English audience. In the section of the *Brut* narrating the Saxon invasions faced by Uther Pendragon and Arthur, Laʒamon depicts the pagan Saxons in a manner reminiscent of how Old English literature depicts invading pagan Scandinavians. Arthur's conflict with Rome, however, also reflects a distinctly post-Crusade ethos. Wace had already anachronistically designated Rome's allies from West Asia and North Africa as Muslims and applied tropes from the *chansons de geste* in depicting the conflict. Laʒamon inflects

this source material with tropes from the English motif of pagan invasions. By successfully applying the native motif to a new non-Christian enemy, one that never invaded England, the *Brut* illustrates the versatility of the invasion motif that allowed it to continue into the Middle English period, long after losing its historical relevance.

The conclusion looks briefly to the afterlife of the motif of pagan invasions in Middle English literature. The romance *King Horn* depicts a Muslim army invading England and behaving much like the Scandinavians who historically did so. The invading Muslims are described in language that recalls the invading pagans in Laȝamon and his Old English sources, but *King Horn* makes greater use of racialized language. Meanwhile *Havelok the Dane* depicts a Christian Scandinavian as a benevolent conqueror of England. Havelok's name goes back to the historical Olaf Cuaran of the Dublin-York dynasty that rivaled the West Saxons in the tenth century, while his position as a Danish conqueror recalls the career of Cnut. However, as a Christian rather than pagan invader, Havelok can function as a hero. These romances illustrate the enduring importance of the motif of pagan invasion in English cultural memory, with the received literary tradition being recirculated long after the historical circumstances of the motif had passed.

## Chapter 1

### To Brunanburh and Beyond

The tenth century saw the literary rearticulation of a motif present in England since the invasion of the Great Army in the mid-ninth century: England was a land in danger of pagan invasion. Of the four English kingdoms that existed at the time when the Great Army arrived in 865, only Wessex retained an autonomous English monarch by the end of the ninth century.<sup>32</sup> The existence of the Danelaw, a large region of England where Scandinavians had settled since the invasion of the Great Army, meant that the threat of invasion was omnipresent, but that threat also provided circumstances for measuring a hero.<sup>33</sup> During the first half of the tenth century, the ruling West Saxon dynasty strategically deployed vernacular literature that portrayed them defending against the pagan Scandinavian threat while expanding their territorial control in the process.

Since the establishment of the Danelaw, the ongoing and future invasions from pagan Scandinavians were a threat to the West Saxon royal dynasty and to the Church, so the narratives of invasion produced in the tenth century were both political and religious in nature. Although literary responses to the presence of pagan Scandinavians appeared in Latin and English, this chapter focuses on vernacular texts. Specifically, the chapter treats the poetry commemorating military conflicts between the West Saxon rulers and factions led by Scandinavians found in the Old English Chronicle since “the Chronicle was

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<sup>32</sup> Anders Winroth, *The Age of the Vikings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 59.

<sup>33</sup> On the Danelaw, see Dawn M. Hadley, “The Creation of the Danelaw,” in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink, and Neil Price (New York: Routledge, 2008), 375-78; Katherine Holman, “Defining the Danelaw,” in *Viking and the Danelaw*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch, and David Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), Chap. 1; and O. Fenger, “The Danelaw and the Danish law: Anglo-Scandinavian legal relations during the Viking period,” *Scandinavian Studies in Law* 16 (1972): 85-96.

intended as a public text.”<sup>34</sup> The Chronicle provides early vernacular accounts of historical conflicts between the Christian English and pagan Scandinavians, the memories and records of which would remain important in England for centuries, with new iterations of these stories continuing into the fifteenth century.

However, since the onset of the Scandinavian invasions, many people of Scandinavian origin in the British Isles had adopted Christianity, weakening the easy association between Scandinavians and pagans that circulated in the ninth century. Moreover, the growing strength and influence of the West Saxon royal dynasty outside of Wessex during the early to mid-tenth century meant that pagans were no longer the most serious political threat to the established rulers in most of Britain: during the reign of Æthelstan, that position was occupied by West Saxon ambition. Æthelstan had inherited from his father Edward the Elder a growing political authority and sovereignty, or *anweald*, that extended beyond traditional West Saxon territory.<sup>35</sup> This was not lost on the other rulers in Britain who considered forming an alliance against the West Saxon royals.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, Chronicle poems like *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *The Capture of the Five Boroughs* demonstrate how motifs of invasion and pagan identity could be used to proclaim West Saxon political and territorial control and authority.

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<sup>34</sup> Scott T. Smith, *Land and Book: Literature and Land Tenure in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 152.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, *Land and Book*, 158.

<sup>36</sup> Benjamin Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes: Dynasty, Religion, and Empire in the North Atlantic*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 30.

### **Pagan Invasion and West Saxon Expansion**

The Chronicle marks the start of the Scandinavian invasion of England in 866 by noting the arrival of a *mycel hæðen here*, a great heathen army.<sup>37</sup> The Scandinavian invaders are identified through their paganism and the size of their force, and the Chronicle provides a record of how the English royal houses fell to this pagan enemy, except the house of Wessex. The dominance of the West Saxon house over its political rivals in England is thus directly tied to the invasion of pagan Scandinavians. The West Saxon king Alfred the Great (d. 899) achieved prominence not through unprecedented aggression across England, but by successfully defending Wessex from invading pagan Scandinavians after the collapse of the other English kingdoms.

The Chronicle is invested in West Saxon hegemony, which was itself built politically on the motif of pagan invasions, and it preserves an official written knowledge of those past invasions. Nicholas Brooks argues for understanding the Chronicle, including the continuations, as royally sanctioned, and Scott T. Smith reads it as a dynastic landbook.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, through heroic poetry like *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *The Capture of the Five Boroughs*, the Chronicle reinscribes a record of pagan invasion with the element of successful defense from West Saxon kings. As Smith argues,

The two poems entered at 937 (*The Battle of Brunanburh*) and 942 (*The Capture of the Five Boroughs*) are historically situated texts designed to

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<sup>37</sup> Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 6 MS D, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996), 24; Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 5 MSC, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 58; and Simon Taylor, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 4 MS B, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983), 34.

<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Brooks, "Why is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* about Kings?" *Anglo-Saxon England* 39 (March 2011): 43-70; Smith, *Land and Book*, 150-89.

publicize and preserve a specific idea about kingship and the relationship between ruler and realm. Both poems celebrate the protection or acquisition of territory by West Saxon kings just as they reiterate a line of legitimate succession, and by implication, the transmission of dynastic land within that line.<sup>39</sup>

The threat of invasion by pagan Scandinavians, recorded in the very Chronicles where the poems survive, provides the impetus for protecting and acquiring more territory. The poems themselves then illustrate how West Saxon kings would rise to the occasion in the face of invasions to defend their territory and those within it. Through their glorification of West Saxon dynasty, the Chronicle poems invest their heroes with legendary status.<sup>40</sup> They also reinforce the idea that the threat of invasion from pagan Scandinavians is recurrent: invaders came in the past and continue in the present, and it is only the heroic kings of the West Saxon dynasty that keeps them away.

The first of the Chronicle poems, *The Battle of Brunanburh*, commemorates the victory of West Saxon and Mercian forces led by King Æthelstan of Wessex over Scandinavian forces led by Anlaf (ON Óláfr) and Scottish forces led by King Constantine. The battle took place in 937 near a place called Brunanburh and resulted in a decisive victory for the West Saxons and Mercians, establishing Æthelstan as the dominant ruler in Britain.<sup>41</sup> The poem commemorating the battle exists in two versions

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<sup>39</sup> Smith, *Land and Book*, 174.

<sup>40</sup> Renée R. Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 201.

<sup>41</sup> Sarah Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), chap. 1, Kindle.



today and survives in manuscripts ABC and D of the Chronicle.<sup>42</sup> Despite its contemporary subject matter, the poem makes use of traditional aesthetics, thereby lending the poem the gravitas of antiquity. As Renée Trilling argues, Old English historical poems like *Brunanburh* use the aesthetics of nostalgia to work out England's "collective relationship to the present through the poetic representation of a heroic past."<sup>43</sup> For example, the second line of the poem refers to Æthelstan as *beorna beahgifa* (ring-giver of men), a kenning for a generous man using the poetic word *beaggyfa* found in such texts as *Beowulf*. Trilling continues, "Nostalgia, then, must be understood in a dialectical relationship to history: as it attempts to reconstruct the lost past in the present moment, its manipulation of material events into aesthetic objects turns the present into history, thereby reifying the separation between present and past."<sup>44</sup> Through its use of heroic aesthetics, *Brunanburh* connects itself to vernacular poetic tradition and embeds itself into England's historical narrative and collective memory.

The poem, with a mix of panegyric and invective elements, presents West Saxon royals as defending the land against enemies from the north. It is the earliest self-consciously literary text in the vernacular to make use of the motif of pagans invading England.<sup>45</sup> Yet despite engaging with the motif of pagan invasions to England,

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<sup>42</sup> All quotations are from the *Battle of Brunanburh* are of Michael Livingston's edition of the A version, though it should be noted that the arguments put forward here hold for both versions of the text. The translations are my own unless otherwise stated but follow the general pattern of original translations for individual words and brief phrases and attributed translations for extended passages. See "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle [Version A], *Battle of Brunanburh*," ed. and trans. Michael Livingston in *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, ed. Michael Livingston (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011), 40-43.

<sup>43</sup> Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Earlier texts from England that use the motif pagan invasions include Asser's *Vita Ælfredi regis Angul Saxonum* composed in Latin, the vernacular Old English Chronicle, which is not overtly literary, and possibly the Old English poem *Judith* which uses the motif in a biblical setting rather than in England. In the context of the whole of Britain, the motif is present in the works of Gildas and Bede.

*Brunanburh* never explicitly refers to the enemies as pagans, not even the Scandinavians. The historical reality during Æthelstan's reign would have strained any immediate association between his enemies and paganism much more than they would have during the reign of his grandfather Alfred the Great because some of the Scandinavians who had settled in England had converted to Christianity. Nevertheless, *Brunanburh* draws on the pagan invasion motif to position Æthelstan, and by extension the West Saxon royal house, as defenders of the land.

*The Battle of Brunanburh*, unlike much of the traditional Old English verse that survives, is overtly political. It is with this poem in the tenth century that we begin to see Old English verse used to commemorate contemporary events, an aspect perhaps due to influence from Scandinavian Skaldic praise poetry.<sup>46</sup> It should be noted that Æthelstan's court also saw the production of Latin praise poetry,<sup>47</sup> but the possibility of Scandinavian influence has significant implications for *Brunanburh's* audience that are explored below. Moreover, the poem's inclusion in the Chronicle, the only context in which the poem survives, suggests that both the poem and the Chronicle should be seen as promulgating the official West Saxon version of events,<sup>48</sup> and as attempts to shape the collective memory around those events.<sup>49</sup> By engaging with the motif of pagan invasions,

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<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth M. Tyler, "Poetics and the Past: Making History with Old English Poetry," in *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, ed. Elizabeth M. Tyler and Ross Balzaretti (Turnhout: Brepols Publishing, 2006), 235, and Matthew Townend, "Pre-Cnut Praise-Poetry in Viking Age England," *The Review of English Literature* 51, no. 203 (August 2000): 355.

<sup>47</sup> Smith, *Land and Book*, 176.

<sup>48</sup> Jayne Carrol, "Concepts of Power in Anglo-Scandinavian Verse," in *Aspects of Power and Authority in the Middle Ages*, ed. B. M. Boltan and C. E. Meek (Turnhout: Brepols Publishing, 2007), 222.

<sup>49</sup> On the propagandistic nature of the Chronicle see R. H. C. Davis, "Alfred the Great: Propaganda and Truth," *History* 56, no. 187 (June 1971): 169-182, and T. A. Bredehoft, *Textual Histories: Readings in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2001).

*Brunanburh* presents the defense against invasion as a part of West Saxon, and eventually English, identity.

As Smith has argued, the Chronicle, especially the southern manuscripts, can be read “as a textual mode for asserting dynastic dominion over a growing amount of territory.”<sup>50</sup> Even though the text of the various manuscripts can differ significantly in the post-Alfredian entries, they all maintain an interest in the activities of kings, which suggests some degree of royal control. Brooks argues:

the content of these tenth- century annals, and their essentially consistent wording in all manuscripts, can be most economically explained on the assumption that an Old English annalistic record of the accessions and deaths of kings, of notable victories and conquests and of the baptism and submission of Viking rulers, was being kept and incorporated into a central record and that royal praise poems were also being composed for it.<sup>51</sup>

While the individual continuations of the Chronicle often reflect distinct local interests, their attention to royal affairs is more consistent. To that end, the text of the Chronicles is selective with what it reveals and what it omits. As Donald Scragg notes, the only entries common to the A, B, C, and D texts of the Chronicle for Æthelstan’s reign are his 934 expedition into Scotland (recorded for 933 in the A-text) and the *Brunanbuh* poem.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, for Æthelstan’s reign the chroniclers demonstrate an interest in dynastic authority

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<sup>50</sup> Smith, *Land and Book*, 152.

<sup>51</sup> Brooks, “Why is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* about Kings?” 50.

<sup>52</sup> Donald Scragg, “A Reading of *Brunanburh*,” in *Unlocking the Wordhord: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Memory of Edward B. Irving, Jr.*, ed. Amodio and O’Keeffe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 111.

and military dominance in the north. For the attack on Scotland the A-text reads, “Her for Æpelstan cyning in on Scotland, ægþer ge mid landhere ge mid scyphere, [and] his micel oferhergade”<sup>53</sup> (In this year King Athelstan went into Scotland with both a land force and a naval force, and ravaged much of it).<sup>54</sup> The annal states that Æthelstan’s forces attacked Scotland by land, implying dominance across Britain far beyond traditional West Saxon territory, and by sea, an area formerly dominated by the Scandinavian invaders.

Interestingly, Æthelstan’s forces are described by compounds with the word *here*, which is often used in the Chronicle to describe Scandinavian forces doing in England what Æthelstan does in Scotland. The wording reflects recognition that, despite his Christianity, Æthelstan’s military actions are no different than those of the pagan Scandinavians that the West Saxon royals defend against.

Yet the Chronicle is guarded regarding setbacks for the West Saxon dynasty. *The Battle of Brunanburh* celebrates a major West Saxon victory over its rivals, but it remains quiet about the cost of that victory. The *Annals of Ulster*, for example, records heavy casualties on both sides at Brunanburh,<sup>55</sup> and two West Saxon royals were among those who were killed.<sup>56</sup> In this light, we can read *Brunanburh* as drawing on the precedent of Scandinavian pagans invading England, a history recorded in the Chronicle where the poem survives, to participate in the political project of advancing West Saxon political authority and territorial dominance. But for the West Saxon royals, that defense must be

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<sup>53</sup> Janet M. Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 3 MS A, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1986), 70.

<sup>54</sup> Dorothy Whitelock ed., *English Historical Documents: c. 500-1042*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1979) 219.

<sup>55</sup> Smith, *Land and Book*, 184.

<sup>56</sup> Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, 199.

successful. This expectation of military success when defending against pagan invaders contrasts with the literature produced outside of the royal court towards the end of the tenth century, such as *The Battle of Maldon*. While *Brunanburh* celebrates a military victory, it projects a dominance that exceeds the realities of the historical battle.

*The Battle of Brunanburh* participates in the pagan invasion tradition by framing the fight as defensive on the part of the Æthelstan's forces. On the surface, this makes perfect sense given that the enemies in the poem, identified as Scots and Northmen, brought troops into England from Scotland and Ireland. The Scots are referred to as *Sceotta leoda* "men of the Scots" (11), the Scandinavians as *scipflotan* "sailors" (11) and *Norþmen* "Northmen" (53). The defeated Constantine flees to *his cyþpe norð* "his homeland in the north" (38), and the defeated Northmen board their ships *Difelin secan, / eft Iraland* "to seek Dublin back in Ireland" (55-56). As the poem repeats, enemies came into England from the "north," a direction associated with paganism in a biblical, West Saxon, and increasingly English, context. These enemies are framed as outsiders that are repelled by Æthelstan's combined West Saxon and Mercian forces and forced back to their respective northern regions. That Æthelstan leads not only West Saxons but Mercians also speaks to West Saxon political authority over the formerly independent Mercia, and the poem's posturing makes a case for the benefits to Mercia of submitting to West Saxon royal authority. Moreover, by focusing closely on the battle, the poem also sidesteps the political context of this military engagement: namely that Anlaf and Constantine's alliance can be regarded as an attempt to push back on the expanding influence of the West Saxons resulting from aggression earlier Æthelstan's reign.

West Saxon influence in England had grown steadily since the reign of Alfred. By the time that Æthelstan acceded to the throne in 924, the Scandinavians in East Anglia and Essex had submitted to the West Saxon crown.<sup>57</sup> Æthelstan quickly expanded his influence further north. In 926, he married his sister Edgyth to Sihtric Cáech, the Scandinavian ruler of York, and following Sihtric's death the following year, Æthelstan annexed Northumbria.<sup>58</sup> Manuscript D of the ASC reports:

Sihtric acwæl, [and] Æþelstan cyning feng to Norðhymbra rice. [And] ealle þa cyngas þe on þyssonum iglande wæron he gewylde, ærest Huwal Westwala cyning, [and] Cosstantin Scotta cyning, [and] Uwen Wenta cyning, and Ealdred Ealdulfing from Bebbanbyrig, [and] mid wedde and mid aþum fryþ gefæstnodon on þære stowe þe genemned is æt Eamotum.<sup>59</sup>

Sihtric died, and King Athelstan succeeded to the kingdom of the Northumbrians; and brought under his rule all the kings who were in this island: first Hywel, king of the West Welsh, and Constantine, king of the Scots, and Owain, king of the people of Gwent, and Ealdred, son of Eadwulf from Bamburgh. And they established peace with pledge and oaths in the place which is called Eamont.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Foot, *Æthelstan*, chap. 1, Kindle.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> G. P. Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 6 MS D, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996), 41.

<sup>60</sup> Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, 218.

Although the tone of the annal is somewhat muted, the implication is that Æthelstan captured York by force.<sup>61</sup> The Latin poem *Carta dirige gressus* implies an even more forceful take-over than does the Chronicle. This poem was likely composed in the immediate aftermath of the meeting at Eamont in which Æthelstan obtained pledges from the other rulers in Britain.<sup>62</sup> The poem states:

Quos iam regit cum ista  
 perfecta Saxonia:  
 uiuit rex Æþelstanus  
 per facta gloriosus!

Ille, Sictric defuncto,  
 armat tum in prelio  
 Saxonum exercitum  
 per totum Bryttanium.

Whom he now rules with this  
 England [now] made whole:  
 King Athelstan lives  
 glorious through his deeds!

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<sup>61</sup> Michael Livingston, “The Roads to Brunanburh,” in *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, ed. Michael Livingston (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011), 9.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Lapidge, “Some Latin poems as evidence for the reign of Athelstan,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 9 (1981): 92.

He, with Sihtric having died,  
 in such circumstances arms for battle  
 the army of the English  
 throughout all Britain.<sup>63</sup>

Even if no battle was fought, this praise poem makes it clear that Æthelstan raised a military force to annex Northumbria. The show of force was likely necessary given that Anlaf, the Scandinavian king of Dublin, probably felt he had a claim to his kinsman Sihtric's lands in Northumbria.<sup>64</sup> The Scandinavian Dublin-York royal house was also the main dynastic rivals to the house of Wessex during the first half of the tenth century.<sup>65</sup>

The manner in which both the chronicle and *Carta dirige gressus* describe Æthelstan's position not just in England but in Britain illustrates the extent to which West Saxon power had grown. The chronicle states that Æthelstan not only took Northumbria, but that he also brought all the kings in Britain under his rule, including the Welsh kings and Constantine king of the Scots. The Latin poem credits Æthelstan with *perfecta Saxoniam*, uniting or perfecting England, and claims that he could move his army throughout all Britain. In essence, while Alfred's Wessex had been defined primarily through defensive triumphs, Æthelstan's kingdom established itself through territorial expansion and by subjugating neighboring rivals.

While the Chronicle, as a tool of West Saxon royal propaganda, and *Carta dirige gressus*, as royal poetry, should both be treated with caution regarding their portrayal of

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<sup>63</sup> *Carta dirige gressus*, ed. and trans. Michael Lapidge, in *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, ed. Michael Livingston (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011), 38-39.

<sup>64</sup> Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 30.

<sup>65</sup> Alfred Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin: The History and Archaeology of two related Viking Kingdoms*, ii (Dublin: Irish Academy, 1987), 55.



West Saxon dominance, other sources corroborate their image and extent of West Saxon power during Æthelstan's reign. From 928 to 935, for example, the witness list in royal charters include British sub-kings.<sup>66</sup> More telling still is the Welsh poem *Armes Prydein Vawr*, which calls “for a pan-Irish Sea alliance to drive the ‘foreign’ Saxons back to the eastern sea.”<sup>67</sup> The poem reads:

gwaethylgwyr hyt Gaer Weir gwasgarawt allmyn.

Gwnahawnt goruoled gwedy gwelyn

a chymot Kymry a gwyr Dilyn.

Gwydyl Iwerdon, Mon, a Phrydyn,

Cornyw a Chludwys eu kynnwys genhyn. (7-11)

Warriors (from) as far as Caer Weir will scatter foreigners.

They will bring about rejoicing after devastation

and reconciliation of the Cymry and the men of Dublin.

The Irish of Ireland, Anglesey, and Scotland,

the Cornish and the men of Strathclyde will be welcomed among us.<sup>68</sup>

The Welsh poem also reminds its audience that the West Saxons are themselves descendants of pagan invaders. It links the contemporary expansion of West Saxon influence to the historical gains of invaders at the expense of the native Britons by alluding to the written history of the arrival of Horsa and Hengist:

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<sup>66</sup> Foot, *Æthelstan*, chap. 1

<sup>67</sup> Livingston, “The Roads to Brunanburh,” 10.

<sup>68</sup> *Armes Prydein Vawr*, ed. and trans. John K. Bollard in *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, ed. Michael Livingston (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011), 28-29.

Pan prynasant Danet trwy fflet called  
gan Hors a Hegys, oed yng eu ryssed,  
eu kynnyd bu y wrthym yn anuonhed. (31-33)

When they purchased Thanet with cunning falsehood  
with Hors and Hengist, their power was constrained,  
their gain at our expense, unworthy.<sup>69</sup>

Hudson argues that the poem, where the “poet calls upon the Scots, the Vikings, and the Irish to join the Welsh and rise up against the ‘Great King,’” reflected a wave of diplomacy following Wessex’s expanding influence under Æthelstan.<sup>70</sup> Nor was it only the Welsh who had cause for complaint. As noted earlier, in 934 Æthelstan attacked Scotland by land and sea.<sup>71</sup> It was through aggression, not defense, that Æthelstan could style himself *rex totius Britanniae* years before the Battle of Brunanburh.<sup>72</sup>

The location of the Battle of Brunanburh also brings some questions as to how defensive the battle was on the part of the West Saxons. The exact location of the battle has not been settled, but there is a growing consensus that Bromborough in the Wirral peninsula is the likeliest candidate.<sup>73</sup> Paul Cavill argues that “Bromborough on the Wirral and its area fits the philological, topographical, and sociological descriptors given in the

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 28-31.

<sup>70</sup> Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 30.

<sup>71</sup> Foot, *Æthelstan*, chap. 1, and Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 30.

<sup>72</sup> Samantha Zacher, “Multilingualism at the court of King Æthelstan: Latin praise poetry and the *Battle of Brunanburh*,” in *Conceptualizing Multilingualism in England, c. 800 - c. 1250*, ed. Elizabeth Tyler (Turnhout: Brepols Publishing, 2011), 80.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Coates, “The Sociolinguistic Context of Brunanburh,” in *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, ed. Michael Livingston (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011), 365.

names.”<sup>74</sup> This is significant because, as Stephen Harding notes, “By the time of the Battle of Brunanburh, a linguistically Scandinavian population had been established in the north and west of the Wirral peninsula, and the existence of its Thing at Thingwall—one of only two surviving Thingwall place-names in England—attests to the Scandinavian being the dominant population.”<sup>75</sup>

The Wirral peninsula was likely ethnically and linguistically diverse with one or more Scandinavian dialects serving as a lingua franca.<sup>76</sup> One of the *Three Fragments of Irish Annals* states that Scandinavians under the leadership of Ingimund arrived at Wirral in 902 and were granted permission to settle.<sup>77</sup> The third Fragment states that the party contained Norwegians, Danes, and Irish “fosterlings,” with the Irish members identified as Christian.<sup>78</sup> A strong Scandinavian presence in the region is further supported by place-names, like Hesby and Kir[k]by.<sup>79</sup> The region also contains some Irish place-names, and Coates suggests, “What is significant in assessing the relationship between Irish and Scandinavian is that these names stuck... This appears to suggest that although the names represent the internal view of the settlements—the view of the inhabitants—they were used by Scandinavian speakers, as well as ultimately by English-speakers.”<sup>80</sup> Given Wirral’s location in the Irish Sea and the report in the fragment noted above about who settled the region, this should come as no surprise. Like Dublin, Wirral was a region

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<sup>74</sup> Paul Cavill, “The Place-Name Debate,” in *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, ed. Michael Livingston (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011), 348.

<sup>75</sup> Stephen Harding, “Wirral: Folklore and Locations,” in *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, ed. Michael Livingston (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011), 357.

<sup>76</sup> Coates, “The Sociolinguistic Context of Brunanburh,” 365.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 379.

with a strong Scandinavian and Irish presence that was politically dominated by Scandinavians. This is not to suggest that the inhabitants of Wirral would have been friendly to Anlaf because of any shared linguistic or cultural connections, but rather to illustrate that when Æthelstan brought West Saxon and Mercian forces to “defend the land” at Brunanburh, his troops were no less alien to the region in which the battle took place than those invaders who were forced to flee north. The Anglo-Scandinavian dimension of the Battle of Brunanburh had more to do with Dublin’s desire to control York, and York’s desire to remain independent of Wessex than with Wessex defending itself from invasion.<sup>81</sup> However, the poetic framing of the West Saxon royal house as defending the land from northern, especially pagan, invasion is significant for *Brunanburh*’s audience and political context.

*The Battle of Brunanburh*, which is geared predominantly toward an English audience, is invested in presenting West Saxon rulers as valiant defenders against invasion. It is in this context provided by the Chronicle that we should approach *Brunanburh*. While the first half of the tenth century was a period of West Saxon expansion and military success, the Chronicle preserved a written account of a time when successful invasions from external enemies were much more an active threat, a time when West Saxon kings rose up to meet that threat. As Renée Trilling argues, the Chronicle poems serve “as nationalist propaganda through the century of [England’s] consolidation... The Germanic and Christian elements of the Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition combine in these poems to form an image of Christian kingship perfected by the

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<sup>81</sup> Livingston, “The Roads to Brunanburh,” 12.

descendants of Cerdic at the same time that their power extends to encompass the greatest extent yet of the island and puts them on par with continental European leaders.”<sup>82</sup> King Alfred successfully defended the land of Wessex from the invading pagan Scandinavians, and the Chronicle broadly, and the *Battle of Brunanburh* specifically, depict his descendants as doing the same on a greater and more sustained scale.

Manuscript B of the Chronicle records that in 910 and 911 King Edward sent a combined force of West Saxons and Mercians against Scandinavian forces, here called a *norðhere*, that were ravaging Mercia.<sup>83</sup> Edward’s victory over the Scandinavians to the north set the stage for the West Saxons to expand their territorial control in the coming years.<sup>84</sup> *Brunanburh* echoes some of Edward’s triumphs in the celebration of his sons.

The poem says of Æthelstan and his brother Edmund:

afaran Eadweardes, swa him gæpele wæs  
 from cneomægum þæt hi æt campe oft  
 wiþ lapra gehwæne land ealgodon,  
 hord, and hamas. (7-10)

Edward’s sons, as it was their  
 birthright that they often in battle  
 against every enemy defended the land,  
 treasure, and homes.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, 194.

<sup>83</sup> Taylor, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 4 MS B, 47.

<sup>84</sup> F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 323.

<sup>85</sup> Livingston, *Battle of Brunanburh*, 40-41.

The poem presents the West Saxon royals as defenders of the land and homes. In doing so, the poem draws on and participates in the broader project of the Chronicle. As Smith notes, *The Battle of Brunanburh* “features a pattern of events similar to that found in annals 914A/915B: a large enemy force arrives by sea only to be beaten back and driven off the land entirely by the West Saxons and their allies.”<sup>86</sup> The poem draws on the knowledge preserved in books to construct its narrative about the present condition, namely that England is a land that remains under threat of invasion, but the West Saxons and the Mercians can rest easy because they are defended by King Æthelstan and the West Saxon royal house. The dynastic implications of the poem are evident in that Æthelstan does not stand alone but alongside his brother Edmund.<sup>87</sup> Defending the land is something that comes naturally to Edward’s sons; it is their birthright. Moreover, they can defend the land from *all* enemies, not just pagan Scandinavians. Indeed, Brunanburh was a major victory over the Christian king Constantine as well. Although the defeat was arguably more crushing for Constantine, the poem gloats more over the retreat of the humiliated Scandinavians,<sup>88</sup> the traditional invading enemies of the West Saxons and their greatest dynastic rivals.

The defensive posturing of *Brunanburh* becomes more apparent when compared to royal poems in Latin during Æthelstan’s reign.<sup>89</sup> In the lines quoted above from the *Carta dirige gressus*, Æthelstan is presented as king of a united England able to mobilize

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<sup>86</sup> Smith, *Land and Book*, 182.

<sup>87</sup> Scragg, “A Reading of *Brunanburh*,” 116.

<sup>88</sup> Sarah Foot, “Where English becomes British: Rethinking Contexts for *Brunanburh*,” in *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks*, ed. Julia Barrow and Andrew Wareham (New York: Routledge, 2008), 137.

<sup>89</sup> Carrol, “Concepts of Power in Anglo-Scandinavian Verse,” 231.

his army throughout the entire island of Britain. *The Battle of Brunanburh*, however, never calls Æthelstan king of all the English or even presents England as a united realm,<sup>90</sup> and his military prowess is presented through successful defense rather than aggression. This speaks to the respective audiences of the poems. Æthelstan's court was cosmopolitan,<sup>91</sup> and the poems associated with the king "can be termed discourses of power... that could promote power in a mould approved by the royal court."<sup>92</sup> These texts could be tailored to specific audiences. The court of King Alfred had already set a precedent for producing texts in different languages geared toward different audiences.<sup>93</sup> A poem in English might appeal to an English audience by evoking the memory of repeating invasions by pagan Scandinavians. A poem in Latin, on the other hand, could reach a non-English audience on the continent, so that the West Saxon court might try to portray itself as equal to continental rulers.<sup>94</sup>

The West Saxon kings sought, and at various points achieved, political authority over all of England. The *Carta dirige gressus* celebrates Æthelstan's uniting England, something Carrol calls "a pleasing fiction."<sup>95</sup> Although Æthelstan and his successors are often celebrated as kings of a united England, the fact that the West Saxon house lost control of York and the Five Boroughs immediately after Æthelstan's death makes this claim tenuous. Anlaf invaded England again in 940, and York "opened its gates wide to

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>91</sup> Zacher, "Multilingualism at the court of King Æthelstan," 82.

<sup>92</sup> Carrol, "Concepts of Power in Anglo-Scandinavian Verse," 224-25.

<sup>93</sup> Alice Sheppard, "The King's Family: Securing the Kingdom in Asser's *Vita Alfredi*," *Philological Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (Fall 2001): 410.

<sup>94</sup> The author of *Carta dirige gressus*, named Petrus in the poem, may well have been a cleric from the continent. See Lapidge, "Some Latin poems as evidence for the reign of Athelstan," 97.

<sup>95</sup> Carrol, "Concepts of Power in Anglo-Scandinavian Verse," 225.

him, apparently without so much as a skirmish,” and the negotiations between Anlaf and King Edmund, Æthelstan’s successor, “effectively reestablished the Danelaw.”<sup>96</sup>

Although the West Saxons would recapture the Five Boroughs in 942, politically England would continue to divide periodically between North and South. As Hudson notes:

In 957, two years before the death of his brother and predecessor Edwy, Edgar was chosen as king by the people of Northumbria and Mercia, regions heavily settled by Vikings. Edgar remembered his debt by enacting legislation that ensured the virtual legal self-determination of the Danelaw. This is visible in the law code IV Edgar, issued circa 963 and addressed to the English, Danes, and Britons in his domain. He gave the Danes the right to choose their laws and punish any royal official who violated them.<sup>97</sup>

This fault line across England would be even more evident during the invasions of Sveinn Forkbeard and Cnut the Great in the early eleventh century. Nevertheless, during the reign of Æthelstan the West Saxon house could present itself as the regional overlords in Britain to their cosmopolitan audience. The *Carta dirige gressus* and another Latin poem, *Rex pius Athelstan*, “specifically praise the king’s military triumphs and territorial control.”<sup>98</sup> The political reality, however tenuous, allowed Æthelstan and the West Saxon royal house to portray themselves as aggressive overlords when they wished to, and the memory of the intense invasions by pagan Scandinavians since 865, preserved in written

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<sup>96</sup> Livingston, “The Roads to Brunanburh,” 25.

<sup>97</sup> Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 71. See also Scott T. Smith, “The Edgar poems and the poetics of failure in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 39 (2011): 108-9.

<sup>98</sup> Scott T. Smith, “*Preliorum maximum*: The Latin Tradition,” in *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, ed. Michael Livingston (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011), 271.



texts like the Chronicle, allowed the West Saxons royals to portray themselves as valiant defenders of the land and homes to an English audience.

Although the invasion element of the motif is explicit in *Brunanburh*, the pagan element is more subtle. Strikingly, neither the A text nor the B text of the poem ever use the word “heathen,” not even when referring to the Scandinavian enemies. The likely reason for this is twofold. First, and most obviously, Æthelstan’s forces fought against pagans and Christians alike at Brunanburh, and the poem records the slaying of King Constantine’s son, presumably a Christian prince. Second, and more significant for the history of the motif, the poem’s audience is not just English, but Anglo-Scandinavian. Æthelstan had extensive political dealings with Scandinavians, both those from the territories he inherited and those from outside his realm. Scandinavians almost certainly made up a portion of Æthelstan’s own troops during the battle, but even more importantly, the language of the poem demonstrates familiarity with Scandinavian language and, perhaps, poetry, suggesting the poet considered a partly Scandinavian audience.

John D. Niles has identified internal evidence in *The Battle of Brunanburh* that suggests familiarity with the Scandinavian language and poetic tradition. At the lexical level he points out “*cnear* ‘warship’ (35a) as a loanword... *guðhafoc* ‘war-hawk’ (64b) as a kenning for ‘eagle’, and ... *eorlas* (31a) in the Norse sense of ‘jarls.’”<sup>99</sup> Niles also points to the use of the word *Ireland* (56) as a sign of Scandinavian influence, since

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<sup>99</sup> John D. Niles, “Skaldic Techniques in *Brunanburh*,” in *Anglo-Scandinavian England: Norse-English Relations in the Period before the Conquest*, ed. John D. Niles and Mark Amodio (New York: University Press of America, 1989), 72.

English sources typically referred to Ireland as *Scotta land* or *Hibernia* in Anglo-Latin. He notes that “The term *Iraland* is not found in English before *Brunanburh* except in the *Chronicle* entry for the year 918 (A text; 915 C and D texts) and in King Alfred’s account of certain geographical information given by his Norwegian guest Ohthere.”<sup>100</sup>

There are also some stylistic grounds for assuming Scandinavian influence in *The Battle of Brunanburh*, though it must not be overlooked that the poem is in the traditional meter of other Old English poems and does not attempt to emulate the more intricate *dróttkvætt* meter of skaldic praise verses. As Matthew Townend argues, the most important common factor between *Brunanburh* and skaldic poetry is “their concerns with contemporary persons and event,”<sup>101</sup> given that the surviving Old English poetry before *Brunanburh* does not commemorate current events in the manner that Scandinavian Skaldic verse does. Nevertheless, scholars have pointed to other suggestive similarities. While kennings were common to both the English and Scandinavian poetic traditions, Niles sees the originality of the kennings in *The Battle of Brunanburh* as reminiscent of Skaldic kennings. Among these kennings are *garmitting*, spear meeting (50), *gumena gemot*, assembly of men (50), and *wæpengewrixl*, weapon exchange (51). This last kenning occurs elsewhere only in Wulfstan’s *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* “where it refers specifically to fighting between Englishmen and heathen Norsemen.”<sup>102</sup> All of this suggests a poet familiar to some extent with the Scandinavian language and poetic tradition who composed a poem that would appeal to an Anglo-Scandinavian audience.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 72-73.

<sup>101</sup> Townend, “Pre-Cnut Praise-Poetry in Viking Age England,” 353.

<sup>102</sup> Niles, “Skaldic Techniques in *Brunanburh*,” 73.

There is also more direct evidence of Æthelstan engaging politically with Scandinavians. As noted earlier, Æthelstan's takeover of Northumbria began with the marriage of his sister Edgyth and King Sihtric. He also gifted an estate at Amounderness to the Archbishop of York that was purchased from Scandinavians.<sup>103</sup> In 930 Æthelstan granted land at Selsey to Bishop Beornheah and an estate in Devon to the bishop of Crediton. Sarah Foot notes that "several ealdormen with names of Scandinavian origin witnessed both grants, their names occurring as a block after the English ealdormen and before the thegns. Presumably these men had responsibility for different localities in the former Danelaw areas of eastern England."<sup>104</sup> Æthelstan built support in the north through generous grants of land to people of Scandinavian origins, including members of his court.

Another telling detail is the way in which Æthelstan is depicted in later Scandinavian writings. The Old Norse-Icelandic *Skáldatal* lists the Icelandic poet Egill Skallagrímsson as a poet of King Æthelstan,<sup>105</sup> and *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, dating to the early thirteenth century, states that the poet composed a *drápa* in honor of Æthelstan with the following refrain: "Nú liggr hæst und hraustum / hreinbraut Aðalsteini"<sup>106</sup> (Now the high deer-road lies under valiant Æthelstan), with the "deer-road" being a kenning for Scotland. Not only do the sources on Egill support the idea that Scandinavian poets had a presence in Æthelstan's court, but the content of Egill's poem portrays Æthelstan's dominance in Britain in similar terms to those of *Carta dirige*

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<sup>103</sup> Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 71.

<sup>104</sup> S 405, see Foot, *Æthelstan*, chap. 3.

<sup>105</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *The Uppsala Edda: DG 11 4to*, ed. Heimir Pálsson and trans. Anthony Faulkes (Exeter: Short Run Press Limited, 2012) 115.

<sup>106</sup> *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal (Reykjavík: Hið Íslensk Fornritafélag, 2012), 147.

*gressus*. Another text depicting positive relations between Æthelstan's court and Scandinavians is *Hákonar saga góða*, included in the early thirteenth century *Heimskringla* attributed to Snorri Sturluson. The saga calls the Norwegian king *Hákon Aðelsteinsfóstri* (Æthelstan's foster son).<sup>107</sup> According to *Heimskringla*, Hákon was fostered by Æthelstan before acceding to the Norwegian throne at the request of his father Haraldr Fair-hair.<sup>108</sup> The story of Hákon's fostering by Æthelstan is also found in the *Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagensium*, written between 1177 and 1188.<sup>109</sup> While no contemporary English sources corroborate the account of Hákon's fostering, Stenton accepts it based on the prevalence of Hákon's nickname, saying "surnames of this kind generally represent a genuine popular memory."<sup>110</sup> The argument is strengthened by the fact that Æthelstan is known to have fostered other sons of foreign dynasties including Louis IV of western Frankia, son of Charles the Simple and Æthelstan's half-sister Eadgifu, the son of Count Matuedoi of Poher in Brittany, and a son of Constantine king of Scots.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, William of Malmesbury, writing in England in the early twelfth century, mentions contact between Æthelstan and a Norwegian king named Haraldr:

Haroldus quidam, rex Noricorum, misit ei nauem rostra aurea et uelum  
 purpureum habentem, densa testudines clipeorum inauratorum intrinsecus  
 circumgiratum.

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<sup>107</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla* I, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzk Fornritafélag, 1941), 150.

<sup>108</sup> Hákon and his father Haraldr Fair-hair most likely did not rule over all of Norway, but the extent of their realm is irrelevant to my argument. What matters is that they were rulers from Scandinavia proper.

<sup>109</sup> Foot, *Æthelstan*, chap. 2.

<sup>110</sup> Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 349.

<sup>111</sup> Foot, *Æthelstan*, chap. 1.

A certain Harold, king of the Norwegians, sent him a ship with gilded beak and a scarlet sail, the inside of which was hung round with a close-set row of gilded shields.<sup>112</sup>

The evidence suggests that Æthelstan indeed had dealings with Scandinavians who remained primarily in Scandinavia. The nature of his contact led to a positive memory of him in Norway and Iceland and reinforces the likelihood that his royal circle included Scandinavians, both those who had settled in England and some whose stay was more temporary, such as court poets and visiting dignitaries.

As West Saxon influence spread across England, more and more Scandinavians came under their political control, and many of these Scandinavians likely provided military service during Æthelstan's reign. Citing charter evidence, Stenton notes that five of the twelve ealdormen gathered at Winchester before Æthelstan's invasion of Scotland in 934 bore Scandinavian names.<sup>113</sup> *The Battle of Brunanburh* mentions Mercian warriors fighting for Æthelstan, but it does not name them as English. As Niles argues, "To judge from the number of Norse-named leaders who assembled at Winchester and Nottingham in 934, presumably to aid Athelstan's Scottish campaign of that year ... the Mercian contingent probably included a significant number of Danes."<sup>114</sup> This information, along with the Scandinavian witnesses attested in the granting of estates noted above, make it clear that people of Scandinavian descent formed a substantial part of Æthelstan's court and would have heard the poem recited if it was read in the presence of the king.

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<sup>112</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 216-17.

<sup>113</sup> Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 342.

<sup>114</sup> Niles, "Skaldic Techniques in *Brunanburh*," 70.

Although *Brunanburh* should be considered alongside the Chronicle, especially in light of the poem's reference to books (68), such a poem may have been recited at court in the manner that Snorri Sturluson suggests Skaldic verses were.<sup>115</sup> As Townend notes, the *Her* that marks new annal entries in the Chronicle and which introduces the poem can be removed without hindering the meter of the poem,<sup>116</sup> thus allowing for its performance outside of its Chronicle context. Furthermore, even those Scandinavians who were not bilingual were likely to have understood some of the poem since English and Norse were somewhat mutually intelligible during the tenth century.<sup>117</sup>

Given that Scandinavians almost certainly formed part of Æthelstan's forces at Brunanburh and almost certainly formed part of the poem's audience, then, it would have been imprudent for the composer of *The Battle of Brunanburh* to draw a correlation between Scandinavians and paganism. Indeed, *Brunanburh* is a rather careful poem with what it reveals. William of Malmesbury records that two of Æthelstan's nephews fell in battle against Anlaf,<sup>118</sup> and as Trilling notes, "the absence of their names from the poem not only reinforces the suggestion that military victory is a fundamental element of heroic kingship, but also shows how carefully *Brunanburh* guards its ideological investments."<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, despite avoiding the word heathen, the context of the poem still invites the association of Æthelstan's enemies with paganism. Even Constantine, a Christian, might be implicated in paganism when the poem calls him *eald*

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<sup>115</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla* I, 5.

<sup>116</sup> Townend, "Pre-Cnut Praise-Poetry in Viking Age England," 352.

<sup>117</sup> Matthew Townend, *Language and History in Viking Age England: Linguistic Relations between Speakers of Old Norse and Old English* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2002), 182.

<sup>118</sup> William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, 220.

<sup>119</sup> Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, 199.

*inwidda* (46) “old enemy,” an epithet of the biblical pagan invader Holofernes in the poem *Judith* (28), and a common description for the devil.<sup>120</sup>

Regarding Scandinavians, the historical context of the poem makes an overt reference to paganism unnecessary. In fact, as late as reign of Cnut in the eleventh century, Scandinavians were generally assumed to be pagans by other Europeans.<sup>121</sup> More important, however, is the context in which the poem survives: all copies of it come to us embedded in the Chronicle.<sup>122</sup> *Brunanburh* accordingly directs attention to book learning, calling the slaughter at the battle the greatest in Britain’s recorded history:

þæs þe us secgað bec,  
 ealde uðwitan, siþþan eastan hider  
 Engle and Seaxe up becoman. (68-70)

as those books tell us,  
 old authorities, since here from the east  
 the Angles and Saxons came ashore.<sup>123</sup>

By mentioning the old authorities in books, *Brunanburh* invites audiences to consider the knowledge preserved in texts like the Chronicle, which repeatedly calls Scandinavians heathens in the preceding entries that lead up to the poem’s place in the Chronicle. As Smith argues for both *The Battle of Brunanburh* and the *Capture of the Five Boroughs*, “The surrounding prose annals work with the poems to inscribe the protection and

<sup>120</sup> Zacher, “Multilingualism at the Court of King Æthelstan,” 97.

<sup>121</sup> Timothy Bolton, *Cnut the Great* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 20.

<sup>122</sup> Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, 192.

<sup>123</sup> Livingston, *Battle of Brunanburh*, 42-43.

extension of the *anweald* through the activity of individual royal figures over time.”<sup>124</sup>

Through the manuscript context in which the poem circulated, at least in its official fashion, and by calling attention to that context in its final lines, *Brunanburh* draws a tacit connection between paganism and the Scandinavians repelled by Æthelstan.

Calling attention to the Chronicle also recalls earlier West Saxon kings who succeeded against invasion from pagan Scandinavians. The A-text of the Chronicle, for example records King Edward repelling a land invasion in 910 and a naval invasion in 914.<sup>125</sup> *Brunanburh*, in fact, begins by calling Æthelstan and Edmund the sons of Edward and glorifying the West Saxon line as natural defenders, and it closes by evoking the history of that royal line once again. The first ten lines of the poem establish “the idea that this family has historically been successful in battle and in defending its lands and peoples,” and in the final section, “the poet sets the battle in its wider temporal and historical context.”<sup>126</sup> In this greatest of battles, the West Saxon rulers prove that they can still successfully repel invasions from enemies that have historically been pagan. The ending of *The Battle of Brunanburh* also presents pagan invasions of Britain as a recurring phenomenon. After calling this the greatest slaughter since the arrival of the Angles and the Saxons, the poem says of these groups:

Ofer brad brimu Bryten sohtan,  
 wlance wigsmiþas. Wealas ofercoman,  
 eorlas arhwate, eard begeatan. (71-73)

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<sup>124</sup> Smith, *Land and Book*, 174.

<sup>125</sup> Batley, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 3 MS A, 63 and 65.

<sup>126</sup> Foot, “Where English becomes British,” 130.



Over the broad salt-sea they sought Britain,  
 those proud war-smiths. They overcame the Welsh,  
 glory-eager earls, and took hold of this land.<sup>127</sup>

*Brunanburh* closes with an account of a successful pagan invasion of Britain. It is a moment of pride for the descendants of the Angles and the Saxons, but it also serves as a warning: pagans had successfully conquered this land in the distant past, and they nearly did so again after 865. The only thing keeping the English from being overcome like the Welsh is the defense of the West Saxon kings. Thus, by evoking its written and historical context, *Brunanburh* makes it clear that the land remains under lasting threat of pagan invasion.

That threat was somewhat validated shortly after Æthelstan's death. Stenton describes Athelstan's England as "an artificial piece of statecraft, which still depended for existence on the strength and political ability of the reigning king,"<sup>128</sup> and with the king's death his rivals saw an opportunity. In 940, Anlaf Guthfrithson invaded Northumbria and then harried south of the Humber, capturing territories in the Danelaw. The archbishops of Canterbury and York arranged a treaty between Anlaf and Edmund.

[The treaty] gave to Olaf the whole region between Watling Street and the Northumbrian border... The treaty meant, in fact, the abandonment to Norse Rule of a large Anglo-Danish population which for more than twenty years had been obedient to the king of England and to local

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<sup>127</sup> Livingston, *Battle of Brunanburh*, 42-43.

<sup>128</sup> Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 356.

officers governing in his name. It was an ignominious surrender, and it marked the first serious reverse suffered by the English monarchy since Edward the Elder began his great advance against the southern Danes.<sup>129</sup>

The implications of this territorial loss were dire. While records of successful pagan Scandinavian invasions were preserved in books, a fact that allowed *Brunanburh* to use the motif, the experience of the West Saxon dynasty for more than a generation had been one of successful defenses and conquest expanding their territorial authority. The seriousness of this territorial reversal provided the exigence for commemorating in verse the recovery of the lost territory, as was done in *The Capture of the Five Boroughs*, a poem included for the year 942 in manuscripts A, B, C and D of the Chronicle.

Anlaf Guthfrithson died in 941 leaving his cousin and namesake Olaf Sihtricson as king. Stenton sees Sihtricson as a weaker ruler, providing the opportunity for Edmund to regain the Five Boroughs.<sup>130</sup> Just as the death of Æthelstan emboldened the Dublin-York dynasty to recapture recently lost territory, the death of Anlaf Guthfrithson emboldened the West Saxon dynasty to do the same. While there are no indications that the campaign to capture the Five Boroughs resulted in any battles comparable in scale to the battle at Brunanburh, the recent territorial loss to Scandinavians, however brief, necessitated that the West Saxon dynasty posture once again as great defenders. Both *Brunanburh* and *The Capture of the Five Boroughs* are poems of political dominance, yet *Capture* is much more a poem of conquest in that it focuses directly on territorial

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 357.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 357-58.

acquisition. Nevertheless, the poem actively engages and redeploys the defensive posturing of its predecessor.

The southern manuscripts of the Chronicle are silent about the territorial loss following Æthelstan's death,<sup>131</sup> but the D manuscript, which is less invested in West Saxon propaganda, records for the year 940 (941D): "Her Norðhymbra alugon hira getreowaða [and] Anlaf of Yrlande him to cinge gecuron"<sup>132</sup> (In this year the Northumbrians were false to their pledges, and chose Olaf from Ireland as their king).<sup>133</sup> That York opened its gates to Anlaf seemingly without resistance brings into question the defensive posturing of *Brunanburh*.<sup>134</sup> It suggests that rather than being a simple invader from Ireland, Anlaf in fact enjoyed some degree of support in parts of England, at least among the elite of the Danelaw. Nevertheless, from a West Saxon perspective, pagan Scandinavians were invading what had become their territory, no longer just Wessex and Mercia, but England as a whole. As Smith notes, "*Brunanburh* memorializes an important military victory for the English, but it also establishes a historical basis for the lasting authority of West Saxon kings over their collective lands."<sup>135</sup> This lasting authority is the position advanced once again in *The Capture of the Five Boroughs*.

Politically, *Capture* builds on the claims of *Brunanburh*. The poem has not been well received by critics, but as Trilling argues, critics misjudge the poem by extracting it from its historical context in the Chronicle,<sup>136</sup> a context that includes *Brunanburh*.

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<sup>131</sup> Smith, "The Edgar Poems and the Poetics of Failure in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*," 106.

<sup>132</sup> Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 6 MS D, 43.

<sup>133</sup> Whitelock ed., *English Historical Documents: c. 500-1042*, 220.

<sup>134</sup> Livingston, "The Roads to Brunanburh," 25.

<sup>135</sup> Smith, *Land and Book*, 184.

<sup>136</sup> Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, 192.

Moreover, as Scragg notes, there are significant similarities between the two poems. The phrase *nyde gebegde* (9)<sup>137</sup> in *Capture* echoes *nede gebeded* (33) in *Brunanburh*, as does *afera Eadwardes* (13) in *Capture* echo *afaran Eadwardes* (7) in *Brunanburh*.<sup>138</sup> Scragg also notes that both poems use the relatively uncommon construction “*swilce plus eac* with a single word between them,”<sup>139</sup> appearing once in *Capture* (7) and twice in *Brunanburh* (19 and 30), with one variant appearance in the latter (37). The significance of these similarities increases when we consider the brevity of *Capture of the Five Boroughs*, which spans only thirteen lines, a large portion of which are devoted to placenames. Even if we do not accept Scragg’s claim that both poems are the work of a single poet,<sup>140</sup> the similarities demonstrate that the author of *Capture* was certainly familiar with *Brunanburh*. As such, the later poem should be interpreted in relation to its predecessor.

*The Capture of the Five Boroughs* takes the motif of pagan invasions from its predecessor and amplifies its political scope. It calls King Edmund *Engla þeoden* (1), lord of the English. Edmund is no longer tied to only the West Saxons and the Mercians, but now to all the English people. This aspiration for West Saxon hegemony across England is also attested in Latin diplomas during Edmund’s reign, though as noted earlier, the reality of West Saxon control over the Danelaw was much more complicated.<sup>141</sup> The authority ascribed to the West Saxon kings in *The Capture of the*

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<sup>137</sup> All citations are from Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie ed. *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942). The translations are my own.

<sup>138</sup> Scragg, “A Reading of *Brunanburh*,” 114.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* 115.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* 119.

<sup>141</sup> Scott Smith, “Artful Prose and the Words of Law: Inscribing Obedience in Sawyer 478 (a.d. 941),” *JEGP* 119, no. 2 (April 2020): 165.

*Five Boroughs*, however, builds on the dominance established by Æthelstan's victory at Brunanburh, even after that dominance had been successfully challenged, resulting in territorial loss. In fact, the challenge to that dominance allows the poem to frame Edmund's conquest defensively. Since Chronicle manuscripts ABC are silent about the circumstances under which the West Saxon dynasty lost territory following Æthelstan's death, the poem can frame the conquest, and the new king leading that conquest, as it sees fit. Edmund is called the *mæcgea mundbora* (2), defender of the people. While the D-text suggests that people north of traditional West Saxon territory may have wanted independence from the West Saxon rulers (hence the Northumbrians breaking their pledges), without that context Edmund's military campaigns can be framed defensively. As such, his conquest of the Five Boroughs is a duty done by the lord of the English in protection of the people.

Despite being a poem commemorating conquest, *The Capture of the Five Boroughs* stresses Edmund—and by extensions the West Saxon dynasty—as defender. The brief poem twice applies epithets to Edmund that imply this role, *mæcgea mundbora* (2), defender of the people, and *wiggendra hleo* (12), protector of warriors. The first half line of the second line and the last half line of the second to last line together frame Edmund's conquest in the language of defense. The symmetry of these epithets is heightened by the fact that the poem is book ended by the words *Eadmund cyning* (1 and 13).<sup>142</sup> As such, *Capture* connects royal authority to successful defense of the people

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<sup>142</sup> The first half line of the poem might fully read “Her Eadmund cyning,” rather than just “Eadmund cyning” like the final half line, but as in the case of the *Battle of Brunanburh*, the *Her* marking the start of the annal can be removed without hindering the meter.

which provides the grounds for conquest and territorial expansion. In this manner, like *Brunanburh*, the poem uses the motif of pagan invasions to advance the West Saxon dynastic project. When the poem calls Edmund *afera Eadweardes* (13), it not only echoes *The Battle of Brunanburh* and its account of the routed invasion, but it explicitly evokes King Edward who, as noted earlier, routed several invasions as recorded in the Chronicle. *The Capture of the Five Boroughs* portrays Edmund as fulfilling his role of defender of the *anweald*, as befits a West Saxon king.

A significant difference between *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *The Capture of the Five Boroughs*, however, is that the latter envisions the subjects of the West Saxon kings as including more than just the English. Whereas *Brunanburh* subtly implies the paganism of Scandinavian invaders, *Capture* is explicit about it while also acknowledging the presence of Christian Scandinavians in England. The poem states:

Dæne wæren æror  
 under Norðmannum nyde gebegde  
 on hæþenra hæfteclommum  
 lange þrage, oþ hie alysde eft  
 for his weorþscipe wiggendra hleo  
 afera Eadweardes, Eadmund cyning. (8-13)

The Danes were earlier under the Northmen, forced by need into heathen fetters, for a long time until Edward's heir, King Edmund, protector of warriors, freed them again through his worthiness.

The Christian Scandinavians are identified here as Danes, while pagan Scandinavians who rule over the Christians are called Northmen, the same word used to identify the Scandinavian invaders in *Brunanburh*. As Trilling argues, “It is of more than passing significance for both poet and readers that the people whom Edmund rescues from the Northmen are *Dæne* [Danes] who have been living in England and are crucially distinguished from the *Norðmannum* whom Edmund fights and defeats.”<sup>143</sup> In this poem Scandinavians are not inherently evil, but pagan invaders are. *The Capture of the Five Boroughs* portrays King Edmund as an equal defender of both the English and these Christian Danes.

In distinguishing between Christian and pagan Scandinavians, *Capture* acknowledges the shifting reality on the ground: namely that, unlike the time when the Great Army arrived in 865, it can no longer be assumed that Scandinavians are pagan. However, the poem goes further by presenting a unity of English and Danes under one rule through West Saxon expansion.<sup>144</sup> Scandinavians were there to stay, so they had to be brought into the English fold, thus weakening the association between Scandinavians and paganism. That association would of course endure much longer, however, especially in literature that engaged with the motif of pagan invasions of England. Still, *The Capture of the Five Boroughs* foreshadows how the Christianization of Scandinavia would affect the motif of pagans invading England, forcing it to adapt by eventually designing a new pagan enemy.

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<sup>143</sup> Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, 200.

<sup>144</sup> Scragg, “A Reading of *Brunanburh*,” 117.

## Chapter 2

### The Vikings Strike Back

After beating out the Dublin-York Scandinavian dynasty for control of northern England, the West Saxon royal house did not face another external dynastic challenge until the eleventh century. In the interim England experienced a period of relative peace. This is not to say that all was stable. In 955 Eadwig was chosen king of a united England, but within two years the Mercians and Northumbrians had chosen his brother Edgar as king, once again splitting England along the familiar north/south fault line.<sup>145</sup> However, the election of Edgar did not create a massive stir in the upper social strata of Mercia and Northumbria. Indeed, several of the ealdormen appointed by Eadwig later retained their positions under Edgar, including Byrhtnoth of Essex, though several people with Scandinavian names do appear as witnesses to his charters.<sup>146</sup>

Upon Eadwig's death in in 959, Edgar "the Peacemaker" was made king of all England, and he reigned until 975.<sup>147</sup> Of Edgar's reign, Stenton commented, "It is a sign of Edgar's competence as a ruler that his reign is singularly devoid of recorded incident."<sup>148</sup> Bishop Æthelwold, writing no later than the 970s, praised Edgar for maintaining peace and tranquility throughout his realm.<sup>149</sup> The relative peace during Edgar's reign was due in part to his dealings with those Scandinavians who had settled in northern England. His ordinance *IV Edgar*, for example, acknowledged "the different

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<sup>145</sup> Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 366.

<sup>146</sup> Levi Roach, *Æthelred the Unready* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 25.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>148</sup> Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 368.

<sup>149</sup> Simon Keynes, "Edgar, *rex admirabilis*," in *Edgar, King of the English 959-975: New Interpretations*, ed. Donald Scragg (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, (2008), 3.



legal customs governing the region.”<sup>150</sup> Edgar was also held in high regard by the Irish, and his passing is recorded both in the Annals of Ulster and the Annals of Tigernach.<sup>151</sup> Yet, Edgar’s dealings with foreigners, particularly pagans, did not go without reproach. Manuscript D of the ASC, after praising Edgar as a good king, adds:

Ane misdæde he dyde þeah to swyðe, þæt he elðeodige unsida lufode,  
[and] heþene þeawas innan þysan lande gebrohte to fæste, [and]  
utlændisce hider in tihte, [and] deriende leoda bespeon to þysan earde.<sup>152</sup>

Yet he did one ill-deed too greatly: he loved evil foreign customs and brought too firmly heathen manners within this land, and attracted hither foreigners and enticed harmful people to this country.<sup>153</sup>

The use of the word *lufode* (loved) implies that Edgar was quite fond of these foreign customs and did not just tolerate them. Dorothy Whitelock notes that this entry in the Chronicle, written in alliterative prose, is in the style of the fiery Archbishop Wulfstan of York.<sup>154</sup> Wulfstan was obviously invested in the Church, and therefore concerned by the spread of paganism in England. Nevertheless, we can extrapolate some informative details from this entry regarding the presence of pagan Scandinavians in England during the second half of the tenth century. First, the king’s supposed love for “foreign

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<sup>150</sup> Roach, *Æthelred*, 25.

<sup>151</sup> Benjamin Hudson, “The ‘Roll of Kings’ in Saltair na Rann,” *Peritia: Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland* 31 (2020), 131.

<sup>152</sup> Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 6 MS D, 45.

<sup>153</sup> Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, 225.

<sup>154</sup> Lesley Abrams also accepts the attribution to Wulfstan, see “King Edgar and the Men of the Danelaw,” in *Edgar, King of the English 959-975: New Interpretations*, ed. Donald Scragg (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, (2008), 171.

customs,” which is immediately linked to paganism, lends some credence to the claims found in Icelandic sagas that Scandinavian poets were present and rewarded in the courts of English kings even before Cnut. *Egils saga*, for example, claims that the eponymous poet composed a *drápa* for King Æthelstan,<sup>155</sup> while *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* preserves a verse in praise of King Æthelred attributed to Gunnlaugr “serpent-tongue,” and supposedly recited before the king.<sup>156</sup> While it is true that no Skaldic verse in praise of Edgar has come down to us,<sup>157</sup> this does not mean that none was composed, since what has survived of Anglo-Scandinavian verses likely represents only a very small percentage of what was composed.<sup>158</sup> Secondly, the point that “heathen manners” were brought firmly into England suggests that Scandinavian cultural influence was being felt in England. This need not mean that people were abandoning Christianity for paganism, but rather that some cultural practices of the Scandinavians, assumed to be pagans, were being adopted by the local population.<sup>159</sup> Finally, the king attracting foreigners suggests that Scandinavians continued to travel and settle in England throughout Edgar’s peaceful reign. All of this suggests that there were more people of Scandinavian descent in England toward the end of the tenth century than at any point prior. Their increased presence accordingly complicated the invasion motif that traditionally equated Scandinavians with pagan invaders.

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<sup>155</sup> *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, 147.

<sup>156</sup> *Borgfirðinga Sögur*, ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Hið Íslensk Fornritafélag, 1938), 71.

<sup>157</sup> Abrams, “King Edgar and the Men of the Danelaw,” 189-90.

<sup>158</sup> Judith Jesch, “Skaldic Verse in Scandinavian England,” in *Vikings and the Danelaw: Select Papers from the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Viking Congress, Nottingham and York, 21-30 August 1997*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch, and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001), 323.

<sup>159</sup> Stephen Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

Nevertheless, more invasions by Scandinavians were to come, even if not necessarily from pagans. Incursions from Scandinavian raiders saw a significant increase, culminating in two full-scale invasions, during the reign of Edgar's son, Æthelred the Unready. When Edgar died, he was succeeded by Edward, his son by his first wife, Æthelflæd. However, just two or three years into his reign, Edward was assassinated, apparently by supporters of his half-brother, Æthelred, Edgar's son by his third wife Ælfthryth.<sup>160</sup> Of Edward's death and Æthelred's ascension, Levi Roach says:

Æthelred was clearly too young to have orchestrated this event, but much uncertainty surrounds his mother's involvement. Post-Conquest narratives almost invariably present her as the guilty party, the archetypal evil stepmother who plotted Edward's demise, and modern historians have often been inclined to follow suit: since she had much to gain from Edward's death, and since this transpired on a royal estate at which she was residing, it is presumed that Ælfthryth must have played a part therein... Fascinating though such speculation may be, it must be emphasized that not a single contemporary source implicates Ælfthryth, Ælfhere or Æthelred.<sup>161</sup>

Regardless of whether Edward's death was orchestrated by Ælfthryth, the circumstances of Æthelred's ascension and his young age at the start of his rule influenced later interpretations of the viking attacks during his reign. Once the English had experienced a

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<sup>160</sup> Roach, *Æthelred*, 61 and 72.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76.

significant defeat at the hands of a Scandinavian fleet, the resumption of frequent attacks from pagans came to be seen as punishment for an impious king and his people.

### **Remember Maldon**

There were some viking raids in England throughout the 980s, but these were mostly small-scale raids.<sup>162</sup> However, 991 saw a shift in the scale and intensity of Scandinavian incursions in England. A raiding party attacked Essex and was countered by ealdorman Byrhtnoth and his troops at Maldon. The vikings were victorious there and Byrhtnoth, a senior ealdorman who had served several kings (Eadwig, Edgar, Edward, and now Æthelred) was killed. Manuscripts C and D of the Chronicle record the battle in their annal for 991 and note that peace was achieved by paying the “Danes” ten thousand pounds. The payment is noted as the first of its kind and as being undertaken under the advice of Bishop Sigeric.<sup>163</sup> The C and D text for the 991 annal form part of a common stock covering annals 983 through 1018 and composed in the early eleventh century after the Danish conquests of England, and hindsight likely explains the exasperated tone of the chronicler as attacks from Scandinavians escalated beginning in 991.<sup>164</sup> While we should not view what transpired over the next several decades as inevitable, the events at Maldon were nevertheless regarded and remembered by contemporaries as a turning point in the dynamic between England and Scandinavian forces.

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<sup>162</sup> Simon Keynes, “The Historical Context of the Battle of Maldon,” in *The Battle of Maldon A.D. 991*, ed. Donald Scragg (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 86.

<sup>163</sup> Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: Vol. 6 MS D, 48, and Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: Vol. 5 MS C, 86.

<sup>164</sup> Janet M. Bately, “The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,” in *The Battle of Maldon A.D. 991*, ed. Donald Scragg (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 42.

The A text of the Chronicle, which records the Battle of Maldon under the year 993, names “Unlaf,” presumably the future king of Norway Óláfr Tryggvason, as the leader of the Scandinavians at Maldon.<sup>165</sup> The A text also notes that when peace was made, King Æthelred stood as sponsor in Óláfr’s confirmation. The C and D texts also mention Æthelred’s sponsorship of Óláfr’s confirmation, but they do so for the year 994, when Óláfr is recorded as raiding England alongside “Swegen,” that is the Danish king Sveinn Forkbeard.<sup>166</sup> While it is plausible that Óláfr Tryggvason was present at Maldon, the annal in MS A for 993 should not be taken as definitive evidence that he was,<sup>167</sup> or that he would have had sole command. The viking fleet at Maldon was likely made up of several smaller forces commanded by war-leaders who sought riches and fame to pursue their ambitions in Scandinavia, as Óláfr Tryggvason eventually did.<sup>168</sup>

The most famous surviving text commemorating the events at Maldon in 991 is the Old English poem we call *The Battle of Maldon*. The poem’s sole medieval manuscript, BL, Cotton Otho A.xii, was lost in a fire in 1731.<sup>169</sup> Luckily, a transcription of the poem existed by 1726, but even before the fire, the source manuscript did not contain a complete copy of the poem, missing both the beginning and the end.<sup>170</sup> The fragmentary nature of the poem and the absence of a surviving manuscript make it difficult to date the text, but scholars generally believe it should be considered

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<sup>165</sup> Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: Vol. 3 MS A, 79.

<sup>166</sup> Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: Vol. 6 MS D, 49, and O’Brien O’Keeffe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: Vol. 5 MS C, 87.

<sup>167</sup> Niels Lund, “The Danish Perspective,” in *The Battle of Maldon A.D. 991*, ed. Donald Scragg (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 132.

<sup>168</sup> Keynes, “The Historical Context of the Battle of Maldon,” 90.

<sup>169</sup> Donald Scragg, “*The Battle of Maldon*,” in *The Battle of Maldon A.D. 991*, ed. Donald Scragg (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 15-16.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

contemporaneous with the battle it describes.<sup>171</sup> A notable exception to this position is that of Stephen Harris, who dates the poem to the early eleventh century, perhaps as late as 1030, and thus during the reign in England of the Danish King Cnut.<sup>172</sup> Following Margaret A. L. Locherbie-Cameron, who has checked the individuals named in the poem against people known to have been in Byrhtnoth's circle from other historical sources, I accept a near contemporary date of composition for the poem.<sup>173</sup>

Although *The Battle of Maldon* commemorates a major military confrontation like *The Battle of Brunanburh*, it is a very different kind of poem. *Maldon* does not directly concern the West Saxon dynasty, and as such, was never included in any known version of the Chronicle. More importantly, while *Brunanburh* commemorates a major military victory against a (partly) Scandinavian foe, *Maldon* commemorates a significant English loss to Scandinavian forces. As Roach notes:

*The Battle of Maldon* represents an anomaly amongst the "historical" poems of the period, most of which were composed to celebrate victories (not defeats) and none of which comes anywhere close to *Maldon* in length and scope. The English losses left deep scars and the poem is clearly an attempt to heal these; it turns a disastrous defeat into a courageous stand, whose very heroism derives in part from its futility.<sup>174</sup>

The poem attests to the collective shock to the English resulting from the defeat at Maldon and attempts to mediate that shock, rather than celebrate a great victory.

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid. 32, and Roach, *Æthelred*, 123.

<sup>172</sup> Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, 161.

<sup>173</sup> Margaret A. L. Locherbie-Cameron, "The Men Named in the Poem," in *The Battle of Maldon A.D. 991*, ed. Donald Scragg (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 238-49.

<sup>174</sup> Roach, *Æthelred*, 129.

*Brunanburh* celebrates the might of the victorious West Saxon monarchs, while *Maldon* celebrates the courage of the defeated. Despite its absent beginning and ending, what survives of *Maldon*, at 325 lines, is several times longer than the entirety of *Brunanburh*'s 73 lines. Yet, for all their differences, both poems draw on the motif of pagan invasions to achieve their ideological goals. *Brunanburh* drew on the knowledge of past invasions, especially those preserved in books, to portray its protagonists as heroes capable of repelling invasions. *Maldon*, on the other hand, uses the motif to process the traumatic return of these historical invasions.

Scholarship on *The Battle of Maldon* is extensive. A popular avenue of inquiry has explored the historicity of the poem regarding what we can extrapolate about late tenth century military tactics and how the poem blends these with the conventions of Old English heroic poetry.<sup>175</sup> Another vein of scholarship treats the importance of loyalty in the poem.<sup>176</sup> Of these studies, Harris says, "Some critics see *Maldon* as significant of larger issues of more than contemporary political or social import. In these cases, the portrait of loyalty is thought to have theological or philosophical significance."<sup>177</sup> Harris himself extends this line of argument by exploring patterns of Scriptural history and their effect on the formation of English identity, building on the works of scholars like John Hill and A. N. Doane.<sup>178</sup> Favoring an earlier date of composition than Harris, I analyze

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<sup>175</sup> Donald Scragg, "The Battle of Maldon: Fact or Fiction?" in *The Battle of Maldon: Fiction and Fact*, ed. Janet Cooper (London: Hambledon Press, 1993), pp. 19–31; O. D. Macrae-Gibson, "How Historical is *The Battle of Maldon*?" *Medium Ævum*, 39 (1970), 89–107; and Thomas D. Hill, "History and Heroic Ethic in *Maldon*," *Neophilologus*, 54 (1970), 291–96.

<sup>176</sup> Dorothy Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society* (London: Penguin, 1952), 34–36; and Stanley B. Greenfield and Daniel G. Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 150.

<sup>177</sup> Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, 165.

<sup>178</sup> John M. Hill, "Transcendental Loyalty in *The Battle of Maldon*," *Mediaevalia* 17 (1994): 67–88; and A. N. Doane, "Legend, History and Artifice in 'The Battle of Maldon,'" *Viator* 9 (1978): 39–66.

*Maldon* as a node in the transmission of the motif of pagan invasions.<sup>179</sup> Rather than offering a theological interpretation of the poem, I follow Trilling in reading religion in *Maldon* as a marker of identity that separates the opposing sides at the battle.<sup>180</sup> *The Battle of Maldon* narrates a fight between two sides, one native and Christian and the other foreign and pagan. However, the close perspective that the poem offers for the side of Byrhtnoth's men also reveals how unstable these divisions can be. Christian is not necessarily moral, as illustrated by those of Byrhtnoth's warriors who flee after his death. Likewise, Scandinavian was not necessarily foreign in late tenth century Essex, as suggested by the presence of the son of a certain Thurstan among Byrhtnoth's warriors. By the late tenth century, when attacks from the archetypal pagan enemy resumed in force, English identity had become more complicated and entangled with that of Scandinavians, creating potential dissonance in the literary motif of pagan Scandinavian invaders.

The action of *The Battle of Maldon* can be briefly summarized as follows. Where the fragment begins, Ealdorman Byrhtnoth and his troops have intercepted a fleet identified as heathen, Danish vikings who are demanding tribute. Byrhtnoth offers battle instead, and the two sides, separated by a river, attack each other with missiles. The invaders then ask Byrhtnoth if he is willing to let them land and continue the battle hand to hand, and because of his *ofermod* (89), Byrhtnoth agrees.<sup>181</sup> Once battle is engaged in

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<sup>179</sup> While I accept a composition date closer to the actual battle in the late tenth century, my argument accommodates any composition date prior to c. 1050 when we begin to see evidence of a cult of St Olaf in England.

<sup>180</sup> Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, 133-174, particularly 159.

<sup>181</sup> All citations of the poem are from Scragg's edition and translation in *The Battle of Maldon A.D. 991*, ed. Donald Scragg (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), though I have silently accepted his resolutions of abbreviations and his emendations. The translations are my own unless otherwise stated.



close quarters, Byrhtnoth is mortally wounded and asks God to take his soul (173-80). Upon Byrhtnoth's death, several of his warriors flee from the battle, but many others choose to die avenging their leader. The fragment ends as the poem compares one warrior named Godric who chose to die in battle, against another Godric who fled the fight.

The perspective *Maldon* offers of its action is much more immediate than that of *Brunanburh* and *Capture of the Five Boroughs*. The poem contains direct dialogue, for example, and names several individuals fighting on Byrhtnoth's side. And unlike the Chronicle poems, it names individuals of various social ranks, not just rulers. Among those named, for example, are a certain Dunnere, an *unorne ceorl* (a simple free man) (256) and Æscferth, a hostage from a Northumbrian family (265-67). Significantly, both these men continue fighting to avenge Byrhtnoth even after some have broken rank and retreated. By naming these individuals of various ranks and showing them fighting together after some of their allies fled, the poet tacitly makes the case for a united front across various swaths of the native Christians against the pagan invaders. And the poet achieves this without referring to Byrhtnoth's side collectively as English.

What survives of *Maldon* does not offer a similarly close perspective to the side of the invading Scandinavians. The poem does not contain the names of Byrhtnoth's enemies, not even those of the leaders. The narrator quickly identifies them as *wicinga* (26), vikings, and *brimlipendra* (27), seafarers. These labels draw attention to the fact that Byrhtnoth's enemies have come from overseas, establishing their position as invaders. Moreover, by treating the vikings as a collective rather than as individuals, the poem facilitates the reading of this particular invasion as part of an ongoing phenomenon

going back well over a century, albeit without drawing the connection explicitly, as does *Brunanburh*.

Although *Maldon* does not name any of the invaders, it does attribute direct speech to a messenger on their side who communicates their demands to Byrhtnoth. The messenger states that he has been sent by *samen snelle* (bold seamen) (29). He concludes the statements of demands by saying:

Gyf þu þæt gerædest þe her ricost eart,  
 þæt þu þine leoda lysan wille,  
 syllan sæmannum, on hyra sylfra dom,  
 feoh wið freode, and niman frið æt us,  
 we willaþ mid þam sceattum us to scype gangan,  
 on flot feran, and eow friþes healden. (36-41)

If you who are the richest man here decide  
 that you are willing to ransom your people,  
 willing to give to the seafarers, in an amount determined by them,  
 money in exchange for peace, and to accept protection from us,  
 we are content to embark with the taxes,  
 to set sail across the sea, and to keep the peace with you all.<sup>182</sup>

The messenger's speech validates the narrator's assertion that Byrhtnoth's enemies are foreign invaders. He not only identifies them as seamen, but he clarifies that they will sail

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<sup>182</sup> Scragg, *The Battle of Maldon*, 19.

back across the sea if their demands are met. This is an outside force that has sailed to England to enrich itself at the expense of those living there. Significantly, although this invading force is later identified collectively as heathen, religion plays no active role in the conflict. The vikings are motivated only by a desire for material wealth. If this desire is satisfied, they are willing to leave without causing further harm to the Christians.

Another significant detail in the messenger's speech is his attempt to sow division among Byrhtnoth and his men. The messenger singles out Byrhtnoth as the wealthiest of those present and puts on him the burden of securing peace by paying tribute. The invaders seem to have noticed a fracture among the Christians and attempt to exploit it, which adds weight to the unity shown by Byrhtnoth's warriors across class and region after his death. While *Maldon* reveals the tensions present in these collective groups, it also demonstrates that unity can exist despite these tensions.

Byrhtnoth answers the viking's messenger with defiance by stressing what is at stake in this conflict, chiefly the land:

Sege þinum leodum miccle laþre spell,  
 þæt her stynt unforcuð eorl mid his werode,  
 þe wile gealgean eþel þysne,  
 Æþelredes eard, ealdres mines  
 folc and foldan. Feallan sceolon  
 hæþene æt hilde. To heanlic me þinceð  
 þæt ge mid urum sceattum to scype gangon  
 unbefohtene, nu ge þus feor hider  
 on urne eard in becomon. (50-58)

Tell your people a much less pleasing tale,  
 that here stands with his company an earl of unstained reputation,  
 who intends to defend this homeland,  
 the kingdom of Æthelred, my lord's  
 people and his country. They shall fall,  
 the heathens in battle. It appears to me too shameful  
 that you should return to your ships with our money  
 unopposed, now that you thus far in this direction  
 have penetrated into our territory.<sup>183</sup>

By stating that he will defend this *epel* (homeland), Byrhtnoth frames the battle of Maldon in a similar way to what we saw in *Brunanburh* and *Capture of the Five Boroughs*—the stakes are territorial. At Brunanburh, the sons of Edward *land ealgodon* (defended the land) (9), and at Maldon, Byrhtnoth declares his intention to “gealgean epel pysne” (defend this homeland). Byrhtnoth is not himself a West Saxon royal, but dynastic interests are nevertheless represented when Byrhtnoth refers to the *epel* he defends as *Æþelredes eard* (Æthelred's country). The vikings claim to only want moveable wealth, a position that I would argue the poem takes at face value with the benefit of hindsight, given that the 991 fleet did cease its aggression once they were paid. Yet to a leader like Byrhtnoth, an aggressive external military force was a threat to the land itself. Pagan

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 21.

Scandinavian invaders had once conquered most of England, and just a few decades after Maldon, Danes would conquer England in its entirety.

Byrhtnoth's speech reveals another factor that sets his side apart from the enemy: the invaders are pagan. He says to the messenger, "Feallan sceolon / hæþene æt hilde" (the heathens shall fall in battle). Byrhtnoth's prediction provides the first evidence for the identity of these foreign invaders: their religion. His statement also tacitly implies that his side is Christian, which the narrator later confirms when Byrhtnoth's warriors pray to God that they can avenge him (262). Byrhtnoth's own Christianity is confirmed when Byrhtnoth indirectly gives thanks to God (147-48), and it is reiterated in Byrhtnoth's speech when he is mortally wounded and entrusts his soul to God (173-80). The poet starkly foregrounds the religious contrast between the opposing sides when, immediately after Byrhtnoth's speech, the poem states "Ða hine heowon hæðene scealcas" (181) (Then heathen slaves hacked him).<sup>184</sup> While religion may not drive the conflict at Maldon, it is nevertheless a ready marker of difference.

The final identity marker of Byrhtnoth's enemies is that they are Scandinavian. After Byrhtnoth allows the vikings passage and the two sides battle hand to hand, the poem states:

Stodon stædefæste, stihte hi Byrhtnoð,  
 bæd þæt hyssa gehwylc hogode to wige  
 þe on Denon wolde dom gefeohtan. (127-29)

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 25.

The steadfast ones held out, Byrhtnoth encouraged them,  
 urged that each warrior should keep his mind on the battle  
 who hoped to win glory from the Danes.<sup>185</sup>

*Maldon* here explicitly identifies the invaders as Scandinavian, specifically Danes, though we must remember that English texts of this period frequently refer to all Scandinavians as Danes regardless of where they came from. Conforming to the motif of pagan invasions of England in the tenth century, Byrhtnoth's enemies are unambiguously foreign, heathen, and Scandinavian, with the last marker representing the ethnicity in which the qualities of "pagan" and "invader" coincide. Byrhtnoth's urging reveals the significance of pagan Scandinavian invaders in England: their invasions pose both a dangerous threat to the land and an opportunity to win glory for those who oppose them. For the ninth century rulers of Northumbria, Mercia, and East Anglia, the invading pagan Scandinavians spelled disaster, but the West Saxons built their glory, in terms of both territory and propaganda, by opposing this archetypal enemy. *The Battle of Maldon*, however, destabilizes the paradigm that glory is predicated on victory. By memorializing Byrhtnoth and those who fought alongside him, this poem makes the case that glory can be found even in defeat for those who defend against heathen Scandinavian invaders.

Yet the identity of the invaders, and Scandinavian ethnicity itself, remain problematic in *The Battle of Maldon*. Fred C. Robinson noted that *Maldon* does not portray the invaders as "heinous villains but as a vague inimical force,"<sup>186</sup> while more recently, Leonard Neidorf has written on "the poet's puzzlingly benign representation of

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid. 23.

<sup>186</sup> Fred C. Robinson, "Some Aspects of the *Maldon* Poet's Artistry," *JEGP* 75, no.1/2 (January 1976), 27.

the Vikings.”<sup>187</sup> While “benign” certainly overstates the fact, given that these vikings raid and kill to enrich themselves, it is true that the *Maldon* poet, writing about a contemporary event, does not portray the Scandinavians as diabolical in the manner that Ælfric does when describing the Scandinavian invaders of the ninth century, as discussed below. As Neidorf argues, the poet’s depiction of the vikings suggests he “was working in a context where a more incendiary representation would have been either impolitic or impermissible.”<sup>188</sup> It is worth recalling that Maldon is in Essex, within Danelaw territory, and that by 991 Scandinavians had settled the region for generations. As the *Capture of the Five Boroughs* records, the English kingdom was populated in part by Christian Scandinavian subjects. By the late tenth century, even amid fresh incursions from Scandinavian fleets, one could no longer unproblematically equate Scandinavian identity with villainy in England. Moreover, an English poet, particularly one commemorating a leader of eastern England, had to consider an Anglo-Scandinavian audience.

In examining the ethnic identities of the combatants in *Maldon*, Harris makes the case that the English and the Scandinavians form part of a single ethnic group. He bases his argument partly on a comparison with the Old English poem *Exodus* where the word *wicingas* i.e., vikings, is used to describe a tribe of the Israelites. Harris states, “In *Exodus*, the Israelite tribe of Reuben which crosses a salt flat is called *wicingas*, while in *Maldon* the Norse pirates, who also pass over a salt flat, are similarly called *wicingas*.”<sup>189</sup> Since only a single tribe of the Israelites are called vikings in *Exodus* while the rest are

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<sup>187</sup> Leonard Neidorf, “II Æthelred and the Politics of *The Battle of Maldon*,” *JEGP* 111, no. 4 (October 2012), 452.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

<sup>189</sup> Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, 179.

called *folc*, Harris reads the vikings in *Maldon* as an irreligious portion of the same English people as the Christians of the poem. From the comparison with *Exodus*, he argues of *Maldon* that “the Vikings were considered by the poet, just as Reuben is considered with respect to Israel, an irreligious part of the English people, a heathen portion of a single people.”<sup>190</sup> Harris’ reading minimizes ethnic distinction between the opposing sides. In addition to religious differences, we should also consider geographic difference, since one side comes aggressively from outside into the homeland of the other, with potential differences in language.

The other leg of Harris’ argument does address language, though unconvincingly. *Maldon* contains a scene of negotiation between the two hostile sides, and Harris argues that since the vikings and the English understand each other “they speak the same language.” Then, alluding to Bede, he says that “a people is defined in part by its common language. Since the Vikings and the English seem to speak the same language, perhaps they are to be understood as ethnically the same people.”<sup>191</sup> Early English genealogies do reflect an understanding of some shared kinship between themselves and the Scandinavians, yet the labels Danes and Northmen in English texts consistently identify groups whose origins are located beyond England. In *Capture of the Five Boroughs*, we hear of Danes forced into heathen fetters by Northmen, implying that these Danes are Christian, yet they remain Danes and not English. As such, I read the use of Dane in *Maldon* as stressing an origin from beyond England rather than a shared ethnicity with the English. To be sure, there were Danes in England and had been for generations,

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 179.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 180.



but the *Maldon* poet does not flatten the distinction between Scandinavians and English on the side of the vikings.

Likewise, I do not see the negotiation scene in *Maldon* as sufficient evidence that the vikings and the English speak the same language. *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* claims that before the Norman Conquest, the language spoken in England was the same as that spoken in Scandinavia,<sup>192</sup> but as Magnús Fjalldal argues, that reference could just reflect the historical fact that Old Norse was widely spoken in England during the tenth and eleventh centuries, since England has always been multilingual.<sup>193</sup> In his book length study of linguistic relations between Old English and Old Norse speakers in England, Townend concludes that “the available evidence points fairly unequivocally to a situation of adequate mutual intelligibility between speakers of Norse and English in the Viking Age,” but cautions that “‘adequate intelligibility’ is under no circumstances equated with perfect intelligibility.”<sup>194</sup> Functional communication is possible between closely related languages. Moreover, the conversations with the vikings in *Maldon* involves a single person on the Scandinavian side identified as an *ar*, a messenger, rather than a leader. The use of a messenger might reflect limited intelligibility on the part of the viking leader since the English leader Byrhtnoth speaks for his side. Ultimately, I do not find sufficient evidence in *Maldon* to support the claim that the English and the Scandinavians are to be understood as ethnically the same people.

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<sup>192</sup> *Gunnlaugs saga*, 70.

<sup>193</sup> Magnús Fjalldal, *Anglo-Saxon England in Icelandic Medieval Texts*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>194</sup> Townend, *Language and History in Viking Age England*, 182.

As in the case of *The Battle of Brunanburh*, I attribute *Maldon's* muted animosity toward Scandinavians on the poem's likely audience. Just as *Egils saga* places Egill Skallagrímsson at the court of Æthelstan, *Gunnlaugs saga* places Gunnlaugr serpent-tongue at the court of Æthelred, but we need look no further than *Maldon* itself and documents shortly after the historical battle to find evidence that suggest a Scandinavian and Anglo-Scandinavian audience. Among Byrhtnoth's men is a certain Wistan, "Þurstaness suna" (Thurstan's son) (298). Thurstan is an anglicized form of the Scandinavian name Þorsteinn.<sup>195</sup> This Wistan, who slays three men to avenge Byrhtnoth before being killed himself, likely came from an Anglo-Scandinavian family, or at the very least from a family that had adopted some Scandinavian cultural practices like the name Thurstan itself. Indeed, the presence of Anglo-Scandinavians among Byrhtnoth's men should come as no surprise, since Byrhtnoth was a leader in eastern England where many Scandinavians had settled more than a century before the Battle of Maldon. Nevertheless, it is significant that Wistan is among those loyal warriors who choose to die by their leader. Byrhtnoth's men, who are never collectively called "English," present an image of unity despite their differences. As Trilling notes, "Leofsunu, the yeoman Dunnere, the Northumbrian hostage Æscferth, Edward the Tall, Æthelric, Wistan, Oswold, Eadwold, Byrhtwold, and another Godric abandon class and regional distinctions to assert their unity through their fallen lord."<sup>196</sup> These warriors, including the Anglo-Scandinavian Wistan, unite not only around their lord, however, but also

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<sup>195</sup> Locherbie-Cameron identifies several other potentially Scandinavian names among Byrhtnoth's men, including Odla, Ecglaf, and Wistan itself, see "The Men Named in the Poem," 239.

<sup>196</sup> Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia*, 167.

against pagan invaders. While all contemporary pagan invaders seem to be Scandinavian, not all Scandinavians in England are either pagans or invaders.

Arguing from the legal evidence provided by the 994 peace treaty contained in law-code *II Æthelred*, Neidorf makes a convincing case for why even a poet who did not feel kindly toward Scandinavians or Anglo-Scandinavians might take a measured approach in depicting vikings. He points to the following clause:

6. 1. Æt eallum slyht 7 aet ealre ðaere hergunge 7 aet eallum ðam  
hearmum, ðe ær ðam gedon wære, ær þæt frið geset wære, man eall  
onweig læte, 7 nan man þæt ne rece ne bote ne bidde.

6. 1. Concerning all the slaughter and all the harrying and all the injuries  
which were committed before the truce was established, all of them are to  
be dismissed, and no one is to avenge it or ask for compensation.<sup>197</sup>

Neidorf interprets this clause as a forgive-and-forget statement, since the peace treaty invited vikings to remain in England and defend against other would-be raiders. Although *II Æthelred* postdates the historical Battle of Maldon by three years, Neidorf suggests that a similar clause was likely included in all Æthelred's peace treaties. He concludes that the *Maldon* poet would have been obliged to avoid inflammatory depictions of Scandinavians, "composing as he was for an audience that likely consisted of Anglo-Saxons, Anglo-Danes descended from ninth-century Viking settlers, and Danish and Norwegian men who had recently invaded England and were now obliged to integrate

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<sup>197</sup> Neidorf, "*II Æthelred* and the Politics of *The Battle of Maldon*," 455.

and defend their new host country.”<sup>198</sup> The evidence strongly suggests that people of Scandinavian descent, whether Anglo-Scandinavians of several generations or recent arrivals, would have formed part of *Maldon*’s audience. As such, a poet commemorating near contemporary events would have been careful not to present Scandinavians broadly as caricatures of evil. Nevertheless, responding to a present resurgence of invasions from Scandinavians, the *Maldon* poet successfully deploys the motif of pagan invasions by depicting a small group of Christian defenders standing united, even in the face of betrayal, against an overwhelming force of Danish, heathen, vikings.

Byrhtnoth’s defeat at Maldon was a significant event, and “a range of sources attest to the scars left by this defeat on the national psyche.”<sup>199</sup> Among those sources is Byrhtferth’s *Life of St Oswald*, written within a decade of the battle. In it, Byrhtferth compares the pagan attacks from the north to the biblical warning issued by the Prophet Jeremiah that God would set all the kindred of the north against the inhabitants of the land because they did not heed His word.<sup>200</sup> Such a crushing defeat after the dominance enjoyed by the West Saxons for most of the tenth century signaled that perhaps something bigger was at work, and that this renewed pagan threat was a sign of divine punishment. Æthelred had ascended to the throne as a child, and his early reign was marred by “youthful indiscretion,” often at the expense of the Church. Roach argues that

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid. 463-64. Neidorf extends his argument to potentially include an audience for *Maldon* consisting of Scandinavians in Scandinavia. He suggests that the *Maldon* poet may have sought to impress the invaders by commemorating Byrhtnoth and cites the example Ulfcytel, whom the Chronicle claims gave the Danes the worst fighting they ever saw in England, and who is remembered in Old Norse Skaldic poetry. It is worth noting that Ulfcytel himself bears a Scandinavian name. See 466-67.

<sup>199</sup> Roach, *Æthelred*, 131.

<sup>200</sup> Michael Lapidge, “The *Life of St Oswald*,” in *The Battle of Maldon A.D. 991*, ed. Donald Scragg (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 55.

“By 993 at the latest Æthelred had become convinced that he had done wrong and the diplomas issued from this point on speak of a pressing need to amend past misdeeds... At Pentecost of this year he called together a council at Winchester at which he admitted to wrongdoing and committed to mend his youthful indiscretions.”<sup>201</sup> Defeat at the hands of pagans from the north was being associated with religious and moral failings. The invading pagan Scandinavians were seen as divine punishment.

More defeats followed. In 994 a fleet led in part by Sveinn Forkbeard and Óláfr Tryggvason attacked, and peace was eventually secured with some of the leaders, including Óláfr, after the English paid 16,000 pounds in tribute. Still more severe attacks followed in 997 and 998.<sup>202</sup> Consequently, history has not been kind to Æthelred, though several scholars have argued that the intensifying incursions do not necessarily reflect a mismanagement of the attacks on the part of the king. On the practice of paying off the vikings, Keynes argues:

It is clear from the support that the king received from his subjects in raising the money, and from similar measures taken by other secular and ecclesiastical leaders for the preservation of their localities, that the policy was not merely the defeatist reaction of an individual (King Æthelred) shirking his responsibilities, but rather was the reaction of the whole nation to the military predicament of the day: direct military action on its own could never contain the unprovoked and unpredictable attacks of the Vikings, and anyway risked the inevitable and irreversible consequences

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<sup>201</sup> Roach, *Æthelred*, 136.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 175, and 149.

of a decisive defeat in the field; in such desperate straits it may have seemed more advisable for a wealthy nation to divest itself of some of its riches in order to gain immediate relief from the threat of devastation and to gain valuable time for making better preparations. The policy certainly achieved its intended effect, for the absence of recorded raids in 995–6, 1002, 1005, and 1007–8 follows the making of payments.<sup>203</sup>

Theodore Anderson in turn argues that rather than being futile or foolish, Æthelred's policy would turn viking fleets against each other by hiring some fleets to defend from others.<sup>204</sup> Indeed, Óláfr Tryggvason is not recorded raiding in England again after making peace in 994, and he later died in battle against his old raiding partner Sveinn forkbeard. Roach notes too that, in responding to attacks from Scandinavian forces, Æthelred's "efforts look little different from those of Æthelred's more illustrious forebear Alfred the Great."<sup>205</sup> Nevertheless, the pressure from Scandinavian incursions continued to mount throughout Æthelred's reign, and the attacks were popularly regarded as punishment for a sinful people.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'The Unready' 978–1016: A Study in their Use as Historical Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980), 202–203.

<sup>204</sup> Theodore Andersson, "The Viking Policy of Ethelred the Unready," *Scandinavian Studies* 59 (1987), 284–95.

<sup>205</sup> Roach, *Æthelred*, 181.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 184–85.

### Ælfric's Heathens

As Mary Rambarn-Olm has noted, the viking raids that plagued Æthelred's reign did not devastate literary activity.<sup>207</sup> On the contrary, there appears to have been an increase in the output of prose works in both Latin and Old English during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, as attested by the surviving works of Byrhtferth of Ramsey, Wulfstan of York, and Ælfric of Eynsham. Haruko Momma has also argued that many of the surviving vernacular homilies, including those of Ælfric, are associated with preaching to the laity and can be read as "popular" texts.<sup>208</sup> As such, Æthelred's reign can be associated not only with an increase in literary output, but possibly also with textual productions for a broad audience, one beyond the courts and monasteries that served as traditional centers of literary production. Unsurprisingly, these writings at times responded to the recurring viking raids, the political crisis of their day.<sup>209</sup>

Ælfric began his education under Æthelwold in the Benedictine Old Minster at Winchester. In 1005, he moved from Cerne Abbey in Dorset to Eynsham Abbey at the behest of Bishop Ælfheah.<sup>210</sup> Ælfric composed the *Lives of Saints* sometime between 994 and 998.<sup>211</sup> His main source for this collection of saints lives was the Cotton Corpus

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<sup>207</sup> M. R. Rambarn-Olm, "Trial by History's Jury: Examining II Æthelred's Legislative and Literary Legacy, AD 993-106," *English Studies* 95, no. 7 (October 2014): 777-802 at 792.

<sup>208</sup> Haruko Momma, "'A Vision of Souls': Charity, Judgement, and the Utility of the Old English *Vision of St. Paul*," in *Old English Lexicology and Lexicography: Essays in Honor of Antonette DiPaolo Healey*, ed. Maren Clegg Hyer, Haruko Momma, and Samantha Zacher, 94-109 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020), 98.

<sup>209</sup> Hugh Magennis, "Warrior Saints, Warfare, and the Hagiography of Ælfric of Eynsham," *Traditio* 56 (2001): 27-51.

<sup>210</sup> Rambarn-Olm, "Trial by History's Jury," 795; Gabriella Corona, "Ælfric's Schemes and Tropes: Amplificatio and the Portrayal of Persecutors," in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 298.

<sup>211</sup> Clayton and Mullins, *Old English Lives of Saints* Vol. 1, vii.

legendary, although he supplemented that source when writing about English saints.<sup>212</sup> As Rambaran-Olm notes, “Although the *Saints’ Lives* mainly deal with the lives and passions of various saints, subjects reflected an interest in the doctrine of just war, royal and military saints and the problem of the Vikings.”<sup>213</sup> Among these texts, Ælfric includes a vernacular “Life of St Edmund” that tells of the martyrdom of an East Anglian king at the hands of pagan Scandinavians invading England in the mid ninth century. The “Life of St Edmund” identifies pagan invasions of England as an historical fact that Ælfric juxtaposes with biblical narratives of pagans invading the lands of Christian believers. The historical distance between Ælfric’s narrative and contemporary events allows him greater liberty in his depiction of pagan Scandinavians than in the more contemporary poetic representations discussed thus far. However, although Ælfric sets his narratives of invasions in the past by drawing on written sources, he weaves commentary on contemporary Scandinavian raids throughout the *Lives of Saints* by drawing on contemporary experience. The growing pressure from Scandinavian attacks makes itself felt throughout Ælfric’s text. Thus, in his *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric presents pagan invasions of England as a recurring historical fact directly associated with other past moments, both national and sacred, in which pagans invaded believing peoples. The Scandinavians are the latest iteration of a repeating pagan threat to God’s people.

Not much is known about the historical King Edmund. Coins issued during his reign suggest that he succeeded Æthelweard to the throne of East Anglia circa 855.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Joyce Hill, “Ælfric: His Life and Works,” in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 55.

<sup>213</sup> Rambaran-Olm, “Trial by History’s Jury,” 795.

<sup>214</sup> Rebecca Pinner, *The Cult of St Edmund in East Anglia* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2015), 4.



The first written historical account of King Edmund is a brief record of his death at the hands of pagan Scandinavians in 869. The A version of the Chronicle says only that an army of Danes invaded East Anglia and “Eadmund cyning him wiþ feaht, [ond] þa Deniscan sigen namon [ond] þone cyning ofslogon” (King Edmund fought with them, and the Danes took victory, and slew the king).<sup>215</sup> Earlier, in the entry for 865, the A-text refers to the invading army as a *heþen here* (heathen army),<sup>216</sup> with “Danes” being the usual name in early English sources given to Scandinavians of all origins. Thus, the Chronicle establishes an association between Scandinavians and paganism, with the detail that King Edmund died in battle against pagans.

Even though King Edmund died in battle against heathen Scandinavians, however, the Chronicle does not call it a martyrdom. Nevertheless, it appears that a cult of Saint Edmund had begun developing within a few decades of the king’s death, as “A series of silver pennies bearing on the obverse side the legend *sce eadmund rex* (O St Edmund the King!) circulated in the Danelaw... from the mid-890s.”<sup>217</sup> While the exact origin and purpose of these coins remains unclear, the coins indicate a developing cult of St Edmund in the Danelaw by the start of the tenth century and illustrates how religion and politics could quickly blend in regions that were invaded and subsequently settled by Scandinavian pagans.

The earliest extant hagiographic treatment of the legend of St Edmund is Abbo of Fleury’s *Passio Sancti Eadmundi*. Abbo was a monk of Fleury-sur-Loire who visited

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<sup>215</sup> Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: Vol. 3 MS A, 47. The translation is my own.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>217</sup> Pinner, *The Cult of St Edmund in East Anglia*, 5.

England in 985 at the invitation of archbishop Dunstan of Canterbury (d. 988).<sup>218</sup> He returned to Fleury two years later, and sometime between 985 and 987 composed the *Passio*, which he dedicated to Dunstan. Although Abbo borrows widely from other literary sources, most notably accounts of the life of St Sebastian, he still provides a chain of transmission for his *Passio*. Abbo claims he learned the story from Dunstan, who had heard the story himself as a youth under King Æthelstan from an old man claiming to be King Edmund's armor bearer.<sup>219</sup> While this chain of transmission across three generations of older men retelling accounts of their youths is possible,<sup>220</sup> its textual function lends authority to the hagiographic account of an invasion from more than a hundred years in the past. Abbo's Latin text was the direct source for Ælfric's vernacular "Life of St Edmund," and Ælfric begins his account by acknowledging his own source and explaining how he began to translate it within a few years of its composition. Abbo vilifies Danes generally in his text,<sup>221</sup> and Ælfric follows suit establishing the tone for his English account.

Ælfric's account of the martyrdom of St Edmund at the hands of pagans contains many tropes that would endure in England throughout the Middle Ages. He begins by introducing Edmund as a righteous Christian king who embodied virtue and rejected vice. Ælfric then shifts to the arrival of the Danes: "Hit gelamp ða æt nextan þæt þa Deniscan

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<sup>218</sup> Michael Winterbottom, *Three Lives of English Saints* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1972), 4.

<sup>219</sup> Abbo of Fleury, *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi: The Garland of Saint Edmund King and Martyr*, trans. Francis Hervey (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1907), 8.

<sup>220</sup> Elisabeth van Houts, *Memory and Gender in Medieval Europe 900-1200* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 48.

<sup>221</sup> Simon Keynes, "An abbot, an Archbishop, and the Viking raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12," *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007): 158.

leode ferdon mid scip-*here* hergiende and sleande wide geond land, swa swa heora gewuna is” (Then eventually it came to pass that the Danes made their way with a naval force harrying and slaying widely throughout the land, as is their custom).<sup>222</sup> The Scandinavians are here immediately associated with both sailing and violence. The invading army is a *here*, the same word used by the Chronicle for its own account of the arrival of the Great Army. Nor is it just this one *scip-*here** that is violent; rather violence is a custom of the Danes generally. *Hergende* (harrying) is literally what a *here* does.

The Danes in Ælfric’s “Life of St Edmund” are also explicitly pagan and, more importantly, aggressively anti-Christian. Ælfric writes “On þam flotan wæron þa fymrestan heafod-men, Hinguar and Hubba, geanlæhte þurh deofol” (Among the fleet were the chief leaders, Hinguar and Hubba, united by the devil).<sup>223</sup> The Hinguar and Hubba mentioned here are the famous Ívarr the Boneless and Ubbi, who are often presented as sons of Ragnarr Loðbrókr in the later medieval legends of England, Denmark, and in the case of Ívarr, Iceland. However, in Ælfric’s account it is not a legendary Scandinavian leader or ancestor that unites Hinguar and Hubba, but the devil himself. As such, their primary purpose is not to accumulate riches, as in *The Battle of Maldon*, but to do evil generally, especially against Christians. Ælfric continues, “And se fore-sæda Hinguar færlice swa swa wulf on lande bestalcode and þa leode osloh—wæras and wif and þa unwittigan cild—and to bysmore tucode þa bile-witan Cristenan” (And the Hinguar that we mentioned before suddenly moved stealthily onto the land like a wolf and killed the people—men and women and innocent children—and shamefully ill-

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<sup>222</sup> Ælfric, *Old English Lives of Saints* Vol. 3, 188-89.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

treated innocent Christians).<sup>224</sup> Hinguar's atrocities are not just that he kills, which Ælfric already presents as customary of the Danes, but *whom* he kills. Hinguar's slaughter is presented as indiscriminate as he kills women and children who presumably pose no threat to him, yet the religion of his victims remains an important accompanying factor. It is specifically Christians that Hinguar shamefully mistreats. In Ælfric's account Hinguar, linked to the devil, follows the Danish custom of slaying widely, and it is innocent Christians who suffer the consequences.

Following his onslaught, Hinguar sends a message to King Edmund asking the king to submit and become his under-king if King Edmund wishes to remain alive. Like a virtuous and humble Christian king, Edmund consults with his bishop before deciding what to do. Fearing for the life of King Edmund, the bishop advises him to submit to Hinguar and accept his demands. After some consideration, King Edmund says, "Eala þu bisceop, to bysmore synd getawode þas earman land-leoda, and me nu leofre wære þæt ic on gefeohte feolle, wið þam min folc moste heora eardes brucan" (O bishop, the poor people of this land are shamefully mistreated, and now I would prefer to fall in battle, provided that my people were able to [enjoy] their land).<sup>225</sup> King Edmund's reply illustrates what is at stake when pagans attack: not only the people, but the land itself. Edmund does not fear a pagan raid, though that would mean theft and slayings, but a pagan invasion, and like Byrhtnoth in *Maldon*, Edmund displays heroic values in his reckless defiance.<sup>226</sup> The threat is such that Edmund is willing to die if his people can

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 190-91.

<sup>226</sup> Paul Cavell, "Heroic Saint and Saintly Hero: The *Passio Sancti Eadmundi* and *The Battle of Maldon*," in *The Hero Recovered: Essays in Honor of George Clark*, ed. Robin Waugh and James Weldon (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2010), 110-24.

retain the land. His defiance accords with secular heroic values.<sup>227</sup> When the bishop informs Edmund that his people are already slain, Edmund still says “ic wolde swiðor sweltan, gif ic þorfte, for minum agenum earde” (I would rather die, if I must, for the sake of my own land).<sup>228</sup> Edmund’s exchanges with the bishop stress the importance of *eard*, the homeland itself, in the face of invasion. The king initially wishes to ensure that his people continue to possess their *eard* despite the pagan threat, but the *eard* remains critically important even after the death of his people. Edmund is willing to die for the cultural identity of his homeland. After Edmund’s death, East Anglia went on to form part of the Danelaw territory, yet the cult of St Edmund provided a cultural relic commemorating the existence of an independent English kingdom prior to the conquest by the Scandinavian pagans.

*Ælfric’s Lives of Saints* takes a long historical approach to the issue of pagan invasions, accounting for sacred history, national history, and current events, with the “Life of St Edmund” providing a brief illustrative stop at one historical moment in which England was invaded. And like in his account of the Maccabees discussed below, *Ælfric* draws attention to land disputes and ethnic difference.<sup>229</sup> As such, when King Edmund states that he is willing to die for the *eard*, his words should be understood in light of the outcomes of historical pagan invasions in Britain, including the emergence of England following the invasions of pagan Germanic tribes recorded in the Chronicle and alluded

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<sup>227</sup> E. Gordon E Whatley, “Hagiography and Violence: Military Men in *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*,” in *Source of Wisdom: Old English and Early Medieval Latin Studies in Honour of Thomas D. Hill*, ed. Charles D. Wright, Frederick M. Biggs, and Thomas N. Hall (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 227.

<sup>228</sup> *Ælfric, Old English Lives of Saints*, vol. 3, 192-93.

<sup>229</sup> Samantha Zacher, “Anglo-Saxon Maccabees: Political Theology in *Ælfric’s Lives of Saints*,” in *Old English Lexicology and Lexicography: Essays in Honor of Antonette DiPaolo Healey*, ed. Maren Clegg Hyer, Haruko Momma, and Samantha Zacher (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020), 154.

to in the closing lines of the *Battle of Brunanburh*, and the establishment of the Danelaw. Pagan invasions had the potential to change the ethnic identity of a once Christian land.

After rejecting Hinguar's offer, King Edmund demonstrates his disdain for the paganism of the invaders. He says to the messenger, "Witodlice þu wære wyrðe slege nu, ac ic nelle afylan on þinum fulum blode mine clænan hande" (You certainly deserve to be put to death now, but I refuse to corrupt my clean hands with your foul blood).<sup>230</sup> To Edmund, pagans are contemptible down to their blood to the point that he refuses to even spill it. He makes his qualms with paganism explicit when he refers to Hinguar as *hæþenum here-togan*, the heathen leader, and further states that he would only submit if Hinguar were himself to submit to Christianity.<sup>231</sup> Edmund's claim to be willing to submit to the Danes if their leader were to accept Christianity adds a religious element to his political concerns regarding the land. At least rhetorically, it allows for the possibility of Christian Scandinavians in England, reflecting the historical reality in Ælfric's own time. Moreover, it underscores that Edmund is concerned not only with the land that provides for his people in this life, then, but also with their religious beliefs, and thus salvation in the next life. As presented in this text, were the pagans reasonable, Edmund would be able to come to an understanding with them that would not only preserve Edmund's own English subjects, but would also enrich the Danes both materially and spiritually. However, the pagan invaders appear as recalcitrant people whose very blood is fouled, so King Edmund has no choice but to accept martyrdom.

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<sup>230</sup> Ælfric, *Old English Lives of Saints* Vol. 3, 192-93.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 192-93.

Upon hearing that that King Edmund has rejected his offer, Hinguar makes good on his threats. He orders Edmund captured, beaten, then tied to a tree and beaten some more. While he is being tortured, Edmund calls out to Christ, “and þa hæþenan þa for his geleafan wurdon wodlice yrre” (and the heathens then became furiously angry because of his faith).<sup>232</sup> As typical in the account of a martyr, the motives of the aggressors spring from religion and power. The violence of the Danes stems from their paganism and thus is heightened by displays of Christianity. The more King Edmund demonstrates his faith, the more cruelly he is treated by his captors. While he is tied to the tree, the Danes shoot Edmund with javelins like St Sebastian, and when the king still refuses to stop calling to Christ, Hinguar has him beheaded. The scene of the torture and eventual killing reinforces that the violence from the Danes is not about material wealth but about savage mistreatment of Christians. Edmund’s displays of piety infuriate the Danes, leading them to escalate the violence against him despite having already attained victory in the region. The Danes’ custom of violence is inherent to their paganism, and the Christians are the victims of their invasions and aggression. The more the Danes see pious Christianity on display, the more violent they become.

The narrative ends with a standard hagiographical account of the saint’s burial and a series of miracles attributed to his intervention. As a narrative of invasion, however, Ælfric’s “Life of St Edmund” includes a telling phrase in the transition between the martyrdom of Edmund at the hands of pagan Scandinavians and the account of the miracles associated with the saint: “Eft þa on fyrste, æfter fela geardum, þa seo hergung

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 194-95.

geswac and sibb wearð forgifen þam geswenctan folce, þa fengon hi togædere and worhton ane cyrcan wurðlice þam halgan” (Some time later, after many years, when the raiding had stopped and peace was restored to the oppressed people, then they joined together and built a church in magnificent fashion for the saint).<sup>233</sup> This transition marks an end to the attacks from pagan Scandinavians at some point in the historical past. Edmund’s translation likely took place in the early tenth century,<sup>234</sup> so Ælfric, following Abbo, must be referring to this period. This raises the question of exactly who joined together to build a church for the saint. Abbo’s Latin account reads, “Quibus rebo permota ejusdem provinciae multitudo, non solum vulgi sed etiam nobilium” (These events aroused great numbers of the inhabitants of that province, high and low alike).<sup>235</sup> Ælfric, however, omits any reference to class in his account, thereby creating an obfuscation. It is unclear whether those who come together are only the English, or whether these formerly oppressed people also include Christian Scandinavians like the Anglo-Danes mentioned in the *Capture of the Five Boroughs*. Moreover, as Ælfric makes clear at multiple times throughout the *Lives of Saints*, incursions from pagan Scandinavians were very much a contemporary reality when he was writing in the late tenth century. The transitional passage from Edmund’s martyrdom to his translation, then, signals that pagan invasions are a recurring phenomenon, since Edmund fell in the past to the same threat that is present in Ælfric’s own time: such invasions may stop for a time, but they can always return. Sacred history, moreover, features a pattern in which the

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 198-99.

<sup>234</sup> Pinner, *The Cult of St Edmund in East Anglia*, 123.

<sup>235</sup> Abbo, *Corolla Sancti Eadmundi*, 44-45.



faithful may always be set upon by pagans. This pattern suggests a recurrence of pagan invasions, so the historical threat remains active even during periods of peace. Thus, the motif of invasion by pagans retains its currency even during lulls in historical invasions because invasions have always resumed eventually, transforming the cultural identity of the region, as was the case with the establishment of the Danelaw.

Ælfric's most extensive account of pagan invasions is set not in England, however, but in Palestine, when he retells the biblical narrative of martyrdom of the Maccabees. And despite its distant setting, his "On the Maccabees" provides important context for reading St Edmund's response to Hinguar's threat, as well as those of other saints threatened by pagan invasions. As Malcolm Godden has argued, it is in his treatment of the Maccabees that Ælfric provides his sharpest political commentary.<sup>236</sup> Towards the end of "On the Maccabees," Ælfric states that there are four kinds of wars: "*iustum*, þæt is rihtlic; *iniustum*, unrihtlic; *civile*, betwux ceastergewarum; *plusquam civile*, betwux siblingum. *Iustum bellum* is rihtlic gefeoht wið ða reðan flot-menn oþþe wið oðre þeoda þe eard willað fordon" (*just*, that is just; *unjust*, unjust; *civil*, between citizens; *more than civil*, between relatives. *Just war* is just war against the fierce seamen or against other peoples who intend to destroy [the] land).<sup>237</sup> As James Cross notes, Ælfric's account of the four types of war is derived from Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*.<sup>238</sup> However, despite "On the Maccabees" being set in the pre-Christian

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<sup>236</sup> Malcom G. Godden, "Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England," in *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E. G. Stanley*, ed. Douglas Gray, Malcolm Godden, and T. F. Hoad, 130-62 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 141.

<sup>237</sup> Ælfric, *Old English Lives of Saints*, vol. 2, 326-327.

<sup>238</sup> James Cross, "The Ethics of War in Old English," in *England before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. Peter Clemoes and Katheen Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 269-82 at 272.

biblical past, the first enemies identified in the definition of just war are the seamen, i.e., Scandinavians. By pointing to England's contemporary pagan enemy, Ælfric invites identification between the English and the heroic Maccabees who themselves resisted pagan invasions in the biblical narrative. This identification is also present in the poem *Judith*, which itself includes the motif of pagan invasions.<sup>239</sup>

The nature of antisemitism in early medieval English writings allowed for Jewish identity to be manipulated to the author's needs, so it was not uncommon for the English to be identified with Jews in retellings of biblical narratives. As Andrew Scheil frames it:

By repudiating Judaism, defining it as lack, Christianity inexorably yokes itself into a tormented relationship with its sibling. This ambivalence gives Jews a curious ideological mobility, a capacity to be deployed as sheer rhetoric in the flux of everyday life. The anti-Judaism of Ælfric's homily Maccabees in the *Lives of Saints* exemplifies this capacity for the Christian understanding of the Jews to function as a mobile, all-purpose political signifier in specific historical circumstances.<sup>240</sup>

Ælfric is not unique in his use of Jews as an all-purpose signifier to deploy as circumstances demand. Poems like the Old English *Exodus* and *Judith* also invite identification between the English and the Jews of the Old Testament. Crucially, these identifications only appropriate Jewish identity for convenience without extending similar sympathy to contemporary Jews.

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<sup>239</sup> On the English presenting themselves as ancient Israelites see Samantha Zacher, *Rewriting the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon Verse: Becoming the Chosen People* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2013).

<sup>240</sup> Andrew P. Scheil, *The Footsteps of Israel: Understanding Jews in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004), 113.

On the *Lives of Saints*, Samantha Zacher notes, “Ælfric domesticated his Maccabees in order to make Anglo-Saxon defense against Viking assailants appear to be a natural extension of an ancient war fought against God’s heathen enemies, much as Crusader authors would do a century later.”<sup>241</sup> Through the identification between the Maccabees and the English, “On the Maccabees” addresses both the fears of what might result from pagan invasions, and the conquests to which pious English kings might aspire. Ælfric presents a narrative of territorial dispute in which a once believing people apostatize under pagan influence, and both the land and faith must then be secured through military might. As Zacher notes, “Ælfric uses his own conception of Just War to reframe the political scene in Maccabees so that it focuses more tightly on land disputes...and ethnic difference.”<sup>242</sup> Thus, by appropriating biblical Jewish identity, Ælfric sanctions military action against the current Scandinavian threat.

Ælfric’s “On the Maccabees” is based on the biblical books 1 and 2 Maccabees. Rather than provide a full translation of either text, however, Ælfric produced a paraphrase that combines both books into a single cohesive account.<sup>243</sup> As Zacher notes, the two books of the Maccabees present differing views on the efficacy of war. 1 Maccabees presents military struggle as “the most effective, divinely mandated response against both foreign oppressors *and* internal Jewish ‘renegades’ who lapsed in their faith and practice,” while 2 Maccabees “is far more concerned with profanation and sin, and

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<sup>241</sup> Zacher, “Anglo-Saxon Maccabees,” 145.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>243</sup> On Ælfric’s use of the biblical subject matter see Stuart Lee, “Ælfric’s Treatment of Source Material in his Homily on the Books of the Maccabees,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 77, no. 3 (1995): 165-76; and Jonathan Wilcox, “A Reluctant Translator in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Maccabees,” *Enarratio* 2 (1993): 1-18.

participates in the cycle of God's blessing, punishment, and redemption of Israel."<sup>244</sup> By blending the two, Ælfric uses biblical narrative to provide commentary on contemporary political situations. As Zacher concludes, "Ælfric's patchwork method thus constructs a coherent political ideology that legitimates defensive war in a time of need, and draws upon Holy War ideology in the Old Testament to lend this message unambiguous legitimacy."<sup>245</sup> In presenting the ancient Israelites as precursors to the English, then, Ælfric situates the motif of pagan invasion within sacred history and provides a model for how his contemporaries should respond to ongoing attacks from Scandinavians.

"On the Maccabees" immediately opens with King Antiochus, described as cruel and arrogant, leading an army to Jerusalem where he "bereafode Godes templ goldes and seolfres" (plundered God's temple of gold and silver).<sup>246</sup> By having Antiochus lead an army to Jerusalem and raid God's temple, Ælfric presents him as a pagan invader akin to the Scandinavian raiders who sacked churches in England. But although Antiochus steals treasures from the temple, as did the Scandinavian raiders, the bigger threat is his investment in paganism. After taking power, "asende se cyning on ærend-gewritum þæt ealle men gebugon to his hæðenscipe and to his gesetnyssum." (the king sent letters declaring that all men should submit to his heathen practices and to his decrees).<sup>247</sup> Antiochus' enforcement of pagan practices gestures to how growing pagan influence might threaten Church authority in England. We are reminded of annal 959D where King Edgar is admonished for bringing "heathen manners" into England.<sup>248</sup> Antiochus'

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<sup>244</sup> Zacher, "Anglo-Saxon Maccabees," 152.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>246</sup> Ælfric, *Old English Lives of Saints* Vol. 2, 280-81.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 6 MS D, 45.

enforcement of paganism warns of the potential consequences should pagan invasions go unchecked.

The influence of pagan rulers on a population that nominally accepted the “true” faith, be that Christianity or Judaism, could be religiously detrimental. Following Antiochus’ decree, Jerusalem was in distress “and manega gebugon on to ðam manfullan hæðen-gilde” (and many converted to evil [heathen] idolatry).<sup>249</sup> The lapse of faith in the “true” religion in the holy city of Jerusalem is a reminder that religious identity is not stable, and it offers a warning regarding the precarity of religious authority under pagan military control. If the powerful pagans command or do a particular thing, the populace under their control might obey or imitate them. For Ælfric’s contemporary audience, Scandinavian cultural influence was very much evident in daily life. In late-tenth and early-eleventh century England, not only did kings invite heathen manners, but even some Englishmen were adopting Scandinavian fashion and hairstyles.<sup>250</sup> While it would be erroneous to assume that all Scandinavians in England at this time were pagan, or that all the English who adopted Scandinavian fashion were abandoning Christianity, contemporary English writings clearly associated Scandinavian culture with paganism, often referring to Scandinavian culture as “heathen practices.”<sup>251</sup> Wulfstan Archbishop of York, for example, decreed that if a Catholic were to cut his hair in the manner of barbarians, he would be considered a stranger to the Church and to Christians until this

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<sup>249</sup> Ælfric, *Old English Lives of Saints* Vol. 2, 282-83.

<sup>250</sup> Nicholas Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths: State and Church, 400-1066* (London: Hambledon Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>251</sup> Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, 1.

misdeed were corrected.<sup>252</sup> Likewise, in a letter, Ælfric himself admonishes a certain Brother Edward for adopting a Danish hairstyle, saying that Edward shows he despises his own kin when he adopts heathen customs:

Ic secge eac ðe, broðor Eadweard, nu ðu me þyses bæde, þæt ge doð unrihtlice þæt ge ða Engliscan þeawas forlætað þe eowre fæderas heoldon and hæðenra manna þeawas lufiað, þe eow ðæs lifes ne unnon, and mid ðam geswuteliað þæt ge forseoð eower cynn and eower ylðran mid þam unþeawum / þonne ge him on teonan tysliað eow on Denisc, ableredum hneccan and ablendum eagum.

I also say to you, brother Edward, now that you have asked me for this, that you do wrong in that you abandon the English customs which your fathers observed and love the customs of the heathen people who did not give life to you and by doing so you reveal that you despise your kindred and you ancestors by such evil customs when you dress in insult to them in the Danish fashion, with bare neck and blinded eyes.<sup>253</sup>

Ælfric's letter may seem out of measure as a response to a haircut, but Scandinavian cultural influence threatened hegemonic power structures in England by providing an alternative to the norms of the English Church. In the early eleventh century, for example, the Scandinavian poets Sigvatr Þórðarson and Hallvarðr háreksblesi both

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<sup>252</sup> *Wulfstan's Canon Law Collection*, ed. J. E. Cross and A. Harmer, Anglo-Saxon Texts 1 (Woodbridge and Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 97.

<sup>253</sup> Mary Clayton, "An Edition of Ælfric's Letter to Brother Edward," in *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg*, ed. Elaine Treharne and Susan Rosser (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2002), 263–83.

include pagan references in their poems praising the Christian king Cnut.<sup>254</sup> As such, those who accepted Scandinavian practices could be seen as turning their backs on the “true” faith, much like the Jews residing in Jerusalem who made pagan sacrifices under Antiochus’ rule.

The influence of pagan invaders came not only from threats of violence. Pagan invaders could offer material wealth and opportunity to members of a society largely divided into the three orders of workers, clergy, and warriors. In the account of the Maccabees, we learn that there were those who accepted pagan money because they were “beswicene mid gitsunge” (seduced by greed).<sup>255</sup> Ælfric’s language discourages his English audience from accepting wealth from their own pagan invaders. The source of pagan wealth is described as “deofollicum” (devilish), and to accept it is a sign of weakness and greed. Yet despite its negative image with the clergy, there were people in England who welcomed the disruption to the established power order that Scandinavians brought, and the opportunities presented by this disruption.<sup>256</sup> For example, Wulfstan complains in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* that

Deah þræla hwylc hlaforde ætleape and of cristendome to wicinge weorþe,  
and hit æfter þam eft geweorþe þæt wæpengewrixl weorðe gemæne  
þegene and þræle, gif þræl þæne þegen fulllice afylle, licge ægyldre ealre

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<sup>254</sup> Sigvatr mentions Þundr, a name for the god Odin, in his *Knútsdrápa*, and Hallvarðr names the gods Hqðr and Freyr in his own *Knútsdrápa*. See Matthew Townend, ed. “Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Knútsdrápa*” and “Hallvarðr háreksblesi, *Knútsdrápa*” in *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*, ed. Diana Whaley, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 649 and 230.

<sup>255</sup> Ælfric, *Old English Lives of Saints*, vol. 2, 310-11.

<sup>256</sup> Keynes, “Historical Context of the Battle of Maldon,” 99.

his mægðeæ and if se þegen þæne þræl þe he ær ahte fullice afylle, gylde þegengylde.<sup>257</sup>

Though a slave should escape from his lord and, leaving Christendom become a [v]iking, and it afterwards happens that armed combat takes place between thane and slave, if the slave should slay the thane, he will lie without payment to any of his family; but if the thane kills the slave that he had previously owned, he must pay the price of a thane.<sup>258</sup>

Wulfstan laments the reversal of the social order where a formerly enslaved person is valued more highly than a thane, but for the enslaved the opportunity to escape slavery and go viking was probably welcome. Receiving the blood price of a thane if a formerly enslaved kinsman were killed would certainly not have seemed more devilish than slavery itself.

Of course, not everyone accepted the practices of pagan leaders in Ælfric's text, and these brave martyrs were met with stereotypical pagan cruelty, as in the story of a martyred King Edmund. When an old scribe named Eleazar is threatened with death if he does not consume food forbidden under Mosaic law, for example, he says "Ðeah ðe ic beo ahred fram manna reðnyse, ic ne mæg þam Ælmihtigan ahwar ætberstan, on life oþþe on deaðe. Ac ic læte bysne þam iungum cnihtum gif ic cenlice swelte ar-wurðum deaðe for ðære halgan æ" (Though I might be saved from human cruelty, I cannot escape

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<sup>257</sup> Wulfstan, *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. Dorothy Bethurum (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 271.

<sup>258</sup> R. M. Liuzza, *Beowulf* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2013), 289.



the Almighty anywhere, in life or in death. But I shall leave an example to young people if I bravely die an honorable death for the holy law).<sup>259</sup> Angered by Eleazar's defiance, the executioners torture him to death. However, Eleazar's example has the desired effect. Seven devout brothers are brought before the king and beaten in an attempt to make them eat pork. When the eldest brother says that he too would rather die than break divine law, "yrsode se cynincg and het forceorfan his tungan, and hine behættian and his handa forceorfan, and eac befotian, and het feccan ænne hwær and hine þæron seoðan oðþæt he sawlode ætforan his gebroþrum þæt hi abugan sceoldon." (the king became furious and ordered them to cut out his tongue, and to scalp him and to cut off his hands, and to cut off his feet also, and he ordered them to fetch a cauldron and to boil him in it until he died in front of his brothers that they might yield).<sup>260</sup> As in the martyrdom of St Edmund, the pagans are angered by the affirmation of faith in the one God, and they respond with grotesque cruelty.

The degree of the pagan king's cruelty is illustrated through the detailed account of the torture to which he subjects believers. Rather than mention a summary execution, Ælfric provides a vivid account of the horrors that pagans commit against the faithful. Significantly, the scenes of torture follow the successful looting of God's temple, so that the motivation for pagan cruelty is anger at displays of faith rather than a desire for material gain. Through these accounts of torture, Ælfric establishes that whether in the biblical past, in the time of St Edmund, and by extension in his own time, pagans remain cruel invaders with a strong hate for the faithful.

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<sup>259</sup> Ælfric, *Old English Lives of Saints* Vol. 2, 286-87.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 288-89.

Following the tale of these martyrs, Ælfric turns to the armed conflict against the pagans by the Maccabees, beginning with Mathathias. When the king commands Mathathias to make a pagan offering, he resists by killing the king's official along with a Jewish man who made the pagan offering. Anticipating retaliation, Mathathias flees to the mountains where he is joined by other believers, and where they meet the king's army in battle. The resulting conflict is summarized as follows: "hi an-rædlice fuhton and fligdon ða hæðenan, mid mycelre strængðe, þe modegodon ongean God. Mathathias þa ferde mid his maga fultume and ehte þæra hæpenra, and mid ealle adræfde, and Godes æ arærde, and him eac God fylste" (they fought resolutely and put the heathens, who exalted themselves against God, to flight with great strength. Mathathias then went with the support of his relatives and pursued the heathens, and drove them away completely, and established God's law, and God helped them also.)<sup>261</sup> Though brief, the summary of the initial conflict highlights the centrality of religion to the battle while subtly alluding to its political implications. The enemy are consistently referred to as "the heathens" so that they are identified by their paganism, and God's law cannot be established until after these pagans have been completely driven away. For a late-tenth century English audience, the word "heathen" would have been most associated with Scandinavians, as evidenced most clearly in the Chronicle. The opposition between the presence of pagans and God's law may also have evoked the Danelaw, the region that had been conquered by Scandinavians and which distinguished itself through its distinct legal practice.<sup>262</sup> The

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., 296-97.

<sup>262</sup> On the Danelaw, see Dawn M. Hadley, "The Creation of the Danelaw," in *The Viking World*, ed. Stefan Brink, and Neil Price (New York: Routledge, 2008), 375-78; Katherine Holman, "Defining the Danelaw," in *Viking and the Danelaw*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch, and David Parsons

presence of pagans meant a threat to the established power structures, and it is only through God's help that pagans can be driven away, as when Mathathias fights them.

However, threats of pagan invasion never disappear for long. As the aged Mathathias senses death approaching, he advises his sons on how to respond to aggression from pagans:

Onginnað nu þegenlice, nu eow þearf mycel is, and syllað eower agen lif for ðære soðfæstan æ and for ura fædera cyðnyse, hit cymð eow to wuldre. Beoð gemyndige nu, mine bearn, hu se mæra Abraham on mycelre costunge Gode wæs getrywe, and him com þæt to rihtwysnyse. Eallswa Ioseph and Hiesus Naue, Daudid and Danihel, and ealle ða þe on God truwodon wurdon æfre getrymde for heora tryweðe wið hine. Beoð nu gehyrte, and gehihtað on God, and healdað mid ðegenscipe ða halga Godes æ, forðan þe ge beoð wuldorfulle on hire. Ne forhtige ge, ic bidde, for ðæs fyrnfullan þreatum, forðan þe his wuldor is wyrms and meox. Nu, todæg, he modegað, and tomergen he ne bið, he awent to eorðan, and his geðoht forwyrð. Eower broðor Symon is snortor and rædfæstæ he bið eow for fæder; folgiað his rædum. Iudas Machabeus is mihtig and strang; beo he eower ealdor on ælcum gefeohte, and gaderiað eow to þa þe Godes æ lufiað, and wrecað eower folc on þam fulum hæðenum, and healdað Godes æ on godum biggencgum.

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(Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), Chap. 1; and O. Fenger, "The Danelaw and the Danish Law: Anglo-Scandinavian Legal Relations during the Viking Period," *Scandinavian Studies in Law* 16 (1972): 85-96.

Act valiantly now, now that your need is great, and give your own lives for the true law and for our father's covenant, for it will result in glory for you. Be mindful now, my sons, of how great Abraham was true to God in the midst of great tribulation, and that justified him. Also Joseph and Joshua son of Nun, David and Daniel, and all those who believed in God were always strengthened because of their trust in him. Be encouraged now, and trust in God, and keep the holy law of God valiantly, because you will be glorified by it. Do not fear, I pray, the threats of the sinful man, because his glory is decayed flesh and dung. Now, today, he exalts himself, but tomorrow he will be no more, he will return to the dust, and his thought will perish. Your brother Simon is wise and prudent; he will be a father to you: follow his advice. Judas Machabeus is mighty and strong; let him be your leader in every battle, and gather to yourselves those who love God's law, and avenge your people on the foul heathens, and observe God's law with good practices.<sup>263</sup>

Mathathias' speech to his sons doubles as a speech to the English facing the threat of pagan invasions by evoking a lineage of resistance from the faithful. During a time of increased aggression from pagan Scandinavians, Mathathias' speech calls on the people to be valiant. It calls on them to give up their lives, if need be, for the "true law" (*soðfæstan æ*) of their forefathers because this will result in the glory of martyrdom as it did for St Edmund and for the seven brothers mentioned above. Mathathias then urges his

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 296-99.

sons to consider the examples of biblical figures like Abraham, Joseph, Joshua, David, and Daniel all of whom remained true to God despite facing great tribulations. For Ælfric's contemporaries, the Maccabees themselves offer the perfect biblical precedent. Like the English, the Maccabees faced the tribulation of pagan aggression, and just as the Maccabees emulated their own biblical predecessors in trusting God to fight off the pagans, the English could in turn emulate the Maccabees in their own response to the incursions by Scandinavians.

Perhaps because his writings are often contrasted with the fiery rhetoric of Wulfstan of York, Ælfric is sometimes presented by scholars as someone who opposed violence.<sup>264</sup> Yet Mathathias' speech is a clear call to arms. He asks his sons to remain true to God and then spurs them on to battle. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne has argued that the values of Germanic heroic ethos are absent from Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*,<sup>265</sup> but Mathathias' speech in fact reflects these values, which are then enacted by his sons. He urges them to avenge their people on the heathens even at the cost of their own lives. These are the very same values present in *The Battle of Maldon* when the loyal Christians choose to die avenging their lord against the heathen Danes.

Mathathias' speech also responds to the uncomfortable reality that despite not having God on their side, pagans have often met with military success. In the ninth century, pagan Scandinavians had toppled all but one of the English kingdoms, and in the late tenth century Scandinavians made several successful raids in England. Mathathias'

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<sup>264</sup> James W. Earl, "Violence and Non-Violence in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric's 'Passion of St. Edmund,'" *Philological Quarterly* 78 (1999), 125-35. See also Magennis, "Warrior Saints, Warfare, and the Hagiography of Ælfric of Eynsham," 27-51.

<sup>265</sup> Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, "The Hero in Christian Reception: Ælfric and Heroic Poetry," repr. in *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. R. M. Liuzza (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 218.

speech offers comfort to the English by reminding them that the success of sinful men is transient, while the glory of those who oppose them proves everlasting. While everyone can see the earthly glory of a militarily powerful pagan, that glory will pass when that figure dies and becomes nothing more than decayed flesh. Nevertheless, Mathathias also points to how a powerful leader, one like Judas Machabeus, can in time put an end to even the earthly successes of pagans. Just as pagan invasions are a recurring historical reality, then, so is the appearance of powerful leaders able to defeat them, whether those leaders are Judas Machabeus or the West-Saxon kings celebrated in the *Battle of Brunanburh* and the *Capture of the Five Boroughs*. Mathathias' speech ends with an emphatic call for action to avenge one's people on the "foul heathens." The pagans are presented as unclean, as in "The Life of Edmund," and violence against them is accordingly justified. Mathathias' speech sets the stage for Judas Machabeus to wage his just war against the pagans, which in turn sets a sacred precedent for Ælfric's contemporary audience.

Mathathias' speech also stresses the importance of the law (*æ*). He references God's law four times, and through this repetition stresses what is most at stake in conflict against pagans: religious authority and orthodoxy. Three of the four mentions of God's law come from Mathathias telling his sons to observe and obey God's law. We are reminded that even after looting God's temple, King Antiochus urged the Jews to violate God's law, and that to Mathathias the Jew who violated the law was as much an enemy as the king's official. The "foul heathens" are not only cruel, but they also pollute the believers around them by urging them to violate sacred law. By emphasizing the divine law as something to defend from pagans, Ælfric employs the stereotype of the corrupting

pagan who must be kept away. For Ælfric, English identity is Christian, and that identity is upheld and reinforced through adherence to Christian law. Pagan invasions threaten to introduce evermore pagans to England, and Ælfric treats their cultural influence as a corruption capable of eroding the status of Christian law and identity in England.

The presence of corrupting pagans also provides the perfect excuse for territorial expansion. When Judas takes over from his father, Ælfric describes him in heroic language: “Iduas ða hine gescrydde mid his scinendan byrnan, swa swa ormæte ent, and hine ealne gewæpnode and his fyrde bewerode wið fynd mid his swurde” (Judas then clothed himself in his shining mail shirt, like a huge giant, and armed himself fully and defended his army against enemies with his sword).<sup>266</sup> The word used for Judas’ troops here is *fyrde*, the common word for English forces opposing invading *here* in the Chronicle. Judas and his brothers, “fuhton ða mid blisse and aflugdon þa hæþenan” (fought joyfully then and put the heathens to flight).<sup>267</sup> Ælfric’s language implies a delight in defeating pagans reminiscent of the language in *Brunanburh* at the defeat of the Northmen. Nor were Judas’ battles entirely defensive, since we learn that he “his eðel gerymde” (enlarged his homeland). Ælfric’s words here conspicuously echo those of King Alfred in his prefatory letter to the Old English version of Gregory’s *Regula pastoralis*, in which the king recalls

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<sup>266</sup> Ælfric, *Old English Lives of Saints* Vol. 2, 298-99.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

hu ða kyningas ðe ðone onwald hæfdon ðæs folces [on ðam dagum] Gode  
and his ærenwrecum hersumedon; & hie ægder ge hiora sioda hiora  
onweald innanbordes gehioldon, & eac ut hiora eðel gerymdon.<sup>268</sup>

... how those kings who had dominion over people in those days obeyed  
God and his representatives; and they upheld peace, good conduct, and  
dominion within, and also expanded their homeland outwards.<sup>269</sup>

By following a model of kingship that encourages both obedience of God and territorial expansion, the West Saxons were able to extend their control over all the territory in England that had been conquered by the pagan Scandinavians. Ælfric presents Judas as just such a leader. As Zacher argues, Ælfric “categorizes England’s war against the Vikings as a correct and vindicated defense of people and homeland. In the process, he effectively collapses the distance he created earlier between the ancient Jews and the English, and between the Seleucid enemies and the Vikings. The English are pronounced the New Maccabees, and by extension, their war against the Vikings is deemed both Holy and Just.”<sup>270</sup> Through his “just war” against the pagans, Judas can engage in military territorial expansion. Judas’ actions, and the language Ælfric uses to describe them, recall the logic advanced in the *Capture of the Five Boroughs* where opposition to pagans justifies territorial expansion from a defender king.

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<sup>268</sup> Henry Sweet, *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version of Gregory’s Pastoral Care*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1871), 3.

<sup>269</sup> Qtd. In Smith, *Land and Book*, 150.

<sup>270</sup> Zacher, “Anglo-Saxon Maccabees,” 147.



The joy with which Judas and his brothers fight against the pagans illustrates another stereotype in English portrayals of pagans: pagans are not only cruel, but also sub-human, so any violence against them is acceptable. When King Antiochus learns of Judas' victories, he sends an army to Judea to crush the rebellion, but Judas prepares his own troop to meet the attack. "Hi bleowan þa heora byman and bealdlice fuhton oðþæt þa hæðenan flugon to fyrleum landum, and Iudas hi todræfde swa swa deor to wuda" (Then they sounded their trumpets and fought bravely until the heathens fled to distant lands, and Judas drove them away like beasts to the woods).<sup>271</sup> The pagans are not only driven out of the land but dehumanized in the process. But whereas the invading Hinguar was likened to a wolf, the defeated troops of Antiochus are reduced to generic beasts. By likening the pagans to animals, Ælfric absolves Judas of the charge of cruelty no matter how harshly Judas responds to their invasion. Ælfric portrays the pagans' own cruelty as tied to their dehumanization. After cleansing God's temple of pagan elements, Judas returns to battle. "Iduas ða hine biwende and wan wið ða hæðenan, forðan ðe hi woldon awestan þa Iudeiscan. Ac Iudas hi oferfeht and aflymde hi æfre, and heora burga forbernde and hi to bysmore tawode" (Judas then turned around and fought against the heathens, because they intended to destroy the Jewish people. But Judas conquered them and put them to flight forever, and burned their towns and treated them with contempt).<sup>272</sup> Such actions seem much like the cruel behavior that might be expected from pagans rather than from believers, but the motivations ascribed to the pagans makes them into monsters unworthy of sympathy. Ælfric states that Judas responds in this manner only

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<sup>271</sup> Ælfric, *Old English Lives of Saints* Vol. 2, 304-5.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 306-7.

because the pagans intended to destroy the Jewish people. Because the motivation of the pagans is destruction and not material wealth, their humanity is compromised, and Judas is justified in treating them as beasts. Judas is free to act like a viking without compromising his heroism.

Despite his many military victories, like Byrhtnoth in *Maldon*, Judas eventually falls in battle, and Ælfric concludes “On the Maccabees” by alluding to the role of the clergy in the ongoing Scandinavian incursions. After briefly introducing the three orders of society, Ælfric states “Is nu forþy mare þæra muneca gewinn wið þa ungesewenlican deofla þe syrwiað embe us þonne sy þæra woruld-manna þe winnað wiþ ða flæsclican and wið þa gesewenlican gesewenlice feohtað” (The fight of the monks against the invisible devils who lay traps around us is greater now, therefore, than that of the men of the world who fight against human enemies and fight visibly against the visible).<sup>273</sup> Pagans are cruel, but their cruelty is motivated by anger towards God and his people. Moreover, pagans can lead believers to give into the “invisible devils” and apostatize, thus the clergy have a key role to play in defending against pagans, but not the only one. Ælfric also states that “*bellatores* synd þa ðe ure burga healdað and urne eard beweriað wið onwinnendne here” (*warriors* are those who protect our towns and defend our land against an attacking army).<sup>274</sup> We must recall that Ælfric composed the *Lives of Saints* for patrons who were themselves warriors (*bellatores*), and that the land (*eard*) was being attacked regularly by a heathen army (*here*). Far from repudiating violence, the closing of “On the Maccabees” is a call to arms for those who should do the fighting. In a letter to

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 334-35.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

the *bellator* Sigeweard written sometime after the *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric urges him to take inspiration from figures like Judith and the Maccabees and to defend his country with weapons against invading Danes.<sup>275</sup> By deploying anti-pagan stereotypes and evoking biblical and saintly exemplars, Ælfric presents violence towards pagans as not only acceptable, but as justified.

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<sup>275</sup> Whatley, "Hagiography and Violence," 221.

### Chapter 3

#### Cnut the Christian Conqueror

The first two decades of the eleventh century saw national events in England of great consequence to Anglo-Scandinavian relations. In 1002, Emma of Normandy arrived in England to be King Æthelred's wife. That same year, the St Brice Day massacre took place. The C manuscript of the Chronicle describes the event as follows:

[And] on þam gearre se cyng het ofslean ealle þa deniscan men þe on Angelcynne wæron; ðis wæs gedon on Britius mæssedæige, forðam cyninge wæs gecyð þæt hi woldan hine besyrwan æt his lif and siððan ealle his witan [and] habban siþþan þis rice.<sup>276</sup>

And in that year the king ordered to be slain all the Danish men who were in England—this was done on St Brice's day—because the king had been informed that they would treacherously deprive him, and then all his councillors, of life, and possess this kingdom afterwards.<sup>277</sup>

The St Brice Day massacre illustrates the degree to which the tension between the West Saxon court and Scandinavians had risen. Although the wording of the Chronicle specifies Danes as the targets of the massacre,<sup>278</sup> as noted in earlier chapters, the term

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<sup>276</sup> O'Brien O'Keeffe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 5 MS C, 89.

<sup>277</sup> Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, 238-39.

<sup>278</sup> The wording quoted also matches that of manuscript D, Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 6 MS D, 51.

was applied to Scandinavians broadly in English documents of the period. The massacre also illustrates that the threat of invasion by pagan Scandinavians existed as more than a literary motif to be deployed for royal propaganda or to cope with raids. The motif existed in a context where invasion was a present threat viewed primarily through ethnic and religious lenses, and which had literal life and death consequences for those living in England. The eleventh century would see England invaded multiple times, but the rise of Christian Scandinavian kings would further strain the once easy association between Scandinavians and paganism in England and Europe more broadly.

Although Scandinavians were frequently assumed to be pagan by the English and others in Christian Europe,<sup>279</sup> Christianity had had a significant presence in the region going back to at least the mid-tenth century. Sometime in the 960s King Haraldr Bluetooth of Denmark converted to Christianity, and he later raised a runestone claiming to have made the Danes Christian.<sup>280</sup> While the claim of converting the Danes should not be taken at face value, Haraldr's own conversion, proclaimed in such grand fashion, speaks to the presence of Christianity among the elite in Denmark. Nor was Denmark unique in Scandinavia in this sense. As noted in the previous chapter, Óláfr Tryggvason was already Christian by the time he stopped raiding in England to claim kingship in Norway in 995. Just as there were Christian Anglo-Scandinavians at the turn of the eleventh century, there were also Christian Scandinavians from the Scandinavian homelands, including some of the leaders known for raiding and invading England.

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<sup>279</sup> Timothy Bolton, *Cnut the Great*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 20.

<sup>280</sup> Anders Winroth, *The Conversion of Scandinavia: Vikings, Merchants, and Missionaries in the Remaking of Northern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 113.

Clearly, the spread of Christianity in Scandinavia did not end the Scandinavian raids and invasions of England.

In 1013, Haraldr Bluetooth's son, Sveinn Forkbeard, invaded England. Early sources are divided on Sveinn's Christianity, with Adam of Bremen denouncing him as a pagan and the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* praising him as a Christian.<sup>281</sup> While Sveinn had led viking raids in England before, the attack in 1013 was an invasion aimed at conquering territory rather than acquiring moveable wealth. The Chronicle reads:

And on þissum ylcan geare toforan þam monðe Augustus com Swegen  
cyning mid his flotan to Sandwic... And þa sona beah Uhtred eorl and all  
Norðhymbre to him and eal þæt folc on Linddesige and siððan þæt folc  
into Fifburhingum and raðe þæs eall here be norðan Wæclinga stræte.<sup>282</sup>

And this same year, before the month of August, King Swein came with his fleet to Sandwich... And then at once Earl Uhtred and all the Northumbrians submitted to him, as did all the people of Lindsey, and then all the people belonging to the district of the Five Boroughs, and quickly afterwards all the Danish settlers north of Watling Street.<sup>283</sup>

According to the Chronicle, those northern regions of England corresponding to the Danelaw quickly submitted to Sveinn. What Whitelock translates as "Danish settlers" is *here*, more properly meaning "army," and a word frequently applied to invading

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<sup>281</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 52.

<sup>282</sup> O'Brien O'Keefe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 5 MS C, 97.

<sup>283</sup> Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, 245.

Scandinavians in the Chronicle. The use of the word *here* to describe those north of Watling Street who join Sveinn evokes the familiar dichotomy between a *heathen here* and the Christian inhabitants of England. Regardless of his religion, Sveinn Forkbeard was a Scandinavian invader who drove out King Æthelred and was eventually crowned king of England himself. In recording his invasion, the Chronicle continues to use the same language it does for earlier attacks by pagan Scandinavians.

Sveinn's conquest of England was short lived, as he died suddenly in 1014,<sup>284</sup> but it nevertheless must have once again shocked and rocked the English, even more so than Byrhtnoth's defeat at Maldon. That is certainly the impression left by Wulfstan of York's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. The *Sermo Lupi* may have been composed as early as 1009, but we know that it was still being worked on and preached in 1014 since one of the manuscripts linked to Wulfstan himself places it then.<sup>285</sup> The 1014 manuscript is headed, "SERMO LUPI AD ANGLOS QUANDO DANI MAXIME PERSECUTI SUNT EOS"<sup>286</sup> (The Sermon of the Wolf [i.e., Wulfstan] to the English when the Danes were persecuting them most greatly). In the sermon, Wulfstan chastises the English for not adhering properly to Christianity, and he laments that some are even leaving Christendom to go viking.<sup>287</sup>

Significantly, the 1014 version of the *Sermo Lupi* likens the present circumstances of the English to that of the Britons as described by Gildas in the *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae*. The sermon states, "An peodwita wæs on Brytta tidum Gildas hatte. Se awrat

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<sup>284</sup> Bolton, *Cnut the Great*, 85.

<sup>285</sup> Roach, *Æthelred*, 281; Keynes links the original composition of the *Sermo Lupi* to the period when Thorkell the Tall was raiding in England, see "An Abbot, and Archbishop, and the Vikings," 203-13.

<sup>286</sup> Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, 267.

<sup>287</sup> Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, 271.

be heora misdædum hu hy mid heora synnum swa oferlice swyþe God gegræmedan þæt he let æt nyhstan Engla here heora eard gewinnan [and] Brytta dugeþe fordon mid ealle”<sup>288</sup> (There was a historian in the time of the Britons named Gildas, who wrote about their misdeeds, how they with their sins angered God so exceedingly that He finally allowed the army of the English to conquer their land and completely destroy the nobility of the Britons).<sup>289</sup> In drawing on Gildas in his response to an attack from Scandinavians, Wulfstan follows the example of Alcuin who made a similar comparison in the aftermath of the raid of Lindesfarne in the late eighth century.<sup>290</sup> Writing to Bishop Ethelhard, Alcuin stated, “Legitur vero in libro Gildi Brettonum sapientissimi, quod idem ipsi Brettones propter rapinas et avaritiam principum, propter iniquitatem et iniustitiam iudicum, propter desidiam et pigritiam praedicationis episcoporum, propter luxoriam et malos mores populi patriam perdiderunt”<sup>291</sup> (We read in the book of Gildas, most learned of the Britons, that the Britons themselves lost their fatherland because of the greedy pillaging of their leaders, the injustice of their judges, the slackness in the preaching of their bishops and the luxury and wicked ways of the people).<sup>292</sup> The attack by pagans follows the moral and religious failings of a people, and if these issues are not rectified, that people could be completely replaced in their land as was the case with the Britons. Wulfstan draws a parallel between contemporary events and the past invasions of Britain by pagan forces. The English did not accept Christianity broadly until after establishing

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>289</sup> Liuzza, *Beowulf*, 291.

<sup>290</sup> Roach, *Aethelred*, 283.

<sup>291</sup> E. Duemmler, ed. *Alcuini Epistolae* (Berlin: Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 1895), 47, qtd. in Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 20.

<sup>292</sup> Stephen Allot, *Alcuin of York: His Life and Letters* (York: Williams Session Limited, 1974), 62, qtd. in Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, 20.



an England in the island of Britain, so that the *Engla here* Wulfstan mentions was literally a *heathen here*. As such, regardless of Sveinn's religion, Wulfstan framed his invasion as a pagan invasion, and his sermon expounds on the suffering occasioned by such raids and invasions.<sup>293</sup> And while Sveinn's conquest was short lived, Wulfstan's mention of Gildas reminds his audience that a more permanent pagan conquest could still lie ahead if the English did not abandon their sinful ways. Indeed, the eleventh century would see two more longer lasting invasions of England, but in both cases the invasions would be led by Christians. The continuance of invasions kept the literary motif of invasion current, but the Christianity of once pagan invaders would further strain the association of Scandinavians with paganism.

### **Cnut's Reign**

Sveinn's son Cnut, who accompanied his father during the invasion of 1013, invaded England again. He met resistance from the forces of Æthelred's son, Edmund Ironside, that was sufficient for them to partition the country, with Edmund retaining rule over Wessex.<sup>294</sup> The Chronicle provides a lengthy entry noting several of Edmund's victories over Cnut's forces before their eventual peace agreement.

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<sup>293</sup> Keynes, "An abbot, and archbishop, and the viking raids," 207.

<sup>294</sup> The fierce resistance that Cnut encountered was remembered in Scandinavia. *Heimskringla* says of the invasion, "Knútr konungr átti margar orrostur á Englandí við sonu Aðalráðs Englakonungs, ok hófðu ýmsir betr...Knútr konungr sættisk við Eaðmund konung. Skyldi hafa hálf England hvárr þeirra" (King Cnut had many battles in England with the sons of Æthelred, king of the English, and sometimes one side sometimes the other had the better of it... King Cnut made peace with King Edmund. Each of them should have half of England), Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla* II, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenszk Fornritafélag, 1945), 33.

Ða wæs Eadmund cyng ær ðam gewend ut [and] gerad þa Westsexon,  
 [and] him beah eal folc to, [and] raðe æfterþam gefeaht wið þone here æt  
 Peonnan wið Gillingham, [and] oþer gefeoht he gefeaht æfter  
 middansumera æt Sceorstane, [and] þær mycel wæl feoll on ægðre healfe,  
 [and] ða heras him sylfe toedan. On þam gefeohte wæs Eadric ealdorman  
 [and] Ælmær dyrling þam here on fultume ongean Eadmund kyning.  
 [And] þa gegaderede he þryddan siðe fyrde [and] ferde to Lundene eal be  
 norðan Temese [and] swa ut þuruh Clæighangran [and] þa buruhwaru  
 ahredde [and] þæne here geflymde to hiora scypon. [And] þa ðæs ymbe  
 twa niht gewende se cyning ofer æt Bregentforda [and] þa wið þone here  
 gefeaht [and] hine geflymde.<sup>295</sup>

King Edmund had previously gone out and he took possession of Wessex,  
 and all the people submitted to him. And soon after that he fought against  
 the Danish army at Penselwood near Gillingham, and he fought a second  
 battle after midsummer at Sherton; and a great number on both sides fell  
 there, and the armies separated of their own accord. In that battle  
 Ealdorman Eadric and Ælfmær Darling were supporting the Danish army  
 against King Edmund. Then he collected the army for a third time, and  
 went to London, keeping north of the Thames, and so out through  
*Clayhanger*, and relieved the citizens and sent the enemy in flight to their

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<sup>295</sup> O'Brien O'Keefe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 5 MS C, 101-2.

ships. And then two days after that, the king crossed over at Brentford, and then fought against the army and put it to flight.<sup>296</sup>

Edmund's army would rout Cnut's forces once more at Kent, but significantly, the Chronicle notes that Cnut enjoyed support from some of the English elite.<sup>297</sup> Likewise, the Chronicle records Anglo-Scandinavians, like Ulfcytel, among Edmund's war leaders, while Scandinavian elites like future king of Norway Óláfr Haraldsson and Cnut's own commander Thorkell the Tall had served as mercenaries of King Æthelred. As M. K. Lawson notes, by the time of Cnut's invasion, "the fighting saw no clear division between Danes and English."<sup>298</sup> In fact, in the Chronicle entry above, both Edmund's and Cnut's forces are referred collective as *heras*, the term usually denoting the invading Scandinavians. Political alliances took precedence over ethnic and religious divisions.

Nevertheless, English records of Cnut's invasion continued to rely on the tropes of the motif of invading pagan Scandinavians. When the Danish forces continued to ravage England during the invasion, the Chronicle describes it as follows:

Se here gewend þa æfter þam fram Lundene mid hyra scypum into  
Arewan, and ðær up foron and ferdon ob Myrcan and slogon on bærndon  
swa hwæt swa hi o<fer>foran swa hira gewuna is.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, 249.

<sup>297</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 100.

<sup>298</sup> M.K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (London: Longman, 1993), 47.

<sup>299</sup> O'Brien O'Keeffe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition Vol. 5 MS C*, 102.

The army then turned after that with their ships from London into the Orwell, and went inland there, and went into Mercia, slaying and burning whatever was in their path, as is their custom.<sup>300</sup>

The Chronicle describes the devastation wrought by Cnut's forces in the same language used by Ælfric to describe the invasion of the Great Army in the ninth century, *swa heora gewuna is*, "as is their custom."<sup>301</sup> In Ælfric's narrative, the leader of the invading force Hinguar is linked to the devil himself. Cnut, on the other hand, may be Christian, but the violence and devastation carried out by his forces is customary of, and linked to, the precedent of Scandinavian pagan invaders. After becoming king of England, Cnut would have to challenge his image as a stereotypical Scandinavian invader despite the violent invasion through which he came into power.

Cnut's forces finally defeated Edmund's at the Battle of Ashingdon leading to the partition that would leave Edmund as king of Wessex. Although Cnut would enjoy a long reign in England, his invasion was more stoutly resisted than Sveinn's had been a few years prior. Rather than being an unstoppable assault, his conquest saw moments of success for both the aggressors and the resisters. Ultimately, it seems both sides agreed it would be mutually beneficial to divide England once again. However, Edmund's death in November of 1016, shortly after the agreement, left Cnut as sole king of England.<sup>302</sup> Cnut would rule England until his death in 1035.

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<sup>300</sup> Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, 250.

<sup>301</sup> Ælfric, *Old English Lives of Saints* Vol. 3, 188.

<sup>302</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 103.

Cnut's long reign in England was likely aided by the fact that he was Christian. This is not to suggest, however, that he invaded England with a Christian army. We know that among his commanders was Eiríkr Hákonarson, jarl of Hlaðir.<sup>303</sup> As Timothy Bolton has noted, "The Norwegian dynasty of the Jarls of Hlaðir were passionate pagans, who had used their religious affiliations to assert themselves against their Christianizing rivals for power in Norway."<sup>304</sup> *Jómsvíkinga saga*, for example, shows Hákon jarl sacrificing his seven-year-old son to a pagan deity to achieve victory in battle.<sup>305</sup> Nevertheless, Cnut himself was Christian, and he made a strategic show of it. A contemporary image of Cnut, for example, depicts him and Queen Emma gifting a decorated cross to New Minster at Winchester.<sup>306</sup> Documents dating to, and immediately after, Cnut's reign that displayed his Christianity further thus challenged perception among the English of Scandinavians as pagans, especially since Cnut arrived from a Scandinavian homeland already a Christian.

Two proclamations issued by Cnut have survived dating to 1020 and 1027. In both proclamations, Cnut asserts his own Christianity and his commitment to rule as a just Christian king in accordance with Christian law. As noted in the previous discussion of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, one of the concerns with a pagan invasion is that it would change the religious identity of the region. Cnut's proclamations challenge that anxiety in

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<sup>303</sup> Alistair Campbell ed., *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1949), 22.

<sup>304</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 100.

<sup>305</sup> The saga depicts Hákon jarl praying to someone called Þorgerðr Hǫrðatröll, but she ignores his prayers until he offers a worthy sacrifice. Hákon eventually offers his son Erlingr, and the saga states, "En þat verðr nú of síðir at Þorgerðr þiggr af honum ok kýss nú Erling, son jarls" (But it happened at last that Þorgerðr accepts this from him now chooses Erlingr, the jarl's son). *Jómsvíkinga saga*, ed. Þorleifur Hauksson and Marteinn Helgi Sigurðsson (Reykjavík: Hið Íslensk Fornritafélag, 2018), 120.

<sup>306</sup> Keynes, "Introduction to the 1998 Reprint," xiii.

the aftermath of a successful invasion by Scandinavians, so long as the invading leader is himself Christian. In essence, an invasion by *Christian* Scandinavians does not carry the same spiritual threat as one by pagan Scandinavians.<sup>307</sup> Moreover, as public documents, these proclamations allowed Cnut to project the image of himself that he would like the English people to see, and he took the opportunity to present himself much like the West Saxon kings had been presented in the early Chronicle poems. The proclamations depict Cnut as a defender against Danish threats, and while the West Saxon kings used their position as defenders to expand their *anweald* to include all of England, Cnut used it to expand his own *anweald* to include Scandinavian countries.

The Proclamation of 1020 survives in a single manuscript dating to the mid eleventh century.<sup>308</sup> It was issued while Cnut was in Denmark following the death of his brother Haraldr.<sup>309</sup> The proclamation presents Cnut not as a pagan invader, but as a Christian ruler defending his people from Scandinavian threats. The homiletic tone of the proclamation also shows influence from Wulfstan Archbishop of York, suggesting that Wulfstan may have further revised the proclamation for preaching after its initial circulation.<sup>310</sup> That the same Archbishop Wulfstan who had so frequently and fervently warned against pagan influence in England worked with Cnut illustrates the degree to

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<sup>307</sup> Of course, cultural identity goes beyond religion. While the Normans who conquered England in 1066 were Christians, they still had significant cultural and linguistic influence on English identity, as did the growing Scandinavian presence in England over the centuries leading up to Cnut's conquest.

<sup>308</sup> A. J. Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1925) 138.

<sup>309</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 154.

<sup>310</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 30; Andrew Rabin, *The Political Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan of York* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 192; and Simon Keynes, "The Additions in Old English," in *The York Gospels: A Facsimile with Introductory Essays by Jonathan Alexander, Patrick McGurk, Simon Keynes and Bernard Barr*, ed. N. Barker (London: Roxburgh Club), 81-99.

which the Danish King of England challenged the standard association of Scandinavian identity with incursive paganism.

The proclamation immediately asserts Cnut's commitments to justice and the Church. It states, "ic cyðe eow þæt ic wylle beon hold hlaforð [and] unswicende to Godes gerihtum [and] to rihtre woroldlage" (I declare to you that I will be a gracious lord, and will not fail to support the rights of the church and just secular law).<sup>311</sup> Cnut positions himself as a champion of the Church. He understood that "good politics could require good religion,"<sup>312</sup> and presents himself accordingly. He is not only Christian himself, but he will use his authority as king to ensure that the Church receives its full rights. The letter further underscores Cnut's Christianity by announcing his communications with the Pope. It states:

Ic nam me to gemynde þa gewritu [and] þa word þe se arcebiscop Lyfing me fram papan brohte of Rome, þæt ic scolde æghwær Godes lof upp aræran [and] unriht alecgan and full frið wyrcean be ðære mihte þe me God syllan wolde.

I have taken cognizance of the written and verbal injunctions which Archbishop Lyfing brought me from Rome from the Pope, namely, that I should everywhere magnify the glory of God and suppress injustice and

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<sup>311</sup> Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, 140-41.

<sup>312</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, 133.

establish perfect security through the power which God has been pleased to grant me.<sup>313</sup>

In noting that the Pope has written to Cnut, the proclamation establishes Cnut's proximity to the upper echelons of the Catholic hierarchy. And by acknowledging Archbishop Lyfing as his intermediary, someone Cnut sought to win over,<sup>314</sup> the letter reinforces Cnut's ties and commitments to the English Church. It also provides a deeper authority for Cnut's Christian duties and mission. Cnut has been tasked with establishing *full frið*, a word which could refer to peace generally or, importantly in Cnut's Anglo-Scandinavian empire, peace between nations or peoples.<sup>315</sup> The Pope himself has asked Cnut to establish this *frið* and to spread the glory of God, a task that Cnut has accepted projecting humility even while cementing his authority since the Pope has endorsed his Christian mission. Moreover, the letter states that Cnut's authority as king is the will of God since it has pleased God to grant him this power. The opening passages of the proclamation establish Cnut as a Christian ruler drawing his legitimacy from the Church and God.

After establishing the depths of Cnut's Christianity, the proclamation turns to the threat of invasion from Denmark. The letter reads:

Pa cydde man me þæt us mara hearm to fundode þonne us wel licode;  
[and] þa for ic me sylf, mid þam mannum þe me mid foron, into  
Denmearcon þe eow mæst hearm of com; [and] þæt hæbbe [ic] mid Godes

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<sup>313</sup> Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, 140-41.

<sup>314</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 128.

<sup>315</sup> *Dictionary of Old English* [DOE], ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018), <https://tapor-library-utoronto-ca.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/doe/>



fultume forene forfangen, þæt eow næfre heonon forð þanon nan unfrið to  
ne cymð, þa hwile þe ge mé rihtlice healdað and min lif byð.

When I was informed that we were threatened with danger greater than we  
could regard with equanimity, I went in person, with those who  
accompanied me, to Denmark, which was the chief source of danger to  
you, and, with the help of God, I have taken measures to prevent hostility  
even from this time forth coming upon you from that quarter, as long as  
you support me loyally and my life lasts.<sup>316</sup>

The proclamation alludes to the recurring nature of attacks from Scandinavia, since Cnut himself became king of England by invading from Denmark, like his father before him, and he has now been informed of yet another threat from there. In fact, Cnut concerned himself with raids from Scandinavian settlers more locally and formed alliances with Scandinavian leaders around Ireland and Britain to prevent raids.<sup>317</sup> He prevented *unfrið* between the English and Scandinavians broadly. But the proclamation also gestures toward a conditional end to those threats so long as Cnut retains power: the letter states that Cnut has put an end to this latest threat and that no new threats will arise, so long as he lives and enjoys the support of the people of England. The proclamation positions Cnut as a defender against attacks from Scandinavians in much the same way as the *Battle of Brunanburh* did the West Saxon princes. And like the texts in support of the

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<sup>316</sup> Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, 140-41.

<sup>317</sup> See Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 124; and G. A. Garmonsway, *Cnut and His Empire*, (London: University College London, 1964), 18.

West Saxon dynasty from the earlier tenth century, the proclamation might well exaggerate the Scandinavian threat. Cnut took only nine ships with him to Denmark in 1019, which does not suggest he expected to meet great resistance; he even may have been invited by the Danish elite to assume the kingship after his brother's death.<sup>318</sup> In any case, the proclamation presents Cnut's defense of England from a Danish threat in explicitly Christian terms. It is with the help of God that he can prevent hostilities returning from Denmark. Cnut the invader from pagan land now becomes Cnut the Christian defender of England.

The Proclamation of 1020 makes a third important point regarding the English perception of Scandinavians. It extends Cnut's Christianity to his Danish subjects in England.

gif hwa swa dyrstig sy, gehadod oððe læwede, Denisc oððe Englisc, þæt ongean Godes lage ga and ongean minne cynescype oððe ongean woroldriht, and nelle betan and geswincan æfter minra biscopa tæcinge, þonne bidde ic Ðurcyl eorl and eac beode, þæt he ðæne unrihtwisan to rihte gebige, gyf he mæge.

If anyone, whether a man in orders or a layman, a Dane or an Englishman, is so presumptuous as to defy the law of God and my royal authority or secular law, and will not make amends and desist from so doing,

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<sup>318</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 154.

according to the instruction given by my bishops, then I pray and likewise enjoin upon Earl Thurkil to bring the evil-doer to justice, if he can.<sup>319</sup>

The proclamation holds Danes and English equally responsible for upholding God's laws. At least nominally, it does not allow an exception for pagan Danes to disregard Christian rules. Cnut the Danish king of England projects a greater legal unity between his English and Danish subjects than that achieved by his West Saxon predecessors, which allowed Danes significant legal leeway as noted in IV Edgar.<sup>320</sup> Any transgressors are now subject to the authority of Cnut's bishops. Significantly, it is a Scandinavian, Thorkell the Tall, who is tasked with enforcing the rules. The statement applies to the laws broadly—ecclesiastical, secular, and royal—but it nevertheless presents Christianity as the norm for Cnut's subjects, Danish and English alike. The Proclamation of 1020 depicts a Scandinavian conqueror as a Christian defender, and while it acknowledges the ethnic distinction between English and Danes, their religion is not presented as a difference between them. The letter presents Cnut as a model of Christian kingship.<sup>321</sup>

Sometime around the year 1020, Wulfstan of York composed a homily titled *Be Hæðendome*, or *On Heathen Practices*. It is preserved in the York Gospels (York, Minster Library, Additional 1), the same manuscript where Cnut's Proclamation of 1020 is preserved, and one which bears annotations believed to be in Wulfstan's own hand.<sup>322</sup> The short homily draws heavily on Wulfstan's earlier works, including several direct

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<sup>319</sup> Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, 142-43.

<sup>320</sup> Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 108-9.

<sup>321</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 30.

<sup>322</sup> Rabin, *The Political Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan of York*, 159.

excerpts.<sup>323</sup> Like Cnut's Proclamation of 1020, this text signals that Christianity is the norm for both English and Danes in England. Yet Wulfstan's homily still reflects some anxiety over the influence of pagans in England, likely heightened in the aftermath of Cnut's conquest and the influx of Scandinavians to England that surely followed.

The homily opens in Latin, saying "Nemo cristianorum paganas superstitiones intendat, sed gentilium inquinamenta omnia omnino contemnat"<sup>324</sup> (No Christian is to heed pagan superstitions, but he is to despise entirely all of the filth of the heathens).<sup>325</sup> The practices of heathens are characterized as *inquinamenta*, filth, but also as a pollutant capable of corruption. The call to reject paganism is repeated in English, but in somewhat softer terms. The homily allows for the possibility of some Christians engaging in pagan practices and stipulates penalties for those who do:

and, gyf hit geweorðe, þæt cristen man æfre heonanforð ahwar heðendom  
 begange oððon ahwar on lande idola weorðige, gebete þæt deope for gode  
 and for worolde; and se ðe to gelome þæt unriht begange, gylde mid  
 Englum swa wer, swa wite, and and on Dena lage lahslite, be ðam þe seo  
 dæd sy.<sup>326</sup>

Moreover, if it befalls that a Christian ever henceforth anywhere engages  
 in heathen practices or worships idols anywhere in the land, he is to repent

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<sup>323</sup> Audrey L. Meaney, "'And we forbeadað eornostlice ælcne hæðenscipe': Wulfstan and Late Anglo-Saxon and Norse 'Heathenism,'" in *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: The Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, ed. Matthew Townend (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 461-500.

<sup>324</sup> Arthur Napier, *Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschrieben homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1883), 309.

<sup>325</sup> Rabin, *The Political Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan of York*, 160.

<sup>326</sup> Napier, *Wulfstan*, 309.

for it sincerely before God and the world; and he who commits that transgression too frequently, is to pay his wergild as a penalty if under English law or his *lahslit* if under Danish law, according to the severity of the deed.<sup>327</sup>

While the text acknowledges that some Christians will engage in heathen practices, some even too frequently, it also underscores that Christianity is the law of the land in broad geographical terms.<sup>328</sup> Paganism is prohibited *ahwar* (anywhere) in the land. *Lahslit* is the penalty due for breaking a law, and the term is used specifically for those regions where Danish law applies. By providing penalties under both English law and Danish law, the homily clarifies that Christianity is to be adhered in the totality of England, including the Danelaw. Wulfstan, who actively endorsed Cnut's rule,<sup>329</sup> presents the king's subjects as united in Christianity. Anxiety over the presence of pagans comes through again when the text states, "her syndan on earde godcundnessæ wiðersacan and godes lage oferhogan,"<sup>330</sup> (Here in this land are enemies of the sacred and despisers of God's law).<sup>331</sup> Elaine Treharne sees in *On Heathen Practice* a reflection of the horrors of the process of conquest.<sup>332</sup> Cnut's invasion meant the forceful arrival of more Scandinavians, some, perhaps most, of which were not Christian, thus destabilizing the religious status quo of England. Nevertheless, while Wulfstan's homily reflects anxiety

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<sup>327</sup> Rabin, *The Political Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan of York*, 160.

<sup>328</sup> On Wulfstan's investment in Christian law see Frank Barlow, *The English Church 1000-1066* (London: Longman, 1979), 39.

<sup>329</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 128.

<sup>330</sup> Napier, *Wulfstan*, 309.

<sup>331</sup> Rabin, *The Political Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan of York*, 160.

<sup>332</sup> Elaine Treharne, *Living Through Conquest: The Politics of Early English, 1020-1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 63.

over the pagan presence in England, it does not articulate those concerns in ethnic terms. As in Cnut's Proclamation of 1020, Christianity is expected of both English and Scandinavian inhabitants of England. Religion functions as a unifying force regardless of ethnic differences.

A few years after the death of Wulfstan in 1023, Cnut issued another proclamation that has survived. This proclamation, issued 1027, survives only in a Latin translation,<sup>333</sup> in both John of Worcester's *Chronicon* and William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum Anglorum*.<sup>334</sup> This proclamation was issued while Cnut was on his way to Denmark from Rome following the coronation of Emperor Conrad II. Like the earlier proclamation, it presents Cnut as a devout Christian ruler, draws attention to his proximity to other prominent Christians, and acknowledges potential dangers coming from Denmark that Cnut has been able to deal with thanks to God's help. In the letter Cnut states that he has been to Rome "oratum pro redemptione peccaminum meorum," (to pray for the redemption of my sins).<sup>335</sup> This opening presents Cnut as both devout and humble. As Lawson puts it, "This is Cnut the caring Christian king and diplomat, vowing to amend what has hitherto been done amiss through negligence or the intemperance of youth."<sup>336</sup> He is aware of his imperfections, and like a good Christian, has gone on pilgrimage to pray for their redemption.

Next, the proclamation announces Cnut's contact with the Pope and other Christian rulers, and the benefits he has won for his devout subjects: "Sit autem vobis

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<sup>333</sup> Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, 138.

<sup>334</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 44.

<sup>335</sup> Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, 146-47.

<sup>336</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, 133.

notum, quia magna congregation nobelium in ipsa pascali solennitate ibi cum domino papa Iohanne et imperatore Cuonrado erat” (Now be it known to you that there was a great assembly of nobles there at the celebration of Easter with my lord the Pope John and the Emperor Conrad).<sup>337</sup> Celebrating Easter with the Pope again underscores Cnut’s eminent Christianity. However, Cnut’s journey to Rome has also been interpreted by scholars as an effort to enter the society of European Christian kings.<sup>338</sup> He enjoyed some success on that front, since Conrad’s biographer names him as one of two rulers to witness the Pope’s benediction of the emperor.<sup>339</sup> His presence among the Pope, Emperor Conrad, and other Christian princes also speaks to his secular authority and high standing among the Christians of Latin Europe. The letter quickly turns to what Cnut accomplished among this august company:

Locutus sum igitur cum ipso imperatore et domino papa et principibus qui ibi eran de necessitatibus totius populi universi regni mei, tam Anglorum quam Danorum, ut eis concederetur lex aequitor et pax securior in via Romam adeundi, et ne tot clausuris per viam artentur et propter thelon iniustum fatigentur.

I therefore spoke with the Emperor himself, and with my lord the Pope, and with the princes who were present, about the needs of the people throughout my kingdom, both English and Danes, that more just

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<sup>337</sup> Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, 146-47.

<sup>338</sup> Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 115; Lawson, *Cnut*, 136-37.

<sup>339</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 183.

regulations should be accorded them and greater security in their journeys to Rome, and that they should not be hindered by so many barriers on their way and harassed by unjust tolls.<sup>340</sup>

After speaking to the benefits of Cnut's own journey to Rome, the letter announces that Cnut has gained ease of access to his subjects wishing to do the same. This was a significant achievement given the conflicts between imperial officials and travelers from England seeking to reach Rome.<sup>341</sup> The letter specifies that these subjects include both English and Danes (*tam Anglorum quam Danorum*), so that once again Cnut's Christianity extends to his Scandinavian subjects.<sup>342</sup> It is not only the English wishing to make pilgrimage to Rome, and Cnut has facilitated access to this holy site for his Danish subjects as well, further challenging the assumption that Scandinavians are pagan.

Like the Proclamation of 1020, the one of 1027 also address the possibility of a military threat from Scandinavia. The letter states:

Danemarciam eo, pacem et firmum pactum omnium Danorum consilio cum eis gentibus et populis compositurus qui nos et regno et vita privare, si eis possibile esset, volebant; sed non poterant, Deo scilicet virtutem eorum destruyente.

I am going to Denmark, in order, with the counsel of all the Danes, to make firm and lasting peace with those nations and peoples who, had it

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<sup>340</sup> Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, 148-49.

<sup>341</sup> Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 115.

<sup>342</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 184.



been in their power, would have deprived us of both our kingdom and our life; but they were not able to do so, since their strength was destroyed by God.<sup>343</sup>

While the wording of this proclamation is more personal than that of the threat to England announced in the Proclamation of 1020, it still speaks to a broader threat to the people. To deprive the king of his kingdom implies an invasion, something the previous proclamation said would not occur so long as Cnut lived, but those who wish to deprive Cnut of his kingdom also wish to deprive him of his life. In any event, the letter states that God has destroyed the strength of those wishing harm on Cnut. As in the previous proclamation, Cnut is presented as a defender of England with God's help. His successes as a Christian king speak to the favor he enjoys from God, which are in turn extended to the English people.

Cnut's propaganda was not limited to England or the English language. His court hosted several Scandinavian poets who celebrated his victories.<sup>344</sup> *Skáldatal* lists eight poets active in Cnut's court, among them the Icelander Sigvatr Þórðarson.<sup>345</sup> Sigvatr was a prolific poet who served both Cnut and his Norwegian rival Óláfr Haraldsson.<sup>346</sup> He composed *Knútsdrápa* in honor of Cnut sometime after the king's pilgrimage to Rome, with dates ranging from 1027 to 1038.<sup>347</sup> The dating controversy stems from the fact that

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<sup>343</sup> Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, 150-51.

<sup>344</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, 130.

<sup>345</sup> The other poets are Óttarr svarti, Þórarinn loftunga, Hallvarðr háreksblei, Bersi Torfuson, Steinn Skaptason, Arnórr Þórðarson jarlaskáld, and Óðarkeptr, see Matthew Townend, "Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*: skaldic praise-poetry at the court of Cnut," *Anglo-Saxon England* 47 (October 2002): 145.

<sup>346</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 80.

<sup>347</sup> Townend, "Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*," 153; Bjarni Einarsson, "De Normannorum Atrocitate, or on the Execution of Royalty by the Aquiline Method," *SBVS* 22 (1986): 79; Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 132; and Russell Poole, "Sigvatr Þórðarson," in *Medieval Scandinavia: an Encyclopedia*, ed. P. Pulsiano (New York, 1993), 580-1.

*Fagrskinna* and the *Legendary saga* of St Óláfr call Sigvatr’s poem an *erfidrápa*, memorial poem, while all other texts—*Heimskringla*, *Knýtlinga saga*, and *Páttur af Ragnars sonnum*—simply call it *Knútsdrápa* with no indication it was a memorial poem.<sup>348</sup> I accept the earlier date as more convincing, especially in light of *Skáldatal* listing Sigvatr as one of Cnut’s royal poets. Because the vocabulary and syntax are simpler than Sigvatr’s other works, it is also possible that Sigvatr composed this poem with an Anglo-Scandinavian audience in mind, who might not enjoy the same fluency in the Old Norse dialects spoken in Iceland and Norway.<sup>349</sup>

Like Cnut’s proclamations, *Knútsdrápa* portrays Cnut as a Christian and a defender of his people.<sup>350</sup> *Fagrskinna* records an episode in which King Óláfr Haraldsson of Norway and Qnundr of Sweden were raiding in Cnut’s Scandinavian lands, and Cnut came to the rescue of his Nordic territories. The saga says, “Knútr konungr var kominn vestan til Limafjarðar, dregr saman óvígjan her ok fór eptir þeim austr,”<sup>351</sup> (King Cnut had come from the west to Limafjörður, drew together an unbeatable army and went after them to the east). In support of this claim, the saga cites the following verse from *Knútsdrápa*:

Létat af jöfurr

(ætt manna fannsk)

<sup>348</sup> Townend, “Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*,” 154.

<sup>349</sup> Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 132.

<sup>350</sup> One stanza of the poem, however, includes a reference to Þundr, a name for Óðinn. Matthew Townend, ed. “Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Knútsdrápa*” in *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*, ed. Diana Whaley, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 649. <<https://skaldic.org/m.php?p=text&i=1356>> (accessed 11 May 2022).

<sup>351</sup> *Agrip af Noregskonunga sögum, Fagrskinna-Noregs Konung Tal*, ed. Bjarni Einarsson (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenskt Fornritafélag, 1985), 186.

Jótlands etask  
 flendr (at því).  
 Vildi foldar  
 fæst rôn Dana  
 hlífskjöldr hafa.  
 Höfuðfremstr jöfurr. (9)<sup>352</sup>

The lord of Jutland, in his land, did not let himself be deprived (the race of men were pleased). The protective shield of the Danes would allow minimal plundering of the land. The most outstanding prince.

Cnut is a defender of his people who does not abide that his lands be plundered. Just as his proclamations assure the English that he will prevent harm from reaching them, *Knútsdrápa* celebrates the king's response when violence reaches his subjects in Scandinavia.<sup>353</sup>

However, *Knútsdrápa* also highlights Cnut's adversarial relationship with the West Saxon dynasty that he displaced. One kenning for Cnut is *andskota Aðalráðs*, the enemy of Æthelred (7). The poem furthermore gloats about Cnut defeating Æthelred's sons and driving them out of England:

Ok senn sonu  
 sló, hvern ok þó,

<sup>352</sup> Townend, "Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Knútsdrápa*," 649.

<sup>353</sup> Sigvatr was not unique among Icelandic poets in portraying Cnut as a defender. Þórarinn loftunga and Hallvarðr háreksblei both compare Cnut's defense of the land to God's defense of heaven. See Lawson, *Cnut*, 135; and Townend, "Contextualizing the *Knútsadrápur*," 162.

Aðalráðs eða

út flæmði Knútr (2).<sup>354</sup>

And Knútr at once struck or drove out the sons of Æthelred, indeed every one of them.

The verse presents Cnut as a triumphant warrior who aggressively displaced the members of a rival dynasty. Sigvatr's verse also elides the contentious struggle that took place, focusing instead on the glory of the victor, much like the *Battle of Brunanburh*. Cnut's propaganda projected strength and successful aggression for his Scandinavian audiences.<sup>355</sup> Just as proclaiming his Christianity allowed Cnut to secure local support in England, projecting strength aided his expansionist ambitions in Scandinavia where he eventually annexed Norway from Óláfr Haraldsson.

Nevertheless, during his reign, Cnut signaled his Christianity to both his English and his Scandinavian subjects. *Knútsdrápa* commemorates Cnut's pilgrimage to Rome:

Kom á fylki

farlyst, þeim bar

hervíg í hug,

hafanda staf.

Rauf ræsir af

Rúms veg suman

<sup>354</sup> Townend, "Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Knútsdrápa*," 649.

<sup>355</sup> See Bolton, *Cnut*, 32; and Roberta Frank, "King Cnut in the Verse of his Skalds," in *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. Alexander Rumble, (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), 106-24.

kærr keisara

klúss Pétrúsi (10).<sup>356</sup>

Desire for a journey came upon the king who bore warfare in mind, having a staff. The king took some of Rome's honor, Peter's enclosure, the emperor's dear one.

Like Cnut's Proclamation of 1027, Sigvatr's verse highlights Cnut's proximity to emperor Conrad II. Yet by also referencing to Rome as Peter's enclosure, the verse touches on the importance of the pilgrimage from a religious perspective. Cnut did not just travel far to meet earthly rulers; he visited the holy see of the apostle Peter, a site of major importance for the Catholic Church. Cnut was aware that religion could offer an avenue for political opposition. After all his Norwegian rival Óláfr Haraldsson, who was eventually canonized, used his position as a missionary to displace the ruling pagan jarls of Hlaðir and claim sole rule of Norway. Cnut thus signaled his Christianity accordingly neutralizing its viability as a tool against him to be used by other Scandinavian kings.<sup>357</sup> Moreover, the verse notes that Cnut's Christianity does not compromise his status as a warrior king. After all, Cnut is described as someone who *bar hervíg í hug*, bore warfare in his mind, even as he made his pilgrimage to Rome.<sup>358</sup> To his Old Norse speaking audience, Cnut, though a Christian king, remained a fearsome warrior.

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<sup>356</sup> Townend, "Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Knútsdrápa*," 649.

<sup>357</sup> Frank, "King Cnut in the Verse of his Skalds," 116–17; Matthew Townend, "Knútr and the Cult of St Óláfr: Poetry and Patronage in Eleventh-Century Norway and England," *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1 (2005): 264.

<sup>358</sup> Townend, "Contextualizing the *Knútsadrápur*," 162.

Cnut's efforts to control his public image as king were multifaceted. His proclamations are obviously not narrative texts, nor even literary texts proper. Yet they do illustrate how Cnut's kingship in England challenged the stereotype of the pagan Scandinavian invaders prevalent in English narratives of invasion. Cnut was a Scandinavian invader, but like many Anglo-Scandinavians and a growing number of Scandinavians from the homelands, he was also a Christian. His cultivated performance of Christianity from the throne provided a prominent challenge to perceptions of Scandinavians more broadly in England. Following his death, Cnut's widow Emma commissioned a text telling a narrative of Cnut's invasions of England, and just as in the documents circulating during his life, that text features his Christianity prominently.

### **In Praise of Christian Northmen**

Emma of Normandy arrived in England in 1002. She married King Æthelred the Unready and soon became politically active. Emma signed numerous land grant charters in England under her English name Ælfgifu.<sup>359</sup> Her presence in charters suggests that she was prominent in the royal court in a way that is reminiscent of Æthelred's mother Ælfthryth.<sup>360</sup> The Chronicle takes note of Emma, something uncommon for queens in England during the previous century, and refers to her as *hlæfdige*, that is Lady, in entries for 1002 and 1013. Despite her foreign origins, Emma is portrayed as an English queen by the time of her husband's death in 1013.<sup>361</sup> She married Cnut after his conquest of

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<sup>359</sup> For a list of documents signed by Emma see Appendix I in Campbell, *Encomium*, 55.

<sup>360</sup> Stacy S. Klein, *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 170.

<sup>361</sup> Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 7.

England and remained politically active throughout his reign. However, Emma may not have had much of a choice in the matter. Cnut had previously been married to Ælfgifu of Northampton, a union whose political value must have diminished after the death of Sveinn forkbeard.<sup>362</sup> Cnut had Emma fetched from Normandy in 1017 likely seeking a marriage more suitable to his new political circumstances.<sup>363</sup>

During the reign of her son Harthacnut (1040-42), Emma commissioned the writing of the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*. Although the *Encomium* was composed in praise of Emma, it is largely concerned with exalting the Danish line of her husband Cnut. Strictly speaking, the *Encomium* falls outside of the tradition of literary texts dealing with invasions of England by pagans and adopting the English perspective.<sup>364</sup> While it does offer an account of a recent invasion of England like the Chronicle poems, the *Encomium* adopts the perspective of the invaders, and emphasizes their Christianity rather than their paganism. The *Encomium* is more properly a political text invested in the heritage, ethnic and religious, of what Emma surely hoped would be a lasting dynasty. And here, the project of heritage is empire. Emma would have seen this firsthand in the Norman court where her father and brother deployed their lineage going back to Rollo, the founder of Normandy, to consolidate and legitimize their power in the region. The *Encomium* likewise sought to legitimize Emma's place atop the Danish North Sea empire. However, neither Cnut's North Sea Empire nor Emma and Cnut's dynasty would outlast Emma herself.

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<sup>362</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 120.

<sup>363</sup> Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 226.

<sup>364</sup> Within this tradition, sometimes Christian English identity is projected unto Jewish Israelites when adapting biblical narratives, as in the example of the Maccabees discussed in the previous chapter.

For a long time, only a single surviving medieval copy of the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, produced in the mid-eleventh century, was known.<sup>365</sup> The manuscript (BL Add. 33241) contains an illustration of Emma seated being presented with a copy of the *Encomium* by a kneeling monk, presumably the Encomiast, in the presence of two young men, presumably her surviving sons at the time, Harthacnut and Edward. There is also an “Edwardian” recension of the *Encomium* that includes the sudden death of the young Harthacnut which survives in a fourteenth century manuscript discovered in 2008, the “Courtenay Compendium,” and a transcript dating to circa 1500.<sup>366</sup> Simon Keynes notes of the later transcription that, “The scribe began by copying some passages descriptive of Britain, under the heading ‘Excerpta ex Gilda.’”<sup>367</sup> In this context, then, Cnut’s invasion of England as recorded in the *Encomium* was associated with Gildas’ *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae* which was also alluded to in Wulfstan’s *Sermo Lupi*. While the *Encomium* does not itself directly use the motif of pagans invading Britain and England, its transmission history suggests compilers recognized its importance to that tradition.

The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* is an unusual text. Despite being devoted to the praise of Queen Emma, she does not enter the action of the narrative until partway through Book II. Indeed, what is omitted is often as interesting as what the Encomiast chooses to include. For example, the Encomiast makes no mention of Emma’s first marriage to Æthelred the Unready. Alistair Campbell notes that, “the Encomiast is so

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<sup>365</sup> Keynes, “Introduction,” xli.

<sup>366</sup> Timothy Bolton, “A Newly Emergent Mediaeval Manuscript Containing *Encomium Emmae Reginae* with the Only Known Complete Text of the Recension Prepared for King Edward the Confessor,” *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 19 (2009): 205-21.

<sup>367</sup> Keynes, “Introduction,” l.



severely selective a writer that nothing can ever be argued from his silence.”<sup>368</sup> The *Encomiast* is engaging in propaganda and omits information found in other contemporary sources that might not support the image of his subject he wishes to portray, such as Emma’s prior marriage to Æthelred and the likely presence of pagans among Cnut’s troops. The anonymous *Encomiast* himself remains an elusive figure. We know that he was probably a monk attached to the Flemish monastery of Saint-Bertin in Saint-Omer.<sup>369</sup> He tells us that he met King Cnut when the latter was on his way to Rome for the coronation of Conrad II, and the fact that Queen Emma asked him to write her encomium suggests that the *Encomiast* enjoyed some reputation. He was a learned man whose writing demonstrates familiarity with classical Latin works. He cites Vergil, for example, and he also likely knew the works of Horace, Ovid, Juvenal, and Caesar, as well as Sallust and Lucan.<sup>370</sup> Not much more can be said with certainty about the author of this eccentric work. However, to understand how the *Encomium* uses Scandinavian identity and Christianity for political ends, it can be helpful to situate the text in the context of the court where its patron Emma was raised.

Reconstructing early Norman history is challenging. Scandinavian raiders are first known to have sailed up the Seine River and attacked Rouen in 841.<sup>371</sup> Raids on Frankish territory came not only from the Scandinavian homelands, but also from raiding camps within Francia itself where vikings could winter. The growing Scandinavian presence

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<sup>368</sup> Alistair Campbell ed., *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1949), lxix.

<sup>369</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, xix; and Elizabeth M. Tyler, *England in Europe: English Royal Women and Literary Patronage, c.1000-c.1150*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 51.

<sup>370</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, xix; and Elizabeth M. Tyler, “Talking about history in eleventh-century England: the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* and the court of Harthacnut,” *Early Medieval Europe* 13, no. 4 (2005): 362.

<sup>371</sup> Eleanor Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power, 840-1066* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 16.

along the Seine would culminate in the treaty of St. Clair-sur-Epte, where legend has it that the Frankish king Charles the Simple would grant territory to Rollo. We know that Scandinavians had been given land along the Seine by 918, when a charter of Charles the Simple granted lands to the abbey of La Croix-Saint-Leufroy, excepting those territories already given to Rollo and his troops. However, the contemporary Flodoard of Reims does not refer to Rollo by Frankish title. Instead, Flodoard refers to Rollo simply as a leader of pirates.<sup>372</sup>

Scholars have drawn attention to important cultural traits retained in Normandy by the Scandinavian settlers, and identified similarities in place-name patterns between Normandy and Northern England, as well as the retention of Scandinavian names for several generations.<sup>373</sup> Despite the limited surviving written materials from the early Norman period, especially in vernacular languages, certain words in the region are demonstrably constructed from borrowed Scandinavian roots with added suffixes or prefixes, such as *dellage*, from Old Norse *deill*.<sup>374</sup>

There is a gap in contemporary records for Normandy following the death of Rollo's son William Longsword in 942 and the production of Norman charters in the eleventh century, making it difficult to reconstruct Norman history.<sup>375</sup> The most complete narrative for this period of Norman history is Dudo of St. Quentin's *De moribus et actis primorum Normanniae ducum*, also known as *History of the Normans*.<sup>376</sup> As with

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>373</sup> Lesley Abrams, "Early Normandy," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 35 (2012): 47.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>375</sup> Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, 61.

<sup>376</sup> A literal translation of the Latin title provided above would be "On the ways and deeds of the first dukes of Normandy." However, William of Jumièges, writing in the eleventh century, refers to Dudo's as a

Emma's *Encomiast*, much has been made of Dudo's reliability (or lack thereof) as an accurate historian. However, Dudo was present at the Norman court in Rouen during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, and he personally knew dukes Richard I and Richard II, Emma's father and brother respectively. For the purpose of understanding Emma's concept of Norman identity and how it might have influenced the writing of her *Encomium*, Dudo's version of affairs can prove more fruitful than the factual occurrences in the ninth and early tenth centuries that led to the founding of Normandy. Indeed, the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* at times echoes Dudo's *History* directly and may very well have been commissioned under the influence of the earlier work.<sup>377</sup>

Dudo was a canon of St. Quentin. In 1015 he was chosen dean of his community.<sup>378</sup> Dudo was Frankish by birth and he first journeyed to Normandy on a diplomatic mission in 987, where he met Duke Richard I. Dudo continued to frequent Rouen and was eventually commissioned to compose a history of the Normans by the duke. Richard I passed away in 996, but his brother Count Rolf and his son Richard II would revive his commission with Dudo.<sup>379</sup> Accordingly, it is difficult to narrow Dudo's dates of composition further than between 996 and 1020.<sup>380</sup> When Dudo undertook to write his *History of the Normans*, he did so with the political intention of advancing the position of the ruling court at Rouen.

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"history". See Dudo of St. Quentin, *History of the Normans*, trans. Eric Christiansen (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), xiii.

<sup>377</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, 53.

<sup>378</sup> Dudo of St. Quentin, *History of the Normans*, ix.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>380</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

Dudo's *History of the Normans* is a reconstructed family narrative not entirely unlike the Icelandic sagas of the thirteenth century. More than recounting history, Dudo illustrates the identity that the Norman dukes wished to have portrayed. He begins his narrative in the semi-legendary past with the arrival of Rollo into Frankish territory. He makes Rollo a *Daci*, from *Dacia*, a term applied by Dudo equally to Normans and Scandinavians.<sup>381</sup> William of Jumièges would later explicitly link *Dacia* and Denmark in his *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, saying of the Norman ancestors, "Quarum in secunda sede Dacia, que et Danamarcha" (Their second settlement was in Dacia, also called Denmark).<sup>382</sup> Scholars generally believe it is more likely that Rollo in fact came from Norway rather than Denmark, agreeing with the later Icelandic sources.<sup>383</sup> This use of a common term to refer to Scandinavians of different backgrounds has parallels in English usage. As noted in the previous chapter, *The Battle of Maldon* refers to the vikings fighting the English as Danes even though they were likely under the leadership of the future king of Norway Óláfr Tryggvason. However, in a work as politically charged as Dudo's *History*, identification with the Danes rather than the Norwegians could be a conscious decision. It has been suggested that Dudo's decision to identify the Norman ancestors with the Danes could stem from the relationship between Richard II of Normandy and Sveinn Fork-beard of Denmark.<sup>384</sup> Ties to Sveinn's Denmark were likely

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<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxvi.

<sup>382</sup> Elisabeth M. C. van Houts, *The Gesta Normannorum Ducum of William of Jumièges, Orderic Vitalis, and Robert of Torigni*: Volume I, ed. and trans. Elisabeth M. C. van Houts (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 14-15.

<sup>383</sup> Mark Hagger, *Norman Rule in Normandy 911-1144* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017), 45. See for example, Bjarni Guðnason ed., *Danakonunga sögur: Skjöldunga saga, Knýtlinga saga, Áfríp af Danakonunga* (Rekjavík: Hið Íslenska Fornritafelag, 1982), 107.

<sup>384</sup> Abrams, "Early Normandy," 63.

more profitable for Normandy when Dudo was composing his *History* than links to either of Norway's missionary kings, Óláfr Tryggvason or St. Óláfr Haraldsson, both of whom fell in battle against Danish plots. Dudo's ancestral identification of the Normans with the Danes rather than the Norwegians should be considered when interpreting the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*: the Danes, who could boast a longer history of Christian royals than the Norwegians, offered the Norman court a more strategic ancestral connection to Scandinavia. For the *Encomiast*, it linked Emma's new family to ancestors of the Normans who themselves had provided a model for former pagan Scandinavians becoming Christian leaders of an ethnically diverse population.

While Dudo does glorify the Scandinavian origins of the Normans, he does not portray Norman identity as entirely Scandinavian. Instead, he constructs a new, distinctly Norman identity.<sup>385</sup> As depicted by Dudo, Norman identity is securely Christian. Rollo's entry into Christendom is contrasted by that of his fellow exile Hasting. Both Rollo and Hasting are given a conversion scene by Dudo. Hasting uses baptism as part of a plot to enter a Christian city by faking his own death so that he can more easily sack it. Rollo takes his conversion seriously, however, establishing from the beginning a connection between Norman identity and devout Christianity.<sup>386</sup> Sincere conversion to Christianity thus allowed Scandinavians to transition from being invading outsiders to full members of Latin Christian Europe.

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<sup>385</sup> Casandra Potts, "Atque unum ex diversis gentis populum effecit: Historical Tradition and Norman Identity," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 18 (1995), 139.

<sup>386</sup> Samantha Khan Herrick, "Remembering the Vikings in the Duchy of Normandy," in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* Vol. VII, ed. Roger Dahood and Peter E. Medine (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 2010), 4-5.

By the time of Emma's birth, the cultural memory of the Norman's Scandinavian heritage had been repurposed for the service of the dukes at Rouen.<sup>387</sup> Far from being forgotten, it was perpetuated to grow the reputation of Normans as fierce warriors.<sup>388</sup> Eleanor Searle notes that in Dudo's mythical history, Rollo ends up playing the role of Aeneas, travelling away from his homeland and founding a new home with a new people.<sup>389</sup> Emma's *Encomiast* would later draw an explicit parallel between Cnut and Aeneas.

Emma is said to be of Dacian descent through both her father Richard and her mother Gunnor. Much has been made of Gunnor's lineage. Searle argues that Gunnor was "pagan-born, and initially pagan-wed."<sup>390</sup> Timothy Bolton states that Emma's mother "was a Danish noblewoman named Gunnor, and her family had been unashamedly proud of their Danish origins."<sup>391</sup> Pauline Stafford, on the other hand goes no further than to say that Gunnor was "Danish-descended."<sup>392</sup> Like Stafford, I interpret Dudo's words conservatively. Yet, it is likely that Gunnor spoke some Scandinavian dialect and that Emma almost certainly spoke Cnut's language by the time of their marriage.<sup>393</sup> Thus we can conclude that Emma was born to parents who could both boast Scandinavian descent, and at least one of them, though likely both, were Christian. We also know that both her

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<sup>387</sup> Abrams, "Early Normandy," 64.

<sup>388</sup> Potts, "Historical Tradition and Norman Identity," 152.

<sup>389</sup> Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, 64.

<sup>390</sup> Searle, *Predatory Kinship*, 63.

<sup>391</sup> Bolton, *Cnut the Great*, 121.

<sup>392</sup> Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith: Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh-Century England* (Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 1997), 3.

<sup>393</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 121.

father and brother maintained contact with Danish rulers.<sup>394</sup> Emma was well positioned to refashion the heritage of her son's Anglo-Danish dynasty along similar lines to those her family had used for their Norman dynasty: fierce Scandinavian warriors, but still devoutly Christian.

The *Encomium Emmae Reginae* presents England as a new Normandy: a people of mixed heritage founded through Scandinavian aggression. It does so by recreating certain elements of Dudo's *History*. Scandinavians once again take pride of place, with the presentation of a Danish leader leaving home to found a new dynasty in a foreign land. However, the Encomiast does not let the Virgilian overtones sit subtly, but rather opens the Argument of the *Encomium* by directly referencing his model. After noting that he will begin his book devoted to Emma's praise by retelling the glory of Sveinn Fork-beard, the Encomiast anticipates that he may be accused of going off topic and provides a preemptive protest:

Aeneida conscriptam a Uirgilio quis infitiri ubique laudibus respondere  
 Octouiani, cum pene nihil aut plane parum eiusmentio uideatur nominatim  
 interseri? Animaduerte igitur laudem suo generi ascriptam ipsius decori  
 claritudinis claritatisque in omnibus nobilitare gloriam.

Who can deny that the *Aeneid*, written by Virgil, is everywhere devoted to the praises of Octavian, although practically no mention of him by name,

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<sup>394</sup> Eleanor Searle, "Emma the Conqueror," in *Studies in Medieval History: presented to R. Allen Brown*, ed. Christopher Harper-Bill, Christopher J. Holfworth, and Janet L. Nelson (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1989), 284.

or clearly very little, is seen to be introduced? Note, therefore, that the praise accorded to his family everywhere celebrates the glory of their fame and renown to his own honour.<sup>395</sup>

The comparison to the *Aeneid* immediately elevates the status of Sveinn, who is often remembered as a troublesome figure.<sup>396</sup> Elisabeth M. Tyler notes that, “At the very outset of the text the Encomiast firmly and explicitly places his narrative in a Virgilian framework.”<sup>397</sup> Rather than being presented as an aggressive pagan pirate, the first impression the Encomiast offers his audience of Sveinn is that of a glorious classical king attempting to find a new home for his people. The Encomiast also frames the end of Danish invasions of England in Christian terms from the onset of his text. After noting that Cnut met military resistance from the English, the Encomiast states that Cnut was victorious adding, “et fortasse uix aut numquam bellandi adesset finis, nisi tandem huius nobilissimae reginae iugali copula potiretur, fauente gratia Saluatoris” (and perhaps there would scarcely or never have been an end of the fighting if he [Cnut] had not at length secured by the Saviour’s favoring grace a matrimonial link with this most noble queen).<sup>398</sup> Emma’s marriage to Cnut is credited with ending the invasions of England, and this marriage was only possible through the Grace of God. Before even taking up its matter in full, the *Encomium* signals that Cnut is a mighty war leader, and like the

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<sup>395</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, 6-7.

<sup>396</sup> Saxo Grammaticus, for example, portrays Sveinn as a disloyal pagan who only reluctantly accepts Christianity, *Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes* Volume 1, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, tr. Peter Fisher (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015), 695-715.

<sup>397</sup> Tyler, *England in Europe*, 60.

<sup>398</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, 6-7.



founders of Normandy before him, his Christianity allowed for peace and harmony among diverse peoples.

Book I of the *Encomium* concerns Sveinn's invasion of England, and while the invasion is called unjust in Book II,<sup>399</sup> the text nevertheless stresses Sveinn's Christianity. We are told he enjoyed great favor from the divine power since he was a child, and everyone loved him except for his father.<sup>400</sup> Emphasizing Sveinn's divine favor here is important, since historically Sveinn drove his father out of Denmark, and his father was none other than Haraldr Bluetooth, the self-proclaimed Christianizer of Denmark.<sup>401</sup> Sveinn toppled more than one Christian king, so his own Christianity had to be asserted to avoid him appearing like a pagan invader of England. But the most important function of Sveinn's Christianity is to buttress Cnut's own. When Sveinn finds himself dying after conquering England, he summons Cnut. The *Encomium* says of Sveinn, "Cui dum multa de regni gubernaculo multaque hortaretur de Christianitis studio," (He exhorted him much concerning the government of the kingdom and the zealous practice of Christianity).<sup>402</sup> The *Encomium* then claims that Sveinn declared Cnut his heir before passing away. The *Encomium* is not a reliable witness on this, and Cnut's succession of Sveinn was certainly much messier, especially given how suddenly Sveinn died.<sup>403</sup> Yet in this scene as narrated in the *Encomium* Sveinn, who already enjoyed divine favor throughout his life, entrusts the kingship to Cnut and urges him to advance the practice of

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>401</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 63.

<sup>402</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, 15.

<sup>403</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, 190.

Christianity. As such, Christianity becomes central to Cnut's kingship even before it technically begins. His spiritual devotion is what will make him a good king.

Cnut's story begins in earnest in Book II of the *Encomium*, and his Christianity is emphasized throughout. Having fled England after his father's death, Cnut asks his brother to split the kingship of Denmark with him. The Encomiast makes Cnut the older brother of Haraldr Sveinsson.<sup>404</sup> However, there is evidence to the contrary, not least of all the fact that Sveinn Fork-beard left Haraldr, not Cnut, to rule Denmark in his absence. Bolton argues that based on the naming practices of the elite southern Scandinavians, we can determine that Haraldr was in fact the older brother since he was named after Haraldr Bluetooth.<sup>405</sup> In any event, Haraldr refuses, leading Cnut to say, "Deus enim rectius fortasse hoc solus ordinabit" (God alone may perchance arrange the matter more equitably).<sup>406</sup> Facing an unfavorable situation at home, the *Encomium* portrays Cnut as trusting in God that things will turn out well. Yet his statement is also somewhat threatening, and later Danish sources suggest that Haraldr may not have enjoyed much local support.<sup>407</sup> As fate would have it, things do turn out rather more favorably for the pious and patient Cnut. He not only goes on to acquire the whole of England, something the *Encomium* consistently presents as the consequence of divine favor, but also the whole of Denmark after his brother's death a few years later.

Christianity also features prominently in Cnut's invasion of England. The Danish leader in the first battle of Cnut's conquest is Thorkell the Tall. Finding his troops

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<sup>404</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, 10-11.

<sup>405</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 58.

<sup>406</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, 18-19.

<sup>407</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, 190.

outnumbered by the English forces, he prays for God's help (*Dei auxilium*)<sup>408</sup> after which his forces defeat the English. Although historically Thorkell had undergone primsigning, scholars are divided on the sincerity of his Christianity.<sup>409</sup> The implication of the scene in the *Encomium* is that God favors the Scandinavian invaders over the native English. And Cnut proves himself worthy of that favor. Another of Cnut's leaders is the Norwegian Eiríkr, presumably Eiríkr Hákonarson jarl of Hlaðir. As noted above, Eiríkr was most likely a pagan, something about which the *Encomium* is silent. After Thorkell's victory, Eiríkr sets out ravaging the land and destroying villages. The *Encomium* follows, "Quo reuerso rex parcens patriae prohibuit ultra eam predari" (When he returned, the king, sparing the country, forbade him to plunder it further).<sup>410</sup> Even as he is waging war on England, the *Encomium* portrays Cnut in a positive light. Whereas the Chronicle presents the slayings and burnings committed by Cnut's troops as customary of Scandinavian invaders, in the *Encomium* these atrocities are limited to the Norwegian Eiríkr, while Cnut himself is depicted as a benevolent conqueror who is concerned for the well-being of his future subjects, despite leading a fleet that is literally killing them.

The *Encomium* interprets all fortuitous events as signs that Cnut enjoys divine favor. When the aged King Æthelred dies, it is because God wants peace and for Cnut to

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<sup>408</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, 20.

<sup>409</sup> Bolton expresses reservations over whether Thorkell abandoned paganism altogether (*Cnut*, 100); but on Thorkell the Tall acting as a Christian see Simon Keynes, "Cnut's Earls," in *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. Alexander R. Rumble (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), 43-88.

<sup>410</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, 22-23.

be victorious. The passing of Æthelred, who remains unnamed in the original recension of the *Encomium*,<sup>411</sup> is described as follows:

Deus itaque, qui omnes homines uult magis saluare quam perdere, intuens  
has gentes tanto periculo labor[ar]e, eum principem, qui interius ciuitati  
presidebat, educens e corpore iunxit quieti sempiternae, ut eo defuncto  
liber Cnutoni ingressus pateret, et utrique populo confecta pace paulisper  
respire copia esset.

And so God, who wishes to save all men rather than to lose them, seeing  
these natives to be pressed by such great danger, took away from the body  
the prince who was in command of the city within, and gave him  
everlasting rest, that at his decease free ingress might be open to Knútr,  
and that with the conclusion of peace the two peoples might have for a  
time an opportunity to recover.<sup>412</sup>

Seeing the English pressed by great danger, God causes the death of the English king rather than the leader of the invaders. In the *Encomium* God is not only concerned with restoring peace, but also with determining Cnut's success. The same logic is applied in explaining the sudden death of Edmund Ironside after he and Cnut divide England

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<sup>411</sup> Æthelred is named, and presented positively, in the Edwardian recension, which states, "Alradus autem primus rex—primus autem quia omnium sui temporis prestantissimus—ei praefuit monarchie. [5] Huic itaque nature persoluenti ultima, dum tenera etas successorem non pateretur filium, ineffabilis prouidencia dei eius prouidit posteritati et licet post aliquot lustra ei turn cui debebatur restituit" (Æthelred, the foremost king—foremost because of all those of his time the most outstanding—commanded that monarchy. When he paid his last debt to nature, since tender age did not permit his son to be successor, God's ineffable providence made provision for his posterity, and albeit after some years restored (that monarchy) to the one to whom it was then due), Simon Keynes and Rosalind Love, "Earl Godwine's Ship," *Anglo-Saxon England* 38 (2010): 196.

<sup>412</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, 22-23.

between them in the aftermath of Æthelred's death: "Cuius rei gratia eum Deus iusserit obire, mox deinde pauit, quia uniuersa regio ilico Cnutotem sibi regem elegit, et cui ante omni conamine restitit, tunc sponte sua se illi et omnia sua subdidit" (Soon thereafter it became evident to what end God commanded that he should die, for the entire country then chose Knútr as its king, and voluntarily submitted itself and all that was in it to the man whom previously it had resisted with every effort).<sup>413</sup> The *Encomium* does not elaborate on the cause of Edmund's death, and neither does the Chronicle, though it has been suggested he may have died of his wounds.<sup>414</sup> On the other hand, Henry of Huntingdon, writing in the twelfth century, claims that Edmund was murdered.<sup>415</sup> Given that Edmund's brother Eadwig was exiled in 1017 and later murdered, and that Edmund's sons were sent away to be dealt with in Sweden, it is certainly plausible that Edmund was himself murdered after his treaty with Cnut.<sup>416</sup> The *Encomium*, however, presents Cnut's conquest of England as divinely sanctioned, without any mention of political killings. When potential English rival Eadric streona is executed, it is because his betrayal of Edmund offended Cnut's sense of justice. Cnut is a pious Christian who trusts in God's favor when his brother deprives him of a shared kingship in Denmark, and is then rewarded with sole rule in England, which eventually grows into rule over a growing region in the North Sea. God not only grants victory to Cnut's soldiers, who pray for God's aid, but also removes the princes who would stand in the way of Cnut ruling England in its entirety.

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>414</sup> Bolton, *Cnut*, 103.

<sup>415</sup> Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People*, ed. and trans. D. E. Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 360-62.

<sup>416</sup> Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 226.

While it may seem strange, and even uncomfortable to a modern audience, that the *Encomium* is so sympathetic to the aggressor in Cnut's conquest of England, the text reminds us of the Norman precedent when Emma enters the narrative. After describing her as exceedingly beautiful and wise, the *Encomium* adds:

Propter huiuscemodi insignia multum appetebatur a rege, et pro hoc  
 præcipue quod erat oriunda ex gente, quæ sibi partem Galliæ uendicauerat  
 inuitis Francigenis et eorum principe.

In view of her distinguished qualities of this kind, she was much desired by the king, and especially because she derived her origin from a victorious people, who had appropriated for themselves part of Gaul, in despite of the French and their prince.<sup>417</sup>

Cnut's conquest of England recalls the conquest of Normandy by Emma's ancestors, a point of pride for settlers in Gaul distinguished by their Dacian roots.<sup>418</sup> And just as their military victories over the Franks were something for the Normans to boast of, so are Cnut's victories over the English. Their military prowess sees them rising above their neighbors and political rivals. Like the Normans, Cnut is Christian, and so long as he centers Christianity in his rule, then his military aggression, generally carried out with God's favor, is something to be celebrated rather than condemned or feared. Moreover, the *Encomium* makes note of the fact that Cnut's conquests did not end with England:

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<sup>417</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, 32-33.

<sup>418</sup> On the use of Scandinavian identity for political purpose, see Katherine Cross, *Heirs of the Vikings: History and Identity in Normandy and England c. 950-1015* (York: York Medieval Press, 2021), 1-24.

Quam plures enim populi domiti bello, gentesque complures longe  
 distante uita, moribus, etiam at lingua, aeternaliter regi regiaeque  
 poster[i]tati annua compulsi sunt soluere uectigalia...quoniam illic diuina  
 aspirat gratia, ubi [i]ustitiae probitatisque aequa libratur trutina.

For very many peoples were subdued in war, and very many nations  
 extremely diverse in habits, customs and speech were permanently  
 compelled to pay annual tribute to the king and to his royal issue...for the  
 divine grace bestows its favour where the scale of justice and uprightness  
 is evenly adjusted.<sup>419</sup>

The *Encomium* again presents Cnut's victories as evidence of his divine favor. Moreover, he is not only a mighty conqueror but a just ruler whose authority extends beyond the English and the Danes. His military success is linked to his practice of Christian values as a ruler. In this way, the *Encomium* echoes the positions expounded by Cnut's proclamations of 1020 and 1027, where his journeys to address threats from Scandinavia are enveloped in his decrees for justice and adherence to God's laws. Cnut is a Christian king who rules fairly by Christian values and who has the strength to protect his people.<sup>420</sup> By the logic of the *Encomium*, he deserves divine grace.

After concluding accounts of Cnut's conquests, the *Encomium* focuses more closely on Cnut's displays of Christian virtues as a king. Cnut embodies Christianity:

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<sup>419</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, 34-35.

<sup>420</sup> See Keynes, "Cnut's Earls," 87; Lawson, *Cnut*, 129; and Bolton, *Cnut*, 21.

Amicus uero et familiaris factus est uiris ecclesiasticis, adeo ut episcopis uideretur coepiscopus pro exhibitione totius religionis, monachis quoque non secularis sed caenobialis pro continentia humillimae deuotionis.

He indeed became a friend and intimate of churchmen, to such a degree that he seemed to bishops to be a brother bishop for his maintenance of perfect religion, to monks also not a secular but a monk for the temperance of his life of most humble devotion.<sup>421</sup>

In the *Encomium*, Cnut is as devoted as bishops and monks. This is fitting, since no lay man was expected to be as connected to the Church as the king.<sup>422</sup> While Cnut's proclamations highlight his communications with the Pope and his proximity to his bishops, the *Encomium* offers a fuller picture of his engagement with elite members of the Church who view him as an equal. Even though he is a secular ruler, Cnut embodies Christian values as well as a member of the clergy. One manifestation of Cnut's piety was gifts to the Church. The *Encomium* states, "Deo omni(modis) placita studuit, ideoque quicquid boni agendum esse didicerat non negligentiae sed operationi committebat. Quae enim ecclesia adhuc eius non letatur donis?" (He gave his attention entirely to things pleasing to God, and therefore he did not abandon to neglect any good thing which he had found to require doing, but set it in train. Consequently what church does not still rejoice in his gifts?).<sup>423</sup> Cnut was generous to the Church, therefore the tribute he

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<sup>421</sup>Campbell, *Encomium*, 34-37.

<sup>422</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, 121.

<sup>423</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, 36-37.



received from the territories he ruled over was beneficial to the Church. Among the many documented gifts Cnut and Emma made to churches were a gold and silver reliquary to Abingdon, a gold shrine to St Edith at Wilton, and the cross given to New Minster which, when melted down in the twelfth century, yielded 500 marks of silver and thirty more of gold.<sup>424</sup> That Churches benefited during his reign further challenged the notion that a Scandinavian conqueror, presumably pagan, would be harmful to the Church and Christianity in England. Rather than plundering churches, Cnut enriched them.

The *Encomiast* includes an especially detailed description of a display of Christianity by Cnut that he claims to have witnessed himself at St. Omer. He states:

Ingressus monasteria et susceptus cum magna honorificencia humiliter incedebat, et mira cum reuerentia in terram defixus lumina et uertim fundens lacrimarum ut ita dicam flumina tota intentione sanctorum expetiit suffragia. At ubi ad hoc peruentum est, ut oblationibus regis sacra uellet cumulare altaria, o quotiens primum pauimento lacrimosa infixit oscula, quotiens illud pectus uenerabile propria puniebant uerbera, qualia dabat suspiria, quotiens precabatur ut sibi non indignaretur superna clementia!

When he had entered the monasteries, and had been received with great honour, he advanced humbly, and with complete concentration prayed for the intercession of the saints in a manner wonderfully reverent, fixing his

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<sup>424</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, 135.

eyes upon the ground, and freely pouring forth, so to speak, rivers of tears. But when the time came when he desired to heap the holy altars with royal offerings, how often did he first with tears press kisses on the pavement, how often did self-inflected blows punish that revered breast, what signs he gave, how often did he pray that the heavenly mercy might not be displeased with him!<sup>425</sup>

According to the *Encomiast*, Cnut is a conspicuous model of humility and generosity. He humbly fixes his eyes on the ground while praying for intercession. Cnut is not just looking to his earthly glory but to an afterlife in a Christian heaven. Furthermore, Cnut's display of humility reflects the teaching he had received from his own churchmen.<sup>426</sup> Despite the theatricality of the scene, Cnut's tears signal the sincerity of his supplications. Moreover, his devotion to Christianity brings material wealth to Churches.<sup>427</sup> The *Encomiast* had already mentioned that Churches still rejoiced in the gifts Cnut offered them even after his death, and here he offers an eyewitness account of Cnut heaping his royal treasures on a Church outside of his own kingdom. If pagan pirates rob churches of their wealth, then Christian kings should seek to enrich them, just as Cnut does. The *Encomiast* adds, "Discant igitur reges et principes huius domini imitari acciones, qui ut ualeret scandere sublime sese humiliauit in infima, et ut posset adipisci caelestia hilariter largitus est terrestrial" (Therefore let kings and princes learn to imitate the actions of this lord, who lowered himself to the depths that he might be able to climb the heights, and

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<sup>425</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, 36-37.

<sup>426</sup> Lawson, *Cnut*, 134.

<sup>427</sup> Emma was herself generous to the Church and likely aided Cnut in his gift giving (Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 148).

who cheerfully gave earthly things in order to obtain heavenly ones).<sup>428</sup> Not only is Cnut not a pagan despite being Scandinavian, he is an exemplary Christian king whose humility and charity should be imitated by other Christian rulers.

Cnut reigned in England until his death in 1035. Throughout his reign, he worked with English clergymen, like the vehemently anti-pagan Wulfstan, and repeatedly signaled his support for the Church in public ways. Evidence of his public support of Christianity are evident in his proclamations of 1020 and 1027, as well as in the illustration of him and Emma gifting a decorated cross to the New Minster at Winchester. After his death, Emma further bolstered the image of Cnut as a divinely favored Christian king to strengthen the legitimacy in England of their son and heir Harthacnut. She commissioned an encomium that commemorated Cnut's Christian piety and devotion to the Church, and furthermore cast him and his family as enjoying God's favor. Cnut was a Scandinavian invader of England, but he was not a pagan. His reign prominently illustrated to the English that Scandinavians could form part of a Christian collective, not only in England, but throughout Latin Europe.

The eleventh century saw two more major invasions of England after Cnut, both occurring in the year 1066. First, the Norwegian king Haraldr harðráði led an invasion. Haraldr was a Christian and the brother of St. Óláfr Haraldsson, who had been martyred by supporters of Cnut in Norway. Haraldr's invasion ended in defeat with his death at the Battle of Stanford Bridge. Next came the invasion of Emma's nephew William the Conqueror, who invaded from Normandy. William's gambit succeeded, and he founded

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<sup>428</sup> Campbell, *Encomium*, 38-39.

the Norman dynasty of kings of England. The first invasion came from Scandinavia, but the leader of the invasion was Christian. The second invasion was led by someone of Scandinavian descent but who was also Christian. The eleventh century proved that England was indeed a land in danger of invasion, but these invaders were no longer pagans, even if they originated in lands that once were. The old pagan enemy was increasingly assimilating to the rest of Latin Christian Europe. The motif of pagan invasions would need a new non-Christian foe if it were to adapt and remain relevant. The start of the Crusades at the end of the eleventh century, and the literary traditions imported by the Norman conquerors of England, would provide just that.

## Chapter 4

### Arthur's Pagan Enemies

The Norman Conquest of 1066 marked the last successful invasion of England. It was not a predominantly pagan army that carried out this invasion but a Christian one, though the leaders were of Scandinavian descent. Following this conquest led by William Duke of Normandy, the West Saxon dynasty never regained the English throne. Under Norman rule, English lost its place as the language of administration, and the varieties of French spoken by the new ruling class led to the French of England acquiring a position of prestige. The twelfth century saw the development and circulation of French literature in England and a general decline in the quantity and variety of English literature. However, this need not mean that literature was not being composed in English. Careful analysis of Middle English alliterative poetry reveals aspects of poetic practice, such as the use of alliterative compounds, that traverse the Old and Middle English divide.<sup>429</sup> However, because the studies of Old English and Middle English poetry were so often carried out independently of each other, such aspects of continuity often did not draw much scholarly attention until recent years.<sup>430</sup>

Despite the French speaking aristocracy, English remained a living language for most of the population in England. It also was not wholly abandoned administratively

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<sup>429</sup> Eric Weiskott, "Grass-Bed: A Poetic Compound in the Alliterative Tradition," *Anglia* 134, no. 4 (2016): 587-603; Thomas Cable, "Progress in Middle English Alliterative Metrics," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 23 (2009): 243-64; Kristin Lynn Cole, "The Destruction of Troy's Different Rules: The Alliterative Revival and the Alliterative Tradition," *JEGP* 109, no. 2 (April 2010): 162-76.

<sup>430</sup> Weiskott, "Grass-Bed," 588.

after the Conquest. The Peterborough Chronicle of the Old English Chronicle, for example, adds English language continuations through the mid-twelfth century.<sup>431</sup>

Moreover, we know that Anglo-Norman historians like Henry of Huntingdon, who wrote in Latin, made use of written English sources. Accordingly, scholarship in recent years has challenged the strong divide between Old and Middle English.<sup>432</sup> Scholars have brought special attention to evidence of continuity in language and literary form between Old English literature and early Middle English literature. A key text in these discussions has been *Lazamon's Brut*. Beyond its language and literary style, however, the *Brut* also demonstrates continuity with earlier English literature through its engagement with the traditional motif of pagan invasions of Britain.

*Lazamon's Brut*, composed near the beginning of the thirteenth century, is an alliterative verse chronicle purporting to tell the early history of Britain from its foundation by Brutus to its conquest by invading Germanic speaking peoples that were to become the English. Translating and adapting Wace's French *Roman de Brut*, *Lazamon* retells the legendary history of Britain made famous by Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, Wace's own source. As such, the narrative's chronology ends before the raids and invasions by Scandinavians that were the subject of literary

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<sup>431</sup> Susan Irvine, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition Vol.7 MS E* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004).

<sup>432</sup> Roger Lass, "Language Periodization and the Concept of 'Middle,'" in *Placing Middle English in Context*, ed. Irma Taavitsainen, Terttu Nevalainen, Päiva Pahta, and Matti Rissanen (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 7–41; Mark C. Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition: Oral Poetics and Literate Culture in Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); Thomas A. Bredehoft, *Early English Metre* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Elaine Treharne, *Living Through Conquest: The Politics of Early English, 1020–1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Haruko Momma, "The *Brut* as Saxon Literature: The New Philologists Read Lawman," in *Reading Lazamon's "Brut": Approaches and Explorations*, ed. Rosamund Allen, Jane Roberts, and Carole Weinberg (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), 53–68.

production in Old English, yet the theme of invasion remains ever present in *Lazamon's* text. Wace drew on the French tradition of the *chansons de geste*, which frequently depicts conflicts between Christians and Muslims, and several continental fragments of Wace's poem survive alongside *chansons de geste*.<sup>433</sup> For his own *Brut*, *Lazamon* imported Wace's use of conventions from the *chansons de geste* and used them alongside the native English motif developed in response to invading Scandinavians. During the reign of the legendary King Arthur, invasion by pagans is of particular concern, and *Lazamon's Brut* depicts Arthur as fighting both polytheists coming from the north and Muslims coming from the east. Moreover, although there were no successful invasions of England in the twelfth century or since, the Norman Conquest cast a long shadow, keeping the motif of invasion relevant even in the absence of historical immediacy. The *Brut's* blend of the English invasion motif and post-Crusade Islamophobia would continue in future vernacular medieval texts.

The *Brut* is the work of a priest named *Lazamon*, the son of *Leovenath*, who lived in a church on the bank of the *Severn*. This we know from the first five lines of the poem, though unfortunately we know little else, making it difficult to securely identify the author. The south-west Midlands dialect of the *Brut* suggests that *Lazamon* wrote in *Worcestershire*. The poem itself survives in two manuscripts: *London, British Library, MSS Cotton Caligula A. ix* and *Cotton Otho C. xiii*.<sup>434</sup> Both manuscripts are usually

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<sup>433</sup> Jean Blacker, "'But That's Another Story': Wace, *Lazamon*, and the Early Anonymous Old French Verse *Bruts*," *Arthuriana* 31, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 49.

<sup>434</sup> W. R. J. Barron and S.C. Weinberg, *Layamon's Arthur: The Arthurian Section of Layamon's Brut* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014), xiii.

dated to the second half of the thirteenth century, with varying proximity to 1250.<sup>435</sup> The differences between the manuscripts further complicates the dating of the poem itself.

The Caligula manuscript uses an archaic style similar to Old English literary material, but the Otho manuscript lacks many features typical of the Old English alliterative style, such as frequent use of compounds, and includes more words derived from French.<sup>436</sup>

Accepting the Caligula manuscript as representing a version of the poem closer to Lazamon's original composition, as is standard, allows for an earlier dating of the poem. Proposed dates of composition accordingly range from 1184 to 1220.<sup>437</sup>

My own analysis relies on the Caligula manuscript. The motif of invasion functions at the narrative level of the *Brut*, and both manuscripts are consistent with each other regarding narrative and plot. However, since my argument addresses continuity in pre- and post-Conquest English literature, I privilege the manuscript that illustrates greater literary continuity, including at the stylistic level. The Caligula version of the *Brut* uses a literary style that is strikingly similar to Old English alliterative poetry.<sup>438</sup>

However, it does not adhere to the expected rules as strictly as what is observable in English poetry from before the Conquest, leading some scholars to suggest that

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<sup>435</sup> C. E. Wright, *English Vernacular Hands from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960); N. R. Ker, "The Owl and the Nightingale": *Reproduced in Facsimile from the Surviving Manuscripts Jesus College Oxford 29 and British Museum Cotton Caligula A. ix*, EETS o.s., 251 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963).

<sup>436</sup> Jonathan Davis-Secord, "Revising Race in Lazamon's *Brut*," *JEGP* 116, no. 2 (April 2017): 158; Christine Elsweiler, "The Lexical Field 'Warrior' in Lazamon's *Brut*—A Comparative Analysis of the Two Versions," in *Reading Layamon's "Brut": Approaches and Explorations*, ed. Rosamund Allen, Jane Roberts, and Carole Weinberg (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 343–66. The Otho version of the *Brut* has been interpreted as a modernized version that avoids archaic language and idioms (Barron and Weinberg, *Layamon's Arthur*, xiii-xiv); however, on the difficulty of proving that interpretation on paleographical evidence see Davis-Secord, "Revising Race in Lazamon's *Brut*," 159.

<sup>437</sup> Françoise Le Saux, *Layamon's "Brut": The Poem and Its Sources* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989) 10; Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1977), 294.

<sup>438</sup> Daniel Donoghue, "Lazamon's Ambivalence," *Speculum* 65, no. 3 (1990), 537–63.



Lazamon's style derives from the Old English homiletic tradition rather than the poetic one.<sup>439</sup> Indeed, homilies composed by late tenth and early eleventh century writers like Ælfric and Wulfstan continued to be copied into the twelfth century, with some homilies surviving only in these late copies.<sup>440</sup> Jonathan Davis-Secord argues that "the possibly metrical nature of Ælfric's homilies and saints' lives seem to provide a reasonable source for the *Brut*'s style, especially given the continuity of Old English homiletics into the early Middle English period."<sup>441</sup> However, Davis-Secord posits Wulfstan as a more direct influence on the Caligula *Brut* based on the frequency of compounds.<sup>442</sup> Thus, it seems likely that Lazamon's *Brut*, particularly as it survives in the Caligula manuscript, was influenced by the works of Old English writers known to have engaged with the motif of pagan invasions during periods of immediate aggression from Scandinavians. Moreover, on the basis of some striking parallels analyzed below, it also seems Lazamon was familiar with the *Battle of Brunanburh*.<sup>443</sup> That poem is included in manuscript D of the

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<sup>439</sup> Angus McIntosh, "Early Middle English Alliterative Verse," in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and Its Literary Background: Seven Essays*, ed. David Lawton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1982), 20–33; S. K. Brehe, "'Rhythmical Alliteration': Ælfric's Prose and the Origins of Lazamon's Metre," in *The Text and Tradition of Lazamon's "Brut"*, ed. Françoise Le Saux (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), 65–87; Eric Weiskott, "Lawman, the Last Old English Poet and the First Middle English Poet," in *Lazamon's "Brut" and other Medieval Chronicles: 14 Essays*, ed. Marie-Françoise Alamichel (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013), 11–58; Weiskott, "Phantom Syllables in the English Alliterative Tradition," *Modern Philology* 110 (2013), 441–58.

<sup>440</sup> Andrew Galloway, "Lazamon's Gift," *PMLA* 121, no. 3 (May 2006), 717–34.

<sup>441</sup> Davis-Secord, "Revising Race in Lazamon's *Brut*," 163; see also Tiffany Beechy, *Poetics of Old English* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 31–8.

<sup>442</sup> For an argument that Lazamon had access to copies of Wulfstan's works, see Scott Kleinman, "Frið and Grið: Lazamon and the Legal Language of Wulfstan," in *Reading Lazamon "Brut": Approaches and Explorations*, ed. Rosamund Allen, Jane Roberts, and Carole Weinberg, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 391–417.

<sup>443</sup> In his analysis of the *Brut*'s sources, Le Saux acknowledges the poem's similarities in battle scenes to Old English poetry but concludes that "not many of Lazamon's phrases go back directly to Old English poetry, with the exception of 'feollen þe fæie' (the doomed/ mortally wounded/ dead fell"; also found in *Maldon* and *Brunanburh*)" and a few other commonplace phrases, Le Saux, *Lazamon's "Brut": The Poem and Its Sources*, 203. However, this phrase is in the *Brut* to strongly echo *Brunanburh*, as evident in my analysis below.

Chronicle, which is linked to Worcester in the late eleventh century and appears to have been in Worcester Cathedral, by the Severn like the church Lazamon mentions in his introduction, around the year 1567.<sup>444</sup> The *Caligula Brut*, then, demonstrates significant stylistic and topical influence from the vernacular literature of the tenth and eleventh centuries responding to invasions by Scandinavians.

Lazamon's *Brut* is a text acutely concerned with identity. This is unsurprising since English identity itself was being renegotiated at the turn of the thirteenth century. Before 1204, the Norman aristocracy of England maintained a sense of cultural division from their English subjects, but after King Phillip II of France confiscated King John's continental lands, the Normans began to cast an image of themselves as English. This accelerated a process that had been underway since the mid-twelfth century.<sup>445</sup> Identity in the *Brut* is complicated, not least of all because Lazamon retells a story about *British* kings but frequently conflates them with the *English* people. At Arthur's death scene, for example, the *Caligula Brut* reads:

Bute while wes an witeȝe Mærlin ihate;  
 he bodede mid worde –his quiðes weoren soðe—  
 þat an Arður scilde ȝete cum Anglen to fulste. (14295-97)

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<sup>444</sup> Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 6 MS D, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996), lxvi.

<sup>445</sup> John Gillingham, "Henry of Huntingdon and the Twelfth-Century Revival of the English Nation," in *Concepts of National Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Simon Forde, Lesley Johnson, and Alan V. Murray (Leeds: University of Leeds Press, 1995), 75–101.

But there was once a seer called Merlin who prophesied—his sayings were true—that an Arthur should come again to aid the people of England.<sup>446</sup>

The use of the indefinite article makes it unclear whether this Arthur who will come again to the aid the English is the same king that the Britons are awaiting, but in both readings a British icon is being appropriated by the English.<sup>447</sup> Just as the Norman aristocracy could claim an English identity, the English could claim British pseudo history.

One of the ways in which the *Brut* draws attention to ethnic and religious identity is through language. When naming his sources for the *Brut*, Laȝamon says in third person:

He nom þa Englisca boc þa makede Seint Beda.

Anoþer he nom on Latin þe makede Seinte Albin

and þe feire Austin þe fulluht broute hider in.

Boc he nom þe þridde, leide þer amidden,

þa makede a Frenchis clerc,

Wace wes ihoten, þe wel couþe writen (16-21)

He chose the English book which St Bede composed. He chose another in Latin composed by St Albin and the blessed Austin who introduced baptism here. He chose a third book and placed it with the others, a book

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<sup>446</sup> *Layamon's Arthur*, 254-55.

<sup>447</sup> Significantly, the Otho manuscript does not mention the English here, but rather the British.

which a French cleric called Wace, who could write well, had composed<sup>448</sup>

Lazamon's claims should not be taken at face value. While Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* was translated into Old English, Bede himself composed it in Latin, something one would expect a learned priest to know even if he only had direct access to the English text.<sup>449</sup>

The blessed Austin associated with the Latin book is most likely Augustine of Canterbury, who was tasked by Pope Gregory with Christianizing the English. The book by the French cleric Wace, the *Roman de Brut*, is Lazamon's one indisputable source.<sup>450</sup>

However, claiming these three sources, each written in a different language, allows Lazamon to comment on English identity and the role of language in its construction.<sup>451</sup>

Each language furthermore marks an arrival from outside of Britain: English represents the arrival of Germanic speaking pagan invaders, Latin the arrival of Christian missionaries, and French the most recent invasion by the Normans. To understand English history and English identity, one needs access to all three. Yet each of these arrivals began and ended with a conquest. As Jacqueline M. Burek argues, "For Lazamon, language and other cultural signifiers are key components in acquiring territory and maintaining sovereignty over it—and that sovereignty then solidifies and enables the

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<sup>448</sup> *Layamon's Arthur*, x-xi.

<sup>449</sup> One manuscript of the Old English *Historia ecclesiastica* was produced in Worcester Cathedral Priory in the second half of the eleventh century. That manuscript (Cambridge, University Library, Kk 3.18, s. xi<sup>2</sup> [Ca]) was glossed by the Tremulous Hand of Worcester in the thirteenth century, demonstrating continued engagement with the manuscript into that century. See Sharon M. Rowley, *The Old English Version of Bede's Historia ecclesiastica* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2011), 24-25.

<sup>450</sup> Galloway, "Lazamon's Gift," 721.

<sup>451</sup> In highlighting the different languages of England, Lazamon echoes the first chapter of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, where Bede lists the five languages current in Britain. "Anglorum uidelicet Brettonum Scottorum Pictorum et Latinorum" (These are the English, British, Irish, Pictish, as well as the Latin languages), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 16-17.

spread of culture itself. Culture and power are represented as mutually reinforcing in the *Brut*, and thus both are important to the different groups vying for control of Britain.”<sup>452</sup> Thus, the story of English identity is in part a study of conquest reflected in language.

Although Lazamon does not name any Scandinavian sources, writing as he was just before the eruption of Old Icelandic written literature in the thirteenth century, the Scandinavian invasions on England also had left their mark in English language and literature. *The Battle of Brunanburh* shows Scandinavian linguistic influence, including the use of the word *cnear* (35) (Old Norse *knorr*) for ship, as does *The Battle of Maldon* which features the word *dreng* (149) (Old Norse *drengr*) for warrior. As Eric Weiskott notes, “Many elevated poetic words in Middle English alliterative verse derive from Old Norse or derive from Old English with evident influence from the Old Norse cognate.”<sup>453</sup> Moreover, the motif of pagan invasions, which flourished as a response to the historical incursions and invasions by Scandinavians, also lived on in Middle English literature. Invasions are present throughout Lazamon’s *Brut*, but the Arthurian section of the poem devotes special attention to invasions by non-Christians. It illustrates both that the tropes of the motif of pagan invasions remained current and how they could be adapted to include a non-Scandinavian enemy.

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<sup>452</sup> Jacqueline M. Burek, “‘Ure Bruttisce speche’: Language, Culture, and Conquest in Lazamon’s *Brut*,” *Arthuriana* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 110.

<sup>453</sup> Weiskott, “*Grass-bed*,” 600.

### **Arthur vs Saxon Pagans**

Among the invasions of Britain recounted in Layamon's *Brut* is the invasion by pagan Saxons. The Saxon invasion is not so much a singular event as a recurring threat to the authority of the House of Uther Pendragon from before Arthur assumes the throne. In this way, the pagan Saxons are to Uther and Arthur's dynasty what the pagan Scandinavians were to the West Saxon kings. In both cases, the pagans present an external threat that the royal house defends against, through which they establish their lasting legitimacy as rulers and their glory as warriors. Furthermore, the threat from external pagans legitimates the conquests that the Christian rulers undertake when dealing with, and after dealing with, the pagan threat.

The *Brut*'s description of the invasion by pagan Saxons echoes elements of the invasions by Scandinavians as described in Old English literature. For example, when the Saxon Octa, the son of Hengest who died invading Britain, believes that King Uther Pendragon, the father of Arthur, is near death, he decides to invade Britain to avenge his father. Octa arrives by sea, landing in Scotland, and immediately engages in a heinous assault.

Sæxes weoren ræie; Scottes heo sloʒen,  
 mid fure heo adun læiden þritti hundred tunes,  
 Scottes heo sloʒen moni and unifoʒen. (9667-69)

The Saxons were ruthless; they slew the Scots, they burned down three thousand homesteads, they slaughtered Scots beyond number.<sup>454</sup>

Octa's Saxons land in Scotland, so their invasion begins from the north of Britain, the cardinal direction associated with Scandinavian pagans in the Chronicle poems *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *The Capture of the Five Boroughs*, as well as in the Bible.<sup>455</sup> Moreover, the Saxon's slaughter of the innocents is reminiscent of Ælfric's account of Hinguar's invasion of East Anglia and of the actions of Cnut's troops in the Chronicle's account of his invasion, where slaying and burning are presented as customary atrocities of Scandinavians.<sup>456</sup> The actions of the pagans in the *Brut*'s pseudohistorical account correspond to actions of the pagans as described in earlier English sources that were responding to contemporary conditions. The established literary motif remained available to later writers even as historical invasions became ever more distant.<sup>457</sup>

Uther's response to the invasion of the pagans also corresponds well to responses found in Old English sources. When his forces are about to engage with Octa's, Uther makes a speech:

“Wær beo 3e, Bruttes, balde mine þeines?  
 Nu is icumen þe ilke dæi þe Drihten us helpen mai—  
 þat Octa scal ifinden, þat he þrættede me to binden!  
 Iþenchð on eoure aldren, hu gode heo weoren to fehten;

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<sup>454</sup> *Layamon's Arthur*, 23-25.

<sup>455</sup> Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, 109; Lapidge, “The Life of St Oswald,” 55.

<sup>456</sup> Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 5 MSC, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 102.

<sup>457</sup> Julia Barrow, “Danish Ferocity and Abandoned Monasteries: The Twelfth Century-Century View,” in *The Long Twelfth-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past*, edited by Martin Brett and David A. Woodman, 77-93 (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2015).

iþenchð þene wurðscipe þat ich eou habbe wel biwiten;  
 ne læten 3e næuere þas hæðene bruken eoure hames,  
 þæs ilke awedde hundes walden eouwere londes. (9743-49)

Where are you, Britons, my bold thanes? Now the day is come when the  
 Lord may help us—as Octa shall discover, he who swore to fetter me!  
 Remember your ancestors, how good they were in fighting; remember in  
 what great splendour I have maintained you; never let the heathens  
 possess your homes, these mad dogs here rule your lands.<sup>458</sup>

Uther’s speech simultaneously appeals to the past glory of the people he leads, notes the territorial stakes of the battle, and identifies his enemies as sub-human based on their religion. In glorifying his army, Uther also glorifies his own dynasty. He tells his warriors to “Iþenchð on eoure aldren,” *after* identifying them as “balde mine þeines.” Uther identifies his fighters as bold warriors owing allegiance to him. The implication is that their “aldren” who were good at fighting likewise served a British king. The dynastic implications of the statement evoke how the Chronicle poems consistently identify the celebrated kings as members of a distinguished line. In both cases, invasion by pagans represents a dynastic threat that demands a military response, one that importantly provides an opportunity to proclaim and even extend dynastic strength.

Like in earlier English literature using the pagan invasion motif, the stakes of the battle are clearly territorial. Uther warns his warriors not to let the enemies take their

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<sup>458</sup> *Layamon’s Arthur*, 26-29.



homes (*hames*) or rule their lands (*londes*). Like the sons of Edward in *Brunanburh*, who “wiþ laþra gehwæne land ealgodon, / hord, and hamas” (against every enemy defended the land, / treasure, and homes) (*Brunanburh* 9-10),<sup>459</sup> Uther is a defender of land and homes. Although the poem states that Octa wants revenge, Uther’s speech presses upon his fighters that the Saxons will not be satisfied with killing leaders and warriors. Their aim is conquest and dispossession. If the Britons do not stop the invading Saxons, the land will have new rulers, as indeed happened in the historical past.

Again, as in earlier English literature, Uther identifies the enemy as coming from outside of Christian society, thus adding a religious element to the conflict. It is *heathens* who want to take possession of the Britons’ homes, and so it is no surprise that the Lord would be on the side of Uther and his warriors. And as in the writings of Ælfric, the pagans are dehumanized, here likened to mad hounds. The subhuman status of the pagan enemy justifies any sort of violence against them, no matter the scale. As the Britons take control of the battlefield, the narrator endorses Uther’s description of the Saxons saying. “þa hæðene hundes hælden to grunde... þer seouentene þusend siþen into helle” (9759-61) (the heathen dogs fell to the ground... there seventeen thousand sank down to hell).<sup>460</sup> Uther and his soldiers kill thousands of Saxons, but the narrator validates Uther’s claims that these are heathens unworthy of mercy. They are once again likened to hounds, and more telling, they sink into hell after death. The pagan invaders are unworthy of mercy, in this life or the next.

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<sup>459</sup> Livingston, *Battle of Brunanburh*, 40-41.

<sup>460</sup> *Layamon’s Arthur*, 28-29.

Moreover, the similarities to earlier iterations of the motif are not only narrative and lexical. The description of the battle itself is stylistically similar to battle scenes in Old English poetry:

Cnihtes gunnen riden, gæres gunnen gliden;  
 breken bræde speren, brusleden sceldes,  
 helmes þer scenden; scalkes feollen.  
 Þe Bruttes weoren balde and bisie to fihten,  
 and þa hæðene hundes hælden to grunde (9755-59)

Warriors charged, weapons flew; broad spears broke, shields clashed,  
 helmets shattered; men fell there. The Britons were bold and active in  
 battle, and the heathen dogs fell to the ground.<sup>461</sup>

The action is described in sequence of independent half-lines featuring heavy alliteration. The terse movement of these verses recalls *Brunanburh's* description of the clash where Northmen and Scots fall in battle:

Ðær læg secg mænig  
 garum ageted, guma norþerna  
 ofer scild scoten, swilce Scittisc eac,  
 werig, wiges sæd (17-20)

There lay many warriors

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<sup>461</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

destroyed by spears, men of the north  
 shot over shield, and so, too, the Scots,  
 weary, sated with war <sup>462</sup>

The series of independent half-lines both punctuates the action and highlights who is left dead. The battle scene in the *Brut* closes with two more echoes to English literary responses to the invasions by pagan Scandinavians: first, where the surviving invaders flee to; and second, how the events are commemorated. After recording the seventeen thousand pagans killed, the *Brut* says, “Feole þer atwenden toward þan norð enden” (9762) (Many there escaped towards the northern regions).<sup>463</sup> The text continues the association between paganism and the north. Pagan invaders come from the north, and when defeated, they will retreat north again. The victors then sing mocking songs about the defeated invaders:

“Her is Vðer Pendragun icumen to Verolames tun,  
 and he hæfued idubbed swa Octa, and Ebissa, and Ossa,  
 and itah heom a londen lazen swiðe stronge  
 þat men mazen tellen heore cun spelle,  
 and þerof wurchen songes inne Sæxlode.” (9768-72)

“Uther Pendragon is come here to the town of Verolam, and he has  
 drubbed Octa, and Ebissa, and Ossa so, and imposed very severe penalties

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<sup>462</sup> Livingston, *Battle of Brunanburh*, 40-41.

<sup>463</sup> *Layamon's Arthur*, 28-29.

on them in this land such that their kinsmen may hear of it, and songs be made of it in Saxony.”<sup>464</sup>

The glory of the victors is commemorated in verse, as is the shame of the defeated. To an extent, the song of the Britons functions similarly to *Brunanburh* in that both poems name the defeated opponent, revel in their humiliation, and use verse as a vehicle to record the events of the battle. Uther and the Britons respond to the invading pagan Saxons in much the same way that the West Saxon royals responded to the invading pagan Scandinavians; only in the *Brut* it is the ancestors of these very English kings who are the pagan invaders, a fact reiterated in the closing lines of *Brunanburh*. Thus, English literature reinforces the idea that pagan invasions are a recurring reality that can always return, and verse functions as a vehicle for keeping that memory current.

Just as the *Brut* sometimes conflates British and English identity, the identity of the pagan Saxons is also unstable. Despite representing the historical ancestors of the English, the Saxons are at times coded as Scandinavian.<sup>465</sup> After their defeat at the hands of Uther,

Weoren þa Saxisce men swiðe iswunten,  
and iscriðen heom tosomne into Scotlonde;  
and Colgrim þene hende heo makeden to kinge ... (9790-92)

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<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>465</sup> The Saxons in Laȝamon’s *Brut* are even coded as Muslim in certain scenes. See William Biel, “Drinking English: The Wassail in Laȝamon’s *Brut*,” *Early Middle English* 3, no. 2 (2021): 57-74.

The Saxons were greatly dejected, and assembled together in Scotland;  
and they made the noble Colgrim king ...<sup>466</sup>

The retreat of the Saxons into Scotland is significant since northern Scotland, particularly Caithness and the archipelagoes of Orkney and Shetland, was home to significant populations of Scandinavian descent and had ties to the Norwegian crown when Layamon was composing the *Brut* circa 1200.<sup>467</sup> More significant still is the name of the new king the Saxons elect. Colgrim (Old Norse Kolgrímr) was a common Scandinavian name.<sup>468</sup> Just as we sometimes encounter Scandinavian names among the English in texts like *The Battle of Maldon*, here we find a Scandinavian ruler for the Saxons. The distinction between English and Scandinavian was permeable, so they can easily stand in for each other as pagan invaders in the *Brut*.

The permeability that allows for the occasional conflation of various ethnic groups in the *Brut* has narrative consequences. Under Colgrim's leadership, the Saxons hatch a plot to murder Uther Pendragon. They say:

“Nime we six cnihtes, wise men and wihte,  
hæweres witere, and senden we to hirede.  
Læten heom uorð liðen an almes-monnes wisen  
and wunien an hirede mid heze þan kinge,” (9798-9801)

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<sup>466</sup> Layamon's *Arthur*, 30-31.

<sup>467</sup> Finnbogi Guðmundsson ed., *Orkneyinga saga* (Rekjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafelag, 1965); see also Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 190-91.

<sup>468</sup> The name appears as Colgrin in Wace, *Wace's Roman de Brut*, 9358. The Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England also lists moneyers named Colgrim active during the reigns of Edgar, Æthelred, Cnut, Harthacnut, and Edward. These men were associated with mints in Lincoln and York, both territories of the Danelaw. *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* (PESA) <https://pase.ac.uk/>.

“Let us choose six soldiers, wise men and valiant, skilful spies, and send them to the court. Let them go there in the guise of beggars and live at court with the high king,”<sup>469</sup>

The plan assumes the plausibility of the Saxons blending with the Britons, and it is carried out successfully. The execution of the plan illustrates that, despite the linguistic and cultural differences between the Britons and the pagan Saxons, the latter are not phenotypically racialized as Other.<sup>470</sup> This marks a significant difference between the Saxons and the other non-Christian enemy faced by Arthur later in the *Brut*, the Muslims, some of whom are explicitly identified as being Black (12666).<sup>471</sup> Differences in language and religion are important throughout the *Brut*,<sup>472</sup> but the possibility of blending allowed to some groups also signals the possibility for them to assimilate in the future. The Saxons, after all, would eventually Christianize. Layamon himself exemplifies the potential for assimilation allowed to historic pagan enemies that are not racialized as other. He is a Christian priest with a Scandinavian name who composed a poem in English about British legendary history. Layamon would not have been able to compose

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<sup>469</sup> Layamon's *Arthur*, 30-31.

<sup>470</sup> Geraldine Heng argues for a shift during the thirteenth century, allowing for chronological leeway, in how European sources treat epidermal race, with growing attention to light and dark skin. She adds, “In contemplating epidermal race, it is thus useful to recognize a distinction between *hermeneutic blackness* in which exegetical considerations are paramount and often explicitly foregrounded, and *physiognomic blackness* linked to the characterization of black Africans in phenomena that extended beyond immediate theological exegesis.” Layamon's treatment of Blackness would correspond with the latter. See Heng, *Invention of Race*, 185.

<sup>471</sup> In a scene similarly requiring a disguise, the hero of the Middle English romance *King Horn* blackens his skin to blend in with the Muslim invaders he is infiltrating.

<sup>472</sup> Hannah McKendrick Bailey, “Conquest by Word: The Meeting of Languages in Layamon's *Brut*,” in *Reading Layamon "Brut": Approaches and Explorations*, ed. Rosamund Allen, Jane Roberts, and Carole Weinberg (Leiden: Brill, 2013) 269–86.

this work if not for the absorption of previous pagan invaders into the English identity at the turn of the thirteenth century.<sup>473</sup>

Upon hearing of his father Uther's death, Arthur says, "Lauerd Crist, Godes sune, beon us nu a fultume, / þat ich mote on life Godedes laȝen halden" (9928-29) ("Lord Christ, son of God, be a help to us now, that I may uphold God's laws throughout life").<sup>474</sup> Arthur's words immediately establish him as a model Christian king. His first move is to appeal to Christ for support, and as with the kings and leaders in Ælfric's accounts of pagan invasions, his primary concern is with upholding God's law. A pagan invasion threatens to change the law of the land, the bedrock of its cultural norms, as was the case when Scandinavians invaded from the ninth through the early eleventh centuries. Of course, the same was true in the wake of invasions by Christian leaders like Cnut the Great and William the Conqueror, but the religious element resulting from pagan invaders heightens the tension. As the *Brut* notes on multiple occasions, dead pagans go to hell. Thus, the spiritual salvation of the people is at stake.

Arthur's concerns with upholding God's laws are validated when the pagans apply their own laws in the territories they rule. We learn that, "Heold a þan ilke dæȝen Colgrim Sæxes to laȝen, / ladde and radde mid ræȝere strengðe" (9996-97) (In those days Colgrim subjected the Saxons to law, led them and ruled them with stern authority).<sup>475</sup> Rather than depicting Colgrim as a leader who brings chaos, the *Brut* notes that Colgrim

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<sup>473</sup> This is not to imply that the Welsh would have been happy about the English appropriating the legendary history of the Britons, but rather to illustrate that a lack of overt phenotypical racialized difference between the invading Germanic speaking peoples and the Britons facilitated that appropriation after the Christianization of the English. In fact, Donoghue argues that the *Brut* is "careful to keep the two main race, the *Brutten* and the *Anglen*, distinct." Donoghue, "Lazamon's Ambivalence," 557.

<sup>474</sup> *Layamon's Arthur*, 36-37.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

holds the Saxons to the law. However, this actually makes him a bigger threat to the Christian inhabitants of Britain. A conquering leader can force new laws on his subjects, and given that Colgrim and his Saxons are pagan, these laws would be at odds with God's laws that Arthur wants to uphold. As Ælfric notes in his retelling of the Maccabees, the risk of apostasy increases when a believing people is ruled by pagans, so Arthur must take military action to defend both his people's access to salvation as well as the legal identity of the land established and held by British sovereignty.

The ensuing conflict between King Arthur and his pagan enemies contains several echoes to the conflicts between the West Saxon rulers and Scandinavians in the tenth and early eleventh centuries generally, and a few echoes to the *Battle of Brunanburh* in particular. When Colgrim hears that Arthur is coming, he “bonnede his uerde 3eond al þan norð ærde” (10001) (summoned his army throughout the whole northland),<sup>476</sup> with the intention to “setten al þis kinelond an his a3ere hond” (10010) (take all this kingdom into his own possession).<sup>477</sup> The *Brut* reminds us yet again that these pagans attack from the north and that they are set on conquest. In this way, the Saxons stand in for the more recent pagan threat posed by Scandinavians. At the same time, however, Arthur's enemies are not only the Saxons:

Per liðen tosomne alle Scotleode,  
 Peohtes and Sæxes si3en heom togæderes,  
 and moniennes cunnes men uuleden Colgrimen. (10003-5)

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.



All the men of Scotland assembled, Picts and Saxons united together, and men of many clans followed Colgrim.<sup>478</sup>

The northern alliance that forms against Arthur is reminiscent of the one that Æthelstan's forces faced at Brunanburh. And like the northern alliance in Brunanburh, Arthur's enemies include Christians, as is made clear in a speech by Scottish women later in the poem (10928-32). The *Brut* identifies several groups vying for control of Britain, and like the West Saxons for most of the tenth century, Arthur and his Britons are identified as the most powerful group, and thus the most dangerous to other potential rulers, despite the paganism of the invading Saxons. Indeed, Arthur goes on to not only establish himself as the undisputed leader of Britain, but to conquer a North Sea empire greater than the one established historically by King Cnut. The *Brut* looks to a legendary British past to imagine an English future with a greater *anweald* than ever existed.<sup>479</sup>

Although the passage quoted above describes an alliance, its language stresses difference. The Picts and the Saxons are identified as separate groups, but beyond these groups we learn that many other “cunnes” follow Colgrim. The *Middle English Dictionary* defines *cun(ne)* as “A race, people, tribe.”<sup>480</sup> Since the Picts and the Saxons each represent a “people,” *cunnes* can be read as referring to other distinct ethnic groups who join Colgrim against Arthur. This type of description is common in the Caligula version of the *Brut*. As Davis-Secord notes, “The Caligula version of the *Brut* thus incorporates a vocabulary that maintains and even highlights the sense of difference

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<sup>478</sup> Ibid.

<sup>479</sup> However, Arthur's empire is already present in Geoffrey's *Historia*, where its function might be to imagine for the Britons a past more glorious than that achieved by the English who displaced them.

<sup>480</sup> *Middle English Dictionary* [MED], ed. Hans Kurath, S. M. Kuhn, and R. E. Lewis (Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1953–2001), <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>

between the groups competing on and over the island.”<sup>481</sup> Because different groups are vying for dominance, ethnic difference represents a threat to cultural identity of the dominant group, in this case the Britons. The alliance of various *cunnes* that Colgrim leads against Arthur alludes to the fact that even if this pagan enemy is defeated, another external threat may well present itself, as proves to be the case for Arthur’s Britain when the Romans, supported by Muslim kings, demand tribute later in the poem.

Echoes from the historical invasions by Scandinavians in the *Brut* continue when Childric, Emperor of Germany, arrives to support Colgrim and the Saxons. Like previous invaders in the *Brut*, Childric lands in Scotland and launches his assault on Britain from the north. The poem describes his advance as follows:

Chilric gon wende 3eon þam norð ende,  
 and nom on honde muchæl dal of londe.  
 Al Scotþeode he 3af his ane þeine,  
 and al Norðhumberlond he sette his broðer an hond;  
 Galeweoie and Orcaneie he 3af his ane eorle;  
 himseolfe he nom from Humbre þat lond into Lundene. (10185-90)

Childric advanced through the regions of the north, and took possession of a large stretch of territory. He gave the whole of Scotland to one of his thanes, and all Northumberland he committed to his brother’s charge;

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<sup>481</sup> Davis-Secord, “Revising Race in La3amon’s *Brut*,” 169.

Galloway and Orkney he gave to one of his earls; he himself took all the land from the Humber as far as London.<sup>482</sup>

Childric conquers all northern Britain, but the details of his partitioning that territory invite association with the conquests in Britain by Scandinavians in the ninth century. While there was never a complete conquest of Scotland by Scandinavians, they did maintain a strong presence in the Scottish Isles. Indeed, Orkney was still ruled by Scandinavian earls when Layamon was writing.<sup>483</sup> In England, Childric's territory is evocative of the Danelaw. He controls the bulk of northern and eastern England, leaving Arthur only with English territory corresponding to Wessex. Arthur's northern pagan enemies represent a precursor of the pagan enemies that the English themselves would later face historically after establishing their dominance in Britain. Likewise, the historical invasions by Scandinavians provided a ready model for narratives of pagans invading England. The conquest of the Saxons in Layamon's legendary history maps on to the historical conquests carried out by Scandinavians.

Not only are Childric's territorial acquisitions reminiscent of the historical invasions by Scandinavians, but the description of his first defeat in Britain resembles the scenario in the *Battle of Brunanburh*. Arthur and the Britons, who describe Childric and his warriors as heathen dogs (10248), ambush their enemies, resulting in a great slaughter:

Nis hit a nare boc idiht þat æwere weore æi fiht

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<sup>482</sup> Layamon's *Arthur*, 48-51.

<sup>483</sup> This is evident across thirteenth century Icelandic sources that mention the Orkney islands including *Orkneyinga saga* and *Heimskringla*.

inne þissere Bruttene þat balu weore swa riue;  
for volken him wes ærmest þat æuere com to ærde. (10313-15)

In no book is any such battle written of within this land of Britain where destruction was so widespread; for of all the armies that had ever come to this land, this was the most ill-fated.<sup>484</sup>

These lines are remarkably similar to lines in *Brunanburh*:

Ne wearð wæl mare  
on þis eiglande, æfre gieta  
folces gefylled beforan þissum  
sweordes ecgum, þæs þe us secgað bec (65-68)

Never was there more slaughter  
on this island, never as many  
folk felled before this  
by the swords' edges, as books tell us<sup>485</sup>

The corresponding passage in Wace reads only, “Unches si faite occisiun/ Ne si laide destructiun/ Ne tel besil ne tel dolur/ Ne fu de Seisnes en un jur” (9175-78) (Such a slaughter, such violent destruction, such a massacre and such suffering was never before inflicted on the Saxons in a single day).<sup>486</sup> The *Brut* and *Brunanburh* both claim to

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<sup>484</sup> *Layamon's Arthur*, 56-57.

<sup>485</sup> Livingston, *Battle of Brunanburh*, 42-43.

<sup>486</sup> Weiss, *Wace's Roman de Brut*, 230-31.

describe the worst slaughter to ever occur in Britain, whereas Wace refers only to the Saxon people it was inflicted on, not to the place where the slaughter took place. Moreover, both English texts appeal to written history in support of their claim, while Wace makes no mention of written authorities. The similarity between the passages in *Brunanburh* and the *Brut* suggests that Laȝamon knew *Brunanburh* and consciously drew on the earlier work when adapting Wace's narrative of invasion for an English audience. It seems plausible that he had access Manuscript D of the Chronicle, which is associated with Worcester in the eleventh century and may have been housed there as late as the sixteenth century.<sup>487</sup> Despite being composed nearly three centuries apart, both scenes from the *Brut* and *Brunanburh* describe battles in which an army invading from the north and associated with paganism is defeated by a Christian army in the greatest battle the island has ever seen, all according to written authority. Beyond the dramatic value of such a claim, it illustrates an understanding of the importance of major invasions for the identity of the island of Britain and those who inhabit it. A once predominantly British speaking region became predominantly English speaking after a series of invasions, and only averted becoming predominantly Norse speaking by preventing a lasting Scandinavian conquest.<sup>488</sup>

As demonstrated in Chapter One, pagan invaders provided the West Saxons kings with both an opportunity for territorial expansion and a way to proclaim their fame and glory as military leaders. In the *Brut*, Arthur is also aware of the opportunity to build his

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<sup>487</sup> Cubbin, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* Vol. 6 MS D, lxvi.

<sup>488</sup> The presence of a French speaking aristocracy following the Norman Conquest once again demonstrated the importance of invasions to cultural and linguistic identity in Britain.

fame against his pagan foes. When Childric is defeated, he asks to be spared, to which Arthur replies:

“nulle ich hine slæ no ahon, ah his bode ich wulle fon...  
 And swa heo scullen wræcchen to heoron scipen liðen,  
 sæilien ouer sæ to sele heore londe,  
 and þer wirðliche wunien on riche,  
 and tellen tidende of Arðure kinge,  
 hu ich heom habbe ifreoied for mines fader saule,  
 and for mine freodome ifrouered þa wræcchen.” (10419-27)

“I will not slay or hang him, but will grant his request... And so they shall return as outcasts to their ships, sail across the sea to their rightful land, live honourably there in that realm; and they shall tell tidings of King Arthur, tell how I set them free for the sake of my father’s soul, and in my generosity have spared the wretches.”<sup>489</sup>

Arthur hopes that word of this greatest victory will spread more widely if he spares his defeated foes, and they talk about his deeds in their own homeland. Arthur’s poetic aspiration is a detail that Layamon adds to his version of events (it is absent in Wace).<sup>490</sup> Thus, Arthur behaves like the royals who deployed the motif of invasion for political ends. The narrator follows Arthur’s speech by saying, “Her wes Arður þe king aðelen

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<sup>489</sup> *Layamon’s Arthur*, 60-63.

<sup>490</sup> Andrew Galloway, “The Past,” in *A Concise Companion to Middle English Literature*, ed. Marilyn Corrie (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 82.

bidæled” (10428) (In this King Arthur was lacking in good judgement).<sup>491</sup> In opening with *Her*, the line is reminiscent of annals in the Old English Chronicle and might be better rendered as “Here King Arthur was deprived of nobility.” However, the form of the word *aðele*, which I translate as nobility, is also evocative of another word: *eðel*, which could be translated as homeland or one’s own country. Arthur’s desire for fame endangers both his nobility and his homeland, and is thus a failure in kingship, a fact that his followers are aware of, but too afraid to speak against (10429-30). Sure enough, Childric invades a different region of Britain instead of sailing back to his own realm. The underlying message is that, while conversion was possible for these northern pagans as proven by the historical conversion of the English, those who did not convert were unworthy of trust and mercy. This newfound understanding informs Arthur’s dealings with the northern pagans for the remainder of the poem.

Childric’s renewed invasion triggers the final sequence of the conflict between Arthur’s Christian forces and Colgrim and Childric’s pagans, and the *Brut* accentuates the difference in religion between the two sides. Distinction, however, is not only an issue of religion. When Arthur suits up for battle, the poem states, “Ne isæh næwere na man selere cniht nenne / þene him wes Arður, aðelest cunnes!” (10561-62) (No man ever saw a better warrior than Arthur was, the noblest of his race!).<sup>492</sup> In framing Arthur as an outstanding member of his *cunne*, the poem reiterates that Arthur’s enemies belong to different peoples. Arthur himself encourages his troops to battle by dehumanizing their pagan foes, saying:

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<sup>491</sup> *Layamon’s Arthur*, 62-63.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, 68-69.

“Lou war, her biforen us, heðene hundes  
 þe slozen ure alderen mid luðere heore craften,  
 and heo us beoð on londe læðest alre þinge!” (10564-67)

“Behold, here before us, the heathen dogs who slew our ancestors by their  
 wicked stratagems, and who are to us the most hateful beings on earth!”<sup>493</sup>

Arthur’s language is one of collectives, and one of historic conflict. A collective *cunne* (we) hates a collective *cunne* (them) over harms done long before the actions of Colgrim and Childric. His speech illustrates a living memory of successive invasions stretching back generations. Since Arthur once again calls the invaders pagans, a contemporary audience could also read into the scope of this conflict the pagan invasions that followed Arthur’s lifetime, especially if that audience could recognize echoes of the Chronicle in the *Brut*. This historic enemy is again likened to dogs when they are called *heðene hundes*, so that they are dehumanized in the lead up to their violent demise. The compound “heathen hounds” is also attested in Old English poetry, such as in *Judith* when Holofernes is called a “hæðenan hund” (110) in the moment Judith decapitates him.<sup>494</sup> As the opposing sides head into battle in the *Brut*, the pagan identity of Arthur’s enemies justifies their deaths.

The attention to religious difference mounts throughout the battle. Arthur’s first opponent is identified as a *hæðene eorl* (10587), and upon killing him, Arthur calls on the Lord and his mother for assistance (10597-98). Both Arthur’s own Christianity and the

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<sup>493</sup> Ibid., 68-69.

<sup>494</sup> Elliot Van Kirk Dobbie, *Beowulf and Judith*, ASPR 4 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953).



paganism of his opponent are emphasized at the moment of lethal violence. In his rage, Arthur adds insult to injury as he slays his heathen foes. After killing Colgrim he says:

“Lien nu þere Colgrim; þu were iclumbe hæze...  
 Þu clumbe a þissen hulle wunder ane hæze  
 swulc þu woldest to hæuene —nu þu scalt to hælle!  
 Per þu miht kenne mucche of þine cunne...  
 And we sculen on londe libben in blisse,  
 bidden for eower saulen þat sel ne wurðen heom nauære” (10694-10705)

“Now lie there Colgrim, you who climbed so high...You climbed very high upon this hill as if you would climb up to heaven—now you shall sink down to hell! There you may meet many of you kinsmen...And we shall live in this land well content, shall pray for your souls that no good ever come to them”<sup>495</sup>

Arthur’s animosity toward his pagan foes stretches beyond death. He not only kills Colgrim but asserts that Colgrim’s soul is damned. In the *Roman de Brut*, we are only told “morz fu Colgrin” 9358) (Colgrim died).<sup>496</sup> It is unclear if Colgrin is among the 400 men that Wace claims Arthur slew single-handedly, and no damning speech over Colgrin’s corpse is attributed to Arthur.<sup>497</sup> In Layamon’s *Brut*, however, Arthur’s

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<sup>495</sup> Layamon’s *Arthur*, 74-75.

<sup>496</sup> Weiss, *Wace’s Roman de Brut*, 234-37.

<sup>497</sup> It should be noted, however, that scenes of a Christian champion gloating over a slain Muslim are common in the *chansons de geste* and do feature elsewhere in Wace.

violence does not stop at the point of his enemy's death. Nor is Colgrim alone in being damned since Arthur states that Colgrim will be able to meet many of his *cunne* in hell. The ethnicity of the pagans is linked to their eternal damnation. Moreover, Arthur claims that he and his people will play an active role in the torment of Colgrim and his *cunne* after death by asserting that the collective "we" of his own kin group will pray that no good ever reach the souls of Colgrim's *cunne*. Arthur's anger and hatred is not satisfied by the death of his enemies. It spreads beyond individuals to an entire people, and it spans beyond to present to encompass their ancestors. The *Brut* excuses, and perhaps even justifies, Arthur's violence because his targets fall outside of Christianity.

As noted earlier, however, not all of Arthur's enemies were pagans, and Arthur does demonstrate a capacity for mercy when dealing with his Christian foes. After he defeats his Scottish enemies, the women of Scotland ask Arthur to be merciful by appealing to their shared religion, saying:

“Ʒu ært Cristne mon and we alswa sunden;  
 Sæxisce men beoð hæðene hundes.  
 Heo comen to þisse londe and þis folc here aqualden.  
 Ʒif we heom hereden, þat was for ure hermen,  
 for we nefden nænne mon þe us wið heom mihten griðien.” (10928-32)

“You are a Christian and so, too, are we; the Saxons are heathen dogs.  
 They came to this land and slaughtered the people here. If we submitted to

them, that was due to our misfortune, that we had no one who could defend us against them.”<sup>498</sup>

The speech of the Scottish women highlights their own similarity with Arthur while stressing their differences with the pagan Saxons. Like Arthur, they themselves are Christian, whereas the Saxons are once again dehumanized by the alliterative title of ‘heathen hounds.’ Thus, while the Saxons are to be cursed even after death, the Scots are worthy of mercy. The Scottish women also distinguish themselves from the Saxons ethnically by identifying themselves as a *folc* already established in the land when the Saxons arrived. One definition listed for *folc* in the *MED* is “nation, race, tribe.”<sup>499</sup> The Scottish women thus present themselves as a separate people from the Saxons who do not owe them any inherent loyalty. Finally, the women claim that the Scots were victims of the Saxons even as they fought alongside them. They submitted to the Saxons because they lacked someone able to defend against these pagan invaders. The logic recalls that present in the *Capture of the Five Boroughs*, where Christian Danes in the Danelaw are oppressed by pagan Northmen until the West Saxon King Edmund liberates them, consequently by expanding his own territorial domain. In both cases, a pagan force oppresses a Christian population until a royal outsider with imperial ambitions, one who shares in the oppressed people’s Christianity despite their different ethnicity, and one who expels the pagans by extending their own royal authority over the oppressed Christians. Thus, Christianity functions as a tool of royal expansionism. While we cannot be sure about the extent of Layamon’s knowledge of the Chronicle poems, it is clear that

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<sup>498</sup> *Layamon’s Arthur*, 86-87.

<sup>499</sup> *MED*.

both poems operate within and engage with an established motif of Christians battling pagan invaders. The appeal of the Scottish women is successful, and Arthur decides to spare the Scot any further punishment.

### **Rome's Muslim Allies**

Arthur's imperial ambitions eventually extend beyond the North Sea region, putting him at odds with the Roman Empire. The resulting conflict introduces a new non-Christian enemy for Arthur and his Britons, namely Rome's many Muslim allies. As with many aspects of Arthurian narratives, this development presents some problems of chronology, not least of which is the fact that the birth of the Prophet Muhammad post-dates the supposed conflict between Arthur and Rome. Indeed, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* does not explicitly call any of Rome's allies Muslims. However, as Geraldine Heng has demonstrated, Geoffrey's Arthurian narrative reflects a post-Crusades ethic that invites identification of Rome's allies from North Africa and West Asia with the contemporary, predominantly Muslim inhabitants and political leaders of those regions. Heng notes that there is "an extraordinary mesh of coincidences in the *Historia* that can only be adequately read when we look in the direction of the Orient, and the territories and history of the First Crusade of European Christendom."<sup>500</sup> Such an identification of Rome's allies with Muslims relies on the conflation of race and religion in depictions of Muslims that assumes Muslims differ from European Christians in terms of bodily

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<sup>500</sup> Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 18-21, at 21.

diversity.<sup>501</sup> Furthermore, it is clear that at least some medieval readers of the *Historia* noted the association between Rome's allies and contemporary Muslims since Wace explicitly makes them Muslim in his *Roman de Brut*.<sup>502</sup>

Wace also draws heavily on the *chansons de geste* in his depiction of Muslims, and Lazamon follows his source.<sup>503</sup> The *chansons de geste* often portray Muslims as polytheists who engage in idolatry.<sup>504</sup> They also frequently feature Black Muslims described grotesquely in what Jacqueline De Weever calls "racist portraits."<sup>505</sup> Sometimes they are even depicted as having physical animalistic qualities like "spiny bristles like a boar, or skin as hard as iron, or they bark like dogs."<sup>506</sup> The Muslims in the *Brut* are strictly human in their physical descriptions, but they are nevertheless likened to dogs, and as non-Christians, their souls are doomed at death.

Rather than follow his source in directly calling Rome's allies Muslims, Lazamon consistently refers to them generally as heathens, the same word he uses when describing pagan Saxons. Yet Lazamon still identifies these non-Christians supporting Rome as Muslims. Both Arthur and the Roman emperor Lucius note that these non-Christians are followers of Mahoun (13636 and 13673 respectively), for example. The *Middle English*

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<sup>501</sup> Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 10.

<sup>502</sup> Wace refers to some of Rome's allies as "Sarazins" (12625), *Wace's Roman de Brut: A History of the British*, Judith Weiss ed. and trans. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999); I follow Shokoofeh Rajabzadeh's recommendation of referring to Muslim characters in Christian medieval texts as Muslims rather than reproduce stigmatizing language, see "The depoliticized Saracen and Muslim erasure," *Literature Compass* 16:e12548 (2019).

<sup>503</sup> Le Saux argues that the Brutus section of Lazamon's *Brut* potentially hints toward firsthand familiarity with the *chansons de geste* (Le Saux, *Layamon's "Brut": The Poem and Its Sources*, 228).

<sup>504</sup> Akbari, *Idols in the East*, 60.

<sup>505</sup> Jacqueline De Weever, *Sheba's Daughters: Whitening and Demonizing the Saracen Woman in Medieval French Epic* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 100.

<sup>506</sup> Heng, *Invention of Race*, 118.

*Dictionary* offers two definitions for Mahoun: “A pagan god, false god” and “The prophet Mahomet,” with the etymology going back to the medieval French form of Muhammad.<sup>507</sup> Thus, Lazamon identifies Rome’s allies as Muslims while still inviting association with the northern pagans by deviating from Wace and consistently referring to both groups of non-Christians as heathens. In doing so, Lazamon more fully deploys the motif of pagan invasions in the service of post-Crusade anti-Islam sentiments.<sup>508</sup>

Arthur’s conflict with Rome begins when messengers from Emperor Lucius arrive in Briton demanding that Arthur recognize Lucius as his lord or face the consequences. Although the challenge from Rome follows Arthur’s own conquest of the North Sea region and France, the latter being a Roman client, the conflict is nevertheless framed defensively on the part of the Britons. Arthur acknowledges his position as a conqueror saying to his warriors, “þurh eou ich habbe biwunnen vnder þere sunnen / þat ich æm swiðe riche mon, reh wið mine feonden” (12467-68) (with you I have conquered all lands under the sun so that I am now a most mighty man and stern with my enemies).<sup>509</sup> Arthur’s past deeds allow him to boast of his military prowess, yet his own aggression against others does not permit that aggression be reciprocated. In response to the challenge from Rome, Arthur says to his people:

“Nu we mote biðenchen hu we ure þeoden  
and ure muchele wurðscipe mid rihte mazen biwitezen

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<sup>507</sup> *MED*.

<sup>508</sup> The motif of pagan invasions of Britain was already active in Latin and French, and both Geoffrey and Wace rely on the motif in their depictions of Muslims and Muslim-coded characters. However, the language of the Caligula *Brut* further reinforces the use of the motif by more clearly associating past pagan enemies of Christians in England with the perceived Muslim enemy after the onset of the Crusades.

<sup>509</sup> *Lazamon’s Arthur*, 164-65.

wið þis riche moncun, wið þas Rome-leoden” (12480-82)

“Now we must consider how we can fitly defend our subjects and our high majesty against this powerful nation, against these Romans.”<sup>510</sup>

Arthur’s language evokes the invasion motif by stressing the need to protect what is theirs and underscoring the difference in identity between the two sides in the conflict. Arthur and his Britons must *biwitezen*, that is protect, their *þeoden*, which can be read as people, land, or *language*. This last meaning is significant since both Arthur and Gawain later gloat over defeated Romans that they will teach them the British tongue, *Bruttisce speche* (13393 and 13248 respectively). Language is literally at stake in the conflict between the Britons and the Romans. Language and group identity coalesce throughout the *Brut*,<sup>511</sup> and Arthur’s speech emphasizes that the Romans he must defend against belong to a different group than his Britons. The Romans are their own *moncun*, their own peoples, a fact reiterated by the closing compound *Rome-leoden*, that is Roman nation or Roman people. By distinguishing the Romans from the Britons and establishing that the Britons must protect their *þeoden* from them, Arthur frames their conflict in the same way as the past conflict against the pagan Saxons he had already defeated. The Romans accordingly represent the next wave in the cycle of invasions.

Defending against invasion can also provide an opportunity for conquest, and Arthur is eager to take possession of all the Roman lands. Importantly, the way he

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<sup>510</sup> Ibid., 164-65.

<sup>511</sup> Davis-Secord, “Revising Race in Laȝamon’s *Brut*,” 172.

expresses these aspirations foreshadows the religious nature of the coming conflict with Rome. In response to Emperor Lucius' threat, Arthur says:

“He wilneð al and ich wilni al þæt wit beiene aʒæð,  
habben hit nu and aʒe, þe hit æð mæʒen iwinne;  
for nu we scullen cunne wham hit Godd unne.” (12531-33)

“He and I both want everything that we each possess, to have and hold now and evermore, whoever can the more readily get it in his power; for now we shall learn to whom God will grant it.”<sup>512</sup>

The Christian Arthur appealed to God before against the pagan Saxons and found success, yet up to this point there is no reason to believe the Romans are not Christian themselves. While Arthur has framed Lucius' threat as one of invasion, at this point it would not yet be a pagan invasion. As Arthur's speech suggests, he and Lucius are both ambitious conquerors desirous of more territory, so it is fair to wonder who, if anyone, God will favor in the contest. But in appealing to God, Arthur introduces the possibility that this is not actually a conflict between religious equals. In fact, Arthur's own devotion to Christian values is already in question when he decides to use military force against Rome, despite Gawain's appeal that peace is a good created by God himself (12455-56). Yet if Arthur is an imperfect Christian as depicted in the *Brut*, Lucius is even more so based on the company he keeps.

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<sup>512</sup> *Layamon's Arthur*, 166-67.



When Lucius hears that Arthur intends to fight him, he summons all those who owe him allegiance, and it is at this point that it becomes clear that those invading Britain might not all be Christian. Lucius' allies include:

Epistrod, King of Grece; Ethion, Duc of Boece,  
 per com mid mucle wiȝe, Irtac, King of Turckie,  
 Pandras, King of Egipte, of Crete þe king Ipolitte,  
 of Syrie þe king Euander, of Frigie þe duc Teucer,  
 of Babilone Mæptisas, of Spaine þe kaisere Meodras,  
 of Medie þe king Boccus, of Libie þe king Sexstorius,  
 of Bittunie Pollidices, of Iturie þe king Sexes,  
 Ofustesar, King of Aufrike –nes þer na king his ilike;  
 mid him com moni Aufrican; of Ethiope he brohte þa bleomen. (12658-  
 66)

Epistrod, King of Greece...Ethion, Duke of Boece, came there with a large force; Irtac, King of Turkey, came, Pandras, King of Egypt, King Ipolitte of Crete, King Evander of Syria, Duke Teucer of Phrygia, Mæptisas of Babylon, Meodras, Emperor of Spain, King Boccus of Media, King Sextorius of Libya, Pollicides of Bithynia, King Sexes of Ituria, Ofustesar, King of Africa—there was no monarch to equal him; with him came many Africans; he brought the [Black men] from Ethiopia.<sup>513</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> Ibid., 172-73.

The list goes on to include some Roman leaders, but the majority of those named as answering Lucius' call come from regions associated with Islam in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. While Lazamon changes the names of some of the leaders, the locations listed match exactly those named by Wace (11093-11111).<sup>514</sup> The list speaks to the strong association between Arthur's campaign against Rome and the Crusades in the tradition following Geoffrey's *Historia*. In Lazamon's *Brut*, this association tacitly signals that Rome's invasion of Britain that Arthur seeks to stop preemptively is also an invasion by "heathens," a fact that is made explicit later in the poem. And as in the case of the West Saxon kings and Cnut, the threat offers an opportunity for Arthur to enlarge his own realm when he decides to conquer Rome. The threat of invasion allows the king to both protect and enlarge his dominion.

The catalogue of Lucius' allies also draws explicit attention to race. Among those who join the Roman emperor are *bleomen*, Black men.<sup>515</sup> Lucius' army includes at least some members who can be visually distinguished from Arthur's Britons based on skin tone. Thus, while the conflict between Arthur and Rome checks the boxes of the invasion motif as illustrated in the earlier invasions by the Saxons, invasions that I argue correspond to the historical invasion by Scandinavians, the racial component of Rome's allies signals a key difference between Rome's Muslim allies and the northern pagans. Whereas the northern pagans are of the same race as the Christians and can therefore be incorporated into a Christian collective if they convert, the Muslims are racially distinct

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<sup>514</sup> Wace's *Roman de Brut*, 278.

<sup>515</sup> The word in Wace is "Mors" (11111), cognate with English "moor" and carrying both racial and religious connotations.

and denied any access whatsoever into the collective that Arthur and his Britons represent.

The racial element of the opposing sides becomes even more overt when Arthur's own allies are tallied up. Arthur's allies come:

of Scotlond, of Irlond, of Gutlond, of Islond,  
of Noreine, of Denene, of Orcaneie, of Maneie.

Of þan ilke londen beoð an hundred þusende  
iwepnede þeines ohte on heore londes wise.

Neoren hit noht cnihtes, no þes wæies idihte,  
ah hit weoren men þa kenlukeste þa æi mon ikende  
mid mucle wiaxen, mid longe saxen. (12686-92)

from Scotland, from Ireland, from Jutland, from Iceland, from Norway,  
from Denmark, from Orkney and from the Isle of Man. From these many  
lands came a hundred thousand valiant warriors, well armed after the  
fashion of their own regions. They were not knights, nor armed in knightly  
fashion, but were equipped like the boldest men ever known, with great  
battleaxes and long [knives].<sup>516</sup>

This list names outsiders who do not form part of Arthur's own Britons. They have their own lands and their own customs, reflected partly in their war gear, which include axes and *saxen* (long knives), a weapon associated with the pagans Saxons already defeated by

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<sup>516</sup> *Layamon's Arthur*, 174-75.

Arthur. Like Lucius' army, Arthur's represents a coalition, but whereas Lucius' allies come from regions associated with Islam, this list of Arthur's allies focuses on regions associated with Scandinavia.<sup>517</sup> Moreover, *Lazamon* slightly expands Arthur's list of northern allies to include Scotland and the Isle of Man. *Wace* names the former among Arthur's allies after closing off the catalogue of unknighly northerners, and he excludes the latter altogether.<sup>518</sup> *Lazamon*'s additions reflect a greater understanding of Scandinavian settlements and cultural influence in the Irish Sea region, and the Scandinavians are here presented as allies against a potential invasion, rather than being a source of invasion themselves.

Arthur's and Lucius' contrasting lists of allies, juxtaposed with only ten lines separating them, illustrate how perceptions of Scandinavians in Christian Europe had shifted by the late twelfth century. In the post-Crusade era, Scandinavians were no longer viewed as pagans who might invade England. Rather, with Muslims now in the picture, Scandinavians became potential allies against a new non-Christian enemy. Indeed, the Norwegian king Sigurðr Jórsalafari led an army to Palestine in the early twelfth century.<sup>519</sup> The once pagan invaders could now join a Christian hero defending his land in Arthurian pseudohistory. Muslims, who never invaded any part of Britain, are now the ones presented as aggressive, "heathen" invaders in the ensuing conflict between Arthur

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<sup>517</sup> I count Ireland among the regions associated with Scandinavia due to the presence of a population that descended culturally from Scandinavian settlers and was still recognized as culturally distinct in Ireland in the twelfth century. They were called *gail* (foreigners) by the Irish and *Ostman* (man from the east) by English. The distinction was still recognized by the English as late as 1215. See Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 6 and 15.

<sup>518</sup> *Wace's Roman de Brut*, (11133-11154), 280.

<sup>519</sup> Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla* III, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (Reykjavík: Hið Íslensk Fornritafélag, 1951), 239-47.

and Rome. Somewhat ironically, in supporting Arthur against Rome Scandinavians continue to function as invaders, since the battles occur in Roman provinces. However, as Christians fighting non-Christians, their invasion is justified within the logic of the text. Following their widespread conversion and the European invasions of Muslim-ruled Palestine, the traditional pagan enemy—that being Scandinavian, with recognized ancestral ties to the English—could be substituted by a new non-Christian enemy in narratives of invasion.

As the war between Arthur and Lucius gets underway, the movement of the Romans and their allies depict them as the active invaders. Spies inform Arthur

þat Luces þe kaisere and al his Romanisce here  
 þiderward heo comen fromward heore þeoden,  
 and swa heo wolden fusen in touward France  
 and al þat biwinnen, and seoððen wenden hidere  
 and Bruttes alle aquellen quicke þer heo heom funde, (13059-63)

that the emperor Lucius and his whole Roman army were moving out of  
 their own land in that direction, intending to press on so into France,  
 conquer it all, and then come here and slaughter all Britons whatsoever,  
 where they found them,<sup>520</sup>

The Romans and their Muslim allies are framed as invaders and aggressors, even though Arthur conquered France by force from Rome, as he himself admits (13106). The

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<sup>520</sup> *Layamon's Arthur*, 192-93.

invading Roman force is also referred to as a *here*, the same word conventionally used to describe pagan raiders and invaders in Old English texts. The act of leaving their own *þeoden*, their own country or region, marks their movements as those of invaders. Arthur engaging the Roman forces on the continent marks his own aggression more overtly than do the Old English sources using the motif, but his aggression is coded as preemptive defense since Roman invaders will not be satisfied with merely establishing their authority. Like the pagan Saxons described earlier in the *Brut*, and like those in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, these invaders intend to slaughter the people. But despite their inherent cruelty, the stakes of the conflict remain territorial. When Arthur receives a wounded knight, we learn that, "hafden Romanisce men al his lond biræued him" (13072) (Roman soldiers had deprived him of all his land).<sup>521</sup> The *Brut* depicts the Romans, with their Muslim *here*, as aggressive invaders who will slaughter the Britons and take their lands if they are not stopped, matching earlier iterations of the pagan invasion motif.

As in Arthur's conflict with the pagan Saxons, attention to the religious difference between the combatting sides is heightened during moments of violence. When Lucius learns that Gawain has captured his follower Petreius, he sends a rescue team led in part by King Evander of Babylon.<sup>522</sup> The narrator says of Evander, "þe heðene king wes swiðe war" (13471), (the heathen king was very wily).<sup>523</sup> As noted earlier, the *Brut* uses the same word to label Muslims that was used to describe the pagan Saxons, thus collapsing the difference between them in their function as invaders. Consistently, those

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<sup>521</sup> Ibid., 194-95.

<sup>522</sup> In the catalogue of allies quoted above, Evander is king of Syria, not Babylon. He is consistently king of Syria in Wace, *Wace's Roman de Brut*, (12110), 304.

<sup>523</sup> *Layamon's Arthur*, 214-15.

labeled “heathens” are tricky and not to be trusted. Sensing a tactical advantage, the crafty Evander gathers his troops “and uenon þan Brutten swulc heo heom wolden abiten” (13474) (and fell upon the Britons as if they would [bite] them).<sup>524</sup> Evander and his troops behave animalistically in battle—their very actions as depicted in the *Brut* dehumanize them. In the extreme violence of battle, the subhuman qualities attributed to non-Christians are again in full display.

Just as the paganism of Arthur’s enemies is stressed in battle, so is the Christianity of Arthur’s own side. In a speech to his troops, Arthur says, “Ʒe beoð under Criste cnihten alre kennest; / and ich æm rihchest alre kinge vnder Gode seolue” (13591-92) (You are the bravest of all [knights under Christ]; and I am the mightiest of all kings under God himself).<sup>525</sup> When Arthur calls his warriors the bravest knights under Christ, it is not a euphemism to mean “everywhere,” since both the poem and the characters draw attention to the fact that Arthur’s enemies are not all Christian. Rather, this statement serves to underscore the Christianity of Arthur and his men as they prepare to fight against Muslims. Arthur makes it clear that his enemies are unworthy of mercy. He says to some of his troops on reserve:

“and Ʒif hit ilimpeð, swa wule þe liuinde Godd,  
 þat heo ouercumen beon and biginnen to fleon,  
 setteð heom after mid allen æouwer mahten  
 and al þat Ʒe oftake maƷen doh hit of lif-daƷen,  
 þa uatte and þa lene, þa riche and þa hene.” (13582-86)

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<sup>524</sup> Ibid., 214-15.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid., 220-21.

“... and if it so happens, as the living God wills, that they are defeated and take flight, pursue them with all your might and kill all those you can overtake, the fat and the lean, the great and the humble.”<sup>526</sup>

By appealing to the living God, Arthur once again broadcasts his own Christianity. He immediately follows that declaration with ordering his troops to be merciless to his *defeated* foes. It might be that Rome and its Muslim allies are being punished for the past deception of Childric and his pagan army, who invaded Britain again after being spared, in a similar way to how Muslims partly inherit the mantle of “pagan invaders” once worn by Scandinavians in English literature. Yet it is difficult to ignore that Arthur *did* show mercy to his Scottish enemies in the aftermath of Childric’s deception once the Scottish women appealed to their shared Christianity with Arthur. Drawing attention to the difference in religion between the two sides both absolves Arthur of the extreme violence he commits; it also raises the stakes of the conflict by showing that there will be no mercy shown to the losing side.

Arthur’s conflict with Rome illustrates how the motif of invasion could be adapted under the influence of the Crusades. Despite all the contradictions inherent in an expansionist king like Arthur accusing someone else of invading, Arthur does charge Rome with invading his territory, and the *Brut* endorses reading Rome as invader. Furthermore, the language used to describe Rome and its allies, much of it shared with the Chronicle, facilitates association between them and the pagan Saxons that invaded

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<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 218-21.



Britain earlier in the narrative. However, in a speech leading up to the final battle against Lucius, Arthur clearly identifies his enemies as Muslim. He says:

“And þis beoð þa forcuðeste men of alle quike monnen,

hæðene leode –Godd heo seondeð laðe!

Ure Drihten heo bilæueð and to Mahune heo tuhteð;

and Lucas þe kæsere of Godd seolf naued nane care,

þat hafueð to iueren hæðene hundes,

Goddes wiðer-iwinnen! We heom scullen awelden,

leggen heom to grunde, and us seoluen beon isunde

mid Drihtenes willen þe waldeð alle deden.” (13634-41)

“And these Romans are the most wicked race on earth, a heathen people—they are hateful to God! They deny our Lord and commit themselves to Mahoun; and the emperor Lucius takes no heed of the true God, Lucius who consorts with heathen dogs, enemies of God! We will vanquish them and, by the will of God who controls all actions, lay them low, and ourselves be safe and sound.”<sup>527</sup>

As noted above, Mahoun is a rendering of the name Muhammad, the final prophet in Islam. Thus, Arthur here identifies his foes not just as “heathens,” but specifically as Muslims. This is a defining characteristic of them as *leode* (a people) which makes them loathsome to God. Since this people are enemies of God, Arthur has divine right on his

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<sup>527</sup> Ibid., 222-23.

side, and any violence against them is permissible, even necessary. Again, this recalls Ælfric's account of the Maccabees.

Yet Arthur's condemnations do not fall evenly on all his enemies. Like the Saxons Arthur defeated in the past, Lucius' allies are again "heathen hounds." Lucius himself, however, is not. Arthur accuses Lucius of not caring for God because he *associates* with Muslims, not because he himself is one. Arthur's speech reveals that the European Lucius is still considered separately from his Muslim allies "of æstene weorlde" (13672) (from eastern lands),<sup>528</sup> whence twenty-five "heathen" kings come to his aide. Although this non-Christian foe fulfills the traditional function as the northern pagans, their identity as Muslims evokes the Crusades and European expansionism in the Levant. In other words, this is not a foe sharing kinship with the English who might be assimilated into a Christian collective if they convert. Unlike Arthur's northern pagan enemies, the *Brut* affirms that his Muslim enemies must be defeated completely.

As the battle unfolds, the *Brut* stresses both the religion and the geography of Arthur's enemies. One group is introduced as follows:

Ða comen þer kinges þreo of hæðene londe;  
 of Ethiope wes þe an, þe oðer wes Aufrican,  
 þe þridde wes of Libie, of hæðene leode. (13725-27)

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<sup>528</sup> Ibid., 224-25.

Then there came three kings from heathen lands; one was from Ethiopia,  
the second was an African, the third was from Libya, from a pagan  
nation.<sup>529</sup>

These locales in the African continent are identified as “hæðene londe” of “hæðene leode.” The point is stated and then reiterated in the half-lines preceding and concluding the naming of the nations. The placenames are thus enveloped by the pejorative label of heathen. The geography additionally gestures to the racial difference that accompanies the perceived paganism of these kings and their people, a point accented by the inclusion of Ethiopia, a place the *Brut* already noted as the home of Lucius’ Black soldiers. Boccus, the King of Media who slays Arthur’s ally Bedevere, is called a heathen right before the killing (13747-48), and when Setor mortally wounds the knight Kay, we are reminded that he is from Libya (13763-65). When Boccus of Media is slain in turn, the poem reads, “and þe heðene king hælde to grunde, / and his fule saule sæh into helle” (13792-93) (and the heathen king fell to the ground, and his evil soul sank down into hell).<sup>530</sup> As the violence unfolds, the *Brut* repeatedly stresses the difference of Lucius’ allies, namely their religion and geographic origin. Arthur is facing an aggressive, non-Christian enemy, and accordingly, they behave like the northern pagans he defeated in the past. However, this new enemy is a post-Crusade iteration of the familiar foe of the invasion motif, a point evident in locating the enemy’s home in predominantly Muslim regions. By adapting the motif of invasion to a Crusading context, the motif can continue despite an end to historical invasions of England by pagan forces.

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<sup>529</sup> Ibid., 226-227.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid., 230-31.

Arthur and his forces achieve victory against Lucius and his allies, but that is not the end of their conflict with non-Christians. To be sure, Arthur's Christians manage a complete victory over their anachronistic Muslim foes, but they must return home to once again deal with the pagan Saxons who historically will conquer Britain. Mordred, Arthur's nephew who was entrusted with defending Britain while Arthur waged war against Rome, betrays Arthur by claiming Britain for himself. When Arthur's wife Guenevere, who takes Mordred as a lover, informs him that Arthur is coming to reclaim Britain, Mordred seeks support from a Saxon named Childric, saying that:

he wolde Childriche 3eouen of his riche,  
 al bi3eonde þere Humbre, for he him scolde helpe  
 to fihten wið his æme, Arðuren kinge. (14111-13)

he would give Childric part of his realm, everything beyond the Humber,  
 so that he should help him to fight against his uncle, King Arthur.<sup>531</sup>

Mordred's offer to partition England with the pagans roughly along a north/south divide echoes the historical divisions of England between a Scandinavian north and a West Saxon south. Within the *Brut* itself, the episode recalls the conquest of the earlier Childric who claimed an even larger northern portion of Britain. In repeating this pattern evident in both recorded and legendary history, the *Brut* promises that pagan invasions are recurrent, following a familiar arc. Pagans may have been defeated in the past, but a new non-Christian threat can always return. After the start of the Crusades, Muslims could be

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid., 246-47.

easily cast as a non-Christian foe who *might* someday invade England, as other non-Christians had done in the past.

While Arthur does defeat Mordred and his army of “heðene and cristene” (14122), he cannot savor the victory. Mortally wounded, he entrusts his kingdom to Constantine, the son of Cador, saying that he will go to Avalon, “And seoðe ich cumen wulle to mine kineriche / and wunien mid Brutten mid muchelere wunne” (And afterwards I will return to my kingdom and dwell with the Britons in great contentment).<sup>532</sup> But the *Brut* never shows Arthur’s return, and in the Caligula version, his prophesied return is to aid the English rather than the Britons (14297). In the Caligula *Brut*, the Briton Arthur’s conflicts with invading non-Christians both looks forward chronologically, backward from Lazamon’s authorial perspective, to the English’s own conflicts with pagan Scandinavians, and forward again to imagined invasions from a Muslim foe.

Lazamon’s *Brut*, especially as it survives in the Caligula manuscript, illustrates a continuation and an adaptation of the motif of pagan invasions. By the time that Lazamon was writing circa 1200, invasions of England by pagan Scandinavians had become a thing of the past. The memory of invasions, however, was very much present. Situated as he was in Worcester, a region where interest in Old English texts continued into the thirteenth century, Lazamon was likely acquainted with writing engaging this motif in the works of Wulfstan, Ælfric, Bede (at least in English if not in Latin), and a version of the

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<sup>532</sup> Ibid., 254-55.

Chronicle that likely included the *Battle of Brunanburh*.<sup>533</sup> He would have known from these old works that invasions had ceased in the past only to begin anew. More importantly, he would have known that Scandinavians were not the first pagans to invade Britain, since the origin of the English as invading Angles and Saxons are frequently alluded to in invasion narratives, with that invasion being a main subject of both the Arthurian section of the *Brut* and his direct source Wace. Thus, the Christianization of Scandinavia did not necessarily mean an end to future invasions of England by pagans. In the post-Crusade era, Muslims provided a convenient substitute for the traditional non-Christian invaders. By drawing on a vernacular tradition and adapting it against an imagined Muslim threat, Laȝamon's *Brut* illustrates how the potent motif of pagan invasion remained available even in the absence of an existing historical threat.

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<sup>533</sup> Christine Franzen, "The Tremulous Hand of Worcester and the Nero Scribe of the 'Ancrene Wisse,'" *Medium Ævum* 72, no. 1 (2003): 13-31.

## Conclusion

### Imagined Invasions

Lazamon was not the last English author to use the motif of pagan invasions. Middle English romances frequently feature plots in which foreign forces threaten to (or actually do) invade Britain.<sup>534</sup> This is the literary legacy of the invasion motif as it developed in response to the historical invasions by Scandinavians in the ninth through eleventh centuries. However, the invaders in these stories are not always Scandinavians; instead, they are often identified as Muslims.<sup>535</sup> Moreover, when the invaders do remain Scandinavian, they can sometimes be Christian heroes rather than pagan villains even as they invade England, as in the stories of Havelok.

Middle English romances exercise creative freedom with the historical record. The Old English texts that employ the motif of invasion analyzed in this dissertation all either respond to contemporary events or engage well attested historical events, both secular and sacred. Even Lazamon makes a claim to historical truth and writes in the tradition of historical chronicle. But whereas these earlier iterations of the motif are

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<sup>534</sup> William Biel, "Drinking English: The Wassail in Lazamon's *Brut*," *Early Middle English* 3, no. 2 (2021): 57-74; Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Dieter Mehl, *Middle English Romances of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968).

<sup>535</sup> I say "identified as Muslim" because Middle English romances generally depict distorted ideas of Islam. See Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Kathy Cawsey, "Disorienting Orientalism: Finding Saracens in Strange Places in Late Medieval English Manuscripts," *Exemplaria* 21, no. 4 (2009): 380-97; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "On Saracen Enjoyment: Some Fantasies of Race in Late Medieval France and England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31, no. 1 (2001): 113-46; Sierra Lomuto, "The Mongol Princess of Tars: Global Relations and Racial Formation in *The King of Tars* (c. 1330)," *Exemplaria* 31, no. 3 (2019): 171-92.

tethered to historical events, romances remain free to draw upon history and its traditions even as they disregard it. This freedom allows romances to continue to use the motif of pagan invasions centuries after the end of the historical conditions that gave rise to the motif.

One early Middle English romance to make use of the motif of invasion is *King Horn*. Composed during the last quarter of the thirteenth century, *Horn* is likely the earliest surviving Middle English romance.<sup>536</sup> It tells a curious tale of Muslims invading Christian kingdoms in England and Ireland. These invaders, who sail in from overseas and topple kingdoms, clearly evoke the memory of historical Scandinavian invasions, yet, as Diane Speed has demonstrated, *Horn* presents the invaders as Muslims and does not link them to Scandinavia.<sup>537</sup> Several versions of the story of Horn survive, including an Anglo-French version dating to the late twelfth century, though this may not be the source of the Middle English *King Horn*.<sup>538</sup> While the Middle English *Horn* never states where these Muslim invaders from overseas originate, The Anglo-French *Horn* links them to Africa, Canaan and Persia.<sup>539</sup> Thus, the legend of Horn draws on the historical invasions by Scandinavians for its narrative, but in deploying the motif, it fully replaces the historical pagan invaders, Scandinavians, with a new imagined Muslim enemy.

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<sup>536</sup> Rosemund Allen, "Date and Provenance of *King Horn*: Some Interim Reassessments," *Medieval English Studies Presented to George Kane*, ed. Edward Donald Kennedy, Ronald Waldron, and Joseph S. Wittig (Suffolk: St. Edmund Press, 1988), 99-126.

<sup>537</sup> Diane Speed, "The Saracens of *King Horn*," *Speculum* 65, no. 3 (1990): 564-95.

<sup>538</sup> Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, *Four Romance of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelston* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 1999), 11.

<sup>539</sup> Speed, "The Saracens of *King Horn*," 567.



Moreover, while figures with Scandinavian names do appear in *King Horn*, they are Horn's virtuous Christian allies from Ireland rather than pagan invaders. Horn meets a king named Thurston (825), for example, with sons named Harild and Berild (766-67).<sup>540</sup> These Irish characters have Germanic names, with Thurston and Harild being Anglicized forms of the popular Scandinavian names Þorsteinn and Haraldr respectively; these names suggest that these characters are not a native Irish dynasty, but rather Scandinavian settlers still distinguished from the native population as the Ostmen in the twelfth century.<sup>541</sup> Just as in *Lazamon's Brut*, Scandinavians (the traditional pagan enemy of the motif) assist an English (or English coded) hero in his battles against Muslims that function as pagan invaders. In the post-Crusade era, the motif changes to adapt Muslims as scapegoats when drawing on conflicts between Europeans that had since Christianized.<sup>542</sup>

Stressing the "paganism" of the invaders, *King Horn* redeploys tropes developed in the literary responses to invasions from pagan Scandinavians. Like in Ælfric's depiction of Scandinavian invaders in his *Lives of Saints*, the Muslims of *King Horn* are motivated primarily by a hatred for Christians. The poem's first lines of direct speech are by a Muslim who says, "'Thy lond folk we schulle slon, / And alle that Crist luveth upon'" (47-48) (We shall slay the people of the land and all who love Christ). Killing

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<sup>540</sup> All quotations of *King Horn* and *Havelok the Dane* are from Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, *Four Romance of England: King Horn, Havelok the Dane, Bevis of Hampton, Athelston* (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 1999).

<sup>541</sup> Benjamin Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes: Dynasty, Religion, and Empire in the North Atlantic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6 and 15.

<sup>542</sup> On the use of Muslims as scapegoats for mediating conflicts between European Christians see Siobhain Bly Calkin, "Violence, Saracens, and English Identity in 'Of Arthour and of Merlin,'" *Arthuriana* 14, no. 2 (2004): 17-36.

Christians is the goal, and the invaders make good on the threat. The poem states, “The pains come to londe / And neme hit in here honde / That folc hi gunne quelle, / And churchen for to felle” (63-66) (The pagans came to the land and took it in their hands; they began to kill that people and to destroy churches). The destruction in *Horn* recalls the violence that Ælfric and the Chronicle described as customary of Scandinavians, but here the perpetrators are Muslims. In noting the land taken by the invaders, *Horn* also reproduces the territorial stakes frequently featured in earlier literature engaging the motif. *Horn* even reproduces language used in earlier iterations of the motif to degrade pagans. In a scene where Horn is riding, the poem says, “He fond o schup stonde / With hethene honde” (601-2) (He found a ship with heathen hounds anchored). Although *Horn* is a rhyming poem, it uses the “heathen hound” alliterative compound favored by *Lazamon*. The presence of their ship, which is necessary since the invaders come from across the sea, recalls the Scandinavians who are so strongly associated with ships in earlier iterations of the invasion motif. Despite not responding to any ongoing or historical invasion, *King Horn* reproduces the tropes used to describe Scandinavian invaders from the invasion motif, albeit on an imagined Muslim invader.

However, unlike most earlier iterations of the motif, *King Horn* blends religion and race in its description of characters. Horn is described as “whit so the flur” (15) (white as a flower) and he introduces himself as being ““Of Cristene blode”” (181) (of Christian blood). The Muslims, meanwhile, are described as Black (1333), and their religion is described as kinship, or *kyn* (637). In blending the race and religion of its characters, *King Horn* participates in the process of race-making, which Geraldine Heng argues “operates as specific historical occasions in which strategic essentialisms are

posited and assigned through a variety of practices and pressures, so as to construct a hierarchy of peoples for different treatment.”<sup>543</sup> By blending the religion and race of its characters, *Horn* removes the possibility of a full religious conversion. As I have argued, in engaging the motif of pagan invasions during the ongoing attacks by Scandinavians, writers had to navigate the reality that there were also Christian Scandinavians in England. However, the imagined invasions by Muslims in romances do not have to allow for the possibility of conversion. By conflating religion and race, the fantasy villains can be made irredeemable, not because of the act of invading but because of their very being.

In the post-Crusade era, romances could also feature a Scandinavian invader functioning as a hero free of the negative connotations typical of Scandinavians. Such is the case in the Middle English romance *Havelok the Dane*. *Havelok* was composed in the late thirteenth century, possibly between 1280 and 1290.<sup>544</sup> Like *Horn*, several versions of Havelok’s stories exist, with the earliest attestations going back to twelfth-century Anglo-French material.<sup>545</sup> Havelok’s story was frequently confused with actual history and linked to such figures as Anlaf Guthfrithsson (who fought at Brunanburh), Olaf Cuaran (from whom Havelok’s name is derived), and Cnut the Great, who ruled Denmark and England like the fictional Havelok.<sup>546</sup> Despite Havelok being associated

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<sup>543</sup> Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 3.

<sup>544</sup> Ronald B. Herzman, Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, *Four Romance of England*, 73.

<sup>545</sup> Caroline D. Eckhardt, “Havelok the Dane in ‘Castleford’s Chronicle,’” *Studies in Philology* 98, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 1-17.

<sup>546</sup> Herzman, Drake, and Salisbury, *Four Romance of England*, 77; Hudson, *Viking Pirates and Christian Princes*, 30; Eckhardt, “Havelok the Dane in ‘Castleford’s Chronicle’”; Alexander Bell, “Gaimar’s Early ‘Danish’ Kings,” *PMLA* 65 (1950): 601-40.

with kings of the Dublin-York and Danish dynasties that led armies with pagans into England, *Havelok the Dane* never presents its hero as a pagan invader.

*Havelok* presents its Scandinavian protagonist as a model Christian, so much so that at one point he offers to swear on the Bible never to take up arms against his enemies (483-95). When his wife Goldeboru is dismayed at having married someone she believes to be a poor man, an angel visits her and says of Havelok, “He shal ben king strong and stark, / Of Engelond and Denemark” (1272-73). The romance does not present Havelok’s acquisition of England as the result of pagan aggression as we might expect from the motif, however, but rather as the fulfillment of divine grace, much like the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* presents Cnut’s conquest. And much like Cnut’s, Havelok’s Christianity is extended to his Danish allies. In a moment of jest, Havelok’s friend Ubbe swears to Goldeboru’s beauty “by Seint Johan” (1721). Ubbe shares the name of one of the leaders of the Great Heathen Army, Hubba, whom Ælfric describes as united by the Devil to Hinguar. Nonetheless *Havelok’s* Ubbe is a friendly Christian man. Although he eventually assists Havelok in his conquest of England, the romance is clear that both these Scandinavians are good Christians who are justified in their actions.

However, *Havelok the Dane* does contain some residual echoes of the negative portrayals of Scandinavians common to the motif. To begin with, Havelok does lead an army of Danes to conquer England.<sup>547</sup> When Godrich, the English villain of the romance, hears that Havelok’s army is approaching, he makes a speech to rouse his troops and denounce his Danish foe: ““He brenne kirkes and prestes binde; / He strangleth monkes

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<sup>547</sup> In some iterations of the Havelok story, he only conquers part of England, but in the Middle English romance, he conquers England entirely, Eckhardt, “Havelok the Dane in ‘Castleford’s Chronicle,’” 1.

and nunnes bothe” (2583-84) (He burns churches and binds priests; he strangles both monks and nuns). While Havelok does not commit the atrocities Godrich claims he has, Godrich essentially accuses the invading Danes of the behavior described as customary to them in earlier iterations of the motif. For Godrich’s words to carry any weight, despite their falseness, speaks to a memory of just such aggression from Scandinavians both in the fiction of the romance and in the experiences of history. Godrich can hope the lie sticks because there is precedent for Scandinavians attacking churches and the clergy, and that precedent is attested in a long literary and historical tradition.<sup>548</sup> Nevertheless, the romance presents Havelok not as a pagan invader like Hinguar and Hubba, but as a Christian Conqueror like Cnut. In scenes evocative of Cnut’s life in the *Encomium*, the Danish king Havelok marries the English queen Goldeboru (2766-71) and rules to the end of his days. *Havelok the Dane* illustrates how Scandinavians could function as heroes once their association with paganism is broken. As a *Christian* invader of England at a historical remove from actual invasions, the Havelok of romance can embody the image that Cnut sought to project.

The motif of pagan invasions that developed in English literature in response to Scandinavian incursions enjoyed a long afterlife. By the time that invasions from Scandinavia no longer posed a threat to England, the motif was set. In the post-Crusade era, Muslims provided a convenient substitute for the once pagan Scandinavians in narratives of invasion. The creative freedom of romance meant one could imagine new

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<sup>548</sup> For the prevalence of the motif in historical writing, see Julia Barrow, “Danish Ferocity and Abandoned Monasteries: The Twelfth Century-Century View,” in *The Long Twelfth-Century View of the Anglo-Saxon Past*, edited by Martin Brett and David A. Woodman, 77-93 (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2015).

invasions of England that accommodated both the Christianity of Scandinavians and the growing animosity toward Muslims. Thus, narratives of invasion remained popular in English literature throughout the Middle Ages centuries after the northern pagan threat posed by Scandinavians had faded into history.

Understanding the motif of invasion offers us a lens for examining Anglo-Scandinavian relations during the ninth through eleventh centuries, a critical period in the development of concepts of English identity. Since the motif was regularly employed by secular and ecclesiastical authorities alike, careful analysis of iterations of the motif also helps us complicate the official narratives pushed by various powers. It reveals that while authorities tried to exploit ethnic and religious antagonism between English and Scandinavians at various points, they also had to negotiate the historical reality of growing Scandinavian cultural influence in England. Moreover, the motif also illustrates how literature produced before the Norman Conquest exerted significant influence on the vernacular literature that followed. Just as accounts of the Germanic invasions on Britain provided a precedent for the motif of pagan invasions that developed in response to Scandinavian incursions, this motif provided an archetype for non-Christian enemies that was applied to Muslims in the post-Crusade era. Invasions could be imagined in which Muslims reenacted the violence of heathen vikings in England. The ethnic and religious antagonism against the old foe was projected as racial and religious animosity against an imagined, more distant, and irredeemable enemy.

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## VITA

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### EDUCATION

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- Ph.D. English, Pennsylvania State University, 2022 (projected).
- M.A. Medieval Icelandic Studies, University of Iceland, 2014.  
*Thesis*: “The Dreams of a Bear: Animal Traditions in the Old Norse-Icelandic Context”  
*Honors*: First Class with Distinction
- B.A. English, Hunter College CUNY, 2013.  
*Honors*: English Departmental Honors

### PUBLICATIONS

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#### Articles

- “Confronting Whiteness: Antiracism in Medieval Studies,” *Postmedieval* 11.2, (2020): 493- 502.
- “Moulding One Another: Grettir and the Landscape.” In *What is North? Imagining the North from Ancient Times to the Present Day*, ed. Alexandra Sanmark. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols (2020): 95-111.
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#### Book Reviews

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