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

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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

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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

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[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]

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[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 (VII^e–X^e 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]

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[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

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[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

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[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

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[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

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[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

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[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]

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[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.

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[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 perfídia 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]

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[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

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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.