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ABBREVIATIONS

AFM	<i>Annals of the Four Masters</i>
AI	<i>Annals of Inisfallen</i>
ANQ	<i>American Notes and Queries</i>
ASE	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
ASPR	Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records
AT	<i>Annals of Tigernach</i>
AU	<i>Annals of Ulster</i>
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
CS	<i>Chronicum Scottorum</i>
CSASE	Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England
DEB	Gildas, <i>De Excidio Britanniae</i>
EEMF	Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile
EETS	Early English Text Society
EHD I	<i>English Historical Documents c. 500-1042</i> , vol. I, ed. D. Whitelock, (2 nd ed., London, 1979)
ES	<i>English Studies</i>
GNA	<i>Gildas: New Approaches</i> , ed. M. Lapidge and D. N. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1984)
GRB	<i>Gildas, The Ruin of Britain and Other Works</i> , ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom (Chichester, 1978)
HE	Bede, <i>Historia Ecclesiastica: Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> , ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, OMT (Oxford, 1969)
MÆ	<i>Medium Ævum</i>
MECI	P. Grierson and M. A. S. Blackburn, <i>Medieval European Coinage, Vol. I: The Early Middle Ages (5th-10th centuries)</i> (Cambridge, 1986).
OMT	Oxford Medieval Texts
SCBI	<i>Sylloge of the Coins of the British Isles</i>

PREFACE

This publication is the outcome of an initiative taken in 1999 by members of the post-graduate community in the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic. That they have brought their venture so successfully to fruition is testimony not only to their commitment and enthusiasm, but no less importantly to the professionalism which they have displayed at every stage of the process. The Department is proud indeed to be associated with the Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, and wishes it every success in the future.

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COLLOQUIUM REPORT

The seventh annual Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic took place on Saturday, May 6th, 2006, in the Faculty of English at the University of Cambridge. Papers on the theme of 'Dialogue and Exchange' were presented in four sessions:

Session I (Chair: Ben Snook)

Michael Lapidge, 'Alcuin in Dialogue with Virgil'

Session II (Chair: Erik Niblaeus)

Michael F. Reed, 'Sculpture and Identity in Viking Age Norfolk: the St Vedast Cross'

Denis Casey, 'An Eighth-Century Royal Conversation: Cathal mac Finguine and Áed Allan at Tír dá Glás, 737 AD'

Jesse Billett, 'Chanting the Roman Office in Early Anglo-Saxon England'

Session III (Chair: Helen Foxhall Forbes)

Abdullah Alger, 'A Punctuation Dilemma: Assessing the Problems of Punctuation in *Christ II*'

Helen Imhoff, 'Dialogue, Exchange, and the Representation of the Past in *Nornagests Þáttur*'

Levi Roach, 'Asking for Intercession: Requests for Prayer in Æthelstan's Laws and Charters'

Session IV (Chair: Rosa Maria Fera)

Rory Naismith, 'Royal Titulature in Eighth-Century Mercia on Coins and in Charters; or, An Offa You Can't Refuse'

Jonjo Roberts, 'Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* and the Narration of Dreams in Medieval Icelandic Literature'

Fiona Salisbury, 'The Figure of Arthur in "Chwedyl Iarllles y Ffynnawn" and "Gereint uab Erbin"'

The members of the colloquium committee for 2005-6 were: Matthias Ammon, Rosa Maria Fera, Helen Foxhall Forbes, Paul Gazzoli, Jean Rumball, and Ben Snook.

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Post-colonial Gildas: a first essay¹

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University of Aberdeen

One of the foundation-texts for the student of British and English history and culture is the passionate *epistola* and *admonitiuncula* which the mysterious Gildas fervently directed to the Britons in the mid-sixth century.² Much has been written about this work, and much has been built on it. But, as arguments about its dating revealed a quarter-century ago,³ there is little agreement about the social and cultural context of its writing and publication. Acts of will are required to remind ourselves that the transmitted versions of the text nowhere contain either the name of the author or the title, *De excidio Britanniae*,

¹ For discussion of the significance and merits of the hyphen in the discourse of post-colonial/postcolonial studies, see J. Thieme, *Post-colonial Studies. The Essential Glossary* (London 2003), pp. 122–4 (“Hyphen in “post[-]colonial”), referring to B. Ashcroft *et al.*, *The Empire writes back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London 1989), and B. Ashcroft, ‘On the Hyphen in “post-colonial”’, *New Literatures Review* 32 (1996), 23–31.

² For the standard critical edition see *Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII.* 3 vols., ed. T. Mommsen (Berlin, 1891–8) III.1–110. For bilinguals see *Gildas*, ed. and trans. H. Williams (London, 1899–1901), and GRB. I refer to the text by book, chapter, and section: the last are found only in Winterbottom’s work; the book-divisions are I=§§3–26, II=§§27–65, III=§§66–110. For *epistola* as Gildas’s description of his work, see *DEB*, Prologue, 1,1, and III.93,4. He could also refer to it as *opusculum*, ‘a little work’ (II.37,2 and 62,1; III.94,1), and – in local contexts – *historia* (for example, I.17,2; II.37,1).

³ See, in particular, the contributions by I. Wood and M. Lapidge to *GNA*, pp. 1–25, 27–50.

'The Ruin of Britain', which we routinely use as its name.⁴ The authorial name we owe to Bede, more or less,⁵ although we meet it in other contexts, beginning first with Columbanus of Bangor, Luxeuil, and Bobbio (†615).⁶ Gildas's name remains problematic if we seek an explanation in terms of Celtic philology⁷ – and Patrick Sims-Williams's brilliant anagrammatic solution, *Sildag*, 'Good Seed', remains profoundly appealing.⁸

Author and text therefore pose very basic problems as we approach them. But these are as nothing by comparison with the conceptual hurdles which have faced modern readers. It has been the work of the last generation to approach the various contexts within which we must appreciate Gildas's writing,⁹ and our grasp of his intentions has been much enhanced thereby. But it may be argued that there is still a considerable distance to travel, that more of

⁴ For *excidium*, see I.26,2: *tam desperati insulae excidii* ('so desperate a blow to the island': *DEB* pp. 28, 98), referring to what the Britons were saved from by Ambrosius Aurelianus.

⁵ *HE*, I.22 (as Gildus [historicus eorum Gildus flebili sermone describit]): *HE*, pp. 66–9 (but Mynors printed Gildas, against the manuscript-evidence).

⁶ *Sancti Columbani Opera*, ed. and trans. G. S. M. Walker (Dublin, 1957), pp. 8/9 (*Epistulae*, I.6–7): the two witnesses (both seventeenth-century) offer *Gildas* and *Giltas*.

⁷ Cf. P. Ó Riain, 'Gildas: a Solution to his Enigmatic Name?', in *Irlande et Bretagne. Vingt siècles d'histoire*, ed. C. Laurent and H. Davis (Rennes, 1994), pp. 32–9.

⁸ P. Sims-Williams, 'Gildas and Vernacular Poetry', in *GNA*, pp. 169–92, at p. 169, n. 2. On the anagram in Insular literature, see D. Howlett, 'The Brigantine Hymn *Xpistus in nostra insula*', *Peritia* 12 (1998), 79–86, especially pp. 85–6 ('Anagrammatic signatures'), and (for a text in Old English) "'Tres linguae sacrae" and Threefold Play in Insular Latin', *Peritia* 16 (2002), 94–115, at 109–12.

⁹ A convenient starting point may be found in the bibliography of *GNA*, pp. 215–35.

Gildas's cultural assumptions remain to be unpacked. He is counsel for the prosecution. He is an Old-Testament prophet. He is a spiritual revivalist calling passionately for moral rearmament. He is an advocate of monasticism. Yet the intellectual and cultural biography of Gildas remains unwritten: there is more than one book which might be expected to emerge from attempts at such an enterprise. Having been a student of Gildas's writing and thought for forty years and more, I can nonetheless say that each time I pick up his work, each time I read him alongside other late Antique literature, I find some new issue to contemplate.¹⁰ For all that this *admonitiuncula* is a full-scale rant, which some generations of readers have found to be appallingly uncouth in thought and word,¹¹ it remains for me a text of great richness and seemingly innumerable possibilities.

Here, I wish to explore but one dimension of Gildas's cultural formation, and that in a preliminary way, making a first probe into uncharted territory. But I hope that this particular sally into our author's context may serve to indicate one aspect of what remains to be done before the biography which I adumbrated can be realized. If we ask 'Who was Gildas?' and invite him to respond through his major work, through the fragments of his letter to Uinniau,¹² and

¹⁰ One may instance the theme of debt in Gildas's writing, which may be illuminated by (for example) the work of Salvian of Marseille in the early fifth century, an author with whom Gildas has sometimes been compared. For him, see *Salviani presbyteri Massiliensis libri qui supersunt*, ed. K. Halm (Berlin, 1877); *The Writings of Salvian, the Presbyter*, trans. J. F. O'Sullivan (New York, 1947).

¹¹ This aspect of his reception was discussed by M. Miller, 'Bede's Use of Gildas', *EHR* 90 (1975), 241–61. Whether we should take the diminutive use by Gildas as reflecting modesty, irony, or simply Late-Latin (and vulgar) usage is a moot point.

¹² See the contributions by R. Sharpe and D. N. Dumville ('Gildas and Uinniau') to *GNA*, pp. 193–205, 207–14. See also D. N. Dumville, 'The Origins and Early History of Insular Monasticism: Aspects of Literature,

through his 'Preface on Penance',¹³ we find few unequivocal statements. He was a Christian. He was an ecclesiastic, in minor holy orders when writing *De excidio Britanniae* (but the latter point has to be teased out from his prose).¹⁴ Probably he was a Briton – there is much circumstantial evidence for his ethnicity – but he nowhere says this in so many words. Nevertheless, his *patria*, 'native land', was Britain,¹⁵ and his literary focus was unremittingly on Britain and the Britons.

This last fact, of geographical and political focus, unequivocally marks Gildas out as post-Roman in time and outlook. E. A. Thompson memorably observed that in the Roman empire it would have been treasonable to write the history of a province.¹⁶ In effect, such a history would create or validate a political identity which was bound to have subversive potential.

Was being 'post-Roman' a chronological, governmental, or cultural matter? We can be reasonably confident that in Gildas's day the writ of the Roman imperial government no longer ran in Britain. No emperor had resided in the West since the 470s, and effective Imperial rule had long since ceased to be a feature of Western life by the 520s. But the Emperor Justinian (527–65) had plans for

Christianity, and Society in Britain and Ireland, A.D. 400–600', *Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental and Occidental Studies, Kansai University* 30 (1997), 85–107.

¹³ These texts are found in all the editions cited in n. 2, above.

¹⁴ This was done by O. Chadwick, 'Gildas and the Monastic Order', *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 5 (1954) 78–80, from *DEB*, II.65,1.

¹⁵ This is apparent from Prologue 1,1 and Prologue 2; the word is found repeatedly through Book I (see for example 4,2, 4,4, 6,2, 7, 12,3, 15,2, 17,1, 18,1, 21,5).

¹⁶ E. A. Thompson, 'Gildas and the History of Britain', *Britannia* 10 (1979), 203–26. For further discussion, see *After Empire. Towards an Ethnology of Europe's Barbarians*, ed. G. Ausenda (San Marino, 1995), pp. 211–12.

reconquest in the West which were progressively put into effect.¹⁷ His armies reached Spain but took little of it, and in what had once been the central Mediterranean heartland of the Empire the Imperial armies struggled to maintain a grip on Italy through years of campaigning which devastated the peninsula. It is uncertain how extensive were Justinian's ambitions for reconquest. Whether his government regarded Britain as its property is arguable.¹⁸ What is not known at all is whether there were those in mid-sixth-century Britain who were willing to, or actively wished to, or indeed did acknowledge Imperial authority. And whether the title flaunted on the tombstone of Uoteporix, presumably a king of the Demetae, *protector* (strictly speaking, member of the Imperial praetorian guard), has any relevance is a matter of speculation.¹⁹

How and when what had been the Roman provinces of Britain ceased to be Roman – and indeed what that would mean – has long been a subject of debate: and yet debate has been quite insufficient. One extreme of interpretation is represented by such expressions as 'When the Romans left Britain'. It defies belief that any scholar can write such a thing: yet the sentiment, even the wording, continues to appear in academic literature. Such a proposition is based on

¹⁷ For accounts of the reign in English, see P. N. Ure, *Justinian and his Age* (Harmondsworth, 1951), and J. Moorhead, *Justinian* (Harlow, 1994), between which books scholarship had traversed much ground.

¹⁸ Prokopios, *Anecdota. Procopius: The Anecdota or Secret History*, ed. and trans. H. B. Dewing and G. Downey, 7 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 1914–40), VI.232/3 (XIX.13–16); Procopius, *The Secret History*, trans. G. A. Williamson (Harmondsworth, 1966), pp. 138–9.

¹⁹ V. E. Nash-Williams, *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales* (Cardiff, 1950), p. 107 (no. 138), MEMORIA UOTEPORIGIS PROTICTORIS, at Castell Dwyran (Dyfed). For pointed commentary of great importance, see P. Sims-Williams, *The Celtic Inscriptions of Britain. Phonology and Chronology, c. 400–1200* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 342, 346–7, and references given there.

misunderstanding of both subject and verb. The other extreme of interpretation is found at the high-water mark of the 'late Antiquity' industry, which would keep Roman as much as possible of the Roman empire in the West throughout the early Middle Ages – waiting for Charlemagne, as it were. Early mediaeval British Britain has not escaped such interpretation.²⁰

Thirty years ago I argued that early mediaeval Brittonic political theory owed much to reading of *De excidio Britanniae* and asserted legitimacy to rule in substantially Roman terms.²¹ But I have also flagged up the importance of the complementary or parallel description of those who bore rule in the British-speaking world as *tyranni*, 'usurpers', illegitimate holders of power who by definition ruled unjustly.²² This term was applied now to the regional overkings excoriated by Gildas, who repeatedly referred to them thus, now to the most local ruler represented by that ruler's constitutional descendant the Breton *machtiern*.²³ It is productive to ask whether there is a contradiction embedded in these two views of British rulership. If constitutionality be the issue, the last Roman emperor

²⁰ K. R. Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom. British Political Continuity, 300–800* (London 1994), for example – a book of great originality and importance.

²¹ D. N. Dumville, 'Sub-Roman Britain: History and Legend', *History*, ns 62 (1977), 173–92, at 179–81, reprinted in my *Histories and Pseudo-histories of the Insular Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1990), essay I.

²² D. N. Dumville, 'The Idea of Government in sub-Roman Britain', in *After Empire*, ed. Ausenda, pp. 177–204 (with seminar-discussion on pp. 205–16), at 178–91. The *tyranni* are prominent in *DEB*, I.13, 14, 21, 23, and throughout Book II which is particularly devoted to their wickednesses.

²³ For discussion, see W. Davies, *Small Worlds. The Village Community in Early Medieval Brittany* (London, 1988), and *The Monks of Redon*, ed. and trans. C. Brett (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 3–4.

known to have borne rule in Britain was Constantine III, a usurper.²⁴ We hear from the Greek historian Zosimus, a contemporary of Gildas, that the administration of that last known emperor was ejected from Britain by the locals.²⁵ But there is no compelling evidence that it was succeeded by any rule which could be described as legitimist in Roman terms.²⁶ If we were to accept what is deeply controversial, Gildas's report of the appeal of the Britons to *Agitio ter consuli* and place that appeal within a few years of 450,²⁷ we could imagine that leading Britons still thought that the Roman empire had some place in their political destiny. This last proposition is by no means incredible in itself, but it would be better considered in isolation from Gildas's thoroughly problematic account of fifth-century history.²⁸

We are dealing with essentially cultural issues when we ask questions about post-Romanness. When an empire's rule ends, whether everywhere or in parts of its former territory, life can never be the same again. And this is not just a matter of politics. The imperial – and colonial – heritage is a fact of many aspects of life in such a situation. Human history offers almost innumerable examples of such transition, but all too few of them have received systematic attention.

²⁴ C. E. Stevens, 'Marcus, Gratian, Constantine', *Athenaeum* (Pavia) 45 [ns 35] (1957), 316–47, remains fundamental.

²⁵ Cf. E. A. Thompson, 'Zosimus, 6.10.2, and the Letters of Honorius', *Classical Quarterly* 76 [ns 32] (1982), 445–62.

²⁶ For discussion, see E. A. Thompson, *Saint Germanus of Auxerre and the End of Roman Britain* (Woodbridge, 1984), pp. 26–38.

²⁷ *DEB*, I.20.1.

²⁸ For my previous discussion, see 'The Chronology of *De excidio Britanniae*, Book I', in *GNA*, pp. 61–84, at 67–9, 83, reprinted in my *Britons and Anglo-Saxons in the Early Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 1993), essay II.

The first major European empire of history was that of Rome. The ability to deploy and sustain state-power over very considerable distances, by land and sea, and to do so at most points of the compass, marks out the Roman empire as a wholly new stage in European political organisation. Britain first felt Roman military aggression in 55 B.C., but this did not lead directly to occupation. It is interesting that British literature of the earlier Middle Ages offers a view of this which is radically different from the account by the leader of the earliest incursion, Gaius Iulius Caesar.²⁹ From A.D. 43 Roman military campaigns in Britain progressively incorporated a great part of the island into the Empire, although much of North Britain escaped permanent occupation. By the early fifth century Roman *Britannia* had been part of the Empire for almost four centuries.³⁰ However romanized we regard the various regions of Britain as having been by A.D. 400, there can be little doubt that the Empire had had profound and very various effects on Britain by that date.³¹ Only the peoples of the far north could think in terms of an unbroken long-term heritage of local independence.³²

In the post-colonial context of the later twentieth century there was little which can compare straightforwardly with the Roman

²⁹ For Caesar, see *Caesar, The Gallic War*, ed. and trans. H. J. Edwards (London 1917), pp. 204–63 (IV.20–V.23). For *Historia Brittonum*, see E. Faral, *La légende arthurienne. Études et documents*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1929), I.86–92 (cf. II.144–58), for discussion, and III.1–62, at 16–17 (§§19–20), for text.

³⁰ For the varying meanings of Latin *Britannia*, see N. Wright, 'Gildas's Geographical Perspective: Some Problems', in *GNA*, pp. 85–105.

³¹ T. Charles-Edwards, 'Language and Society among the Insular Celts, A.D. 400–1000', in *The Celtic World*, ed. M. J. Green (London 1995), pp. 703–36.

³² Even in this case, we must allow for the radicalisation of the Caledonians by the presence of the Imperial frontier-zone and for the possible ethnogenesis of the Picts in the third century. For the classic discussion, see *The Problem of the Picts*, ed. F. T. Wainwright, 2nd. ed. (Perth, 1980).

experience. Only the Portuguese empire had comparable longevity: it had enjoyed worldwide reach, but its territorial control was dispersed and relatively slight, especially after the loss of Brazil. Nevertheless, the European states which had in the nineteenth century deployed their developing technological and military might, combined with a sense of mission, could have a profound impact in a shorter time than ancient Rome might achieve. The last generation of scholarship has seen a sustained engagement with the cultural processes associated with empire, arising from the process of so-called 'decolonisation' as European empires outside Europe came to an end in the aftermath of World War II. While significant parts of that 'postcolonial' scholarship (as it has come to be known)³³ have been driven by unattractive political and psychological agenda, as well as a myopic conviction that nothing like these cultural processes had been seen before the rise and fall of modern European colonial empires, nevertheless major gains have been registered in the cultural history of empire: a body of experience has accumulated on which scholars can draw comparatively in order to sharpen the questions which we ask of our sources.

Gildas lived in a post-Roman, and in that sense post-imperial, Britain of whose territory significant parts had been seized by groups who originated beyond what had been the Imperial frontiers. These people were by definition *barbari*, 'barbarians', 'savages' indeed,³⁴

³³ A convenient entry-point is via the works cited in n. 1, above. This has become a very substantial scholarly industry over the last two decades.

³⁴ There is no point in trying to downplay the unpleasant essentials here. For some introductory discussion, see B. Maier, *Cut-throat or Cuddly: who were the Celts (not)?* (Aberdeen, 2006). For a major treatment, see Y. A. Dauge, *Le Barbare. Recherches sur la conception romaine de la barbarie et de la civilisation* (Brussels, 1981).

though savages of differing characteristics.³⁵ All induced fear, but some – the more familiar and less dangerous – also provoked contempt. Gildas's language is at points frankly racist.³⁶ While this may simply reflect disdain for outsiders perceived as less civilized or more uncivilized, the language employed is of course part of the Graeco-Roman heritage of post-Roman Britain. This was not all. These barbarians were *gentes*, not to say *Gentes* – they were 'Gentiles', heathen.³⁷ Gildas was heir likewise to a tradition of Judaeo-Christian discourse which also defined an Other. Yet we meet no sense of pity for these outsiders' condition, no suggestion of any merit in converting them to Christianity or otherwise seeking to civilize them: they were hostile to the Britons and (whether accordingly or by their very nature) beyond the pale.³⁸

³⁵ I have discussed this in 'The Idea of Government', pp. 197–8 (cf. pp. 212–15).

³⁶ *DEB*, I.19,1 (*GRB*, pp. 23, 94–5): 'Itaque illis ad sua remeantibus emergunt certatim de curucis, quibus sunt trans Tithicam uallem euecti, quasi in alto Titane incalescenteque caumate de artissimis foraminum cauerniculis fuscis uermiculatorum cunei, tetri Scottorum Pictorumque greges, moribus ex parte dissidentes sed una eademque sanguinis fundendi auiditate concordantes furciferosque magis uultus pilis quam corporum pudenda pudendis proxima uestibus tegentes, ...'; 'As the Romans went back home, there eagerly emerged from the coracles which had carried them across the sea-valleys the foul hordes of Gaels and Picts, like dark throngs of worms who wriggle out of narrow fissures in the rock when the sun is high and the weather grows warm. They were to some extent different in their customs but they were in perfect accord in their greed for bloodshed: and they were readier to cover their villainous faces with hair than their private parts and neighbouring regions with clothes.'

³⁷ *DEB*, Prologue 1,5 and 2; I.4,2; 5,2; 14; 18,1; 21,2.

³⁸ The fifth-century British missionary to the Irish ran into this attitude when he announced his evangelizing plans: cf. D. N. Dumville *et al.*, *Saint Patrick, A.D. 493–1993* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 133–9. For further discussion, cf. Dumville, 'The Idea of Government', pp. 212–15.

Gildas's *Britanni* therefore had a grievance: not only had they been dispossessed of much of their *patria*, 'fatherland', but those who had done that were inferior to themselves in every way except that which counted, in warfare.³⁹ In whatever way the Britons at large might explain this outcome, Gildas's education and belief-system led him to reflect on the causes of such a grievous *démarche*. One revealing phrase allows us to posit a starting point for his rumination.

Gildas's great work, while an *epistola* (albeit of a length and intensity which together might have alarmed even St Paul or St Jerome), was organized in three books of which the first is structurally narrative, the second and third being variously descriptive and moralising though not without their own mini-narratives.⁴⁰ Book I (§§3–26)⁴¹ presents a remarkable and breathless narrative of British history from timeless prehistory to Gildas's own day. It is worth stressing again the wholly Britannicentric character of the authorial focus. Gildas did not ask, whether as a central or as a temporal question, why the Roman empire fell, thus plunging the Britons into their post-Imperial agonies. Indeed we cannot be certain that he thought in such terms at all – or would even have acknowledged that fall. The phrase which I identify as central to his thought as he embarked on his enquiry occurs in the last chapter of Book I, a chapter in which are summed up various others of Gildas's central

³⁹ We can see this clearly in medieval Welsh literature: cf., for example, *Armes Prydein, The Prophecy of Britain, from The Book of Taliesin*, ed. and trans. I. Williams and R. Bromwich (Dublin, 1972).

⁴⁰ For discussion, see *GNA*.

⁴¹ §§1–2 constitute a prologue (§2 comprising a radical, one-sentence summary of Book I). A future editor will need to balance the rival merits of retaining Mommsen's chapter-divisions (which have held the field since 1894) and redividing the work to reflect readings arising from further consideration of its structure and meaning.

ideas: 'ut in ista gente experiretur Dominus solito more *praesentem Israellem*, utrum diligat eum an non'.⁴² Gildas is here picking up an extended comparison which he advanced in his Prologue (§1) between the prostrate Old-Testament Israel over whom the prophet Jeremiah lamented and the Britain of Gildas's day.⁴³ That sixth-century Britain is a latter-day Israel is a remarkable conceit, the forerunner of many such in mediaeval and modern Christian history.⁴⁴ In so far, then, as Gildas sought the cause of present troubles, it must lie in the sinfulness of a people chosen by God. The barbarians would not be defeated unless the Britons showed that they loved God by respecting their Christian covenant with Him; to the extent that the barbarians punished the Britons for their sinfulness, they were doing God's work. It was a theme which would run through Christian history.⁴⁵

I have already remarked that we do not know whether Gildas thought in terms of the fall of the Roman empire in the West, a concept very much alive in the Constantinople of his day.⁴⁶ Nor do we know how much of the history and culture of the other parts of the Empire in the period from, say, 425 to his own day had penetrated his Insular world. His written sources seem not to be later

⁴² *DEB*, I.26,1 (*GRB*, pp. 28, 98): 'so that the Lord, in an accustomed way, might test in this nation *the Israel of today*, whether it loves him or not'.

⁴³ *GRB*, pp. 14–15 (Prologue 1,7–13).

⁴⁴ It was picked up from Gildas by Bede, *HE*, in 731 and developed for his own purposes. See further R. W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain from Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York, 1966), on the larger issues, and pp. 75–85 on this aspect of Bede's *HE*, albeit with a notorious error on p. 84.

⁴⁵ Cf. Dumville, 'The Idea of Government', pp. 214–15.

⁴⁶ W. Goffart, *Rome's Fall and After* (London, 1989).

than the early fifth century.⁴⁷ Yet there are hints of his having some knowledge of a wider world. Above all, we know that there were channels which could bring knowledge of the Mediterranean to western Britain – long-distance trade is the most obvious, and hints of diplomatic contacts⁴⁸ – but that is not the same as proving that Gildas received such intelligence. Did he know that Justinian's armies were active in the West, and might he have supposed that one day they would arrive in Britain?

Such matters seem to be beyond the scope of Gildas's concerns. However, his message – that the Britons must reform themselves to be worthy of God – necessarily involved an internalising focus; yet it did not necessarily spring from one. Gildas could, in the concluding sentence of Book I, deliver a sharp externalising jab at the Britons: 'Quippe quid celabunt ciues quae non solum norunt sed exprobant iam in circuitu nationes?'.⁴⁹

Romanitas had eventually brought *christianitas* to the Britons. In Gildas's published perception they received this with an accustomed ingrained fickleness,⁵⁰ and it was a question of great grief whether they would ever submit themselves wholly, wholeheartedly, to God.⁵¹ In sum, Gildas's assessment of the Britons' morals and general

⁴⁷ For a full analysis, see N. Wright, 'Gildas's Reading: a Survey', *Sacris erudiri* 32 (1991) 121–62; cf. his book *History and Literature in Late Antiquity and the Early Medieval West. Studies in Intertextuality* (Aldershot, 1995).

⁴⁸ On trade see (for example) M. G. Fulford, 'Byzantium and Britain: a Mediterranean Perspective on post-Roman Mediterranean Imports in Western Britain and Ireland', *Medieval Archaeology* 33 (1989), 1–6.

⁴⁹ *DEB*, I.26,4 (*GRB*, pp. 29, 99): 'For why will fellow-citizens hide what nations round about not only know but already condemn?'

⁵⁰ *DEB*, I.9,1 (*GRB*, pp. 19, 91): 'Christ's precepts were received by the inhabitants without enthusiasm'.

⁵¹ This question runs through the whole work, but it is put starkly in the last chapter of Book I (I.26,1): see n. 42, above.

character is overwhelmingly negative. Individual Britons, or particular small groups – martyrs and monks, for example –, could excite his admiration;⁵² but the general, long-term picture was bleak. And it is in this context that we must consider the Romans.

For Gildas, the Romans were external conquerors. They could in that capacity behave with cruelty and severity. *Reges Romanorum*, the rulers of the Romans, had made themselves masters of the world, and therefore of Britain.⁵³ But, once Britain was theirs and they felt responsibility for its people, they could be compassionate and helpful at some cost to themselves.⁵⁴ And crucially, it was on their political watch that Christ was born and the Faith spread across the Roman world.⁵⁵ For Gildas, then, the Romans enjoyed some legitimacy, and their very success might be attributed to God's will. Imperial persecution of Christians could also be held to be part of God's plan – and Britain shone with martyrs who should have provided long-term role-models.⁵⁶

In this context it is worth remarking that Gildas's perception of the governance of the Roman empire is not always easy to grasp. Romans, particularly emperors and military leaders, seem to come to Britain and leave. It is far from clear that Gildas thought of a permanent military presence or a country fully absorbed within Roman constitutional structures.⁵⁷ One is tempted to suppose that Gildas thought in terms of the relationships between overkings with

⁵² *DEB*, I.9–12 (martyrs); I.26,3–4 (monks – cf. Prologue, 1,16). Cf. Dumville, 'The Origins'.

⁵³ *DEB*, I.5.

⁵⁴ *DEB*, I.17,2.

⁵⁵ *DEB*, I.8.

⁵⁶ *DEB*, I.9–12 (cf. n. 52, above).

⁵⁷ *DEB*, I.6–19; I.20,1 (cf. n. 27, above) marks the point at which Britain and Rome went their separate ways.

which he would have been familiar in contemporary Britain: the overlord would assume compliance and acceptance of obligations arising from dependence until some action or failure of action on the part of the presumed dependant provoked retaliation or enforcement.⁵⁸ In Gildas's history of Britain, therefore, the Romans did not merely leave, they left more than once – and the construction of the walls across the north of the island and the Saxon-Shore forts of the south was an aspect of their departures.⁵⁹ So the myth of Roman departure from Britain has ancient roots and served to explain prominent features of military infrastructure whose second-century origins were by the sixth long forgotten.

After the last Roman departure and a further appeal for Roman help which drew no answer, Gildas's Britons were thrown back on their own resources.⁶⁰ Occasionally, when they trusted in God, they could be victorious against their enemies.⁶¹ Ordinarily they preferred to fight *ciuilia bella* and to destroy their own civilization.⁶² When the

⁵⁸ On overkingship among the Britons, see T. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Native Political Organization in Roman Britain and the Origin of MW *brenbin*', in *Antiquitates indogermanicae. Gedenkschrift für Hermann Güntert*, ed. M. Mayrhofer *et al.* (Innsbruck, 1974), pp. 35–45. Cf. D. N. Dumville, 'The Terminology of Overkingship in Early Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century. An Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. J. Hines (San Marino, 1997), pp. 345–65 (with seminar-discussion, pp. 366–73); 'Anglo-Saxon and Celtic Overkingships: a Discussion of some shared Historical Problems', *Bulletin of the Institute of Oriental and Occidental Studies, Kansai University* 31 (1998), 81–100; and 'Kingship, genealogies and regnal lists', in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (Leeds, 1977), pp. 72–104, reprinted in my *Histories and Pseudo-histories*, essay XV.

⁵⁹ For this last, see *DEB*, I.15–18.

⁶⁰ *DEB*, I.20–6.

⁶¹ *DEB*, I.20,2–3 and 25,2–26,1.

⁶² *DEB*, I.21,1 and 4, 26,2–3.

prospect of utter destruction beckoned after extensive Anglo-Saxon conquest and raiding, a remnant of a remnant of British forces became standard-bearers for the people:⁶³

... duce Ambrosio Aureliano uiro modesto, qui solus forte romanae gentis tantae tempestatis collisione – occisis in eadem parentibus purpura nimirum indutis – superfuerat, cuius nunc temporibus nostris suboles magnopere auita bonitate degenerauit, uires capessunt, uictores prouocantes ad proelium. Quis uictoria Domino annuente cessit.

The leader of this spirited rearguard-action to save Britain from the dreadful English was a Roman, and indeed a scion of an imperial family. That normal British service would resume within two generations even in his family was a pointer to the Britons' capacity for insane immorality.

Gildas may then have been a Briton who identified with his country and its people, in a thoroughly post-Roman fashion; but in his narrative their saviours, over and over again, were Romans who displayed superior moral stature.⁶⁴ Gildas is on the face of it a perfect example of post-colonial cultural hybridity. The Britons had their own (non-Roman) identity, but the removal of the Roman politico-military embrace had exposed them to another cruel world in which their identity, their very survival, was at stake. To avoid destruction, the key was to behave like Romans – Christian Romans. Emulation

⁶³ *DEB*, I.25, 3 (cf. *GRB*, pp. 28, 98): 'Under the leadership of Ambrosius Aurelianus – a man of unassuming character, who perhaps alone of a Roman family had survived in the shock of such a storm, his relatives (who had undoubtedly worn the [Imperial] purple) having been killed in that, and whose offspring in our time have greatly degenerated from their grandfather's nobility – they took up arms, challenging the victors to battle. To them victory was given by the Lord's favour.'

⁶⁴ *DEB*, I.4–26. But Gildas was in no doubt as to the severity of Roman conquest and rule: *DEB*, I.4–7 and (persecution of Christians) 9–12.

was important: a wholly independent identity, whether of pre- or post-colonial character, was an insufficient option.

It was the Roman empire which had provided the conduit for Christianity to reach the Britons. Its holy texts were foreign in origin and language and were brought no closer than Latin. Its role-models were foreign until British martyrs – notably Alban of Verulamium, and Iulius and Aaron of Caerleon – arose.⁶⁵ Its prophets were remote in time and place until Gildas took on their mantle. The more modern accessory texts of the religion were mostly foreign. (Gildas quoted 'one of us', who seems to have been British – Gildas appears not to know that that one adhered to a Christianity condemned in 418 as heretical.)⁶⁶ The Christian religion, once accepted, provided a rich store of role-models for emulation and was part of the culture-changing legacy of Imperial rule.

The perceptions of the Roman past which Gildas stated overtly were ones which recognized change, indeed loss, and perhaps provoked regret and wonder. The overwhelming power of the Roman army is repeatedly demonstrated in his text.⁶⁷ The technological capability made manifest on the landscape – the construction of great walls and fortresses, the creation of urban centres – provided silent testimony to an absent empire.⁶⁸ Its benefits

⁶⁵ *DEB*, I.10,2.

⁶⁶ *DEB*, II.38,2, *ut bene quidam nostrum ait*, 'as one of us well says' (cf. *GRB*, pp. 37, 105). We may compare another such quotation (source as yet unidentified) in *DEB*, III.92,3 (cf. *GRB*, pp. 69, 133: *sicut bene quidam nostrorum ait*, 'one of us is right to say'): for discussion of this passage, see Dumville, 'The idea of government', pp. 196–7.

⁶⁷ *DEB*, I.4–7 (conquest), 9–12 (anti-Christian persecution), 14–18 (defeat of barbarians). Of course, all this is tempered by repeated remarks about the moral inadequacies of the Britons.

⁶⁸ *DEB*, I.3,2, 15, 18, 19, 24, 26,2.

were defence of the frontiers, internal peace, and prosperity.⁶⁹ Seaborne trade, bringing foreign luxuries, had entered southern Britain via Thames and Severn but no longer did so (of the more modern, lesser trade reaching the west coast from the Mediterranean Gildas wrote nothing in this text).⁷⁰ In sum, Gildas could see and sense the benefits of Empire, now lost; but the history of Britain's involvement could not be accurately chronologized, and in any case other imperatives affected the management of history.

We may detect a significant inner tension in Gildas's senses of identity. But it is very difficult to know whether he could recognize or deliberately articulate them. For the conflict which concerned Gildas was a universal one, between truth and falsehood, good and evil, a conflict which had temporally and geographically local realisations of lesser (if pressing) importance. His religion may be held to have provided the dominant element of his self-identification and the key to his attitude to the Britons at large.

One other very important clue to Gildas's formation resides in the style of his Latin and in his mode of exposition. In a famous article published in 1984, Michael Lapidge identified Gildas as the beneficiary of a conventional advanced Roman education, designed to prepare its recipients for public life.⁷¹ As the century 450–550 advanced, such an education was harder to obtain since its *raison d'être* was disappearing as a result of changes in governance. If Gildas was educated in Britain – this cannot be proved, even though there is no evidence to the contrary – then the implication is that in those decades there was still a conventional, Roman-style, career to be had

⁶⁹ These are referred to through (above all) the negative opposites: see *DEB*, I.19,3–4.

⁷⁰ *DEB*, I.3,1 (and cf. n. 48, above).

⁷¹ M. Lapidge, 'Gildas's Education and the Latin Culture of sub-Roman Britain', in *GN4*, pp. 27–50.

in public life.⁷² If Gildas lived from, say, the 490s to 570, publishing *De excidio Britanniae* around 540, we might deduce that in the first two decades of the sixth century, a hundred years after the presumed end of Imperial rule in Britain, a society and governmental structure still existed which was based closely on the Roman heritage.⁷³ We must account this a significant dimension of Gildas's cultural identity.

Disputes about the dating of our author and his *magnum opus* have been a characteristic of Gildasian scholarship during the last generation. What has become apparent is that attempts to revise the received chronology have derived very largely from an assumption that Britain must have kept in step, in its cultural and administrative history, with the rest of the (former) Western Roman empire. It is not necessary to make this assumption. There are many and various ways in which the British experience of the fifth century and the sixth differed from the fates of Continental neighbours.⁷⁴

Whether what Gildas represented survived another generation or two is a moot point. In his own day, we must suppose, there was an audience – both lay and ecclesiastical – capable of understanding his prose and his message. But the further changes which affected Britain from about 550 may have removed, or begun to remove, the *raison*

⁷² For argument in qualification of this analysis, see the review by T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 12 (1986), 115–20.

⁷³ What has been discovered by excavation at Wroxeter might be held to provide a material context: R. White and P. Barker, *Wroxeter. The Life and Death of a Roman City* (Stroud, 1998); P. Barker *et al.*, *The Baths Basilica, Wroxeter. Excavations 1966–90*, 2nd ed. (London, 1999); G. Webster, *The Roman Baths and Macellum at Wroxeter. Excavations, 1955–85* (London, 2000), and *The Legionary Fortress at Wroxeter. Excavations, 1955–85* (London, 2002).

⁷⁴ E. A. Thompson, *Romans and Barbarians. The Decline of the Western Empire* (Madison, WI, 1982), especially pp. 238–48 (notes on pp. 305–7), and *Saint Germanus*. See also B. Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford, 2005), and P. Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (London, 2005).

d'être of the secular educational system which produced him. He himself had entered religion (and, eventually, monastic life), and the age of monastic enthusiasm was about to begin in British Britain.⁷⁵

One is bound to think of Cassiodorus.⁷⁶ The First Minister of the 'post-Roman' Gothic government of Italy had received a conventional Roman education, as had his many colleagues and correspondents in King Theoderic's reign. But it is very apparent from his writing that Cassiodorus could see the arriving end of the world in which he had been nurtured and trained. While Gildas's mission was to recall the Britons from sin, itself no modest ambition, that of Cassiodorus in monastic retirement was nothing less than the salvation of the essentials of Roman civilization by transmitting these via the Church to future generations.⁷⁷ If Gildas succeeded in persuading many Britons to opt out of secular life,⁷⁸ he was no doubt hastening or completing the demise of the social, governmental, and educational framework within which he himself was formed. In the view of both men, Christianity provided the route to the future; but perhaps Gildas would have been more justified in doubting or at least fearing for the survival of that religion in his country.

By degrees, in various ways and at various speeds, the various regions of the post-Imperial West adapted to new realities. In some regions and times, the withdrawal from Empire was deliberate. In

⁷⁵ Cf. Dumville, 'The Origins'.

⁷⁶ J. J. O'Donnell, *Cassiodorus* (Berkeley, CA, 1979); J. Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy* (Oxford, 1993). E. K. Rand, *Founders of the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA, 1928), pp. 240–50, is still well worth reading.

⁷⁷ *Cassiodori Senatoris Institutiones*, 2nd. ed., ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1961). For translations see *An Introduction to Divine and Human Readings, by Cassiodorus Senator*, trans. L. W. Jones (New York, 1946), and *Cassiodorus: Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning on the Soul*, trans. J. W. Halporn (Liverpool, 2004).

⁷⁸ Dumville, 'The Origins'.

others it was achieved by violence or flowed from the collapse of Imperial governance. What is certain, however, is that recognisably post-colonial results are to be observed in the 'sub-Roman' contexts of the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries.⁷⁹ We need to read our sources, and study the history, language, and material culture of post-Imperial successor-societies, with an awareness both of that fact and the rich body of comparative experience available to us. The work of Gildas, providing a passionate post-colonial voice of great richness, is an excellent place to begin this journey.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ I have used this term in my papers 'Sub-Roman Britain' and 'The Idea of Government': it still seems quite apposite, although there appears to be scope for misunderstanding. See the recent discussion by K. R. Dark, 'Back to "The Dark Ages"? Terminology and Preconception in the Archaeology of Fifth- to Seventh-century Britain', *The Journal of Celtic Studies* 4 (2004), 193–200.

⁸⁰ I am obliged to Ben Snook for the invitation to contribute this article, albeit at quite short notice to substitute for a paper which failed to materialize. It is a pleasure to publish in this context about an author whose work I taught in Cambridge for many years. I dedicate it (without permission) to Neil Wright, *sine quo non*.

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Exeter, Cathedral Library MS. 3501, known as the Exeter Book,¹ is an anthology of Old English poetry that preserves about twenty percent of the total surviving corpus of Old English poetry which was copied some time between 950 and 1000.² The manuscript's origin is unknown; however, this has not hindered scholars to at least suggest varying possibilities.³ The first account of the manuscript appears in

¹ For descriptions of the manuscript see: R. W. Chambers, M. Förster, and R. Flower, *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry* (London, 1933); P. W. Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: a Tenth-Century Cultural History* (Woodbridge, 1993); *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: an Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501*, ed. B. J. Muir, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Exeter, 2000). For a shorter, yet indispensable description of the manuscript see N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), p. 153 (no. 116).

² R. Gameson, 'The Origin of the Exeter Book of Old English Poetry', *ASE* 25 (1996), 135–85, at 135. Various dates have been suggested ranging from 950–1000. Conner (*Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, p. 94) suggests the earliest date of 950 but before 968, whilst K. Sisam suggests 970–1000 ('The Exeter Book' in his *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 97–107 (at 99). Others have stayed within Ker's date s. x² (*Catalogue*, p. 153).

³ See especially Conner (*Anglo-Saxon Exeter*) who suggests that the manuscript was copied at Exeter. Richard Gameson elaborately argues for either a Glastonbury or Christ Church, Canterbury origin ('The Origin', pp. 179–85; also see a reply to Gameson's article in P. W. Conner, 'Exeter's Relics, Exeter's Books', *Essays on Anglo-Saxon and Related Themes in Memory of Lynne Grundy*, ed. J. Roberts, J. Nelson and J. Laughland, King's College London Medieval Series 17 (London, 2000), 117–56). For a more recent publication arguing also for a Glastonbury origin see, R. Butler, 'Glastonbury and the Early History of the

Bishop Leofric's inventory which records the codex as 'i. mycel englisc boc be gehwilcum þingum on leoðwisan geworht'.⁴

The poems are written in Square minuscule by a single scribe and presented like prose with 21–3 long lines per folio.⁵ The beginnings of poems are indicated variously throughout the manuscript. In some, the scribe separates one poem from another by utilising a large decorated initial with large block-capitals for running titles together with a space above. In others, the scribe sometimes uses only a large initial to separate a poem with or without space above it.⁶ In poems

Exeter Book', *Old English Literature in its Manuscript Context*, ed. J. T. Lionarons, Medieval European Series 5 (Morgantown, 2001), 173–215. Joyce Hill ('The Exeter Book and Lambeth Palace Library MS 149: the Monasterium of Sancta Maria', *ANQ*, N.S., 1 (1988), 4–9) suggests a Crediton origin (agreeing with Flower; Chambers *et al.*, *The Exeter Book*, pp. 83–90), whilst later she favours a Glastonbury origin, with Crediton as runner-up, but ultimately, like Gameson, regards its origin as unknown (J. Hill, 'Anglo-Saxon Scholarship and Viking Raids: the Exeter Book Contextualised', *Revue de Philologie* 25 (1998), 9–28, at 19; see also Gameson, 'The Origin', p. 179).

⁴ 'One large book in English about various things composed in verse'. All translations are my own unless noted. For editions of Leofric's inventory see Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, 226–35, and M. Lapidge, 'Surviving Booklists from Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: Basic Readings*, ed. M. P. Richards (New York and London, 1994), pp. 87–167, at pp. 132–9. Also see M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 139–40; however, the Exeter Book is not listed in his inventory because he only includes manuscripts that were intended for scholarly use, excluding those which were meant for liturgical use and those written in the vernacular (p. 133). For an assessment of the manuscripts within the inventory see E. M. Drage, 'Bishop Leofric and Exeter Cathedral Library Chapter (1050–1072): a Reassessment of the Manuscript Evidence' (unpubl. DPhil dissertation, Oxford Univ., 1978).

⁵ See Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, pp. 48–86.

⁶ See Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, I, pp. 16–25 and 27–8. See also Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, pp. 77–80, and for ornamented initials in conjunction with booklet divisions see pp. 129–47.

that are divided into sections,⁷ the scribe always uses a large initial to indicate the beginning of sections with a space above, and sometimes capitalizes the rest of the word to distinguish it from the text on the page. The scribe did not sustain a great degree of consistency when choosing how initials should be copied in the manuscript, but made certain that breaks between poems, or within poems, were visible.

Small capitals also appear within the poems. Most of these capitals are preceded by a point or a space.⁸ Many of the letters which are capitalized and not pointed are either proper names or certain letters, especially the long *i*. Undoubtedly, the long *i* is the most common since it is frequently capitalized when it begins a word in order to distinguish it from other letters containing minims such as *m* and *n*. Those capitals that are preceded by points are generally regarded as being emphatic grammatical or rhetorical divisions which may indicate where one should pause whilst reading, or where a sense unit ends, in order to promulgate a particular reading of the text.⁹

The punctuation within the Exeter book has not received a considerable amount of scholarly attention, which is partly due to the lack of a consistent agreement concerning the use and importance of punctuation marks in manuscripts collectively.¹⁰ With the exception

⁷ Muir discusses the sectional divisions at length (*The Exeter Anthology*, I, pp. 16–25). See also K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse*, CSASE 4 (Cambridge, 1990), p. 157, n. 9.

⁸ *The Exeter Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, ASPR 3 (New York and London, 1936), pp. lxxvi–lxxxii, print a list of small capitals in the manuscript, but the list is not reliable; see O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, pp. 156–7, n. 5. For a general account of the development of spacing in manuscripts see P. Saenger, *Space between Words: the Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford, 1997).

⁹ M. B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: an Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Aldershot, 1992), pp. 70–2.

¹⁰ O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, p. 158.

of full editions, most descriptions of the punctuation practices are located in what are labelled as 'critical editions' of individual poems; however, even these editions have varied and inadequate descriptions that frequently offer broad, rather than meticulous details.¹¹ T. P. Dunning and A. J. Bliss provide the most detailed study of the punctuation in *The Wanderer*.¹² Here, not only do they explain the punctuation in the poem, but also combine their study to explain the punctuation practices found in the Vercelli Book (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare, MS CXVII), Junius 11 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11) and the Nowell Codex (London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A. xv). Despite finding regular pointing patterns in the other major poetic codices, Dunning and Bliss found that the punctuation in the Exeter Book seems to not to follow any particular pattern (e.g. metrical or structural), but rather conclude:

It cannot be claimed that the punctuation is fully systematic; on the other hand, it is far from being random. With a very limited range of symbols at his command, the scribe has chosen to do three things: to mark out sections in the development of the poem; to call attention to sequences of

¹¹ The most recent account of the punctuation practices in the Exeter Book can be found in Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, I, 28–9. Muir's account is not as detailed as Chamber's *et al.*, *The Exeter Book*; however, he does mention D. S. McGovern's article concerning the scratched punctuation marks in *The Ascension* and *Guthlac A* ('Unnoticed Punctuation in the Exeter Book', *MÆ* 52 (1983), 90–9). McGovern discusses many incised marks in these poems which have generally been unnoticed since they have been scratched into the surface of the folio very delicately. There are more marks which McGovern does not account for, especially some accent marks above certain letters, which I found during an examination of the manuscript in September 2005. A more thorough investigation of these marks is needed and I intend to publish an article on this subject titled, 'More Unnoticed Punctuation in the Exeter Book'.

¹² *The Wanderer*, ed. T. P. Dunning and A. J. Bliss (New York, 1969), pp. 4–11.

parallel clauses or phrases; and to indicate places where the reader might misconstrue the syntax.¹³

This explanation has been reasserted by subsequent research relating to other poems in the Exeter Book. Craig Williamson, in his edition of the Exeter Book Riddles supports this position,¹⁴ whilst more recently Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe has agreed, suggesting that the scribe must have copied the punctuation mechanically from a pre-existing exemplar.¹⁵ On the other hand, Rosemary Woolf posits that the pointing in *Juliana* is metrical not grammatical,¹⁶ which may be based on Max Förster's description since most of the points occur at the end of the b-verse.¹⁷ The most recent account of pointing in the Exeter Book is by Anne L. Klinck who analyses the pointing in the Elegies.¹⁸ Klinck, like Williamson and O'Keefe, counts the number of points and remarks that each text is punctuated differently, not following a specific 'system', stating, 'except where they [the points]

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁴ *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book*, ed. C. Williamson (Chapel Hill, 1977), p. 18. He includes very useful appendices that include all of the accents, small capitals, and more impressively punctuation marks. I have compared his count of punctuation with mine and found that he has included all points except three: Riddle 77 (Williamson 75) *beurigena* .; Riddle 78 (Williamson 76) *willa* .; Riddle 93 (Williamson 90) *style . smeare*.

¹⁵ *Visible Song*, p. 163; Sisam, 'The Exeter Book', pp. 97–8.

¹⁶ *Juliana*, ed. R. Woolf (London, 1966), p. 2.

¹⁷ Chambers *et al.*, *The Exeter Book*, p. 61. My count of the number of points in *Juliana* occurring at the end of the b-verse is 84, whilst those at the end of the a-verse are 27. These numbers do not reflect those points that are in the middle of a line, made by a later hand, or separate runes.

¹⁸ *The Old English Elegies: a Critical Edition and Genre Study*, ed. Anne L. Klinck (Montreal, Kingston, London and Ithaca, 1992), pp. 21–6. Klinck includes the following poems as elegies: *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *The Riming Poem*, *Deor*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, *Resignation*, *Riddle 60*, *The Husband's Message*, and *The Ruin*.

are designed to mark off some kind of rhetorical figure, the points coincide with long-line endings, and the more emphatic ones are followed by small capitals'.¹⁹

A recent investigation into the punctuation practices of *Beowulf* has found that the punctuation may not be as 'inconsistent' as modern scholars think.²⁰ Daniel Donoghue investigated the pointing in *Beowulf* and found that seventy per cent of the points fall at the beginning of what he calls the 'a-clause', or those points which fall at the end of the b-verse of the previous line (or at the beginning of the a-verse).²¹ From that total, he found that seventy per cent of those points precede a clause-initial dip.²² These statistics, however, are not definitive since Donoghue reveals that both scribe A and B point before a-clauses at notably different rates.²³ Donoghue also found correlations between the pointing before a clause dip and verse grammar. He suggests that the scribes may have used punctuation to signal to a reader clause boundaries, but sometimes when verse grammar alone signals the beginning of a new clause, such as in Siever's type A3 or in Bliss's 'light' half-lines,²⁴ then the grammar

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁰ See D. Donoghue, 'A Point Well Taken: Manuscript Punctuation and Old English Poems', *Inside Old English: Essays in Honour of Bruce Mitchell*, ed. J. Walmsley (Malden, Oxford and Victoria, 2006), pp. 38–58. See also his *Style in Old English Poetry: the Test of the Auxiliary*, Yale Studies in English 196 (New Haven and London, 1987), pp. 92–9.

²¹ Donoghue, 'A Point Well Taken', pp. 51–2.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 52. Donoghue defines a clause dip as 'a run of metrically unstressed syllables at the beginning of a clause, and it typically contains semantically light words such as conjunctions, personal pronouns, adverbs and auxiliaries' (p. 52).

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 53. These rates are seventy and fifty percent respectively.

²⁴ See E. G. Stanley, 'Initial Clusters of unstressed syllables in half-lines of *Beowulf*', *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture presented to*

itself denotes the beginning of a new clause which may have made graphic cues redundant.²⁵ Donoghue has also suggested that the auxiliary verb may serve as a visual cue for a reader and indicate where clauses end allowing him/her to assemble the clauses into a coherent order.²⁶ Although Donoghue recognized that punctuation served other roles in Old English manuscripts, since scribes did not always use the same types of punctuation marks which were employed in Latin manuscripts, there is much more work that remains to be pursued further.

Whilst there is a substantial amount of evidence suggesting that there was no set 'system' that punctuation followed, it may perhaps be better to view medieval punctuation practices not in terms of modern practices, which are based predominantly on grammatical rules, but as a tool that medieval scribes and readers used in order to disambiguate sentences, to elucidate sense, and to direct a reader to a particular interpretation of a text.²⁷ This may account for the inconsistency that is commonly thought to have been prevalent within the Exeter Book and in vernacular verse in general.

Certainly, there is more work to do in order to develop a full understanding about how the punctuation within the poems functions, and its relationship to how the punctuation contributes to the way in which the poems were read and understood by their audience. I hope this paper will contribute in a small way to this investigation by examining the metrically punctuated passage in *The*

Helmut Gneuss, ed. M. Korhammer (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 263–84; A. J. Bliss, *The Metre of Beowulf*, rev. edn. (Oxford, 1967).

²⁵ Donoghue, 'A Point Well Taken', p. 55.

²⁶ Donoghue, *Style in Old English*, pp. 94–5.

²⁷ Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, pp. 70–2.

Ascension which occurs in folios 14v to 15v.²⁸ This metrically punctuated passage of the poem has unfortunately not received as much scholarly attention as other features, such as the lacuna between folios 15v and 16r,²⁹ its literary style and imagery,³⁰ and its place within the 'Cynewulf canon'.³¹ In this paper I will discuss four issues: (1) the current research into the metrical pointing of vernacular verse; (2) the punctuation within *The Ascension*; (3) the

²⁸ I have used Muir's titles throughout this paper; the poem is commonly referred to as *Christ II* or *Christ A*. See Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, I, 63–78, and commentary in vol. II, 401–17.

²⁹ For evidence of the missing folio here see M. Trautmann, 'Berichtigungen, Erklärungen und Vermutungen zu Cynewulfs Werken', *Bonner Beiträge zur Anglistik* 23 (1907), 85–146; K. Jost, 'Crist 558–585', *ES* 27 (1946), 175–9; J. C. Pope, 'The Lacuna in the Text of Cynewulf's *Ascension* (*Christ II*, 556b)', *Studies in Language, Literature, and Culture of the Middle Ages and Later*, ed. E. B. Atwood and A. A. Hill (Austin, 1969), pp. 210–19; *idem*, 'Palaeography and Poetry: Some Solved and Unsolved Problems of the Exeter Book', *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. M. B. Parkes and A. G. Watson (London, 1978), pp. 25–63; Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, pp. 95–147, esp. 98–9; Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, II, 405–6.

³⁰ See E. R. Anderson, *Cynewulf: Structure, Style, and Theme in his Poetry* (London and Toronto, 1983).

³¹ The text of *The Ascension* is given in Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, I, 63–78; Muir's commentary is in vol. II, 401–17. Muir also has compiled a substantial bibliography of the poem (p. 902) with corresponding cross-references to his bibliography in vol. II (pp. 746–901). All subsequent line numbers are associated with this edition. The phrase 'Cynewulf canon' is taken from A. H. Olsen, *Speech, Song, and Poetic Craft: the Artistry of the Cynewulf Canon*, American University Studies Series IV, English Language and Literature 15 (New York, Berne and Frankfurt am Main, 1984). The canon is made up of poems bearing the runic signature 'CYNEWULF'. In *The Ascension* this signature can be found in ll. 358–368. Other poems with the runic signature in the Exeter Book include *Juliana*, whilst the other two, *Fates of the Apostles* and *Elene*, can be found in the Vercelli Book.

metrical punctuation within folios 14v to 15v; and (4) how the poem may have been read and why only a few lines were selected for this type of punctuation.

METRICAL POINTING IN OLD ENGLISH VERSE

The antecedent of metrical punctuation derives from the Latin grammars of antiquity.³² As far as we know it was influenced predominantly by the Latin psalmody, which divided verses into two equal members merging both meaning and form into parallel structures.³³ Its influence extended not only to Latin verse but was also transmitted later into copies of vernacular verse that used a variety of signals such as layout, space and punctuation to facilitate the reading and interpretation of texts.³⁴

The debate concerning transmission of metrical punctuation into Old English verse has been largely confined to problems related to Junius 11, since it is the only poetic codex punctuated metrically throughout.³⁵ Most discussions about the punctuation in Junius 11

³² For an analysis of punctuation in antiquity see both R. Müller, *Rhetorische und syntaktische Interpunktion: Untersuchungen zur Pausenbezeichnung im antiken Latein* (Tübingen, 1964) and E. O. Wingo, *Latin Punctuation in the Classical Age*, *Janua Linguarum Series Practica* 133 (The Hague, 1972), esp. pp. 158–63 for metrical punctuation. For a summary of most of comments on punctuation from classic and medieval grammarians see, M. Hubert, 'Corpus Stigmatologicum Minus', *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 37 (1970), 5–171.

³³ Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, p. 103 and pl. 43.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104; P. J. Lucas, 'The Metrical Epilogue to the Alfredian *Pastoral Care*: a postscript from Junius', *ASE* 24 (1995), 43–50, + 2 pls., at pp. 46–7; M. B. Parkes, 'Reading, Copying and Interpreting a Text in the Early Middle Ages', *A History of Reading in the West*, ed. G. Cavallo and R. Chartier, L. G. Cochrane trans. (Amherst, 1999), pp. 90–102 and 378–84, at p. 102.

³⁵ *Visible Song*, pp. 179–87; L. Lockett, 'An Integrated Re-Examination of the Dating of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 11', *ASE* 31 (2002), 141–73 + 12 pls., esp. 167–72; *Exodus*, ed. P. J. Lucas (Exeter, 1977), pp. 17–24.

have suggested that it was perhaps influenced by continental Latin models;³⁶ however, recently, Leslie Lockett has posited its influence may have been derived from manuscripts containing Germanic verse.³⁷ Focusing attention mainly on three main texts, the *Ludwigslied*,³⁸ the Saxon *Genesis*,³⁹ and two copies of the *Heliand*,⁴⁰ Lockett finds that the manuscripts containing these texts do not have metrical punctuation like Junius 11, but utilize a combination of space, punctuation and layout to indicate metrical divisions to the reader. Although this type of metrical division is different from Junius 11, Lockett argues that the metrical punctuation in Junius 11 may be the work of the scribe of an earlier copy of *Genesis B*; where one scribe consulting the Old Saxon *Genesis* may have added punctuation to *Genesis B*, which was then transmitted into the poems of Junius 11.⁴¹

³⁶ Lucas, *Exodus*, pp. 21–2. Lucas also finds similarities between the layout of verse and punctuation in the *Metrical Epilogue to Pastoral Care* which may have been influenced by Latin manuscripts ('The Metrical Epilogue', p. 49). See also, N. R. Ker, *The Pastoral Care: King Alfred's Translation of St. Gregory's Regula Pastoralis (MS Hatton 20 in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, MS Cotton Tiberius B.xi in the British Museum, MS Anhang 19 in the Landesbibliothek at Kassel)*, EEMF 6 (Copenhagen, 1956).

³⁷ Lockett, 'Integrated Re-Examination', pp. 169–72.

³⁸ Valenciennes, Bibliothèque de la Ville, 150 [143], s. ix/x; Lockett also examines the Old French sequence to Sainte Eulalie in this manuscript; however, I have not included it since it is written in Old French. For a description, partial transcription and partial translation of fol. 141v see, Parkes, *Pause and Effect*, pp. 236–7, and H. Fischer, *Schrifttafeln zum althodischen Lesebuch* (Tübingen, 1966), pl. 22 (= 141v and 142r).

³⁹ Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Pal. lat. 1447, s. ix.

⁴⁰ One is preserved in the Vatican manuscript above. For the other copy see, Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm. 25; Fischer, *Schrifttafeln*, pl. 17 (= 2r).

⁴¹ Lockett, 'Integrated Re-Examination', p. 171.

Alternatively, O’Keeffe suggests a didactic purpose for the metrical pointing in Junius 11, which may have followed the punctuation of earlier models of Latin verse.⁴² O’Keeffe notes that the pointing found in the other major poetic codices (Exeter Book, Vercelli Book, and Nowell Codex) is much more conservative than in Junius 11, asserting that Junius 11 represents an early ‘forward-looking’ model for the punctuation of eleventh-century Old English verse, which was later employed by scribes when copying religious vernacular verse.⁴³ This claim has not gone unchallenged. Lucas, reviewing O’Keeffe’s *Visible Song*, has questioned some of her more controversial arguments.⁴⁴ For instance, Lucas notes that if later scribes who were copying religious poetry adopted metrical pointing then why do eleventh-century religious poems such as *Gloria II* and those in the *Paris Psalter* have little or no punctuation?⁴⁵ Furthermore, Lucas argues that spacing is also an important indication of metrical division,⁴⁶ as in Germanic verse, which is not taken into consideration by O’Keeffe. If space was accounted for then an early example of metrical division would be the *Metrical Preface* to the *Pastoral Care*

⁴² O’Brien O’Keeffe, *Visible Song*, p. 186.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 185. O’Keeffe (p. 185, n. 72) provides some analogues of this kind of style of pointing in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 201 (s. xi^m) and London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. i (s. xi^{med}).

⁴⁴ P. J. Lucas, ‘Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse’ by Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe, *RES* 44 (1993), 401–3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 403. See also J. Brown, ‘Punctuation’, *A Palaeographer’s View: the Selected Writings of Julian Brown*, ed. J. Bately, M. P. Brown and J. Roberts with a preface by A. C. de la Mare (London, 1993), pp. 79–87. Brown emphasizes in the use of space as a form of punctuation in the first sentence of his description stating, ‘Punctuation is the use of spacing, conventional signs and certain typographical devices as aids to the understanding and correct reading, both silently and aloud, of handwritten and printed texts’ (p. 79).

(Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 20) written AD 890–7, which uses both space and punctuation to separate parts of the text into verse divisions.⁴⁷ However, O’Keeffe discounts spacing in this manuscript since ‘neither capitalization, pointing nor layout – distinguishes verse from prose’, and only analyses spacing as a method to separate the metrical from the prose preface.⁴⁸

The difficulty with both O’Keeffe’s and Lockett’s hypothesis about the transmission of metrical punctuation into Junius 11 is the absence of an exemplar. There is no means to prove or disprove that metrical punctuation was imported into Junius 11 from either Germanic or Latin models, or from a lost exemplar, which may or may not have had metrical punctuation. If we conclude that Junius 11 is based on a Germanic model of punctuation, then that model would almost certainly have been derived from Latin practices that were adopted for Germanic verse which were also prevalent in Anglo-Saxon texts during the same period. If we say that Junius 11 is based on a Latin model of punctuation, then the model would be emulating not only Latin verse, but more likely the Latin psalmody. There are no surviving exemplars for which we can say definitively that the punctuation in Junius 11 is unique to the vernacular verse of the eleventh century. If an exemplar existed that contained metrical punctuation, then O’Keeffe’s theory that Junius 11 represents a ‘forward-looking’ model for pointing verse could not be taken seriously, since there is a possibility that the exemplar would have been copied before the other major poetic codices. Furthermore, if we accept Lockett’s dating for Junius 11 to be c. 960 – c. 990 then the manuscript would be a contemporary of the Exeter Book, which

⁴⁷ Ker, *Catalogue*, no. 324; O’Brien O’Keeffe, *Visible Song*, pp. 77–95. O’Keeffe does not include a discussion of the spacing as a key feature for punctuating a text, but is mostly concerned with ‘graphic cues’.

⁴⁸ O’Brien O’Keeffe, *Visible Song*, p. 90.

would add further problems to O'Keeffe's theory since the Vercelli Book and Nowell codex are thought to have been produced later. Both theories could appear plausible if there was enough evidence for either claim; yet, I think that the origin of the metrical punctuation in Junius 11, or manuscripts containing poems which have metrical punctuation with no known exemplar (i.e. *The Ascension* poem in the Exeter Book), should perhaps continue to be left as a textual anomaly. On the other hand, the question that remains to be answered is why did the scribe or reader use metrical punctuation in a text, or in an entire manuscript? This question will be dealt with further in the discussion pertaining to the context of metrical punctuation in *The Ascension* below.

PUNCTUATION IN *THE ASCENSION*

The Ascension spans folios 14r to 20v, is made up of 427 lines of verse, and divided into four sections which are indicated by a large initial and a space above.⁴⁹ The beginning of the poem is indicated by the decorated initial 'N' with a running title of block-capitals: *NUDUGEORN LICE GÆST/gerynum*. The sections of the poem divide the narrative into what some have tended to believe are divisions of thought.⁵⁰ The purpose and source of the manuscript divisions have been questioned; however, Bernard J. Muir, the most recent editor of the manuscript, suggests that they almost certainly derive from the scribe's exemplar, rather than by authorial invention, and do not originate from 'aesthetic considerations'; otherwise one would expect some kind of consistency in their use.⁵¹

⁴⁹ The divisions occur on folios 15r, 16v, 18r and 19r.

⁵⁰ Muir provides a good summary of the positions held; see *The Exeter Anthology*, I, 16–25.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, I, 19–20.

According to my count, *The Ascension* contains 272 points which can be further divided into 60 ending on the b-verse and 31 ending on the a-verse, leaving 181 points unaccounted for. Out of the 181 points, however, 167 can be classified as later based on their position on the line, colour, shape and size. The remaining 14 points are those that appear on either side of runes, or 'runic points', which are used to separate runes from the rest of the text. Later points and 'runic points' are separated from the rest of the statistics otherwise they would skew the results. Since later points are sometimes used in the same way as scribal points, adding them to the total result would allow for a higher amount of punctuation to occur within some texts, and within specific lines. The 'runic points' can be thought of the same way, because some points can occur within the half-line or at the end of a half-line, which would provide imprecise statistics about where the concentrations of points occur.

Contrary to my count, O'Keeffe counts only 43 points within the entire poem.⁵² In *Visible Song*, she does not present us with her methodology for counting points, making it unknown how she may have come to her total.⁵³ Nevertheless, her count may have been influenced by Neil R. Ker's description of the manuscript who suspected that some folios were pointed by a later hand;⁵⁴ and thus, she may not have counted the punctuation on these folios. The later punctuation is not completely visible in the 1933 facsimile, which is

⁵² O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, p. 188. See pp. 188–9 for the tabulation of the pointing in the Exeter Book.

⁵³ In his review of *Visible Song*, Peter J. Lucas also shows a discrepancy found within O'Keeffe's count of punctuation in MS B of *The Battle of Brunanburh* (*Visible Song*, p. 401).

⁵⁴ Ker, *Catalogue*, 153; N. R. Ker, 'The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry', ed. R. W. Chambers, Max Förster and Robin Flower (Book Review), *MÆ* 2 (1933), 224–31.

indicated by Ker in his review of it, stating, 'in the facsimile small differences in the colour of the ink do not show up, and erasures are indicated only by a blank space. The reader will therefore find it hard to distinguish between alterations by the original scribe and alterations by a later hand, and between blank spaces due to a defect in the vellum, or other cause'.⁵⁵ Concerning the punctuation in *The Ascension*, he observes that the punctuation appears to be made by a later hand in folios 14v to 15v and 16v to 20r, which is distinguished by its colour, shape and position on the line.⁵⁶ Ker does not discuss the punctuation within *The Ascension* further, but confines his discussion to those points in *Christ in Judgement*.⁵⁷ Although Ker finds evidence for later punctuation found in folios 16v to 20r, I have only found later punctuation in folios 17r to 20r. Ker's identification of a second hand involved in the punctuation practices is useful for a description of the pointing practices generally found within the manuscript, and the extent to which a later reader may have used it, but the description unfortunately does not disclose whether all of the punctuation was made by a later hand, or whether it was added to the scribe's.

⁵⁵ Ker, 'The Exeter Book', p. 226.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 228. Other folios that he suggests were pointed by a later hand are 21r, 32v and 33r. In the new digital facsimile produced by Muir, although the images are superb, the differences mentioned by Ker are still unnoticeable, except for those occurring in *Guthlac A*, which are identified easily by the light coloured ink and their position at the bottom of the line (B. J. Muir and N. Kennedy (software), *The Exeter DVD: the Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry* (Exeter, 2006)).

⁵⁷ Known also as *Christ C* and *Christ III*, the title *Christ in Judgement* is taken from Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, I, 79–107; see commentary in vol. II, 418–434. All subsequent references to poems follow Muir's edition.

THE METRICAL PUNCTUATION IN *THE ASCENSION*

In this section, I hope to show that not all of the punctuation was made by a later scribe, but that some of it is, in fact, original. Additionally, I will discuss some of the places where the corrector either forgot to point, or places where he may have been confused and not punctuated due to his unfamiliarity with the original scribe's script or other cause.

The pointing in *The Ascension* was first described by Förster who noticed that the punctuation is metrical and unlike the other poems in the manuscript.⁵⁸ Krapp and Dobbie described the punctuation as 'regular' and that it resembles the pointing in Junius 11;⁵⁹ whilst Muir, has also noticed the metrical pointing and calls it 'verse-pointing', tabulating similar occurrences within the manuscript.⁶⁰ The tabulation of this type, and other types, of pointing in the folios is only a fraction of the analysis that is essential for an overall picture of how the punctuation was used. A more constructive, yet far from comprehensive, description is to count the number of points in each text, describe where they occur (either on the a- or b-verse), record the words that come before and after the point, and state whether the points are scribal or introduced by a later hand. I have appended to this paper a list of later points to encourage further analysis.⁶¹

⁵⁸ He also mentions those exceptions that are not pointed in ll. 45a, 52a, 71b, 106a. Förster also suggests that a point is missing on 77b, but I have not included this point in my count because it is replaced by heavy pointing (:7) to mark the end of a section and therefore not a metrical point (Chambers, *et al.*, *The Exeter Book*, p. 61).

⁵⁹ ASPR 3, xxi. ASPR also mentions the exceptions noted by Förster; see xxi–xxii.

⁶⁰ B. J. Muir, 'A Preliminary Report on a New Edition of the Exeter Book', *Scriptorium* 43 (1989), 273–288 + 8 pls., esp. 284.

⁶¹ See appendix A.

The metrically punctuated section of the poem occurs in folios 14v to 15r, and within it are 144 points. Out of these 144 points I suggest that 139 are by a later reader, whilst five are scribal. The characterising feature of the corrector's intervention in the pointing is the size and shape of the point, and just as important is its colour in contrast with the colour of the text written by the original scribe. The position on the line is not of importance here, because all of the points are located in the mid-line. The most obvious way to distinguish between the scribe and the later hand are the corrections made in folios 15v.12 and 15v.17 (fig. 1). In folio 15v.12, the corrector places an ϵ over an erased i giving *beorn* (previously *biorn*),⁶² and an Ω over *bidan* giving *bidon* (l. 101). In folio 15v.17, the corrector places an α over *ælbeorhte* giving *albeorhte* (l. 106) which only occurs once in the manuscript, whilst all other instances of the word within the manuscript retain the spelling *ælbeorhte*.⁶³ When examining the colour of the corrections in comparison with the colour of the ink of some of the points, it appears identical.

I have also compared the colour of the ink of the corrector with the other points within folios 14v to 15v, and with points before small capitals which were certainly pointed by the scribe prior to the corrector's intervention. The small capitals in question are **n** in *nu* (l. 73), **g** in *gewitan* (l. 94), and **ð** in *ða* (ll. 52a, 88a) and *ðæt* (l. 108a) (fig. 2). These capitals are distinguished by their size compared to the other words on the page. Most obvious are the words beginning with **ð** since the Exeter Book scribe seems to prefer pointing before words that begin with **ð** rather than **p**.⁶⁴ For the small capitals **n** and **g**, I

⁶² Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, I, 66.

⁶³ See also *The Ascension* l. 67a; *Christ in Judgement* ll. 14a and 62b; *The Canticles of the Three Youths* l. 52a (*Azarias*). See *Christ in Judgement* l. 410a for *allbeorhte*.

⁶⁴ *ða*, *ðonne*, and *ðæt* have some of the highest pointed to non-pointed ratios of 92/58, 48/51, 7/12 times respectively. Other words beginning with *ð* are

compared them to other words in the folio, especially words that begin the same letters, and saw that they appear larger than the others on the page. By examining the points that occur before the small capitals in the daylight and by artificial light it is clear that the points before the small capitals are lighter than the others and match the ink of the text.

Other factors to take into consideration are the shapes and sizes of the points. Although the shape and size of the points are an indication that another hand has intervened in the manuscript, they have considerable similarities between the scribe's, making them appear sometimes as scribal, whilst at other times noticeably different; therefore, the shape and the size of the points does not appear to profoundly suggest another hand was involved in punctuating the text.

Examining appendix A below, it is obvious that the corrector was a very competent reader of Old English verse. There are, however, five errors that he made occurring in ll. 45a, 52a, 71b, 81b and 109a.⁶⁵ The error in line 52a (fig. 3) is easily accounted for seeing as the corrector must have confused the point at the end of the hook of the scribe's *a* for a point.⁶⁶ The errors in ll. 71b, 81b and 109a are probably due to the corrector confusing the small wedge at the end of

pointed, but relatively few words beginning with \tilde{d} are not pointed. For example, compare the ratio of *ðæt* (above) with *pæt* which is 32/816. For a description of the \tilde{d} see, Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, p. 66.

⁶⁵ Förster suggests that there is an error in l. 77b, which I dismiss because it is replaced by heavy pointing since it occurs at the end of a section (see note 49 above). However, I include l. 81b because a point should be included at the end of *seleste*, but it is flanked by two points with a line under it. I think that this probably occurred after the corrector and was inserted by a later reader.

⁶⁶ This *a* is a characteristic of the Exeter Book scribe's hand; see Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, pp. 60–3.

the elongated tongue of *e* as a point (fig. 4). The instance in l. 109a must have resulted from the corrector's confusion since the same phrase *albeorbte englas* is pointed in l. 67. Another reason why this line may not have been pointed is due to the corrector overlooking it when he was writing the *a* over *æ*.⁶⁷

The error in l. 45a (fig. 5) is difficult to explain since the corrector did not put a point after *fulwiad̄*. The following verse *folc under roderum* (l. 45b) must have been understood to be a single metrical unit since it is pointed in l. 87b. The error may be due to the scribe not being able to cope with the line's metre since *ond fulwiad̄* is a metrically light verse (Bliss type d1a). This may also be another reason why the scribe failed to put a point at the end of l. 81b linking *pat seleste* and *ond ædeleste* (both are Bliss type d1a). These two lines are the only instances where *ond* precedes the first stressed word, whereas in ll. 50b and 86a *ond* is followed by another unstressed word. The scribe probably had difficulty in recognizing verses beginning with the single word *ond* in the dip as distinct verses, and I suspect the basis for this error was a result of the scribe's unfamiliarity with the *tironian nota* (abbreviation for *ond*) following a stressed word.

READING AND POINTING IN *THE ASCENSION*

The motivation behind metrically pointing ll. 42–117 is difficult to describe in terms of whether it was meant to be read aloud or silently, since there is no evidence to suggest how the poem was intended to be used. However, the narrative of the passage, the textual anomalies described above, and the corrector's intervention within other parts of this poem,⁶⁸ may suggest that it was used for both private reading and instructional purposes.

⁶⁷ See the discussion above.

⁶⁸ See McGovern, 'Unnoticed Punctuation'.

As noted previously, the metrical punctuation practices in the Latin psalmody greatly influenced the punctuation and layout of vernacular verse. Like the Latin psalmody, where metrical units indicated textual structure and voice intonation, vernacular verse may have been pointed according to the same principles in order for it to be performed in the classroom by young pupils or as a guide for the teacher to explain the text.⁶⁹ This is particularly evident in the classroom manuscripts of Notker Labeo (950–1022) who used both Latin and Old High German translations of Latin texts to teach pupils, whilst restructuring and pointing these texts in order to 'facilitate reading and comprehension by presenting words in an analytic and more logical sequence'.⁷⁰

One of the methods of punctuation used in Notker's texts pointed both Latin and vernacular texts into 'sense blocks', allowing larger or smaller phrasal units to be singled out for emphasis or instruction.⁷¹ These phrasal units were signalled by the varying height of the point on the line; the smallest unit was usually signalled by a low point, whilst the larger unit was signalled by a high point or more

⁶⁹ See A. Grotans, *Reading in Medieval St. Gall* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 245–8. See also, Parkes, 'Reading', pp. 91–6. On the psalms and education see P. Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West: from the Sixth to the Eighth Century*, trans. J. J. Contreni (Columbia, 1978); S. Reynolds, *Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric and the Classical Text*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 27 (Cambridge, 1996); G. H. Brown, 'The Psalms as the Foundation of Anglo-Saxon Learning', *The Place of the Psalms in the Intellectual Culture of the Middle Ages*, ed. N. van Deusen, SUNY Series in Medieval Studies (Albany, 1999), pp. 1–24; *idem*, 'The Dynamics of Literacy in Anglo-Saxon England', *Textual and Material Culture in Anglo-Saxon England: Thomas Northcoat Toller and the Toller Memorial Lectures*, ed. D. G. Scragg, Publications of the Manchester Centre for Anglo-Saxon Studies 1 (Woodbridge, 2003), pp. 183–212, esp. 194–207.

⁷⁰ Grotans, *Reading*, p. 223.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 224–6. This is characterized by Grotans as 'syntactical punctuation'.

elaborate points at the end of chapters or sections.⁷² Another method was to signal performance cues using the *positurae* which acted as structural performance markers that were employed in manuscripts used for the monastic *lectio* and in Notker's major secular translation/commentaries.⁷³ Anna Grotans suggests that these performative commentaries may have served as guides for the teacher, 'One can imagine Notker, or any other *magister*, standing in front of his pupils, dictating and explaining the text. Whenever a good example, let us say, for the structure of a period came up, Notker would take the time to point it out and then practise its performance'.⁷⁴

Although Notker's texts were mainly Latin texts with vernacular commentaries, one can observe and visualize similar practises and purposes of punctuation operating within *The Ascension*. The metrical pointing itself attests to this as identifying and separating for the reader the basic semantic and compositional unit: the half-line. Each half-line was punctuated on its own, but those that were not punctuated may have been thought of as too short a unit to be analysed independently and therefore attached to other lines to facilitate the overall explanation of the lines. This was part of the classroom process of reading and understanding Latin texts,⁷⁵ and appears to be valid as well in Old English verse as it was also practised in vernacular verse on the continent.⁷⁶

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 235–8.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 247–8.

⁷⁶ See the discussion above on Lockett's analysis of Germanic verse pointing and its relationship with the metrical pointing in Junius 11.

The Ascension must have been a text that was used for some type of instruction for monks.⁷⁷ The poem, according to Conner, is part of a series of poems which reflect the Benedictine Reform's intellectual prowess in their tone and use of sources.⁷⁸ The metrically punctuated selection is particularly important not only because it describes the moments before and after Christ's ascent and descent from heaven, but it is important for its instruction to preach and proclaim the gospel in order to save the souls of sinners. This direction given by Christ, so vividly depicted by Cynewulf, is not only the foundation of Christian faith, but is furthermore understood in Anglo-Saxon England as an evangelical directive to instruct Christians in the interpretation of holy writings.

The importance of going forth and proclaiming (or teaching) the gospel is emphasized in both biblical and homiletic discourse; for example, Paul, in Ephesians 4:7–13, discusses the importance of teaching the gospel in order to educate and convert the masses to attain unity, whilst several homilies of Ælfric emphasize the importance of teaching the gospel. In his preface to his *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric stresses that he would be guilty before God 'gif ic nolde oðrum mannum cyðan ... þa godspellican soþfæstnysse þe he

⁷⁷ For an argument that the Exeter Book wisdom poems were used for instructional purposes see, M. D. C. Drout, 'Possible Instructional Uses of the Exeter Book Wisdom Poems: a Benedictine Reform Context', (forthcoming). I am grateful to Professor Drout for providing me with a copy of his paper before its publication in the proceedings of the Leorningcræft conference at the University of Udine.

⁷⁸ See Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, pp. 162–4. See M. J. B. Allen and D. G. Calder, *Sources and Analogues of Old English Poetry: the Major Latin Texts in Translation* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 78–83; J. N. Garde and B. J. Muir, 'Patristic Influence and the Poetic Intention in Old English Religious Verse', *Journal of Literature and Theology* 2 (1988), 49–68; J. N. Garde, *Old English Poetry in Medieval Christian Perspective* (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 131–58.

sylf gecwæð, and eft halgum lareowum onwreah'.⁷⁹ In the homily *Dominica II post pasca* (Italics), Ælfric also emphasizes the role of the teacher as the representative of God, delivering people from the devil through religious instruction, stating:

Se bið to strangum geteald, seþe wiðstent deofles lare; se bið untrum, seðe on leahtrum fylð; Ac se lareow bið unscyldig gif he þæt folc mid lare gewissað, and him wið God geðingað.⁸⁰

It is perhaps the significance of teaching the gospel that the Anglo-Saxon corrector placed emphasis on when pointing *The Ascension*. Since there is a folio missing from the text there is no means to determine how far the pointing would have continued.⁸¹ Although this paper dealt with the pointing of a small portion of *The Ascension*, there are more possibilities in coming to terms with how Anglo-Saxons used and viewed texts within their manuscript contexts if more attention was paid to the analysis of punctuation. More scholars are becoming aware of the importance of punctuation within prose,⁸² but much more has yet to be done with verse.⁸³

⁷⁹ Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies: the First Series*, ed. P. Clemoes, EETS ss 17 (London, 1997), 176. 'If I would not make known to other men ... the truth of the gospel which he himself proclaimed, and afterwards revealed to holy teachers'.

⁸⁰ Clemoes, Ælfric, p. 314. 'He will be reckoned strong who withstands the teaching of the Devil; he will be weak who falls into sins. But the teacher will be guiltless if he directs the people with instruction, and mediates for them with God'. Abbreviations in the text have been silently extended, and I have changed the *punctus elevatus* to a comma. The importance of the teacher as the one who guides others to salvation is reflected in many other texts in Anglo-Saxon England and a full description is beyond the scope of this paper. I hope to come back to this topic in the future.

⁸¹ Pope, 'The Lacuna', p. 216, posits that there are approximately 65 lines missing.

⁸² For the most recent analysis of punctuation within Wulfstan's homilies see, A. Orchard, 'Re-editing Wulfstan: Where's the Point?', *Wulfstan, Archbishop of*

APPENDIX A: LATER PUNCTUATION IN *THE ASCENSION*

Number	Folio	Line Number	Word before the Point	Word after the Point	Point Position
1	14v	42a	ealne	yrmenne	Middle of the Half-Line
2	14v	42b	grund	geond	Middle of the Half-Line
3	14v	43a	widwegas	weoredum	Middle of the Half-Line
4	14v	43b	cyðað	bodiað	Middle of the Half-Line
5	14v	44a	bremað	beorhtne	Middle of the Half-Line
6	14v	44b	geleafan	7	Middle of the Half-Line
7	14v	45b	roderum	hweorfað	Middle of the Half-Line
8	14v	46a	heofonum	hergas	Middle of the Half-Line
9	14v	46b	breotaþ	fyllað	Middle of the Half-Line
10	14v	47a	feogað	feondscape	Middle of the Half-Line

York: the Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference, ed. M. Townend, *Studies in the Early Middle Ages 10* (Turnhout, 2002), pp. 63–91; D. F. Johnson, 'Who Read Gregory's *Dialogues* in Old English?', *The Power of Words: Anglo-Saxon Studies presented to Donald G. Scragg on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. H. Magennis and J. Wilcox, *Medieval European Studies VIII* (Morgantown, 2006), pp. 171–204.

⁸³ I am grateful Professors Patrick Conner and Bernard Muir for their advice concerning many of the ideas presented in this paper. I would also like to thank Mr Francisco José Álvarez López for reading a draft of this article. I am especially grateful to Professor Peter Lucas who has helped me immensely by providing advice about the metrical pointing practices in medieval manuscripts. Any errors expressed in this paper are my own. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the Exeter Cathedral librarian Mr Peter Thomas and his assistant Michael Howarth for allowing me to examine the Exeter Book on numerous occasions and providing help whenever necessary.

11	14v	47b	dwæscað	sibbe	Half-Line
12	14v	48a	sawað	on	Middle of the Half-Line
13	14v	48b	manna	þurh	
14	14v	49a	sped	ic	Middle of the Half-Line
15	14v	49b	wunige	forð	
				7	Middle of the Half-Line
16	14v	50a	frofre		
17	14v	50b	healde	strengðu	
	14v-				Middle of the Half-Line
18	15r	51a	staþolfæstre	on	Middle of the Half-Line
19	15r	53a	gehyred	heofonengla	Middle of the Half-Line
20	15r	53b	þreat	weorud	
21	15r	54a	wlitescyne	wuldres	Middle of the Half-Line
22	15r	54b	aras	cwomun	
23	15r	55a	corðre	cyning	Middle of the Half-Line
24	15r	55b	gewat	þurh	
25	15r	56a	hrof	þær	Middle of the Half-Line
26	15r	56b	segun	þa	
27	15r	57a	gen	last	Middle of the Half-Line
28	15r	57b	weardedum	on	
29	15r	58a	þingstede	þengas	Middle of the Half-Line
30	15r	58b	gecorene	gesegon	

31	15r	59a	heahþu	hlaford	Middle of the Half-Line
32	15r	59b	stigan	godbearn	
33	15r	60a	grundum	him	Middle of the Half-Line
34	15r	60b	sefa	hat	
35	15r	61a	heortan	hyge	Middle of the Half-Line
36	15r	61b	murnende	þæs	
37	15r	62a	leofne	leng	Middle of the Half-Line
38	15r	62b	mostun	geseon	
39	15r	63a	swegle	song	Middle of the Half-Line
40	15r	63b	ahofun	aras	
41	15r	64a	unfancunde	æþeling	Middle of the Half-Line
42	15r	64b	heredum	lofedun	
43	15r	65a	liffuman	leohte	Middle of the Half-Line
44	15r	65b	gefegun	þe	
45	15r	66a	hælendes	heafelan	Middle of the Half-Line
46	15r	66b	lixte	gesegon	
47	15r	67a	ælbeorhte	englas	Middle of the Half-Line
48	15r	67b	twegen	fægre	
49	15r	68a	frumbearn	frætþum	Middle of the Half-Line
50	15r	68b	blican	cyninga	
51	15r	69a	wuldor	cleopedon	Middle of the

52	15r	69b	heahþu	wordum	Half-Line
53	15r	70a	wrætlicum	ofer	Middle of the
54	15r	70b	mengu	beorhtan	Half-Line
55	15r	71a	reorde	hwæt	Middle of the
56	15r	72a	galilesce	guman	Half-Line
57	15r	73a	geseoð	soðne	Middle of the
58	15r	73b	dryhten	on	Half-Line
59	15r	74a	faran	sigores	Middle of the
60	15r	74b	agend	wile	Half-Line
61	15r	75a	heonan	eard	Middle of the
62	15r	75b	gestigan	æþelinga	Half-Line
63	15r	76a	ord	mid	Middle of the
64	15r	76b	gedryht	ealra	Half-Line
65	15r	77a	fruma	fæder	Middle of the
66	15r	78a	þyslice	þreate	Half-Line
67	15r	78b	willað	ofer	Middle of the
68	15r	79a	gehliðu	hlaford	Half-Line
69	15r	79b	fergan	to	Middle of the
70	15r	80a	byrg	mid	Half-Line

71	15r	80b	gedryt	ealra	Middle of the
72	15r	81a	sigebearna	þæt	Half-Line
73	15v	82a	æþeleste	þe	Middle of the
74	15v	82b	stariað	7	Half-Line
75	15v	83a	geseoð	frætsum	Middle of the
76	15v	83b	blican	wile	Half-Line
77	15v	84a	þeah	eorðan	Middle of the
78	15v	84b	mægðe	sylfa	Half-Line
79	15v	85a	gesecan	side	Middle of the
80	15v	85b	herge	7	Half-Line
81	15v	86a	gedeman	dæda	Middle of the
82	15v	86b	gehwylce	þara	Half-Line
83	15v	87a	gefremedon	folc	Middle of the
84	15v	88a	weard bifangen] MS	wolcnum	Half-Line
85	15v	88b	bifengun	heahengla	Middle of the
86	15v	89a	cyning	ofer	Half-Line
87	15v	89b	upp	haligra	Middle of the
88	15v	90a	helm	hyht	Half-Line
89	15v	90b	geniwad	blis	Middle of the
90	15v	91a	burgum	þurh	Half-Line

91	15v	91b	cyme	gesæt	Half-Line
92	15v	92a	sighremig	on	Middle of the Half-Line
93	15v	92b	hand	ece	
94	15v	93a	eadfruma	agnum	Middle of the Half-Line
95	15v	94a	gongan	to	Middle of the Half-Line
96	15v	94b	Hierusalem	hæleð	
97	15v	95a	hygerofe	in	Middle of the Half-Line
98	15v	95b	burg	geomormode	
99	15v	96a	geomormode	þonan	Middle of the Half-Line
100	15v	96b	nyhst	up	
101	15v	97a	stigende	eagum	Middle of the Half-Line
102	15v	97b	segun	hyra	
103	15v	98a	wilgifan	þær	Middle of the Half-Line
104	15v	98b	hring	torne	
105	15v	99a	bitolden	wæs	Middle of the Half-Line
106	15v	99b	treowlufu	hat	
107	15v	100a	heortan	hredet] MS	Middle of the Half-Line
108	15v	100b	weoll	hreder	
109	15v	101a	breostsefa	beorn	Middle of the Half-Line
110	15v	101b	þær	bidon] MS	
				bidan	Middle of the Half-Line
				þegnas	

111	15v	102a	þrymfulle	þeodnes	Middle of the Half-Line
112	15v	102b	gehata	in	
113	15v	103a	byrig	tyn	Middle of the Half-Line
114	15v	103b	gen	swa	
115	15v	104a	bibead	swegles	Middle of the Half-Line
116	15v	104b	agend	ærþon	
117	15v	105a	stige	ealles	Middle of the Half-Line
118	15v	105b	waldend	on	
119	15v	106b	cwoman	eorla	
120	15v	107a	eadgiefan	englas	Middle of the Half-Line
121	15v	108a	cweden	swa	Middle of the Half-Line
122	15v	108b	secgað	þæt	
			albeorhte] MS		Middle of the Half-Line
123	15v	109a	ælbeorhte	englas	
124	15v	109b	togeanes	in	Middle of the Half-Line
125	15v	110a	tid	heapum	
126	15v	110b	cwoman	sigan	Middle of the Half-Line
127	15v	111a	swegle	þa	Middle of the Half-Line
128	15v	111b	mæst	geworden	
129	15v	112a	wuldre	wel	Middle of the Half-Line
130	15v	112b	gedafenað	þæt	
131	15v	113a	blisse	beorhte	Middle of the

132	15v	113b	gewerede	in	Half-Line
133	15v	114a	burg	þegnas	Middle of the
134	15v	114b	cwoman	weorud	Half-Line
135	15v	115a	wlitescyne	gesegon	Middle of the
136	15v	115b	wilcuman	on	Half-Line
137	15v	116a	heahsetle	heofones	Middle of the
138	15v	116b	waldend	folca	Half-Line
139	15v	117a	feorhgiefan	frætsum	Middle of the
140	17r	190a	magutudre	sipþan	Half-Line
141	17r	192a	god	us	Middle of the
142	17r	198a	Iudeas	ongietan	Half-Line
143	17r	198b	meahtan	In	Middle of the
144	17r	200b	eorþan	dyrne	Half-Line
145	17r	201a	degol	þam	Middle of the
146	17r	203b	oncnowan	þe	Half-Line
147	17r	204a	fremede	freobearn	Middle of the
148	17r	205a	mislic	geond	Half-Line
149	17r	206a	fugel	flyges	Middle of the
150	17r	207a	eard	up	Half-Line
					Middle of the

					Half-Line
					Middle of the
151	17r	208a	strang	þone	Half-Line
152	17r	210b	sohte	wende	Middle of the
					Half-Line
153	17r	215a	fugles	flyht	Middle of the
154	17v	227b	fela	singan	Half-Line
155	17v	229b	wel	hlude	
156	17v	243b	bryttað	Nyle	
157	18r	264b	her	æfyllendra	Middle of the
					Half-Line
158	18v	304a	gefea	æþelinges	Middle of the
159	19r	323b	unholdan	wunde	Half-Line
160	19r	328a	wærlice	wearde	Middle of the
161	19v	347b	astag	In	Half-Line
					Middle of the
162	19v	351a	ondræde	dom	Half-Line
					Middle of the
163	19v	358a	cwacað	gehyreð	Half-Line
164	19v	358b	mæðlan	rodera	Middle of the
					Half-Line
165	19v	359a	ryhtend	sprecan	Middle of the A-
			beheofiað] MS be		Verse
166	20r	388a	heofiað	þonne	
167	20r	392b	ondlean	þonne	

Statistics of Points made Later

Folios	End of the Line	Middle of the Half-Line	Middle of the A-Verse
14v-15v	66	73	
16r-20v	12	15	1
	78	88	1

APPENDIX B: MANUSCRIPT IMAGES⁸⁴

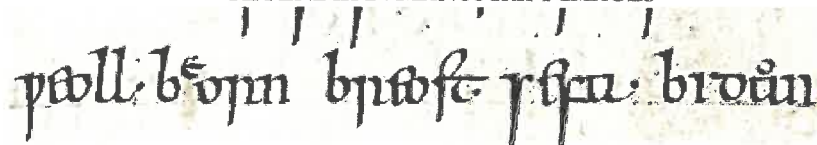


Fig. 1a

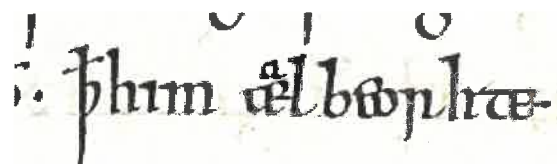


Fig. 1b



Fig. 2a

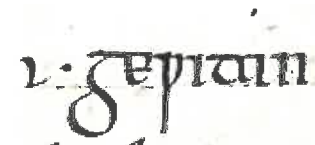
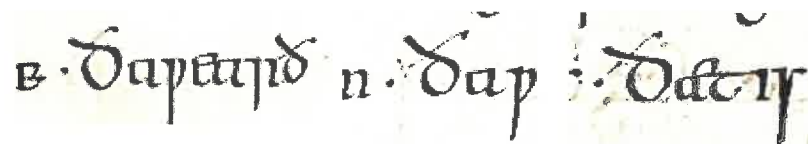


Fig. 2b



Figs. 2c-d

⁸⁴ I would like to thank the Exeter University Press for permission to reproduce the images in this article which are taken from The Exeter DVD: The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry edited and compiled by Bernard J Muir, University of Exeter Press 2006 (DVD).

·Dapauð Finninga· wez

Fig. 3

Fig. 4a

Fig. 4b

þhim ælbwyrta siglar

Fig. 4c

Fig. 5

An Eighth-Century Royal Conversation: Cathal mac Finnguini and Áed Allán at Tír dá Glás, AD 737

Denis Casey
Trinity Hall, Cambridge

In 737 the Annals of Ulster and the Annals of Tigernach report a rendezvous between Áed Allán, king of Cenél nÉogain and Cathal mac Finnguini, king of Munster: 'Dal iter Aedh nAlldan & Cathal oc Tír Da Glas' (*AU* 737.9).¹ This meeting could possibly have been the occasion of the attempted creation of an anti-Laigin alliance between Áed Allán of the Cenél nÉogain and Cathal mac Finnguini, king of Munster.² In order to understand the context of this meeting we must first examine the political and military events of the previous twenty years. We will begin by looking at Cenél nÉogain-Laigin relations

¹ *The Annals of Ulster (to AD. 1131): Part 1 (text and translation)*, eds. and trans. S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill, (Dublin, 1983); 'A meeting between Aed Allán and Cathal at Tír dá Glas'. The same entry is also found in the Annals of Tigernach: 'Dal eter Aedh n-Allan & Cathal mac Findgaine oc Tír Da Glass (*AT* 737.5)'; *The Annals of Tigernach*, ed. W. Stokes, *Revue Celtique* 16 (1895), 374–419; 17 (1896), 6–33, 119–263, 337–420; 18 (1897), 9–59, 150–97, 267–303 (reprinted Felinbach, 1993, 2 vols.). For the system of dating and numbering followed for the Annals of Tigernach see *CELT: Corpus of Electronic Texts*, <<http://celt.ucc.ie/published/G100002/index.html>> [accessed 19th December 2006].

² The name Munster has been used in this article for the medieval kingdom as it was roughly co-terminous with the modern province of Munster. In contrast, Laigin has been used instead of the modern province name Leinster due to the significant difference in the territory of each.

between 719 and 737 and then Munster-Laigin relations in roughly the same period.

CENÉL NÉOGAIN-LAIGIN RELATIONS 719–737

Beginning with the Cenél nÉogain, it is highly understandable that their king, Áed Allán, might have desired to challenge the Laigin. He may well have been following the political agenda of his father, Fergal mac Máele Dúin, who had pursued an aggressive policy towards the Laigin. In 719, for example, numerous chronicles report that the Laigin were attacked up to five times in the same year by the Uí Néill and the Annals of Inisfallen specifically claim that Fergal was responsible (*AI* 719; *AT* 719.7; *CS* s.a. 715; *AFM* s.a. 717).³ In 721 Fergal is recorded as having invaded the Laigin again. This time he is said to have exacted a cattle tribute (*bóruma*) and taken hostages (*AU* 721.8; *AT* 721.5; *CS* s.a. 717; *AFM* s.a. 717). The taking of hostages is rarely recorded prior to the tenth century (for example, the Annals of Inisfallen first record it in 907) and the noting of such an incident in 721 may suggest that the taking of hostages was an unusual occurrence worthy of note. However the entry is in Irish rather than Latin which may suggest that it is a later interpolation.⁴ The use of the

³ *The Annals of Inisfallen*, ed. and trans. S. Mac Airt, (Dublin, 1951). *Chronicum Scotorum: a Chronicle of Irish Affairs from the Earliest Times to A.D. 1135*, ed. and trans. W. M. Hennessy, RS 46, (London, 1866). *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters from the Earliest Times to the Year 1616*, ed. and trans. J. O'Donovan, 7 vols. (Dublin, 1848–51). *AU* is strangely silent with regard to this event yet *AU*, *AT*, *CS* and *AFM* all note an internal battle among the Laigin in the same year which may have been taken as a sign of weakness and prompted Uí Néill aggression.

⁴ *Cath Almaine*, ed. P. Ó Riain, Mediaeval and Modern Irish Series 25 (Dublin, 1978), p. xviii.

word *bóroma* further suggests that the entry may be influenced by later sagas such as *Cath Almaine*.⁵

In the following year Fergal was killed by the Laigin at the battle of Allen.⁶

Bellum Almuine .iii. Id. Decimbris die ui. feriē in quo ceciderunt Fergal mc. Maele Duin mc. Mhaile Fithrich mc. Aedha Uairidhnaich, .i. la Murchad mc. mBriain, & Conall Menn rex generis Coirpri, Clothgno m. Colggen, Dub da Crich, Flann m. Rogellnaich, Aedh Laigen m. Fithchellaig rex nepotum Maini, m. Muirgiso, Nuadhó m. Dunchada, Eicnech m. Colggen rex Orientalium, Fergal nepos Aithechtaí (*AU* 722.8).⁷

As well as following his father's policies, Áed may have harboured anti-Laigin sentiments due to the death of his father at their hands and desired revenge. In addition, an approximately 150-year-old alliance of the Cenél nÉogain and Cenél Conaill was broken during his reign.⁸ The years 727–34 saw warfare between the Cenél nÉogain and the Cenél Conaill (*AU* 727.2, 732.10, 733.3, 734.8) and it is possible that these attacks were an attempt to exact revenge for the

⁵ For a critical edition of this text see *ibid.*; for a text and translation of one recension see 'The Battle of Allen', ed. and trans. W. Stokes, *Revue Celtique* 24 (1903), 41–70.

⁶ Located five miles North-East of Kildare town, not to be confused with Ailenn (Knockaulin) which is also located in modern Co. Kildare, north of Old Kilcullen and 5 miles east of Kildare town.

⁷ 'The battle of Almain on the third of the Ides [11th] of December, the sixth feria, in which fell Fergal son of Mael Dúin, son of Mael Fithrich son of Aed Uairidnach, i.e. by Murchadh son of Bran; and Conall Menn king of Cenél Cairpri; Clothgna son of Colgu; Dub dá Crich; Flann son of Rogallach; Aed Laigen son of Fithchellaig, king of Uí Maine; the son of Muirgius; Nuada son of Dunchad; Eicnech son of Colgu, king of Airthir; Fergal grandson of Aithechda'.

⁸ T. Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695–743: the Rise and Fall of Dynasties', *Peritia* 16 (2002), 396–418, at 408.

possible abandonment of his father at Allen by the Cenél Conaill as no Cenél Conaill names appear in the list of the dead in the Annals of Ulster entry.⁹ This would have left Áed in an unenviable position in the early 730s whereby any desire for revenge against the Laigin was further hampered by the existence of a new enemy on his own borders.

MUNSTER-LAIGIN RELATIONS 715–737

An investigation of the relationship between Munster and the Laigin shows it to have been equally as stormy as that between the Cenél nÉogain and the Laigin. The sequence of events of approximately twenty years leading up to 737 show a general state of hostility between the two territories punctuated by occasional periods of peace and a single isolated example of cooperation.

In 715, after the death of Cellach Cúalann, Murchad mac Brain (of the Uí Dúnlainge) became king of the Laigin and attacked Caisel, the premier royal site of Munster (*AU* 715.4; *AT* 715.5). Nonetheless, in 721 Cathal and Murchad worked jointly and devastated Brega (*AU* 721.6; *AT* 721.3; *AI* 721.2; *AFM s.a.* 717). The Annals of Inisfallen, a chronicle of Munster origin, is the only compilation not to ascribe a part in this attack to Murchad, possibly in an attempt to portray Cathal as being in a stronger position than he actually was. This is in keeping with their general pro-Munster stance, as Cathal is recorded as one of only five kings of Munster who ruled Ireland after the introduction of Christianity (*AI* 721).¹⁰ The Annals of Inisfallen are also the only compilation to claim that Fergal mac Máele Dúin submitted to Cathal after this attack. This seems unlikely as not only did Cathal attack the territory of Síol nÁeda Sláine, who were the

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 408.

¹⁰ The reference is clearly retrospective as the inclusion of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn (*ob.* 847) and Brían Bórama (*ob.* 1014) demonstrates.

Southern Uí Néill rivals of the Cenél nÉogain for the kingship of Tara, and not Cenél nÉogain territory, but Fergal's powerbase was geographically distant from Munster and was not under direct pressure from the Munstermen.

During the late 720s the Laigin remained under pressure from the Uí Néill (*AT* 726.8; *AFM s.a.* 721) and indulged in a substantial amount of infighting, not only between the Uí Máil and the Uí Dúnlainge dynasties, but also among the Uí Dúnlainge themselves. This culminated in 728 in the victory of Fáelán mac Murchada at the battle of Ailenn and the assumption by him of his late father's position as king of the Laigin (*AU* 728.2; *AT* 728.2; *AFM s.a.* 722). Both the Uí Dúnlainge (*AI* 735; *AU* 735.3; *AT* 735.3; *AFM s.a.* 730) and the Uí Chennselaig (*AU* 732.12; *AT* 732.8; *AFM s.a.* 726) followed an anti-Munster policy in the early 730s which could feasibly have precipitated the meeting and a possible attempted alliance between Cathal and Áed.

There are two ways of viewing the mindset of Áed and Cathal as they approached the *dál*. The first suggests a convergence of interests, the second suggests that Cathal and Áed were involved in a wary standoff.

THICK AS THIEVES OR MUTUAL MISTRUST?

By the mid 730s Áed, having defeated the Cenél Conaill in a series of battles centering on Mag nÍtha,¹¹ was now in a position whereby he could turn to his Laigin interests. Cathal, conversely, was possibly feeling uncomfortable due to the pressure exerted on him by the Laigin. An alliance between the two may have resulted from the Cenél nÉogain desire for revenge and the Munster desire for a removal of the Laigin threat. Furthermore Áed may have sought a

¹¹ Mag nÍtha is located in modern Co. Donegal.

new alliance in order to replace that which he had broken with the Cenél Conaill. There was no way for Áed to know that the Cenél Conaill were to be permanently excluded from power, as were the Síl nÁeda Sláine, as demonstrated by the kingship of Tara regnal lists.¹² Áed may have felt that, although he had defeated the Cenél Conaill, the need for new alliances to consolidate his power was necessary, hence his creation of a northern alliance with the Airgíalla and perhaps a southern alliance with Munster.¹³ Áed's own standing within Cenél nÉogain can be viewed as a microcosm of that of Cenél nÉogain in Uí Néill politics. Áed's own people, Cenél Meic Erca, had only come to prominence under Áed's father, Fergal. Prior to that, the Cenél Feradaig had been the most powerful members of the Cenél nÉogain during the seventh century and the Cenél Meic Erca usually only featured in the annalistic record in defeat.¹⁴ Áed could not possibly have known that the Cenél Meic Erca would monopolize power within the Cenél nÉogain as effectively as the Cenél nÉogain would among the Northern Uí Néill. Effective political alliances and military success abroad could only have a beneficial effect on Áed's position and that of the Cenél Meic Erca within the Cenél nÉogain.

Alternatively the Laigin may possibly be viewed as a Munster-Uí Néill battleground. Both Áed and Cathal were powerful kings and, having reached a certain plateau in their careers, may have needed an outlet for their energies. They may have been reluctant to attack each other, fearing a mutually destructive war. Having come to this realization they may well have turned their attentions towards the Laigin reasoning that it was better to subdue this kingdom than to

¹² *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, ed. M. A. O'Brien (Dublin, 1962), pp. 124–5.

¹³ For the alliance with the Airgíalla see T. Charles-Edwards, 'The Uí Néill 695–743', 410–12; and 'The Airgíalla Charter Poem: The Legal Context', *The Kingship and Landscape of Tara*, ed. E. Bhreathnach (Dublin, 2005), pp. 100–23.

¹⁴ P. Ó Riain, *Cath Almaine*, p. xii.

fight each other. Naturally whoever subdued the Laigin would become more powerful still and would be able to exert pressure on the other. The *dál* of 737, therefore, may have been designed to reduce tensions by promoting a joint anti-Laigin policy to which both kings may or may not have adhered.

Thus, the holding of the *dál* may mirror the tactics of Áed's father, Fergal, at the apogee of his power in 721. An alliance between Áed's father and Cathal may have been instituted prior to the battle of Allen. The Annals of Inisfallen record the making of peace between Cathal and Fergal in 721 after Cathal, who had succeeded to the kingship of Munster in that year, had harried Brega. The Annals of Ulster also record that: 'Inmesach relegiosus legem cum pace Christi super insulam Hibernie constituit' (*AU* 721.9).¹⁵ Pádraig Ó Riain has suggested that by taking these two annalistic entries in conjunction they may suggest an arrangement between Cathal and Fergal prior to the battle of 722 and provide a close parallel to the events of 737–8.¹⁶ Certainly this was a view that later Munster sources attempted to portray. The recension of *Cath Almaine* from the beginning of the twelfth century, which is found in three of the four surviving manuscripts that contain the tale, support the view that Cathal and Fergal had been warring for a period and subsequently made peace before the battle of Allen.¹⁷ The eleventh-century tale *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* similarly refers to warfare between Cathal and Fergal for the kingship of Ireland.¹⁸ However, both texts are much

¹⁵ 'Inmesach the religious established a law with the peace of Christ over the island of Ireland'.

¹⁶ P. Ó Riain, *Cath Almaine*, p. xiv.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17. See also W. Stokes, 'Battle of Allen', 44–5.

¹⁸ *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne*, ed. K. Jackson, (Dublin, 1990), 1–2. For an earlier edition of the text with a translation see *Aislinge Meic Conglinne: the Vision of Mac*

later compositions; in addition the former is a pseudo-historical saga, while the latter, also pseudo-historical, is extremely chimerical. Nonetheless, in such circumstances, Áed, possibly imitating his father, may have been trying to secure his political and military flank by forging a deal with Cathal first before attacking the Laigin.

TÍR DÁ GLAS

Turning towards the meeting itself, the location of the *dál* at Tír dá Glas is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was in a liminal area on the frontier between Munster and the territory of the southern Uí Néill.¹⁹ As a general rule it can be said that the holding of an assembly within the territory controlled by the driving force of that assembly signifies the dominance of that person or interest group. In contrast the use of liminal areas denotes equality as boundary districts signify neutrality through their ‘no-man’s land’ status.²⁰ The use of such border regions is not exclusive to medieval Ireland but may be seen as a universal feature of how borders function. Clifford Geertz, for example, observed with regard to boundaries in his study of the ‘theatre state’ in nineteenth-century Bali: ‘frontiers were “not clearly defined lines but zones of mutual interest”, not “the precise MacMahon lines of modern political geography” insulating one “country” from another, but transition areas, political ecotones through which neighboring power systems “interpenetrated in a

Conglinne, a Middle-Irish Wonder Tale, Edited with a Translation, Notes, and a Glossary, with an Introduction by Wilhelm Wollner, ed. and trans. K. Meyer (London, 1892).

¹⁹ Terryglass, located on the banks of Lough Derg, is in modern Co. Tipperary.

²⁰ T. Charles-Edwards has noted: ‘as in contemporary continental practice, meetings on the boundary suggest equality, those within one territory the superiority of the ruler of that territory’, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 280.

dynamic manner”.²¹ A second reason is the possible vested interest of the church of Tír dá Glas in creating an anti-Laigin bloc due to the possible murder of one of its members by the Laigin.

In the year prior to the meeting, the killing of a Mael Fothartaig son of Mael Tuile is recorded (*AU* 736.5; *AT* 736.4; *AFM* s.a. 731). The Annals of Tigernach and the Annals of the Four Masters claim he was a member of the Laigin.²² If the editors of the Annals of Ulster are correct in their interpretation, then he was killed by the Laigin.²³ As his death was important enough to be recorded it is reasonable to assume that his father should also be found in the historical record and thus Mael Fothartaig’s identity can possibly be ascertained from that of his father. Unfortunately no Mael Fothartaig son of Mael Tuile appears in the genealogies. When the annalistic record is investigated the Mael Tuile who, chronologically was most likely to have an adult son in the late 730s, was Mael Tuile, abbot of Tír dá Glas who was recorded as dying in 752 (*AU* 752.10; *AT* 752.12; *AFM* s.a. 747), 15 years after the *dál*. If this identification is correct, then the killing of someone close to the centre of power in

²¹ C. Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, 1980), p. 24. The quotations within Geertz’s statement come from E. Leach, ‘The Frontiers of “Burma”’, *Comparative Stud. in Soc. and His.* 3 (1960), 49–68, at 50.

²² ‘Guin Mail Fothartaig maic Mail Tuile do Laignib’ (*AT* 736.4). ‘Maolfothartaigh, mac Maoiletuile, do Laighnibh’ (*AFM* s.a. 731).

²³ ‘Iugulatio Maele Fothartaigh filii Maele Tuile di Laignibh’ (*AU* 736.5). S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill translate this as ‘The killing of Mael Fothartaig, son of Mael Tuile, by the Laigin’. ‘Di Laignibh’ could also mean ‘from the Laigin’ as in ‘Mors Rudgaile di Luignibh’ (*AU* 747.13). ‘Death of Rudgal of the Luigne’. W. M. Hennessy previously translated it as ‘by Leinstermen’; *Annala Uladh, Annals of Ulster otherwise Annala Senait, Annals of Senat: a Chronicle of Irish Affairs from A.D. 431, to A.D. 1456*, ed. and trans. W. M. Hennessy and B. MacCarthy, 4 Vols. (Dublin, 1887–1901), while J. O’Donovan translated it as ‘[one] of the Leinstermen’.

that church community may have provided Tír dá Glas with an incentive to assist the creation of an anti-Laigin alliance between Cathal and Áed.

Alternatively though, if the killing of Mael Fothartaig had nothing to do with the Laigin, and Tír dá Glas were not willing participants, then the choice of Tír dá Glas as the site of the *dál* may be viewed as an emphatic statement of Cathal and Áed's anti-Laigin sentiments. Tír dá Glas was founded by the Laigin prince Colum mac Crimthannáin of the Uí Chrimthainn Áin in the sixth century²⁴ and seems to have retained links with Laigin as the abbot of Tír dá Glas in the ninth century was also abbot of Cluain Eidnech and died at Dún Masc, both of which are located in the territory of the Laigin (*AU* 845.2).

THE EVENTS OF 738: THE RESULTS OF THE *DÁL*?

The results of the meeting may be as difficult to discern as the motives for its occasion. There are four possible interpretations of the outcome of the *dál*. The first is that while Cathal and Áed did not join together on the battle field they followed a predetermined plan which saw Áed strike the Laigin a devastating blow allowing Cathal to subdue the weakened Laigin. This may have been the plan agreed upon at the *dál*. An alternative explanation is that the roles were reversed and that Cathal struck first and Áed provided the follow up blow when he attacked the Laigin at Áth Senaig.²⁵ The third theory is that Cathal may have repudiated any agreement to leave the Laigin to Áed and attempted to subjugate the Laigin himself first. The final possibility is that no agreement was reached at Tír dá Glas.

²⁴ F. J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings* (London, 1973), p. 134.

²⁵ Ballyshannon in modern Co. Kildare.

The year following the meeting at Tír dá Glas saw both Áed and Cathal assault the Laigin. They may have been aided by internal Laigin difficulties created by the sudden death of Fáelán, king of the Laigin (*AU* 738.1; *AI* 738; *AT* 738.1; *AFM s.a.* 733).

Áed's victory at the battle of Áth Senaig over the Laigin seems to have been comprehensive as it was claimed that almost the entire army of the Laigin was obliterated (*AU* 738.4; *AT* 738.4; *AI* 738; *AFM s.a.* 733).²⁶ The Annals of Ulster describe it as follows:

Bellum Atho Senaich, .i. cath Uchbadh .xiii. Septimbris die, .vi. feria, inter nepotes Neill & Laginenses crudeliter gestum est, in quo binales reges, celci rigoris rectores, armis alternatim congressi sunt, .i. Aedh Alddan, .i. (ri Tem)rach, & Aedh m. Colggen, .i. ri Laigen, e quibus unus superstes uulneratus uixit, .i. Aedh Allan; alius vero, .i. Aedh mc. Colgan, militari mocrone capite truncatus est. Tunc nepotes Cuinn inmensa uictoria ditati sunt, cum Lagenos suos emulos insolito more in fugam mittunt, calcant, sternunt, subuertunt, consumunt ita ut usque ad internicionem uniuersus hostilis pene deletur exercitus, paucis nuntiis renuntiantibus; & in tali bello tantos cecidisse ferunt quantos per transacta retro secula in uno subcubuisse impetu & feroci ruisse conflictu non conperimus. Ceciderunt autem in bello optimi duces: Aed m. Colggen, Bran Becc m. Murchadho, .i. da righ Laigen; Fergus m. Moinaigh, Dub da Crich m. aui Cellaigh m. Triein, (.i. da tiger)na Fothard; Fiangalach h. Maele Aithcen; Conall h. Aithecdai; ceithir meic Flainn aui Conghaile; Eladach aui Macluidhir, & ceteri multi, & compendii causa omissi sunt (*AU* 738.4).²⁷

²⁶ The *AU* entry (*AU* 738.4) is significantly longer than any other eighth-century prose entry. Although it is in Latin it has a literary quality that may have been influenced by vernacular literature.

²⁷ 'The battle of Áth Senaig i.e. the 'battle of groans' on the 14th of [the Kalends of] September, the sixth feria, between the Uí Néill and the Laigin was sternly fought, and the two kings respectively, leaders firm and exalted i.e. Aed Allán king of Temair and Aed son of Colgu king of Laigin. One of them i.e. Aed Allán, though wounded, survived triumphant, but the other i.e. Aed son of

The references to Áed's army as the descendants of Conn suggest that this was much more than a Cenél nÉogain or even Uí Néill army but that a substantial force from Leth Cuinn was amassed. It is also implicit from the statement that Munster did not form part of the army.

If the meeting at Tír dá Glas resulted in Cathal agreeing to let Áed have a free hand with regard to the Laigin, he too appears to have benefited from the arrangement. In the same year we are told: 'Slogad Cathail m. Finngúine co Laigniu co rucc giallu o Faelan & co rruc maine mara' (*AU* 738.9).²⁸ This is one of the few occasions where hostages are noted as being taken and may suggest the subjection of the Laigin to Munster.

The second theory proposed earlier suggests that Cathal had already severely weakened the Laigin and then Áed's army delivered the *coup de grâce*. This theory is somewhat more plausible than the first due to the primary obstacle preventing acceptance of the first theory, namely the niggling question of whose hostages Cathal obtained.

Colgu was beheaded by a battle-sword. Then the descendants of Conn enjoyed a tremendous victory, when in extraordinary fashion they rout, trample, crush, overthrow and destroy their Laigin adversaries, so much so that almost the entire enemy is well nigh annihilated, there being a few messengers to bring back the tidings. And men say that so many fell in this great battle that we find no comparable slaughter in a single onslaught and fierce conflict throughout all preceding ages. There fell in the battle, moreover, excellent leaders: Aed son of Colgu, Bran Bec son of Murchad i.e. two kings of Laigin, Fergus son of Maenach, Dub dá Crich son of the grandson of Cellach son of Trian, i.e. two lords of Fothairt, Fiangelach grandson of Mael Aitchen, Conall [great]grandson of Aithechda, four sons of Flann grandson of Congal, Éladach grandson of Maelodar, and many others, and for the sake of brevity, they are [here] omitted'.²⁸ 'A hosting by Cathal son of Finngúine to Laigin and he took hostages from Faelán and great treasures'.

Fáelán was clearly dead before the battle as the record of his death in the same year, his absence from the battle record and the listing of Áed mac Colggen (of the Uí Chennselaig and not Uí Dúnlainge) as king of the Laigin and Áed Allán's opponent all demonstrate.²⁹ In addition to this, the Annals of Tigernach and the Annals of the Four Masters add to the confusion by claiming that Cathal took the hostages and valuables from Bran Becc mac Murchada, brother of Fáelán (*AT* 738.7; *AFM* s.a. 733). Bran Becc, however, had fallen in the battle of Áth Senaig alongside Áed mac Colggen and so could not have submitted to Cathal after the battle. If any of the three references to Cathal's actions in 738 are correct, they suggest that he must have struck the Laigin prior to Áth Senaig as both Fáelán and Bran were most likely dead by the end of the battle.³⁰

Since Cathal most likely attacked first, then, a third theory suggests itself. It may be possible that he might have repudiated any agreement reached at the *dál* which permitted Áed to wreck revenge on the Laigin as Cathal may have come to the conclusion that this would have allowed Áed to become too powerful. Had Áed subdued the Laigin first, he would have been in a strong position to subsequently turn his attentions towards subjugating Munster. It is not unlikely that an ambitious king such as Cathal would have acted in such an underhand manner. It is also possible that Cathal and Áed

²⁹ Thus both W. M. Hennessy and P. Ó Riain's translation of the same *AU* entry use a slightly anachronistic term when they claim that Cathal took hostages from the 'Uí Fháeláin', P. Ó Riain, *Cath Almáine*, p. xv. *AU* does not refer to such a population group and such a designation could not be used until the third generation after Fáelán and certainly not for his immediate successor.

³⁰ T. Charles-Edwards has recently suggested that the annalistic entry comes from a source separate from the Iona annals upon which the surviving chronicles are based. See *The Chronicle of Ireland*, trans. T. Charles-Edwards, Translated Texts for Historians 44, 2 Vols. (Liverpool, 2006) I, 211, n. 2.

did not come to an agreement at Tír dá Glas and that their respective attacks on the Laigin were attempts at one-upmanship where the ambitions of these two kings were played out against the unfortunate Laigin.

CONCLUSION

It is undeniable that the Laigin suffered two military disasters in the year following the meeting of Cathal and Áed at Tír dá Glas. The previous military engagements of the Cenél nÉogain and Munster against the Laigin had resulted in defeats for both and possibly a desire for revenge. This revenge, exacted in 738 by the participants of the *dál* of 737, suggests that the *dál* could well have had a part to play in it. The *dál* can also be viewed as a consequence of the growth in power of Cathal and Áed and a possible desire to avoid direct conflict. Their wariness of each other led them to use the Laigin as a means to further power. The location of the *dál* at a largely neutral location suggests that Cathal and Áed were meeting on roughly equal terms and since neither was directly imposing himself on the other, it is reasonable to suppose that questions of joint interest would have been discussed. The scale of the disaster suffered by the Laigin at the hands of these two groups is perhaps best shown by the Laigin's lack of recorded martial activity again until eighteen years had elapsed. Even this action in 756 was on behalf of Domnall Midi, king of the Clann Cholmáin, who led an army of the Laigin against Níall Frossach of the Cenél nÉogain (*AU* 756.3; *AT* 756.4; *AFM s.a.* 751). The *dál* of 737 may be interpreted as a demonstration of the increase in the power of major kings during the eighth century. As Pádraig Ó Riain has noted, 'meetings such as that between Cathal and Áed, and Cathal and Fergal if one took place, underline the changing political

emphasis of the time and the dramatic increase in the scope of operations'.³¹

³¹ P. Ó Riain, *Cath Almaine*, p. xv.

Dialogue, Exchange and the Presentation of the Past in
Nornagests Þátrr

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INTRODUCTION

Nornagests þátrr, the Tale of Nornagestr, is generally dated to the early fourteenth century,¹ and is set in the time of Óláfr Tryggvason, the Norwegian king who is associated with the conversion of Scandinavia in medieval sources and who ruled from around 995–999 or 1000.² The earliest surviving manuscripts to preserve the tale date from the late fourteenth century, but the story also survives in some later copies, and early editions and translations bear witness to its popularity.³ In both of the fourteenth-century manuscripts, the tale

I would like to thank Dr Judy Quinn and Dr Máire Ní Mhaonaigh for their helpful comments and suggestions regarding this paper.

¹ See, for example, J. Harris and T. D. Hill, 'Gestr's "Prime Sign": Source and Signification in *Norna-Gests Þátrr*', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 104 (1989), 103–22, at 105; and S. Würth, 'Nornagests þátrr', *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopaedia*, ed. P. Pulsiano (New York and London, 1993), pp. 435–6, at 435.

² For an overview of Óláfr's activities, see J.V. Sigurðsson, 'Óláfr Tryggvason', *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Pulsiano, pp. 446–7.

³ The two earliest manuscripts are Copenhagen, Den Arnamagnæanske Samling AM 62 fol., which has been dated to the last quarter of the fourteenth century (see *DONP = A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose: Indices*, ed. Den arnamagnæanske kommission (Copenhagen, 1989), p. 346) and 'Flateyjarbók' (Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi Gks 1005 fol.), which is dated to c. 1387–94. For a list of manuscripts earlier than the seventeenth century see *DONP*, p. 346. Details of later manuscripts can also be found on <<http://www.sagnanet.is>>. The 'Flateyjarbók' version of the story is found in G. Vigfússon and C. R. Unger's edition of that manuscript (G. Vigfússon and C. R. Unger, *Flateyjarbók*:

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forms part of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, one of five sagas about Óláfr.⁴

The *þátrr* tells the story of the encounter between Óláfr and an old man called Gestr, or Nornagestr, who is clearly of great age. Gestr tells Óláfr and his men stories about the past and about his time with the legendary hero Sigurðr Sigmundarson whose exploits are best known in Old Norse from *Völsunga saga* and the heroic poems of the *Poetic Edda*, but who also appears in a number of other European works, such as the German *Nibelungenlied*. Gestr tells them about Sigurðr's fight with the dragon Fáfnir, his encounter with Óðinn, and about his fight with the sons of Hundingr, as well as the story of the death of Brynhildr.⁵ He also recounts an episode which occurred while he was in the company of Ragnarr loðbrók, another Old Norse hero and protagonist of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*. Gestr provides physical objects to prove his stories, for example a saddle buckle from the saddle of Sigurðr's horse, Grani, and a strand of hair from the horse's tail. In the last story which Gestr tells Óláfr, he explains that his nickname is Nornagestr because, when he was a baby, he was cursed

en samling af norske konge-sagaer med inskudte mindre fortællinger om begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samte annaler, 3 vols. (Christiania [Oslo], 1860–8) I, 346–9) and this is the edition from which I will be quoting. The tale was translated into English by N. Kershaw in her *Stories and Ballads from the Far Past* (Cambridge, 1921), pp. 14–37. A. Cipolla's recent edition is accompanied by a translation into Italian as well as a detailed discussion and analysis of the tale and its sources and models (*Il racconto di Nornagestr: edizione critica, traduzione e commento*, ed. A. Cipolla, *Medioevi Testi* 1 (Verona, [1996 (?)]).

⁴ Not all of these survive. See Ó. Halldórsson, 'Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar', *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Pulsiano, pp. 448–9, for details of the sagas and their sources.

⁵ Gestr's stories include some verse passages and these are quotations from the poems *Reginismál* (stanzas 13–25) and all of *Helreið Brynildar* with the exception of stanza 7.

by a norn, a supernatural female being who had the power to decide an individual's fate. She ordained that his life should be tied to the life of a candle which was burning by his bed. The candle was immediately extinguished by one of the other norns present and given to Gestr's mother, thus preventing his immediate death. Once Gestr had reached adulthood, his mother gave him the candle which he then always carried with him. Following this last story, Gestr is baptized, and the next thing the tale tells us about him is that he chooses to die some time later. His candle is lit, and before dying, Gestr reveals his full age: 300 years.

GESTR, A WITNESS TO THE PAST

It has been shown by different scholars that *Nornagests þátr* draws on a number of different sources and traditions, which include Old Norse and Continental tales, supposedly pre-Christian traditions and overtly Christian ideas, and writings in the vernacular and in Latin.⁶

⁶ *Nornagests þátr* has attracted attention because of the material it shares with the *Poetic Edda* and *Snorra Edda*. It was for this reason that E. Wilken included the *þátr* in his *Die prosaische Edda im Auszuge nebst Völsungasaga and Norna-Gests-Þátr* (Paderborn, 1912), pp. 253–61. The tales about ancient Scandinavian heroes with which Gestr entertains Óláfr and his men have also aroused interest in more modern times and *Nornagests þátr* was included in printed editions of heroic literature from as early as the eighteenth century. One of the earliest printed editions included translations into Swedish and Latin (see E. J. Björner, *Nordiska kämpa dater i en sagoflock samlade om forna konger och hjältar* (Stockholm, 1737)), and an edition of *Nornagests þátr* was included in *Norrone skrifter af sagnhistoriske indhold*, ed. S. Bugge, 3 vols., *Det norske oldskriftselskabs samlinger* 6, 8 and 17 (Christiania [Oslo], 1864–73), pp. 45–79. Gestr's similarities with Óðinn, which are mentioned below (see p. 83), have been considered by scholars such as L. M. Hollander, who thought it likely, however, that *Nornagests þátr* was also influenced by French literature ('Notes on the *Nornagests þátr*', *Publ. of the Soc. for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study* 3 (1916), 105–11, at 110).

Joseph Harris and Thomas D. Hill have called the tale a 'well organized literary vehicle',⁷ yet despite its literary nature and its written form, the *þátr* presents us with stories about the far past which it claims are oral in origin, namely Gestr's stories. The author of the *þátr* would have his audience believe that these tales reflect Gestr's genuine experiences which he, as a witness to the events, is passing on to Óláfr's audience in the first instance, and the audience of the *þátr* in the second. This raises a number of questions, the most important of which is whether the perceived oral nature of Gestr's stories is significant: to what extent is it important for our understanding of the *þátr* that the stories told and preserved through it are presented as being the result of a direct encounter with the witness to these stories and are related through the medium of dialogue?

The mere *telling* of a story within a tale is not particularly remarkable, but *Nornagests þátr* is different because of the unnatural circumstances in which the telling of the stories occurs. Gestr, human witness to events of the far past, is impossibly old and should not have survived into Óláfr's time. Nevertheless, it is made quite clear in the *þátr* that Gestr can be trusted. He can back up his stories with material evidence — the saddle buckle, his life-candle and other objects — and the *þátr* thus uses a literary trope to depict the old man as a truthful witness to the events he relates. More importantly, however, Óláfr is portrayed as trusting him. In the final sentence, the *þátr* states that Óláfr believed Gestr to have told the truth: 'þotti konungi ok mikit mark at sógum hans ok þotti sannazst um lifdaga

More recently, Harris and Hill have examined analogues to and sources for the story ("Prime Sign").

⁷ Harris and Hill, "'Prime Sign'", p. 122.

hans sem hann sagde'.⁸ If the great missionary king Óláfr Tryggvason believed Gestr, then there should be no reason for a medieval audience to doubt him. Gestr, then, is portrayed as a genuine member of the past society whose stories he tells. This eye-witness quality gives Gestr's accounts a degree of immediacy and reliability which they would otherwise lack, and it is this that makes the stories Gestr tells valuable.

TEMPORAL LAYERS IN *NORNAGESTS ÞÁTR*

Through their immediacy, Gestr's stories create a very vivid image of the past and bring it much closer to his audience. The coming together of past and present is underlined by the structure of the *þátr*. Rather than presenting us with a linear chronology of events, the frametale-subtale structure of the *þátr* places past and present side by side through Gestr's stories. As Gestr talks to Óláfr and his men, the narrative moves from one period of time to another and the audience finds itself in the time of Óláfr one minute and in the world of Sigurðr Sigmundarson in the next. This structure creates different temporal levels. The two most obvious are the time of Óláfr and the time of the stories Gestr tells: the past and the present of the *þátr*. For example, when Gestr tells Óláfr the story of how he got his nickname, the distance between Gestr's time and Óláfr's comes out quite strongly, not least through the use of the pronouns *þá* and *nú*, 'then' and 'now', at the beginning and end of that account:

þat uar þa er ek uar fæddr upp med fôdur minum j þeim stad er Græningr hætitir. fadir minn uar rikr at peningum ok hellt rikuliga herbergi sin. þar foru þa um landit uoluur er kalladar

⁸ *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Vigfússon and Unger I, 359; 'The king thought that his [Gestr's] stories were of great importance and he thought that what he had said about the old days [lit.: his life's days] proved to be true'. All translations of quotations from *Nornagests þátr* are my own.

uoru spakonur ok spadu monnum alldr. ... þa er ek er roskinn madr fær modir min mer kerti þetta til uarduæitzslu. hefui ek þat nu med mer.⁹

Gestr's story starts in the past, *þá*, but ends up quite firmly in the present, *nú*, Óláfr's time.

In addition to these two levels, we have a third level which is less obvious. This is the narrator's present time, and it is referred to in the occasional comment. So, for example, when talking about how Óláfr's men were sitting drinking, the narrator remarks that 'þa voru æigi hallir smidadar j þann tima j Noregi'.¹⁰ This comment clearly implies that while halls had not yet been built in the time of Óláfr, they did exist in the narrator's time. At other times, too, a distinction between the narrator's present and the other time-levels is implied, as for example in the dating of events. Near the beginning of the *þátr*, the narrator informs the audience that 'Sua segia menn at Gestr þessi kæmi a þridea ari rikis Olafs konungs til hans'.¹¹ On the one hand, this comment, perhaps a natural way of dating an event, places Gestr's arrival within a known historical context and makes it easier for the audience to relate to it as it is measured in terms familiar to them. On the other hand, such a remark distances both Gestr and

⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 358 (my italics); 'It was when I was brought up by my father in the place which is called Græningr. My father was wealthy and maintained his house magnificently. At that time, prophetesses, who were called *spákonur*, went around the country and they prophesied people's lives. ... When I reached adulthood, my mother gave me that candle for safe-keeping. I have it with me now.'

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 347; 'No halls had been built in Norway at that time'.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I, 347; 'People say that this Gestr came to Óláfr in the third year of his reign'. The play on words involving the literal meaning of Gestr's name, 'guest', becomes particularly clear here (see also below, p. 82, n. 23, and p. 84, n. 30)

Óláfr from the *þáttr's* audience, and serves to push Gestr back further in time, as he now predates the historical framework to which the audience is accustomed.

In the context of *Nornagests þáttr*, past and present in general can be seen in terms of a distinction between pre-Christian and Christian. One of Gestr's own comments, which separates different time levels in a similar way to the dating of his arrival by the narrator, draws attention to the change from pre-Christian times to the Christian era, thus emphasising the temporal and cultural divide between the past which he has experienced and the world of Óláfr. Gestr tells Óláfr that he left Denmark a long time ago 'en Otto keirari [sic] let brenna Danaurke ok kugade Haralld konung Gormsson ok Hakon blotjall [sic] at taka uit kristne'.¹² This places the beginning of Gestr's adventures in a time before well-known historical events, thus associating Gestr with a past long gone and with a time before the arrival of Christianity in Scandinavia.

The characters in the *þáttr* are well aware of the distance between the different times and of the discrepancies between them. Óláfr, for example, is puzzled by Gestr's claim to have witnessed the events of which he tells as they lie further back in time than the length of a human lifespan, and even, as it seems, memory:¹³ 'Konungr mællti. æigi fæ ek skilit til fullz um alldr þinn huer likendi þat ma uera at þu ser madr suo gamall at þu værir uit staddr þessi tidendi'.¹⁴ The characters' awareness of the chronological discrepancies draws

¹² *Ibid.*, I, 346; 'before Emperor Otto had the Danevirk burnt and forced King Harald Gormsson and Hákon blótjarl to accept Christianity'.

¹³ See the remarks on p. 80, below, on the poetry Gestr recites.

¹⁴ *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Vigfússon and Unger I, 354; 'The King said: "I don't fully understand your age and what the likelihood is that you are such an old man that you were present at these events"'.

attention to the unusual temporal structure of the *þáttr*, and this suggests that the author is deliberately emphasizing its importance, indicating that the relationship between the different levels is a significant aspect of the story.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT

The nature of the relationship between past and present within the *þáttr* is indicated by the way in which Óláfr and his men react to Gestr's stories. Generally, the king and his followers show acceptance and approval of Gestr and his tales. Óláfr, for example, expresses his enjoyment of the stories, and it is clear that his men also like listening to Gestr: 'Olafr konungr mællti. gaman mikit þikir mer at sögum þinum. Lofudu nu allir frasagnir hans ok fræklæik'.¹⁵

That said, Gestr's story about Brynhildr's encounter with an ogress does not receive a particularly favourable reception from Óláfr who is not uncritical and is selective in that of which he approves. He brushes aside his men's request to hear more such stories by deciding that 'æigi er naudzsyn at segia flæira fra þuilikum hlutum'.¹⁶ Considering the way in which Óláfr judges Gestr's other stories, this comment is quite harsh. Although some stories are acceptable and even enjoyable, others are obviously not deemed suitable according to Óláfr's judgment.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 354; 'King Óláfr said: "I am enjoying your stories very much." Now everyone praised his stories and his prowess'.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 357; 'There is no need to say more about such things'.

¹⁷ J. Quinn has suggested that Óláfr's displeasure on hearing the story is linked to Christian disapproval of the idea that decisions over life and death lay with a power other than God, in this case valkyries: 'In *Norna-Gests þáttr*, debunking the heathen belief that figures like norms and valkyries might have had power over death is the aim of the evangelising narrative in which Gestr joyfully relinquishes his unnatural (and heathen) life-span under the influence of King

Nevertheless, Óláfr and his men continue to show interest in Gestr's stories. It is made quite clear that what he tells them is new to them. For example, near the beginning of the *pátr*, Gestr recites poems about Gunnar, Sigurðr's brother-in-law, and Guðrún, Sigurðr's wife, and the narrator states that 'þau hofdu menn ægi fyrr heyr't'.¹⁸ Thus for the king and his men, Gestr is a source of interesting and new information about the past. His audience is clearly keen to acquire this knowledge and they value Gestr's tales. Óláfr, for example, encourages Gestr to tell more stories by saying 'uerdr þu at segja sögu adra suo at ver verdim sannfrodari um slika atburde.'¹⁹

Óláfr's enjoyment of Gestr's stories and his interest in the past seems to go so far as to accept Gestr's judgement that Sigurðr was the best of heathen kings.²⁰ Óláfr does not contradict Gestr when the

Óláfr's guiding counsel. ... Experienced in choosing warriors' deaths according to her own inclinations, Brynhildr ultimately chose her own in order to engineer a reunion with her (unrevivable) warrior-lover. The deeply un-Christian notion that the life of the body continued after death – that ill-fated lovers might choose another fate beyond the grave and be corporally reunited – is offensive to Óláfr who asks not to hear such things. ... That the power to resurrect the dead was a definitive act of God is an article of Christian faith and one that could not admit another tradition that accorded the power to valkyries' ('The End of a Fantasy: *Sörla pátr* and the Rewriting of the Revivification Myth', in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles: Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference Durham and York, 6th – 12th August, 2006*, ed. J. McKinnell, D. Ashurst and D. Kick, vol. 2 (Durham and York, 2006), pp. 808–16, at 811–12).

¹⁸ *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Vigfússon and Unger I, 348; 'People had not heard them before'.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 354; "You must tell other stories so that we might become better informed about such events".

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 349.

latter makes this statement, and considering that the king does not hesitate to voice his disapproval of the Brynhildr story, lack of objection suggests that Óláfr accepts Gestr's view. It appears that Sigurðr has qualities that are still valued in Óláfr's time and Adele Cipolla has in fact argued that Sigurðr prefigures Óláfr to some extent.²¹ This indicates a certain degree of ideological overlap between the past and the present, and suggests that the pre-Christian and the Christian age share certain moral values regarding the qualities expected of a king.

COMPATIBILITY OF MORAL VALUES

Interestingly, the behaviour of characters in the tale, and some statements made by them, echo sentiments found in other texts which might be thought to express pre-Christian moral advice, for example in the eddic poem *Hávamál*, represented as being spoken by Óðinn.²² The inclusion of such sentiments in *Nornagests pátr* suggests that advice or values from the past are still regarded as valid in the present. For example, both the *pátr* and *Hávamál* share ideas about

²¹ See 'Re Óláfr Tryggvason allo specchio degli eroi: Il *Nornagests pátr*. Paradigmi narrativi fra tradizione eroica e leggenda agiografica', *L'ombra, il doppio, il riflesso: Quaderni di lingue e letterature - numero monografico*, ed. F. Piva, L. Camaiora, B. Cetti Marinoni, G. Poggi and C. Stevanoni (Verona, 1997), pp. 31–53, at 52–3.

²² *Hávamál* is the second poem in the collection of Eddic poems in the 'Codex Regius' (Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi Gks 2365 4to; c. 1270–80). It is included in *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, Band I: Text, ed. G. Neckel, revised H. Kuhn, 4th ed. (Heidelberg, 1962), pp. 17–44. A translation into English can be found in C. Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford, 1996), pp. 14–38. D. A. H. Evans's 'Hávamál', *Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Pulsiano, pp. 272–3 contains a brief discussion of the poem, which appears to have been put together from different poems in medieval times.

the correct way to behave in the company of an unknown guest and about the importance of asking intelligent questions.

Close to the beginning of the story, Óláfr's men laugh at Gestr when he claims to have seen better gold than that of a ring that is being passed around. They suspect that Gestr does not have much experience with such things and make a bet with him, challenging him to prove that he has seen better gold. Óláfr, on the other hand, is more cautious when he hears about Gestr's claim: 'gestr hinn komni mun fleira uita en þer munut ætla'.²³

Óláfr's caution is justified when Gestr proves what he says by producing the saddle buckle of Grani's saddle. Óláfr and everyone at court can only agree that it is made of better gold than the ring. Gestr's advice to the king's men after this episode is in line with Óláfr's words: 'uedit ekki oftarr uit okunna menn þuiat æigi uitu þer huernn þer hittit þann firir at bæde hefuir flæira set ok heyrnt en þer',²⁴ Gestr's and Óláfr's judgment are thus brought into parallel.

In addition, Óláfr's and Gestr's statements accord with the ideas expressed, for example, in stanzas 132–3 of *Hávamál*:

At háði né hlátri hafðu aldregi
gest né ganganda!

opt vito ógorla, þeir er sitia inni fyrir,

²³ *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Vigfússon and Unger I, 348; 'The guest who has arrived may know more than you think'. Again, the *þátr* appears to be playing on the literal meaning of Gestr's name (see above, p. 77, n. 11 and also below, p. 84, n. 30).

²⁴ *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Vigfússon and Unger I, 349; 'Don't make bets with strangers again because you don't know who you might meet who has both seen and heard more than you'.

hvers þeir ro kyns, er koma.²⁵

Although Óláfr is a Christian king, some of his ideas appear to be inherited from the pre-Christian past. As mentioned above, another subject which appears in *Hávamál* is the good use of questions, for example in stanza 63:

Fregna oc segiascal fróðra hverr,
sá er vill heitinn horscr.²⁶

Questions and answers obviously play a large part in *Nornagests þátr*, both structurally and with regard to the content of the *þátr*, and Óláfr's judicious use of questions is suggested in the Brynhildr episode. It was not Óláfr, but one of his men, who asked to hear about her encounter with the ogress, and Óláfr's reaction suggests that he would not have asked the same question. Question-and-answer dialogues occur elsewhere in Old Norse literature, and in particular in association with Óðinn. Gestr's Odinnic qualities have been pointed out a number of times as has the fact that the question-and-answer format of the *þátr* is hardly coincidental in this context.²⁷

The same format is picked up again in two of the episodes within the *þátr*. The first is Gestr's story about Sigurðr's encounter with Óðinn, which is also known from *Reginismál* and in which Sigurðr questions Óðinn. The second is the tale of the encounter between the sons of Ragnarr loðbrók and an unknown man outside Rome, whom Óláfr identifies as having been sent by God to protect the town. Both

²⁵ *Edda*, ed. Neckel and Kuhn, p. 38–9; 'Never hold up to scorn or mockery a guest or a wanderer. Often those who sit in the hall do not really know whose kin those newcomers are', trans. Larrington, *Poetic Edda*, p. 33.

²⁶ *Edda*, ed. Neckel and Kuhn, p. 27; 'Asking questions and answering, this every wise man should do, he who wants to be reputed intelligent', trans. Larrington, *Poetic Edda*, p. 22.

²⁷ For example by Hollander, 'Notes', pp. 106–8; as well as by Cipolla, 'Re Óláfr', p. 43.

episodes underline the overall importance of the question-and-answer format to the *pátrr* as a whole. Through the associations with advice-giving which this format has, the two episodes also emphasize the importance of the giving of advice within the *pátrr*. This has led Cipolla to argue that Gestr is passing on advice and moral standards from the past to Óláfr.²⁸ Gestr's stories inform Óláfr's present, and the format of the whole *pátrr*, the question-and answer-dialogue, underlines this didactic aspect of the tale. Gestr's dialogue with Óláfr can be seen as a form of cultural exchange although crossing temporal rather than geographical boundaries.

THE SURVIVAL OF THE PAST INTO THE PRESENT

The past is also seen to affect the present in other ways. In addition to the objects which Gestr shows Óláfr and which underline the reliability of Gestr's accounts, he also mentions a tooth which belonged to the giant Starkaðr against whom Sigurðr fought. In the course of this fight, one of Starkaðr's backteeth was knocked out. This tooth, Gestr tells Óláfr, is now used on a bellrope in a church in Denmark where it has become something of a tourist attraction.²⁹ This story shows an object from the past surviving into the present in a new environment, where it has been put to good use. It provides very tangible evidence of the way in which the past affects and is part of the present.

In a sense, Gestr himself is the best example of how the past can touch on and interact with the present in a positive way, as he himself is a remnant of the distant past and the society he describes.³⁰ Nevertheless, Gestr appears to fit in well with Óláfr's society, the

²⁸ 'Re Óláfr', p. 52.

²⁹ *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Vigfússon and Unger I, 354.

³⁰ The literal meaning of his name, 'guest', may be seen as emphasising the fact that Gestr is an outsider visiting from a different time and culture.

present of the *pátrr*, and this society does not seem to find it difficult to accept him. He seems trustworthy and he gets along well with the people at Óláfr's court, as the narrator's description of Gestr indicates: 'hann uar sidsamr madr ok latadr uel. uar hann ok pokkasamr af flestum monnum ok virdizst uel'.³¹

Gestr's willingness to accept Christianity is likely to be an important factor in the welcome he receives from Óláfr and the society he represents.³² This attitude proves him worthy of acceptance by a Christian society. When Gestr arrives at Óláfr's court, he has already been prime-signed and when Óláfr asks him to name his favourite among the kings with whom he has been, Gestr chooses Louis the Pious at whose court, as Gestr says, Christianity was well observed.³³ It is Gestr's attitude and good qualities not least which are described in the *pátrr* that justify transmitting his stories.

At the end of the tale, Gestr is baptized and he becomes a good Christian. Gestr has passed on his tales, and he in turn accepts Christian teaching. This is not to imply that pre-Christian and Christian traditions or values are necessarily presented as equal – Christianity always has the upper hand. For example, at the beginning of the tale, Óláfr does not have much time to greet his newly-arrived guest because he has to rush off to attend mass.³⁴ The visit of a spirit in the night after Gestr's arrival causes Óláfr to question him closer as to his identity, and when Gestr asks if he may stay with him for a while, Óláfr's first concern is whether he has been baptized. Only after Gestr tells him that he has been prime-signed does Óláfr allow him to stay, but Óláfr stresses from the start that Gestr will have to

³¹ *Flateyjarbók*, ed. Vigfússon and Unger I, 347; 'He behaved well and was well-mannered. He was also popular with most men and highly thought of'.

³² For Gestr's baptism, see *ibid.*, I, 358.

³³ *Ibid.*, I, 357.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 346.

be baptized.³⁵ The superiority of Christianity is not surprising given the context of *Nornagests þáttir*. Although Óláfr Tryggvason was not officially a saint, he enjoyed the respect of later writers as the first missionary king of Scandinavia, and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* portrays him as a very devout king who enjoyed God's special favour.³⁶ In Flateyjarbók, *Óláfrs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* is paired with *Óláfs saga helga*, and the two kings who were so strongly associated with the Christianisation of Scandinavia in the Middle Ages were said to have shared the same relationship as John the Baptist and Christ.³⁷ Óláfr's special status in the context of the history of the Christianisation as it was seen by medieval Scandinavians thus becomes clear. However, despite this context and the superiority of Christianity in the *þáttir*, Gestr, the survivor from the pre-Christian past, and his stories are accepted. The past and the present are shown to be connected and certainly not mutually exclusive, despite the change in faith.

It has been suggested that it is Gestr's prime-signed status which enables him to tell his stories.³⁸ He occupies a borderline position between heathen and Christian in which he can thus communicate with Óláfr's Christian following, but has not yet broken entirely with his pre-Christian origins. This idea is supported by the fact that he

³⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 346.

³⁶ See, for example, E. A. Rowe's discussion of the role of 'luck' and its connotations of Christian grace in some of the *þættir* in the saga: 'In the *þættir* added to *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, we most definitely have further examples not only of a king whose luck can be extended to one of his men, but of one whose "luck" cannot be anything other than synonymous with Christian grace' ('Cultural Paternity in the Flateyjarbók *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*', *Ahvissmál* 8 (1998), 3–28, at 14).

³⁷ See *ibid.*, 'Cultural Paternity', pp. 11–12.

³⁸ Harris and Hill, "Prime-Sign".

stops telling his stories once he is baptized. Harris has consequently suggested that *Nornagests þáttir* represents 'a symbolic burying of the heathen past'.³⁹ To some extent, this is true: Gestr, in a sense a symbol of the pre-Christian past itself, dies and with his death any direct connection with the past is cut off. However, he is survived by his stories, transmitted in the *þáttir* and elsewhere, and at least one of the objects he mentions, namely Starkaðr's tooth. The written *þáttir* and its narrator take over from Gestr and carry the past into the present of the narrator and of his audience, but the narrator keeps up the appearance of an oral narrative by letting Gestr speak through the *þáttir*. In this way, and through the swift changes between the different time-levels, the narrator's audience begin to identify with Óláfr and his men, hearing Gestr's tales in the same way as they do, but with the additional benefit of the narrator's occasional comment. The three time-levels discussed above are thus bridged, and Gestr's distant past is brought through Óláfr's time into the present. For a medieval audience this passage through the past and Óláfr's time would have sanctioned the transmission of the tales.

CONCLUSION

Nornagests þáttir tells of the direct encounter between Óláfr and the past, represented by Gestr and his objects. Through the dialogue between Óláfr and Gestr, this encounter becomes immediate and personal, making any statements about the past more valid. It provides the author of the *þáttir* with an opportunity to explore the problem of the role of pre-Christian traditions within a Christian society. In order to do this, past and present are placed side by side and the juxtaposition is made more effective through the use of the

³⁹ Harris, 'Folktale and That: The Case of Rognvald and Raud', *Folklore Forum* 13 (1980), 158–98, at 165.

motif of the ancient survivor who tells his stories. Gestr's appearance at Óláfr's court gives his audience in the *pátr* the chance to interact with and respond to a witness of the events told. Óláfr's almost saint-like status as missionary king would have lent authority to his words and judgements in the eyes of a fourteenth-century audience. Óláfr's approval of Gestr's stories therefore justifies their transmission and gives them a degree of status. The past, although finally over, has left its traces and reminders in the present, and the value of Gestr's stories lies in their capacity to entertain and to provide models of behaviour.

An Offa You Can't Refuse? Eighth-Century Mercian Titulature on Coins and in Charters

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Despite important recent work, most notably by Derek Chick, much is still uncertain about the coinage of Offa (reigned 757–96). Serious questions concerning its chronology and structure remain unanswered, though the imminent publication of a complete corpus of Offa's coinage will help immensely in nearing some conclusions.¹ But it is not all doom and gloom. The coinage of Offa has been used in imaginative ways by historians and numismatists alike to illuminate several aspects of the eighth century, and many more areas await full exposition. Just one subject for which Offa's coinage provides important – and often unnoticed – testimony is a debate that has involved many of the greatest names in Anglo-Saxon historiography, from the Venerable Bede and Alfred the Great onwards: the evolution of the concept of a 'kingdom of the English'.

Bede, who died in 735 at the monastery of Jarrow, entitled his great historical work the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, the 'Ecclesiastical History of the English People'. He and his contemporaries attached two senses to the word *Angli*. One had quite specific connotations, denoting the 'Angles', who with the Saxons

¹ D. Chick, *The Coinage of Offa and his Contemporaries* (forthcoming, 2007). This will contain a new classification of the coinage of Offa, updating that of C. E. Blunt, 'The Coinage of Offa', in *Anglo-Saxon Coins: Studies Presented to F. M. Stenton on the Occasion of his 80th Birthday*, ed. R. H. M. Dolley (London, 1961), pp. 39–62. References to type numbers from both these works will take the form 'Chick' and 'Blunt'.

and the Jutes came over to Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries.² Bede himself belonged to one of the 'Anglian' kingdoms, which included Northumbria, Mercia and East Anglia. To the south were the East, Middle, South and West Saxons, whilst the Jutes were confined to Kent and the Isle of Wight. The other sense attached to *Angli*, however, approached 'English' in meaning and implied all the English-speaking realms in Britain. This wider sense of *Angli* appears in several of the earliest surviving texts from England,³ and perhaps gained popularity as a result of the famous story that Pope Gregory the Great, before despatching St Augustine on the first mission to the Anglo-Saxons, had seen English slaves on sale in Rome, and when told that they were *Angli* had replied that they looked more like *angeli*.⁴ It was through the mission of Gregory and Augustine beginning in 597 that the first pan-English institution had been created: the church. Whilst Bede does to some extent concentrate on Northumbria in his *Historia ecclesiastica*, one of its primary themes is

² Bede, *HE* I.15 (pp. 48–51). Lengthy discussion of this dichotomy can be found in M. Richter, 'Bede's *Angli*: Angles or English?', *Peritia* 2 (1984), 99–114.

³ Boniface (a West Saxon) used *Angli* in this sense, to take a non-Northumbrian example: for numerous examples and relevant discussion of Boniface's views of the *gens Anglorum*, see N. Brooks, 'English Identity from Bede to the Millennium', *Haskins Society Journal* 14 (2003), 33–51, at 37–41. See also P. Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins of the *Gens Anglorum*', *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, ed. P. Wormald, D. Bullough and R. Collins (Oxford, 1983), pp. 99–129, at 122–3.

⁴ This story is already manifested in the earliest *vita* of Gregory the Great, written at Whitby in the late seventh century (c. 9: B. Colgrave, ed. and trans., *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great, by an Anonymous Monk of Whitby* (Lawrence, KA, 1968), pp. 90–1), and was taken up by Bede: *HE* II.1 (pp. 132–5).

the conversion and foundation of an English church encompassing the whole *gens Anglorum*, united in obedience to a single archbishop.⁵

Some two centuries later, another leading figure in Anglo-Saxon history took one more major step in the direction of a unified 'English' realm. Alfred 'the Great' inherited the kingdom of Wessex in 871, which by this time included all England south of the Thames. By his death in 899 Alfred had brought western Mercia under his control as well, leaving it to the governance of the ealdorman Æthelred rather than an independent king. Coins and charters from the beginning of Alfred's reign refer to him as *rex Saxonum*, king of the Saxons, as was traditional for kings of Wessex.⁶ His expanded

⁵ This interpretation of the *Historia* is expounded most fully in Wormald, 'Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins', pp. 123–9; N. Brooks, 'Bede and the English', *Jarrow Lecture* 1999, 1–34; P. Wormald, 'The Venerable Bede and the Church of the English', *The English Religious Tradition and the Genius of Anglicanism*, ed. G. Rowell (London, 1992), pp. 13–32; and G. Tugène, *L'idée de nation chez Bède le vénérable* (Paris, 2001).

⁶ For the charters, see S 344 and 345 (all references to Anglo-Saxon charters will henceforth take this form, referring to the appropriate number in P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968)). The two 'offering pieces' of Alfred style him **REX SAXONVM** and the *Cross-and-Lozenge* type of Alfred and Ceolwulf II (c. 875–80) applies a wide range of titles: sometimes just **REX**, in other cases **REX S**[*axonum*], **REX S**[*axonum ei*] **M**[*erciorum*], whilst the sole known example of Alfred in the *Two Emperors* type styles him **REX ANGLO**[*rum*]. The classic study of the coinage's chronology is R. H. M. Dolley and C. E. Blunt, 'The Chronology of the Coins of Ælfred the Great, 871–99', in *Anglo-Saxon Coins*, pp. 77–95; with important recent additions in P. Grierson and M. A. S. Blackburn, *MEC* I, pp. 307–16; M. A. S. Blackburn, 'The London Mint in the Reign of Alfred', in *Kings, Currency and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century*, ed. M. A. S. Blackburn and D. N. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 105–23; M. A. S. Blackburn and S. D. Keynes, 'A Corpus of the Cross-and-Lozenge and Related Coinages of Alfred, Ceolwulf II and Archbishop Æthelred', in *Kings, Currency and Alliances*, pp. 125–

overlordship was reflected in later titulature, however, in which he became *rex Anglorum* or even *rex Angulsaxonum*.⁷ Franks and Lombards had already used the term *Anglissaxones* since the eighth century to refer to all the Germanic inhabitants of Britain.⁸ But in the several Old English texts written or translated from Latin during his reign Alfred spoke also in terms of *Angelcynn*, 'the English nation', which was united by its common language, *Englisc*.⁹ When, in 927, Alfred's grandson Æthelstan conquered the Viking kingdom centred on York and added the ancient Northumbria to his realm, the *regnum Anglorum*, the 'kingdom of the English', became a political actuality encompassing the whole *gens Anglorum*, a fact again emphasized in the

50; and M. A. S. Blackburn, 'Alfred's Coinage Reforms in Context', in *Alfred the Great: Papers from the Eleventh-Centenary Conferences*, ed. T. Reuter (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 199–217.

⁷ This is particularly evident in the usage of Asser for Alfred himself (*rex Angulsaxonum* or similar, depending on date) and his predecessors (*reges Saxonum*) (*De rebus gestis Ælfredi regis* (ed. W. H. Stevenson, *Asser's Life of Alfred together with the Annals of Saint Neots erroneously ascribed to Asser* (Oxford, 1904); trans. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (London, 1983)). For discussion, see S. Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', in *Kings, Currency and Alliances*, pp. 1–45, at 39–45; and S. Foot, 'The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity before the Norman Conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6 (1996), 25–49.

⁸ Richter, 'Angles or English?', pp. 110–13; and W. Pohl, 'Ethnic Names and Identities in the British Isles: a Comparative Perspective', in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: an Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. J. Hines (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 7–32, at 22–3.

⁹ A particularly famous example is the epistolary preface to the Alfredian translation of the *Cura pastoralis* of Gregory the Great (ed. H. Sweet, *King Alfred's West Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 2 vols., EETS o. s. 45 and 50 (London, 1871–2), I.2–3).

titulature on charters and coins.¹⁰ The medieval kingdom of England was born.

Between these two high-points, the situation is decidedly more murky. In 829 King Egbert of Wessex conquered Mercia, and received the submission of Northumbria and Wales the following year. Coins from London announce Egbert as 'king of the Mercians',¹¹ and Egbert was also included in a list of the kings of Mercia drawn up at Worcester (Plate I).¹²

Although the next year Wiglaf regained his independence as king of the Mercians,¹³ for a brief moment Æthelstan's kingdom of the English had been anticipated. But was Egbert the first to rule over a kingdom of all the English? The Mercia he conquered in 829 had until only a few years previously seemed very formidable indeed, its kings intriguing with Charlemagne and bullying the archbishops of Canterbury. Under Offa, the kings of Kent, the Hwicce and Sussex

¹⁰ Charters of Æthelstan from 928 regularly favour the king with the title *rex Anglorum* and by extension ruler of *totius Britanniae* (S 398 onwards), in contrast to the title *rex Anglorum et Saxonum/Angulsaxonum* employed in the first two years of Æthelstan's reign (S 394 and 396–7). The coins closely reflect these new pretensions, moving from plain **REX** to **REX TO[tius] BRIT[anniae]** in the *Circumscription Cross* type (C. E. Blunt, 'The Coinage of Athelstan, 924–39: a Survey', *British Numismatic Journal* 42 (1974), 35–140 at 47 and 55–6).

¹¹ C. E. Blunt, C. S. S. Lyon and B. H. I. H. Stewart, 'The Coinage of Southern England, 796–840', *British Numismatic Journal* 32 (1963), 1–74 at 34 (and illustrations on pl. VII, A and B); and C. E. Blunt, 'The Coinage of Ecgbearht, King of Wessex, 802–39', *British Numismatic Journal* 28 (1958), 467–76 at 472–3.

¹² London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A.xiii, f. 114v (printed by T. Hearne in *Hemingi chartularium ecclesiae Wigornensis*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1723), I, 242).

¹³ *ASC* 828 (=830) (ed. C. Plummer, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel, with Supplementary Extracts from the Others*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1892–9; repr. 1952 with bibliographical note by D. Whitelock), I, 62; trans. D. Whitelock, *English Historical Documents, vol. 1: c. 500–1042*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1979) no. 1, p. 186).

had been defeated and reduced to the status of ealdormen,¹⁴ daughters of Offa were married off to the rulers of Wessex and Northumbria,¹⁵ and the king of the East Angles was executed.¹⁶ To the west, a massive earthwork – Offa’s Dyke – was erected to protect the border from Welsh attacks.¹⁷ Offa’s long reign, from 757 to 796, was arguably Mercia’s heyday, and when the eminent Anglo-Saxon historian Sir Frank Stenton came to write about the greatness of Offa and his kingdom in 1918, one of the linchpins of his argument was a series of a dozen charters in which Offa styled himself *rex Anglorum* or the even more explicit *rex totius Anglorum patriae*, mostly in later copies of varying reliability, but in two cases in copies thought to date

¹⁴ This process is generally discussed in Wormald, ‘Bede, the *Bretwaldas* and the Origins’, pp. 112–13 and 115–17. The crucial documents are, for Kent, S 34, 105 and 155; for the Hwicce S 54–63 and possibly also S 139 (for discussion see H. P. R. Finberg, *The Early Charters of the West Midlands* (Leicester, 1961), pp. 167–80); for Sussex, Symeon of Durham’s *Historia regum* records that Offa subdued the men of Hastings in 771 (ed. T. Arnold, *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, 2 vols. (London, 1882–5), II, 44) and the progress of Offa’s control is illustrated by S 49, 108, 1183–4 and 1178 (see S. Kelly, *Charters of Selsey*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 6 (Oxford, 1998), nos. 10–13 and Appendix II 2C, with further discussion on pp. lxxx–iv).

¹⁵ ASC 787 (=789) and 792 (ed. Plummer I, 54–5; trans. EHD I, pp. 180–1).

¹⁶ ASC 792 (=794) (ed. Plummer I, 54–5; trans. EHD I, p. 181). King Æthelberht II of the East Angles is only otherwise known from a dubious *vita* (ed. M. R. James, ‘Two Lives of St Ethelbert, King and Martyr’, *English Historical Review* 32 (1917), 214–44; trans. E. C. Brooks, *The Life of Saint Ethelbert, King and Martyr 779AD–794AD* (1996)) and three surviving silver pennies (Chick 186).

¹⁷ For the classic study, see C. Fox, *Offa’s Dyke: a Survey of the Western Frontier Works of Mercia in the 7th & 8th Centuries A.D.* (London, 1955); with important update and summary of more recent work in D. Hill and M. Worthington, *Offa’s Dyke: History and Guide* (Stroud, 2003).

from Offa’s reign.¹⁸ To Sir Frank’s mind, this was the icing on the multi-tiered cake that was the ‘Mercian supremacy’, proving that Offa’s power and wide-ranging authority were accompanied by a constitutional leap towards a unified kingdom of the English.

Eventually, however, historical opinion took a swing in the opposite direction when Peter Sawyer came to re-examine the charters of Offa in the 1960s and 70s.¹⁹ He pointed out that the two so-called ‘original’ charters in fact dated from at least two hundred years after Offa’s death, and that indeed almost all of the dozen charters in which Offa is styled *rex Anglorum* are quite probably later forgeries. Other historians since have taken up Sawyer’s lead, and Stenton’s Offa has been cut down to size: no longer did he foreshadow the glories of Egbert, Alfred and Æthelstan or lift Mercian ambitions towards the goal of English unity. Instead, he has been recast as the most successful of a series of warlords to come storming out of the Midlands, wielding power with the sword rather than sceptre.²⁰ Offa may have subjected or overshadowed the rest of

¹⁸ F. M. Stenton, ‘The Supremacy of the Mercian Kings’, *English Historical Review* 33 (1918), 433–52; repr. in his *Preparatory to Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. D. M. Stenton (Oxford, 1970), pp. 48–66, at 60–4. This idea was further developed in F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1971), pp. 211–12. The charters of Offa which Stenton emphasized were S 110 (*Offa rex Anglorum*) and 111 (*Offa rex totius Anglorum patriae*), with reference also made to S 132.

¹⁹ P. H. Sawyer, *From Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England*, 2nd ed. (London, 1998), p. 101, based on the assessments applied by Sawyer himself (with the advice of N. R. Ker) to S 110, 111 and 132. For a more detailed summary of this re-evaluation of Offa as *rex Anglorum*, see S. D. Keynes, ‘The Kingdom of the Mercians in the Eighth Century’, in *Æthelbald and Offa: Two Eighth-Century Kings of Mercia*, ed. D. Hill and M. Worthington, BAR British series 383 (Oxford, 2005), pp. 1–26 at 3–7.

²⁰ This is the conclusion arrived at by, for instance, Keynes, ‘Kingdom of the Mercians’, pp. 6 and 9–10 (who cites the numerous other historians to have

the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, but that did not make him a king of the English, just a very successful king of the Mercians.

It will be noticeable that the debate has so far been carried along almost solely on the basis of documentary evidence. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is particularly sparse on the period of Mercian dominance, and it is necessary to trawl through charters, letters and other sources to build up any picture of Offa and his kingdom at its height. But one crucial source has often been overlooked. The coinage of Offa has been praised for its artistic qualities and for the picture it presents of a royal government capable of running mints at Canterbury, London and somewhere in East Anglia.²¹ There is, however, another insight it provides into Offa's government and image-making, an insight that has not generally been emphasized. Just like charters, each royal die presents a manifestation of Offa's name and title. The relatively homogenous 'heavy' coinage struck during the last three or four years of Offa's reign after the death of Archbishop Iænberht of Canterbury in 792 sticks rigidly to **OFFA REX M**, using the characteristic uncial **M** for *Merciorum* (Plate II).²²

picked up on this new reading of Offa) and 'England, 700–900', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History, volume 2: c. 700–c. 900*, ed. R. McKitterick (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 18–42, at 35–7.

²¹ Offa's coinage has attracted the most talented of Anglo-Saxon numismatists for well over a century. The principal specialized studies are C. F. Keary, 'Art on the Coins of Offa', *Numismatic Chronicle* n.s. 15 (1875), 206–13; R. C. Lockett, 'The Coinage of Offa', *Numismatic Chronicle*⁴ 20 (1920), 57–89; C. E. Blunt, 'The Coinage of Offa' (in which the fundamental division between the 'heavy' coinage, struck after 792/3, and the earlier 'light' coinage was made); B. H. I. H. Stewart, 'The London Mint and the Coinage of Offa', in *Anglo-Saxon Monetary History*, ed. M. A. S. Blackburn (Leicester, 1986), pp. 27–43; and D. Chick, 'Towards a Chronology for Offa's Coinage: an Interim Study', *Yorkshire Numismatist* 3 (1997), 47–64.

²² Chick 200–58, Blunt 84–109 and 114–15.

The earlier 'light' coinage, however, presents a wide variety of usages, a simple **OFFA** or **OFFA REX** being the most common in the light coinage as a whole. **OFFA REX M** or **ME** also appears,²³ and occasionally the ethnic is fully expanded to give us **OFFA REX MERCIORUM** (Plate III).²⁴

Of particular interest is a series of coins from the earlier part of the light coinage which carry an abbreviated form of the royal title influenced by early Carolingian coins of Pippin III (751–68) and Charlemagne (768–814), struck from about 754 onwards with the abbreviated legend **RP** or **RF** (Plate IV).²⁵

This abbreviated legend of the Offan coins usually takes the form **OFRM**, which can be expanded to *Offa rex Merciorum*, and appears on the non-portrait coins identified by Derek Chick as among Offa's earliest issues,²⁶ as well as on the reverse of some of the first portrait coins, which – rather oddly – place the moneyer's name

²³ Chick 64. Cf. the central **M** used on the reverse of the coinage of Cynethryth (Chick 138–48, Blunt 116–24).

²⁴ Chick 25, 26, 33, 47, 61 and 63; Blunt 37, 45 and 69. Interestingly, every use of the extended ethnic occurs on the coins of moneyers who can be attributed to London.

²⁵ Examples include Grierson and Blackburn, *MEC* I, nos. 719–20 and 730–3; and K. H. Morrison and H. Grunthal, *Carolingian Coinage*, American Numismatic Society Notes and Monographs 158 (New York, 1967), pl. I–III and VIII–X. For discussion of the Carolingian reforms of 754 and 793 and their influence on Offa's coinage, see Grierson and Blackburn, *MEC* I, pp. 194–210 and 277–82.

²⁶ The very earliest group includes coins by the moneyers Wilred in East Anglia (Chick 160), Eoba in Canterbury (Chick 102; Blunt 10) and Mang and 'Odd...', less conclusively attributed to London (Chick 5–7). This group – particularly in the case of Eoba – shades into the large number of light coins with the **OFRM** legend.

alongside the portrait on the obverse die.²⁷ Perhaps there was reluctance to break the rule of allotting one face to the abbreviated royal title, as on the contemporary Frankish coinage. A small number of coins bear witness to the moment when this practice was phased out, and carry the royal title in full on the obverse portrait die and the abbreviated royal title on the reverse die. The moneyer's name is omitted altogether (Plate V).²⁸

Amongst the non-portrait **OF&M** coins are a few which carry the letters **OF&A**, always arranged in exactly the same positions as in the **OF&M** legend, which also never varies. About twelve of these **OF&A** coins are known, all from the mint of London, ten in the name of the moneyer Ealhmund and two in the name of Bishop Eadberht of London (Plate VI).²⁹

Each coin is struck from a different set of dies, verifying that this legend was something more than a one-off aberration. However, both Ealhmund and Eadberht also struck coins of the same design but with the legend **OF&M**.³⁰

²⁷ Chick 8 (Æthelwald), 35 (Ealhmund), 51–3 (Ibba), 92 (Ealræd) and 112 (Eoba, which has the obverse moneyer's name, but the reverse legend **OFFA REX**); Blunt 43, 47, 52 and 61–2.

²⁸ Chick 94; Blunt 21. Three specimens are known, all using the same reverse die but two different obverse dies (both of which were also used with signed reverse dies of the Canterbury moneyer Ealræd).

²⁹ Chick 39–41 (Ealhmund) and 83 (Bishop Eadberht); Blunt 8 and 40–1. Some examples of the **OF&A** pennies have been known since the eighteenth century, whilst others have been found recently in the Aiskew hoard and singly, precluding any possibility of forgery. See C. Barclay, 'Aiskew, nr. Bedale, North Yorkshire, 1991–97', no. 46 in 'Coin Hoards', *Numismatic Chronicle* 157 (1997), pp. 229–30. To the thirteen pennies listed by Barclay can be added another Cynethryth penny (pers. comm., G. Williams).

³⁰ Chick 38, 42, 80 and 82; Blunt 34 and 40.

The interpretation of these coins is debatable to say the least, and it is worth carefully examining every possible reading. The first takes the a of the **OF&A** legend as part of Offa's name, with only one **F** missing from the full name. This would be plausible were it not for the alignment of the letters, which suggests they should be read in two lines rather than a circle, and thus follow the less ambiguous **OF&M** in every case: they are to be taken in the order **OF&A**, not **OF&R**.³¹ Aberrations in letter arrangement do occur in Anglo-Saxon coinage, but only rarely under Offa and almost never with the royal title.³²

The second possibility is that the a is actually an Alpha, part of a truncated Alpha-Omega pair. These Greek letters hark back to three passages in the book of Revelation in which Christ is referred to as Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end,³³ and they are a standard feature of Christian art, either as a pair or a monogram. In a few instances the Omega might be omitted, leaving us with an Alpha alone. The earliest numismatic example in England is found in the

³¹ D. Chick, 'The Coinage of Offa in the Light of Recent Discoveries', in *Æthelbald and Offa: Two Eighth-Century Kings of Mercia*, ed. D. Hill and M. Worthington, BAR British series 383 (Oxford, 2005), pp. 111–21, at 120. For an earlier attempt to use this explanation, see C. S. S. Lyon, 'Historical Problems of Anglo-Saxon Coinage – (1)', *British Numismatic Journal* 36 (1967), 215–21, at 220.

³² The only example that occurs in the whole light coinage is with one die of Chick 82; Blunt 34. Indeed, in many cases the die-cutters for Offa's light coinage delighted in creating innovative arrangements of the royal name and title (e.g., Chick 54; Blunt 65). There was rather more variation in the arrangement of the letters making up a moneyer's name, however (as in the case of some of the coins of Eoba: Chick 102–11; Blunt 10–18).

³³ Revelations 1:8, 21:6 and 22:13.

coinage of Offa's son-in-law Beorhtric, king of Wessex (786–802). Only three of Beorhtric's pennies survive (Plate VII).³⁴

One of them, in the name of the moneyer Weochthun,³⁵ carries an Alpha-Omega monogram on the obverse, with an Omega in the centre on the reverse. The other two pennies, both of the moneyer Ecgheard, have only an Alpha in the middle of the obverse, with a cross on the reverse. A similar design was used at Canterbury, London and East Anglia in the reigns Offa's successors, and the **Α** in the centre of the obverse was very common in the coinage of ninth-century East Anglia (Plate VIII).³⁶ In this case, it is quite possible that it was meant as something of a double entendre, standing for both the Christian Alpha and the political A for *Angli*. Other ninth-century East Anglian pennies provide positive evidence that kings such as Æthelstan (c. 825–c. 845), Æthelweard (c. 845–c. 855) and St Edmund (855–69) regularly used the longer title **REX ANGL[orum]**.³⁷

Despite the interesting development of the Alpha-Omega motif on Anglo-Saxon coinage there are good reasons to doubt this interpretation in the context of Offa's coinage. There are no precedents for the use of Alpha-Omega so early in Anglo-Saxon

³⁴ Two in the British Museum (the Ecgheard penny is C. F. Keary, *A Catalogue of English Coins in the British Museum: Anglo-Saxon Series*, 2 vols. (London, 1887–93), I no. 36; and the Weochthun penny was bought from the C. R. Lockett collection (Glendining's auction 6.6.1955, lot 452)) and one in the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow (A. S. Robertson, *Sylloge of Coins of the British Isles*, vol. 2: *Hunterian and Coats Collections*, University of Glasgow (London, 1961), no. 528).

³⁵ Weochthun may be identical with the bishop of Selsey of that same name ((786x789)–(805x811)): B. H. I. H. Stewart, 'Ministri and Monetarii', *Révue Numismatique* 30 (1988), 166–75, at 173–5.

³⁶ Grierson and Blackburn, *MEC* I, p. 294.

³⁷ These are most easily studied in H. Pagan, 'The Coinage of the East Anglian Kingdom', *British Numismatic Journal* 52 (1982), 41–83, at 65, 71–3 and associated plates.

coinage, and there are certainly no examples among Offa's pennies, which may have later dropped the Omega. More importantly, the Alpha is never integrated into the royal title in the same way as the **Α** on the **OFRA** coins, where an Alpha would be positively misleading.

The third possibility is that the legend should be interpreted as *Offa rex Anglorum*³⁸ — a reading which presents fewer practical difficulties but has created much controversy. It does not sit well with political historians in general, who hear echoes of Stenton's perception of Offa welding a fragmentary eighth-century patchwork into something approaching the tenth-century kingdom of England. Indeed, few historians have considered the implications these coins might have for their understanding of Offa's Mercia.³⁹ Certainly they are not enough to transform Offa's realm into a proto-kingdom of England. The **OFRA** coins are, after all, only a dozen of the 720 or so known pennies of Offa and his contemporaries, and neither do they belong to the later years of Offa's reign when his power was at its zenith. Although the dating of the light coinage is still uncertain,⁴⁰ the **OFRA** coins were probably minted during the time of Bishop Eadberht, who came into office sometime after 772 and was dead by 789. It was also during the 770s and 80s that seven of the thirteen suspect charters labelling *Offa rex Anglorum* purport to have been

³⁸ For earlier suggestions of this possibility, see Chick, 'Coinage of Offa', p. 120; and D. M. Metcalf, 'Offa's Pence Reconsidered', *Cunobelin* 9 (1963), 37–52, at 41.

³⁹ Stenton himself did not pick up on the numismatic evidence, and Wormald ('Bede, the Bretwaldas and the Origins', p. 111 n. 50) was quick to dismiss it.

⁴⁰ Blunt ('The Coinage of Offa', pp. 40–1 and 53–4) believed that the coinage of the Kentish kings began c. 775–80 and that of Offa c. 784–5. Another assessment by Chick ('Towards a Chronology', pp. 48–9, 56–7 and 59) puts the beginning of Offa's earliest coinage in around the mid 760s, with the main part of the portrait coinage at London coming in the late 770s. However, the issue is far from resolved.

drawn up.⁴¹ Fresh examination in recent years has caused at least some of these documents to be re-evaluated, and whilst many are definitely forgeries, in some instances the only 'suspicious' feature was the use of the title *rex Anglorum*.⁴² Other important points besides the numismatic evidence also suggest that there may be more to these charters than later medieval forgery. They come from five centres in two countries – Christ Church, Canterbury, Evesham, Worcester, Selsey and St Denis in Paris – which are unlikely to have all independently undertaken the same fraudulent enterprise.⁴³ Moreover, it wasn't beyond the wit of a medieval forger to notice that Anglo-Saxon kings had not usually claimed dominance over all England before the tenth century.⁴⁴ Yet Offa is the only pre tenth-century ruler

⁴¹ They are S 104, 108–11, 121, 145; and the other six *rex Anglorum* charters are S 54, 132–3, 138, 146 and 1178.

⁴² Particularly interesting examples are the Selsey charters (S 108 and 1174): see discussion in Kelly, *Charters of Selsey*, at no. 13 and Appendix 2C. It is possible that since these specimens come from a 'Saxon' kingdom, the term *rex Anglorum* was chosen to reflect Offa's 'Anglian' origins, not as a statement on the extent of his power; but if so, this was certainly not standard practice, and in all the other charters that Offa confirmed or granted in Sussex he is described as *rex Merciorum* (this is even the case in the witness list to S 108, in which the main text describes him as *rex Anglorum*).

⁴³ Obviously not all of these archives and their documents are to be treated with the same level of credibility. The St Denis charter of Offa *rex Anglorum* (S 133), for instance, is clearly in large part a forgery, but nevertheless is based on a single-sheet in insular script and quite probably in the name of Offa: see W. H. Stevenson, 'The Old English Charters to St Denis', *English Historical Review* 6 (1891), 736–42; and S. Kelly, 'Trading Privileges from Eighth-Century England', *Early Medieval Europe* 1 (1992), 3–27, at 22–3. Similarly, the charters of Christ Church (S 110, 111 and 132) are very probably forgeries.

⁴⁴ There are exceptions to this rule: S 3–4 (attributed to King Æthelberht I of Kent) name the ruler *rex Anglorum* and S 79 from Evesham describes Cenred of Mercia as *monarchia Albionis regni...roboratus*. But in most cases forgers had done

so consistently labelled *rex Anglorum*. There is in addition unambiguous evidence that Offa's predecessor Æthelbald (716–57) had occasionally made use of a very similar title, *rex Suthanglorum*. The precise significance of this peculiar title is revealed by one of the precious few charters to survive in a copy definitely made during Æthelbald's reign, the so-called 'Ismere diploma' issued in 736 to a nobleman named Cyneberht.⁴⁵ Here Æthelbald is called *rex non solum Marcersium sed et omnium provinciarum quæ generale nomine Sutangli dicuntur*.⁴⁶ Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* specifies the extent of such power in around the year 731, when he tells us that Kent, Wessex, Mercia, Sussex, East Anglia, Essex and all the other provinces south of the river Humber were subject to the rule of Æthelbald, king of the Mercians.⁴⁷

Why the term South Angles was abandoned under Offa is uncertain. There is nothing to show that Offa's sphere of influence was any smaller than that of Æthelbald – quite the opposite, in fact. Perhaps it was seen as too specific and cumbersome, for whilst impressive, the title given to Æthelbald in the Ismere diploma was

their homework, and in fact are often rather more specific than one would expect in an authentic charter: thus in the elaborate Peterborough forgery S 68 Wulfhere is styled *rex Merciorum et Mediterraneorum Anglorum australium quoque regnorum*.

⁴⁵ S 89. *Sutangli* and derivative forms also appear in S 94, 101 and 103. It should be noted that all four of these charters come from the archive of Worcester.

⁴⁶ 'King not only of the Mercians but of all the lands which are generally called by the name South Angles'.

⁴⁷ Bede, *HE* V.23 (pp. 558–9). For extensive discussion of Æthelbald's titulature, see A. Scharer, 'Die Intitulationes der angelsächsischen Könige im 7. und 8. Jahrhundert', in *Intitulatio, vol. 3: Lateinische Herrschertitel und Herrschertitulationen vom 7. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert*, ed. H. Wolfram and A. Scharer (Graz, 1988), pp. 9–74, at 49–63.

something of a mouthful, and seems never to have entered usage anywhere outside Worcester. Under Offa, titulature stabilized until *rex Merciorum* was the standard. It is important not to lose sight of this fact, and that throughout their reigns both Æthelbald and Offa remained kings of the Mercians in the majority of their charters and coins. Although the grandiose titles *rex Anglorum*, and *rex Suthanglorum* were used from time to time – and in literary contexts as well as charters⁴⁸ – these unusual titles seem to have complemented the more usual *rex Merciorum*. They may perhaps be taken as an indication of the extent of the power of the king of the Mercians, who might have exerted some kind of vague supremacy over the other English kingdoms without always ruling directly over them.⁴⁹

But is this enough to elevate Offa, sometime *rex Anglorum*, to the heights of ‘king of the English’ in quite the same sense as Æthelstan and his successors in the tenth century? Bede, it will be remembered, had a view of a *gens Anglorum*, an English nation, encompassing all the Germanic peoples settled in Britain. Offa must have been well aware of the views promulgated by Bede. He is believed to have owned a

⁴⁸ For Æthelred (675–704) as *rex Anglorum* see Felix, *Vita S. Guthlaci*, c. 1 (B. Colgrave, ed. and trans., *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac* (New York, 1956), pp. 72–3); and it was as *bonus rex Anglorum* that Offa was commemorated in the *Annals of Ulster* s.a. 796.2 (S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill, ed. and trans., *The Annals of Ulster to A.D. 1131. Part 1: Text and Translation* (Dublin, 1983), pp. 250–1).

⁴⁹ Whether such supremacy could have been expressed by the term *Bretwalda* is a long-running debate: for a range of views, see S. D. Keynes, ‘Rædwald the *Bretwalda*’, in *Voyage to the Other World: the Legacy of Sutton Hoo*, ed. C. Kendall and P. Wells (Minneapolis, 1992), pp. 103–23; S. Fanning, ‘Bede, Imperium and the *Bretwaldas*’, *Speculum* 66 (1991), 1–26; B. Yorke, ‘The Vocabulary of Anglo-Saxon Overlordship’, *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 2 (1981), 171–200; Wormald, ‘Bede, *Bretwaldas* and the Origins’; and E. John, ‘Orbis Britanniae and the Anglo-Saxon Kings’, in his *Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies* (Leicester, 1966), pp. 1–63.

copy of the *Historia ecclesiastica*,⁵⁰ and the famous Northumbrian expatriate Alcuin (d. 804) wrote to Offa about the *regnum tuum immo Anglorum omnium*.⁵¹ To Alcuin, *Angli* usually meant English as a whole, though his views were somewhat partisan.⁵² It is this interpretation of *rex Anglorum* that most modern historians have seized upon. For Bede and other contemporaries, however, there was a second meaning to the word *Angli*, that of ‘Angles’. It is quite possible, even probable, that it was this latter meaning that Offa and Æthelbald aspired to. *Suthangli* under Æthelbald could simply have been intended as a synonym for Mercians, alongside the north *Angli* in Northumbria and the east *Angli* in East Anglia.⁵³

In the case of Offa there are considerable difficulties with seeing him as a ‘king of all the English’. Some of these are technical, but potentially significant. In translating a Latin title such as *rex Anglorum* into English, there is often an implication of *the* king of *all* the people in question. Latin, however, does not employ such definite or indefinite articles as standard. Whilst qualifications could sometimes

⁵⁰ D. Whitelock, ‘After Bede’, *Jarrow Lecture* 3 (1960), pp. 1–16; repr. in her *From Bede to Alfred: Studies in Early Anglo-Saxon Literature and History* (London, 1980) as no. V, p. 11. For the relevant text, see W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford, 1946), pp. 245–6.

⁵¹ ‘Your kingdom, that is, of all the English’. Alcuin, ep. 101 (E. Dümmler, ed., *Epistolae Karolini aevi II*, MGH Epistolae 4 (Berlin, 1895), p. 147)

⁵² Alcuin’s use and understanding of *Angli* is discussed by Wormald, ‘Bede, *Bretwaldas* and the Origins’, pp. 121–2; and Brooks, ‘English Identity’, pp. 41–3.

⁵³ This is suggested by the first appearance of the word *Suthangli* (as *Sudranglorum*) in the earliest *vita* of Gregory the Great written at Whitby in the opening years of the eighth century (c. 18; ed. Colgrave, pp. 102–3). Bede spoke of the Humber dividing the northern and southern Angles (*HE* I.25 (pp. 72–3)), but it is unclear whether by southern Angles he had in mind all the Southumbrian English kingdoms, the Angles below the Humber, or just the Mercians.

be introduced, like Æthelbald's *South Angles*, and later there seems to have been an understanding that there was one king of a whole people, it is also sometimes clear that there could be multiple kings of the same people. A *rex Anglorum*, therefore, could have been one of several things: a king of *some Angles*, the king of *all* the English (or Angles), an English king or something in between.⁵⁴ Where Offa fell on this scale cannot be known for sure, and whilst he did not tolerate rivals to kingship within his own realm from other royal lines, his son Ecgfrith was elevated to the kingship in 787, and ruled as king alongside his father for nine years. Offa was not, therefore, the only king of the Mercians for the last years of his reign.

But it is not only a nicety of translation that stands in the way of Offa's pretensions to rule over all the English. Apart from Mercia, East Anglia was one Anglian kingdom that had definitely come under Offa's rule by the death of Æthelberht II in 794,⁵⁵ and *rex Anglorum* could have been chosen to signify rule over multiple Anglian kingdoms. The plot thickens the further one strays beyond the northern and southern borders of Mercia. Both Wessex and Northumbria seem to have escaped his direct rule,⁵⁶ and in East

⁵⁴ For general discussion of problems of this nature, see J. Campbell, 'Bede's *reges* and *principes*', *Jarrow Lecture* 1979, repr. in his *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), pp. 85–98; and D. N. Dumville, 'The Terminology of Overkingship in Early Anglo-Saxon England', in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century*, pp. 345–65.

⁵⁵ Though the now relatively numerous pennies of the light coinage from East Anglia strongly suggest that Offa enjoyed some kind of authority there before the 790s.

⁵⁶ This important issue has been closely examined twice by Keynes ('England, 700–900', pp. 31–4, and 'Kingdom of the Mercians', pp. 10–12), who finds little evidence for Offa's control over Wessex (at least before the accession of Beorhtric in 786) and still less for Mercian influence over Northumbria. A crux is how one interprets the marriage of Offa's daughters to the kings of Wessex

Anglia and particularly Kent Offa's power waxed and waned over the course of his reign. In Kent it was even at quite a low ebb for most of the 770s and 80s.⁵⁷ It is difficult to imagine Offa – who was so concerned about maintaining his rights vis-à-vis subordinate rulers – stepping down from the exalted heights of 'king of all the English' if that is what *rex Anglorum* meant to him. In Offa's view, *rex Anglorum* probably held some other primary significance,⁵⁸ most likely relating to Mercia's Anglian origins, and – as with *rex Suthanglorum* under Æthelbald – may even have been intended simply as a synonym for *rex Merciorum*.⁵⁹

Of course, all of this depends on the assumption that we are dealing with Offa's personal choice of title, and it is well worth considering the often overlooked question of who chose to place what title on charters or coins, and why. In many cases, the king himself may not have been directly responsible for selecting his own

and Northumbria in 789 and 792 (see above, n. 16 and 17), and the course of the dispute between Offa and Charlemagne over the possible union of their offspring suggests that there may have been overtones of subjection in marrying a neighbouring ruler's daughter (revealed in the mid ninth-century *Gesta sanctorum patrum Fontanellensis* ('Acts of the Abbots of Fontanelle') xii.2; trans. *EHD* I no. 20).

⁵⁷ Although the cause, combatants and aftermath of the battle of Otford in 776 are not recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Sir Frank Stenton used S 35 and 36 to suggest that King Ecgberht II of Kent (issuer of Chick 85–8; and Blunt 2–4) defeated Offa and remained independent until c. 784/5 (cf. S 38 and 123); see Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 207.

⁵⁸ Though if Offa and his contemporaries were aware of the dual significance *Angli* had carried in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, it is quite probable that they also knew of the wider, secondary meaning the title could imply, and in avoiding more specific titulature may even have deliberately chosen to exploit this ambiguity.

⁵⁹ Indeed, in two charters (S 108 and 121) both *rex Anglorum* and *rex Merciorum* are used of Offa in the main text and witness list.

title. With regard to charters, it is clear that the actual drafting of documents was carried out by episcopal scriptoria, which could follow very different practices.⁶⁰ Certain centres were rather more adventurous than others in their use of royal titulature: as has been noted, all the *Suthangli* charters of Æthelbald come from Worcester, as do the bulk of the *Offa rex Anglorum* charters, at a time when most other centres stuck to *rex Merciorum*.⁶¹ Unusual titles of this kind may owe as much to scribal hyperbole as to any lofty ambitions on the part of Æthelbald or Offa. The coins might not have been so very different. Although we are to a large extent in the dark on the processes behind their production and the selection of designs,⁶² Offa's reign was a watershed in monetary history: all coins now bore the names of both king and moneyer, and followed a (relatively)

⁶⁰ P. Chaplais, 'The Origin and Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diploma', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 3 (1965), 48–61; repr. in *Prisca Munimenta: Studies in Archival and Administrative History*, ed. F. Ranger (London, 1973), pp. 28–42, at 39–40.

⁶¹ Although the appearance of *rex Anglorum* in charters from outside Worcester bolsters the case for authenticity, they are primarily a Worcester phenomenon. Only three *rex Anglorum* charters that can make a serious claim to authenticity come from outside Worcester: S 108 and 1178 from Selsey (which may have had local reasons for seeing Offa as *rex Anglorum*: see above, n. 44), and S 54 from Evesham (an endorsement to a charter granting land to Bishop Ecgwine of Worcester in 706 for the church of Evesham, and was most likely written by those responsible for drawing up all charters in the diocese of Worcester).

⁶² Attempts to identify moneyers of this period in the written sources (for which see B. H. I. H. Stewart, 'Ministri and Monetarii', and 'Moneyers in the Written Records', in *Kings, Currency and Alliances*, pp. 151–3) have been largely unsuccessful. Nevertheless, it is clear that moneyers were important individuals who could survive numerous changes of dynasty, as in the case of Lul in East Anglia. Eoba in Kent is an even more interesting individual: he struck for the early Kentish kings and throughout the coinage of Offa, and was the sole moneyer of the coinage of Cynethryth.

uniform design at at least three mints. Dies often moved between London and Canterbury.⁶³ These features imply a considerable measure of royal control over the new broad penny coinage – certainly more than was evident in the earlier *sceattas* – and the selection of designs with direct reference to numerous models, Roman and otherwise, suggests a regime that took some interest in the currency.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, in several important respects Offa's coinage, particularly before the reform of 792/3, represented something of a halfway house between the *sceattas* and the more uniform penny coinage of the ninth century. Offa's light pennies retained much of the diversity and inventiveness of the *sceattas*; a diversity which could only have been achieved by permitting die-cutters and moneyers at the three mints a good deal of freedom in the implementation of broad monetary guidelines. This freedom could well have extended to matters of titulature as well as design, and consequently it may be significant that all of Offa's light pennies with titles other than **OFFA**, **OFFA REX** or **OFRA** were struck at London, including the **OFRA** pennies.⁶⁵ Like charters from Worcester, coins from London may bear witness to a specific milieu in which a few

⁶³ Chick, 'Towards a Chronology', pp. 50–1.

⁶⁴ For detailed discussion of the art-historical aspects of Offa's coinage, see A. Gannon, *The Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage, Sixth to Eighth Centuries* (Oxford, 2003), esp. pp. 31–3, 40–1, 59–61, 142–4 and 168–71. For the artistic relationship between Offa and Charlemagne's coins, see S. Zipperer, 'Coins and Currency: Offa of Mercia and his Frankish Neighbours', in *Völker an Nord- und Ostsee und die Franken*, ed. U. von Freeden, U. Koch and A. Wiczorek (Bonn, 1999), pp. 121–7.

⁶⁵ Canterbury and East Anglia are rather more conservative in the matter of titulature, though in the heavy coinage both used the new standardized type with the obverse legend **OFFA REX M[erciorum]**.

die-cutters experimented with different conceptions of royal power.⁶⁶ as in contemporary Frankia, perceptions of the king could vary substantially depending on one's geographical and ideological perspective.⁶⁷

It is perhaps best to finish before the possibilities become too numerous. Offa began and ended his reign as king of the Mercians, as did his predecessor and successor. Nevertheless, the evidence of the coins presents a formidable case in favour of Offa's being known, if only for a short time and at only one mint, as *rex Anglorum*, and should prompt reconsideration of other documentary pieces of evidence for royal titulature and of how the term *Angli* is most likely to have been understood by this time. Offa's reign was successful and complex, but thanks to the scarcity of the surviving sources can only be imperfectly understood. Just one murky but potentially fascinating area is the king's and his household's view of their own position, and

⁶⁶ A similar situation prevailed at London in the 870s in the confused period of the deposition of Burgred of Mercia (c. 852–73/4): see Blackburn, 'London Mint'. Unfortunately, knowledge of London under the Mercian kings is still rather limited, though archaeological investigation around Covent Garden in recent years has revealed the vibrancy and extent of Middle Saxon London. See G. Malcolm, D. Bowsher and R. Cowie, *Middle Saxon London: Excavations at the Royal Opera House, 1989–99* (London, 2003); R. Cowie, 'Mercian London', in *Mercia: an Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. M. P. Brown and C. A. Farr (Leicester, 2001), pp. 194–209; and S. Kelly, *Charters of St Pauls, London*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 10 (Oxford, 2004).

⁶⁷ For some of the most relevant and important literature in the area of Carolingian royal titulature, see H. Wolfram, *Intitulatio vol. I: Lateinische Königs- und Fürstentitel bis zum Ende des 8. Jahrhunderts* (Graz, 1967) and 'Lateinische Herrschertitel im neunten und zehnten Jahrhundert', in *Intitulatio vol. II: Lateinische Herrscher- und Fürstentitel im neunten und zehnten Jahrhundert*, ed. H. Wolfram (Graz, 1973), pp. 19–178; and, with interesting discussion of how coinage relates to titulature in other media, I. H. Garipzanov, 'Communication of Authority in Carolingian Titles', *Viator* 36 (2005), 41–82.

how that was interpreted through the media of charters and coins, the two collections of sources with which modern historians principally reconstruct the reign.⁶⁸ These combine to present a multifaceted image of Mercian power, not only redefining political status as Offa redrew the map of eighth-century England, but even taking new slants on the king's position.⁶⁹ Thus on the coinage and in other media the representation of royal power became increasingly sophisticated under the Mercian kings, and especially Offa. The images on his coinage can be seen to associate Offa with several different representations of Roman emperors, the biblical King David and the riches of the Islamic east.⁷⁰ Even Offa's queen, Cynethryth, gets a piece of the action, the only Anglo-Saxon queen ever named or represented on the coinage. Although modelled in fabric and conception on reformed Frankish coinage, in artistic terms Carolingian *denarii* simply cannot hold a candle to Offa's light coinage.

Although this changing view of regal authority did not need to coincide with the advent of a 'kingdom of all the English', neither would it have precluded experimentation with royal titulature and

⁶⁸ That is not, however, to downplay the important contributions of other evidence, such as archaeology and art history, which are quite rightly emphasized in the two volumes of essays on the kingdom of Mercia which have appeared in the last thirty years: A. Dornier, ed., *Mercian Studies* (Leicester, 1977) and M. Brown and C. A. Farr, ed., *Mercia: an Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (London, 2001).

⁶⁹ Just one such area that has received much consideration is the appearance of phrases like *gratia dei rex* and *rex a dei dono* in charters of Æthelbald and Offa: see Scharer, 'Die Intitulationes', pp. 67–70; and K. Schmitz, *Ursprung und Geschichte der Devotionsformeln bis zu ihrer Aufnahme in die fränkische Königsurkunde* (Amsterdam, 1965), pp. 170–80.

⁷⁰ Chick 1, 10, 18, 22, 25, 54 and 138–48; Blunt 5, 57, 23, 30, 27, 31, 38, 65 and 116–24.

new perceptions of Offa's kingdom at centres closely linked to the king. Certainly the royal establishment's concept of Offa's position was more elaborate than a particularly belligerent king of the Mercians lording it over southumbrian England. How and where the emphasis fell depended on the circumstances, and we should see the coins and charters and the titles they carry as part of an experimental, evolving process of visual and verbal representations of royal power, where little was set in stone and there was much to play for. Doing full justice to the evidence and the rich, half-lost world in which it originated is similarly an ongoing process, in which all specialists must cast their nets widely in order to reach as complete an understanding as possible.

APPENDIX

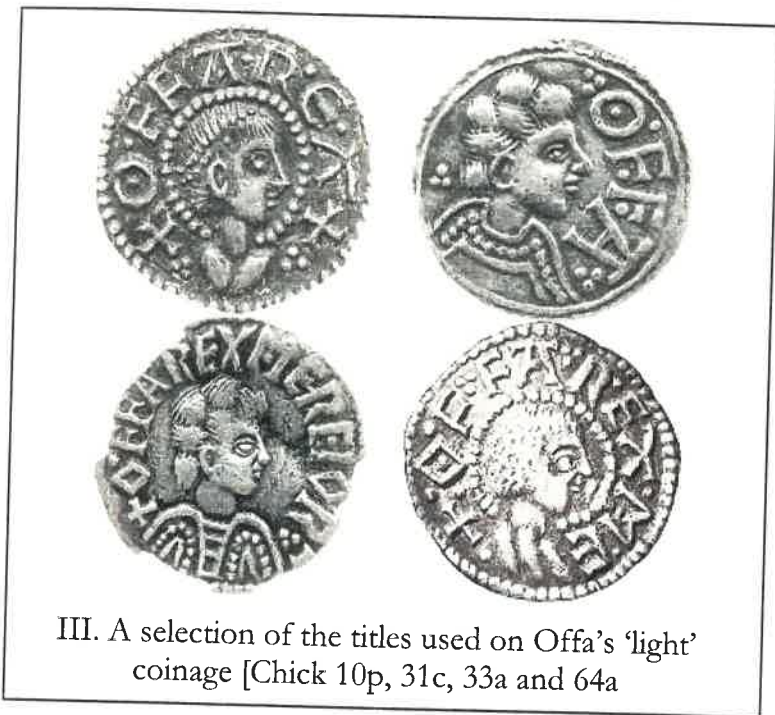
Plates



I. Egbert's London issue as **REX M**[*erciorum*]
[British Museum]



II. An example of Offa's post-792/3 'heavy'
coinage [Chick 203a]



III. A selection of the titles used on Offa's 'light' coinage [Chick 10p, 31c, 33a and 64a]



IV. An example of Offa's **OFRM** pennies [Chick 102c]



V. Examples of the double royal title coins, and of the obverse moneyer name coins [Chick 94a and 92a]



VI. Examples of **OFR&A** pennies of Ealhmund and Bishop Eadberht, with similar **OFR&M** pennies [Top to bottom: Chick 38b, 39c, 80b, 83a]



VII. Two of the pennies of Beorhtric, by Weochthun and Ecgheard [British Museum and Hunterian Museum, Glasgow (*SCBI* 2, 528)].



VIII. Examples of the central **A** design of Cenwulf (Canterbury mint) and Æthelstan of East Anglia [State Museum, Berlin (*SCBI* 36, 73), and American Numismatic Society (*SCBI* 30, 230)].

Intercultural Dialogue in Late Saxon Norwich: the St Vedast Cross

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INTRODUCTION

Few processes have impacted archaeological theory and practice more than the construction and documentation of cultural identities. Throughout the history of their discipline, archaeologists have attributed the material record to specific cultural groups;¹ however, the ways in which cultural groups express their perceived uniqueness have been the subject of concerted interest for a comparatively short time, beginning, most recently, in the 1980s.² Influenced by theoretical and methodological developments in the social sciences and acknowledging that 'identity' had been under-theorized in historical contexts, some archaeologists initiated investigations of

¹ The resultant 'Culture History' approach is attributed to Childe. He first defined an archaeological culture as a collation of objects, decorations and practices 'constantly recurring together'. He later refined this definition, proclaiming 'culture is social heritage'. See V. G. Childe, *The Danube in Prehistory* (Oxford, 1929), p. vi; and V. G. Childe, 'Races, peoples and cultures in prehistoric Europe', *History* 18 (1933), p. 198. Later generations of archaeologists have emphasized the importance of analytical techniques and hermeneutics in identifying and documenting cultures. See, for example, D. L. Clarke, *Analytical Archaeology* (London, 1968); and I. Hodder, *Reading the Past* (Cambridge, 1986).

² S. Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present* (London, New York, 1997), pp. 1–5, 15–39.

group and individual distinctiveness in historic periods, including the early Middle Ages.³

Advances in the conceptualization of identity have informed such recent ethnic study of material culture. Throughout the nineteenth century and continuing, arguably, until the advent of Processual Archaeology in the 1960s and 1970s, ethnic groups had been regarded as biological and cultural isolates.⁴ Scholars now concur that innate uniqueness within ethnic groups is unfounded and that the semiotic systems through which cultural identities are proclaimed exist in collective opposition; in essence, 'cultures only exist in relation to other cultures'.⁵ The resultant creation or proclamation of cultural identity can be interpreted as a sociological strategy and can employ various means, including language, religion, burial practices, architecture and costume; and in colonial contexts, cultural groups can employ various political strategies for cultural promotion, including isolation, hybridity, assimilation or genocide.⁶

Reconceptualization of identity as a situational construct representing an aspect of social organization has resulted in two streams of research: (1) studies that address the relationship between material culture and symbol systems and (2) those which assess ethnicity's role in the organization and negotiation of political and

³ *Ibid.*, See also W. O. Frazer, 'Introduction: Identities in Early Medieval Britain', *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. W. O. Frazer and A. Tyrrell (London, 2000), pp. 1–7.

⁴ Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity*, pp. 15–29; J. D. Richards, *The Vikings: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2005), p. 7.

⁵ Richards, *The Vikings*, p. 7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, For a thorough discussion of the means through which identity can be expressed, see W. Pohl, 'Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity', *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800*, ed. W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (Leiden, 1998), pp. 17–69.

economic relationships.⁷ Archaeological study of late Saxon East Anglian ethnicity can benefit from either approach; however, with reference to the role(s) of identity in its sculptural production—particularly the relationship between stone and status—the latter is of greater significance. Furthermore, if the region's apparent culture-specific media, object-types and decoration are interpreted as expressions of authority and privilege rather than ethnic signifiers, the complexity and intent of artistic patronage and display will be evident.⁸

⁷ P. Geary, 'Ethnic identity as a situational construct in the early Middle Ages', *Mitteilungen der Anthropologischen Gesellschaft in Wien* 113 (1983), 15–26; Jones, *The Archaeology of Ethnicity*, pp. 13, 28. As examples of semiotic approaches to ethnicity and material culture, see I. Hodder, *Symbols in Action* (Cambridge, 1982); and S. J. Shennan, 'Introduction', in his *Archaeological Approaches to Cultural Identity* (London, 1989), pp. 1–32. As examples of ethnicity in political and economic relationships, see T. Kimes, C. Haselgrove and I. Hodder, 'A method for the identification of the location of regional cultural boundaries', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 1 (1982), 113–31; and R.H. McGuire, 'The study of ethnicity in historical archaeology', *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 1 (1982), 159–78.

⁸ Ethnicity's association with authority and status has a lengthy history in sociological discourse and has also been the subject of influential archaeological studies. For example, see F. Barth, 'Introduction', in his *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Bergen, Oslo, London 1969), pp. 10, 17; W. Pohl, 'Conceptions of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Studies', *Archaeologia Palona* 29 (1991), 41; W. Pohl, 'Telling the Difference', pp. 22, 60, 64; and M. O. H. Carver, 'Conversion and Politics on the Eastern Seaboard of Britain: Some Archaeological Indicators', *Conversion and Christianity in the North Sea World: The Proceedings of a Day Conference held on 21st February 1998*, ed. B. E. Crawford, St. John's House Papers 8 (St. Andrew's, 1998), pp. 13, 26.

THE ST VEDAST CROSS, NORWICH CASTLE MUSEUM (PLS. 1–2)

The extant corpus of East Anglia's pre-Conquest stone sculpture is characterized, predominantly, by motifs associated with an Anglo-Saxon cultural milieu.⁹ Aside from the controversial panels in St. Nicholas' church, Ipswich, and a capital from Norwich Cathedral, only the cross-shaft preserved in Norwich Castle Museum, known as the 'St. Vedast Cross', exhibits Scandinavian-derived decoration.¹⁰ As this constitutes the only East Anglian sculpture securely dated to the pre-Conquest period bearing such ornament, it is of considerable importance to the study of identity in the region and its relationship with material culture in the Viking Age.

The St. Vedast Cross is a monolithic cross-shaft, tapering in both width and depth, measuring approximately 88 cm in height, 43 > 30.5

⁹ See S. J. Plunkett, 'Appendix: Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture and Architecture in Suffolk', *A Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Material from Suffolk*, S. West, East Anglian Archaeological Report 84 (1998), 323–57; C. Fox, 'Anglo-Saxon Monumental Sculpture in the Cambridge District', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* 23 (1922), 15–45; and B. Cozens-Hardy, 'Norfolk Crosses', *Norfolk Archaeology* 25 (1934), 297–336.

¹⁰ Two zoomorphic relief-sculptures from St. Nicholas' church (a boar and a dragon) exhibit features characteristic of the Mammen and Ringerike styles: pronounced hip-spirals with double-line contours, substantial bodies (in contrast to the ribbon-shaped forms typical of the Jellinge style) and large, ovoid eyes tapering to points in one or both corners. Since their first publication in 1764, the dates proposed for these sculptures have varied enormously. Scholarly consensus now situates these works in the early- to mid-twelfth century. See K. J. Galbraith, 'Early Sculpture at St. Nicholas' Church, Ipswich', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History* 31.2 (1969), 172–84; D.M. Wilson and O. Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art* (London, 1966), pp. 119–46, 153, 155; G. Zarnecki, et al., eds., *English Romanesque Art, 1066–1200: Hayward Gallery, London, 5 April–8 July 1984* (London, 1984), p. 164, no. 121; and T.D. Kendrick, *Late Saxon and Viking Art* (London, 1949), p. 123.

cm in width and 30 > 21 cm in depth.¹¹ Mammen-style decoration (c. 950–1025) is preserved on two of its sides: a recessed, arched panel on one of its broad faces depicts two quadrupeds hierarchically with raised heads (one with a prominent hip-spiral) against a background of plump vegetal ornament, and a second recessed panel on one of the shaft's narrow faces depicts what is possibly a serpentine beast, akin to the creatures on Thorleif's Cross, Kirk Braddan, Isle of Man.¹² However, it must be noted that damage to one side of this panel complicates identification of its decorative element(s).¹³ The sculptures on the St. Vedast Cross were executed with obvious competence; they were also elaborated with paint, as evidenced by traces of pigment on the shaft's broad sculpted face.¹⁴

The St. Vedast Cross was removed from an architectural context in Norwich in 1896.¹⁵ The monument had been built into the fabric of a house on Rose Lane, approximately 310 metres northwest of Norwich Castle. Antiquarian accounts describe the stone positioned

¹¹ These measurements were taken when the monument was inspected and photographed by the author in May 2006.

¹² P.M.C. Kermodé, *Manx Crosses: or, the Inscribed and Sculptured Monuments of the Isle of Man from about the End of the Fifth to the Beginning of the Thirteenth Century, etc.* (London, 1907), pp. 203–5; see also Wilson and Klindt-Jensen, *Viking Art*, p. 113, fig. 52.

¹³ Concurring with Hudson, Margeson has posited that this panel depicts two creatures. See S. Margeson, *The Vikings in Norfolk* (Norwich, 1997), p. 25; see also W. Hudson, 'On a Sculptured Stone recently removed from a House on the Site of the Church of St. Vedast, Norwich', *Norfolk Archaeology* 13 (1898), 118–19.

¹⁴ Vestiges of painted decoration were observed in the animals' contours when the St. Vedast Cross was inspected and photographed by the author in May 2006. The wedge-shaped incision above the sculpted panel on the shaft's broad face is a nineteenth-century Ordnance Surveyors' mark. See Hudson, 'On a Sculptured Stone', pp. 116–17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

horizontally in one of the building's exterior walls, heavily whitewashed, and resting on what is now its narrow, undecorated face.¹⁶ The house had been erected on the site of the Church of SS Vedast and Amant (demolished in 1540) and had incorporated part of the churchyard wall into which the stone had been built.¹⁷ When Rose Lane was widened in 1896, the architectural fabric preserving the St. Vedast Cross was demolished; the monument was recovered by Mr. F.B. Crowe who subsequently donated it to the Norwich Castle Museum.¹⁸

Based on the size of the extant fragment of the St. Vedast Cross, the monument utilized a substantial block of stone.¹⁹ While any estimate of the cross's original height is conjectural, even a tentative ratio of 2:1 *vis à vis* head and shaft proportion would generate a minimum height of 132 cm for the intact monument. East Anglia has never possessed quantities of workable stone; and throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, stone was quarried in the Barnack region of Cambridgeshire and probably exported to East Anglia via rivers and the fenland waterways.²⁰ Such lengthy transport of heavy, raw material undoubtedly increased its price—and, arguably, its prestige—in East Anglia. Thus, the St. Vedast Cross, a substantial, monolithic, painted sculpture erected approximately 130 km from its probable

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, It is likely that the St. Vedast Cross was sculpted on each of its sides; those faces which no longer exhibit decoration were re-cut, facilitating the stone's use as building material. The modification of the shaft's undecorated broad face (together with the sides of its two narrow faces) was observed in May 2006 when the monument was inspected and photographed by the author.

¹⁷ Margeson, *The Vikings in Norfolk*, p. 24.

¹⁸ Hudson, 'On a Sculptured Stone', p. 117.

¹⁹ The existing fragment of the St. Vedast Cross weighs approximately 135 kg: T. Pestell, Personal Communication, 7 May 2006.

²⁰ D. Stocker and P. Everson, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Volume V: Lincolnshire* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 47–9.

quarry, is demonstrative of considerable wealth concentrated in the city of Norwich *c.* tenth to eleventh century.

ANGLO-SAXON NORWICH

Though Norwich's importance as a commercial and administrative centre (both secular and ecclesiastical) in the later middle ages is well-documented, there are few extant references to the city from the Anglo-Saxon period.²¹ Of these, the most substantive (datable to the 980s) is preserved in the *Liber Eliensis*, recording how Abbot Brithnoth of Ely, when purchasing land in Cambridge, was assured by the city's residents that 'Cambridge, Norwich, Thetford and Ipswich were possessed of such great freedom and dignity that if anyone bought land there he did not require sureties.'²² This implies that late-tenth-century Norwich was a

²¹ For a concise summary of Norwich's importance in the later middle ages, see B. Ayers, 'Norwich before the Black Death', *Norwich, 'A Fine City'* (Stroud, 1994), pp. 87–108.

²² *Liber Eliensis: A History of the Isle of Ely from the Seventh century to the Twelfth*, trans. J. Fairweather (Woodbridge, 2005), ii, 26; p. 122 (translation), ed. E. O. Blake, *R. Hist. Soc. Camden 3rd Series 92* (London, 1962), p. 100 (text): 'Grantebruge et Noruic et Theofford et Gyppesuic tante libertatis ac dignitatis essent ut, siquis ibi terram compararet, vadibus non indigeret'. Other references to Norwich in the *Liber Eliensis* mention King William's castle and the fortress of the Abbots of Ely (see ii, 124–6; iii, 9, 12, 56, 85). The second source for Norwich's early history is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which records in 1004: 'In this year Swein came with his fleet to Norwich, and completely sacked the borough and burnt it down', trans. G. N. Garmonsway, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, (London, 1953), p. 134. ('Her com Swegen mid his flotan to Norpwic, 7 þa burh eall for heregodan 7 forbærnde', ed. C. Plummer and J. Earle, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel* (Oxford, 1892–9), p. 134). The third source seemingly refers to Cnut participating in a battle at Norwich sometime in the early

well-established and esteemed city whose status had obviously grown since its early Saxon settlement.²³

The earliest Anglo-Saxon proto-urban settlements in the Wensum Valley are datable to the eighth century. These probably formed the first nuclei of medieval Norwich.²⁴ While Middle Saxon pottery and metal objects have been recovered from the city in relatively large numbers—the excavations at Barn Road (1952) and Fishergate (1985) were especially productive—archaeological evidence suggests that urbanism in eighth- and ninth-century Norwich was only a gradual development.²⁵ The settlement's economic base is unclear, though pottery sherds from the Rhineland (recovered from excavations in the vicinity of the Palace Plain) are suggestive of trade.²⁶

eleventh century. See M. Ashdown, ed., *English and Norse Documents relating to the Reign of Ethelred the Unready* (London, 1930), p. 139. The other textual sources for Norwich in the Anglo-Saxon period are two wills of tenth- and eleventh-century date. See *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, ed. D. Whitelock (London, 1930), nos. 26, 38.

²³ M. Atkin, A. Carter and D. H. Evans, *Excavations in Norwich 1971-1978 Part II*, East Anglian Archaeol. Report 26 (1985), esp. pp. 1-6; P. Wade-Martins, ed., *Waterfront Excavation and Thetford Ware Production, Norwich*, East Anglian Archaeological Report 17 (1983), 1-11; Ayers, *Norwich*, p. 35.

²⁴ A. Carter, 'The Anglo-Saxon Origins of Norwich', *ASE* 7 (1978), 175-204.

²⁵ M. Atkin, *et al.*, *Excavations in Norwich 1971-1978 Part II*, pp. 1-6; Wade-Martins, *Waterfront Excavation, Norwich*, pp. 1-11; and Carter, 'The Anglo-Saxon Origins of Norwich', pp. 175-204.

²⁶ A. Carter, 'The Norwich Survey: Excavations in Norwich—1971—an interim report', *Norfolk Archaeology* 35.3 (1972), 410-16, esp. 414-15; A. Carter, J.P. Roberts and H. Sutermeister, 'Excavations in Norwich—1972. The Norwich Survey—Second Interim Report', *Norfolk Archaeology* 35.4 (1973), 443-68, esp. 445.

The birth of Norwich's prosperity is associated with Danish settlement. The Danes effectively conquered East Anglia after the defeat and murder of King Edmund in 869. While this victory was followed by a decade of conflict across southern England, culminating in Danish defeat against Alfred of Wessex in 878 and the Treaty of Wedmore, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records in 879 that the Danish 'went from Cirencester into East Anglia, and occupied that land, and shared it out'.²⁷ While most Danish settlements were probably rural in nature and supported by agriculture, the evidence of the Five Boroughs (Nottingham, Derby, Lincoln, Leicester and Stamford) in the East Midlands confirms that urbanism and industry were also practiced by the Danish settlers.²⁸ While there are no extant records of towns in Norfolk in this period other than the reference to the Danish army wintering in Thetford in 869,²⁹ it seems probable that Danish presence in Norwich increased its significance as an urban centre.³⁰

²⁷ *ASC* 879, ed. and trans. Garmonsway, p. 76; 'Her for se here of Cirenceastre on East Engle, 7 gesæt þæt lond, 7 gedælde', ed. Plummer and Earle, p. 76.

²⁸ R.A. Hall, 'The Five Boroughs of the Danelaw: a Review of Present Knowledge', *ASE* 18 (1989), 149-206, esp. pp. 200-6.

²⁹ *ASC* 869, ed. and trans. Garmonsway, p. 70; 'Her rad se here ofer Mierce innan East Engle 7 wintersetl namon æt Þeodforda', ed. Plummer and Earle, p. 70.

³⁰ Carter, 'The Norwich Survey: Excavations in Norwich—1971', 410-16, esp. 415; Carter, *et al.*, 'Excavations in Norwich—1972', 443-68, esp. 443; A. Carter, J. P. Roberts and H. Sutermeister, 'Excavations in Norwich—1973. The Norwich Survey—Third Interim Report', *Norfolk Archaeology* 36.1 (1974), 39-71; esp. 43-4, 59-60; J. P. Roberts, *et al.*, 'Excavations in Norwich—1974. The Norwich Survey—Fourth Interim Report', *Norfolk Archaeology* 36.2 (1975), 99-110, esp. 99-100; M. W. Atkin, *et al.*, 'Excavations in Norwich—1975/6. The Norwich Survey—Fifth Interim Report', *Norfolk Archaeology* 36.3 (1976), 191-201, esp. 191; M. W. Atkin and A. Carter, 'Excavations in Norwich—1976/7.

ANGLO-SCANDINAVIAN NORWICH

Norwich retains considerable evidence of its Danish occupation. Arguably its most substantial feature of Danish origin is a D-shaped enclosure, identified by excavation in the 1970s.³¹ The enclosure is probably of tenth-century date, measures roughly 310 or 470 metres in maximum width, extends approximately 450 metres north of the River Wensum and was fortified with a ditch and a defensive bank.³² A mint was established within the enclosure by King Athelstan (924–939), and by the 930s, 'Norwic' or Norwich appears among signatures on Athelstan's coinage.³³

Onomastic evidence, in the form of place-names and church dedications, is also demonstrative of Danish presence in Norwich. For example, the Old Norse word 'gate' ('road') is preserved in numerous street names, including 'Fishergate', 'Colegate', 'Pottergate' and 'Cowgate'.³⁴ Old Norse words also appear in the names of watercourses ('Spiteldike', for example, preserving the Old Norse 'dike' meaning 'ditch') and numerous other features of both the natural and human landscape.³⁵ Church dedications also reflect

The Norwich Survey—Sixth Interim Report', *Norfolk Archaeology* 36.4 (1977), 287–304, esp. 287; and M. W. Atkin, *et al.*, 'Excavations in Norwich—1977/8. The Norwich Survey—Seventh Interim Report', *Norfolk Archaeology* 37.1 (1978), 19–55, esp. 19.

³¹ Carter *et al.*, 'Excavations in Norwich—1972', pp. 443–8.

³² *Ibid.*, Comparison with similar earthworks at Ipswich, Repton and Bedford strongly suggests that the Norwich enclosure is of Anglo-Scandinavian provenance. For a general discussion of other D-shaped enclosures in England, see J. D. Richards, *Viking Age England* (London, 1991), pp. 29–31.

³³ Carter *et al.*, 'Excavations in Norwich—1972', pp. 443–8.

³⁴ K. I. Sandred and B. Lindström, *The Place-Names of Norfolk, Part I: The Place-Names of Norwich*, English Place-Name Studies 61 (Irthlingborough, 1989), pp. 82–155.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7 and *passim*.

Danish presence in the city. Though not martyred until 1030, St. Olaf had two churches consecrated in his name in pre-Conquest Norwich.³⁶ A fifteenth-century church survives dedicated to St. Clement. Approximately fifty pre-Reformation dedications to Clement are known in England, and many of these are located in Anglo-Scandinavian towns, including Cambridge, Bedford, Ipswich and London.³⁷ Clement, patron saint of sailors, was also popular in Denmark; the Cathedral of Århus, for example, is dedicated to him.

Much of Norwich's Old Norse onomastic evidence is preserved north of the River Wensum within the general confines of the aforementioned D-shaped enclosure. However, this Danish settlement did not exist in isolation. Since 1974, excavations south of the river have provided increasing evidence of Danish occupation. This includes tenth-century Borre-style disc brooches recovered from sites near Rose Avenue and two eleventh-century Ringerike-style bronze mounts (one from St. Martin-at-Palace plain).³⁸ Other evidence includes a mid-eleventh- to twelfth-century Urnes-style bronze mount, metal-detected on the bank of the River Wensum near

³⁶ Carter, *et al.*, 'Excavations in Norwich—1972', p. 463; Margeson, *The Vikings in Norfolk*, p. 27. Based on a reconsideration of pottery evidence, Carter has since suggested that the dedications to St. Olaf might be post-Conquest. See Carter, 'The Anglo-Saxon Origins of Norwich', p. 201. See also J. Campbell, *Norwich* (London, 1975), pp. 4–5.

³⁷ Ayers, *Norwich*, p. 28.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32; Margeson, *The Vikings in Norfolk*, pp. 33–34; and B. Ayers, *et al.*, *Excavations at St. Martin-at-Palace Plain, Norwich, 1981*, East Anglian Archaeological Report 37 (1987), pp. 63–7. Evidence of a bronze-smithy was also discovered south of the Wensum on Bishopgate. See Carter, *et al.*, 'Excavations in Norwich—1972', pp. 449, 452.

Mile Cross Bridge, the twelfth-century Urnes-style capital from Norwich Cathedral and the enigmatic St. Vedast Cross.³⁹

Collectively, the diverse evidence from the settlements north and south of the River Wensum suggests a growing, affluent urban settlement c. tenth to eleventh century. Metalworking (including minting) was clearly an important industry, as was fishing and, probably, sheep-rearing.⁴⁰ The presence of Barnack limestone, as evidenced by the St. Vedast Cross, is suggestive of trade with the Midlands, and Rhenish pottery, together with the *Domesday* reference that Norwich furnished the king annually with a bear, confirms that Norwich also participated in international trade.⁴¹

³⁹ S. Margeson, 'A Viking Urnes Style Mount from Sedgeford', *Norfolk Archaeology* 37.3 (1980), p. 355; Zarnecki, *et al.*, eds., *English Romanesque Art, 1066-1200*, p. 164, no. 121.

⁴⁰ According to *Domesday Book*, the manor of Thorpe (St. Andrew), east of Norwich, owed a rent of two thousand herrings to the king. '[Thorpe St. Andrew] was worth £12 and 1 sester of honey and 2,000 herrings', trans. A. Williams and G. H. Martin, *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation* (London, 1992), pp. 1072-3; 'Tnc ual XII.lib. 7 .1.fext mell.&.II.M.alleciu', ed. P. Brown, *Domesday Book: Norfolk*, 2 vols., History from the Sources 33.1 (Chichester, 1984), I.138a. It is likely that a similar fishing industry existed on the Wensum at Norwich. *Domesday Book* also records an abundance of sheep in the vicinity of Norwich. See *Domesday Book*, ed. Williams and Martin, pp. 1056-9; *Domesday Book: Norfolk*, ed. Brown, I, 113b-19b.

⁴¹ 'And the whole of this town paid £20 to the king and £10 to the earl TRE, and besides this 21 S. 4d. [to certain] prebendaries, 6 sestres of honey 1 bear and 6 dogs for the bear', trans. Williams and Martin, *Domesday Book*, p. 1058; 'Tota hec Willa reddebat.t.r.e.XX.lib regi. 7 comiti.X.lib. 7 pt hoc XXI.fol. 7 .IIII.d pbendarios. 7 VI.fextarios mellis. 7 .I.urfu. 7 VI. canes ad urfum', ed. Brown, *Domesday Book: Norfolk*, I, 116b-17b.

Based on extant onomastic and material evidence, Danish identity was seemingly proclaimed within this urbanized tenth- and eleventh-century environment. The St. Vedast Cross is arguably the most powerful extant expression of that identity. Considering the quantity of surviving evidence from a Scandinavian cultural milieu—and the paucity of Anglo-Saxon material—it is reasonable to assume that the patron of the sculpture was either a lord of Danish ancestry, perhaps even a descendant of Guthrum's 'Great Army' who settled in East Anglia after its defeat by Alfred, or a Saxon lord who wished to express his allegiance to the new hegemony. This interpretation complements the archaeological evidence of Norwich's Danish culture in the tenth and eleventh centuries. However, material from the excavation of the Church of St. Martin-at-Palace, Norwich complicates this theory.

THE ST MARTIN-AT-PALACE GRAVE-COVER, NORWICH (PL. 3)

The Church of St. Martin-at-Palace is also on the south side of the River Wensum and is approximately 510 metres north of the former site of the Church of SS Vedast and Amant. A major excavation was undertaken within the church in 1987, resulting in evidence of two timber structures (one possibly a church) beneath its present nave.⁴² Fragments of a sculpted grave-cover, exhibiting two panels of four-cord plaitwork with a border of cable moulding, were recovered from a post-hole of the later timber building, termed 'Structure B'.⁴³ Based on their similarity of form and design to the 'Fenland Group' of grave-covers identified and catalogued by Fox,

⁴² O. Beazley and B. Ayers, *Two Medieval Churches in Norfolk*, East Anglian Archaeological Report 96 (2001), 1-14.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

the fragments are probably of early to mid-eleventh-century date.⁴⁴ Thus, Structure B must have been constructed sometime after the grave-cover had been used for its original purpose. The excavators suggested a date of *c.* 1010 for the cover and *c.* 1040 for its reuse.⁴⁵ Based on these postulated dates, the St. Vedast Cross and the St. Martin-at-Palace grave-cover are broadly contemporary.

The existence of contemporaneous material culture exhibiting Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian motifs within a zone of Danish influence is suggestive of intercultural dialogue. Specifically, these sculptures are seemingly indicative of artistic choice. I have argued elsewhere that tenth- and eleventh-century East Anglian funerary sculptures exhibiting Anglo-Saxon motifs are probably manifestations of lordship *vis à vis* association with minster churches.⁴⁶ Through display of such motifs (the visual 'language' of the minster system) elites proclaimed their participation in, and their allegiance to, its hierarchy. The St. Martin-at-Palace grave-cover demonstrates that the visual language of the minster system was likely understood and spoken in late-tenth- and eleventh-century Norwich.

Therefore, the St. Vedast Cross, with its Mammen-style zoomorphs, is probably indicative of another dialogue. Acknowledging that participation in the minster system is likely

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; Fox, 'Anglo-Saxon Monumental Sculpture in the Cambridge District', pp. 15–45.

⁴⁵ O. Beazley and B. Ayers, *Two Medieval Churches in Norfolk*, pp. 1–14.

⁴⁶ See M. F. Reed, 'Sculpture and Identity in Late Saxon Suffolk, a case-study', *Approaching Interdisciplinarity: Using Archaeology and History Together for the Study of Medieval Britain*, eds. Z. Devlin and C. Smith, BAR (forthcoming, 2007); M. F. Reed, 'A Late Saxon Grave-Cover from Thetford, Nf.: Form, Patronage and Production', *New Voices on Insular Sculpture*, ed. M. F. Reed (forthcoming, 2008); and M. F. Reed, 'Sculpture and Identity in Late Saxon East Anglia', (Ph.D. thesis, University of York, completion expected 2007).

evidenced by the St. Martin-at-Palace grave-cover, the St. Vedast Cross is probably demonstrative of manorial church-foundation—specifically, the related practice of founder-burial. Its closest parallels in form, scale and date are the Ryedale, N. Yks., 'Warrior Crosses'.⁴⁷ Even its zoomorphic decoration, specifically, its possible serpentine beast(s), is similar to the creatures ornamenting many of the Ryedale sculptures.⁴⁸ The patron of the St. Vedast Cross, like his contemporaries in Ryedale, probably founded a manorial church or was closely related to a founder. Their sculpted funerary monuments proclaimed their lordly status and ethnicity (whether biological or adopted) and were arguably erected prior to their churches' association with minster foundations.

Within the corpus of East Anglia's extant late Saxon sculpture, the St. Vedast Cross is idiosyncratic. It bears no similarity of form, scale or decoration to the other surviving crosses and cross-fragments, and its zoomorphic ornament is unrelated to the non-figural decoration of the Fenland Group of grave-covers.⁴⁹ When this sculpture is considered with other evidence of Danish settlement in Norwich, it is apparent that elite patrons were conversant in the visual languages of both Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian cultures; thus, based on extant evidence, the elite populace of tenth- and

⁴⁷ See J. Lang, *et al.*, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Volume III: York and Eastern Yorkshire* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 40–2; 126–30, ills. 427–37; pp. 154–7, ills. 514–35; pp. 175–8, ills. 631–58; pp. 181–7, ills. 670–93; pp. 199–201, ills. 751–61, 763; pp. 207–13, ills. 800–22.

⁴⁸ The strands that bisect the bodies of the Ryedale creatures, including those at Ellerburn, Kirkbymoorside, Levisham, Middleton, Pickering and Sinnington are also present on the St. Vedast serpentine creature(s).

⁴⁹ See Fox, 'Anglo-Saxon Monumental Sculpture in the Cambridge District', pp. 15–45; and Plunkett, 'Appendix: Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture and Architecture in Suffolk', pp. 323–57.

eleventh-century Norwich can accurately be termed, 'Anglo-Scandinavian'.

APPENDIX

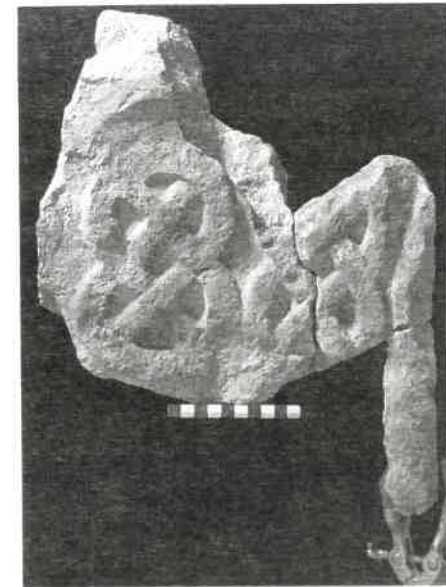


Pl. 1. St Vedast Cross, Face A, c. tenth – eleventh centuries. Norwich Castle Museum.

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Pl. 2. St Vedast Cross, Face B, c. tenth – eleventh centuries. Norwich Castle Museum.
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Pl. 3. St Martin-at-Palace grave-cover, c. eleventh century. Norfolk Archaeological Unit.

Gregory the Great's *Dialogi* and the Narration of Dreams in Medieval Icelandic Literature¹

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It is well known that the *Dialogi* of Gregory the Great (c. 540–604), who became Pope in 590, exerted a considerable influence on Old Icelandic literature.² The *Dialogi*, completed in 593, consist largely of accounts of miracles attributed to saints and of dreams and visions experienced by holy men, as well as by others not so holy. Echoes of many of the incidents related in the *Dialogi* are found in Old Icelandic literature, not only in works with an obvious religious concern, such as the lives of the saints and the bishops, but also in predominantly secular sagas, including the most famous of the sagas of Icelanders,

¹ This paper draws on work undertaken for my forthcoming doctoral thesis at the University of Leeds, 'Dreams and Visions in Medieval Icelandic Romance', supervised by Professor Rory McTurk, and supported by an award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. I am grateful to Christina Rowley for her valuable suggestions and assistance in producing this paper, and to all those who commented on the paper at the Colloquium. Note that all translations of primary sources are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

² For the most thorough discussion of this subject, see R. Boyer, 'The Influence of Pope Gregory's *Dialogues* on Old Icelandic Literature', *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference: University of Edinburgh, 1971*, ed. P. Foote, H. Pálsson, and D. Slay (London, 1973), pp. 1–27. For an edition of the text of the *Dialogi*, see *Grégoire Le Grand: Dialogues*, ed. A. de Vogüé, 3 vols (Paris, 1978–80); volume and page numbers in this article refer to this edition whenever a passage from the *Dialogi* is quoted or alluded to.

Brennu-Njáls saga.³ The *Dialogi* were translated into the Old Norse language in the late twelfth century, and so the text was known at an early stage in the history of native Icelandic literature. Unfortunately, only fragments of the Old Norse version survive, which is perhaps surprising given the work's apparent popularity in Iceland in the Middle Ages.⁴

Those who have commented on Icelandic saga literature's debt to the *Dialogi* have limited themselves to noting the various motifs and episodes from the text – often dreams and visions – which have been adapted by saga authors.⁵ It should be remembered, however,

³ See Flosi Þórðarson's dream in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. E. Ó. Sveinsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 12 (Reykjavík, 1954), pp. 346–48. Þorvaldur Bjarnarson, *Leifur fornra kristinna fræða íslenzkera: Codex Arna-Magnæanus 677 4to auk annara enna elztu brota af íslenzkum guðfræðisritum* (Copenhagen, 1878), p. xv, noted the similarity between this dream and the visions of Mellitus and Armentarius in the fourth book of the *Dialogi* (III, 90–94). Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, *Á Njálsbúð: Bók um mikið listaverk* (Reykjavík, 1943), pp. 10–11, suggested that Flosi's dream is based on the story of Anastasius in the first book of the *Dialogi* (I, 72). Boyer, 'The Influence of Pope Gregory's *Dialogues*', pp. 20–21, has pointed out, however, that Flosi's dream could have been inspired by any of these episodes, as well as the dream of Gerontius (III, 88–90), all four stories being variations on the same motif.

⁴ For a list of manuscripts of the Old Norse translation of the *Dialogi*, see *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog: Registre* (Copenhagen, 1989), p. 258. Editions of the text of the fragments can be found in *Leifur fornra kristinna fræða íslenzkera*, ed. Þ. Bjarnarson; *Heilagra manna sögur: Fortællinger og Legender om hellige Mænd og Kvinder*, ed. C. R. Unger, 2 vols (Christiania, 1877); and *The Life of St. Gregory and his Dialogues: Fragments of an Icelandic Manuscript from the 13th Century*, ed. H. Benediktsson (Copenhagen, 1963).

⁵ This is true of Boyer, 'The Influence of Pope Gregory's *Dialogues*', as it is of, for example, G. Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 136–37, and R. Perkins, 'The Dreams of *Flóamanna saga*', *Saga-Book* 19 (1974–77), 191–238, at 209, who have simply repeated the observations made by Bjarnarson, Sveinsson, or Boyer.

that the *Dialogi* were not written to be a storehouse of material for the authors of literary works, but rather as moral and theological instruction for the faithful. Gregory did not simply list and describe dreams and visions experienced by individuals; he also discussed their significance, categorized them, and considered their origins. The text thus not only serves as a model for later literary dreams, but also legitimizes their use and indicates specific functions that dreams may serve, as well as possible ways in which they might arise. I wish to argue that the influence of the *Dialogi* on saga literature may be detected not only in borrowed motifs and reworked episodes, but also in the ways in which dreams are presented in the sagas. In other words, the narration of saga dreams displays evidence of the existence of a conceptual framework of the kind that was constructed by Gregory and which was accessible to medieval Icelanders via the *Dialogi*. In this article, I draw the reader's attention to certain aspects of dreams from the secular sagas which show such evidence. In particular, I focus on the causes of dreams, and on those who experience and interpret them.

This article is an exploratory study of the possible connections between the dream theory expounded by Gregory and certain features of the narration of dreams in medieval Icelandic literature. The selection of dreams analysed here is very limited, consisting of only a few from the very large number of dreams in the sagas. I do not claim that all saga dreams exhibit the features highlighted here. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the *Dialogi* were just one of many possible influences on the way in which medieval Icelanders thought of dreams. There were numerous other learned sources for theories about dreams, many of which would have been available to medieval Icelanders, either in Latin or in Old Norse translation. The fifth-century author, Macrobius, whose *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* were known in medieval Iceland, wrote about

dreams, as did other major scholars of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, including Augustine of Hippo, John of Salisbury, Honorius Augustodunensis, Thomas Aquinas, William of Conches, and Albertus Magnus, all authors whose works would have been available to Icelanders.⁶ Nevertheless, my observations will show specific correspondences between Gregory's dream theory and the ways in which saga dreams are narrated, and will show that dreams in the sagas can be related to the dream theories of medieval Europe.

Nowadays, we rarely attribute much significance to our dreams; when we do, we tend to locate this significance in what dreams can tell us about ourselves, about our unconscious hopes, desires, and fears. For many in the medieval world, however, dreams served not so much as an exposition of the psyche, but rather as a window onto a spiritual realm, allowing contact between the worlds of the dead and the living, or, as was often the case, providing a means to see into the future. Such phenomena became an accepted part of reality in the Middle Ages, not only as a part of popular folk belief, but also through the literature and teachings of the Church. The Bible provides paradigmatic examples of significant dreams and visions, from Jacob's dream at Bethel (Gen. XXVIII.10–22) to the visions related by John of Patmos in Revelation. Descriptions of visions of the otherworld became a popular genre in their own right throughout the whole of Europe, appearing in both Latin and vernacular literature, including Old Norse.⁷ There is little doubt that the

⁶ S. F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1992), provides a useful overview of the dream theories formulated by these writers and the relationships between them.

⁷ For a general overview of otherworld literature in Europe in the Middle Ages, see H. R. Patch, *Descriptions of the Other World According to Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, MA, 1950). The best known description of an otherworld journey in Old Norse literature is *Eiríks saga víðförla*, ed. H. Jensen (Copenhagen, 1983),

prophetic dreams and otherworld visions described in the four books of Gregory's *Dialogi* were a major influence on the growth of this genre.

GREGORY'S DREAM THEORY

Gregory presents his theoretical discussion of dreams and precognition in the fourth book of the *Dialogi*. In it, he relates a number of examples of individuals who experience visions or seemingly acquire prophetic power shortly before death. He goes on to explain how individuals may gain insights into the future or experience visions of heaven or hell when close to death: 'Ipsa aliquando animarum uis subtilitate sua aliquid praeuidet, aliquando autem exiturae de corpore animae per reuelationem uentura cognoscunt, aliquando uero, dum iam iuxta fit ut corpus deserant, diuinitus afflatae in secretis caelestibus incorporeum oculum mentis mittunt' (III, 86).⁸ We are fortunate that part of this section of the *Dialogi* survives in the fragmentary Icelandic version, where it is rendered, 'Stvndvm fer ond neckveria hluti af afli líno oc æðli. Ítvndom vitrar gvð oordna hluti fyrer ondom þa er nalgaz vt ganga þeira or licam. Sialft andar afl ma vita oordna hluti af afli líno.'⁹

a saga with a notably religious tone, but the motif can also be found in secular sagas. See R. Power, 'Journeys to the Otherworld in the Icelandic *Formaldarsögur*', *Folklore* 96 (1985), 156–75.

⁸ 'Sometimes it is through a subtle power of their own that souls can foresee the future. At other times the future is made known to them through revelation shortly before death. Again, they are sometimes divinely inspired when they are on the point of leaving the body, and thus enabled to gaze upon the secrets of the heavenly kingdom with the incorporeal eye of their mind.' Trans. O. J. Zimmerman, *Saint Gregory the Great: Dialogues* (Washington, D.C., 1959), p. 219.

⁹ *The Life of St. Gregory and his Dialogues*, ed. H. Benediktsson, p. 61. 'Sometimes the soul sees certain things by its own power and nature. Sometimes God reveals things that have not yet happened to souls when their exit from the

Although the distinction Gregory makes between the three means of learning the future is not as clear in the Icelandic translation as in the Latin original, the examples which follow provide sufficient clarification. For the first category, Gregory cites the example of a man, a lawyer (*advocatus*) in the Latin version, but a chieftain (*högðingi*) in the Icelandic translation, who, on his deathbed, apparently predicted that he would be buried in a particular church, a prediction that came true in unlikely circumstances:

Æn litlo aðr hann andaðiz. þa bað hann svæin sinn felia fer clæði sin oc bva fig til farar. Svæinn enn lyddi æigi ordom hanf. oc hvgrði hann orar mæla. þa settiz vpp enn sívki oc tok til fata sína. oc letz fara fkilldo til kirkio síxti. agoto þa er apia hæiter. Æn hann andadiz litlo síðar. oc var qt lat at færa lic hanf til .kirkio. ianuaríi martyrif agoto þa er preneftina hæiter. æn er þeir komo alæið er lic hanf færdo. þa þotti þeim langt þangat oc fnæro for sinni agoto þa er appia hóiter oc grofo hann at þeiri .kirkio. er hann hafði firer sagt oc viffo þeir æigi hvat hann hafði mællt. Æn sía .maðr. hafði verit bvndinn iveralldar ahygiom oc matti hann af því non þetta vita af annare vitran nema fialft andar qðle fa firi hvat goraz myndi of licam hanf.¹⁰

body approaches. The very strength of the soul may know things that have not yet happened from its own inherent power.'

¹⁰ *The Life of St. Gregory and his Dialogues*, ed. Benediktsson, p. 61. 'Shortly before he [*sc.* the chieftain] died, he asked his servant to hand him his clothing and prepare him for a journey. The servant didn't heed his words, and thought he was giving voice to wild fantasies. Then the sick man got up and reached for his clothes and declared that he was going to the Church of St. Sixtus on the street called the Via Appia, but he died soon after. The plan was to bring his body to the Church of Januarius the Martyr on the street called the Via Praenestina. However, when those who were carrying his body were on their way, it seemed to them far to there and they directed their journey onto the street called the Via Appia and buried him in that church which he had specified before, though they didn't know what he had said. Yet that man had been caught up in the cares of the world and he could not have known of this holy occurrence from

This is an important passage, as it allows for the possibility that a person who is not necessarily saintly or even religious-minded, perhaps even a heathen, might be able to see the future without any direct assistance from God, a factor which has some bearing on saga dreams, as we shall see.

Gregory then turns to the second means by which the dying may gain knowledge of future events, divine revelation (*reuelatio*), and describes two examples of monks who were visited by divine messengers in a dream or vision and thus learned of their own impending deaths and those of others. The first example is that of the monk Gerontius, who is visited at night by men dressed in white, presumably angels (III, 88–90).¹¹ The next example is very similar,

any other revelation unless the very nature of the soul had foreseen what would be done with his body.

¹¹ *The Life of St. Gregory and his Dialogues*, ed. Benediktsson, p. 62: 'Gerontius het mvnkr iroma borg. Æn er hann hafdi fott tecna. þa fa hann vm natt liofa .men. ihvitom clæðom coma af himni. Æn er þeir namo ftaðar fyrer rekkio hanf. þa melte æinn þeira. Til þeff erom vær comner at taka nekqveria bredr or mvnklifi gregorií. til herferdar gvðf. þa melti hann við annan er stoð hia honom. Ritaðv nofn þeira er ec man til nefna. Æn er þvi .var. lokit þa melti hann enn. Ritaðv oc þeffa nafn er fer off. Æn at morni þa sagði geroncius brædrvm hverir dæyia mvndo or mvnclifi fyr en hann sialfr. Æn at odrvm degi þa toko mvnkar at dæyia at þeiri skipan fem þeir voro nefnder iritino. Æn fidarft þeira andadiz hann sialfr fa er fyrer fa annarra dæða.' ('Gerontius was the name of a monk in the city of Rome. And when he was taken ill, he saw in the night fair men in white garments descend from heaven. But when they stopped before his bed, then one of them said: "We have come to take some brothers from Gregory's monastery for God's campaign." Then he said to another who was standing beside him: "Write the names of those whom I shall mention." But when it was finished then he said again: "Write also the name of this one who is watching us." But in the morning, then Gerontius told the brothers which members of the community would die before himself. And two

and concerns the monk Mellitus, who was visited by a young man who carried a letter showing the names of various people, including his own, which Mellitus correctly interpreted to mean that he and the others mentioned would die shortly.¹²

days later, the monks began to die in the order in which they were named in the writ. And last of them he himself died, he who before saw the death of others.')

¹² The Old Norse version is only partially preserved, so I shall quote from the Latin version: 'In ea quoque mortalitate quae ante triennium hanc urbem uehementissima clade uastauit, in Portuensis ciuitatis monasterio Mellitus dictus est monachus, adhuc in annis iuuenalibus constitutus, sed mirae simplicitatis atque humilitatis uir, qui adpropinquante uocationis die eadem clade percussus ad extrema deductus est. Quod uir uitae uenerabilis Felix eiusdem ciuitatis episcopus audiens, cuius et haec relatione cognoui, ad eum accedere studuit, et ne mortem timere debuisset uerbis hunc persuasoriis confortare. Cui etiam adhuc de diuina misericordia longoria uitae spatia polliceri coepit.

Sed ad haec ille respondit cursus sui tempora esse completa, dicens apparuisse sibi iuuenum atque epistolas detulisse, dicentem: « Aperi et lege. » Quibus apertis, asseruit quia se et omnes qui eodem tempore a praedicto episcopo in paschali festiuitate fuerant baptizati, scriptos in eisdem epistolis litteris auresis inuenit. Primum quidem, ut dicebat, suum nomen repperit, ac deinde omnium illo in tempore baptizatorum. Qua de re certum tenuit et se et illos de hac uita esse sub celeritate migraturos.

Factumque est ut die eadem ipse moreretur, atque post eum cuncti illi qui baptizati fuerant ita secuti sunt, ut intra perpauca dies eorum nullus in hac uita remaneret. De quibus nimirum constat, quod eos praedictus Dei famulus idcirco auro scriptos uiderat, quia nomina apud se fixa aeterna claritas habebat.' (III, 90–92). 'During the plague which devastated Rome three years ago with terrible loss of life, there was a monk by the name of Mellitus in the monastery at Ostia. He was still a young man, but had acquired a remarkable degree of simplicity and humility. When his appointed hour came, he contracted the plague. Hearing of his sickness, Bishop Felix of Ostia, who is also the source for this account, hastened to Mellitus' bedside and with persuasive and comforting words assured him there was no reason to fear death. In fact, he even promised that God in His mercy would grant him an extension [sic] of life. But the sick monk answered that his span of life had come to an end. A young man had appeared to him with a letter, he said, commanding him to open it and

The third category of prescience mentioned by Gregory is that gained in what modern superstition would term a 'near-death experience', that is to say, when an individual comes close to death, and experiences a vision of heaven or of hell, but then recovers consciousness, even if only temporarily, and is able to report what he has seen. The story recounted in the *Dialogi* is that of a servant-boy, Armentarius, who appears to die of the plague, but then suddenly recovers and is able to speak in many different languages, and correctly predicts which members of the household are to die. The boy himself dies three days later.¹³

Later on in book four of the *Dialogi*, after more accounts of dreams and visions, Gregory offers a six-fold classification of the origins of dreams: 'Sciendum, Petre, est quia sex modis tangunt animam imagines somniorum. aliquando namque somnia ventris plenitudine vel inanitate, aliquando vero inlusione, aliquando cogitatione simul et inlusione, aliquando revelatione, aliquando autem cogitatione simul et revelatione generantur' (III, 172).¹⁴ Gregory

read. On opening it, he had found his own name and the names of all the others whom Bishop Felix had baptized at Easter time written down in letters of gold. His own name had appeared first on the list, followed by the others. For this reason he was certain that he and the others would die very soon.

He died the same day, and the others followed shortly after. Thus, within a few days, the entire group of those who had been baptized together passed away. We can be sure, therefore, that the saintly monk Mellitus had seen their names written in gold because they had been entered into the book of eternal life.' (Zimmerman, *Saint Gregory the Great*, p. 221).

¹³ See III, 92–94.

¹⁴ 'It is important to realize, Peter, that dreams come to the soul in six ways. They are generated either by a full stomach or by an empty one, or by illusions, or by our thoughts combined with illusions, or by revelations, or by our thoughts combined with revelations.' (Zimmerman, *Saint Gregory the Great*, p. 261).

passes over the first two causes, fullness or emptiness of the stomach, without comment, presumably because, as far as he is concerned, dreams with a simple physiological cause have no significance. The remaining four causes may be divided into two types: illusion (produced by the Devil) and revelation (divinely inspired). Both of these causes may be shaped by the preoccupations of the waking mind, for better or for worse. For each of the four main categories of causation, Gregory provides an example from scripture. He concludes that the multiplicity of causes for dreams means that to put one's faith in them is somewhat risky. They may or may not accurately predict future events, but even if they do contain some truth, this is no guarantee that they are of divine origin, as the devil 'solet multa uera praedicere, ut ad extremum ualeat animam ex una aliqua falsitate laquare.'¹⁵

The attitude towards dreams expressed in the *Dialogi* is, therefore, cautious yet not dismissive. Gregory does, of course, assert the truth and importance of dreams in which holy messengers appear, and other visions of divine revelation. He also accepts that the soul is able to gain knowledge of the future through its own innate powers. He even claims that there may be truth in dreams produced by diabolical illusion. Even so, Gregory advises against putting one's faith in dreams since their origin is so uncertain. Some people, on the other hand, are able to discern genuine divine revelations from the illusions of the Devil: 'Sancti autem uiri inter inlusiones atque reuelationes ipsas uisionum uoces aut imagines quodam intimo sapore discernunt, ut sciant uel quid a bono spiritu percipiant, uel quid ab

¹⁵ *Dialogues*, ed. de Vogüé, III, p. 176: 'is clever enough to foretell many things that are true in order finally to capture the soul by but one falsehood.' (Zimmerman, *Saint Gregory the Great*, p. 262).

inlusionē patiantur' (III, 174–76).¹⁶ The interpretation of dreams should, therefore, be left to the saints, or at least to those who possess a certain *intimus sapor*. Although everyone experiences dreams, and it is possible that these dreams may be precognitive for whoever has dreamt them, not everyone can or should attempt to interpret them.

THE CAUSES OF DREAMS

Almost all dreams in medieval Icelandic literature appear to be accurate predictions of the future – it is rare indeed for a dream to give a false indication, though this does not mean, of course, that a dream will be correctly interpreted. At the same time, however, the way in which dreams are presented in the sagas often creates an air of uncertainty around them. Phrases such as *mér þótti* and *mér sýnist* are regularly employed, as if to emphasize the subjectivity of the experiences being recounted and to distance the narrator from the content of the dream.¹⁷ Furthermore, the circumstances in which dreams occur and the reactions of those who experience them or attempt to interpret them often appear to cast some doubt on the origins of even the most obviously precognitive dream, implying that there may be more mundane – usually physiological – explanations for them.

¹⁶ 'The saints, however, can distinguish true revelations from the voices and images of illusions through an inner sensitivity. They can always recognize when they receive communications from the good Spirit and when they are face to face with illusions.' (Zimmerman, *Saint Gregory the Great*, p. 262).

¹⁷ For a discussion of the narratological indications of subjectivity and objectivity in saga narratives about the supernatural, including dreams, see R. McTurk, 'The Supernatural in *Njáls saga*: A Narratological Approach', *Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research* 23 (1990–93), 28–45.

This is true in the case of the most famous dream scene in medieval Icelandic saga literature, that of Þorsteinn Egilsson, son of the renowned poet and chieftain Egill Skalla-Grímsson, in *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*.¹⁸ This thirteenth-century saga tells of the rivalry between two accomplished poets, Gunnlaugr Illugason and Hrafn Qnundarson, for the affections of Þorsteinn's daughter, Helga *in fagra* ('the fair'). The dream in question takes place early in the saga, before the birth of Helga. In his dream, Þorsteinn sees a swan at his home in Borg. An eagle flies down from the mountains and talks to the swan, and the pair seem happy. Then another eagle arrives, wishing to court the swan, and the two eagles fight and kill each other. Next, a hawk arrives and treats the swan kindly, and they fly away together. Þorsteinn is dismissive of the dream, but his companion, a Norwegian named Bergfinnr, supplies a detailed interpretation: the birds are the apparitions of people, he says, and the dream indicates that Þorsteinn's wife will give birth to a baby girl, over whom two noble men will fight and die as a result. Then a third man will arrive whom his daughter will marry.¹⁹ Bergfinnr's interpretation turns out to be a summary of the plot of the rest of the saga: the struggle between Gunnlaugr and Hrafn for the hand of Helga *in fagra* and her marriage to Þorkell Hallkelsson after the deaths of the rival suitors in a duel.

The dream and its interpretation are well known to readers of the sagas, but the narrative context of the dream is often overlooked. The scene is prefaced by a lengthy description of the journey undertaken by Þorsteinn and his companions to the site of the Borgarfjörður assembly and the work they carried out there:

¹⁸ An edition of the saga may be found in *Borgfirðinga sögur*, ed. S. Nordal and G. Jónsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 3 (Reykjavík, 1938).

¹⁹ *Borgfirðinga sögur*, ed. Nordal and Jónsson, pp. 54–55.

Um v́́rit einn dag ræddi Þorsteinn um við Bergfinn, ef hann vildi ríða með honum upp undir Valfell; þar var þá þingstoð þeira Borgfirðinga; en Þorsteini var sagt, at fallnir væri búðarveggir hans. Austmaðrinn kvezk þat víst vilja, ok ríðu þeir heiman of daginn þrír saman ok húskarl Þorsteins, þar til er þeir koma til bæjar þess, er at Grenjum heitir. Þar bjó einn maðr félítill, er Atli hét; hann var landseti Þorsteins, ok beiddi Þorsteinn Atla, at hann fœri til starfs með þeim ok hefði pól ok reku; hann gerði svá. Ok er þeir koma til búðartóftanna, þá tóku þeir til starfs allir ok færðu út veggina. Veðrit var heitt af sólu, ok varð þeim Þorsteini ok Austmanni erfitt; ok er þeir hfðu út fœrt veggina, þá settisk Þorsteinn niðr ok Austmaðr í búðartóftina, ok sofnaði Þorsteinn ok lét illa í svefni. Austmaðr sat hjá honum ok lét hann njóta draums síns, ok er hann vaknaði, var honum erfitt orðit.²⁰

What is most striking about this passage is its mundanity. The details of the journey, the encounter with Atli, the difficulty of the work, and the state of the weather do not, on the face of it, make for an absorbing read, and can hardly be said to constitute events of great

²⁰ *Borgfirðinga sögur*, ed. Nordal and Jónsson, pp. 52–53. ‘One day in the spring Thorstein had a word with Bergfinn, whether he would like to ride with him up Valfell way, where the Borgarfjord men then had their place of assembly. It had been reported to Thorstein that the walls of his booth had caved in. The Norwegian said he would like to go very much, and they rode from home that same day, with a housecarle of Thorstein’s for a third, until they reached a farm called Grenjar. A poor man lived there, by the name of Atli; he was a tenant of Thorstein’s, and Thorstein asked him to come along and work with them and bring his spade and shovel. He did so, and when they had come [...] to the site of the booth, they all set to, rebuilding the walls.

It was a day of hot sunshine, and Thorstein and the Norwegian found it hard going, so once they had rebuilt the walls the two of them sat down inside the booth, and Thorstein dozed off and fell into an uneasy slumber. The Norwegian was sitting alongside him and let him have his dream out, but when he woke up Thorstein was deeply distressed.’ (G. Jones, *Eirik the Red and other Icelandic Sagas* [Oxford, 1961], p. 172).

importance in the story as a whole. The condition of Þorsteinn’s booth is not mentioned again in the saga and the repair work carried out by the party seems to have no impact on the events subsequently related.²¹ Why, then, does the saga author feel it necessary to provide so much detail about the events preceding Þorsteinn’s dream? One answer might be that this accumulation of apparently inconsequential details has the paradoxical effect of heightening tension, suggesting to the reader that a significant event is imminent. This narrative technique is, after all, a recognized element of saga style. But if we read the scene in the light of Gregory’s dream theory, another possibility suggests itself: Þorsteinn’s physiological state – he was exhausted after a session of hard work in the hot sunshine – was such that he fell asleep and was therefore in a position to dream. Gregory does not mention physical exertion as one of the six causes, but exhaustion might be seen as a physiological trigger not dissimilar to a full or an empty stomach.

Furthermore, the discussion about the meaning of the dream which follows Þorsteinn’s relation thereof to Bergfinn invites the reader to consider mundane explanations for dreams. Although Þorsteinn at first claims that dreams have no meaning (‘Ekki er mark at draumum’, p. 53), he later claims that the dream must be related to the weather: “[...] Ok er draumr þessi ómerkiligr,” segir hann, “ok mun vera fyrir veðrum, at þau mœtask í lopti ór þeim ættum, er mér þóttu fuglarnir fljúga.”²² Though Bergfinn’s interpretation which

²¹ Later in the saga, Hrafn’s suit for Helga’s hand in marriage is brought to Þorsteinn in his booth, and other important events in the saga take place at the assembly, but this hardly provides a convincing rationale for the inclusion of the booth-repairing episode which precedes the dream.

²² *Borgfirðinga sögur*, ed. Nordal and Jónsson, p. 55. “But the dream has no significance,” added Thorstein, “and must betoken the winds, how they clash in

follows is eventually proved to be correct (as the reader must suspect), it adds to the air of uncertainty. Dreams in the sagas are rarely assigned a single, definitive meaning.

Just as Þorsteinn falls asleep after hard work, a character in *Þorskefirdinga saga*, a less well-known, post-classical saga of Icelanders, falls asleep after expending considerable effort.²³ Þórir Oddsson and Ketilbjörn Gillason travel to the burial mound of the berserker, Agnarr Reginmóðsson, in order to acquire the treasure that is concealed therein with him:

Peir áttu at fara í fjallshlíð nökkura til haugsins, ok er þeir kómu upp í hlíðina, laust í móti þeim svá miklu fárviðri, at hvárgi mátti upp standa. Þeir höfðu milli sín eitt snæri, ok gekk Þórir fyrir, meðan hann mátti. En um síðir tók upp hvárntveggja ok kastaði ofan fyrir hlíðina, ok nú festir snærit um stein einn mikinn, en þeir váru ákafa móðir ok lágu þar, til þess er svefn fell á þá.²⁴

Þórir then has a dream in which Agnarr appears to him and grants him treasure and magical objects. The objects serve as a token of the genuinely supernatural nature of the dream, just as the fact that the events of *Gunnlaugs saga* come true shows that Þorsteinn's dream is genuinely precognitive. Nonetheless, in this passage, *Þorskefirdinga saga* offers a description of exhausting work preceding a dream rather

the air from those quarters of the sky out of which it seemed to me the birds made their flight.” (Jones, *Eirik the Red and other Icelandic Sagas*, p. 173).

²³ For an edition of the saga see *Harðar saga*, ed. Þ. Vilmundarson and B. Vilhjálmsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 13 (Reykjavík, 1991).

²⁴ *Harðar saga*, ed. Vilmundarson and Vilhjálmsson, p. 184. ‘They had to go up a certain mountainside to reach the mound, and as they were going up the side, a storm blew up against them so strongly that neither of them could stand up. They had a rope between them, and Þórir went on while he was able to. At last, he lifted them both up and launched them down the other side, and now fastens the rope to a large stone. They were extremely tired and lay there until sleep overcame them.’

similar to that found in *Gunnlaugs saga*. In both sagas, then, alternative, more mundane, causes for dreams are implied, even though certain contextual elements lead us to favour the supernatural explanation.

To find examples of physiological disturbance as a precursor to a significant dream closer to the kind which Gregory indicated could cause dreams, we can turn to the Icelandic romances. In *Valdimars saga*, a romance composed in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, a giantess appears to the hero in a dream and grants him assistance in his quest to find his sister, Marmórla, who has been abducted by a dragon.²⁵ There is no doubt that this dream is a genuine supernatural encounter, as the giantess leaves behind magic objects which are present when Valdimar wakes up (as happens in *Þorskefirdinga saga*). Yet, as in the case of Þorsteinn's dream in *Gunnlaugs saga*, an examination of the context in which it occurs is revealing. The narration of the dream is immediately preceded by a description of Valdimar's journey in search of his sister: ‘ok nu ridr jungkiærj Ualldimar a merkr ok skoga um alla fíora daga hafandj huorkj suefn ne mat edr dryck ok arla eins dags kemr hann fram j eitt ríodr. hann uar þa badj syfiadr ok hungradr. hann settezt undir eina eik ok lídr þa omegen yfer hann.’²⁶ This description might have been included because the passage serves to demonstrate Valdimar's determination to find his sister – he is so set on his mission that he is neglectful of his own bodily needs – or that it provides a reason for

²⁵ *Late Medieval Romances*, ed. A. Loth, Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ, B, 20–4, 5 vols (Copenhagen, 1962–65), I (1962), 51–78, at 55–56. Further references to the saga are to this edition.

²⁶ *Late Medieval Romances*, ed. Loth, I, p. 55. ‘And now young lord Valdimar rides into forests and woods for a whole four days, having neither sleep nor food nor drink, and early one day he arrives in a clearing. He was by then both sleepy and hungry. He sat down under an oak tree and then unconsciousness overcomes him.’

why Valdimar falls asleep and so provides an opportunity for him to dream. But, recalling Gregory's writings, an *inanitas ventris* ('emptiness of stomach') was one of the causes of dreams. The saga draws further attention to Valdimar's physiological needs: the objects that the giantess leaves behind for him are food and drink, of which he partakes when he wakes up. Having eaten his fill, Valdimar falls asleep again, though his *plenitudo ventris*, unlike the *inanitas ventris*, precedes no dream.

In another romance, *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, a work from the first half of the fourteenth century, the hero dreams of his marriage to a beautiful woman in a magnificent city, a vision which is realized later on in the saga after Rémundur undertakes a long quest to find the dream-maiden.²⁷ The dream itself is long and detailed, but again, it is worth examining the context. The dream takes place immediately after he returns from the drinking-table ('undan drykkjuborðum'). In this case, the implied cause of the dream is a *plenitudo ventris*, even though the dream is genuinely precognitive, as the events of the saga subsequently show.

Intriguing to a twenty-first century readership are those dreams which may be shaped by the preoccupations of the waking mind. The fourteenth-century romance, *Mírmanns saga*, provides us with a rather modern-sounding example of a dream with a possible psychological cause (Gregory's *cogitatio*, which may be combined with illusion or revelation).²⁸ Like that of Þorsteinn in *Gunnlaugs saga*, the dream takes place near the beginning of the saga, before the birth of Mírmann, the central character of the story. It is experienced by Hermann, the staunchly heathen Earl of Saxony, and told to his wife, Brígiða:

²⁷ *Rémundar saga keisarasonar*, ed. S. G. Broberg, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 38 (Copenhagen, 1909–12), pp. 12–21.

²⁸ For an edition of the saga, see *Mírmanns saga*, ed. D. Slay, Editiones Arnarnagæanæ, A, 17 (Copenhagen, 1997).

Nv er fra þui at segia at eina not er þau huildu j sæng sinni. þa ræddi hon vid jarl þessum ordum. at hon mundi eigi einnsamann vera ok kallar helldr vænt til getnadar med þeim. Enn jarl þagdi langa hrid. enn hon spurdi hui þat sætti. Hugda eg at þetta mundi þer feginn saga. þui at her til hefir okcr bædi leingi til langat. Jarl svaradi þa. Ef þessi getnadr verdr ath fagnadi þa væri vel. enn mer syndiz fyrir skömmo j suefni kynligr hlutr. ok em ek þui farædinn vm. Hon spurdi huatt hann dreymdi. Mik dreymdi sagdi hann ath þu hafdir orm einn j serk þer ok þotti mer vera vndarlíga mikil ok olmr. enn þa er ek vilda hann taka ok kippa honum fra þer beit hann mik svo at ek hafda ekci afl vid honum. Enn hon svaradi litils þikci mer vert vm draum þenna. Mantþu j sumar er vid lekum okcr at þu skeindiz a tygil knifi minum er ek hafda j serk mer ok er þetta eigi meira mark. Jarl mælti. eigi skorta þig ord ok hardlyndi. enn huersu sem þu slettir þetta med tungo þinni. þa vilda ek heldr at nidr hefdi sokcit halft riki mitt er ek a Saxlandi ok hefdi mik þetta eigi dreymtt. Enn nu fell þersi ræda at sinni.²⁹

²⁹ *Mírmanns saga*, ed. Slay, p. 2. 'Now it is to be told that one night, as they were resting in their bed, she addressed the earl with these words, that she would be with child and said it was rather promising for a conception for them. But the earl remained silent for a long time. She asked what the reason was – "I thought that this would be joyful news for you, because both of us have hitherto desired this for a long time." Then the earl replied: "If this conception turns out joyful, then all would be well. But a strange thing appeared to me a short while ago in my sleep, and that is why I am quiet." She asked what he dreamt. "I dreamt," said he, "that you had a snake in your shirt and it seemed to me to be extraordinary large and savage. But, when I wanted to take it and snatch it from you, it bit me so that I had no strength against it." She replied, "This dream seems of little significance to me. Remember in the summer when we played together and you scratched yourself on my knife which I had in my shirt? This has no greater meaning." The earl said, "You are not short of words and a hard temper. But howsoever you smooth this over with your tongue, I would rather that half my realm which I own in Saxony had sunk down and I had not dreamt this." And now this conversation stopped for the time being.'

Hermann's suspicions prove to be correct: he is later slain by his son, Mírmann, in an angry confrontation which takes place when Mírmann tries to convert his father to Christianity. It is notable, though, that Brígiða's explanation of the cause of the dream is perfectly plausible, notwithstanding the later events of the saga.

DREAMERS, DREAMS, AND THEIR INTERPRETERS

Those who experience dreams in the sagas form a diverse group of characters. Gregory's theory of precognitive dreams allows for the possibility that wicked men or even heathens could have a genuinely precognitive dream. Both historical and romance sagas include plenty of examples of heathens experiencing precognitive dreams. The aforementioned dream from *Mírmanns saga* is an example of this, as is Heinrekr's dream from the romance *Bærings saga*: Heinrekr dreams that he gets savaged by a lion, the king of beasts, and this predicts his eventual defeat at the hands of Bæringr at the end of the saga.³⁰ These cases are analogous to that of the *advocatus* or *hofðingi* whose knowledge of the future came from the innate powers of the individual's soul, according to Gregory's analysis.

Although those who successfully interpret dreams in the sagas also constitute a diverse set of people, it is a group which is marked out in the texts as being exclusive. The interpretation of dreams attracts at least as much attention as the dreams themselves, and the ability to interpret dreams correctly is a highly-prized skill in all kinds of sagas. In many cases, there are rival interpretations of dreams, with one character giving a mundane interpretation and another giving a more ominous (and accurate) one.

The character of Bergfinnr, who interprets Þorsteinn's dream in *Gunnlaugs saga*, is a case in point. The Norwegian is a somewhat

³⁰ See *Fornsögur Suðrlanda*, ed. G. Cederschiöld (Lund, 1884), 85–123, at 86.

mysterious character, entering the saga immediately prior to the dream scene, and disappearing after he has interpreted the dream (the narrator explicitly stating, 'er hann nú ór sögunni').³¹ We are told little about him other than that he is a wealthy Norwegian, getting on in years, a wise man, and interested in dreams.³² This last point serves to reinforce the suspicion that Bergfinnr's only purpose in the narrative is to persuade Þorsteinn to describe his dream and interpret it. Bergfinnr is not a saint, of course (the beginning of the saga is set in the late tenth century, before the conversion of Iceland and Norway to Christianity). That Bergfinnr has a specialized skill in the interpretation of dreams, however, reminds us of Gregory's advice to leave the interpretation of dreams to those with an *intimus sapor*.

The skill of dream interpretation is the subject around which the action of the fourteenth-century romance, *Drauma-Jóns saga* revolves.³³ Jón, the hero of the saga, is a poor farmer's son who has the extraordinary ability not only to interpret dreams accurately but also to describe the contents of people's dreams before they are told to him. Earl Heinrekr, who is also skilled at the interpretation of dreams, but lacks Jón's ability to describe dreams before they are told, is jealous of Jón's gift, and attempts to have him killed so that he can eat his heart and thus gain his power. Thanks to the intervention of

³¹ *Borgfirðinga sögur*, ed. Nordal and Jónsson, p. 55. ('He is now out of the saga.')

³² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

³³ Although *Drauma-Jóns saga* is traditionally classed among the romances, having been included in Bjarni Vilhjálmsson's edition of works of this genre, it has the quality of an exemplum, and, as Davíð Erlingsson has shown, it is an Icelandic version of an international folk-tale. See D. Erlingsson, 'Ætterni Drauma-Jóns sögu', in *Opuscula*, VII, ed. J. Louis-Jensen, J. Helgason, and P. Springborg, Bibliotheca Arnarnagæana, 34 (Copenhagen, 1979), pp. 172–218. The standard scholarly edition is R. I. Page, 'Drauma-Jóns saga', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 1 (1957), 22–56. See also *Riddarasögur*, ed. B. Vilhjálmsson, 6 vols (n.p., 1949–54), vi (1951), 147–70.

the earl's wife, Ingibjörg, Jón's life is saved: a dummy of his body is made, and Heinrekr is fed a dog's heart instead of the real thing. Eventually, Heinrekr is exposed when he fails to describe the Emperor of Saxland's dream when asked, and the Emperor demands to see Jón, who successfully describes and interprets his dream. It is notable that Jón is portrayed as a saintly individual, in contrast to the treacherous Heinrekr. He possesses the *intimus sapor* which Gregory stated to be an essential attribute for the correct interpretation of dreams.

In *Bærings saga*, Heinrekr does not understand the meaning of his dream (experienced near the beginning of the saga) until near the end, when his defeat at the hands of Bæringr is assured.³⁴ Although he is able to have a precognitive dream, he does not have the kind of *intimus sapor* that Gregory mentioned to be able to interpret the dream correctly.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have highlighted some of the correspondences between medieval dream theory and the dreams in Old Norse saga literature. I have shown that the conceptual framework presented in the *Dialogi* corresponds to that which we can reconstruct from narratives about dreams in the sagas. It is often possible to identify a cause (or stated cause) for a dream in a saga that fits into Gregory's schema, whether it is diabolical illusion or divine revelation, or a physiological or psychological trigger. We find the same emphasis on the uncertainty about both the causes of dreams and how they should be interpreted in the sagas as we do in Gregory's writings. Even though a dream might appear to be genuinely precognitive, or otherwise supernatural, it might also be accompanied by indications

³⁴ *Fornsögur Suðurlanda*, ed. Cederschiöld, p. 122.

of an alternative cause, usually physiological, as in *Gunnlaugs saga* or *Valdimars saga*, sometimes psychological, as in *Mírmanns saga*. In Old Norse literature, as in the *Dialogi*, anyone can have a supernatural dream. Whether a character is Christian or heathen, virtuous or wicked, seems to have little bearing on how significant a dream is.³⁵ Interpreters of dreams, however, are a more exclusive group of people. Some people are not able to interpret dreams correctly. This ability is limited to those who possess the *intimus sapor* that Gregory mentioned.

There have been many analyses in the field of Old Norse studies of the imagery of saga dreams and of how they function in the narratives; there have also been examinations in the more general field of medieval studies of the dream theories presented in learned writings of medieval Europe.³⁶ There have, however, been no

³⁵ It might be suggested, however, that there are connections between the different kinds of dream and the status of the individuals experiencing the dreams. Heathens and the wicked are more likely to have dreams associated with Nordic folk belief, such as fetch dreams (though the virtuous can have these) or visions of heathen gods; generally, only Christians and virtuous characters experience revelations. For a Christian, dreams associated with heathen culture might be explained by reference to Gregory's assertion that foreknowledge of the future could arise from the innate powers of the soul; the appearance of heathen gods might be explained by diabolic illusion. This is the case for the appearance of Þórr in *Flóamanna saga* (see *Harðar saga*, ed. Vilmundarson and Vilhjálmsson).

³⁶ Among the best known of the studies of saga dreams are W. Henzen, *Über die Träume in der altnordischen Sagalitteratur* (Leipzig, 1890); G. D. Kelchner, *Dreams in Old Norse Literature and their Affinities in Folklore* (Cambridge, 1935); and R. J. Glendinning, *Träume und Vorbedeutung in der Islendinga Saga Sturla Thordarsons: eine Form- und Stiluntersuchung*, Kanadische Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur, 8 (Berne, 1974). Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, is, as mentioned above, a recent contribution to the more general study of dream theory in medieval scholarship.

significant attempts to trace the influence of these theories on saga literature. Such an attempt would help us to identify the place of the sagas in the wider medieval European intellectual tradition. My study aims to show that a broader analysis of dream theory in Icelandic literature would be both a possible and a valuable undertaking.

The Figure of Arthur in *Chwedyl Iarllles y Ffynnawn* and *Ystorya Gereint uab Erbin*

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Chwedyl Iarllles y Ffynnawn and *Ystorya Gereint uab Erbin* are two of the three so-called Arthurian 'romances'. They exist in the White Book of Rhydderch (National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, MSS Peniarth 4 and 5) and Red Book of Hergest (Jesus College Oxford, MS CXI) compilations and are probably twelfth-century in date.¹ Scholarship on these texts has often concentrated on their relationship to the twelfth-century French romances by Chrétien de Troyes, *Yvain* and *Erec*, which have roughly the same plots and characters. However, attempts have also been made to analyse these texts from a more literary angle, for example by Helen Fulton in her recent article on the place of the hero in society.² I will be approaching the texts in this way, ignoring their French analogues. My focus will be the dialogue of the tales, and how a close look at this can illuminate the figure of Arthur, who, I will argue, embodies a prominent theme in both texts.

The plots of the two tales complement each other, to a certain extent being opposites of each other. Each centres around the fall from grace of an Arthurian hero and how he regains his honour and

¹ The standard editions are *Owein, or Chwedyl Iarllles y Ffynnawn*, ed. R. L. Thomson (Dublin, 1986) and *Ystorya Gereint uab Erbin*, ed. R. L. Thomson (Dublin, 1997). The introductions to these editions discuss the manuscript traditions and likely dating of the texts.

² H. Fulton, 'The Individual and Society in *Owein/Yvain* and *Gereint/Erec*' in *The Individual in Celtic Literature*, Celtic Studies Association of North America Yearbook 1, ed. J. F. Nagy, pp. 15–50.

place in society. The mistakes made by the heroes of *Iarllles y Ffynnawn* and *Gereint* are opposite: Owein, the hero of *Iarllles y Ffynnawn*, becomes too involved in martial activities at the expense of his marriage, while Gereint becomes too wrapped up in his marriage, neglecting his roles as ruler and knight. These faults are not, however, simply due to the characters' own personalities; to a large extent they are the product of the faults evident in the societies depicted in the two tales. The issue of authority in particular is highlighted in both tales, both seeming concerned with how effectively and rigorously authority is exercised. Naturally the figure of Arthur is central to this theme, since he is the undisputed ruler in both texts. This paper will show how Arthur's personality and place in society are created by the dialogue in these two tales: both what Arthur says and what is said to him.

The issue of authority is introduced at the start of both tales, with Arthur's relationship to his court illuminated by his first conversations. In *Iarllles y Ffynnawn* the author gives us a calm, domesticated scene, with Arthur leaning on cushions in the middle of a room, Gwenhwyfar and her maidens sewing at the window and a few men – Cei, Owein and Cynon – accompanying Arthur.³ Arthur's first words fit into this scene but come as a surprise: 'Ha wyr, pei na'm goganewch ... mi a gyskwn tra uewn yn aros vy mwyt'.⁴ It seems extraordinary that a man with the power and authority of Arthur should even consider the possibility that his men might make fun of him – surely the idea of laughing at their king would be anathema to the men. These strange words therefore indicate to the audience immediately that the society depicted in *Iarllles y Ffynnawn* may not be

³Owein, lines 1–12.

⁴Owein, lines 13–14, 'Oh men, if you will not make fun of me ... I will sleep while I await my food.' My translations throughout.

quite what might be expected of an Arthurian setting. Arthur seems weak and insecure, and his desire to take a nap gives the impression of elderly feebleness or decadent laziness. The respect any audience familiar with Arthurian literature might automatically assign to Arthur has already been undermined.

In contrast, *Gereint* starts with a flourish of pomp and ceremony with the court depicted at one of the largest state occasions of the year, Easter, in all its finery.⁵ Arthur is introduced holding court, surrounded by his men, ready to pass judgement, grant or deny requests, in short, exercise his royal authority.⁶ His first conversation is with a forester, Madog, who arrives unexpectedly from the Forest of Dean with a question to put to Arthur:

A dyuod a oruc hyd rac bron Arthur. 'Henpych gwell, arglwyd,' heb ef. 'Dyw a rodo da it,' heb ynteu, 'a gresso Dyw vrthyt. Ac a oys chwedleu o newyd gennyd ti?'

'Oes, arglwyd,' heb yr ynteu.

'Nyd adwen i di,' heb yr Arthur.

'Ryued yw genyf nu na'm atwaynost; a forestwr i ti, arglwyd, vyf i yn forest y Dena. A Madauc yw uy enw, uab Twrgadam.'

'Dywed ti dy chwedleu,' heb yr Arthur.

'Dywedaf, arglwyd,' heb yr ef. 'Carw a weleist yn y forest, ac ny weleis yrmoet y gyfryw.'

'Pa beth yssyd arnaw ef,' heb yr Arthur, 'pryt na welut eiroyd y gyfryw?'

'Purwyn, arglwyd, yw, ac ny cherda gyd ac un aniuell o ryuyc a balchder rac y urenhineidet. Ac y ouyn kyghor i ti, arglwyd, y dodwyf i. Beth yw dy gyghor y amdanaw?'

'Iawnaf y gwnaf i,' heb yr Arthur, 'mynet y hely ef yuory yn ieuengtit y dyt, a pheri gwybot heno ar bawb o'r llettyeu hynny, ac ar Ryuerys (oed benkynyd y Arthur) ac ar Eliuri (a oed penn maccwyf), ac ar bawb y am hynny.'

⁵*Gereint*, lines 1–17.

⁶*Gereint*, lines 26–7.

Ac ar hynny y trigassant, a gellwg y macwyf o'r blaen a oruc.
Ac yna y dywawd Gwenhwyuar vrth Arthur, 'Arglwyd,' heb hi, 'a genhedy di uyui auory y uynet y ydrych ac y warandaw ar hely y carw a dywawd y macwyf?'

'Canyhadaf yn llawen,' heb yr Arthur.

'Mineu a af,' heb hi.

Ac yna y dywawd Gwalchmei vrth Arthur, 'Arglwyd,' heb ef, 'ponyd oed iawn i tithew canhadu y'r neb a delei hwnnw attaw yn y helua llad y benn a'y rodi y'r neb y mynhei, ay y orderch itaw e hun, ae y orderch y gydymdeith itaw, na marchawc na phedestyr y del itaw?'

'Canhadaf yn llawen,' heb yr Arthur; 'a bid y keryd ar y distein ony byd parawt pawb y bore y uynet y hely.'⁷

And he came in front of Arthur. 'May it be well, lord,' he said.

'May God do good to you,' he said, 'and God's welcome to you. And do you have tidings of news?'

'Yes, lord,' he said.

'I don't recognize you,' said Arthur.

'Now it is strange to me that you don't recognize me; I'm a forester of yours, lord, in the Forest of Dean. And Madog is my name, son of Twrgadarn.'

'Tell your tidings,' said Arthur.

'I will, lord,' he said. 'I have seen a stag in the forest, and I've never seen its like.'

'What is it about it,' said Arthur, 'that you've never seen its like?'

'It is, lord, pure white, and it doesn't travel with any animal from arrogance and pride of its kingliness. And I came, lord, to ask your counsel. What is your counsel concerning it?'

'I will do what is most right,' said Arthur, 'go to hunt it tomorrow in the youth of the day, and let it be known tonight to everyone in these lodgings, and to Ryferys (who was Arthur's chief huntsman) and to Elifri (who was chief squire) and to everyone about that.'

And on that they decided, and the squire was sent away from before him. And then Gwenhwyfar said to Arthur, 'Lord,' she said, 'will you

⁷*Gereint*, lines 31–60.

permit me tomorrow to go to watch and listen to the hunting of the stag the squire spoke of?'

'Yes, gladly,' said Arthur. [or 'I will permit it, and welcome']

'I will go,' she said.

And then Gwalchmei said to Arthur, 'Lord,' he said, 'would it not be right for you to permit the one to whom it may come in the hunt to cut off the head and give it to the one whom he wants, either to his own lady or to his companion's lady, whether it come to a knight or a pedestrian?'

'Yes, gladly,' said Arthur; 'and the blame will be on the *distein* unless everyone is ready in the morning to go hunting.'

Arthur welcomes the man but then states baldly, 'Nyd adwen i di'.⁸ Madog is apparently offended and hurt that his lord does not know him and quickly introduces himself. Arthur, however, makes no attempt to placate his man or soothe his hurt feelings, simply demanding, 'Dywed ti dy chwetleu'.⁹ This curttness makes Arthur seem rather aloof and arrogant, impressions strengthened as Gwenhwyfar and Gwalchmei both make requests of Arthur in the most deferential possible way. Arthur deals with all the questions put to him with brisk and dispassionate dispatch, contrasting markedly with the rather lax Arthur of *Iarllles y Ffynnwaw*. Arthur claims the right to lay down the standard of right and wrong for his court, saying, 'Tawnaf y gwnaf i'¹⁰ – he will inevitably do what is best because he knows best and has the authority to impose his decision on others. His ominous warning that the *distein* will be in trouble should everyone not be assembled in an orderly way the next day seems to hint that Arthur's standards are high and penalties will be incurred by anyone at court who fails to reach them.

⁸*Gereint*, lines 34–5, 'I don't recognize you'.

⁹*Gereint*, lines 36–7, 'Tell your tidings'.

¹⁰*Gereint*, line 44, 'I will do what is most right'.

From these first conversations, therefore, Arthur has been presented in the two tales as having very different personalities. In *Gereint* he seems aloof, dictatorial and perhaps slightly bad-tempered, whereas in *Iarllles y Ffynnawn* he seems a little feeble, possibly lazy and easy-going. These impressions are swiftly reinforced. The next morning in *Gereint*, Arthur's harsh words regarding his wife's oversleeping indicate a rather rigid and easily offended nature – 'Na deffrowch hi ... canys gwell genthi gyscu no mynet y edrych ar yr hely'.¹¹ Arthur seems to view Gwenhwyfar's failure to take advantage of his permission for her to watch the hunting as a personal insult, as if she has deliberately slighted his gift and therefore his authority. In *Iarllles y Ffynnawn*, Arthur wakes from his nap into the middle of a sharp exchange of words between Gwenhwyfar and Cei:

'Ha wyr,' heb yr Owein, 'ponyt oed da mynet y geisaw dywanu ar y lle hwnnw?'

'Mynn llaw vyg kyfeillt,' heb y Kei, 'mynych y dywedut ar dy dauawt yr hynny peth nys gwnelut ar dy weithret.'

'Duw a wyr,' heb y Gwenhwyfar, 'oed gwell dy grogi di, Gei, no dywedut ymadrawd mor warthaedic a hwnnw wrth wr mal Owein.'

'Myn llaw vyg kyfeillt, wreicda,' heb y Kei, 'nyt mwy o volyant y Owein a dywedeist di no minneu.'

Ac ar hynny deffroi a oruc Arthur, a gofyn a gysgassei hayach.

'Do, arglwyd,' heb yr Owein, 'dalym.'

'Ae amser ynni vynet y'r byrdeu?'

'Amser, arglwyd,' heb yr Owein.

Ac yna kanu korn ymolchi a wnaethpwyt, a mynet a wnaeth yr amherawdyr a'e deulu oll y vwytta.¹²

'Oh men,' said Owein, 'wouldn't it be good to go to try to alight on that place?'

¹¹*Gereint*, lines 72–3, "Do not wake her ... since she would rather sleep than go to watch the hunting."

¹²*Owein*, lines 119–28.

'By the hand of my companion,' said Cei, 'often has been said on your tongue that thing that was not done by your action.'

'God knows,' said Gwenhwyfar, 'it would be better to hang you, Cei, than for you to say something as disgraceful as that about a man like Owein.'

'By the hand of my companion, noblewoman,' said Cei, 'you have not spoken more praise of Owein than I have.'

And at the Arthur woke up and asked if he had slept at all.

'Yes, lord,' said Owein, 'a little.'

'Is it time for us to go to the tables?'

'Time, lord,' said Owein.

And then the washing horn was sounded, and the emperor and all his warband went to eat.

Cei started the trouble by belittling Owein's courage, claiming that he often boasted and failed to deliver on the boasts. Gwenhwyfar rebukes Cei severely – using an oath to reinforce her words – 'Duw a wyr ... oed gwell dy grogi di, Gei, no dywedut ymadrawd mor warthaedic a hwnnw wrth wr mal Owein'. The violent imagery, oath, and the strongly disparaging word *warthaedic* as well as the emphatic constructions used in the sentence all demonstrate the strength of Gwenhwyfar's outrage. Cei hits back with an ambiguous speech – 'Myn llaw vyg kyfeillt, wreicda ... nyt mwy o volyant y Owein a dywedeist di no minneu'. On the face of it, Cei is claiming that he has praised Owein in the past just as much as Gwenhwyfar. However, Cei's use of the term of address *wreicda* in place of *arglwydes*, the usual term used to a woman of higher rank than oneself, and the tense context of the speech make it seem likely he may intend another meaning (perhaps as well) – that Gwenhwyfar has in the past praised Owein very little, perhaps even insulted him as badly or worse than Cei behind his back. At this point, with the atmosphere full of animosity and incipient conflict, Arthur wakes up and the tale relates 'a gofyn a gysgassei hayach'. The inanity of the question contrasts markedly to the previously loaded exchanges, making Arthur seem

foolishly oblivious. His next question is similarly inane, 'Ae amser inni vynet y'r byrdeu?'. Owein's answers are calm and respectful – he seems to be the one in control, both in this brief conversation with Arthur, in which he is placed in the superior position of provider of information, and in the wider context of Gwenhwyfar and Cei's petulant sniping.

Arthur's role in *Gereint* is far more prominent than in *Iarllles y Ffynnawn*, reflecting his more active character and stronger authority. In both tales Arthur disappears from the scene for a while as the heroes undertake their first adventures.¹³ In *Gereint*, however, Arthur's opinion of Gereint's adventure – not a particularly favourable one – is stressed, and he takes part in several conversations that make this clear.¹⁴ Arthur's reappearance in *Iarllles y Ffynnawn* also shows him disapproving of his knight's quest – in this case not because he feels that it is unjust or excessive (as in *Gereint*) but because he misses Owein.

Ac ual yd oed Walchmei diwarnawt yn gorymdeith y gyt a'r amherawdyr Arthur, edrych a oruc ar Arthur a'e welet yn trist gystudedic; a doluryaw a oruc Gwalchmei yn uawr o welet Arthur yn y drych hwnnw, a gofyn a oruc idaw.

'Arglwyd,' heb ef, 'py derw itti?'

'Y rof a Duw, Walchmei,' heb yr Arthur, 'hiraeth yssyd arnaf am Owein a golles y gennyf meint teir blyned. Ac o bydaf y bedwarded vlwydyn heb y welet, ny byd vy eneit y'm korff. A mi a wn yn hyspys panyw o ymdidan Kynon mab Clydno y kolles Owein y gennym.'

'Nyt reit itti,' heb y Gwalchmei, 'luydyaw dy gyfoeth yr hynny; namyn ti a gwyr dy ty a eill dial Owein or llas, neu y rydhau ot ydyw yg karchar, ac os buw, y dwyn gyt a thi.'

Ac ar y dywawt Gwalchmei y trigywyt.¹⁵

¹³ In *Owein* from line 230–455, in *Gereint* from line 80–397.

¹⁴ *Gereint*, 468–484, 489–95, 515–524, 610–18.

¹⁵ *Owein*, lines 455–467.

And one day as Gwalchmei was walking with the emperor Arthur, he looked at Arthur and saw that he was sad and afflicted; and Gwalchmei grieved greatly to see Arthur in that state, and asked him. 'Lord,' he said, 'what has happened to you?'

'Between me and God, Gwalchmei,' he said, 'I have a longing for Owein who has been lost to me the length of three years. And if I am a fourth year without seeing him, my soul will not be in my body. And I know it was because of Cynon mab Clydno's tale that Owein has been lost to us.'

'There is no need for you,' said Gwalchmei, 'to muster your kingdom about that; but you and the men of your household can avenge Owein if he has been killed, or free him if he's imprisoned, or if he is alive, bring him with you.'

And it was decided according to Gwalchmei's speech.

Arthur apparently does not have the determination to announce his desire to see Owein again to his court and attempt to find him. Instead, it is only when Gwalchmei notices that the king seems sad that Arthur reveals his longing. Even then, Arthur seems incapable of forming a plan to get what he wants, leaving Gwalchmei to suggest the best course of action.

In *Iarllles y Ffynnawn*, Arthur sets off to find Owein because he regards him as a friend and wants to see him again. In *Gereint*, Arthur shows no interest in Gereint's whereabouts, and this lack is thrown into relief by Gwenhwyfar's keen interest.¹⁶ Arthur does, however, express sympathy with Edern, whom Gereint defeated and injured as punishment for an insult done to Gwenhwyfar and himself.¹⁷ Arthur shows little or no concern for Gwenhwyfar's honour and she remarks

¹⁶ She sets men to watch for Gereint (*Gereint*, lines 420–1) and questions Edern about when Gereint might arrive (*Gereint*, lines 465–6).

¹⁷ He repeats that Edern's injuries are disproportionate to the insult he did to Gwenhwyfar (*Gereint*, lines 482–3, 518–19, 614–16) and instructs Morgan Tud to give him the best possible medical care (*Gereint*, lines 490–2).

on this, pointing out that an insult to her is an insult to him.¹⁸ When Gereint arrives back at court both king and queen welcome him, and the contrast in their attitudes towards him is marked:

'Dyw a rodo da it,' heb hi, 'a chresso vrthyt; a hynt ffrwythlawn donyawc hyrrwyd cloduawr a dugost. A Dyw a dalho it,' heb hi, 'peri iawn ym yn gualchet ac y pereist.'

'Arglwydes,' heb ef, 'mi a ry buchwn peri iawn it vrth dy ywyllus. A llyma y uorwyn y keueist ti dy warthrud o'e achaws.'

'Te,' heb y Gwenhwyfar, 'gressaw Dyw vrthi. Ac nyt cam im uot yn llawen vrthi.'

Dyuot y mywn a orugant a discynnu, a mynet Gereint yn yd oed Arthur a chyuarth gwll itaw.

'Dyw a rodo da it,' heb yr Arthur, 'a chresso Dyw vrthyt. A chyt caffo Edern uab Nud gouut a chlwyueu genhyt ti, hynt llwydyannus a dugost.'

'Nyt arnaf i y bu hynny,' heb y Gereint, 'namyn ar ryuyc Edern uab Nud e hun, nat ymgystlynei; nyt ymadawn inheu ac ef yny vpwyn pwy uei, neu yny orfei y lleill ar y llall.'

'A vr,' heb yr Arthur, 'pa le y may y uorwyn a gilef y bot y'th ardelw di?'¹⁹

'May God do good to you,' said she, 'and welcome to you; and you have had a fruitful, skilful, successful, famous journey. And may God repay you,' she said, 'for avenging me so nobly as you have.'

'Lady,' he said, 'I wanted to avenge you according to your will. And behold the maiden because of whom you were insulted.'²⁰

'Well,' said Gwenhwyfar, 'God's welcome to her. And it is not wrong for me to welcome her.'

¹⁸ *Gereint*, lines 477–9 '... vrth uot yn gymeint gywilid y ti, arglwyd, kyhyrdu gvarthaed a myui ac a thi dy hun', '... since it is as much shame to you, lord, for insult to touch me as you yourself.'

¹⁹ *Gereint*, lines 507–20.

²⁰ I find the alternative in the Peniarth 6 version, 'dy diwarthrudyaw', makes more sense: 'because of whom you were freed from insult'.

They came inside and alighted, and Gereint went to where Arthur was and greeted him.

'May God do good to you,' said Arthur, 'and God's welcome to you. And although Edern fab Nud got injury and wounds from you, you had a successful journey.'

'Not on me was the blame for that,' said Gereint, 'but on the pride of Edern fab Nud himself, that he wouldn't identify himself; and I would not leave him until I knew who he was, or until one overcame the other.'

'Oh man,' said Arthur, 'where is the maiden I heard was avowed to you?'

Arthur's reception of Gereint is both cold (in contrast to Gwenhwyfar's effusive string of four adjectives of praise, Arthur bestows only one) and disapproving – 'A chyt caffo Edern uab Nud gouut a chwyueu genhyt ti, hynt llwydyannus a dugost'. The prominent place given to Edern's injuries effectively strips away the strength of the praise, leading Gereint to respond defensively, 'Nyt arnaf i y bu hynny ... namyn ar ryuyc Edern uab Nud e hun'. Arthur refuses to be drawn into a discussion of the matter, however, changing the subject at once. Perhaps he feels that to argue with Gereint would be beneath him.

Arthur is not seen to fight in either of the two tales, although he comes close in *Iarllles y Ffynnawn* when they catch up with Owein and the court fights him one by one until only Arthur and Gwalchmei are left. Arthur then prepares to go out and challenge Owein, only to be stopped by Gwalchmei with the words, 'Och, arglwyd ... gat y mi vynet y ymwan a'r marchawc yn gyntaf'.²¹ This does little to heighten Arthur's prestige, indeed seeming slightly farcical. Gwalchmei's dismay at the idea of his lord fighting seems genuine, with the exclamation *och* highlighting his sincerity. Again there is a hint in this that Arthur may be envisaged as rather old in this tale. It is notable

²¹ *Owein*, lines 514–15, 'Alas, lord ... let me go to fight the knight first'.

that Arthur speaks very little in the passage leading up to the reunion with Owein. His words are reported indirectly as he gives permission to every request placed before him, only once being given in direct speech.²² Arthur's voice is therefore nearly absent from the tale, weakening him as a character and strengthening the impression that he is only nominally in control of his court. Arthur does get a chance, however, to demonstrate a certain amount of wisdom and fatherliness when Owein and Gwalchmei start a polite dispute over who has won their duel. Arthur goes over to them – not the other way round, contrasting to the scene in which Gereint is brought to Arthur – and gives his judgement that both should submit to him rather than one to the other. This is neat, if perhaps trite, solution, and brings their dispute to an amicable end.²³ The author of the tale seems to be indicating that Arthur may be a bit ineffective in his exercise of authority but he is not entirely without ability.

In *Gereint*, Arthur at no time comes close to active fighting. The impression is that he is too well in control of events to find himself placed in such a position. He does, however, take part in the hunt for the white stag at the start of the tale – and it is he that makes the kill, rather than any of his presumably younger, more eager, knights.²⁴ Arthur's vigour, therefore, seems to extend to physical activity as well as laying down the law.

There is little further mention of Arthur in *Iarllles y Ffynnawn*. However, his influence (or lack of it) is very much apparent. It is he who requests that Owein be allowed to leave his wife and return to court for a while, leading to Owein's culpable failure to return on time.²⁵ It seems that, having got Owein back, Arthur made no attempt

²² *Owein*, lines 468–512.

²³ *Owein*, lines 534–44 describes the dispute and its resolution.

²⁴ *Gereint*, lines 398–404.

²⁵ *Owein*, lines 557–60.

to ensure that he stuck to the terms of the bargain with the Iarllles y Ffynnawn, that Owein should return after three months. Rather than upholding her rights, Arthur apparently forgot them as entirely as did Owein, or simply ignored them since he preferred to keep Owein with him. Whatever the case, as Owein's lord and the man who made the bargain with the Iarllles, Arthur is at least partially responsible for Owein's lapse. Whether because he was too weak or too self-indulgent or because he simply forgot, Arthur is made to look like a very poor authority figure. Owein pays the price for his own and his lord's incompetence in mental anguish and physical suffering once he has been reminded of his neglected wife. Guilt apparently drives him mad, and he wanders in the wilderness for a long time.²⁶

In *Iarllles y Ffynnawn*, society's hierarchy seems badly weakened. Arthur, sitting at the top of the social tree, seems incapable of exercising proper control over his men or even taking action to fulfill his own desires. His incompetence is symptomatic, or even the cause, of a general disruption in status relationships which can also be seen in the topsy-turvy servant/mistress relationship between Luned and the Iarllles y Ffynnawn. Luned's first conversation with her mistress illustrates this, as she insults and manipulates her mistress:

A dyuot a oruc Lunet attei a chyarch gwell idi, ac nys atebawd yr iarllles. A blyghau a oruc y uorwyn a dywetut wrthi, 'Py derw ytti pryt nat atteppych y neb hediw?'

'Lunet,' heb yr iarllles, 'py wyneb yssyd arnat ti pryt na delut y edrych y gofut a uu arnaf i? Ac ys gwneuthum i dyti yn gyfoethawc. Ac oed kam iti hynny!'

'Dioer,' heb y Lunet, 'ny thebygwn i na bei well dy synwyr di noc y mae. Oed well ytti geissaw gualu am ennill y gwrda hwnnw noc am peth arall ny ellych byth y gaffel.'

'Y rof i a Duw,' heb yr iarllles, 'ny allwn i vyth ennill vy arglwyd i o dyn arall yn y byt.'

²⁶ *Owein*, lines 570–581.

'Gallut,' heb y Lunet, 'gwrha gwr a vei gystal ac ef neu well noc ef.'
'Y rof i a Duw,' heb yr iarllles, 'pei na bei wrthmun gennyf peri dihenydyaw dyn a uackwn, mi a barwn dy dihenydyaw am gyffelybu wrthyf peth mor aghywir a hynny. A pheri dy dehol ditheu mi a'e gwnaf!'

'Da yw gennyf,' heb y Lunet, 'nat achaws itty hynny namyn am idi ohonaf i ytti dy les lle nys metrut dy hun. A mefyl idi ohonam y gyntaf a yrro att y gilyd, ae miui y adolwyn gwahawd itti, ae titheu y'm gwahawd inneu.'

Ac ar hynny mynet a oruc Lunet ymeith.

A chyfodi a oruc yr iarllles hyt ar drws yr ystafell yn ol Lunet, a phessychu yn uchel. Ac edrych a oruc Lunet tu draechefyn, ac emneidaw a oruc yr iarllles ar Lunet. A dyuot drachefyn a oruc Lunet att yr iarllles.²⁷

And Luned came to her and greeted her, and the Iarllles did not reply. And the maiden grew angry and said to her, 'What has happened to you that you don't answer anyone today?'

'Luned,' said the Iarllles, 'what is the face you have, when you haven't come to see the affliction that has come upon me? And it was me that made you wealthy. And that was a mistake!'

'God knows,' said Luned, 'I didn't think but that your sense was better than it is. It would be better for you to try to worry about how to replace that nobleman than about something else that you can never get.'

'Between me and God,' said the Iarllles, 'I could never replace my lord with any other man in the world.'

'You could,' said Luned, 'marry a man who is as good as him or better.'

'Between me and God,' said the Iarllles, 'if it wasn't repugnant to me to cause the execution of one I nurtured, I would cause you to be executed for hinting at something as wrong as that. And cause you to be banished I will!'

²⁷ *Owein*, lines 385–407.

'I'm glad,' said Luned, 'that you have no reason for this except my telling you your benefit where you couldn't see it yourself. And shame on the one of us who sends first to the other, whether me to beg an invitation from you, or you to invite me.'

And at that Luned went away. And the Iarllles rose up as far as the door after Luned and coughed loudly. And Luned looked back, and the Iarllles nodded to Luned. And Luned came back to the Iarllles.

First, Luned callously ignores her mistress' legitimate distress at the recent death of her husband (at Owein's hand) then reacts to the Iarllles' threat of banishment with an arrogantly offended dignity – 'Da yw gennyf ... nat achaws itty hynny namyn am uenegi ohonaf i ytti dy les lle nys metrut dy hun. A mefyl idi ohonam y gyntaf a yrro att y gilyd'. Luned places herself firmly on the same level as her mistress by including the two of them in her 'mefyl i...' ('shame to...') formula. Her insult – 'ny thebygwn i na bei well dy synwyr di noc y mae' – and rebuke of her mistress – 'Py derw ytti pryt nat atteppych y neb hediw?' – are also high-handed and indicate Luned's complete confidence in her own position and ability to control her mistress. The Iarllles is reduced to a humiliating climbdown: realising she needs Luned's advice, she summons her back with a nod, too embarrassed to speak out loud. The Iarllles starts three speeches in this conversation with 'Y rof i a Duw' showing her anger and distress, while Luned remains cool throughout. There is no doubt at all who is in control in this relationship and it is not the supposed authority figure.

This anarchic state of affairs could not be more different to that in *Gereint*, just as the two Arthurs could not be more different. In *Gereint* there is no doubt who is in charge, because Arthur does not allow there to be. His presence looms over the tale, pushing Gereint into fulfilling the role demanded by his father and making his disapproval very clear when Gereint has the audacity to leave his proper sphere and travel the wilderness with Enid. During his

journey, Gereint meets Gwalchmei, who recognizes him. Gereint refuses to come before Arthur, so Gwalchmei asks Arthur to move closer to the road:

A chynnhwyllaw Gereint a oruc Gwalchmei ar hyt y fford y'r lle yd oed Arthur yn pebyllaw a'y uaccwyueit yn tynnu pebyll yn ystlys y ford.

'Arglwyd,' heb y Gereint, 'henpych gwell.'

'Dyw a ro da it,' heb yr Arthur; 'a ffwy vyt ti?'

'Gereint,' heb y Gwalchmei, 'yw hwnn; ac o'e uod nyt ymwelei a thydi hetiw.'

'Ie,' heb yr Arthur, 'yn y aghyghor y mae.'

Ac ar hynny Enyt a doeth yn yd oed Arthur a chyuarch gwell itaw.

'Dyw a ro da it,' heb yr Arthur; 'kymeret un hi y'r llaw.'

Ac un o'r maccwyueit a'e kymerth.

'Och, a Enyt,' heb ef, 'pa gerdet yw hwnn?'

'Na vn, arglwyd,' heb hi, 'namyn dir yw im gerdet y ford y kerdo ynteu.'

'Arglwyd,' heb y Gereint, 'ni a awn ymdeith, gan dy genyad.'

'Pa le uyd hynny?' heb yr Arthur; 'ny elly di uyned yr awron onyt ey y orfen dy agheu.'

'Ny adei ef y mi,' heb y Gwalchmei, 'gvahawd arnaw.'

'Ef a'e gad y mi,' heb yr Arthur, 'ac y gyt a hynny nyt a ef odyrna yny uo iach.'

'Goreu oed gennyf i, arglwyd,' heb y Gereint, 'pei gattut uyui ymdeith.'

'Na adaf, y rof a Dyw,' heb ynteu.²⁸

And Gwalchmei lured Gereint along the road to the place where Arthur was camping with his squires erecting a tent by the side of the road.

'Lord,' said Gereint, 'may it be well.'

'May God do good to you,' said Arthur; 'and who are you?'

'This is Gereint,' said Gwalchmei; 'and by his will he wouldn't have seen you today.'

'Well,' said Arthur, 'he is in his uncounsel.'

And at that Enid came to where Arthur was and greeted him.

²⁸ *Gereint*, lines 1189–1207.

'May God do good to you,' said Arthur; 'let someone lift her to the ground.'

And one of the squires lifted her.

'Alas, oh Enid,' said he, 'what journey is this?'

'I don't know, lord,' she said, 'but I am happy to travel the way he may travel.'

'Lord,' said Gereint, 'we will go away, with your permission.'

'Where will that be?' said Arthur; 'you cannot away now, unless you go to complete your death.'

'He wouldn't let me,' said Gwalchmei, 'invite him.'

'He will allow me,' said Arthur, 'and along with that he won't go from here until he may be well.'

'I would like it best, lord,' said Gereint, 'if I were allowed to go away.'

'No, between me and God,' he said.²⁹

It is striking that Arthur asks Gereint who he is, although he has been told by Gwalchmei whom to expect. It seems likely that by asking this question Arthur is hinting that Gereint has forfeited all right to Arthur's respect and recognition by his actions. Arthur asserts total control over Gereint, forcing him to stay at the court against his will as he previously forced him to leave it to go back to his patrimony.³⁰ At no time in the tale does anyone challenge Arthur's right to act this way – the speeches made to him or in his presence by Gwalchmei, Gwenhwyfar, Gereint, Enid and so on are highly deferential, careful to avoid any hint of insubordination.

The errors into which Gereint and Owain fall are in part caused by the societies in which they live, moulded by their respective Arthurs. Gereint is bullied into taking up a role he does not want – that of ruler of his father's territory – and so at first withdraws from society and then, when he feels betrayed and disrespected even by his

²⁹ Or 'I won't allow it, between me and God'.

³⁰ See *Gereint*, lines 583–91. Gereint's remarks here and to his father at lines 642–5 show he is less than thrilled.

wife, flips completely and abandons his social position and its demands to prove his prowess to himself and to his wife on his own terms. He is harshly reprimanded for this by Arthur, but manages to remain outside Arthur's control for long enough to reach a state of contentment and reconciliation with Enid and society. Owein, on the other hand, lives in a society where authority is not enforced consistently and a lax atmosphere of self-indulgence reigns.³¹ This leads to Owein's over-indulging his own desire to hang around Arthur's court, and this negligence is not corrected by Arthur. Owein's own sense of guilt forces him to leave the court and wander in the wilderness in a kind of penance for his decadence. Owein also has to find his own way back to society, with no help from the ineffective authority structure of his community. He learns instead from a lion who befriends him and demonstrates the kind of loyalty that Owein so conspicuously lacked in his relationship with his wife.³² Owein is also required to demonstrate some self-discipline in returning to rescue Luned, who has been falsely imprisoned and threatened due to her loyalty to him.³³ Once this is accomplished he finds the strength of mind to return to his wife.

³¹ Note the emphasis on food and eating throughout the tale. It is mentioned at *Owein*, lines 13–24, 82–5, 202, 227–31, 248–50, 324–30, 377–80, 549–56, 564–73, 577–8, 618–19, 677–81, 700–1, 703–8, 713–19, 808–10. Compare this to seven references to food and eating in *Gereint*, which is much longer. Interestingly, both Enid and Gereint refuse to eat for emotional reasons (*Gereint*, lines 1287–95, 1380–94) while Owein continues to eat even when he has just fallen in love and when he has been devastatingly accused of infidelity, and food is his first concern even after discovering that Luned's life is in danger due to his behaviour.

³² It goes to all lengths to help Owein fight at *Owein*, lines 749–55 and 771–75 and provides him with food and fuel at 675–80.

³³ *Owein*, lines 756–7.

Although Arthur is a secondary character in both *Iarllles y Ffynnawn* and *Gereint*, this brief discussion has shown that his characterisation is sufficient to allow him an important role in some of the major themes in the tales such as fame and dishonour, disgrace and redemption. Moreover, a look at his character helps to deepen our understanding of why the heroes of the tales fail in their opposite ways and how the tales comment on wider society, not just on individual faults. It seems that the way the personal faults of the leader may adversely affect society as a whole was an issue of interest to the writers of these tales and they used their characterisation of Arthur to show how this might occur. These insights grew out of a study of Arthur's dialogue – how he speaks and how he is spoken to. Given the laconic and unembellished style of Middle Welsh narrative prose, close attention to the words spoken by characters is usually the best way to gain insight into their personalities. From the first words they speak, the Arthurs in these two tales reveal the faults that have moulded the societies they preside over – and it is these faults that lead to the dramatic falls from grace of the two heroes.