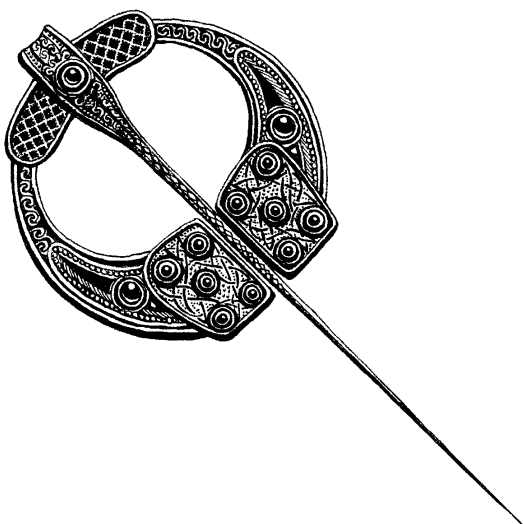


The Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon,
Norse and Celtic is a yearly spring conference
organized by postgraduate students of the
Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and
Celtic at the University of Cambridge.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ArchJ</i>	<i>Archaeological Journal</i>
<i>ASE</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
BAR	British Archaeological Reports (Oxford)
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna)
EETS	Early English Text Society
<i>EME</i>	<i>Early Medieval Europe</i>
<i>ES</i>	<i>English Studies</i>
HER	Historic Environment Record
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>JEPNS</i>	<i>Journal of the English Place-Name Society</i>
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae Historica
rer. Germ.	rerum Germanicarum
MLR	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
<i>MÆ</i>	<i>Medium Ævum</i>
NM	<i>Neuphilologische Mitteilungen</i>
<i>N&Q</i>	<i>Notes and Queries</i>
<i>PBA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
<i>PQ</i>	<i>Philological Quarterly</i>
<i>RES</i>	<i>Review of English Studies</i>
<i>SBVS</i>	<i>Saga-Book of the Viking Society for Northern Research</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studies in Philology</i>
<i>SS</i>	<i>Scandinavian Studies</i>
TRHS	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>

PREFACE

The Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic is proud to be associated with *Quaestio Insularis*, the journal of the annual Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic (CCASNC). The Colloquium and *Quaestio* were established in 1999 and 2000 by the department's postgraduate community, and successive generations of students have maintained the very high quality of both the event and its proceedings volume. Like its predecessors, this issue showcases the cross-disciplinary ethos which distinguishes CCASNC, combining research into the Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic peoples and their cultures from literary, historical and linguistic perspectives. The dialogue between these subject areas is highlighted in particular this year by the papers deriving from the Colloquium's paired lectures on the Old English *Orosius*, in which Malcolm Godden and Paul Russell approach a major and under-appreciated text from Anglo-Saxon and Celtic points of view respectively. *Quaestio* 12 and all back numbers can be ordered direct from the Department's website (www.asnc.cam.ac.uk).

Dr Richard Dance
ASNC Department
University of Cambridge

COLLOQUIUM REPORT

The 2011 Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, ‘Colliding Worlds’, held in Room G/R 06-7 of the English Faculty on Saturday 26 February. It was an extremely well-attended day which provided a stimulating and convivial atmosphere to complement the diverse and insightful papers. The colloquium committee wish to thank all those who attended, especially the speakers, and the ASNC department undergraduates—Caitlin Ellis, Moa Höijer, Becky Loughhead, Anna Millward, Hannah Rose, Shelby Switzer and Alexia Trench—who helped out on the day.

Plenary Speakers (*Chairs: Simon Patterson and Georgia Henley*)

Prof Malcolm Godden, ‘The Old English Orosius and its sources’

Dr Paul Russell, ‘Revisiting the “Welsh Dictator” of the Old English Orosius’

Session I (*Chair: Rosie Bontè*)

Naomi Bennett, ‘What makes Anglo-Saxons Anglo-Saxons? Cultural identity according to the homolists’

Michael Rush, ‘The ploughsoil and the place-name: British and Germanic cultural interaction in early Anglo-Saxon East Anglia’

Session II (*Chair: Joanne Shortt Butler*)

Robert Avis, ‘Law, conflict and resolution in *Njáls saga*, and some analogues’

Sarah Waidler, ‘The organisation of the miraculous in Adomnán’s *De locis sanctis* and *Vita Columbae*’

Megan Cavell, ‘Is the Lord-Retainer “bond” of Old English Poetry a modern construction? The colliding worlds of Old and Modern English semantics’

Session III (*Chair: David Baker*)

Brian J. Stone, ‘Rhetorical re-telling: *Dindschenchas* and Christian interests in *Acallam na Senórach*’

Victoria Symonds, ‘Alphabetical Interplay: reading and writing in the runic riddles of the Exeter Book’

Christine Voth, ‘Biblical parallels in Alfredian Law and the early compilation of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge MS. 173’

The members of the colloquium committee for 2010–11 were: Simon Patterson, David Baker, Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough, Rosie Bonté, Joanne Shortt Butler and Georgia Henley.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Quaestio Insularis 12 was edited by Simon Patterson, David Baker, Eleanor Rosamund Barraclough, Rosie Bonté, Joanne Shortt Butler and Georgia Henley. The editors also wish to acknowledge the assistance of Prof Malcolm Godden, Dr Paul Russell, Dr Judy Quinn, Dr Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, Dr Richard Dance, Dr Denis Casey, Dr Matthias Ammon, Dr Megan Cavell, Jayne Riley, and our peer reviewers. Editorial design is by Alistair Vining and the *Quaestio Insularis* logo was drawn by Katharine Scarfe Beckett. The production of this volume and the successful running of the conference have been made possible through the generosity of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic and the support of the Faculty of English.

The Old English *Orosius* and its Context: who wrote it, for whom, and why?

Prof Malcolm R. Godden
University of Oxford

The origins of Orosius' *Historiae adversum paganos* are remarkably well documented.¹ During the years 406–9 AD, a large army of Goths originating from the Balkans under the leadership of their king, Alaric, had been hovering on the borders of Italy and at times marauding through it in an attempt to extract a generous deal from the western emperor Honorius, which would have provided land to settle on, food subsidies and an accepted place in the imperial forces for Alaric and his warriors. For his part, Honorius, unable to raise the forces to despatch the Gothic army but secure himself in the fastness of Ravenna, refused to give Alaric what he wanted. Finally, in 410, the Gothic leader, having tried unsuccessfully to move Honorius by the device of an alliance with the senate in Rome and the election of an alternative emperor, resorted in some desperation to a move on the city of Rome itself. His forces entered the city and spent three days plundering. Both Christians and pagans took refuge in churches, and the Goths, who were themselves Christians, generally left them and the church treasures untouched, but some Romans were killed and some buildings burnt. When even this failed to move Honorius, Alaric and his Goths moved south in an apparent attempt to migrate to Sicily and thence to Africa, but Alaric died and the army under his

¹ The most recent critical edition is *Orose: Histoires (Contre les Païens)*, ed. M.-P. Arnaud-Lindet, 3 vols., 2nd edn. (Paris, 2003).

successor moved back north through Italy and, under pressure from a revived Roman army, left Italy for southern Gaul. Eventually they were to settle in Spain and establish a Visigothic kingdom there with the approval of the subsequent Roman emperors.²

The event had little immediate effect in Italy itself, but further away it was seen as a major cataclysm with a profound effect on intellectual thought and readings of history. Indeed, in England it was to be seen, from the time of Bede onwards, as marking, and causing, the end of Roman rule in Britain and the decline of the western empire.³ St Augustine, in North Africa, heard (or claimed to have heard) that those Romans who were still pagan were arguing that it was Christianity and the neglect of the old pagan gods that had caused the decline of Roman power and the humiliation of the city, and was inspired to begin his massive work, *De Civitate Dei*, in reply.⁴ Its main argument was that the Christian God had always ruled over human history but that, in the final scheme of things, human existence was directed towards their membership of the city of God, meaning the heavenly life, rather than earthly prosperity. But in the first five books he focused on Roman history in pagan times, arguing that the Romans had not in fact been protected by their gods from calamities worse than those recently experienced or from corruption and civil dissension. Not content with the limits of this account he asked Orosius to write something on the same theme that would

² For a good modern account, see P. Heather, *Goths and Romans, 332–489* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 193–224. The main contemporary accounts are by Orosius himself and the *Nova Historia* of the Byzantine historian Zosimus.

³ See M. R. Godden, 'The Anglo-Saxons and the Goths: rewriting the sack of Rome', *ASE* 31 (2002), 47–68.

⁴ *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Episcopi De Civitate Dei, Libri XXII*, ed. B. Dombart and A. Kalb, CCSL 47–8, 2 vols. (Turnhout, 1955), esp. Book I.

expand it to cover other parts of the world and more recent history since the birth of Christ. Orosius had come to North Africa from his native Spain (or Portugal) in 414, either as a refugee or to seek Augustine's views on current theological issues. He then visited Jerome in Palestine but on his return to Africa and Augustine he took up the task and expanded it into a history of the world (or at least, of the Mediterranean world and the Near East) up to his own time, with an emphasis on the recurrent miseries of warfare and natural disaster that plagued mankind until the birth of Christ, which took place in a time of universal peace under Augustus and ushered in a time of comparative freedom from conflict and disaster.⁵

Orosius' *History* was widely read in the Middle Ages. Some 250 manuscripts survive, though most of those are from the later medieval period, numbers peaking in the twelfth century and again in the fifteenth: only about fifty are earlier than 1100, and only seventeen of those earlier than 900, the rough date of the Old English text.⁶ It was clearly well known and much used in England in the centuries immediately following conversion. It was used by Bede both in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* and his *De Temporum Ratione*, and by Aldhelm, and known to Alcuin.⁷ The evidence of the Épinal and Erfurt Glossaries, deriving from the late seventh or early eighth century, shows that the *History* was being intensively studied in

⁵ See the succinct account of Orosius and his work in *Orosius: Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, trans. with an introduction and notes by A. T. Fear (Liverpool, 2010).

⁶ See L. B. Mortensen, 'The Diffusion of Roman Histories in the Middle Ages. A List of Orosius, Eutropius, Paulus Diaconus, and Landolfus Sagax Manuscripts', *Filologia Mediolatina. Studies in Medieval Latin Texts and their Transmission* 6–7 (1999–2000), 101–200.

⁷ M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 183 and 221.

England at that time.⁸ There is rather more slender evidence of familiarity with Orosius in the later Anglo-Saxon period, from the ninth century onwards. There are indications of influence on some anonymous homilies and on Byrhtferth,⁹ from the tenth or early eleventh centuries, but in both cases this could be by way of intermediaries or excerpts. But the key testimony to its importance in Anglo-Saxon England is an Old English adaptation extant in two manuscripts of the tenth and eleventh centuries respectively, and in two small fragments.¹⁰

Until comparatively recently, the origins of the Old English version were as firmly established as those of Orosius' *History* itself. Neither manuscript has any preface or attribution, but early in the twelfth century William of Malmesbury listed the *Orosius* among the translations done by King Alfred himself,¹¹ and it remained in the Alfredian canon, with few objections, until the middle of the twentieth century. The attribution firmly placed the work in the last decade of the ninth century, and it was generally accepted that the *Orosius* was one of the translations undertaken by the king as part of his programme of educational reform, and that it was to be

⁸ See J. D. Pheifer, 'Early Anglo-Saxon Glossaries and the School of Canterbury', *ASE* 16 (1987) 17–44, esp. pp. 26–9; M. Lapidge, 'The Career of Aldhelm', *ASE* 36 (2007) 15–69.

⁹ See *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: A Register of Written Sources Used by Anglo-Saxon Authors* [CD-ROM Version 1.1], developed by R. Jayatilaka, M. R. Godden and D. Miles (Oxford: Fontes Anglo-Saxonici Project, English Faculty, Oxford University, 2002); also online at <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/>; and Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*.

¹⁰ *The Old English Orosius*, ed. J. Bately, EETS ss 6 (Oxford, 1980).

¹¹ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, Oxford Med. Texts, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1998–9), ii.123 (I, pp. 192–4).

understood as a response to the needs and concerns of that time and of the king himself. Editions and commentaries named him as author and interpreted the work in the light of his known interests and responsibilities, including his military tactics against the vikings.¹²

Then, in 1951, Josef Raith demonstrated, on linguistic grounds, that the translation could not possibly have been done by King Alfred; it was, he said, out of the question.¹³ Anglophone scholars were slow to respond to this, but in 1966 Dorothy Whitelock acknowledged doubts about Alfred's authorship, citing Raith, and then in 1970 Elizabeth Liggins and Janet Bately published articles arguing again on linguistic grounds that the translation was not the work of King Alfred.¹⁴ Those arguments seem to have been universally accepted, though one could make some objections. The two articles are not entirely in agreement (Liggins saw clear evidence of more than one translator at work, which Bately has resisted), and the main line of argument, that the language differs too much from that of the 'authentic' Alfredian works (the *Pastoral Care*, *Boethius*, *Soliloquies*), no longer looks so sound a case, given the differences among those three texts and the doubts about their attribution to Alfred or their common authorship.¹⁵ Indeed, one might argue that of all the translations traditionally attributed to Alfred, the *Orosius* comes

¹² See *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, p. 220.

¹³ J. Raith, *Untersuchungen zum englischen Aspekt. I. Grundsätzliches Altenglisch* (Munich, 1951), 60–1.

¹⁴ D. Whitelock, 'The Prose of Alfred's Reign', in *Continuations and Beginnings*, ed. E. G. Stanley (London, 1966), pp. 67–103, at pp. 89–93; E. Liggins, 'The authorship of the Old English Orosius', *Anglia* 88 (1970), 289–322; J. Bately, 'King Alfred and the Old English translation of Orosius', *Anglia* 88 (1970), 433–60.

¹⁵ M. Godden, 'Did King Alfred Write Anything?' *MÆ* 76 (2007), 1–23.

closest in its concerns to what might be presumed to have been the interests of a king, a layman and a military leader. But since there was never any evidence for the attribution except William's assertion, it is perhaps not worth pursuing further. From here on I would like to call the author 'Osric' to avoid the repetitive circumlocution 'the anonymous Old English translator of Orosius' and to try to give some substance to this author (the name is an entirely arbitrary choice, except that it chimes with Orosius).

The rejection of Alfredian authorship did not make as much difference to views of the origins of the Old English *Orosius* as one might have expected, for there remained a consensus that the work was done by a member of the king's court and circle, was part of his programme of translation, and was at least commissioned or encouraged by him.¹⁶ Two pieces of evidence supported that view. First, there is the account of voyages around Norway and the sub-arctic which occurs in the geographical section and claims to have been given orally by the Norwegian trader Ohthere to King Alfred himself: 'Ohthere sæde his hlaforde, Ælfrede cyninge, þæt he ealra Norðmonna norþmest bude'.¹⁷ That seemed to indicate a translator who was able to draw on materials, perhaps oral materials, available at the Alfredian court. Secondly, there is the dating evidence:

¹⁶ See, for instance, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and other Contemporary Sources*, trans. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge (Harmondsworth, 1983), pp. 32–3; the entry on Alfredian texts by N. Discenza in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge *et al.* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 29–30; Patrick Wormald's entry on King Alfred in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: from the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, ed. H. C. Matthew and B. Harrison, 60 vols. (Oxford, 2004), I, 716–25.

¹⁷ *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, I, 1, p. 13: 'Ohthere said to his lord King Alfred that he lived furthest north of all the Northmen'. Translations from Old English and Latin are my own.

on the one hand, the reference to the Hungarians, which seemed to indicate that the translation must have been done some time after 889, placing it close to the inauguration of the Alfredian programme some time between 890 and 896;¹⁸ on the other, the apparent influence of the concluding passage of the *Orosius*, describing the invasion of Italy by the Goths under Alaric and Rædgota, on the opening of the Old English *Boethius*, which seemed to show that the *Orosius* must have been known to Alfred, the putative translator of Boethius, well before his death in 899 and therefore soon after its composition.¹⁹

Neither of those arguments quite has the force formerly attributed to it. Bately's subsequent argument, in 1988, that Ohthere's account of his voyages was not an original part of the translation but a later interpolation by a reviser of the early tenth century, though inevitably speculative, weakened the force of this piece of evidence.²⁰ It might only mean that a later reviser had acquired material originating from Alfred's court and added it (as indeed a post-Alfredian translator might have done even if the passage was in the original version). The case for a date after 889 rested on Osric's reference to the Hungarians as the present-day equivalents or successors of the Basternae, a tribe of the second century BC living

¹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. lxxxix–xc.

¹⁹ Whitelock, 'The Prose of Alfred's Reign', p. 82 and n. 3; *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, pp. xci–ii, and *ead.*, *The Literary Prose of Alfred's Reign: Translation or Transformation* (London, 1980), p. 6.

²⁰ J. Bately, 'Old English prose before and during the reign of Alfred', *ASE* 17 (1988), 93–138, at p. 117. The suggestion is adumbrated in *ead.*, 'The Old English *Orosius*: the Question of Dictation', *Anglia* 84 (1966), 255–304 at p. 303 n. 291, but there she apparently argues for interpolation in Alfred's reign by someone connected to his court.

north and west of the Black Sea: ‘wolde seo strengeste þeod winnan on Romane, þe mon þa het Basterne, and nu hie mon hæf *Hungerre*’.²¹ The Hungarians were a new element in Europe in the ninth century. The first reference to them, at least under that name, in European sources seems to be in the *Annals of St-Bertin*, written (for the relevant period) in the 860s or 870s by Hincmar of Rheims. Under the year 862, Hincmar reports an attack by Hungarians on the kingdom of Louis the German, ruler of the East Franks, though without specifying the particular region, and claims that the Hungarians were hitherto unknown to Louis’s subjects: ‘Sed et hostes antea illis populis inexperti, qui Ungri vocantur, regnum eius populantur’.²² If they were unknown to the peoples of eastern Francia until 862 then they could hardly have been known to the Anglo-Saxons until after that date. Bately argued, somewhat more questionably, that since Orosius was describing at this point an attempted crossing of the Danube by the Basternae, Osric must have had reason to suppose that the Hungarians were settled in the region of the Danube in order to identify them with the Basternae. She cited as evidence for the date of such settlement the early tenth century chronicle of Regino of Prum, which mentions the Hungarians settling near the Danube in the annal for 889.²³ But that is to press the parallel between Hungarians and Basternae too hard. Osric probably took the parallel from a gloss in his Latin exemplar, and the glossator, who

²¹ *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, IV. 6, p. 110: ‘the very strong people who were then called Basternae and are now called Hungarians decided to attack the Romans’.

²² *Hincmarus Remensis, Annales Bertiniani. Pars III*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH SS rer. Germ. 5 (Hannover, 1883), 55–154, at p. 60. See *The Annals of St-Bertin*, trans. and annotated by J. L. Nelson (Manchester, 1991), p. 102.

²³ Bately, *The Literary Prose of Alfred’s Reign*, p. 6.

seems to have been based in East Francia, was in the habit of making such links and might have had many reasons for this particular parallel.²⁴ As for the influence of the *Orosius* on the Old English *Boethius*, the evidence is persuasive but if, as I have argued elsewhere, the Old English *Boethius* was not the work of Alfred and has no necessary connection with him or his circle, we can only say with confidence that the Old English *Orosius* was produced before the latest possible date for the *Boethius*, c. 950, and before the date of the earlier manuscript of the *Orosius*, likewise c. 950.²⁵ Realistic working dates for the Old English *Orosius*, allowing some time for dissemination, are then something like 870 × 930, rather than 889 × 899. Although that certainly allows the possibility that the translation was connected with Alfred's court or circle or programme, there is nothing in the text or outside it to suggest such a connection (setting aside Ohthere's voyages), and it remains equally possible that the text was written after Alfred's lifetime, or indeed during it but by someone unconnected with his court and his supposed programme of translation.

It follows that the context of the Old English *Orosius* is much less clear than we once thought, and we need to look afresh at the nature of the translation, focusing on the evidence of the text rather than later traditions. Firstly, what can we say about the intended

²⁴ See M. Godden, 'The Old English *Orosius* and its sources', *Anglia* 129 (2011) 297–320.

²⁵ For the date and authorship of the *Boethius*, see *The Old English Boethius: an Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae*, ed. M. Godden and S. Irvine, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2009), I, 140–6. The earlier manuscript of the *Orosius* is generally thought to have been produced in the same scriptorium as the annals for the Parker Chronicle covering 892–924, dated possibly as late as 950.

readership? As noted already, the text as it appears in the surviving manuscripts offers no preface of any kind to explain or introduce the work: Orosius' own preface is not included in the translation, and there is no substitute by the translator. The earlier manuscript does not even have a title, though the scribe did leave the first leaf blank, perhaps with the expectation that he or a more expert colleague would add an elaborate title-page later; the later manuscript just has the simple heading 'Her onginneð seo boc þe man Orosius nemneð' ('Here begins the book which is called Orosius'). It may be of course that the original translation gave more information. But, as things stand in the manuscripts, it appears that the Old English *Orosius* was written for readers who were already familiar with the work in its Latin form and the author's name, and needed no introduction to them. That would make sense of Osric's curiously abrupt references to Orosius and to the contexts in which Orosius was writing, and the equally abrupt addresses to the Romans who were the original readers. Thus he opens the work with an unexplained reference to the original author: 'Ure ieldran ealne þisne ymbhwyrft þises middangeardes, cwæþ Orosius [...] todældon'.²⁶ A little later, again without explanation, he reproduces Orosius' address to his original readers: 'Ic wolde nu, cwæð Orosius, þæt me ða geandwyrðan þa þe secgað þæt þeos world sy nu wyrse on ðysan cristendome þonne hio ær on þæm hæþenscype wære'.²⁷ A few pages later, we find Orosius directly addressing the Romans: 'Hit is scondlic, cwæð Orosius [...]

²⁶ *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, I, 1, p. 8: 'Our ancestors divided the whole circumference of this world into three, said Orosius'.

²⁷ *Ibid.* I, 8, p. 27: 'I would wish, said Orosius, that those who say that this world is worse now under Christianity than it was before under paganism would answer me now'.

hu ungemetlice ge Romware bemurciað'.²⁸ Osric evidently assumed that his readers would already know that the Old English text was a translation of Orosius, and be well aware who Orosius was and in what circumstances he had been writing and who he had been addressing. They also apparently knew the system of dating history by years before and after the foundation of Rome, since he uses that system throughout, without explanation. No doubt these were readers who felt more comfortable with English than with Latin, but they appear to have been readers (and listeners) who had a fair amount of education, who knew about the main historical authors, and to whom it might be appropriate to say, for instance, that the story of the Trojan war could be passed over because it was familiar from histories and poems.²⁹ This would explain Osric's frequent reference to Orosius and his opinions, and his inclusion of Orosius' addresses to his original readers or opponents, and of statements which, by the end of the ninth century, were self-evidently wrong or out-of-date, such as his brave statement that Honorius still reigned, and that the Roman empire would continue until the end of time. This was not simply, then, a matter of translating and updating the *Historia* to make it an informative account of antiquity for an Anglo-Saxon readership. Osric was writing for readers who knew of the *Historia* as a classical and much-studied text, knew the context in which Orosius had written, and wanted an accessible version of it—just as they might need an accessible version of Vergil. What he was producing, or at least gave the impression of producing, was not so much an account of ancient history as an (adapted and abridged) account of what Orosius said about ancient history for readers who were expected to

²⁸ *Ibid.* I. 10, pp. 30–1: 'It is shameful, said Orosius, how excessively you Romans complain'.

²⁹ *Ibid.* I. 7, pp. 27–8.

know something about the subject.

That is not to say that he did simply reproduce what Orosius said. For the first four books of the seven, Osríc included most of the main events reported by Orosius, but by cutting comment and extraneous detail was able to reduce the length to about eighty per cent of the original. For the remaining three books, from the destruction of Carthage in 150 BC to the time of writing in 417 AD, he cut more radically, omitting much of the narrative of the later history of the Roman republic and the history of the empire. The result was set down in just two books, running to only twenty-five per cent of the original. That means of course that Osríc devoted his efforts primarily to ancient times and omitted much from the period which one might have expected to interest Anglo-Saxon readers most—the period since Christ's birth, the spread of the Roman empire to Britain and Gaul, the encroachment of Germanic barbarians on the empire, the final years when Orosius was drawing on first-hand reports rather than old books. By contrast, it was the period since the birth of Christ, and especially the final years, which Bede found most useful or interesting in Orosius' account. It may be, as has often been suggested, that Osríc's energies or resources flagged as the work of translation progressed and he just could not sustain his initial enthusiasm for the task.³⁰ But we should perhaps be more willing to accept the possibility that ancient history was what really interested him and his readers. There is other evidence of that interest in this period. The earlier books of the Latin *Orosius* sometimes circulated on their own, and surviving commentaries often focus on the early books too. Anglo-Saxon interest in ancient history is evident in texts like the Old English adaptation of the Letter of Alexander to

³⁰ Whitelock, 'The Prose of Alfred's Reign', pp. 89–90.

Aristotle.³¹ And Osric generally shows little interest, either in the initial account of world geography or in the later historical narrative, in material relating to his own country. It may be that what particularly interested Osric was the history of the world through its four successive empires, Assyria, Greece, Africa (represented first by Egypt and then by Carthage) and Rome, and that with the fall and eradication of Carthage at the end of the fourth book, that particular story was complete. It would seem that he was writing for readers who needed to know about Orosius and the ancient world, not readers who wanted to know about their own history.

As well as omitting material, Osric also incorporated a remarkable amount of additional material into his reworking of the Latin *Historia*, especially for the early centuries. Orosius wrote his history for classically educated readers who were well grounded in the history of Rome especially, and he could afford to be brief and allusive in his treatment of familiar history. Much of the time, indeed, he seems to be offering simply a résumé of the traditional account given by Livy or Justinus, reworked with the aid of his own characteristic spin to emphasise the treachery or the destructiveness of the times. Osric could not count on the same kind of familiarity in his readers, and seems in any case interested in retelling the stories with enough colour and detail to make them effective in their own right. The most substantial single additions are in the geographical section: the description of the Germanic parts of Europe and their contemporary inhabitants (forty-six lines), and the long account (145 lines) of the voyages of Ohthere and Wulfstan around Scandinavia (if that is not a later interpolation). Beyond those there are a host of

³¹ Edited and translated by Andy Orchard in his *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 204–53.

small additional details which give substance and colour to the historical narratives. Many of them derive ultimately from earlier histories, often indeed the very sources which Orosius himself had used, such as Livy and Justinus, though the list also includes Ovid, Valerius Maximus, Sallust, Servius, Festus, Florus and others.³² There is also occasional use of Biblical story and its exegesis and elaboration (including saints' legends), as well as historical sources, though strikingly little given the likely clerical character of author and readership.³³

Quite what resources he was using for this additional detail is not immediately clear. If he really knew the astonishing range of sources that have been cited for his additions and revisions, then he was one of the most widely read of Anglo-Saxons, at any time, and one with the backing of a remarkably well-equipped library. That seems hard to credit for the period in question (Livy, for instance, otherwise leaves no trace in Anglo-Saxon England at any time), and the details of his rendering often suggest that he had not seen the full account. More plausible intermediaries such as Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, which gives its own succinct versions of some of the stories, rarely provide persuasive evidence of their use. There is, though, a fair amount of evidence that Osric was using a copy of Orosius which provided substantial glosses and annotations, drawn in part from classical sources, and that these furnished much of the additional detail that he

³² *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, p. lxi.

³³ The section on the plagues of Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea (*ibid.* I.7, pp. 25.14–26.34), draws for instance on both the Bible and the account given in *Passio Petri et Pauli*: see F. M. Biggs and T. N. Hall, 'Traditions concerning James and Mambres in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE* 25 (1996), 69–90.

exploited in his retelling of the stories.³⁴ There are particularly close parallels with the glosses in a manuscript written and annotated at the abbey of St Gall, and it seems likely that the Old English author was using a copy of the Latin text that had been glossed in that part of the Continent—that is, in the East Frankish kingdom under Louis the German, grandson of Charlemagne. That would explain his access to up-to-date information about central and eastern Europe and the peoples on the eastern borders, which is evident both in the geographical account at the beginning of the text and in occasional references in the rest of the work, such as the comment on the Hungarians. It would also explain the use of material apparently drawn from classical writers such as Livy, Justinus and Frontinus who were available in the Frankish kingdoms but not apparently in ninth-century England. But it seems likely that he also used his imagination in some cases, especially where variants or corruptions in his source-text required some additional effort to make sense of it.

There are implications here for the abilities of Osric. Recent criticism has tended to see him as a translator who frequently misunderstood and mistranslated his source and revealed appalling ignorance of classical culture.³⁵ But that is perhaps to misrepresent both his resources and his purposes. Much of the time Orosius writes in an allusive and condensed fashion which others besides Osric found difficult to elucidate. In expanding these accounts he could not draw on the range of classical sources in modern editions that his

³⁴ For this and following points, see the detailed account in Godden, ‘The Old English *Orosius* and its Sources’.

³⁵ Cf. for instance the comment in the standard literary history by Greenfield and Calder: ‘The translation is littered with misinterpretations and mistakes of various kinds’ (S. B. Greenfield and D. G. Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York and London, 1986), p. 57).

critics can use, but had to rely mainly on glosses that were themselves difficult to interpret and often loosely attached to the text. Equally, he was not attempting to give a faithful rendering of what Orosius wrote. Simeon Potter used the term ‘imaginative dramatisation’ of Osric’s method, and it is a useful expression.³⁶ He often adds speeches, for Orosius and others. One of the most dramatic anthology pieces is the speech by the city of Babylon, acknowledging its role as a symbol of transience in contrast to the eternal city Jerusalem:

Seo ilce burg Babylonia, seo ðe mæst wæs and ærest ealra burga, seo is nu læst and westast. Nu seo burg swelc is, þe ær wæs ealra weorca fæstast and wunderlecast and mærast, gelice and heo wære to bisene asteald eallum middangearde, and eac swelce heo self sprecende sie to eallum moncynne, and cweþe: ‘Nu ic þuss gehroren eam and aweg gewiten, hwæt, ge magan on me ongietan and oncnawan þæt ge nanuht mid eow nabbað fæstes ne stronges þætte þurhwunigean mæge’.³⁷

Osric is perhaps here drawing on the Book of Revelations as well as Orosius to dramatise the passage. Or one might also note the moving speech he creates for Leonidas, king of the Spartans, before the battle of Marathon.³⁸

³⁶ S. Potter, ‘Commentary on King Alfred’s *Orosius*’, *Anglia* 71 (1952–3), 385–437, at p. 410.

³⁷ *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, II. 4, pp. 43–4; ‘That same city of Babylon, which had been the greatest and first of all cities, is now the least and most desolate. Now that city, which before was the strongest and most wonderful and most famous of all structures, is now as it were an example to the whole world, as if it spoke itself to all mankind and said: “Now that I am so fallen and departed, lo, you can see in me that you have nothing among you that is strong or firm and that can last”. See further P. J. Frankis, ‘The Thematic Significance of *enta geweorc* and Related Imagery in *The Wanderer*’, *ASE* 2 (1973), 253–69.

³⁸ *The Old English Orosius*, II. 5, p. 47.

A particularly striking case is the passage on the death of Scipio the Younger. The Latin text has a brief and undistinguished report:

C. Sempronio Tuditano et M. Acilio consulibus, P. Scipionem Africanum pridie pro contione de periculo salutis suae contestatum, quod sibi pro patria laboranti ab improbis et ingratis denuntiari cognouisset, alio die mane exanimem in cubiculo suo repertum non temere inter maxima Romanorum mala recensuerim [...].³⁹

Orosius goes on to suggest that it was Scipio's wife who was responsible for his murder and that it was linked to political conflicts. Osric says nothing of the wife, but adds details taken from the career of Scipio Africanus the elder (who had similarly suffered from Roman ingratitude) to present a lively adaptation of this passage, focusing on the treachery and ingratitude of the Romans in general:

On þære tide Scipia, se betsta and se selesta Romana witeana and þegna, mænde his earfoða to Romana witeana, þær hie æt hiera gemote wæron, hwy hie hiene swa unweorðne on his ylde dyden; and ascade hie for hwy hie nolden geþencan ealle þa brocu and þa geswinc þe he for hira willan and eac for hiera niedþearfe fela wintra dreogende wæs unarimedlice oft; and hu he hie adyde of Hannibales þeowdome and of monegre oþerre þeode; and hu he him to þeowdome gewylde ealle Ispaniae and ealle Africe; On þære ilcan niht þe he on dæg þas word spræc, Romane him geþancodon ealles his geswincs mid wyrsan leane þonne he to him gearnod hæfde, þa hie hiene on his bedde asmorodon and aprysemodon, þæt he his lif alet. Eala, Romane, hwa

³⁹ Orosius, *Historia*, ed. Arnaud-Lindet, 5.10 (II, p. 106): 'I would reckon it without rashness among the greatest crimes of the Romans that, under the consuls Sempronius Tuditanus and M. Acilius, Scipio Africanus, having testified the day before in the presence of the assembly about the threat to his safety, because he knew that while he was labouring for his country he was being denounced by wicked and ungrateful men, on the next day in the morning was found lifeless in his bedroom'.

mæg eow nu truwian þa ge swylc lean dydon eowrum þam getrywestan witan?⁴⁰

It is a fine passage, focusing on Roman ingratitude, and typically Osric adds at the end a little speech by Orosius, who becomes a character in his own right in the Old English version.

Though much of the writing is straightforward narrative, Osric often produces such fine passages of comment on the events and characters. One might note, for instance, his comment on the humbling of Xerxes, or the dramatic passage on the Romans emerging from the ruined heaps of stone after the destruction of the city by the Gauls, and the contrast between the Gauls and the Goths.⁴¹

As we noted at the outset, Orosius' *Historia* was an attempt to rewrite world history, and especially Roman history, from a Christian point of view, using mainly secular and indeed pagan sources, but recasting the narrative in the light of the theology of Augustine and

⁴⁰ *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, V. 4, pp. 118–19 (omitting the brackets used by Bately to mark apparent omissions in one of the MSS); 'At that time Scipio, the best and finest of the Roman senators and soldiers, complained of his hardships to the Roman senators, when they were at their meeting, asking why they treated him so disrespectfully in his old age, and why they would not consider all the afflictions and toil which he had endured at their desire and also for their needs over many years, in countless expeditions; and how he had saved them from being enslaved by Hannibal, and by many another nation; and how he had reduced to their service all of Spain and all of Africa. And then, on the same night that he had made this speech, the Romans showed their gratitude to him for all his labour with worse reward than he had deserved of them, when they smothered him in his bed and suffocated him, so that he gave up his life. O you Romans, who can trust you now, when you gave such a reward to your truest senator?'

⁴¹ *Ibid.* II. 5, p. 48.13–18; II. 8–III. 1, pp. 52.15–53.30.

the chronicle of Eusebius and Jerome. Later writers sometimes thought that he had not gone far enough in incorporating a Christian dispensation. Freculph of Lisieux had created his own more ecclesiastical chronicle of world history earlier in the ninth century by combining much of Orosius' account with Jewish and Christian history drawn from the Bible, Josephus and the church historians. But Osric seems to have accepted Orosius' focus and perhaps even to have played down the religious aspect. He did not use Orosius' prologue in which he sets out his distinctive approach, and starts not with the Fall of Man and the Flood, as in his source, but with the king of the Assyrians, Ninus. He omitted some substantial passages on the agreement of classical and Biblical sources (as with the plagues of Egypt). Sometimes he rewrote events to make them less miraculous. And, most strikingly, he abridged drastically the last two books dealing with the birth of Christ and the beginnings of the Christian church and the subsequent reigns of Christian emperors. Though he was keen to emphasise that it is divine providence and not fate that governs the rise and fall of empires,⁴² it is primarily the secular history of the Mediterranean empires that engrossed him, not Biblical history or church history. Though we must assume that Osric and his readers came from an ecclesiastical milieu, given the degree of education assumed, the approaches and attitudes are not strikingly religious.

The need for educated Anglo-Saxon clerics to know the work of Orosius, and the fact that many of them did not find Latin easy, at least in the period in question, may be sufficient explanation for the creation of an English version, as for the numerous other translations of the ninth and tenth centuries (the *Dialogues* and *Regula Pastoralis* of Gregory, the works of Boethius, Bede and St Benedict, and others).

⁴² *Ibid.* II. 1, p. 37.

Their interest, or Osric's own personal interest, in ancient history and society and warfare may in turn be sufficient explanation for the kinds of changes and improvements that Osric made to the text. But it is difficult not to ponder the possible relevance of the work to the Anglo-Saxon readers of the time, beyond a scholarly and educational interest. How might the history as recorded by Orosius and recast by Osric have signified to them? For Orosius, the Roman empire was the last of the world empires and, unlike the others, would not fall but would continue to the end of time, absorbing the new barbarian peoples into its Christian faith and its benign rule. So he ends with the expulsion of the Goths from Italy and the renewal of Roman power. It has been plausibly argued that in constructing his history in seven books, of which the last ran from the time of Christ to the present, Orosius was echoing the traditional concept of the seven ages of the world and aiming to present the Roman empire under its new Christian dispensation as occupying the final age of the world, which would continue to the end of time and the second coming of Christ.⁴³ That must all have looked rather doubtful from the perspective of the late ninth century, after the collapse of the empire in the west in 476 and the rise of barbarian kingdoms in former Roman territories, including Britain. Osric reproduces Orosius' personal assurances about the continuity of Rome, and it is perhaps conceivable that he and his readers did see Rome as continuing in some way in 900, either because the empire still flourished in the east and, after the reconquests of Justinian's time in the sixth century, still maintained a foothold in Italy, or because the Roman empire in the west had been restored by Charlemagne in 800, and was still in existence under his successors. But that seems unlikely. The

⁴³ Fear, *Orosius: Seven Books of History*, pp. 10–11.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is emphatic that with the sack of Rome in 410 (or as it sees it, the destruction of Rome) Roman rule in Britain had ended and the Anglo-Saxons had soon replaced them. The Old English *Boethius* seems to think of the eastern empire as the land of the Greeks, not the Romans. Freculph of Lisieux, writing his world chronicle in the Carolingian empire earlier in the ninth century, uses Orosius' account but then goes on to describe Franks and Lombards replacing the Romans in the west, rather than continuing their empire. And the death of the last legitimate Carolingian emperor and the break-up of the Frankish empire which is recorded under the year 887 by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle would have made it difficult to sustain the view that the Roman Empire in the west still flourished under the Carolingians. It seems more likely that Anglo-Saxon readers of Orosius would have registered the failure of his vision of a continuing Roman future. When in the Old English version, Orosius is heard asserting that the Romans were not defeated like the older empires but 'are now still reigning both with their Christian faith and their power and their emperors', and in the same breath that the same God who had appointed the older empires 'is still appointing and changing all dominions and kingdoms according to his will',⁴⁴ readers would surely have recognised the irony of his perspective: he was wrong in his confidence about Rome, whose empire would finally end sixty years later, but perhaps right about God's ordering of the succession of kingdoms. Osric, unlike Freculph, did not continue the story much beyond the sack of Rome, but when he concluded his work with an account of the Goths settling in Italy he was presenting the start of that process by which barbarian kingdoms supplanted

⁴⁴ *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, II.1, p. 38.

Romans, which Freculph had described.⁴⁵ He could no doubt rely on Bede and (if it had already been written) the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle to provide his readers with the story of that process as it affected Britain. The historical point for Anglo-Saxon readers was that the succession of empires had not, as Orosius predicted, ended with Rome, but had continued with the replacement of Rome by Germanic kingdoms such as the Visigoths in Spain, the Franks in western and central Europe, and the English in Britain, who could all be seen in various ways as the heirs of Rome, perhaps, but as successors not upholders of the Roman empire. It would perhaps follow that when Osric invokes Orosius as a speaker in the narrative, as he so often does, he is inviting his readers to see a distinction between the perspective of Orosius in 417 and the different view available to themselves around 900. He may not have been questioning Orosius' providential view of history, but he was inevitably raising doubts about his particular and optimistic application of that view to the Romans. One might add that any reader who knew the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, or indeed Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* in either its Latin or Old English form, would be aware of a quite different view of the Gothic incursion than Orosius' benign picture of merciful providence, gentle assailants and an undamaged empire: 'Her Gotan abrecon Romeburg, and næfre siþan Romane ne ricsodon on Bretone'.⁴⁶ They may have still seen

⁴⁵ See W. Kretzschmar, 'Adaptation and anweald in the Old English *Orosius*', *ASE* 16 (1987), 127–45; S. Harris, 'The Alfredian World History and Anglo-Saxon Identity', *JEGP* 100 (2001), 482–510.

⁴⁶ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS A*, ed. J. Batley, in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition*, ed. D. Dumville and S. Keynes, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1986), p. 15: 'In this year the Goths broke open the city of Rome, and the Romans never afterwards ruled in Britain'; *Abrecon* has a range of meanings in

providence at work here, but not in the way that Orosius sees it.

There may, however, have been a more immediate relevance to the Old English version of Orosius. It is hard at times to avoid seeing parallels between Osric's account of the Gothic invasion of Italy in the fifth century and the Danish invasions of England in the ninth.⁴⁷ Orosius' concern to reconcile a belief in divine providence and in God's protection of the faithful with the sacking of Christian Rome by heretical barbarians could become equally apposite for Anglo-Saxons facing the successes of the heathen vikings who had sacked monasteries and taken over Christian kingdoms. If the parallel is really there, and was recognised by Osric and his readers, it has interesting implications. The running argument, in the Old English version even more than in the Latin text, is that the depredations of the Goths in Rome were extremely mild, with even Roman pagans safe from harm if they took shelter in Christian churches, and not a single house burnt. It is, says Osric's Orosius, absurd of the Romans to complain so vociferously about what, in the context of history, was a very minor incursion that did little damage. They should recognise instead that what injury and loss did occur was a relatively merciful punishment for their own misdeeds, a punishment imposed by God and executed by his agents, the Goths.

That last point may well have resonated with Anglo-Saxon readers. The traditional idea that invasion and destruction was an expression of divine justice or punishment, even when at the hands of pagans, had been used by Gildas and Bede with reference to the

such contexts, including 'destroy, raze, break into by violence, take by storm'. Cf. too Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. 40–1.

⁴⁷ See, for instance, Bately's note at *The Old English Orosius*, ed. *ead.*, p. 270 (on III. 11, p. 83.2–3).

Anglo-Saxon invasions of Britain, and by Alcuin with reference to the earliest viking raids on Northumbria, and was to be used later by Wulfstan with reference to the Danish invasions and abuses early in the eleventh century. There is a hint of a similar idea in the prose preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care*, presumably referring again to viking invasions, and later writers saw the Danish invasions of Alfred's time as a divine punishment for the king's own sins.⁴⁸ It would not be surprising, then, if Osric and his readers saw a topical relevance in that aspect of Orosius' polemic, suggesting that, like the Goths in Rome, the Danes in England were a divine punishment for the sins of the English. More challenging, though, is Orosius' claim, repeated by Osric, that the depredations of the invaders were slight and the complaints excessive. What did readers think when they saw Orosius' attack on whinging Romans?:

Hu ungemetlice ge Romware bemurciað and besprecað þæt eow nu wyrs sie on þiosan cristendome þonne þæm þeodum þa wære, for þon þa Gotan eow hwon oferhergedon and iowre burg abracon and iower feawe ofslogon [...].⁴⁹

Did they remark that the same was true of themselves or their contemporaries, complaining about a little light plundering by the vikings? Or did they tell themselves that their own tribulations were much worse than those suffered by the Romans, and thus brought

⁴⁸ See M. R. Godden, 'The Old English Life of St Neot and the Legends of King Alfred', *ASE* 39 (2011), 193–225, esp. p. 212 and n. 86.

⁴⁹ *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately I. 10, p. 31.2–5: 'How extravagantly you Romans complain and protest that things are now worse for you under Christianity than they were for those people [Pyrrhus, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, who all feared the Goths], just because the Goths did a little light plundering and broke into your city and killed a few of you [...]'.

into question Orosius' argument that wars were much less of a burden under Christianity? If the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is to be believed, the vikings had ravaged Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia and much of Kent and Wessex, and killed King Edmund and vast numbers of English troops. It might have seemed highly inappropriate to imply that the English, like the Romans earlier, complained too much about minor damage. But much depends on the precise date at which Osric was writing. The continuator of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, looking back on the invasions of 892–6 from some time after 920, does conclude that the viking armies had not on the whole done very much damage compared to the losses inflicted on people and livestock by disease. It is perhaps conceivable that if Osric was writing after 896, and thinking primarily of the events of 892–6 rather than the more destructive phase of invasions and raids that had ended in 880, the parallels with excessively complaining Romans in 417 might have looked rather appropriate to the author and his readers, however different from the emphasis in the accounts given by Asser and the original part of the Chronicle. Alternatively, of course, Osric may have been wanting to suggest that the English of his time were still greater sinners than the Romans, and therefore punished more severely, though nothing of that idea emerges in his account.

More problematic is the potential parallel between Gothic settlement in Italy and viking settlement in England. In commenting on the mildness of the Gothic attack, Osric remarks (in Orosius' voice) that the Goths could have dominated and enslaved the Romans in the manner of earlier conquerors, but instead were merely asking for peace and a bit of land to settle on, at the Romans' choice,

and asserts that the Romans have spare land that is not needed.⁵⁰ The Latin text does indicate that the Goths had asked for land at the time, but not that the request was granted, and the emperor's refusal of land or supplies seems to have been what in part led Alaric to sack Rome. But in the Old English version, Orosius treats the Gothic request with much sympathy, and ends the work by reporting that the Goths did indeed eventually settle in Italy, 'sume be þæs caseres willan, sume his unwillan'.⁵¹ That certainly suggests a parallel with the vikings, who also wanted land to settle on and did eventually take it and occupy it, some by King Alfred's consent, some without it—though it seems unlikely that even a West Saxon could describe Northumbria, eastern Mercia and East Anglia as spare land that the English did not need. If Osric was inviting his readers to see a parallel between the fifth-century Goths and the ninth-century vikings in their eventual permanent settlement in part of the territory which they had invaded, his attitude was surprisingly positive towards the vikings. Again, it is possible to imagine such a position after King Alfred had made treaties with the vikings under Guthrum, newly baptised, and accepted their possession of the north and east of England. Osric's remark that under the Christian dispensation it is possible for warring peoples to make lasting peace with each other and settle down in amity may also have become apposite.⁵² But if Osric and his readers did recognise the failure of Orosius' vision of a continuing Roman empire under the benign and just guidance of God, saw that it had been replaced by a series of barbarian successor kingdoms, and also saw parallels between Gothic conquests and settlement in Italy and Danish conquests and settlement in England,

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, I. 10, p. 31.7–10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* VI. 38, p. 156: 'some by the emperor's will, some against his will'.

⁵² *Ibid.* I. 10, p. 31.

then they were coming very close to the position which Wulfstan was to reach a century or so later: that the Danes might be one more successor state, replacing the Anglo-Saxon rulers in Britain just as the Anglo-Saxons had replaced the Romans and Britons.

If, then, we can imagine a West Saxon writer of the late ninth or early tenth century who thought that the viking invasions had been mild and relatively harmless, that the English had complained excessively, and that the Scandinavian settlement of the Danelaw was an example of the good things that were possible under a Christian dispensation, then it is reasonable to see the Old English *Orosius* as having a political message to offer to contemporary readers. But that might appear quite a stretch of imagination, and since Osric seems in other respects rather uninterested in the relevance of his work to the history of the British Isles, we should perhaps allow the possibility that contemporary topical reference was not on his mind. A more historical parallel between the Goths of the fifth century and the Anglo-Saxons of the same period may have interested him more than a contemporary one between Goths and vikings.

Finally, we might note a possible reflection on Anglo-Saxon tastes in literature. One of Osric's characteristic themes is the horrors of war in ancient times, and he offers a distinctive twist on this theme in his recurrent suggestion that it is particularly poets who celebrate war and its values. So in I.8, he briefly cites the endless wars of the Assyrians which continued for more than a thousand years, the disgraceful story of Tantalus and Pelops and of Ganymede, and the whole story of the Trojan war, none of which he will bother to treat in detail, he says, since their wars are familiar from stories and poems (*leodum*).⁵³ Again, he describes in I.14 how the Spartans chose a poet

⁵³ *Ibid.* pp. 27–8.

(*scop*) as their king, and when they hesitated in their battles against the Messenians he urged them on with his poetry (*scopleoðe*) and toughened their minds, so that they prolonged the fighting until nearly all were dead on both sides.⁵⁴ After describing the slaughter of the whole Roman army by the Sabines in II.4, he remarks that warfare, misery and terror reigned at that time not just among the Romans, but throughout the whole world, and that they were celebrated in poetry (*scopleoðum*).⁵⁵ In III.1, after reporting the eager acceptance of a truce by the Spartans, he remarks sarcastically ‘On þæm mon mæg sweotole oncnawan hu micelne willan hie to ðæm gewinne hæfdon, swa heora scopas on heora leoðum giddiende sindon and on heora leaspellengum’.⁵⁶ In III.7, he concludes a long account of the wars and conquests of Philip of Macedon with ‘Orosius’ addressing the Romans and wondering why they love hearing poems (*leoðcnwidum*) about these events and celebrate them but at the same time complain about the brief troubles of the present.⁵⁷ Little if any of this theme of poetry celebrating war is in Orosius, though he does sometimes refer to fables or stories. What Osric evidently has in mind is that poets in classical times celebrated and praised the warmongering of the ancient past, and that the fifth-century-AD Romans and others of their time enthusiastically read and listened to such poems, sharing in the admiration for the great conquerors while failing to recognise the horrors of past warfare, or to compare them to the relatively minor troubles of which they complain in their own time and country.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 35.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p. 42.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 53: ‘from that you can see how eager they were for war, as their poets (*scopas*) proclaim in their poems and lying stories’.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 65.

As an observation on Roman taste in poetry it is perhaps not an unreasonable line to take, and one perhaps consonant with at least some of the poetry that might be read in a contemporary Anglo-Saxon school (such as Virgil's *Aeneid*, Statius' *Thebaid* or Lucan's *Pharsalia*). But it is hard to avoid noting the relevance of this critique of poetry to Anglo-Saxon verse as well, both as it survives (*Beowulf*, *Waldere*, *Finnsburh*) and as it is described (as in Alcuin's complaint about clerics listening to songs about Ingeld). The Anglo-Saxons too were listening to, and presumably enjoying, poems which celebrated the warfare of a bygone age while witnessing at first hand, and bemoaning, the horrors of viking raids and the collapse of kingdoms. In emphasising poetry rather than histories and other narratives, Osric can hardly have failed to recognise the parallel with his own culture, and the implied critique of his contemporaries for their celebrations of war.

In reading the Old English *Orosius*, it does seem difficult to imagine that contemporary readers did not see parallels with their own times, but they may have been rather uncomfortable ones. In the Old English version, Orosius castigates his readers for their excessive complaints about recent attacks by barbarian invaders and their exaggeration of the damage, and for their enthusiasm for heroic poetry, and invites them to see the positive side of barbarian settlement in their country. That is not an impossible view for an Anglo-Saxon scholar of the late ninth or early tenth century to take of recent events in England and his own contemporaries, but it would perhaps be an unexpected one—and certainly not one that we have come to associate with Alfred. If, as I have argued, readers of the Old English version would have recognised the limitations of Orosius' reading of the fifth-century situation, then it might follow that they were cautious about trying to apply its optimism or its providentialism to their own times.

The old story of the *Orosius* as a work of the Alfredian court, and part of a royal programme of education and renewal in an intellectual vacuum, may have to be abandoned in favour of a rather fuzzier picture, at least for the time being. But the evidence suggests that the *Orosius* was produced at some point in the period 870-930, by an Anglo-Saxon cleric of some learning and lively imagination, for educated readers who already had a grounding in classical history and culture and were expected to read Orosius in a critical manner.

Revisiting the ‘Welsh Dictator’ of the Old English Orosius

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Whoever the translator of the Old English Orosius may have been, the evidence of the extant manuscripts appears to be that the text as we have it acquired its present form as a result of dictation not by a man of ‘Romance culture’ but by a Welshman of Latin education to a scribe with an Anglo-Saxon background.

In concluding her 1966 paper on the question of dictation in the Old English Orosius thus, Janet Bately not only consolidates the general and long-held opinion that the Old English Orosius was the product of dictation, but suggests the crucial refinement that the dictator was a Welshman.¹ The final sentence of the footnote added to that concluding sentence also raises the tantalising possibility that we

¹ J. M. Bately, ‘The Old English Orosius: the Question of Dictation’, *Anglia* 84 (1966), 254–304, at p. 304; *The Old English Orosius*, ed. *ead.*, EETS ss 6 (Oxford, 1980), pp. cix–xvi. The standard edition of the Latin Orosius is *Pauli Orosii Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII*, ed. C. Zangemeister, CSEL 5 (Vienna, 1882); cf. also *Orose: Histoires (Contre les Païens)*, ed. M.-P. Arnaud-Lindet, 3 vols. (Paris, 1990–1). A recent English translation of the Latin text is A. T. Fear, *Orosius: Seven Books of History against the Pagans*, Translated Texts for Historians 54 (Liverpool, 2010), which is based principally on the Arnaud-Lindet edition. Janet Bately, Fred Biggs, Richard Dance and Malcolm Godden all read drafts of this paper, and I am grateful for their helpful comments and suggestions – not that they might all agree with what I have done with them. I am also grateful to Georgia Henley for her painstaking editorial work which has made this a better paper. This version has also benefited from the comments made after the original presentation of this work at the Cambridge Colloquium in Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic in 2011.

know who that Welshman was: ‘At King Alfred’s court the most famous Welshman was of course Asser’.² With occasional probing and suggested minor modifications, this view of the creation of the text has now generally become embedded in the scholarship;³ for example, Michael Lapidge takes it as given and ties it into Asser’s knowledge of Orosius: ‘[...] it may have been Asser himself who dictated the Old English translation of the Latin Orosius’.⁴

The evidential basis of argument rests primarily on two features observable in the spelling of names of peoples and countries in the text: first, they show irregularities in the spelling of internal stops in relation to the spellings found in the Latin version, so as to suggest

² Bately, ‘The Old English Orosius’, p. 304, n. 293; the full note reads: ‘For a Celtic secretary working with Æpelweard, cf. Sisam, *PBA*, 39 (1953), 320–321. At King Alfred’s court the most famous Welshman was of course Asser’.

³ For probing by Peter Clemons (as reported by Peter Kitson), see P. Kitson, ‘The Dialect Position of the Old English Orosius’, *Studia Anglica Posnaniensia* 30 (1996), 3–35, at pp. 5–6. For other modifications and suggestions (focusing on the possibility of a Cornish dictator), none of which shakes the foundations of Bately’s core proposal, see A. Breeze, ‘Cornwall and the Authorship of the Old English Orosius’, *N&Q* 38 (1991), 152–4; *id.*, ‘Cornish *Donna* “Danube” and the Old English Orosius’, *N&Q* 39 (1992), 431–3; *id.*, ‘Cornish *Ligore* “Loire” and the Old English Orosius’, *NM* 93 (1992), 271–3 (with re-assertions in *id.*, ‘The Old Cornish Gloss in Boethius’, *N&Q* 252 (2007), 367–8; *id.*, ‘Orosius, the Book of Taliesin, and *Culhwch and Olwen*’, *Studia Celtica* 45 (2011), 203–9, at p. 207). For observations on Breeze’s view, see Kitson, ‘The Dialect Position’, pp. 3–4. Curiously, Breeze talks of the nationality of the translator, when Bately’s argument relates to the dictator, not the translator (Breeze, ‘Cornwall and the Authorship of the Old English Orosius’; *id.*, ‘Cornish *Donna*’, p. 432); in the quotation at the top of this paper and elsewhere, Bately explicitly declines to comment on the translator.

⁴ M. Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 119–20 (quotation on p. 120).

that the dictator not only voiced internal unvoiced stops, but also turned internal voiced stops into fricatives. This had been observed from the late nineteenth century onwards and was explained by the process of dictation; thus, e.g., $p > b$, $t > d$, $b > v$, $d > \beta/\ð$; e.g., *Tribulitania* (*Tripolitana*), *Lampida* (*Lampeto*), *Galua* (*Galba*), *Leoniþa* (*Leonidas*).⁵ Secondly, some names also show irregularity in the spelling of initial stops, e.g. *Clafrione* (*Glabrione*), which, Bately suggested, may have to do with the Brittonic propensity to mutate initial stops.⁶ The dictator, so the argument goes, a non-native speaker of Old English, was pronouncing the Old English text in front of him (and so also the names of peoples and places in the texts) in such a way that the scribes coped with the rendering of the Old English narrative perfectly well (for there seem to be no errors in the copies which scholars have attributed to dictation errors), but in some instances they apparently struggled with the spelling of the names. To account for these features, two inter-related hypotheses were developed: first, that the text was produced by dictation, and secondly, that the accent with which the dictator pronounced the names (derived mainly from

⁵ In these examples and throughout, the first form comes from the Old English text and the form in brackets from the Latin; to avoid burdening the argument with numbers, full references can be traced through the compendious Index of Names in *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, pp. 407–33. Note also that at this stage I am referring to this variation as variation in spelling, thus p and b , etc.; later in the discussion, when referring to sounds, I use $/p/$ and $/b/$. For earlier discussions, see H. Schilling, *König Ælfreds Angelsächsische Bearbeitung der Welt-geschichte des Orosius* (Halle, 1886), p. 58; A. Pogatscher, *Zur Lautlehre der griechischen, lateinischen und romanischen Lehnworte im altenglischen* (Strassburg, 1888), §§ 247n, 310, 317, 325, 329, 340n; N. H. P. Bøgholm, *English Speech from an Historical Point of View* (Copenhagen, 1939), p. 19; A. Kirkman, 'Proper Names in the Old English "Orosius"', *MLR* 25 (1930), 1–20, 140–51.

⁶ Bately, 'The Old English Orosius', pp. 274–81.

Latin and Greek) in his Old English text could reveal the nationality of the dictator. With regard to the latter, while some of these features might be regarded as reflecting Romance or Germanic pronunciation (thus earlier scholars⁷), the combination of the spelling of both intervocalic and initial consonants suggested to Bately that the dictator was a speaker of a Brittonic language. Thus, for Bately the dictator was Welsh (with Asser springing to mind as the most likely candidate). More recently, Andrew Breeze has proposed, on the basis of the spelling of a handful of names, that the dictator was not a Welshman but a Cornishman, though he does not rule out the possibility that he was a Breton.⁸

There are then two distinct questions which can be asked of the Old English Orosius: first and more generally, was it at some point during its transmission the product of dictation? Secondly and more

⁷ For the work of earlier scholars, see the references in n. 5.

⁸ Breeze, 'Cornish *Donua*', p. 432. Surprisingly, no strong arguments have been presented for a Breton dictator – surprising in that no one has attempted systematically to connect the alleged Brittonic character of the Old English text with the Breton provenance of several manuscripts of the Latin Orosius. The following five Orosius manuscripts are known to contain Old Breton glosses: Venice, Bibliotheca Marciana, Zanetti, Lat. 349 (s. ix); Rome, Vatican Library, Regina 296 (s. ix); Berne, Stadtbibliothek 160 (s. xi); Rome, Vatican Library, Lat. 1974 (s. xii); Rome, Vatican Library, Regina 691 (s. xii); see L. Fleuriot and C. Evans, *A Dictionary of Old Breton / Dictionnaire du Vieux Breton: Historical and Comparative*, 2 vols. (Toronto, 1985) [the first vol. reprinted from L. Fleuriot, *Dictionnaire du Vieux Breton* (Paris, 1964)], I, 4–7. On the Breton term *Ormesta* to refer to Orosius, see A. Anscombe, "'Ormesta'", *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 4 (1903), 462–3; C. Cuissard, "'Ormesta Britannae'", *Revue Celtique* 5 (1881–3), 458–60; and most recently P. Sims-Williams, 'Some Functions of Origin Legends in Early Medieval Wales', in *History and Heroic Tale: A Symposium*, ed. T. Nyberg *et al.* (Odense, 1983), pp. 97–131, at p. 116. The likely Breton (or more generally Brittonic) origin of *Ormesta* seems to have eluded Fear, *Orosius*, p. 24.

specifically, can we tell from the variation in the spelling of the names whether the dictator was speaking Old English with a Welsh accent? As indicated above, both questions have been answered in the affirmative, the former since the nineteenth century and the latter since the mid-sixties of the twentieth century. However, there are good reasons for thinking it timely to re-open both questions and to re-visit the evidence. With regard to the general question of dictation, it is well known that identifying dictated texts is a notoriously difficult business, but recent linguistic analyses of 'slips of the ear', and in particular Peter Bierbaumer's work on Old English, might be able to cast some new light on this issue.⁹ Secondly, Bately's work in identifying the dictator as Welsh was reliant on the ground-breaking work of Kenneth Jackson on the historical development of Brittonic phonology, and it is also clear from various comments in her work that Jackson took a close interest in her analysis of the names in the Old English Orosius.¹⁰ However, since then, important work has been done by Anthony Harvey, in particular, to improve our understanding

⁹ P. Bierbaumer, 'Slips of the Ear in Old English Texts', in *Luicke Revisited*, ed. G. Bauer, D. Kastovsky, and J. Fisiak, Tübinger Beiträge zur Linguistik 288 (Tübingen, 1988), 127–37. For other recent work on 'slips of the ear', etc., see C. Browman, 'Perceptual Processing: Evidence from Slips of the Ear', in *Errors in Linguistic Performance: Slips of the Tongue, Ear, Pen and Hand*, ed. V. Fromkin (New York, 1980), pp. 213–30; M. Celce-Murcia, 'Meringer's Corpus of "Slips of the Ear"', in *Errors in Linguistic Performance*, ed. Fromkin, pp. 200–11; S. Garnes and Z. S. Bond, 'A Slip of the Ear: a Snip of the Ear? A Slip of the Year?', in *Errors in Linguistic Performance*, ed. Fromkin, pp. 231–9; B. Voss, *Slips of the Ear: Investigations into the Speech Perception Behaviour of German Speakers of English* (Tübingen, 1984).

¹⁰ K. H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953). I am grateful to Janet Bately for showing me a copy of a letter from Kenneth Jackson discussing aspects of the spelling of the names in the Old English Orosius.

of the relationship between phonology and spelling in the early medieval Celtic languages.¹¹ Furthermore, ongoing work by Roger Wright has changed our understanding of the nature of the development of, and the relationship between, the Romance languages and late Latin.¹² In other words, it might pay us to re-consider aspects of the arguments about the Romance, and indeed Germanic, features alleged to be visible in the spellings of the names in the Old English Orosius.

WAS THE DICTATOR WELSH?

We may begin with the specific question of whether it is possible to decide if the dictator was Welsh, and then proceed to the more general question of whether we can tell if a text has been dictated. However, it may be worth first reminding ourselves of some of the established facts concerning the manuscript transmission of the Old English Orosius, and in this, as so much else to do with this text, we are reliant on the work of Janet Bately.¹³ The two earliest manuscripts containing a complete text of the Old English Orosius are:

¹¹ A. Harvey, 'Retrieving the Pronunciation of Early Insular Celtic Scribes: Towards a Methodology', *Celtica* 21 (1990), 178–90; *id.*, 'Retrieving the Pronunciation of Early Insular Celtic Scribes: the Case of Dorbbēne', *Celtica* 22 (1991), 48–63; *id.*, 'Reading the Genetic Code of Early Medieval Celtic Orthography', in *LautSchriftSprache: Beiträge zur vergleichenden historischen Graphematik*, ed. E. Glaser, A. Seiler and M. Waldspühl, Medienwandel – Medienwechsel – Medienwissen 15 (Zurich, 2011), 155–66. Harvey's work forms the backdrop to what follows.

¹² R. Wright, *Latin and the Romance Languages in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 1991).

¹³ Bately, 'The Relationship between the MSS of the Old English Orosius', *ES* 48 (1967), 410–16; *ead.*, 'King Alfred and the Latin MSS of Orosius' History', *Classica et Mediaevalia* 22 (1961), 69–105.

- L Lauderdale (Tollemache) MS: London, British Library,
 Additional 47967 (s. xⁱⁿ)
- C London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. i (s. xi)

The spelling variation discussed by Bately and argued to be diagnostic of a Welsh dictator is found in both manuscripts; according to Bately, L, on which her edition is based, is at least three removes from the original translation of Orosius' 'History'.¹⁴ There are also a few more instances of spelling variation in C than in L. It is clear, therefore, that whatever was going on to create the variation in the spelling of the names happened between the translation and the archetype of the surviving manuscripts, L and C.

Bately discusses a wide range of spelling features exhibited by the names in the Old English Orosius. However, the clearest diagnostic feature concerns variation in the spelling of consonants, and that will be the focus of this discussion. Vocalic variation is a less secure guide to the kind of linguistic interference perpetrated by a dictator, since the perception of vowel quality by a scribe can be influenced by a number of conditions, such as the extent to which a vowel might be affected by the quality of the flanking consonants (e.g., rounding of vowels adjacent to labial consonants, etc.), or whether the syllable is stressed or unstressed. The latter issue itself raises an interesting question: if, for the sake of argument, we accept that the dictator was a Welshman, he would presumably have still pronounced Old English with an initial stress, but how would he have treated the unfamiliar personal and place names? Is it possible that in some instances, perhaps where the name was least familiar, he reverted to a Brittonic

¹⁴ Bately, 'The Relationship'; *ead.*, *The Old English Orosius*, pp. xxxi–ix.

pattern of penultimate stress?¹⁵ In my survey of the names in the Old English Orosius, I found no correlation between spelling alternations and variation in the possible position of the stress accent, whether a classical Latin pattern varying between an ante-penultimate and a penultimate position, a later Latin pattern, an Old English initial pattern, or a Brittonic penultimate pattern. In comparison, systematic variation in consonantal spelling may prove more helpful, not least because it may be clearly visible in the spelling.

At this point a brief digression into early Brittonic phonology may be of use. From the earliest contacts between Latin and British speakers, Latin words borrowed into Brittonic underwent the same changes as native lexical items, one of the most distinctive of which was the voicing of intervocalic unvoiced stops, and the change of intervocalic voiced stops into fricatives, thus $-/p/- > -/b/-$, $-/m/- > -/μ/-$ (later $-/v/-$), $-/t/- > -/d/-$, $-/k/- > -/g/-$, $-/b/- > -/β/-$ (later $-/v/-$), $-/d/- > -/ð/-$, $-/g/- > -/γ/-$; in the last case, the voiced guttural disappeared completely within the history of Welsh, but traces of it survived in the other Brittonic languages.¹⁶ Thus, for example, a borrowed Latin *medicus* ‘doctor’ developed into Middle Welsh *medyc*, Modern Welsh *meddyg* /meðig/, etc. We may note that in the medieval stage of the Welsh language the Latin letters *d* and *c* in the middle and end of words represented $-/ð/-$ and $-/g/-$, and it is only in the later stages of the language that a more distinctive and consistent spelling was adopted. Within Latin texts surviving from early medieval Wales, there are rare, but precious, examples which indicate that, when speaking Latin, native speakers of Brittonic languages used a Brittonic accent (which involved, *inter alia*, the

¹⁵ The issue is raised by Bately, *The Old English Orosius*, p. cxiii, n. 2.

¹⁶ For a basic discussion, see P. Russell, *An Introduction to the Celtic Languages* (London, 1995), pp. 236–8.

voicing and spirantising of intervocalic consonants); for example, in the text entitled *De Raris Fabulis*, designed to teach basic Latin, preserved in a manuscript from Cornwall, Oxford, Bodleian Library 572 (s. x), we find the question *quae cubis?* where the context requires this to mean 'what do you want?', corresponding to a more classically spelt *quae cupis?*¹⁷ It is precisely this feature that Bately argues can be detected in the spellings of the names in the Old English Orosius, thus *Tribulitania* corresponding to the Latin *Tripolitana*.¹⁸

In the early stages of the Brittonic languages, the same voicing or spirantising of intervocalic stops also occurred on word boundaries; for example, where a feminine noun ended in *-/a:/* and the following adjective began with a consonant, e.g., **/kassika: duba:/* 'a black mare', **/kassika: kokka:/* 'a red mare', the initial intervocalic consonants of the two adjectives underwent the same changes as if they were word-internal, thus **/kassiga: ðuva:/* and **/kassiga: goɣa:/*. After the loss of final syllables, what had been a phonetic alternation on the word boundary developed into the pattern of initial mutation, used in the later language to mark grammatical categories; thus, Middle Welsh *cassec du*, *cassec goch*, Modern Welsh *casseg ddu*, *casseg goch*.¹⁹ Bately has argued that such initial alternations are also detectable in the names in the Old English Orosius, e.g., *Brobus (Probus)*; *Dissafarnon (Tissafernen)*, and can be used as supporting evidence for the claim that

¹⁷ *Early Scholastic Colloquies*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1929), pp. 1–11, at p. 3, l. 3 (§ 5).

¹⁸ Note, however, that we might have expected *Tribulidania*, or the like; for further discussion, see below.

¹⁹ For the grammaticalization of the mutations, see Russell, *Introduction*, pp. 249–51.

the dictator was a Welshman.²⁰

We may now turn to the data provided by the personal and place names of the Old English Orosius. There are 357 names listed in Bately's index which contain the relevant phonological segments, namely intervocalic consonants (also including a consonant flanked by a resonant and vowel, e.g. *Marþonius* (*Mardonius*), or vowel and resonant, e.g. *Fifnam* (*Pydna*). Some instances also contain more than one relevant segment, such as *Tripolitana* mentioned above. All the relevant data for intervocalic consonants is presented in Appendix 1 (pp. 58–60). All instances of a spelling which is not found in the Latin version of Orosius are listed. For the sake of completeness, the Appendix also contains the instances where a variant spelling is also attested in one of the manuscripts of the Latin text, e.g. *Abulia* : Latin *Apulia* (but the variant *Aboliam* is found in MS D (Donaueschingen, Court Library 18)), *Fauius*, *Fania*, *Uauius*, etc. : Latin *Fabius* (but forms in *-u-* are a common variant in Latin manuscripts); such cases are not counted in the statistics, since it could always be argued that such forms were present in the Latin exemplar which was translated into Old English. All these forms are presented in Bately's discussion; however, what is lacking in her data is the number of instances where the form of the name is identical to the standard Latin form; without that extra set of figures it is very difficult to gain a real sense of the significance of the cases where there is a variant spelling. Table 1 presents the summary statistics based on the forms listed in Appendix 1.

²⁰ It might be pointed out, as others have done, that if the evidence is thus interpreted, the dictator could just as well be Cornish or Breton (see the citations in nn. 3 and 5 above). It is also worth pointing out that, although I have used feminine examples above as illustration of initial mutation, mutations frequently occur in various collocations with masculine names in Welsh; for discussion, see T. J. Morgan, *Treigladau a'u Cystrawen* (Cardiff, 1952), pp. 101–28.

Revisiting the 'Welsh Dictator'

Intervocalic consonants:	Changed	Unchanged from Latin
-/p/- > -/b/-:	1	42
-/t/- > -/d/-:	2	50
-/k/- > -/g/-:	0	71
-/b/- > -/v/-:	4	37
-/d/- > -/ð/-:	30	47
-/g/- > -/ɣ/- > -/j/- > -/∅/-:	1	9
-/m/- > -/μ/- > -/v/-:	0	63
Total	38	319 [= 357]

Table 1: Summary of data presented in Appendix 1

A number of observations can be made about these data. First and most obviously, it is striking that the number of forms which do not match the Latin spellings is a relatively small proportion (10.64%) of the examples overall; in other words, 89.36% of the names in the Old English Orosius are, apart from the anglicisation of the morphology, spelt the same as the forms in the Latin version.²¹ Furthermore, there are very few examples indeed of the voicing of unvoiced stops (/p/ > /b/, etc.), and some of these examples may reflect spellings of the Latin exemplar. Another striking feature is that there are no examples of *-v-* corresponding to spellings in *-m-* in the Latin text; since a Welsh dictator, who would

²¹ Not including forms where there is a standard Old English version of the name, such as *Megelan* (Mediolanum (Milan)), *Profentse* (Provincia (Provence)) or *Magentsan* (Mogontiacum (Mainz)); see Bately, *The Old English Orosius*, p. cxiv.

have been pronouncing *-b-* as *-v/-*, would certainly have pronounced *-m-* as *-μ/-* or *-v/-* which would probably have been written by an English scribe as *-f-*; this is a telling gap in the data.²² It is also worth observing that there are several cases where one consonant in the word was affected but not another, e.g. *Metreβatis* (not ***Medreβadis*), *Sarβanopolim* (not ***Sarβanobolim*); in such cases it is noticeable that it is the voiced stop which has been modified to the fricative. This last feature makes it particularly difficult to see how such spellings could be the product of dictation by a Welsh dictator, as it would force us to assume that he was changing his pronunciation mid-word. As noted above, there are relatively few examples of variation; the one exception, however, is the voiced dentals: 30 out of 77 possible examples show a fricative spelling, which amounts to 39% of all the voiced dentals, and 78.9% of all consonants showing variation. Again, it is difficult to see how a case can be made that this is a product of dictation by a Welshman, when there are so few examples of variation involving the other consonants. While we would not necessarily expect an even spread of variation across all the consonants, the lack of occurrences involving other consonants is striking, and to my mind goes beyond what might be attributed either to variable pronunciation by the dictator or to a patchy awareness on the part of the scribe of the distinctive sounds in the dictator's pronunciation.

The discussion so far has focused on the spelling of intervocalic

²² On the Brittonic development of the bilabial nasal *-/m/-* to the fricative *-/μ/-* and subsequently to *-/v/-* (merging with *-/β/-*, the lenited reflex of *-/b/-*), see Jackson, *Language and History*, pp. 413–24, 480–95; Russell, 'Romyynniauc, Rbūfoniog: the Orthography and Phonology of */μ/* in Early Welsh', in *Yr Hen Iaith. Studies in Early Welsh*, ed. Russell (Aberystwyth, 2003), pp. 25–47.

consonants, and some specific examples which have been argued to be significant have been left to one side. One particular example worth discussing is the rendering of the Latin name *Jugurtha* as *Geoweorþa*. Bately, following a suggestion from Kenneth Jackson, argues that the Old English spelling reflected an Old Welsh pronunciation of the Latin form where the dictator read *-gu-* as the Old Welsh spelling of *-/w/-* and so 'the underlying form **Iuwurtha* is most satisfactorily explained in terms of Old Welsh pronunciation and scribal tradition'.²³ It is not clear, however, why we should suppose that a Welsh scribe would jump to the conclusion that *-gu-* was an Old Welsh spelling when it figured in an Old English text.²⁴ A more satisfactory explanation is partly anticipated by Bately in her suggestion that the spelling *-weorþa* was an assimilation of the second part of the name to the Old English adjective *weorþa* 'worthy'.²⁵ More recently, Eric Stanley has suggested that the whole of the form of the name *Geoweorþa* can be accounted for by assuming that it represents etymological word-play on the form of the name, and can be understood as meaning 'one formerly held in high esteem' (*iu/geo* 'formerly' + *weorþa* 'worthy').²⁶ That an

²³ Bately, 'The Old English Orosius', pp. 271–2 (and n. 102).

²⁴ There is also a problem with the analysis of the *-gu-* of *Jugurtha* as *-/w/-* in that the Old Welsh use of *gu* for */w/* is found before a vowel, e.g., Old Welsh *petguar* 'four' (Modern Welsh *pedwar*); *leguenid* 'joy' (Modern Welsh *llawenydd*). It is therefore not obvious that a Welsh-speaking dictator could have read *Jugurtha* in a way to produce an internal *-/w/-*.

²⁵ Bately, 'The Old English Orosius', p. 271.

²⁶ E. G. Stanley, 'Geoweorþa: "Once Held in High Esteem"', in J. R. R. Tolkien, *Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam*, ed. M. Salu and R. T. Farrell (Ithaca, 1979), pp. 99–119 (repr. in *A Collection of Papers with Emphasis on Old English*, ed. E. G. Stanley (Toronto, 1987), pp. 31–5). It is also worth pointing out that the

alternative analysis is thinkable and plausible should give us pause before we accept that the spelling of *Geoweorþa* is the product of a Welsh dictator's mis-dictation. Stanley supplies a number of other instances of the same kind of paronomasia from Old English literature, but a relevant example, which cuts across the relevant linguistic boundary, is perhaps the spelling of some Old Welsh names in the Durham *Liber Vitae*, which suggest that a process of etymological rationalization is going on:²⁷ for example, the name *Cuntigeorn*, a rendering of a name which, were it attested in Old Welsh, would have been spelt **Contigern* or *Cintigern* (lit. **con-/cin-* 'hound' + *tigern-* 'prince'), has seen the final syllable re-analysed as *georn* 'desirous, eager'.

So far we have been concerned with the spelling of intervocalic consonants. But an important element of Bately's argument relates to instances where there was variation in initial consonants. She argues that this variation could be understood in the light of the initial mutations used in all Celtic languages to mark grammatical categories. The data for consonantal variation in initial position are presented in Appendix 2 (pp. 61–2), and summarized in Table 2.

treatment of Jugurtha in Orosius, which is markedly more gentle than that of Sallust, does not readily permit this analysis; cf. Stanley '*Geoweorþa*', pp. 325–7.

²⁷ See Russell, "Ye Shall Know Them by Their Names": Names and Identity among the Irish and the English', in *Anglo-Saxon/Irish Relations before the Vikings*, ed. J. Graham-Campbell and M. Ryan, *PBA* 157 (London, 2009), 99–111, at pp. 109–10; *id.*, 'The Names of Celtic Origin', in *The Durham Liber Vitae: London, British Library, MS Cotton Domitian A.VII*, ed. D and L. Rollason, 3 vols. (London, 2007), II, 5–8, at p. 6; *id.*, 'Commentary: A. Personal Names: A.1 Celtic names', in *ibid.* II, 35–43, at pp. 37 and 42.

Initial consonants:

Voicing:	Changed	Unchanged from Latin
/p/- > /b/-:	4	67
/t/- > /d/-:	3	40
/k/- > /g/-:	0	85
Total	7	192 [= 199]

Devoicing:

/b/- > /p/-:	2	46
/d/- > /t/-:	2	36
/g/- > /c/-:	2	31
Total	6	113 [= 119]

No examples involving /b/- > /v/-, /d/- > /ð/-, or /g/- > /ɣ/- > /j/- > /∅/-

Table 2: Summary of data presented in Appendix 2

If Bately is correct, it might be predicted that, since the voicing of initial unvoiced stops and the spirantisation of voiced stops are used as grammatical markers in Brittonic languages, the two types would be evenly distributed; furthermore, we would not expect to find significant examples of devoicing, as Brittonic languages do not devoice in mutation except for instances in Cornish and Breton involving grammatical mutation in phrases (and it is not clear how early these are).²⁸ However, close scrutiny of the data indicates that none of these predictions is fulfilled: there are no examples at all of the spirantisation of initial voiced stops; and there are six cases of

²⁸ Russell, *Introduction*, pp. 235–6.

devoicing. The most striking point to note is how infrequent the variation is in initial position: thirteen examples out of a total of 318 possible instances, of which there are seven cases of voicing, none of spirantisation, and six of devoicing. In other words, there is almost as much evidence for devoicing as voicing, and no evidence for voiced consonants becoming fricatives. In addition, it is worth noting that of the few examples in Appendix 2, four of them, *Blaciduses* (*Placido*); *Brobus* (*Probus*); *Clafrione* (*Glabrio*); *Craccus* (*Gracchus*), occur where the stop is followed by /l/ or /r/—a phonetic environment in which voicing is commonly neutralised. In other words, this is precisely the environment in which we might expect to find some phonetic variation (and thus spelling), but this is variation of a phonetic nature which is not uniquely Celtic, Brittonic or Welsh. In conclusion, then, it would appear that the evidence of the variation in the spelling of initial consonants can tell us very little.

Before coming to any firm conclusions, one other issue needs to be addressed. Throughout this discussion, we have observed on several occasions that the evidence is strikingly thin for the weight of argument it seeks to bear; the paucity of evidence is particularly clear when one brings into play the number of examples where variation has not occurred. 89.36% of the names in the Old English Orosius containing intervocalic consonants are spelt the same as the forms in the Latin version; for initial consonants the proportion is even greater, at 95.85%. However, it might be argued that some of the irregularities could have been ironed out in the process of transmission. It is worth recalling that there are more irregular spellings in C than in L (upon which Bately based her edition), and it is always possible, and indeed likely, that at any point in the transmission of the Old English translation, reference could have been made to a Latin version, and some of these spellings straightened out again. Another possibility was suggested by Janet

Bately herself, in response to queries from Peter Clemoes: that the dictator was shifting between his own 'Welsh' pronunciation of Latin (involving changes to all intervocalic consonants) and the new standardized Latin pronunciation.²⁹ However, for that to be the case, we would have to assume, somewhat implausibly, that in examples like *Metreþatis* (not ***Medreþadis*) or *Sarþanopolim* (not ***Sarþanobolim*) the dictator was changing his pronunciation between these two models mid-word. Roger Wright has argued that this standardized classical pronunciation of Latin arose in the Carolingian Empire partly as a response to the various pronunciations of Latin across the Carolingian Empire; what is not clear is how long it took for that type of pronunciation to be adopted in England. But even so, such variation within a word would be surprising.

Even if we were to accept one of these scenarios, that the spellings were secondarily tidied up, or that the dictator was varying his pronunciation, they raise their own set of problems. While the issue of the relative sparseness of the evidence might recede into the background, the unevenness of the evidence, and especially the very slight evidence for the voicing of unvoiced stops remains a problem; if the surviving manuscripts are the product of a gradual tidying-up of the aberrant spellings, it is not clear why some have remained more resistant to revision than others: why would a scribe have revised the spelling of almost all the unvoiced stops but have declined, for example, to do the same for voiced dental stops? Furthermore, as noted above, the complete absence of instances of *m > f* is a real problem for a Welsh explanation. As the evidence stands, all we can

²⁹ Clemoes (as reported by Kitson, 'The Dialect Position', pp. 5–6). On the development of a new standardized pronunciation, see now Wright, *Latin and the Romance Languages*.

say with confidence is that a dictator, if indeed that is what was happening, may have pronounced the voiced dental stops in the names as voiced dental fricatives; the evidence is so thin that it is not even clear that the other voiced stops were spirantised. Some of the other sporadic evidence may be due to variation in the Latin exemplar; we can see in Appendices 1 and 2 several examples of such variation attested already in Latin manuscripts of Orosius. All in all, on the basis of such evidence, it is difficult to see a strong basis to the claim that the dictator was a Welshman.

WAS THE OLD ENGLISH OROSIUS DICTATED?

We may move from the specific issue of the linguistic orientation of the dictator to the more general question of whether the Old English Orosius was dictated at all. Exploration of this question is beset with difficulty. One of the principal difficulties is that we understand very little about the process of dictation.³⁰ There is no modern discussion of the practice of dictation and to a large extent we are still reliant on the excellent work of Skeat. His work, however, was largely concerned with the classical world, and any application of his work to medieval texts is largely a matter of guess-work. We are forced into the position of making assumptions about what might have remained the same, and what might have changed, and indeed wondering whether dictation was employed at all as a process of manuscript production. One of the difficulties is the usual assumption that dictation, as a practice, was an efficient way of generating multiple copies of a text—a dictator would read from a single copy to a

³⁰ T. C. Skeat, 'The Use of Dictation in Ancient Book-Production', *PBA* 42 (1956), 179–208; also P. Russell, 'Scribal (In)competence in Thirteenth-century North Wales: the Orthography of the Black Book of Chirk (Peniarth MS 29)', *National Lib. of Wales Jnl* 29 (1995–6), 129–76, at pp. 160–4.

roomful of scribes—but it is not easy to think of many examples from the medieval period where such a scenario can be plausibly imagined, except arguably perhaps for the Carolingian court or the court of Alfred.³¹ Moreover, we know so little about how dictation worked that we do not even know how the text was read, whether they repeated the text phrase by phrase or whether there was one long, slow, read through the text. More likely, then, is the other scenario—a single scribe read the text aloud as he copied and, perhaps intermittently, took more notice of his own voice than of the text in front of his eyes. Such a scenario might be more plausibly envisaged in cases where a scribe was reading whole sentences aloud and then repeating them to himself as he wrote them down. In such cases of what might be called ‘self-dictation’, the kind of errors the scribe would make might overlap with the kind of errors which he would make when he had no sight at all of the text he was copying but was solely reliant on his ears. It is also, of course, worth pointing out that an optical error can still appear in a dictated text, because the dictator may make one when reading to his scribes. In other words, evidence for dictation in the form of acoustic errors—that is, errors which we could not imagine a scribe making if he had been looking at

³¹ Bierbaumer, ‘Slips of the Ear in Old English Texts’, p. 128 (cf. also pp. 134–5), argues that the demand for glossed psalters in Anglo-Saxon England might have required the speedy production that dictation allows. For a more sceptical view, see F. E. de Roover, ‘The Scriptorium’, in *The Medieval Library*, ed. J. W. Thompson (Chicago, 1939), pp. 594–612: ‘In the Middle Ages, dictation was not often practised; and hence scribal errors, owing to imperfect hearing on the part of the copyist, are not common in medieval books’ (*ibid.* p. 603). For a brief discussion of dictation in the early medieval period and a summary discussion of scholarship, see Skeat, ‘The Use of Dictation’, pp. 200–3. I hope to produce a more detailed study of the evidence for medieval dictation in due course.

the written text—may well be accompanied in any text by examples of optical misreadings. Conversely, a text which was dictated and thus contained acoustic errors may subsequently have been copied, as it were, optically, and the outcome would then contain both types of error. Since we have no evidence for the situations in which texts were dictated (in either sense) and lack helpful colophons stating that a particular text has been copied from dictation, we have to rely on potentially misleading and confusing features of the copied text. Moreover, in the final analysis, we have to acknowledge that, if a dictator dictated a text perfectly and the scribe(s) arrayed before him wrote down what he said perfectly, then it would be impossible to distinguish the final product from a text copied by a single scribe sat in front of his exemplar.³²

The most compelling evidence for dictation is provided by errors which we cannot imagine could have been perpetrated if the scribe had been able to see the text, but which are explicable by hearing errors, or ‘slips of the ear’. A particularly compelling example of such a slip from the classical world occurs in a recently discovered letter of the first century AD from Vindolanda, near the line of the future Hadrian’s Wall. Unsurprisingly for that area the letter is preoccupied with the weather; part of the letter reads: *qui feramus tempestates etiam si molestae sint* ‘[...] we may endure the storms even if they are troublesome’.³³ However, *etiam* is a correction written above *et hiem* which has then been deleted. It is highly likely that the letter was being dictated to the scribe and, because of the preceding reference to

³² ‘if a dictator dictates accurately and a scribe accurately writes down what he says, then there will be no way of distinguishing a dictated MS from one copied visually’ (Russell, ‘Scribal (In)competence’, p. 161).

³³ *The Vindolanda Writing Tablets (Tabulae Vindolandenses II)*, ed. and trans. A. K. Bowman and J. D. Thomas (London, 1994), pp. 208–9 (TV II.234.ii.2).

storms, he heard *etiam* as if it were *et hiem[es]* 'and winter(s)' before realising his error and correcting himself. In such a case, it is difficult to see how the error could have arisen if there had been a written text before his eyes. Such clear examples are rare.

An interesting example of potential mishearing is provided by a passage from an early medieval copy of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* I, preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley MS Auct. F. 4. 32 (s. ix), 37r–47r, which was almost certainly copied in Wales, as it contains Old Welsh glosses copied by the main scribe. Parts of the main text of Ovid arguably show signs that at some point in its transmission it had been dictated: one section of the text (copied in Hand B of this section of the manuscript) regularly shows *-nd-* for *-nt-* and confusion between *-b-* and *-u-*, neither of which is explicable as an optical error, but which can be accounted for by assuming a dictator was reading the text aloud. More specifically, the following are also suggestive of acoustic error:³⁴ *atque* (43r32) for *ecce* (l. 543), *sibi bellatore* (43v9) for *sine illa toro* (l. 487), *uacuans illis* (43v13) for *uacuis illi* (l. 491), *locare* (43v22) for *loquare* (l. 500), *incedit* (45v26) for *inquit et* (l. 652). Since we cannot guarantee that an exemplar consistently and correctly marks word division, errors of mis-segmentation are only minimally helpful in this respect; they are not diagnostic by themselves, but can be useful in combination with other

³⁴ The first section of text comes from the manuscript, the second from the standard edition of Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, I (*P. Ovidi Nasonis: Amores, Medicamina Faciei Femineae, Ars Amatoria, Remedia Amoris*, ed. E. J. Kenney (Oxford, 1961; rev. edn. 1995)); for a facsimile of the relevant passage of text in Bodley Auct. F. 4. 32, see *Saint Dunstan's Classbook from Glastonbury*, ed. R. W. Hunt (Amsterdam, 1961); and for an online image, see the *Early Manuscripts at Oxford University* website (viewed 19 Dec., 2011):

<http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msauctf432>.

stronger evidence. In the context of this manuscript, where there does seem to be evidence for dictation, the segmentation errors found in *credita mens speculo* (41r20) for *crede tamen speculo* (l. 307) carry more weight than they would have done in isolation.

Tracking down examples of dictation in vernacular texts is rather more difficult. Claims have been made; for example, Dafydd Jenkins argued the case for the Black Book of Chirk (Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth 29), a mid thirteenth-century manuscript of medieval Welsh law from Gwynedd, on the basis of peculiar orthographical features: ‘The conclusion seems irresistible, that the Black Book of Chirk was written from dictation by a non-Welshman’.³⁵ The conclusion ultimately did prove to be resistible, as it has now been shown that the orthographical vagaries of the manuscript have more to do with the varying propensities and competences of the six different scribes involved in the production of the main text (not to mention the three others who made later additions) than the dictator’s native language.³⁶ But even in that case, the possibility cannot be ruled out that some of the scribes were more prone to ‘self-dictation’ than others, and were more likely to listen to their own voice than to refer constantly to the written text. As regards other instances of dictation in Old English, Bierbaumer’s discussion of the Old English glosses in the Tiberius Psalter looks more promising.³⁷ His work was partly based on more recent work on ‘slips

³⁵ D. Jenkins, ‘The Black Book of Chirk: A Note’, *National Lib. of Wales Jnl* 15 (1967–8), 104–6.

³⁶ Russell, ‘Scribal (In)competence’; Jenkins thought that the main text had been copied by a single scribe.

³⁷ Bierbaumer, ‘Slips of the Ear in Old English Texts’; for the following examples, see *ibid.* pp. 128–9 and 130. For the sigla in this paragraph used to refer to psalter texts, see *The Tiberius Psalter*, ed. A. P. Campbell, Ottawa Med.

of the ear', i.e., acoustic rather than optical errors, and he was able to suggest that the glosses in this manuscripts may have been dictated.³⁸ for example, the H version glosses Latin *proba* (2 sg. imperative 'try!') with *of handa* 'from a hand', while the D version seems to have the correct version, *afanda* 'try!'; the H version glosses Latin *affluant* with *by atflugon* 'fled together' while the D version correctly has *by atflowon* 'flowed together'. These examples require more examination than can be given here, but they are suggestive and least present a case based on the right kind of evidence. There may well be more examples in circulation but the claim for dictation should always be carefully scrutinized and tested.

The text of Orosius has figured previously in discussions of dictation, but it is the Latin text which provides some good examples of dictation error. In his important discussion of dictation, Skeat quoted examples from the Latin Orosius, e.g., *audisse molent* for *aut dissimulent*, *secundam* for *se quondam*, *filio melae* for *Philomela*, *malos suorum* for *Molossorum*.³⁹ We may also note examples from the Latin version quoted by Bately, where confusion in the Old English text has arisen through dictation error within the Latin tradition, e.g. *Sceltiuerim* (: Latin *ingens Celtiberorum*), *Anilius Mostumius* (: Latin *Aulum Postumium*);⁴⁰ *Margas* (: Latin *Sicyonem Argos* (MS D *siciona margus*)). The

Texts and Stud. 2 (Ottawa, 1974), xi–xii; H is the Tiberius Psalter itself (London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius C. vi), while D refers to the Regius Psalter (London, British Library, Royal 2. B. v).

³⁸ Cf. Browman, 'Perceptual Processing'; Celce-Murcia, 'Meringer's Corpus of "Slips of the Ear"'; Garnes and Bond, 'A Slip of the Ear'; Voss, *Slips of the Ear*.

³⁹ Skeat, 'The Use of Dictation', pp. 200–2 on Orosius, and especially p. 201 for further examples.

⁴⁰ The variation between *Anilius* and *Aulum* also seems to involve minim-confusion, a common optical error.

last of these examples again is a segmentation error which is not itself diagnostic, but the other two examples, with *-u-* for *-b-* and the oral assimilation of *-m P-* to *M-*, are good indications of dictation at work.⁴¹ However, when one turns to the Old English text, it is difficult to find compelling examples of the kind of acoustic mis-hearings we might expect to find. Some instances could have occurred either in the Latin or Old English text, such *Arachasibedros* (: Latin *Arachossi Chedrosque*), *Arfatium* (: Latin *carpathio/Carfatio*), where it is not possible to assign the non- or mis-segmentation to a particular language. Only one instance of mis-segmentation can be found in the Old English text, *an Nilirice* for *on Ilirice* and, in the absence of any supporting evidence, is as likely to be the result of scribal misreading as of dictation. Another striking feature of the Old English text is that the variation on which Bately focused is entirely onomastic, precisely the part of the text where the scribes would have been most likely to go astray; as far as I can see, there are no examples of acoustic error in the Old English text of the narrative itself.

In conclusion, then, while there is some variation in the spelling of names, there is no evidence in the Old English version of Orosius of any of the strong indicators of dictation, such as errors which could not have been perpetrated if the scribe could see the manuscript (and certainly none of those identified by Bierbaumer). On the other hand, there seems to be good evidence that there was a dictated text somewhere in the relatively recent transmission of the Latin Orosius, and this only serves to point up the absence of similar evidence in the Old English text. In fact, not only is there an absence

⁴¹ The examples quoted by Bøgholm, *English Speech*, p. 19, are less compelling: *from Actesifonte* (a Ctesiphonte) and *Plicinius* (P. Licinio) could easily be the result of optical error.

of such evidence in the latter, but there are also some pointers in the other direction, namely, that the scribe was capable of distinguishing spelling forms which would have been indistinguishable in pronunciation. For example, while on three occasions in the Old English text the word *anfiteatrum* (or the plural form) is spelt thus, suggesting that both *f* and *ph* were pronounced as /f/ and both *th* and *t* as /t/, it is noteworthy that the scribe succeeded in getting *Philippus* and *Theodosius* right (and indeed most cases of names containing initial *Ph-* and *Th-*).⁴² Similarly, he spells classical names with *-th-*, e.g., *Æthiopes* and *Agathocles*, but uses *þ* as in *Dyringas*. Likewise, he correctly spells *Æquitania* with *-qu-*, and not *Æcu-* or *Æcw-*, but the non-classical *Cwenas* 'Lapps' with *Cw-*.⁴³ In other words, not only does the scribe get the majority of the spelling of intervocalic consonants right (as argued above), but he also maintains a remarkable distinction between etymological spellings of other sounds. The most likely explanation is that these spellings are transmitted from the Latin text by a continuous chain of visual copying and translating.

What variation there is in the names seems not, therefore, to be the product of dictation, by a Welshman or anyone else, but could be the outcome of cumulative variation which is not then amenable to a single explanation. We still nevertheless have to acknowledge the theoretical possibility of the perfect dictator reading to the perfect

⁴² That *ph/p* and *th/t* were used for /p/ and /t/ respectively was the standard pronunciation in north-western Europe in the early medieval period is demonstrated by Harvey, 'Some Significant Points of Early Insular Celtic Orthography', in *Sages, Saints and Storytellers: Celtic Studies in Honour of Professor James Carney*, ed. D. Ó Corráin, L. Breatnach, and K. R. McCone (Maynooth, 1989), 59–61.

⁴³ The consistency is striking but not absolute; there are two instances of *Cwintus* and one of *Cuintus*.

scribe producing a perfect text which would be indistinguishable from a text perfectly copied by eye. But, more pragmatically, if signs of dictation are absent, then the balance of evidence points to the text being copied in the usual way; in other words, the Old English Orosius was probably not dictated. If so, it follows that *a fortiori* nothing can be said about the linguistic competence of the ‘dictator’.

Even so, we should not regard the first part of this paper as a completely destructive exercise. Useful things have emerged that require consideration. The presentation of all the data, including the very high proportion of forms where no change has taken place, highlights one important fact. While most of the variation in the spelling of names could be explained as cumulative, one-off changes or errors in either Latin or Old English, it emerges very clearly that something more systematic is going on with the spelling of the voiced dental fricative, $\text{-}\mathfrak{d}\text{-}$ or $\text{-}\mathfrak{ð}\text{-}$, where the Latin text had a voiced dental, $\text{-}d\text{-}$. That at least is in need of explanation, and this paper ends with a few suggestions to set the discussion in train.

It is noteworthy that the spelling of dental fricatives was the one area of Old English orthography where new letter forms were introduced, namely \mathfrak{d} and $\mathfrak{ð}$, but before their adoption, early Old English used d for both $/d/$ and $/ð/$.⁴⁴ One possibility, therefore, is that the scribe of the archetype was used to introducing the new signs into his copying and, when he encountered the text of the Old English Orosius with all these Latinate style names containing $\text{-}d\text{-}$, he sporadically replaced them with $\text{-}\mathfrak{d}\text{-}$ or $\text{-}\mathfrak{ð}\text{-}$ (though admittedly it is very late for this still to be happening). Bately has pointed other sporadic

⁴⁴ P. P. O’Neill, ‘The Irish Role in the Origins of the Old English Alphabet’, in *Anglo-Saxon/Irish Relations before the Vikings*, ed. Graham-Campbell and Ryan, pp. 3–22; Russell, “Ye Shall Know Them by Their Names”. Cf. also R. M. Hogg, *A Grammar of Old English, I: Phonology* (Oxford, 1992), § 2.59.

instances in other texts, such as the spelling *Dauið* beside *Dauit* in the Hatton manuscript of the *Cura Pastoralis*.⁴⁵ Another simpler possibility is that on a number of occasions the scribe just misread his exemplar's *-d-* as *-ð-*; if so, we would then have to assume that later scribes changed some of them to *þ*. A third tantalising possibility is that something more interesting is going on:⁴⁶ since a good proportion of these words refer to Greeks or places in the eastern Mediterranean, an enterprising scribe knowing that in spoken Greek the intervocalic voiced dental was a fricative simply spelt it accordingly;⁴⁷ if so, it would imply that the knowledge of spoken Greek, which we know was available in England in the seventh century, survived in some form until the late ninth century.⁴⁸

In sum, the Welsh dictator of the Old English Orosius has been re-visited and found not to be at home. The balance of evidence makes it difficult to argue that the Old English text was dictated,

⁴⁵ Bately, *The Old English Orosius*, p. cxvi; cf. also A. H. Feulner, *Griechische Lehnwörter im Altenglischen* (Frankfurt, 2000), who shows that most Greek words end up in Old English with intervocalic *-d-* for Greek *-ð-*, though he notes *aðamans* (*Cura Pastoralis*) and the regular occurrence of *senoð*, *sinod*, etc. 'synod'; cf. also A. Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959), p. 210, n. 3.

⁴⁶ This possibility was suggested to me by Richard Dance, but in fact was anticipated by Pogatscher, *Zur Lautlehre der griechischen, lateinischen und romanischen Lehnwörter im altenglischen*, p. 177.

⁴⁷ On the pronunciation of Greek, see M. W. Herren, 'Evidence for "Vulgar Greek" from Early Medieval Latin Texts and Manuscripts', in *The Sacred Nectar of the Greeks: the Study of Greek in the West in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. M. W. Herren and S. A. Brown, King's College London Med. Stud. 2 (London, 1988), 57–84.

⁴⁸ See M. Lapidge, 'The Study of Greek at the School of Canterbury in the Seventh Century', in *The Sacred Nectar of the Greeks*, ed. Herren and Brown, pp. 169–94.

although it is highly likely that dictation was involved at some stage in the transmission of the Latin version. If no dictator was involved in the Old English, we can say nothing about his native language.

APPENDIX 1

List of forms in the Old English Orosius showing irregular spelling of intervocalic consonants.

Textual references can be found in the Index of Names in *The Old English Orosius*, ed. Bately, pp. 407–33. The figure provided after ‘Unchanged’ represents the number of attested forms where the relevant segment occurs but where the spelling corresponds to what is found in the Latin text. Where variants are given from the Latin text, they come from the *apparatus critici* of Zangemeister and Arnaud-Lindet.

/p/ > /b/:

[Abulia (but Latin *aboliam* in D)]

Tribulitania [1]

Unchanged: 42×

/t/ > /d/:

Lampida

Parcohadras [2]

Unchanged: 50×

/k/ > /g/:

No examples [0]

Unchanged: 71×

/b/ > /v/:

Aelfe

Clafrione

[Faius, Fauia, Faiuses, Uaius (common variants in the Latin manuscripts)]

Galua

Surfe (cf. Surpe) [4]

Unchanged: 37×

/d/ > /ð/:⁴⁹

Archimeðes

Argiraspiðes (C only)

Ariþeusses

Aþramentum†

Bosiriþis†

Cipnus

Dipa

Epithaurus

Eureðica (C only)

Fipnam

Gapest†

Ganemeþis

[Geothulas (Latin manuscripts Gethuli)]

Haeþum

Iþasfe(s)/Iþaspe(s)

Iuþan†

Lemniapum

Leonipa

Lipa

Maeþe, Meþas, Meþia*

⁴⁹ In this section, forms marked with * indicate cases in which there are multiple examples, and all are spelt with the fricative in L; forms marked with † indicate cases in which there are multiple examples, and the fricative is the minority spelling in L.

Marponius

Metrepatist†

Nauipa

Numepia, Numedia, etc.†

Olimp(h)iaðe, etc. (C only)

Perðica† (C also)

Ponthionis (C)

Roþum

Sarþanopolim† (more common in C)

Sarþinia† (C also)

Siðonem (C only) [30]

Unchanged: 47×

/g/ > /ɣ/ > /j/ > /∅/:

Cartaine, Cartainiense [1]⁵⁰

Unchanged: 9×

/m/ > /μ/ > /v/:

No examples

Unchanged: 63×

/p/ > /f/:

Escolafius

Ipasfe(s)/Ipaspe(s)

/t/ > /θ/:

Alcipen

Damerap

Eþna, Aepna

Cf. also Hisdriana, Isþrie (: Istri)

⁵⁰ Cf. also these back-spellings: *Ueigentes*, *Aquilegia*, *Argeata(s)*.

APPENDIX 2

List of forms in the Old English Orosius showing irregular spelling of initial consonants.

Textual references can be found in the Index of Names in *The Old English Orosius* (ed. Bately, pp. 407–33). The figure provided after 'Unchanged' represents the number of attested forms where the relevant segment occurs but where the spelling is regular.

Voicing:

/p/- > /b/-:

Bachinum (C) : Pachynum

Blaciduses : Placido

Bothmose : Patmum

Brobus : Probus [4]

Unchanged: 67×

/t/- > /d/-:

Danai/Danaus, etc. : Tanais

Deprobane : Taprobane

Dissafarnon : Tissafernen [3]

Unchanged: 40×

/k/- > /g/-: none [0]

Unchanged: 85×

Devoicing:

/b/- > /p/-:

Pactriane : Bactrianos, etc.

Pulgare, etc. : Bulgari [2]

Unchanged: 46×

/d/- > /t/-:

Tardanus : Dardanus

tictator(es) : dictator(es) [2]

Unchanged: 36×

/g/- > /c/-:

Clafrione : Glabrione

Craccus : Gracchus [2]

Unchanged: 31×

No examples involving /b/- > /v/-, /d/- > /ð/-, or /g/- > /γ/- > /j/- > /∅/-

British and Germanic Cultural Interaction in Early Anglo-Saxon East Anglia

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This paper will examine the transition between the late Romano-British period and the early Anglo-Saxon period in East Anglia from roughly the fourth to the seventh centuries. It will ask what can be gleaned from the archaeological record in relation to interaction between post-Roman Britons and early 'Anglo-Saxons', and will then go on to pose the same question of the region's place-names. The principal question under consideration is whether these two bodies of evidence can be linked in any straightforward way, and, if so, with what historical outcome.

Archaeology and place-names are two areas of research that are habitually used as standpoints from which to analyse a third field of study—the sparse documentary evidence of the period. The underlying assumption of much of this kind of work is that each of these disciplines reflects aspects of the same basic process: the arrival of invader-migrants from across the North Sea. As such, it is expected that archaeological material represents their dispersal according to artefacts and customs, toponymy, the spread of the language they used, and written history, the events that took place. One discipline can therefore be used to explain aspects of either of the other two where they are lacking. This paper will discuss a few of the problems that become apparent when this approach is put into practice, and why the different types of evidence do not correlate in the way in which we might like. This is no longer a radical sentiment, but the value of this discussion is in the comprehensive way in which

the material is handled, allowing one to do more than generalize from a few key examples. The topic is also one that deserves continual reassessment, in order to accommodate new developments in the various disciplines that contribute to our understanding of the period, and the new archaeological discoveries that are made every year.

The area under consideration will consist of the historic counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, which are broadly coterminous with the mid eighth-century dioceses of Elmham and *Dommoc*.¹ These dioceses together probably demark the contemporary extent of the kingdom of the East Angles, although it seems to have been larger in the 730s, when Bede recorded that the kingdom included the Isle of Ely.² Further evidence for the polity having been larger in earlier centuries comes in the form of the Cambridgeshire dykes, which are possibly indicative of early fluctuations in the territory's southwestern boundary.³

ROMANO-BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGY

Shedding light on the interaction between British and Germanic material cultures in early post-Roman Britain is notoriously difficult. As so little is known of post-Roman native culture, it is prudent to begin with the late Romano-British archaeology of the region. Figure 1 is a summary of all known archaeological activity greater than a metal-detected find scatter or undated cropmark. It is based on the material contained within each county's Historic Environment

¹ P. H. Blair, *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1959), p. 145.

² *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), IV, 19, p. 397; J. Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000), p. 115, n. 32.

³ T. Malim, 'New evidence on the Cambridgeshire dykes and Worsted Street Roman road', *Proc. of the Cambridge Ant. Soc.* 85 (1996), 27–122.

British and Germanic Cultural Interaction

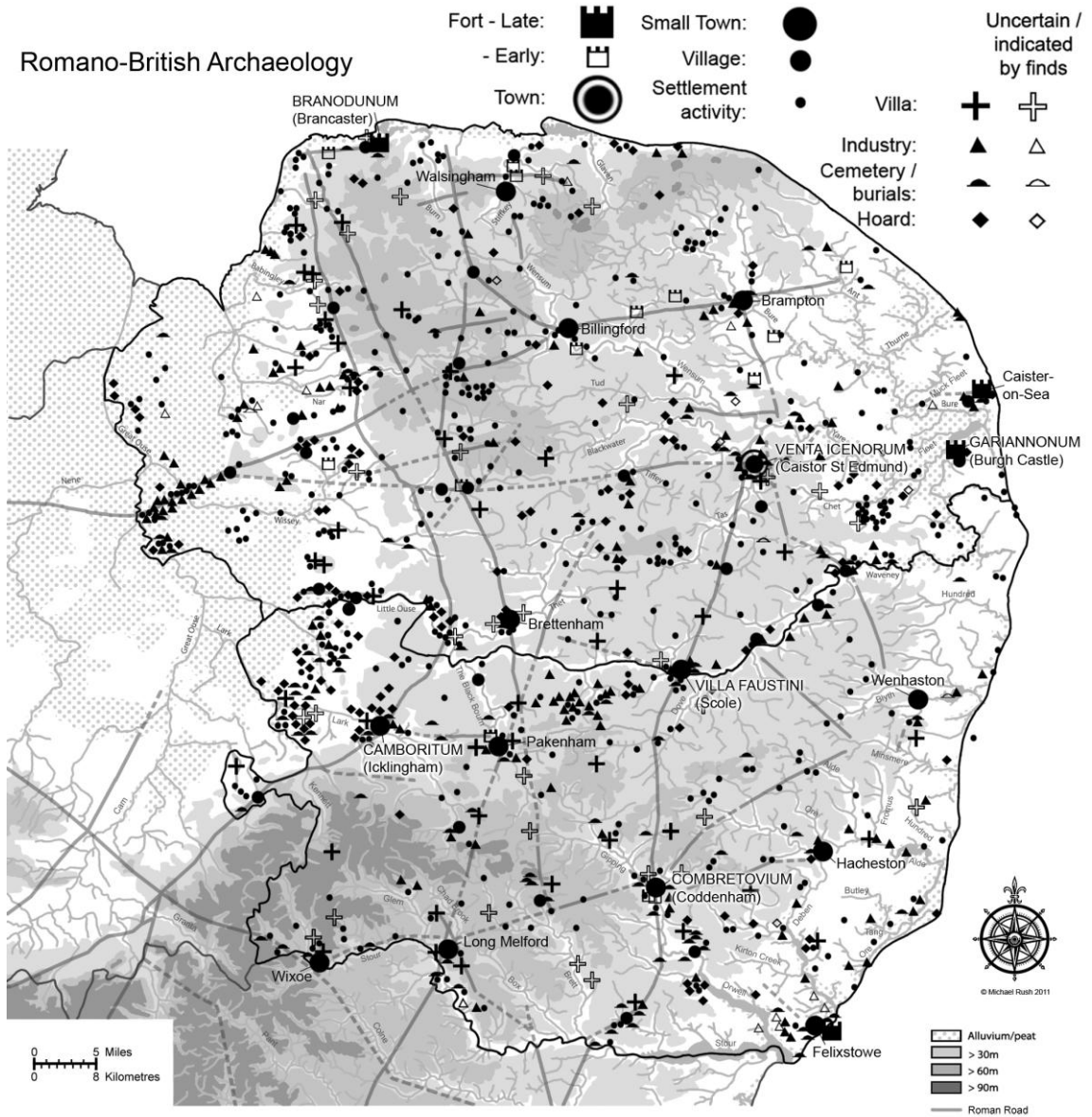


Fig. 1: Known archaeological activity in East Anglia (greater than a metal-detected find scatter or undated cropmark)

Record (HER), and on published excavation reports. The ‘settlement activity’ sites are those that contain building material. In reality, occupation evidence from the Roman period is virtually ubiquitous, and so this map is not a complete record, but more of a general impression. This is an important point to make, as historical or toponymic studies still sometimes employ archaeological distribution maps as if they depicted isolated islands of settlement. It is now recognized that substantial parts of the landscape of this region of Britain have been more or less fully exploited since the late Iron Age or early Roman period at the latest, and so whether a name attached to a modern settlement site coincides with an actual group of Roman farm buildings or similar is largely irrelevant.⁴

When attempting to study the post-Roman situation in East Anglia using the late Roman archaeology as a starting point, some important questions to be considered are the durability of the trappings of Roman lifestyle, the types of site at which the latest Roman period occupation can be identified, and the length of time for which the Roman way of life was therefore likely to have continued. All of the larger settlements, that is, the town of *Venta Icenorum* at Caistor St Edmund, the ‘small towns’ (shorthand for a variety of types of unplanned Romano-British settlement) and the shore forts, have produced evidence that they were occupied in the second half of the fourth century. Caistor St Edmund,⁵ Felixstowe,⁶

⁴ T. Williamson, *The Origins of Norfolk* (Manchester, 1993), pp. 20–8; N. J. Higham, ‘Britons in Anglo-Saxon England: an Introduction’, in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. N. J. Higham (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 1–15 (here p. 8).

⁵ Norfolk HER ref. 9786; D. Atkinson, ‘Caistor excavations 1929’, *Norfolk Archaeol.* 24 (1931), 93–139; C. F. C. Hawkes, ‘Caistor-by-Norwich: the Roman town of *Venta Icenorum*’, *ArchJ* 106 (1949), 62–5; M. J. Darling, ‘The Caistor-by-Norwich ‘massacre’ reconsidered’, *Britannia* 18 (1987), 263–72; J. N. L. Myres

Icklingham,⁷ Pakenham⁸ and Walsingham⁹ all show evidence of occupation in the early fifth century, and for most of the others this can be inferred. There is deterioration apparent in the fabric of these places, but the towns would physically have been available for habitation into the fifth century, if such a thing were desired. The lack of coin series makes it impossible to tell for how long they remained occupied. What is more certain is that their survival as social entities would have depended on the existence and productivity of a surrounding hinterland of rural settlements. Whilst it is difficult archaeologically to confirm the continued existence of many of the smaller sites at the turn of the fourth and fifth centuries, their continued occupation can therefore be inferred from the wider situation.

Some of the rural sites do produce coins of the latest phases, but the proportion of them that has been investigated fully is much lower than that of the larger sites. The latter generally seem to have been active for a large portion of the Roman period, but without much

and B. Green, *The Anglo-Saxon cemeteries of Caistor-by-Norwich and Markshall, Norfolk*, Reports of the Research Committee of the Soc. of Antiquaries of London 30 (1973), pp. 8–9.

⁶ Suffolk HER ref. FEX 092; J. Fairclough and S. J. Plunkett, 'Drawings of Walton Castle and other monuments in Walton and Felixstowe', *Proc. of the Suffolk Inst. of Archaeol.* 39 (2000), 419–59 (here p. 447).

⁷ Suffolk HER ref. IKL 127; S. E. West and J. Plouviez, 'The Roman site at Icklingham', *Suffolk, Various Papers*, East Anglian Archaeol. 3 (1976), 63–126.

⁸ Suffolk HER ref. PKM 005; T. Blagg, J. Plouviez and A. Tester, *Excavations at a Large Romano-British Settlement at Hacheston, Suffolk, 1973–74*, East Anglian Archaeol. 106 (2004), p. 84.

⁹ Norfolk HER refs. 2024, 3980 and 42850; T. Gregory and D. Gurney, *Excavations at Thornham, Warham, Wighton and Caistor St Edmund, Norfolk*, East Anglian Archaeol. 30 (1986), p. 15.

coin dating evidence from the second half of the fourth century. Of almost eighty known villas or similar substantial rural residences in East Anglia, very few show signs of destruction; the general picture is rather one of slow decay, inferior efforts at rebuilding, changing patterns of usage and reduction in the size of buildings. This decline is also apparent across much of the western Roman Empire, and it has been suggested that this represents changes in fashion and ideology rather than impoverishment.¹⁰ The vast majority of the contemporary population lived in small rural settlements; and it is at these that precise dating is most difficult and therefore late occupation is hardest to discern. A handful of them do demonstrate very late Roman activity, such as the farmstead at Spong Hill,¹¹ several sites in the Thetford area,¹² and Poplar Farm in Ashbocking.¹³

A problem which blights all attempts to investigate late Roman archaeological evidence is that coin series, whilst exceedingly useful as a means of absolute dating, tend to reflect the overall picture of coin supply in Britain rather more than they reflect relative phases of activity at a particular site. A comparison by Judith Plouviez of the coin series from the Roman ‘small towns’ of Suffolk made this clear.

¹⁰ T. Lewit, “‘Vanishing villas’: what happened to elite rural populations in the West in the fifth to sixth centuries?”, *Jnl of Roman Archaeol.* 16 (2003), 260–74.

¹¹ R. Rickett, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Spong Hill, North Elmham, Part VII: Iron Age, Roman and Early Saxon Settlement*, *East Anglian Archaeol.* 73 (1995), p. 154.

¹² A. Mudd, *Excavations at Melford Meadows, Brettenham, 1994: Romano-British and Early Saxon Occupations*, *East Anglian Archaeol.* 99 (2002); D. Garrow, S. Lucy and D. Gibson, *Excavations at Kilverstone, Norfolk, 2000–02*, *East Anglian Archaeol.* 113 (2006), pp. 141 and 146; R. Atkins and E. Connor, *Farmers and Ironsmiths: Prehistoric, Roman and Anglo-Saxon Settlement beside Brandon Road, Thetford, Norfolk*, *East Anglian Archaeol.* 134 (2010).

¹³ G. Maynard, ‘Recent archaeological field work in Suffolk’, *Proc. of the Suffolk Inst. of Archaeol.* 25 (1951), 205–16 (here p. 206).

The chronological distribution of coin loss at each was generally very similar, and the only impression that emerges with any clarity is that the eastern settlements of Hacheston and Wenhaston are comparatively lacking in coins of the latest phases (Reece's periods 20 and 21: 378–402).¹⁴ After a dip around the middle of the fourth century, there was a resurgence in supply to Britain during the reign of the house of Valentinian (364–78), followed by a drop-off in the 380s and a slight increase from 388 to 395, before the supply finally petered out altogether; there are no coins in Britain from the second half of the reign of Honorius (395–423).¹⁵ A lack of coins from the 380s or the 400s, therefore, need not denote a lack of activity, but simply the relative scarcity of coinage during those decades. When coins from the first decade of the fifth century are found, it is most commonly as part of a hoard. This phenomenon reflects a practice that must have been fairly common in antiquity, but the proliferation of unrecovered hoards at this time is generally thought to represent great upheaval of some kind. East Anglia has produced some of the most lavish late Roman hoards found in Britain, including those found at Hoxne¹⁶ and Mildenhall.¹⁷ The increasing failure to recover hoards in the two or three decades to either side of c. 400 implies that the fears of those stashing away their wealth were realized during this time. This has provided useful ammunition to those wishing to substantiate the impression given by the written sources, based ultimately on the work of Gildas, of invasion and catastrophe following the end of Roman administration and the withdrawal of the

¹⁴ Blagg *et al.*, *Excavations at a Large Romano-British Settlement*, pp. 83–4.

¹⁵ A. S. Esmonde Cleary, *The Ending of Roman Britain* (London, 1989), pp. 93 and 138.

¹⁶ Suffolk HER ref. HXN 019.

¹⁷ Suffolk HER ref. MNL 231.

legions.¹⁸ All archaeological activity in East Anglia that looks distinctively ‘Romano-British’, with very few exceptions such as the hoard of glassware buried within Burgh Castle in the first or second quarter of the fifth century,¹⁹ subsequently comes to a halt. It is followed by a period from which archaeologists can identify no material culture whatsoever.²⁰ In the first analysis, therefore, the archaeology implies that there were very few, if any, natives with whom the incoming Anglo-Saxons could have interacted.

EARLY ANGLO-SAXON ARCHAEOLOGY

The fifth century is the site of a void in the archaeological record, following the disappearance of the previously plentiful and varied set of artefacts, buildings and settlement classifications that are recognized as belonging to the Romano-British period. When archaeologists are next able to identify material, it is termed ‘early Anglo-Saxon’, that is to say, material that dates from the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, and is Germanic in its cultural affiliations. Figure 2 shows the distribution of known early Anglo-Saxon archaeology in East Anglia. It is very similar to the Romano-British distribution in general terms, although it avoids the fenland and the clay uplands of Suffolk, and adheres far more closely to the riverside sands and gravels.²¹ There is more detail here than is found on earlier

¹⁸ *Gildas: the Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, ed. and trans. M. Winterbottom (London, 1978), XXIV, 1, p. 27.

¹⁹ S. Johnson, *Burgh Castle: Excavations by Charles Green 1958–61*, *East Anglian Archaeol.* 20 (1983), p. 88.

²⁰ H. Härke, ‘Invisible Britons, Gallo-Romans and Russians: Perspectives on Culture Change’, in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. N. J. Higham (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 57–67 (here p. 58).

²¹ H. C. Darby, *The Domesday Geography of Eastern England* (Cambridge, 1952), pp. 104 and 158.

maps of 'dark age' archaeological material, because our knowledge of early Anglo-Saxon settlement sites, as opposed to cemeteries, is improving year on year. Nonetheless the general distribution is the same as that which has been published for decades on maps of early Anglo-Saxon period cemeteries.²² More archaeological finds, it seems, reinforce the picture rather than changing it. What is beyond doubt is that the visible manifestations of human activity during the fifth to seventh centuries is of a far lesser quantity than that of the three preceding centuries. The question of whether this represents the whole population during this time becomes an important one, as does the extent to which the fairly sudden switch in material cultural outlook necessarily denotes the appearance of substantial new groups of people. Environmental evidence is one of the tools that has been used to attempt to study the general picture of human use of the historical landscape. Environmental studies in East Anglia have consistently failed to distinguish an increase in tree pollen, and therefore a break in land cultivation, such as would be caused by a dramatic decline in the number of people working the land after the end of Roman rule.²³ A recent investigation at the Roman 'small town' at Scole, analysing the most complete pollen sequence yet collected in East Anglia, stressed that 'there are no obvious signs of abandonment and neglect of the landscape during early Saxon times. The environs of the channel remained very much as they had been in except that there was intensification of arable and (perhaps)

²² A. Meaney, *A Gazetteer of Early Anglo-Saxon Burial Sites* (London, 1964); *Ordnance Survey: Map of Britain in the Dark Ages*, 2nd edn. (Southampton, 1966).

²³ Williamson, *The Origins of Norfolk*, pp. 58–9.

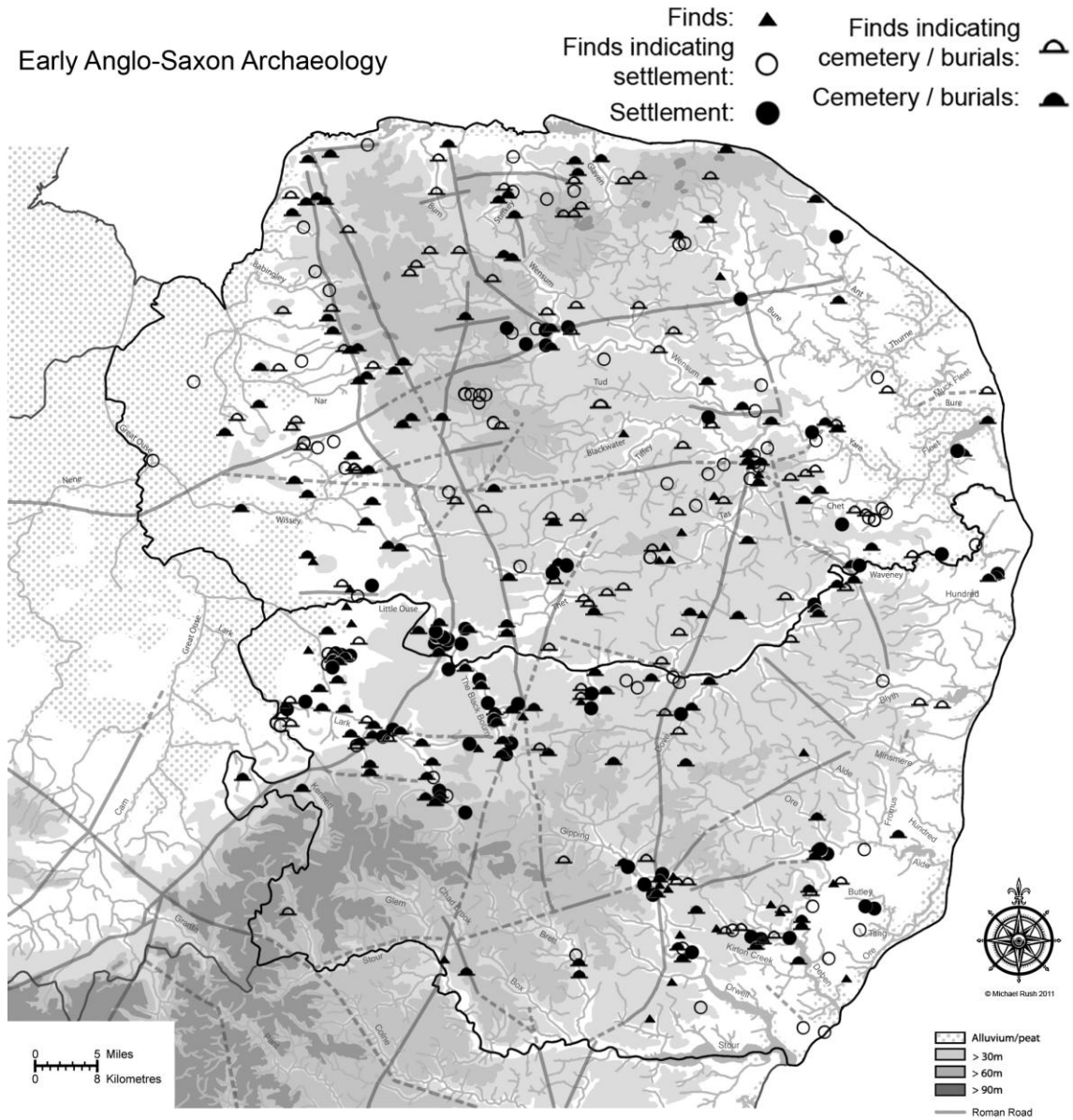


Fig. 2: Distribution of known early Anglo-Saxon archaeology in East Anglia

pastoral farming'.²⁴ This makes it very unlikely that the reduced levels of population that are apparent from the known 'early Anglo-Saxon' archaeology do actually represent the entirety of the contemporary population. The archaeologically 'invisible Britons', it seems, were still present, and no less invisible, despite the fact that the appearance of Germanic material culture allows us to discern human activity once again. If unfurnished, unclothed inhumation remained the standard burial rite amongst most of the native population, then the cemeteries of post-Roman Britons would be largely undetectable in the harsh soil conditions of most of East Anglia, which can cause bone to deteriorate completely;²⁵ indeed the vast majority of early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries are only known because of their likelihood of being found by metal-detectors.²⁶ Heinrich Härke has compared the situation, with clear caveats, to post-Soviet Russia, where native material culture might indeed seem to have disappeared, as it was shorn of its distinguishing features, and shunned in favour of even second-hand goods from abroad.²⁷

So should we characterize the period as one of settlement by small groups of Germanic migrants, in a post-Roman British landscape populated by people keen to re-align their cultural leanings?

²⁴ P. E. J. Wiltshire, 'Palynological Assessment and Analysis', in *A Romano-British Settlement in the Waveney Valley: Excavations at Scole, 1993–4*, ed. T. Ashwin and A. Tester, *East Anglian Archaeol.* (forthcoming).

²⁵ C. Scull, 'Approaches to material culture and social dynamics of the migration period in eastern England', *Europe between late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. J. Bintliff and H. Hamerow, *BAR, International Series*, 617 (Oxford, 1995), 71–83 (here p. 77).

²⁶ D. Gurney, 'A note on the distribution of metal-detecting in Norfolk', *Norfolk Archaeol.* 42 (1997), 528–32 (here p. 529).

²⁷ Härke, 'Invisible Britons', pp. 57–67.

Such has become the new, albeit uncertain, consensus.²⁸ Were the new fashions and customs popular simply because of the cultural vacuum caused by shrugging off the Roman mantle? To establish whether it is possible to prove that archaeological ‘Anglo-Saxons’ were the same communities as the ‘Romano-Britons’ by descent, we must look more closely at the pattern of settlement in local areas. We have already seen that the general distribution of settlement in the two periods is broadly similar, but this is not enough in itself to posit continuity of population; nor is coincidence of site of late Roman and early Anglo-Saxon material. Clear stratigraphic continuity, with no break in the sequence of occupation, is required.²⁹ There is one such site in the region, discovered in 2002 near Brandon Road in Thetford, where the pottery and metalwork series at a Roman farmstead continues from the first to the sixth century without a break. This is tantalisingly close to suggesting that the same descent group altered their cultural allegiance to ‘become’ Roman and then to ‘become’ Anglo-Saxon.³⁰ As far as we can tell, however, this is the exception rather than the rule. That said, the Thetford area features both several late Roman settlements and a group of early Anglo-Saxon settlements, with frequent coincidence of site. Whilst continued occupation by the same population has not been proven at any of these other sites, it is unlikely that Brandon Road West is a complete

²⁸ C. M. Hills, *Origins of the English* (London, 2003), p. 14.

²⁹ As is found at Orton Hall Farm (Cambridgeshire) and Wasperton (Warwickshire). D. Mackreth, *Orton Hall Farm: a Roman and Early Saxon Farmstead*, *East Anglian Archaeol.* 76 (1996); M. O. H. Carver, C. M. Hills and J. Scheschkewitz, *Wasperton: a Roman, British and Anglo-Saxon Community in Central England*, *AS Stud.* (Woodbridge, 2009).

³⁰ Atkins and Connor, *Farmers and Ironsmiths*.

anomaly.³¹ There are two areas where there appears to have been an overlap between the two ways of life (or rather, death): around the town of *Venta Icenorum* at Caistor St Edmund and around the ‘small town’ of *Camboritum* at Icklingham.³² Whilst these examples are very important, they are again exceptions; it is far more common to find a definite lack of stratigraphic continuity. Although the invisibility of native culture in the interim period is a possibility, to insist upon it is to do great disservice to generations of archaeologists who consistently find no such thing.

The lack of evidence for cultural contact becomes even harder to explain given that the general settlement pattern in both periods is so similar, and that the old image of pioneering migrants clearing new settlements amidst a forested countryside has long been rejected.³³ There have been several intensive field surveys undertaken in East Anglia, and although results differ, the general rule is that early Anglo-Saxon concentrations, whilst scarcer than those of the Roman period, tend to coincide with the Roman material rather than with that of the middle Anglo-Saxon period. In this later period, it appears that activity generally moved to a new location, where it would remain and develop throughout the middle ages, becoming the site of the modern habitations.³⁴ Through statistical analysis, Mary Chester-

³¹ Norfolk HER refs. 5746, 5756, 17269, 24822, 24849, 33812, 34489 and 37158.

³² Norfolk HER refs. 9788 and 9791; Suffolk HER ref. WSW 003.

³³ Higham, ‘Britons in Anglo-Saxon England’, pp. 8–9.

³⁴ A. Davison, *The Evolution of Settlement in Three Parishes in South-east Norfolk*, East Anglian Archaeol. 49 (1990); *id.*, ‘The field archaeology of the Mannington and Wolterton estates’, *Norfolk Archaeol.* 42 (1994), 160–84; *id.*, ‘The field archaeology of Bodney and the STANTA Extension’, *Norfolk Archaeol.* 42 (1994), 57–79; A. Rogerson, A. Davison, D. Pritchard and R. J. Silvester, *Barton Bendish and Caldecote, Fieldwork in South-west Norfolk*, East Anglian Archaeol. 80

Kadwell found that twenty-three per cent of settlements and seventeen per cent of burial sites in early Anglo-Saxon period Norfolk were within one hundred metres of the nearest Roman site.³⁵ This is definitely a positive bias, in the sense that only one per cent of the total land area is within that zone of proximity to a Roman site. Perhaps it is possible to infer the continuity of a population who ‘became’ Anglo-Saxon. The fact that the seventh and eighth centuries demonstrate an apparently greater dislocation in the settlement pattern of the East Anglian landscape than does the fifth century should at least give cause to consider whether or not migration should be seen as the primary factor at work. Archaeological and landscape evidence of the early Anglo-Saxon period, then, implies that an unknown, and conceivably substantial, proportion of the population of East Anglia during this time were the descendents of people who had formerly been Romano-Britons.

PLACE-NAMES AND BRITONS

Archaeology is not the only form of evidence for cultural interaction. Linguistic evidence, as preserved in place-names, is also a potential source. Whilst the place-name corpus of England is overwhelmingly dominated by Old English, there is a body of names which preserve pre-English elements. These serve as evidence of local interaction, as

(1997); A. Davison, ‘The archaeology of the parish of West Acre’, *Norfolk Archaeol.* 44 (2003), 202–21; S. E. West and A. McLaughlin, *Towards a Landscape History of Walsham-le-Willows, Suffolk*, *East Anglian Archaeol.* 85 (1998); J. Newman, ‘The late Roman and Anglo-Saxon settlement pattern in the Sandlings of Suffolk’, in *The Age of Sutton Hoo*, ed. M. O. H. Carver (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 25–38.

³⁵ M. Chester-Kadwell, *Early Anglo-Saxon Communities in the Landscape of Norfolk*, BAR, British Series 481 (2009).

virtually nothing of the British lexicon was borrowed into Old English.³⁶ Figure 3 shows the occurrence of this phenomenon in East Anglia, as well as place-names in Old English that make reference to the presence of Britons. They are hardly numerous; most other English counties contain a higher proportion. Only twelve of around 1,480 major place-names in Norfolk and Suffolk are believed to contain pre-English elements, and in seven of these the element comes from a river name; these may have been learned at a wider remove, and are not necessarily indicative of close local contact. On the first impression, the place-names, like the archaeology, suggest very little survival of native British communities in the region. Though few in number, these place-names cover the whole of the region. They provide valuable evidence that there were speakers of the British language present, and that elements of their place-nomenclature were picked up by the speakers of Old English. Those which refer to Britons—for example, Walcott, Walpole and Walsham, which contain OE *walas* ‘foreigners’—must belong to a time when the British language was still being spoken, or at least when people still lived a way of life that was in some sense British (and hence ‘foreign’ to Old English speakers). The *Laws of Ine* make it clear that in seventh-century Wessex there were people who were, legally speaking, ‘foreigners’.³⁷ So whilst they do not necessarily belong to the earliest part of the Old English period, these

³⁶ R. Coates, ‘Invisible Britons: the view from linguistics’, in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. N. J. Higham (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 172–91 (here p. 176).

³⁷ M. Grimmer, ‘Britons in early Wessex: the evidence of the law code of Ine’, in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. N. J. Higham (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 102–14 (here p. 103).

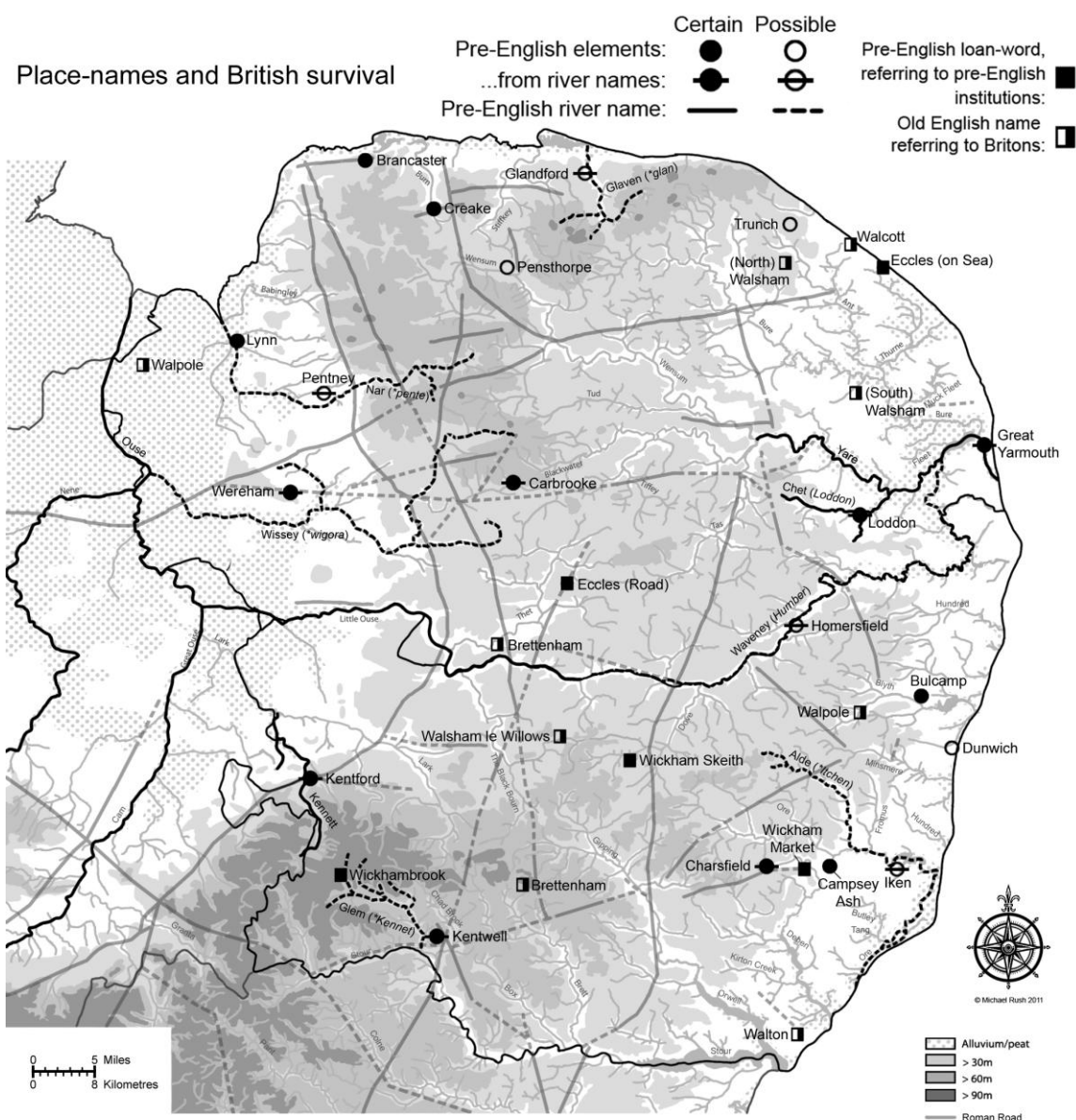


Fig. 3: Place-names in East Anglia containing British elements, or elements that refer to the presence of British people

place-names show that even in the easternmost parts of Britain there were people present who were considered British by those around them.

The nature of these groups of people can only be a matter of speculation. Nonetheless, the presence of even a handful of such names in this region of England, which the archaeological record suggests saw the earliest incursions of Germanic material culture,³⁸ is a challenge to the plausibility of any models based on the written accounts, which tell of the wholesale slaughter, expulsion or enslavement of the native Britons. It is important, however, not to overstate the significance of this linguistic survival, given the cloud of uncertainty that shrouds attempts to attribute place-names to the early Anglo-Saxon period. Furthermore, any ‘revisionist’ account that posits the substantial survival of the native population is faced with the as-yet unsurmounted problem of how to explain the negligible lexical borrowing of British terms into Old English.³⁹ For Richard Coates, the best, and indeed only, way to allow for the lack of lexical copying from the native population—common to most comparable instances of linguistic contact—is if eastern England were almost wholly empty of British speakers at the time that Old English speakers arrived.⁴⁰

Barrie Cox’s compilation of all the place-names in England recorded in sources up to the early eighth century implies that more place-names containing pre-English elements were in use during the

³⁸ H. W. Böhme, ‘Das Ende der Römerherrschaft in Britannien und die Angelsächsische Besiedlung Englands im 5. Jahrhundert’, *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 33 (1986), 469–574.

³⁹ Coates, ‘Invisible Britons: the view from linguistics’, pp. 172–3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 188–9.

early Anglo-Saxon period than survive today.⁴¹ The same is no doubt true of East Anglia. This is a useful piece of information, if only because it serves to remind us that place-names in the early medieval period were by nature far more fluid than in the modern period, and that the change from a Romano-British to an Old English place-nomenclature was piecemeal rather than sudden and wholesale. The question of what became of the vast body of British place-names in England, however, is one that has not yet been satisfactorily answered. The issue is exacerbated by the fact that the archaeological evidence, as described above, arguably suggests that a proportion of the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ population was in fact descended from native Britons who had in some way ‘re-branded’ themselves. If this were the case, it appears to be odd that so much of their place-name stock should have been lost and, more generally, that there was virtually no borrowing of words from British into Old English. One of the more plausible explanations is that the transition to Old English was gradual, but took place for the most part before the era in which the place-names were first recorded, and was the result of socio-cultural factors that preferred Old English modes over British ones.⁴² The lack of contemporary documentary evidence, from speakers of either language, is another contributing factor to our ignorance of the interaction that took place. The few British elements that remain would therefore represent chance survivals, rather than persistent enclaves of British speakers. Ultimately, as several commentators

⁴¹ B. Cox, ‘Place-names of the earliest English records’, *JEPNS* 8 (1976), 12–66.

⁴² N. J. Higham, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1992), p. 200; J. T. Baker, *Cultural Transition in the Chilterns and Essex Region, 350 AD to 650 AD* (Hatfield, 2006), p. 183; D. Probert, ‘Mapping early medieval language change in south-west England’, in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. N. J. Higham (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 213–44 (here pp. 232–3).

have observed, there are no general rules governing name-survival that can be applied across the whole corpus.⁴³ Some large and well-known Romano-British place-names did not survive into Old English usage (for example, *Venta Icenorum*), and some small and relatively insignificant Romano-British place-names did survive the transition (for example, Creak). As with the archaeology, geographical variety is great, even within one region such as East Anglia. Whilst revisionist models must thus accommodate for the negligible impact of British upon the Old English lexicon, traditionalist models must do the same for the occurrence of British place-names in even the most comprehensively Anglicized of areas.

DISCUSSION

The bodies of evidence provided by both archaeology and place-names imply, at first reading, that the British element within the fifth-century population of East Anglia was minimal, if it existed at all. This, at least, is the traditionally held view. On further investigation, however, the archaeological and landscape evidence suggests that the people whom we identify as archaeologically ‘Anglo-Saxon’ did not constitute the entirety of the contemporary population, and at least some of them may have been natives who had turned their material cultural outlook towards the North Sea cultural zone. Although thoroughly Anglicized in later centuries, the place-name corpus similarly provides evidence for the preservation of a very small number of British place-name elements throughout the region in the centuries following the introduction of Old English, and the presence of communities who were perceived to be British or ‘foreign’, probably predominantly on a linguistic basis. In this way it is possible

⁴³ C. Smith, ‘The survival of Romano-British toponymy’, *Nomina* 4 (1980), 27–40 (here p. 33).

to connect the two disciplines, but providing a coherent description of the historical events and processes to which they relate is a goal that remains elusive.

Although academic discourse in the various disciplines that contribute to the study of the period has moved on greatly from the old modes of analysis, there is still a scholarly inclination to construct divisory categories, be they racial, social or geographical, and to employ generalizations about the processes that occurred. Whilst generalization is a necessary ill, it must be remembered that it serves merely as shorthand. The old ‘culture-historical’ approach to archaeology derives primarily from written sources—the creators of which were raised in an educational and literary environment steeped in the classical tradition, wherein discrete ‘peoples’ act *en masse* for narrative purposes. Conveying the nuanced reality of a situation, or whether these shared ethnicities mattered to the people in question, was not their concern. Discussion of ethnicity since the work of the Vienna School in the 1960s and 1970s has acknowledged that ethnicities are literary products, which do not fully reflect the generally diverse origins of most groups of people.⁴⁴

Modern attempts to conduct genetic surveys of the British Isles have suggested that the proportion of continental DNA in England varies greatly, with a mean average of just over fifty per cent.⁴⁵ The consensus that had formed around theories of small-scale migration and ethnic re-alignment somehow had to allow for large-scale genetic input. This has led some commentators to hypothesize a kind of

⁴⁴ T. Reuter, ‘Whose race, whose ethnicity? Recent medievalists’ discussions of identity’, in *Medieval Politics and Modern Mentalities*, ed. J. L. Nelson (London, 2006), pp. 100–8 (here p. 103).

⁴⁵ C. Capelli *et al.*, ‘A Y chromosome census of the British Isles’, *Current Biology* 13 (2003), 979–84.

apartheid-based social structure, in which communities of people who were legally identifiable as British would have diminished over time in social standing and eventually in number.⁴⁶ This suggestion has been criticized in turn,⁴⁷ but processes of genetic transition are ultimately, it could be argued, not as important as ones of culture and perceived ethnicity. By the time of Alfred's law codes (*c.* 885 × 899) the process of ethnic assimilation was presumably complete, as these make no distinction between Anglo-Saxon and Briton.⁴⁸

In conclusion, detailed multi-disciplinary work of the kind outlined here is necessary if we are to profitably understand the complex and varied processes that are reflected in the different types of source material. There are almost two centuries for which we know little or nothing of social organization in East Anglia, or of the developments that affected the landscape and the power structures by which it was governed. The stories—based upon the documentary evidence provided by early writers, most notably Bede—of continental leaders establishing entire kingdoms *de novo* in England have long been discredited, not least because for the time in which the earliest named leaders for kingdoms such as Wessex and East Anglia apparently lived, the archaeological evidence suggests that there had been people living a 'Germanic' way of life in those areas

⁴⁶ M. G. Thomas, M. P. H. Stumpf and H. Härke, 'Evidence for an apartheid-like social structure in early Anglo-Saxon England', *Proc. of the R. Soc. B* 273 (2006), 2651–7; A. Woolf, 'Apartheid and economics in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. N. J. Higham (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 115–29.

⁴⁷ J. E. Pattison, 'Is it necessary to assume an apartheid-like social structure in early Anglo-Saxon England?', *Proc. of the R. Soc. B* 275 (2008), 2423–9.

⁴⁸ *English Historical Documents: c. 500–1042*, ed. D. Whitelock, Eng. Hist. Documents 1, 2nd edn. (London, 1979), pp. 407–16.

for decades.⁴⁹ The processes that formed the kingdoms may indeed have involved those dynastic figures at some point, but by the eighth century, oral memory had confused them with the issue of migrations from the continent, in the course of conceptualizing its present situation. It has been argued here that an unknown but potentially significant portion of the population of early Anglo-Saxon East Anglia was probably derived from the late Romano-British population. That the fifth-century melting pot in East Anglia should cool with time and become the eighth-century kingdom of the East Angles, with its one badge of identity, is not a remarkable occurrence in its wider early medieval context, given the way in which communal memory worked to simplify past events and processes in an age without written literacy. We should not be taken aback if the different sorts of evidence cannot easily be reconciled, because the assumption that they should speak of the same coherent narrative is predicated upon a literary conceptualization of the period that is no longer thought of as being simply 'history'.

⁴⁹ H. M. Chadwick, *The Origins of the English Nation* (Cambridge, 1907), p. 15; L. Alcock, *Arthur's Britain* (London, 1971), p. 294.

Conflict, Cooperation and Consensus in the Law of *Njáls saga*

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INTRODUCTION

In 1878, Guðbrandur Vigfússon described *Brennu-Njáls saga* as ‘the saga of law *par excellence*’, and the central position of the law in its many manifestations within the saga is indisputable.¹ Indeed, legal transactions and legal language have been identified on a more general level as generic markers of the *Íslendingasögur* (‘sagas of Icelanders’).² But the role the law plays within the narrative of *Njáls saga* is profoundly ambivalent, and the manner in which it should be interpreted even more so. One might expect the law to be a set of structures to restrain and contain social discord and as shall be examined below, this expectation is present within the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus—and indeed in *Njáls saga* itself—principally in the depiction of the moment of conversion to Christianity. But it is undeniable that *Njáls saga* charts a tragic series of deaths and confrontations that legal processes at the very least do not prevent, and indeed may actively help to engender.

Guðbrandur Vigfússon’s argument continued with the idea that ‘the lesson [the saga] teaches is of a Divine retribution, and that evil

¹ *Sturlunga saga*, ed. Gudbrand Vigfusson, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1878), I, xlii.

² This generalization is far from completely supported by the texts; for a recent argument in favour of the variable depiction of the law between the *Íslendingasögur*, see H. Burrows, ‘Cold Cases: Law and Legal Detail in the *Íslendingasögur*’, *Parergon* 26:1 (2009), 35–56.

brings its own reward in spite of all that human wisdom and courage, even innocence, can do to oppose it'.³ This reading of *Njáls saga* as a portrait of essentially powerless characters lashed by the waves of fate and chaos has been persistent. One hundred years later Lars Lönnroth echoed Guðbrandur, saying: '[h]uman laws and human wisdom are of little use on a lonely farm threatened by the entire universe',⁴ and Einar Sveinsson is in accord: '[m]an, regardless of how wise, powerful, and benevolent he may be, is impotent against fate, against that which must come to pass'.⁵ Richard Allen sees the saga as an attempt to demonstrate how such a tragic outcome might be inevitable, that '*Njáls saga* might be seen as an attempt to explain, to make comprehensible, the horror and ineluctability of this central disaster, as an attempt to cope with these facts, the burning of Njáll, the death of Gunnarr, which—as tradition states and other evidence supports—did actually happen'.⁶

Towards the end of the twentieth century, criticism has taken a strongly structuralist approach, embodied in William Ian Miller's suggestion of a 'balance-sheet model' of feud lying at the centre of *Njáls saga*.⁷ More recently, other critics have deviated from a

³ *Sturlunga saga*, ed. Guðbrand Vigfusson, I, xlii.

⁴ L. Lönnroth, *Njáls saga: a Critical Introduction* (Berkeley, 1976), p. 48.

⁵ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Njáls saga: a Literary Masterpiece*, trans. P. Schach (Lincoln, 1971), p. 196.

⁶ R. F. Allen, *Fire and Iron: Critical Approaches to Njáls saga* (Pittsburgh, 1971), p. 124.

⁷ 'In this construct specific wrongs create debits of blood or debits of honor which require repayment'. See W. I. Miller, 'Justifying Skarpheðinn: of Pretext and Politics in the Icelandic Bloodfeud', *SS* 55:4 (1983), 316–44, at p. 316. This critical predisposition may be traced all the way back to Vladimir Propp's famous 1928 analysis of the folk tale: see, for example, V. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. L. Scott (Austin, 1968) and J. L. Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic*

kinship-derived model of feud to look at more dynamic social structures.⁸ But in some respects, all these approaches have much in common with earlier views that the saga was about the intractability of fate. Where once Providence was the immobile force against which Njáll and Gunnarr battled, for later critics it has become the Structure. These approaches have been valuable, but they leave the status of the law in the saga as one of profound ambiguity. How, for example, is Njáll's character to be interpreted? Are the failures to contain violence within the saga attributable to the decisions characters make, or to the systematic flaws inherent in the legal system itself? These questions have pertinence beyond *Njáls saga* alone, for across a variety of Old Norse-Icelandic texts from Ari inn froði's *Íslendingabók* onwards, law and the Icelandic community are frequently portrayed as coterminous. Law is developed, between texts, as an expression of Icelandic literary identity. It would therefore be remiss not to address the fact that many of the sagas, but perhaps most of all *Njáls saga*, have been interpreted as directly critical of the law and may appear to demonstrate the potential for legal transactions to frustrate and fragment the very community it purports to embody.

In order to begin to address this question, it is necessary to understand that the semantic sense of 'law' (*lög*) in Old Norse-Icelandic literature is broad. Within this analysis, the law may be considered a set of social conventions subscribed to by a certain

Saga (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 47–50. For a short and balanced history of structuralist criticism of the *Íslendingasögur*, see L. Lönnroth, 'Structuralist Approaches to Saga Literature', in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World*, ed. J. Quinn, K. Heslop and T. Wills (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 63–73.

⁸ An example of this is discussion exploring friendship and regional politics; see R. Gaskins, 'Network Dynamics in Saga and Society', *SS* 77:2 (2005), 201–16.

group and therefore more than simply the institutional and public manifestations of these conventions. Law, then, concerns more than dealing with aberrant behaviour: it also embodies norms of behaviour. *Njáls saga* provides the opportunity to attempt to discern where the law comes from, and to suggest that perhaps a more fundamental element of Icelandic literary identity is the individual and subjective nature of the law itself. The argument given here is that a freedom to interpret the law according to one's inner convictions is intrinsic to an understanding of the events of *Njáls saga*. Part of the freedom that the settlers are represented as having sought was to avoid definition by another—by a king—and instead define themselves actively through the search for fame.⁹ Icelandic identity therefore acquired meaning self-reflexively, through a process of self-definition, rather than by deference to outside authority. *Njáls saga* is not an indictment of the law; rather, it is a demonstration of the tragedy that arises when individuals, each acting according to their own conceptions of justice, fail to recognize these differences of interpretation until it is too late. The law is nothing more than the sum of the members of the community, shown in literary form by the set of principles, actions and beliefs attributed to various actors. It is

⁹ See, for example, the likely compiler of *Sturlunga saga*'s description of the reasons for emigration in *Geirmundar þáttr heljarskinns*: 'Ok þat vilja sumir menn segja, at Geirmundr færi fyrir ofríki Haralds konungs til Íslands. En ek hefi þat heyrð, at í þann tíma, er þeir bræðr kómu ór vestrvíking, væri sem mest orð á, at engi þætti vera frægðarför meiri en fara til Íslands': *Sturlunga saga*, eds. Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn, 2 vols. (Reykjavík, 1946), I, 7 ('and some men will say that Geirmundr fled from the tyranny of King Haraldr to Iceland. But I have heard that in that time when the brothers came back from raiding in the west it was held by most that there was no more glorious journey than the trip to Iceland', all translations are my own unless otherwise stated).

not something above or behind the text, but something created through it.

TWO INTERPRETERS OF THE LAW: NJÁLL AND GUNNARR

The tragedy of Gunnarr is at least as poignant as the tragedy of Njáll, and this is doubtless the reason why debate continues as to when the version of *Njáls saga* as it exists today became a literary unity.¹⁰ The disjuncture between Gunnarr's repeated avowals of distaste for violence and desire for peace—relatively unusual amongst saga-heroes—and the many vicious feuds in which he finds himself generates considerable pathos. This pathos is all the more compelling given Gunnarr's own recognition of his conflicted self: “[h]vat ek veit,” segir Gunnarr, “hvárt ek mun því óvaskari maðr en aðrir menn sem mér þykkir meira fyrir en qðrum mǫnnum at vega menn”.¹¹ This insecurity that Gunnarr expresses, just after killing Otkell Skarfsson, arises both from a fear that his lack of relish in killing is somehow unmanly and that this lack of relish is caused by a recognition of the gravity of the act: pragmatically, in the knowledge that it may perpetuate the feud, but more generally as an offence to natural justice.

Gunnarr demonstrates most clearly a personal inclination towards a judicial ideal when he intervenes on behalf of Ásgrímr Elliða-Grímsson in an inheritance case against Úlfr Uggason:

¹⁰ For a recent discussion of this issue, which comes down on the side of the text as a unity, see T. M. Andersson, *The Growth of the Medieval Icelandic Sagas (1180–1280)* (Ithaca, 2006), pp. 183–203.

¹¹ *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslenzk fornrit 12 (Reykjavik, 1954), pp. 138–9: “I should like to know,” says Gunnarr, “whether I’m less manly than others, for to me killing men seems so much graver than [it seems] to them”.

Ásgrími tók sk svá til, sem sjaldan var vant, at vörn var í máli hans; en sú var vörnin í, at hann hafði nefnt fimm búa, þar sem hann átti níu; nú hafa þeir þetta til varna. Gunnarr mælti: “Ek mun skora þér á hólmi, Úlfr Uggason, ef menn skulu eigi ná af þér réttu máli; ok myndi þat Njáll ætla ok Helgi, vinr minn, at ek mynda hafa nokkura vörn í máli með þér, Ásgrímr, ef þeir væri eigi við.” “Ekki á ek þetta við þik,” segir Úlfr. “Fyrir hitt mun nú þó ganga,” segir Gunnarr.¹²

Gunnarr is not entirely unconnected to the participants in this dispute. Although this is the first appearance of Úlfr in the saga, Gunnarr is well acquainted with Ásgrímr. Þórhalla Ásgrímsdóttir is married to Helgi Njálsson and Njáll fosters one of Ásgrímr’s sons and teaches him the law.¹³ But Gunnarr is by no means automatically obliged to help Ásgrímr because of his connections to the family of his friend Njáll. When Gunnarr was prosecuted by Geirr goði for the killing of Otkell Skarfaxson, Ásgrímr was one of the *goðar* (“chieftains”) who took the side of Gizurr hvíti Teitsson, a kinsman of Otkell, who also initiates the legal action with Geirr and will later lead the attack on Hlíðarendi in which Gunnarr will die.¹⁴ It is not especially

¹² *Ibid.* p. 152: ‘it turned out that there was a flaw in his case, which was rare for Ásgrímr; and the defence case was that he had named five neighbours when he was required to have nine. Now they [the defendants] have this as a defence. Gunnarr said, “I shall challenge you to a duel, Úlfr Uggason, if people are not going to get their rightful dues from you; and I’m sure that Njáll and my friend Helgi intend me to have some part in your case, Ásgrímr, if they are absent.” “I don’t have any quarrel with you over this,” says Úlfr. “It’ll now turn out to be quite the opposite,” says Gunnarr’.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 74.

¹⁴ ‘Í sambandi með Gizuri hvíta váru þessir höfðingjar: Skapti ok Þóroddr, Ásgrímr Elliða-Grímsson, Oddr frá Kiðjabergi, Halldórr Qrnólfsson’, *ibid.* pp. 141–2, (‘in league with Gizurr hvíti [the white] were these chieftains: Skapti and Þóroddr, Ásgrímr Elliða-Grímsson, Oddr of Kiðjaberg, [and] Halldórr Qrnólfsson’).

surprising that Ásgrímur takes this side, since Gizurr is his uncle.¹⁵ Úlfr's surprise at Gunnarr's desire to involve himself in the dispute is quite probably in part due to the fact that not only does Gunnarr have no particular reason to get involved, but he even takes the side of a chieftain who had in the past stood against him in a legal dispute. The reason he gives for doing so is particularly interesting: *ok myndi þat Njáll ætla ok Helgi, vinr minn, at ek mynda hafa nokkura vörn í máli* (my emphasis). It is an entirely conjectural explanation: he does this out of his own internal conviction that this is what his friends would want him to do.¹⁶ Thus Gunnarr's internal image of what a friend ought to do—to stick up for the father-in-law of Njáll's son—is expressed in terms of justice. He vows to fight Úlfr *ef menn skulu eigi ná af þér réttu máli*, but Gunnarr's sense of what is just is entirely malleable according to his internal sense of what is right. It is not that he is seeking to uphold correct procedure by preventing Úlfr from using procedural tactics to frustrate a case: after all, he willingly used similarly deceptive tactics to recover Unnr's dowry from Hrútr.¹⁷ Rather, it reflects a fundamentally emotional response to justice that is most clearly exemplified by his behaviour later in the saga, when he decides not to leave Iceland for the term of his lesser outlawry for the

¹⁵ Ásgrímur's mother is Jórunn Teitsdóttir, Gizurr's sister (*ibid.* pp. 72 and 485).

¹⁶ Note that Helgi is a *vinr* ('friend'), quite distinct from a *frændi* ('kinsman'). In many respects this scene can be seen as a vindication of the power of bonds of friendship being of equal potency to those of kinship, at least according to Gunnarr's own values.

¹⁷ Arguably, tricking Hrútr into reciting summons was even more against the spirit of the law than exploiting a legal loophole. However, whilst it was unjust, for Gunnarr, at least, it was also right. For the episode in which Njáll instructs Gunnarr on how to force Hrútr to recite the summons, see *ibid.* pp. 59–63.

killing of Þorgeirr Otkelsson.¹⁸ Gunnarr makes this decision despite Njáll's stern warning that if he breaks the settlement made for the second killing within one family, his downfall is assured.¹⁹

The friendship between Njáll and Gunnarr endures despite the repeated conflicts between their households, but they do not share comparable attitudes towards justice, and this failure of Gunnarr to understand the ramifications of Njáll's advice is due to his inability—or refusal—to see himself as beholden to a structural, 'balance-sheet' model of law. Even Mǫrðr Valgarðsson, the 'villain' of the piece, recognizes the sagacity of Njáll's advice—he interprets it, correctly, as prophecy.²⁰ These differing outlooks on law are crystallized early in the saga, in a conversation between the two friends:

Njáll sagði hann vera inn mesta afreksmann—“ok ert þú mjök reyndr, en þó munt þú meir síðar, því at margr mun þik ǫfunda.” “Við alla

¹⁸ Gunnarr's rationale for remaining in Iceland is predicated on the emotions the landscape of his homeland evokes: “Fǫgr er hlíðin svá at mér hefir hon aldri jafnfǫgr sýnzki, bleikir akrar ok slegin tún, ok mun ek ríða heim aprt ok fara hvergi”, *ibid.* p. 182 (“How beautiful are the mountain slopes, more beautiful than they have ever seemed to me before, the fair cornfields and mown home-meadow. I shall ride back home, not travel away”).

¹⁹ Gunnarr has already killed Otkell Skarffsson after being wounded by Otkell's spurs whilst sowing his field (*ibid.* p. 138), after which Njáll issued his warning (*ibid.* p. 139). The killing of Þorgeirr Otkelsson thus constitutes the second killing in Njáll's warning, and the settlement that was made for it the one that he must not break if he wishes to live to be old.

²⁰ Advising Þorgeirr Starkaðarson to hold back in the attack on Gunnarr to ensure that Gunnarr kills Þorgeirr Otkelsson, if anybody, Mǫrðr concludes: ‘Hefir hann þá vegit tysvar í inn sama knérunn, en þú skalt flýja af fundinum. En ef honum vill þetta til dauða draga, þá mun hann rjúfa sættina. En þar til at sitja’, *ibid.* p. 168 (‘He has then killed twice in the same family, and you shall flee from the battle. And if this is to drag him to his death, then he shall break the settlement. And then it's a matter of waiting’).

vilda ek gott eiga,” segir Gunnarr. “Mart mun til verða,” segir Njáll, “ok munt þú jafnan eiga hendr þínar at verja.” “Undir því væri þá,” segir Gunnarr, “at ek hefða málaefni góð.” “Svá mun ok vera,” segir Njáll, “ef þú geldr eigi annarra at.”²¹

Gunnarr and Njáll speak in two very different ways. Gunnarr expresses wishes of an absolute kind. He desires good relations with everybody and if he must defend himself, he would do so only with justice on his side: with a *málaefni góð*. Conversely, Njáll prophesizes: *munt þú, mart mun til verða*, and so on (my emphasis). Njáll is apparently blessed with a supernatural knowledge of the future: ‘vitr var hann ok forspár, [...] langsýnn ok langminnigr’.²² The juxtaposition of *langsýnn* and *langminnigr* establish Njáll as a temporal fulcrum, seeing both far ahead and far behind in time.²³ Njáll sees law as a deep structure, which has the capability to engender an agency of its own, and which, with sufficient knowledge, can be manipulated.²⁴ Gunnarr does not see this; he, to all intents and purposes, lives in the moment, something reified in the different uses of tenses exemplified

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 84: ‘Njáll said that he was the most valiant man—“and you’re well proven, though yet to be more so, since many will envy you.” “I want to have good relations with everybody,” says Gunnarr. “Many things are to happen,” says Njáll, “and you will always have to act in self-defence.” “It would then depend,” says Gunnarr, “on me having a good case.” “So you shall,” says Njáll, “if you do not suffer on account of others”’.

²² *Ibid.* p. 57: ‘He was wise and prescient, [...] far-sighted and had a long memory’.

²³ In this respect Njáll could even be said to have some of the characteristics of the *völva* (‘seeress’), who, for example, in *Völuspá* is able to recall both unimaginably ancient events whilst also prophesying the end of the world. For a discussion of the role of the *völva*, see *The Poetic Edda*, ed. and trans. U. Dronke, vol. II, *Mythological Poems I*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1969–2011), p. 28.

²⁴ This agency is vindicated in the saga by Gunnarr’s death as a result of his double killing and unlawful decision to remain in Iceland, as discussed above.

in the passage above. He cannot see the hidden chain of cause and effect of which Njáll is aware; his interpretation of the law is utterly different. For Gunnarr, the law is not a structure, but simply an ideal, something that he expects will authorize his internal sense of justice. Gunnarr's tortured sense of his own failure to leave peacefully is a direct consequence of his inability, even with Njáll's help, to reconcile the public dimension of the law with his own interpretation of justice.

Shortly after the challenge to Úlfr discussed above, Gunnarr again becomes involved in legal disputes which are not directly of his concern. But this time it is not because of his sense of natural justice, but because Njáll sees the assignment of some of his own claims to Gunnarr as a means to counter the charges that will be made against him after his skirmish with the Þríhyrningi: Nú hefi ek nökkut at hugat, ok lízk mér sem þetta muni nökkut með harðfengi ok kappi verða at gera. Þorgeirr hefir barnat Þorfinnu, frændkonu mína, ok mun er selja þér legorðssøkina. Aðra skóggangssök sel ek þér á hendr Starkaði, er hann hefir höggvit í skógi mínum á Þríhyrningshálsunum, ok skalt þú sækja þær sakir báðar.²⁵

Njáll, of course, transfers the cases to Gunnarr in accordance with legal ritual. Njáll also goes on to give Gunnarr detailed instructions on how he must dig up the bodies of the men killed in the skirmish and outlaw them for conspiring to attack him and his men.²⁶ Gunnarr acts

²⁵ *Njáls saga*, p. 160: 'I've now given it some thought, and it seems to me that this can be achieved with some courage and boldness. Þorgeirr has made Þorfinna, my kinswoman, pregnant, and I shall assign to you the seduction claim. I'll also assign to you an outlawry action against Starkaðr, since he has cut wood in my forest at Þríhyrningshálsar, and you shall take up the prosecution of both these actions'. Gunnarr has just arrived at Bergþórshváll to ask Njáll's advice after killing a number of men in an encounter that stems from the violence that broke out at the horse-fight (see *ibid.* pp. 147–51).

²⁶ 'Þú skalt [...] grafa upp ina dauðu ok nefna vátta at benjum ok óhelga þá alla ina dauðu fyrir þat, er þeir fóru með þann hug til fundar at veita þér ákvámunur

entirely according to Njáll's wishes, and it seems quite clear that despite his strong sense of just behaviour, he has no insight whatsoever into the *legality* of his actions. The contrast between these two assignments could not be starker; in the first instance, Gunnarr involves himself in a case without invoking legal language but directly through a challenge to a duel, all for the sake of natural justice. In the second instance, Gunnarr is involved by Njáll in two further legal cases, through the medium of correct legal language and procedure, in the course of self-preservation. As these examples demonstrate, it is that Gunnarr's sense of the law tends towards natural justice and not self-preservation that is his tragedy.²⁷

As has already been shown in his interactions with Gunnarr, Njáll interprets the law in a very different way. Njáll is indisputably a

ok bráðan bana ok bræðrum þínum', *ibid.* p. 160–1 ('You shall [...] dig up the dead and name witnesses to the mortal wounds and declare outlawed all of the dead who came with the intention of delivering you and your brothers wounds and sudden death').

²⁷ The author of *Bandamanna saga* offers a harsh satire of the lawyer class, embodied in the wily old Ófeigr Skíðason, whose son, Oddr, faces defeat in a lawsuit over a similar technical infraction to that made by Ásgrímr. Ófeigr seeks a just outcome by pecuniary corruption of the court, through the comic juxtaposition of a verbal appeal to high legal ideas and a visual display of a money-bag: "hvát er sannara en dæma inn versta mann sekjan ok dræpan ok firrðan allri björg, þann er sannreyndr er at stulð ok at því, at hann drap saklausan mann, Vála?" [...] Ófeigr lætr stundum síga sjóðinn niðr undan kápunni, en stundum kippir hann upp', *Bandamanna saga* in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, Íslenzk fornrit 7 (Reykjavík, 1936), 291–363, at ch. 6, p. 323 (*Möðruvallabók* redaction) ('What is more just than to sentence the worst of men to outlawry, to death, and to deprive him of any assistance, when he has been duly proved of theft and of killing the innocent man Váli? [...] Ófeigr let the money-bag fall from time to time out from under his cloak, before snatching it back up').

strong advocate for the mutual dependency of law and society. In his analysis of *Njáls saga*, Thomas Bredsdorff has refuted Njáll's recitation of the old proverb that 'með lögum skal land várt byggja, en með ólögum eyða'.²⁸ Instead, Bredsdorff considers the saga an indictment of the intrinsic inefficacy of the legal institutions of the commonwealth period: '[t]he law is no longer the means by which the land will be built up, but rather an institution that keeps wounds open and delays their healing. [...] What we witness in *Njal's Saga* is [...] a demonstration of the paradox that the growth of legal institutions equals the decay of the rule of law'.²⁹

Bredsdorff's argument is a little subtler than some of those advanced above, but it still equates the central tragedy of the saga with the failure of the 'rule of law', a concept that remains ill-defined. Nevertheless, the argument that the law should be regarded as the villain of the saga requires consideration, especially since Njáll himself is presented as directly responsible for a particularly famous example of 'the growth of legal institutions', and a particularly useful example of his own attitude towards the idea of the law. This is the establishment of the *fimtardómr*, a 'fifth court' for the *Alþingi* ('general assembly'), without the geographic remit of the quarter-courts, that would act as a kind of supreme court or court of appeal for settling the most contentious cases and those which crossed jurisdictional boundaries. The circumstances surrounding its creation are telling in terms of the very specific interpretation of the law to which Njáll subscribes: 'Þetta sumar váru þingdeildir miklar; gerði þá margr sem vant var at fara til fundar við Njál, en hann lagði þat til mála manna,

²⁸ *Njáls saga*, p. 172: 'With law shall this land be built, and with lawlessness destroyed'.

²⁹ T. Bredsdorff, *Chaos and Love: the Philosophy of the Family Sagas*, trans. J. Tucker (Copenhagen, 2001), p. 83.

sem ekki þótti líkligt, at eyddusk sóknir ok svá varnir, ok varð af því þræta mikil, er málin máttu eigi lúkask, ok riðu menn heim af þingi ósáttir'.³⁰

In context, Njáll's actions can plausibly be read as nepotistic: eager to find a *godðorð* ('chieftaincy') for his foster-son Hǫskuldr Hvítanessgoði, he uses the common people's dependence on his knowledge of the law to confound cases and thus create evidence to demonstrate the necessity of a court of final instance that would—happily—also require the creation of additional chieftains as presiding officers. The saga-author is careful, however, to ensure that one can never be certain of the veracity of this reading. The phrase *sem ekki þótti líkligt* could equally be read to imply that against all expectations, even Njáll's acumen could not resolve the intractable quarrels which arose at that year's assembly, thus prefiguring the crescendo of institutional collapse that occurs at the assembly following Njáll's death. There is, one might argue, no correct reading of this: the law is value-neutral, and it is the very human character of Njáll whose values one needs to infer. Nevertheless, Njáll's intervention is a moment of considerable importance in this analysis, because it sees a character essentially redefining constitutional arrangements according to his own will. What makes Njáll a great lawyer is his ability, in sharp contrast to Gunnarr, to effect a match between the public, institutional manifestations of law and his own conception of what it is that the law ought to do. Njáll is wrong to believe that the structure of the law is such that it can provide him

³⁰ *Njáls saga*, pp. 241–2: 'That summer there was a great deal of litigation at the assembly; many people then went as usual to talk with Njáll, but he gave them advice, which seemed improbable, which rendered actions and defences void, and so there arose great wrangling when legal matters were not resolved, and people rode away from the assembly unreconciled'.

and his kinsmen with protection; but he may be closer to the truth in comprehending that it is a corporate, human endeavour, which has no transcendent principle at its heart. At no other place in the saga is it clearer that the law is a malleable concept, in a process of continuous evolution.

LAW AND CONSENSUS

The conception of the law as a corporate enterprise arising through interactions by discrete individuals is dissimilar to previous critical interpretations of the law as something above or behind the narrative, as a quasi-religious ideology that fills the pre-Christian void. Bredsdorff broadly interprets the narrative trajectory of *Njáls saga* as a confirmation of the weaknesses of the socio-legal system of the *þjóðveldi* ('Commonwealth'), weaknesses redeemable only by outside agency, be it new religion or new government: 'the old world is the world of the law, the new one is that of Christianity'.³¹ But the old law and the Christian law are far from equal; to compare them is not to juxtapose like with like. *Njáls saga* takes place before the inscription of the law at the house of Haflíði Másson; until that moment, the law existed only in multiple instances of interpretation by discrete individuals.³²

A conversion narrative (sometimes labelled *Kristni þáttur*) stands at the centre of *Njáls saga*. It occurs just after the institution of the *þing* and acts as the fulcrum of the saga narrative. Whilst offering two very different, but ultimately equally fated, interpretations of and interventions into law in the figures of Gunnarr

³¹ Bredsdorff, *Chaos and Love*, p. 84.

³² This transcription of the laws is recorded in *Íslendingabók*: see *Íslendingabók; Landnámabók*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, *Íslensk fornrit* 1 (Reykjavík, 1968), pp. 3–28, at p. 23.

and Njáll, the conversion provides the reader with the opportunity to witness an example of the synthesis of precepts new and old in two figures: Ámundi Hǫskuldsson and Síðu-Hallr Þorsteinsson. If, as is argued here for Njáll and Gunnarr, one's understanding of the law was predicated on one's inner convictions, in these post-conversion examples, characters are guided by a new, externally-verified certainty about the values that the laws ought to embody.

Immediately after the end of the conversion narrative, Ámundi, a blind man and a grandson of Njáll, confronts Lýtingr á Sámsstöðum, the killer of his father. Lýtingr had paid compensation to Njáll just before the conversion narrative, and indeed, the case of Lýtingr is divided into two parts by *Kristni þáttr*. Although it has sometimes been regarded as an interpolation, the splitting of the case provides an important example of the consequences of the conversion. Before Christianity, Njáll had settled the case; but a change has now been effected. Having been told by Lýtingr that he will pay no compensation, Ámundi replies: “Eigi skil ek,” segir Ámundi, “at þat muni rétt fyrir guði, svá nær hjarta sem þú hefir mér höggvit; enda kann ek at segja þér, ef ek væra heileygr báðum augum, at hafa skylda ek annathvart fyrir fǫður minn fébætr eða mannhefndir, enda skipti guð með okkr!”³³

Here Ámundi involves God in a legal matter. He appeals to a transcendent definition of justice and rectitude, although it is, of course, also a reflection of his own sense of what is right. Although a minor character, here he demonstrates how Christianity gives him a strength of conviction that Gunnarr lacked: Gunnarr did not know

³³ *Njáls saga*, p. 273: “I do not understand,” says Ámundi, “how that can be just before God, when you have struck me so close to the heart; and yet I can say this to you, that if both my eyes could see, I should have either compensation for my father or blood vengeance. And may God choose between us!”

whether he was less of a man for being reluctant to take revenge, but Ámundi is convinced that in the sight of God he is entirely on the side of justice. It is not that the law has now been given the deep structure that previous critics have observed through its incorporation of Christianity; it is simply that an *appeal* to a deep structure is now possible. The fiction that the law is founded in something transcendent, something beyond human agency, becomes arguable. Just as Ámundi leaves the booth, his eyesight is restored, momentarily, and he kills Lýtingr. Then, ‘Ámundi gengr út í búðardyrin, ok er hann kom í þau spor in sømu, sem upp höfðu lokizk augu hans, þá lukusk aptr, ok var hann alla ævi blindr síðan’.³⁴

Even miracles conform to patterns of social space that recall the spatial dimension of the law. Within the booth, God permits Ámundi to exact revenge, but only to settle his claim, and the Divinity allows him no more sight than is necessary. It still falls to Njáll and Höskuldr Hvítanessgoði to settle with Lýtingr’s kinsmen. Two points can thus be drawn from this example. In some respects, the conversion—and the accompanying rhetoric of Christianity—allows for the *idea* of an absolute truth to lie behind the law.³⁵ But conversely, the way in which both the conversion narrative itself, and the miracle of Ámundi’s sight, are bounded by legal manoeuvres, language and

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 273: ‘Ámundi goes back to the door of the booth, and when he came to the same spot where his eyes opened, they shut again, and he was blind again for the rest of his life’.

³⁵ It is far from the case that the conversion necessitates any material change in ethics. This is perhaps seen most clearly in a direct comparison between Gizurr hvíti’s pre-conversion refusal to countenance Mqrðr’s suggestion to burn in Gunnarr (*Njáls saga*, p. 188) and Flosi’s grim avowal, post-Conversion, that burning Njáll is a sin but unavoidable: ‘er þat þó stór ábyrgð fyrir guði, er vér erum kristnir sjálfir’, *Njáls saga*, pp. 327–8 (‘it is, however, a heavy responsibility before God, and we ourselves are Christians’).

procedure, demonstrate a degree of synthesis. The law is able to accommodate Christianity, but it is able to do so only through consensus—in Ámundi's case, through the synchronous action of miraculous vengeance and legal settlement. Ámundi's personal desire to achieve his own sense of justice is again sublimated into a movement towards a consensual settlement. It is only in the privacy of the booth, alone before his enemy and God, that a different law applies.

The conversion is, ultimately, a moment of consensus broken and then repaired. One of the few contemporary external narratives of Iceland's conversion, that of Adam of Bremen, written around the middle of the eleventh century, contains the following remark: 'De quibus noster metropolitanus inmensas Deo gratias retulit, quod suo tempore convertebantur, licet ante susceptam fidem naturali quadam lege non adeo discordabant a nostra religione'.³⁶ Although far from a historical account of the conversion, Adam's rhetoric is useful in elucidating the literary treatment of the process of Christianization. It was a process of 'receiving the faith' (a process elaborated on in a number of sagas through the portrayal of the baptism of key characters), which *began* at the *Alþingi* but did not end there. Furthermore, the idiom of 'natural law' that Adam of Bremen uses may be applied to the wider concept of law discussed here in the sagas. It is certainly not just the procedures of the *Alþingi* or the rules governing the summoning of witnesses that Adam could be seen to

³⁶ Adam of Bremen, *Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte*, ed. B. Schmeidler (Hannover, 1917), p. 273 ('For them our metropolitan returned vast thanks to God that they had been converted in his time, even though before receiving the faith they were in what may be called their natural law, which was not much out of accord with our religion', Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, trans. F. J. Tschan (New York, 1959), p. 218).

refer to; instead it is conformity to a set of modes of social behaviour and interaction which seemed not so distant from those of the Christian world. The communitarian principle which saw the adoption of Christianity might well be seen as proof that there existed no intrinsic incompatibility between Christianity and Icelandic law.

Within *Íslendingabók*, there are two moments during the process of conversion when consideration of the future of the law becomes a primary concern. The first of these is when Iceland appears to be on the brink of religious war: ‘En þat gørðisk af því, at þar nefndi annarr maðr at qðrum vátta, ok sqgðusk hvárir ýr lögum við aðra, enir kristnu menn ok enir heiðnu, ok gingu síðan frá lögbergi’.³⁷ The second is when communal unity is affirmed as an absolute necessity by the law-speaker: ‘En þá hóf hann tqlu sína upp, es menn kvómu þar, ok sagði, at hónum þótti þá komit hag manna í ónýtt efni, ef menn skyldi eigi haga allir lög ein á landi hér’.³⁸ This second quotation demonstrates the inability of the Icelanders to countenance the existence of more than one law, and this is precisely because to a considerable extent ‘Iceland’, as any kind of meaningful entity beyond the purely geographic, was defined by this law. William Ian Miller notes the necessity of the identifying role of the law given the nature of the Icelandic state itself:

[H]ow in the world could one build a polity with two laws? The ready answer is that one would need a strong state. But given the non-existent state apparatus (there was no state beyond the Law-speaker,

³⁷ *Íslendingabók*, p. 16: ‘And it so happened because of this that one named another as a witness, and each side declared themselves out of law with the other—the Christians and the heathens—and then went from the law-rock’.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 17: ‘He then began to speak, when people arrived there, and said that it seemed to him that the situation would become impossible to handle, if people should not manage [themselves under] one law here in this land’.

the two-week long Allthing, plus local things that met in the spring) [...] what you had was a recipe for exactly what Thorgeir supposed: ‘that it was a reasonable expectation that armed conflict would arise among men such that the land would be wasted.’³⁹

When the conversion narrative is examined it must be remembered that the compromise the two parties sought to attain was not merely in order to secure peace but to preserve the existence of the community itself. Whilst there were certainly some social conventions that differed between the Christian and non-Christian communities (such as those regarding the eating of horse flesh and the exposure of infants) that were dealt with by positive laws, the process that is actually taking place in this depiction of the *Alþingi* is not the simple replacement of one ‘law’ with another, but rather the vindication of the Icelandic law in its potential to defuse conflict and unite a people: in other words, to achieve consensus. It is a rather neat paradox that it is the law (here referring not to procedures, but to the unity which Þorgeirr deems it essential to maintain) that resolves the problem of the two communities declaring themselves *yr logum*. As was argued above, the law is thus far more than the institutions and procedural rules which are so liable to abuse; it is a shared cultural value constituted through collective action.⁴⁰ In the process of demonstrating the binding power of the law as a communal foundation-myth, a new one is born: that of the peaceful and

³⁹ W. I. Miller, ‘Of Outlaws, Christians, Horsemeat, and Writing: Uniform Laws and Saga Iceland’, *Michigan Law Rev.* 89:8 (1991), 2081–95, at p. 2090.

⁴⁰ The anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup views ‘collective action’ as the fundamental process by which Icelandic society evolved from disparate communities of settlers. See K. Hastrup, *Island of Anthropology: Studies in Past and Present Iceland* (Odense, 1990), p. 79. One must always be aware, of course, that this analysis is predicated on a literary narrative; it is a story of the coming about of Icelandic society and its relation to actuality is, and may well remain, obscure.

‘democratic’ conversion to Christianity.⁴¹ This sense is sealed by Þorgeirr’s explicit exaltation of the will of the people, by arguing that if the law is equated with a monarch and their jurisdiction, war is inevitable: ‘[h]ann sagði frá því, at konungar ýr Norvegi ok ýr Danmörku höfðu haft ófrið ok orrostur á miðli sín langa tíð, til þess unz landsmenn görðu frið á miðli þeira, þótt þeir vildi eigi’.⁴² The resolution the Danes and the Norwegians effect is one of popular consensus in the defiance of a monarch; it is a collective, corporate constitution of what the law ought to be. It is, therefore, in many ways a macrocosmic version of the way in which, as was argued above, the law ought to be considered in *Njáls saga*.

Returning to *Njáls saga*, after the great battle at the *Alþingi* that follows the attempt to prosecute the burners of Njáll, it is Síðu-Hallr who embodies this spirit of consensus. Realizing that the settlement to be made for the killings at the *Alþingi* could be irredeemably complex and acknowledging the failure of the settlement put before Flosi that proved unable to prevent the burning, Hallr makes an astonishing sacrifice: ‘En ek vil vinna þat til sætta at leggja son minn ógildan ok ganga þó til at veita þeim bæði tryggðir ok grið, er mínir mótstöðumenn eru’.⁴³ With these words Síðu-Hallr achieves an

⁴¹ Haki Antonsson observes that the myth of the conversion at the *Alþingi* ‘provided the Icelandic conversion tradition with a gravitational centre to which other narratives, such as the celebrated conversion episode in *Njáls saga*, were drawn’. See Haki Antonsson, ‘Traditions of Conversion in Medieval Scandinavia: a Synthesis’, *SBVS* 34 (2010), 25–74, at p. 38.

⁴² *Íslendingabók*, p. 17: ‘He told about how the kings of Norway and Denmark had long had strife and warfare between them, until the people brought peace about between them, even though they [the kings] did not want it’.

⁴³ *Njáls saga*, p. 412: ‘But in order to find a settlement I will leave my son uncompensated for and nevertheless pledge a sworn truce and peace to those who were my enemies’.

interpretation of the law that eluded both Gunnarr and Njáll. Hallr appears to recognize that one's personal convictions of justice must sometimes be sublimated towards a greater good, for the very reason that the law—and by extension society as a whole—is nothing more than the sum of its participants' actions. It is a realization that the communal nature of the law demands that its participants engage in the search for consensus. This search for consensus necessitates a subtle treatment of legal instruments, in the knowledge that pursuing one's case to the 'full extent' of the law may, ultimately, be detrimental to the very ability of the law to maintain social stability. Síðu-Hallr stands between the two extremes of legal interpretation constituted in Gunnarr and Njáll. For Gunnarr, the law—and indeed the community in general—ought to let one pursue natural justice by any means, irrespective of legal structures. For Njáll, legal structures ought to protect any legal agent, no matter how far from natural justice the ends sought may be. Both of these interpretations contribute, of course, to tragic outcomes, which foreshadow and reflect a greater tragedy beyond the text of *Njáls saga* itself.

CONCLUSION: THE COLLIDING WORLDS OF LAW

The partial expiation of the legal community that Hallr achieves in *Njáls saga* is not, of course, analogous to the progress of that greater intertextual narrative of the Icelandic *Þjóðveldi* itself.⁴⁴ *Íslendinga saga*, the longest discrete text within the *Sturlunga saga* compilation, records

⁴⁴ By this specifically is meant the intertextual narrative of the settlement and elaboration of a society in Iceland, about which a significant portion of the corpus is concerned. This has been termed a 'große Erzählung' ('grand narrative'); see J. Glauser, 'Begründungsgeschichten: der Mythencharakter der isländischen Literatur', in *Skandinavische Literaturgeschichte*, ed. J. Glauser (Stuttgart, 2006), pp. 41–50.

in detail the conflict between the *goðar* of Northern Iceland and the Bishop of Hólar, Guðmundr Arason. There is much symbolic significance in the clash between secular and religious authorities that punctuate Guðmundr's career, but for the purposes of this comparison, one quotation will suffice, drawn from the aftermath of a battle that took place *circa* 1209 between a coalition of seven chieftains and the Bishop's men:

Þeir, er sekir váru, váru færðir í urð ok lágu þar tvá mánuði. En sína menn, þá er þar fellu án iðran ok lausn, grófu þeir at kirkju, ok kölluðust þeir þat allt líkja eftir biskupi, er hann lét seka menn í kirkju ganga. Biskup lét ok einn mann, er fallit hafði af Kolbeini iðrunarlauss, eigi at kirkju liggja mánuð.⁴⁵

This rather confusing passage does need some explanation. Sturla Þórðarson, the putative author of *Íslendinga saga*, couches the conflict between the Bishop and the *goðar* as one between two differing interpretations of law. Guðmundr's propensity to shelter secular outlaws infuriates the *goðar* and the Bishop's response is to use excommunication—fundamentally, outlawry by another name. From the point of view of the *goðar*, the Bishop is acting against the law because he is sheltering outlaws, an action expressly prohibited under Icelandic law, at least as recorded in *Grágás*.⁴⁶ But for the Bishop, the

⁴⁵ *Sturlunga saga*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson *et al*, I, 253: "Those who were outlawed were buried under a heap of stones and lay there for two months. But their own men, who fell there without repentance or absolution, they buried by the church and said that this was exactly in the manner of the bishop, who allowed outlawed men to go into church. The bishop did not allow a certain man of Kolbeinn's, who had died unrepentant, to lie in the churchyard for a month".

⁴⁶ "Ef menn sia *scogar* man er þeir fara leiðar sínar. oc varðar þeim eigi við lavg þoat þeir take hann eigi ef þeir eiga ecki við hann. En ef þeir eiga við hann kavp eða avnor mavc nokor eða raða homom ráð þav er hann se þa nær lífe sino en aðr. oc er þat biörg við hann. oc varðar þat Fiör Bavg's garð", *Grágás efter det Arnamagnæanske*

burial of those in consecrated land who have been excommunicated or died without absolution is in contravention to God's law. Here, one witnesses the collision of two worlds of law, rather than merely two individual interpretations. It is the very bifurcation of the community that Þorgeirr Ljósvetningagoði counselled against at the Alþingi in the conversion narrative of *Íslendingabók*. If the mismatch between expectations of what the law *ought to be* is part of the tragedy of Gunnarr, the more fundamental failure of the law of the 'old order' to accommodate Christianity is the tragedy of the greater narrative of Iceland itself.

This analysis has sought to posit an alternative understanding of the law in some Old Norse-Icelandic texts, which de-emphasizes its status as a social superstructure, a concept that sits above and regulates characters and texts, and instead emphasizes its corporate, consensual nature. It is desirable to view the law as a mediating space rather than a structure.⁴⁷ The law also permits an expression of individual identity through its interpretation, and an expression of collective identity through the interaction and dialogue between these interpretations. Finally, one may return to the spatial metaphor noted with respect to Ámundi's booth. Law in the sagas is the coming together of various discrete agents to determine boundaries,

Haandskrift Nr. 334 Fol., Staðarbólsbók, ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen (Copenhagen, 1879), p. 402 ('If people see an outlaw while they are journeying they are not breaking the law if they do not capture him, as long as they have nothing to do with him. But if they trade with him or have any other dealings or give him advice such that his life is more secure than it was before, that is assistance to him and the penalty for that is lesser outlawry').

⁴⁷ This concept has been posited by William Pencak, who offers some insightful readings of the law in the *Íslendingasögur* but whose analysis is compromised by a reliance on modern translations of the sagas: see W. Pencak, *The Conflict of Law and Justice in the Icelandic Sagas* (Amsterdam, 1995).

sometimes literal, but usually figurative. Law involves making a ‘finding’; it is an active process of description. The desired outcome is consensus in the form of an agreement between individuals that they will all see a certain part of the world in the same way. The tragedy of *Njáls saga* is that even allies fail to see the law in the same way, never mind adversaries. But *Njáls saga* is not a condemnation of the law, merely a tragedy of inadequate lawyers; for there is nothing to the law but individuals. The greater tragedy described throughout *Sturlunga saga*, of the fragmentation of a society, is the description of a similar process, but with one crucial difference. Christian or otherwise, in *Njáls saga*, the highest authority to which one could appeal was consensus between individuals. In *Sturlunga saga*, with the religious constituency no longer beholden to secular law, the direct equivalence between the law and the community was broken.

Rhetorical Re-tellings: *Senchas Fagbála Caisil* and Twelfth-Century Church Reform in Ireland

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Acallam na Senórach ('the Colloquy of the Ancients'; henceforth *Acallam*)¹ is a prosimetric text comprised of a multiplicity of genres and narrative techniques. Elements of the king tale meet with those of hagiography and the Fenian tradition. The coming together of these elements provides its audience with a heteroglot space in which discourses compete and work together to achieve the desired ends of the redactor. In the *Acallam* the origin legend of the kingship of Cashel, *Senchas Fagbála Caisil* ('Stories of the Founding of Cashel'; henceforth *SFC*),² is adapted to the context of the twelfth-century reform of the Irish church. This re-telling, when considered in its contemporary context and compared with a ninth-century version, provides evidence to suggest that the purpose of the *SFC* in the *Acallam* was to contribute to the proliferation of reform ideology and the subsequent union of secular and ecclesiastical powers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In this way, the *Acallam* can be identified as a rhetorical discourse composed by those in power to assure the hegemony of twelfth- and thirteenth-century reform ideology.

The *Acallam* is the longest prose composition in early Irish,

¹ W. H. Stokes, ed. *Irische Texte*, vol. IV, pt. 1 (Leipzig, 1900).

² M. Dillon, ed. and trans. 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel', *Ériu* 16 (1952), 61–73.

second only to the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* ('The Cattle Raid of Cooley').³ The *Acallam* includes stories from various traditions all told within a frame narrative. St Patrick wanders Ireland with Fenian warriors, meeting kings and other interesting characters who share with him stories of the early Irish narrative tradition. This study will rely upon the four manuscripts of the *Acallam* edited by W. H. Stokes in *Irische Texte*.⁴ Though the manuscripts themselves are dated to the fifteenth century,⁵ text-internal evidence suggests a twelfth- or thirteenth-century date. In a recent article, Anne Dooley has resisted the temptation to place the *Acallam* in a twelfth-century context; however, she notes that:

Evidence for its reflection of twelfth-century cultural concerns is indeed plentiful and may be summed up under two main headings: firstly, concern for the status of aristocratic marriages and their conformity with the norms of twelfth-century ecclesiastical reform; and, secondly, the growing need to establish some commonly agreed norms for the operation of increasingly militarized kingship polities.⁶

Dooley accounts for the disparate datings of the *Acallam*; however, as she notes, evidence for a twelfth-century date is plentiful. This is especially due to the presence of themes relevant to twelfth-century reform that are found throughout the text.⁷ As for the significance of

³ Cf. C. O'Rahilly, ed. and trans. *Táin Bó Cúailnge. Recension I* (Dublin, 1976), and *Táin Bó Cúailnge from the Book of Leinster* (Dublin, 1967).

⁴ For an explanation of Stokes' use of this compilation of manuscripts see W. H. Stokes, ed. *Irische Texte*, vol. IV, 1 (pp. x–xi).

⁵ These are: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud 610; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson B. 487; Derbyshire, Chatsworth House, the Book of Lismore; and Dublin, University College MS A 4.

⁶ A. Dooley, 'Date and Purpose of *Acallam na Senórach*', *Éigse* 34 (2004), 97–126 (at pp. 98–9).

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 98.

the presence of the *SFC* in the *Acallam*, Dooley goes on to say, '[i]t is clear that the west of Ireland offers the best environment for a work combining new treatments of hitherto under-used narrative traditions and Patrician interests with new reform interests'.⁸ As Cashel had been granted monastic supremacy in the southern half of Ireland as a result of twelfth-century church reform, establishing a connection between Patrick and the monastic community at Cashel would have been significant for various western political factions. Thus, the re-telling of the *SFC* in the *Acallam* provides further evidence of reform interests as an impetus for the production of the text.

The stories of the founding of Cashel tell the story of the Éoganacht dynasty and their right to rule Munster. The *SFC* are part of the Corc legends and David Sproule explains their tradition: '[t]he stories about Corc were composed, reworked and transmitted over a period stretching from at least as early as c. AD 700, as in the case of the group of five stories found in Laud 610, to the time of Keating, who retold some of the stories in his history of Ireland'.⁹ Miles Dillon provides a summary of this eighth- or ninth-century version of the tale as it appears in a fifteenth-century manuscript, which will serve as the focus of the current study:¹⁰

The account opens with Corc abiding at Cathair Étain Tairb and Teamair Eimín. It is autumn, and the trees of Cashel are laden with fruit. Duidriu, swineherd of the king of Éile, and Cuirirán, swineherd of the king of Músgraige, go to put their swine to mast. They fall asleep and sleep for three days and three nights, and in a dream (?)

⁸ Dooley, 'Date and Purpose', p. 121.

⁹ D. Sproule, 'Politics and Pure Narrative in the Stories about Corc of Cashel', *Ériu* 36 (1985), 12–28 (at p. 12).

¹⁰ The manuscript is Dublin, Trinity College Library, MS H. 3. 17; see Dillon, 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel', p. 63.

they see Corc, and hear the blessing given him by an angel. In this vision they see also all the future kings of Munster, and learn the length of their reigns and the prosperity and peace that will attend them.¹¹

In this version of the narrative, we are given the story of Corc becoming the king of Munster. In the tradition of this tale, Corc's becoming king is associated with otherworldly intervention. This is something we see in the *Acallam* version as well, although in a much more explicitly Christian context. There is also an historical dimension to the narrative as our redactor provides us with a list of the kings of Munster, one which in this context of prophecy and divine origins serves to justify Éoganacht supremacy in Munster. Therefore, the 'historical' dimension of the narrative may more aptly be described as historico-political; however, the historical and political function of any narrative is much more finely nuanced than such statements allow. We shall explore these functions in the version of the *SFC* as it is told in the *Acallam*.

Joseph Nagy provides an important analysis of the historical and political functions of early Irish narrative. Nagy says that early Irish narrative can tell us 'about the institutions, values, beliefs, and assumptions shared among the participants in a storytelling tradition'.¹² However, it is not simply the case that narrative reveals ideology. In his article on 'Myth and *Legendum* in Medieval and Modern Ireland', Nagy provides a definition of myth that clarifies what should rightfully be called myth. The early Irish tradition consists of various types of tales, including 'myth', legend, and folklore. While some of these stories are based in some type of

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 61.

¹² J. F. Nagy, *The Wisdom of the Outlaw: The Boyhood Deeds of Finn in Gaelic Narrative Tradition* (Berkeley, CA, 1985), esp. p. 13.

historical reality, others are utterly fictitious. Nagy sees a narrative strategy underlying all of these tales that allows us to speak of all of these genres as ‘myth’. He explains: ‘[t]his other “myth” is a metagenre, a rhetorical as well as epistemological strategy that potentially inheres in all storytelling’.¹³ Here Nagy conceptualizes myth as a multiplicity of narratives that comprise cultural memory, which are drawn on to purposes specific to a particular socio-historical context. The *SFC* in the *Acallam* serve an epistemological function that is not concerned so much with representation of historical truth, but with furthering political interest, specifically, the proliferation of twelfth-century church reform ideology. Nagy further describes this structuralist conception of narrative:

The hypothesis behind this method is that within a narrative tradition, at any given point in its historical span, every story has something to say about every other story within the tradition [...] can be treated as a multiform of the others [...] and encourages the analyst to ascertain the meaning of a story, its fundamental, ahistorical ‘truth’ on the basis of the other stories within the tradition.¹⁴

If myth tells us something about the ideologies shared among participants of a storytelling tradition, the most telling is the choice of stories chosen by the storyteller from the many available, what Claude Lévi-Strauss calls *bricolage*.¹⁵ The stories chosen and the ends for

¹³ J. F. Nagy, ‘Myth and *Legendum* in Medieval and Modern Ireland’, in *Myth: A New Symposium*, ed. G. Schremp and W. Hansen (Bloomington, IN, 2002), pp. 124–38.

¹⁴ Nagy, *Wisdom of the Outlaw*, p. 15.

¹⁵ For a definition of this term in relation to myth see C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. J. and D. Weightman (Chicago, 1966): ‘The characteristic feature of mythical thought is that it expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. It has to use this repertoire, however, whatever the task in hand because it has nothing else at its

which they are used demonstrate that myth is not simply narrative that reveals ideology, but ideology that can come to be narrated, and which informs the structure of the narrative.

The various versions of the *SFC* support Nagy's thesis. Indeed, the re-telling of this narrative in the *Acallam*, when compared with earlier versions, is revealed as a persuasive narrative that orders the present state of knowledge and establishes the ethos of the secular milieu at Cashel by associating it with St Patrick. This epistemology establishes the ideology of twelfth-century church reform for a twelfth- and thirteenth-century audience, the centuries during which the *Acallam* was composed. The early twelfth-century reform movement was to have a continuous influence on the course of twelfth- and thirteenth-century history and was to become a part of the cultural memory of scribal communities, as is witnessed in the re-telling of this narrative in the *Acallam*. As Sproule demonstrates, the ninth-century version of the *SFC* is inherently political as well, as are all socially symbolic acts.¹⁶

SENGHAS FAGBÁLA CAISIL

It would not be accurate to suggest that the *SFC* represents the historical reality of twelfth-century Ireland. Instead, these tales should be conceived of as discourse that sought to shape knowledge of the past in order to serve the present. This discourse was intended for an

disposal. Mythical thought is therefore a kind of intellectual "bricolage", pp. 16–7.

¹⁶ F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY, 1981), esp. p. 20. It is Jameson's position that latent political consciousness informs the structure and content of narrative; therefore, all narrative is inherently political by its very nature, despite authorial intention. Instead, this is a result of the act of narration.

audience of *fir dhána*, a learned class who through their endeavours achieved such an end. Dooley has suggested the audience of the *Acallam* as ‘the common people and the nobility in unison’.¹⁷ As for the text’s purpose, Dooley says, ‘[i]t is a work that presents an ideal image of regional kings who hear, over and over again, the exploits of the military men of whom Caílte is the surviving representative, and who expresses at all times both his due deference to authority and his proud commitment to the ideal of parity and mutual respect’.¹⁸ Dooley argues the *Acallam* is an optimistic affirmation of the aspirations of political institutions in the west of Ireland intended for a wide audience of both literate and illiterate people. However, that this text was read by a wide audience is not only unlikely, but cannot be known with certainty. Moreover, it is not clear why scholars should see the text as a creative expression of optimism. Certainly entertainment and aesthetic value are characteristics of the narrative; nevertheless, the text works to serve the political interests of western monastic powers, since its very structure is organised by reform ideology. A comparison of the ninth-century version of the *SFC* with the re-telling in the *Acallam* reveals the political interestedness and persuasive intentions of twelfth and thirteenth-century *fir dhána*.

In the re-telling of this *dindsenchas* (‘lore of place and placename’) in the *Acallam* we see divine and literary justification for the twelfth-century reform of the Irish church. This reform entailed division of the country, the establishment of a new social order and the stratification of the ideological forces of church and state. This stratification was witnessed geopolitically in the establishment of the supremacy of the secular seat of power at Cashel in the south and the

¹⁷ Dooley, ‘Date and Purpose’, p. 122.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* ‘Date and Purpose’, pp. 122–3.

continued ecclesiastical supremacy of Armagh in the north. Prior to the twelfth century, the ancient site at Cashel was pivotal in Irish politics as the seat of power for the kingship of Munster, and was associated mainly with the Éoganacht dynasty. While Éoganacht hegemony never reached that of the rival Uí Néill dynasty, they were a powerful force in the west. As Dáibhí Ó Cróinín explains, ‘an early law tract states baldly that “supreme among kings is the king of Munster” and the dictum bespeaks a self-confidence which is borne out by the annals’.¹⁹ Despite such associations with kings, Cashel was not to be associated with the church until, in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, Muirchertach Ua Briain granted the site to the church while working for reform. According to Ó Cróinín, Muirchertach’s reform intentions were not wholly pious: ‘[i]n this also his interest was as much political as it was devout, and followed along lines laid down by his father before him’.²⁰ The ultimate political move came in Muirchertach’s handing over the rock of Cashel, which had been the ‘ancient capital of his family’s enemies’ to the church at the synod of Cashel in 1101.²¹ This event would have far reaching ideological implications in the centuries to come.

While this may be the earliest political association of the church and Cashel, earlier secular literature associated with the site is Christian through and through. Even the earliest version of the *SFC* contains Christian elements. Francis J. Byrne says concerning these earlier versions: ‘[t]here are no myths or legends concerning the rock of Cashel relating to pagan prehistory: we are told that the site (despite its obvious prominence in the Munster landscape) was found accidentally or revealed miraculously, and the story has a strong

¹⁹ D. Ó Cróinín, *Early Medieval Ireland, 400–1200* (London, 1995), p. 59.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 281.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 282.

Christian coloration, even in its most archaic versions'.²² David Sproule, in his study of several stories associated with Corc of Cashel, considers both the narrative and political dimension of these tales. Such considerations are important to the current study of *SFC* as well as its re-appropriation in the *Acallam*. Sproule puts forth the thesis that these tales of Corc of Cashel:

[...] do not yield the kind of specific information they pretend to: they do not tell us anything about the activities of a historical founder of Cashel, nor do we learn anything of the period in which the stories are set, but we do learn about genealogical arrangements as they were seen at a later period, a vital aspect of power politics in Ireland, and about political propaganda aimed at the western Éoganachta.²³

Sproule echoes Nagy's conception of myth as epistemological strategy. As such, myth is necessarily a persuasive discourse as all epistemology is bound up in power relations. In order to understand such an ideological operation in a specific context, we will turn to the tales themselves.

Senchas Fagbála Caisil, the story of the founding of the Éoganacht dynasty at Cashel, contains elements of both king tale and *dindshenchas*. This story tells of Conall Corc mac Luigdech, founder of the kingship of Cashel and the ancestor of the Éoganacht dynasties and how he came to be king of Munster. The story begins with the vision of two swineherds, Duidriu and Cuirirán. While tending their herd near Cashel, they fall asleep and dream of seeing an angel blessing Corc.²⁴ Following the dream vision of this blessing, they travel toward Cashel and on the first night at Clais, north of Munster, 'they see a cleric with two choirs of cantors about him, prefiguring

²² F. J. Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings* (Dublin, 1973), p. 184.

²³ Sproule, 'Politics and Pure Narrative', p. 21.

²⁴ Dillon, 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel', p. 61.

St Patrick. An angel declares that whosoever shall first kindle a fire there is to be king of Munster'.²⁵ Cuirirán goes to Cashel and relates his visions to Corc, who immediately goes to the rock of Cashel, lights a fire there, and holds a fantastic feast. The king of Éile becomes angry upon hearing of Dúirdriu's vision, as Cashel is within his territory. Still, he accepts Corc's right to Cashel. Dillon relates the conclusion of the tale thus: 'the last paragraph recites the duties and privileges of the descendants of Dúirdriu, the virtue of the blessing, and the coming of St Patrick to baptize Oengus son of Nat Fraích and the people of Munster sixty years after Corc became King'.²⁶ So, Conall Corc mac Luidgech, the ancestor of the Éoganacht dynasty, becomes the king of Munster and Cashel becomes the seat of that power.

This early telling is a part of the tradition that helped to secure the right of the Éoganacht dynasty's place in the kingship of Munster. As Dillon notes, there is a Christian coloring in the divination of the coming of St Patrick and his divine consecration of the secular establishment there. There is undoubtedly secular interest here, as well. The king of Éile grants the land to Corc, the Éoganacht king, without question once he hears of this divine intervention. The final section of the text is worth quoting as in it there is a look ahead to Aengus son of Nat Fraích, which is essential to understanding the re-telling in the *Acallam*. In this section, Patrick meets the spurious Eógan Lethderg, son of Aengus, and baptises him. The early telling goes: 'Trí .xx. bliadnae áirmid eólaig ó ro gab Corc Caisil co táinic Pátrig i Caisil do baisdid Áengusa meic Nat Fraích agus fear Muman ar cheana. Is ann sin ro smachtaig Aengus mac Nat Fraích agus fear

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 62.

²⁶ Dillon, 'The Story of the Finding of Cashel', p. 62.

Muman ar cheana. Is ann sin ro smachtaig Aengus mac Nat Fraích sgreaball bathais Pátraig for Mumain'.²⁷ This last section of text not only justifies the vision had by Dúirdriu, but associates the tax levied on Munster by Aengus with Patrick. Here, we see the political interestedness alluded to by Sproule, as well as the literary precedent set for the composers of the *Acallam* version.

TWELFTH-CENTURY CONTEXT AND THE
ACALLAM NA SENÓRACH

As is well known, the twelfth century was a time of turbulence and change in Ireland. Before the Anglo-Norman invasions and the coming of King Henry I, Ireland was awash with heteroglot ideological forces. The battle for the high-kingship—both ideologically and politically—was ongoing and created a geopolitical landscape marked by the battle for hegemony. At this time the lines between secular and ecclesiastical power became blurred, as both institutions worked together to assure control and stratification. In the early twelfth century Muirchertach Ua Briain attempted to extend Dál Cais hegemony throughout Ireland. Of course, the high kingship of Ireland was contested by many and the entire history of this contest is too vast to be accounted for in the current study. However, an account of the events of early twelfth-century reform, events that determined the course of ecclesiastical and secular politics for subsequent centuries, will provide the context in which to consider the *SFC* as they appear in the *Acallam*.

With Muirchertach's attempt to secure Dál Cais hegemony came

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. 68: "The learned reckon sixty years from the seizing of Cashel by Corc till Patrick came to Cashel to baptize Aengus son of Nat Fraích and the rest of the men of Munster. It was then that Aengus son of Nat Fraích laid the tax of "the scruple of Patrick's baptism" upon Munster", cf. *ibid.* p. 73.

the intervention of the *comarba Pátraic*. Marie Therese Flanagan explains the implications of this intervention and subsequent union: '[t]his suggests that Armagh was now seeking to take a more leading role in the Irish church [...] In 1101 an ecclesiastical synod was convened at Cashel under Muirchertach's auspices, one of the most significant outcomes of which was the donation of the former Éoganacht royal site of Cashel "as an offering to St Patrick and to the Lord"'.²⁸ This, Flanagan claims, would imply a rapprochement of Cashel with Armagh. As this synod was the public recognition of the high kingship of Muirchertach and a powerful symbol of the union of secular and ecclesiastical power, it slighted Domnall na hÉnna, who was associated with the ecclesiastical community at Derry as well as Cenél nEógan, and who was Muirchertach's rival for the high kingship of Ireland. Flanagan says the *Lebor na Cert* ('The Book of Rights') recorded these implications: '[t]he Book of Rights claimed that the king of Cashel was the supreme secular ruler of Ireland, just as the *comarba Pátraic* held the supreme ecclesiastical office'.²⁹ In 1111 the synod of Ráith Bressail was to institute this ideological claim in geopolitical divisions. This synod 'legislated for an island-wide diocesan hierarchy for the Irish church'.³⁰ *Leth Cuinn*, the northern half of Ireland, was to belong to the metropolitan see of Armagh, while *Leth Moga*, the southern half, was to belong to the metropolitan see of Cashel. The two metropolitan sees represent not only a geopolitical union of Ireland, but also the union of secular and ecclesiastical powers. While the struggle for the high kingship would continue, this division is one that reflects contemporary

²⁸ M. T. Flanagan, 'High Kings with Opposition, 1072–1166', in *A New History of Ireland I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 899–932 (at p. 913).

²⁹ Flanagan, 'High Kings', p. 914.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 916.

divisions. When considering the *SFC* as they appear in the *Acallam*, these events provide the ideological context of textual production.

In terms of literary production, Kim McCone sees the twelfth-century reform as the development of a mandarin class of propagandists seeking socio-political advantage; inherent to discursive practices are socio-political contexts. McCone claims:

The twelfth and thirteenth centuries are generally recognised as a watershed in which the success of newly established monastic orders forced the vernacular learning of the older monasteries into an increasingly secular milieu, and it looks as if the earlier rigid distinctions between the monastically oriented *fili* and the humbler secular bard gradually disappeared around that time to bring into being an emerged class of *fir dhána* with a major input of previously bardic personnel and practices.³¹

McCone describes the *filid* of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as a monastically trained and learned elite who had come to possess knowledge of the folklore, myth and legend disseminated in the bardic tradition. He also claims that it is the case that the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were the pinnacle of this movement, which began as early as the seventh century, the time when vernacular texts first came into existence in Ireland. McCone explains:

The socio-political or even family concerns shared by the monastic keepers of a genealogy and the secular dynasty to which it referred doubtless helped to promote local interests as well as the intermeshing of lay and ecclesiastical, kingly and saintly pedigrees in individual compilations reflecting a very practical *comuaim n-ecalsa frí túaith* or ‘joining of church with kingdom’.³²

³¹ K. McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Kildare, 1991), p. 27.

³² *Ibid.* p. 244.

McCone claims this twelfth- and thirteenth-century scribal milieu operated according to socio-political agendas. Describing the context of twelfth-century church reform, Flanagan claims that the pre-reform church had dominated secular learning as an elite force in a highly illiterate society. Before the twelfth-century reform, ‘a scholarly consensus was achieved, in, for example, the case of historians, by the formulation of a *senchas choitbenn*, an agreed interpretation of Ireland’s past, and the synchronisation and harmonisation of regnal lists and genealogies’.³³ Flanagan explains that during the church reform movement, consensus was no longer secure. We can consider the *SFC* as a literary product of these twelfth-century reform ideologies.

The *Acallam* re-telling of the *SFC* is a literary composition that brings these ideological forces together. Dynastic and ecclesiastical meet as Eógan and Patrick meet on the rock of Cashel. The site (or *topos*) of this telling, the rock of Cashel, is the site of ideological unity in geopolitical terms, as well as one of polyphony in the composition itself. The heteroglot nature of this event as represented in the text speaks to the heteroglot nature of ideological forces in the reform movement. F. J. Byrne explains the importance of such a literary representation of these unities:

Munster had broken away from allegiance to Patrick when the Law of Ailbe of Emly, the central cult-site of the Eóganacht dynasties, was proclaimed there in 782 (admittedly at a time when the kingship of the province was claimed by Máel Dúin mac Aedo of the western kingdom of Loch Léin, a region over which not the most assiduous of

³³ M. T. Flanagan, ‘Henry II, The Council of Cashel, and the Irish Bishops’, *Peritia* 10 (1996), 185–211 (at p. 203).

research scholars had been able to provide convincing evidence for any cult of Patrick.³⁴

Practicing ingenious bricolage, the scribe of the *Acallam* found the tools necessary to create the link between Ireland's pagan past and the church, between Armagh and Cashel, between Finn and Patrick, in the *SFC*.

In the *Acallam* telling of the founding of Cashel, Patrick arrives at Cashel along with Caílte and meets Eógán Lethderg, son of Aengus, the Éoganacht king of Munster. On this occasion, Benén, son of Aed, calls for a gospel fee of land to be given to Patrick. Eógán responds:

‘In baile seo a táocus ina fuarusa hé,’ ar rí Muman, ‘do fognum dó co brathocus da muintir ina diaid.’ Is andtuc rí Muman Caissil do Patraic mac Alpraind. ‘Cindus doberar duind sin?’ ar Beineoin. ‘Mar seo,’ ar in rí, ‘tiacht don chleirech fein ar Lic na cét,’ bar rí Muman, ‘ocus in neoch atchífea do mín Muman ar cach leth do beith aici.’³⁵

Patrick then stands on the stone and 11,000 demons fly from under it. Patrick blesses the place and the scribe then notes that this place is home to one of the three perpetual fires in Ireland. In this passage, Cashel is granted to Patrick by Eógán, the son of Aengus. Aengus was said to have been baptized by Patrick in the earlier *SFC* sixty years after the granting of land to Corc of Cashel. The previous

³⁴ F. J. Byrne, ‘Church and Politics, c. 750–c. 1000’, in *A New History of Ireland I: Prehistoric and Early Ireland*, ed. D. Ó Cróinín (Oxford, 2005), pp. 656–79 (at p. 659).

³⁵ Stokes, *Irische Texte*, IV, 1 (ll. 5395–401): “‘This place he stands in and in which I have found him,’ said the King of Munster, “shall be at his service until his death and at the service of his people after.” It is then the King of Munster gave Cashel to Patrick, son of Calpurn. “How shall it be given to us?” asked Bénén. “In this way,” said the king. “The cleric shall himself step onto the stone of the hundreds, and whatever he sees of Munster in any direction shall be his” (author’s own translation).

tellings are alluded to in this and in the lighting of the perpetual fire. Most importantly, Patrick is given dominion over the land from an Éoganacht king. This is significant, for in the early twelfth century the site was granted to the church by a Dál Cais king, Muirchertach Ua Briain. Of course, the rivalry between the Dál Cais and the Éoganachta over the right to rule Cashel was the impetus for the creation of the ninth-century *SFC*. In this telling, the church, particularly *comarba Pátraic*, is granted the site by an Éoganacht king. Considering the continued struggle amongst the Dál Caissian and Éoganacht dynasties for the high kingship in Cashel during the latter part of the twelfth century, this telling assures consecration of the site by Patrick and the unity of the church with both dynasties. Regardless of which dynasty is associated with the high-kingship, they have the blessing of Patrick.

After this, Patrick, Cailte and all of the nobles of Munster sit to converse. Eógan asks Cailte of the origin of the name of *Cloch na Cét*. Cailte responds:

‘Is am mebrach-sa inní dia tá’ ar Cailte, ‘uair ní raibe fis nime riam acainde nocor’ tsuidh Find ar in cloich-seo ocus co tuc a ordain fa chét ar a dét fis, ocus cora fallsiged nem ocus talam ocus ereidim in fírDía forórda, ocus do thuidecht-sa d’ind-saigid Eirenn, a Tailgind,’ ar Cailte, ‘ocus naim ocus fíreoin ocus creidem cros ocus crabad inti’.³⁶

³⁶ Stokes, *Irische Texte*, IV, 1 (ll. 5414–19): “‘I am mindful of what it is,’ said Cailte, “since we did not previously have knowledge of heaven until Finn sat on that rock and put his thumb on his tooth of knowledge one hundred times, and heaven and earth and the faith of the true golden God and your coming to Ireland, Adze-Head, were revealed,” said Cailte, “and [it was revealed that there would be] saints and righteous [people] and belief in the cross and piety in it [i.e. Ireland]” (author’s own translation).

As with the earlier versions, our scribe invents a divine or otherworldly discovery of the Rock of Cashel. Additionally, there is divination of events to be associated with the site. In the ninth-century version, the genealogy of the kingship of Munster is given, along with a prediction of the peacefulness and prosperity of each king's reign. In the *Acallam* version, the coming of the church is prophesied by a pagan figure, Finn Mac Cumhail. In this way, Cashel, the seat of the kingship, is not only blessed by the patron saint who received the land from a pagan king, but such a blessing is also predicted and approved of by the leader of the *Fianna* himself. Undoubtedly the interest in this telling is in unifying dynastic and ecclesiastical power and establishing Cashel as a monastic sovereign unified with Armagh. Moreover, Cashel is provided with a much-needed connection to St Patrick, one that earlier propagandists were unable to provide.

In conclusion, twelfth-century reform ideologies are inherent in the narrative of the *Senchas Fagbála Caisil* in the *Acallam na Senórach*. In a historical moment marked by social and political turmoil, church reform attempted stratification of Ireland. This was to be realised not only geopolitically, but also in discursive practices. The tales serve as evidence of the literary attempts of the *fir dhána* to (re)shape knowledge of Ireland's past.³⁷

³⁷ I would like to extend my gratitude to the *Quaestio Insularis* editors, particularly David Baker, for their helpful and diligent efforts in the preparation of this article. Also, I would like to thank Dr Dan M. Wiley for his insight and assistance in completing my translations of the *Acallam*.

Reading and Writing in the Runic Riddles of the *Exeter Book*

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The runic alphabet was originally used for carving inscriptions into hard materials such as stone and wood.¹ As a result, it is visually distinct from the roman alphabet: curved lines are avoided completely as they would be difficult to cut, and horizontal lines are not used because they would not be easily distinguished from the grain of a wooden surface. The earliest examples of Old English runic poetry, such as the inscriptions on the Franks Casket dating from c. 700 and on the Ruthwell Cross from c. 730, as well as various memorial inscriptions, are epigraphic.² In all of these cases, although roman script may also be used elsewhere on the object, the poems are written entirely in runes. The runic poetry found in Old English manuscripts is generally later, and sparser, than epigraphic inscriptions. The entire corpus is represented by approximately twelve to fifteen texts, almost all of which are preserved in manuscripts from the later tenth century onwards (although the poems themselves may be older than this). All of these poems are written primarily in roman script with only a small number of runes used to highlight or distinguish certain letters or words. It seems that the reason for including runes in these poems may be related to their differences in appearance from the roman alphabet. The runes for *thorn* and *wynn* (T and w), when incorporated into the roman alphabet by Anglo-

¹ R. I. Page, *An Introduction to English Runes*, 2nd edn. (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 40–1.

² *Ibid.* pp. 147–50 and 173–9.

Saxon scribes, were adapted to make them easier to write and bring them closer in appearance to roman letters. However, when scribes wrote runes *as* runes, including these two letters, they took care to maintain their unique appearance.³ This means that any textual runes are highly visible on the manuscript page, a feature that poets and scribes seem to have exploited in these riddles and other runic passages.⁴ Across the entire corpus of manuscript runic poetry there is virtually no consistency in the methods used to incorporate runic letters within the body of the text. Only in two of Cynewulf's signatures, which are likely to be the work of a single author, is the method of using runes replicated exactly in more than a single text. This lack of an established convention for incorporating runic letters into written, manuscript poetry, combined with the scarcity of such texts, suggests that when runes are used in such contexts they serve a significant purpose. In this paper I will discuss the function and purpose of runes in four of the *Exeter Book* riddles, numbers 19 ('ship'), 24 ('jay'), 42 ('cock and hen') and 64 ('ship'), with the aim of demonstrating the thematic significance of the script in each text.

The *Exeter Book* manuscript contains a relatively large number of runes, both within texts and in the margins. All of the textual and some of the marginal runes are the work of the manuscript's sole scribe, and a few of the marginal runes appear to have been added

³ Compare, for example, the difference between 'romanised' and runic 'þ' in the *Exeter Book Riddle* 64 l. 4 (Exeter Cathedral Library MS 3501 fol. 125r). Throughout this article, the riddles are numbered according to *The Exeter Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 3 (London and New York, 1936), which differs slightly from both *Old English Riddles*, ed. C. Williamson (Chapel Hill, 1977) and B. J. Muir, *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, 2 vols. (Exeter, 2000).

⁴ Page, *Introduction*, pp. 187 and 221.

later.⁵ In addition to their formal distinctiveness from the roman alphabet, all of the textual runes in the *Exeter Book* are consistently punctuated, with points before and after individual runes or groups of consecutive letters, so as to further visually isolate them from the surrounding roman text.⁶ In each of the four runic riddles of the *Exeter Book* which I aim to discuss here, the scribe appears to exploit the visual disjunction between runic and roman letters in order to represent writing and written communication. All of these poems, regardless of the style and subject which are unique to each, have a common thematic interest in exploring aspects of the written word or the act of writing. In this paper I shall suggest that runic letters themselves are used in these texts with the specific purpose of representing the written word.

RUNIC RIDDLES

The majority of runes in the *Exeter Book* are found in ff.101r–130v, which contains the riddles as well as *The Husband's Message* and *The Ruin*.⁷ There are four riddles (19, 24, 75 and 64) with multiple runic letters. *Riddle* 91 ('key') uses the runic letter 'w' as an abbreviation for 'wynn' and *Riddle* 58 ('well sweep') follows a reference to *runstafas* with the word *rad*, which may or may not stand for runic 'r'. Additionally, a number of folios have runes in the margins around the texts, possibly

⁵ The runic poems in the *Exeter Book* are: *Christ II*, *Juliana*, *The Husband's Message*, *The Ruin*, and a number of riddles, which are discussed on p. 2. For the marginal runes see Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, pp. 53–9.

⁶ This practice was first noted by M. Förster in *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry* ed. R. W. Chambers, M. Förster and R. Flower (London, 1933), p. xxiii; see also Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, p. 188. For the punctuation of the *Exeter Book* see K. O'Brien O'Keefe, *Visible Song* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 164 and 188.

⁷ See Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, I, p. 16.

as an aid to the solutions. Finally there are *Riddles* 42 and perhaps 58, which, rather than using actual runes, incorporate rune names written in roman letters.

It seems likely that the runes in *Riddle* 75 have been interpolated from the margins at some point in its transmission, and are not an integral part of the text.⁸ *Riddle* 91, with the single rune w, is also not strictly a runic poem. The practice of using a select few runes as scribal abbreviations, while not widespread, is attested in Old English manuscripts. The *Beowulf* manuscript, for example, has several instances of runic ‘e’ used to represent the word ‘eþel’ (‘homeland’).⁹ It can be argued that *Riddle* 58 should be treated as a runic riddle. The final sentence of the poem reads: ‘þry sind in naman / ryhte runstafas, þara is rad forma’ (14b–15).¹⁰

The presence of the word *rad* alongside a reference to *runstafas* suggests that *rad* should be read for the runic letter ‘r’ and that it is the first of the three ‘rune-staves’ that spell the riddle’s solution. However, *runstafas* does not necessarily refer to specifically runic letters and an equally plausible interpretation is that the answer consists of three letters preceded by *rad-*. The word has also been accented which is not the case with any of the runes named in *Riddle* 42, the only other riddle that uses names rather than letters to represent runes.¹¹

⁸ A. Orchard, ‘Enigma Variations: The Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Tradition’, in *Latin Learning and English Lore; Studies in Anglo-Saxon literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. K. O’Brien O’Keefe and A. Orchard (Toronto and London, 2005), pp. 284–304, at pp. 290–1.

⁹ For example *Beowulf* ll. 520, 913, and 1702.

¹⁰ All quotations from Williamson, *Old English Riddles*: ‘there are three right letters in the name and *rad* is first’ (all Old English translations are my own).

¹¹ Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, II, p. 654.

Plausible solutions have been put forward for both interpretations.¹² Adding to the uncertainty is the fact that the final word of the riddle is not *forma* in the manuscript but *furum*, which requires emendation of some sort to be intelligible.¹³ It is therefore unclear whether or not this poem should be considered a runic riddle.

This paper, then, will discuss *Riddles* 19, 24, 42 and 64. The first three all contain letters written in runes. In each case the letter must be read for its rune name in order for the verse to be metrically and alliteratively correct. However, the rune names are not coherent with the sense of the verse, and the runic letters in each riddle simultaneously spell out words, or parts of words, which must be deciphered by the reader. This is illustrated by the first line of *Riddle* 19: ‘Ic seah s r o / h’. The line can be read in two ways. Firstly, in order for the line to scan, it can be translated ‘I see sun, riding, mouth, hail’, which is clearly nonsensical. Once the letters are rearranged, however, the line reads ‘I see a horse’. *Riddle* 42 is somewhat different in that it uses rune names written in roman letters to represent its runic material.

RIDDLE 24

The subject of *Riddle* 24 is spelt out by its runes, making it decidedly easier to solve than many of the Old English riddles:

Ic eom wunderlicu wiht, wræsne mine stefne,
hwilum beorce swa hund, hwilum blæte swa gat,
hwilum græde swa gos, hwilum gielle swa hafoc,

¹² For a summary of the numerous solutions suggested see Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, II, p. 654; D. Bitterli, *Say What I Am Called: The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book and the Anglo-Latin Riddle Tradition* (Toronto and London, 2009), pp. 104–5.

¹³ For a discussion of this riddle and its interpretation see Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, pp. 311–12.

Runic Riddles

hwilum ic onhyrge þone haswan earn,
5 guðfugles hleoþor, hwilum glidan reorde
muþe gemæne, hwilum mæwes song,
þær ic glado sitte. g mec nemnað,
swilce æ ond r o fullesteð,
h ond i. Nu ic haten eom
10 swa þa siex stafas sweotule becnap.¹⁴

When rearranged, the runes spell the word *bigoræ*, the feminine form of the Old English noun *bigor*. The precise meaning of the word is not certain. It is used to refer to woodpeckers and members of the crow family, namely jays, magpies and jackdaws.¹⁵ Given the context of the riddle, which highlights the bird's mimicking abilities, and since woodpeckers do not copy other sounds, it seems certain that the word is referring to a member of the crow family, most likely a jay or magpie.¹⁶

The riddle is notable for its emphasis on aurality. It is the only one of the four riddles that is narrated in the first person by its subject, and the very first line draws attention to the *stefne* ('voice', 1b) of the jay.¹⁷ The variations in the jay's 'speaking' voice are then

¹⁴ 'I am a wondrous creature, I vary my voice. Sometimes I bark like a dog; sometimes I bleat like a goat; sometimes I cry like a goose; sometimes I yell like a hawk; sometimes I imitate the cry of the eagle, the war-bird's laughter; sometimes the voice of the kite I copy with my mouth; sometimes the gull's song where I sit, happy. g names me, likewise æ and r, o helps, h and i. Now I am named, as these six staves clearly show'.

¹⁵ J. Bosworth and T. N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford, 1898), p. 535.

¹⁶ Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, pp. 207–8; see also Bitterli, *Say What I am Called*, pp. 92–6.

¹⁷ The emphasis on the creature's voice throughout this riddle is such that, as Bitterli points out (*ibid.* p. 96), 'the creature's mimicry is presented as its main

highlighted as it works its way through a range of different creature's vocalisations, represented by what are probably onomatopoeic words such as *beorce* ('bark', 2a), *gielle* ('yell', 3b).¹⁸

This is the only one of the four runic riddles which personifies its runes, with the actions *nemnað* ('names', 7b), *fullesteð* ('helps', 8b) and *becnaþ* ('signify', 10b) all performed by the poem's *siex stafas*.¹⁹ That the first action attributed to the runes, the naming of the riddle's subject, implies that the letters themselves have a voice. This creates a dichotomy between the runes, abstract concepts that use a fictional voice to clearly name something, and the jay, a living creature with its own voice which it can nevertheless vary in such a way as to conceal rather than reveal its identity.

This contrast between the abstract yet fixed runes and the physical, deceptive jay is reflected in the interplay between the riddle's spoken and visual clues. The ephemeral nature of the spoken word is illustrated though the constant alterations of the jay's voice. Although the bird gives the illusion of defining itself, its nature in fact becomes less certain with each change of voice, and given that the riddle itself is narrated in its subject's voice—the same voice that alters constantly throughout the text—the reliability of everything it 'says' within the text is undermined. The only stability in the poem comes from the

characteristic' and there is no visual description of the 'colourful jay, which [...] is actually more often heard than seen'.

¹⁸ M. Nelson, 'The Rhetoric of the Exeter Book Riddles', *Speculum* 49:3 (1974), 421–40, at p. 434.

¹⁹ Bitterli, *Say What I am Called*, p. 97, argues that the runes fall within the catalogue of actions performed by the jay, so that it 'not only imitates the voices of its fellow animals, but [...] even speaks the language of man'. However, the grammar of the riddle, as outlined in the previous paragraph, emphasises the fact that the runes function separately from the jay and its mimicries.

runes, the embodiment of the visual, written word set against the spoken words of the jay; the personification of the runes themselves separates them from the jay's shifting speech and their appearance on the manuscript page distinguishes them visually from the surrounding text.²⁰ The rhetoric of the text also changes at the point in which the runes are introduced; in the preceding lines the jay is the active character, illustrated by the repetition of the nominative form *ic* (ll. 1a, 2a, 4a, 7a). However, in the second half of l.7, directly following the first rune, the pronoun becomes accusative and it is the runes that are the active characters.

In this way the poet draws a distinction between the elements of the poem that illustrate the ephemeral nature of the spoken word, which is constantly shifting and varying within the text, and the written word, which can transfix it and render it *sweotule* ('clear', 10b) and permanent. This is, perhaps, emphasised by the use of the verb *becne* at the end of the riddle, used only once elsewhere in the *Exeter Book* riddles.²¹ However, the equivalent noun, *becun*, appears frequently in runic inscriptions on Anglo-Saxon memorial stones.²² I would suggest that the verb is used in this riddle with the intention of echoing such inscriptions, thereby emphasising the visual, physical and permanent nature of runic inscriptions (and by extension, writing generally) compared with the spoken word.

The division between the aural and the literary is not as definitive as it appears, however. The joke of the riddle is that even the shifting

²⁰ See R. Dewa, 'The Runic Riddles of the Exeter Book: Language Games and Anglo-Saxon Scholarship', *Nottingham Med. Stud.* 39 (1995), 26–36, at pp. 28–9.

²¹ There is, however, only one other example of its use in the *Exeter Book* riddles (*Riddle* 39, l.26); see <http://www.doe.utoronto.ca>, *Dictionary of Old English: A to G online* (University of Toronto, 1997), s.v. *bicnan*, *bicnian*, *beacnian*.

²² Page, *Introduction*, pp. 154–5.

‘voice’ of the jay is in fact a literary creation, written on the manuscript page. Even as the poem portrays the speech of the jay as ephemeral and unreliable, it illustrates the ability of the written word to deceive, both in its ability to portray fiction (that the jay is speaking) and in its ability to conceal what it appears to be revealing.

RIDDLE 42

The exploration of aspects of written communication, and the interplay between speech and writing, is encountered again in *Riddle 42*. As in *Riddle 24*, the runes in this riddle encode its solution. When written out and rearranged the letters spell the words ‘hana’ and ‘hæn’, which the riddle’s narrator describes as engaged in the act of *hæmedlaces* (‘marriage play’, a euphemism for sex); the solution, therefore, is ‘a mating cock and hen’.²³ Like *Riddle 24*, however, the underlying thematic interest of this poem is the nature of writing as a means of communication:

Ic seah wyhte wrætlice twa
Undearnunga uhte plegan
hæmedlaces; hwitloc anfeng
wlanc under wædum gif þæs weorces speow,
5 fæmne fyllo. Ic on flette mæg
þurh runstafas rincum secgan,
þam þe bec witan, bega ætsomne
naman þara wihta. Þær sceal nyd wesan
twega oþer ond se torhta æsc
10 an an linan, acas twegen,
hægelas swa some. Hwylce þæs hordgates
cægen cræfte þa clamme onleac
þe þa rædellan wið rynnemenn
hygefæste heold heortan bewrigene

²³ Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, II, p. 661.

15 orþoncbendum? Nu is undyrne
 werum æt wine hu þa wihte mid us,
 heanmode twa, hatne sindon.²⁴

Riddle 24, as has been seen, creates an illusion of auralty in what is a distinctly literary text. In contrast, this riddle focuses primarily on the visual nature of runes and writing,²⁵ whilst the text itself is, of all the runic riddles, the most suited to being appreciated by a listener. Whereas *Riddle 24* opens with an invitation to the reader to listen to the jay's voice, *Riddle 42* begins by describing the sight of a mating cock and hen, as seen by the riddle's narrator. This emphasis on the visual extends to the portrayal of runes in the poem. Along with *Riddle 24*, this riddle makes conscious reference to its runes within the text but, unlike the former riddle, in this text the runes are envisaged as letters written *on flette* ('on the floor', 1.5b). That these runes are a visual creation, intended for the benefit of readers, is illustrated by the narrator's emphasis that they are of use to *þam þe bec witan* ('those who know books', 1.7a).²⁶ Although *Riddle 19* and *Riddle 64* both describe

²⁴ 'I saw two wondrous creatures openly outside playing at sex. The white-haired woman, proud under the clothes, if that work succeeded, received fullness. I can say to men, on the floor through rune-letters, to those who know books, both of those creatures' names together. There will be need, two times, and the bright ash, one in the line; two oaks and hails the same. Which one has, with the power of a key, unlocked the fastenings of that treasure-door which held the riddle mind-fast against riddle-men, concealed in the heart with skilfully made bonds? It is now clear to men at wine how those two high-minded creatures are named amongst us'.

²⁵ S. Lerer, *Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Lincoln and London, 1991), p. 124.

²⁶ The 'bookishness' of this riddle has often been highlighted by critics; see for example P. Lendinara, 'The World of Anglo-Saxon Learning', in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. M. Godden and M. Lapidge (Cambridge,

the act of writing in general and enigmatic terms, *Riddle 42* is the only runic riddle that specifically describes the writing of the runes contained within the text, thereby emphasising their nature as a written, seen form of communication. Although the other three riddles make creative use of the visual appearance of their runes on the manuscript page, this text forgoes the visual effects of the runes by using their names rather than letter forms. This may, however, be a grammatical necessity rather than a stylistic choice since, as Dieter Bitterli points out, two of the rune names are in inflected forms.²⁷ The rune names are portrayed as being in a *linan* ('line', 10a) and the description of their appearance mimics the act of reading a line of disjointed letters; the reader is first given the name of each letter and then the number of times it appears, rather as the eye would pick out each letter in a line and then register if it is repeated.

Despite the emphasis on the acts of writing and reading within this riddle, it nevertheless follows *Riddle 24* in creating an interplay between written and spoken communication. In *Riddle 24* the runes are personified, with their ability to speak to the audience implied by the use of the verb *nemnað*. *Riddle 42* creates a similar effect with the narrator's explanation that it is through the use of runes that he is able to *secgan* ('say', l.6b) the names of the creatures. This verb implies the use of speech, and yet it is the act of writing the runes on to the floor that enables it. The poet uses these lines to introduce the contradictory character of written words: both their ability to silently communicate between people and their ability to speak to a reader

1991), pp. 264–81, at p. 268; R. Wehlau, *The Riddle of Creation: Metaphor Structures in Old English Poetry* (New York, 1997), p. 101. Orchard, in 'Enigma Variations' p. 287, however, notes the riddle's bookish overtones but argues that this is undermined by the final line's description of *werum æt wine*.

²⁷ Bitterli, *Say What I Am Called*, p. 122.

despite their abstract nature.

The majority of the text of *Riddle 42* is devoted not to providing clues about the riddle's subject but to describing the act of writing the runes and then the results of reading them. In this description the effect of the runes is likened to *cægan cræfte* ('the power of a key', 12a), which is able to unlock the solution of the riddle. The solution itself is *hygefæste* ('mind-fast', 14a) and *heortan bewrigene* ('concealed in the heart', 14b), phrases which carry connotations of the human body. These two phrases, then, suggest that the *clamme* ('fastenings', 12b) that withhold the solution from the reader are a separate person, the riddler, and the runes, with their ability to clearly name the solution of the riddle to *werum at wine* ('men at wine', 16a), are the means by which a reader may unlock the image held in the riddler's mind.²⁸ The final two lines return the riddle to its overt subject, the mating hens, creating a sandwich structure in which the descriptions of the two creatures (1–5a, 16b–17) frame the riddle's depictions of the acts of writing and reading. *Riddle 42* may begin and end as a bawdy portrayal of mating hens, but at its centre it is transformed into an illustration of the transfer of information from one person's mind to another through the use of the written word.

The runes in both of these poems are used to spell out their solutions. This creates a clear division in the texts between the riddle proper and the runic puzzle; each of these poems is in effect a dual riddle.²⁹ Although the riddles' solutions are not overtly related to writing, the fact that they are literally written on the manuscript page for the benefit of a reader highlights the fact that both poems have an

²⁸ Lerer, *Literacy and Power*, pp. 118–23. See also Bitterli, *Say What I Am Called*, p. 127, and B. Mize, 'The Representation of the Mind as an Enclosure in Old English Poetry', *ASE* 35 (2008), 57–90, esp. pp. 60–1.

²⁹ Wehlau, *The Riddle of Creation*, p. 101.

underlying thematic interest in writing and written communication. This is especially emphasised in *Riddle 24*, where the visual contrast between the two alphabets on the manuscript page draws a reader's attention to the nature of the text as a written document. Both texts highlight the presence of the runic letters, and inform the reader that the act of interpreting them will identify the riddles' subjects.³⁰ Primarily those subjects are 'jay' and 'cock and hen', but I would argue that in both cases a secondary solution, the written word, can also be 'read' through the interpretation of the runic letters. It is interesting that both of these riddles use runes, and not roman letters, to represent the concept of the written word.

RIDDLES 19 AND 64

Runes function somewhat differently in the remaining two riddles compared to those already discussed. Runes are not explicitly mentioned in either text. Moreover, the words they encode are integral to the sense of the verse, so that the runes must be rearranged and interpreted before the riddles themselves can be read. As stated previously, there is little consistency in the use of runes across these texts. In *Riddle 19* the four groups of runes spell out entire words, written in reverse. The runes must be read for their names in order for the verse to alliterate, and then read in reverse to give the words that complete the sense of the verse:

Ic on *sīþe* seah s r o
h, hygewloncne heafodbeorhtne,

³⁰ *Riddle 24*, ll. 9b–10: 'nu ic haten eom / swa þa siex stafas sweotule becnaf' ('now I am named, as these six staves clearly show'); *Riddle 42*, ll. 5b–8a: 'ic on flette mæg / þurh runstafas rincum secgan [...] bega ætsomne / naman þara wihta' ('I can say to men, on the floor through rune-letters [...] both of those creatures' names together').

Runic Riddles

swiftne ofer sælwong swiþe þrægan.
Hæfde him on hrycge hildeþryþe
5 n o m nægledne rad
a g e w. Widlast freed
rynestrong on rade rofne c o
f o a h. For wæs þy beorhtre,
swylcra siþfæt. Saga hwæt hit hatte.³¹

Riddle 64 contains six shorter groups of runes, with all but the last arranged in pairs. Each pair represents the first letters of a word, with the reader required to supply the rest of the letters themselves:

Ic seah w ond i ofer wong faran,
beran b e. Bæm wæs on siþþe
hæbbendes hyht h ond æ
swylce þryþa dæl. þ ond e
5 gefeah, f ond a fleah ofer ea
s ond p sylfes þæs folces.³²

The four runic words of *Riddle* 19 do not exactly equate to the six found in *Riddle* 64.³³ *Riddle* 19 has the words *hors*, *mon* and *haofoc*. These are translated as ‘horse’, ‘man’ and ‘hawk’ and are paralleled by, in the same order, *wicg* (‘w i’), *beorn* (‘b e’) and *hafoc* (‘h æ’) in *Riddle* 64.

³¹ ‘I saw on a journey s r o h [horse], proud, bright headed, run very swiftly over the plain. It had on its back the battle power, n o m [man]. The a g e w [warrior] rode the nailed one. The wide path, strong-flowing, carried the bold c o f o a h [hawk]. The journey was the brighter, the course of those ones. Say what I am called’.

³² ‘I saw w and i travel over the plain, bearing b e. To both on that journey h æ was the keeper’s joy and likewise a share of the power. Þ and e rejoiced; f and a flew over the q s and p of those same people’.

³³ For the reasoning behind expanding the letters in *Riddle* 64 to words paralleled in *Riddle* 19, see Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, pp. 327–30.

Riddle 19 then has the word *wega*, which has proved somewhat problematic but is most convincingly read as ‘warrior’.³⁴ This serves as a repetition of the word *mon* from earlier in the poem, paralleled in Riddle 64’s *þegn* (‘þ e’) and *fælca* (‘f a’), repetitions of the previously mentioned *beorn* and *hafoc*. That leaves one runic word in the latter riddle, represented by the runic letters ‘ea’, ‘s’ and ‘p’, which is not present in the former. Deciphering the meaning of this word is complicated by the fact that there is no parallel in the preceding riddle, and also by the scribe’s unusual punctuation. Craig Williamson suggests that the runes stand for a compound of *ea* (‘sea’, or perhaps water) and *spor* (‘track’).³⁵

The obvious similarities between these two riddles have led to a consensus that they share a common solution.³⁶ On the most literal level they both describe a horse, carrying a rider, travelling across a plain with a hawk flying above them, and earlier critics such as Tupper, assuming that the runes in these riddles provide the solution, proposed a solution of ‘a man on horseback with a hawk on his fist’.³⁷ Williamson, however, describes this interpretation as ‘simply restating the terms of the riddle’.³⁸ He argues that both riddles should be solved as ‘ship’, and later editors such as Muir have agreed with him.³⁹

³⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 190–1.

³⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 329–30.

³⁶ Krapp and Dobbie, *The Exeter Book*, p. 368; Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, p. 325.

³⁷ Krapp and Dobbie, *The Exeter Book*, p. 331.

³⁸ Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, p. 187; on the need to further interpret elements of Old English riddles see J. Neville, ‘Fostering the Cuckoo: *Exeter Book* Riddle 9’, *RES* 58:236 (2007), 431–46, at p. 445.

³⁹ Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, II, pp. 657–8 and 735–6; see also Dewa, ‘Runic Riddles’, p. 32, and M. Griffith, ‘Riddle 19 of the Exeter Book: SNAC, an Old English Acronym’, *N&Q* 39:1 (1992), 15–16.

In this solution, the ‘horse’ is the ship, with the ‘man’ or ‘warrior’ as the sailor and, flying above the pair of them, the ‘falcon’ or sail. This solution does not, however, address the reasons for including runes in either of these texts. Given that the incorporation of runes into Old English poetry does appear to have been very unusual, any interpretation of these riddles should also attempt to account for their presence.

That runes are integral to the meaning of these two riddles is reinforced by the fact that much of the language of *Riddle 19* appears to have been deliberately chosen to highlight their presence. The word *beorht*, which occurs twice in the poem, is one such example. It first appears in line 2 as part of the compound *heafodbeorhtne* (‘bright-headed’, 2b), used to describe the runic ‘horse’. *Beorhtre* is then used in the riddle’s penultimate line to describe the journey of the horse, man and hawk. I would suggest that this word is used repeatedly in the poem because of its associations with runic inscriptions. The runic associations of the verb *becnaþ* in *Riddle 24* have already been discussed. As R. I. Page points out, ‘*becun* [a cognate of *beacnian*] collocates very often with the adjective *beorht* [... and this] may tell us something of how contemporaries saw the rune-stones’.⁴⁰ From Scandinavia there are a few surviving examples of painted rune-stones, and it is likely that Anglo-Saxon rune-stones were also decorated in this way.

It is possible that the word *beorht*, especially in association with the runes in *Riddle 19*, would carry connotations of painted runic inscriptions.⁴¹ Indeed, in its first use in this riddle, as part of the compound *heafodbeorhtne*, the word refers explicitly to the runes of the

⁴⁰ Page, *Introduction*, p. 155.

⁴¹ Compare the description of the rune *asc* as *torht* (‘bright’) in *Riddle 42* l. 9b.

previous line. It occurs a second time in line 8, in the phrase *For wæs þy beorhtre, / snylcra sibfæt* ('the journey, the expedition of these, was the brighter', 8b–9a). Although the word *snylcra* refers to the nouns encoded by the runes (as opposed to the runes themselves), the description of their journey as *beorhtre* is a reference to the manner in which these nouns have been written into the text; the presence of runes, with their associations of decoration, has made the text itself *beorhtre*.⁴²

Another key word in *Riddle 19* is *rynestrong* (7a), describing the *widlast* or 'wide-journey' of line 6b. Williamson gives a good account of this otherwise unattested word, arguing for the meaning 'strong-flowing'.⁴³ I would suggest that the word is also a pun emphasising the riddle's use of runes. Although semantically unrelated, the first element of this word, *ryne* ('flow') is homonymous with the word (*ge*)*ryne*, a cognate of *run*, carrying similar meanings of mystery and secrecy. This word is also used in relation to writing.⁴⁴ In the same essay, Page points out that *run* often alliterates with the word *ræd* in Old English poetry.⁴⁵ By using a homonym of this word, *rad* ('journey'), the poet of *Riddle 19* creates an alliterating pair, *rynestrong on rade* (7a), which semantically bears no relation to the pair *run* and *ræd* and yet closely echoes that formula. The poet therefore uses the word *rynestrong* in two ways: to provide an elusive clue to the riddle's solution and to draw attention to the presence of the runic letters.

⁴² N. E. Eliason, 'Four Old English Cryptographic Riddles', *SP* 49:4 (1952), 553–65, at p. 561, discusses other possible connotations of the word *beorhte* in relation to writing in this riddle.

⁴³ Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, pp. 191–2.

⁴⁴ R. I. Page, 'Anglo-Saxon Runes and Magic' in *Runes and Runic Inscriptions*, ed. D. Parsons (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 103–16, at p. 111.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 109; see also Lerer, *Learning and Power*, pp. 172 and 236, n. 23.

This use of language in *Riddle* 19, chosen to highlight the presence of runes, suggests that their inclusion is more significant than simply a means of encoding certain key words. Given that runes are used in *Riddles* 24 and 42 as a means of representing the written word, the presence of runic letters in *Riddles* 19 and 64 may also indicate an interest in writing or written communication. I would argue that the runic words in both *Riddles* 19 and 64 do not describe a ship, but rather a quill pen moving over a manuscript page. Interpreted in this way, the horse is a pen, the warrior carried on its back is the scribe's hand and the hawk flying over them is the plume of the quill.⁴⁶

Although the runes describe a pen in the act of writing, that is not the riddles' ultimate solution. Williamson points out that *Riddle* 19 ends 'with a miniature riddle: "What is the swift-flowing road which carries the bold hawk?"'.⁴⁷ In an ingenious twist, the closing lines of *Riddle* 19 deftly shift the focus of the text and, ultimately, ask the reader not for the name of the collective 'horse, man and hawk', but for the name of the 'swift-flowing road', represented by *widlast* and *for*, that carries them. If the horse, man and hawk are a pen in a hand, rather than a ship, then the *widlast* is not the sea but the strokes of ink, forming the written word, which are left behind as the pen travels

⁴⁶ This interpretation of the runic words has previously been put forward by Eliason, 'Cryptographic riddles', p. 560. He suggests that 'the act of writing' may be a credible solution, before concluding that the riddles both depict a scribe. See also L. K. Shook, 'Riddles Relating to the Anglo-Saxon Scriptorium', in *Essays in Honour of Anton Charles Pegis*, ed., J. O'Donnell (Toronto, 1974), pp. 215–36, at pp. 221–2. A number of other *Exeter Book* riddles create a connection between birds and writing, mediated through the common element of feathers/quill pens; see P. Murphy, 'Bocsafas: A Literal Reading of Exeter Book Riddle 57', *PQ* 84:2 (2005), 139–60, at pp. 144–5.

⁴⁷ Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, p. 186.

over the page.⁴⁸ It is this, the written word, that is the riddles' solution. The runic words therefore provide a double set of clues. Firstly they provide a metaphorical image of a pen travelling across a page, caught in the act of creating the written word that is the riddle's solution. Secondly, the very fact that these words are written on a manuscript page, a fact that is made conspicuous by the use of runes rather than roman letters, turns them into the physical manifestation of the riddles' solution, rendered visible for the reader's benefit.

So far the evidence for solving these two riddles as 'writing' has come primarily from *Riddle* 19. *Riddle* 64 is a more compact text, encoding six runic words in six lines compared to the four words over nine lines of *Riddle* 19. It shares its counterpart's emphasis on the movement of the horse, rider and hawk, it names the same creatures in a similar order, and both highlight the unity of the 'travelling companions' in their final lines.⁴⁹ The only runic word in *Riddle* 64 not found in *Riddle* 19 is indicated by the runic letters 'ea', 's', and 'p', which Williamson argues represent the word *easpor*, 'sea-track'.⁵⁰

Williamson interprets the *easpor* as a reference to the waves created by a ship cutting through the sea. He uses this reading to lend support to his solution of 'ship' for both of these riddles, but in fact the word cannot be interpreted in this way. No other runic word, either in this riddle or its counterpart, encodes a literal clue; the *wicg* is

⁴⁸ Compare *Riddle* 51 ('Pen and Fingers'; 'Quill'), 2b, where the trail of ink left by a pen is described as 'swearte [...] lastas' ('dark tracks').

⁴⁹ Arguing that *Riddle* 57 also describes written letters, Murphy points out that both that text and *Riddle* 51 emphasise the unity of a group of moving creatures as a metaphor for either the act of writing or the resulting letters ('Bocstafas', pp. 145–6).

⁵⁰ Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, p. 326.

not really a horse, nor is the *hafoc* a literal hawk. By taking this final word to mean ‘sea-track’ and not interpreting it further, Williamson follows earlier critics by providing a simple ‘restatement of the literal terms of the riddle’.⁵¹ In fact, the very interpretation of the word *easpor* as a reference to waves is problematic. *Spor* conventionally refers to a physical, lasting track, not the temporary displacement of water.⁵² I would suggest that the *easpor* over which the riddle’s falcon flies in this riddle equates to the *widlast* or ‘wide road’ in the closing lines of *Riddle 19*. *Easpor*, then, is a cryptic reference to the trail of ink, literally a ‘watery track’, left by the pen as it writes words on the manuscript page. Using the sea as a metaphor for ink is paralleled in *Riddle 51*, which is solved as ‘pen and fingers’ or ‘quill’.⁵³ In this riddle, too, the pen is likened to a bird, in this case a sea bird which repeatedly dives *under yþe* (‘under the waves’, line 5a) and leaves black tracks of ink as it travels.⁵⁴

In both of these riddles the runes provide a complex series of clues. They are integral to the text, and must be deciphered before the riddles can be read, yet they are written cryptically, each one a tiny riddle needing its own solution. Once deciphered, however, they do not provide solutions but more clues, requiring further interpretation from the reader. As with *Riddles 24* and *42*, the very presence of runes, in the text and on the manuscript page, also provides a visual clue to the riddles’ solutions. The visual distinctiveness of the runic letters draws attention to the written words made by the strokes of

⁵¹ *Ibid.* p. 187.

⁵² See the range of definitions in Bosworth and Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, p. 903.

⁵³ Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, II, p. 662.

⁵⁴ For a fuller discussion of this riddle and its use of writing imagery see Murphy, ‘Bocstafas’, pp. 145–6.

ink on the manuscript page, so that in these riddles the reader can literally, as well as metaphorically, read the solution. The very fact that these words are written in runes therefore makes them the physical manifestation of the riddle's solution. In all four of the runic riddles discussed in this paper, runes and runic letters are used to represent the written word in a way that roman letters are not.

This, of course, implies that the four runic riddles were intended primarily to be read rather than heard; it is arguable that an alert listener may be able to recognise the presence of the runes but they would miss the visual cues they bring to the texts.⁵⁵ In fact, there is some further evidence to suggest that these riddles were intended for a readership. The word *rad* in *Riddle* 19 directly precedes a group of runic letters. *Rad* is also the name of the rune r and it seems highly doubtful that a listener could be relied upon to differentiate the word *rad* from the following runic letters in that context. Additionally, in the upper margin of f. 125r of the *Exeter Book*, on which *Riddle* 64 appears, there are five runes, written in dry point, which are not by the scribe. The meaning of these runes, even their exact letter forms, is unclear.⁵⁶ However, they do provide some further evidence that this section of the manuscript was read rather than, or perhaps as well as, recited.⁵⁷ A close reading of the four

⁵⁵ R. Derolez, *Runica Manuscripta; The English Tradition* (Brugge, 1954), p. 396; J. Opland, 'From Horseback to Monastic Cell: The Impact on English Literature of the Introduction of Writing', in *Old English Literature in Context*, ed. J. D. Niles (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 30–43, at p. 36, and H. Magennis, 'Audience(s), Reception, Literacy', in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature* ed., P. Pulsiano and E. Treharne (Oxford, 2001), pp. 84–101, at p. 97.

⁵⁶ Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, II, p. 708; also Williamson, *Old English Riddles*, p. 327.

⁵⁷ Other additions to the manuscript indicating a reading audience include scratched punctuation marks made on several different occasions by one or

runic riddles, then, can illuminate both the concepts and associations of runes in Anglo-Saxon England and contemporary reading practices.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the four riddles discussed in this paper are united not only by the use of runes in each poem but by a shared interest in exploring themes of written communication. *Riddle* 24 uses rhetorical techniques to create the illusion of fleeting speech which is then contrasted with the permanence of the words written on the manuscript page, while *Riddle* 42 uses the act of writing itself to represent the transfer of knowledge and learning from one person to another. *Riddles* 19 and 64 employ enigmatic language and ambiguous imagery to describe the act of writing on a manuscript page, with the runes themselves providing visual clues to the riddles' shared solution of 'the written word'. It can therefore be seen that the theme of writing, of written communication and the nature of the written word, is fundamental to all four of these texts. Furthermore, it is the inclusion of runes alongside roman letters that enables these riddles to function as they do. Runes are used in all of these poems specifically to represent the written word in a way that roman letters do not seem to have been considered capable of doing; the inclusion of an essentially epigraphic script within the world of the scriptorium enables poets to exploit the contrast between these two alphabets. These riddles foreground and highlight the physical reality of the written word in a manner that could not be

more readers as 'guides to reading' the poetry, see Muir, *The Exeter Anthology*, I, p. 29; for a discussion of readers responding to Aldhelm's Latin *Ænigmata*, which have parallels in the *Exeter Book* riddles, through manuscript glossing and commentating see Lerer, *Literacy and Power*, p. 107.

achieved without the creation of such visual interplay between runes and roman letters on the manuscript page, so that runic letters in these poems are used specifically for the purpose of symbolising the written word.

Biblical parallels in Alfredian Law and the Early Compilation of
Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 173

Christine Voth
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The palaeography and codicology of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 173 (Winchester, s. ix–xi², viii–ix; later provenance Christ Church, Canterbury), also known as the Parker Manuscript, has been the subject of much debate, particularly in relation to provenance and ownership.¹ The most ‘hotly contested’ portion of the manuscript is the first five quires,² which include the oldest surviving copies of three documents related to the reign of Alfred the Great (AD 871–99): a royal genealogy of the House of Wessex, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and the laws of King Alfred.

The only manuscript witnesses to contain both the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Alfred’s laws are CCC 173 and its copy London, British Library, Cotton Otho B. xi (Winchester, x^{med}–xi¹), despite both documents having been circulated in the late ninth century and the fact that multiple copies of each survive.³ An examination of the

¹ See D. Dumville, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the Origins of English Square Minuscule Script’, in his *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar* (Woodbridge, 1992), pp. 55–139, and M. B. Parkes, ‘The Palaeography of the Parker Manuscript of the Chronicle, Laws and Sedulius, and Historiography at Winchester in the Late Ninth and the Tenth Centuries’, in his *Scribes, Scripts and Readers* (London, 1991), pp. 143–70.

² P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, vol. I *Legislation and its limits*, 1 vol. (Oxford, 2001), I, 163.

³ The Chronicle and the laws were widely disseminated and can be found in nine and ten extant manuscripts respectively, ranging from the tenth to the

tenth-century compilation of the Parker Manuscript therefore provides insight into the written products closely tied to Alfred's reign. The purpose, production and inclusion of the particular documents within the manuscript appear to tell the story of Alfred's reign, leading up to (and eventually including) the reign of his successor(s), as well as establishing a connection to the past necessary to promote Alfred as legitimate ruler and lawgiver.

In the first section of this paper, I will address the history and codicology of the Parker Manuscript, thus establishing the importance of the tenth-century compilation. In the second section, I will examine the documents within the early compilation of the manuscript as they reflect the biblical convention of contextualising law within narrative and kingship.⁴ Finally, in the third section of the paper, I bring the first two sections together by discussing the materiality of the compilation itself. While biblical influence on the Alfredian law code itself has been examined in previous scholarship,⁵ no study has thus far examined the materialization of biblical parallels

twelfth centuries; S. Keynes, 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle', *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge, S. Keynes and D. Scragg (Oxford, 1995), p. 35.

⁴ D. Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (London, 1986); R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History* (New Haven, 1977).

⁵ Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, I, 425–6; A. Frantzen, 'Poetry and Prose of Alfred's Reign', in *Alfred the Great*, ed. T. Reuter (Ashgate, 2003), pp. 122–36; D. Pratt, *The Political Thought of Alfred the Great*, Cambridge Stud. in Med. Life and Thought 4 (Cambridge, 2007); E. Stanley, 'The Administration of Law in Anglo-Saxon England: Ideals Formulated by the Bible, Einhard and Hincmar of Rheims – but no Formal Mirror of Princes', in *Germanic Texts and Latin Models of Medieval Reconstructions*, ed. A. Harbus and T. Hofstra (Leuven, 2001), pp. 53–71.

between the documents themselves.⁶ This paper will demonstrate how the early compilation of CCC 173 creates a unique template from which we can examine an era of change within the kingdom of Wessex.

THE EARLY COMPILATION AND ITS HISTORY

In the tenth century, the manuscript comprised five quires and was copied from a ninth-century original by four scribes working at different stages between AD 900 and 940.⁷

The first quire begins with the West Saxon Royal genealogy down to Alfred on 2r.⁸ The portion of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle known as the ‘Common Stock’ begins on 2v. These annals continue into the second quire until the year 892. The third quire details the Chronicles of Alfred’s reign and those of his son, Edward, to the year 920. The writing on the last folio of the third quire (26v) ends midway down the page, and no further dates are entered. A quire signature ‘c’ is visible at the bottom of this folio.

The fourth and fifth quires contain the laws of Alfred, preceded by a preface translated from the Book of Exodus and followed by the laws of Alfred’s ancestor and former king of Wessex, Ine. On the

⁶ Parkes’ study of the palaeography and codicology of the Parker manuscript focuses on how the compilation reflects ‘a record of achievements of the West Saxon royal house in war [...] and in peace’ (‘The Palaeography of the Parker Manuscript’, p. 164).

⁷ Dumville, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and English Square Minuscule’, pp. 127–8; Parkes, ‘The Palaeography of the Parker Manuscript’, p. 164. ‘The scribe of E [the Alfredian Law Code in CCC 173] in the second quarter of the tenth century had an Alfredian original which he respected’, M. Turk, *The Legal Code of Alfred the Great* (Halle, 1893), p. 19.

⁸ R. I. Page, ‘The Parker Register and Matthew Parker’s Anglo-Saxon manuscripts’, *Cambridge Bibliographical Soc.* 9 (1981), 1–7.

final folio of quire V, the quire signature ‘e’ is visible. The argument that the first five quires of the Parker Manuscript once existed as a single textual entity relies heavily on the presence of these quire signatures, written in an early tenth-century hand, which Patrick Wormald proposes was that of the scribe who copied the rubrics of the law code.⁹ Some of the quire signatures have been cropped off the manuscript when it was bound, but two remain fully visible on the third and fifth quire.

David Dumville observed unusual collation within this group of quires, given in Table 1. In quires I and IV the first folios have been removed; R. I. Page suggests that Matthew Parker is responsible for excising these folia which had been left blank by the original scribes.¹⁰ In quires II, III and V, a single folio overlaps within each quire in the same deliberate patterns. These practices cannot have been accidental, and the nearly identical nature of quires I and IV and quires III and V—as well as the fact that these patterns of structure are not repeated in the quires added after c. 950—indicates that preparation of the quires took place within a single scriptorium where there was concern that the quires containing the laws should be a match to those with the genealogy and Chronicle.¹¹

⁹ Wormald, *Making of English Law*, I, 166, n. 9. Dumville dates the rubrics to c. 930. ‘Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and English Square Minuscule’, p. 126.

¹⁰ Page, ‘The Parker Register and Matthew Parker’s Anglo-Saxon manuscripts’, p. 5. We know from Parker’s register that folio 1 was intact at the time Matthew Parker owned the compilation, based on the incipit *willelm cyng*, possibly from a charter which had been entered on the blank folia during the reign of William I. See Table 3 on p. 156.

¹¹ Dumville, ‘Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and English Square Minuscule’, p. 138.

<p>Quires I ‘a’ and II ‘b’ (I^f lacks 1; II^o lacks 3 and 9, plus 1 after 10) West Saxon royal genealogy to Alfred; Chronicles of the Anglo-Saxons to 892 (the ‘Common Stock’);</p> <p>Quire III ‘c’ (III^o lacks 3 and 7, plus 1 after 10) Chronicles of Alfred’s reign; Chronicles of Edward’s reign to 920;</p> <p>Quires IV ‘d’ and V ‘e’ (IV^f lacks 1, plus 1 after 8; V^o lacks 3 and 7, plus 1 after 10) Alfred’s law code</p>

Table 1: Collation of the Parker Manuscript 930 x 940

The manuscript was copied sometime between 1001 and 1013 into a compilation of texts now known as Cotton Otho B. xi, which was mostly destroyed in the fire at Ashburnham house in 1731. A transcription was made by Lawrence Nowell in 1562 (London, British Library, Additional 34652), who noted the original compilation had been supplemented between quires 3 and 4 by additional entries to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* to 1001, as well as the series of episcopal lists (see Table 2).¹²

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• West Saxon royal genealogy to Alfred• Chronicles of Anglo-Saxons to 892• Anglo-Saxon Chronicle from 893 to 920• Chronicles from 924 to 946, with additions to 1001• Episcopal list• Alfred’s law code
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Table 2: London, BL, Cotton Otho B. xi, copied from CCCC 173 in 1001x1013

¹² N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 230–2. Wormald suggests that the Otho scribe omitted the Sedulius texts, but it is just as likely that the Sedulius was not appended to the Parker Manuscript at the time of its copying (*The Making of English Law*, I, 63).

A brief look through the cataloguing of the manuscript over the centuries gives us insight into the condition of the collection of texts found in the modern-day Parker Manuscript (see Table 3). In the late sixteenth century, Matthew Parker's entry in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 575 (Cambridge, 1574), the 'Parker Register', for the manuscript compilation S. 11 (now CCCC 173) includes the entirety of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (to 1070 and including the Latin 'Acts of Lanfranc') and the Alfredian law code. He does not specify a quire containing the episcopal lists, but we may presume it is included.¹³ The Sedulius texts present in the modern compilation, however, are not listed at all.¹⁴ Fifteen years later, Thomas James recorded the manuscript compilation as including the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle through the later additions, plus the episcopal lists, the Sedulius texts and the laws of King Alfred.¹⁵

In 1705, however, Humfrey Wanley's catalogue entry for the Parker Manuscript showed a different order in the manuscript compilation, with the law codes following directly after the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (and the 'Acts of Lanfranc'). After the laws come the episcopal lists, and the Sedulius texts are recorded at the end of the compilation.¹⁶ This same order is also recorded in the 1722 catalogue of the Corpus Christi library.¹⁷

As evidenced in Otho B. xi and from the catalogues of

¹³ The episcopal lists include a list of the archbishops and bishops of Canterbury, which likely warrants Parker's notation of *ecclesie cantuariensis*, as well as the later additions to the Chronicle made at Christ Church, Canterbury.

¹⁴ Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 575 (Cambridge, 1574).

¹⁵ T. James, *Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis* (London, 1600), p. 89.

¹⁶ H. Wanley, *Antiquae literaturae septentrionalis*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1705), II, 63–4.

¹⁷ *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum in biblioteca Collegii, Corporis Christi in Cantabrigia: quos legavit Mattheaus Parkerus* (London, 1722), p. 130.

Matthew Parker, Thomas James and Humfrey Wanley, the compilation of what is now CCCC 173 appears to have undergone a series of additions and restructurings over the centuries. Malcolm Parkes and Janet Bately maintain that the Parker Manuscript is comprised of a series of ‘booklets’, or ‘self-contained units’ of text,¹⁸ which could be rearranged within the manuscript, thus allowing for the variations noted in these catalogues.¹⁹ The purposeful quire structures noted by Dumville, as well as the addition of the quire signatures after the completion of the copying of the laws, provides further evidence that at least the first five quires existed as a single manuscript entity in the tenth century. The genealogy, Chronicle and laws may have circulated as a booklet for a decade or longer before the updates to the Chronicle and the episcopal lists broke up the original structure.

In a review of the manuscript register kept by Matthew Parker, Page suggests that the variations in the post eleventh-century

¹⁸ Parkes, ‘The Palaeography of the Parker Manuscript’, pp. 143–7; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: MS A*, ed. J. Bateley, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: Collaborative Edition*, ed. D. Dumville and S. Keynes, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1986), xvi–xx. For more on booklets in manuscripts see P. R. Robinson, ‘Self-Contained Units in Composite Manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Era’, *ASE* 7 (1978), 231–8, and R. Hanna, ‘Booklets in Medieval Manuscripts: Further Considerations’, *Stud. in Bibliography* 39 (1986), 101–12.

¹⁹ Parkes conjectures that Wanley catalogued the Sedulius texts at the end of the compilation in order to emphasise the vernacular portions of the manuscript (‘The Palaeography of the Parker Manuscript’, p. 146); therefore, the Sedulius texts may have still been located after the episcopal lists and before Alfred’s Laws in the eighteenth century. However, since the 1722 library catalogue is not a direct copy of Wanley’s catalogue, it seems more likely that the Sedulius texts were moved to the end of the compilation sometime in the seventeenth century.

Current Parker Manuscript (CCCC 173) Compilation

- West Saxon royal genealogy to Alfred
- Chronicles of the Anglo-Saxons to 892 ('Common Stock')
- Anglo-Saxon Chronicle from 893 to 1070, including Latin 'Acts of Lanfranc'
- Alfred's law code (including laws of Ine)
- Episcopal list (popes, archbishops of Canterbury, bishop list, archbishops of York, bishop list, regnal list of Kent)
- Latin texts of works of Sedulius and other poems, hymns and verses; extracts from Augustine of Hippo

CCCC 575 'Parker Register', Matthew Parker, (1574)

- *Annales Saxonici ecclesie cantuariensis *willelm cyng*
- *Leges Aluredi regis*

Ecloga Oxonio-Cantabrigiensis, Thomas James (1600)

- *Chronica vetustissima Saxonice, scripta anno 23. aetatis Alfrici [sic]; vel aliter, Annales Saxonici Ecclesiae Cantuariensis*
- *Sedulius*
- *Leges Aluredi*

Antiquae literaturae septentrionalis, Humfrey Wanley (1705)

- *Annales Saxonici (sive Chronicon Saxonicum) Ecclesiae Christi Cantuariae [...] Res gestae a Lanfranco Archiepiscopo [...] Latine*
- *Leges Aelfredi Regis, quibus recitantur etiam Leges Inae Regis West-Saxonum*
- *Nomina Pontificum Romanae urbis, Archiepiscoporum Dorouernensis Ecclesiae [...]*
- *[...] Sedulii Presbyteri Hymni de Christo [...]*

Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum in biblioteca Collegii Corporis Christi in Cantabrigia (1722)

- *Chronica Saxonica, vel Annales vetustissimi [...] ad obitum Lanfranci*
- *Leges Aluredi, numero centum viginti [...] Ad Legum primam quis notat, Hae Leges referuntur ad Inam in Codice Legum Saxonicarum*
- *Deinde Catalogus Pontificum Romanorum a Petro ad Marinum [...] Archiepiscoporum et Episcoporum in Anglia ad Dunstani tempora, circa An. 961*
- *Epistola Sedulii ad Macedonium Presbyterum [...]*

Table 3: Catalogue of Entries for CCCC 173

compilations are the result of a manuscript collection in which the composite texts were not bound formally into a codex.²⁰ Only sometime in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century were the texts assembled and bound, giving us the manuscript as it exists today. United with original quires I through V were the later additions to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. And the episcopal lists, previously inserted between the Chronicle and the laws, were moved to a place after the laws. The importance of this codicological survey of CCC 173 is to emphasise the status of the first five quires of the manuscript as a single entity of purposefully composed documents.

While the primary argument about these five original quires has centred on provenance,²¹ I believe that a more important aspect of the organization has been missed. The contents of these five original quires (the genealogy, the Chronicle and the laws), are all documents initiated in the reign of King Alfred as part of an overall project of reform often referred to as the 'Alfredian renaissance'. These texts arguably represent the political climate in which they were produced, and that climate looks to have been influenced heavily by biblical themes of reconstruction. The law code in particular sets a tone of biblical influence and style which is further amplified by the genealogy and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

²⁰ Page, 'The Parker Register', p. 10.

²¹ Parkes believes that the first five quires were written in Winchester ('The Palaeography of the Parker Chronicle', pp. 159–60), while Dumville argues that provenance is impossible to determine ('Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and English Square Minuscule', pp. 60–98).

THE BIBLICAL PARALLELS OF THE EARLY COMPILATION

Alfred's law code

Alfred's law code is an extensive document including the laws of Alfred followed by those of his ancestor Ine of Wessex (AD 688–726). The code itself is prefaced by a lengthy translation from the book of Exodus. The biblical passages were adapted by the translator(s) so that they would be recognised and would address 'shared concerns' in Anglo-Saxon society.²² Wormald's commentary on the adaptations was that they seemed to be a 'Mosaic mirror in which West Saxons could [...] glimpse their own customs'.²³ Alfred's overall goal in his translation was, however, to review the divine law from which all law stemmed.

In the preface to the Old English *Regula pastoralis*, Alfred cites the rendering of Old Testament law into the vernacular by newly Christianised cultures as a motivation for his programme of translation:

Ða gemunde ic hu sio æ wæs ærest on Ebriscgeðiode funden, ond eft, ða ða hie Creacas geliornodon, ða wendon hie hie on heora agen geðiode ealle, ond eac ealle oðre bec. Ond eft Lædenware swæ same, siððan hie hie geliornodon, hie hie wendon ealla ðurh wise wealhstodas on hiora agen geðiode. Ond eac ealla oðræ Cristnæ ðioda sumne dæl hiora on hiora agen geðiode wendon. For ðy me ðyncð betre, gif iow swæ ðyncð, ðæt we eac sumæ bec, ða ðe niedbeðearfosta sien eallum monnum to wiotonne, ðæt we ða on ðæt geðiode wenden

²² Pratt, *Political Thought*, pp. 321–2.

²³ Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 421. Adaptations or additions of social and legal content did not alter the message of the laws but perhaps made them all the more applicable for a contemporary audience.

ðe we ealle gecnawan mægen, ond gedon, swæ we swiðe eaðe magon
mid Godes fultume.²⁴

This passage is important because the prefatory material in Alfred's law book is a portion of the 'divine law' that was presented to the Hebrews, known as the Decalogue (or the Ten Commandments) and the Book of the Covenant.²⁵ The same divine law was later translated from the original Hebrew into Greek and Latin.

Experts on Alfred's reign suggest that the law code was produced in Alfred's court during the late 880s or early 890s; it may have preceded the endeavour to translate Gregory's *Regula pastoralis*.²⁶ If this is so, then Alfred alludes directly to the Exodus translation in

²⁴ *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader*, ed. H. Sweet and D. Whitelock (Oxford, 1975), p. 6: 'Then I remembered also how the divine law was first composed in the Hebrew language, and afterwards, when the Greeks learnt it, they turned it all into their own language, and also all other books. And the Romans likewise, when they had learnt them, turned them all through learned interpreters into their own language. Therefore it seems better to me, if it seems so to you, that we also should turn into the language that we can all understand some books, which may be most necessary for all men to know; and bring it to pass, as we can very easily with God's help', 'The Old English Prose and Verse Prefaces to Alfred's Translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*', in *English Historical Documents c. 500–1042*, ed. D. Whitelock, Eng. Hist. Documents 1, 2nd edn. (London, 1979), no. 226.

²⁵ In the original Hebrew and as translated in the Vulgate, the Ten Commandments are laid out in the Decalogue (Ex. XX.2–17), followed by the Book of the Covenant (Ex. XX.23–XXIII.19). The Book of the Covenant is aptly named for its creation of a divine agreement, or covenant, between the Israelite nation and the Lord presented to the people of Israel after their departure from slavery in Egypt.

²⁶ S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's 'Life of King Alfred' and other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 163; A. Frantzen, *King Alfred* (Boston, 1986), p. 11; Pratt, *Political Thought*, p. 219.

this preface. From this perspective, all major translations begin with divine law, and this therefore was where Alfred would begin his own translation project.

Still other scholars believe that Alfred's use of the title *Westseaxna cyning* (king of the West Saxons) at the end of the preface to the law code dates the document to before Alfred accepted overlordship of the kingdoms of Mercia and Kent in AD 886, while others believe that the law book's conspicuous absence from Asser's *Vita Ælfredi* means it was written at a date closer to 893.²⁷ Yet Alfred's designation in the law code preface is perhaps more importantly preceded by a list of the three kings chosen as legislative patrons: Offa of Mercia, Æthelberht of Kent and Ine of Wessex; the three kingdoms listed here were also those under Alfred's control after 886.²⁸ It is doubtful this choice of rulers was coincidental; thus it is more likely that the law code was written sometime in or just after 886.

King Alfred's choice of style for his law code is significant, beginning with a prefatory reiteration of Old Testament law, which is followed by the correlation of the divine presentation of the laws with a secular king's ability to grant law, and then finally the laws themselves. In the Parker Manuscript, these laws number 120, including 76 from Alfred's ancestor Ine. The number of laws is significant as 120 is the age of the 'archetypal lawgiver' Moses when he died.²⁹ Alfred also acknowledges a certain contribution of his

²⁷ F. Liebermann proposes a date between 892 and 893, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols. (Halle, 1903–16), III, 23. Wormald favours a post-893 date for the law code, *Making of English Law*, pp. 281 and 286.

²⁸ Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, p. 39.

²⁹ Frantzen, *King Alfred*, p. 14. Deut. XXXIV.5–8; see also, Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, I, 417; Wormald, 'Lex Scripta and Verbum Regis:

predecessors (Æthelberht, Offa and Ine) in the context of his own code.³⁰ While Alfred looks to associate himself with other important Anglo-Saxon kings, either through claim or by inclusion, his choice of format in which to present his own law code connects him more strongly with the Israelite kings whose basis for their own rule stood firmly on the Mosaic laws of the Old Testament.

Could Alfred and his advisors have known the extent to which the Israelite nation's identity hung on the laws as laid out in the Pentateuch? This is quite demonstrable in the Old Testament readings, and Gregory the Great—whose book Alfred honoured as his first formal translation—recognised that a great secular leader must always maintain a strong connection with the 'sacred law'.³¹ Sacred law is dependent upon the willingness of the people of God to obey the covenant. Therefore, re-affirmation of the laws was a major step in returning the people to worship, both in social reform and as a precursor to architectural and spiritual reconstruction. The prophets, well versed in the laws, served as 'social reformers' by reminding the Israelite nation of its duties to God and the law.³² This could only be done through a renewal of the covenant with God and acceptance of his laws, whereby the scrolls of the laws were brought out and read aloud to the people.

Kingship was also inseparable from the laws in the Old Testament. The earthly king was responsible for maintaining the covenant with the heavenly king, ruling by those laws established by

Legislation and Germanic Kingship, from Euric to Cnut', in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Woods (Leeds, 1977), pp. 105–38 at p. 132.

³⁰ *Die Gesetze*, ed. Liebermann, III, 46.

³¹ *Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. H. Davis, 2 vols. (London, 1950), II, 87.

³² G. Stibitz, 'Old Testament Prophets as Social Reformers', *Biblical World* 12 (1898), 20–8, at p. 22.

God, and making sure his people followed his lead. Regarding legislation, the king's responsibility was more as law-speaker and upholder of the laws; the king himself did not issue new legislation.³³ In many ways, Moses can be perceived as the first king of Israel.³⁴ He accepts the leadership role (albeit reluctantly!), commands the people in the face of the Egyptian adversaries, and is seen by the people as their mediator. As the first law-speaker in the Old Testament, Moses embodied those characteristics that the Lord desired in a king.

A medieval king such as Alfred was not restricted in his ability to promulgate law. Legislation was a privilege of Anglo-Saxon kingship; the first codified law extant and noted by Bede is that of Æthelberht of Kent in AD 603.³⁵ The earliest extant Anglo-Saxon law codes were of a punitive nature with monetary penalties for certain offences, in particular bodily injury and loss. Wormald suggests this may initially have been the recording of oral, customary law, and Æthelberht's style established a precedent which was carried on by subsequent rulers until Alfred.³⁶

The greatest difference between Israelite and Anglo-Saxon laws was the impact upon the societies for whom they were intended. Old

³³ H. Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice* (London, 1980), p. 41; Patrick, *Old Testament Law*, p. 119; J. Watts, *Reading Law: the Rhetorical Shaping to the Pentateuch* (Sheffield, 1999), p. 110.

³⁴ See also Watts, *Reading Law*, pp. 109–10.

³⁵ *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), part II, ch. 5.

³⁶ Wormald, *Making of English Law*, I, 482. Along with setting fines, Anglo-Saxon laws traditionally established certain protections for the church, such as fines for theft of church property (Æthelbert 1) or designating sanctuary (Alfred 5), M. Richards, 'Anglo-Saxonism in the Old English Laws', in *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, ed. A. Frantzen and J. Niles (Tampa, 1997), pp. 40–57, at p. 41.

Testament laws governed the tribes of Israel, establishing them as the Children of God; obedience to the laws was divinely rewarded, and disobedience was likewise punished. Anglo-Saxon law codes had no similar, demonstrable effect on the populace. In fact, Wormald found no evidence that Anglo-Saxon legislation was cited in lawsuits or really affected the decisions of the court.³⁷ However, codifying law may have served an ideological purpose, as societies viewed a king's ability to legislate as derived from the 'image of king and people as heirs to the Roman emperors, as counterparts to the Children of Israel'.³⁸

Alfred appears to be aware of the differences between the restrictions of an Old Testament king and those of a medieval king in regards to legislation, and thus he cites the evolution of Old Testament law into contemporary, secular law in his preface to the law code:

7 siððan se ancenneda Dryhtnes sunu, ure God, þæt is hælend Crist, on middengeard cwom, he cwæð, ðæt he ne come no ðas bebodu to breccanne ne to forbeodanne, ac mid eallum godum to ecanne [...] þæt monega ðeoda Cristes geleafan onfengon, þa wurdon monega seonoðas geond Angelcyn [...] hie ða gesetton for ðære mildheortnesse þe Crist lærde, æt mæstra hwelcre misdæde þætte ða weoruldhlafordas moston mid hiora leafan buton synne æt þam forman gylte þære fiohbote onfon, þe hie ða gesettan.³⁹

³⁷ Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 477.

³⁸ Wormald, 'Lex Scripta and Verbum Regis: Legislation and Germanic Kingship from Euric to Cnut', p. 136.

³⁹ *Die Gesetze*, ed and trans. Liebermann, I, 42–6, 'And after the only begotten son of the Lord, our God, that is, our Saviour Christ, came on earth, he said that he came not to break nor forbid these commandments, but with all good to increase them [...] many nations received the faith of Christ; then were many synods assembled throughout the English race [...] They then ordained, out of

The medieval king's right to legislate was the end result of this ecumenical evolution. And with this statement, Alfred, as law-speaker, links his kingship and laws with the Old and New Testament in a chain of clearly defined historical events.

The West Saxon genealogy

The genealogy of the West Saxon royal house begins the codex CCCC 173, tracing the lineage from Cerdic (the first king of Wessex) through to Alfred. Charles Plumber believes the genealogy dates back to the early part of Alfred's reign because it ends with Alfred as king of the West Saxons but does not record how long he ruled or his eventual accession to the throne.⁴⁰ The purpose of this document is clearly more than a recounting of kings and their regnal years. Dumville notes that 'kings-lists and royal genealogies [were] important mirrors of a king's right to rule', tied directly to his ability and right to legislate for his people.⁴¹ The West Saxon genealogy with its forty-two names (including three women) was likely modelled after the biblical genealogy in Matt. I.1–17 with its forty-two generations (and three women).⁴² The West Saxon genealogy combines two common styles used in biblical genealogies: 'determinative lineage' and 'ancestral table'. The determinative line genealogies focus on a

that mercy which Christ had taught, that secular lords, with their leave, might, without sin, take for almost every misdeed, for the first offence, the money-*bot* which they then ordained'.

⁴⁰ C. Plumber, *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1892–99), I, cvi.

⁴¹ D. Dumville, 'Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists', in *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (Leeds, 1977), pp. 72–104 at p. 75.

⁴² See also D. Howlett, *British Books in Biblical Style* (Dublin, 1997), pp. 328–9.

‘common antecedent’⁴³ which in the Parker genealogy is Cerdic. The first genealogy actually traces Cerdic’s line back to Woden, a pagan god, yet uses the common biblical model of ten generations.⁴⁴ This pagan past is then mitigated by the second genealogy, which acts as a table of ancestors, tracing through a royal line of Wessex, not with historical accuracy as its main aim, but rather the legal-political purpose of establishing Alfred’s claim to the throne in a single line dynasty of kings.⁴⁵ The third genealogical line is in reverse order compared to the first, taking Æthelwulf back thirteen generations to Cerdic. The first and last determinative lines work together to trace Alfred’s ancestry back twenty-three generations, and, conveniently, Alfred is reported in the genealogy as being twenty-three years old at the time he became king.

Genealogies like the one found in the Parker Manuscript are found throughout the bible, with the greatest number of them occurring in the Old Testament. These often telescope entire generations of peoples and result in a politically refined product, comprising only those names necessary to establish the authority of those deemed worthy to rule under sacred law. The genealogy in Matt. I is, in fact, King David’s table of ancestry, tracing the descent of Jesus back to the house of Jesse.⁴⁶

⁴³ A. Malamat, ‘King Lists and Biblical Genealogies’, *Jnl of Amer. Oriental Soc.* 88 (1968), 163–73, at p. 164.

⁴⁴ Wilson, *Genealogy and History*, p. 197; Malamat, ‘King Lists’, p. 165.

⁴⁵ A. Scharer, ‘The writing of history at King Alfred’s court’, *EME* 5 (1996), 177–206, at p. 178; Dumville, ‘Regnal List’, p. 57.

⁴⁶ Matt. I.3–6.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

Genealogies and laws occur in the bible within a narrative.⁴⁷ This narrative functions as an ‘amplification’ of the circumstances of the laws, and is written within a common history known to the people for whom the laws are intended.⁴⁸ Such is the case with the second text of the Parker Manuscript, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which is a narrative re-telling of the common history of the Anglo-Saxons beginning with the defeat of the Britons by Julius Caesar (60 BC). The entry for AD 1 records the birth of Christ. A short series of annals follow until AD 47, where a longer entry describes a second conquest of the Britons by the Romans. The coming of Hengest and Horsa, and Hengest’s subsequent succession to the throne, are recounted in the annals for AD 449–50. Conquest and survival are thus common themes of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. These entries continue to 892, followed by a Wessex-focussed narrative of the reigns of Alfred and his son Edward the Elder (899–924). Their legitimate claim to the throne had been previously laid out in the Wessex royal genealogy, and is explored further within the Chronicle itself.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle provides the narrative base from which one can understand the circumstances of Alfred’s laws. The genealogy-within-narrative, a common literary device in the Old Testament, is also played out within the Chronicle.⁴⁹ It has been argued that the purpose of such telescoped genealogies is to ‘function as political or social “charters” [...] to explain and justify current

⁴⁷ Wilson, *Genealogy and History*, p. 137; Patrick, *Old Testament Law*, pp. 24–5.

⁴⁸ J. Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament* (London, 1995), p. 98.

⁴⁹ Scharer, ‘Writing of History’, p. 178; *ASC* 552 A, 597 A, 611 A, 648 A, 674 A, 685 A, 688 A, 728 A, 784 A, 855 A.

political and social claims and aspirations'.⁵⁰ The genealogy written in the entry for AD 855 recounts the generations of the West Saxon house back to Adam;⁵¹ this may have served as a means of linking Alfred's line to the tribes of Israel, whose laws Alfred reproduces at the beginning of his law code. This in turn aids in making the connection between divine law and the promulgation of law by a secular king, as explained at the end of the preface to the law code.

Commissioned sometime before AD 892, after Alfred's treaty with Guthrum (according to Alfred's biographer, Asser),⁵² and after the Viking forces had turned their focus temporarily onto the Continent, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle would have been written during a time of reconstruction, in which Alfred was not only pulling together his own kingdom, but also reforming the Anglo-Saxon people under his own rule.⁵³ The rise and fall of Anglo-Saxon kings and kingdoms, in particular that of the West Saxons, amidst the destruction wrought by the invading pagan hordes, are not Genesis themes *per se*; they do, however, bear a striking resemblance to the narratives of the Israelite kings in the *libri regum*.⁵⁴

A criticism of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle has been its Wessex-centric approach.⁵⁵ However, if the purpose of the Chronicle was to provide a basis for West Saxon hegemony and Alfred's claim to the

⁵⁰ D. Thornton, *Kings, Chronologies and Genealogies* (Oxford, 2003), p. 23.

⁵¹ *ASC* 855 A; see Gen. V for Adam's genealogical table.

⁵² Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, ch. 56, pp. 84–5 and ch. 85, p. 98. W. H. Stevenson, *Asser's Life of King Alfred* (Oxford, 1904).

⁵³ *ASC* 886 A.

⁵⁴ II Chron. XVI.11, XXIV.27 and XXV.27 reference the actions of kings as worthy of being recorded in the *libro regum* (I–IV Kings).

⁵⁵ See R. Davis, 'Alfred the Great: Propaganda and Truth', *History* 56 (1971), 169–82.

throne, and to provide a narrative account of the circumstances leading to the creation of Alfred's laws, then these criticisms lose some of their cogency. Creating a national identity united under West Saxon rule would have been a priority for Alfred and his advisors. Janet Nelson proposes that Alfred had difficulty both gaining and maintaining power, and this insecurity forced him to reinvent kingship and 'court culture' under his own rules.⁵⁶ Under these circumstances, Alfred might have envisioned the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as the narrative of a country's identity rather than of a single region.⁵⁷

When the AD 886 entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle describes Alfred's occupation of London and the submission of all the free *Angelcyn*,⁵⁸ we get a sense of purpose for the Chronicle: Alfred has survived and provides hope for a continuing united kingdom of all the Anglo-Saxon peoples. We see continuity in this theme of unity with the legislative influence of Æthelberht of Kent, Offa of Mercia and Ine of Wessex in Alfred's law code. The echoes of Israelite fortunes and misfortunes found in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle anchors Alfred, his kingship and his people in the tradition of the Chosen People of God.

⁵⁶ J. Nelson, 'Power and Authority in the Court of Alfred', *Essays on Anglo-Saxon and Related Themes in Memory of Lynne Grundy*, ed. J. Roberts and J. Nelson (London, 2000), pp. 311–37, at pp. 311–12.

⁵⁷ This may also explain why the Annals to 892 are not written from a regional perspective.

⁵⁸ ASC 886 A.

THE MATERIALITY OF THE EARLY COMPILATION OF THE PARKER
CHRONICLE

There is a demonstrable relationship between the documents from Alfred's reign as they are presented in the Parker Manuscript, the materiality of which presents an overriding theme of kingship and justification through historical and biblical channels. The genealogical table ending with Alfred seeks to eliminate any doubt of the king's legitimate and ancestral right to rule. The Chronicle provides a narrative of Anglo-Saxons' history with the House of Wessex playing a central role in the combined history of this nation.⁵⁹ It also provides the historical basis for Alfred to unify his newly-expanded kingdom under a single law. The above are then tied together by the law code's preface declaring divine permission for royal rule.

The decision to translate and adapt the Exodus covenant laws into the Alfredian law code is an overt demonstration of biblical influence on political ideology; it certainly does not stand alone out of these three documents. In the Old Testament, law and narrative are closely intertwined, that is to say, 'the Biblical narrative grounds the [sacred] laws in certain events from which they take on their meaning'.⁶⁰ Laws are not merely presented in code, but in context and through the medium of a law-speaker; the emulation of this practice is visible in the early compilation of the Parker manuscript. Biblical law as established in Exodus is a pervading theme throughout the

⁵⁹ See also, S. Foot, 'The Making of *Anglecynn*: English Identity', *TRHS* 6 (1996) 25–49. Foot proposes that Alfred's educational reforms were intended to both restore a former glory to the country as well as unite the people under his rule: 'Appealing to their memory of shared experience and common law he sought to persuade them that he was restoring the English' (p. 33).

⁶⁰ H. Nasuti, 'Identity, Identification, and Imitation', *Jnl of Law and Religion* 4 (1986), 9–23, at p. 11.

Old Testament: the laws influence the society in such a way that success or failure is brought back to a response to the covenant created when the people accepted the laws.⁶¹ Biblical narrative serves to remind the reader of the past so that the laws can then shape the present and the future. The choice of events detailed in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle serves a similar purpose. The early annals demonstrate the collected Anglo-Saxon conquests and often their bitter defeats in order to create a common ethnic history similar to that of the Israelites in the Old Testament.

By AD 891, the last standing Anglo-Saxon kingdom was Wessex, with Alfred as a king who may have believed it was God's will that he reunite the Anglo-Saxons under his rule; in order to do that, he had to create a common history with 'certain past events in which the community discerned the presence and action of God'.⁶² The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle demonstrates both the achievements and the punishments as meted out by God in much the same way as the Old Testament narrative. Just as the Israelite laws united the twelve tribes under a common (divine) rule, Alfred's choice of format for his law code continues in this vein, providing the laws of the Children of Israel for the Anglo-Saxon people.

Looking at the organization of the early manuscript in the most basic sense, one can see that Alfred's (and subsequently Edward's) reign is sandwiched neatly between those of his predecessors. First is the genealogy which established Alfred's claim to the throne as a direct descendent of Cerdic, the first West Saxon king, and last come the laws of Ine, the king of Wessex whose regnal years fall midway between Cerdic and Alfred. The genealogy, the Chronicle and the

⁶¹ See Lev. XXVI.3–9.

⁶² *Pastoral Care*, ed. Davis, pp. 87–8.

laws work together to establish the legitimacy of Wessex—and thus Alfred’s—rule after the collapse of the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. Together they not only imitate the biblical style of contextualizing law in narrative and kingship, but they also arguably emphasize an adherence to a biblical model of reform within the reign from which they derive. That is, the overall schema of Alfred’s ‘renaissance’ seems to have been influenced by an Old Testament tradition which features the laws as a cornerstone to reform as well as a spiritual and social renewal. As Alfred points out at the end of his preface to the law code, the apostles went out to teach the law of Christ because, just as the Mosaic laws brought order and religion to the twelve tribes, the Christian law would bring order and faith for those who would receive it.⁶³ Alfred’s emphasis on biblical law ties back to these examples of how law begets change and order, and one must teach the law in order to disseminate wisdom.

CONCLUSION

The genealogy, the Chronicle and the laws were all products of Alfred’s court, and through an examination of the biblical parallels between these documents, it is possible to get a feel for the political climate in late ninth-century England. It is not inconceivable that these documents may have existed or even circulated in the late ninth century in a similar compilation as the tenth-century manuscript.⁶⁴ If we assume this compilation reflects a similar one from the reign of King Alfred, the overt desire to anchor his reign in the comforts of

⁶³ *Die Gesetze*, ed. Liebermann, I, 46.

⁶⁴ Wormald proposes that the final construction of the first five quires was undertaken by King Æthelstan, grandson of King Alfred, and this would account for the inclusion of Edward’s reign into the Chronicle, as a token gesture from his son (*Making of English Law*, I, 269).

the West Saxon dynasty might be a celebration of the House of Wessex as Parkes suggests,⁶⁵ but why would it be necessary to promote a dynasty that had already proven its ability to stand in the face of massive adversity?

Nelson makes an interesting case for familial discord in the early years of Alfred's reign, commencing with the disaffection of Alfred's brother-in-law, the *ealdorman* Wulfhere, from Alfred's camp, as just one reason why Alfred may have needed to demonstrate his legitimate rule.⁶⁶ This view of Alfred as a king who wanted or needed to justify his reign is indeed provocative when trying to understand why dynastic and divine authority held such appeal for Alfred, and thus had such visible effect on the works produced in his kingdom.

⁶⁵ Parkes, 'The Palaeography of the Parker Chronicle', p. 164.

⁶⁶ Nelson, 'Power and Authority', p. 325.

