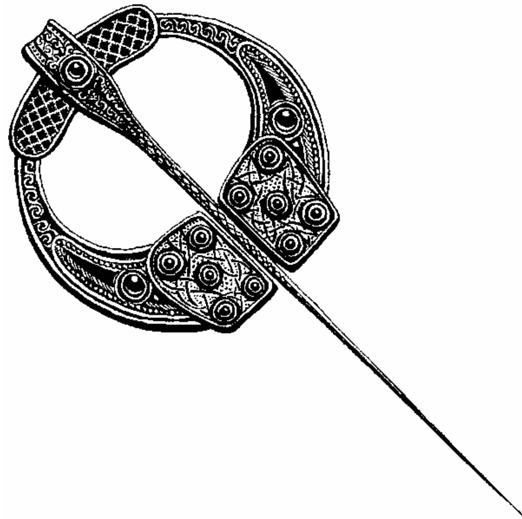
The Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic is a yearly spring conference organised by postgraduate students of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic at the University of Cambridge.
Information on the next Colloquium, including details of registration and submission of abstracts, may be found on the Colloquium's official website:
http://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/ccasnc/

Selected proceedings of the Colloquium are published annually in *Quaestio Insularis*. All enquiries and subscription requests should be directed either to the address found on the official website, or by email to:
quaestioinsularis@gmail.com



UAESTIO INSULARIS

Selected Proceedings of the Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic

Volume 24 · 2025

Articles Copyright © 2025 Individual Contributors
Editorial Copyright © 2025 Cambridge Colloquium
in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic

Published in the United Kingdom
in Cardo

ISSN 1745-8676
ISBN 978-1-909106-41-3

CONTENTS

Preface vii
Colloquium Report viii
Acknowledgements x

"Now What I want is Facts": Deconstructing and Reconstructing the Career of Archbishop Wulfstan II of York 1
Catherine Cubitt

When Queen Glede Became Glad – Accidental Fabrication or Deliberate Editorial Choice? 27
Piergiorgio Consagra

Fabricating History, Creating Facts: Critical Responses to *Lebor Gabála Érenn* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De Gestis Britonum* 38
Jenyth Evans

Adapting Parental Grief in Early Medieval England 66
Abigail Greaves

King Alfred and the Eighteenth-Century Mirror of Princes 88
Kirsten Ogilby

ABBREVIATIONS

ASE	*Anglo-Saxon England*
eDIL	*eDIL: Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*, edited by Gregory Toner, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, Sharon Arbuthnot, Marie-Luise Theuerkauf and Dagmar Wodtko (www.dil.ie, 2020)
EETS	The Early English Text Society
OEPF	*Old English Poetry in Facsimile 3.0*, ed. by Martin Foys, et al. (*Center for the History of Print and Digital Culture*, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2019)
ONP	ONP: *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog*, edited by Aldís Sigurðardóttir et al. (www.onp.ku.dk, 2016)

PREFACE

The Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic is proud to be associated *with Quaestio Insularis*, the journal of the annual Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic (CCASNC). The Colloquium and *Quaestio* were established in 1999 and 2000 by the department's lively postgraduate community, and successive generations of students have maintained the superb quality of both the event and its proceedings volume. The 2023 conference, on the theme of Facts and Fabrications, was another very successful event, all the more so because it was the first in-person Colloquium after the pandemic. Catherine Cubitt's keynote address on Archbishop Wulfstan II of York was as refreshing as it was rigorous in its candid examination of the epistemology of our field, and the papers published in this volume are equally sensitive to methodological issues, whether raised by the Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* or an eighteenth-century poem about King Alfred. As ever, these essays showcase the cross-disciplinary ethos which distinguishes CCASNC, combining research into the peoples and cultures of early medieval Northern Europe from literary, historical, linguistic and material perspectives. *Quaestio Insularis* 24 and all back numbers of the journal can be ordered directly from the Department's website (www.asnc.cam.ac.uk).

Professor Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, FSA, Head of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, University of Cambridge

COLLOQUIUM REPORT

The 24th Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic was held in person after two years online, and took place at the Faculty of English on Saturday 11 February 2023. We were pleased to invite Professor Emerita Catherine Cubitt from the University of East Anglia, who was our keynote speaker. The Colloquium featured a range of fascinating papers from nine different postgraduate students on the theme 'Facts & Fabrications', and we were delighted by the rich discussions that followed each paper.

We were grateful to the previous Colloquium's co-presidents, through whose efforts previous issues of the Colloquium's journal, Quaestio Insularis, have been digitised and are now freely available online at https://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/publications/quaestio/index.html.

Session I (*Chair: Alexandra Zhirnova*)
Pau Blanco Ríos, Reading Servius in the Early Medieval Period
Piergiorgio Consagra, *When Queen Glede Became Glad*: Accidental Fabrication or Deliberate Editorial Choice?
Abigail Greaves, Adapting Grief in Early Medieval England

Session II (*Chair: Davide Salmoiraghi*)
Jenyth Evans, Fabricating History, Creating Facts: Critical Responses to *Lebor Gabála Érenn* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De Gestis Britonum*
Eleanor Smith, Free Real Estate? Fremund's Family Tree in the Fourteenth Century
Ellen Gallimore, Ambiguity, Infidelity, and the Doctrine of the Eucharist: Ælfric's *Sermo de Sacrificio in Die Pascae* and Allegations of Norman Fabrication

Keynote Lecture (*Chair: Emily Clarke*)

Catherine Cubitt, "Now, What I Want Is Facts": Deconstructing and Reconstructing the Career of Archbishop Wulfstan II of York

Session III (*Chair: Nina Cnockaert-Guillou*)

Colin Fisher, Jens, Hans, Jakob and Sigurðr: Faroese Oral Literature, Factitious Heritage, and Medievalisms

Emmet de Barra, Facts and *Filíocht.* Poetry and the Creation of Historical 'Truth' in Early Modern Ireland

Kirsten Ogilby, Religious Medievalism in Frances Burney's *Edwy and Elgiva*

The members of the colloquium committee were Beatrice Bedogni, Emily Clarke, Nina Cnockaert-Guillou, Adele Kreager, Adrián Rodriguez Avila, Davide Salmoiraghi, and Alexandra Zhirnova.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Quaestio Insularis 24 was edited by Beatrice Bedogni, Emily Clarke, Nina Cnockaert-Guillou, Adele Kreager, Adrián Rodriguez Avila, Davide Salmoiraghi, and Alexandra Zhirnova. The editors wish to acknowledge the assistance of our anonymous peer reviewers. Editorial design is by Alistair Vining and the *Quaestio Insularis* logo was drawn by Katharine Scarfe Beckett. The production of this volume and the successful running of the conference have been made possible through the generosity of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic and the support of the Faculty of English.

“Now what I want is facts”: Deconstructing and Reconstructing the Career of Archbishop Wulfstan II of York

Prof. Catherine Cubitt
University of East Anglia

My title borrows from the words of Mr Gradgrind in Charles Dickens’s novel, *Hard Times*, whose educational system was designed to install into children only hard facts and figures and to suppress imagination, creativity and ‘fancy’.[1] One wonders how the study of the early Middle Ages would have fared in Mr Gradgrind’s schools as facts are all too often few and far between, and frequently conflicted and contestable. I speak as someone who spent the first couple of months of her doctoral study here at Cambridge trying to work out if the Council of Hertford met in the year 672 or 673, at a time when my peers researching modern topics were forging ahead working out which were the most productive archives for their research or what particular methodological approach they should take. The conference theme has inspired me to try and to think about how we as modern scholars build our arguments and construct own our narratives. The early Middle Ages constitute a particularly interesting place to consider these issues for a number of reasons – the rarity of facts, the importance of inference in the construction of history and the intersection with other disciplines and their methodologies.

An illuminating example here is Bede’s account of the conversion of the English in his *Historia ecclesiastica*. The complexity of Bede’s *Historia*, the significance of his pro-papal, Romanising and reformist agenda have long been recognised.[2] But it remains our most detailed resource for the history of seventh

[1] Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1854), ch. 1.
[2] *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969). For the seminal reassessment of Bede’s *History*, see James Campbell, ‘Bede I’ and ‘Bede II’, in his *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London: Hambledon Press, 1986), pp. 1–27 and 29–48. For a more recent overview see *The*

to eighth-century England, fundamental in providing both narrative, chronology and an interpretative framework. Archaeological discoveries have been seen to reinforce and illuminate Bede's narrative – the discovery of the Sutton Hoo ship burial cast into sharp focus the significance of the monk's description of the kingship of Raedwald, while the current excavations at Rendlesham are confirming and highlighting the power and prosperity of the East Anglian kingdom.[3] On the other hand, the publication in 2019 of the princely burial at Prittlewell, Essex, has delivered a substantial jolt to our acceptance of Bede's account of the role of the Gregorian mission in the English conversion. The burial – unlike that at Sutton Hoo – has unambiguous evidence of Christian belief, for example, in the placing of gold foil crosses on the body, probably over the eyes. Taking the assemblage as a whole, archaeologists have argued for a date in the 590s for the burial which predates the arrival of Augustine in Kent in 597 and the subsequent evangelisation of the East Saxon kingdom, challenging the primacy of Bede's story of the papal origins of the English conversion.[4]

This example highlights the precarious nature of 'facts' and historical interpretations in early medieval research. It raises questions about how we deal with historical texts and their representation of the past and exemplifies the constant need for the re-evaluation of historical knowledge in the light of new discoveries and approaches. One might infer from this radical challenge to Bede's authority and the reliance of historians upon it, that the product of historical

---

Cambridge Companion to Bede, ed. by Scott DeGregorio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[3] For Raedwald and Rendlesham, see Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, II. 5, 12, 15; III. 22, and Christopher Scull, Stuart Brookes and Tom Williamson, eds., *Lordship and Landscape in East Anglia AD 400–800: The Royal Centre and Rendlesham, Suffolk and its Contexts* (London: Society of Antiquaries, 2024). For Sutton Hoo, see James Campbell, 'The Impact of the Sutton Hoo Discovery on the Study of Anglo-Saxon History', in *Voyage to the Other World: the Legacy of Sutton Hoo*, ed. by Calvin B. Kendall and Peter S. Wells (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 79–101; M. Carver, 'Sutton Hoo', in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Michael Lapidge, John Blair, Simon Keynes and Donald Scragg, 2nd edn (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 448–50.

[4] Lyn Blackmore, Ian Blair, Sue Hirst and Christopher Scull, *The Prittlewell Princely Burial Excavations at Priory Crescent, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, 2003* (London: Museum of London Archaeology, 2019), esp. pp. 341–64.

research is unreliable, and that historians simply generate a 'set of arbitrary, competing representations of the past', to quote from the historian, Adrian Wilson. Wilson postulated something he called 'the historian's dilemma', that 'practical experience brings the conviction that historical knowledge is possible […] that the historian reconstructs (however incompletely and imperfectly) a past which actually happened', which he contrasts with the elusive nature of historical method and the lack of agreement amongst practitioners concerning it and their collective inability to respond adequately to the challenges of postmodernism.[5] While historians have proclaimed the virtues of their discipline – analytical rigour, clarity in terminology, and fidelity to the sources - there remain tough questions about how historians move from the evidence of the primary sources to historical knowledge. In his essay, Wilson sets out essential features of historical methodology – the willingness of historians to refine and modify their key concepts in the light of new interpretations and evidence, their awareness of the 'genealogy' of their ideas and approaches, their rootedness in past thinkers and times, and the complex and sophisticated methodologies they use in evaluating their sources, including the means by which these were generated, transmitted and preserved.[6]

Given the special challenges of writing history in a period where information is often scarce in the extreme and, where it exists, usually deeply fragmentary, where there are difficulties in verifying even the most basic of facts (see my puzzle over the date of the Council of Hertford), and where the textual sources are complex, it is easy to succumb to one of two temptations. The first is to practise a kind of negative positivism, to insist on the primacy of facts but to doubt and demolish every shred of evidence so that nothing positive or constructive can be said. James Campbell once described this as reducing the history of Anglo-Saxon England to that of the North Pole.[7] The second is to become locked into a kind of antiquarianism where, perhaps as Mr Gradgrind

[5] Adrian Wilson, 'Foundations of an Integrated Historiography', in *Rethinking Social History*, ed. by Adrian Wilson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 293–335 (quotations from pp. 293 and 294).

[6] Ibid.

[7] James Campbell, 'Some Considerations on Religion in Early England', paper given at the Institute of Historical Research in 2007.

would wish, all we can do is to assemble the evidence and set out the problems in its interpretation, but eschew narrative, explanation, and speculation.

Both these responses seem to me to be retreats from the work of a historian, which is to try to understand the past and explain the traces left in the form of texts, visual and material culture. Pondering my contribution to this conference, I found that my key question concerned not the reality of facts, difficult though this may be, but how I as a historian was able to connect shards of information to describe what had happened in the past, precisely that leap from evidence to knowledge.[8] How did I test my own historical narratives and explanations of events and sources and those of others? What is it that I actually do when I assess hypotheses and build historical arguments? This is not an easy question to answer and I was relieved to read the observation of an eminent philosopher, Peter Lipton, who when discussing inferential reasoning, used the analogy of riding a bike – you know how to do it but it is very difficult to describe.[9] I am by no means a philosopher of history and I wish I had had more time to devote to this, but in my quest to understand historical practice, I was most attracted to the philosophical idea of 'explanationism'. This looks at how well hypotheses explain the evidence, and particularly to the form refined by Peter Lipton which distinguishes between the 'likeliest explanation' and the 'loveliest explanation', where the likeliest explanation of the evidence is that which is most probably true and the loveliest that which provides the most understanding of the evidence.[10] This seemed to me to best fit how I worked as a historian.

My own case-study today is a fine example of the difficulties of historical reconstruction: the career of Archbishop Wulfstan II of York (d. 1023), a figure who now looms large in modern scholarship but who was little regarded until the groundbreaking work of Karl Jost and Dorothy Whitelock in the 1930s and

---

[8] See, for example, Mark Day, *The Philosophy of History: An Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), esp. pp. 16–49; Mark Day and Gregory Radick, 'Historiographic Evidence and Confirmation', in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography,* ed. by Aviezer Tucker (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 87–97.

[9] Peter Lipton, *Inference to Best Explanation*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

[10] Lipton, *Inference*, pp. 121–41.

40s.[11] Although occupying three of the most important sees in England in the tenth and eleventh centuries – London from 996, then Worcester from 1002 to 1016, and York from 1002 until his death in 1023 – Wulfstan is rarely mentioned in contemporary sources, but owes his current fame to the attribution of homilies, political tracts and a set of major lawcodes to his authorship. His highly distinctive literary style coupled with his occasional use of the *nom de plume*, *Lupus*, has led to the creation of a Wulfstan canon, the existence of which is now uncontested, even if the attribution of some individual texts is problematic. At the same time that the archbishop was being discovered as a writer, his connection to a number of contemporary manuscripts was also emerging, largely due to the definitive identification of his hand annotating and correcting them by Neil Ker in 1971.[12] Wulfstan does not become visible in the historical record until his appointment to the see of London in 996, when he begins to witness charters, and he can subsequently be identified in a handful of documents. Modern understanding of his career rests therefore largely on the evidence of his writings and the manuscripts associated with him.[13]

I am going to focus here on three aspects of Wulfstan's career to explore questions of how we as medievalists piece together our own scholarly accounts and to try to consider how we can test some of the assumptions underpinning them. I shall take three different texts as the starting points for my discussion. The first is the commemoration of Wulfstan in the twelfth-century *Liber eliensis*, which I shall use as a springboard to address the question of Wulfstan's family origins and religious training. The second is the Old English sermon, *De septiformi spiritu* (in Dorothy Bethurum's edition of his sermons), which opens up questions of how Wulfstan has been constructed as an author. And finally, a

[11] On the historiographical development of Wulfstan studies, see now Andrew Rabin, 'Scholars Come for the Archbishop: The Afterlife of Archbishop Wulfstan of York', *ASE*, 50 (2023, for 2021), 361–48.

[12] Neil Ker, 'The Handwriting of Archbishop Wulfstan', in *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock*, ed. by Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 315–31.

[13] For Wulfstan's biography, see Patrick Wormald, 'Wulfstan [Lupus] d. 1023' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <www-oxforddnb-com> [accessed 31 October 2024]; the essays in *Wulfstan of York*, ed. by Matthew Townend (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), and Rabin, 'Scholars'.

description of the relationship between the later archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm, and Henry I in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Pontificum*, which set the scene for consideration of the nature of Wulfstan's role in politics. I have tried to flag up methodological issues – how we assess and weigh up evidence, how modern scholarship can be a distorting lens on the past, and finally the evaluation of underlying assumptions and competing models of interpretation.

PATTERNS AND PROBABILITIES: WULFSTAN'S FAMILY BACKGROUND AND RELIGIOUS FORMATION

The question of Wulfstan's background and his religious formation is beset with uncertainties – where did his family roots lie? In the West or East Midlands? Was he a monk or did he train as cleric? An important testimony in this respect is the *Liber eliensis*, the twelfth-century chronicle from Ely, the house where the archbishop was buried. It describes how his body was transported from the place of his death at York to Ely, his chosen burial place, and records miracle-working at his tomb. Wulfstan is eulogised:

> vir optimus [....] bonis pollebat moribus. Primo monachus, deinde abbas, postremo beato Oswaldo Eboracensi archiepiscopo [...] Floruit autem temporibus Æðelreði, Ædmundi et Canuti regum Anglorum, quibus singulis eque amabatur ut frater, eque honorabatur ut pater, et ad maxima regni negotia, utpote doctissimus consiliarius, frequenter vocabatur, in quo ipsa Dei sapientia, quasi in quodam spirituali templo, loquebatur.[14]

[14] *Liber eliensis,* ed. by E. O. Blake, Camden 3rd Series (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1962), II. 87, 155–57 (p. 156): 'An excellent man, he became powerful on the basis of good morals. First monk, then abbot, he finally succeeded the blessed Oswald, Archbishop of York [....] And he was in his prime during the times of Æthelred, Edmund and Cnut, Kings of the English, by each of whom equally he was loved as a brother, equally, too, honoured like a father, and was frequently called upon in furtherance of the great affairs of the kingdom, as being the most learned of counsellors – someone in whom the very wisdom of God used to speak as it were in a spiritual temple [...]'. Trans. by Janet Fairweather, *Liber eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh Century to the Twelfth* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), II. 87 (p. 185). See also *The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus, A Monk of Peterborough*, ed. by W. T. Mellows (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 73, which also mentions Wulfstan's burial at Ely.

This unambiguously states that he was a monk and had been an abbot prior to his episcopal elevation.

In her 1942 Royal Historical Society lecture, Dorothy Whitelock was sceptical about the reliability of the *Liber eliensis*'s information, seeing it as 'biased by private considerations', by which I think she meant the desire to promote the bishop as a saint.[15] Ely's tradition, however, has real value – Wulfstan's association with the house is well-evidenced not only by his burial there but also in its record of the gifts he gave the house: a silver gilt processional cross and a chasuble.[16] Moreover, the brief summary of the pontiff's career accords remarkably well with what we now know of his role at the royal court through the identification of his authorship of lawcodes for Æthelred and Cnut. Wulfstan's earlier monastic career is also recalled by another post-Conquest historian, John of Worcester, who describes him as 'abbot' when noting his accession to York.[17]

Can we go further in testing these assertions by later medieval historians? There is, I think, confirmation of Wulfstan's status as a monk in a different type of evidence, that provided by patterns of kinship and monastic association pieced together from the historical record. These are also open to question, but they provide another way into the issue and one which derives from contemporary

[15] Dorothy Whitelock, 'Archbishop Wulfstan, Homilist and Statesman', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th series, 24 (1968), 42–60 (p. 42). It is likewise discounted by Andrew Rabin, 'Archbishop Wulfstan of York and the Danish Conquest of 1016', *English Historical Review*, 138 (2023), 1165–97 (p. 1165), and in his 'Scholars', p. 2.

[16] *Liber eliensis,* ed. by Blake, III. 50. For Wulfstan's burial and commemoration at Ely, see John Crook, 'Vir optimus Wlfstanus: The Post-Conquest Commemoration of Archbishop Wulfstan of York at Ely Cathedral', in *Wulfstan*, ed. by Townend, pp. 501–24; Katherine Weikert, 'Ely Cathedral and the Afterlife of Ealdorman Byrhtnoth', in *The Land of English Kin*, ed. by Alexander Langlands and Ryan Lavelle (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 554–81 should be used with care.

[17] *The Chronicle of John of Worcester Volume 2: The Annals from 450 to 1066*, ed. by R. R. Darlington and P. McGurk (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), s. a. 1024, r. 1002 (p. 452). William of Malmesbury disparages Wulfstan in comparison to his predecessor, Ealdwulf Archbishop of York, as 'qui sanctitate discrepabat et habitu', possibly a contrast between his predecessor's monastic vocation and his clerical one, but this interpretation is not sure; *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum: The History of the English Bishops*, Bk III. 11, ed. by Michael Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), I, p. 381. See Dorothy Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 57, n. 4.

patterns and not the possibly tendentious claims of accounts written a hundred or more years later. Tenurial sources preserved at Worcester indicate that he was related to two of his successors there, Bishop Brihtheah (1033–38) and St Wulfstan (1062–95).[18] The latter was probably Archbishop Wulfstan's maternal nephew, a possibility strengthened by the contemporary naming customs. In the tenth and eleventh centuries, continental sources demonstrate a pattern for a nephew to succeed his uncle as bishop of a particular see, with the nephew very commonly bearing the same name as his uncle.[19] The two Wulfstans, archbishop and saintly bishop, appear to be an example of this custom. Moreover, St Wulfstan as a youngster was sent to Peterborough for training (although he only became a monk subsequently), a connection shared – as we have seen – by the elder Wulfstan.[20] This shared link between the two Wulfstans and Peterborough raises the possibility that Archbishop Wulfstan had an early connection with the house and perhaps trained as a monk there. Family links therefore suggest that Archbishop Wulfstan belonged to a clerical dynasty perhaps straddling both the West and East Midlands. It is possible that his family connection to the archbishopric of York goes back to the first half of the tenth century, when the see was held by another Wulfstan (931–56), a prelate notorious for his wavering support for the West Saxon dynasty's control of York and the North.[21] Wulfstan therefore resembles St Oswald (d. 992), his predecessor as bishop of Worcester and archbishop of York, who was also a member of a clerical dynasty, the Anglo-Scandinavian family known to include Archbishops Oda of Canterbury (d. 958), Osketel of York (d. 971), and Abbot Thurketel of Bedford (d. c. 970).[22]

---

[18] Nicholas Brooks, 'Introduction: How do we know so much about St Wulfstan?', in *St Wulfstan and his World*, ed. by J. S. Barrow and N. P. Brooks (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 1–21 at pp. 18–20, and see n. 20 below.

[19] Julia Barrow, *The Clergy in the Medieval World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 122–25.

[20] These arguments are set out in full, in Catherine Cubitt, 'Personal Names, Identity and Family in Benedictine Reform England', in *Verwandtschaft, Name und soziale Ordnung (300–1000),* ed. by Steffan Patzold and Karl Ubl (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 223–42.

[21] As suggested by Rabin, 'Archbishop Wulfstan', p. 1173.

[22] For tenth- and eleventh-century ecclesiastical dynasties, see Barrow, *The Clergy*, pp. 128–29; Catherine Cubitt, 'Dissolving Kinship: Spiritual and Blood Kinship in Episcopal Appointments in the English Benedictine Reforms', *Journal of Medieval History* (forthcoming).

The family ties between Archbishop Wulfstan II of York, our homilist, and Bishop Wulfstan II of Worcester reinforce the likelihood of the archbishop's monastic training. But can we go further and find a way of refuting the notion that Wulfstan was a clerk, rather than a monk? I think that we can through looking at the pattern of episcopal appointments in the tenth and eleventh centuries. From the 970s through to the first half of the eleventh century, the heyday of monastic reform, Benedictine monks and abbots were regularly selected for promotion to the episcopate. The evidence is patchy, with the earlier careers of many bishops unrecorded, but, almost without exception, where the background of a bishop is known, it records that he was a monk, very often an abbot. This is true of the major sees of Worcester and York, where Wulfstan's predecessors were the Benedictine reformers St Oswald, and Ealdwulf (a former abbot of Peterborough). His successors at Worcester included Leofsige, former abbot of Thorney and Wulfstan's relative, Brihtheah who had been abbot of Pershore.[23] Wulfstan was promoted to London, one of the most important bishoprics in the kingdom, in 996, a period when the monastic reformers were in ascendancy at the king's court.[24] It is hard to imagine that so important a see, at such a politically charged moment, would have been conferred upon a cleric.[25]

Wulfstan's family and ecclesiastical connections have important implications for understanding both the archbishop and the contemporary church. They hint at the controlling interest over certain sees by significant kindred networks which manifested themselves in ecclesiastical dynasties. This pattern of family control intermeshed with the takeover of episcopal office by monastic reform, in which some bishoprics were virtually monopolized by particular monasteries. The best example here is the archbishopric of

---

[23] For Ealdwulf, see *Charters of Peterborough*, ed. by S. E. Kelly, Anglo-Saxon Charters, 14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2009), pp. 113–15. For Leofsige and Brihtheah, see *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, s. a. 1016, 1033 (pp. 497 and 519).

[24] For episcopal appointments in this period, see Catherine Cubitt, 'Abbots as a Human Resource in the English Benedictine Reforms', in *Abbots and Abbesses as a Human Resource in the Ninth- to Twelfth-Century West*, ed. by Steven Vanderputten (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2018), pp. 27–40; this point was also made by Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 57; Andrew Rabin, 'Wulfstan at London: Episcopal Politics in the Reign of Æthelred', *English Studies*, 97 (2016), 186–206.

[25] As noted by Bethurum, *Homilies,* p. 57.

Canterbury, which was dominated by former monks of Glastonbury from the accession of Dunstan in 959 to that of the royal priest, Eadsige in 1038.[26] The pattern of uncle-nephew succession where the two relatives bear the same name is not as well attested in the English evidence as it is in the continental, but the procession of successive bishops with same name at some sees should give us pause for thought.[27] Sherborne, for example, was held by three bishops of the name of Wulfsige, two in the tenth century, and by two bishops, each named Æthelsige and Brihtwine. Repeated names are also found in the succession at Winchester in the tenth and eleventh centuries.[28] Archbishop Wulfstan therefore may be placed in this context, where monastic and family networks overlapped to strengthen the position of the bishop and his kindred.

Exploration of Wulfstan's background sheds significant light on the monastic reform movement and transforms our understanding of him. Rather than seeing Wulfstan as an isolated figure, a conundrum, we can contextualise him within an elite cadre of monastic bishops who come to dominate the tenth- and eleventh-century church and who wielded considerable political influence through their place at royal assemblies and at court.

I want now to turn to how modern preconceptions about Wulfstan as a writer hinder a fuller sense of his pastoral and political activities, through its privileging of his authorship of vernacular works, particularly of sermons.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF WULFSTAN AS A LITERARY AUTHOR

Wulfstan's prominent position in the scholarship of pre-Conquest England rests very largely upon his role as a vernacular homilist. Dorothy Whitelock's 1942 Royal Historical Society lecture was entitled 'Archbishop Wulfstan *Homilist* and Statesman' (my emphasis).[29] The central place of his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* in the

---

[26] Cubitt, 'Abbots', pp. 34–35.

[27] Barrow, *The Clergy*, pp. 117–35 ; Régine Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir dans le monde franc (VIIe–Xe siècle)* (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 1995), pp. 216–17.

[28] See the episcopal lists in Simon Keynes, 'Archbishops and Bishops, 597–1066', in *Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, Appendix II (pp. 539–66). For further discussion, see Cubitt, 'Dissolving Kinship'.

[29] See above, n. 15.

teaching of Old English has been crucial in this.[30] Indeed, as a bravura exercise in Old English rhetoric, it is probably the best-known piece of Old English prose today. Some thirty homilies have now been identified as his compositions and these are part of a collection of texts which include lawcodes, ecclesiastical canons, and a treatise on political thought, the *Institutes of Polity*.[31] Andy Orchard described this range of writings as 'eclectic' and suggested that this might be one reason why Wulfstan's works have not been well-served by his editors.[32]

These editions are still, however, the gateway to Wulfstan as a writer, and influence how we perceive him. The standard edition of Wulfstan's sermons was published in 1957 by Dorothy Bethurum. It supplemented the volume published in 1853 by Arthur Napier, which presents bare texts, with no commentary, manuscript stemma or notes, these – promised in a second volume – never appeared.[33] Bethurum's 1957 edition does not supersede Napier's for many reasons, particularly her omission of some 15 sermons now regarded as authentic.[34] While Bethurum's work can be criticised for its faults in its editorial method and accuracy, she was a pioneering scholar whose work in many ways reflected the scholarly conventions of its day.[35]

---

[30] On Wulfstan's place in Old English studies, see Rabin, 'Scholars', pp. 28–29.

[31] Crucial contributions on the Wulfstan oeuvre, are Karl Jost, *Wulfstanstudien* (Bern: Francke, 1950); *Die "Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical": Ein Werk Erzbischof Wulfstans von York* (Bern: Francke, 1959); and the contributions by Dorothy Whitelock, gathered together in her collected papers, *History, Law and Literature in 10th–11th Century England* (London: Variorum, 1981). On this process, see Rabin, 'Scholars'.

[32] Andy Orchard, 'On Editing Wulfstan', in *Early Medieval Texts and Interpretations*, ed. by Elaine Treharne and Susan Rosser (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2003), pp. 311–40 (p. 312); 'Re-editing Wulfstan: Where's the Point?', in *Archbishop Wulfstan*, ed. by Townend, pp. 63–91.

[33] See Rabin, 'Scholars', p. 21.

[34] See the important study of Jonathan Wilcox, 'The Dissemination of Wulfstan's Homilies: The Wulfstan Tradition in Eleventh-Century Vernacular Preaching', in *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the 1990 Harlaxton Symposium,* ed. by Carola Hicks (Stamford: Watkins, 1992), pp. 199–217.

[35] *Homilies*, ed. by Bethurum; Wulfstan, *Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit*, ed. by Arthur Napier (Berlin: Weidmann, 1883; repr. Dublin/Zurich, 1967). For a summary of criticisms of Bethurum, see Orchard, 'Re-editing', pp. 64–65, and see the reviews of her edition by John Pope, *Modern Language Notes*, 74.4

My focus here is on how Bethurum's edition constructs Wulfstan as a homilist and its representation of his writings and their subject matter. It is now recognised that Wulfstan's compositions defy pigeonholing according to modern scholarly categories: in 1992, Lawson drew attention to the way in which the archbishop blurred the boundary between sermon and legislation, composing exhortatory lawcodes and sermons which consist of little more than a set of directives, and borrowing verbatim from his codes in his sermons and vice versa.[36] His constant recycling and rewriting of his own texts endows his oeuvre with great fluidity, with additions, excisions, fragmentation and multiple versions of individual texts.[37]

The unruly archbishop required a good deal of tidying up if his writings were presented as complete and bounded texts. Bethurum's task was therefore a difficult one, made more problematic still by the genre of the sermon or homily. Indeed, alarm bells start ringing very loudly when one discovers that Bethurum deliberately omitted from her edition texts, which in Napier are acknowledged to be authored by Wulfstan, because she did not consider them to be 'homilies', apparently because their content was largely borrowed from Wulfstan's lawcodes and other writings.[38] Bethurum's preconceptions of what a homily should be was presumably influenced by the figure of Wulfstan's contemporary, Ælfric of Eynsham. Ælfric's two series of *Catholic Homilies* were modelled upon Carolingian homiliaries such as those of Paul the Deacon, and designed to be read at mass or the night office, expounding the Gospel pericopes and ordered according to the liturgical year.[39] Wulfstan, however, rarely preached for a liturgical occasion and never, I think, explicated a pericope. Nor do his sermons really treat doctrinal and pastoral issues in the way in which Ælfric's do.

(1959), 333–40; Peter Clemoes, *Modern Language Review*, 54 (1959), 81–82. See the balanced and sympathetic assessment of her in Rabin, 'Scholars', pp. 29–30.

[36] M. K. Lawson, 'Archbishop Wulfstan and the Homiletic Element in the Laws of Æthelred II and Cnut', *English Historical Review*, 107 (1997), 565–86. On the fluidity of Wulfstan's works, see Andy Orchard, 'Crying Wolf: Oral Style and the "Sermones Lupi"', *ASE*, 21 (1992), 239–64 (pp. 256–58).

[37] On Wulfstan's recycling, see Orchard, 'On Editing', p. 313.

[38] *Homilies*, ed. by Bethurum, pp. 36–41.

[39] Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, EETS, Supplementary Series, 18 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for EETS, 2000), pp. xxi–xliv.

Bethurum organised her edition in a way which recasts them by assigning individual sermons to distinct categories:

- Eschatological Homilies
- The Christian Faith
- Archiepiscopal Functions
- Evil Days

This classification represents the archbishop's writings as falling into coherent and self-contained categories which neatly pattern our understanding of him as a Christian author.[40] In my reading of these headings, Wulfstan is presented as a preacher who was concerned to lay down the fundamentals of the Christian faith by a series of sermons on topics such as baptism, the Holy Spirit, the Creed and Christian belief and conduct.[41] This series of sermons is differentiated from those which arose from his role as an archbishop – with sermons on the Ash Wednesday and Maundy Thursday rites for public penitents, for example. Two other outlying categories gather his sermons in a suite of five eschatological texts concerning the End of the World and a set rather less transparently labelled 'Evil Days' which consists of the four versions of the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, with two other pieces of contemporary criticism and condemnation. These divisions artificially separate texts which overlap in subject matter and are often closely related. Bethurum's tidy labels both misrepresent the texts she edits and, to my mind, creates an interpretation of the archbishop as an author with a sense of consistent purpose, working his way through the fundamentals of the faith with the occasional excursus into contemporary affairs. These headings structure, whether consciously or unconsciously, our view of Wulfstan and his writings. They are echoed, for example, in the thematic divisions of Joyce Lionarons in her 2010 book, *The Homiletic Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan*, the chapter headings of which include 'Wulfstan's eschatology', 'Salvation History and

[40] *Homilies*, ed. by Bethurum, pp. 29–36.

[41] See the comments of Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 103: 'What Wulfstan apparently did in the early years of his incumbency was to compose homilies on the fundamentals of the Christian faith – on baptism, the creed, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the essentials of Christian life, an outline of the history as the church sees it, and the sins most likely to beset man [....]'.

Christianity', 'Wulfstan as Archbishop', 'Sacramental Sermons' and 'The Danish Invasions and *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*'. Lionarons expands the range to include 'Homilies based on legal codes and the *Institutes of Polity*' but four of her thematic divisions reflect Bethurum's.[42]

None of Bethurum's categories really works. The first of these – Wulfstan's eschatological homilies – is perhaps the most successful as the six sermons contained in it are a reasonably coherent group. The disadvantage is that by coralling these sermons into their own section, Bethurum obscured the extent to which a good number of Wulfstan's other sermons have a strong eschatological element, including the *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*.[43] And as I have argued elsewhere this has affected scholarly interpretations of Wulfstan's apocalyptic concerns, suggesting that they were confined to the years around 1000 when in fact Wulfstan's sense of the imminence of the End was pervasive and coloured his views across his career.[44] At the same time, Bethurum's division between 'Eschatological homilies' and her category of 'Evil Days' (effectively contemporary criticisms) obscures the extent to which three of the eschatological homilies comment on contemporary sins and crimes.[45]

The most problematic section is the second, 'The Christian Life', covering a confusing range of topics – three sermons in Latin and Old English on the rite of baptism, a translation of part of the *Institutio canonicorum Aquisgranensis*, and a set of biblical excerpts in Latin and Old English, for example.[46] The sermon which for me really highlights the misleading nature of Bethurum's apparatus is

[42] Joyce Tally Lionarons, *The Homiletic Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010).

[43] See Joyce Tally Lionarons, 'Napier Homily L: Wulfstan's Eschatology at the Close of his Career', in *Archbishop Wulfstan*, ed. by Townend, pp. 413–28; and *Homiletic Writings*, pp. 70–74.

[44] Catherine Cubitt, 'On Living in the Time of Tribulation: Archbishop Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* and its Eschatological Context', in *Writing, Kingship and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by Rory Naismith and David A. Woodman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 202–32.

[45] *Homilies*, ed. by Bethurum, nos. III, IV and V.

[46] *Homilies*, ed. by Bethurum, nos. VI–XII. Bethurum reports the source as Amalarius of Metz, to whom the *Institutio* was formerly attributed; Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 322. On this misattribution, see Jerome Bertram, *The Chrodegang Rules* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 93–94. I am very grateful to Lene ten Haaf for her help on this attribution.

the *De septiformi spiritu*. This is a short sermon which rewrites an original Old English text by Ælfric.[47] Its subject – the gifts of the Holy Spirit and their opposing vices, the counter-gifts instigated by the devil where God's good gifts are absent – seemingly makes it a natural choice for Bethurum's category of spiritual teaching. She placed it alongside the sermons on baptism because it mentions in its opening paragraphs the episcopal rite of confirmation. But Wulfstan's interest in this text is not with episcopal confirmation, which is only mentioned in passing, nor even with the gifts of the Spirit. No, it is the counter-gifts of the devil which really gets Wulfstan going, elaborating Ælfric's treatment by intensifying and expanding upon his comments on the evils which the devil sows in place of spiritual gifts and how these are all the worse because they counterfeit virtue. This sham exercise of virtue, where sinners pretend to be wise, leads Wulfstan to single out the wickedness of hypocrisy and to denounce it as the work of Antichrist, the archdeceiver. What is even more interesting is that Wulfstan declares this wicked, hypocritical behaviour as characteristic of his own day, when men pretend to be wise but speak other than they think.[48]

The polemic against contemporary deceit in the *De septiformi spiritu* aligns it with two other sermons which make similar denunciations – 'On Evil Rulers', filed by Bethurum under 'Evil Days', and with Napier L, which also warns of Antichrist and the End of the World (which Bethurum omitted).[49] The mislabelling of the *De septiformi spiritu* not only has led it to be overlooked as a political critique; its interesting proximity to Napier L has also been little discussed. The latter was composed early in the reign of Cnut and should

[47] *Homilies*, ed. by Bethurum, no. IX, and see now edition of Ælfric's sermon in *Ælfrician Homilies and Varia Editions, Translations, and Commentary*, ed. by Aaron J. Kleist and Robert K. Upchurch, 2 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 2022), II, no. 16 (pp. 808–26). See also Lionarons, *Homiletic Writings,* pp. 71, 130–32, 147 and 159.

[48] For discussion of this sermon, see Catherine Cubitt, 'Ostriches, Spiders' Webs and Antichrist: Hypocrisy in Writings of Pope Gregory the Great and Archbishop Wulfstan II of York', *Studies in Church History*, 60 (2024), 64–90, at 80–88.

[49] *Homilies*, ed. by Bethurum, no. XXI, translated with commentary by Andrew Rabin, *The Political Writings of Archbishop Wulfstan of York* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), no. III. 2 (pp. 177–79). See also Orchard, 'On Editing', on Bethurum's faulty edition.

probably be associated with the 1018 code.[50] Its denunciations of devious counsel and practice at the court of Æthelred are similar to the accusations of present-day vice in *De septiformi spiritu* and in 'Evil Rulers'. One might suggest therefore that while the *De septiformi spiritu* and 'Evil Rulers' belong to the reign of Æthelred, and Napier L to Cnut's, they were not composed many years apart.[51]

Bethurum's framework of pastoral and theological headings obscures the extent to which the texts she prints represent Wulfstan's response to contemporary issues, both political and ecclesiastical. The three sets of Latin and Old English biblical excerpts, distributed under the heading of 'The Christian Faith', 'Archiepiscopal Functions' and 'Evil Days' all contain passages directly relevant to Wulfstan's present day anxieties. Her divisions in fact disguise the extent to which Wulfstan's sermons and writings were written in direct response to the present and address current evils. They also conceal Wulfstan's strong interest in the liturgy and his composition of sermons about it as instruction and tools for the clergy and for other bishops.[52] The three sermons on baptism, for example, are actually close descriptions of the rite of baptism supplemented by only a small amount of explicatory commentary.[53] The two Lenten sermons, on the first Sunday in Lent and on Maundy Thursday, should be associated too with Wulfstan's collection of liturgical texts for public penance and for Maundy

---

[50] Wulfstan, *Sammlung*, ed. by Napier, no. L (pp. 266–74); see Rabin, *Political Writings*, no. II. 6 (pp. 143–58), given the title 'On Justice, Virtue, and the Law'. For dating, see *Homilies,* ed. by Bethurum, p. 40; Lionarons, *Homiletic Writings*, p. 175; Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 335–56; and, Sara M. Pons-Sanz, *Norse-Derived Vocabulary in Late Old English Texts: Wulfstan's Works, a Case Study* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2007), p. 25.

[51] For dating, see Patrick Wormald, 'Archbishop Wulfstan: Eleventh-Century State-Builder', in *Wulfstan*, ed. by Townend, pp. 9–27 (p. 26).

[52] On Wulfstan's liturgical interests, see Christopher A. Jones, 'Two Composite Texts from Archbishop Wulfstan's "Commonplace Book"', *ASE*, 27 (1998), 233–71; 'A Liturgical Miscellany in Cambridge Corpus Christi College 190', *Traditio*, 54 (1999), 103–40; 'The Chrism Mass in Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Liturgy of the Late Anglo-Saxon Church*, ed. by Helen Gittos and M. Bradford Bedingfield (London: Henry Bradshaw Society, 2005), pp. 105–42; 'Wulfstan's Liturgical Interests', in *Archbishop Wulfstan*, ed. by Townend, pp. 325–52. For Wulfstan's pontifical, see Richard W. Pfaff, *The Liturgical Books of Anglo-Saxon England* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute at Western Michigan University, 1995), pp. 91–92, and Wormald, *Making*, 190–95.

[53] *Homilies*, ed. by Bethurum, nos. VIIIa, b and c.

Thursday.[54] The Latin source for the Maundy Thursday sermon, a sermon by Abbo of Saint-Germain-des-Pres, is found in three manuscripts associated with Wulfstan in association with penitential and liturgical texts.[55] The intimate connections between Wulfstan's two vernacular sermons for public penance and his collections of Latin texts highlights how the emphasis on Wulfstan as a vernacular author distorts our perspective. Many of the texts printed by Bethurum draw heavily on Latin sources, especially on those which the archbishop gathered together in his manuscript collections.[56] Divorcing the Old English texts from this wider context enabled Bethurum to create a corpus of homilies, but one which obscured their original context as pieces in a much larger process of assembling educational, exhortatory and pastoral texts in both Latin and Old English, both for Wulfstan's own use as a bishop and for the work of priests and other bishops. He drew heavily on Carolingian texts by authors such as Theodulf of Orléans and Amalarius of Metz. The primacy of the genre of homilies has intensified the same problem, not only isolating and foregrounding only one aspect of Wulfstan's enterprise, but also shoehorning a very diverse series of texts into one genre. At the same time, the focus on the archbishop as a vernacular author failed to do justice to his compositions in Latin: it is only recently that the work of Tom Hall has demonstrated the number and significance of his Latin sermons.[57]

To be sure, Wulfstan was the author of sermons, both Old English and Latin, but is the label of 'homilist' really a useful one?[58] Rather than speaking of

---

[54] *Homilies,* ed. by Bethurum, nos. XIV and XV.

[55] Copenhagen Kongelige Bibliothek. G. K. S. 1595, Cambridge Corpus Christi College, MS 190 and London, British Library, Cotton Ms Nero A 1. See J. E. Cross and Alan Brown, 'Literary Impetus for Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi*', *Leeds Studies in English*, 20 (1989), 271–91; C. Cubitt, *Sin and Sociey in Tenth- and Eleventh- Century England* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming); Sam Holmes, 'Archbishop Wulfstan, his Manuscripts and the Texts within Them: A Study of Codicologically Independent Booklets in Eleventh-Century Episcopal Manuscripts' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia, 2023), pp. 151–266.

[56] For example, J. E. Cross and Alan Brown, 'Wulfstan and Abbo at St-German-des-Près', *Medievalia*, 15 (1993 for 1989), 71–91.

[57] T. N. Hall, 'Wulfstan's Latin Sermons', in *Archbishop Wulfstan*, ed. by Townend, pp. 93–139.

[58] As noted by Renée Trilling, 'Sovereignty and Social Order: Archbishop Wulfstan and the *Institutes of Polity*', in *The Bishop Reformed: Studies of Episcopal Power and Culture in the Central*

him as 'homilist and statesman', should we not simply describe him as 'bishop' or 'archbishop'? His composition of sermons was only one aspect of his busy life, compiling, excerpting, composing and translating texts for use in his dual ministry of preaching and teaching, which reached out to the whole church, clergy and bishops, and to the laity. Wulfstan's composition and collection of texts in both Latin and Old English is a highly important aspect in this regard. These bilingual activities were driven by his role as a bishop, as a preacher to be sure, but also as a figure with disciplinary and instructional responsibilities over priests and laity, and as an archbishop over other bishops. His manuscripts show him collecting Carolingian Latin texts, for example, Maundy Thursday liturgies and sermons which could be passed on to other bishops, expositions of the liturgy and regulatory texts on the clerical life presumably for use with his diocesan clergy.[59] These also stimulated the production of educational, disciplinary and exhortatory texts in Old English, again for use amongst the clergy and for the laity.[60] Wulfstan's utilisation of both Latin and the vernacular to accomplish his episcopal duties was innovatory. He is surely the first recorded bishop to do so, and certainly on such a large scale. His importance is not simply that he was a high-flying vernacular stylist but that he promoted the vernacular as a medium for instruction and discipline within the church in many different fora, for both the laity, clergy and for his fellow bishops.

Middle Ages, ed. by John S. Ott and Anna Trumbore Jones (Aldershot: Routledge, 2007), pp. 58–85 (p. 62).

[59] Christopher A. Jones, 'The Book of the Liturgy in Anglo-Saxon England', *Speculum*, 73 (1998), 659–702; 'Two Composite Texts from Archbishop Wulfstan's "Commonplace Book": The *De ecclesiastica consuetudine* and *Institutio beati Amalarii de ecclesiasticis officiis*', *ASE*, 27 (1999), 233–71; 'A Liturgical Miscellany in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 190', *Traditio*, 54 (1999), 103–40; 'Wulfstan's Liturgical Interests', in *Archbishop Wulfstan*, ed. by Townend, pp. 325–52. And see my *Sin and Society* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

[60] On Wulfstan as educator, see Sarah Hamilton, 'The Good Shepherd: Wulfstan's Efforts to Educate his Clergy', in *Wulfstan II: An Archbishop and his World*, ed. by Catherine Cubitt and Andrew Rabin (Woodbridge: Brewer, forthcoming).

WULFSTAN THE BISHOP IN POLITICS

We should therefore view Wulfstan as a bishop – but what sort of a bishop was he? This question underpins our interpretation of his political role and problematises the assumptions we bring to the interpretation of his career. The *Liber eliensis* described his relationship to kings Æthelred, Edmund and Cnut as loving and familial – he was loved as a brother and honoured as a father.[61] This image of close and harmonious collaboration is one echoed in the scholarly literature. Historians, with some rare exceptions, have tended to see Wulfstan's collaborations with Æthelred and Cnut as positive partnerships. Wulfstan is seen as Æthelred's righthand man, responsible for enacting a programme of moral reform for the kingdom with the king's support and authority.[62] The nature of his relationship with Cnut has attracted little analysis and he tends to be seen as providing vital continuity because of his continued authorship of lawcodes. He was clearly a trusted counsellor, acting as a royal deputy in his northern diocese.[63] Bethurum, for example, implies that Wulfstan acted as a kind of guiding mentor for Cnut, 'the brilliant young barbarian'.[64] Andrew Rabin is one of the few scholars to subject their relationship to scrutiny and he argues for tensions between the two, with Cnut enjoying the upper hand.[65]

Idealised depictions of kings and bishops working together in unity for the Christian welfare of the kingdom go back a long way; Bede's depiction of the cooperation of kings and bishops in the conversion is just a way station in this tradition. Reality was, of course, more complex and had become increasingly so, particularly after major changes in the episcopal ideology in the ninth century. The reign of the Emperor Louis the Pious represents a watershed, not only in the role of the episcopate in the emperor's public penance of 833 but also

---

[61] See above, n. 14.

[62] See, for example, Levi Roach, *Æthelred the Unready* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), p. 234, on the Enham code. Rabin, 'Archbishop Wulfstan', problematises the relationship between Cnut and Wulfstan and argues for a more complex relationship.

[63] Rabin, 'Archbishop Wulfstan'.

[64] Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 63. See also, Timothy Bolton, *The Empire of Cnut the Great* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 83–84.

[65] Rabin, 'Archbishop Wulfstan'.

changes in ideas about the ministry of both kings and bishops.[66] The importance of royal and episcopal collaboration in safeguarding the Christian welfare of the kingdom was emphasized in 829 at the Council of Paris which also assigned a superior role to bishops because they answered to God for the conduct of kings.[67] The identity of the episcopate as an order became more pronounced, as a group holding office directly from God and answerable to him alone. At the same time, the king's role was increasingly defined by his own Christian ministry and by the obligation to govern in accordance with the Church's teaching, a development which enhanced the role of the bishop in government. The position of bishops as kingmakers through their role in royal consecrations also became more prominent. These ideas influenced Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims who argued for the jurisdiction of bishops over kings but stopped short of claiming that bishops could depose them. Rather he pointed to the great responsibility of both, and the threat of divine punishment for their sins and for those of their subjects.[68]

Wulfstan's debts to Carolingian thinking are deep: he drew upon not only the disciplinary and instructional texts of eighth- and ninth-century continental writers but also upon capitularies and conciliar *acta* which showed kings working with bishops in grand ecclesiastical councils to promote reform.[69] Hincmar of Rheims, indeed, makes an interesting comparison with Wulfstan – both had strong legal interests, in canon law and in secular law highlighting the importance of law and justice for kings, both were prolific authors and keen collectors of texts, and both held prominent political positions.[70] So in thinking

---

[66] Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814–840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[67] Steffen Patzold, *Episcopus Wissen über Bischöfe im Frankenreich des späten 8. Bis frühen 10. Jahrhunderts* (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2008), esp. 120–68.

[68] Janet L. Nelson, 'Kingship, Law and Liturgy in the Political Thought of Hincmar of Rheims', *English Historical Review*, 92 (1977), 241–79.

[69] Catherine Cubitt, 'Refashioning Episcopal Authority: Continental Influence on the Episcopacy of Archbishop Wulfstan II of York", in *Continental Connections: Britain and Europe in the Long Tenth Century,* ed. by Levi Roach and David A. Woodman (Woodbridge: Boydell, forthcoming).

[70] For Hincmar, see *Hincmar of Rheims Life and Work*, ed. by Rachel Stone and Charles West (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

about Wulfstan's relationship to Æthelred and Cnut we might think of an independent-minded bishop who saw himself as the member of an episcopal order whose role was to safeguard the Christian community and Church and to take an active stance in advising and admonishing the king over his exercise of royal authority.

There are difficulties in seeing Wulfstan as Æthelred's righthand man – the speed with which Wulfstan transferred his allegiance to Æthelred's foreigner invader, Cnut, fits uneasily with a view of him as a faithful supporter of the vanquished king. Perhaps odder still is the passing over of Æthelred's lawcodes in those drafted by Wulfstan for Cnut. The lawcodes of 1018 and 1020/1021 were designed to protect the legal rights of the English under their new ruler but, rather than harking back to Æthelred as the reference point for English law, they very pointedly overlook him and affirm the laws of his father, King Edgar.[71] Cnut himself presented the laws of Edgar as legally authoritative in his letter of 1019 × 1020 to the English leaders, requiring that 'eal þeodscype, gehadode 7 læwede, fæstlice Eadgares lage healde, þe ealle men habbað gecoren 7 to gesworen on Oxenaforda'.[72] The omission of Æthelred's law is particularly odd given that Wulfstan himself had authored so much of it and that in drafting the great twin lawcodes of 1020/1021, he reproduces much of his earlier, Æthelredian legislation. One explanation for this oversight is that the former king's laws were being framed as invalid, the acts of a delegitimised ruler. As I have argued elsewhere, there is good evidence that Æthelred was regarded as an abusive ruler whose exercise of power overrode the rights and freedoms of the English.[73]

[71] Nicole Marafioti, 'The Legacy of King Edgar in the Laws of Archbishop Wulfstan', in *Remembering the Medieval Present: Generative Uses of England's Pre-Conquest Past, 10th to 15th Centuries,* ed. by J. P. Gates and Brian T. O' Camb (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 21–50.
[72] Letter of Cnut to the people of England, in *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church I A. D. 871–1204*, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, Martin Brett and C. N. L. Brooke, 2 vols (Oxford, 1981) I, 433–41, c. 13 (p. 439): 'all the nation, ecclesiastical and lay, shall steadfastly observe Edgar's law, which all men have chosen and sworn to at Oxford'.
[73] Catherine Cubitt, 'Reassessing the Reign of King Æthelred the Unready', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 42 (2020), 1–28.

In reconstructing Wulfstan's political involvement, it also matters how royal authority is viewed. To what extent did Æthelred and Cnut need the archbishop's support? Did his articulation of Christian teaching, for example, on the divinely-ordained nature of kingship or the obligation of loyalty shore up their regimes at moments of need? Æthelred's reign was destabilised by Viking attacks from the 990s which called into question his exercise of his Christian office.[74] After the disastrous defeat of the English at the Battle of Maldon in 991, the king was forced in 993 to make a public statement of penance, expressing remorse for his earlier conduct in allowing ecclesiastical land to be alienated to his magnates.[75] His renewed authority was predicated upon the support of the Church and particularly the monastic reform party, bishops and abbots, who could convey the vital message that the king was the ruler chosen by God, and once anointed could not be removed.

How then should we see the archbishop's collaboration with Æthelred? One possible model lies in continental comparisons, particularly with Archbishop Hincmar, a close supporter of Charles the Bald, but one who, after the king's death, wrote an account describing the fate of the king in the afterlife, gnawed by worms because of his failure to follow Hincmar's advice.[76] His example is particularly interesting given his strong interests in both secular and canon law. A possible alternative interpretative model lies in William of Malmesbury's description of a later archbishop of Canterbury's support for King Henry I (1068/9–1135) at a time when the king's grasp of his kingdom was under threat from his brother. William (following Eadmer's *Historia novorum*) describes how Archbishop Anselm supported Henry by preaching against treachery and by reminding his magnates of the need for fidelity. In turn, Henry promised to pass good laws.

---

[74] Cubitt, 'Reassessing the Reign'; Levi Roach, *Æthelred the Unready*.

[75] Catherine Cubitt, 'The Politics of Remorse: Penance and Royal Piety in the Reign of King Æthelred the Unready', *Historical Research*, 85 (2012), 179–92; Levi Roach, 'Penitential Discourse in the Diplomas of King Æthelred "the Unready"', *Journal of Ecclesiastical Hist*ory, 64 (2013), 258–76.

[76] Paul E. Dutton, *The Politics of Dreaming in the Carolingian Empire* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), pp. 183–93.

> Rex ipse regno timens, uitae parum fidens, in Anselmum solum inclinari. Ipsi omnia secreta credere, bonas leges iureiurando promittere. Sepe aduentu suo et procerum maxime suspectorum curiam ei facere, ut eos a perfidia sermonibus suis archiepiscopus exterret. Quod ille non nesciens, ita de fide disserebat et perfidia, per occasiones et quasi delonge petita materia [...].[77]

This is a suggestive image for the relations between Wulfstan and both Æthelred and Cnut – Wulfstan famously condemned the treachery and bad faith of the English in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, and his *Institutes of Polity* reminded both kings and leaders that royal authority was God-given.[78]

Cnut's reign is usually seen after the extreme turbulence of Æthelred as a period of stable government, with the king's accession secured by conquest.[79]

[77] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Pontificum Anglorum,* I. c. 55. 11 (pp. 170–71): 'The king, afraid for his kingdom and not sanguine for his life, could lean only on Anselm. He let him into all his secrets, and swore to pass good laws. Often he paid court to him by coming to see him in company with his most suspect magnates, so that the archbishop could by what he said to them scare them out of their disloyalty. Anselm was well aware of what the king wanted, and lectured them on faith and treachery, making the most of every opportunity and coming at the point indirectly'. See Ryan Kemp, 'Advising the King: Kingship, Bishops and Saints in the Works of William of Malmesbury', in *Discovering William of Malmesbury,* ed. by Rodney M. Thomson, Emily Dolmans and Emily A. Winker (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2017), pp. 65–79. See *Eadmeri Historia Novorum*, ed. by Martin Rule, Rolls Series, 81 (London: Longman, 1884), pp. 126–27; trans. by Geoffrey Bosanquet, in *Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England* (London: Cresset, 1964), pp. 132–33. On Anselm's political abilities and motivation, see Charles Warren Hollister, *Henry I* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 136–38. See also, Sally N. Vaughn, *Anselm of Bec and Robert of Meulan: The Innocence of the Dove and the Wisdom of the Serpent* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), with the critique by Richard Southern and her response in the same edition: Sally N. Vaughn, 'Anselm: Saint and Statesman', *Albion*, 20 (1988), 181–204 and 205–20. See also, Sally N. Vaughn, 'Henry I and the English Church: The Archbishops and the King', *Haskins Society Journal*, 17 (2006), 132–57 (esp. 133–44).

[78] *Homilies*, ed. by Bethurum, no. XX, pp 261–66 (e.g. p. 263). Karl Jost, *Die "Institutes"*, translated in Rabin, *Political Writings*, no. I. 7, pp. 101–24. See Rabin, 'Archbishop Wulfstan', on the change in tone towards kingship in Wulfstan's writings after 1016.

[79] See, for example, Frank M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 397–402; Ryan Lavelle, *Cnut the North Sea King* (London: Penguin, 2017), p. 26: 'a surprising smooth transition to power'; and the comment of Simon Keynes, 'Cnut's Earls', in *The Reign of Cnut King of England, Denmark and Norway*, ed. by Alexander Rumble (London: Leicester University Press, 1994), pp. 43–88 (p. 87): 'For their part the English are seen as a

The Danish ruler was able to suppress rebellion against his rule in Scandinavia and maintain the union of the kingdoms together during his lifetime.[80] Force of arms did not, however, smooth the way to the throne: Cnut gained power only after a series of hard-fought struggles. Although the campaigns of his father, Swein, had resulted in the expulsion of Æthelred and his own accession, on his death the English choose to restore Æthelred as king, necessitating further military action by Cnut. Even after the defeat of Æthelred's son, Edmund, at the Battle of *Assandun* in 1016, he did not become sole ruler, but instead the kingdom was divided between the two men. It was only the unexpected death of Edmund later that year which enabled him to seize the whole kingdom.[81]

English resistance was therefore strong, and Cnut's seizure of the English throne hard won. Such a troubled path raises the question of his legitimacy as ruler. Cnut may have overrun England through his leadership of an army of Vikings, drawn from all over Scandinavia and perhaps largely made up of pagans, but he had to rule his newly-won kingdom as a Christian king. It was one thing to gain a kingdom by conquest and another to secure it for yourself and your dynasty as legitimate Christian rulers. We know that in 1066, the second conquest of England by an overseas ruler, William the Conqueror had gone to great lengths to demonstrate his claim to be rightful king of England.[82] While

---

people who had grown tired of the disruption and oppression experienced during the latter years of Æthelred's reign, and who were ready to give their loyalty to the Danish conqueror in the interests of peace, justice and the Anglo-Saxon way'. And see below n. 84.

[80] M. K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the early eleventh century* (Harlow: Longman, 1993), esp. 9–48; Bolton, *Empire*; see too the detailed survey of Keynes, 'Cnut's Earls', pp. 43–88.

[81] Lawson, *Cnut*, pp. 82–89. And see the arguments of Katharin Mack, 'Changing Thegns: Cnut's Conquest and the English Aristocracy', *Albion*, 16 (1984), 375–84, for major upheavals, the replacement of the leading English thegns at court by Cnut's own men, and disruptions in land holding and the inheritance of property. The changes at court and in governance are tracked in more detail by Keynes, 'Cnut's Earls'.

[82] David Bates, *William the Conqueror* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), pp. 212–30 and 251–57; George Garnett, 'Coronation and Propaganda: Some Implications of the Norman Claim to the Throne of England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 36 (1986), 91–116. And see Elisabeth Van Houts, 'Cnut and William: A Comparison', in *Conquests in Eleventh-Century England: 1016, 1066*, ed. by Laura Ashe and Emily J. Ward (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2020), pp. 65–84.

religious and intellectual thought had moved on in the fifty years between Cnut's invasion and William's, the Conqueror's actions can still alert us to serious contemporary doubts about the legitimacy of invasion and conquest as the means to the throne. Moreover, Cnut not only lacked any claim to the throne but also faced the significant hurdle that, before his conquest, propaganda by Ælfric had been vociferous in rallying the English to arms by depicting the struggle as one against a pagan enemy, referencing the biblical battles of the Israelites.[83] It was imperative therefore that Cnut presented himself as a lawful Christian ruler, governing by the grace of God and by the consent of the English.

We should ask what part Wulfstan, as one of the two archbishops, the religious leaders of the English church, played in Cnut's transition from conqueror to lawful king.[84] It was he who consecrated Cnut's foundation at *Assandun*, the church built as a penitential gesture.[85] He played a prominent role in brokering the settlement between the English leaders and Cnut at Oxford in 1018, drafting the new code in which the English council pledged themselves to 'cnut cyngc . lufian. mid rihtan. 7 mid trywðan and 7 eadgares lagan. geornlice folgian'.[86] Cnut, as we have seen, references the English sworn allegiance to these laws in his 1019×1020 letter. On a minimalist interpretation, Wulfstan had found a way to safeguard English rights and laws by harking back to those of Æthelred's father and conveniently forgetting the son. A maximalist view would suggest that the archbishop may have done more – by eradicating Æthelred from the record, by omitting his laws and reign, he painted the king as an unjust ruler

[83] Mary Clayton, 'Ælfric's *Judith*: Manipulative or Manipulated?', *ASE*, 23 (1994), 215–27.
[84] For a different approach, also emphasizing tense rather than harmonious relations, see Rabin, 'Archbishop Wulfstan', p. 1182, n. 78, for scholarly emphasis on collaboration. The *locus classicus* for harmonious relations between the two, see Bethurum, *Homilies*, pp. 63–64. See also, Patrick Wormald, 'Archbishop Wulfstan: Eleventh-Century State-Builder', in *Wulfstan*, ed. by Townend, pp. 9–25 (pp. 19–24).
[85] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* s. a. 1020, in *English Historical Documents: Volume I c. 500–1042*, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, 2nd edn (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979); *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition Volume 5 MS. C,* ed. by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001). See also, Van Houts, 'Cnut and William', pp. 67–70.
[86] A. G. Kennedy, 'Cnut's lawcode of 1018', *ASE*, 11 (1983), 57–81, c. 1 (p. 72): 'love King Cnut with due loyalty, and zealously observe the laws of King Edgar'.

whose authority was vitiated by his failings and wrongdoings. He pathed the way for Cnut to be regarded as a rightful ruler, one ordained by God in his punishment of the sins of the English, who was re-establishing the proper order of the kingdom and replacing a ruler who had become a tyrant.

So here I have presented two competing hypotheses concerning Wulfstan's political role. The first that Wulfstan's collaborations with Æthelred and Cnut were founded on close and trusted relationships. The second emphasizes the tensions in these relationships, as the kings sought to strengthen their authority through the support of the archbishop, while the latter used this situation to put forward his own agenda for the kingdom. This brings me back to my mention of the explanationist theory – both hypotheses explain the evidence, but to my mind, it is the second which provides the fullest and most satisfying explanation of it.

This lecture had a twin purpose – to present new ways of thinking about the episcopacy and career of Archbishop Wulfstan by re-examining the evidence and its interpretation in modern scholarship. My argument has been perhaps an unsurprising one, that Wulfstan is best understood not as a homilist or statesman, as Whitelock described him, but as a bishop, one schooled in the Carolingian thought with a strong sense of his responsibility for the Christian kingdom and one with a significant power base of his own, founded in his family networks and in the ideological resources of Benedictine reform. I have tried to highlight the methodological issues in each of my three areas and to think about how we as historians test and arrange our facts not to fabricate but to explain historical data and uncover past events.

When Queen Glede became Glad – Accidental Fabrication or Deliberate Editorial Choice?

Piergiorgio Consagra
Háskóli Íslands

INTRODUCTION

Fornaldarsögur, also known as legendary sagas, constitute a literary genre that, after having been extremely popular and eagerly read by Icelanders during and after the Middle Ages – as manuscripts from these periods clearly witness –, has been somewhat dismissed by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars, who perceived them as cultural products of mediocre value. Since the second half of the twentieth century, however, *fornaldarsögur* have received renewed interest, and scholars have started to examine them in detail. Besides three anthologies focused on this literary genre, which were published during the first decades of the twenty-first century,[1] *Íslenzk Fornrit*, the editor responsible for scholarly editions of medieval Icelandic texts, is currently working on a new edition of legendary sagas – the last edition having been published by Guðni Jónsson in the 1950s.

Many *fornaldarsögur* have received considerable attention by scholars, although the same cannot be said about all of them: some legendary sagas have hitherto not yet been examined in detail. In some cases, the harsh judgement from previous scholarship still lingers, as in the case of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*. For example, Finnur Jónsson wrote the following about this saga: 'In principle, nothing but a pile of any possible trope [of legendary sagas], wars and battles on

[1] Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney, eds., *Fornaldarsagornas: Struktur och Ideologi* (Uppsala: Swedish Science Press, 2003); Agneta Ney, Ármann Jakobsson and Annette Lassen, eds., *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og Virkelighet* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2009); Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney and Ármann Jakobsson, eds., *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development* (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012).

land and at sea, fight for winning a king's daughter, slaughter of berserks, use of witchcraft and so on',[2] adding that it is 'overall, one of the most worthless [of legendary sagas]'.[3] Similarly, Margareth Schlauch defined it as 'fantastic and incoherent',[4] and, at present, only a few scholars, such as Ferrari and Lethbridge, have considered it to be a significant literary witness worth of being examined closer.[5] I have myself worked extensively on this saga by making a digital edition of the text based on the oldest parchment manuscript which contains it in its entirety, Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, AM 152 fol.[6] While working on it, I had the chance to appreciate this largely underestimated work of medieval Icelandic literature, although the editing process has often turned out to be more problematic than one could anticipate.

THE FAMILY OF HÁLOGI IN CHAPTER I OF *ÞORSTEINS SAGA VÍKINGSSONAR*

Chapter I of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* as it appears in editions of *fornaldarsögur* opens by introducing a series of legendary characters who lived in Scandinavia in a pseudo-historical time:

> Þat er upphaf þessarar sögu, at Logi hefir konungr heitit. Hann réð fyrir því landi, er norðr er af Noregi. Logi var stærri ok sterkari en nokkurr annarr í því landi. Var lengt nafn hans, ok var kallaðr Hálogi. Af honum tók landit nafn ok var kallat Hálogaland [...] Hann átti Glöð,

[2] Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, 3 vols, 2nd edn (Copenhagen: Gad, 1901), II, p. 817: '[I] grunden ikke andet end en ustanselig ophobning af alle mulige motiver, krigstog og kampe til lands og vands, strid om en kongedatter, bersærkedrab, trolddomskunster osv'. All translations are my own.

[3] Ibid.: 'I det hele en af de værdiløseste'.

[4] Margaret Schlauch, *Romance in Iceland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1934), p. 37.

[5] Fulvio Ferrari, 'La *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* e la questione dei generi', *Studi Nordici*, 1 (1994), 11–23; Emily Lethbridge, 'The Place of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* in *Eggertsbók*, a Late Medieval Icelandic Saga-Book', in *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, ed. by Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney and Ármann Jakobsson (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012), pp. 375–403.

[6] Piergiorgio Consagra, '*Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* in AM 152 fol.; An analysis and edition', Unpublished MA thesis, University of Iceland, 2022.

> dóttur Gríms ór Grímsgörðum [...] Hálogi konungr átti tvær dætr við Glöð drottningu sinni. Hét önnur Eisa, en önnur Eimyrja. Þær váru fríðari meyjar en nokkurar aðrar í því landi. Þær áttu til þess kyn, svá var faðir þeira ok móðir. En sakir þess, at eldr ok ljós birtir þar, sem áðr er myrkt, tóku þessir hlutir nafn af fyrrgreindu fólki.[7]

It can be observed that, at the beginning of the saga, the reader is introduced to a family of characters whose names are mainly nouns that in Old Icelandic indicate phenomena linked to the semantic sphere of fire, namely *logi* ('flame'), *eisa* ('glowing embers'), and *eimyrja* ('embers'). One of them, however, does not seem to conform to this pattern: *glöð*. It is an inflected form of the Old Icelandic adjective 'glaðr' in its feminine, nominative, singular, strong form, and it is usually translated into English as 'glad' or, more rarely, it can also be interpreted as 'shining'.[8] It seems clear that the queen's name diverges considerably from the connection to the element of fire shared by the other members of her family and

---

[7] *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 3 vols (Reykjavík: Forni, 1943–44), pp. 1–2: 'It is the beginning of this saga, that a king was named Logi ['flame']. He ruled that country which is north of Norway. Logi was larger and stronger than any other man in that country. His name was lengthened and was called Hálogi ['high flame']. After him the country was named Hálogaland ['land of high flame'] [...] He had as his wife Glöð ['glad'], daughter of Grímr of Grímsgarðar [...] King Hálogi and his wife, Queen Glöð, had two daughters. One was named Eisa ['glowing embers'] and the other Eimyrja ['embers']. These maidens were the fairest in the land. They were of the same nature as their father and mother. And it is for this reason that fire and light illuminate those places where before it was dark, that these things were named after the above-mentioned people'.

[8] See s. v. 'glaðr', in *ONP* <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o27327> [accessed 13 October 2023]. It should be clarified here that, although tempting, the translation of *glaðr* as 'shining' is not to be intended as 'gleaming' or 'sparkling' as one might imagine fire does. As in cognates in other Germanic languages, Old Icelandic *glaðr* can be interpreted as something that shines by reflecting light, not does not shine by its own light, such as ice or glass does; see, for example, the adjective *glatt* in German, Norwegian, and Swedish or its Latin cognate *glaber*, which can all be translated as 'smooth'. For further etymological details, see Ferdinand Holthausen, *Vergleichendes und etymologisches Wörterbuch der Altwestnordischen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1948), p. 87; Alexander Jóhannesson, *Isländisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1956), pp. 376–77; Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch, Zweite verbesserte Auflage* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), p. 171; and Frank Heidermanns, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der germanischen Primäradjektive* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), pp. 244–45.

that, as a consequence, it clashes with the last sentence about the family of Hálogi reported above, where it is said that natural phenomena related to fire and light were named after these legendary characters. The question that arises is thus how the queen's name fits into this thematic framework and whether older sources can reveal anything relevant about the matter. In order to find an explanation to this, it is firstly necessary to take a closer look at the manuscripts preserving this saga.

THE OLDEST MANUSCRIPTS CONTAINING *ÞORSTEINS SAGA VÍKINGSSONAR*

The oldest surviving medieval Icelandic manuscripts of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* are:

- Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, AM 567 XXIV 4to, dated to the fifteenth century, which consists of only five folia;
- Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, AM 579 4to, dated around the second half of the fifteenth century, which contains parts of the saga with a large lacuna in the middle of the text;
- Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, AM 556 b 4to, dated to the last quarter of the fifteenth century, which contains almost the entire text of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, except for a lacuna of two folia;
- Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, AM 152 fol., dated around the first quarter of the sixteenth century, which is the oldest manuscript containing *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* in its entirety.[9]

Although most of these codices do not witness the complete saga, all of them contain the first chapter that shows the passage reported above. By examining the instances where the queen is mentioned, it is possible to observe that no manuscript spells her name as *Glöð*:

[9] For an overview of all the manuscripts of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, both in parchment and paper, see Consagra, '*Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*', pp. 13–18.

AM 567 XXIV 4to	**AM 579 4to**	**AM 556 b 4to**	**AM 152 fol.**
fol. 1^{r}5: <glod>	fol. 7^{v}5: <glod>	fol. 35^{r}29: <glod>	fol. 116^{r}b8: <glod>
fol. 1^{r}14: <glod>	fol. 7^{v}12: <glod>	fol. 35^{r}39: <glod>	fol. 116^{r}b21: <glod>

All occurrences of the name never feature the letter *ö* or any other vowel used to represent the corresponding phoneme in medieval Icelandic manuscripts, such as *ǫ*, *ỏ*, *ø*, *au* or *av* but only a simple *o*. The absolute regularity of all the instances observed here therefore strongly suggests that the name should not be interpreted as *Glöð*, rather as *Glóð*.[10] Not only would the consistent spelling adopted by the oldest manuscripts support this, but this reading would find further corroboration by looking at the meaning of the Old Norse-Icelandic noun 'glóð', which means 'glede', 'embers'.[11] In this way, the queen's name would also match with the identity of the legendary family of Hálogi, so that each of its members' name is linked to the semantic sphere of fire. Furthermore, in light of this interpretation, the sentence reported above ('[e]n sakir þess, at eldr ok ljós birtir þar, sem áðr er myrkt, tóku þessir hlutir nafn af fyrrgreindu fólki') would ultimately make sense.

It can be thus inferred that the name of this character was originally intended to be *Glóð*, and that, considering the evidence provided by the manuscripts listed above, this must have been clear to medieval Icelandic scribes. The question that rose previously will now change thus: if the queen's name originally fitted into the saga's thematic framework in its older sources, what happened afterwards? Something must have occurred at a later stage for the name to be interpreted as *Glöð* instead of *Glóð*. In order to address this, it will be

[10] Difference in vowel length, here between *o* and *ó*, is rarely represented consistently in medieval Icelandic manuscripts in general. This is even more true for late-medieval witnesses, as it is the case here. As for the letter *ð*, it must be kept in mind that it had fallen into disuse in a period prior to the writing of the codices mentioned above, which spell both *d* and *ð* indiscriminately as *d*.

[11] See s. v. 'glóð', in *ONP* < https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?o27574> [accessed 13 October 2023]. For further etymological details, see Holthausen, *Wörterbuch der Altwestnordischen*, p. 89; Alexander Jóhannesson, *Isländisches Wörterbuch*, pp. 375–76; and de Vries, *Altnordisches Wörterbuch*, p. 175.

necessary to move from the medieval Icelandic manuscripts of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* to the first works where the saga was edited and published.

ÞORSTEINS SAGA VÍKINGSSONAR IN PRINTED EDITIONS

The first printed witness of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* dates to the end of the seventeenth century – some two centuries after the oldest manuscripts mentioned above – in an edition published by Jacob Isthmén Reenhielm.[12] In his work, the Swedish antiquarian prints the saga in two parallel versions: the original Old Icelandic and a Swedish translation. In the first chapter, it is possible to notice that the queen's name is reported as *Glod* in the Old Icelandic text and as *Glöd* in Swedish.[13] This would suggest that the queen's fiery identity was still clear to a Swedish editor from the late seventeenth century, who would correctly spell her name as *Glod*, corresponding to *glóð* in Old Icelandic, and translate it with its Swedish cognate *glöd*. However, although the edition refers to a manuscript,[14] no information is provided by the author concerning the handwritten sources he has used for the Old Icelandic text. After this appearance in the late seventeenth century, *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* would appear again in print during the second decade of the nineteenth century.[15]

[12] *Thorstens Viikings-Sons Saga, på gammal Göthska, af ett åldrigt Manuscripto afskrefwen och uthsatt på wårt nu wanlige språk, sampt medh några nödige anteckningar förbettrad af J. I. R.*, ed. by Jacob Isthmén Reenhielm (Uppsala: Excudit Henricus Curio, 1680).

[13] It should be underlined here that, while the queen's name is mentioned twice in the Old Icelandic text, the Swedish translation only reports it in the first instance, whereas it leaves it out in the second one, so that the form *Glöd* is actually attested only once in the whole text: Reenhielm, *Thorstens Viikings-Sons Saga*, pp. 1–2.

[14] Cf. the title of Reenhielm's work: '[A]*f ett åldrigt Manuscripto afskrefwen*' ('[T]ranscribed from an old manuscript').

[15] This is true except for another seventeenth-century Swedish edition: Olof Rudbeck (ed.), *Sagan af Þosteine Wijkings Syne: hæc est Torstani, Wiikingi filii historia* (Uppsala: Excudit Henricus Curio, 1697). Rudbeck's edition offers the original text in Old Icelandic with a parallel Latin translation. In both texts, the queen's name is spelled regularly as *Glod*, so that no translation into Latin is provided. However, both the Old Icelandic and the Latin text employ the letter *o* for the phoneme corresponding to *ö*, so it is not possible to determine whether the editor intended to spell it as *Glóð* or *Glöð*. For this reason, I deemed it unnecessary to take this edition into account in the present investigation.

The second relevant work in need of scrutiny when it comes to printed editions of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* is the one by Peter Erasmus Müller. In his *Sagabibliothek*, published in three volumes between 1817 and 1820, the Danish historian provided summaries of sagas in Danish.[16] While this may fall short of present-day standards of scholarly editions, Müller's work nevertheless represents an important milestone concerning publications of medieval Icelandic literature in general, and especially for *fornaldarsögur*.[17] For the purposes of the present investigation, it is relevant to notice that in the summary of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, Müller offers a translation in brackets of three of the characters' names from the first chapter that were mentioned above: Logi is translated as *Lue* ('flame'), Eisa as *Kul* ('coal'), and Eimyrja as *Emmer* ('embers').[18] It is possible to observe that, conversely, no translation is provided for the queen's name, which is simply reported as *Gløđ*. The Danish noun 'gløđ' would indeed be the cognate of Old Icelandic *glóð*, and would therefore require no translation. But why then did Müller not report its original form with the Danish translation in brackets as it was done with the other names (i.e., 'Dronning Glod (Gløđ)')? It is reasonable to suggest as an explanation the fact that the two words are very similar in Danish and in Old Icelandic, but it can only be speculative to assume how aware of it Müller was when he made this editorial choice. Furthermore, he does not provide any information concerning the manuscripts on which his summaries are based upon, which makes it impossible to assess the matter definitively.

The third edition where *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* appeared in print is *Nordiske Fortids Sagaer*, published by Carl Christian Rafn between 1829 and 1830, where the author offers a large group of legendary sagas in Danish

---

[16] Peter Erasmus Müller, *Sagabibliothek med Anmærkninger og indledende Afhandlinger*, 3 vols (Copenhagen: I. F. Schultz, 1817–20).

[17] For a detailed discussion concerning the first printed editions of *fornaldarsögur*, see Philip Lavender, 'The Secret Prehistory of the *Fornaldarsögur*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 114.4 (2015), 526–51.

[18] Müller, *Sagabibliothek*, II, p. 589: 'Kong Loge (Lue), der gav Halogeland ſit Navn, og var gift med Dronning Gløđ, negtede at give ſine Døtre Eyſa, (Kul) Eymyrja, (Emmer) til tvende tappre Jarler, Veſete og Vifil'.

translation.[19] In the first chapter of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, Rafn reports the name of King Hálogi's wife and queen as *Gløð*,[20] in a similar way to what had been done by Müller some ten years earlier. It is important to note that this is the first edition where the author accounts for the manuscripts he has used for his translation.[21]

Lastly, the fourth printed edition from the nineteenth century examined for the present investigation is the one also published by Carl Christian Rafn in the same years (between 1829 and 1830),[22] which is considered to be the edition *par excellence* of the whole corpus of *fornaldarsögur* in Old Icelandic. Rafn's work is the first one to provide a label for the genre, *Fornaldarsögur Nordrlanda*, which is otherwise never used elsewhere before, neither in manuscripts nor in print. All subsequent editions of legendary sagas, such as the one edited by Valdimar Ásmundarson towards the end of the nineteenth century, or the most recent ones from the first half of the twentieth century by Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, are predominantly based on Rafn's influential work. When one looks at the beginning of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* in these editions, it is possible to observe that they all regularly report the queen's name as *Glöð*.[23] It can be safely assumed that the responsibility of this reading is to be ascribed exclusively to Rafn, and that later editors accepted his interpretation without questioning it. As opposed to the missing account of manuscripts by previous editors, however, Rafn provides a thorough account of the manuscripts he has used for editing the saga: (A) is AM 152 fol., (B) is AM 579 4to, (C) is AM 556 b 4to, and (D) is 567

---

[19] *Nordiske Fortids Sagaer*, ed. by Christian Carl Rafn, 3 vols (Copenhagen: Popp, 1829–30).

[20] Cf. *Nordiske Fortids Sagaer*, ed. Rafn, II, pp. 311–12. It should be noted that, conversely, the other characters' names (Haloge, Eisa and Eimyrja) are not translated.

[21] Cf. *Nordiske Fortids Sagaer*, ed. Rafn, I, p. xxiii.

[22] *Fornaldar Sögur Nordrlanda eptir gömlum handritum*, 3 vols (Copenhagen: Popp, 1829–30).

[23] Cf. *Fornaldar Sögur Nordrlanda*, ed. by Rafn, II, pp. 383–84; *Fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda*, ed. by Valdimar Ásmundarson, 4 vols (Reykjavík: Sigm. Guðmundsson, 1885–86), II, pp. 55–56; *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, 4 vols (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1950), II, pp. 185–86; *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, III, pp. 1–2.

XXIV 4to.[24] Interestingly, all these codices are the ones which were mentioned earlier in this article, as they are the saga's oldest witnesses. This notwithstanding, Rafn's reading of the queen's name in Old Icelandic is *Glöð*, which contrasts with what was argued above, i.e., that it should be interpreted as *Glóð*.

To summarise, the overview of printed editions of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* provided here suggests that, while the spelling of the queen's name seems to have been clear to a Swedish editor from the late seventeenth century, the same cannot be maintained with certainty about Danish editors from the nineteenth century. Reenhielm correctly reported it as *Glod* in Old Icelandic and provided a correct translation of it, whereas both Müller and Rafn reported the queen's name as *Glød* in their Danish translations without providing its original spelling. Then, Rafn employed the spelling *Glöð* in his Old Icelandic edition, which was inherited by later works featuring legendary sagas, leading ultimately to the inconsistency that was highlighted above: an oversight that has survived until today. Therefore, the question that was posed at the beginning of this article has once again transformed, and will ring thus: Why did Rafn change the queen's name from *Glóð* to *Glöð*? Was it a deliberate choice or was he unaware that by doing so this character would no longer fit into the thematic framework of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*? For one last time, it will be necessary to direct the gaze elsewhere in order to find an answer to this question.

WHY GLAD AND NOT GLEDE?

Before attempting to draw any conclusions, it will be necessary to state three facts that can be inferred from what has been said so far.

First, the members of King Hálogi' and Queen Glóð's family are not among the main characters of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*. Quite the opposite, they can be considered marginal characters, who are only mentioned a few times at the beginning of the saga and who do not reappear ever again. Second, given the evidence provided by the oldest parchment manuscripts containing *Þorsteins*

[24] Cf. *Fornaldar Sögur Nordrlanda*, ed. by Rafn, II, pp. xiii–xiv. The manuscripts on which Rafn's Danish translation of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* is based are the same ones he used for the Old Icelandic edition. Cf. footnote 21.

saga Víkingssonar, it is possible to maintain that the queen's name, despite being a minor character, was clearly understood in medieval Iceland, as scribes spelled her name in a form closer to *Glóð* than *Glöð*. The same can be said about late seventeenth-century Sweden, where her name in Old Icelandic was correctly spelled as *Glod* and translated as *Glöd* into Swedish. Third, the misunderstanding about the queen's name that one can still find in present-day editions of legendary sagas is to be ascribed to Carl Christian Rafn, as the spelling *Glöð* in Old Icelandic appears for the first time in his edition of the text.

In order to better understand how this might have happened, it is necessary to look at the equivalent forms of Old Icelandic *glóð* in modern Scandinavian languages, i.e., Swedish *glöd* and Danish *glød*. Should one take into account the close resemblance between Old Icelandic *glóð* and Danish *glød*, together with the fact that editions from the nineteenth century are not free from mistakes and misreadings, it is not unlikely that the queen's name spelled as *Glöð* is nothing but an oversight on both Müller' and Rafn's part. If they had interpreted it correctly as *Glóð*, the former would have provided its original form together with a Danish translation in brackets, and the latter would have provided its original form in both of his editions. When one considers all the evidence presented above, this is the most plausible explanation for this accidental fabrication. While it is not possible to know it for sure, it might well be that the queen's fiery identity was clear in the mind of editors such as Müller and Rafn, who simply reported her name in its Danish form, ignoring that this could have a completely different meaning in Old Icelandic. After all, Rafn likely worked on his Danish translation and his Old Icelandic edition simultaneously, between 1829 and 1830. This, together with the marginality of the character, could well explain this oversight.

CONCLUSIONS

Towards the end of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, in chapter XXII, Þorsteinn meets a character named Brennir of Brennieyjar, who reveals himself to be the son of Eimyrja and Vífill, and thus brother of Víkingr and uncle to the eponymous hero of the saga, Þorsteinn. This character's name could be translated as 'burner',

which is closely related to the Old Icelandic verb *brenna* ('to burn'). An attentive reader or listener might well remember that, in the first chapter of the same saga, a family of legendary characters were introduced, whose members were all linked to the semantic sphere of fire (Hálogi, Glóð, Eisa, and Eimyrja). These happen to be the ancestors of Brennir. Therefore, for how much Queen Glóð might be considered a minor character, it can be clearly observed that her family's identity is part of the core structure of the whole saga, ultimately linking one of the last chapters of its plot to the first one, providing a circular structure where beginning and end are closely linked one to the other by a fine thread. This suggests that the anonymous author of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* deliberately provided said characters with an identity closely linked to the element of fire, embedding a thematic framework inside their work that could be observed by an attentive audience able to follow these well-hidden hints. The identity of Queen Glóð, which should have been obvious to a scribe – and perhaps even to an audience – of medieval Iceland, eventually ended up being slightly altered by Danish editors of the nineteenth century: an accidental fabrication that would have been inherited by later editions of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* in Old Icelandic and that has survived until nowadays.

Mistakes and misreadings are not uncommon in editions from the past centuries, a time when editorial practices were quite different if compared to present-day standards. While relying on these previous works might be undoubtedly useful for new editions, one must be vigilant and refer to them cautiously and critically. Such oversights, for how small they can be, can ultimately compromise the original meaning of a text and alter it, as I have argued in this article, which I hope will contribute to the future edition of *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* by *Íslenzk Fornrit*, showing how Queen Glede (*Glóð*) has become Glad (*Glöð*).

Fabricating History, Creating Facts: Critical Responses to *Lebor Gabála Érenn* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De Gestis Britonum*

Jenyth Evans
University of Oxford

INTRODUCTION

At the close of the twelfth century, William of Newburgh (d. c. 1198) wrote a history of England, entitled the *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*. The prologue to this text begins with a praise of Bede (672/3–735), one of his most respected exemplars, and Gildas (*fl.* sixth century). However, this praise quickly descended into a well-known diatribe against Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1095–c. 1155), since William believed Geoffrey to have directly contradicted the authority of Bede. Geoffrey had finished his *De Gestis Britonum* (hereon *DGB*) earlier in the twelfth century, and it had begun to circulate between 1123 to 1139.[1] Geoffrey claimed it was not his own original work, but a translation of a 'Britannici sermonis librum uetustissimum'.[2] However, it is clear, both now and to some of Geoffrey's contemporaneous readers, that the *DGB* was overwhelmingly his own composition.[3] Given the length of William's prologue, one small extract will have to summarise the tone of his criticisms of the *DGB*:

[1] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *De Gestis Brittonum*, ed. by Michael Reeve, trans. by Neil Wright, in *The History of the Kings of Britain: An Edition and Translation of* De Gestis Britonum (Historia Regum Britanniae) (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), p. vii.

[2] *De Gestis Britonum* 2, ed. by Reeve, trans. by Wright, pp. 4–5: 'A very old book in the British language'.

[3] Simon Meecham-Jones, 'Early Reactions to Geoffrey's Work', in *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. by Joshua Byron Smith and Georgia Henley (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 181–208 (pp. 185–86). On Geoffrey's source material, see, for example, Neil Wright, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and Bede', *Arthurian Literature*, 6 (1986), 27–59; Neil Wright, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and Gildas', *Arthurian Literature*, 2 (1982), 1–40; Ben Guy, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth's Welsh Sources', in *Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, pp. 31–66.

> At contra quidam nostris temporibus pro expiandis his Britonum maculis scriptor emersit ridicula de eisdem figmenta contexens, eosque longe supra virtutem Macedonum et Romanorum impudenti vanitate attolens. Gaufridus hic dictus est agnomen habens Arturi, pro eo quod fabulas de Arturo ex priscis Britonum figmentis sumptas et ex proprio auctas per superductum Latini sermonis colorem honesto historiae nomine palliavit.[4]

This prologue has been well-trodden ground in previous scholarship: although William's criticism has been lauded for its uniqueness – in the words of Michael Staunton, 'bringing a distinctly un-medieval eye to English history' – it nonetheless demonstrates that Geoffrey's work was open to critical appraisal soon after it began circulating.[5]

Roughly fifty years before Geoffrey's work began to circulate, the earliest recension of *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (hereon *LGÉ*) was being collated by medieval Irish redactors. These authors were engaged in a similar project to Geoffrey: namely, they composed a comprehensive account of Irish prehistory. In contrast to the *DGB*, *LGÉ* was multi-authored. Multiple redactors collected together various disparate stories and traditions, written across hundreds of years, into its

[4] William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum* 3, ed. by P. G. Walsh and M. J. Kennedy, in *The History of English Affairs* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1988), pp. 28–29: 'But in our own day a writer of the opposite tendency [to Gildas and Bede] has emerged. To atone for these faults of the Britons he weaves a laughable web of fiction about them, with shameless vainglory extolling them far above the virtue of the Macedonians and the Romans. This man is called Geoffrey and bears the soubriquet Arthur, because he has taken up the stories about Arthur from the old fictitious accounts of the Britons, has added to them himself, and by embellishing them in the Latin tongue he has cloaked them with the honourable title of history'.

[5] Michael Staunton, *The Historians of Angevin England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 82. On William's prologue, see, for example, Antonia Gransden, 'Bede's Reputation as an Historian in Medieval England', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 32.4 (1981), 397–425 (pp. 414–19); Siân Echard, '"Hic Est Artur": Reading Latin and Reading Arthur', in *New Directions in Arthurian Studies*, ed. by Alan Lupack (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002), pp. 49–68 (pp. 52 and 58); Matthew Fisher, *Scribal Authorship and the Writing of History in Medieval England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012), p. 89.

narrative.[6] Some of this material was perhaps as old as the seventh century: one major source – an extensive poem by Máel Muru of Othan (d. 887), entitled *Can a mbunadus na nGáedel?* ('Whence the origin of the Gaels?') – was composed in the ninth century.[7] Four distinct medieval versions of the text survive today, labelled as Recensions 1, Míniugud, 2 and 3, in order of rough chronological composition.[8] *LGÉ* provides a history of Ireland, beginning with an epitome of the Book of Genesis before tracing six successive invasions of the island, ending with the invasion of the Gaels: *LGÉ* maintained that this group were the eponymous ancestors of the native Irish of the compilers' own day. This match in narrative breadth to *DGB* has led to comparisons between both texts: extensive studies which have included *LGÉ* and *DGB*, however, have tended to focus on comparing their source material, rather than putting both texts into conversation directly.[9] One important distinction between the two texts, however, is that *LGÉ* was not met with the same ire with which William received the *DGB*. The same disbelief expressed by William could have been addressed to multiple events in *LGÉ*: for example, the Gaels encounter sirens (creatures labelled as 'murdúchu', meaning literally a 'sea-singer') on their journey across the Mediterranean to Ireland;[10] or, in a story unique to Recension

[6] John Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend: Synthetic Pseudohistory*, Quiggin Pamphlets on the Sources of Mediaeval Gaelic History, 1 (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, University of Cambridge, 1994).

[7] On the oldest sources, see Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, pp. 9–10; Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'Origin Legends in Ireland and Celtic Britain', in *Origin Legends in Early Medieval Western Europe*, ed. by Lindy Brady and Patrick Wadden (Leiden: Brill, 2022), pp. 46–74, esp. p. 47 on Máel Muru.

[8] Richard Mark Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions of the Lebor Gabála', in *Lebor Gabála Érenn: Textual History and Pseudohistory*, ed. by John Carey (London: Irish Texts Society, 2009), pp. 1–20; Richard Mark Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* - Part I: The Growth of the Text', *Ériu*, 38 (1987), 81–142. More detail about the recensions will be given below.

[9] One brief comparison is in Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, pp. 23–24. Extensive comparative studies of earlier insular pseudohistorical material include Charles-Edwards, 'Origin Legends'; Lindy Brady, *The Origin Legends of Early Medieval Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); it should be noted Brady includes the *DGB* in her study, but as a later reworking of the earlier material, and not in direct comparison to *LGÉ*, on pp. 188–94.

[10] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 112, 130 and 154, ed. and trans. by Robert Alexander Stewart Macalister, Irish Texts Society, 35, 5 vols (Dublin: Irish Texts Society, 1939), II, pp. 18–19, 40–43 and 68–

2, the Tuatha Dé Danann encounter Athenian necromancers who raise an army of the dead.[11] Yet, no such critic emerged in a medieval Irish context.

This paper, therefore, will explore some reasons why *LGÉ* escaped this kind of criticism. In order to contextualise this question, I will first review a wider range of criticisms and critical readings attached to both *LGÉ* and *DGB*: these offer different perspectives as to how medieval readers understood these texts, beyond William of Newburgh's prologue. These responses lie somewhere between William's outright criticism, and wholesale belief in the texts: they questioned and criticised these texts not in a manner which attempted to undermine its overall authority, but which instead addressed specific issues. By correcting or flagging such issues, I will argue that the authors of such comments aimed to reinforce the texts' overall historical authority. Having established the nuance of such readings, I will spend some time considering whether *LGÉ* escaped such criticism because it was written in a vernacular language, not Latin, since this was such an important distinction for William of Newburgh. The final part of this paper will then examine one opportunity where an Irish scribe had the chance to respond to *LGÉ* in a similar manner to William, but chose not to. I will argue that the previously examined comments accrued to *LGÉ* are useful in understanding why the Irish scribe made such a choice, and, overall, I will use these case-studies to underscore the sophistication of reader responses to both texts.

CRITICAL RESPONSES TO BOTH TEXTS

In this section, I will consider internal comments accrued to Welsh translations of *DGB* – a collection of texts known under the title *Brut y Brenhinedd*, hereon referred to as *ByB* – as responses to *DGB*'s historicity.[12] This approach is inspired

71; see also John Carey, '*Lebar Gabála*: Recension I' (unpublished PhD thesis, Harvard University, 1983), pp. 86 and 240. I will explain in more detail below which editions of *LGÉ* I am using in this paper.

[11] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 321–22, ed. by Macalister, IV, pp. 138–41.

[12] For an overview of the *ByB* textual tradition, see Patrick Sims-Williams, *Rhai Addasiadau Cymraeg Canol o Sieffre o Fynwy* (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru, 2011).

by the work of Georgia Henley – who has argued persuasively that the *ByB* texts demonstrate a sophisticated and lively engagement with the Latin text of Geoffrey's work – and Nia Wyn Jones, who had already examined many of the below quotes as evidence of the medieval Welsh reception of the *DGB*.[13] I will examine passages from three versions of the *ByB* text: namely, the 'Peniarth 44' and 'Llanstephan 1' versions, which were both in circulation by the mid-thirteenth century;[14] and the 'Dingestow' version, which was written later in the thirteenth century.[15] I will then compare some of the comments added to *ByB* with similar ones added to various recensions of *LGÉ*, and I categorise them under three different headings: calls for more clarity, corrections, and expressions of disbelief in the text.

The textual tradition of *LGÉ* is worth reviewing, since it is notoriously complex: however, the work of John Carey and Richard Scowcroft has greatly furthered our understanding of it.[16] In this paper, I work with the understanding that Recension 1 was composed first, with the Míniugud Recension being composed shortly after, around the first quarter of the eleventh century. Then, Recension 2 was composed almost immediately after them.[17] The re-dating of Recension 1 to earlier than Recension 2 is a recent reassessment made by Carey, on the basis that Gilla Cóemáin (*fl.* c. 1014) was the main compiler of this version, and that his *floruit* can be pushed earlier than previously thought.[18] Recension 3 is a far more nebulous text: it is an amalgamation of Recensions 1 and 2, and it shows the greatest textual variation amongst its witnesses. This variation led

[13] Georgia Henley, 'Reading Geoffrey of Monmouth in Wales: The Intellectual Roots of *Brut y Brenhinedd* in Latin Commentaries, Glosses, and Variant Texts', *Viator*, 49.3 (2018), 103–27 (pp. 105–10); Nia Wyn Jones, 'The Most Excellent Princes: Geoffrey of Monmouth and Medieval Welsh Historical Writing', in *Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, pp. 257–90.

[14] Henley, 'Reading Geoffrey', pp. 106–7. I follow Henley's convention of using quotation marks to distinguish between versions and manuscript shelfmarks; see ibid., 106, fn. 16.

[15] Ibid., pp. 108–9.

[16] The main studies *LGÉ*'s textual tradition are Carey, 'Lebar Gabála'; Scowcroft, 'Part I'; Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions'; John Carey, 'The Floruit of Gilla Cóemáin', *Ériu*, 70 (2020), 31–39.

[17] Scowcroft argued that Recension 2 was composed just before Recension 1: Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 5–18; the re-dating is based upon Carey, 'Floruit'.

[18] Carey, 'Floruit'; on his association with the composition of Recension 1 and the Míniugud Recension, see Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 9–10.

Scowcroft to suggest that the best way to edit Recension 3 (as well as Recension 1) would be to produce individual, diplomatic editions of each of its witnesses. He also argued that Recension 2's witnesses could withstand being edited together into a single critical edition.[19]

Although Scowcroft made these suggestions fifteen years ago, *LGÉ* has not been edited fully since Robert Alexander Stewart Macalister produced his edition for the Irish Texts Society in the early twentieth century. The shortcomings of these volumes have been well-documented in secondary scholarship: perhaps the most memorable is Scowcroft's comment that Macalister 'bequeathed to posterity an edition woefully incomplete, riddled with errors, and all but impossible to read'.[20] The first of these charges is because Macalister died before he could complete the series: this meant that the final volume only 'represents the Editor's first draft', by the admission of the Irish Texts Society's chairman and secretary.[21] However, Scowcroft points out that that even within the previous volumes, which were supposedly complete, the sections on the Picts and on the Túatha Dé Danann are particularly garbled, and many other sections have been omitted or silently rearranged.[22] Therefore, large swathes of the text are poorly edited. Macalister's attempts to harmonise the various witnesses of the four medieval recensions led to an overwhelming number of critical notes, making it 'all but impossible to read': Scowcroft was particularly critical of Macalister's inclusion of all orthographical variants across witnesses in these notes, which, by their sheer volume, obscure more serious variations in text and

---

[19] Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 14–15.

[20] Quote from Scowcroft, 'Part I', p. 82, but see pp. 82–3 for his comments in full. In addition, see Carey, 'Lebar Gabála', pp. 20–22 and Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', pp. 1–2.

[21] See Macalister's preface to the fifth volume of his edition of *Lebor Gabála Érenn* (no page numbers given).

[22] Scowcroft, 'Medieval Recensions', p. 1; see also ibid., p. 2, on the incoherence of the sections on the Picts and the Túatha Dé Danann. On the omission of other sections, see, for example, Scowcroft, 'Part I', p. 121 on omission of a *dindsenchas* text about Emain Macha, and p. 125, on the omission of Flann Mainistrech's *Redig dam, a Dé do nim* and a recapitulation of a section synchronising Irish history with world history.

structure.[23] Nevertheless, Macalister's edition remains the only attempt to edit *LGÉ* in its entirety: since its publication, only Recension 1 has been edited separately by John Carey.

Therefore, as an attempt to account for this editorial state, I have provided at least one dated manuscript witness for each of the following excerpts from *LGÉ*. This, at the very least, provides a broad *terminus ante quem* for when each comment was added to the text. For Recension 1, I will mainly refer to the twelfth-century manuscript Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1339, hereon referred to as the Book of Leinster.[24] I will also occasionally use Dublin, Royal Irish Academy MS 23 E 29, hereon referred to as the Book of Fermoy: the portion of this manuscript which contains Recension I of *LGÉ* has been dated to the fourteenth century.[25] For Recension 3, I will use either the late-fourteenth century Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 P 12, hereon referred to as the Book of Ballymote, or the Recension 3 witness in the fifteenth-century portion of the Book of Fermoy.[26] This approach, I hope, will help to compensate for the editorial shortcomings of Robert Macalister's edition; I will still supply references to Macalister for ease of reference, but I will supplement these citations with John Carey's edition whenever they are from Recension 1.

---

[23] For example, see the volume of footnotes in Macalister, *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, V, pp. 44–45. On criticisms of including too many 'trifling' orthographical variants in his footnotes, see Scowcroft, 'Part I', p. 82.

[24] Although I use the Book of Leinster due to modern convention, the manuscript is referred to as the Book of Nuachongbála in medieval citations: see Elizabeth Duncan, 'A Reassessment of the Script and Make-up of *Lebor Na Nuachongbála*', *Zeitschrift Für Celtische Philologie*, 59.1 (2012), 27–66 (p. 27, fn. 2).

[25] John Carey, 'Compilations of Lore and Legend: Leabhar Na hUidhre and the Books of Uí Mhaine, Ballymote, Lecan and Fermoy', in *Treasures of the Royal Irish Academy Library*, ed. by Siobhán Fitzpatrick and Bernadette Cunningham (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2009), pp. 17–31 (p. 28).

[26] Carey, 'Compilations of Lore and Legend', p. 23 on the Book of Ballymote, and pp. 28–29 on the Book of Fermoy.

A PREFERENCE FOR CLARITY

Translators or compilers express a preference for clarity at numerous points across the versions of *ByB* and recensions of *LGÉ*. For example, Nia Wyn Jones has noted that, in the 'Dingestow' version of *ByB*, the lack of information about Arthur's death or survival after the battle at the river Camblan elicits the comment 'Ac ny dyweit y llyuyr amdanav a uo diheuach na hyspyssach no hynny'.[27] This sense of frustration may stem from other texts which purported to record Arthur's death: for example, the *Vera historia de morte Arthuri*, written in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, added more exciting detail to the moment, such as pouring tempests, earthquakes, and Arthur's body being whisked away in a flash of lightning.[28] With other such narratives circulating, the baldness of Geoffrey's original description may have provoked disappointment such as this.

In a similar vein, some versions of *LGÉ* show a desire for greater clarity amid its medieval redactors. For example, the end of Recension 1 preserves an extended discussion of the progeny of the sons of Míl. Ith's son, Lugaid, and Éber Finn are said to have children; however, there is no information about the children of Míl's other sons, such as Én, Etán and Cacher. One voice expresses a hint of frustration at this state of the sources: 'Noco n-innister clanda na fénned .i. Én, Etan, Cacher, Fulmán, Mantán. Ní fargaib Éber Dond nó Érech claind, dáig ro báitte *ut diximus*'.[29] The Milesian genealogical scheme was a vital pillar in the development of *LGÉ*.[30] As mentioned above, one of the earliest sources used to date the development of the Irish origin legend is a Leinster genealogical poem, written c. 700, which refers to Éremón, son of Míl. Given that a son of Míl was such an important and early part of this genealogical scheme, the lack

[27] *Brut Dingestow*, ed. by Henry Lewis (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1942), p. 185: 'And the book says nothing more certain or clear about it than that'. See Jones, 'The Most Excellent Princes', p. 276.
[28] Michael Lapidge, 'The *Vera Historia de Morte Arthuri*: A New Edition', *Arthurian Studies*, 44 (2001), pp. 115–42; Echard, '"Hic Est Artur"', pp. 52–53.
[29] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 403, ed. by Macalister, V, pp. 44–45: 'It is not told that the warriors had offspring, that is, Én, Etan, Cacher, Fulmán, Mantán. Neither Éber Donn, nor Érech left children, for they were drowned *as we have said*'. Translation from Carey, 'Lebar Gabála', pp. 161 and 318. Witnessed in the Book of Leinster, p. 14.
[30] Charles-Edwards, 'Origin Legends', pp. 48–52.

of information about the offspring of Míl's other sons seems to have caused frustration amidst later readers of *LGÉ*. In short, this comment elucidates the critical reading of *LGÉ*, in a similar manner to that of *ByB* above.

Another moment where more detail is wished for in *LGÉ* is in Recension 3. According to this recension, Nél, the son of Fenius Farsaid, lives with the rest of the Gaels on the shoreline of the Red Sea, near Egypt, at the same time when the Israelites flee Egypt. During the Israelites' flight from Egypt, this version of *LGÉ* purports that the Israelites stayed with the Gaels, and Aaron speaks with Nél and informs him of the miracles performed by Moses in Egypt. Moses also heals Nél's son, Goídel Glas, from a snake bite. Moses commands that neither Goídel nor any of his descendants will die from snakes, and this story is used to explain why Ireland is devoid of such creatures. Nél then worries that he and his people will be punished for helping the Israelites: in exchange, Aaron offers to give the Israelites' ships to Nél. Nél agrees, stating:

> "Is i sin comairle is coir and", ol Nel. No cuirid and sin tra tri mili fear n-armach n-incomloinn maille re Nel gu harm a mbadar na longa ⁊ doradadh do Niul combhadar ar a comas.[31]

A question, embedded into the main text, directly follows this paragraph: '[Cid] ar na berdais mac Israel fein leo cena longa sin?'.[32] It is reasonably posed, since the Israelites are fleeing from Egypt at this point, and these ships presumably offered a faster escape than on foot. Only a vague reply is given – 'Ar daigh na fadbadh Forann trealma na ndhiaidh' – perhaps implying that the Egyptians could have more easily pursued them over water than on foot.[33]

This question-and-answer format is a familiar one in medieval Irish writing, often used at the beginnings of poems, such as *Can a mbunadus na nGáedel?* mentioned above. Its roots as a pedagogical and memetic technique

[31] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 145, ed. by Macalister, II, pp. 60–61: '"It is that decision which is righ", said Nél. Then, three thousand men, armed and battle-ready, were sent to Nél, to the place where the ships were, and they were put at Nél's disposal'. This and all further translations from Macalister are adapted by me. Witnessed in the Book of Ballymote, fol. 10v.

[32] Ibid., p. 60–61: 'Why did the sons of Israel themselves not take those ships?'.

[33] Ibid., p. 60–61: 'In order that Pharaoh should not find means of pursuing them'.

have been noted previously.[34] This story is not present in Recensions 1 or 2, and must have been included as a way to both answer the question of how the Gaels sailed from Scythia to Spain, and to further intertwine the history of Ireland with that of the Israelites and Old Testament history.[35] As with the passage from *ByB* above, it demonstrates the thought process of one of *LGÉ*'s compilers: the question must have struck them as they were actively reading and engaging with the text. This comment, therefore, reveals that medieval Irish readers thought about the wider implications of such stories: even if a story was added to bolster the prestige of the Gaels, it was still open to scrutiny from its readers. Taken together, all of these responses demonstrate moments where their redactors or translators desired more detail from their source text. Since these medieval readers felt able to make these desires clear, it shows that these texts were flexible, and not only passively and conservatively copied. Moreover, even though disappointment is expressed by the Dingestow's comment and the note about the offspring of the other sons of Míl, this differs starkly to William of Newburgh's direct criticisms: although these reactions are negative, they are expressed in a way which still does not contradict the authority or veracity of the source text. By comparing such responses, then, we can understand further the nuance and sensitivity of these comments attached to *ByB* and *LGÉ*.

CORRECTIONS

At other moments, the compilers or translators of each text go further than to express a desire for more details, and instead issue corrections to the text. Across all recensions of *LGÉ*, many such corrections were issued. One of particular interest describes the period in which Ireland was vacant between the invasions of Partholón and Nemed. One redactor amended the period in which Ireland is unoccupied in the following manner: 'Ba fás trá Hériu iar sain fri ré trí chét mbl.

[34] Bernhard Bischoff, 'Turning-Points in the History of Latin Exegesis in the Early Middle Ages', in *Biblical Studies: The Medieval Irish Contribution*, ed. by Martin McNamara (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1976), pp. 74–160.

[35] On deliberate connections made between Old Testament history and Irish history, see Elizabeth Boyle, *History and Salvation in Medieval Ireland* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), pp. 16–19 and 20–23.

– nó .xii. ar .ccc., *quod verius est* – conos toracht Partholón mac Sera meic Srú'.[36] In the Book of Leinster witness to this section, it is clear that the author of this intervention used the comparative 'verius' ('more true'), rather than 'verus' ('true'), which one might have expected from such a correction: the letter *i* is represented unabbreviated on the line.[37] This use of the comparative, then, suggests that truth existed on a spectrum for the redactors of *LGÉ*. Even discrete facts, such as the number of years between successive invasions, could be comparatively more or less true than other estimates. Moreover, it also demonstrates that *LGÉ*'s compilers were comfortable preserving two different versions of a fact in the body of the text.

In a similar manner, translators of Geoffrey's text could hold several varying versions of events in their mind. As Jones has demonstrated, the treatment of Arthur's nephew – Gwalchmai in various Welsh texts, but Gualguainus in *DGB* – is one such example. Although in *DGB* Gualguainus is said to be the son of Arthur's sister, Anna, Gwalchmai appears with the matronymic 'fab Gywar' in Welsh texts external to *DGB*.[38] Jones argues that 'Llanstephan 1' 'seems to be signalling uncertainty' when it cites that Anna was Gwalchmai's mother 'herwyd gwyryoned er hystorya'.[39] She also notes that the Peniarth 44 version merges both Anna and Gywar together, by saying that Gywar was another name for Anna.[40] Meanwhile, the Dingestow version preserves both names: it uses Anna to refer to Arthur's sister, but exclusively

---

[36] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 237, ed. by Macalister, III, pp. 120–21: 'Then Ireland was empty for a period of three hundred years – or three hundred and twelve, *that is more true* – until Partholón, son of Sera, son of Srú, landed there'. Translation from Carey, 'Lebar Gabála', pp. 100 and 254.

[37] Book of Leinster, p. 5.

[38] Rachel Bromwich, Trioedd Ynys Prydein*: The Triads of the Island of Britain*, 4th edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2014), pp. 367–71.

[39] 'according to the authority of the *Historia*'. Noted and translated in Jones, 'The Most Excellent Princes', p. 277. This addition is in the Cardiff, Central Library, 1.363 witness to 'Llanstephan 1', on fol. 140r. A transcription is available on *Rhyddiaith Gymraeg 1300–1425*, 2013 <http://www.rhyddiaithganoloesol.caerdydd.ac.uk> [accessed 16 January 2025].

[40] Jones, 'The Most Excellent Princes', p. 277. Brynley Francis Roberts, 'Astudiaeth Destunol o'r Tri Chyfieithiad Cymraeg Cynharaf o *Historia Regum Britanniae* Sieffre o Fynwy: Ynghyd Ag "argraffiad" Beirniadol o Destun Peniarth 44' (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Wales, 1969), p. 136, ll. 26–27: '[...] ac env e verch wu Anna, a honno hevyt a elwyt Gwyar[.]' ('[...] and the name of the daughter was Anna, who was also called Gwyar'.)

refers to Gwalchmai as 'fab Gywar', separating Anna and Gywar into two different characters.[41] These examples demonstrate how translators of *ByB* incorporated dissent amongst sources: in particular, 'Llanstephan 1' opts for a similar response as *LGÉ* above, in presenting both, conflicting versions of Anna/Gywar's name. What moments such as these signal is that, again, these texts were malleable to those copying them. Whether they began as marginal annotations or were incorporated into the main text from their inception, by the time these witnesses were produced they were directly subsumed into the main body of *LGÉ* and *ByB* respectively. Moreover, such variations were important enough to be recorded alongside one another. These moments seem to signal that these translators and redactors viewed these texts as a forum to gather as much data as they could, inviting further analysis and debate over the veracity of their source. In other words, corrections such as these seem to reinforce the source text's authority, not undermine it.

EXPRESSIONS OF DISBELIEF

Finally, the authors of these texts did, on occasion, signal serious disbelief in their contents. While these responses lack the ire of William of Newburgh's prologue, they nonetheless flag varying degrees of doubt in both texts. In the 'Peniarth 44' version of *ByB*, the translator signals such doubt by saying, in the paragraph before the *Prophetiae Merlini* appear in *DGB*, that Merlin spoke 'anhavd kan dynyadon ev credv'.[42] The translator then followed through on this disapproving comment by removing the *Prophetiae* altogether from this version. What is worth noting is that the translator still flags the existence of the *Prophetiae*, by signalling that Merlin delivered some kind of unbelievable speech. This may have been influenced by the popularity of the *Prophetiae*: they circulated independently of the *DGB* throughout the medieval period and were often

[41] Jones, 'The Most Excellent Princes', p. 277; for uses of Anna, see Lewis, *Brut Dingestow*, pp. 140 and 152; for uses of Gywar, see Lewis, *Brut Dingestow*, pp. 171, 175, 179, 180 and 183.
[42] Roberts, 'Astudiaeth Destunol', p. 121: 'words which are difficult for men to believe'. Noted and translated in Jones, 'The Most Excellent Princes', p. 277.

quoted and reinterpreted by generations of readers.[43] This may have pressured the translator to at least acknowledge the *Prophetiae*'s existence in the text, without having to translate them in their entirety. Nevertheless, the translator's disbelief in the content of the *Prophetiae* directly affected their editorial choices, evidently prompting their total removal.

In *LGÉ*, an expression of disbelief can be found in the Book of Fermoy witness to Recension 1. This passage appears after the sons of Míl have defeated the Tuatha Dé Danann, and encounter three of the eponymous goddesses of Ireland: namely, Fótla, Banba and Ériu. This version of the text describes their meeting with Banba as follows:

> Atbert Lebur Dromma Snechta cor iarfaig Amairgen dia cenel. "Do chlaind Adham dam," ar si.
>
> "Cid cenel do maccaib Noe duit?" ol se.
>
> "Am sini-sea anas Noe," ol si, "for rind sleibe ro basa isin dilind; cosa tel-sa anois," ol si, "dechaid tonda dilend". Is de sin do garar Tel Tuindi sin.
>
> [Acht] chena is ingantach in slecht sin anuas. Canait iarum diceltta forri ⁊ attarbanath uadaib.[44]

There is some ambiguity in the adjective 'ingantach': its semantic range can stretch from 'surprising' in the sense of 'incredible', or 'wonderful', or surprising' in the sense of 'strange', and therefore signalling disbelief.[45] However, the use of 'chena' – presumably a shortening of the conjunctive phrase 'acht chena' –

---

[43] Maud McInerney, 'Riddling Words: The Prophetiae Merlini', in *Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth*, pp. 129–52; on their use by later authors, see esp., pp. 144–45 and 151–52.

[44] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 390, ed. by Macalister, V, pp. 34–35: 'The Book of Druim Snechta says that Amairgen asked about her race. "I am from the offspring of Adam," she said. "Which of the sons of Noah are you descended from?" he said. "I am older than Noah," she said, "I was on top of a mountain during the flood. It was to this very mound," she said, "that the wave of the Flood reached". It is because of this that it is called 'Tel Tuine'. However, the aforementioned passage is surprising. After this, they sang spells against her, and drove her away from them'. Witnessed in the Book of Fermoy, fol. 9v.

[45] See s. v. 'ingantach', in *eDIL* <https://dil.ie/search?q=ingantach>.

suggests that the author wished to contrast his comment more adversely with the story. Regardless, the author of this comment is signalling some kind of incredulity at this story, even if not outright disbelief. When considered together, these accrued comments demonstrate that both texts enjoyed a busy and active readership, invested in the historicity of the events described within the text. They also show that the pages of *LGÉ* and translations of *DGB* became a forum for debate over their contents. Therefore, in a way quite different to William's comments, they display a willingness to tolerate dissent from their sources: instead of meeting such contradictions with dismissal, they seized upon the opportunity for further discussion.

VERNACULAR VERSUS LATIN

So far, I have used William of Newburgh's prologue as a yardstick against which to measure the tone of responses to *LGÉ* and *DGB*, either within the texts themselves or in translations like the *ByB*. But there is another important distinction made by William in the prologue to his work, especially given that many of the responses examined above are in either the Irish or Welsh language. William says specifically that:

> [...] fabulas de Arturo ex priscis Britonum figmentis sumptas et ex proprio auctas per superductum Latini sermonis colorem honesto historiae nomine palliavit.[46]

There are several key assumptions which are implicit in this sentence. First, William creates a dichotomy between a vernacular language and Latin. Then, a distinction in genre follows on from this: William indicates that this translation into Latin is what makes it possible for the *DGB* to gain the 'historiae nomine' – the title or label of history, if not becoming a true 'historia' in itself – and as opposed to remaining a 'figmentum' when recorded in the language of the

[46] William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, 3, ed. by Walsh and Kennedy, in *The History of English Affairs*, pp. 28–29: '[...] he [Geoffrey] has taken up the stories about Arthur from the old fictitious accounts of the Britons, has added to them himself, and by embellishing them in the Latin tongue he has cloaked them with the honourable title of history'.

'Britones'. This is a distinction which has already been the subject of much analysis and debate in previous scholarship.[47] However, it raises an important point when considering why *LGÉ* appeared not to garner the same level of criticism: *LGÉ* was a composition in the Irish vernacular language, not Latin.[48] Therefore, I will now consider the implications of this dichotomy in relation to some other medieval Irish reactions to *LGÉ* or other related material.

One such response appears at the beginning of the so-called Psalter of Cashel. The reason the Psalter is called as such is because its composition was often associated in the medieval period with Cormac mac Cuilennáin, the bishop-king of Cashel who died in 908: it has also been attributed to Brian Bóroime (d. 1014). Bart Jaski has argued that the Psalter was probably composed around the beginning of the tenth century.[49] The introduction to the Psalter includes the following, lively passage:

> Imprudens Scottorum gens rerum suarum obliuiscens acta quasi inaudita siue nullo modo facta uendicat quoniam minus tribuere litteris aliquid operum suorum praecurrat; et ob hoc genelogias Scottigenas litteris tribuam; primo gentis Ēbir secundo gentis hĒremōin tertio hĪr quarto Lugdach meic Ītha.[50]

[47] Echard, '"Hic Est Artur"', pp. 51–52; Kellie Robertson, 'Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Translation of Insular Historiography', *Arthuriana*, 8/4 (1998), 42–57 (pp. 51–52); Sara Harris, *The Linguistic Past in Twelfth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 95–96.

[48] I follow Carey and Scowcroft in believing *LGÉ* did not exist in a Latin version, *contra* Macalister: while a core tract about the Gaels may have originally been composed in Latin, there is nothing to suggest *LGÉ* as a whole did. See Carey, 'Lebar Gabála,' pp. 29–30; Scowcroft, '*Leabhar Gabhála* - Part II: The Growth of the Tradition', *Ériu*, 39 (1988), 1–66 (p. 19).

[49] See Bart Jaski, 'The Genealogical Section of the Psalter of Cashel', *Peritia*, 17–18 (2003), 295–337 (pp. 324 and 330–31).

[50] This version of the Psalter's introduction was reconstructed and translated in Jaski, 'Genealogical Section', p. 303: 'The foolish Irish race, forgetful of its history, boasts of unheard of deeds or ones that never happened because it has taken little care to commit its deeds to letters; and because of that I propose to write down the genealogies of the Irish race; first, the race of Éber, secondly the race of Éremón, thirdly the race of Ír, and fourthly the race of Lugaid mac Ítha'.

This passage is a valuable insight into historical criticisms made in medieval Ireland which parallels that of William of Newburgh, especially with regards to its tone and focus on the believability of events within a text.[51] For the purposes of this discussion, however, the contrast made here is not between languages in which sources are written. Instead, there seem to be two distinctions made: first, between sources which are unwritten versus written ('tribuere litteris'); and second, between sources which record 'acta quasi inaudita', versus 'genelogia' specifically as a genre. It seems, therefore, that the genre of a text and its capacity to transmit events accurately was more important to verifying its historical veracity, rather than the language in which it was written.

Other evidence from *LGÉ* itself also indicates this distinction between Latin and the vernacular was not held as sharply by Irish readers as with William and the *DGB*. The Míniugud recension introduces its version of *LGÉ* as follows:

> Míniugudh Gabal nErenn, 7 a senchas, 7 a remend rigraidi annso sis, 7 ethre i mbeolu aisneisin, 7 labra og dondni remunn, o thosuch ind libair co tici indso, ut dicit historia.[52]

The exact phrasing of this passage deserves careful analysis. First, the vernacular section of the quote explains what exactly the Míniúgud Recension is in relation to the preceding Recension 2 version, which seems to be referred to as the 'ind libair co tici indso'. *LGÉ* is divided into two distinct parts by the author of this passage: it is comprised of 'senchas' (often translated as 'lore', but sometimes 'history') and a 'rem rigrade' ('kings-list'). *Senchas* is well-known for its capaciousness as a term. Elva Johnston summarises it succinctly as 'a field of study

[51] Máire Herbert, 'Sea-Divided Gaels? Constructing Relationships between Irish and Scots *c.* 800–1169', in *Britain and Ireland, 900–1300*, ed. by Brendan Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 87–97 (pp. 88–89); Ann Dooley, *Playing the Hero: Reading the Irish Saga Táin Bó Cúailnge* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 198–99.

[52] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 101, ed. by Macalister, V, pp. 162–63: 'A setting out of the Takings of Ireland, and her history, and her list of kings, is here below: and it is a recapitulation, and a complete telling of that which is before us, from the beginning of the preceding book down to this, *as the history says*'. I have kept Macalister's translation of 'senchas' as 'history', but will discuss it further below. Witnessed in in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson B 512, fol. 90v, and Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 P 2, fol. 16v.

that makes use of many other disciplines rather than forming a single autonomous discipline in itself', which might incorporate everything from legal knowledge to expertise in genealogical tracts. This includes some aspects of knowledge common also to the term *historia*, but Johnston also notes that its more direct cognate term in Latin is *peritia* ('experience'), not *historia*.[53]

The Latin phrase at the end of this passage, however, is more directly relevant to our understanding of how *LGÉ* was read and perceived. The two manuscript witnesses of this passage differ slightly, in ways which can affect our interpretation. The Book of Lecan's version, found on fol. 16v, preserves the phrase entirely unabbreviated as 'ut dicit historia', clearly refers to a single 'historia'. This 'historia', therefore, might be referring to the preceding witness of Recension 2 of *LGÉ*, which directly precedes this passage in this witness and in the other manuscript in which it is present. Therefore, this sentence might be interpreted as a medieval Irish author outright labelling *LGÉ* as a *historia*. However, Oxford, Bodleian, MS Rawlinson B 512, records 'd*icu*nt histo*riae*', leaving the *n* of 'd*icu*nt' unabbreviated on the line, and therefore making it clear that *historiae* should be read in the plural. In this reading, it might therefore be seen as saying that multiple other *historiae* record the same events as the preceding Recension 2 witness, without directly labelling *LGÉ* as a *historia* itself. Even in this least generous interpretation of this passage, the overarching point seems to be that either a *historia* or multiple *historiae* corroborate the events contained within *LGÉ*. In short, then, we can see a medieval Irish author comfortably associating *LGÉ* with the authority of the Latin term *historia*.

Code-switching between Latin and the vernacular is also present in some use of Latin comments accrued to *LGÉ*. We have seen this above with the 'quod verius est' comment attached to the range of time between Cessair and Partholón's invasions, which seems to use such a switch into Latin to call attention to a moment of dissent between sources. It is also significant that the 'imprudens Scottorum' passage, and the well-known Táin colophon, are both moments of historiographical criticism written in Latin. I will return to the Táin

[53] Elva Johnston, *Literacy and Identity in Early Medieval Ireland* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), pp. 55; see also p. 56.

colophon in more detail below, but for now it is important to note that, as Pádraig Ó Néill has shown, there was significant rhetorical weight behind using the Latin language to criticise the Táin's historicity: this choice links it with critical language used in Latin rhetorical handbooks, such as the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*.[54] It is also important to note that neither the 'imprudens Scottorum' passage, nor the colophon, link a lack of credibility in a text to the language in which it is written. Finally, judging by the comment attached to the beginning of the Míniúgud recension, this code-switching also appears to also work in the opposite direction. Prefacing *LGÉ* with a comment in Latin, which associates it directly with *historia*, seems to be bolstering, not questioning, its historical authority. Therefore, this ability to associate *LGÉ* with the Latin label *historia* demonstrates that one of William's key contentions against the *DGB* was not so much of a concern to Irish readers of *LGÉ*.

CRIES OF EMMANUEL?
A POSSIBLE SCRIBAL REACTION TO *LGÉ* MATERIAL

For the rest of this paper, I will focus on another type of reaction to material related to *LGÉ*: specifically, marginal notes added to manuscripts. For reasons of space, I will focus on one note in particular. This was added to the very top centre of p. 143 in the Book of Leinster and is comprised of an 'em' with a horizontal abbreviation mark, standing for 'emmanuel'. The content of the main body of this page is pseudohistorical poetry: namely, the last nineteen stanzas of Dublitir Úa Úathgaile's (*fl.* late eleventh century) *Redig dam a Dé do nim* ('Recite to me, O God from Heaven'), and the first part of Gilla in Chomdid úa Chormaic's (*fl.* eleventh c.) *A Rí ríchid réidig dam* ('O King of Heaven, recite to me').[55] These poems do not appear in *LGÉ* itself: the former is more associated

[54] Pádraig Ó Néill, 'The Latin Colophon to the "Táin Bó Cuailnge" in the Book of Leinster: A Critical View of Old Irish Literature', *Celtica*, 23 (1999), 269–75 (pp. 273).

[55] *Redig dam a Dé do nim* can be found in *Sex Aestates Mundi*, 70, in *The Irish Sex Aetates Mundi*, ed. by Dáibhí Ó Cróinín (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), pp. 97–108 and 132–37. A diplomatic edition of *A Rí ríchid réidig dam* is available in R. I. Best, Osborn Bergin, M. A. O'Brien and Anne O'Sullivan, *The Book of Leinster, Formerly Lebar Na*

with the *Sex Aetates Mundi*, and Uáitéar Mac Gearailt argues that Dublitir wrote it specifically to fill a gap in the *Sex Aetates Mundi* where there is no other poetry present.[56] The parts of these poems which appear on p. 143 do, however, contain material which is common or relevant to *LGÉ*. *A Rí ríchid réidig dam*, in stanza 23, mentions Ulysses' use of wax to plug his ears against the sirens, similar to Cacher's advice to the Gaels on their way from Scythia to Spain in *LGÉ*:[57] it also mentions the Fir Bolg in stanza 7, and Éremón in stanza 33.[58] The section of *Redig dam a Dé do nim* which appears on this page also contains material common to *LGÉ*: in stanzas 77 to 81, Dublitir summarises the story of how Fénius Farsaid created the Irish language from the other languages of the world at the Tower of Babel.

Other additions of 'emmanuel' appear in the margins of the Book of Leinster. These instances are almost all abbreviated in a similar way – that is, as 'em' with a contraction mark over the *m* – and occur in roughly the same place in every instance: namely, at the top of the page, roughly in the centre. Overall, I have counted twenty-three such additions in the Book of Leinster, with three other possible instances.[59] There is also an invocation of 'I*n* noimi*n*e dei patr*is*' at the top of a page near the beginning of the manuscript's witness of *Togail Troí*, which is a similar pious invocation.[60] These additions appear most frequently

---

Núachongbála, 6 vols (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1956), III, p. 574, ll. 17727–18170.

[56] Mac Gearailt, Uáitéar, 'Dublittir Úa hÚathgaile's Poem *Rédig Dam, a Dé, Do Nim* and *Sex Aetates Mundi*', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 34 (2014), 180–214 (p. 205).

[57] A translation and discussion are given by Brent Miles, *Heroic Saga and Classical Epic in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), pp. 48–49. Barbara Hillers links this motif with *LGÉ* in '*In Fer Fíamach Fírglic*: Ulysses in Medieval Irish Literature', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, 16/17 (1996), 15–38 (pp. 29–31).

[58] Best and O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster*, III, p. 576, ll. 17751 and 17856.

[59] These are Book of Leinster, pp. 55, 57, 59, 61, 65–68, 70–76, 83, 98, 143, 157, 195, 207 and 211. Five are not noted in Best and O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster*, II, pp. 72, 98, 157, 207 and 211: p. 98 is the only 'emmanuel' to be written out in full and unabbreviated within the whole manuscript. Two (pp. 74 and 76) are noted in Best and O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster*, II, but I cannot see them in the digitised version of the manuscript: however, I have included them since their inclusion indicates they were visible at the time. The possible other 'emmanuel' annotations are on pp. 171, 236 and 280, but their appearance is so faint and unclear that I am hesitant to include them in the final total without consulting the manuscript in person.

[60] Book of Leinster, p. 222.

within the Táin, with 'emmanuel' written seventeen times in total within its witness.[61]

The reason these annotations are important for this study is because they have been adduced as evidence of medieval attitudes towards the Táin's historical veracity. Since they most frequently appear within the Táin section of the Book of Leinster, they have been interpreted as aghast exclamations of surprise at the contents of each folio upon which they appear: for example, Dagmar Schlüter argues that, 'Generally these exclamations seem to occur where there are, what we would term from a modern point of view, exaggerations in the narrative', and specific examples cited include when the Connachta are completely covered in snow, and when Fergus recovers from a battle frenzy.[62] This connection to the Táin has another, deeper significance for this paper. When these additions of 'emmanuel' have been interpreted as exclamations, some scholars have linked them back to the Táin colophon, attached to the end of the Book of Leinster's witness of *Táin Bó Cuailnge*. The first part is in Irish, while the second is in Latin, and it reads as follows:

> Bendacht ar cech óen mebraigfes go hindraic Táin amlaid seo 7 ná tuillfe cruth aile furri.
>
> Sed ego qui scripsi hanc historiam aut uerius fabulam quibusdam fidem in hac historia aut fabula non accommodo. Quaedam enim ibi sunt praestrigia demonum, quaedam autem figmenta poetica, quaedam similia uero, quaedam non, quaedam ad delectationem stultorum.[63]

---

[61] Book of Leinster, pp. 55, 57, 59, 61, 65–68, 70–76, 83 and 98. Dagmar Schlüter, however, noted that 'emmanuel' appears 'twenty-four times on the margin of *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in the *Book of Leinster*'; Schlüter, *History or Fable?: The Book of Leinster as a Document of Cultural Memory in Twelfth-Century Ireland* (Münster: Nodus, 2010), p. 221. I have found only seventeen such instances, so perhaps the figure of twenty-four comes from the total number of 'emmanuel's throughout the Book of Leinster, as opposed to just within the Táin.

[62] Schlüter, *History or Fable?*, p. 221. These examples are found on the Book of Leinster, pp. 59 and 61; they can also be found in Best and O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster*, II, pp. 276 and 279.

[63] Cecile O'Rahilly, *Táin Bó Cúalnge: From the Book of Leinster* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1967), pp. 136 and 272: 'A blessing on everyone who shall faithfully

Ó Néill has suggested that the first section of the colophon – written in the Irish vernacular – is the work of an earlier scribe, while the latter section in Latin was a direct reaction to the earlier portion: therefore, it shows two distinct phases of critical appraisals of medieval Irish literature. He has also persuasively linked the language of the colophon to rhetorical terminology, such as that used in the *Rhetorica ad Herrenium*.[64] Most importantly for this study, Ann Dooley, Ó Néill and Ralph O'Connor have previously noted the similarities in tone between the Táin colophon and the critiques of William of Newburgh, or other Anglo-Norman critiques of Arthurian material.[65]

The connection between the 'emmanuel' comments and the Táin colophon comes from the colophon's vagueness. This lack of specificity has prompted scholars to try to find specific events in the Táin to which it is referring. William of Newburgh, by contrast, had cited specific parts of the *DGB* he deemed to be unbelievable: namely, stories attached to King Arthur, and Merlin's association with demons.[66] This same level of specificity is not present in the Latin section of the Táin colophon: instead, the author refers repeatedly to 'quaedam', which are never explicitly linked to specific episodes in the text.[67] This vagueness has led to some scholarly speculation, and one strand of this has

---

memorise the Táin thus here, and who will not add any other form to it. But I who have written this story, or rather this fable, give no credence to the various incidents related in it. For some things in it are the deceptions of demons, others poetic figments; some are probable, others improbable; while still others are intended for the delectation of foolish men'.

[64] Ó Néill, 'Latin Colophon', p. 273.

[65] Ibid., p. 274; Ralph O'Connor, 'Fabulous Content, Historical Purpose and Scribal Strategy in Irish and Icelandic Saga Narrative: Some Comparative Perspectives on the Colophon to the Book of Leinster *Táin*', in *Adapting Texts and Styles in a Celtic Context: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Processes of Literary Transfer in the Middle Ages* (Münster: Nodus, 2016), pp. 305–30 (pp. 312–13); Dooley, *Playing the Hero*, p. 197, although she compares it instead with William of Malmesbury's (c. 1095 – c. 1143) derision of Arthurian material, which predates the *DGB*.

[66] William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, 14–15, ed. by Walsh and Kennedy, in *The History of English Affairs*, pp. 34–37.

[67] 'some things' or 'certain things'. Scholars such as Ó Néill have rightly pointed out a link in the phrase 'figmenta poetica' to the writing of St Augustine (354–430), and his dismissal of stories from classical mythology: but, again, this only allows a reasonable guess at the kinds of episodes which the colophon author may have had in mind: see Ó Néill, 'Latin Colophon', pp. 272–73.

attempted to align the additions of 'emmanuel' with the colophon's 'figmenta poetica' and 'praestrigia demonum'. The argument follows that additions of 'emmanuel' appear on folios which contain unbelievable moments in its main text, and therefore represent the moments to which the colophon author is referring when they express their dissatisfaction and disbelief in events from the Táin. Indeed, this argument might be extended to the addition, for example, of 'in noimine dei patris' on p. 222: on this folio, the text of *Togail Troí* describes the 'druidechta' and the 'diabolacdachta' of Medea, events which could be compared to the unbelievable events in the Táin Schlüter connects with 'emmanuel' annotations.[68] But if these marginal additions do represent aghast exclamations at the contents of the page they appear on, then this same argument could be applied to p. 143, which contains material common to *LGÉ*. Before committing to this interpretation, however, I will spend the rest of this section putting these 'emmanuel' in greater context. Specifically, I will examine in closer detail the lines of argument which have led to the assessments summarised above, in order to understand whether they can reasonably show a similar reaction to *LGÉ* material as to the colophon's reaction to the Táin, and – in a parallel fashion – William of Newburgh's reaction to the *DGB*.

First, it is necessary to trace how these 'emmanuel' citations have been treated in modern scholarship. Charles Plummer was the first to argue that an annotation of 'emmanuel' was written as a direct reaction to unbelievable events in the Táin: namely, above a list of Cú Chulainn's feats in Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 E 25, fol. 73, hereon referred to as Lebor na hUidre. Plummer argued that this comment was an example of when a 'scribe's flesh seems to creep at what he writes or reads':[69] in other words, he read it as a scribe's aghast exclamation at the content of the text on a particular manuscript page.[70] He makes this argument by connecting the use of 'emmanuel' in Lebor na hUidre

[68] R. I. Best and M. A. O'Brien, Togail Troí*: From the Book of Leinster Vol. IV* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1966), p. 1072, ll. 31178–9.

[69] Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS 23 E 25, p. 73. Charles Plummer, 'On the Colophons and Marginalia of Irish Scribes', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 12 (1926), 11–44 (pp. 21–22).

[70] Emmanuel was another name used to refer to Jesus in the Bible (for example, in Matthew 1:23): this was based on the prophecy of Isaiah, in Isaiah 7:14. Therefore, the annotation is generally accepted to be an expression of shock.

to an annotation in the sixteenth-century manuscript Leiden, University Library, MS VLQ 7. This annotation is on fol. 2r, which contains a copy of *Echtra Finn*, and reads 'emmanuel is uaiccnech an scel'.[71] Ó Néill was then the first to link the marginal comment from Lebor na hUidre with the Táin colophon itself, suggesting such marginalia could indicate the kind of events to which the colophon author was reacting.[72] However, O'Connor has already drawn sceptical attention to these comments as representations of aghast outbursts. He argued that there are other moments in both Lebor na hUidre and the Book of Leinster which do not elicit an 'emmanuel' in the margins: for example, Cú Chulainn undergoing his *ríastrad*, and Fedelm's prophecy. He concluded that '[i]ncredulity or amazement of some kind does seem to be expressed by these oaths, but their testimony to a specifically sceptical outlook is ambiguous and calls for more detailed examination of the manuscripts themselves'.[73]

The argument that they are linked to the colophon also relies somewhat on the hand of the marginalia being the same as the Táin colophon author. Given the brevity of these annotations, however, this is incredibly difficult to prove. In accordance with Elizabeth Duncan's recent reassessments of the scribal hands in the Book of Leinster, I will assign the hand which wrote the colophon the name T1.[74] Identifying T1 with the hand of the 'emmanuel' comments is very difficult, given that the ink is consistently very faint, and that it is extremely abbreviated: as mentioned previously, it is written with only an *e*, a *m* and a contraction mark, with the exception of p. 98, where it is written in full. Moreover, there is no discernible pattern between the pages 'emmanuel' appears on and the main scribe of that page, except that they occur with the greatest frequency throughout the Táin than any other text.[75] Therefore, at least within the bounds of this paper, it is difficult, if not impossible, to argue that the author of the 'emmanuel'

[71] 'Emmanuel the story is mysterious'. Ludwig Christian Stern, 'Le Manuscrit Irlandais de Leide', *Revue Celtique*, 13 (1892), 1–31 (p. 2). I will return to this annotation later in this paper.
[72] Ó Néill, 'Latin Colophon', p. 273, fn. 29.
[73] O'Connor, 'Fabulous Content', p. 312.
[74] Duncan, 'Reassessment', p. 36.
[75] For a summary of the different hands and the pages they are found on, see Duncan, 'Reassessment', pp. 35–36.

comments are the same as Duncan's T1 hand who wrote the colophon, or if they are simply the additions of a later annotator.

It is helpful to contextualise the Book of Leinster's instances of 'emmanuel' with those from other manuscripts. The most well-known manuscript to include such invocations is National Library of Scotland, Advocates MS 72.1.46, written in the fifteenth century. This is because Thomas Astle nicknamed this manuscript the 'Emmanuel MS', because 'emmanuel' appears at the top of every page for the entire text of *In Cath Catharda*.[76] First, the sheer frequency of these marginal annotations suggests they are not meant to indicate a reaction to anything specific in the text. Moreover, Charles Graves, in 1847, argued that Astle was being misleading in naming the manuscript after these annotations: he declared that '[i]t was usual for scribes to place some sacred name at the top of a page, by way of hallowing the work which they were commencing'.[77] Indeed, several other Irish manuscripts contain similar annotations. Christina Cleary has noted that 'emmanuel' appears at the top of pages in the seventeenth-century Dublin, Royal Irish Academy C vi.3, fols. 30v and 64v, and commonly throughout the sixteenth-century London, British Library, MS Egerton 1782, without any apparent connection to the main text of each folio. She also notes that on Royal Irish Academy C vi.3, f. 28r, above the beginning of manuscript's witness of the Táin, the scribe wrote 'a nainm dé':[78] this is similar to the invocation of 'i*n* noimi*n*e dei patr*is*' in the Book of Leinster. Therefore, one possible explanation for these annotations is that advocated by Graves: namely, that these were pious dedications written at the top of the page, perhaps as a scribe began their work. Another persuasive explanation is that they could be pen trials: the long *e*, in combination with the *m* and the contraction mark, cover

[76] Thomas Astle, *The Origin and Progress of Writing, as Well Hieroglyphic as Elementary* (London, 1784), p. 123.

[77] Graves gives examples of 'Jesus', 'Maria', 'In nomine Sanctae Trinitatis', and 'Amen': Charles Graves, 'On Irish Manuscripts in the Possession of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy (1836–69)*, 4 (1847), 255–60 (pp. 258–59). I have not seen examples of these phrases inscribed at the top of Irish manuscripts, but they may appear across manuscripts from different cultures.

[78] 'in the name of God': see Christina Cleary, 'An Investigation of the *Remscéla* to the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*; and an Edition and Translation of *Aislinge Óenguso*' (unpublished PhD Thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 2018), pp. 26–27.

a range of different pen strokes, which could have been used to test ink flow before beginning to copy a text proper.[79] In short, while I believe that Schlüter and Ó'Néill correctly identified the kind of episodes in the Táin to which the colophon author was referring, I do not believe that we can use the 'emmanuel' exclamations to identify exactly which episodes they were. These annotations are numerous throughout this Táin witness, but this may have a misleading effect. As with Advocates MS 72.1.46, their frequency means that several are bound to appear on pages which might have piqued the ire of the Táin colophon's author.

Another reason to be cautious is that these annotations are consistently placed at the top of these pages, far removed from the main text itself. Scribes throughout the Book of Leinster were not adverse to directly annotating text as a reaction: Christina Cleary, for example, has already examined the use of critical marks to add comments and corrections to the Táin in the Book of Leinster.[80] Given that scribal activity in the manuscripts demonstrates an affinity for marking text directly, it seems strange that direct reactions would be so far-removed from the main body of the text. Finally, reading these annotations as exclamations originally stems from Plummer's study of scribal marginalia, and his reading of 'emmanuel' as an outburst in Leiden, University Library, MS VLQ 7. However, going back to this manuscript, the 'emmanuel' and the rest of the comment, treated as one by Stern and Plummer, are written in two different ink colours, with the latter being much darker in colour. This, and differences in the letter forms (such as the *l* at the end of 'emmanuel' and 'scel') would suggest they are two different comments made by separate authors.[81] To summarise, then, there appear to be more satisfactory ways of explaining the additions of 'emmanuel' to manuscripts such as Lebor na hUidre and the Book of Leinster,

[79] I am very grateful to Máire Ní Mhaonaigh for this suggestion.

[80] Christina Cleary, 'Critical Notes and Signs in the Book of Leinster Táin Bó Cúailnge', in Táin Bó Cúalnge *from the Book of Leinster: Reassessments*, ed. by John Carey (London: Irish Texts Society, 2020).

[81] '[Historia Herois Hibernici Finn Mac Cumaill Vel Fingal], Initium Deest Deperditis Foliis. – Fled Bricrend: "Bai Fled Mar La Bricrinn Nemthengai", Etc. (Hibernice) VLQ 7', *Leiden University Libraries Digital Collections* <hdl.handle.net/1887.1/item:3218239> [accessed 20 November 2023].

rather than ascribing them as pearl-clutching outbursts of scribes reacting to unbelievable material in a manuscript page's main text.

However, there may be one other way of using the Táin colophon productively to think about the reception of *LGÉ* within the Book of Leinster. Why, in other words, was this colophon was addressed to the Táin, and not *LGÉ*, given that it contains material which might also be described as 'figmenta poetica', such as the sirens enticing the Gaels as they travelled across the Mediterranean? One answer might lie in returning to the exact language the colophon uses. In the vernacular section of the colophon, the author praises anyone who 'ná tuillfe cruth aile furri':[82] the Latin author seems to be responding, at least in part, to the vernacular author's/authors' call for the unquestioning preservation of the text. However, as we have already seen in the first section of this paper, *LGÉ* could be described as a flexible text. It accrued comments, corrections, and questions to its main body, just as the *DGB* did in its later Welsh translations. Therefore, it already shirked the conservativeness against which the Latin author of the colophon reacted. Indeed, if T1 themself was the Latin author of the colophon, they were adept in implementing changes in the Book of Leinster. For example, Duncan notes that on pp. 17, 21 and 22, T1 went back over the work of hand A, erasing it and squeezing new text into a smaller space.[83] The main body of these pages contain *Do fhlathiusaib Érenn*, a kings-list at the end of *LGÉ* which filled the chronological gap between the Milesian invasion and the first recorded historical kings in Ireland.[84] An exhortation to leave texts unchanged, then, directly contrasts with the behaviour of scribe T1 throughout the rest of the manuscript, and especially with material related to *LGÉ*. Therefore, I suggest that the flexibility of *LGÉ* – its ability, as we have seen above, to welcome additions, changes and comments into its narrative – made it less susceptible to the ire of authors like that of the Latin part of the Táin colophon.

[82] 'does not add any other form to it'.

[83] Duncan, 'Reassessment', pp. 38–39.

[84] See Scowcroft, 'Part I', pp. 118–22.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has argued three things. First, that the responses to both *LGÉ* and *DGB* amid their respective redactors and translators can be remarkably similar. Those who translated, copied, or redacted these texts were creative and flexible in their approach: the chatter of varying versions of events, comments, corrections and expressions of doubts percolate throughout their textual transmission. By studying such critical comments and responses, we can begin to untangle the intellectual thought processes which went into building their authority. Moreover, this type of criticism differs starkly to responses like William of Newburgh's prologue. Various translators and redactors of both texts added these comments not to undermine the texts' authority, but instead to bolster it. What they demonstrate above all was that both texts were deemed important enough to correct. It clearly mattered to these redactors and translators that they were accurate, to the best of their abilities. Comparing the responses of William of Newburgh with other critical responses to historical material in medieval Irish contexts can give us a more granular understanding of what exactly was being criticised in each instance. In the case of responses like the introduction to the Psalter of Cashel and the Táin colophon, we can see that such authors were far less concerned with the language in which a source was written than William of Newburgh was with the *DGB*. Nevertheless, code-switching into Latin for such critiques was still an important technique to bolster the authority of some criticisms.

Although marginalia can illuminate important new readings of texts, as well as provide direct evidence for reader responses, the final part of this paper argued for caution in their interpretation. But I have also argued that scribal activity in the Book of Leinster's *LGÉ* can add to our understanding of why, in particular, it did not face the same criticisms as levelled in the Táin; namely, because of its historiographical flexibility, and ability to tolerate narrative accretions. This flexible approach to *LGÉ* is exemplified in a passage from Recension 3. This section of *LGÉ* discusses the languages spoken by the sons of Míl, and concludes in the following manner:

> […] ar bui ic maccaib Miled nama bui Gaedhealg, o ro-gabsat fein nert for Erinn ro-fortamlaig in Gaedhealg ro-lai faill forsin nGrec. […] Manip inund, no manip maith la neach, in dream sin, fagbaidh ius a ferr 7 genaid ius uadh.[85]

Even if some events could be 'ingantach', 'inund', or 'anhavd credv', the ability to add corrections or different versions of events allowed readers of *LGÉ* and *DGB* to not only tolerate, but to enjoy the intellectual activity of appraising the likelihood of such episodes.

[85] *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, 497, ed. by Macalister, V, pp. 184–85: 'For only the sons of Mil had Irish, [and] when they held power across Ireland, Irish prevailed, while Greek fell into neglect. […] If this passage [lit. band, throng] is unbelievable, or if it does not sit well with anyone, let him find out knowledge that is better, and we shall receive knowledge from him'. Witnessed in the Book of Fermoy, fol. 2r, and the Book of Ballymote, fol. 23v.

Adapting Parental Grief in Early Medieval England

Abigail Greaves
University of Nottingham

It may seem obvious to a modern audience to say that parents in early medieval England grieved at the death of their child, but this view has not always been held by scholars. Most influential of all has been Phillipe Ariès's argument that childhood is a uniquely modern phenomenon and that in the Middle Ages they were perceived as merely miniature adults.[1] In general, the idea that children 'did not count' in the medieval period has been commonly repeated.[2] However, Sally Crawford has shown that archaeological evidence from early medieval England does not support this theory.[3] Skeletal evidence shows the attention given to infants and children even when severely ill or incapacitated, and that at least some survived into adulthood.[4] Likewise, as this paper will examine, parental grief is a reoccurring motif in Old English literature, suggesting a literary interest in the distress of losing a child.

In particular, this paper will focus on the way ideas of parental grief emerge in what I will refer to as 'adapted' narratives. Many Old English works draw on earlier sources and concepts, but here I want to differentiate those that based directly on pre-existing narratives. These four texts are the Old English translations of *Orosius* and *Boethius*, and two of the biblical poems *Genesis A* and *Exodus*. Since these texts follow a known source relatively closely it is possible to see where the Old English version deviates from the original. This makes authorial choices more obvious, and better exposes the influences and concepts that are unique to the Old English. By doing so I will illustrate how writers and

[1] While influential, Ariès's work has received significant criticism. For an overview of these issues see, Colin Heywood, 'Centuries of Childhood: An Anniversary-and an Epitaph?', *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 3 (2010), 341–65.
[2] A summary of these discussions can be found in Sally Crawford, *Childhood in Anglo-Saxon England* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), pp. 2–8.
[3] Ibid., pp. 92–101.
[4] Ibid., pp. 94–96.

translators are engaging with and being influenced by tropes of grief. In addition, each text will be contextualised against parental grief as it appears in other works. This paper will be divided into four sections, each based around the changes to a particular adapted text. First, we will examine the *Old English Orosius*, maternal grief, and revenge, then how parental grief is used to illuminate theological ideas in *Genesis A* and *Exodus*, before finally looking at the *Old English Boethius* and the literary motif of parents witnessing their child's death. Through the narrow lens of parental grief, it is possible to view a world of interrelated motifs and a rich textual tradition of depicting parental grief in the Old English corpus.

THE *OLD ENGLISH OROSIUS*, MATERNAL GRIEF, AND REVENGE

The first 'adaptation' this paper will examine is the *Old English Orosius*, which is a version of Paulus Orosius's *Historiarum adversum paganos libri VII*, a fifth-century text. The Old English text runs to only five books instead of the original seven and contains many alterations, leading Janet Bately to describe it as a 'transformation' rather than a simple translation.[5] Malcolm Godden has proposed a likely date for the translation during the period 'substantially after 862' and before 930.[6] Simeon Potter has described some of these alterations as 'imaginative dramatization', in which speeches, motivations, and emotions have been added to make a more dramatic text.[7] Of interest here is one such change which expands on the maternal grief of Queen Thamyris, whose son is killed by King Cyrus of Persia.

In the *Old English Orosius*-version of the story, Cyrus invaded Scythia and was confronted by the young king and his mother Thamyris. The young Scythian king decided to advance to try and trap Cyrus, but he and his army were outwitted and killed by the Persians. His mother, Queen Thamyris, was

[5] Janet M. Bately, 'The Old English Orosius', in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. by Nicole Guenther Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 313–43 (p. 323).
[6] Malcolm Godden, *The Old English History of the World: An Anglo-Saxon Re-writing of Orosius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. xi–xii (quotation at p. xi).
[7] Simeon Potter, 'Commentary on King Alfred's Orosius', *Anglia*, 71 (1953), 385–437 (p. 410).

subsequently informed of the news of his death. In the Old English text, we are told she reacted thus:

> Heo ða seo cwen Dameris mid mycelre gnornunge ymb þæs cyninges slege hyre suna þencende wæs, hu heo hit gewrecan myhte.[8]

In this characterisation, Thamyris's great grief ('mycelre gnornunge') is the direct motivation for her desire to avenge her son, but in the Latin original she instead chooses to deal with her sorrow through vengeance rather than through weeping.

> Thamyris exercitu ac filio amisso uel matris uel reginae dolorem sanguine hostium diluere potius quam suis lacrimis parat. simulat diffidentiam desperatione cladis inlatae paulatimque cedendo superbum hostem in insidias uocat.[9]

Thamyris feels the sorrow expected of her as a mother, but Orosius highlights that she chooses an unexpected alternative, to lure Cyrus into a trap and kill him. The differences between the Latin original and the Old English translation are subtle, but they alter the way Thamyris is portrayed. For Orosius, she makes a choice to pursue revenge as an alternative to grieving. In contrast, the Old English translator links her grief directly to her decision to avenge her son. In the Latin, the expected response for a mother is grief and retreat; it is noteworthy and unusual that Thamyris chooses revenge instead and feigns her loss of confidence and despondency. The Old English translator does not see any surprise in the fact that Thamyris's grief leads to revenge: it is a logical

[8] *The Old English Orosius* ed. Janet Bately, EETS, Supplementary Series 6 (London: Published for EETS by the Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 44: 'Then the queen Thamyris with great grief about the king's, her son's, slaying thought of how she might avenge him'. Translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

[9] *Pauli Orosii Historiarum adversum paganos libri VII*, ed. by Karl Zangemeister (Leipzig: Teubner, 1889), pp. 43–44: 'After losing her army and son, Thamyris made ready to assuage her sorrows as a mother and as a queen with the blood of her enemy rather than with her own tears. She pretended that she had lost confidence and was despondent because of the disaster, and, by slowly retreating, drew her arrogant foe into an ambush'. Translation by Andrew T. Fear, *Orosius: Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p. 85.

consequence of her emotions, and there is no need to portray them as feigned. This reflects the Old English translator's experience and perspective, in a fundamentally different cultural and literary framework to that of Orosius, in which grief was understood as a motive for revenge. For example, we can see a similar conceptual link between maternal grief and a desire for revenge in *Beowulf*, when Grendel's mother enacts revenge against the Danes for the killing of her monstrous son.[10]

Erin Sebo has compellingly argued for the grief of Grendel's mother as the main motivator for her desire for revenge against King Hrothgar.[11] Before her attack on Heorot, Grendel's mother is described as sorrow-minded ('galgmod'), and her journey to the hall as sorrowful ('sorhfulne').[12] Once her act of revenge is complete, the text makes no more mention of the mother's grief. Instead, it presents her as a confident combatant who becomes the aggressor when Beowulf seeks out her lair: her revenge has resolved her feelings of sorrow. There are strong similarities between the portrayal of Grendel's mother and the Old English version of Thamyris. Thamyris's confrontation with Cyrus likewise ends with the king's beheading, and the symbolic placing of his head in a bag full of human blood.[13] These lines in the *Old English Orosius* follow the Latin closely, and so this appears to be a literary trope common to the late antique and early medieval traditions (reflected, for example, in *Beowulf*).[14] When Beowulf and his men approach Grendel's mother's *mere* they are confronted by the decapitated head of Æschere. Beowulf beheads Grendel's mother, and then decapitates Grendel's corpse.[15] This is not to suggest a direct link between Thamyris and Grendel's mother, but rather that the translator of *Orosius* may have been

[10] *Beowulf*, ll. 1251–1650, in *Electronic Beowulf: Fourth Edition* ed. by Kevin Kiernan <http://ebeowulf.uky.edu > [accessed 27 March 2024].

[11] Erin Sebo, '*Ne Sorga*: Grief and Revenge in Beowulf', in *Anglo-Saxon Emotions: Reading the Heart in Old English Language, Literature and Culture*, ed. by Alice Jorgensen, Frances McCormack and Jonathan Wilcox (Farnham: Routledge, 2015), pp. 178–92 (p. 187).

[12] *Beowulf*, ll. 1277–78, ed. by Kiernan.

[13] *Old English Orosius*, ed. by Bately, p. 44.

[14] Orosius, *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, trans. by Fear, p. 86.

[15] *Beowulf*, ll. 1420–21 and 1590, ed. by Kiernan.

drawing on an existing expectation, or literary trope, linking grief and violent revenge when rendering Thamyris's narrative.

There is another grieving mother in *Beowulf*, although one who does not take direct revenge against her son's killer. At the feast following Grendel's defeat, a *scop* sings of an ill-fated interaction between the Danes and the Frisians: the so called 'Finn Episode'.[16] The Danish princess Hildeburh had been married to the Frisian king Finn. During a visit from her brother Hnæf and his men, fighting broke out between Danes and Frisians. Hildeburh's brother and son were killed, and the poem contains an emotional description of the men's funeral and Hildeburh's lament at the loss of her kinsmen. Following this, Hnæf's successor Hengest kills Finn in retaliation, and Hildeburh is taken back with the Danes. There have been two main interpretations of Hildeburh in the Finn episode. On one hand, she has been seen as a passive victim in the violence of the Danes and Frisians, lacking agency and representing the grief and devastation produced by feuding culture.[17] Alternatively, her choice to place her son on her brother's pyre and her lament as they burn have been read as a deliberate call for Danish revenge against her husband Finn.[18] The funeral is viscerally described, with heads melting and wounds bursting open and spraying blood, serving to emphasise the tragedy of the situation. These descriptions are fanciful and do not reflect the actual way a body would burn on a pyre, suggesting a deliberate choice to portray the events shockingly.[19] As with Thamyris and Grendel's mother, Hildeburh is devastated by the deaths, lamenting ('gnornode') and singing mournful songs ('geomrode giddum') at the funeral.[20] If we view Hildeburh's actions as a deliberate provocation for Danish revenge, and we are told later that Hengest spends the winter thinking of

[16] *Beowulf*, ll. ll. 1071–1159, ed. by Kiernan.

[17] For example, Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), p. 300; Martin Camargo, 'The Finn Episode and the Tragedy of Revenge in *Beowulf*', *Studies in Philology*, 78.5 (1981), 120–34 (p. 126).

[18] For example, John Hill, *The Cultural World in Beowulf* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 26; Leonard Neidorf, 'Hildeburh's Mourning and *The Wife's Lament*', *Studia Neophilologica*, 89.2 (2017), 197–204.

[19] Gale R. Owen-Crocker, *The Four Funerals in Beowulf: And the Structure of the Poem* (Manchester: University Press, 2000) pp. 54–55.

[20] *Beowulf*, ll. 1116–17, ed. by Kiernan.

'gyrnwræce' (literally, 'grief-revenge'), then again we see the link being made between maternal grief and revenge.[21]

The depiction of Thamyris in the *Old English Orosius* makes only slight changes from the Latin, but when compared with *Beowulf* there is a striking similarity between their presentation of maternal grief and revenge. This is not to suggest a direct relationship between the texts, but that they seem to be drawing on a similar idea of grief leading to a desire for violent revenge. Thamyris's grief exists as part of a wider literary world. When 'adapting' this part of *Orosius*, the translator understood Thamyris's revenge to be motivated by her grief rather than as an alternative to grieving. Perhaps this was informed by familiarity with the trope of grief and revenge in Old English. If we continue exploring these 'adaptations', we can see further changes that similarly align with wider ideas of grief.

GENESIS A, PATERNAL GRIEF, AND EXEGESIS

Turning from the grieving mothers of the *Old English Orosius* and *Beowulf*, we will now consider the emotional responses of fathers if *Genesis A*. *Genesis A* (and *B*) is an Old English poem contained in the Junius Manuscript alongside three other poems based on biblical narratives: *Exodus*, *Daniel*, and *Christ and Satan*. In this case, *Genesis A* is an 'adaptation' in that it retells the established narrative of *Genesis* with some alterations and additions. Of interest here is the way that emotions have been introduced to flesh out the motivations and feelings of the biblical characters. Britt Mize has observed that these 'subjectivizing moments', in which poets expand on characters' mentalities and emotions, are a traditional feature of Old English poetry, and appear frequently in *Genesis A*.[22] In this section we will look at two of these moments involving biblical fathers. Firstly, Adam's response to the death of Abel, and the birth of Seth; and secondly, Abraham's desire for, and inability to have, a son.

[21] *Beowulf*, ll. 1137.

[22] Britt Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities: The Old English Poetics of Mentality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 5–6 and 78–79.

After the death of Abel at Cain's hands and the birth of Seth in *Genesis A*, the poet has Adam give a speech expressing his emotional pain at the loss of his son and gratitude at the birth of another:

> […] Þa word acwæð
> ord moncynnes: "Me ece sunu sealde selfa
> sigora waldend, lifes aldor
> on leofes stæl, þæs þe Cain ofsloh,
> and me cearsorge mid þys magotimbre
> of mode asceaf þeoden user.
> Him þæs þanc sie!"[23]

The poet of *Genesis A* creates a version of Adam who is troubled with sorrow by Abel's death. A useful comparison, which underscores the uniquely enhanced emotions of Adam's word in *Genesis A*, is the text of the *Old English Heptateuch* for Genesis 4:25. In it, Adam merely says 'Drihten me sealde ðisne sunu for Abel ðe Cain oflsoh', a fairly literal translation of the biblical passage.[24] The *Genesis A* poet introduces Adam's love for Abel and the troubling sorrow ('cearsorge') that the death of his beloved son causes.

The addition of parental sorrow to the biblical narrative is not unique to this passage. Later in the text, Abraham is depicted as deeply distressed and sorrowful, not at losing his son, but at his inability to have another one. Abraham tells God 'ne sealdest þu me sunu, forðon mec, sorg dreceð, on sefan swiðe'.[25] Likewise, Sarah is 'sar on mode' ('sad in her mind') and 'ferhðcearig' ('troubled

---

[23] *Genesis A*, ll. 1110–16, ed. by Martin Foys, Alex Fairbanks-Ukropen, Carsten Haas, Aaryn M. Smith and Kyle Smith, in *OEPF*: 'Then the head of mankind spoke words: "The Eternal Victory Ruler, Lord of All Life, has given me a son in place of the one I loved [i.e. Abel], that Cain slew, and with this child Our Prince has driven my troubling sorrow from my mind. Thanks be to him!"'.

[24] *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch: Ælfric's Treatise on the Old and New Testament and his Preface to Genesis*, ed. by S. J. Crawford, EETS, Original Series 160 (London: Published for EETS by Oxford University Press, 1922), pp. 81–417 (pp. 91–92): 'The Lord has given me this son for Abel who Cain slew'. Cf. Genesis 4:25: 'Posuit mihi Deus semen aliud pro Abel, quem occidit Cain' ('God hath given me another seed, for Abel whom Cain slew').

[25] *Genesis A*, ll. 2180–81, ed. by Foys, *et al.*: 'You have not given me a son, therefore sorrow afflicts me greatly in my mind'.

in spirit') at her inability to bear her husband a child.[26] As he did in the Adam episode, the poet of *Genesis A* inserts emotions into biblical narratives that are typically unemotional. The *Old English Heptateuch* (Genesis 15:2) records Abraham's words as so: 'þa cwæð Abram: "Eala þu min Drihten God, hwæt gyfst þu me? Ic fare butan bearnum"'.[27] The anxiety and sadness of Abraham comes from his concern about the future of his inheritance and legacy if he should fail to have a son. Adam too is facing a situation in which one of his sons is dead and the other a perpetual exile and, as such, neither can continue his line. He clearly has an emotional attachment to Abel who is described as beloved, but this concern for the future causes both men to be troubled and sorrowful. In both cases, it is only God who can resolve the situation by giving the men the sons that they desire. As before, when read alongside other Old English texts these adaptations illuminate how the trope of parental grief is employed by the *Genesis A* poet. By using early medieval exegesis to inform our reading of Adam and Abraham's sadness we can see how their grief is both literal and allegorical.

In early medieval exegesis, the birth of Seth was often identified as an allegory for Christ's death and the world's salvation. For example, in his commentary, *In Genesim*, Bede writes:

> And just as Abel having been killed by Cain signifies mystically that the Lord suffered, so Seth born in his place signifies that he was "aroused again" from death.[28]

When Adam speaks of his joy at the birth of Seth, the poem identifies him as the head of mankind ('ord moncynnes'), identifying him as representative of humanity. His grief can be read literally, as that of a parent losing his son, but also allegorically, as the sorrowful nature of the world prior to the resurrection. Frequently in early medieval texts the physical, fallen world is presented as one

---

[26] *Genesis A*, ll. 2215 and 2219.

[27] *Old English Heptateuch*, ed. by Crawford, p. 121: 'Then Abraham said: "Oh, my Lord God, what will you give me? I go without children"'. Cf. Genesis 15:2: 'Dixitque Abram: "Domine Deus, quid dabis mihi? ego vadam absque liberis"' ('And Abram said: "Lord God, what wilt thou give me? I shall go without children"').

[28] Bede, *On Genesis*, trans. by Calvin B. Kendall (Liverpool: University Press, 2008), p. 160.

of suffering and sorrow and is contrasted with the promised joyful world of heaven that awaits the righteous, discussed further in the following section. The birth of Seth cures Adam's 'cearsorge' ('anxious sorrow'), just as the resurrection provides a way for humanity to escape worldly pain. The parental grief of Adam is an acknowledgement of the pain of child loss, while also being a reminder of God's role in curing the grief of the world, and of the reader. In this way, the text's inclusion of Adam's parental grief engages with the theological notion of the world as inherently sorrowful, and of God as the only true salvation.

Just as Abel represents the crucified Christ, and Seth the resurrected Christ, so too do Abraham's two sons have exegetical significance. In the Epistle to the Galatians (4:21–31), Paul identifies Ishmael, Abraham's son by the servant Hagar, with the Old Covenant; while Isaac, Abraham's miraculous son by Sarah, is symbolic of the New Covenant, brought about through Christ. Paul's words are referenced by Bede in *In Genesim*:

> In Galatians the Apostle has discussed very fully how Hagar and Ishmael signify the Synagogue and the Old Covenant, just as Sarah and her son Isaac signify the Church and the New Covenant.[29]

In *Genesis A*, Abraham and Sarah's grief at their lack of a son prefigures the coming joy of Isaac, who represents the New Covenant and the possibility of salvation through Christ. This mirrors the sorrow of Adam at Abel's death, and his joy at the birth of Seth. Intriguingly, the language of *Genesis A* seems to link these two narratives together. In line 1108, Seth is described as a 'freolic to frofre' ('noble one as comfort'); in lines 2216–19, Sarah is pained that she cannot have a child with Abraham, which is described in the same terms as a 'freolic to frofre'. Of course, the theologically educated reader, or listener, would know that Sarah will have a 'freolic to frofre' in Isaac, her child by Abraham. Mize has noted that the phrase 'freolic to frofre' highlights a similar subjective position in the accounts of Adam and Sarah.[30] The phrase links the emotions of Adam and Sarah, while also linking the figures of Seth and Isaac, who are the two 'freolic to frofre'

[29] Bede, *On Genesis*, p. 278.
[30] Mize, *Traditional Subjectivities*, pp. 52–53.

referred to. Literally, Adam, Abraham and Sarah are grieving parents, or potential parents, who are filled with anxiety and sorrow over their child's death, their inability to conceive, and their concern over continuing their lineage and legacy. Allegorically, the parents' emotions reflect the pain and suffering of the world without Christ and the hope of salvation. Seth and Isaac, the noble ones who bring comfort to their parents, both allegorically represent Christ's resurrection and the New Covenant, which brings comfort and salvation to the fallen world and humanity's suffering. As such, the paternal grief of Adam and Abraham can be read both literally and figuratively.

By emphasising Adam, Abraham, and Sarah's grief, the *Genesis A* poet not only creates a version of Genesis which conforms to traditional poetic expectations, but also a depiction that brings these characters into wider dialogue with literary and theological themes. The emotional suffering of parents is a common theme in Old English literature. By choosing to expand upon these emotions particularly, the parents of *Genesis A* begin to show similarities with those of *Beowulf*, the *Old English Orosius*, and the other texts that this article will discuss in the next section. Furthermore, within the poem itself the shared emotional distress of Adam, Abraham, and Sarah serves to connect their narratives together. Both sets of parents receive a child from God as comfort for their sadness and anxiety. Modelled in their experiences is the belief that God is the true solution to earthly grief, both the literal grief of the parents and the allegorical grief of the world. Parental grief serves to align *Genesis A* with the common tropes of Old English literature and early medieval theological discourse.

EXODUS, THE DEATH OF THE FIRST BORN, AND *TRISTITIA*

Genesis A is not the only biblical poem that engages with the theme of parental grief. *Exodus*, also in the Junius Manuscript, contains an unusually emotional portrayal of the Egyptians' reaction to the final plague and the deaths of their first-born sons (Exodus 12:29–30):

hordwearda hryre, heaf wæs geniwad,
swæfon seledreamas, since berofene.[31]

As with Adam's reaction to the death of Seth, rather than the straightforward, unemotional description of these events in the Exodus and its translation in the *Old English Heptateuch*, the *Exodus*-poet expands on the emotional devastation of the Egyptians at the death of their children.[32] Upon their deaths, the text relates that mourning is renewed ('heaf wæs geniwad') and in doing so engages with a formula for expressing intense loss found also in *Beowulf* and *The Wanderer*.[33] Likewise, the poem also tells us that 'wop wæs wide, worulddreama lyt' ('weeping was wide, few worldly joys') underlining the intensity of the Egyptians' grieving. However, despite these similarities there is an important difference in the depiction of the Egyptians. Their grief is expressed through terms relating to the loss of worldly joys. In this passage, I have translated 'hordwearda' as 'the first-born' (following the Vulgate *primogenitus*), but it literally means 'treasure-guardians', reflecting how their deaths result in the ceasing of hall-joys ('seledreamas') and loss of treasure ('sinc').[34] As mentioned in the previous section, worldly-suffering and heavenly-joy are common motifs in Old English literature and theological texts.

We see this concept in line 93 of *The Wanderer*, when the sorrowful narrator asks '[h]wær sindon seledreamas' ('where are the hall joys?'), and in *Christ and Satan*, when Satan laments his exile from heaven.[35] In specific reference to paternal loss in *Beowulf*, King Hrethel chooses to give up mortal-joy ('gumdream') after the death of his son.

[31] *Exodus*, ll. 35–36, ed. by Alex Fairbanks-Ukropen and Martin Foys, in *OEPF*: '[At] the destruction of the first-born, mourning was renewed, hall-joys dead, deprived of treasure'.
[32] *Old English Heptateuch*, ed. by Crawford, pp. 243–47.
[33] Elise Louviot, 'Grief, Resurrection & Renewal: *geniwad* in Old English Verse', *English Studies*, 102.8 (2021), 969–90 (pp. 973–76).
[34] 'hord-weard', in *Dictionary of Old English: A to I online*, ed. by Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018) <https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/> [accessed 27 March 2024].
[35] *The Wanderer*, l. 93, ed. by Martin Foys, in *OEPF*. See also Katherine R. Norcross, 'Counter-Empathy and Elegiac Critique in the Old English *Christ and Satan*', *Philological Quarterly*, 96.2 (2017), 143–170.

> He ðа mid þære sorhge, þe him swa sar belamp,
> gumdream ofgeaf, godes leoht geceas.[36]

Hrethel's choice follows his sorrow at seeing the wine-hall empty and 'reote berofene' ('deprived of joy'), as a result of his son's death.[37] The phrasing 'reote berofene' closely mirrors 'since berofene' ('deprived of treasure'), again part of line 36 in *Exodus* (see above). There is a clear similarity in the way the grief of Hrethel and the Egyptian is described, as both draw on a wider literary idea of sadness caused by the loss of worldly pleasures. The death of a first-born leaves the halls of their parents bereft and empty. However, this is not always portrayed as a helpful or healthy kind of grief.

For early medieval religious authors, earthly sadness was seen as a sign of the sin of *tristitia*.[38] For example, Ælfric of Eynsham describes the sin *tristitia* as being the kind of sadness suffered by people when they have suffered events, such as violent death, loss, or the passing of close friends:

> se seofoða heafodleahter is *tristitia* on leden, þæt is on englisc unrotnyss for mislicum gelimpum, þe mannum becymð on cwealme and on lyrum oððe on freonda forðsiðe.[39]

More generally, we see Old English poems such as *Deor*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Dream of the Rood* contrast the worldly-suffering of their characters with the peace and joy of God, with whom they can find resolution.[40] This is also a

---

[36] *Beowulf*, ll. 2462–69, ed. by Kiernan: 'He then with his sorrow, that grief that happened to him, gave up mortal happiness, chose God's light'.
[37] Faulkner, 'Death and Treasure', p. 794.
[38] Christina Lee, 'De Profundis: Sadness and Healing', in *Emotional Alterity in the Medieval North Sea World*, ed. by Erin Sebo, Matthew Firth and Daniel Anlezark (Cham: Springer, 2023), pp. 151–70 (pp. 153–54).
[39] Ælfric, *Letter to Bishop Wulfstan*, ed. by Bernhard Fehr, in *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics in Altenglischer Und Lateinischer Fassung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966), pp. 210–11: 'The seventh cardinal sin is *tristitia* in Latin. That is in English *unrotnys* [sadness] because of various misfortunes which come to people, in plague and in losses or in the departure of friends'.
[40] Peter Stockwell, 'Cognitive Poetic Analysis: *The Dream of the Rood*', in his *Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2002), pp. 82–88; Margret Gunnarsdóttir Champion, 'From Plaint to Praise: Language as Cure in "The Wanderer"', *Studia*

message preached by a number of homilies, both by Ælfric and others.[41] *Vercelli Homily I* contrasts the sorrow and unhappiness ('sorh and unblis') in this world, with the heavenly world without sorrow.[42] The sin of *tristitia*, or *unrotnes*, is discussed in *Vercelli Homily XX*, which says that this worldly-sadness will lead to the death of the soul: 'Đonne is oðer, men ða leofstan, ðysse worulde unrotnes, seo gewyrcð deað þære sawle'.[43] As a final illustration, *Blickling Homily I* relates that Eve's original sin made it so 'þæt æghwylc man sceolde mid sare on þas world cuman, & her on sorhgum beon, & mid sare of gewitan' (cf. Genesis 3:16–17).[44] These texts span a range of genres and time periods, but they all express the idea that earthly-suffering can only be remedied by turning ones attention to God and future heavenly joys. Christ's birth and resurrection provide a way for the faithful to escape the sinful and painful material world.

The motif of the deprivation of the hall or of worldly joys intertwines with this idea of *tristitia*, portraying an over-attachment to the physical world contrasted with the pursuit of heavenly joy. In *The Wanderer*, the memories of the past and the *seledreamas* lead to the narrator's depression, and are only resolved at the end of the poem through turning to God.[45] Satan in *Christ and Satan* is similarly trapped in his misery by his longing for heaven, which is conceived in the poem as a wine-hall, having been deprived of joy by his rejection of Christ.[46] Hrethel's decision to choose God's light ('godes leoht geceas') and leave behind his *gumdream* is more difficult to interpret given the

---

Neophilologica, 69.2 (1997), 187–202; Ruth Wehlau, '"Seeds of Sorrow": Landscapes of Despair in *The Wanderer*, Beowulf's Story of Hrethel, and *Sonatorrek*', *Parergon*, 15.2 (1998), 1–17; Anne L. Klinck, *Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), pp. 231–34.

[41] Lee, 'De Profundis', p. 154.

[42] *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, ed. by D. G. Scragg, EETS, Original Series 300 (London: Published for EETS by Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 26.

[43] Ibid., pp. 338–39: 'Then is the other, beloved people, this is worldly sadness, that makes death for the soul'.

[44] *The Blickling Homilies of the Tenth Century* ed. R. Morris, EETS, Original Series 58 (London: Published for EETS by Oxford University Press, 1874), p. 5: 'that every man should come with sadness into this world, live here in sadness, and with sadness depart'.

[45] *The Wanderer*, ll. 93, ed. by Foys.

[46] *Christ and Satan*, ll. 91–95, 136 and 182–86, ed. by Martin Foys, Kyle Smith, Aaryn M. Smith and Alex Fairbanks-Ukropen, in *OEPF*.

presumed paganism of Hrethel, but we can see similar phrasing used elsewhere in the corpus. In each of these cases, the individual is making a positive choice. In *Guthlac B*, Guthlac's soul leaves behind his body to seek glory in God's light ('in leoht godes sigorlean sohte'); in *The Death of Edgar* the king ended his earthly dreams ('eorðan dreamas') to choose other light ('ceas him oðer light'); and, in the *Fates of the Apostles* we are told that at his martyrdom Andrew chose long life and eternal light ('geceas langsumre lif, leoht unhwilen').[47] Considering this evidence, it seems that the idea of abandoning the worldly joys as a positive choice was a well-established trope for authors could use. To do so is a positive choice. In contrast, in the *Exodus*-poem, the Egyptians' grief is described in terms of the deprivation of material things. The Egyptians embody the sin of *tristitia* and of an unhealthy attachment to the world, their 'seledreamas' and 'worulddreama'. Like Satan, the Egyptians in *Exodus* were deprived of their joys by their rejection of God. This rejection is exemplified by their *tristitia* and their refusal to let the Israelites leave. As a result, the Egyptians are left bereft of their material wealth and worldly joy, and without God to provide them with a resolution (unlike King Hrethel or the Wanderer). The mourning of the Egyptians both reflects the devastation of losing a child, and their position as separated and punished by God.

The unhealthy grief of the Egyptians in *Exodus* can also be contrasted with the depictions of grieving parents in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*. Mindful of the dangers of the sin of *tristitia*, Ælfric contrasts the sorrow of the martyrs' parents with the saints' joy at his or her spiritual rewards in heaven. Saint Eugenia's mother weeps over her daughter's burial, 'ða weop seo modor mid mycelre sarnysse æt hyre byrgene', before seeing a vision of her daughter adorned with gold and accompanied by a heavenly host.[48] Eugenia comforts her mother and

[47] *Guthlac*, ll. 1366–70, ed. by George Philip Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, in *The Exeter Book* (London: Routledge, 1936), pp. 49–88; *The Death of Edgar*, ll. 1–4, ed. by E. V. K. Dobbie, in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* (London: Routledge, 1942), p. 22; *The Fates of the Apostles*, l. 20, ed. by Aaryn M. Smith and Martin Foys, in *OEPF*.

[48] *Ælfric's Lives of Saints I*, ed. by Walter Skeat, EETS, Original Series 76, 2 vols (London: Published for EETS by Oxford University Press, 1881), II, pp. 48–51: 'Then wept the mother with great sadness at her grave'.

tells her she will depart and join her in heaven on Sunday.[49] Elsewhere, Saint Julian's mother comes to his martyrdom with 'mycelre sarnysse' ('great sadness'), before being told that she should not weep for him but for herself, as he will soon be in heaven.[50] Unusually, Saint Agnes appears in a vision to her parents, who are specifically described as not weeping for her, to warn them that they should not weep at her death, but instead rejoice: 'þa cwæð seo halige agnes to hire magum ðus warniað þæt ge ne wepon me swa swa deade. ac blyssiað mid me'.[51] As opposed to the sinful Egyptians of *Exodus*, the martyrs of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* are the perfect embodiment of Christian values, and their hagiographies were intended to both illustrate their sanctity and to serve as models for how people should live piously. In these accounts, the grief of the parents highlights the love they have for the martyred saint, and this models the veneration and love the reader should likewise have for the saints. The martyrs' admonishment of their parents not to weep illustrates how, as saints, they have transcended their attachment to the world and turned their attention to the rewards of heaven, which they readily recieve. Again, this models how the reader should respond to loss and sadness in the material world, finding comfort and reassurance in heaven.

As with *Genesis A*, the depiction of parental grief in these texts intertwines emotion and theology. The grief of the Egyptians creates a version of *Exodus* which aligns with poetic expectations and traditions. Reading the text alongside other Old English works also shows us how the Egyptians' grief interacts with theological discourse around the correct nature of sadness. Unlike Hrethel, the Wanderer, Ælfric's martyrs, or the parents of *Genesis A*, the Egyptians cannot find resolution to their grief. Instead, they remain attached to their worldly losses and continue to sin against God and the Israelites. While the other texts discussed here provide a model for real grieving parents to emulate, the Egyptian's serve as a warning of the dangers of over attachment. The popularity of the motif of parental grief in Old English literature allowed authors to communicate

[49] *Ælfric's Lives of Saints I*, pp. 50–51.
[50] Ibid., pp. 108–9.
[51] Ibid., pp. 184–85: 'Then said the holy Agnes to her parents. Beware that you do not weep for me as if dead, but rejoice with me'.

theological messages about the appropriateness of sadness, as well as to create versions of received narratives that align with Old English genre expectations.

THE *OLD ENGLISH BOETHIUS* AND UNRIPE DEATH IN YOUTH

My final example, the *Old English Boethius*, similarly reflects the persistence of parental grief as a feature of Old English literature and will be used here to examine the recurring motif of parents witnessing their children's death. An Old English adaptation of Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* exists in a prose and prosimetrum version, both containing numerous changes from the Latin versions.[52] Of interest here is a particular line inserted into both versions. In it, personified Wisdom and Reason tell Boethius that the greatest gift to mortal men is that their sons are alive and are healthy, and that 'mænegum men is leofre þæt he ær self swelte ær he gesio his wif and his bearn sweltende'.[53] The assertion that many men would rather die than see their wife and child dying is unique to the Old English rendition of the text, but further reinforces Wisdom's argument that Boethius has no reason to weep as he and his family are still alive. For the early medieval reader, this argument may have seemed somewhat ironic given that Boethius and his father-in-law Symmachus would soon be executed.[54] Perhaps the additional statement that it is better for a man to die than to watch his family die is intended to acknowledge Boethius's execution while still arguing that he has no reason to be sad. Where the inspiration for this statement came from is unclear. There has been much debate as to whether King Alfred translated the *Old English Boethius* himself, and a highly speculative possibility would be that the line is based on his own experience of losing several children in infancy, which is recorded in Asser's *Life of King Alfred*.[55] However, in

[52] Paul E. Szarmach, 'Boethius's influence in Anglo-Saxon England: The Vernacular and the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*', in *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Noel Harold Kaylor and Philip Edward Phillips (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 221–54.

[53] *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. by Malcolm Godden and Susan Irvine, 2 vols (Oxford: University Press, 2009), I, pp. 259 and 402: 'Many a man would rather die himself than see his wife and child dying'. Translation by ibid., II, pp. 15 and 109.

[54] *Old English Boethius*, ed. by Godden and Irvine, II, p. 259.

[55] *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of Alfred and other contemporary sources,* trans. by Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 75; Nicole G. Discenza, 'The Old English

keeping with the arguments of this paper, it is possible it was inspired by another recurring motif of parental grief. More specifically, in the theme of a parent watching the death of their child, which as we will see recurs across Old English hagiography and poetry.[56]

Turning first to hagiographical texts, the pain of child death can be seen in the *Old English Martyrology*'s account of Saint Felicity. The text says she was far greater than an ordinary martyr, as she 'died' seven times, once for each of her sons:

> Þeos wyduwe ys mare þonne martyre; heo onsende hyre seofen suna to heofena rice; swa oft heo wæs dead beforan hyre sylfre.[57]

Similarly, Ælfric's homily *On the Purification of Saint Mary* describes the Virgin Mary as a spiritual martyr. When Christ was taken and crucified his suffering of the body was her suffering of the mind and this was a far greater torment than if she had been martyred:

> heo wæs mare ðonne martyr, forðon þe mare wæs hyre modes þrowung þonne wære hire lichaman, gif heo gemartyrod wære.[58]

For both the Virgin Mary and Saint Felicity, the experience of watching their sons' violent deaths is far worse than if they were to be merely martyred or crucified themselves. In these comments, we see the same understanding of

Boethius', in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. by Nicole G. Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 200–26.

[56] For the biographical interpretation, see *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of Alfred and other contemporary sources,* trans. by Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 75; Nicole G. Discenza, 'The Old English Boethius', in *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. by Nicole G. Discenza and Paul E. Szarmach (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp. 200–26.

[57] *The Old English Martyrology*, ed. by Christine Rauer, in *The Old English Martyrology: Edition, Translation and Commentary* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), p. 218: 'This widow is greater than a martyr; she sent her seven sons to the kingdom of heaven; she died as many times, before [she died] herself'. Translation from ibid., p. 219.

[58] *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, ed. Benjamin Thorpe, 2 vols (London: Ælfric Society, 1844), II, pp. 146–47: 'She was more than a martyr, because the suffering of her mind was more than her body's would have been, if she had been martyred'.

parental grief as expressed by the additional sentence in the *Old English Boethius*, that it is worse to witness a child die than to die oneself.

Alongside the brief statements in the Old English Boethius and hagiographical literature we also have several more graphic depictions of parents bearing witness to their child's death and the emotional pain this causes. The clearest example of this is the *Fortunes of Men*, a poem included in the Exeter Book which reflects on the process of child rearing, and the potential fates awaiting offspring in the world. The intended message of the poem and its overall theme has provoked much scholarly debate. The majority of commentators have interpreted the poem as a reflection of man's helplessness in the face of God and nature. For example, Jill Hamilton Clements has argued for a specific interest in 'sudden death', while Leonard Neidorf has drawn out a theme of control and mastery.[59] Regardless of the overall message, what is clear is that the *Fortunes of Men* harnesses the motif of parental grief to convey its meaning. For example, we are told of a woman who sees her child consumed by fire:

> Sum on bæle sceal brondas þencan,
> fretan frecne lif fægne monnan;
> þær him lifgedal lungre weorðeð,
> read reþe gled; reoteð meowle,
> seo hyre bearn gesihð brondas þeccan.[60]

The mother in this passage is forced to watch her child's death, described in vivid detail, with no other recourse than to weep. Clearly, the mother experiences

---

[59] Jill Hamilton Clements, 'Sudden Death in Early Medieval England and the Anglo-Saxon *Fortunes of Men*', in *Dealing with the Dead: Mortality and Community in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Thea Tomaini (Carol Stream: Brill, 2018), pp. 36–67; Leonard Neidorf, 'The Structure and Theme of the *Fortunes of Men*', *English* Studies, 101.2 (2020), 97–111. For a summary of the scholarship in which the poem's theme is identified as helplessness, see Neidorf, 'The Structure and Theme', 97–98.

[60] *Fortunes of Mortals*, ll. 43–47, ed. by Robin Cummins and Martin Foys, in *OEPF*: 'One fire shall do to death on the pyre; greedy flame shall consume the doomed man, red fierce incandescence, where severance from life comes quickly, and the woman weeps who sees the flames engulf her child'. Translation from S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Orion, 1982), p. 342.

deep emotional pain at the death of her child.[61] We see a similar idea appear in *Beowulf*, when, as an analogy to Hrethel's grief at his son's death, an old man is described as watching his son on the gallows:[62]

> Swa bið geomorlic gomelum ceorle
> to gebidanne þæt his byre ride
> giong on galgan. Þonne he gyd wrece,
> sarigne sang, þonne his sunu hangað
> hrefne to hroðre, 7 he him helpan ne mæg […][63]

There is in fact a direct parallel between this description and the *Fortunes of Men*, although in the latter there is no parental figure watching on. One of the possible fates is that 'sum sceal on geapum galgan ridan' and will have a 'hrefn nimeþ heafodsyne'.[64]

Common to both these examples is the inability of parents to control what happens to their children, even though, as *Boethius* says, a father would rather die than see his child suffer that fate. The old man in *Beowulf* can do nothing to help his executed son, regardless of his age and wisdom; likewise, the idea that children will suffer, despite careful nurturing, is prominent in *The Fortunes of Men*. This theme is picked up and expanded upon in the Old English poem *Solomon and Saturn II*, a fictional dialogue between King Solomon and Saturn, prince of the Chaldeans. *Solomon and Saturn II* says of a mother that:

> Oft heo to bealwe bearn afedeð,
> seolfre to sorge, siððan dreogeð

[61] Christina Lee, 'Forever Young: Child Burial in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Youth and Age in the Medieval North*, ed. by Shannon Lewis-Simpson (Boston: Brill, 2008), p. 22.
[62] Cf. *Beowulf*, ll. 2445–50, ed. by Kiernan. First discussed in Dorothy Whitelock, '*Beowulf* 2444–71', *Medium Ævum*, 8.3 (1939), 198–204.
[63] *Beowulf*, ll. 2445–49, ed. by Kiernan: 'Just as it is miserable for an old man to live to see that his son in youth rides the gallows. Then he makes a dirge, a sorrowful song, that his son hangs as comfort to ravens, and he cannot help him […]'
[64] *Fortunes of Mortals*, ll. 33 and 36, ed. by Cummins and Foys: 'some shall ride on capacious gallows' and 'a raven take [their] eyes'.

his earfoðu, orlegstunde.[65]

Despite the careful raising of the child, Solomon, the speaker in this section of the poem, states that the child will go on to cause great sorrow. Ultimately Solomon concludes that:

> Forðan nah seo modor geweald, ðonne heo magan censeð,
> bearnes blædes, ac sceall on gebyrd faran
> an æfter anum.[66]

These passages share similar ideas to those of *Beowulf* and the *Fortunes of Men* mentioned above. The mother is unable to control the fate of her child, just as the hanged man's father can do nothing to help his son and the fate is shown to be beyond the hands of human control in the *Fortunes of Men*. While the subject matter of these poems may otherwise seem quite different, they are unified in their depictions of the helplessness of parents to control their child's fate and the sorrow that this causes.

Another important element of the grief is death in youth. The unnaturalness of a young person's death is shown by Ælfric, when he writes of three kinds of death: the *bitera* ('bitter') death of children, the *ungeripod* ('unripe') death of youth, and the *gecyndelica* ('natural') death of the old.[67] In the description of the hanged man in *Beowulf*, the youth of the son is directly contrasted with the age of his father watching on. Similarly to the *Old English Boethius*, the *Beowulf* poet relates that it is a miserable experience to see one's son perish. This is particularly painful partly because the unnaturalness of the younger dying before the older. This unnaturalness is further strengthened by the violence and suddenness of the deaths discussed, whether the children are martyred, executed,

[65] *Solomon and Saturn I*, ll. 195–97, ed. and trans. by Daniel Anlezark, in *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2009), p. 88: 'Often she nurtures the fierce one for ruin, to her own sorrow, later endures his torment at the fated hour'. Translation from ibid., p. 89.

[66] Ibid., ll. 206–8, p. 88: 'Therefore the mother does not have control, when she gives birth to her son, over her child's success – but one must go after the other in birth'. Translation from ibid., p. 89.

[67] Victoria Thompson, *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2004), pp. 10–11.

or fall foul to one of the multitude of scenarios in the *Fortunes of Men*. Jill Hamilton Clements notes that ‘a “good death” in the Middle Ages was not a quick death’, as time was needed to get one’s earthly and spiritual affairs in order.[68] In early medieval England, ‘sudden death’ was of great concern and something to be avoided, as evidenced by the late Old English *Prayer Against Sudden Death*, extant in three eleventh-century manuscripts.[69] With this in mind, the death of the children in these texts becomes even more distressing for their parents, and serves as a reminder to real parents to make sure that they and their children are following God’s word.

While these examples come from a range of textual genres and varying dates, they share strong similarities in their presentation of the experience of a parent witnessing their child’s death. The emotional turmoil of the parent, the unnaturalness of such an event, and the cruelty of fate typify these depictions. As the previous sections have likewise shown, there appear to be common ideas and motifs of parental grief that span across Old English literature regardless of genre or type.

CONCLUSION

Throughout Old English literary texts there is a persistent interest in parental grief. Through the lens of ‘adapted’ texts it is possible to see how translators and authors have introduced such ideas to their work. Thamyris’s pursuit of revenge for her son’s death becoming a consequence of her grief, the fathers of *Genesis A* grieve for their lost and desired sons, the Egyptians of the *Exodus* poem grieve for their first born and worldly treasures, and Wisdom tells Boethius about the pain of witnessing a child die. These inclusions align these texts with depictions of parental grief in more ‘original’ Old English works, as well as allowing authors to explore early medieval theological and philosophical ideas. In turn, this suggests the strength and appeal of parental grief as a theme for authors, as does the appearance of grieving parents in a wide range of genres from varying time

[68] Clements, ‘Sudden Death’, p. 37.
[69] Ibid., p. 46.

periods. Regardless of whether it was always viewed as appropriate for early medieval parents to grieve for their child, a parent's emotional distress is a powerful and frequently reoccurring literary theme.

King Alfred and the Eighteenth-Century Mirror of Princes

Kirsten Ogilby
University of Copenhagen

In 1709, Thomas Hearne (1678–1735) published his edition of Sir John Spelman's 1678 *Aelfredi Magni, Anglorum Regis Invictissimi Vita Tribus Libris Comprehensa* – the *Life of Alfred the Great.* Like the rest of Hearne's work, the *Life of Alfred the Great* touches on the early medieval period in England, but is largely based on Latin chronicles and antiquities.[1] His work, being largely curatorial, and centred on translation of the Latin and collating known works, is often overshadowed by the philological achievements of contemporary Old English scholars such as George Hickes (1642–1715), Humphrey Wanley (1672–1726), and, to a lesser extent, Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756). However, in the decades following Hickes's death, Hearne's edition of Spelman's work found a popular audience. This fulfilled Elstob's wish in the preface to her edition of Ælfric's homily on St Gregory's birthday: that Old English be enjoyed by a broader populace which liked 'a play, a romance, a novel'.[2] Hearne's work was used thereafter as the base for creative work on Alfred's life through the long eighteenth century. This article focuses on two early pieces: Richard Blackmore's *Alfred: An Epick Poem* (1723), and Thomas Arne, James Thomson, and David Mallet's *Alfred: A Masque* (the first edition in 1740, and the second in 1751). Both these pieces juxtapose the figure of Alfred with the crown prince at the time, Frederick of Hanover (1707–51), in an eighteenth-century version of the medieval genre of the 'mirror of princes'.[3]

[1] There are a few exceptions to this – notably, Hearne's work on the antiquities of Glastonbury contained a copy of *The Battle of Maldon.*
[2] Elizabeth Elstob, *An English-Saxon Homily on the Birthday of St. Gregory* (London: W. Bowyer, 1709), p. iv.
[3] See Hans-Joachim Schmidt, 'The Use of Mirrors of Princes', in *A Critical Companion to the 'Mirrors for Princes' Literature*, ed. by Noelle-Laetitia Perret and Stéphane Péquignot (Leiden: Brill, 2022), pp. 473–513.

The transformation of Alfred, king of Wessex (r. 871–99) from a historical figure into a figure in popular culture serves as not only a useful window into eighteenth-century conceptions of the Middle Ages but also reveals *which* elements of the early medieval period in England were seen as important. The popularity of Alfred, and the manner and audience to which he was presented gives useful insight into how the Middle Ages served as a historical angle from which to comment on eighteenth century concerns and debates. As De Certeau argues in *The Writing of History,* all history is essentially a modernism: the choice of narrative, the construction, citation, presentation of sources alter the past even as it tries to recreate it.[4] There is no organisation of historical material that can recall the past perfectly; nor would a complete and perfect recreation of the past be exempt from the narrative filter of human perception.[5] Looking at Arne, Thomson, and Mallet's *Alfred: A Masque,* and Blackmore's *Alfred* allows us to see the eighteenth-century imprint on the medieval; the use of history to tell eighteenth-century narratives. This article examines how the dissolution of ideas of sacral monarchy, and anxieties regarding the regent's status as de-facto head of the Anglican Church, regardless of personal conviction, lead to a shift in the use of King Alfred as a foundational figure in histories of England.

King Alfred's enormous popularity in the Victorian era, recently and thoroughly explored in Joanne Parker's *'England's darling': The Victorian cult of Alfred the Great*, has its roots in the preceding century, which saw Alfred enter popular British culture through plays, paintings, history books, and poetry.[6] Much as the Anglican Church sought a sense of continuity in the face of rupture through embracing religious medievalism and searching for Anglican doctrine among Old English texts, the British monarchy sought to create a sense of

[4] Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 136.

[5] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, ACLS Humanities E-Book (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), pp. 44–49.

[6] Simon Keynes, 'The Cult of King Alfred the Great', *ASE*, 28 (1999), 225–356; Joanne Parker, *'England's Darling': The Victorian Cult of Alfred the Great* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

continuity through similar measures.[7] During the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the British royal line was deposed during the Civil War, reinstated, and suffered several succession crises. First, during the Glorious Revolution in 1688, when James II (r. 1685–88) was deposed in favour of his (protestant) daughter Mary II (r. 1689–94) and her husband, William of Orange (r. 1689–1702); and later in 1714, when Queen Anne (r. 1702–14) died without surviving heirs, leaving the throne to George I (r. 1714–27) and the House of Hanover.

Alfred, as a historical figure, was offered up first by Spelman and Hearne, and later by Thomson, Mallet and Blackmore, as an antidote to this narrative of disjunction. It is worth briefly examining the presentation of Hearne and Spelman's work on King Alfred, firstly, to have a sense of why King Alfred became such a locus of royal medievalism. Although Thomson, Mallet, and Blackmore transformed Alfred according to their own political opinions and religious and commercial pressures, the preceding scholarship on Alfred had already rendered him uniquely appropriate as a vehicle to comment on English kingship.

John Spelman's (1594–1643) enormously influential 1678 work on Alfred was dedicated to Charles II, 'Dei Gratia Magnæ Britanniæ, Franciæ, & Hibernia Regi, Fidei Defensori, &c'.[8] It was published posthumously – as Spelman had died in 1643 – with a translation and a preface likely provided by the translator, Christopher Wase.[9] King Alfred had particular significance to the Stuart line;

---

[7] Hugh Magennis, 'Not Angles but Anglicans? Reformation and Post-Reformation Perspectives on the Anglo-Saxon Church, Part 1: Bede, Ælfric and the Anglo-Saxon Church in Early Modern England', *English Studies*, 96.3 (2015), 243–63.

[8] John Spelman, *Ælfredi Magni Anglorum Regis Invictissimi Vita Tribus Libris Comprehensa a Clarissimo Deo. Johanne Spelman, Henrici F. Primum Anglice Conscripta, Dein Latine Reddita, & Annotationibus Illustrata Ab Ælfredi in Collegio Magnæ Aulæ Universitatis Oxoniensis Alumnis* (Oxford: e theatro Sheldoniano, 1678), p. 2: 'King by God's grace of Great Britain, France, and Scotland, Defender of the Faith'. Charles II (1630–85) had a claim to the French throne through his mother, Henrietta Maria of France (1609–69), though calling him king of France is, by any stretch, a rather generous statement.

[9] Patrick V. Day, 'Rectifying a Chronicle of Contradictions: The Political Context of Abraham Wheelock's 1643 Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*, 43.1 (2017), 81–107 (p. 87).

both Abraham Wheelock and Spelman sought to link the Stuart reign to ideas of sacral kingship.[10] Spelman offered a regnal line which traced royal descent from Alfred down through David I (1082–1153) and Robert the Bruce of Scotland (1274–1329) to Henry VIII (1491–1547). As Patrick Day argues, this emphasises the mixed Scottish and English descent of the Stuarts, linking them doubly to Alfred, both by virtue of descent from Henry VIII, and through their connection to Scotland.[11] Wase's Stuart Restoration dedication of the text to Charles II, then, serves as a reiteration of the thesis of the edition: Charles II was rightful leader of both Britain and the English Church, and part of an unbroken line of divine kingship stretching back to King Alfred.

With the deposition of the Stuarts, as well as the somewhat dubious scholarship of the regnal lists which linked Alfred to that royal house, this connection was left largely behind in the long eighteenth century.[12] It was not entirely abandoned, however: Hearne's decision to include a dedication in the *Life of Alfred* was a politically charged choice. It was addressed to 'the prince' (leaving open the question of *which* prince) and opened 'I Here present unto Your Highness a Repaired Image of one of your Ancestors'.[13] Hearne went on to emphasise how the prince, 'deriving from [Alfred] in Bloud derive withall a Genuine Capacity of all Royall Endowments' and will 'represent unto the World a more lively Figure of Him than by any other can be given'.[14] I say Hearne: lacking Spelman's original preface (if any existed) and taking into account the total divergence from Wase's Latin preface, the preface is likely Hearne's, or at least heavily edited by him. Hearne, refusing to swear to the Hanovers, even to the point of losing his job and access to the Bodleian, left the preface nebulously dedicated.[15] Given that Alfred had been tied to the Stuart lineage in preceding

[10] Day, 'Rectifying a Chronicle', pp. 83–84.
[11] Ibid, p. 87.
[12] Ronald G. Asch, 'The Crisis of Sacral Monarchy in England in the Late Seventeenth Century in Comparative Perspective', in *Monarchy Transformed*, ed. by Robert Von Friedeburg and John Morrill (Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 319–46 (p. 341).
[13] John Spelman, *The Life of Aelfred the Great*, ed. by Thomas Hearne (Oxford: Printed at the Theater for Maurice Atkins at the Golden-Ball in St Paul's Church-Yard, London 1709), p. i.
[14] Ibid., p. iii.
[15] Thomas Hearne, *The Life of Mr. Thomas Hearne, of St. Edmund's Hall, Oxford; from His Own MS. Copy, in the Bodleian Library. Also an Accurate Catalogue of His Writings and Publications,*

scholarship, and that Hearne placed an emphasis on blood descent, the preface, even scrubbed of recognisable names, was still most likely intended as a defence of Stuart kingship (although one which provided plausible deniability if Hearne was outright accused of Jacobitism).

Despite the Stuart associations, Hearne's Alfred proved too compelling a figure for historians and writers to abandon. While Alfred's fame within historical circles stretched back to Archbishop Matthew Parker's (1504–75) work, with songs on Alfred circulating as early as 1570, Hearne's work sparked new interest in the matter.[16] Hearne's easily accessible version of Alfred's life saw the idea of Alfred as a model for kings made available to amateur historians, playwrights, and writers with a looser interest in historical source material – or limited access to the originals.[17] One such playwright was the poet and physician Richard Blackmore (1654–1729), of whom Alexander Pope wrote:

> All hail him victor in both gifts of song,
> Who sings so loudly, and who sings so long.[18]

Modern scholarly opinions of Blackmore largely concur with Pope's assessment. Clare Simmons writes of his 1723 work, *Alfred: An Epick Poem*, that: 'critics have yet to discover a redeeming feature in the twelve tedious cantos of rhyming couplets'.[19] Still, as Joanne Parker notes, the value of Blackmore's work is not in the quality of rhyme alone, but as a piece of political writing: 'read in the context of pro-Hanoverian propaganda, the poem is fascinating in its attempt to make the foreign Frederick (George II's eldest son and the poem's dedicatee) a more acceptable prospect to his potential subjects. The poem was also clearly intended

from His Own MS. Copy, Which He Designed for the Press. To Which Are Added, Several Plates of the Antiquities, &c. Mentioned in His Works. Never Before Printed (Oxford: Printed at the Clarendon-Press for J. and J. Fletcher in the Turl; and J. Pote at Eton, 1772), p. 24.

[16] Keynes, 'Cult of King Alfred', pp. 240–45.

[17] Ibid., 246–47.

[18] Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad: In Four Books*, ed. by Valerie Rumbold, Longman Annotated Texts, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 187.

[19] Clare A. Simmons, *Reversing the Conquest: History and Myth in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990), p. 27.

as a didactic work for the benefit of the prince himself – demonstrating to him the value and antiquity of the British system of constitutional monarchy'.[20]

Blackmore's *Alfred* was a small part of his enormously varied and productive writing career. As Valerie Rumbold points out in her annotations to Pope's *Dunciad*, Richard Blackmore 'could hardly be accused of writing for hire'.[21] He was born in 1674, in Wiltshire, the son of the wealthy attorney Robert Blackmore.[22] In addition to being a prolific poet, he was also a doctor. The success of his initial epic offering from 1695, *Prince Arthur,* an epic poem in ten books (to be followed by *King Arthur*, a twelve-book continuation in 1697) led to his appointment as Physician-in-Ordinary to William III (and later Queen Anne) and knighting. *Prince Arthur* is a fairly transparent encomium of William's victories in the Glorious Revolution, and *Alfred* followed the same model of arguing for continuity between the British past and present, in particular with regards to the line of kingship.

The story of the poem is not Hearne's version of Spelman, or even that of Asser's *Life of King Alfred*. Though it takes as its main plot Alfred's journey to Rome on pilgrimage as a young man, it branches off from the narrative of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* almost immediately. Alfred journeys to Italy from Africa over the sea, and is swept up in a terrible storm. He is washed up on the coast of Namibia, where he befriends the pagan king Halla, before journeying on. During his travels, he meets a Spanish hermit who was tutor to the princes of Spain before being cast out by the 'lallites',[23] is near tempted to his ruin by the daughter of the king of Sicily, and is given a tour of Heaven and Hell. Finally, he returns to England in order to roust the Danes in a final, triumphant battle, marries the daughter of the Danish chief, and:

> [Takes] to fair *Eboracum* the Road,
> The City chosen for his Chief Abode.

---

[20] Parker, *'England's Darling'*, p. 62.

[21] Pope, *Dunciad*, p. 187.

[22] Flavio Gregori, 'Blackmore, Sir Richard (1654–1729)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by B. Harrison and H. C. G. Matthew (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[23] That is, Lollards – though by the eighteenth century this had become a catch-all term for heretics, rather than referring to the fourteenth- and sixteenth-century religious movement.

And now attend[s] with a noble Train
The British Monarch from *Cunetio*'s Plain
D[oes] to the Banks of spreading Thames retreat
And ma[kes] *Augusta* his imperial Seat.[24]

The future, Alfred has already been prophetically assured, is secured: from his line will eventually come 'Fred'rick, just and bright'.[25]

Blackmore's poem, however, remains anxious about this bright future. It goes out of its way to describe the fates of those who stray from Christian doctrine, or oppose English colonial ambition – the king of India and his subjects burn among 'Fiends' and 'raging Flames'.[26] The tutor to the Spanish princes, after furnishing them with a lengthy speech on the value of Christian mercy and good governance, is ousted from his position by the 'lallites', who compose tortuous 'Works of ingenious Cruelty, for those who would not Christian Liberty betray, / And yield the Church to Arbitrary Sway'.[27] *Alfred*, thematically, is plagued with contradiction and anxiety over the subject matter. Fredrick, 'just and bright', will inherit the throne, but the Spanish court, well-guided by the hermit, still falls to deception, heresy, and internal schism.

Given the focus on paganism in the introduction to the poem, the heavy emphasis it places on Christian heresies seems misplaced. It exists, however, in continuation of Blackmore's other work and personal concerns. The mirror of princes, as a genre, is designed first of all to serve as an instruction to princes and rulers – though, as Hans-Joachim Schmidt argues, these books and poems often saw wide circulation and also contained 'discussion of political issues which were not enshrined in mere personal morality'.[28] The advice given to princes was also advice directed at the nation. Blackmore, as a theological writer, was deeply

[24] Richard Blackmore, *Alfred An Epick Poem. In Twelve Books* (London: Printed by W. Botham, for James Knapton, 1723), p. 448.
[25] Ibid., pp. 287 and 292.
[26] Ibid., pp. 278–83.
[27] Ibid., p. 48.
[28] Schmidt, 'The Use of Mirrors of Princes', pp. 473–74.

concerned with the rise of dissenting movements to the Church of England in the eighteenth century.[29]

The epic poem *Alfred* was predated by Blackmore's *Letters of Religion between Theophilius and Eugenio* (1720), a tract in the epistolary format featuring Theophilius (lit. 'Friend of God') explaining virtue to Eugenio (lit. 'well-born' or 'noble'.) The letters were followed by *Modern Arians Unmask'd* (1721). In *Arians,* Blackmore argues stridently against what Robert Ingram terms 'the prevailing heresy of England in the first half of the eighteenth century,' the non-trinitarian beliefs being put forwards by theologians like William Whiston.[30] Blackmore compared the 'Modern Arians' directly to the banned practice of Catholicism, arguing that they 'maintain[ed] Opinions no less absurd in Religion' than the Catholic doctrine of the eucharist, 'for which our pious Reformers, to their immortal Honour, renounced the Communion of that Church'.[31] *Alfred*'s lengthy interlude dealing with heretics infiltrating an otherwise pious court – a common contemporary anti-Catholic trope – extends the parallel made between the practice of Catholicism and dissenting movements in *Arians. Alfred* was written not only as an assurance of Prince Frederick's right to rule, but also as a general warning regarding the contemporary state of British religion.

As a tract about the dangers of heresy, *Alfred* makes its point quite emphatically. As a medievalist text, it is remarkably unconvinced of its own core argument: that English antiquity is as valuable and worthy as the Greek or Roman one. Authority, in *Alfred,* still comes from Rome, centring Roman Britain in an early medieval narrative set after the end of the Roman empire.

---

[29] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 19.

[30] Robert G. Ingram, 'How Heterodox Was Benjamin Hoadly?', in *Religious Identities in Britain, 1660–1832*, ed. by William Gibson and Robert G Ingram (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 71–90 (p. 69).

[31] Richard Blackmore, *Modern Arians Unmask'd Idolatry Fix'd upon Them; Their Criminal Manner of Subscribing to Articles of Faith; Their Insincerity and Double-Dealing: Greater Difficulties on the Arian, than on the Orthodox Side; The Doctrine of the First Pernicious to the Commonwealth: The Orthodox Persuaded to Exert Themselves in Opposition to This Spreading Heresy. By Sir Richard Blackmore, M. D.* (London: Printed at the Bible and Crown in the Poultry, near Cheapside, for John Clark, 1721), p. 6.

York is not allowed to be *Ebor, York,* or the period-appropriate *Jorvík,* but retains its anachronistic Latin name, *Eboracum*, – just as Alfred is from *Cunetio*, dwells in *Augusta*, and must go to Italy before assuming his empire-building destiny, just as Aeneas did.[32] Similarly, at a narrative level, the poem imposes the structure of the *Aeneid* onto the English Middle Ages. Despite these attempts to appeal to a literary audience which valued Classical poetry as the pinnacle of the form, *Alfred* saw much less success that the earlier *King Arthur,* and has, as mentioned above, not fared well posthumously.[33] It shares, however, several notable features – the comparison of King Alfred to Frederick of Wales, the future succession of kings being shown to Alfred – with a far more popular work which was written twenty years later.

In the summer of 1740, to celebrate the third birthday of the young Princess Augusta, *Alfred: A Masque* was first performed at Cliveden House in Buckinghamshire. The audience was the Prince of Wales, Frederick, and his wife and family.[34] Though Thomas Arne's (1710–78) name is the one largely attached to the masque – he wrote the musical accompaniment and provided the theatrical connections – the masque itself was written by David Mallet (1705–65) and the poet and playwright James Thomson (1700–48). The masque dealt with the period of Alfred's life where the Danes had him cornered on Athelney, at what was, essentially, his lowest point: the Kingdom of Wessex beset by Danes, and Alfred driven into the far reaches of his own lands, before turning the tide of war and emerging triumphant.

---

[32] Blackmore, *Alfred. An Epick Poem*, p. 448.

[33] In the eighteenth century, Old English was seen as a less compelling an artistic medium than even modern English. Thomas Warton, in his *History of English Poetry,* notably claimed that Old English poetry was too 'jejune and intricate' to bother with: Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry, from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century. To Which Are Prefixed, Two Dissertations. I. On the Origin of Romantic Fiction in Europe. II. On the Introduction of Learning into England* (London: Printed for, and sold by J. Dodsley, Pall Mall; J. Walter, Charing Cross; T. Becket, Strand; J. Robson, New Bond-Street; G. Robinson, and J. Bew, Pater-Noster-Row; and Messrs. Fletcher, at Oxford, 1774), p. vii.

[34] David Mallet and James Thomson, *Alfred: A Masque. Represented before Their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales, at Cliffden, on the first of August, 1740* (London: Printed for a Millar, over-against St Clement's Church in the Strand, 1740).

By the mid-seventeenth century, high-profile masques that linked patriotic displays of Englishness with encomia of the royal family had become a popular genre. Examples included *Brittania Triumphans* (1638) by Inigo Iones and William Davenant, showcasing the powerful fleet of Charles I (and justifying the incredibly unpopular tax to support this navy), and *The Subjects Joy for the Kings Restoration* (1660) by Anthony Sadler, performed on the occasion of Charles II's return from exile.[35] Medieval – or pseudo-medieval – subject matter had also been used to introduce such themes prior to *Alfred,* notably in John Dryden and Henry Purcell's *King Arthur, or the British Worthy* (1691) which, in addition to featuring a British king fighting heathen invaders, saw 'Britannia rise / In triumph o'er the main' to assert naval supremacy.[36]

In Arne, Mallet, and Thomson's masque, Alfred is given shelter by a shepherd and his wife, who recognise his innate nobility. Despairing at losing England to the Vikings, a hermit, aided by divine spirits, shows Alfred and his wife, Eltruda, a series of visions. Edward III (r. 1327–77) and his wife Philippa and son the Black Prince, Queen Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603), and William III (r. 1689–1702) all appear before Alfred and Eltruda. The Hermit explains that they are their glorious descendants and details their martial victories against the French and Spanish. After these visions, Alfred receives news that his followers have rallied to fight the Danes and prepares to ride out to join them – but not before the hermit professes that Britain will 'grasp the world: All nations serve thee; every foreign flood, Subjected, pays its tribute to the Thames'.[37]

The figures appear before Alfred, who is imagined as an *incipient* British king. On stage, the kings and queens also appeared before the audience – the Prince of Wales and his wife.. Likewise, Prince Fredrick was 'present' and visible to King Alfred like Edward III and Elizabeth I; an oblique flattery which is not explicitly called out in the text. It was a mirror designed to flatter Frederick, casting him at once as an analogue to King Alfred, and as one of the worthy descendants who carry on Alfred's military legacy, just as he is presented in

[35] Lauren Shohet, *Reading Masques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 191.
[36] Henry Purcell and John Dryden, *King Arthur, or the English Worthy*, Act V, at *OperaGlass*, 2015 <http://opera.stanford.edu/Purcell/KingArthur/libretto.html> [accessed 18 July 2024].
[37] Mallet and Thomson, *Alfred: A Masque*, p. 44.

Blackmore's poem. It is also, as a mirror, much less interested in instruction than Blackmore's, preferring outright praise.

In 1740 England was at war with Spain, and there were severe ongoing tensions with France which would eventually lead to the Seven Years' War. The play raised the spectres of British royals who had successfully won battles against the Spanish and French, as well as embracing a deeply ahistorical focus on naval power with regards to Alfred's reign which culminates in the assertion that 'they rule the balanc'd world, who rule the main'.[38] British colonial aspiration through naval supremacy was legitimised by showing a version of Britain at its lowest point – a king disguised as a shepherd and a country limited to the marshes in which he is hiding – and then casting the retaking of the country from invaders as part of the same, divinely sanctioned military reversal as Britain's later colonial aspirations.

It is worth noting, here, that there are two main versions of the *Alfred* masque. The original masque was fairly short and written for a small cast: six main players, and various 'bards, soldiers, spirits'.[39] However, the masque was reworked by David Mallet in 1751 as a play for Drury Lane. He expanded the play significantly, adding several new songs and roles.[40] Additionally, large parts of the original were cut. Mallet maintains that of '[Thomson's] part, [he retains] three or four speeches, and part of one song'.[41] The two plays do differ in some regards, one of which is the 1740 version's strong emphasis on Alfred's function as a messianic figure. Corin, the shepherd offering Alfred shelter, describes him as like 'some saint or angel in disguise', and wishes for vengeance on 'those Danish infidels, that war with Heaven and us'.[42] Likewise, at times Alfred approaches comparisons to Christ. He is both king and father to the British people, his life 'held in trust' for them – an exchange he pleads with God to let him make:

---

[38] Mallet and Thomson, *Alfred: A Masque*, p. 44.
[39] Ibid., p. 6.
[40] Ibid., advertisement, p. 3.
[41] Ibid., advertisement, p. 3.
[42] Ibid., pp. 6, 9–10.

> And hear, eternal Justice!
> If my life can make atonement for them, King of Kings!
> Accept thy willing victim. On my head
> Be all their woes:
> To them be grace and mercy.[43]

The Christ analogy dovetails neatly with the general defence of divine right of kingship Alfred's name carried in the mid-eighteenth century. The King of kings' relationship with his flock is one of sacrifice followed by rightful rule and eternal glory. In mirroring this relationship in the play, Alfred's kingship is set up to carry the same weight of divine preordination and foreshadows a similar trajectory from a dark night of doubt to eternal kingship – though it is an eternal kingship through his prophesied successors, rather than his own return.

Some subtler analogies are also only extant in the 1740 masque. Corin says of Athelney that:

> This island is of strength.
> Nature's own hand hath planted round a deep defence of woods,
> The founding ash, the mighty oak;
> Each tree a sheltering grove.[44]

Alfred's island is warded about by a girdle of trees, given by nature. When the play tips over into a celebration of England's naval power in the second act, the oak ships warding Britain at sea, this protection is likewise understood to be bestowed by nature itself: a natural naval supremacy, the right order of things.

The favour bestowed by God on England and on Alfred's line is shown to endure across time, through the regnal list. Edward III, 'Belov'd of Heaven,' wields an army 'as if this King had summon'd from on high Heaven's dread artillery to fight his battle!', while still showing 'care paternal' for the public.[45] Elizabeth rousts the 'faithless sons of barbarous zeal', though England after her

[43] Mallet and Thomson, *Alfred: A Masque*, p. 14.
[44] Ibid., p. 8.
[45] Ibid., p. 10.

reign is ruled by the 'slave of dreaming monks'.[46] There is an elision of the years between James I and William III, which allows the masque to cast the staunchly Protestant William III as the scourge of Catholicism in England, by 'Heaven upraise[d]', as 'before him flies superstition, flies oppressive Power'.[47] Alfred cheers on English Protestantism and William III, Prince Frederick's grandfather – about as direct an endorsement of Frederick's line as possible, and a complete reversal of Hearne's argument regarding Alfred's lineage and relationship to the Catholic Stuarts.

When going through these rulers, Thomson and Mallet sweep any mention of the pre-reform church under the rug. Like most contemporary Old English scholars, they are happy to view the English church from Alfred's time as essentially right-thinking, the same church as the eighteenth-century Anglican Church. Unlike early eighteenth-century Old English scholars like George Hickes and Elizabeth Elstob, they present the legacy of that church as an unbroken continuum, avoiding mention of the Reformation altogether. This suits the disparate goals of the texts. While the circle of scholars surrounding George Hickes was keen to argue for a restoration, to defend the changes made during the Reformation (and their validity against encroaching variant versions of Protestantism), the story of the *Alfred* masque is one of continuity. It papers over the interregnum and various succession crises of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century in favour of a vision of a direct, divinely sanctioned line of kings. Introducing an interlude on the Reformation would run directly counter to the point.

This struggle to present an unbroken royal line characterises both plays. One of the main issues plaguing Blackmore's vision is that it confidently *suggests* the notion of continuity – as in the masque, Alfred has a dream vision of future England – while undermining the narrative about early English kingship put forward by contemporary historians.[48] Focusing the narrative on what, historically, was Alfred's journey to Rome to be blessed by the pope jars with the medievalist notion of a proto-Anglican king; insisting on Latin language for

[46] Mallet and Thomson, *Alfred: A Masque*, pp. 33–34.
[47] Ibid., p. 35.
[48] Ibid., pp. 287 and 292.

English cities undermines the idea of a semi-independent early English state ruled by a model of good kingship, instead casting further back to Britain as a peripheral Roman outpost. It conflicts with the post-Reformation narrative in Old English medievalism which focused on a Germanic, proto-Anglican Britain – and more importantly, re-centred British antiquity on Rome, a contentious approach, given the degree to which the succession crisis leading to the Hanover dynasty was tied in with anxiety about Catholic kingship.

A story emphasising the Latin roots of England, focusing on a Germanic king travelling to Italy to genuflect to the pope, while admonishing him to beware heretics, presents a number of contradictions, none of which Blackmore addresses in the play itself. The contemporary historical narrative regarding the period, the literary positioning of the poem as a Classical epic, and the political considerations of the period all being given space in the poem results in a disjointed narrative, uncertain of its own argument. In this sense, it is an excellent distillation of the debates surrounding English national identity during the period, which sought identity from Mediterranean antiquity, while still seeking to distance itself from it.

Meanwhile, Thomson and Mallet present a similar narrative of divinely sanctioned continuity through the British regnal line (with similarly near-hagiographical approaches to kingship). Their model of kingship and nation is a good deal more coherent. England, they argue, has always been ruled by a line of divinely sanctioned rulers, destined to lead England into an age of naval supremacy. Their Alfred emerges from the Somerset fens to lead England to victory, though in a play which spends nearly as much time on the future as the early medieval present; Alfred sees the visions of his descendants, and, in the 1740 masque, defeats the Danes off-stage – the continuity of the royal line is the main thrust of the argument, even the contemporary action. Alfred exists in an atemporal state, in which the present regards the past, which in turn regards the present and finds it all the same: De Certeau's modernist history taken to a recursive extreme in order to assure the audience that everything is as it should be – and always has been.