2017

Viking Nobility in Anglo-Saxon England: The Expansion of Royal Authority Through the Use of Scandinavian Accommodation and Integration

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VIKING NOBILITY IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND: THE EXPANSION OF ROYAL AUTHORITY THROUGH THE USE OF SCANDINAVIAN ACCOMMODATION AND INTEGRATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of History

by
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B.A., Troy State University, 2005
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May 2017

For my children, Halcyann and Daniel

Proof that dreams are possible, as long as you are willing to work for them.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge those who have helped me complete this monumental task; I am forever in your debt.

First, to my husband, Eric, thank you for being my support and shelter when I believed I could not finish. Your calm certainty and fortitude assured me that I could in fact complete the seemingly impossible. For bearing the burden of wrangling an active toddler while I was locked away, furiously working—you are an exceptional daddy and husband.

To my family, particularly my parents, David and Deborah Doughty—thank you for all of your support over the course of numerous years. Thank you for the encouraging words and care packages that sustained me, both body and soul, while I pursued my dream.

To my professors at Louisiana State University who stimulated my mind and fostered my creativity, thank you. Particular thanks to my advisor Maribel Dietz whose patience and guidance helped me achieve my goals. Also a special remembrance for Lisi Oliver—I'm still hopeless at Anglo-Saxon translation, but I believe you would approve of the finished product nonetheless.

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ABSTRACT

This project seeks to understand the transformative period in Anglo-Saxon England between the ninth to eleventh centuries. During these centuries, Anglo-Saxon kings extended their royal power through the manipulation of Scandinavian ethnicity by using the mechanisms of accommodation, integration and appeasement as well as the incorporation of female royal power. Anglo-Saxon kings such as Alfred the Great, Æthelræd the Unræd, and Cnut were challenged by various hindrances from expressing their full royal authority, including the rise of an independent nobility, economic difficulties and invasions. Despite intrinsic limitations on their rule, kings such as Alfred, Æthelræd and Cnut sought to expand their royal authority through carefully crafted political, religious and economic accommodations with Scandinavians as well as the incorporation of female royal power. Through the legal manipulation of identity constructed in law codes such as the *Alfred-Guthrum Treaty* and the *Wantage Code*, Anglo-Saxon kings integrated Scandinavian elites into the political structure of England, thereby increasing their own royal authority.

Introduction

In this year dire portents appeared over Northumbria…immense whirlwinds, and flashes of lightening, and fiery dragons were seen flying in the air.[1]

First studied during the Romantic era of the nineteenth century, Anglo-Saxon scholarship has blossomed in the last thirty years. Historians such as Pauline Stafford, Richard Abels and Simon Keynes have drastically changed historical preconceived notions depicting Anglo-Saxon England as a simplistic society, waiting for continental inspiration.[2] In particular, the dramatic rise of royal authority during the ninth through eleventh centuries demonstrates the complex nature of Anglo-Saxon political realities. Much like continental kingship, Anglo-Saxon kings were hampered by various factors, including reliance on powerful nobles to support their reign, from fully expressing their royal authority. Despite intrinsic limitations on Anglo-Saxon kingship, kings such as Æthelwulf, Alfred, Edgar, Æthelræd and Cnut sought to expand the reach of royal authority through carefully crafted political, religious and economic accommodations with Scandinavians using the medium of law. This projects seeks to understand the mechanisms by which royal authority was expanded from the ninth to eleventh-centuries using various means including ecclesiastical endowment, female royal power, the rise of "new" nobility and most significantly, Scandinavian accommodation.

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[1] "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.;Oxford University Press,1979), 793.

[2] For more information see: R. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England*, (Berkeley, 1988); A. Campbell, *Skaldic Verse and Anglo-Saxon History*, (London, 1971); J. Campbell, *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History*, (London, 1986); M. Campbell, "The *Encomium Emmae Reginae*: Personal Panegyric or Political Propaganda?", *Annuale Mediaevale,* 19, (1979), 27-45; R. Fleming*, Kings and Lords in Conquest England*, (Cambridge, 1991); R. Fletcher, *Bloodfeud: Murder and Revenge in Anglo-Saxon England*, (London, 2002); P. Foote and D. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement*, (London, 1970); J. Graham-Campbell, *The Viking World*, (London, 1989); C. Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions,* (Oxford, 1962); L. Larson, *The King's Household in England before the Norman Conquest*, (Madison, 1904); M. Lawson, *Cnut: the Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century*, (London, 1993); P.H. Sawyer, *The Reign of Cnut*, (London, 1985); P. Stafford*, Unification and Conquest*, (Oxford, 1989).

Over the past several decades historians have begun to reevaluate longstanding theories on the impact and importance of Scandinavians in Anglo-Saxon England. The incorporation of Scandinavian elites into the fabric of Anglo-Saxon society stands as an important facet of ninth, tenth and eleventh century life. By understanding the ways in which Scandinavian "invaders" were seamlessly absorbed into the ruling hierarchy, historians obtain a more nuanced insight into the complex political, religious and ethnic relationships occurring during this period of change.[3] Integration and accommodation were significant avenues for the indigenous Anglo-Saxons to cope with the onslaught of Scandinavian settlers during the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries. Accommodation refers to attempts made by Anglo-Saxon kings to incorporate Scandinavians into the established power structure via laws and land grants while allowing their new subjects the opportunity to retain elements of their Scandinavian heritage, such as language or religion. Integration denotes mechanisms by which Anglo-Saxon kings sought to fully enmesh Scandinavians into local society, most often through conversion or inter-marriage, thus creating a new Anglo-Scandinavian ethnicity. In particular, Anglo-Saxon kings such as Alfred used the accommodation and integration of Scandinavian leaders to define separate spheres of authority while simultaneously creating subservient yet powerful allies. By creating modes of accommodation through legal manipulation of identity, Anglo-Saxon kings maximized their royal authority while forming the idea of "Englishness". Additionally Anglo-Saxon kings used strategies of appeasement for particularly troublesome Vikings who did not want to settle within England; often these strategies included large gold payments or the gifting of land, such as the Danelaw, with no expectation by Anglo-Saxon kings of extending their royal authority. While

[3] This study will use Scandinavian or Scandinavians to describe the Danish, Norse or Swedish populations interacting with Anglo-Saxon England. The use of the word Viking will be applied only to describe a band of Scandinavian warriors. This linguistic choice reflects the historiographic trend, which has reformed the image of Scandinavians to include raiders, traders, and settlers rather than pillagers.

numerous examples of these tactics of accommodation exist, such as religious conversion and intermarriage, none have discussed the incorporation of infamous Jómsvíking, Thorkel the Tall, into the court of Æthelræd the Unræd and later Cnut, demonstrating the significant role these Anglo-Scandinavian elites played in shaping Anglo-Saxon royal authority during the tenth and eleventh centuries.[4]

Scholars interested in examining the Anglo-Saxon period are particularly blessed with a plethora of source material for their perusal. The most significant primary source concerning Anglo-Saxon England from the ninth to eleventh centuries are the laws, charters and diplomas found in Felix Liebermann's *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, published in installments from 1898 to 1903. A herculean task, Liebermann assembled, edited and annotated the records of early English law, including such seminal works as the *Quadripartitus*, an Anglo-Norman attempt to translate early Anglo-Saxon laws into Latin during the twelfth century.[5] Divided into four translation sections, including two sections of Old English, one section of Anglo-Norman Latin and one section of German, the *Quadripartitus* comprises every Anglo-Saxon written law from Ine to Edward the Confessor. Cataloguing and translating into German Anglo-Saxon laws beginning with Ine in the seventh century, Liebermann's work sought to shed light on long-ignored corners of Anglo-Saxon scholarship. Though Liebermann's work has garnered harsh criticism over the last hundred years, the overall importance of his efforts remains a pivotal tool for Anglo-Saxon scholars.[6]

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[4] Jómsvíkings came from Jómsborg, a fortified town on the east side of Wollin at the mouth of the river Oder. Known for their skills in battle and terrifying demeanor, their deeds are recorded in the twelfth-century *Jómsvíkinga Saga*; though historians still debate their legitimacy, the description of any Scandinavian warrior as a Jómsvíking displays his value as a warrior. See Anders Winroth, *The Age of the Vikings*, 75 for more information.

[5] Andrew Rabin, "Felix Liebermann and *Die Gesetze Der Angelsachsen*" in *English Law Before the Magna Carta*, ed, by Stefan Juraninski, Lisi Oliver and Andrew Rabin, (Boston; Brill Publishing, 2010), 3-4.

[6] Jürg Rainer Schwyter, "L1 Interference In The Editing Process: Felix Liebermann, The *Gesetze* and The German Language", in *English Law Before the Magna Carta*, ed, by Stefan Juraninski, Lisi Oliver and Andrew

In addition to the laws and charters so carefully collected by Felix Liebermann, stands the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Translated repeatedly since the mid-nineteenth century, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is unique in that it is a contemporary set of annals recorded in the vernacular, ranging in time span over nearly seven hundred years. Early fragments, taken largely from Bede and elsewhere, run from 860 to 1154, with the later sections arguably being produced under Alfred's court.[7] Compiled at various monastic houses such as Winchester, Abingdon and Canterbury, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* takes on local influence depending on the various manuscript versions, ranging from *A* to *E*.[8] The most complete versions of the *Chronicle* rely on manuscripts *D* and *E* for the most comprehensive detail. Though the exact dating of the individual chronicle entries remains fertile ground for historical debate, the overall scope of the *Chronicle* provides scholars with an abundance of information.

Other primary sources necessary for understanding the influence of Scandinavians in Anglo-Saxon England include Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, the contemporary biography of Alfred the Great and the equally significant the *Encomium Emmae Reginae,* an eleventh-century biography of Queen Emma. Asser's *Life,* written in 893 after Alfred's successful response to years of Scandinavian invasion, stands as a remarkable source for scholars to examine both Alfred's life as well as the development of kingship in the ninth century. Though overzealous in its praise of Alfred and his virtues, Asser's proximity to Alfred's court and events he described

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Rabin, (Boston; Brill Publishing, 2010), 46-47. Some of the criticisms of Liebermann including his failures in textual transmission of sections of the *Quadripartitus*, including conflating later Elizabethan text for early Anglo-Saxon and his arbitrary naming and division of laws, including splitting such law codes as *II Edgar* and *III Edgar*.

[7] David Knowles, "The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle"*, *The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 48, No. 4, (Jan., 1963), 533.

[8] This study will exclusively use Dorothy Whitelock's translation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* found in *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, manuscript *E*, for consistency and clarity. Produced in Canterbury, manuscript *E* gives the fullest, and regionalized, accounts of the rise of Wessex.

allows modern historians a vivid glimpse at pre-Conquest rule.[9] A monk and priest recruited into Alfred's famously literate court, Asser wrote the *Life* in elaborate Latin, echoing the tone and grandeur of Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne.*[10] A rather idiosyncratic biography, Asser's *Life* falls into two rough parts: the first section, relying heavily on the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as well as memories of members of the court, details Alfred's life until 887; the second consists of a broad analysis and hearty approval of Alfred's rule. Though heavily criticized by various scholars for its flattery and haphazard dating, Asser's *Life of King Alfred* is a particularly useful tool for those interested in the development of royal authority.

Alongside Asser's biography of Alfred stands the eleventh-century biography of Queen Emma of Normandy which sought to strengthen her son Harthacnut's position as rightful heir after husband Cnut's death in 1035.[11] Written in prosaic Latin, the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* details Cnut's reign as well as several key Scandinavian figures within Cnut's sphere of influence, including Thorkel the Tall.[12] Biased and often misleading, the *Encomium Emmae Reginae* however "illuminates the character and motive at the time of the Danish conquest of England in 1013-16 and during the political crisis precipitated by Cnut's death."[13] Both biographies, though separated by over 120 years, enable historians to understand how Scandinavians imbedded themselves into court politics. Asser's accounts of "pagani" in Alfred's court and the Encomiast's vivid, and disingenuous, descriptions of Emma's relationship to

[9] *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and other Contemporary Sources*. Translated by Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge. (New York; Peguin Books, 1983), 10-11.

[10] Ibid, 55.

[11] *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, ed. by Alister Campbell, (Cambridge, U.K.; Cambridge University Press, 1998), v.

[12] This study will use Alister Campbell's translation of the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*.

[13] *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, xv.

Thorkel the Tall demonstrate the essential nature of the accommodation of Scandinavian nobility into the Anglo-Saxon power structure.

Discussions of the impact of the Scandinavian incursions into England hinge upon rather distorted impressions of their settlement patterns, largely drawn from the study of place names. Peter Sawyer first sparked the debate on the impact and influence of the Scandinavian settlement with his paper "The Density of the Danish Settlement in England" which challenged the widely accepted notion of massive numbers of Scandinavian settlements.[14] Questioning long-held tenets, Sawyer pointed out that instead of arguing about numbers that will never be adequately proven, historians should instead focus on the manner in which Scandinavians settled England. By questioning the process of migration rather than the eventual outcome, historians can better construct the dynamic relationships and negotiations that typify this period.[15] The presence and impact of the Scandinavian incursions should be treated as a significant factor in the overall development of a collective "Englishness" rather than a divergent period of invasion.[16]

The first thorough, modern history of Anglo-Saxon England which addressed Scandinavians in England was Sir Frank Stenton's monograph *Anglo-Saxon England.*[17] First published in 1943, the lengthy volume traces the creation of Anglo-Saxon England from the invasions of the fifth-century to the formation of the Anglo-Norman state—the decisive end point for purely Anglo-Saxon history. Refined and revised over the course of three volumes, and thirty years, Stenton's work was the first to truly analyze the impact of Scandinavians within the

[14] Peter Sawyer, "The Density of Danish Settlement in England", *University of Birmingham Historical Journal,* Vol. 6, (1958), 6-10.

[15] Sawyer, "The Density of Danish Settlement", 15.

[16] Simon Traford, "Ethnicity, Migration Theory, and the Historiography of the Scandinavian Settlement of England", in *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. by Dawn M. Hadley & Julian D. Richards, (Belgium; Brepols Publishing), 29.

[17] F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England Third Edition*, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1973), 5.

framework of Anglo-Saxon England. Though wide in scope, Stenton manages to focus on the themes of the emergence of Anglo-Saxon political unity, the introduction of Christianity with its development as a social and cultural touchstone and the development of the legal system. Relying heavily on place-name evidence, Stenton focuses on the midlands of England, rather than the often-examined West Saxon kingship.[18] Concerned with detailing how the Danelaw influenced the development of tenth-century kings such as Edgar and Æthelræd, free from historical bias, Stenton skillfully navigates the complicated waters of early English history to underscore how Scandinavians imbedded themselves in Anglo-Saxon society. Though the scope of Stenton's work limits the detail in which he could fully examine controversial subject areas, such as the dating of certain battles and the importance of coinage, the overall balanced approach to Scandinavians in Anglo-Saxon England opened the field to further inquiry. Rather than hostiles determined to wreak Anglo-Saxon society, Stenton portrays Scandinavians in their proper historical context, as raiders, traders and intimates of developing English society. His favorable portrayal of Cnut's reign, coupled with his glowing accounts of William the Conqueror give the first impression of a positive Scandinavian rule in England.

The process of integration and accommodation of Scandinavian elites reached a pivotal moment during the eleventh century when a second wave of invaders threatened the precarious balance in England. Discussed at length in P.H. Sawyer's *Kings and Vikings Scandinavia and Europe AD 700-1100,* this next wave of Scandinavians sought not only plunder but territorial acquisition as well.[19] Sawyer's study seeks to rehabilitate the image of Vikings as mere

[18] Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England,* 212-214.

[19] P.H. Sawyer, *Kings and Vikings Scandinavia and Europe AD 700-1100,* (London, U.K.: Metheun, 1982), 99-100.

mercenaries out for gain, placing them within the context of raiders, traders and colonists.[20] Under the reign of King Æthelræd, ironically nicknamed Unræd or ill-counseled, there occurred a significant reshaping of social and political power due to the violent migration of Scandinavians during the early eleventh century. Unlike the policies of his predecessor Edgar, King Aethelraed attempted to legislate directly those areas following Danish law, increasing his royal authority through charters which sought to vigorously enforce his royal will.[21] Matthew Innes argues that Æthelræd's law codes "demonstrates a powerful and assertive kingship, characterized by a ruthless use of royal patronage in the East Midlands and Northumbria which resulted in several leading families being brought down at the hands of the king."[22] The influx of new Scandinavian elites during the eleventh century challenged the accepted policies of accommodation, once again renewing fears of betrayal and factional manipulation. Laws, as recorded by such kings as Edgar and Aethelraed, were a medium for political bargaining which shaped relationships between regional elites and court, a medium that was sorely tested during periods of increased Scandinavian migrations.[23] In his masterful work, *The Diplomas of Æthelræd "The Unready" 978-1016: A Study in Their Use As Historical Evidence* published in 1980, Simon Keynes diligently researches and explains the numerous charters, laws, and edicts of Æthelræd's thirty-eight year reign.[24] Though seemingly a work geared towards exploring the character of a misunderstood king, Keynes's diligence in decoding the diplomas encourages not only a better understanding of Æthelræd, but also more importantly the place of Scandinavians

[20] Ibid, 23.

[21] Matthew Innes, "Danelaw Identities", *Cultures in Contact*, 72-73.

[22] Innes, Ibid.

[23] Innes, "Danelaw Identities", 75.

[24] Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of Æthelræd "The Unready" 978-1016: A Study in Their Use As Historical Evidence,* (Cambridge, U.K.; Cambridge University Press, 1980), 4.

within his court. By examining both domestic troubles and foreign policy, Keynes underscores the importance of "new men" in Æthelræd's coterie of advisors, emphasizing the significance of position denoted within royal witness lists. The "ranking" of advisors in the witness lists of charters and diplomas, argues Keynes, explains Æthelræd's later foundering during Swein Forkbeard's invasion when unsteady youngsters such as Eadric Streona rose to prominence.[25] Among those discussed in the witness lists was Thorkel the Tall, whose own rise to a position of influence within Æthelræd's court signaled a turning point in Scandinavian acceptance. Used as a "framework for the reign of King Æthelræd", Keynes's work on detangling Æthelræd's legislative diplomas helps scholars understand the inner-workings of Æthelræd's court and the impact Scandinavians had on the ever-shifting reality of tenth-century West Saxon politics. [26]

Significantly, Æthelræd attempted to follow the standard for accommodation set by Alfred and Guthrum with the elevation of the Jómsvíking Thorkel the Tall to the position of *eorl* and advisor to King. Thorkel's elevation into the ranks of the Anglo-Saxon elite provided King Æthelræd not only a valuable Scandinavian ally, but also a brilliant tactician against further incursions. Though Æthelræd would eventually loose his kingdom to Cnut, Thorkel the Tall's position within the Anglo-Saxon elite served as a pivotal thread of continuity, helping Cnut establish his legitimacy and royal authority. Cnut's reign, with the aid of Thorkel the Tall and Archbishop Wulfstan, became a model of legal duality for cooperation and partnership between Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons. Cnut's legislations closely mirrored the traditions of Edgar the Peaceable's reign, which recognized the duality, and distinctions of the elites, while emphasizing the role of expanded royal authority in mitigating disputes.

[25] Keynes, *The Diplomas of Æthelræd*, 221.

[26] Keynes, *The Diplomas of Æthelræd*, 10.

Pauline Stafford, and later M.K. Lawson, examines the themes of increased royal authority in relation to Scandinavian settlement in their respective works. Pauline Stafford's *Unification and Conquest* published in 1989, as well as numerous later articles, details the dramatic and often contentious rise of royal authority during the tenth and eleventh centuries in England.[27] Providing a political narrative, Stafford surveys "the unification of the English kingdoms under one ruler in the tenth-century and the two conquests of the unified kingdom in the eleventh."[28] Stafford explains that the unification of England under West Saxon leadership did not primarily arise from external Scandinavian threats, but rather internal tension between increasingly powerful kings and fractious nobility alongside Scandinavian settlement spurred the complex process. Stafford explains, "Unification was effected by conquest, enhancing the prestige of the tenth century monarchy and producing changes among the nobility, in royal power and in relations between English kings and their immediate neighbors."[29] Though Stafford presents a broad historical narrative, framed by conquest, her study does not focus on how accommodation and integration of Scandinavian elites through the medium of law encouraged expansion of royal authority.

Magnified under the harsh circumstances of Æthelræd's reign, the political and social distinctions between Scandinavians and the local population were dramatically reactivated by Cnut's victory and reign. Seeking to once again blur the political and social lines between Viking and Anglo-Saxon, Cnut with the aid of advisors, such as Thorkel, attempted to once again reach equilibrium. Cnut's laws, largely written by Archbishop Wulfstan, sought to mirror the historical template of the *Alfred-Guthrum* treaty, presenting an arranged sense of stability within the

[27] Pauline Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, (London, U.K.; Edward Arnold, 1989), iii.

[28] Stafford, *Unification and Conquest*, v.

[29] Ibid.

kingdom through a symbiosis of Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon rooted in law.[30] A key element to this symbiosis remained a reliance on the accommodation and integration of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian elites into the newly established court. M.K. Lawson's *Cnut England's Viking King*, published in 2004, seeks to contextualize Cnut's reign as both distinctly Scandinavian and essentially Anglo-Saxon in character.[31] The first major biography of Cnut since L.M. Larson's 1912 *Canute the Great*, Lawson uses the sparse primary source material for Cnut's reign to create a portrait of how social structures, personal relationships and the church helped to shape the political events within Cnut's reign.[32] An exhaustive study of Cnut's vast empire, Lawson documents how Cnut manipulated his identity as a Scandinavian king to more closely match that of a traditional Anglo-Saxon monarch through his laws and the church. Lawson treads new ground, examining Cnut's reign as part of a larger spectrum in the shifting political environment of the eleventh-century. Concerned with competing with his imperial continental peers, Lawson portrays Cnut as more than a Viking conqueror, rather portraying a complex political mind behind a dramatic era, which shaped Anglo-Saxon identity before the Conquest.

At the very center of this idea of symbiosis stands the career of Thorkel the Tall who rose to prominence in the blended Anglo-Scandinavian elite under King Æthelræd and Cnut. Under the guidance of the *Alfred-Guthrum* treaty, relations between these two disparate groups were stabilized and articulated through the medium of law and the integration/accommodation of leading elites allowing for a growth in royal authority. By associating with traditional, established means of authority, Scandinavian elites renegotiated political and cultural identities

[30] Innes, "Danelaw Identities", 77.

[31] M.K. Lawson, *Cnut England's Viking King*, (Gloucestershire, U.K.; Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2004), 3-4.

[32] Lawson, *Cnut England's Viking King*,14. Though the majority of Anglo-Saxon history benefits from a plethora of source material, Cnut's reign is marked by a paucity of charters, diplomas and laws. Various theories have been put forth as to why such a scarcity exists including F.M. Stenton's famous quip that Cnut's reign was so peaceful the people could hardly complain.

in Anglo-Saxon England. This study seeks to understand the transformative mechanisms by which Anglo-Saxon kings such as Alfred, Æthelræd and Cnut used accommodation with Scandinavians to increase their royal power.

Chapter One:
Alfred The Great: A Lesson in Accommodation

> *In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 878, the Viking army left Exeter and went to Chippenham, a royal estate situated in the left hand part of Wiltshire […] By strength of arms they forced many men of that race to sail overseas [….] and very nearly all the inhabitants of that region submitted to their authority.*[33]

Terse in tone and sparse in detail, Asser, the biographer of legendary English king Alfred the Great, recounts in this passage the renewal of a decades long conflict between Scandinavian insurgents and local Anglo-Saxon communities. Driven from the royal palace of Chippenham during Twelfth night celebrations, King Alfred thus began his lauded foray into the marshes of Somerset, eventually to emerge victorious against his Scandinavian foes. Written in 893 and meant for the edification of courtiers and later heirs, Asser's *Life of King Alfred* uses this dark episode as a dramatic counterpoint to Alfred's subsequent victory and peace with his long-time enemies.[34] Though seemingly fated, Alfred's triumph over the Viking horde was in actuality the continuation of a delicate process of Anglo-Scandinavian interaction and accommodation culminating in the creation of the Alfred Guthrum treaty of 886. Alfred's famed treaty with the Viking leader Guthrum, later rechristened Æthelstan after Alfred's long-dead brother, created a symbiosis, rooted in law between the two disparate peoples, defining Anglo-Scandinavian relationships until the Norman Conquest of 1066. Following a policy of accommodation and integration, Alfred used treaties and direct legislation to manage Anglo-Scandinavian relations; in particular, the *Alfred-Guthrum Treaty*, stands as a model of how ethnicity became a malleable commodity in the face of political and economic gain.

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[33] Asser, *Life of of King Alfred*, trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, (New York; Penguin Books, 2004), 83.

[34] David Horspool, *King Alfred: Burnt Cakes and Other Legends*, (Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 2006), 23.

Alfred's Childhood and the Origins of Appeasement

Beginning with the brutal attack on Lindesfarne Abbey in 783 AD, Scandinavian raiders plundered the coasts of Anglo-Saxon England, Carolingian France and Celtic Ireland meeting with little resistance. More concerned with internecine political struggles and territorial acquisition, the separate Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Mercia, Wessex, Sussex, East Anglia and Northumbria were ill suited to fend off the Scandinavian onslaught. Originally lured by the promise of the amassing spoils, Scandinavian raiders soon began to establish settlements throughout the disturbed areas of England, France and Ireland.[35] Born into this world of turmoil and chaos, Alfred of Wessex learned not only the politics of war, but also more importantly the tools of lasting governance that helped created an integrated nation.

Though the exact date of Alfred's birth is unknown, his biographer Asser ascribes the year to 849 at the royal estate of Wantage.[36] The fifth son and youngest child born to King Æthelwulf and Osburh of Wessex, Alfred's birth garnered little notice outside the royal court. Over twenty years junior to his eldest brother Æthelstan, who at Alfred's birth was acting as under-king to their father Æthelwulf, Alfred's possibilities of inheriting his father's kingdom seemed bleak at best. Richard Abels points to Alfred's name as evidence of his distance from the throne, writing, "why they named him 'Ælfræd' rather than choosing another name beginning with 'Æthel-' is unkown, and its significance, is unclear. The 'Ælf-' element is found in Northumbrian and East Anglian genealogies but not in West Saxon, and the name Alfred was

[35] Notable Viking settlements during the late eighth and ninth centuries include Dublin, York and Normandy.

[36] Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 22. There continue to be debates as to the accuracy of Asser's date of 849 for Alfred's birth, see Abels for more information.

uncommon in the mid-ninth century."[37] Though Alfred's name seems to depart from West Saxon tradition, Asser takes great pains to demonstrate Alfred's connections to not only the West Saxon dynasty, but also linking the young *aetheling* to both Jutish and Gothic genealogies. Asser states,

> Now his genealogy is traced in this following manner: King Alfred was the son of King Æthelwulf, which was the son of Egbert, which was the son of Ealhumnd, which was the son of Eafa, which was the son of Eoppa, which was the son of Ingild. Ingild and Ine, the famous king of the West Saxons, were brothers of full blood…His mother called Osburh, a very religious woman, noble in character, noble also by birth; for she was the daughter of Oslac, the renowned cupbearer of King Æthelwulf. This Oslac was by race a Goth, for he was sprung from the Goths and Jutes…[38]

Significantly, these early royal genealogies seldom demonstrate factual ancestry, but rather reflect ideological and political goals of the current monarch, as seen in both Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian France. Written during the later portion of Alfred's reign, Asser's *Life of Alfred* certainly sought to educate heirs and courtiers of the 'rightness' of Alfred's claims to the throne while more importantly connecting Alfred to foreign, possibly Scandinavian, dynasties.[39]

For the young *aetheling* Alfred, the origins of appeasement, accommodation and integration were built through the charters and policies of his father King Æthelwulf.[40] Reigning successfully from 839-858, King Æthelwulf of Wessex first crafted the tenuous strategy of accommodation that his heirs would diligently reengineer, to deal not with Scandinavian invaders, but to solidify West Saxon hegemony over neighboring kingdoms.

In early 840, King Æthelwulf of Wessex, alongside his father Egbert, fashioned a territorial consolidation that "merged the once independent kingdoms of Kent, Sussex, Surrey

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[37] Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England*, (London, U.K.; Longman Limited, 1998), 50.

[38] Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 25.

[39] Horspool, *King Alfred: Burnt Cakes*, 33-34.

[40] Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 25.

and Essex into a 'Greater Kent'" alongside their traditional holdings in Wessex.[41] Notably, the incorporation of these new shires into the royal holdings of Wessex allowed for the rise of "new men" among the noble families in southeast England. Shaped by the ethos of reciprocity, the local Kentish thegnage bartered their loyalty for generous gifts of land and benefices, demonstrated in a surviving charter granting land to Ealdorman Eadred. Interestingly, this Horton charter demonstrates not only the rise of new men, but more importantly illustrates the mechanisms of political control and integration available to King Æthelwulf. Richard Abels explains, "in the gift giving culture of the ninth-century England, King Æthelwulf's grant not only reinforced his ties with Eadred and Eadred's with his neighbors, but confirmed or created bonds of mutual obligation and friendship between the king and the lesser landowners who benefited from the gift."[42]

Rather than impose the rule of West Saxon thegns in Kent, Æthelwulf wisely chose to appease and incorporate the native nobility creating a substantial base of support in the newly acquired territory. Additionally, the Horton charter demonstrates the importance of *bocland* or "booking properties" which were conveyed by royal charter as opposed to *folkland*, conveyed by oral contract.[43] David Pratt argues that bookland's "defining advantage was its conferral of ownership in perpetuity."[44] Though initially used by ecclesiastics, the extension of bookland to secular nobility during the eighth and ninth centuries laid the foundations for seigneurial lordship and its relation to royal authority. The booking of land was a deeply symbolic act, which demonstrated courtly negotiation and royal power, thus securing Æthelwulf's authority over his

[41] Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 31.

[42] Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 33.

[44] David Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great*, (Cambridge, U.K.; Cambridge University Press, 2007), 20.

newly acquired territory.[45] Æthelwulf's decision to retain local thegns and imbue others with *bocland* proved a provident decision, as his kingdom faced continual Scandinavian threats to his kingdom.

In 851, Æthelwulf's hegemony was threatened by renewed Scandinavian hostilities as four separate Viking armies converged on England. Both the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* here after known as *ASC*, and Asser's *Life* recount the struggles and victories of Æthelwulf and his sons to halt the advancing armies.

> In this year Ealdorman Ceorl, with the contingent of men of Devon fought against the heathen army at *Wicanbeorg*, and the English made a great slaughter there and had the victory. And from the first time, heathen men stayed through the winter on Thanet. And the same year 350 ships came into the mouth of the Thames and stormed Canterbury and London and put to flight Brihtwulf, king of the Mercians, with his army, and went south across the Thames into Surrey. And King Æthelwulf and his son Æthelbald fought against them at *Aclea* with the army of the West Saxons, and there inflicted the greatest slaughter [on a heathen army] that we have ever heard of until this present day, and had the victory there. And the same year, King Æthelstan and Ealdorman Ealhere fought in ships and slew a great army at Sandwich in Kent, captured nine ships and put the others to flight.[46]

At the height of his power at home, Æthelwulf's victory against the Viking forces at *Aclea* garnered international attention, including Bishop Prudentius of Troyes who recorded the triumph in the *Annals of St. Bertin* noting, "[Danes] attacking the island of Britain and the English, were defeated by them with the help of our Lord Jesus Christ."[47] Success on the battlefield helped King Æthelwulf transcend his rather modest kingdom, bringing him foreign acclamation and further strengthening his claims at local dominance.

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[45] Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great*, 38-39.

[46] "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford University Press; Oxford, U.K.,1979), 188. It should be noted that 'A' omits Thanet, while Asser has instead Sheppey.

[47] "Annals of St. Bertin", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford University Press; Oxford, U.K.,1979), 343.

During this period of political consolidation and military victory, occurred a rather curious event in the life of the young Alfred;[48] in 853, the 4/5-year-old *aetheling* Alfred journeyed to Rome where upon his arrival he was received and "fully anointed as king."[49] Alfred's leapfrogging over his four surviving brothers to be anointed king by Pope Leo IV seems a strange political stratagem in light of Æthelwulf's attempts at local consolidation and accommodation. Promoting a youngest son while relying on the other three for political and military assistance appears a foolhardy step that surely would inspire fraternal warfare and retribution. Both the *ASC* and Asser record Alfred's journey and warm reception by Pope Leo, even recounting that Leo "made Alfred his own son by adoption."[50] Such a perilous, and seemingly prescient, journey has inspired much historical fodder, with historians alternatively arguing to reject the entirety of the *ASC* as a compilation originating from Alfred's court to Asser's *Life of Alfred* being a complete forgery. Though details of Alfred's visit to Rome are lost to history, the legitimacy of this journey can be established through a letter from Pope Leo to Æthelwulf. Discovered in a twelfth century papal collection, the letter clarifies Alfred's journey in light of Æthelwulf's ambition outside the narrow confines of Wessex. Pope Leo writes,

> To Æthelwulf, king of the English. We have now graciously received your son Alfred, whom you were anxious to send at this time to the thresholds of the Holy Apostles, and we have decorated him, as a spiritual son, with the dignity of the belt and the vestments of the consulate, as is customary with Roman consuls, because he gave himself into our hands. [51]

[48] Alfred's journey to Rome still remains a problematic issue for historians who doubt the veracity of such a difficult journey due to his youth and unlikelihood of ascending to the throne; so much so that some historians have used this incident to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the entire *ASC*.

[49] Asser, *Life of Alfred*, 34.

[50] Asser, *Life of Alfred*, 36.

[51] "Extract From a Letter of Pope Leo IV to Æthelwulf, king of Wessex", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press,1979), 219.

With the office of Roman consulship long abandoned by the ninth century, Pope Leo's use of the honorary title for an unknown Anglo-Saxon princeling seems anomalous.[52] Abels explains that rather than a complete fabrication, as some historians would paint it, Alfred's anointing as king by Pope Leo was merely the misremembered recollections of an aging ruler who defied the odds to ascend the throne.[53] Rather than focus on the veracity of Alfred's elevation to anointed successor, his visit to the Holy See should be contextualized in the larger paradigm of his father's political machinations. Æthelwulf's attempts to create a single unified hegemony through the processes of accommodation and appeasement had succeeded, garnering him enough allies to emerge victorious against a seemingly invincible foe. Æthelwulf's greatest victory against the Scandinavians at Aclea gained him international acclaim, making his efforts to receive papal blessings, even by proxy, a logical means by which to demonstrate his growing power.[54] As further evidence for Æthelwulf's political motivation for Alfred's Roman adventure, stands his second marriage to the Carolingian princess Judith. Completed after a second sojourn to Rome by both Æthelwulf and Alfred in 856, marriage into the royal house of Charlemagne legitimized Æthelwulf's attempts to create a dynastic kingship and further strengthen his control over Wessex and Kent.[55] The *ASC* records the marriage, stating

> And the same year King Æthelwulf conveyed by charter the tenth part of his land throughout all of his kingdom to the praise of God and his own eternal salvation. And he went to Rome the same year with great state, and remained there a twelvemonth, and then

[52] W.H. Stevenson notes Alfred's papal blessing as "little more than a brevet of Roman nobility."

[53] Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 66.

[54] There remains some debate about Æthelwulf's reasons for choosing Alfred as his proxy, including theories that point to Alfred's youthful illnesses as reason to receive papal blessing. See Abels and Stevenson for more information.

[55] Though only twelve years of age at her marriage to the fifty-year-old Æthelwulf, Judith was honored with the title of "Queen" against Anglo-Saxon tradition, which denied female rulers the title. Judith's elevation to co-ruler demonstrates not only the significance of her Carolingian connections, but also more importantly Æthelwulf's own consequence in spiting tradition. See Chapter 4 "Royal Women" for further information.

went homewards. And Charles, king of the Franks, gave him his daughter as his queen. And afterwards he came home to his people and they were glad of it.[56]

Though the marriage ultimately proved fruitless, the deft political machinations used to connect the fledgling Anglo-Saxon court and the magnificence of the Carolingian world demonstrates Æthelwulf's acumen in crafting alliances. The young Alfred received no better education in medieval power politics than through careful examination of his father's tactics of accommodation, appeasement and integration.

The Great Micel Here

In this year Æthelbert's brother Æthelred succeeded to the kingdom of the West Saxons. And the same year a great heathen army came into England…[57]

After the death of his father in 858, Alfred found himself living under the co-rulership of his eldest surviving brothers, Æthelbald and Æthelbert. Though disorderly, the successive reigns of Æthelbald, Æthelbert and Æthelred avoided whole-scale fraternal civil war due to the unrestrained pressures of increasing Scandinavian raids.[58] The *ASC* details a number of small Viking raids throughout the early reign of Æthelbert, demonstrating a new level of Scandinavian attention in England. Rather than raiding and plundering, these latest Viking attacks displayed increasing frequency as well as a decided eye towards settlement. Historian David Horspool describes these new Scandinavians as an "expansionist people looking for more territory to occupy" who no longer confined themselves to seasonal raiding patterns.[59] The *ASC* documents the increasing fervor of Scandinavian raiding and settlement, culminating in 865 with the arrival

[56] *ASC*, 855-858.

[57] *ASC,* 866.

[58] Æthelbald died only two years after his father in 860, with his brother Æthelbert succeeding him. His reign was short, but notable for his marriage to his former step-mother Judith.

[59] Horspool, King Alfred: Burnt Cakes, 44-46.

of the Great Heathen Army (*micel here).*[60] Exact numbers for the size of this Viking army vary wildly, but historians have estimated up to five thousand Scandinavian warriors threatened the shores of England that summer.[61] Under the leadership of Ivarr the Boneless and Halfdan, the sons of famed Viking warrior Ragnar Löthbrok, these new Scandinavians represented a complex political reality as a prelude to settlement.[62] Rather than a single cohesive army, the Great Heathen Army seems to have been a combination of several different Scandinavian contingents, some of which had wintered in Francia while others sailed directly from areas in Scandinavia.[63] Whatever their individual origins, the leaders of the Great Heathen Army managed to skillfully coordinate the various contingents in order to successfully accomplish their strategic goals. Striking the heart of East Anglia, Wessex and as far north as Northumbria, Ivarr and Halfdan spent the majority of two years executing a well-thought out strategy of conquest that involved as much diplomacy as brute force. The *ASC* recounts how local kings such as Æthelbert alternatively fought and negotiated with the Vikings, often following the Carolingian tradition of payment for peace. Unfortunately for the Anglo-Saxons, rather than take payment and leave, the determined Scandinavians chose to winter in England. For instance, in the year 866 the *ASC* recounts,

> In this year a heathen army encamped on Thanet and made peace with the people of Kent. And the people of Kent promised them money for that peace. And under the cover

[60] The *ASC* distinguishes the arrival of the Great Heathen Army in 865 because of both it's size and success; the Anglo-Saxon *micel here* or large army is used to clarify.

[61] Peter Sawyer, *Kings and Vikings: Scandinavia and Europe, AD 700-1100*, (London, U.K.; Meuthen Press,1982), 110-111.

[62] Dawn M. Hadley, "Hamlet and the Princes of Denmark: Lordship In the Danelaw, c. 860-954", *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. by D.M. Hadley & J.D. Richards, (Turnhout, Belgium; Brepols Publishers, 2000), 107-109.

[63] Abels, *Alfred the Great,* 112-113. Asser also mentions the appearance of the great *micel here*, but seems rather confused as to its origins, writing that the Scandinavians sailed from the Danube.

> of that peace and promise of money the army stole away inland by night and ravaged all of eastern Kent.[64]

Though only a teenager during these Viking invasions, Alfred participated alongside his brothers in both warfare and negotiations. Significantly, these Scandinavian incursions facilitated peaceful relations between the traditional enemies of Wessex and Mercia, including Alfred's marriage to the Merican princess Ealhswith. Relying heavily on their Mercian allies for defense, intermarriage between the two royal households became standard procedure, including but not limited to Alfred's own marriage and that of his sister Æthelswith.[65] Cooperation with neighboring rulers, including intermarriage, was a powerful weapon that undercut Scandinavian involvement in factional disputes. Unlike previous Vikings, the leaders of the Great Heathen Army employed a "strategy of establishing indigenous lords to rule on its behalf in places it occupied" including ousting the Merican king Burgred and replacing him with Ceolwulf II described in the *ASC* as "a foolish thegn".[66] Exploiting factionalism in the burghal network allowed Scandinavians an unprecedented amount of power in the areas they settled. In particular, York became a 'client kingdom' and stronghold for Scandinavian settlement.

Rather than rest on their victories, the Great Heathen Army marched southward in 869 across East Anglia under the leadership of Halfdan and Bacgsecg. With their sights set on conquering Wessex, Alfred alongside his brother King Æthelred fought numerous battles against the Vikings, including Alfred's famous victory at Ashdown. By the spring of 871, however, the Great Heathen Army occupied the royal burgh of Reading with fresh troops arriving in the 'great summer fleet' (*micel sumorlida*) under the command of three new Viking 'kings', Guthrum,

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[64] *ASC*, 866.

[65] Horspool, *King Alfred: Burnt Cakes*, 55-56.

[66] Hadley, "Lordship in the Danelaw", 110-111.

Oscetel and Anwend.[67] The death of King Æthelred on 15 April 871 and the auspicious arrival of newly minted Viking commanders eager for plunder left Alfred's kingdom in a precarious position. Alfred's tough straights were noted by his biographer Asser, writing, "for indeed he did not think that he alone could ever withstand such great harshness from the pagans, unless strengthened by divine help, since he had already sustained great losses of many men while his brothers were alive."[68] Adding to Alfred's burdens was ineffective royal administration that relied on the willing participation of shire *fyrds*, territorial forces composed of local thegns' personal followers raised on an *ad hoc* basis. Continual warfare and costly losses had depleted Aflred's personal *fyrd*, a complement of fifty to one hundred household thegns, leaving the recently crowned king sorely lacking in battle-ready manpower. A crushing defeat at Wilton forced the young king into making an uneasy peace with the Viking invaders, thus beginning Alfred's reign with a bought peace and the stirrings of a grander strategy of appeasement and integration that would characterize Alfred's later kingship.

Exploring the Alfred Guthrum Treaty: Appeasement and Integration in Alfred's Charters

Locked into a seemingly endless war of attrition, Alfred looked to the policies of his father for inspiration in combating the Scandinavian threat. Beleaguered from years of warfare, Alfred ultimately demonstrated his pragmatism by favoring negotiation over continued attempts at total victory on the battlefield. In 871, however, Alfred's negotiations for peace followed standard Frankish practices which focused on payment to the Vikings for their cooperation, but these negotiations were seasonal and transitory. To fully address the problem of Scandinavian

[67] Abels, *Alfred the Great*, 134-135. Again the *ASC* uses *micel sumorlida* to distinguish this fleet from other previous Viking raids.

[68] Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 81.

settlement, Alfred needed to create a "shared common political culture [that] held the same concept of 'peace'".[69] Ultimately, Alfred's policies would focus on remaking Scandinavian leaders into Christian monarchs and yet initially the young king followed precedent set by Carolingian monarchs. Alfred's bought peace in 871 gained him five years of diplomatic relations with the Vikings, who turned their attention northwards to Northumbria and Mercia. However, by 876 Scandinavian forces returned to Wessex intent on conquest and plunder. It is at this point, which Alfred turns towards a more inclusive and innovative strategy to ensure peace.

In the spring of 876, the Viking leader Guthrum led his army from their encampments in Cambridge into Wessex, avoiding Alfred's troops and eventually capturing the royal burh of Wareham. Although Alfred and his forces would lay siege to the town, the battle turned quickly into a stalemate with the Vikings trapped inside and Alfred's troops unable to break the siege. Once again unable to inflict a total victory on the battlefield, Alfred turned to a more diplomatic solution. Rather than pay Guthrum and his followers to leave the royal city, Alfred instead "attempted to find common ground with them, some ceremony or ritual of peace-making that the Vikings would recognize as binding."[70] By combining payment with sacred oaths, Alfred hoped to cement a more long-lasting peace through mutual acknowledged practices. The *ASC* documents Alfred's attempt at peaceful innovation stating

> and then the king made peace with the enemy and they gave him hostages, who were the most important men next to their king in the army, and swore oaths to him on the holy ring—a thing which they would not do before for any nation—that they would speedily leave his kingdom.[71]

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[69] Richard Abels, "King Alfred's Peacemaking Strategies with the Vikings", *The Haskins Society Journal*, Vol. 3, (1992), 23-25.

[70] Abels, "King Alfred's Peacemaking Strategies", 27.

[71] ASC, 876. (*yþþan wið þone here se cyning frið nam, 7 him ða gislas sealdon þe on þam here weorþuste wæron to þam cyninge, 7 him þa aðas sworon on þam halgan beage, þe hi ær nanre þeode noldon, þæt hredlice of his rice foron*.)

Though Guthrum would ultimately break this pledge of peace, the importance of Alfred's attempts to bind the two parties with sacred oaths cannot be ignored. The swearing of sacred oaths played a central role in the politics of ninth-century England. Historian Patrick Wormald emphasizes the critical role such oaths played to maintaining social and political order of Anglo-Saxon England stating "Alfred's introductory laws on 'oath and pledge' hold the key to early English law and order."[72] Drawing on the belief in divine retribution to secure a man's promise of fidelity, oath-swearing on holy relics was a coercive force powerful enough to end hostilities between kingdoms. What marks this oath between Guthrum and Alfred as particularly significant is Alfred's use of a pagan "holy ring" rather than Christian relics. Using an arm-ring associated with the worship of the Scandinavian god Thor, Alfred demonstrated his willingness to use appeasement and accommodation to secure a positive outcome.[73] Though Alfred's attempt's to find "common ground" failed, with Guthrum and his band of warriors killing all the hostages and slipping away to plunder Essex, it remains a significant turning point in Alfred's dealings with the Vikings. Rather than confine himself to temporary peace measures, Alfred hoped to craft a new dynamic between his people and the Scandinavian invaders. He would soon be provided with the ultimate opportunity to create a lasting peace with his nemesis, the Viking leader Guthrum.

In 878, Alfred decisively defeated Guthrum and his forces at the battle of Edington; later pursuing Guthrum to his stronghold at Chipenham and laying siege to the Viking force. With his enemies trapped once again, Alfred turned his attention to creating a peace settlement. Learning

[72] Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, (Oxford, U.K.; Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 282.

[73] Both *Eyrbyggja Saga* and *Landnamabok* describe oaths being sworn using the holy ring of Thor or being sealed by formal handshakes, however most of these practices come from a later period than the oath ceremony performed by Alfred and Guthrum.

from his previous error in attempting to secure a peace through ceremonies, Alfred instead refocused his efforts creating a political ideology that emphasized stability and legitimacy. No longer satisfied with pagan blessings and oaths, Alfred's new strategy hinged on accommodation and integration into Anglo-Saxon society with Christianity serving as a pivotal marker of acceptance. Asser writes,

> the heathens swore in addition that they would leave his kingdom immediately, and Guthrum, their king, promised to accept Christianity and to receive baptism at King Alfred's hand; all of which he and his men fulfilled as they promised. For three weeks later Guthrum, king of the heathens, with thirty of the best men in his army, came to King Alfred at a place called Aller, near Athelney. King Alfred raised him from the holy font of baptism, receiving him as his adoptive son; the unbinding of the chrism took place at a royal estate called Wedmore. Guthrum remained with the king for twelve nights after he had been baptized, and the king freely bestowed many excellent treasures on him and all his men.[74]

Guthrum's acceptance of Christian baptism marked more than a simple conversion experience; rather it inducted the Viking into a new political identity of a legitimate Christian king, following the example of both Alfred and Carolingian monarchs. Richard Abels explains "the ceremonies at Aller and Wedmore were intended to impress Guthrum and enmesh him in webs of obligation and dependence."[75] By sponsoring Guthrum's conversion, Alfred became his adoptive father, re-christening Guthrum Æthelstan in honor of his eldest brother. Baptism and the acceptance of freely given gifts, rather than payment, demonstrated Guthrum's inclusion into the political community of English rulers as well as Alfred's position of power over him. Alfred now operated from a position of over-lordship (*hlaford*), a position that would clearly be reflected in the later Alfred Guthrum treaty.

Though imperfect, the peace settlement of 878 allowed Alfred time to stabilize the political situation between the West Saxons and East Anglians while simultaneously absorbing

[74] Asser, *Alfred the Great*, 84-85.

[75] Abels, "King Alfred's Peace-Making Strategies," 31.

Guthrum into the political community. The fluid political situation in Mercia and East Anglia, particularly the absence of the Viking sponsored Mercian king Ceolwulf II, provided an opportunity for Alfred to negotiate the settlement of Guthrum and his men.[76] By 880, Alfred had consolidated his power over both Wessex and Mercia, including acquiring the city of London, and was ready to formalize the peace settlement that had been negotiated in 878.[77] The resulting treaty known as the *Alfred Guthrum* treaty (hereafter *AGu*) not only created formal boundaries for the Danelaw, but also more importantly created social identities for Scandinavians through political accommodation formalized by law.[78] Written in Anglo-Saxon, the *AGu* survives in various extant copies, most notably the *Quadripartitus* in which the treaty is copied in the original Anglo-Saxon versions, Norman Latin and finally translated into German by Felix Liebermann.[79] The treaty begins:

> This is the peace which King Alfred and King Guthrum and the councilors of all the English race and all the people who are in East Anglia have all agreed on and confirmed with oaths, for themselves and for their subjects, both for the living and the unborn, who care to have God's favors or ours.[80]

The treaty then goes on to define the boundaries of the two kingdoms, providing a seemingly clear line of political demarcation between English and Scandinavian authority: 'Up the Thames, and then up the Lea, and along the Lea to its source, then in a straight line to Bedford, then up

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[76] Though Asser and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* remain largely silent on the political context or rulership of East Anglia and Mercian during this period, it seems likely that these areas were already under some sort of Scandinavian rule as evidence by the kingship of Ceolwulf II.

[77] The dating of the *Alfred Guthrum* Treaty remains a significant historical debate with no clear winner. Historians such as Mark Blackburn and David Dumville have argued for dating the treaty to around 886 due to Alfred's acquisition of London and the demise of surrounding independent kingdoms, but with little clear evidence to support such a later date this dissertation will continue to place the *AGu* as completed in 880.

[78] Paul Kershaw, "The Alfred Guthrum Treaty: Scripting Accommodation and Interaction", *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries,* ed by Dawn Hadley & Julian Richards, (Turnhout, Belgium;Brepols Publishing, 2000), 43-44.

[79] Please refer to Introduction for additional information on the *Quadripartitus* and Felix Liebermann.

[80] "The Alfred-Guthrum Treaty", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press,1979), 34.

the Ouse to Watling Street.'[81] Commonly hailed by historians as the foundation charter for the Danelaw, the *AGu*'s neat linear boundaries, known as *landgemaera* or land limits, ignores the complex realities of Scandinavian settlement for an over-simplified ideal.[82] Significantly the remainder of the *AGu* focuses on defining "separate spheres of authority, division of territory and regulations for the avoidance of disputes between followers of Alfred and Guthrum."[83] Though seemingly straightforward, the *AGu* stands as the first text to recognize the social standing of and give legal recognition to Scandinavian settlers.[84] The signing of this treaty not only drew Guthrum and his followers into ninth-century English politics, but also more importantly legitimized them within the wider world of European diplomacy. Historian Paul Kershaw notes "Alfred was legislating for the English as a unitary body" demonstrating his royal authority over both earthly and heavenly concerns through the medium of law.[85] Standing as the merciful (*militse*) judge, Alfred uses the *AGu* to align himself with the Old Testament Solomon, creating an image of the archetypical *rex pacificus*, which became a theme of the Alfredian court literature and law codes.[86]Alfred's later law code, the *Domboc*, stressed the importance of good judgeship and wisdom; a characteristic noted by Asser who wrote, "having come to despise all renown and wealth of this world, sought wisdom from God, and thereby achieved both, namely wisdom and renown."[87] Alfred's wise and merciful beneficence to his former adversaries

[81] Ibid, 34.

[82]Scandinavian place names south-west of the boundary hint at Scandinavian settlement in areas that according to the *AGu* were under English control. See Kershaw, Dumville, Lund for further information.

[83] Hadley, *The Vikings in England*, 32.

[84] Kershaw, "The Alfred Guthrum Treaty: Scripting Accommodation", 48.

[85] Ibid, 49-50.

[86] Ibid, 50. See also Pratt, *The Political Thought of Alfred the Great*, 226-230; Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 120-121.

[87] Asser, *Life of Alfred the Great*, 63.

demonstrated his power as both secular and religious figure, lending legitimacy to Guthrum's recent elevation to Christian kingship.

Crucially, the language of the *AGu* depicts Alfred as not simply merciful judge and ruler of Wessex, but rather as the ruler of 'all the English race'.[88] The concept of Alfred as representing a "united" Englishness is problematic, but the use of such language underscores the importance of the *AGu* in creating a new political reality. Representing not just the men of Wessex, but essentially all men of *Angelcynn* Alfred legitimizes his own role as peacemaker and wise councilor while shaping Scandinavian ethnic identity as "other". Guthrum shared in this remaking of Scandinavian identity through his conversion and adoption of the baptismal name Athelstan, a judicious connection to the legitimate ruling house of Wessex. Paul Kershaw notes, "Guthrum's behavior after Edington shows him striving to associate himself with the existing practices, and identities, of the Anglo-Saxon ruling elite." [89] By sharing the identity of merciful and peaceful kingship, Alfred legitimized Guthrum's rule and identity as a traditional Christian king thereby establishing himself and his followers as permanent members of East Anglian society.[90] The language of the *AGu* sought to manage the coexistence of two disparate peoples by crafting new identities through the prism of law.

Rather than two homogeneous groups, the *AGu* represents the complex and overlapping identities present in England during the late ninth century. Evidence of such a mixed population can be found in the unbalanced nature of the *AGu* prologue. Written entirely in Anglo-Saxon, it defines Alfred's followers as *Angelcynn* with Guthrum being supported by a less ethnically

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[88] "The Alfred-Guthrum Treaty", 34.

[89] Kershaw, "The Alfred-Guthrum Treaty: Scripting Accommodation", 51.

[90] Hadley, *The Vikings in England,* 32-33. It should be noted that other Viking leaders would legitimize their newly acquired positions through the judicious issuing of law codes, most famously and ironically Rollo of Normandy took great pains to draft laws on theft and violence. See Dudo of St Quentain.

defined "all the people (*þeod)* of the East".[91] Though *þeod* can be translated as "people", it appears most often in charters as denoting subject and ruler.[92] The vagueness in defining Guthrum's support in strict ethnic terms, as opposed to the clear *Angelcynn,* has less to do with the Scandinavians' political organization than the recognition of pre-existing settlement within the treaty's boundaries. Seeking to manage ethnic identity while accommodating the coexistence of new and pre-existing inhabitants within the framework of law, the *AGu* created new definitions for Scandinavians in England.

Instead of defining inhabitants strictly by political loyalty, which often naturally occurred, the *AGu* instead regulated identity through each king's *militse* (mercy) and *landgemæra* (land boundaries) thereby creating modes of accommodation through manipulation of identity.[93] The practical simplification of dividing subjects under the treaty into *Englisce* (English) or *Denisce* (Danish) allowed for the highly complex and mutable identities present in ninth century England to be acknowledged without hindering the overall peace process. Kershaw notes, "Whether all the Scandinavian incomers were actually Danish or comprised a heterogeneous mixture who may, or may not, have had a common sense of ethnic identity is an open question."[94] What is relevant is that the ethnic divisions created by the *AGu* gave the so-called Danish in England a cohesive identity while simultaneously forming an idea of "Englishness" as seen by the use of *Anglecynn*. The structure of the *AGu* helps to clarify these ethnic divisions through the monetization of crime and legislation of trading relationships.

[91] Ibid, 34.

[92] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 285.

[93] Kershaw, "The Alfred-Guthrum Treaty", *Cultures in Contact*, 57-58.

[94] Ibid, 57.

The text of the *AGu* can be divided into four general sections: prologue which outlines each kings' authority; the definition of territory along geographic lines; then clauses that specify crimes and their subsequent punishments and lastly guidelines for lawful trade between the two groups. Patrick Wormald explains,

> The statements about compensation and process for dispute settlement follow on sequentially, widening the range of possible events ('and if', 'and if') as they unfold. This sequence has its own internal logic, moving from the terms of compensation for proven or declared homicide, whether of an Englishmen or a Dane, and the *wergelds* [man-price] to be paid, through to unproven accusation of *manslihte* [manslaughter],…down to cases involving wrongful possession of moveable goods.[95]

Moving from ameliorative to preventative, the *AGu* sought to mitigate the daily interactions of Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxon subjects. The last clause of the *AGu* focuses on mutual oath-swearing and restricting the uncontrolled movements of men between lords, stating, "And we agreed on this day when oaths were sworn, that no slaves or freemen might go without permission into the army of the Danes, any more than any of theirs to us."[96] Interestingly, this clause foreshadows Alfred's later laws (*domboc)* in their concern with regulating movements, or more accurately defections, from one court to another. Alfred's fears of defection to Viking authority were not without merit as evidenced in a later charter from 901 that granted land formerly held by an ealdorman named Wulfhere. Written under the reign of Alfred's successor, Edward the Elder, the charter states, " truly this afore-mentioned estate was originally forfeited by a certain ealdormann, Wulfhere by name, and his wife, when he deserted without permission both his lord King Alfred and his country in spite of the oath which he had sworn to his king and all his leading men."[97] Though an obvious concern for Alfred, the loss of followers between

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[95] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 286.

[96] *"*The Alfred Guthrum Treaty"*,* 34.

[97] "Grant by King Edward the Elder of land in Wylye to Æthelwulf"*, English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford University Press; Oxford, U.K.,1979), 542. There is some debate as to when

courts was not all one sided as evidenced by the presence of *pagani* in Alfred's court as recorded by Asser.[98] No matter the side, the defection of individuals to one court or another complicated the political and ethnic realities the *AGu* hoped to codify.

Significantly, the *AGu* did not seek to stop all violence, but rather intended to foster peaceful resolutions through due process. Kershaw explains, "this was, then, a peace within which there was an acceptable level of violence, and acceptability turned on the possibility of ready resolution."[99] In an attempt to channel legal disputes through the medium of judicial resolution, the *AGu* negotiated specific payments of *wergeld* (man-price) for *Englisce* and *Denisce* depending on recognized legal status.[100] For example the *AGu* states,

> If a man is slain, all of us estimate Englishman and Dane as the same amount, at eight half-marks of pure gold, except the *ceorl* who occupies rented land (*gafollande*) and 'the freedmen of Danes' (*liesengum*); these also are estimated at the same amount, both at 200 shillings.[101]

By endeavoring to find equivalence between economic and social systems, the *AGu* strived to price violence out of people's reach. Raising the *geld* price of a *ceorl* to the equivalent of a freedman, the *AGu* dis-incentivized attacks on both Scandinavian and English freemen. Alfred's concern with the rapid resolution of conflicts between Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons demonstrates the centrality of accommodation and integration to the overall peace making process. Throughout the text of the *AGu*, both sides sought to maximize the king's authority to regulate Anglo-Scandinavian relations. By injecting royal authority, through the use of royal

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Wulfhere lost his land, but it would seem to coincide with Guthrum's successful invasions of 876, making Wulfhere's defection a treasonous act against his king. Although as a Mercian, Wulfhere may have departed with King Burghed instead of joining with the Viking host.

[98] Asser, *Alfred the Great*, 76.

[99] Kershaw, "The Alfred-Guthrum Treaty", *Cultures in Contact*, 54.

[100] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 288.

[101] "King Æthelstan's Laws Issued at Grately", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press,1979), 35. For a more detailed discussion of the meaning of man-price see Lisi Oliver's work *The Body Legal in Barbarian Law*.

agents or thegns, in cases ranging from murder to lowly cases of theft, both Alfred and Guthrum asserted the primacy of their reigns while simultaneously acknowledging their codependency. The treaty created by Alfred and Guthrum, though only a few hundred lines long validated the importance of accommodation and integration while simultaneously creating new ethnic identities for their subjects.

Ce-minting Peace: Coinage as a Medium for Peace

The success of the *AGu* and the subsequent absorption of a new ruling elite in East Anglia was demonstrated and strengthened by the minting of coinage. The stabilizing effect of the *AGu* as well as the influx of wealth in both Wessex and East Anglia led both Alfred and Guthrum to create new standards of coinage. After years of continual warfare the debasement of coinage was a pressing issue in the region, requiring a significant reform in standards of weight and size. Minted by Alfred's moneyers sometime in the late 880's both the 'Cross-and-Lozenge' and 'Two Emperors' marked a significant restoration to a silver standard not seen since Æthelred's reign during the 870's.[102] Alongside Alfred's coinage reforms, newly minted King Guthrum demonstrated his intentions to rule as a legitimate "English" king by minting coins imprinted with his baptismal name. Much in the same fashion as earlier Alfredian coinage, Guthrum's coinage followed a Carolingian style "featuring a temple, and the reverses of two of the coins incorporated the mint name of Quentovic."[103] Later coins minted by Guthrum would follow the Alfredian standard, even bearing his name and the names of his moneyers. Rather

[102] Philip Grierson and Mark Blackburn*, Medieval European Coinage, I, The Early Middle Ages 5th-10th Centuries*, (Cambridge, U.K.; Cambridge University Press, 1976), 312-313.

[103] D. M. Hadley, *The Vikings in England*, 33. Quentovic seems to have been a mint located south of the Humber River.

than simple, poor imitations of Alfred's weightier coins, Mark Blackburn argues that Guthrum's coinage actual complied with previous East Anglian standards leading to a more homogeneous monetary system. Forged in a similar style to Alfred, Guthrum's coinage remained firmly rooted in East Anglian tradition demonstrating the importance of incorporation of the Scandinavians into traditional modes of rulership as well as the value of coinage as an aspect of legitimate kingship. Scandinavians rarely minted coins, so Guthrum's adoption of a coinage system represents a significant step towards integrating with his new subjects. Not only did Guthrum adopt the trappings of kingship, but also more significantly adopted an "English" idea of kingship, which rooted authority in the creation of hard currency.[104]

Power of the Church: Integration and Belief

Guthrum's use of his baptismal name on his coinage not only supplied him with political legitimacy, but also, more importantly, infused his reign with religious authority. Like other Scandinavian elites in England, Guthrum needed ecclesiastical support to cement his royal authority. Though the depth of Guthrum's "conversion" is unknown, and truthfully unimportant, his continual use of his baptismal name gave his reign a profound connection to religious legitimacy. Viewed as another medium through which Scandinavians could integrate and acculturate, Guthrum and his cohorts were not the only Viking rulers to form working relationships with ecclesiastics. The most significant Viking community in England outside of East Anglia was located in Northumbria under the leadership of King Guthred. Interestingly and somewhat ironically, Guthred became king of the region seemingly at the behest of the religious community of St. Cuthbert, demonstrating the evolving nature of Scandinavian settlement in

[104] Ibid, 34.

England during the late ninth century.[105] The community of St. Cuthbert stands as a remarkable example of integration through religious practice with significant connections to Alfred's own reign.

Once housed on the island of Lindesfarne, the monks of St. Cuthbert abandoned their monastery in 875, taking the body of the saint on a seven year journey for a new home. A historical compilation finished sometime after 1031, the *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, records how the monks, guided by St. Cuthbert, came to appoint Guthred as their king and protector.[106] Appearing to Abbot Eadred, St. Cuthbert states,

> "Go" he said, "across the Tyne to the army of the Danes, and say to them that, if they will obey me, they are to point out to you a certain boy, Guthred, Harthacnut's son, by name, a purchased slave of a certain widow, and you and the whole army are to give in the early morning the price for him to the widow; and give the aforesaid price at the third hour, and at the sixth hour lead him before the whole multitude, that they may elect him king."[107]

The *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto* goes on to record Guthred's elevation to the throne through an elaborate ceremonial rite, including an exchange of oaths and arm rings. Significantly the ceremony reflects an incredible degree of accommodation, as both the practices of the Christian monks and pagan Vikings were included. Dawn Hadley explains that the ceremony

> Involved the exchange of vows in the presence of the relics of the saint, and the giving of a gold armlet, which was presumably a Scandinavian-perhaps pagan-symbol of authority. The hill at which the ceremony took place was linked to seventh-century Northumbrian

[105] Matthew Innes, "Danelaw Identities: Ethnicity, Regionalism and Political Alliance", *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. by D.M. Hadley & J.D. Richards, (Turnhout, Belgium; Brepols Publishers, 2000) 67-68.

[106] The *Historia de Sancto Cutherberto* contains various instances of the saint's life, most significantly land grants to the monks up until the mid-eleventh century with Cnut's grants in 1031.

[107] "History of St. Cuthbert", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press,1979), 6. The original text of the *Historia* was written in Latin, for continuity I will contine to use Whitelock's translation.

> king, Oswiu (d. 670), which doubtless intended to add the credence of history and of earlier regnal traditions to the legitimacy of the events of 883.[108]

The Church offered Guthred a model of kingship and the exercise of power in an unstable environment and paradoxically empowered ecclesiastics who were threatened by the power of local nobility.[109] Possessing huge resources, both physical and spiritual, the Church in northern England needed allies among the new Scandinavian settlers to ward off the secular ambitions of such nobles as the lords of Bamburgh and King Egbert of York.[110] Underscoring the need for advantageous political alliances, historian David Rollason argues that rather than haphazard wanderings, the monks of St. Cuthbert were strengthening "links with its tenants through the strategic translation of the saint".[111] Effectively, the monks of St. Cuthbert spent seven years touring lands held in their trust while using the body of the long dead saint as a holy proof of purchase. Odd though it may seem, the elevation of Guthred to a position of power allowed the monks of St. Cuthbert to reaffirm their hold of territorial land while accommodating the settlement of new converts into the fold.[112] The support given to Guthred by the community of St. Cuthbert ensured their own survival during a political unstable period while simultaneously giving legitimacy to a newly crowned king. The complex political situation in northern England created a mutually beneficial situation in which collaboration between Scandinavian leaders and ecclesiastics was preferable to cooperation with local elites.

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[108] Hadley, *The Vikings in England*, 39.

[109] Wormald, *The Making of English Laws*, 213.

[110] Hadley, *The Vikings in England*, 40-41.

[111] D. W. Rollason, *Sources of York History to AD 1100,* (York Archaeological Trust; York, U.K., 1976), 22.

[112] D.M. Hadley, "Lordship in the Danelaw", 115-116.

Remarkably, St. Cuthbert extended his proverbial reach and appeared to the young King Alfred during his time in the Somerset marshes. Both the *Historio de Sancto Cuthberto,* finished in 1031, and William of Malmesbury's twelfth-century *Gesta Regnum Anglorum* recount the episode in which Alfred shares his meal of fish with a stranger who reveals himself to be St. Cuthbert.[113] The saint then goes on to promise "you shall in a short time be restored in glory to your throne."[114] Interestingly, Alfred's biographer Asser does not include this particular saintly visitation in his recitation on the great king's time in Somerset. Found only in later extant copies, this episode may have been included in the *Historio de Sancto Cuthberto* as a response to diplomatic overtures made by Alfred in 894.[115] In an attempt to extend the power of Wessex northward, Alfred's ambassadors hoped to procure land west of Stamford, which seems to have been controlled by the community of St. Cuthbert.[116] Once again local politics and land ownership directed the political alliances of the monks of St. Cuthbert which preferred Scandinavian lordship than being beholden to the house of Wessex. Alfred's inclusion into the *Historio de Sancto Cuthberto* must be viewed as a later addition to the narrative with the express purpose of manipulating Alfred's later descendants from interfering with the community's land rights.

Ecclesiastical support proved mutually beneficial for both local Scandinavian elites and members of the clergy. Providing an alternative to powerful Anglo-Saxon nobles, Scandinavian leaders often received vociferous support form leading clerics. By providing models of good Christian lordship and even a means to atone for past sins, the Church demonstrated a

[113] Though these sources come much later than Asser's *Life of Alfred* the inclusion of such a meeting stands a significant piece of propaganda, as the power of Alfred extended far beyond his own death.

[114] "History of St. Cuthbert", 6.

[115] Horspool, *King Alfred: Burnt Cakes*, 92-93.

[116] Hadley, *The Vikings in England*, 41.

remarkable ability to respond to the changing nature of settlement in England. Rather than exclude these new men, the Church responded proactively, focusing on acculturating and integrating Vikings into the fabric of Christian society.

Death and Lordship: The Impact of the Alfred Guthrum Treaty

In 890, the *ASC* records the death of King Guthrum stating, " and the northern king, Guthrum, whose baptismal name was Athelstan, died. He was King Alfred's godson, and he lived in East Anglia and was the first to settle there."[117] Though a seemingly simple entry, Guthrum's inclusion in the *Chronicle* demonstrates his radical metamorphosis from terrifying outsider to, if not beloved then at least respected, king. Alfred would follow his godson and regnal counterpart in death only nine years later, but the legacy left by these men lasted far longer. The *Alfred Guthrum Treaty* provided a model for the legitimization and integration of Scandinavian lordship into Anglo-Saxon society. At the forefront of the treaty, stood the twin ideas of accommodation and acculturation as a means for peaceful negotiation while providing mechanisms for Scandinavian lordship. Heavily influenced by the policies of his father, Alfred understood the changing political landscape of Anglo-Saxon England. Viking raids had transformed into settlement, necessitating a drastic transformation in the methods for dealing with Scandinavians. By giving Scandinavians kings legal and religious authority through the tradition of Anglo-Saxon law, the *AGu* set a standard for peaceful integration. Ethnic identity became a malleable commodity, to be traded and modified in the face of secular concerns. Though far from perfect, the *AGu* set a template for cohabitation and the elevation of "new men" into the Anglo-Saxon hierarchy that future kings would either follow, or disastrously ignore.

[117] "The Alfred Guthrum Treaty", 34.

Chapter Two:
Æthelræd: The Early Years

> *All these misfortunes happened to us because of poor counsel in that he wanted neither to offer them tribute in a timely manner nor to fight against them.*[118]

Ruling for a staggering thirty-eight years, King Æthelræd II garnered both lavish praise and unprecedented scorn from his subjects and historians alike. Though his reign saw long periods of peace and prosperity, King Æthelræd is most remembered for his disastrous policies, which embroiled his people in civil war and eventual conquest by a foreign king. Simon Keynes described this dichotomy best when he wrote, "[Æthelræd] has acquired one of the poorest reputations of medieval English kings, and his reign is synonymous with national degeneracy, characterized especially by treachery and incompetence at the highest levels of society."[119] Ignominiously dubbed the Unræd or Il-Counseled, Æthelræd's reputation as monarch has suffered the slings and arrows of both political propagandists, and most ironically, the peaceful Anglo-Danish hegemony that followed his reign.

Æthelræd's successes, and most notably his failures, as monarch are best understood when placed within the context of his policies directed towards Scandinavians in his kingdom. Swinging wildly from attempts at accommodation to complete annihilation, Æthelræd's treatment of Scandinavians in England typified his haphazard kingship. Rather than follow the example of his forbearer, Alfred, Æthelræd the Unræd charted a different course in his relations with Scandinavians, ultimately resulting in the rise of an Anglo-Danish monarchy.

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[118] *ASC,* 1007.

[119] Simon Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelræd 'The Unready' 978-1016,* (Cambridge, U.K.; Cambridge University Press, 1980), xvi.

Æthelræd's Foundation: The Reign of Edgar the Peaceable

Though his birth goes unrecorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* future King Æthelræd was born somewhere between 966-968 to King Edgar the Peaceable and Queen Ælfthryth. Æthelræd was the final son for King Edgar, who already had one "recognized" son from a previous marriage, Edward, and another young son, Edmund, from his marriage to Ælfthryth. A political union, the marriage of King Edgar to Ælfthryth aligned the Wessex royal house more closely to East Anglia through Ælfthryth's powerful father, Ealdorman Ordgar of Devon.[120] Significantly, Ælfthryth demonstrated her influence over court politics early in her reign, when she skillfully managed to have her sons' recorded as witnesses to their father's charters as "*clito legitimus prefati regis filius"* rather than "*clito eodem regem procreatus"* as Edgar's first son, Edward, was referenced.[121] The political power and machinations displayed by Queen Ælfthryth to have Edgar's first son's legitimacy questioned illustrates the complicated lines of succession and maternal power that plagued the tenth century West Saxon court. Not one to stand idly by, Queen Ælfthryth dominated both the courts of her husband and youngest son, Æthelræd, proving to be one of the most significant figures in the tenth century.

Ruling beside his powerful queen, Edgar's reign was marked by West Saxon hegemony with an eye towards expansion. Ruling for eighteen years, Edgar was supported by his council of advisors as the *Witangemot* or Witan.[122] This powerful advisory council rose to prominence over the course of the early tenth century, serving as both a consultative body as well as a legitimizing

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[120] *ASC*, 956.

[121] "Grant by King Edgar of Land at Kineton", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042,* ed. Dorothy Whitelock*,* (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979*)*, 119. Edmund and Æthelræd are "legitimate sons" of Edgar, while the elder Edward is recognized as merely a "begotten son". Further discussion of legitimacy and marriage can be found within this work in Chapter 4.

[122] Ann Williams, *Æthelræd the Unready, The Ill-Counselled King*, (London, U.K.; Hambeldon and London Publishing, 2003), 3.

force for the king. Under Edgar's rule the witan served as an important proving ground for "new men" who were promoted from West Saxon families to positions of power. These "new men", drawn mostly from the Thames valley, were given the task of administering Edgar's expanding kingdom after the submission of Northumbria in 956.[123] Advanced by their powerful families and energized by their youth, the young counselors to Edgar presided over a prolonged period of peace and economic prosperity. Included in these ranks of new men were freshly appointed church officials such as Archbishop Dunstan and Bishop Æthelwold, who would advance royal authority under the guise of monastic reform. Dunstan, archbishop of Canterbury and later saint, proved to a particularly powerful voice in the king's council during the reigns of Edgar as well as the reigns of his sons' Edward and Æthelræd.[124]

With coinciding objectives, Edgar and Dunstan worked to expand the Church's reach in England by sponsoring monastic reform and the foundation of new monasteries throughout the kingdom. Motivated partially by religious piety, Edgar saw the expansion of monastic reform and foundation as an opportunity to increase royal authority and centralization. Inspired by the empire building of Otto the Great, Edgar sought to develop Benedictine monastic foundations as a means of unifying the disparate peoples under his control while creating peace and prosperity.[125] Though somewhat controversial by ecclesiastical standards, Edgar and Dunstan endowed monasteries in areas of "marginal" regnal control, thereby creating Christian centers that were beholden to royal authority rather than the official church hierarchy. Additionally,

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[123] Ian Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions and the Danish Conquest of England, 991-1017*, (Rochester, N.Y.; Boydell Press, 2003), 8.

[124] Dunstan had been a royal councilor to both Kings Eadred and Eadwig before Edgar took the throne, but had fallen out of favor with King Eadwig after a rather scandalous incident occurred in which Dunstan supposedly caught the king dallying with two women (his future wife and mother-in-law) during his coronation ceremony and admonished the young king.

[125] Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions*, 10-11.

Edgar expanded his royal reach by replacing high-ranking clerical officials with monks whose loyalty was to the king rather than to the church in Rome. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* recounts Edgar's appointments of the year 964 stating,

> Here (in this year) King Edgar drove the priests of the burh from the Old Minster and from New Minster; and from Chertsey and from Milton; and planted them with monks. And he appointed Abbot Aethelgar as abbot of New Minster, and Ordberht for Chertsey, and Cyneweard for Milton.[126]

One of Edgar's most fortuitous appointments was Bishop Æthelwold, formerly a pupil of Dunstan's, who would play a pivotal role as an advisor to both Edgar and his son Æthelræd. Serving as an important provincial leader, Æthelwold encouraged the practice of using monastic endowments as avenues of secular power and centralization first under Edgar, then Æthelræd. With Edgar's blessings, Æthelwold worked to extend royal authority through monastic endowments in the Danelaw, where both royal authority and Christianity were severely constrained.[127] Though lacking offical "royal lands" to donate in the Danelaw, the foundation of monasteries by Edgar encouraged both conversion to Christianity and the beginnings of submission to royal authority.[128] The abbots and bishops of these endowments, hand selected by Edgar, Dunstan and Æthelwold, took active governmental roles appearing in witness lists of the royal court. For example, in a 969 charter grating land to his thegn Ælfwold, King Edgar's witness list contains a staggering thirteen clerics, stating,

> In the year of the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ 969, the charter of this donation was written, these witnesses consenting whose names are inscribed below.
> I, Edgar, king of the English, with consent of my advisors have strengthened it with the sign of the Holy Cross.
> I, Dunstan, archbishop of the church of Canterbury, have consented and subscribed.

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[126] *ASC*, 964.

[127] Williams, *Æthelræd the Unready*, 11-12.

[128] Lesley Abrams, "Conversion and Assimilation", *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, ed. Dawn M. Hadley & Julian D. Richards, (Turnhout, Belgium; Brepols Published, 2000), 139.

I, Oscetel, archbishop, have speedily consented.
I, Ælfstan, bishop, have joined in signing.
I, Æthelwold, bishop, have consented.
I, Oswulf, bishop, have confirmed.
I, Wynsige, bishop, have consolidated.
I, Oswald, bishop, have strengthened.
I, Wulfric, bishop, have consented.[129]

Additionally, six abbots names are included in Edgar's charter to Ælfwold, as well as numerous ealdormans and thegns. However, the prominence given to both bishops and abbots in Edgar's charters demonstrates the significance of the church to his quest for extending his royal authority through the manipulation of monastic endowments.

Not only did Edgar seek to expand his royal authority through centralization of religious life, but also, like Alfred the Great, through the regulation of coinage. Under the laws of King Æthelstan, Edgar's predecessor, coinage was regulated as a mean through which the king could easily exercise his rights to taxation in areas he visited infrequently.[130] For instance in Æthelstan's *Grately Code*, issued in 930, both the location of mints and areas for transactions were clearly defined,

> Concerning moneyers. Thirdly, that there is to be one coinage over all the king's dominion, and no one is to mint money except in a town. And if a moneyer is convicted, the hand with which he committed the crime is to be struck off, and put up on the mint. And if, however, there is an accusation, and he wishes to clear himself, he is then to go to [the ordeal of] hot iron, and redeem the hand with which he is accused of having committed the crime; and if he is convicted at the ordeal, the same is to be done as it is said here above.[131]

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[129] "Lease by King Edgar with permission of the bishop and community of Winchester of land at Kilmeston, Hampshire, To Æthelwulf", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042,* ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979*)*,110. Interestingly, the grant of land to Ælfwold includes what seems to be an administrative recounting of the traditional lines of demarcation between the old Mercian kingdom and Wessex. Arguably, Edgar's donation to his thegn reaffirms the idea of donation as a mechanism of royal power.

[130] The itinerancy of the royal court necessitated the ability of kings to tax his citizens through direct and indirect means, in particular those outside the Thames River Valley.

[131] "King Æthelstan's Laws issues at Grately", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042,* ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979*)*, 35. I have used Whitelock's translation of ordeal, rather than the threefold-ordeal of the *Quadripartitus* to maintain consistency of translation.

In particular, Æthelstan's *Grately Code* delineated clear areas of trade and transaction, centering in towns, which could be effectively taxed. Also, by locating mints in large towns such as Canterbury and Rochester, the king and his tax collectors could more efficiently move coins into the money supply. Æthelstan's coinage and trading policies created beneficial economic conditions which increased the amount of silver coinage available while simultaneously stimulating trade between the Danelaw and the West Saxon hegemony.[132] Under Edgar the Peaceable's long reign, this trading relationship flourished allowing Edgar to once again extend his royal reach by improving upon Æthelstan's reforms to currency. Edgar's coinage reforms focused on strengthened requirements for moneyers and local sources of production creating a surplus of silver coinage and fostering successful international trade. Peaceful borders between the West Saxon kingdom and the Danelaw as well as an increased supply in silver coinage created an economic boom.[133]

Riding a triumphant wave of religious benefaction and economic prosperity, Edgar envisioned himself as an emerging emperor or *basileus* on the international stage.[134] Closely modeling himself after his Carolingian and Ottonian counterparts, Edgar embarked on a mission of personal aggrandizement through the medium of law. Inspired and influenced by the continent, Edgar put forth two new law codes that further cemented his royal authority over both English and Danish subjects. First published somewhere between 959-963, Edgar's *Andover Code* represents the most comprehensive set of Anglo-Saxon laws created as a "coherent response to perceived issues" thoughtfully crafted with unencumbered directives.[135] Patrick

[132] Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasion*, 13.

[133] Ibid, 13-14.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, (Oxford, U.K.; Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 317.

Wormald notes that the *Andover Code* was "rational and rationed" focusing on both ecclesiastical and secular issues with an eye to making English law more Carolingian in nature.[136] Incorporating the idea of "Rome-money", stipulating neighborhood sureties, and reinforcing the demand for a single currency were just a few of the topics addressed by Edgar in the *Andover Code*, all of which sought to strengthen his centralization efforts. Significantly in the later *Wihtbordesstan Code* (IV Edgar), Edgar's imperialistic aspirations led him to legislate the Danelaw directly, even incorporating Scandinavian terms into the code itself.[137] Written in a more personal and informal legislative mode, the *Wihtbordesstan* code harkened back to the ideas of Alfred, focusing on guarded inclusiveness and accommodation. Edgar begins his secular legislative section with a reaffirmation of his royal prerogative, tempered with allusions to Danish self-determination:

> It is my will that secular rights be in force in every province, as good as they can best be devised, to the satisfaction of God, and for my full royal dignity and for the benefit and security of poor and rich; and that I have in every borough and in every shire the rights belonging to my royal dignity, as my father had; and my thegns are to have their dignity in my time as they had in my father's. And it is my will that secular rights be in force among the Danes according to as good laws as they can best decide on.[138]

The secular section goes on to reaffirm earlier laws on trade and activities of local courts, with particular emphasis on theft and the regularization of cattle trading. Viewed through the prism of Edgar's economic and regnal concerns, the *Wihtbordesstan* code stands as a testament to the ideas of appeasement and accommodation first voiced by Alfred the Great. Personal aggrandizement and imperial aspirations aside, Edgar's law codes demonstrate a remarkable

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[136] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 316-317.

[137] Ibid, 319. The *Wihtbordesstan* code is the first Anglo-Saxon law code to incorporate any Scandinavian terminology, including *forgifnes* (forgiveness) and *lagu* (law).

[138] "Edgar's Code issued at Wihtbordesstan", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042,* ed. Dorothy Whitelock*,* (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979*)*, 41.

degree of inclusion with the Scandinavian population within the West Saxon kingdom and in the Danelaw. Edgar emphasizes this point once again, stating,

> Nevertheless, this measure is to be common to all the nations, whether Englishmen, Danes or Britons, in every province of my dominion, to the end that poor man and rich may possess what they rightly acquire, and a thief may not know where to dispose of stolen goods…[139]

Patrick Wormald explains that for Anglo-Saxon kings law-making, "whilst clearly an instrument of a powerful royal government, was also a medium for the political bargaining which shaped the relationship between regional elites and the royal court."[140] Like his predecessor Alfred, Edgar used the medium of law to mitigate ethnic tensions, while discreetly proclaiming his own royal authority. By encouraging Scandinavian conversion through the strategic placement of monastic endowments in the Danelaw, increasing coinage to strengthen international trade, and crafting legislation that supported Scandinavian self-determination within a framework of Anglo-Saxon power, Edgar the Peaceable fulfilled the promise inherent in the *Alfred-Guthrum Treaty*, demonstrating to his heirs the possibility of a cohesive Anglo-Scandinavian kingdom. Unfortunately, Edgar the Peaceable's laudable legacy would be completely neglected by each of his sons, none more disastrously than Æthelræd.

Edward the Martyr: A Bad Son on the Rise

> In this year Edgar, king of the English, reached the end of earthly joys, chose for him the other light, beautiful and happy, and left this wretched and fleeting life. The sons of nations, men on earth, everywhere in this country-those who have been rightly trained in computation-call the month in which the young man Edgar, dispenser of treasure to warriors, departed from life on the eighth day, the month of July. His son then succeeded to the kingdom, a child ungrown, a prince of nobles whose name was Edward.[141]

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[139] Ibid.

[140] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 120.

[141] *ASC*, 975.

The death of King Edgar the Peaceable in 975, recounted in the *ASC* with florid prose, effusively praising the dead monarch, left the kingdom in disarray, as both of his heirs were small children. Though Edward was the eldest *ætheling*, his succession to the throne was not guaranteed as courtly factions raised issues of legitimacy and his "throne-worthiness".[142] Rumors of Edward's scandalous birth, supposedly from a union between Edgar and a veiled virgin of Wilton Abbey, were magnified by the political machinations of Queen Ælfthryth who supported the elevation of her nine year old son Æthelræd to the throne.[143] Compounding the issues of legitimacy stood Edward's own character, which apparently even at the tender age of eleven left much to be desired. The *Vita Oswaldi*, written in the late tenth century, describes the controversy over Edward's election to the throne stating,

> Certain of the chief men of this land wished to elect as king the king's elder son, Edward by name; some of the nobles wanted the younger, because he appeared to all gentler in speech and deeds. The elder, in fact, inspired in all not only fear but even terror, for [he scourged them] not only with words but with dire blows, and especially his own men dwelling with him.[144]

Personality deficits notwithstanding, Edward's eventual election to the throne depended on the skillful manipulation of cleavages within the powerful *Witan*, particularly nobles who sought to undermine Edgar's monastic endowments. Backed by Archbishop Dunstan and powerful nobles such as Ealdorman Ælfheah, a deal was brokered in which Edward traded a unanimous vote from the *Witan* for a gift of land to Æthelræd along with the assurance of Æthelræd's position as

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[142] Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelræd 'The Unready'*, 163.

[143] Edward's legitimacy is not documented in any contemporary charters or the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; only chronicles from the late eleventh century make reference to Edward's suspicious birth, most likely as foreshadowing of his death. Edward, most likely, was the progeny of Edgar and his first wife Æthelflæd. See Simon Keynes for a more detailed discussion.

[144] "Vita Oswaldi", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042,* ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979*)*, 914.

aetheling.[145] Ironically, the gift of land to Æthelræd evidenced the first deviance of Edward from his father's generous monastic policies, in particular Edward and his supporters began a campaign of retracting monastic endowments, namely Abingdon Abbey. The surviving charter written in 999 during Æthelræd's reign recounts the transference of land,

> I, Æthelræd, by his saving grace king of the English, in the midst of the various vicissitudes of this fleeting age, called to mind how in the time of my boyhood an act was done on my behalf, when my father, King Edgar, going the way of the whole universe, departed to the Lord old an full of days; namely that all the leading men of both orders unanimously chose my brother Edward to guide the government of the kingdom, and gave over to me for my use the lands belonging to kings' sons. Some of which lands, in truth, my father, while he reigned, had granted for the redemption of his soul to the onimpotent Christ and Mother St. Mary, to the monastery which is called Abingdon…[146]

The charter goes on to explain that the lands were "withdrawn by force, by decree and order of all the leading men" and turned over to the young *ætheling*.[147] Though only eleven years old, Edward and his councilors pursued a policy of anti-monasticism, dispossessing many of the endowments put in place by his father. Edgar's monastic donations, meant as an avenue for royal power and centralization, often dispossessed and angered powerful local nobility whose authority was usurped. Edward, though young, eagerly sided with the nobility in their quest to reassert their local control. The *Vita Oswaldi* attests to the scathing anti-monastic fervor of Edward's court, stating,

> …the whole kingdom was thrown into confusion, the bishops were agitated, the noblemen stirred up, the monks shaken with fear, the people terrified; the clerics were made glad, for their time had come. Abbots, with their monks, were expelled; clerics with their wives, were introduced; and the last error was worse than the first[…]These words which I utter are not extravagant, but well known, that before the holy churches of God were laid waste by our countrymen, when the servants of the Lord, who ceased not day and night from divine praises, were expelled…[148]

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[145] Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelræd 'The Unready'*, 164-165.

[146] "Grant by King Æthelræd of lands at Farnsborough", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042,* ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979), 123.

[147] Ibid.

[148] "Vita Oswaldi", *EHD,* 236.

Edward's anti-monastic sentiments even touched the author of the *ASC* who noted "ill-omens" and "pestilence" accompanied Edward's succession to the throne.[149] The unknown chronicler goes on to describe the monastic displacement, writing, "many of the wise servants of God were dispersed… that was a great cause of mourning."[150]

Unpopular and troubled, Edward's reign was cut short by his murder on 10 June 978 at the hands of unnamed attackers. Edward the Martyr, as he was later christened, fell victim to palace intrigue seemingly instigated by the displaced Queen Ælfthryth. Though contemporary chronicles stop short of accusing Queen Ælfthryth, and by extension Æthelræd, of plotting the murder, they did record Edward's murder at the hands of "vengeful thegns" encircling the doomed king as "Jews once surrounded the supreme Christ."[151] Hagiographies such as the *Vita Oswaldi* and Edward's own *Vita* go on to note "no vengeance was sought" after Edward's dastardly murder at the hands of those he trusted, signaling that his murder, though unpalatable, was likely perpetrated by Queen Ælfthryth on Æthelræd's behalf. After his stringent anti-monastic policies, Edward's later elevation to sainthood stands as the ultimate irony. Additionally, later eleventh century chroniclers such as William of Malmesbury used Edward's martyrdom and Æthelræd's implied guilt to foreshadow Æthelræd's eventual troubles. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* ominously notes, "men murdered [Edward], but God honoured him…His earthly kinsmen would not avenge him, but his heavenly Father has greatly avenged him."[152]

[149] *ASC,* 975.

[150] Ibid.

[151] "Vita Oswaldi", *EHD,* 236.

[152] *ASC*, 978.

Æthelræd: The Reckless Years 978-993

Consecrated king on 4 May 979; Æthelræd began his reign under the careful watch of his domineering mother and a score of wary councilors. Queen Ælfthryth, whose power and political acumen will be discussed in a later chapter, helped to ensure a smooth transition for her young son. Additionally, Bishop Æthelwold, a long-time ally of Queen Ælfthryth, served as a close advisor for the barely twelve-year-old monarch. From an examination of Æthelræd's early charters, a cohesive and continuous list of religious and secular figures emerges as advisors. These men, largely pulled from his father's coterie of confidants, helped to stem the tide of Edward's anti-monastic policies and reaffirm the programs of Edgar. Simon Keynes notes, "the ealdorman represent a continuation of the position established in Edgar's reign, as modified by new appointments made during the reign of Edward, and several of the prominent *ministri* who attest these diplomas can probably be identified amongst those in the lists […] of Æthelræd's predecessors."[153]

In particular, under the guidance of his mother and Bishop Æthelwold, Æthelræd's early reign saw a resurgence of ecclesiastic endowments throughout the kingdom. Furthermore, many secular reformers such as Ealdorman Ordwulf, Aethelmaer, and Wulfgeat "encouraged the king to restore the lands and liberties of Abingdon Abbey" as well as endow numerous other Benedictine houses throughout the kingdom.[154] Keynes notes that, "the period was one of the most prosperous for the advancement of the ecclesiastical cause before the Norman Conquest."[155] Under the supervision of Queen Ælfthryth and Bishop Æthelwold, the monastic-reform party used its resources to strengthen royal authority through the manipulation of

[153] Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelræd 'The Unready'*, 175.

[154] Williams, *Æthelræd the Unready, The Ill-Counselled King*, 39.

[155] Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelræd 'The Unready'*, 179.

religious devotion and allegiance, as Edgar had done previously. Also like his father, Æthelræd professed imperial suzerainty over all of the British Isles, claiming royal authority over all "Britons" including Danes who owed him allegiance. In a grant of land to his thegn Aethlwig written in 995, Æthelræd describes himself as, " [Æthelrad], king, *basileus* of the English, holding the summit of the whole kingdom."[156] Another charter written in the same year, echoes Æthelræd's imperial visions, describing the kings as "emperor by the providence of God of all Albion."[157] The boy king, standing on the shoulders of powerful men and women, surveyed the greatness of his kingdom, but it was not to last.

In 984, the disastrous happened, the great Bishop Æthelwold died; the *ASC* records his passing,

> In this year the benevolent Bishop Æthelwold died, and the consecration of the succeeding bishop, Aelfheah, who was called by a second name, Godwine, was on 19 Ocotober, and he occupied the bishop's throne in Winchester on the festival of the two apostles, Simon and Jude.[158]

The death of Æthelwold marks a significant turning point for Æthelræd, who at sixteen, seems to have abruptly turned away from both the policies of his father and the council of his mother. From 984 until 993, Queen Ælfthryth disappears from royal witness lists, indicating a radical break between the two.[159] This sort of dramatic reversal of position would typify Æthelræd's reign, swinging from one political extreme to another, seemingly at the mercy of his advisors.

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[156] " Grant by King Æthelræd to his thegn Æthelwig", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042,* ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979*)*, 118.

[157] "Grant by King Æthelræd to Wulfric", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042,* ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979*),* 119.

[158] *ASC*, 984. The mention of Ælfheah's other name, Godwine, is significant as it was a name often associated with Scandinavian settlement. The possibility that Ælfheah had Scandinavian roots is significant and informative for his position as Bishop of Winchester and royal councilor.

[159] Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelræd 'The Unready'*, 180-181. For further information on Ælfthryth see Chapter Four.

Lacking the steadying hands of Æthelwold and Queen Ælfthryth, Æthelræd began to exercise a greater degree of personal authority, including choosing new advisors who initiated another period of anti-monastic policies. Possibly under the sway of the once popular Archbishop Dunstan, Æthelræd began depoliticizing the Church, including returning some church lands to secular use and disbanding Edgar's program of monastic reform. One of the most infamous episodes from this reactionary period, the "harrowing" of Rochester, is recorded in numerous chronicles, though it only garners a scant reference in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which records "the king laid waste the diocese of Rochester."[160] Writing a generation later, Sulcard of Westminster gives the fullest account of the incident, describing how the king "in a fit of insolent rage set on fire the city of Rochester and the church of St. Andrew, and by burning and ravaging laid waste all the lands which belong to the bishop of that city."[161] Sulcard explains the harrowing was a result of the Bishop of Rochester evicting one of Æthelræd's cronies from the bishopric's lands. Sulcard goes on to say that Dunstan admonished the king for his egregious actions against the town and bishopric, and when Æthelræd refused to be chastened, Dunstan forewarned of devastation "by fire and sword".[162] Rochester was not the only ecclesiastical holding to be returned to secular hands, Abingdon Abbey, Winchester and monasteries throughout the kingdom lost lands to the nobility. In particular, Keynes notes five ealdorman who benefited most from Æthelræd's maltreatment of churches including Ælfweard, Ælfsige, Wulfsige, Æthelsige and Ælfgar.[163] Each of these men profited from the return of monastic lands

[160] *ASC*, 986.

[161] Bernarnd Scholz, "Sulcard of Westminster; 'Prologus de Constuccione Westmonasterii", *Traditio 20*, (1964), 61.

[162] Ibid.

[163] Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelræd 'The Unready'*, 180-183.

to secular control; each would later by blamed by King Æthelræd for his youthful indiscretions against the church. By 993, Æthelræd came to regret his actions against the church and rectified much of the damage that he had inflicted, but nevertheless, Æthelræd's vacillation in political alliance set a terrifying precedent for the remainder of his reign. Rather than a steadying influence, as his father had been, Æthelræd's frenetic policy reversals demonstrated an inherent weakness in both his character and his ability to rule.

Compounding Æthelræd's troubles during this period was increased Scandinavian activity, most significantly the arrival of the first large Viking force since the *Great Micel Here* of 885. Forced into exile from Denmark, Swein Forkbeard, heir to the Danish throne, arrived in England with his forces in late 990 and began raiding along the eastern coast of England. Joining Swein's horde were various other notable Viking leaders including the would-be king Olaf Tryggvason of Norway, Guthmund Steirtarson, as well as various contingents from all over the Baltic region.[164] The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* details the arrival of the Scandinavian force stating, "in this year Olaf came with 93 ships to Folkestone, and ravaged around it, and then from there went to Sandwich, ans so from their to Ipswich, and overran it all."[165] Interested in plunder rather than settlement, Swein Forkbeard's assorted Scandinavian force ravaged eastern England, eventually meeting the Anglo-Saxon *landfyrd* at the famous Battle of Maldon.[166] Recounted in a stunning Anglo-Saxon poem, the Battle of Maldon was the first major battle in more than a generation against a Scandinavian force. The unknown poet describes how the Anglo-Saxon commander, Byrhtnoth, defied the invaders,

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[164] Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions*, 15.

[165] *ASC*, 991.

[166] Ibid. *Landfyrd* was an Anglo-Saxon militia mobilized on a local basis, consisting of men from several shires to address immediate threats. The use of the *landfyrd* could be very costly, as it required provisioning by both the king and local nobility. See Ian Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions,* 22, for more information.

> …here stands with his company an earl of unstained reputation, who intends to defend his homeland, the kingdom of Æthelræd, my lord's people and his country. They shall fall, the heathens in battle.[167]

Though the battle ended in defeat for the Anglo-Saxon force, the bravery displayed by the combatants after the death of Byrhtnoth was memorialized,

> Now was fallen the people's chief, [Æthelræd's] earl. All the retainers saw how their lord lay dead. Then the proud thegns pressed on, hastened eagerly, those undaunted men. All desired one of two things, to lose their lives or to avenge the one they loved.[168]

After their victory at Maldon, the Scandinavian *here* journeyed south to Kent, pillaging along the way, eventually wintering either on the Isle of Sheppey or Isle of Thanet.[169] Unable to defeat the Viking force in a decisive battle and ill-equipped to keep the *fyrd* in the field, King Æthelræd was persuaded by Archbisop Sigeric to negotiate a winter truce in the style of Alfred. Surviving in a twelfth-century manuscript, Æthelræd's treaty with the Vikings (*II Æthelræd*) sought to protect Anglo-Saxon property and trading interests through the payment of *heregeld*. The treaty begins,

> Firstly, that a general peace be established between king Æthelræd with all his people and all the army to which the king gave tribute, according to the terms which Archbishop Sigeric, Ealdorman Æthelweard and Ealdorman Ælfric made, when they obtained permission from the king to purchase peace for the areas which they had rule over, under the king.[170]

The treaty then goes on to outline protections for property, shipping and establish *wergilds* for both Englishmen and Danes killed by one another. Significantly, Æthelræd denies any and all compensation or revenge for death or destruction done before the treaty, effectively giving

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[167] "The Battle of Maldon", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042,* ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979*)*, 10.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions*, 39.

[170] "II Æthelræd", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042,* ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979*)*, 42.

amnesty to all Scandinavians who participated in the raids.[171] The treaty ends with the payment of twenty-two thousand pounds of gold and silver to the Scandinavian army for the truce. Æthelræd and his *Witan*'s inability to adequately respond to the Scandinavian incursion and the ultimate decision to purchase peace set an ugly precedent for the remainder of Æthelræd's rule. Rather than create a meaningful peace settlement, Æthelræd harkened back to the detrimental initial policies of Alfred. Unlike the *Alfred-Guthrum Treaty*, Æthelræd's treaty with the Scandinavians focused too narrowly on the immediate issues of the *here*, rather than crafting a meaningful avenue by which the Vikings could integrate themselves through land and privilege.

By early 992, Æthelræd and his councilors sought a more dramatic end to the Scandinavian threat, openly challenging them to a sea engagement. The *ASC* records Æthelræd's strategy, stating, "then the king and all his councilors decreed that all the ships that were any use should be assembled at London. And the king then entrusted the expedition to the leadership of Ealdorman Ælfric…and they were to try if they could entrap the Danish army anywhere at sea."[172] Æthelræd's bold, and ultimately reckless, plan sought to deal the Scandinavian *here* a defeat so devastating that they would be forced to flee England entirely while discouraging any future incursions.

Rather than showing the Anglo-Saxon's military prowess, the ensuing debacle demonstrated Æthelræd's laughable depths of ineptitude. Apparently, Ealdorman Ælfric maneuvered his flotilla too close to the moored Viking ships, alerting them too early of their presence and allowing the Scandinavians to sail away unscathed.[173] For his incompetence, Ealdorman Ælfric was exiled, his property in Mercia given to a local noble named Eadric

[171] Ibid.

[172] *ASC*, 992.

[173] Williams, Æthelræd the *Unready, The Ill-Counseled King*, 45.

Streona, whose precipitous rise to prominence would greatly influence Æthelræd's later reign. After their anti-climatic battle, the *sciphere* dispersed only to be attacked by the Scandinavian fleet while sailing home. The *ASC* records the battle, stating,

> And then the *here* met the ships from East Anglia and from London, and they made a great slaughter there and captured the ship, all armed and equipped, on which the ealdorman was.[174]

Contemporary annals do not record any other significant Scandinavian disruptions after the disastrous sea confrontations; most likely the *here* journeyed northward, ceasing to be a threat to Æthelræd's kingdom.[175]

Æthelræd's response to the Scandinavian invasion had been woefully inadequate, both militarily and diplomatically. Consequently, Æthelræd seems to have taken a step back, allowing for the return of several old advisors as well as his mother. Æthelræd acknowledged the return of Queen Ælfthryth to his inner circle with a gift of lands to her for "as long as may retain the vital spirit unextinguished in the mortal flesh; and then, indeed, she is to leave it to what heir she pleases in succession to her."[176] In later charters, Æthelræd blamed his foolish behavior "partly on account of the ignorance of my youth…and partly on account of the abhorrent greed of certain of those men who ought to administer to my interests."[177]

Æthelræd's mistreatment of churches, the appropriation of their property, and the willful disregard of the privileges granted to them by his father as well as his pathetic efforts against the Scandinavian *here* demonstrated the young king's changeable nature and susceptibility to the opinions of others. Unfortunately, Æthelræd's erratic and ineffective reaction to Scandinavian

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[174] Ibid.

[175] Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions*, 46.

[176] "Grant by King Æthelræd to his mother, Æthelfryth", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042,* ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979*)*,120.

[177] "Old English Charter of King Æthelræd confirming the will of Æthelric of Bocking", *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042,* ed. Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979*)*,121.

conflict typified the remainder of his reign. The young king, only twenty-three years old, began his reign under a cloud of suspicion and ill-ease, reinforced by his attacks on the church and ruinous losses to his Scandinavian foes; Æthelræd sat upon a troubled throne.

Chapter Three
Æthelræd Inaction: A Study in Alienation

> *Here in this year Bamburgh was sacked and much booty was taken there, and after that the here came to the mouth of the Humber and brought about great misery there, both in Lindsey and in Northumbria.*[178]

After the pitiable treaty with the Vikings in 991 and the purchased peace of 992, beleaguered King Æthelræd struggled to find his equilibrium under the continuing onslaught of Scandinavian invasions. Æthelræd's strategically inadequate response to these earlier confrontations resulted in a dramatic political shift within the king's inner circle, including the return of his powerful mother, dowager Queen Ælfthryth, as well as recriminations against the Witan's poor counsel. If Æthelrædhoped for a peace in 993, he would be sorely disappointed. By September of that year, a large Viking contingent rampaged through northern England led by the future kings of Norway and Denmark, Olaf Tryggvason and Swein Forkbeard, respectively. Journeying southward, the two Viking leaders aimed their *here* towards the city of London; the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records the ensuing battle, stating,

> Here in this year Olaf and Swein came to London on the Nativity of St. Mary with 94 ships, and they proceeded to attack the city stoutly and wished also to set it on fire; but there they suffered more harm and injury than they ever thought any citizens would do them.[179]

The chronicle goes on to describe how once repulsed from London, Olaf and Swein proceeded to do "the greatest damage that ever any army could do, by burning, ravaging and slaying, both along the coast, and in Essex, Kent, Sussex and Hampshire."[180] With over ninety ships and upwards of four thousand men, Olaf Tryggvason and Swein Forkbeard's *here* wreaked havoc on an already destabilized kingdom.

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[178] *ASC,* 992.

[179] *ASC*, 994.

[180] Ibid.

His Scandinavian Foes

The lives of Olaf Tryggvason and Swein Forkbeard are well recorded in Anglo-Saxon sources as well as Scandinavian history and legend. Descended from famed Norwegian king Harald Fairhair, Olaf Tryggvason's life was mainly detailed in skaldic verse and later sagas such as the *Heimskringla.*[181] Exiled from his homeland at birth, Olaf grew up in Gardarik (Russia) where he excelled at warfare; Snorri Sturlason, thirteenth-century author of the Icelandic saga the *Heimskringla*, praises the young Olaf writing, "[he] was very good-looking, big and strong, and in all kinds of sport surpassed all the Norsemen who are spoken of."[182] A born leader and adventurer, Olaf Tryggvason spent his early years fighting as a mercenary for various kings until striking out to gain fame and fortune raiding along the North Sea. The *Heimskringla* recounts in poetic verse Olaf's raids throughout England, from Scotland to the Hebrides Islands,

> The young king unsparingly Harried English.
> The maker of the spear rain avenged The murder of the Northumbrians.
> The battle-glad wolf feeder Wasted the Scots widely
> With the sword. The dealer of gold Made the sword play in Man.
> The bearer of the elm bow Brought death to the army
> Of the Isles of the Irish,
> For yearning for fame was the prince.
> The king knocked the dwellers
> Of Bretland and struck down
> The Cumberlanders, and greed
> Did leave the vultures.[183]

Fighting alongside Olaf Tryggvason, Swein Forkbeard also stood as heir to a Scandinavian kingdom. Son of famed Danish warrior and king Harold Bluetooth, Swein Forkbeard by 987 had ousted his father from power and commanded a large contingent of warriors eager for plunder, including members of the notorious Jómsvíkings.[184] The *Heimskringla* describes an inheritance

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[181] Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, The Ill-Counselled King, 45.

[182] Snorri Sturlason, *Heimskringla: The Lives of the Norse Kings,* ed. Erling Monsen, (New York; Dover Publications, Inc, 1990), 119.

[183] Snorri Sturlasson, "The History of Olaf Tryggvason", *Heimskringla*, 136.

[184] See Anders Winroth, *The Age of the Vikings*, 75 for more information.

feast given by Swein in his father's honor in which the newly crowned king details his intentions,

> The first day of the feast, before King Swein stepped into his father's high-seat, he drank his cup of remembrance and made a vow that ere three years were gone he would go to England with his army and slay King [Æthelræd] or drive him from the land.[185]

Formidable and fearsome, the Viking leaders Olaf Tryggvason and Swein Forkbeard saw England as a rich prize for the taking in 994.

Unable to keep a *fyrd* in the field during harvest time, Æthelræd called together his advisory council, the *Witan*, with the purpose of halting Olaf and Swein's marauding. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* recounts the meeting and outcome, stating, "then the king and his *witan* decided to send to them and promise them tribute and provisions, on condition that they should cease their harrying."[186] In exchange for 16,000 pounds of coin and winter quarters, Olaf and Swein agreed to stop their raiding for the time being while simultaneously acting as a mercenary force to dissuade other Vikings from hostile action. Hoping to cement the truce as his forbearer Alfred had, Æthelræd sent his two most prominent advisors, Bishop Ælfheah and Ealdorman Æthelweard, to Olaf with the intention of standing as his sponsor.[187] Much like Alfred's sponsorship of Guthrum a century before, Æthelræd's ponsorship of Olaf's conversion to Christianity signified not just a religious bond but a relationship infused with authority and allegiance.[188] Using conversion as a diplomatic event, Æthelræd and his councilors hoped to reinforce their political agenda, as Alfred had successfully done. Alice Sheppard explains the importance of Æethelræd's attempts at prioritizing policy over tactics, using Olaf's baptism to

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[185] Ibid, 141.

[186] *ASC,* 994.

[187] Ibid.

[188] Lesley Abrams, "Conversion and Assimiliation", *Cultures in Contact*, 137.

bring him into Æthelræd's "community of lordship relations."[189] The *ASC* states that, "Olaf promised, as he also did, that he would never again come among the *Angelcynn* in hositilty", solidifying Æthelræd's lordship and authority over the Scandinavian leader.[190] Demonstrating his worthiness as king and over-lord, Æethelræd's use of a diplomatic solution rather than overt military action incorporated Olaf into the schema of established Anglo-Scandinavian relationships developed first by Alfred. Olaf's conversion is also recorded in the *Heimskringla*, which completely ignores Æthelræd's sponsorship, instead focusing on the necessity of Olaf's conversion to Christianity in order to claim his throne. The *Heimskringla* describes a prophetic aging hermit as the catalyst for Olaf's baptism, stating,

> The hermit answered with holy soothsaying: "Thou shalt be a glorious king and bring forth glorious work. Thou shalt bring many men to the truth and to become Christian. Thereby shalt thou help thyself and man others, and that thou shalt not have doubt about my answer, thou canst have this evidence: near to thy ships wilt thou meet treachery and foes and wilt come to battle; thou wilt lose some of thy men and thou thyself wilt be wounded. From that wound thou shalt near be dead and be borne on the shields to thy ship; but from that wound thou wilt be well in seven nights and shortly after wilt thou be baptized."[191]

An enthusiastic convert to Christianity, Olaf returned to his native Norway in 995 with hopes of claiming the throne from Earl Hakon Sigurdsson, whose increasing unpopularity burgeoned Olaf's chances. Supported and encouraged by Æthelræd, Olaf met with little difficulty in securing his throne and eagerly set about converting both Norway and Iceland to Christianity.

Significantly, Olaf upon his return to Norway had left the majority of his Scandinavian army in England as mercenaries in service to King Æthelræd, demonstrating his allegiance to

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[189] Alice Sheppard, *Families of the King: Writing Identity in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, (Toronto; University of Toronto Press, 2004), 100.

[190] *ASC,* 994. Alice Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 101.

[191] Snorri Sturlasson, "The History of Olaf Tryggvason", *Heimskringla*, 137. Interestingly, Adam of Bremen also notes Olaf's conversion, though he accuses the Viking of practicing magic and witchcraft alongside his new religion. See P.H. Sawyer, *Kings and Vikings* for a more thorough discussion.

Æthelræd as his over-lord and sponsor. The use of Scandinavian mercenary armies had been a practice of both Æthelstan and Edward the Elder, but Æthelræd would have varying degrees of success with such a precarious multitude of Scandinavians. Included in this mercenary force was Swein Forkbeard, who avoided conversion to Christianity, but maintained a political alliance with Æthelræd for a short time. Returning to Denmark in 995, Swein Forkbeard spent several years consolidating his power over both Denmark and Sweden through diplomacy, military action and marriage alliances. The resulting Danish/Swedish hegemony brought Swein and Olaf into direct conflict, thereby distracting both kings from further plundering England.[192] The political and religious unrest caused by Olaf and Swein's wars in Scandinavia allowed Æthelræd and his kingdom an extended period of peace from Viking incursions. Significantly between 995-1000, Æthelræd and his counselors used their respite from Scandinavian attacks to draft legislation that crafted new identities and authority for Scandinavians within an Anglo-Saxon narrative.

The Extension of Royal Privilege: Law, Elites and Religion

Issued sometime in 997, *III Æethelræd*, better known as the *Wantage Code*, sought to legislate "for the reform of matters of various sorts" focusing on a vigorous enforcement of Æethelræd's authority in the Danelaw.[193] Incorporating much Scandinavian terminology, the *Wantage Code* "does not provide evidence for a kingdom riven by ethnic difference, which could be recognized by the king in objective, legal terms."[194] Drawn up by men familiar with the issues in northern England and heavily influenced by regional preoccupations, the *Wantage Code* sought to introduce royal rules and practices from Wessex into the territory of the Five

[192] Anders Winroth, *The Age of The Vikings*, (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 2014), 150-151.

[193] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 329.

[194] Hadley, *The Vikings In England: Settlement, Society and Culture*, 69.

Burroughs.[195] Patrick Wormald notes the regional influence on the *Wantage Code*, stating, "no West Saxon king or council could have produced a code so thoroughly Scandinavian in form and content."[196] For example in the *Wantage Code*, Scandinavian terminology is used to describe the legalities of purchasing land,

> And the purchase of land, and the lord's gift which he has the right to give, and the purchase of legal rights, and agreements and witness, are to be valid, so that no one may pervert them.[197]

Significantly, both "landcop" and "witword" are Scandinavian terms denoting the proper legal formalities for the purchase of land and "demonstrable title to possession"; the inclusion of such terms in a law code sponsored by Æethelræd's court make evident the impact of Scandinavians to his reign. By legislating identity and authority through the *Wantage Code*, Æthelrædhoped to integrate lord and neighborhood through a vigorous enforcement of his will. Closely mirroring his previous *Woodstock Code* (*I Æethelræd*), the *Wantage Code* stands as a markedly sympathetic piece of legislation designed to "define procedural aspects of the distinction in legal terms between" the Anglo-Danish community.[198]

Reflective of this trend towards localization and reorganization were Æethelræd's appointments of new men to positions of power within his kingdom. As a result of the Scandinavian invasions, several key ealdorman had perished, such as Ealdorman Byrhtnoth at the Battle of Maldon, leaving Æthelrædto appoint new lords to assist with the administration of his kingdom. Included in these appointments was the promotion of Aelfhelm, a member of a powerful Mercian family, to the position of ealdorman of Northumbria as well as the selection of

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[195] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 329.

[196] Ibid, 330.

[197] Felix Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols (Halle, 1903-1916), vol 1, pp. 228-32, line 3. Translation from Old English, Lauren Doughty. (*And lándcóp 7 hlafordes gifu, þe he on riht age to gifanne, 7 lahcóp 7 witword 7 gewítnes, þæt þæt stande, þæt hit nan man ne awénde.)*

[198] Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æethelræd*, 197.

Ealdorman Leofwine to oversee the vulnerable Thames estuary, an area neglected earlier in Æethelræd's reign. [199] Significantly, though Æthelræddid encourage the promotion of some new men to positions of power within his kingdom, large parts of the realm remained without high-ranking secular officials. Simon Keynes theorizes that Æthelrædattempted to compensate for such deficiencies by "[improving] the articulation of central with local government through […] the development of the shire as a unit of administration by encouraging the emergence of the shire-reeve as his representative at that level."[200] Æethelræd's emphasis on local governance for both his English and Danish subjects encouraged an unprecedented extension of both *de facto* and *de jure* royal authority.[201] By streamlining central governance with the promotion of new, local men and the creation of legislation that regulated Anglo-Danish relations, Æthelrædcrafted a new identity for his kingdom—one of cooperation and acculturation between two disparate groups.

Included in Æethelræd's grand reorganization of the realm's laws and ruling elite, was the advancement of the ecclesiastical cause. Often characterized as the "most prosperous advancement of the ecclesiastical cause before the Norman Conquest", Æthelrædreactivated the spirit of reform begun during his father Edgar's reign.[202] Simon Keynes notes, "not only were privileges confirmed, lands restored and houses founded and endowed; the period also saw extensive English missionary activity in Scandinavia."[203] Hand in hand with his extension of royal privilege in the Danelaw, Æthelrædsought to gain political influence through the

[199] Ibid.

[200] Ibid, 198.

[201] Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions* 33.

[202] Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æethelræd*, 198-199.

[203] Ibid, 199. Keynes also notes it was during this period that Anglo-Saxon material culture and scholarship achievement reached its zenith.

appointment of bishops and abbots in northern England, particularly in the heavily Scandinavian city of York. The development of monastic foundations in the Danelaw under the direction of Oswald, Archbishop of York, allowed for the creation of significant political inroads for Æthelrædand his *Witan*.[204] Additionally during this period of extensive monastic endowment, Æthelrædbegan to actively foster the cult of royal saints. Particularly, Æthelrædencouraged the Church to recognize the sanctity of his dead sister, Edith, as well as his brother, King Edward the Martyr.[205] Susan Riyard describes how Æthelrædand his council promoted the cult of royal saints, stating,

> Æethelræd's involvement in the translation of St Edith fell squarely within this same period, and was associated with the activities of Ordwulf, royal adviser and founder of Tavistock abbey. It seems, then, that Edward's cult, and very probably also that of Edith, was fostered by Æthelrædat a time when he was working with advisors who had a well-attested interest in the patronage of the church and when, despite the continuing threat of the Danes, the internal affairs of the kingdom were smoothly and constructively run.[206]

By encouraging the cult of royal saints, particularly the veneration of his siblings, Æthelrædimbued himself with religious authority. Increasing the prestige of the royal family allowed Æthelrædto more concretely bind his royal authority to religious authority, thereby cementing his position as rightful monarch.[207] Having begun his reign under a cloud of suspicion surrounding his involvement in his brother's death, Æthelrædused the cult of royal sainthood as well as his extensive investment in monastic reform to purge the sins of his past. Unfortunately for Æethelræd, his attempts at good lordship were lost in a sea of Viking invasion.

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[204] Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions*, 35.

[205] It seems that Edward was given the moniker "the Martyr" for his youth, rather than dying in the service of the Christian faith.

[206] Susan Riyard, *The Royal Saints of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study of West Saxon and East Anglian Cults,* (Cambridge, U.K.; Cambridge University Press, 1988), 165.

[207] Ibid, 165-166.

"The Danes Had Control of the Field"[208]

Though no raids were recorded in the *ASC* from 994-997, the respite from Scandinavian attacks proved brief with renewed attacks beginning in 998. The *ASC* records,

> In this year the *here* turned back east into the mouth of the Frome, and there they went inland everywhere into Dorset as widely as they pleased; and the English army was often assembled against them, but as soon as they were to have joined battle, a fight was always instigated by some means and always the enemy had victory at the end.[209]

For the next two years the chronicle records a staggering increase in Scandinavian raids throughout Æethelræd's kingdom, "[seizing] horses and [riding] wherever they pleased."[210] The leaders and origins of these new raiders remain unacknowledged in contemporary sources, leading some historians to speculate that the *here* ravaging Æethelræd's kingdom was in fact the dissatisfied mercenary army left by Olaf Tryggvason.[211] Whatever the origin of the *here*, whether possibly a traitorous mercenary force or new Scandinavians seeking riches, the *ASC* scornfully reproaches Æthelrædand his *Witan* for their response to the raids. In 999, the *ASC* recounts the Scandinavian raids on Kent and Æethelræd's poor response stating,

> The king with his councilors determined that they should be opposed by a naval force and also by a land force. But when the ships were ready, on delayed from day to day, and oppressed the wretched people who were on the ships. And ever, as things should have been moving, they were the more delayed from one hour to the next, and ever they let their enemies' force increase.[212]

The vacillation and incompetence displayed by Æthelrædand his councilors as well as the delays caused by such ineffectiveness severely undercut the morale of the *fyrds*, thus crippling further response. The *ASC* voices such judgments, stating, "the Kentish levy came against them there

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[208] *ASC,* 999.

[209] *ASC,* 997.

[210] *ASC*, 999.

[211] Both Ian Howard and Alice Williams make cases for the origins of the *here* being Æethelræd's poorly controlled Scandinavian mercenary army.

[212] *ASC,* 999.

and they then joined battle stoutly; but, alas! they too soon turned and fled because they had not the support which they should have had.[213]

Possibly in a bid to fortify his kingdom and invigorate his forces, Æthelræddrastically changed his strategy in dealing with Scandinavian raids in the year 1000. The *ASC* records this year as the "harrying of Cumberland", a large swath of territory extending into the northern reaches of Æethelræd's kingdom. Travelling a great distance with his *fyrd*, Æthelrædravaged Cumberland as well as the Isle of Man openly challenging the roaming Scandinavian *here,* while also reassuring his suzerainty over these outlying areas.[214] Often depicted as a weak man who avoided direct military engagements, Æthelrædpersonally oversaw the expedition, which focused on harassing Viking trading centers in the north and west. Although the campaign was an overall success, continued issues of ineffective leadership and betrayal marred Æethelræd's victory. The *ASC* records Æethelræd's inability to harry Viking ships due to a miscommunication with his navy who did not come to his aid, but rather sailed past to Chester.[215] Standing as a rather enigmatic episode of direct action, Æethelræd's foray against the Scandinavians in Cumberland did have the desired effect, the *ASC* recounts, "and the enemy fleet had gone to Richard's kingdom that summer."[216] Though Æthelrædhad been able to send the latest band of Viking raiders scurrying, the reassertion of his dominance over the kingdom was lackadaisical and anti-climatic at best. Æethelræd's royal authority rested, in large part, on his ability to secure the realm from any and all threats, but with victories over-shadowed by ineptitude and a lack of

[213] Ibid.

[214] Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions*, 46-47.

[215] *ASC,* 1000.

[216] *ASC*, 1000. Richard's kingdom refers to Normandy.

leadership, the nobility increasingly became disheartened and disloyal.[217] Treachery and desertion by his once loyal nobles soon plagued Æthelræd's already troubled reign.

Treachery and Reprisal: Pallig and the St. Brice's Day Massacre

Once again the *ASC* records Scandinavian attacks beginning in the spring of 1001, with a *sciphere* of up to 1500 men attacking the southern coast of England.[218] Ravaging through most of Sussex, the Scandinavian force was met by the local *fyrd* who suffered heavy losses in the ensuing battle. The chronicle states that 81 men were lost, including several high reeves, a thegn and others of noble birth, including Bishop Ælfsige's son.[219] Though the *ASC* notes that many more "Danish" lives were lost than Anglo-Saxon, it concludes by stating, "they had control of the field", a depressing addendum to a hard-fought battle. Significantly, this Viking attack targeted Queen Ælfthryth's royal holdings in Dean, alluding to the possibility that some of the Scandinavians participating in the attack were part of the mercenary forces working for Æthelræd.[220] Though a common practice throughout Æthelræd's reign, his use of Scandinavian mercenary forces often led to further destruction and bloodshed.[221]

Adding to Æthelræd's miseries in 1001 was the shocking betrayal of the Viking mercenary commander Pallig. Entering Æthelræd's service sometime after the treaty of 994, Pallig and his *lió* joined with the invading *here* to ravage Devon. The *ASC* records Pallig's treachery, stating,

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[217] Alice Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 85.

[218] P.H. Sawyer, *Kings and Vikings,* 102. *Sciphere* refers to a large Viking contingent of ships.

[219] *ASC*, 1001.

[220] Simon Keynes, "A Tale of Two Kings: Alfred the Great and Æthelrædthe Unready," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 36, (1986), 207.

[221] It should be noted that the use of Scandinavian mercenaries was an accepted practice dating back to Alfred the Great, unfortunately Æthelrædseems to have lacked any true control over his forces; causing them to be a destructive force rather than a peace-keeping one.

> Pallig came to meet them there with the ships which he could collect, because he had deserted King Æthelrædin spite of all the pledges which he had given him. And the king had also made great gifts to him, in estates and gold and silver. And they burnt Teignton and also many other good residences which we cannot name, and afterwards peace was made with them.[222]

Pallig's betrayal cut to the heart of Æethelræd's continuing policy of using a mixed force to defend his kingdom. Using Scandinavian mercenaries as well as the local *fyrds* to combat new Scandinavian invasions left Æthelrædvulnerable and overreliant on independent commanders. Significantly unlike his successful acculturation of Olaf, no mention is made of whether Æthelrædhad stood sponsor to Pallig, merely noting sacred oaths and gifts exchanged, thus diminishing the effects of Pallig's commitment to Æethelræd. Not only does Pallig's betrayal highlight Æethelræd's over-reliance on mercenary forces, but also demonstrates the limits of tenth-century kingship. Æethelræd's policy of concentrating power in the hands of local reeves rather than appointing new ealdorman, though an effect means of limiting the power of the nobility while simultaneously extending localized royal authority, hampered efforts to put forth a cohesive, and loyal, defensive force.[223] Once again forced to pay tribute to end the Scandinavian onslaught, Æethelræd's faith in his mercenary army was badly shaken by Pallig's treachery, necessitating a radical shift in policy towards both Scandinavian mercenaries and civilians.

In dramatic fashion, and highly out of character, Æthelrædstruck a retaliatory and sinster blow to Scandinavians throughout his kingdom in the autumn of 1002. The *ASC* records Æethelræd's directive,

> And in that year the king ordered to be slain all the Danish men who were in England—this was done on St. Brice's Day—because the king had been informed that they would

[222] *ASC*, 1001.

[223] Pauline Stafford, "Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference", in *The Reign of Aethelred II: A Study in the Limitations of Royal Policy and Action*, ed by David Hill, (British Archaeological Reports; London, U.K., 1978), 28-30.

> treacherously deprive him, and then all his councilors, of life, and possess the kingdom afterwards.[224]

Framed by Pallig's treachery, Æthelræd's decision to strike out at Scandinavians in his kingdom with a direct attack seems almost prudent. Targeting Scandinavian newcomers and mercenaries whose loyalties were dubious, Æthelrædordered "with the counsel of my leading men and magnates, to the effect that all Danes who had sprung up in this island, sprouting like cockles amongst the wheat, were to be destroyed by a most just extermination."[225] Though portrayed as a judicious action in the face of rumored treachery, a later diploma for the reconstruction of St. Fridewide's in Oxford demonstrates the indiscriminate nature of Æthelræd's attack detailing how the "Danes" sought shelter in the church only to have it burnt down with them inside.[226] Modern archaeological research done on mass graves in Oxford and Weymouth also reveal the frenzy of the St. Brice's day attacks, with wounds on the victims being classified as "the result of undefended people running away from attackers."[227] Archaeologists also noted the ritualistic beheading of the victims with a sword rather than an axe, indicating a level of public spectacle. Henry of Huntingdon, whose account of the massacre was based on boyhood stories told by "very old persons", disapprovingly condemned the massacre which he says targeted men, not women and children, in towns throughout the kingdom. He states that the killings merely sparked the fury of the Danes "like a fire which someone had tried to extinguish with fat."[228] Both William of Jumieges and William of Malmesbury imply that the entire Anglo-Danish population

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[224] *ASC,* 1002.

[225] Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 102.

[226] Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelræd*, 230-231.

[227] Nadia Durrani, "Vengeance: On the Vikings", *Archaeology*, Vol. 66, No. 6, (November/December 2013), 50.

[228] Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*, ed. Diana Greenway, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press,1996), 340-341.

was targeted, describing wholesale slaughter of men, women and children. Significantly, both chroniclers connect the massacre directly to Swein Forkbeard's later raids, identifying his sister Gunnhild and her children as dying in the massacre; both describe Gunnhild coming to England as wife to Pallig, and offering herself as "hostage for peace", but dying alongside the other Danes in England.[229] No records exist to prove the life or death of Swein Forkbeard's sister in the St. Brice's day massacre, but the creation of a "legitimate" reason for Swein's ensuing conquest by later authors was most likely an attempt to explain Æthelræd's eventual defeat.

Reactions to the St. Brice's day massacre varied considerably throughout the kingdom. Both the *ASC* and the diplomas of St. Frideswide indicate a population willing, if not eager, to implement wholesale slaughter against the Scandinavain residents.[230] Significantly, the Danelaw remained loyal to Æethelræd's reign for more than a decade after the massacre and Anglo-Scandinavians in eastern England would be some of Swein's toughest opponents during his later invasions. The reactions, or lack thereof, of the longtime Anglo-Scandinavian populace to the St. Brice killings indicates the overall effectiveness of Æethelræd's rule in assimilating non-natives through law and conversion. In particular, Æethelræd's *Wantage Code* defined land rights for Scandinavians, allowing for the structured buying and selling of land between both *Angelcynn* and *Dane*.[231] It seems that ethnic identity mattered less to the Scandinavian residents of England than political calculations, ensuring land rights and loyalty through sponsorship, i.e. the foundation of monastic institutions throughout the Danelaw, helped Æthelrædretain the support of his Anglo-Scandinavian subjects in the face of open hostilities.[232]

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[229] Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 54-55. Though no evidence suggests of Swein's sister Gunnhild, he did apparently have a sister Thyra, but neither was she married to anyone named Pallig nor did she die in England.

[230] Ibid, 55.

[231] Wormald, *The Making of English Laws*, 329-330.

[232] Innes, "Danelaw Identities", 73-74.

Included in Æethelræd's overall policy shift towards direct action against the Scandinavian *here* stands his marriage to Emma of Normandy, sister to Duke Richard II. Forming a powerful alliance with Duke Richard through marriage, Æthelrædhoped to break the longstanding connection between Normandy and Scandinavian raiders.[233] Often used as a base of operations or alternatively a willing participant in trade, Normandy remained an ongoing source of Viking encroachment and encouragement. A marriage alliance between the two powers would effectively hamper Scandinavian raiding efforts in the area. Aged somewhere between 15-20, Emma arrived in England and was immediately consecrated as Queen alongside her 35-year-old husband Æethelræd. Renamed Ælfgifu (after both Æethelræd's first wife and his sainted grandmother), Emma immediately began to attend meetings of the king and his councilors.[234] Emma's consecration as queen broke with Anglo-Saxon tradition, demonstrating both the importance of the Norman alliance and Emma's own influence.[235] Significantly in response to the marraige, Swein would target Emma's dower lands in Exeter in 1003 as a "deliberate response to the marriage, which had been designed to cut off Danish armies from Norman harbors."[236]

Fury Unleashed: Swein's Retaliatory Raids and the Rise of Thorkel the Tall

As Æthelræd attempted to pursue a policy of self-sufficiency and direct action, he faced a renewed onslaught of Scandinavian invasion beginning in 1003. Refusing to resort to either mercenary forces or the payment of tribute, Æthelræd relied increasingly on the promotion of "new men" to combat Swein's *here.* With defense as his uppermost priority, Æthelræd sought

[233] Williams, *Aethelred The Unready*, 53.

[234] *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, xvii.

[235] For a more thorough discussion of female power and agency in Anglo-Saxon England, refer to Chapter 4 in this work.

[236] Pauline Stafford, *Emma and Edith*: *Queenship and Women's Power in Eleventh Century England*, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1997), 220.

new support with the appointment of new ealdorman throughout his kingdom. In particular, more northern and eastern thegns appear in the witness lists beginning in 1002, with a paucity of land grants in the heartland of Wessex, a first in Æthelræd's twenty-three year reign.[237] Men such as Eadric Streona of Mercia, Uhtred of Bamborough, and Ulfcytel of East Anglia rise to prominence during this period of uncertainty. The rise of Eadric Streona as sole ealdorman of Mercia revived an area of dominance and control that lay dormant since the deaths of Ealdorman Ælfhere twenty years before. Placed under the control of a single ealdorman, defensive forces could much more easily be committed to battle. Though only tenuously connected to the king, Ealdorman Uhtred of York commanded a significant following and displayed a stellar military acumen.[238] Seeking to cement the loyalties of these new men whose defensive abilities were necessary to the kingdom's success, Æthelræd married three of his daughters to the ealdormen, an extremely rare occurrence. The marriage of royal princesses to members of the English nobility was virtually unheard of in tenth or eleventh century England, but interestingly mirrors Alfred's marriage of his daughter, Æthelflæd, to Æthelræd of Mercia, which was also prompted by military necessity.[239] The fragility of Æthelræd's position, underscored by his daughters' defensively inspired marriages, remains even more apparent when examined in the light of soured expectations. The rapid elevation of relatively unknown men to positions of power within Æthelræd's court resulted in feelings of bitterness and jealousy from older retainers, particularly in Wessex where dissatisfaction with Æthelræd's polices would lead to its eventual collapse.[240] Unlike his predecessor Alfred, Æthelræd's promotion of new men so far into his reign, and under

[237] Stafford, "Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference", 33-34.

[238] Ibid, 34.

[239] Willliams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 120.

[240] Stafford, "Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference", 35.

such strenuous conditions, frustrated the expectations of longtime courtiers who had fought alongside the king for so long. Rather than ensuring a stable of loyal followers, the promotion of new men to the ranks of ealdorman weakened Æthelræd's grip on his homeland of Wessex while simultaneously emphasizing the limits of his authority.

Wulfstan's Code: Pseudo-Legislation & Apocalyptic Anxiety

In the midst of the renewed Scandinavian attacks headed by Swein Forkbeard, Æthelræd's chief advisor Archbishop Wulfstan of York put forth two sets of pseudo-legislation, which sought to mitigate the increasing lawlessness and fear felt throughout the kingdom. Produced in 1008, "Wulfstan's Code" or *V Æthelræd* concentrated on reforming perceived failings in the church, with the hopes that "God's law henceforth is to be eagerly loved by word and deed; then God will at once become gracious to this nation."[241] Written in a sermonizing tone, *V Æthelræd* sought to calm the apocalyptic anxiety and mutual hatred felt throughout the kingdom by reasserting divine precepts over mortal punishments.[242] Focusing on the behavior of mass-priests as well as the laity, Wulfstan crafted *V Æthelræd* in order that "all shall love and honor one God and zealously hold one Christian faith and entirely cast off every heathen practice; and we all have confirmed both with word and with pledge that we will hold one Christian faith under the rule of one king."[243] Though some mention is made of "improvement of coinage", "repair of boroughs" and "military service", Wulfstan's main concern in *V Æthelræd* was suppressing abuses to God's law "which hitherto have been to common far and wide."[244] Underscoring the idea of fidelity to one king, *V Æthelræd* encouraged a renewed faith in both

[241] "Æthelræd's Code of 1008", *English Historical Documents 500-1042 Volume 1*, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979), ln. 26.

[242] Wormald, *The Making of English Laws*, 452.

[243] "Æthelræd's Code of 1008", ln. 1.

[244] Ibid, lns. 26.1-32.

God and his representative on earth, King Æthelræd, while scrupulously scourging the land of perceived sinfulness. Less a law code and more a protracted diatribe on sin, *V Æthelræd* stands outside the traditional form of Anglo-Saxon law.

Written almost exclusively by Archbishop Wulfstan, *V Æthelræd* drew upon the archbishop's well-known homiletic sagacity to prescribe an "otherworldly remedy of mass penitence for the body politics' distempers."[245] Wulfstan rose to prominence as the Bishop of London (996-1002), by establishing himself as a man of eloquence whose "extant homilies [evoked] a searing vision of the reign of the Antichrist."[246] One can hardly discredit Archbishop Wulfstan for his millenarian theme of coming apocalypse as the kingdom Alfred and his heirs had crafted seemingly stood on the precipice of disaster. Accompanying *V Æthelræd* was the creation in 1009 of another edict, which like its predecessor sought a divine means of combating the Scandinavian *here*. Created as a reaction to the disastrous loss of the English fleet at Sandwich, *VII Æthelræd* compelled the nation as a whole to do penance in hopes of securing the lord's blessing.[247] *VII Æthelræd* demanded, "all of us have need eagerly to labor that we may obtain God's mercy and his compassion and that we may be able through his help to withstand our enemies."[248] Once again Æthelræd's purely legislative tone of prior laws was replaced by Wulfstan's voice of penitential fear. Rather than view Wulfstan's pseudo-legislation as the last gasp of a doomed nation, *V Æthelræd* and *VII Æthelræd* should be placed in context of eleventh century politics, which made little distinction between secular and religious outcomes. Instead the laws commissioned by Æthelræd and written by Wulfstan in 1008/9 need to be viewed as a

[245] Wormald, *The Making of English Laws*, 450.

[246] Ibid, 450.

[247] Ibid, 451-452.

[248] "VII Æthelræd", *English Historical Documents 500-1042 Volume 1*, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979), Prologue.

concerted effort of a unified kingdom to restore the morale and resolution necessary to defeat their enemies. As archbishop of York, Wulfstan preached to a largely Scandinavian audience, imbuing his homiletic sermons with a powerful message of unity in the face of outside aggression. Using multiple Scandinavian loan words throughout both edicts, Wulfstan preached a message of divine retribution in the face of ongoing conflict.

Arrival of Thorkel the Tall: "King in All But Name"

Arriving in the spring of 1009 to reinforce the *lió* ravaging throughout southern England, Thorkel the Tall represented a significant new threat to Æthelræd's already precarious grip on power. A prominent figure in the *Jómsvíkinga Saga* and in the sagas of St. Olaf, Thorkel the Tall arrived in England as Swein Forkbeard's appointed military commander, bringing with him a large contingent of Danish warriors to strengthen the *here* already present.[249] According the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, the eleventh-century biography of Queen Emma, Thorkel took command of Swein's forces after the death of his brother, Hemingr, seeking vengeance on the English.[250] Accompanied by Olaf Haraldsson, later known as St. Olaf King of Norway, Thorkel the Tall led his *here* throughout southern England, raiding nearly unopposed. The *ASC* harshly criticizes Æthelræd's response to Thorkel's military successes, stating,

> […]the immense raiding army, which we called Thorkel's army,…turned about till it reached the Isle of Wight, and from there they ravaged and burnt, as is their custom, everywhere in Sussex and Hampshire, and also in Berkshire. Then the king ordered all the nation to be called out, so that the enemy should be resisted on every side; but nevertheless they journeyed just as they pleased.[251]

Emphasizing Æthelræd's impotence in combating Thorkel's army, the *ASC* notes that the citizens of Canterbury and eastern Kent made separate peace with the *here*, paying 3,000 pounds

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[249] Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelræd*, 219-220.

[250] *Encomium Emma Reginae*, 73.

[251] *ASC*, 1009.

to them.[252] Rather than a put forth a cohesive defense strategy, Æthelræd and his chief councilors seemed to react to each movement of Thorkel's army individually. This piecemeal strategy can equally be blamed on Æthelræd's military ineptitude and vacillations as well as the nature of the Anglo-Saxon system of *fyrds*. Raised and deployed shire by shire, the *fyrds* relied upon the direction of local magnates to direct and supply them.[253] Regionalism and fractured loyalties due to the rise of new men weakened Æthelræd's abilities to present an organized defensive force. Relying on his military household, Æthelræd eschewed the policies of Alfred who by 890 had created a standing army "whose members served in rotation, fully integrated with the permanent garrisons of the burhs."[254] In particular, Ealdorman Eadric Streona of Mercia, in defiance of seniority, established his precedence as chief military advisor, only to frustrate defensive efforts. The *ASC* harshly recounts, "then on one occasion the king had intercepted [the *here*] with all his army, when they wished to go to their ships, and the whole people was ready to attack them, but it was hindered by Ealdorman Eadric, then as it always was."[255] The harshest condemnations of Ææhelræd's reign emerge during this period of Thorkel's raids; in particular the chronicler of the *ASC* specifies the failure of Æthelræd and his councilors to agree on a lasting strategy to challenge the *here*. Entries from 1011 indict Æthelræd, stating,

> All the disasters befell us through bad policies, in that they were never offered tribute in time nor fought against; but when they had down most to our injury, peace and truce were made with them; and for all this truce and tribute they journeyed none the less in battle everywhere, and harried our wretched people, and plundered and killed them.[256]

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[252] Ibid.

[253] Williams, *Æthelræd the Unready*, 101-102.

[254] Richard Abels, "From Alfred to Harold II: The Military Failure of the late Anglo-Saxon State," *The Normans and Their Adversaries: Essays in Memory of C. Warren Hollister*, (Woodbridge, U.K.; Boydell and Brewer, 2001), 20.

[255] *ASC*, 1009.

[256] *ASC,* 1011.

The ravaging perpetrated by Thorkel and his *here* represent a significant turning point in Æthelræd's reign, lacking clear defensive strategies and hampered by an incompetent advisory council, Æthelræd needed a new stratagem to combat pillaging Scandinavians in an increasingly divided nation.

By 1011, Thorkel and his band of men had been successfully raiding in England for two years, with only a token resistance put forth by Æthelræd's forces. Pressured by his councilors, Æthelræd sued for peace with Thorkel, agreeing to pay the *here* "tribute and provisions on condition that they should cease their ravaging."[257] Though Thorkel and Olaf Haraldsson abided by the truce, decamping to Norway to fight there, the vast majority of the *here* remained to continue its harassment of the kingdom. The *ASC* continues, stating, "for all this truce and tribute they journeyed non the less in bands everywhere, and harried our wretched people and plundered and killed them."[258] Significantly, Thorkel returned in time to lead the *here* in the sack of Canterbury in which the Archbishop Ælfheah, longtime confidant of the king, was captured and later martyred. With little hope of stopping the destruction through payment of tribute alone, Æthelræd and his councilors met in London before Easter 1012 to devise a new strategy. Having eschewed the use of mercenary armies after his victories in 1002, Æthelræd now faced the prospect of once again fielding mercenaries as a deterrent to further raiding. The *ASC* records the hiring of this army, stating,

> When that tribute was paid and the oaths of peace were sworn, the Danish army then dispersed as widely as it had been collected. Then 45 ships from that army came over to the king, and they promised him to defend this country, and he was to feed and clothe them.[259]

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[257] *ASC*, 1011.

[258] Ibid.

[259] *ASC*, 1012.

Commanded by Thorkel the Tall, this latest mercenary force would prove to be both a blessing and a curse for Æthelræd's reign.

Thorkel's transfer of loyalties to the embattled Anglo-Saxon monarch caused a shockwave to reverberate through the Scandinavian kingdoms, particularly Swein Forkbeard's, who counted Thorkel as a close ally. Thorkel's change in allegiance is recorded in the *Encomium Emmae Reginae,* hereafter known as the *EER*, through a speech made to Swein by his men, stating,

> "Thorkel," said they, "your military commander, Lord King, having been granted license by you, has gone to avenge his brother, who was killed there, and leading away a large part of your army, exults that he has conquered. Now, as victor, he has acquired the south of the country, and living there as an exile, and having become an ally of the English, whom he has conquered through your power, he prefers the enjoyment of his glory to leading his army back, and in submission giving you the credit of his victory. And we are amongst the best Danish warriors. Let not our lord suffer so grave a loss, but go forth leading his willing army, and we will subdue for him the contumacious Thorkel together with his companions, and also the English who are leagued with him."[260]

Ignoring for the moment Thorkel's complicated relationship with Queen Emma, to be discussed in subsequent chapters, it merits noting that Thorkel's seeming treachery against Swein stands as justification for his invasion against Æthelræd. Though there is no direct evidence surviving of Thorkel's alliance with Swein, it is almost certain that a portion of the *here* under Thorkel's command had come from Swein's earlier invasion forces.[261] Whether Thorkel abandoned a long-standing ally or not, Æthelræd's treaty with Thorkel was soon put to the test.

Swein Forkbeard's Invasions: The Horsemen Arrive

By August of 1013, Swein Forkbeard and his forces sailed along the eastern coast of England, harassing the population until reaching Northumbria where, "Earl Uhtred and all

[260] *Encomium Emma Reginae*, 11.

[261] Abels, "From Alfred to Harold II: The Military Failure of the late Anglo-Saxon State," 22.

Northumbria straightaway submitted to him."[262] Not only did Northumbria submit to Swein's invasion, but also the "people of Lindsey, and then the people belonging to the Five Boroughs, and soon afterwards all the *here* to the north of Watling Street."[263] The traditional boundary of Watling Street, first referenced in the *AGu*, between the Danelaw and the remainder of the kingdom stands as a meaningful beginning to Swein's eventual victory. Swein's quick and thorough domination of the Danelaw cannot be attributed simply to ethnic Scandinavians throwing off "English rule", rather their willingness to accept Swein needs contextualization.[264] Increasing regionalism exacerbated the brewing political crisis, straining already tenuous bonds between Æthelræd and his northern subjects. Already alienated by hardship and the remembered pains of the St. Brice's massacre, the Danelaw's loyalties to Æthelræd were severely strained before Swein's arrival. Once ashore, Swein's sensible geopolitical strategy of appealing to the outlying, and often neglected, areas of Æthelræd's kingdom demonstrated a shrewd *real politik* in which political calculation overrode ethnic identity.[265] Supporting this idea of politics over ethnicity stands the rapid submission of the "English" heartland of Oxford and Winchester to Swein's conquest; both long-time centers of royal power and authority, their relatively easy capitulation to Swein's troops sent a profound statement to surrounding shires, indicating an overall dissatisfaction with Æthelræd's reign. Additionally, during this period of conquest Swein cemented local alliances through the marriage of his son Cnut to Ælfgifu of Northhampton, daughter of the murdered Ælfhelm of Northumbria. Ælfhelm of Northumbria had been a valued ealdorman and advisor to Æthelræd until his mysterious death in 1006 at the hands of Eadric

[262] *ASC*, 1013.

[263] Ibid.

[264] Innes, "Danelaw Identities: Ethnicity, Regionalism and Political Alliance", 74.

[265] Ibid, 74-75. See also Pauline Stafford, "Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference", 35.

Streona, possibly as a political favor to the king.[266] Whether Ælfhelm was murdered by the rising star Eadric Streona or not, the marriage of Cnut into such a powerful northern, Anglo-Saxon family demonstrated a level of accommodation and inclusiveness that Æthelræd's reign severely lacked.

After an abortive attempt at breaching the royal capital of London, the *ASC* credits the citizens and the presence of Thorkel the Tall for the victory, the Danish king journeyed to Bath where, "Ealdorman Æthelmær came there and with him the western thegns, and all submitted to Swein, and they gave him hostages."[267] Soon after the *ASC* notes, "when he had fared thus, he then turned northward to his ships, and all the nation regarded him as full king."[268] London submitted to Swein thereafter, necessitating the withdrawal of the royal court, including Queen Emma and her young sons, Edward and Alfred, who fled to her brother Richard's court in Normandy. Surprisingly, Thorkel remained loyal to Æthelræd withdrawing first to Greenwich, and then celebrating Christmas on the Isle of Wight with the displaced monarch. Eventually both Thorkel and Æthelræd "went across the sea to Richard", until the sudden death of Swein on Candlemass (February 3) 1014 drew the defeated men back to English shores.[269]

Apocalypse Aborted?: Wulfstan's Sermo Lupi and Æthelræd's Return

During's Æthelræd's exile in Normandy, Archbishop Wulfstan remained in England, serving as bishop under Swein's brief reign. Significantly, during this period the effusive bishop put forth his most famous work of homiletic splendor the *Sermo Lupi* or "Sermon of the Wolf to the English". Another apocalyptic piece cataloguing the nation's sins, the *Sermo Lupi* sought to

[266] Williams, *Æthelræd the Unready*, 71-72. John of Worcester is the first to link Ælfhelm's death to Eadric Streona, as his rise to prominence was helped by the passing of a long-time vassal.

[267] *ASC*, 1013. See also Anne Williams, *Æthelræd the Unready*, 119-120.

[268] Ibid, 1013.

[269] Williams, *Æthelræd the Unready*, 120.

bring the English back into God's grace by leaving "wrong –doing, and [atoning] zealously for what we have done amiss."[270] Concerned with both the abandonment of God's and royal laws, Wulfstan preached once again for a return to godliness and abolition of heathen practices. Laying the blame for English troubles equally at the feet of ecclesiastics and laity alike, Wulfstan reminds his audience how the English conquered the lands and destroyed the host of Britons,

> through robbery of the powerful, and through the coveting of ill-gotten gains, through the lawlessness of the people and through unjust judgments, through the sloth of the bishops and the wicked cowardice of God's messengers, who mumbled with their jaws where they should have cried aloud; also through the foul wantonness of the people and through gluttony and manifold sins they destroyed their country and themselves perished.[271]

Drawing obvious parallels between the ancient displacement of the Britons with the defeat of Æthelræd, Wulfstan's prose called for the righting of injustices and the atonement of sins, themes that dominated the minds of once loyal thegns on the eve of Æthelræd's return.

Rather than a triumphal return to claim his stolen throne, Æthelræd's homecoming was instead a conditional one, requiring the king to make amends for his past misdeeds and his shoddy lordship. After the death of Swein in February 1014, the *ASC* records that "then all the fleet elected Cnut king…then all the councilors who were in England, ecclesiastical and lay, determined to send for King Æthelræd."[272] Wulfstan, as senior archbishop and leading figure on the *Witan*, must have played a significant role in the deliberations to return Æthelræd to the throne, as his themes of just lordship and atonement of past sins in the *Sermo Lupi* reappear in the conditions of Æthelræd's restoration.[273] The *ASC* records the agreement between the king and his councilors stating,

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[270] Wulfstan, "Sermo Lupi", *English Historical Documents 500-1042 Volume 1*, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979), 933.

[271] Wulfstan, "Sermo Lupi", 934.

[272] *ASC*, 1014.

[273] Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelræd*, 226.

> [the councilors] said that no lord was dearer to them than their natural lord, if he would govern them more justly than he did before. Then the king sent his son Edward hither with his messengers and bade them greet all his people and said that he would be gracious lord to them, and reform all the things which they all hated; and all the things that had been said and done against him should be forgiven on condition that they all unanimously turned to him without treachery. And complete friendship was then established with oath and pledge on both sides, and they pronounced every Danish king an exile from England forever.[274]

The tone of the entire agreement reflects the deep dissatisfaction felt by Æthelræd's subjects, insisting on unspecified reforms and the forgiveness of wrongdoing in exchange for their renewed loyalties. Alice Sheppard explains the emphasis on loyalty writing, "in having the king make such a promise, the annalist implies that loyal lordship will enable Æthelræd to make reparation for the instances of his disloyalty, justify his return from exile, define his new regime, and unite his people."[275] In an attempt to address these grievances, Æthelræd with Wulfstan's help put forth a piece of legislation in 1014 known as *VIII Æthelræd*; though surviving versions focus solely on ecclesiastical reforms, the objections of the lay nobility must have been addressed to some extent as Cnut's later laws reference "the original specific commitments which Æthelræd made in 1014."[276] In particular, Cnut's later laws focus on addressing "what the subject should do for authority, but on what authority could do for its subjects."[277] In addition to legislative atonement, Thorkel the Tall acted as a political bridge in bringing the whole of England, particularly the Danelaw, back to its former allegiance. As the leader of the king's mercenary army, Thorkel stood as the highest-ranking Scandinavian in Æthelræd's government, thus allowing him to curry the favor of both English and Scandinavians in the Danelaw who feared Æthelræd's retribution. After their ready acceptance of Swein Forkbeard the year before,

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[274] *ASC*, 1014.

[275] Sheppard, *Families of the King: Writing Identity in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 110.

[276] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 340.

[277] Ibid, 340-341.

the Danelaw may have rightly feared for their safety.[278] The conciliatory tone of Æthelræd's legislation coupled with the prominence of Thorkel waylaid the fears and grievances of the kingdom, allowing for the king to once again assume the mantel of power.

Though many of the English magnates had reaffirmed their loyalty to Æthelræd, the problem of the Danish fleet captained by his royal rival remained. Cnut stayed in England until Easter 1014, when he was met with fierce resistance from Æthelræd's forces under Thorkel's command. Snorri Sturlasson, quoting skaldic sources, gives credit to Thorkel and his comrade St. Olaf for driving Cnut's soldiers from such important garrisons as Canterbury and Lindsey.[279] Faced with such a rapid advance by a superior force, Cnut abandoned England "[putting] out to sea with his fleet, and thus the wretched people were betrayed by him."[280]The chronicler's emphasis on Cnut's betrayal highlights the complicated network of loyalties that bound the king to his people. Both Cnut and Æthelræd had been chosen king by the *Witan*, thus supporters on both sides could claim betrayal by one or more kings. Æthelræd's attempts to soothe these factions through legislation and promises of reform once again demonstrate the limits of his royal authority.

Rebellion and Re-conquest: The Disastrous Last Years of Æthelræd's Reign

As part of the efforts to reconcile Æthelræd with his northern and southern magnates, a great assembly was called at Oxford in 1015. The choice of Oxford as a meeting site was geographically significant, poised as "a gateway linking Wessex to Mercia and the north", the city stood as a physical representation of the hoped for unity between the aristocracies of the

[278] Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions*, 130-131.

[279] Snorri Sturlason, *Heimskringla,* 225.

[280] *ASC*, 1014.

north and south.[281] The meeting most likely sought to settle outstanding issues between the king and the Danelaw, particularly the regulation of trade between Mercia and the north, an important source of royal revenue. Unfortunately for Æthelræd, the assembly at Oxford was a spectacular failure that alienated both northern leaders and his staunch ally, Thorkel the Tall. The blame for the meeting's failure has historically landed equally on the shoulders of both Æthelræd and his advisor, Ealdorman Eadric Streona. Rather than focus on reconciliation with northern magnates, Æthelræd unwisely allowed Eadric to sway him towards a "hard line" in dealing with his wayward subjects. In particular, Eadric advocated for the deaths of Sigeferth and Morcar, chief men in the Danelaw, for treachery against the crown. The *ASC* records Eadric's misdeeds, stating, "Ealdorman Eadric betrayed Sigeferth and Morcar, the chief thegns belonging to the Seven Boroughs: he enticed them into his chamber, and they were basely killed inside it."[282] Adding insult to the dishonorable murder, Æthelræd seized the men's property and ordered Sigeferth's widow into a nunnery at Malmesbury.

The exact reasons for the men's murder are lost; perhaps Æthelræd feared a future betrayal, or perhaps their connections to Cnut (who was married to their kinswoman, Ælfgifu of Northampton) proved to dangerous for Æthelræd to ignore, or possibly Æthelræd's forbearance had reached its natural limits, whatever the reason for the murders it proved to be a grave miscalculation. The absence of royal lands and royal monasteries in the north meant that kings could not reinforce their authority either through royal visits or the appointment of numerous loyal thegns, rather they relied on binding individual members of the Northumbrian aristocracy to royal interests.[283] With rudimentary administrative structures and reliant on the good will of

[281] Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 132.

[282] *ASC*, 1015.

[283] Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 132-133.

northern magnates, Æthelræd seriously misjudged the impact of the heinous murder of two chief thegns while attending a "good will" meeting. Not only were Sigeferth and Morcar influential in the north, but also among members of Æthelræd's own circle, particularly the *æthelings* from his first marriage. The *ASC* records the *ætheling* Edmund's reaction to the deaths of Sigeferth and Morcar, stating,

> Edmund went and took the woman against the king's will and married her. Then before the Nativity of St Mary the ætheling went from the west, north to the Five Boroughs, and at once took possession of all Sigeferths' estates and Morcar's, and the people all submitted to him.[284]

Edmund's seizure of both Sigeferth's widow and lands effectively declared the north independent of Æthelræd's authority and in open rebellion. Edmund's rebellion against his father's authority was not wholly sponsored by outrage over Æthelræd's ill treatment of his thegns, but rather underscores the brewing issues of inheritance plaguing the royal family. Fearing usurpation by Æthelræd's younger sons from Queen Emma, in particular Edward who had played a key role in negotiating his father's return to England, Edmund used the opportunity presented by Sigeferth and Morcar's death for his own ends.[285] The culmination of long-standing family strife and disaffected loyalties, Edmund's rebellion hoped to capitalize on Æthelræd's failure and incompetence in incorporating the Danelaw into the sphere of royal authority.

Not only did the murder of Sigeferth and Morcar result in the continued alienation of the north, already strained by remembered hurts from St. Brice's Day, but it also resulted in the dissension of Æthelræd's strongest Scandinavian ally, Thorkel the Tall. With Æthelræd clearly under the sway of Eadric Streona, Thorkel must have felt his own position was threatened.

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[284] *ASC*, 1015.

[285] Stafford, "Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference", 35-36. Ironically, Edmund's revolt against his father mirrors the tenth century revolt of Æthelbald against Æthelwulf after his marriage to the Carolingian princess Judith. Once again rivalry between heirs caused succession nightmares.

Though Sigeferth and Morcar were not ethnically Scandinavian, the brothers had loyally served the Scandinavian population in the Five Boroughs. Their murder at the hands of Æthelræd's most powerful ealdorman placed Thorkel's position within the court at a dangerous crossroads.[286] Rather than remain and possibly fall victim to court machinations, Thorkel left the mercenary army in England and returned to Denmark where he swore allegiance to Cnut and vowed to help him reconquer England.[287] With Thorkel's guidance, Cnut and his forces concentrated their invasion efforts on Wessex rather than the Danelaw, where the political situation was heavily divided in the ongoing conflict between Æthelræd and the *ætheling* Edmund. Though once a loyal royalist stronghold, Wessex was torn between continuing to support an old, ailing Æthelræd or supporting either of the two possible successors, Edmund or Alfred. Ian Howard explains this political dilemma writing, "this, in turn, meant a royal council which would be dominated by the Norman queen, Emma, and the Ealdorman of Mercia, Eadric…the people of Wessex had reason to be wary of Norman alliance with English leadership, because it might threaten local interests."[288]

After subduing Wessex, Cnut and Thorkel turned northwards where his marriage to Ælfgifu of Northampton assured him potential allies.[289] During Cnut and Thorkel's successful campaigns, Æthelræd battled both his son Edmund's growing rebellion and his own illness. Remaining largely in London and using Ealdorman Eadric to carry out the various campaigns, Æthelræd watched as his kingdom was torn apart. By Easter of 1016, Edmund journeyed to London, possibly to make peace with the aging monarch, where upon 23 April Æthelræd died.

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[286] Ibid, 36.

[287] *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, 19.

[288] Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions*, 135.

[289] Ironically, Edmund was also married to a northern heiress, distantly related to Ælfgifu, through her marriage to Sigeferth; making Edmund and Cnut cousins-in-law.

The *ASC* recount's King Æthelræd's passing, "he ended his days on St. George's day, and he had held his kingdom with great toil and difficulties as long as his life lasted."[290] For Æthelræd the long battle to control his kingdom was at an end, but war for supremacy raged on between the *ætheling* Edmund, Cnut and Queen Emma.

Conclusion

The reign of King Æthelræd lasted for thirty-eight years, many of which were spent in conflict with Scandinavians, both internally and externally. Habitually nicknamed the Unready or Ill-Counseled, Æthelræd stands as a peculiar figure in tenth and eleventh-century power politics. His early emphasis on continuing his father's program of monastic reform as an extension of royal authority and his over-reliance on an aging coterie of his father's councilors, left Æthelræd at odds with loyal supporters during his early years. Later, Æthelræd promoted "new men" over more experienced factions leading to strained bonds of lordship and bitter treachery. Whatever strategy Æthelræd chose to pursue, whether it be assertive kingship or befuddled indolence, resulted in an overall weak rule. Æthelræd's habit of vacillation hampered his rule, allowing for numerous instances of treachery and betrayal to mar his kingdom. Though Æthelræd did try to incorporate Scandinavians into his royal sphere through legislation such as the *Wantage Code* or personal benefaction, as with Thorkel the Tall, his haphazard style created conflict and uncertainty undermining his attempts to reinforce his royal authority.

Rather than a steady hand at the wheel of state, Æthelræd bounced wildly between action and inaction resulting in his eventual overthrow. Even his own family struggles, consecrating Queen Emma and thereby elevating her children over his older sons, highlight Æthelræd's lack of political awareness. Unlike his predecessor Alfred, who made accommodation and

[290] *ASC*, 1016.

incorporation a central key to his successful reign, Æthelræd lacked the consistency and forethought necessary in a great ruler. If not for Thorkel the Tall's intervention, Æthelræd would surely have lost his kingdom in 1014, but rather than elevate Thorkel as Alfred had Guthrum, and bind him with oaths/confirmation, Æthelræd instead turned inward to rely on the treacherous Eadric Streona. King Æthelræd died as he lived, sitting on his throne wondering which course of action he should take and in the end taking the wrong one.

Chapter Four: Royal Women: Sexual Politics and the Gendering of Royal Authority

> *For the people of the West Saxons do not suffer a queen to sit next to the king, nor do they even permit her to be called a queen but only wife of the king.*[291]

Often marginalized or ignored, the women of the West Saxon royal court nevertheless played a valuable role in securing and expanding royal authority. Limited by geography, politics, and economics, Anglo-Saxon kings increasingly relied on women of the court to secure their ascension, legitimize their reign and retain dynastic power. Dominated by fraternal succession struggles, the West Saxon court relied on women to both produce heirs and rule as regent if necessary. The increasing power of the nobility through the ninth and tenth centuries threatened royal security, thus making the role of queen a vital component of a successful reign.[292] As the nature of Anglo-Saxon kingship changed, becoming more centralized, bureaucratic and ceremonial the nature and language of queenship also evolved from peace weaving to regnal consort.[293] Lisa Bitel explains, "Women's full realization of the potential of royal wifedom and motherhood became possibly only when early medieval tribal kingdoms developed into the expanding, centralized, proto-national units of later Europe."[294] This fundamental shift in royal kingship allowed medieval queens the opportunity to actively use their power in dynastic struggles, rather than acting as peace weavers. In Anglo-Saxon England, the role of queen was fraught with difficulty and challenges; from succession disputes, palace intrigues, accusations of adultery and murder, the royal women of the Anglo-Saxon court faced numerous tests to their royal authority. Royal women such as Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians, Queen Ælfthryth, and

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[291] Asser, Life of King Alfred, 13.

[292] Pauline Stafford, "The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066", *Past and Present*, No. 91, (May, 1981), 16.

[293] Lisa Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe 400-1100*, (Cambridge, U.K.; Cambridge University Press, 2002), 278.

[294] Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe*, 284.

Queen Emma helped shape not only the role of queen in Anglo-Saxon England, but helped to expand royal authority through their skillful manipulation of gendered ideals.

The Nature of Medieval Marriage & Queenship

To understand how Anglo-Saxon queens used their position and patronage to expand royal authority, one must begin with the role of queens in the wider medieval schema of marriage. The most fundamental aspect of any medieval marriage was the exchange of property, which legitimized the practice from other relationships such as concubinage.[295] Arranged by family members, legitimate marriage was a "multi-purpose contract aimed at creating a social union, a reproductive unit, and a production and property holding unit or household economy."[296] Like all property matters, the couple's respective families negotiated marriage, with little direct participation from either the man or woman. In general Anglo-Saxon law codes, such as Alfred's ninth-century laws, sought to prohibit elopement, rape, and abduction (often treated as the same crime) as a means of controlling not only violence against women, but also, more importantly, as a means of protecting legitimate marriage contracts. The force of law helped to distinguish legitimate marriage from other, less rigorous forms of union. Significantly, while primogeniture and monogamy gave structure to the politics and social mores of the later Middles Ages, between the seventh and twelfth centuries disunity, illegitimacy and sexual melodramas typified marriage across the whole of Europe. Ancient and medieval sources including Tacitus and Gregory of Tours comment on the polygynous nature of marriage; for example, the plurality of wives allowed Merovingian kings to sustain a marked biological

[295] Pauline Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, (Oxford, U.K.; Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 71.

[296] Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe*, 167.

presence among the Franks late into the eighth century, even as their political power waned.[297] Although later Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon kings did not practice polygyny, most followed a pattern of serial monogamy, punctuated with easily obtained divorces allowing for a multitude of both legitimate and illegitimate heirs.

In general, medieval society actively acknowledged the presence and role of concubines within the sanctioned framework of marriage. Originally recognized as a formal status in Roman law, concubinage underwent significant legal clarification during the early Middle Ages. Ruth Mazo Karras defines the legal distintion of concubines, writing, "the concubine of Roman law was a woman attached to an unmarried man by a bond that was less than that of marriage, yet not just a casual union."[298] Though illegitimacy was not an insurmountable obstacle to succession, it did require special dispensations, which complicated the process of inheritance. Thanks largely to efforts made by the Roman Catholic Church to encourage monogamous marriage and clerical celibacy during the tenth century, the practice of polygyny or concubinage slowly fell away as legitimacy issues began to hamper effective governance. While the Church made serious headway in battling the plurality of wives on the continent, the pagan edges of the world remained devoted to the practices of serial monogamy and concubinage far into the eleventh century; in particular concubinage remained the predominate practice in places such as Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England.[299] The continued practice of serial monogamy and concubinage not only complicated inheritance procedures, but also severly limited the possiblity for queens to garner power and influence, effectively diffusing her power.

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[297] Jo Ann McNamara & Suzanne Wemple, "The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe; 500-1100," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 1, No. ¾, (Winter-Spring, 1973), 127-129. Also see Lisa Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe,* 168-170.

[298] *Law and the Illicit in Medieval Europe*. Ed. Ruth Mazo Karras, Joel Kaye, and E. Ann Matter. (Philadelphia; University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008),117.

[299] Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe*, 171.

For queens, medieval marriage was much more than an exchange of property; rather royal women acted as an extension of regnal power and patronage. During the seventh and eighth centuries, queenly power was relegated to that of peace weaver or simple sexual partner of the king, but as kingdoms centralized in the tenth and eleventh centuries they no longer needed to rely on kinship bonds to cement tribal alliances, thereby allowing queens to take on new roles.[300] As royal women became more concerned with dynastic struggles, thanks in large part to the continued practice of serial monogamy and concubinage, the perception of queenly power and authority changed. Suddenly the *mater regis* (king's mother), referenced in both Latin and vernacular prose, became the acceptable face of female power and authority.[301] Motherhood fully incorporated queens into royal power by legitimizing her place in a successful reproductive unit and later conferring the power of regency, if necessary.[302] Significantly, the role of mother for Anglo-Saxon queens was complicated by the tradition of serial monogamy practiced by kings. Much like concubinage, serial monogamy allowed kings the opportunity for a plethora of heirs to potentially inherit. For Anglo-Saxon queens, multiple heirs and a long tradition of fraternal succession cast royal women in complex roles as active powerful mother, and potentially wicked step-mother to nearly full grown heirs that rivaled her own offspring.[303] With all sons as potential claimants for the throne, consecration of the queen mother began to be held as a sign of an heir's throne worthiness. Consecration, particularly anointing with holy oils, conferred legitimacy to queens and their offspring by aligning them with the sacred power of the king. Combining

[300] McNamara & Wemple, "The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe; 500-1100,",130.

[301] Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 61. Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe*, 284.

[302] McNamara & Wemple, "The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe; 500-1100,",133.

[303] Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, (Athens, GA University of Georgia Press, 1983), 102.

traditions of West Francia and the Ottonians, queenly consecration developed as part of a strategy to streamline succession by "blessing" one particular branch of the royal family.[304] Significantly, the consecration of queens, first mentioned by Gregory of Tours, was not standard practice in Wessex, which traditionally viewed royal women as passive participants within the royal court.

West Saxon Royal Tradition: The Making of Queenship

During the eighth and ninth centuries, West Saxon tradition held royal women in deep contempt denying them the title of queen and ignoring any substantial contributions with few direct mentions of them in the *ASC*. Those royal women who did merit a mention in the *ASC* or other chronicles were most often portrayed as vile and wicked women. Most of the slander against royal women was directed towards their involvement within the political arena and household, especially when they behaved outside of their gendered role of dutiful wife or mother. For instance in the ninth century, Asser harshly condemned Eadburh, royal daughter of King Offa of Mercia and wife of King Beorhtric of Wessex.[305] Chronicled in Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, Eadburh stands as a cautionary tale of royal female power gone horribly wrong. Described as a manipulative shrew, who poisoned, seduced and terrorized the West Saxon court, Eadburh's illicit deeds ended with her accidentally poisoning her husband, thus necessitating her flight to the Carolingian court—with the royal treasury.[306] Far from hanging her head in shame, Eadburh so impressed Charlemagne that the monarch offered her a choice of marriage to either himself or his son. Unfortunately for the "lusty" lady, Eadburh chose the younger man, leading

[304] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, 127-133.

[305] Ibid, 17-18.

[306] Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 25-27.

Charlemagne to exile her to a nunnery.[307] Eadburh's scandals did not end there however; eventually the royal refugee journeyed to Italy where she died in poverty.[308] This, Asser, informs is why West Saxon kings refused to elevate women to the status of queens. Filled with anti-Merican overtones, a tradition that encouraged royal female power, and concerned with explaining how Alfred's grandfather Ecgberht justly took the West Saxon throne after Beorhtric's death, Asser's account gleefully discredited Eadburh and acted as propaganda legitimizing the Alfredian dynasty.[309] The West Saxon tradition of relegating royal women to subordinate status is directly influenced by their attempts to justify and legitimize a dynastic change.

Those royal women who did garner a mention in the *ASC*, were designated *seo hlæfidige*, or king's lady, a diminutive title denoting their subservient status as merely the wife of the king. In the vernacular, a *hlæfidge* was "lord of a people, an area, of land, of servants, a male head of a household, a ruler, an owner or proprietor, and a husband."[310] By designating the king's wife as *seo hlæfidige*, West Saxon tradition placed royal women within the accepted construct of nobility, sharing her husband's power within the household thereby establishing an easily recognizable gendered hierarchy. Pauline Stafford explains, "it is best to refine the definition of "the Lady" as a queen's title: in the loosest sense 'queen', encompassing king's wife, mother and Queen, but most specifically the wife as mistress of the royal household and partaker of the king's status as the most noble of nobles."[311] In particular, ninth-century Alfredian tradition did

[307] Ibid.

[308] Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 27.

[309] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, 19.

[310] Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 57. The Anglo-Saxon *hlæfidge* derives from the word *hlaford* or lord, which is directly taken from the idea of loaf (*hlaf*) or bread-giver; meaning the provider for either a kinship or social group.

[311] Ibid, 59.

not allow the king's wife to be called *regina* or the vernacular *cwen*, largely reflecting Alfred's own attitudes towards his various wives.

Significantly, Alfred's reluctance to acknowledge his wives as anything other than *lady* may have stemmed from his own childhood interactions with female royal power; specifically his father, Æthelwulf's marriage to the much younger Carolingian princess Judith. The *ASC* records Æthelwulf's marriage in 856 stating, "And Charles, king of the Franks, gave him his daughter as his queen (*7 him þa Carl Francena cing his dohtor geaf him to cwene*)."[312] Judith's designation as *cwen* indicates she was most likely consecrated before returning to Wessex, an acknowledgement of both her royal ancestry and the significance of the marriage alliance. Significantly, Judith would be the only consecrated queen in Wessex until Æfthryth in the tenth century.[313] Alfred's first wife Ealhswith was the first to hold the title *seo hlæfidige* or "Lady", but its use reflects less about Alfred's concept of royal women than his son and successor Edward the Elder.[314] Pauline Stafford explains the shift in title, stating, "Edward had every interest in stressing his mother's standing; what may have started as a title to demonstrate lesser status, was now reclaimed for a higher one[…] she was now the 'true lady of the English' associated with the widest aspirations of tenth-century kingship to rule all of the English."[315] By the dawning of the tenth century, West Saxon kings began to realize the benefits of female power and patronage as a means to expand their own royal authority.

[312] *ASC*, 856.

[313] Stafford, "The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066", 4.

[314] Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 57.

[315] Ibid.

Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians

Significantly, the only West Saxon women to make an impact on ninth century history were married to Mercian rulers. With a long tradition of recognizing female royal power, Mercian rulers understood the worth in utilizing queenly power to further their own royal authority. Ironically, one of the greatest beneficiaries of the Mercian tradition of queenly importance was Alfred's own daughter, Æthelflæd, who married Æthelræd of Mercia in the early tenth century. Æthelflæd, dubbed "Lady of the Mercians", ruled jointly with her husband, until his passing in 911 when she assumed all public powers of governance until her own death seven years later.[316] An active and capable ruler, Æthelflæd oversaw local governance, military operations and played politics for and against other rulers in England, including her own brother Edward the Elder. No shrinking violet, Æthelflæd "played a vital role in the military conquest of Danish England, master-minding the building of fortifications, receiving submission of armies, leading an alliance of rulers of northern Britain against the Viking menace."[317] At the height of her power in 918, Æthelflæd headed a vast alliance of rulers in northern England in which the people of York bowed to her rule with oaths and pledges.[318] By wielding power within the guidelines of local politics and gendered expectations, Æthelflæd emerged as not only a powerful queen, but more importantly as a significant ruler in her own right. A product of personality, Æthelflæd used the favorable traditions of Mercian queenship to strengthen her position, and eventually that of Wessex. After her death in 918, Æthelflæd's daughter Ælfwyn was briefly installed as ruler of Mercia, before her powerful uncle, Edward the Elder denied her authority

[316] Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe*, 89.

[317] Stafford, "The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066", 4-5.

[318] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, 140.

and enfolded Mercia into his own kingdom.[319] Though Mercia was no longer an independent kingdom, from this point on it would be ruled by ealdorman appointed by the West Saxon royal house, Æthelflæd's skilled rule brought Mercia under West Saxon control, thereby expanding her family's royal authority and holdings. The inclusion of Mercia into the West Saxon hegemony was a crucial step in the growth of royal power and the expansion of royal authority.

Ælfthryth: First Queen of England

By the later tenth century, West Saxon kings began to formally recognize the significant role of royal wives and mothers within the schema of regnal power. During the late tenth and early eleventh century, as kingship became more centralized and bureaucratic, the nature of queenship changed to embrace a more publicly political agenda. Arguably the most significant and politically active queen in the tenth century, Ælfthryth was the first West Saxon royal consort to be officially consecrated and openly acknowledged as queen.[320] Ælfthryth's tenure as queen began rather scandalously; similar to the later English queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, Ælfthryth was already married when she drew the notice of King Edgar the Peaceable. Recorded in William of Malmesbury's twelfth-century chronicle *De Gestis Regnum Anglorum*, Edgar sent his ealdorman Æthelwold to inspect Ælfthryth's suitability, only for the ealdorman to return describing her as "a girl nothing out of the common track of beauty, and by no means worthy such transcendent dignity."[321] On the word of his trusted advisor, Edgar lost interest in the advantageous match; meanwhile, Æthelwold married Ælfthryth instead. Later Edgar visited the couple, only to realize Æthelwold's duplicity, aided by Ælfthryth's attempts to seduced Edgar. In

[319] Ibid, 141.

[320] Bitel*, Women in Early Medieval Europe*, 278. Stafford, "The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066", 7-8.

[321] William of Malmesbury, *De Gestis Regnum Anglorum*, ed by J.A. Giles, (London, U.K., Henry G. Bohn, 1847), 159.

a passionate rage, Edgar the Peaceable slew Æthelwold while they were out hunting.[322] The dramatic narrative of Edgar and Ælfthryth's marriage reflects the overall significance of the relationship between the two monarchs. Not only were the pair passionate about one another, but also they were like-minded in pursuing their ambitions, whether they were matrimonial or political. Malmesbury's portrayal heavily influenced by later medieval ideas of courtly chivalry and romance, of Edgar and Ælfthryth's scandalous marriage demonstrated Edgar's need for Ælfthryth, both as a bedfellow and political ally.

The importance of Ælfthryth's relationship with Edgar is supported by his dower gifts to the queen soon after their marriage. Although Ælfthryth was Edgar's third wife, she was the only one both consecrated as queen and given dower lands for her personal enrichment. The diploma, written in 965, does not specify exactly all or most of the land involved in the queens dower, but does include the biblical phrase "they shall be two in one flesh", indicating the overall nature of the charter.[323] By binding their marriage with property, Edgar stressed the legitimacy of the union over all previous marriages. Pauline Stafford explains, "there had been a special attempt to single out this marriage, and stress its legitimacy, whether through blessing, insistence on the fulfillment of all the necessary stages or by other means…the special emphasis extended to the sons of this marriage."[324] Formalizing their union with an exchange of property as well as Ælfthryth's consecration as queen imbued the marriage with royal authority and legitimacy. Not only was Edgar's marriage to Ælfthryth more special than his two previous marriages, but also by extension any children from their marriage would benefit from this elevation in status.[325] Still

[322] William of Malmesbury, *De Gestis Regnum Anglorum,* 160.

[323] "S-725", *Anglo-Saxon Charters, an Annotated List and Bibliography*, ed P.H. Sawyer, "Royal Historical Society Guides and Handbooks", no 8, (1968), cited by number.

[324] Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 71.

[325] Ibid, 83.

fraught with succession problems, the West Saxon royal house benefited from elevating Ælfthryth's line, increasing an *ætheling*'s throne worthiness.[326] A politically charged idea, "throne worthiness" could describe any candidate for the throne, whether legitimate or not; in an era where direct and fraternal succession coexisted, increasing the "specialness" of one candidate through the mother's consecration was a distinct advantage.

Seemingly consecrated twice, once upon her marriage to Edgar in 965 and then again in an extravagant ceremony in 973, Ælfthryth used her queenly status to aid her husband in extending royal authority and influence, particularly through her efforts in legal advocacy and monastic patronage.[327] An active politician and reformer, Ælfthryth "combined the legal notion of advocacy with a model of queenly patronage that developed as part of the tenth-century monastic reform…making her a figure capable of mediating between the legal subject and the masculine authority of her royal husband."[328] Though the surviving corpus of Anglo-Saxon lawsuits is incomplete, the number of cases that include Ælfthryth's active participation suggests that legal advocacy played a central role in her perception of queenship. Most importantly, Ælfthryth's intervention was a "means of developing long-term political alliances and cultivating an independent circle of influence."[329] Edgar the Peaceable radically expanded the formal procedures for dispute resolution, particularly through formalizing witness panels in *IV Edgar*, thereby making royal oversight of dispute resolution an intrinsic part of West Saxon kingship.[330] Through royal legislation of legal disputes, Edgar sought to extend royal authority by

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[326] Ibid.

[327] Both Edgar and Ælfthryth were anointed at Bath in 973 in a quasi-imperial ceremony. Most likely to emphasize both rulers' political authority and imperial designs.

[328] Andrew Rabin, "Female Advocacy and Royal Protection in Tenth-Century England: The Legal Career of Queen Ælfthryth", *Speculum*, Vol. 84, No. 2, (April 2009), 263.

[329] Ibid, 265.

[330] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 317.

highlighting the king's status as sole lawgiver. By extension, Ælfthryth's legal advocacy created an opportunity for royal patronage, consolidating her position at court while enhancing the power of her office.[331] Her capacity to sway the judgment of both her husband and later son, allowed Ælfthryth to grant and collect favors at court thereby strengthening her status. By standing *forespecan* or advocate, Ælfthryth cultivated a partisan agenda and personal constituency that eventually aided her in boosting her son Æthelræd to the throne.[332] Interestingly, Ælfthryth's advocacy did not challenge gendered ideas of queenly power or royal motherhood; instead Ælfthryth framed her advocacy as gender specific by stressing domestic and familial bonds. Once again royal motherhood and other forms of domestic authority offered an acceptable face of female power.[333] Andrew Rabin explains by "locating her advocacy within a network of domestic affiliations enables Ælfthryth to propose a model of female legal community, the efficacy of which contrasts with the limitations of conventional male social and legal networks."[334] Ælfthryth used her queenly status to translate domestic authority into legal influence, thereby redefining both queenly and royal power.

Supplementing Ælfthryth's efforts at legal advocacy were her contributions to monastic reform. Part and parcel of royal patronage, the benefaction of monasteries was a central tenant in Edgar's schemes to extend royal authority. For Ælfthryth, and subsequent Anglo-Saxon queens, forging friendships and alliances with churchmen who gave them practical and ideological support, especially during uncertain successions, was a crucial element of queenly power.[335]

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[331] Rabin, "Female Advocacy and Royal Protection", 279.

[332] Ibid, 280. Significantly, Ælfthryth's active legal participation garnered some slanderous and salacious rumors, including a story that said Ælfthryth hid in Bishop Æthelwold's closet in order to find ways to curry his favor.

[333] Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 61.

[334] Rabin, "Female Advocacy and Royal Protection", 284.

[335] Stafford, "The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066", 12-13.

Alongside her husband and Archbishop Æthelwold, Ælfthryth was an active participant in the monastic reform movements designed to extend royal authority.[336] Focused on clarifying the religious status of clergy versus laity, the reforms supported by Edgar and Ælfthryth sought to set the clergy, and their property, apart while encouraging local churchmen to embrace a more monastic lifestyle.[337] Pauline Stafford explains, "the definition of clerical status was shaped by the primary commitment of many reformers to monasticism and was expressed in a language of purity: in Old English, *clænnysse*, the recurring definer of separation."[338] As the female sponsor of monastic reform, Ælfthryth became the defender and guardian of nuns throughout the kingdom.[339] Royally supported houses such as Shaftesbury and Wilton benefited from Ælfthryth's largesse and patronage through donations of coin and land. Using portions of her dower lands, Ælfthryth founded or re-founded communities, including Wherwell, allowing her to extend royal influence while enhancing her own status as queen. As protector and benefactor of nunneries, Ælfthryth stood shoulder to shoulder with her husband Edgar, equivalent in regality and common lordship.[340] Taken alongside her legal advocacy, Ælfthryth's active participation in monastic reform and standing as guardian of nunneries helped reshape the image of queenship, imbuing the role with newfound power and prestige, not merely as a reflection of her husband's power but infused with her own authority. Unfortunately for Ælfthryth's later image, her active participation in both the political and domestic spheres would recast the powerful queen as

[336] For further discussion of the political purposes of Edgar's clerical reform see Chapter 2 of this work.

[337] Pauline Stafford, "Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen: Gender, Religious Status and Reform in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England", *Past and Present*, No. 163, (May, 1999), 7.

[338] Ibid, 7.

[339] Ibid, 3.

[340] Ibid, 20.

wicked stepmother or ferocious mother as succession struggles dominated the late tenth-century West Saxon court.

Wicked Stepmother or Proactive Regent: Queen Ælfthryth and Succession

After the death of Edgar the Peaceable in 975, Ælfthryth as dowager queen found herself embroiled in a contentious struggle for the throne between the *aethlings* Edward, her stepson, and Æthelræd, her natural son. As with other dowager queens, the battle for succession drew Ælfthryth into the center of court politics where she had to rely upon the alliances forged during her husband's reign. Significantly, Ælfthryth's supporters, and ostensibly her nine-year old son's supporters, drew upon the power of her consecration as a critical element to Æthelræd's cause. Fraternal succession had long been a feature of West Saxon kingship, a response in part to Scandinavian incursions and dynastic insecurity.[341] The low status of royal wives played a part in such succession struggles, with earlier queens denied the standing and authority to successfully pursue a regency. Part of Ælfthryth's strategy for dynastic victory relied on her network of allies within the church, such as Bishop Æthelwold, as well as her physical control of the young *ætheling* Æthleræd.[342] Pauline Stafford explains, "many West Saxon princes were reared away from court by foster mothers, removing them from the arena of palace intrigue and establishing links with noble families who nurtured them."[343] Unlike previous royal wives, Ælfthryth retained physical care over her young son, and later even raised her grandsons, thus gaining an advantage in the initial succession dispute.[344] Though Ælfthryth would lose the succession struggle, largely

[341] Stafford, "The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066", 20-21.

[342] Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe*, 282.

[343] Stafford, "The King's Wife in Wessex 800-1066", 21.

[344] Ibid.

due to her stepson's close ties with anti-monastic reform parties within the *Witan*, her power as dowager queen did not diminish.

After Edward's death in 978, whether by Ælfthryth's command or not, the royal court once again turned to her and Æthelræd, restoring the dowager to queen mother and regent.[345] Though briefly ousted from power during her son's wild youth in the 990s, Ælfthryth nevertheless maintained her queenly status throughout Æthelræd's reign. Overshadowing both of her son's first two wives, Ælfthryth denied her royal daughters-in-law the title of queen, reigning closely alongside her son. Ruling both Æthelræd's court and household, Ælfthryth retained her hard-won power until her death in the year 1000. Only after his mother's death, Æthelræd married an equally ambitious and political minded queen who rivaled the power of the deceased Ælfthryth.

Queen Emma: Twice a Queen

Formidable and politically astute, Emma of Normandy married the much older King Æthelræd as part of a strategic alliance between Wessex and the Norman dynasty. Seen as an attempt by Æthelræd to gain allies against the continued threat of Scandinavian advance, his marriage to the young sister of the Duke of Normandy created a blessed, royal family.[346] Married in 1002, only two years after the death of Queen Ælfhtryth, Emma was rechristened Ælfgifu, after Æhthelræd's grandmother and recently christened saint, formally incorporating her into her new Anglo-Saxon identity as both queen and royal bedfellow. Significantly, this political alliance recognized the importance of both royal consecration and queenly power, as the marriage was both blessed and Emma received anointing with holy oils fully securing her status

[345] For further discussion of Edward the Martyr's death see Chapter 2 of this work.

[346] Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 72.

and that of any offspring.[347] Æthelræd's two previous marriages had been to daughters of local nobility, both of whom were denied consecration and the title of queen; however, his marriage to Emma was fully secured and legitimate, meaning any offspring of the union would benefit in subsequent succession disputes.[348] Unfortunately for Emma's sons by Æthelræd, their mother's swiftly changing political alliance and royal ambitions undermined any questions about legitimacy or "throne-worthiness".

By 1017, King Æthelræd was dead and his queen faced a new political reality; marriage to the successful invader Cnut or banishment from her kingdom. Unwilling to relinquish her royal authority, Emma once again entered into a politically motivated marriage, sending her two young sons into exile in Normandy. A common occurrence, pretenders to the throne often married their predecessor's widow in order to gain legitimacy and political support while simultaneously neutralizing a potentially powerful opponent.[349] The politically expedient marriage between the Danish Cnut and Emma allowed the newly crowned king to woo support away from the young *aethelings*, soothe Emma's Norman kin, and gain invaluable knowledge of West Saxon politics. Emma's consecration bolstered Cnut's claims of legitimacy, elevating his own royal authority. In her later biography, the *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, Emma acts as peace weaver for the new king, the Encomiast describes the pacifying effect of the union, stating, "and perhaps there would scarcely or never have been an end of the fighting if [Cnut] had not at length secured by the Saviour's favouring grace a matrimonial link with this most noble queen."[350] The Encomiast continues praising the rightness of the marriage between Emma and Cnut explaining

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[347] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, 40.

[348] Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 72-73.

[349] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, 49-50.

[350] *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, 7. *Et fortasse uix aut numquam bellandi adesset finis, nisi tandem huius nobilissimae reginae igugali copula potiretur, fauente gratia Saluatoris*.

that the union was "eagerly desired on both sides" bringing "the gentle calm of peace".[351] Cnut's marriage to Emma brought a host of benefits to the new Anglo-Scandinavian king, including the possibility of additional, legitimate heirs for the throne. The problem of legitimate heirs for the Anglo-Saxon throne was complicated by Cnut's previous relationship with Ælfgifu of Northampton, who he had married in order to garner local noble support during his father's invasion of 1012.[352] Since Scandinavian marriage practices allowed for multiple marriages and concubinage with legitimate children stemming from any relationship, thus negating what little security Emma's consecration had provided.

More Danico: The Influence of Scandinavian Marriage Practices

Pointedly, the prevalence of multiple marriages and concubinage in Scandinavian countries resulted from the slow, and at times extremely reluctant, integration of Christianity into Norse culture. The overall retention of pagan beliefs and practices far into the twelfth and thirteenth centuries allowed Scandinavian countries to continue their polygynous practices without serious hindrances from the Church.[353] Scandinavian countries such as Norway, Denmark and Sweden proved to be fertile grounds of unregimented sexual mores and procreation during the early middle Ages. Particularly, Norwegian tradition allowed for men to take numerous concubines both before and after "legal" marriage. For example, one Norwegian king, Harald Fairhair, dismissed nine concubines before settling into a legal "Christian" marriage.[354] While often applied to describe a particular union in the Scandinavian sagas, the terms "legal" and "Christian" marriage held little importance other than to denote the rank of the

[351] Ibid, 33.

[352] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, 72.

[353] Jenny Jochens, "The Politics of Reproduction: Medieval Norwegian Kingship", *American Historical Review*, Vol. 92, No. 2, (Apr, 1987), 331.

[354] Sturlason, *Heimskringla*,107.

wife, neither term held any implication as to the process of inheritance. The vast and isolated geography of Norway allowed for numerous ruling families, lessening the social disunity and confusion created by the presence of multiple heirs.[355]

Almost exclusively the prerogative of kings and upper nobility, concubinage afforded Scandinavian men the ability to choose from a diverse array of successors. Not strictly bound by the laws of primogeniture, kings throughout Scandinavia relied heavily on the freedom of choice granted to them through the practice of concubinage. The ability to choose a successor from an ever-expanding pool of candidates allowed Scandinavian, as well as later Anglo-Saxon and Norman, leaders the opportunity to mold their kingship far after their own deaths.

Often dictated by politics, the kings' choice of primary or "legal" wives remained a contractual business matter, with the appropriate exchanges of property and dower gifts taking place between participants.[356] Concubines, on the other hand, were most often selected for their personal beauty; numerous sagas recount the adventures of roving Vikings charming or capturing beautiful women who later bore them children. Norway's patron saint, King Olaf Tryygson, fathered numerous illegitimate children on his over-seas exploits; even marrying a Russian princess in Kiev while his "Christian" wife remained at his court in Norway.[357]

Pointedly, the imprecise nature of the vocabulary distinguishing a concubine from a legal wife in the sagas makes deciphering legitimacy all the more difficult. While both *ambatt*, "slave" or "servant", as well as the more precise *friðla*, refer to the extramarital status of a concubine, neither denote the complicated legal status of a polygynous union. Further complicating matters, *konurr* can mean both wife or woman with the modifying words *fekk*, "obtained", or *atti*, "had",

[355] Jochens, "The Politics of Reproduction", 334.

[356] Jenny Jochens, "The Illicit Love Visit: An Archaeology of Old Norse Sexuality", *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (Jan, 1991), 360-361.

[357] Sturlason, *Heimskringla*, 150.

implying some sort of marriage as well as the phrase "placed next to himself in bed" (*lagδI hana hja ser*) which can indicate anything from a transitory sexual relationship to liaisons lasting years.[358] Additionally in family sagas throughout Scandinavia, evidence of "illicit love" visits exist in which men clandestinely engage in sexual contact with women, almost always to tragic ends. These depictions of illicit sexual encounters never specify whether the women are formal concubines or legal wives, but rather point to the dangers of unrestrained male sexuality.[359] Vocabulary aside, both the King's sagas as well as the family sagas demonstrate that between the eighth and twelfth centuries the practice of concubinage or polygyny dominated the social fabric of Scandinavian culture.

Both the benefit and danger of a polygynous society, the abundance of successors left after the death of a king or noble to haggle over inheritance often spawned major turmoil. As a response in both Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England, paternity rather than legitimacy proved the most important factor to succession.[360] As long as a king, or noble, acknowledged the paternity of his offspring, it mattered not whether the child was conceived within a "legal" union. In cases where paternity proved harder to determine, while physical resemblance often served as proof, trial by ordeal prevailed as the solution, with five such cases being recorded in the King's sagas. The most famous example of trial by ordeal involved the paternity of Harald Gille, a claimant to the Norwegian throne in the eleventh century, who walked across nine red-hot plowshares to prove his royal paternity.[361] In most cases kings openly acknowledged both their

[358] Jochens, "The Politics of Reproduction", 332-333.

[359] Jochens, "The Illicit Love Visit", 371.

[360] Margaret Ross, "Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England", *Past and Present*, No. 108, (Aug, 1985), 22-3.

[361] Sturlason, *Heimskringla,* 223-225.

bedmates and their progeny, but either in the case of ordeal or open acknowledgement, women played a pivotal role in determining royal succession.

Seen as a socially acceptable method of advancement, women and their kin groups did not shy away from illicit sexual relationships with kings. As long as succession remained open to all contenders whose parentage could be established either through acknowledgement or ordeal, women had the opportunity to elevate their own station as well as that of their extended families.[362] Numerous sagas recount Scandinavian mothers assisting their sons in establishing paternity, and even in some cases co-ruling alongside their sons. For example, after his death in 1035, King Cnut's illegitimate son Harald Harefoot, by the concubine Edith Swansthroat, inherited the English throne, while Cnut's legitimate son, Harthacnut, returned to Denmark with his mother, Queen Emma, to rule Cnut's Scandinavian territories.[363] From available evidence, testimony of the mother carried significant weight in verifying paternity, some women even going so far as to endure their own trials by ordeal. Harald Gille's mother endured a similar trial to her son's to support his claims to the throne. For women, sex with Vikings often proved an advantageous gamble, offering an opportunity for advancement for both their offspring as well as their kin group. Inclusion into the royal milieu of half-siblings and maternal kin increased the attractiveness of sexual relationships with kings, even if they lacked legality.[364] Unfortunately, as increasing issues of legitimacy began to plague Scandinavian kingship, the Church stepped forward to offer alternatives to the Vikings' ambiguous sexual mores.

[362] Jochens, "The Politics of Reproduction", 341.

[363] *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, 39.

[364] Ross, "Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England", 15-17.

Emma and the Heirs

At Cnut's death in 1035, Queen Emma faced multiple "legitimate" heirs vying for the throne including: her sons Edward and Alfred by Æthelræd, who had lived in exile for 20 years; her "stepson" Harald Harefoot, by the wife/concubine Edith Swansthroat; or her own son by Cnut, Harthacnut, who was ruling in Denmark.[365] Unlikely to retain her power and royal authority under either her disaffected older sons or her "stepson", Emma used her status to back her younger, and possibly more pliable, son Harthacnut. Relying heavily on the Anglo-Danish aristocracy that had come to power under Cnut, Emma seized the royal treasury at Winchester in an attempt to hold off Harald Harefoot's ambitions until Harthacnut could arrive.[366] Unfortunately for Emma, her hopes for Harthacnut's rule were scuttled when not only did her two older sons appear in England, but also her staunchest ally Lord Godwin of Wessex turned his support to Harald Harefoot. Outmaneuvered politically and physically isolated from her son, Harthacnut, Emma was sent into exile. Queen Emma ruled alongside two kings of Anglo-Saxon England for over thirty years, skillfully using her political acumen and royal authority to stabilize both Æthelræd's turbulent reign as well as legitimize Cnut's. Emma's use of queenly power, in particular to protect her own legacy, helped strengthen Cnut's Anglo-Danish dynasty.

Conclusion

Royal women in Wessex were necessary to secure the ascension and retention of royal authority and power. Royal wives, mothers, and daughters helped extend royal authority through advantageous marriages, patronage and through their own fierce desire to retain their positions. Women such as Æthelflæd, Ælfthryth, and Emma confounded traditional West Saxon notions of queenly power by actively ruling alongside, or in place of, their husbands. By wielding power

[365] Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, 156.

[366] Stafford, *Queen Emma and Queen Edith*, 87-88.

and influence within the guidelines of local politics and gendered expectation, these queens expanded the scope of royal authority. As kingship became more centralized and streamlined in the tenth century, the nature of queenship evolved, allowing for women to shift their focus from "peace-weaving" to royal wifedom and motherhood. Shifts in family structure and changing character of marriage drew royal women into dynastic struggles, necessitating their more active involvement in the political sphere of the kingdom. Gathering allies among local nobility and high-ranking churchmen, queens traded in royal patronage in efforts to secure their children's futures. Whether threats came from dynastic rivals or invading armies, West Saxon queens faced their enemies on a solid foundation of royal authority and female power.

Chapter Five: The Reign of Cnut—Politics of Duality

There was no justice in his succession to the throne, but he arranged his life with great statesmanship and courage.[367]

Possibly the greatest beneficiary of the rise in female royal status and authority, Cnut stood on the precipice of victory in early 1016, having already conquered large swaths of Wessex and Northumbria. After King Æthelræd's death on 23 April 1016, the *ASC* recounts "all the councilors who were in London and the citizens chose Edmund as king, and he stoutly defended his kingdom while his days lasted."[368] Edmund, nicknamed Ironside, former rebel against his father, now stood as his successor tasked with eliminating the Scandinavian threat posed by the invasion of Cnut's army. After securing support in Wessex, Edmund Ironside turned his attention to battling not only Cnut's forces, which now included Æthelræd's former commander, Thorkel the Tall, but also the faction of loyal supporters who surrounded Queen Emma and her son Edward. In physical control of both the *burhs* of London and Southwark, but lacking an army large enough to present a challenge to either contender, Queen Emma used her tactical advantage to open alternating negotiations with both Edmund Ironside as well as Cnut, playing one man off the other in hopes of securing their support.[369]

Unfortunately for both Edmund and Emma, the politics and rivalries of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy hampered their overall defense against Cnut; in fact John of Worcester writing in the late eleventh/early twelfth century recounts that "the bishops, abbots, ealdormen, and all the more important men of England assembled together and unanimously elected Cnut as their lord

[367] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Angolorum*, 320.

[368] *ASC,* 1016.

[369] Howard, *Swein Forkbeard's Invasions*,154-155.

and king…and repudiated all the race of King Æthelræd."[370] After several indecisive skirmishes against Cnut's forces, Edmund Ironside met the Scandinavian king on the battlefield at *Assandun* on 18 October 1016.[371] The *ASC* records the clash between Edmund Ironside and Cnut, stating,

> The king…pursued them and overtook them in Essex at the hill which is called *Assadun*, and they stoutly joined the battle there. Then Ealdorman Eadric did as he had often done before; he was the first to start the flight with the *Magonsæte*, and thus betrayed his liege lord and all the people of England. There Cnut had the victory and won for himself all the English people.[372]

Whether Eadric Streona's desertion of Edmund Ironside swung the outcome of the battle or not, Cnut emerged victorious. The *ASC* ends it's description of the battle's carnage, stating "all the nobility of England was there destroyed."[373] Though the chronicler was most likely describing the mood after the battle, rather than the actual destruction of all England's nobles, Cnut's victory forced Edmund Ironside to concede that a military victory against the Scandinavians was not possible. After the victory, Edmund Ironside and Cnut met together at Olney at which time they drew up an agreement that included a "fixed payment for the Danes" as well as the division of the kingdom—Wessex under the control of Edmund and Mercia under the control of Cnut.[374] This division of the kingdom was no mere peace treaty, but the first step in Cnut establishing his royal authority in England. Recognized by Edmund Ironside as effectively a co-ruler, Cnut's place as both a military victor as well as a legitimate ruler in England was cemented. The death of Edmund Ironside within a month of the division of the kingdom on 30 November 1016

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[370] John of Worcester, "Chronicon ex Chronicis", *English Historical Documents 500-1042 Volume 1*, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press,1979), 311.

[371] Keynes, "Cnut's Earls", 43. The exact location of the battle is debated as it is refered to as both *Assadun* or *Ashingdon* depending on the translation of the *ASC* or John of Worcester. I defer to Keynes's argument for *Assadun*, rather than Whitelock's modernized *Ashingdon*.

[372] *ASC*, 1016. *Magonsæte* refers to the people of Herefordshire, most likely the portion of the fyrd that he was responsible for leading.

[373] Ibid.

[374] Keynes, "Cnut's Earls", 43-44.

allowed Cnut to complete his conquest with little effort. Cnut succeeded easily to a kingdom that was politically divided; exhausted from years of economic depression and warfare, the English were ready for peace, even if it came from an outsider.

Establishing and Legitimizing Royal Authority

Still in control of the *burhs* of London and Southwark, and backed by a strong coterie of loyal supporters, Emma and her sons represented a compelling threat to Cnut's rule. Though Cnut was already proclaimed king and married to one English noblewoman, Ælfgifu of Northampton, political expediency dictated a marriage to Emma, ensuring both legitimate successors while connecting Cnut to the former ruling dynasty.[375] Not only did Cnut gain legitimization through his marriage to Emma, but also, more importantly, he curried favor with Robert of Normandy, Emma's brother. The promise of Norman military assistance in future conflicts, as well as neutralizing any help for the *æthelings* Edward and Alfred, made Cnut's marriage to Emma extremely beneficial to the newly crowned monarch. Queen Emma's biographer in the *EER,* imbues the marriage with greater significance depicting Cnut's quest for Emma's hand, stating,

> The king lacked nothing except a most noble wife; such a one he ordered to be sought everywhere for him, in order to obtain her hand lawfully, when she was found, and to make her the partner of his rule when she was won…this imperial bride was, in fact, found within the bounds of Gaul, and to be precise in the Norman area, a lady of the greatest nobility and wealth, but yet the most distinguished of the women of her time for delightful beauty and wisdom, insamuch as she was a famous queen.[376]

While the unnamed biographer glosses many of the details of Cnut and Emma's marriage, including the fact that Emma was in England during the bridal negotiations, he does emphasize

[375] Lawson, *Cnut England's Viking King,* 85. See also Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers*, 49-50.

[376] *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, 33.

Emma's importance as both a partner in rule and the legitimate mother of any future heirs.[377] The Encomiast concludes stating, "Gaul rejoiced, the land of the English rejoiced likewise, when so great an ornament was conveyed over the seas."[378]

Marriage to Queen Emma brought a certain amount of stability to Cnut's early days, allowing for him to begin ascertaining the loyalty of the thegns and ealdormen who surrounded him. Unlike other conquerors, Cnut did not win a decisive victory over the entire Anglo-Saxon kingdom; rather his was a victory in stages.[379] Due to the fact he did not subdue the entire kingdom through military might, Cnut was unable to fully supplant the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy for a new regime, and instead he was forced to selectively cull the nobility of troublemakers. Included in this political bloodletting was the crafty Eadric Streona, ealdorman of Mercia, whom Cnut had beheaded sometime late in 1017, John of Worcester suggests the execution occurred in London at Christmas.[380] The *ASC* notes Eadric's death as well as the executions of Æthelward and Brithnic, powerful West Saxon nobles who potentially could resist Cnut's rule.[381] Cnut, however, did not set about eliminating all Anglo-Saxon nobles and replacing them with Scandinavians, hampered by his narrow "victory" Cnut drew his followers from throughout Scandinavia, leaving more "English" than Scandinavian thegns.[382] Additionally, Cnut divided his kingdom into four parts each ruled by an interim "military" governor to better aid in establishing his royal authority. Wessex, the royal heartland of the Anglo-Saxon dynasty, remained under

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[377] Apparently Emma did not trust Cnut's good intentions completely, making part of the marriage contract that any sons she had would inherit the throne before any other of Cnut's sons.

[378] *EER,* 33.

[379] Keynes, "Cnut's Earls", 44.

[380] Lawson, *Cnut England's Viking King*, 83-84.

[381] Ibid.

[382] Katharin Mack, "Changing Thegns: Cnut's Conquest and the English Aristocracy", *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4, (Winter, 1984), 378.

Cnut's direct control, East Anglia was placed under the control of Cnut's chief strategist and aid, Thorkel the Tall, while Mercia remained under Eadric Streona, before his untimely replacement, and Northumbria was given to a powerful Scandinavian named Eric.[383] M.K. Lawson explains Cnut's possible motives for this division, writing, "neither the precise purpose nor the duration of this move are clear, but it was probably largely intended to provide an interim military government, facilitate the collection of taxation, give Cnut's chief supporters the impression that their efforts were proving worthwhile and hold the country down."[384]

Though Cnut's decision to subdivide the kingdom between his military commanders, two of whom were Scandinavian, seems contrary to the notion of relying on English support his actions were in fact part of larger effort of reorganization. After Æthelræd's less than successful reign, the disparate areas of Cnut's kingdom were politically divided, economically depressed with old noble families deeply entrenched in every aspect of governance. By dividing his kingdom, Cnut could strategically examine each area while addressing the unique needs of its inhabitants. A temporary expedient, division of the kingdom allowed Cnut to respond to local conditions and unfolding patterns rather than creating blanket solutions for the whole of Anglo-Saxon England. For instance in Northumbria, long held by Scandinavians or by those who accepted Scandinavian settlement, Cnut's use of a Scandinavian overlord more readily engendered him to the locals rather than raising a "new" English ealdorman from obscurity to control the territory. Echoing the policies of both Alfred and Edgar, accommodation was at the forefront of Cnut's policies in 1018, demonstrated by his participation in an assembly at Oxford in which he not only reaffirmed the laws of Edgar, but also dismissed his fleet a clear signal of

[383] Ibid, 380. Interestingly, Eric seems to have been instrumental in urging Eadric Streona's death, probably fearing his less than straightforward loyalties.

[384] Lawson, *Cnut England's Viking King*, 83.

his dependence on English support.[385] Displaying admirable administrative and political competency, Cnut reaffirmed the laws of Edgar the Peaceable harkening back to a time of peace and prosperity for the kingdom. Not only did Cnut's reaffirmation of Edgar's laws signal a renewal of "good" times, but also, subtly, alluded to his grander imperial ambitions and the growth of his royal authority.

Innately tied to both Cnut's division of the kingdom and his affirmation of Edgar the Peaceable's laws, was a larger strategy of movement towards a more localized form of government. Relying on local level networks of lesser officials gave Cnut more freedom to appoint, or remove, ealdormen and thegns at his leisure. Æthelræd's reign was plagued by an ever-shifting coalition of ealdormen and thegns surrounding the king, each with longstanding kinship networks that muddled loyalties to the crown. Unable and unwilling to wholly supplant the leading nobles of the nation with Scandinavians, Cnut used "local" thegns to administer his kingdom, rather than rely on the heavily entrenched noble families.[386] The emphasis on local governance not only allowed for localized solutions to issues, but also, more importantly, created a pool of loyal men from whom Cnut could draw. Much like Æthelwulf's creating of "new nobles" to support the West Saxon hegemony, Cnut's movement towards local government thinned out the traditional kinship networks that hampered previous rulers while also allowing for the appointment of new men to positions of importance. Largely the beneficiaries of such elevations in stature were native Englishmen, who were "new" without being foreign; for instance, under Cnut several noble families rise to prominence including the house of Godwin, which would dominate late eleventh-century politics. Noted historian Simon Keynes thoroughly examined charter evidence from Cnut's reign, finding that the attestations of earls and thegns

[385] Lawson, *Cnut England's Viking King*, 87.

[386] Mack, "Changing Thegns", 380-381. See also, Keynes, "Cnut's Earls", 46-48.

showed little continuity from Æthelræd's reign while "new" earls such as Godwin and Leofwine rose to positions of prominence.[387] The realities of Cnut's slow and steady reshuffling of the nobility was the creation of a "new" aristocracy with shallower and less entangled roots, which allowed for an immense growth in royal authority. These "new" men, reliant on Cnut's favor for their elevation and wealth, formed a loyal coterie of subjects for the monarch.

Cnut and the Written Word: Laws, Charters, and Letters

Often cited as the most successful of pre-Conquest rulers, Cnut demonstrated his political acumen and imperial aspirations at his very first legislative session. A master of public relations, Cnut used the Oxford assembly of 1018 to issue his own code of laws, which were taken almost wholesale from Edgar the Peaceable's *Wantage Code*, also known as *III Edgar*. Influenced largely by Archbishop Wulfstan, Cnut's laws of 1018 returned to the status quo of Edgar, which Wulfstan viewed as a Golden Age of peace and prosperity—particularly for the church.[388] Written and delivered in Anglo-Saxon, the dominant voice of his early kingship, Cnut's 1018 code was a medium for political bargaining which shaped relationships between regional elites and the court.[389] In the law code Cnut calls upon his nobles to "steadfastly hold one Christian faith" and orders them to "love King Cnut with due loyalty and zealously observe Edgar's laws."[390] Significantly the Cnut's 1018 code advocated ethnic unity, displaying the king's ethnic pragmatism in the face of continued tensions between English and Scandinavian. The code states,

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[387] Keynes, "Cnut's Earls", 56.

[388] Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, 346-347. See Chapter 2 of this work for more details on Edgar's *Wantage Code*.

[389] Innes, "Danelaw Identities", 72-73.

[390] "Cnut's 1018 Code", *English Historical Documents 500-1042 Volume 1,* ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979), 452. *7 ænne cristendom anrædlice healdan. 7 cnut cyngc. lufian. mid rihtan. 7 mid trywðan. 7 eadgares lagan. geornlice folgian*.

> This is the ordinance which the councilors determined and devised according to many good precedents; and that took place as soon as King Cnut with the advice of his councilors completely established peace and friendship between the Danes and the English and put an end to all their former strife.[391]

Offering a model of duality, Cnut's law of 1018, though merely a reaffirmation of Edgar's laws, created a symbiosis between Scandinavian and English rooted in law. Heavily influenced by Archbishop and chief councilor Wulfstan, Cnut's laws reinforced Edgar's laws, strengthening royal authority while representing the politics of acceptance and accommodation found in Alfred's laws.

By 1020, Cnut was forced to return to Denmark, possibly due to uprisings encouraged by his brother Harald, but his brief relocation did not stop the king from displaying his interest in extending his royal authority. In a letter addressed to "his archbishops, and his diocesan bishops, and Earl Thorkel and all his earls, and all his people, whether men of a twelve hundred wergild or a two hundred, ecclesiastic and lay, in England," Cnut promised to enforce justice in temporal and spiritual affairs while providing loyalty and good lordship.[392] Once again heavily influenced by the homiletic style of Wulfstan, the letter of 1020 set a communication precedent between king and subject. Devoted almost entirely to protecting "God's law and my royal authority", Cnut cast himself as the savior of a beleaguered nation "so that all together through the mercy of the eternal God…we may come to the bliss of the heavenly kingdom."[393] By framing his letter in terms of mutual loyalty and lordship, Cnut emphasized the founding principle of his reign,

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[391] "Cnut's 1018 Code", *EHD*, 452. *Ðis is seo gerædnes þe witan geræddon. 7 be manegum godum bisnum. asmeadon. And þæt wæs geworden sona swa cnút cyngc. mid his witena geþeahte. frið 7 freondscipe. betweox denum 7 englum. fullice gefæstnode. 7 heora ærran saca. ealle getwæmde*.

[392] "Cnut's Letter to the People of England, 1019-1020", *English Historical Documents 500-1042 Volume 1*, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979), 452.

[393] "Cnut's Letter to the People of England", *EHD*, 453-454.

setting himself apart from the disastrous lordship of his predecessor Æthelræd.[394] Cnut used his lordship to take and maintain governmental control over his new people, distinguishing himself from the failures of Æthelræd and his poor choice of councilors.[395]

Though not physically present in a country he had barely won less than three years before, Cnut's letter of 1020 established a discourse of Anglo-Scandinavian identity, imbued with the ideology of good lordship and justice, which echoed Alfred's attempts to create a shared political culture. Like Alfred's famous *AGu*, Cnut's letter of 1020 sought to exert royal authority while offering himself as merciful judge and wise ruler to a weary nation. By articulating Alfred's ideas of accommodation and integration, Cnut crafted new, more complex identities for his subjects as part of a larger Anglo-Scandinavian world. The letter of 1020 also reaffirmed Cnut's commitment to Edgar's laws, stating, "it is my will that all the nation, ecclesiastical and lay, shall steadfastly observe Edgar's law, which all men have chosen and sworn to at Oxford" which encouraged equal opportunities for both Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian subjects.[396] Once again, the use of Edgar's laws helped to cement and legitimize Cnut's rule by connecting him not only to the old West Saxon dynasty, during happier times, but also, more importantly served to reinforce his royal authority as lawgiver.

Another letter sent by Cnut in 1027 echoed the previous letter of 1020 in its themes of justice and good lordship while also taking on a more imperial tone. Written after attending the imperial coronation of Conrad II, Holy Roman Emperor, in Rome on 26 March 1027, Cnut's letter begins with clear imperial aspirations, stating,

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[394] Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 114.

[395] Ibid, 95.

[396] "Cnut's Letter to the People of England", *EHD*, 453.

> Cnut, king of all England and Denmark and the Norwegians and part of the Swedes, to Æthelnoth the metropolitan and Ælfric, archbishop of York, and to all his bishops and chief men, and too all the English people, both nobles and ceorls, greetings.[397]

Written in Latin, rather than Anglo-Saxon, Cnut depicts himself as king of a unified empire, stretching from the Baltic to the Atlantic. Unlike his previous letter of 1020, this missive does not come in *freondlice*, friendship, but with the unequivocal voice of imperial authority. The letter gives twin purposes for Cnut's journey to the holy city, the redemption of his personal sins and concern for the safety of all his kingdoms.[398] Cnut goes on to detail his visit, stating, "I learnt from wise men that St Peter the Apostle received from God the great power of binding and loosing, and carries the keys of the kingdom of heaven."[399] Cnut goes on to describing meeting with the Pope where he spoke "about the needs of all the people of my entire realm whether they be English or Danish" (*totius populi universi regni mei tam Anglorum quam Danorum*) advocating for equal opportunities for both ethnicities.[400] Throughout the missive, Cnut paints himself as penitent conqueror, transitioning his image in the minds of his Anglo-Saxon subjects from Viking usurper to legitimate Christian emperor advocating for his people. Once again, as in his prior letter, Cnut reiterates the laws of Edgar, emphasizing his place as wise judge and good lord. He writes,

> For that reason, I enjoin upon and command my counselors to whom I have entrusted the counsels of my kingdom that in no way ether from fear of me or to obtain the favor of any powerful person shall they consent to any injustice or allow it to emerge in all of my kingdom from now on. I also instruct all the sheriffs and reeves within my entire realm, just as they want to have my friendship or their own safety, to employ no unjust violence

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[397] Felix Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 276. *Cnuto rex totius Anglie et Denemacie et Norreganorum et partis Suanorum Æthelnotho metropolitan et Alfrico Eboracensi achiespiscopo omnibusque episcopis et primatibus et toti gentil Anglorum tam nobilius quam plebeiis salute*. Translation is mine.

[398] Elaine Treharne, *Living Through Conquest, The Politics of Early English, 1020-1220*, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 2012), 33.

[399] Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 276.

[400] Ibid, 276. Treharne, *Living Through Conquest*, 33.

> against any man whether he is rich or poor; but all people, whether noble or ordinary, rich or poor, shall be able to receive just law.[401]

Significantly, Cnut addresses the importance of local governance in his kingdom, addressing directly the sheriffs and reeves under his authority, offering both "friendship" and a stern warning for not following his laws. Cnut's reliance on both high officials and local appointments demonstrates his ability to build a "coalition" government that succeeded even in his absence. In overall tone, Cnut's letter of 1027 demonstrated his imperial aspirations as well as his successful identity construction as a devout but powerful monarch. Placing himself within the intimate circle of not only the Pope, but also the newly crowned Holy Roman Emperor, Cnut elevates his own stature as both king and moral authority. Similar to Edgar's "imperial" coronation of himself and Ælfthryth in 973, Cnut's journey to Rome and subsequent letter home rhetorically cemented his control over Anglo-Saxon England.

The *Knútsdrápur*, a Danish panegyric praise poem written during the height of Cnut's reign (1027-1031), reflects not only Cnut's overall imperial aspirations, but also more quietly exalts in his victories against all his foes. Originally performed in Danish, in front of a mixed Anglo-Scandinavian audience, the poem revels in Cnut's victories against the Swedes, English and Norse displaying a bravado and personal aggrandizement that is studiously avoided in his laws and letters.[402] Written by royal skald Ottar the Black, the *Knútsdrápur* extolled Cnut's military prowess, his proud Danish lineage and his wholesale dynastic revolution in England. The poem states,

Herskjöld bard ok helduð	You carried the warshield
Hilmir, rikr af sliku;	prince, and prevailed;
Kykkat, þengill, þekkðust	I do not think, lord, you

[401] Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 277.

[402] Matthew Townsend, "Contextualizing the *Knútsdrápur*: Skaldic Praise- Poetry at the Court of Cnut," *Anglo-Saxon England 30,* (2001), 155.

Þik kyrrsetu mikla.	Cared much for sitting in peace.
Ætt drap, Jóta dróttinn,	The lord of the Jotar [Cnut],
	Struck the kindred
Játgeirs í för þeiri;	of Edgar on that expedition;
Þveit rakt—þrar est heitinn--	ruler's son [Cnut], you dealt them
Þeim, stillis konr, illan.	A harsh blow; you are called defiant.[403]

Elaine Treharne explains, "the piling up of lordly nomenclature—'hilmir' ('leader', 'king'), 'þengill' ('leader', 'prince'), 'Jóta dróttinn' ('lord of the Jutes'), and so on—reinforces the magnificent achievements of Cnut, placing him among the greatest of his race."[404] By defeating the "family of Edgar" not simply Æthelræd, rhetorically Cnut supplants an entire dynasty, glorying in a victory that was less than straightforward. Though the political reality of Cnut's victory was measured in increments, rather than sweeping success, the praise poetry written by Cnut's Scandinavian subjects casts him as the ultimate victor. Intended for an elite Scandinavian audience, the praise poetry highlights the divide between Cnut's English and Danish subjects in spite of his efforts to reconcile the two groups. While the Scandinavian praise poetry casts some doubt on the effectiveness of Cnut's ethnic integration, the totality of his written charters, laws and letters indicate a king concerned with ethnic pragmatism. A master of public relations and rhetoric, Cnut's written works stress imagery of aggressive, vocal piety coupled with a return to good and judicious lordship for all of his subjects.

The Fall of Thorkel the Tall

After ascending to the Anglo-Saxon throne in 1017, Cnut appointed his most trusted allies to oversee his sub-divided kingdom. Included in these appointments was the elevation of Cnut's chief military aid and strategist, Thorkel the Tall who was given control of East Anglia, a bulwark of much needed resources and support for the new king. Though unevenly depicted in

[403] Treharne, *Living Through Conquest*, 45.

[404] Ibid.

the *EER*, Thorkel is described as more of an ally than a subject to Cnut; for example, the *EER* explains, and thoroughly glosses, Thorkel's motivations for remaining in England after Swein Forkbeard's death in 1013, stating,

> For Thorkel, whom we have already mentioned as a military commander, observed that the land was most excellent, and chose to take up his residence in so fertile a country, and make peace with the [English], rather than to return home like one who had, in the end been expelled. And according to some, he did not do this because he despised his lord, but in order that when Knútr returned with renewed forces and his brother's help to subdue the kingdom, he might either incline the chief men of the kingdom to surrender by his counsel, or if this plan were not a success, attack the incautious enemy from behind as they fought against his lord.[405]

Though the reality of Thorkel's early allegiance remains arguably cloudy, his loyalty to Cnut after joining his forces in 1015 is unquestionable. Entrusted with not only the earldom of East Anglia in 1017, Thorkel the Tall appears among the witness lists in Cnut's charters from 1018 and 1019. Listed directly after the archbishops of the realm, Thorkel's standing as the premier earl and chief councilor demonstrated Cnut's belief in and reliance on his loyalty. Simon Keynes further notes, "[Thorkel] occurs (with Archbishop Lyfing, Earl Eilífr, and others) among the witnesses to a grant of land to the church of Ramsey, and he appears to have been associated with Ælfwine, bishop of Elmham, in the reform, also in 1020, of the community of Bury St. Edmunds."[406] Not only was Thorkel listed in charters, but Cnut directly addressed Thorkel in the 1020 letter, stating, " King Cnut greets in friendship his archbishops and his diocesan bishops, and Earl Thorkel and all his earls…"[407] Significantly, Cnut goes on to charge Thorkel with

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[405] *EER*, 17. Thorkel the Tall is the third most named figure in the *EER* after Emma and Cnut, however his portrayal is rather uneven. Written as a biography of Emma in order to help cement her son, Harthacnut's, claim to the English throne, Thorkel's depiction vacillates wildly from ally to traitor back to ally within the space of a few lines. Likely, Emma's own dealing with Thorkel, under first Æthelræd then Cnut, colored her biographer's rendition of Thorkel.

[406] Keynes, "Cnut's Earls", 56.

[407] "Cnut's Letter to the People of England", *EHD*, 452.

upholding the king's justice and his royal authority, key elements in Cnut's overall strategy of governmental reformation and good lordship. Cnut orders,

> If anyone, ecclesiastic or layman, Dane or Englishman, is so presumptuous as to defy God's law and my own royal authority or the secular law, and he will not make amends and desist according to the direction of my bishops, I then pray, and also command, Earl Thorkel, if he can, to cause the evil-doer to do right. If he cannot, then it is my will that with the power of us both he shall destroy him in the land or drive him out of the land, whether he be of high or low rank.[408]

By singling out Thorkel as an extension of royal judgment and authority, Cnut effectively designated the earl as his surrogate while in Denmark. Rather shockingly only a year later, Cnut outlawed Thorkel for unknown, or more accurately, unrecorded reasons. The *ASC*'s only entry for the entire year of 1021 simply states, "In this year, at Martinmas, King Cnut outlawed Earl Thorkel."[409] Even the *EER* remains eerily silent on the reasons behind Thorkel's eviction from England, a rather interesting omission since little love was lost between Emma and Thorkel.[410] From the smattering of evidence in the *EER* and John of Worchester, Thorkel seems to have returned to Denmark after his fall from grace only to cause unrest there, necessitating Cnut's visit in 1022.[411] Textual evidence provides no clues as to Thorkel's motivations for encouraging Cnut's Danish subjects to rebel against their king, nor do any charters remain to explain why such a highly trusted ally would be cast out of the kingdom. Interestingly, whatever argument occurred between Thorkel and Cnut in 1020, the *ASC* documents a hasty reconciliation by 1023, stating,

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[408] Ibid, 453.

[409] *ASC,* 1021.

[410] Written to legitimize Emma's son by Cnut, Harthacnut's, claims to the English throne after the brutal murder of the *ætheling* Alfred, the *EER* only hints at the mistrust between Emma and Thorkel. See source discussion in the Introduction for more information.

[411] Ann Williams, "Thorkel the Tall and the Bubble Reputation: The Vicissitudes of Fame", *Danes in Wessex: The Scandinavian Impact on Southern England, c.800-1100*, ed. by Ryan Lavelle and Simon Roffery, (Oxbow Books; Oxford, U.K., 2016), 145-146.

> In this year King Cnut came back to England, and Thorkel and he were reconciled, and he entrusted Denmark and his son to Thorkel to maintain and the king took Thorkel's son with him to England. And afterwards he had St. Ælfheah's relics moved from London to Canterbury.[412]

The swapping of sons to bind two allies together was a common enough practice throughout the middle ages; what sets the reconciliation of Thorkel and Cnut apart from other alliances is that Cnut not only gave Thorkel control of his acknowledged heir, Harthacnut, but also control over Denmark in a quasi-regency.

Not one to shy away from executing those who were deemed troublesome, Cnut's decision to expel and then promote Thorkel the Tall stands as a rather fascinating paradox. Unlike Eadric Streona, Thorkel's loyalty to Cnut never seems to have been questioned, either publicly or privately. What is interesting is that the *ASC* notes both Thorkel's reconciliation with Cnut and the movement of Archbishop Ælfheah's remains to Canterbury within the same entry. Though a seemingly innocuous event, the relocation of Ælfheah's body from London to Canterbury was intimately connected to Thorkel the Tall, who in 1012 had participated in the murder of the archbishop during the sack of Canterbury. Perhaps the unnamed chronicler of the *ASC* had good reasons to connect the reconciliation with the internment of St. Ælfheah.

The connection of the two events in the *ASC* may hint at the underlying rift, which occurred in 1020; if Cnut had wished to move the saint's bones in order to pacify the church, Thorkel's connection to the murdered saint may have caused discord between the two allies. The movement of a prominent saint, killed by the king's closest advisor, from London to Canterbury may have stirred significant anti-Scandinavian sentiment in the south of England, where numerous raids had occurred. In particular, the East Anglian church suffered greatly under Viking occupation and raiding, a fact Thorkel tacitly acknowledged in co-sponsoring the

[412] *ASC*, 1023.

consecration of Bury St. Edmunds.[413] The rising popularity of St. Edmund, killed by Danes and supposedly credited for Swein Forkbeard's death, in East Anglia could provide a motive for both Thorkel's patronage of the monastery and his eventual removal from his position in England.[414] While inconclusive, the placement of these two connected events in the *ASC* entry provides an interesting line of inquiry and possibilities for Thorkel's sudden disappearance from England.

Whatever the reasons for Thorkel's departure from England, his tenure as guardian of Harthacnut and regent of Denmark leaves no discernable evidence. Thorkel the Tall all but disappears from the historical record after 1023 with no explanation in any contemporary source material. An almost forgotten figure in twelfth-century historiography, except for the *Jómsvíkinga saga*, Thorkel's name survived to "enter the pantheon of the legendary heroes" in Scandinavian tales.[415] Though his deeds remain somewhat shrouded in the muted history of the eleventh century, Thorkel the Tall represents a significant turning point in the accommodation of Scandinavians within Anglo-Saxon England. Starting his infamous career as a raider bent on plunder, Thorkel transitioned into a trusted ally of not one, but two kings of England while helping to pursue a royal agenda of the expansion of kingly authority. As an earl under Cnut, Thorkel was instrumental in the transition of power from the West Saxon dynasty to a new Anglo-Scandinavian royal house. Standing as military commander and chief political strategist to two successive kings, Thorkel the Tall represents the culmination of Alfred the Great's strategy of integration and accommodation to increase royal control and authority through the medium of

[413] Interestingly, the consecration of Bury St. Edmunds did not occur on the saint's feast day, but on St. Luke's on 18 October, the anniversary of the battle of *Assadun*.

[414] John of Worcester credits the spirit of St. Edmund with raising the spear that pierced Swegn Forkbeard's heart during battle. Though not a credible source, the connection with Cnut's father and Thorkel makes the story an interesting counter point possible rising anti-Scandinavian feelings in East Anglia.

[415] Williams, "Thorkel the Tall and the Bubble Reputation", 152.

law. Cnut's letter of 1020 underscores Thorkel's central role as royal judicial surrogate, providing justice as an openly acknowledged arm of Cnut's royal authority.

Cnut and the Church: Playing an "English" Game

Cnut's legacy of interaction with the church in England largely mirrors his Anglo-Saxon royal predecessors. The West Saxon monarchy had a long history of dabbling, or more accurately interfering, in church politics with an eye towards increasing their own authority, for instance the spread of monasticism under Edgar the Peaceable. Though a less enthusiastic monastic reformer than his father Edgar, King Æthelræd used the clergy extensively to increase his royal authority, particularly under the guidance of archbishops Ælfhelm and Wulfstan. Monastic endowment greatly increased the scope and breadth of Anglo-Saxon kingship in the early eleventh century, but not without a certain amount of political recompense. Churchmen and kings crafted complicated webs of personal political allegiance and alliances rooted in lay affairs, necessitating Cnut's involvement in the English church.

Though the exact date is unknown, Cnut converted and was baptized long before ascending to the Anglo-Saxon throne, taking the baptismal name Lambert.[416] Nominally Christian, Cnut displayed great enthusiasm for using the mechanisms of the church to extend his own royal authority. Significantly, Cnut was obliged to "play the English game", meaning he relied heavily on established churchmen to further any royal policies in England. Having no opportunity to cultivate continental replacements, Cnut had to use the connections established by Wulfstan and his wife Emma early in his reign.[417] Appeasement of ecclesiastical discontent was a priority for Cnut who relied upon unequivocal clerical support to bolster and legitimize his

[416] Lawson, *Cnut England's Viking King*, 121.

[417] Ibid, 122.

kingship. Joining a civilized fraternity of Christian kings, Cnut distanced himself from his spotty past and created a new role for himself.

Shepherded by Archbishop Wulfstan, Cnut crafted a new Christian identity for himself as a pious statesman concerned with bringing religion and justice to his people, an image which dominated his kingship. M.K. Lawson explains, "good religion could be good politics, good politics could require good religion, and there can be no question that Cnut threw himself into certain aspects of his role with zest."[418] Self-professed humility and extravagant gift-giving typified Cnut's public relations with the Church, for example the *EER* recounts Cnut's lavish gifts on his journey to Rome, stating,

> For he went to Rome by way of these countries and as appears from many things, [Cnut] displayed on this journey such great charitable activities, that if anyone should wish to describe them all, although he might make innumerable volumes out of these matters, at length he will admit in failure that he had not covered even the least ones.[419]

The chronicler goes on to describe Cnut's generous benefaction to St. Omer in which he "[heaped] the holy altars with royal offerings" then "poor men came and were all forthwith given gifts one by one."[420] Not only did St. Omer benefit from Cnut's generosity, but William of Malmesbury notes Chartres also received a large sum from Cnut.[421] By emphasizing both his humility and his generosity, Cnut demonstrated his legitimacy as a Christian monarch as well as his growing imperial aspirations. Symeon of Durham's infamous story of Cnut attempting to turn back the waves underscores the new narrative crafted by Cnut of a devout Christian king who respectfully follows the laws of God while imposing his own on man.[422] The story places Cnut in

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[418] Ibid, 125.

[419] *EER,* 37.

[420] Ibid.

[421] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regis Anglorum*, 203.

[422] Lawson, *Cnut England's Viking King*, 125.

the same category of leader as the Emperor Claudius punishing the English Channel for stopping his invasion and Emperor Xerxes whipping the Hellespont for daring to defy his grand army. Whether Cnut ever tried to turn back the ocean or not, the imagery summons ideas of grandeur and empire, coupled with a staunch piety and humility. Cnut's humble benefaction pervaded not only stories but imagery as well. A painting of Cnut and Emma giving a golden cross to the church at Winchester survives in the Stowe 944 manuscript. Elaine Treharne describes the work, writing, "in the Stowe 944 depiction of Cnut's royal generosity and devotion, he is the direct linear descendant of St. Peter, with shared ownership of the keys to celestial joy; Cnut's feet are planted squarely on the symbolically global *terra firma*, the imperial heir to the manifestly stylized northern hemisphere upon which he treads."[423] Gloriously self-promotional, Cnut's manipulation of his image from Scandinavian warrior to godly, and imperial, ruler benefited not only his own royal authority, but also gave Anglo-Saxon churchmen a seat at the imperial table.

One element of Cnut's religious narrative was the continuation of the veneration of royal saints, a practice that aligned him with his West Saxon predecessors. A common feature of West Saxon kingship, the veneration of royal saints, such as Æthelræd's sister Edith and martyred brother Edward, was both a religious and political opportunity to legitimize royal authority through saintly connections. Prior kings, particularly Æthelræd, used the cult of royal sainthood to cement their authority as rightful monarchs, a benefit not lost on the politically savvy Cnut. Cnut promoted several royal saints, including Edward the Martyr, with gifts and benefices for their veneration. Interestingly, Cnut's promotion of Edward's cult had the dual purpose of discrediting Æthelræd who had long been blamed as a conspirator in his brother's murder. Pauline Stafford notes that Cnut may have reinforced the idea by "encouraging the cults of other

[423] Treharne, *Living Through Conquest*,13.

murdered princes, such as Wigstan, a ninth-century Mercian, whom he had translated from Repton to Evesham."[424] Alternatively, Cnut also venerated Edmund Ironside, whom he called "brother" echoing the treaty between them that stressed peace, friendship and brotherhood. In fact William of Malmesbury records Cnut visiting his "brother" Edmund's burial site at Glastonbury in 1032, stating,

> Moreover, Cnut took at journey to the church of Glastonbury, that he might visit the remains of his brother Edmund, as he used to call him; and praying over his tomb, he presented a pall, interwoven, as it appeared, with party-colored figures of peacocks.[425]

M.K. Lawson explains the significance of the peacock design, writing, "the peacock appears in other English contexts-together with the Tree of Life on a finger-ring bearing the name of the ninth-century West Saxon king Æthelwulf, and on the lid of the eight-century Mortian casket…the [peacock] was a symbol of resurrection of the flesh."[426] By using the symbol of the peacock, Cnut connected himself with both Æthelwulf and Edmund linking his reign with the West Saxon tradition of fraternal succession. Æthelwulf's five sons had inherited from one another, including Alfred the Great. Casting Edmund Ironside as his "brother", Cnut imitates this long-held tradition of legitimate fraternal succession while also displaying his humility before God. Enhancing the prestige of the royal line, while gaining political advantage, Cnut's continuation of the cult of royal sainthood served dual, beneficial purposes.

Death and Identity: Cnut's Legacy

The *ASC* recounts Cnut's death in 1035, simply stating, "In this year, King Cnut died at Shaftesbury and he is buried in Winchester in the Old Minster; and he was king over all England

[424] Pauline Stafford, "The Laws of Cnut and this History of Anglo-Saxon Royal Promises", *ASE*, 10, (1982), 178.

[425] William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regis Anglorum*, 202.

[426] Lawson, *Cnut England's Viking King*, 129.

for very nearly twenty years."[427] Almost immediately his dynasty was cast into confusion, as his son by Ælfgifu of Northhampton was declared king by the *Witan* while his other son Harthacnut remained in Denmark. Though his dynasty would ultimately be dismantled and replaced by the previous West Saxon dynasty in the form of Edward the Confessor, Cnut's legacy in England cannot be ignored. Praised by historians as the "most successful of pre-Conquest rulers", Cnut used precedents set by Alfred the Great and Edgar the Peaceable to effectively rule a kingdom in upheaval. Reeling from the shocks of continued warfare, Anglo-Saxon England eagerly embraced Cnut's kingship. Using his impressive administrative and political acumen, Cnut sought to reform Anglo-Saxon government, focusing on the elevation of "new" English men and local governance for the ultimate benefit of his own royal authority. Displaying ethnic pragmatism, Cnut reinstated popular laws from the "Golden Age" of Edgar the Peaceable to accommodate and advocate for ethnic unity between the English and Scandinavians. The model of duality, Cnut embraced Anglo-Saxon kingship while retaining his Scandinavian strength. Famed British historian Sir Frank Stenton wrote, "Cnut's reign was so successful, there was very little to say about it."[428]

[427] *ASC*, 1035.

[428] F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 634.

Conclusion: Royal Authority, Accommodation, and Scandinavians

In this year heathen men…[429]

The Venerable Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* eloquently wrote that the purpose of history was to "[relate] good things of good men, the attentive hearer is incited to imitate what is good; or if it recounts evil things of wicked persons, nevertheless the devout and godly hearer or reader, shunning that which is hurtful and wrongful is more earnestly kindled to perform those things which he knows to be good and worthy of God."[430] Written decades before the first Scandinavian incursion to England, Bede's words nevertheless demonstrate the profound power history, or more pointedly precedent, had on kings. To emulate or shun, the behavior of their predecessor's informed the policies of Anglo-Saxon kingship, like so many other medieval kingships.

The profound difference, however, for Anglo-Saxon kings were the limitations on their royal authority, particularly in the ninth and tenth centuries. The rise of the nobility, a product of the unification of Anglo-Saxon England first begun by Æthelwulf in Wessex, created a morass of wealthy, inter-related families that encouraged dissent and separatism from royal authority. The very nature of the expansion of royal authority during the ninth and tenth centuries created the nobility, which hampered the king's effectiveness. Pauline Stafford explains the convoluted nature of royal authority in relation to the nobility, writing, "[relations were] complicated not only by local separatism and links to the dynasty but also by the inevitable struggles for power within the noble ranks over the scarce rewards of office."[431]

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[429] *ASC*, 858.

[430] Bede, "Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation", *English Historical Documents 500-1042 Volume 1*, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979), 640.

[431] Pauline Stafford, "Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference", in *The Reign of Aethelred II: A Study in the Limitations of Royal Policy and Action*, ed by David Hill, (London, U.K.; British Archaeological Reports, 1978), 19.

Linked through an intricate system of clientage and tightening dynastic links, Anglo-Saxon kings relied heavily on their nobility, weakening their overall royal authority. Despite intrinsic limitations on Anglo-Saxon kingship, kings such as Æthelwulf, Alfred, Edgar, Æthelræd and Cnut sought to expand the reach of royal authority through carefully crafted political, religious and economic accommodations with Scandinavians using the medium of law while simultaneously manipulating female royal power. The Scandinavian invasions of the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries caused unprecedented chaos for much of the country, but politically savvy kings used the Vikings as an opportunity to extend their reach. Through charters, laws and treaties Anglo-Saxon kings, such as Alfred the Great, manipulated Scandinavian surrogates for their own political advantage. By enfolding Scandinavians into the Anglo-Saxon political and religious landscape, kings created new identities and loyalties for Scandinavians living in England. Loyal only to the king, these "new" Scandinavian nobles were intimately bound by law and duty to their new reality. This strategy of accommodation and appeasement of Scandinavians into Anglo-Saxon society was neither straightforward nor always successful for the kings who employed it, and yet its significance cannot be ignored.

Æthelwulf and Alfred: Trend Setters

The expansion of royal power through accommodation and the reliance on "new" men began with Æthelwulf of Wessex, father to Alfred the Great, in the mid-ninth century. Concerned with creating West Saxon hegemony among the disparate kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England, Æthelwulf set the precedent for later Scandinavian accommodation through the medium of law. In particular, Æthelwulf used charters to "book" land, once a reserved privilege of the clergy, in order to bind newly appointed thegns closer to royal authority. Demonstrated in the Horton charter, written in 846, Æthelwulf gifted himself "some portion of land, of 20 hides,

to be ascribed to myself into my own inheritance; for me to have and enjoy with meadows and pastures, with fields and woods, with waters, running and stagnant, and again, for me to leave eternally to anyone whatever is pleasing to me."[432] Through the formal process of booking land first to himself and then to loyal thegns, Æthelwulf created an atmosphere of reciprocity in which new men gained land while the king gained power, prestige and expanded his royal authority.[433] Charters, such as the Horton charter, demonstrate a desire for appeasement and accommodation with the nobility, setting the standard for successfully expanding royal authority through accommodation formalized in law.

After becoming king in 871, Alfred faced a seemingly endless war of attrition against the invading Scandinavian *here*. After several failed treaties and a forced evacuation to the Sussex fens, Alfred turned to his father's policies of accommodation and appeasement to negotiate a different peace settlement. Using pragmatism and adhering to a political ideology that emphasized stability and legitimacy, Alfred made peace with the Viking leader Guthrum, including standing has his baptismal sponsor. By combining a political treaty with a religious conversion, Alfred crafted a new identity for Guthrum as a powerful Christian leader who was subservient to Alfred's own royal authority. Echoing this royal control, Guthrum took the baptismal name of Æthelstan, demonstrably tying him to the ruling West Saxon dynasty. By 878, Alfred and Guthrum formalized their peace in the *AGu*, a treaty which defined separate spheres of authority, territory, and regulated disputes; integrating Guthrum, and by extension his Scandinavian *here*, through the medium of law, Alfred expanded his own royal reach to include East Anglia. By actively creating new identities for Guthrum and his followers, Alfred placed

[432] "Horton Charter", *English Historical Documents 500-1042 Volume 1*, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, (Oxford, U.K.; Oxford University Press, 1979), 523.

[433] For reference see Chapter 1 of this work.

himself as the "cornerstone" of Englishness, the single arbiter of royal and divine justice. Creating modes of accommodation through the manipulation of legal identities in the *AGu*, Alfred helped to initiate the definition of both "Englishness" and "other". More significantly, the *AGu* maximized royal authority as the sole regulator of Anglo-Scandinavian relations, injecting the king's justice into the daily interactions of both Danish and English subjects.

By providing the mechanisms for Scandinavian lordship, Alfred set the standard for not only the incorporation of Scandinavians in the fabric of Anglo-Saxon life, but also more importantly extended his royal authority. Through the *AGu,* Alfred crafted new identities for Scandinavians, creating mutable ethnicities under secular, royal control. Far from a perfect peace, the *AGu* set a precedent for accommodation through law while simultaneously expanding royal authority. Alfred's imperfect solution to the Scandinavian crisis allowed for further territorial expansion as well as the considerable expansion of his own royal prerogative.

Edgar the Peaceable and Æthelræd: Faith and Folly

Wise, thoughtful, and devout, Edgar the Peaceable used the politics of religion to aid in his imperial aspirations. By pursuing policies, which expanded monasticism in areas not directly under his control, Edgar the Peaceable extended his royal authority without subsuming any power to the local nobility. Sponsoring the endowment of monasteries throughout the Danelaw, Edgar not only pushed an agenda of Anglo-Danish conversion, but also created bastions of royal authority in "foreign" territory. Assisting in these endeavors was a lack of Scandinavian raiding which significantly bolstered the West Saxon economy, allowing for the monetary means to secure monastic endowments. Trading with the Anglo-Danish citizens both within his own

holdings and the Danelaw, Edgar's kingdom rose in both peace and prosperity. Untroubled by Viking incursions, Edgar used monastic endowments and trading prospects to create inroads to Scandinavian people living in England. Additionally, Edgar actively promoted a grand vision of empire, including naming himself *basileus* in charters and organizing a grand re-coronation ceremony alongside his queen, Ælfthryth, in 971. Mirroring his imperial concerns were Edgar's attempt to directly rule the Danelaw through the *Andover Code* and the *Wihtbordesstan Code* (IV Edgar), which harkened back to the inclusiveness and accommodation of Alfred.

Like his father Edgar the Peaceable, Æthelræd also dreamed of imperial glory, but lacked the political skill and personal charm to secure his royal ambitions. Unlike Edgar, Æthelræd's rule was immediately troubled by not only whispered accusations of his involvement in the murder of his predecessor, Edward the Martyr, but also his youthful indiscretions against the church. Succumbing to the lull of anti-monastic factions within the *Witan*, Æthelræd gleefully stripped monastic lands for personal and political gain. Though he would later claim to be guided by false councilors and youthful folly, Æthelræd's early years of tumult, vacillation and reversal set the tone for the remainder of his long reign. Though Æthelræd would eventually, like Alfred, stand sponsor to a Scandinavian leader to seal a peace treaty, in this case the less than saintly Olaf Tryggvason, his first attempt to exert his royal authority to secure a Scandinavian elite's allegiance through religious ceremony failed miserably. Olaf Tryggvason was hardly a worthy surrogate for Guthrum, and lacking formal ties to local nobility, the peace treaty of 991 saw little success.

Æthelræd's first attempted to extend his royal reach through legislation in the *Wantage Code*, issued in 997, seeking to regulate Scandinavian identity and define royal authority. Using Scandinavian terminology, the *Wantage Code* demonstrated the influence of local Northern men

by introducing West Saxon royal procedure heavily influenced by regional concerns. Described by Simon Keynes as a "vigorous enforcement of royal will", the *Wantage Code* demonstrated not only Æthelræd's attempts to extend royal authority, but also the necessity of accommodation with the Anglo-Scandinavian community.[434] Attempts at direct rule soon turned to direct action against the Anglo-Scandinavian community in the St. Brice's Day massacre of 1002. Explained as retaliation for Scandinavian treachery, the St. Brice's Day massacre was a bloody demonstration of unrestrained royal power and authority. Though who exactly was targeted, whether old men or new settlers, remains hotly contested, the result of the massacre left the Danelaw shaken but still loyal to Æthelræd. Ethnic considerations paled in comparison to political considerations for Anglo-Scandinavian subjects under Æthelræd's rule, likely owing less to any personal loyalties to the king and more to the generous land protections provided in his *Wantage Code.*

Æthelræd's drastic change in strategy from tepid resistance of foreign invaders to direct action included the shoring up of his rule with new men and alliances. Early in his reign, Æthelræd benefited from a large number of ealdormen and thegns left from his father's administration, but as years and battles depleted his pool of councilors Æthelræd looked to secure new alliances to prop up this sagging rule. Men such as Ælfhelm and Eadric Streona rose to prominence, marrying Æthelræd's daughters to more fully cement the alliances. Though older men were included in Æthelræd's charters and witness lists, increasing frustration led to jealousy and treachery against the aging monarch. The need for such "new" men to aid his rule demonstrated the overall fragility of Æthelræd's rule, which counted on unknown men and frustrated longtime allies. Bitterness and dissatisfaction of old retainers, particularly in Wessex

[434] Keynes, The Diplomas of Æthelræd,197.

that would eventually welcome Scandinavian invaders, with the rapid promotion of new men so late in Æthelræd's reign displayed the limits of kingly authority. Part of Æthelræd's defensive marriage strategy included in own marriage to Emma of Normandy, sister to Duke Richard II, in hopes of securing Norman military assistance. Nearly twenty years her husband's junior, Emma was nevertheless a powerful political ally in the later years of Æthelræd's reign. Though Æthelræd's strategy for direct action and the creation of new alliance systems was envisioned as a policy of self-sufficiency, renewed Scandinavian invasions by Swein Forkbeard underscored the fragility of such a strategy and the limits of Æthelræd's rapidly depleting authority.

Possibly the most telling sign of the troubles in Æthelræd's later reign was the creation of the pseudo-legislation under the direction of Archbishop Wulfstan. Wulfstan's homiletic codes, known as *V Æthelræd* and *VII Æthelræd* respectively, sought to calm apocalyptic anxieties in the face of renewed Scandinavian hostilities. Both pieces of legislation attempted to reassert divine precepts over mortal punishments in hopes of winning the Lord's blessing amid increasing lawlessness.[435] Penitential in tone, *V Æthelræd and VII Æthelræd* stressed unity under the king's authority in hopes of calming mutual hatreds, which flared during Swein Forkbeard's invasions. Unfortunately neither piece of legislation was able to soothe regional tensions that hampered the defenses of Æthelræd's reign. Torn on how to approach the renewed Viking hostilities in 1011, Æthelræd and his *Witan* sued for peace with the newest Scandinavian commander ravaging the countryside, Thorkel the Tall. Famed as a Jomsviking, the most hardened of warriors, Thorkel would eventually act as a political bridge between Æthelræd and the Scandinavian community; a sage, and savage, military commander, Thorkel served as the leader of Æthelræd's mercenary army, remaining loyal to Æthelræd during his exile to Normandy. Acting as Æthelræd's

[435] Wormald, The Making of English Law 452.

surrogate during his return to England in 1014, Thorkel curried favor with residents of the Danelaw who feared retribution from the king after their swift surrender to Swein Forkbeard in 1013. Powerful and politically prudent, Thorkel stood as surrogate to Guthrum, helping to mediate piece between the king and his subjects. Unfortunately, Thorkel too fell victim to Æthelræd's haphazard kingship during the disastrous Oxford meeting in 1014, where the treacherous Eadric Streona was allowed by Æthelræd to execute two northern magnates.

Though Æthelræd attempted to follow in his father's peaceful and prosperous footsteps, his vacillation from assertive action to befuddled incompetence left his kingdom ripe for invasion. Æthelræd's early reign attempted to duplicate his father's successful extension of royal authority through monastic endowment, after a short period youthful folly in which he stripped monastic lands in order to enrich himself. After spending much of his early reign relying on a coterie of loyal followers, Æthelræd strained the bonds of lordship by promoting "new men" whose quick ascension caused a backlash of bitterness and frustration among loyal noble families causing drastic cleavages between king and subject, exploited by Swein Forkbeard. His early policies and legislation, such as the *Wantage Code*, stressed ethnic accommodation and royal authority while Æthelræd's later charters pleaded for divine mercy and begged for faithfulness. Æthelræd's early use of mercenary armies to combat Scandinavian invasions transformed to direct action on the battlefield, including the willful murder of women and children during the St. Brice's Day Massacre. The entirety of Æthelræd's disastrous reign was a dramatic soap opera of poor decisions, ineptitude and calamity. Even Æthelræd's attempt to include Thorkel the Tall as a political bridge to the Danelaw ended in disaster when Æthelræd was swayed by unwise councilors. Frenetic and vacillating, Æthelræd's reign truly deserved the moniker "ill-counseled" for its political ineffectiveness.

Royal Women: Power and Patronage

Royal women were a necessary component needed to secure and expand royal authority during the tenth and eleventh centuries. More than simple peace-weavers, Anglo-Saxon queens conferred legitimacy on kings and heirs through sacred anointing ceremonies, helping to secure unsteady dynasties. Though the tradition of queenship in Anglo-Saxon England varies wildly between early traditions, royal women eventually became a significant force in the quest to expand royal authority. Initially, West Saxon tradition eschewed granting the title of queens to the wives of kings, citing the infamous Eadburh as a lascivious royal woman who tainted the title. Mercian tradition, however, encouraged female royal power, as co-equal to their kings, a tradition that Æthelflæd daughter of Alfred the Great used to the advantage of her family. Dubbed the Lady of the Mercians, Æthelflæd ruled alone after the death of her husband maintaining laws, overseeing armies and assisting her brother Edward the Elder to enfold Mercia into Wessex. Though not a queen, Æthelflæd used the power of Merican tradition to skillfully rule the area, eventually ceding the land into her brother's power—enhancing West Saxon royal authority.

The first truly powerful West Saxon queen was Ælfthryth, wife to Edgar the Peaceable and mother of Æthelræd. Officially consecrated queen in 973 at the imperial ceremony held by her husband in Bath, Ælfthryth overcame rather scandalous beginnings to sit beside Edgar as co-ruler. As an equal partner in royal authority, Ælfthryth used legal advocacy and monastic patronage to actively participate in the governance of the kingdom. Andrew Rabin describes Ælfthryth's queenship as the "combined the legal notion of advocacy with a model of queenly patronage that developed as part of the tenth-century monastic reform…making her a figure capable of mediating between the legal subject and the masculine authority of her royal

husband."[436] Additionally, Ælfthryth's active participation in her husband's monastic reform and endowments aligned her closely with many churchmen, creating opportunities for political intrigue and favoritism. Though Ælfthryth's power dimmed considerably during the later years of her son's reign, her active queenship enhanced the power of the throne and extended female royal authority for those who followed her. In particular, Ælfthryth's daughter-in-law Emma benefited from the power and position afforded her by queenly status. First crowned queen in 1002, Emma's marriage to Æthelræd helped to stabilize his unsteady reign by aligning England with powerful Norman allies. Cunning and politically malleable, Emma used her position as queen to maintain control of London after Æthelræd's death and Edward Ironside's rebellion. Eventually marrying the invader Cnut, Emma used her special position as a consecrated queen to legitimize her new husband's reign, elevating his own royal authority. Politically expedient, Emma's marriage to Cnut brought a peaceful conclusion to an unsettled time, neutralizing any resistance and providing for a legitimate continuation of a dynasty.

Cnut and Alfred: Accommodation and Authority Revisited

Cnut's rise to power after his successful invasion of England in 1015 was anything but a complete and thorough victory. At first forced to co-rule alongside Edmund Ironside, Cnut only achieved complete control of the kingdom after Edmund's death in November 1016. Marriage to Emma, the widow of King Æthelræd, legitimized Cnut's royal authority by connecting him to the former ruling dynasty, a necessary step in crafting a new identity for himself as the rightful ruler of England. Relying heavily on local support, Cnut avoided significant political bloodletting, carefully weeding his new kingdom of faithless nobles who stood as known troublemakers, including the notorious Eadric Streona. Possibly the most telling aspect of Cnut's

[436] Rabin, "Female Advocacy and Royal", 263.

early reign was his movement towards local governance, encouraging and promoting "new men" who were familiar with local conditions. Though Cnut did appoint some Scandinavians to positions of power, such as Thorkel the Tall, the vast majority of his thegnly appointments were English, demonstrating a keen awareness of the difficulties of Æthelræd's reign. While long-standing noble families jockeyed for position under Æthelræd, Cnut emphasized the use of "local" thegns creating a pool of loyal men from whom he could draw supporters. Much as Æthelwulf and Alfred had, Cnut's reliance on local men to solve local problems thinned out the traditional kinship networks that hampered his predecessor's royal authority. New without being foreign, Cnut's followers benefited from his ethnic pragmatism and political acumen. Unlike William, Duke of Normandy's later conquest, Cnut's was a victory in stages, reliant on local English support to enhance his royal authority and imperial aspirations.

Supporting Cnut's emphasis on local governance and good lordship were his charters and laws; particularly his laws of 1018 which sought to return to the status quo of Edgar the Peaceable. Heavily influenced by Archbishop Wulfstan, Cnut's laws of 1018 harkened back to an era of peace and prosperity, renewing the policies of accommodation and acceptance that were eschewed during Æthelræd's reign. By reaffirming the laws of Edgar the Peaceable, particularly the *Wantage Code*, Cnut strengthened his royal authority through the politics of accommodation and acceptance, which marked the legislation. A model of duality and ethnic pragmatism, Cnut's laws duplicated the tone of Alfred, creating a symbiosis between Scandinavian and English rooted in law. Echoing his laws, Cnut set communicative precedence in his letters of 1020 and 1027, which emphasized mutual loyalty and good lordship. Like the *AGu*, the letters sought to exert royal control while portraying Cnut as merciful judge and penitent savior. Through the letters Cnut constructed a new identity for himself, an identity of

good Christian lordship and imperial desire. Advocating for equal opportunities for both English and Scandinavians subjects, Cnut echoed the principles of accommodation and appeasement set forth by Alfred and Edward in their legislation. The concepts of royal authority, local governance and imperial aspiration imbued Cnut's letters with not only rhetorical, but also political power. Unlike his predecessor, Cnut demonstrated his strength as a skilled politician who understood the necessity of laws and charters that fortified ethnic accommodation while underscoring royal authority.

An integral part of Cnut's identity creation as a lawful Christian king was his interactions with the English church. Much like his slow political victory, Cnut played an "English" game in his dealings with the church. Always with an eye towards increasing his royal authority, Cnut continued Edgar's policy of royal monastic endowment as well as the veneration of royal saints. In particular, his devotion to the cult of royal sainthood mirrored his Anglo-Saxon predecessors while intimately connecting Cnut to legitimate royal offspring. Careful moderation of his image allowed Cnut to enjoy the religious privileges conferred to monarchs while also distancing himself from the follies of his predecessor, notably Æthelræd's spotty past. Gaining significant political advantage, Cnut used his patronage of the English church to enhance his royal authority and support his imperial designs. Much like his continental counterparts, Cnut used his wealth to give lavishly to the church, displaying his humility and generosity, accentuating his royal virtues and divinely inspired authority. Cnut masterfully played the pious game of royal elevation, crafting an identity which set him apart from his predecessor while raising the overall pedigree of the Anglo-Saxon throne.

Strategies of Power

The story of Anglo-Saxon England from the ninth to the eleventh century is a saga of royal ascendency and the remarkable expansion of royal authority through the manipulation of law and ethnicity. During a period of hostile Scandinavian invasion, successful monarchs such as Alfred and Cnut used policies of accommodation and appeasement to integrate disparate ethnicities through the medium of law to the benefit of royal authority. Political surrogates such as Guthrum and Thorkel the Tall acted as important political aides to bridge the differences between Scandinavians and English subjects. Laws such as Alfred's *AGu* and Edgar's *Wantage Code* allowed for the skillful interweaving of ethnicities for the benefit of increased royal authority. Royal women also played a crucial role during these tumultuous centuries, crafting new queenly roles, which supported and enhanced the king's power while simultaneously created new avenues for female advocacy. Though there were significant challenges to the policies of accommodation and integration, particular under Æthelræd's frenetic reign, the overall supremacy of such policies held sway. From Alfred to Cnut, ethnic accommodation and appeasement through the medium of law increased royal authority, creating a diverse and powerful nation.

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